Reflexive BrAsian Family Practices: Boxers' Understanding of Parental Influence

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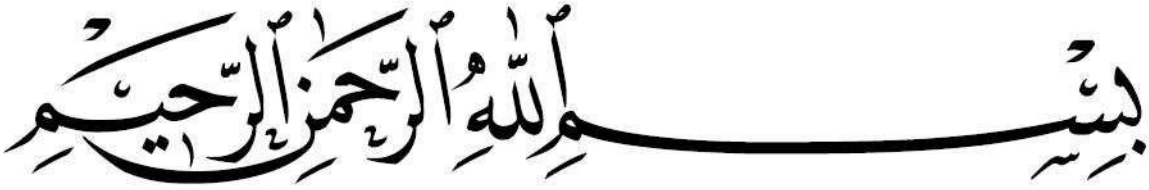
Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of Sociology and Social Policy

September 2022

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.



In the Name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I am thankful to my Creator, Allah (swt), the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, for giving me the ability to complete this thesis. I would have not crossed the finish line in three years without the will of my Lord. Shukar Alhamdullilah.

In a sentence, this PhD underlines the importance of parental support. Without the unwavering backing of both my mother and father who have been beside me throughout these very tumultuous past few years, I would not have got to this stage. I am eternally indebted to them.

There are striking differences between partaking in the sport of boxing and undertaking a PhD. There are, however, also many similarities. Both are mentally demanding, in every respect. The feelings of fear, anxiety and isolation (to name a few) overlap between the two respective trades. In the absence of adequate support – dreams can become nightmares. I was very fortunate to have Prof. Nick Emmel and Dr Rodanthi Tzanelli in my corner. I often felt like a boxer staggering back to his corner at the end of a brutal round, as supervisions approached. Feeling beaten up usually by a piece of writing that I would be working on, I sought them for their advice on how I could get my back off the ropes and retake the centre of the ring. They were unapologetic in their approaches. I was demanded to think harder, deeper and against the grain about the sociological puzzles that regularly confronted me. I am immensely thankful to them for aiding me in seeing the final bell.

It was on a wintery evening, during my first semester as an undergraduate student, in 2015, when my doctoral journey began. Prof. Jason Arday pulled me aside in a tutorial and expressed that I should contemplate a career in academia. Despite leaving the institution shortly after, he never left my side - whether he was inviting me to contribute to special issues, writing my references or even giving me golden nuggets of advice about how to navigate through the Academy. His support was conditional upon the promise that I would support my future students in the same way that he supported me. I firmly stand by that promise brother. Thanks for everything you have done.

An undergraduate student may be forgiven for feeling sceptical about the prospects of one day becoming an academic. Dr John Connell was pivotal in reminding me that the unimaginable was imaginable. I have benefited from the belief and confidence that he instilled in me from day one (and continues to instil in me) to realise my dreams. Thanks Dr C.

I am indebted to Prof. Bobby Sayyid. As a 'foster' ART-ista, I have been privileged to study under a true heavyweight. From Wittgenstein to Winch, Laclau to Larry, Prof. Sayyid has showed me the ropes and generously supported me in the transition from student to academic. My *duas* are with you Bobby – I pray that the Almighty, Allah (swt), rewards you for everything that you have done particularly for laying the intellectual foundations to contest Islamophobia.

Many acknowledgements are owed for this thesis. It is not just a product of continuous reading and writing but a culmination of personal life experiences, reflections and conversations with scholars, colleagues, friends and family members. I cannot note the influence of everyone in this section, but I know who you are and I am forever in your awe and appreciation.

Abstract

This PhD examines how British South Asian Muslim (BrAsian) boxers have perceived and understood the ways in which their parents have influenced their engagement within the sport of boxing. The research employs the theoretical framework of family practices and the concept of family displays to comprehend how parental decisions converge/ diverge with religious, cultural and gendered norms on how to 'do' and 'display' family. Data was generated from BrAsian boxers located in West Yorkshire (England), through a qualitative multiple methods approach of interviews and ethnography. The findings highlight how parents either enabled or constrained their child(ren)s personal projects. Based on the boxers' accounts, it is argued that parents engaged in reflexive deliberation, which allowed them to evaluate their child(ren)s personal projects, with reference to objective structural and cultural powers, and what they (the parents) cared about the most, before concluding on whether they should promote or prevent their child(ren)s involvement in boxing. Interpretations of 'good' and responsible parenting, aspirations for their child(ren), household circumstances, personal motivations and the norms, values and expectations of living amongst the *biradari* (community) were all issues that intersected and were recognised by the boxers as the most influential factors underpinning the levels of parental support that they experienced. The boxers lay claim how their parents were mostly acting in the best interests of their children, although their practices and approaches appeared to be, at times, ambiguous, unclear, contradictory and contested. Family relationships and dynamics often endured fraught moments as deliberations were undertaken against the backdrop of ideas around how family ought to be 'done' and 'displayed'. These were inseparably infused by religious, cultured, gendered and classed beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions. This thesis contributes towards enriching the debates on family practices and displays whilst also offering an alternative reading to the hegemonic narratives that purportedly construct stereotypical accounts of knowledge about BrAsians.

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Introduction

1.1 Setting the Scene

"In the balanced view of sociology, we have to consider the failures as well as the successes"

(Young, 1958, p. 15)

The combination of personal experience and intellectual curiosity have been the key ingredients in developing the impetus to embark on this research. I have been involved with the sport of amateur boxing for the best part of fifteen years – in this time I have fought competitively and have also trained other fighters. Like many young British South Asian Muslims (BrAsians[1]), I was enticed towards the sport after watching the ascendance Amir Khan[2] as he went from local hero to global phenomenon. Khan had seemingly provided a blueprint for success that subsequent generations could emulate – the glass ceiling had been shattered – the thought process that began to gain traction amongst younger individuals was that *if he could do it, then why couldn't we*? There was an aura of neoliberal discourse gathering pace which foregrounded meritocracy and reinforced the message that if you put the effort in and made the sacrifices then glory was an inevitable outcome, irrespective of your social background and identity. There was, however, a noticeable problem unfolding that triggered my desire to pursue sociological investigation and thus motivated the inception of this research. The influx in young BrAsians endeavouring to emulate the accomplishments of Amir Khan was not readily translating into championship success (in both the amateur and professional ranks), as the levels of engagement were not being reflected amongst the elite rankings. In other words, despite the symbolic characterisations of Amir Khan being a beacon for change (Burdsey, 2007), there were no signs in the years that followed of any BrAsian coming even remotely close towards duplicating his achievements.

[1] The term BrAsian is adopted throughout this thesis for stylistic reasons and to be economical with the word count. It was coined by Salman Sayyid in *A Postcolonial People* (2006) and I utilise it to avoid the circumlocution of 'British South Asian Muslim' whilst describing the sample. I acknowledge that all Asians are not Muslim and not all Muslims are Asian, however, I draw upon Wittgenstinian thought in how the meaning of a term arrives through its locally embedded meanings. In the communities that I have been researching, the term Asian is not used in their vernacular to describe, for instance, those of Chinese heritage but rather – it is used interchangeably with the term Muslim.

[2] Amir Khan has been widely recognised as one of the most decorated BrAsian boxers of the modern era. His accomplishments include an Olympic silver medal in the amateur ranks and multiple world championships as a professional.

I commenced my doctoral research in 2019, in pursuit of examining the motivations and experiences of BrAsian amateur and professional boxers through the lens of prejudice and discrimination. I generated some data from the boxers that I interviewed about how institutional Islamophobia had disrupted their chances of achieving in the sport (Chaudry, 2021). It was, however, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, that I was unable to generate the sufficient breadth and depth of data required to produce a convincing and credible analysis that was solely based on Islamophobia in boxing. More significantly, I observed at the start of fieldwork, how large swathes of BrAsians were departing (or had already departed) from boxing given the pandemic to pursue endeavours elsewhere. This, consequently, had implications for generating data that pertained to my original research focus on prejudice and discrimination given that many experienced fighters had decided to 'hang up the gloves'[3]. It was not, however, until I was in the midst of fieldwork when I ascertained the reasons, as to why some boxers were leaving, that I identified a more proximate issue which merited further sociological inquiry.

King et al. (2019) have reminded us how the focus will undoubtedly transform during qualitative studies given the dynamic and iterative nature of the research process. There were, both, circumstantial and analytical reasons to explain how the focal point of the research had shifted from an exploration of prejudice and discrimination; to eventually examining *the significance of parental influence and how the boxers' perceived and understood the ways in which their parents either supported or constrained their engagement with the sport*. I noticed during the early phases of fieldwork how many seasoned amateur and professional boxers had walked away from the sport because of their parents' wishes. This subsequently inspired my decision to investigate the ways in which parents either promoted or prevented their child(ren)s participation in the sport of boxing; their reasons why and how the boxers responded to their mother and fathers influence. Gillies (2003) has observed, after all, how the family remains of huge significance to the everyday lives of individuals. More specifically, parents have been deemed to play an integral role towards shaping how their children experience and progress within sports and physical activity: a process that is influenced by gendered discourses, socio-economic circumstances, cultural

[3] This phrase is boxing jargon and is used to describe when someone permanently quits partaking in the sport of boxing.

beliefs and parenting ideologies (Jeanes et al., 2021). The necessity for parental support has been reported to intensify for young individuals competing at the elite levels of their respective sports given the importance that factors such as financial support and emotional comfort can have in aiding athletes to manage the pressures and setbacks associated with elite competition (Harwood and Knight, 2015). Strandbu et al. (2019) have highlighted how individuals who do not enjoy parental support during their sporting endeavours tend to be at a more profound disadvantage in contrast to those benefitting from the backing of their mothers and fathers.

By studying parental support, I am aligning to a *relational* approach for undertaking sociological analysis in order to facilitate a greater understanding of how the networks and relationships that social actors find themselves located within either create opportunities or constraints vis-à-vis their personal projects[4]. I agree with King (2004) who has criticised the ontological dualism[5] that is currently hegemonic in contemporary social theory which downplays how society is constituted by a complex web of relations between people. According to King (2004), a social ontology must be promoted to avoid the division and reification of structure and agency which is usually at the expense of focusing on human relations. The central concern here, is how we are always nested amongst numerous social relations that have implications towards our agency[6], the agential powers we accrue and the constraints that are imposed upon us. It is, therefore, against this backdrop that I recognise how it is untenable and sociologically problematic to undertake an individualistic analysis which reduces people to discrete atomic entities given that individuals are essentially inseparable from the contexts and ties within which they are embedded (Crossley, 2015, 2022). Furthermore, I have also observed how it is necessary to artificially delineate the boundaries of the potentially infinite number of open systems incorporated before my gaze, throughout this research, for pragmatic purposes and ensure that I can make claims about my findings that are empirically substantiated (Bhaskar, 1979; Emmel and Hughes, 2012).

[4] Personal projects are the courses of action that we intentionally engage upon as human beings. The reason why we act at all is in order to promote our ultimate concerns and we subsequently form personal projects to either sustain or advance what we care about the most (Archer, 2007).

[5] King (2004) has argued how sociology is no longer interested in human social relations. Instead, the dynamic powers of social intercourse has been reduced to a rigid dualism of structure and agency.

[6] Agency refers to an individual's ability to make free choices and to control how they shape their own lives (Woolley, 2009).

To this extent, I will focus on the parent-child nexus throughout this thesis to explore the ways in which parents shape the engagement of their child(ren) in boxing and how the boxers subsequently respond. The analysis will, however, also incorporate the significance of prominent others. Becher (2008) has recommended that researchers studying BrAsian family and community practices should widen their analysis beyond the confines of the immediate family to understand how outside connections function as positive resources and also as pressures, threats and constraints towards family practices. Therefore, I will also be concerned with how the family, the extended family and the *biradari*[7] all interact and communicate with one another to provide a more wholesome insight towards understanding into the ways in which parents shape the personal projects of their child(ren). This brief introduction has sought to lay the foundations for this study and underline how the study of parental support, which entails multitude of ideals and practices, is essentially fundamental towards establishing a better view about the successes and failures of BrAsian amateur and professional boxers.

1.2 Research Background

There has been ample research undertaken to examine the myriad of ways in which BrAsian parents influence how their children experience sports and physical activity (Dagkas et al., 2011; Knez et al., 2012; Hamzeh, 2012; Stride, 2016; Stride and Flintoff, 2017). Fletcher et al. (2014) suggested how elder generations have hardly maintained any knowledge of sports and physical activity and have generally held it in low value. Historically, first-generation migrants arrived *en masse* with the intention to work, save money and then return home. Sports and leisure were deemed as antithetical to this objective and thus never valued or appreciated as 'proper' occupations. These values have endured for decades and are now being transmitted to younger generations. For example, parents have sought to limit their child(ren)s engagement in sports and physical activity so that they could invest their time working towards more vocational occupations such as law, medicine and education. These have been preferrable routes, as parents have sought to navigate their child(ren)s futures given the

[7] The *biradari* has a range of meanings and denotes relatives living locally; other relatives in Britain and Pakistan; and all caste members (Shaw, 1988, p.51).

familiarity that elder generations have with these fields and how they are universally recognised and seen as 'respectable' (Brah, 1996; Rytter, 2011).

Moreover, Tjønndal and Hovden (2020) argued how some families did not support their daughters endeavours in boxing as it conflicted with religious, cultural and gendered constructions of being a "good girl" (p. 9). Knez et al. (2012), have likewise, proclaimed how gender-related constraints were imposed by BrAsian parents upon their daughters on the basis that it was not appropriate for women to partake in sports. These researchers argued how parental support had been withheld given the potential consequences that immodest appearance and training alongside men could have towards tarnishing the reputation of the family. These are not original arguments and there have been many explanations alike about how social pressures have influenced parents in restricting the independent agency, regarding physical activity, for their daughters (Dagkas et al., 2011; Walseth and Strandbu, 2014). It has been accentuated how religious, cultural and gender beliefs have interlocked to construct particular ideals about how BrAsian female bodies are expected to behave – which supposedly involves no sports or physical activity (Walseth and Strandbu, 2014; Stride and Flintoff, 2017). The majority of previous research has, consequently, depicted young BrAsian women as docile subjects with an inability to demonstrate any agency regarding the ways in which their parents enforce their beliefs upon them. The findings emerging from previous research have suggested how involvement in the sports and physical activity feels virtually impossible without adequate parental support. However, the prospects of mothers and fathers providing their unwavering support is supposedly obstructed by the intersection of religious, cultural and gendered issues. This is accompanied by portrayals about how young individuals, in particular women, do not negotiate their engagement and instead passively and uncritically accept the wishes of their parents.

Connecting these studies, either implicitly or explicitly, has been the way in which *izzat* (honour) has been emphasised to construct parents as being authoritative and solely concerned with dictating the lives of their child(ren) to advance their own personal interests and social standing. It has been argued that *izzat* can be enhanced through achievements such as attaining an education, securing a respectable occupation and also by individuals, particularly women, adhering to religious and cultural norms and expectations around behaviour (Soni, 2012; Shahani, 2013; Hamilton, 2018). Pursuing *izzat* has been reported to

potentially rupture the intimacy and bonds shared between family members given the pressure and competition that it generates (Hamilton, 2018). Cultural concepts like *izzat* and *sharam* (shame) have been drawn upon frequently (and often problematically) as analytical tools throughout many studies examining BrAsian parental influence in sports and physical activity (Snape and Binks, 2008; Kipnis and Caudwell, 2015; Rozaitul et al., 2017). These have produced stereotypical representations about how BrAsian families tend to assume dictatorial roles in oppressing younger generations into preserving their cultural heritage whilst contemporaneously deterring off Western influences that may be prevalent within sports and leisure spaces. There is no denying that *izzat* and *sharam* are valued and held in high regard, however, their representations as being permanent are erroneous and construct a distorted picture that fails to recognise the nuances and complexities involved with BrAsian parental practices. There is some research that has highlighted examples of parental support against the context of the child(ren)s engagement within sports and physical activity (Kay, 2006; Burdsey, 2007; Barron, 2013). These studies are, however, shadowed by the majority of the literature which depicts *all* BrAsian parents as agents that constrain sporting participation. It is, therefore, against this backdrop of previous literature which inaccurately portrays younger generations as having no agency whilst disproportionately focusing on parental constraint, especially in the context of young women, that an alternative narrative is required to counter the reductive arguments that continuously (re)produce stereotypical and deterministic canons of knowledge about BrAsians.

1.3 Research Questions

(1) What are the boxers' perceptions and understandings of how their parents support or constrain their engagement within the sport of boxing?

(2) In what ways does being located within a wider manifold of social connections and networks shape the boxer's experiences of parental support?

(3) How can we interpret the ways in which the boxers respond to parental influence?

1.4 Methods: A Brief Summary

This research is concerned with the boxers' perceptions and understandings of how their parents either support or constrain their engagement within the sport of boxing. The generation of qualitative data was, therefore, deemed to be the most appropriate for answering this central research question. Being a former amateur boxer and trainer was instrumental in gaining access to a research site (amateur boxing club) and also recruiting study participants. I employed a qualitative multiple methods approach which entailed ethnography and interviews to gather the perspectives from BrAsian amateur and professional boxers on how their parents had shaped their engagement in boxing and how they had subsequently responded. I commenced data generation through 'complete participation' (Hennink et al., 2020) at the boxing club, as attending the gym to just sit down and transcribe notes would have drawn far too much attention from other individuals, who would have questioned my presence and quizzed why I was not training. This phase of data generation, in short, required me to partake in the training sessions whilst contemporaneously making notes about my visual observations and the conversations that I was having with other gym interactants. I obtained rich insights from this element of the research regarding the different ways in which parental influence was shaping the boxers motivations and experiences with the sport.

I then began to undertake interviews with participants who could be recruited because of the pre-existing relationships that I had with them. In conjunction, I utilised snowball and opportunistic methods to sample hard-to-reach individuals such as female and elite boxers. These individuals had a vast array of experiences and outlooks which enriched my data. In total, I interviewed 8 males and 3 females. I also had multiple conversations with and observed several dozen boxers and trainers throughout fieldwork. The research process was not neat, linear and undertaken in sequential stages but rather often involved the iterative process of moving back and forth between the different stages of the research which were usually overlapping and operating contemporaneously (Mason, 2002). This was especially prominent throughout the sampling and data analysis phases of the research. For instance, my decision to conclude data generation and commence the writing-up phase was informed by the analysis of data where I had to make a judgement on the adequacy of evidence (Emmel, 2013). I simultaneously coded and organised my data to construct numerous thematic

categories. There onwards, I tested how workable my data was for producing a set of convincing and credible arguments by developing some trial themes and beginning a trial run of writing-up the data which eventually constituted three analysis chapter (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A more comprehensive account on the methods that I employed for this research is provided in the third chapter.

1.5 Theoretical, Conceptual and Methodological Tools

Family practices, as developed by David Morgan (1996), suggests that the family ought to be seen less as a noun and more as an adjective. In other words, family represents something that we do rather than just a thing that we have or an institution that we merely belong to. Put differently, there must be a shift in focus that moves beyond defining what family *is* to focusing on what families *do* (Dermott and Fowler, 2020). Most importantly, this framework enables a deeper understanding about the meanings that people ascribe to family relationships. This is best articulated by Morgan (2011) as he writes: "while it is true that not all intimate relationships are family, it is also true that not all family relationships are intimate" (p. 7). I partially frame my analysis by adopting the family practices approach to examine how the everyday experiences and commitments of belonging to a family are managed and negotiated, as the young individuals engage with the sport of boxing. I am, therefore, able to pave the way for a deeper insight towards understanding how the stances taken by the parents to either support or constrain their child(ren)s personal projects and how the boxers subsequently respond are underpinned by reference to the collective interests of the family. Through the family practices approach, I am also able to remain conscious to the prospective overlap between the boundaries that differentiate practices as being family and non-family. In other words, there is a fluidity and fuzziness between what may be deemed as family practices on the one hand, and religious/ cultural practices on the other, given that the decision to describe a practice in one way does not preclude nor invalidate the possibility of these other modes of description. I illustrate how the family practices discerned in this research cannot be understood independently of a context that foregrounds religious/ cultural expectations.

Janet Finch (2007) provided a compelling and persuasive development of the family practices approach by arguing that "families need to be 'displayed' as well as 'done'" (p. 66). She appreciated the social nature of family practices by laying claim how display entails a process whereby individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to one another and relevant audiences that certain actions constitute the 'doing' of family and thereby confirm how such relationships are family relationships. The underpinning message that individuals and groups of individuals endeavour to convey whilst displaying is that "these are my family relationships, and they work" (Finch, 2007, p. 73). I utilise the concept of display throughout sections of my analysis to highlight how those observing family displays, such as the extended family and the *biradari*, yield a strong influence in reinforcing both religious and cultural conventions vis-à-vis how to 'do' and 'display' family. I argue, therefore, that these expectations have implications on the decisions made by parents to either support or constrain their child(ren)s personal projects given that they are under the constant surveillance and appraisal of these external audiences. To summarise, the concept of display enables an insight into the social and cultural worlds that the boxers and their parents are embedded within and how conformity to conventions are praised whilst deviations are sanctioned.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) interlinking concepts of – capital, habitus and field – are also employed across the analysis to illuminate the struggles, investments, incentives and motivations informing the boxers (and their parents) decisions vis-à-vis how to navigate personal projects. On the topic of parental support, I explore whether "is it possible that parents could get something out of this?" (Brown, 2018, p. 1499). In other words, are there also personal incentives for parents as they make investments and provide allowances towards their child(ren)s personal projects? The Bourdieusian perspective on how capital[8] is accumulated, converted and amalgamated is particularly insightful for addressing these questions and gaining a deeper understanding of the material and symbolic profits that the boxers and their parents are set to gain by pursuing/ supporting certain personal projects. Bourdieu (1996) has argued, after all, how the family is a primary site regarding the accumulation and transmission of different types of capital. I argue how some parents recognise that if they support and nurture their child(ren) through methods such as the

[8] Capital presents itself in several fundamental guises – social, cultural, emotional, physical and economic. It offers a perspective on the ways in which an individual's resources are privileged, marginalised, traded or acquired within a particular field (Bourdieu, 1986; Reay, 2000; Shilling, 2004).

transmission of capital and/ or the moulding of their habitus[9] then they stand to benefit in numerous ways by, for instance, being conferred with the symbolic capital of claiming prestige, respect and/ or authority within their respective social field[10] through being hailed for their exemplary parental practices. My analysis does, however, extend beyond the vantage point of mothers and fathers mobilising capital to generate the recognition of being characterised as 'good' parents. This is exemplified in the final analysis chapter where I argue how some parents supported their daughters in training and competing so that they could glean the physical and psychological benefits that emerge from participation such as the amelioration of their emotional capital. This, as a result, entailed a capital trade-off (Reay, 2004) with the wellbeing of the daughters superseding gendered expectations. In other words, symbolic capital is forfeited and exchanged for physical and emotional currencies based on the more pressing issues of the family.

Lastly, to appreciate heterogeneity and examine why parents in similar objective circumstances do not respond in a uniform fashion on whether they should support or constrain their child(ren)s personal projects, I draw upon Margaret Archer's (2007) understanding of reflexivity. This allows for a conceptualisation of the role played by human subjectivity in mediating structural and cultural influences. Reflexivity plays a fundamental part in enabling individuals to design and determine their responses to the structured circumstances in which they are embedded, against the backdrop of what they personally care about the most (Archer, 2007). The incorporation of reflexive deliberation is indispensable because, without it, there is no explanatory purchase on what exactly individuals do. The absence of this purchase means settling for descriptive empirical generalisations about what "most of the people do most of the time" (Archer, 2007, p. 21). This approach rejects the deterministic terms of social hydraulics where conditional influences operate in a pull or push fashion on un-reflexive subjects to whom things merely happen (Archer, 1995). Based on the boxers' accounts, I argue how the reflexive deliberation that the parents engaged in entailed a multitude of inseparable factors, that did not always have equal weighting and the effects were dependent upon context, such as the households

[9] The habitus is a socially developed "system of durable, transposable dispositions" which enables an individual to act in a certain way whilst responding to familiar and novel situations (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 52).
[10] Fields are structured spaces that are constituted around certain types of capital, consisting of dominant and subordinate positions. Examples of fields analysed by Bourdieu (1990) include the fields of law, art, education, science and religion

socio-economic circumstances, established and enduring values about respectable jobs, cultural and gendered expectations, the perceptions of the extended family and the *biradari*, the child(ren)s overall wellbeing and interpretations of 'good' and responsible parenting. Conditional influences, after all, are never singular but rather plural and it is their confluence and combinations which perform the overall process of moulding the situations that people finding themselves located within (Archer, 1995). The different agential responses and courses of action suggest how the boxers and their parents are all heterogeneous subjects that seek very different ends, despite sharing similar structural positions. Archer (2007) has summarised the central function of reflexivity by arguing how "the subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes" (p. 5).

1.6 Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis makes both substantive and conceptual contributions to existing knowledge. Firstly, I contribute more broadly to the debates and characterisations of BrAsian communities, in particular, the different aspects of the South Asian Muslim presence in Britain. There has been a tendency for previous research to maintain an "epistemic coherence" by "systemising and totalising all knowledge" on BrAsian families and communities which has usually led to an echoing of the usual popular stereotypes about ethnically marked communities (Sayyid, 2006, p. 9). This has predominantly resulted from other authors' arguments either implicitly or explicitly erring on the side of homogeneity rather than heterogeneity in their constructions of the BrAsian modus vivendi (Stride and Flintoff, 2017; Bhopal, 2019). I have, rather, provided an alternative reading of BrAsians that appreciates their similarities and interrelationships, whilst at the same time, taking into account the internal conflicts, disputes and fragments which constitute their differences and diversities. This, in turn, entails a counter argument to the hegemonic narratives that purportedly construct stereotypical and deterministic cannons of knowledge about BrAsians.

Gleaning the boxers' perceptions and understandings on the ways, in which, their parents have either supported or constrained their personal projects has provided an important contribution to the dearth of knowledge about the successes and failures of BrAsians partaking in amateur and professional boxing. The boxers' accounts have also offered alternative insights into the dynamics of BrAsian parental practices that reject erroneous

generalisations. Within the context of sports and physical activity, BrAsian parents have regularly been depicted as "agents that constrain" participation, as highlighted by Walseth (2006, p. 87). These arguments have been underpinned by claims about how elder generations generally hold sports and physical activity to a low value, in conjunction with mothers and fathers *always* foregrounding and prioritising cultural expectations at the expense of their child(ren)s individual agency (Dagkas et al., 2011; Fletcher et al., 2014; Walseth and Strandbu, 2014; Stride, 2016; Stride and Flintoff, 2017; Bhopal, 2019). Rather, I offer alternative insights into the reasons for parental constraint that extend beyond the common stereotypical explanations that tend to be centred around culture and religion. For example, I lay claim throughout chapter four, how socio-economic circumstances and the familiarity of particular occupations are also equally important vantage points for comprehending constraint. Furthermore, I provide an important contribution on the subject of values by suggesting how the accomplishments of role models, such as Amir Khan, have been instrumental for enticing younger and older generations located within the *biradari* towards appreciating boxing as a serious pathway wherein symbolic status and materialistic success are possibilities. In chapter five, I argue how the knowledge and value of sports and physical activity (like boxing) may be improved within the *biradari* through positive representation of role models. This, in turn, has the potential to challenge the stereotypes that trivialise the value of sports. From a broader perspective, I contribute towards the ongoing argument about how BrAsian values are not permanent but rather provisional.

Following on, I demonstrate how the concepts of *izzat* and *sharam* are not fixed nor unchanging but dynamic and constantly negotiated in different ways based on different situations. In doing so, I enter existing debates and reject assertions that have explicitly characterised BrAsian parents as being the incubators of patriarchal values (Bhopal, 2019). For instance, I illustrate throughout chapter six how some parents enabled their daughters engagement in the sport of boxing whilst knowing that they were deviating away from cultural and gendered expectations on 'appropriate' femininities and parental practices. To this extent, I substantiate my counter argument against the ways in which BrAsian families have been represented as patriarchal structures that entail '*izzat*-obsessed' parents. Furthermore, I contribute to the discourse on BrAsian females involved with sports and physical activity by contesting the gendered and racialised accounts which put forth how

"Asians are women not interested in sports" and that "Muslim girls are forbidden by their parents from participating" (Fleming, 1994, Walseth, 2006, p. 75; Ahmad et al., 2020). The findings from this thesis demonstrate that the appeal for BrAsian females to get involved with boxing is burgeoning – and that they are beginning to enjoy the support of their parents to do so. To summarise the substantive contributions, in contradistinction to the depictions about "brutal Asian parents" and the "horrendous experiences" that they impose upon their offspring in order to preserve cultural ways (Wilson, 2006, p. 88), the findings from this thesis suggest how the boxers perceived and understood their parents to be mostly acting in their best interests. I highlight that even when the boxers experienced constraint that they were able to negotiate the limits of their engagement by arriving at a mutual agreement with their parents. This provides an important contribution that contrasts with large swathes of literature which has falsely sketched younger generations of BrAsians as mere passive recipients of their authoritative parents dictations (Kay, 2006; Wilson, 2006; Dagkas et al., 2011; Stride and Flintoff, 2017; Bhopal, 2019).

Finch (2007) conceded that the concept of display was in its embryonic phase and how it would benefit from further empirical and theoretical rigour. Finch (2007) invited researchers "to refine the concept as well as to use it" (p. 65). I utilise display throughout the analysis to provide a sociological insight into the relational nature of family practices. Finch (2011) reiterated, years after the publication of her seminal article on the concept, that display was mainly concerned with conveying meanings to those within the family unit and not to external audiences. I contribute to the appraisal of display by concurring with other scholars who emphasise the importance of external audiences by laying claim that display would be meaningless and flawed by solely focusing on the internal family unit (James and Curtis, 2010; Dermott and Seymour, 2011; Gabb, 2011; Heaphy, 2011). I argue that paying attention to audiences beyond the immediate family, such as the extended family and the *biradari*, provides an explanation towards how family practices are judged based on the interpretations of displays and feedback which tend to reflect cultural norms and values. Additionally, Finch (2011) claimed that "my article did not explore, to any depth, the possibility of 'unsuccessful' or misrecognised displays. This is an area which would repay further development" (p. 202). Others have responded by examining the implications for families, upon the occasions, wherein their displays have been judged as 'unsuccessful' by

external audiences (Gabb, 2011, Heaphy, 2011, Walsh, 2015). Their inquiries have rather focused on the aftermaths of 'unsuccessful' displays. I contribute towards the conceptual debates on 'unsuccessful' displays by asserting how families possess the aptitude to foresee the likelihood of producing 'unsuccessful' displays through engaging in reflexive deliberation and thus respond by taking strategic measures to mitigate the prospective chances.

Dermott and Seymour (2011) have asserted that "the requirement to display family may involve a wide range of potential audiences that are not restricted to family members" (p. 17). There has been much attention paid towards understanding occasions where displays may be rejected, misunderstood or characterised as 'unsuccessful' (Seymour, 2011; Lowson and Arber, 2014; Walsh, 2015). The same attention, however, has not been given for considering the plethora of prospective audiences. An underlying assumption amongst previous research has centred on families generally being aware of the broad range of potential audiences that may be observing their displays. Put differently, the literature on display has presented the concept, to the extent, that the families unquestionably maintain control over 'who observes what'. I argue how displays may be exposed to being witnessed by 'unintended' audiences that see a limited view which lacks any context. These may, therefore, be misinterpreted, miscommunicated and/ or rejected as 'acceptable' by onlookers making ethnocentric interpretations and constructing stereotypical assumptions about BrAsian family practices. On the discussion about how displays work, Finch (2007, p. 73, emphasis original) suggested that the following questions of "*how* displaying is done, and to *whom*?" would benefit from further empirical investigation. This thesis contributes towards addressing these questions through the ideas of external and 'unintended' audiences.

Lastly, Dermott and Seymour (2011) recognised how displays may not always deliver positive impressions about family relationships and "if displays are not successful then the cost may be high" (p. 109). The theme of risks associated with the 'doing' and 'displaying' of family practices has been under-explored within the literature yet it was one that recurred particularly throughout chapter five. I examine three cases which include: how the foregrounding of pretentious displays which seek to impress external audiences with false representations about the ways in which the family functions risks damaging intra-family relations; how 'unsuccessful' displays risk tarnishing the *izzat* of the family; and also, how the

ways in which family is 'done' (or not 'done') risks deviating from interpretations of religious obligations. Parts of the analysis show how the planning and execution of displays are not always completed in unison with every family member concurring. In sum, I provide wholesome empirical contributions towards enriching the current superficial knowledge on the pertinence of risk in the study of family practices.

1.7 Thesis Structure

Chapter Two: Literature Review – Relatedness

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the principal sociological arguments pertaining to the field of BrAsian families and communities. I integrate findings from previous studies that have explored the ways in which BrAsian families and communities have shaped the engagement of younger generations in sports, physical activity and where the literature exists - boxing. The underpinning rationale for this chapter is to explicate the degree of influence that parents, the extended family and the *biradari* have towards either supporting or constraining young individuals in their personal projects and whether there is any overlap. Throughout, I pose questions where ambiguities in the literature exist to address during the analysis of data. I also introduce and unpack the theoretical framework of *family practices* and the concept of *family displays* which together form a substantial backdrop for this thesis. I argue that my purpose is to not only apply family practices and displays to my analysis but to also develop the theoretical framework and concept where necessary.

Chapter Three: Methods

This chapter examines the methodological decisions that were undertaken throughout this study. I justify my approach of avoiding any alignment with a grand position, doctrine or philosophy as this would have inevitably constrained my flexibility to address the research questions. I begin by reflecting on how my positionality, as a BrAsian boxer and trainer, shaped and influenced the research. I then present the sampling strategies and recruitment techniques that I employed. Herein, I provide a methodological justification for my sample size and how my decision to cease participant recruitment was based on having enough data to make a convincing and credible argument. Hereafter, I outline the three types of data generation methods that were adopted which included (1) ethnographic observations and participation; (2) semi-structured interviews and lastly; (3) a paired interview. This is followed

by detailing the analysis and interpretation of data. Lastly, I demonstrate my attentiveness toward numerous ethical considerations whilst also reflecting upon the methodological limitations of the research.

Chapter Four: The 'Archetypal Trajectory': Family Expectations

This opening analysis chapter examines the ways in which the boxers have been (or may be) constrained by their parents from partaking in and/ or making any serious commitments to the sport of boxing. I structure the chapter through what I call the 'archetypal trajectory' which refers to numerous (and often overlapping) reference points such as the necessity to attain a university qualification, secure a respectable job and then prepare for marriage and family life. The central argument put forth is how the 'archetypal trajectory' constitutes a social constraint, as the combination of cultural expectations alongside socio-economic circumstances, centred around the family, ultimately inhibit personal projects (the pursuit of a career in boxing). I argue that adherence to the 'archetypal trajectory' is predominantly rooted in the ongoing evaluation between the 'examiner(s)' and the 'examined' in which the observing external audience of extended relatives and the *biradari* appraise whether a family is doing well or not based on how their displays align with religious interpretations and cultural expectations.

Chapter Five: The (Overly) Supportive Family

This second analysis chapter examines the importance of parents providing the necessary support to their children as they partake in and/ or make any serious commitments to the sport of boxing. I begin by arguing how the 'Amir Khan Effect' was a seminal moment in enticing younger generations towards engaging in boxing. An argument presented in the previous chapter about the value of sports and physical activity is developed in how the admiration that Khan achieved through his success was instrumental in also getting families and communities (with no previous appreciation of sports and physical activity as serious occupations) to recognise the worth of a career in boxing. I argue, however, that there is neoliberal thinking at play here which downplays structural and institutional forces by foregrounding the hardwork and commitment as determinants to success. Throughout, I present the support strategies identified in the data which included parents providing emotional encouragement and practical assistance; financial aid; and lastly, guardianship

through active protection from Islamophobia. To conclude, I analyse how the composition of financial and emotional support alongside unreasonable expectations may amount to 'pushy parenting' and thus damaging the parent-child relationship and the child(ren)s prospects and longevity within the sport.

Chapter Six: 'Females Can Fight Too': - Negotiating Gender, Culture and Religion

This final analysis chapter explores both parental constraint and support through the examination of the female experience in boxing. By focusing on the narratives of three experienced female fighters, I argue how they have been enabled rather than constrained by their parents to partake in boxing to yield the prospective health benefits. I highlight how the priorities of the family supersede gendered expectations. In other words, symbolic capital is forfeited for physical and emotional currencies based on the demanding issues of the family which centre around the health and wellbeing of the child(ren). I then illustrate how the young women withstood the criticisms projected towards them by their extended families and the *biradari* because of the unwavering support and solidarity they have enjoyed from their parents. They justified their involvement by asserting how their decisions to box were religiously compliant. Throughout, I also argue how the young women interviewed were instrumental in promoting greater female BrAsian engagement in boxing by using their platforms to seek more inclusive policies that eventually satisfied other parents in allowing their daughters to box.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This chapter highlights the arguments and contributions to knowledge emerging from this thesis. I recap, based on the boxers' accounts, how parental support is a complex phenomenon that is shaped by reflexive deliberation, which entailed parents evaluating their child(ren)s personal projects, with reference to objective structural and cultural circumstances, and what they (the parents) cared about the most, to conclude on whether they should support or constrain their child(ren)s involvement in boxing. I outline how interpretations of 'good' parenting, aspirations for their child(ren), household circumstances, personal motivations and broader norms and values located within the manifold of their social networks were all issues that intersected and were seen by the boxers as the most influential issues underpinning the levels of parental support that they experienced. I recap how the boxers understood that their parents were mostly acting in their best interests

although their practices were, at times, ambiguous, unclear, contradictory and contested. I maintain how family relationships and dynamics often endured fraught moments as deliberations were undertaken against the backdrop of ideas around how the family ought to be ‘done’ and ‘displayed’ which were inseparably infused by religious, cultured, gendered and classed beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions.

Literature Review:

Relatedness

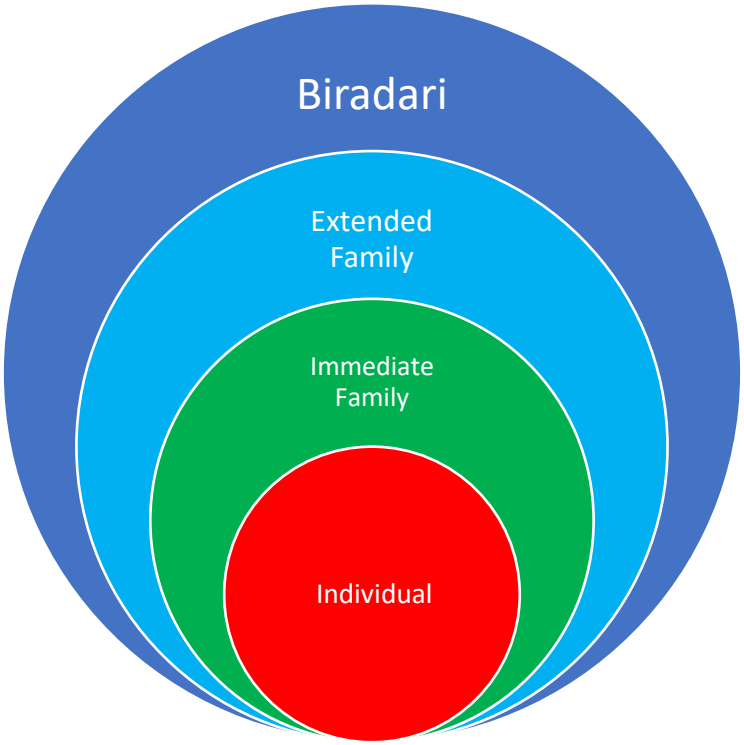
"Our lives, thoughts, feelings, and actions are always interwoven with those of others such that they cannot be understood atomistically: we affect others, they affect us, and breaking that circle by reducing the social world to discrete atomic entities renders both that world and the actions of those within it unintelligible. It removes the context that occasions action and thought and lends it meaning. Human activity is, for the most part, interactivity, and it is best analysed as such."

(Crossley, 2015, p. 67)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will critically examine the existing literature relating to this thesis. The central theme for this review of literature is *relatedness* and I will structure the chapter by analysing the principal arguments in the field of BrAsian families and communities. I will intertwine findings from previous studies that have explored the various ways in which BrAsian families and communities have shaped the engagement of younger generations in sports, physical activity and where the literature exists - boxing. In what follows, I will set the context and develop my argument for this thesis by examining the literature, in the order illustrated in figure 1. Throughout, I will produce questions where ambiguities in the literature exist to address during the analysis of data. The underpinning rationale for the structure of this chapter is to comprehend the degree of influence that these open social systems may have on enabling or constraining the boxers personal projects. I will then move onto introducing and unpacking the theoretical framework of *family practices* and the concept of *family displays* which will comprise a substantive backdrop for this thesis. Herein, I will argue that my purpose is not only to apply the theoretical framework of family practices and the concept of family displays to my empirical data but also to develop them.

Figure 1: Levels of Relatedness



2.2 The Immediate Family

The centrality of family has been repeatedly stressed within Islamic texts. Both the Quran and Hadith[11] have detailed rules on how Muslims should interact with members of their family. These range from the rights that parents have to expect obedience and respect from their children to how women ought to be treated (Basit, 1997). There have been ample studies conducted which have identified how BrAsian families are generally cohesive and intimate units with very strong loyalties and obligations towards one another (Ballard, 1994; Basit, 1997; Becher 2008). This has been echoed by Qureshi et al. (2000) who have lay claim that individuals residing within BrAsian communities tend to experience supportive family relationships, as they tend to 'look after their own'. Before I proceed with this review, I shall clarify my decision to adopt the term 'family' throughout the thesis to avoid any analytical confusion. In *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies* (1996), Morgan warned against abandoning the usage of the word family because there are few attractive and immediately persuasive alternatives and how any substitutes may be analytically problematic: "the word family is widely used and understood, by lay persons as well as by professionals, it would seem counter-productive to place an embargo on its use" (p. 187).

Relationships within BrAsian families have been characterised as affectionate yet hierarchical with great emphasis being placed upon respecting parents and elders (Basit, 1997; Becher, 2008). This is usually reflected in living arrangements as it is conventional to observe a two/ three-generational family unit living together that is comprised of parents, married sons (with their wives and children) and remaining unmarried sons and daughters. Basit (1997) suggested that families tend to stay together as it is frowned upon to part ways without a genuine reason. Ballard (1994) added that younger generations are expected to repay their gratitude for the sacrifices that their parents would have made throughout their lifetimes in the interests of the family. This may be impeded by living separately. Many internalise these values and beliefs at a young age and learn to behave in accordance with the ethos of the family. For Basit (1997), the overarching values of these families subsequently oppose Western ideologies of individualism with the interests of the collective taking precedence. As

[11] Hadith refers to traditions relating to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): his words and actions.

each individual member is accountable to the entire group because his/ her actions impinge on the *izzat* of the family.

Finch (1989) argued in her monograph *Family Obligations and Social Change* that family relationships are special and intimate because they entail a membership that cannot be replicated by other groups. You are a member and remain so whatever else happens in life – in all other social groups, membership can be revoked or withdrawn either by your own accord or by others. Irrevocable membership, therefore, explains the sense of obligation that family members have for one another. Finch (1989) suggested that family relationships entail a moral component that implies what people do and how they support one another is governed significantly by beliefs about "the proper thing to do" (p. 144). She elaborates by arguing how the distinctive feature of family relationships can be described through the notion of morality. Family relationships are, therefore, conceptualised and explained in practice as having a "peculiar, inescapable moral quality of obligation attached to them" (Firth et al., 1970, p. 114). Insofar, I have provided an explanation on my decision to adopt the term family throughout the thesis. I have also illustrated the central values that underpin the dynamics of the BrAsian family with great emphasis being placed upon respecting parents, elders and how these acts contribute towards privileging the interests of the collective. I shall now narrow the focus of the review by examining the ways in which the immediate family either enables or constrains the experiences of young BrAsians involved in sports, physical activity and where the literature exists – boxing. The review will pay particular attention to the role played by parents given that they yield the most significant influence in the lives of their child(ren) (Kay, 2006; Quarmby, 2011).

Parents have been characterised as being either enablers or constrainers regarding their child(ren)s personal projects. Kay (2006) explored how the experiences of young BrAsian women participating in sports and physical activity were strongly shaped by parental influence. Kay (2006), for example, found cases of outright support for some young women, as their mothers wished for their daughters to benefit from the sporting experiences available, as they were not readily available to them, in their earlier lives due to the combination of traditional restrictions and limited opportunities. Interestingly, Kay (2006) heard accounts from some of her participants suggesting that they were being galvanised by family members into increasing their participation in sports and physical activity. Elsewhere,

Barron (2013) described how the boxing brothers Haroon and Amir Khan had attributed their successes within amateur and professional boxing to the support and inspiration that they enjoyed from their family. For example, their father, Shah Khan played a managerial role throughout their careers by providing them with his unwavering financial, practical and emotional support which aided them in succeeding at domestic and international level (Burdsey, 2007; Barron, 2013). There were no explanations provided in these studies regarding why the parents decided on supporting their children and whether they had any inherent personal motivations for doing so. I shall investigate throughout the analysis of data, as to how parental motivations may influence the levels of support that they provide. I agree with Kay (2006) who has rejected the sweeping generalisations made by previous researchers that depict *all* immigrant and Muslim parents as "agents that constrain" sporting participation (p. 87). These claims are not only stereotypical but invalidated by empirical accounts. It is, however, worth examining the evidence that provides the basis to these assertions to explore the reasons why *some* BrAsian parents have had reservations about their child(ren) partaking in sports and physical activity. I will proceed with exploring, therefore, the potential reasons as to why parental support may be denied and whether the positions taken by parents are negotiable.

Tjønndal and Hovden (2020) investigated the power relations, dominant ideologies and prejudices underpinning the experiences of female BrAsian women partaking in amateur boxing. The narratives gleaned illustrated how some families were interpreting their daughters involvement as directly conflicting with religious, cultural and gendered expectations. On the topic of appearance, a study participant stated "In the video, I was boxing in shorts and a t-shirt, so my legs and arms were showing. The referee wouldn't let me wear tights and a long-sleeved t-shirt. My family said I was ruined. That I was naked in the video" (p. 9). Hamzeh (2012) made similar observations by coining the phrase 'veiling-off' to describe how certain appearances, in the co-presence of men during sports and physical activity, risked violating the visual expectations that the family had for their young women. This phrase is problematic and fails to recognise any diversity by assuming that all BrAsian women wear the 'veil' and have similar interpretations of modesty. The relational element here is, nevertheless, pertinent as whilst the young women may not be worried about their appearance – their families may be. In the forthcoming sections, I will review why the

appearance of young women may be of equal concern for the parents. Tjønndal and Hovden (2020) observed how some families refused to support their daughters endeavours in boxing as it conflicted with constructions of being a "good girl" (p. 9). Young women were required to follow religion, attain an education, stay at home, respect their elders and avoid interacting with boys. Tjønndal and Hovden (2020) argued how the conflation of being a "good daughter" and "good Muslim" was deployed by some parents to impose pressure and dissuade the young women from training and competing as amateur boxers. It was summarised by a study participant that "none of these things [appearance, reputation and gendered norms] really matter to me], but it is so important for them" (p. 9). The implication was that partaking in boxing felt virtually impossible without parental acceptance and support.

Knez et al. (2012) observed how gender-related constraints were being imposed on young BrAsian women by their parents who believed that "it is not good for a girl to do sports" (p. 112). This is not a unique finding and may be explained through the social pressures experienced by parents that lead to restrict the independent agency of their daughters (Dagkas et al., 2011; Walseth and Strandbu, 2014). Tjønndal and Hovden (2020) heard from a study participant about how the potential consequences of immodest appearance and training alongside men caused consternation for the family through fears that the daughters boxing career could tarnish the reputation of the whole family and she may be subsequently labelled as a "whore" (p. 9). Stride and Flintoff (2017) recognised how engagement in boxing for young BrAsian women risked jeopardising the reputation of the family, as study participant Bebo expressed "I don't want my parents' respect going down the drain" when contemplating boxing as a physical activity pursuit. This highlighted the religious, cultural and gender infused expectations regarding the ways in which female BrAsian bodies are expected to behave in particular spaces. Both Stride and Flintoff (2017), however, outlined problems whilst providing no solutions. This is predominantly due to their narrow and disproportionate focus on the family as a unit of analysis. For them, the family is the key barrier that ought to be overcome for these young women to enjoy experiences of sports and physical activity. This issue, here, is that institutional barriers such as dress codes and mixed gender spaces are downplayed and not deemed to be significant. Tjønndal and Hovden (2020) began to recognise these issues, as they highlighted how institutional failures to appreciate diversity led to those who are religiously and culturally obliged to cover their arms and legs during

competition being discriminated. The analysis chapters will pay particular focus on whether institutional adaptations and accommodations towards religious and cultural requirements are effective in facilitating inclusion and alleviating parental concerns.

This review on parental constraint has mostly focused on the female experience. This is representative of how other researchers have disproportionately accentuated the religious and cultural barriers to participation encountered by young female BrAsians (Kay, 2006; Knez et al., 2012; Hamzeh, 2012; Stride and Flintoff, 2017; Tjønndal and Hovden, 2020). Mackintosh and Dempsey (2017) studied how the intersections between religion, culture and social identity either promoted or prevented sports participation amongst a sample of BrAsians aged 16-25 years old. They observed how some of the study participants parents recognised sports as a negative distracting activity, in relation to Islam, and discouraged their involvement. Thus, illustrating how constraint was inherently interwoven between parents, religious practice and sport. This was in contrast to Kahan (2003) who stated that the strongest explanation for inactivity, in sports, amongst young BrAsian men, was that their parents did not offer any support, as they failed to recognise any value for their child(ren) partaking in sports and considered it as an impediment to achieving desirable educational and career goals. Despite Kahan (2003) emphasising the strength of his explanation, there was no elaboration on the reasons why parents did not equally value sports and physical activity with careers that require an education. This merits further examination to discern the value that is placed upon boxing and the ways in which parental perspectives influence the levels of support that they offer for their child(ren)s endeavours in the sport.

In this section, I illustrated the significant role that parents play towards influencing the experiences of their child(ren) in sports, physical activity and in particular boxing. In sum, parents are either enablers or constrainers. A recurring theme that has been explicit throughout this opening section has centred on how the decisions made by parents to offer or withhold support cannot be solely explained without reference to religious, cultural and gendered expectations that extend beyond the immediate family. These intersections are instrumental towards understanding the social pressures endured by parents as they contemplate on whether to support their child(ren) or not. The term ‘reputation’ also repeatedly surfaced substantiating the relational element on how parental constraint/ support has wider implications and may be shaped by communication and interaction with

other open systems. Questions that warrant further examination also emerged such as what are the parents' motivations and how do they value the sport of boxing overall? The review of literature also presented, on the topic of constraint, how institutional adaptations and accommodations towards making sports and physical activity more inclusive and religiously/ culturally compliant may alleviate key concerns echoed by parents particularly around their daughters appearances. There is, however, a necessity to identify whether such changes would be sufficient for generating parental support. This is an important line of inquiry for this thesis towards understanding how involvement may be negotiated between the parent and the child(ren) and whether it may be contingent upon specific conditions and expectations being met. I will now progress by examining the significance of the extended family and how they may influence the promotion or prevention of sporting (in particular boxing) involvement.

2.3 The Extended Family

In *Family Practices in South Asian Muslim Families: Parenting in a Multi-Faith Britain* (2008), Harriet Becher identified how the majority of BrAsian families involved in her study maintained a strong connection with their extended families[12] (either physically or symbolically) who were seen as important sources of emotional, practical and economic support. The extended family refers to relationships beyond the parent-child dyadic and spans across grandparents, aunties, uncles and cousins residing either locally, nationally or abroad. Local extended families are particularly significant and tend to be intimately involved with daily routines such as the organisation of religious celebrations, helping with the housework and caring for the sick. Becher (2008) also observed how families endeavoured to maintain close proximal links with their extended relatives through the organisation of living arrangements which involved purchasing houses on the same street or in the same neighbourhood to allow for regular contact.

[12] The term 'extended family' is used to refer to family members outside the strictly defined nuclear family (Becher, 2008).

Kay (2006) found how it was conventional for approximately 40-60 members of the same extended family to live in a neighbourhood as a means of preserving solidarity. She suggested how young women from these communities experience surveillance to ensure that their behaviours align with cultural norms. In her study on Indian Muslim female boxers, Mitra (2009) identified how the extended family would openly express their dissatisfaction by speaking with the parents of the young women to argue how it was 'un-Islamic' for women to box. Criticisms were not solely projected by relatives and also entailed members from the *biradari* voicing their concerns. Stride and Flintoff (2017) recognised how the young women in their study felt monitored by relatives and neighbours vis-à-vis how they dressed and behaved. Sumera, a study participant, explained why extended relatives remained vigilant about the behaviours of one another, as they recognised the relationality of their reputations: "My family's different. We have good status 'cause of my granddad and girls have to keep up that respect, that holy reputation. Do their work, study hard and get a good job, don't go out uncovered, don't mess about, no boys or smoking or bad things like that. Just respect boundaries, innit?" (Stride and Flintoff, 2017, p. 12). Herein, Sumera described how the constraints that she was experiencing were connected to the reputation of the collective. In her PhD research on identity construction in the context of BrAsian communities, Franceschelli (2013) interviewed 52 young people and their parents and observed the salient role played by the extended family in providing inter-familiar support. The local extended family were influential in providing support and counsel on numerous issues. Parents confided in their extended relatives to seek advice and second opinions about decisions relating to their child(ren) (Franceschelli, 2013). Becher (2008) concurred with other researchers in how the approval of local extended families is paramount when it comes to issues on parenting. I have examined insofar how the local extended family may influence constraint by communicating and interacting with parents to cast doubt about the appropriateness of an individuals conformity to religious, cultural and gendered norms regarding their engagement in sports and physical activity. The analysis of data will examine whether parental constraint via the influence of the extended family, also impacts male boxers, and under what circumstances.

Contact with transnational kin 'back home' in Pakistan has also been deemed essential towards sustaining family relationships with particular emphasis being placed upon communicating regularly and arranging visits to create/ preserve familiarity between family members (Mason, 2004; Becher, 2008). Jennifer Mason (2004) explored the meaning of 'the visit' to Pakistan and found how visiting relatives was a fundamental act of kinship per se and entailed social interactions and obligations that were informed by religious and cultural beliefs. Another theme emerging from her work centred around knowing your relatives rather than simply knowing about them. Families endeavoured to make the effort of visiting their relatives abroad every year to allow their children to acquire mutual and shared knowledge of each other, help them understand their family identities and also enhance the transmission of religious and cultural values (Mason, 2004; Becher, 2008). Visiting extended family members abroad generally involves distributing gifts, not just as a gesture of goodwill, but also as way of displaying wealth and exemplifying to their relatives how they are living successful and prosperous lives in the UK (Shaw, 2000; Mason, 2004). I will examine throughout the analysis chapters whether the extended family living abroad has any significance on how parents either support or constrain their child(ren)s engagement in boxing. I will remain attentive to the potential overlap with *biradari* members abroad yielding similar levels of significance alongside the extended family.

Becher (2008) obtained contrary accounts to the perception of the universally close and positive extended family. She found in some cases how family dynamics were a source of strain and/ or failed to provide adequate support. Sonuga-Barke and Mistry (2000) are supportive in how extended family ties could sometimes collapse and/ or prove stressful for individual family members. Bachu (1985) claimed that the pursuit of *izzat* was detrimental towards the intimacy and bonds shared between families "… [*izzat*] generates constant competition, both between individuals and even more between closely related families" (p. 15). Werbner (1990) identified how relationships between families are often competitive, with each family being concerned about its own reputation. The family wants to look pure; they do not want anyone to think that there is something wrong with them. Such examples serve as a warning against the assumptions that all BrAsian families enjoy close, supportive and intimate relationships (Qureshi et al., 2000). This is an important backdrop for analysing,

in what ways, competitivity between families may influence the decisions that parents make regarding the lives of their child(ren) whilst remaining attentive towards their *izzat*.

Mason and Tipper (2008) utilised the term 'kinship' whilst characterising the extended family as "relationships with others to whom children are related, or with whom they feel a sense of family or relatedness. [This] approach thus moves beyond ideas of the family to broader concepts of kinship and relatedness" (p. 442). Their study sampled children aged between 7-12 from the North of England and sought to understand how children defined kinship and relatedness. Children in the study often spoke about genealogical kin through terms like 'proper aunty' or 'real uncle' especially when differentiating between those who felt 'like family' but were not 'real' relatives. They defined 'proper' relatives as those connected by 'blood' or marriage. Mason and Tipper (2008) interpreted the use of 'proper' relatives as referring to a sense of *fixity* and *permanence* in the children's *official* relationships. "The way children talked about 'proper' relatives indicates that while they could choose to like or not these people, they could not choose for them *not to be relatives,* now or in the future, even if they did not like or see them very much (Mason and Tipper, 2008, p. 445, emphasis original).

Mason and Tipper (2008) recognised how their sample demonstrated the ability to establish distance from 'proper' relatives with whom they did not get along or had little contact and association with. They could not choose to be 'unrelated' nor 'less related' but were able to exercise practical avoidance tactics in relation to extended relatives that they did not like. Haavind (2005) acknowledged more effective and less confrontational ways for individuals to establish distance from their relatives: "hesitation or unwillingness to voice independent opinions on shared matters may very well reflect an awareness that in this moment no such independent position exists […] some self-government is better fostered by reduction in communication rather than by making communication more intense" (p. 144). Mason and Tipper (2008) highlighted how family rituals and regular involvement in the routine aspects of everyday family life were deemed to be important for their sample in measuring closeness and intimacy. Furthermore, being nice, friendly and most significantly respecting the child(ren)s orientations and interests were important considerations for the sample as they evaluated their relationships. Mason and Tipper (2008) have thus provided an insightful analysis that provides a vocabulary for the ways, in which, individuals may categorise their extended relatives and how they recognise the inseparable nature of the relationships that

they are enmeshed within. This will be useful to draw upon during the analysis of data to examine how my study participants interpret the influence of the extended family and how they subsequently respond.

In this section, I progressed the review of literature beyond the immediate family to not only examine how the extended family operated as a source of positivity but also as a source of tension and pressure. I structured this section by differentiating between the extended family that resided locally and abroad. Those located locally were recognised as particularly significant and intimately involved in the everyday lives of families. Living within close proximity facilitated regular contact and parents sought their relatives for counsel and approval on family decisions (Becher, 2008; Franceschelli, 2013). The literature indicated how this was potentially problematic especially for young women, as the extended family was able to monitor them and communicate with their parents expressing discontent about how their involvement in sports and physical activity was at odds with religious, cultural and gendered norms. The review also illustrated how maintaining contact with relatives abroad was common and essential for sustaining family relationships (Mason, 2004). Visiting extended family members was seen as an important way of preserving religious and cultural values within the family and also entailed the opportunity to show relatives how a family was living prosperously through the gesture of gift giving (Shaw, 2000; Mason, 2004). I will examine throughout the analysis of data whether the extended family living abroad has any significance on how parents either support or constrain their child(ren)s engagement in the sport of boxing. I then presented research that provided a counter-narrative to the universal assumptions of the close and warm extended family. For example, how the pursuit of *izzat* between families risked rupturing relationships through the generation of a competitive culture where families sought to supersede one another whilst establishing their own reputations (Bachu, 1985; Werbner, 1990). This is an important backdrop particularly for analysing, in what ways, competitivity between families may influence the decisions that parents make regarding the lives of their child(ren) whilst remaining mindful about *izzat*. Lastly, I examined the innovative methods that have been used by individuals to distance themselves from relatives. Whilst recognising that you cannot unrelate yourself from someone – it emerged that innovative avoidance tactics were being deployed to maintain distance between relationships (Mason and Tipper, 2008). I will examine, in the analysis

chapters, the strategies that were adopted by my study participants, as they experienced and responded to the inseparable influence of the extended family. I have mentioned throughout this section how the extended family and *biradari* are not two distinct entities and may overlap in how they influence a family. Therefore, I will now develop this review by furthering the analysis beyond the immediate and extended family to the *biradari*. This will enrich the review and foreground how the expectations of members from the same caste may shape family practices.

2.4 The *Biradari*

"Community is one of those words that feels good: it is good 'to have a community', 'to be in a community'. And community feels good because of the meanings which the word conveys, all of them promising pleasures, and more often than not the kind of pleasures which we would like to experience but seem to miss [..] *But there is a price to be paid for the privilege of being in a community. Community promises security but seems to deprive us of freedom, of the right to be ourselves. Security and freedom are two equally precious and coveted values which could be balanced to some degree, but hardly every fully reconciled* […] *We cannot escape the dilemma but we can take stock of the opportunities and the dangers, and at least try to avoid repeating past errors"*

(Bauman, 2001, p.144)

"Community becomes both a source of strength as well as a source of oppression"

(Dwyer, 1998, p. 60)

In *Kinship and Continuity: Pakistani Families in Britain* (2000), Alison Shaw asked the question "just what is a *biradari*?" (p.140) – for which she answered that the *biradari* constitutes relatives and members of the same caste living locally, nationally or globally. In her ethnographic study on the settlement and development of the Pakistani diaspora in Oxford, Shaw gave the example of the Oxford Arain[13] whilst articulating how "Oxford Arain also, sometimes, refer to all Arain everywhere as *biradari* regardless of whether they know them personally or not […] the simple definition of *biradari* might therefore be the kinship group I belong to, and the sense of kinship widens or narrows its focus depending on context" (p.140).

[13] Arain denotes a caste that is found mainly in the Pakistani provinces of Punjab and Sindh.

I shall adopt the term *biradari* throughout this thesis (unless I am presenting the terminology adopted by other authors in their studies) as opposed to the "Asian Community" (Dwyer, 1998, p.58) because of the associated meanings and concepts with the term, that I will examine shortly. Shaw (2000) has put forth how the underlying principles that sustain the *biradari* are rooted in foregrounding the values and expectations of the collective: "[Pakistani's] do not prize 'individuality' as highly as Westerners do, and for most of them the sacrifice of 'individuality' that the culture requires is more than offset by the advantages of fulfilling ones roles within the family and *biradari*" (pp. 7-8). Ballard (2002) has argued similarly how those operating within the cultural traditions of the *biradari* downplay the contemporary Western thought regarding the pursuit of personal freedom, as it risks destroying meaningful relationships, especially those of collective kinship. For them, loyalty to the family and *biradari* must always trump the desire for personal freedom otherwise factors pertaining to mutuality and security may be jeopardised. Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1990) have corroborated the aforementioned distinction by writing "the British may be concerned with individual reputation, and, at a day-to-day level with 'what the neighbours will say', but the impact of the family's reputation on its position in the social network, on its status in the kin group and on the marriageability of its children, is not a major concern for British families" (p. 75).

The tensions between unlimited autonomy and personal security have been observed by Claire Dwyer (1998) who studied how young BrAsian women were either empowered or constrained by the *biradari*. Dwyer (1998) explored the account of study participant Alia who linked her feelings of security in the Asian community, in Hertfield, to the absence of racism in the town. This was profoundly advantageous as opposed to the experiences of BrAsian women in the surrounding 'white' areas where they encountered being stared at really badly and generally feeling out of place. Conversely, the study participants also observed many the disadvantages of living in an BrAsian community which included experiencing surveillance from members of the *biradari* to ensure that they were operating within the prescribed norms of expected behaviours (Dwyer, 1998). In evaluating which of the two prospects, freedom or security, is more desirable – Ballard (2002) noted that each view has its own merits and demerits. They are incommensurable like apples and oranges. For the apple lover, oranges

may indeed be a fruit, but a kind which is a poor substitute for apples; and of course, vice versa (Ballard, 2002).

The *biradari* is an incubator for the preservation of solidarity and culture. But what does the term culture actually mean? Ballard (2002) described culture as codes that are socially transmitted and range from modes of communication to behavioural expectations that individuals *learn* to operate. Ballard (2002) suggested that "just as with speech, all behaviour is coded: not only are both sets of activities ordered in terms of a specific code, but unless the hearer/ observer has access to the relevant code they will not be in a position to accurately interpret what is being communicated – or indeed to decide whether the signals being transmitted are coherent and hence meaningful, or whether they are merely a jumble of incoherent and meaningless white noise" (p. 12). The phenomenon of culture is best understood as "the set of ideas, values and understandings which people deploy within a specific network of social relationships to use as a means of ordering their inter-personal interactions hence generating ties between themselves: in doing so it also provides the principal basis on which human beings give meaning and purpose to lives" (Ballard, 2002, p. 12). Ballard (2002) has elaborated by suggesting that culture – like language – is the foundation for the meanings that we derive from the world. But that such meanings are never self-evident: they are always culturally coded. Those who do not have any familiarity with a cultural code will always struggle to comprehend what is unfolding before them. Just like human speech is unintelligible to those unfamiliar with the linguistic codes utilised by the speaker – so too is behaviour (Ballard, 2002). What then tends to happen is that individuals end up 'reading' behaviours through codes familiar to their own resulting in erroneous understandings and interpretations of the behaviours they have observed (Ballard, 2002).

Emphasis on preserving the unity of the *biradari* has predominantly centred around the mutual benefits available for all. Members of a *biradari* are expected to provide their unwavering assistance to each other, especially where the precise relationship is known and felt to be close. To elaborate, Ballard (1992; 2002) argued how younger generations and locally born offspring have specifically maintained strong connections with the *biradari* whose resources have been advantageous towards constructing strategic responses to the ramifications of the forces of exclusion to which they find themselves routinely exposed to in their everyday lives. In other words, the *biradari* has constituted a safeguard. Shaw (2000)

highlighted how sustaining contact with the *biradari* was a fundamental requisite for enjoying the support and dependence of others when it came to shared interests in properties or businesses. The saying '*you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours'* is pertinent here given the socio-economic advantages possible for the collective, on the basis, that everyone remains committed to the *biradari* and supportive of one another. So far, I have presented a definition of the *biradari* and described how the underlying value of collectivism is prioritised over individualism. I have also recognised the tensions that are likely to emerge for individuals who get caught up in the polarisation of wanting unlimited autonomy and personal security – and how the two may never be fully reconcilable. Furthermore, I have detailed how the *biradari* constitutes as an incubator for the kinship solidarity and the preservation of culture. I presented how those involved with sustaining the *biradari* are likely mutually benefit from the support and resources of others. Like many types of memberships – those who enjoy particular benefits are required to abide by the expectations[14] of the collective to ensure that the practices that operate within are sustainable. I shall therefore explore the concepts of *izzat* and *sharam* and detail what they mean and how they act as the glue to sustain and perpetuate cultural and *biradari* dynamics.

There is no fixed definition of *izzat* amongst *biradaris* or academic communities. It is usually associated with terms like 'honour', 'respect' and 'prestige' (Takhar, 2005). *Izzat* has been seen as important given that it is a way of conferring status on individuals and their families thus shaping their standing amongst the *biradari* (Werbner, 1990; Ballard, 1994; Shaw, 2000). In her PhD study examining how *izzat* (and the equally important concept *sharam*) shaped the lives of BrAsian men and women, Soni (2012) observed how there were three salient categories in how *izzat* is maintained or enhanced. Category one involved 'conforming to acceptable norms' such as being respectful, partaking in *lena dena* (gift exchanges) and maintaining religiosity, piety and modesty. Category two entailed 'achievement' regarding employment, education, wealth and 'good' actions. Category three centred around 'inherited factors' like caste affiliation. Elsewhere, Shahani (2013) acknowledged the relational element of *izzat* and how senior figures within the family tend to reflect on their izzat by posing the question "what will people say?" (p. 7). Gunasinghe et al. (2019) have suggested that

[14] I am intentionally using the term expectations rather than rules, as the latter implies clear and specific prescriptions for action and is very restrictive.

maintaining cultural practices that have been transmitted down the family through older generations has been the general approach towards families preserving or enhancing their *izzat*. The quest for *izzat* has been deemed as desirable given that it is essentially a phenomenon that is difficult to escape as it regulates the conduct of families within the *biradari*. The potential benefits that *izzat* may provide for families are attractive and may include being treated with privilege when looking for employment or business investments and also having greater choice when seeking spouses for dependents of a marriageable age (Bachu, 1985).

Loosing *izzat* can evoke its antonym - *sharam*[15]. Gilbert and Andrews (1998) stated that shame has been recognised since antiquity. Shame ought to be avoided at all costs, as when one family member is at risk of being shamed, all the others are too, since shame is not projected upon individuals but the entire family (Gill, 2011). Shame (like *izzat*) is fundamentally a relational concept: it refers to a distinct feeling of discomfort in relation to the response of others. Whilst the term refers to the individual and internal feelings – "I felt so ashamed" – it ought to be seen more relationally and co-constructed through the relationship between the self and others (Morgan, 2019, p. 95). Feelings of shame may linger beyond one-off experiences and come to be internalised and believed (Morgan, 2019). For Soni (2012), factors that are likely to produce *sharam* and tarnish *izzat* involve relationship misdemeanours, bad manners, appearance and crime related issues. Soni (2012) observed how there was a gendered element meaning that transgressing masculine/ feminine expectations was likely to have consequences on *izzat*. Gunasinghe et al. (2019) explored how *izzat* and *sharam* shaped the lives of BrAsian women. Their study highlighted how conformity produced psychological distress and led to the mental health of the sample deteriorating. Participants from this study used the phrase "unwritten rules" (p. 10) whilst describing how these cultural concepts had been transmitted by the family and *biradari* to younger generations. Their view was that the elder generation sought to protect their child(ren)s reputations by ensuring that they developed into respectable figures of the *biradari*. There were also contrasting opinions emerging from this study with one young woman disclosing how she did not care about *izzat* or *sharam* thus illustrating variance and

[15] There is a dualistic meaning to *sharam*: shame and punishment of guilty behaviour on the one hand and modesty and shyness on the other (Shahani, 2013). I am interested in the former.

adjustments in personal opinions and values. Whilst this study participant claimed that she was not concerned about *izzat* or *sharam* – there was nothing put forward to suggest that these cultural concepts did not bear significant weight on her life regarding her relational experiences.

Sen (2005) argued how both *izzat* and *sharam* are patriarchal values that have been transmitted by older generations to enforce gendered roles and expectations of honourable behaviour. For Sen (2005), women have usually had to bear greater burden and have been constructed as more susceptible towards tarnishing the *izzat* of the family and evoking *sharam* through non-compliance towards cultural codes. Whilst males can also bring *sharam* on their families, they are usually characterised as the gainers of *izzat* in completing an education, getting a successful job and raising a pious family. These assertions surface from patriarchy theory and have contributed towards the perpetuation of stereotypes directed towards BrAsian families. The implications are that all BrAsian family, community and gendered structures are implied to be inherently oppressive with women being characterised as 'objects' and 'victims' rather than active subjects (Ahmad, 2006). Kalwant Bhopal (1999) has advocated patriarchal theory as an analytical tool whilst examining BrAsian family and community practices. Bhopal (1999) does not only fail to recognise the diversity and differences within this group but also promotes a polarised and simplistic binary between the 'traditional (Asian) woman' and 'modern (Westernised) woman' that also disregards the possibility of any hybridity. For Bhopal (1998; 1999; 2019), the terms 'tradition' and 'traditional' are not often used to represent historical links with cultural practices that have positive connotations such as displaying respect towards elders. Rather, they are utilised to imply meanings like 'un-Westernised', 'un-modern' and 'backwards'. Within the context of arranged marriage, Bhopal (1999) argues how "it is through marriage that women are able to achieve respect and status in South Asian communities. Single women are stigmatised and regarded as having failed the community" (p. 133). Whilst Bhopal (1999) does not explicitly use the terms *izzat* and *sharam*, they are implied through the phrases 'respect', 'status', 'stigmatised' and 'failed'. Bhopal (1999) suggests that for those wanting to achieve success (which remains undefined in her work) must turn their backs on culture and religion by exercising resistance and dissenting from the collective. She brazenly argues how those who stray away from upholding honour are 'independent' (yet 'deviant', to some). To summarise,

Bhopal's (1998; 1999; 2019) view effectively represents the practices within BrAsian families and communities as incompatible with notions of liberty and freedom. The uncritical application of patriarchy theory produces numerous problematic issues such as the promotion of extreme binaries, the homogenisation of culture through the failure to acknowledge diversity amongst practices and also the promotion of hegemonic and colonialist-rooted discourses about Western cultural superiority (Ahmad, 2006).

I have examined how a patriarchal analysis on *izzat* and *sharam* within families and communities will always fail to account for the heterogeneity of practices, as it will provide simplistic, overly generalised and stereotypical perspectives about the subordination of women. Bhopal (1998; 1999; 2019) for example, is complicit in the production of discourses that use *izzat* and *sharam* as yardsticks to claim that women are subservient to both family and husband, how they are passive and subjugated and that their lack of education is an explanation for their engagement with cultural practices (Ahmad, 2006). Younger generations are, in fact, becoming increasingly diverse and innovative in how they engage and interact with the *biradari* culture. Ballard (2002) has lay claim that cultural systems are not "God-given" and how they are never fixed nor static but frequently rejigged, reinterpreted and reinvented (p. 13). Every cultural system may be a strategic response to a given set of circumstances, but the relationship between circumstances and solutions is never deterministic (Ballard, 2002). Becher (2008) observed the dilemmas faced by the families whilst balancing out the value of BrAsian culture alongside the supposed perceived needs to change and integrate within British society. The value of keeping culture and tradition was reflected in the perceived desirability for generational continuity which involved transmitting ascribed cultural norms for behaviour. A common narrative emerging from research conducted by Becher (2008) was how individuals endeavoured to situate themselves within the middle ground of tradition and change. It is important to recognise, however, that enacting cultural change does not necessarily equate to becoming less religious. For example, it has been widely reported within the literature how the elderly generation may inadvertently conflate religion with culture thus blurring the distinctions (Dwyer, 1998; 1999; 2000; Becher, 2008). The example of dress and appearance has reoccurred with parents interpreting that modesty can only be attained through women wearing South Asian dress. Dwyer (1999) argued that younger generations displayed resistance by adopting different

dress styles that were associated with 'new' BrAsian identities. For some, wearing dress that was religiously compliant meant that tradition which only perceived 'Asian' clothing as appropriate was contested. Tariq Ramadan (2004) has highlighted that "it is with the emergence of the second and third generations that problems appeared, and the questions arose: parents who saw their children losing, or no longer recognizing themselves as part of, their Pakistani, Arab and Turkish culture seemed to think that they were losing their religious identity at the same time. However, this is far from being the case: many young Muslims, by studying their religion, claimed total allegiance to Islam while distancing themselves from their cultures of origin." This assertion, however, is only partially corroborated by other research, as whilst it may be argued that younger generations have become more religious and Islamically literate – there is little to suggest that they have rejected culture completely (Ali, 1992; Dwyer, 1998; 1999; 2000; Becher, 2008). They are in fact, more reflexive about how tradition may shape their lives and observant to how it may at times be conflated with faith.

This section has examined the final layer of relatedness pertaining to this review – the *biradari*. I started by defining what the *biradari* is and how it is underpinned by the values of collectivism. This was important to understand the ways in which *biradari* values can be transmitted and influential on individuals and families. I then developed the review through an examination of the likely tensions for individuals who may get caught up between the polarisation of wanting unlimited autonomy and personal security – and how the two may not ever be fully reconcilable. I then reviewed how the *biradari* operated as an incubator for the kinship solidarity and the preservation of culture. It was presented that those engaged with sustaining the *biradari* were likely mutually benefit from the support and resources of others. Nevertheless, like many other types of memberships – those who enjoy particular benefits are also required to adhere to the expectations of the collective to ensure that the practices that operate within are sustainable. I analysed how *izzat* and *sharam* strongly shaped the cultural dynamics within the *biradari* and influenced the behaviours of all. I will examine later in this thesis how these cultural concepts can be further understood through an analysis and interpretation of the empirical data. I found how other authors had drawn upon *izzat* and *sharam* to perpetuate stereotypes that about *biradaris* being patriarchal, homogenous and oppressive towards women. I then appraised how patriarchal theory had

been deployed uncritically, in previous studies, without any recognition of the diversity and differences that are regularly displayed especially by women. I substantiated this by drawing upon literature which had illustrated that the culture inherent within the *biradari* is not fixed and unchanging but rather dynamic and open to being reinterpreted and rejigged. I will analyse later in the thesis how my study participants' experiences of parental support have been shaped through the influence of culture that is sustained within the *biradari*. Previous literature has disproportionately characterised culture as being fixed, primitive and patriarchal. This has the tendency to produce essentialist stereotypes that are not reflective of *biradaris*. I will examine throughout the analysis chapters whether culture bears a negative influence, as suggested by previous research, or whether it is valued and embraced by younger generations subject to reinterpretations and reinventions. I have now examined the three layers of relatedness relevant to the individual – the family, the extended family and lastly the *biradari*, and how these three groups may overlap and shape the everyday lives of the individual. This provides a substantive backdrop for this thesis for understanding how these three open systems interact with one another and how the norms, values and expectations of one another may shape parental practices and the experiences of the study participants engaging with the sport of boxing. I shall now progress this review by presenting and analysing the theoretical framework of *family practices* followed by the concept of *family displays*.

2.5 Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Underpinnings

In this section, I will examine the theoretical framework of *family practices* and the concept of *family displays* which will form the backdrop for my thesis. Firstly, I will explicate the significance of David Morgan's contribution towards the sociology of family – the practices approach. Morgan (1996) advocated for a more sophisticated understanding that foregrounds family as something that we do rather than something that we have. I will then proceed by listing the six central characteristics to the family practices framework. I will then highlight the limitations of a family practices lens within the context of this thesis, as it downplays the structure and stability that is generally inherent amongst BrAsian families. To conclude, I will justify my decision for adopting the family practices approach by laying claim that it offers an invaluable way of understanding the ways in which people 'do' family and how such family practices are informed and infused by religious, cultural and gendered

norms, expectations and values. Secondly, I will progress the review by examining the most convincing development of the family practices framework – the concept of *family displays.* Janet Finch (2007) stressed how "families need to be 'displayed' as well as 'done' (p. 66). I will conceptually locate family displays within this thesis by foregrounding how it is relevant to *all* families and not just those characterised as unconventional. I will then highlight how family displays entail a twofold process with an unavoidable social element that involves audiences (observers) who provide feedback on the successes of family displays. Herein, I illuminate how feedback may not always be positive and that it is unsustainable to argue that displays are intended for audiences within the immediate family unit, as Finch (2007; 2011) has asserted. I will outline how audiences are not passive consumers but active interactants who maintain the ability to shape family practices. I will then explore the process of family displays beyond social interactions. Put differently, I will analyse how background features or 'tools' for display may be able convey meanings about family relationships. To conclude, I will point out how there is a scholarly consensus, in how the concept of display would benefit from further development and how that will become one of the objectives for this thesis.

2.5.1 Family Practices

"Family practices consist of all the ordinary, everyday actions that people do, insofar as they are intended to have some effect on another family member"

(Cheal, 2002, p.12)

David Morgan (1996) developed his 'family practices' framework to argue that the nuclear and biological associations with the family were dated and how the modern family was no longer predetermined and fixed but fluid, diverse and multifaceted. This insightful viewpoint was able to portray the family as a way of life rather than a fixed and unchanging entity. Morgan (1996) has thus been influential in shifting the dialogue in family studies from discussions of *the* family towards the numerous ways in which people *do* family (Finch, 2007; Dermott and Seymour, 2011; Heaphy, 2011; Dermott and Fowler, 2020). As Morgan (1996) has argued "family [is] to be seen as less of a noun [and more of an adjective] … [that] represents a quality rather than a thing" (p 186). For Morgan (1996), the doing of family practices ought to be understood as the "little fragments of family life which are part of the normal taken for granted existence if practitioners" (p. 190). Families are thus able to

accentuate the family-like qualities of their relationships. Fletcher (2020) has provided an example by stating how a family practice may be when a parent decorates his/ her office with photos of their child(ren). This serves as an outward expression of articulating that one is part of a family. This example is pertinent to Morgan's (1996) framework as it is a practice that is carried out, with reference to other family members, although it is not necessarily carried out in their presence.

Morgan (1996) elaborated on what the term 'practices' meant in 'family practices' by detailing six characteristics. Firstly, the term practices combines the perspectives of the observer and the observed. The social sciences have largely privileged the perspectives of those being observed but it is also essential to recognise the interpretations of the observers. Mainly because those being observed may not always acknowledge what they are doing as family practices. For example, those being observed may describe their actions or activities by using some concrete statements like 'paying the bills' or 'doing the cooking'. On the other hand, the observer may have a different understanding and characterise their actions and activities as 'gendered family practices'. In sum, the term practices enables a sense of flow between the perspectives of the observers and the observed. Secondly, the term practices conveys a sense of the active. For example, in comparing the terms 'family structures' with 'family practices', the former suggests something that is static and concrete whilst the latter carries a sense of 'doing' and action. Thirdly, the term practices carries some sense of the everyday: "practices are often little fragments of daily life which are part of the normal taken-for-granted existence of practitioners. Their significance derives from their location in wider systems of meaning" (p. 190). For example, cooking for the children derives significance from systems of parenting. Fourthly, the term practices highlights a sense of regularity. In other words, family practices are not usually deployed for one-off events but rather those that are routine and repeated. The meaning and character of cooking for the children derives from the fact that the same children will be fed, usually by the same parents, at about the same time and same place. Fifthly, the term practices convey a sense of fluidity. For example, cooking for the children may constitute 'family practices' as well as 'gendered practices' as well as 'consumption practices'. Choosing to describe practices in one way does not preclude nor invalidate the possibility of these other modes of description. There may be overlap in how something that is primarily identified as a 'family practice' will also constitute a

'gendered practice'. Finally, the term practices constitutes major links between history and biography (Mills, 1959). "Practices are historically constituted and the linkages and tensions or contradictions between practices are historically shaped. At the same time practices are woven into and constituted from elements of individual biographies" (Morgan, 1996, p. 190).

Dermott and Fowler (2020) suggested that the family ought to be considered as a range of interpersonal relationships rather than a static institution constituted by a set of members. They elaborated by laying claim how an understanding of the family on the basis of biological relatedness and co-residence is unlikely to endure given the heterogeneity of ways in which people now define who is 'their family'[16]. Put differently, there is now greater flexibility on how individuals think about and define their families; and the inclusion/ exclusion methods that they draw upon are not necessarily reliant on blood ties or legal documents. Earlier in this chapter, I presented how there is a degree of structure and stability amongst BrAsian families given the norms, values and beliefs that sustain relationships and provide continuity. I do not intend to employ the family practices approach to illustrate examples that move beyond conventional understandings of the family such as same-sex relationships or single-parent families. I will, instead, utilise family practices, as a theoretical backdrop towards makings sense of how people 'do' family and how such family practices are informed and infused by religious, cultural and gendered norms, expectations and values. I will pay particular attention towards the dyadic relationship between parent and child. This will not be done in isolation, as I will also examine relationships with the extended family, and how these other types of relatedness may influence parental decisions to either prevent or promote their child(ren)s endeavours in the sport of boxing. To reiterate, I recognise the degree of structure and stability in how the immediate family relates to the extended family, that subsequently relates to the *biradari*. Within the context of this thesis, I would suggest that the 'families of choice' argument, which has been advocated by scholars adopting the family practice approach (Spencer and Pahl, 2006; Dermott and Fowler, 2020), is untenable, as the complete negation of any institutional framing of the family is disconnected from the lived experiences of BrAsians. Therefore, I shall complement my analysis with other theories, concepts and my own insights to address any limitations whilst appreciating the levels of

[16] Dermott and Fowler (2020) have provided the example of the sister's partner, or mother in law's brother, or the stepfather when describing the complexities and precariousness involved in inclusion/ exclusion approach towards who is 'your family'. In some cases, they would be thought of as family, and in others they would not.

structure and stability that still exists. I shall also recognise the innovative ways, in which, younger generations are responding to being enabled or constrained by these other relationships. I will now progress this review by examining what has arguably been the most persuasive development of the family practices framework – the concept of *family displays.*

2.5.2 Family Displays

Janet Finch (2007) argued in her article, *Displaying Families,* that "families need to be 'displayed' as well as 'done' (p. 66). She understood displaying as "the fundamentally social nature of family practices, where the meaning of one's actions had to be both conveyed to and understood by relevant others if those actions are to be effective in constituting 'family' practices" (p. 66). She justified the intervention of the concept by arguing how the contemporary family had substantially changed over time. Meaning that family did not equate to household and could no longer be demarcated by those living under the same roof; how the contours of family were no longer obvious and easy to identify but fluid and subject to the quality of relationships between individuals; and how family relationships were not unchanging and fixed but dynamic and subject to change over time. Finch (2007) reiterated amidst this backdrop how the current diversity of relationships and living arrangements meant that families were required to be 'displayed' as well as 'done'. She lay claim that relationships need to be 'displayed' to have a social reality, which itself means that they require recognition [and validation] from others. The intensity of the need for display may fluctuate depending on the context. Finch (2007) articulates that "there are certain circumstances where the need for display becomes more intense" (p. 72). Haynes and Dermott (2011) have emphasised how thinking about intensity enables the possibility to appreciate how different forms of mixing and milieu may have lesser or greater social significance on family practices. To sum, the underlying message of displaying is that "these are my family relationships, and they work" (Finch, 2007, p. 73).

The concept of display is not only relevant for families that may be perceived as unconventional: "In a world where families are defined by the qualitative character of the relationships rather than by membership, and where individual identities are deeply bound up with those relationships, *all* relationships require an element of display to sustain them as family relationships" (Finch, 2007, p. 71, emphasis original). It has been recognised by Almack

(2008) that the concept of display may be a useful "orienting device to examine what might be going on below the surface of family lives" (p. 1195). Finch (2007) highlighted how the process of display entailed two elements of social interaction such as the direct interaction that occurs between family members (father and son) to establish family relationships and the social interaction required for individuals to attain feedback on their family displays. To elaborate on the second element, feedback is required from another person who is an active participant within the family confirming success of the relationship between the family members. This may be done verbally by providing praise to someone about their parenting. It is, therefore, the combination of direct social interactions with the individuals with whom one is establishing family relationships in conjunction with the validation of others that acknowledge "the family like nature of what they see, hear or learn about" (p. 74). Put simply, displaying family entails revealing your relationships to relevant others and having them accepted as familial.

James and Curtis (2010) entered the debate on family displays by arguing how it is unsustainable to suggest that it is only family members who observe and provide feedback given that familial social interactions are not limited to the private sphere. Others observing may be potential sources of feedback for a family and their feedback may not always be positive (Gabb, 2011; Almack, 2011). Dermott and Seymour (2011) have recognised that family displays may not always be characterised as 'successful' and may be misrecognised or simply not accepted by others. Roth (2011) explained that the reasoning lies in certain displays not being perceived as familial as "certain relationships can be considered by observers to be so far from their preconceived notions about family life, that they might refuse to recognise certain acts as constituting displaying the family" (p. 114). Heaphy (2011) elaborated by stating how "alternative or critical displays of family are weak displays within our own culture with potential audiences for those displays unwilling to receive, interpret and validate them as desirable alternatives to the family" (p. 37). Walsh (2018) observed that within the context of multicultural communities how display often overlapped with other types of practices – religious, cultural, gendered and familial – to shape one another. For example, Werbner (2007) noted how wearing the hijab within Islam is not only a symbol of religious and cultural piety but also of family honour. Family, therefore, can be seen as site where the intersections of religious, cultural, gendered and familial practices are displayed.

As Seymour and Walsh (2013) have asserted, what is deemed to be an 'acceptable' family practice/ display may vary depending on the cultures that the families find themselves located amongst. Consequently, alternative displays may be produced in relations to the normative cultural constructs of a particular environment. Seymour (2011) noted that family displays within these circumstances may not reveal the positive and 'successful' nature of family practices with the potential costs of these 'unsuccessful' displays being high. I will provide further consideration throughout this thesis to examine the criteria, by which, displays are evaluated. I will focus on the relational element and analyse how 'success' is defined, within the context of this research.

Finch (2011) clarified that for her, family display was primarily concerned with conveying meanings to those within the family unit and not to external audiences. Heaphy (2011) responded by emphasising the importance of external audiences and laying claim that the concept of display would be meaningless if it solely focused on the internal unit. There is scholarly consensus that the role of audiences ought to be extended beyond the immediate family (James and Curtis, 2010; Dermott and Seymour, 2011; Gabb, 2011; Heaphy, 2011). Dermott and Seymour (2011) have lay claim that "the requirement to display family may involve a wide range of potential audiences that are not restricted to family members" (p. 17). Walsh (2015) has also asserted that multiple audiences may require different displays and these may entail contrasting perspectives and understandings as to what constitutes a 'good' and 'successful' display. This raises important empirical questions about the significance of audiences beyond the narrow confines of the immediate family and how their interpretations of family displays and feedback may be more critical and reflective of wider cultural norms and values (James and Curtis, 2010; Heaphy, 2011). Haynes and Dermott (2011) have reminded us that particular audiences – individuals, groups, institutions – may be critical in shaping family practices. They have also proposed the idea of future audiences. On the topic of *who matters,* they have suggested that audiences may not be thought about as being in the vicinity of the family. It may be the case that the meanings underpinning particular displays are for 'future' and 'imagined' audiences. To summarise, audiences cannot be seen as passive consumers to displays but active interactants in the meaning-making of family practices. I will explore throughout this thesis, on the topic of recognition and

validation from audiences, *whose* recognition of the family-like quality of relationships is deemed to be important? And *how* is that recognition conveyed? (Finch, 2007).

Finch (2007) suggested another process of displaying family that went beyond social interactions. She lay claim "there are ways in which [family] displays are supported and reinforced by background features, which we might think of as 'tools' for display" (p. 77). Such 'tools' are wide ranging and may entail physical objects such as the process of giving gifts to convey meanings about relationships (Cheal, 1988). Elsewhere, there have been other interpretations of what constitutes 'tools' for display with Rees et al. (2012) highlighting eating practices and how "mealtimes allow families to enact and display family life" (p. 2). James and Curtis (2010) recognised the widespread cultural importance attached to the family meal and how it accentuates a "we-ness" (p. 1173). After all, family meals are what 'proper' families do (DeVault, 1991). Zittoun (2004) observed how naming a child also constituted a 'tool' of display, as the process enables parents to tell the world what type of child they want to be parents to. On the topic of migrant families, Walsh (2015) has stated that naming practices may be strategic as a means to build/ sustain connections with the parents original homeland and the host country. These examples indicate that 'tools' cannot be limited to physical objects. The decision made by Finch (2007) to adopt the term 'tools' as opposed to using the terms 'methods' or 'processes' remains unclear and is likely to create confusion on what may be categorised as 'tools' towards conveying meanings that "these are my family relationships, and they work" (Finch, 2007, p. 73). I will examine how the boxers perceived and understood the various ways in which their parents utilised 'tools' to display their family practices.

To conclude, Finch (2007) wrote upon introducing the concept of display that whilst it provided an invaluable contribution towards the sociological tool kit, it was still in its very early phases and would benefit from further empirical and theoretical rigour. She invited researchers "to refine the concept as well as to use it" (p. 65). Ever since, there have been many significant applications and developments particularly through the edited collection by Dermott and Seymour (2011) entitled *Displaying Families: A New Concept for the Sociology of Family Life.* Julie Walsh's (2015) PhD thesis was also underpinned conceptually by the application of display to aid a better understanding of the dynamics of migrant families residing in Hull and how they interacted with the local and transnational communities.

Alongside the family practices framework, I will utilise the concept of display throughout the analysis of data to provide a theoretical and conceptual underpinning for the empirical accounts. My aim will not only be to work with it but to also hone and develop it as recommended by Finch (2007), Dermott and Seymour (2011) and Walsh (2015).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I critically examined the existing literature pertaining to the central theme of this review – relatedness. I integrated arguments from previous studies that had explored the various ways in which BrAsian families and communities have shaped the engagement of younger generations in sports, physical activity and where the literature exists - boxing. Throughout, I posed questions where ambiguities in the literature existed. These will be returned to during the analysis of data. I then moved onto explicating the theoretical framework of *family practices* and the concept of *family displays.* These will form the substantive backdrop for this thesis. I argued that my objective is not only to apply the theoretical framework of family practices and the concept of family displays to the empirical data but to also develop and enrich them. I have not provided an overview of *all* the key arguments in the literature given the restrictions on the word count and the necessity to maintain focus. This has been my intention. I recognised that developing a context and argument for this research would necessitate privileging some literature whilst omitting the rest. In the forthcoming chapter, I will explain the methodological decisions that were taken for this study.

Methods

"A single life story stands alone, and it would be hazardous to generalise on the grounds of that one alone, as a second life story could immediately contradict those premature generalisations. But several life stories take in the same set of socio-structural relations support each other and make up, all together, a strong body of evidence"

(Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame, 1981, p. 167)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will detail and justify the methodological decisions that have been made throughout this research. I have refrained from passively aligning with a grand position, doctrine or philosophy as this would not have been helpful for the research process. This is supported by Jennifer Mason (2002) who has encouraged qualitative researchers to think strategically about the integration of methods as opposed to piecing them together in an *ad hoc* or eclectic way. By not being tied to any philosophical blueprint, I have allowed the necessary fluidity and flexibility for addressing the research questions. This chapter starts by attending to how my positionality shaped my research encounters and influenced data generation and interpretation throughout this study. I then outline my research design and generation methods by, firstly, describing and justifying the sampling decisions that were made around location, strategies, access, recruitment and my reasoning behind ceasing participant recruitment and data generation. There onwards, I present and explain how I utilised the qualitative multiple methods of ethnography and interviews to generate data. Subsequently, I detail how thematic analysis was adopted to analyse and interpret the data. I then describe the ethical considerations that were necessary for this research. Lastly, I note the methodological limitations. This chapter does not (and should not) represent neat, linear and sequential stages by which the research was undertaken. The reality was much more uncertain and messier and involved the iterative process of moving back and forth between different elements of the research (Mason, 2002).

3.2 Positionality: 'The Muslim … The Boxer … The Researcher'

Foote and Bartell (2011) understand that "the positionality which researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which their positionality is shaped, may influence what they may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes" (p. 46). Curtner-Smith (2002) has, therefore, recommended that researchers declare their positionalities to ensure that there is transparency about how their values, beliefs and experiences may implicate the decisions made throughout the research process. Mason (2002) has rightfully acknowledged that qualitative researchers cannot be neutral, objective or detached from the knowledge and evidence that they generate. They should, instead, seek to understand their role in the research process and continue to ask

themselves difficult questions as part of the activity of reflexivity. If positionality, therefore, refers to who we are, what we know and what we believe then reflexivity focuses on what we do with this knowledge (Finlay, 1998). I do not believe that the interweaving between our personal biographies and the research process reduces validity nor its scientific significance. Rather, I would suggest that it is essential to understand how our personal and political perspectives shape the research decisions that we make whilst striving towards attaining methodological rigour. To this extent, I shall detail in this chapter and in the forthcoming analysis chapters how my positionality yielded both advantages and dilemmas at different stages of the study.

I found that being a second-generation BrAsian male and having trained and competed as an amateur boxer at regional, national and international level brought a whole host of benefits and issues specifically pertaining to research doctrines on 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Martyn Hammersley (1993) has, for example, argued similarly, that there are "no overwhelming advantages to being an insider or outsider, but that each position has both advantages and disadvantages, which take on slightly different weights depending on the specific circumstances and the purpose of the research" (p. 433). For these reasons, Mercer (2007) has characterised the prospective influence of positionality as a "double-edged sword" (p. 7). What, for instance, an insider researcher gains in terms of "their extensive and intimate knowledge of the culture and taken-for-granted understandings of the actors" may be lost in terms of "their myopia and their inability to make the familiar strange" (Hawkins, 1990, p. 417). Entering fieldwork, I maintained the assumption that I would enjoy numerous advantages of being an insider to the domain that I was studying. This was based on a combination of factors which included my identity alongside being an active member (for approximately thirteen years) of the boxing/ local community that I was embarking upon studying. It rapidly dawned, however, that I had overestimated the possible insider advantages that I thought I had. This, subsequently, did not only affect my confidence but also led to me becoming increasingly reflexive about the methodological decisions that I was making whilst erring on the side of caution.

It is common, as Breen (2007) has argued, that qualitative researchers usually begin their studies as 'natives'. They tend to already be intimately engaged with their research domains and are not usually accused of "parachuting into people's lives … and then vanish[ing]" (Gerrard, 1995, p. 59). Drew (2006) has labelled these researchers as seagulls who fly into communities "crap all over everything then leave the community to tidy up the mess" (p. 40). The sample that I was working with did not fear that I had 'colonial-like' intentions that entailed 'entering, seeing and then disappearing', as I had relationships with many of them that have pre-existed the study. There was, therefore, no reluctance from anyone to interact with the research on the basis that I was a stranger who was merely exploiting their insights for personal gain. This was based on a degree of trust that had been established years in advance. If I were, for example, a total stranger to the sample that I was studying then the process of developing trust and rapport would have been significantly lengthy. This would have undoubtedly been problematic given the periodic COVID-19 social restrictions that were occurring amidst fieldwork. I, therefore, had to be efficient with the uncertain amounts of time that I had to generate data.

Being an insider enabled me to interact naturally with the group whilst knowing when and where I needed to generate data. I was familiar with routine practice and what was deemed as 'normal' which enabled me to glean rich and focused data. Having insider knowledge also meant that I was able to identify when an individual had changed his or her 'normal' behaviour and what the potential causes may have been. Lipson (1984) warned that there may be a risk of over-familiarisation wherein insider researchers take-for-granted and purposefully disregard moments that require clarification for the underpinning factors and rationales. Saidin (2017) has likewise postulated that insiders may often enter studies absorbed by assumptions that tend to overlook certain issues which outsiders may regard as salient. I was aware that my values, beliefs and previous experiences risked constraining my vision and, as such, adopted numerous strategies with regard to the data generation and analysis methods to mitigate the drawbacks of being an insider. These will be discussed throughout this chapter.

Mercer (2007) has suggested that "the insider/ outsider dichotomy is, in reality, a continuum with multiple dimensions and that all researchers constantly move back and forth along several axes, depending upon time, location, participants and the topic" (p. 1). Breen (2007) is supportive by arguing that the insider/ outsider dichotomy is simplistic and unlikely to adequately capture the role and experiences of the researcher. It is, instead, better to conceptualise the role that a researcher plays on a continuum as opposed to the insider/ outsider dualism. I concur with these authors, as I did not experience falling on either side of the insider/ outside fence. Rather, I felt that I would shift back and forth the continuum feeling 'more insider than outsider' or 'more outsider than insider' dependant on the context, situation or people before me. To conclude, I draw upon Holmes (2020) who has postulated that a good strong positionality statement will incorporate a rich description of the researchers philosophical, personal and theoretical beliefs and perspectives alongside how their social identity characteristics (age, gender, sexuality, social class, 'race', ethnicity and/ or religious beliefs) may potentially shape the research. I do not believe that it is desirable to produce such a statement beforehand given that it does not adequately capture and demonstrate the influence that the researcher has (or has had) on the generation of data and production of knowledge. Therefore, I shall integrate throughout this chapter and in the forthcoming analysis chapters how my positionality influenced the fieldwork, interpretation of the data and the analysis.

3.3 Research Design: Data Generation Methods

This substantive section will present the qualitative multiple methods approach that was adopted throughout this study. Utilising multiple methods has been perceived as a means towards attaining methodological triangulation whereby the combination and application of several methods allows for a more detailed and complete picture of the phenomenon being studied (Denzin, 2007). Roller and Lavrakas (2015) have elaborated by stating:

"… [multiple methods] enables the qualitative researcher to study relatively complex entities or phenomena in a way that is holistic and retains meaning. The purpose is to tackle the research objective from all the methodological sides. Rather than pigeonholing the research into a series of focus groups or observations, the multiple method approach frees the researcher into total immersion with the subject matter." (p. 287).

It is important for me to clarify the terminology that I have adopted and will continue to adopt, as this chapter proceeds. It is not unconventional to read or hear social scientists talking about 'collecting' data. I, however, maintain an alternative view in that data for this research has been 'generated' as opposed to 'collected'. The data was not 'out there' as an already existing reserve of knowledge ready to be collected independently of any interpretation (Mason, 2002). By speaking about 'generating' rather than 'collecting' data, I am rejecting the idea that I was a completely neutral and objective researcher of the social sphere. Instead, I effectively used the methodological tools at my disposal to generate data from my chosen sources rather than extracting repositories of knowledge existing in collectable states.

3.3.1 Sampling

3.3.1.1 Location: 'Between the Ropes'

This study was predominantly conducted in Bradford, West Yorkshire. Population figures released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2018 highlighted that 24.7% out of the estimated 534,000 Bradford residents are Muslims. Statistics also revealed that Bradford contains the largest proportion of people from Pakistani origin (20.3%) in England (ONS, 2018). Bradford has generally been depicted as an ethnically heterogenous city. This was evident given the considerable number of mosques and *halal* meat grocers which reflected the strong BrAsian presence within the district thus making it an ideal location to undertake this study. Like Wacquant (1992), Woodward (2004) and Fulton (2011), I decided to focus upon studying one gym to ensure that the fieldwork was manageable yet thorough and rich in detail. As Sparkes and Smith (2014) have argued, the researcher does not study a place or site (school, health club and so on) per se but some phenomenon (social process, human action) within that place or site. I chose this research site on the basis of availability, accessibility and theoretical interests. Schwandt (1997) suggested that "a single place may be chosen because in that site one had good reason to believe that the human action or social process going on there […] is critical to understanding, testing or elaborating on some theory or generalised concept of that social process. Similar to Wacquant (1992), Woodward (2004) and Fulton (2011), I also interacted with the wider boxing scene to ensure that I could generate views that were not exclusive or representative of the particular boxing gym that I

was engaging with. This meant, upon occasion, that I would visit other boxing clubs in the regional vicinity to conduct interviews. Such examples will be elaborated on momentarily.

Figure 2: The Karmand Centre Amateur Boxing Club (Upstairs View)

Figure 3: The Karmand Centre Amateur Boxing Club (Floor View)

The gym itself that was the focal point of this study is situated at a local community centre (figures 2 and 3). It was open every weekday between 9am-5pm during fieldwork. This, was however, an unusual opening schedule given the COVID-19 pandemic as the evening caretaker was being furloughed. This meant that the boxing club had to close every day at 5pm because of the community centres health and safety policy. Consequently, I was therefore unable to observe/ partake in the evening boxing sessions where I would have been

able to study the dynamic, routines and any other behaviours relevant to the research questions. Instead, I had to rely on the one-to-one and small group workouts occurring during the day, as the larger sessions could not be held earlier given that the majority of the boxing squad had educational or work-related commitments elsewhere.

There is an abundance of information in the public domain ranging from social media posts, news articles and other web pages highlighting the strong association that I have had both as a competitor and a trainer with the main observation site for this study. This backdrop alongside the statement that I have presented earlier detailing my positionality and years of experience with the relevant local/ boxing made the task of promising anonymity problematic. Having acknowledged that it would have been difficult to effectively conceal identifying features of the location and sample that was being studied, I therefore endeavoured to mitigate this issue by offering choice and ownership to the club and participants that I engaged with as to whether they would be happy to reveal their identities for this study. Tilley and Woodthorpe (2011, p. 200) have urged researchers to not make blanket decisions about upholding anonymity for the following reasons:

"On the one hand, to reveal identifying features challenges the normal expectation of the benefit of protection that anonymity brings; on the other, upholding the principle of autonomy could actually serve to undermine the research and/ or participants' autonomy. In particular, where participants are active agents in the research, - as they can be with participatory or emancipatory approaches – there is a strong case to be made for offering individuals and organisations the choice as to whether or not their identities are disclosed, even if this may create conflict between participants' and researchers' autonomy."

The head trainer granted permission for the club to be identified throughout the dissemination of findings. This was primarily based on a degree of trust that had been established beforehand. I believe that this was his way of expressing that there should be no surreptitious stance about the values, beliefs and operations of the club. Sparkes and Smith (2014) have argued that even if pseudonyms are used and names are changed that the 'better' a qualitative study, the 'worse' it will be at maintaining anonymity. Kaiser (2009) raised the issue that modifying empirical accounts in qualitative research through the process of 'data cleaning' risks rendering the findings as meaningless. This is supported by Mellick and Fleming (2010) who observed that when rich descriptions are "toned down" to protect

anonymity and confidentiality, how arguments may become “less authentic and the analysis less persuasive” (p. 301). Entering the debate on ethical considerations early has been necessary for the sake of coherence and in justifying my decision to reveal the name of the main observation site. There will be further exploration, later in this chapter, about the choices that were made around concealing/ revealing the identities of the sample. To summarise, it would have been challenging to hide the identifiable details of the location that I was studying given my renowned relationship with the club. By presenting the head trainer with a choice about anonymity, not only was I able to mitigate this issue, but also, I provided him with some research autonomy. Further, I was able to maintain contextual identifiers that had not been ‘washed out’ through a meticulous process of pseudonymisation and anonymisation. This would have ultimately had negative repercussions for the significance and potency of my work.

3.3.1.2 Sampling Strategies, Access and Recruitment

Michael Quinn Patton (1990) argued that qualitative inquiry typically focuses on studying the depth, nuance and complexity of relatively small samples that have been selected *purposefully*. Patton (1990) postulated that “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling“ (p. 169, emphasis original). At the beginning of fieldwork, I sought the verbal consent and support of the head trainer at the Karmand Centre Amateur Boxing Club to observe and/ or interview prospective study participants who would potentially be able to provide this research with information-rich insights into the influence that their parents had on their engagement within boxing. I was granted permission, without hesitation, as a result of my pre-existing relationship with the head trainer. This consent was conditional, however, upon ensuring that my fieldwork did not disrupt the focus and dynamics of the training environment that I was embedding myself within. The head trainer was not controlling about how I conducted fieldwork though he did play an instrumental role in, at times, blocking my access to speaking with certain individuals on the grounds that they were easily distracted and would then struggle to regain focus on the training session. I drew upon Patton’s 14+1 framework of purposeful sampling whilst selecting the strategies best useful towards participant recruitment. Aligning with Patton (2002), I took advantage of

selecting, using and mixing any of the 14 purposeful sampling strategies that met the needs of the research. My initial sampling strategy was to adopt *criterion sampling* meaning that all the prospective study participants had to meet the predetermined criterions of (1) being aged 18 years or above; (2) having the minimum boxing experience of training/ competing at amateur level; and lastly (3) recognising themselves as being BrAsian.

I was able to recruit the study participants, many with whom I had pre-existing relationships, either through face-to-face conversations at the gym or by messaging them personal platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram. I aligned with Ysabel Gerrard (2021) in utilising my personal rather than a new research phone number/ account for data generation to maintain credibility with my prospective study participants whilst refraining from giving them the impression that they were being contacted by a 'fake' phone number or social media account. In the second interview, as presented in table 1, I had the experience of *opportunistically sampling* a parent who was fascinated by the points of contention, in my interview with Ahsan, as he listened on from afar, and wanted to provide his own contributions towards the subject. Patton (1990) has described how opportunistic sampling throughout fieldwork involves on-the-spot decisions about sampling to take advantage of new opportunities during actual data generation. In other words, "opportunistic sampling takes advantage of whatever unfolds as it unfolds" (Quinn, 1990, p. 179). I felt that it would be unwise to delay or decline another individual offering to make me privy to privileged information. I was not only opportunistic about *who* I sampled but also opportunistic about *when* I sampled. Put differently, I made the decision during fieldwork, given the looming social restrictions on interactions alongside the time constraints of my PhD, to interview study participants whenever the opportunities presented themselves. For instance, I interviewed two participants within one day and a total of ten participants in the space of six weeks to ensure that the pending national lockdown did not significantly disrupt my ability to start analysing the data.

In the endeavour of locating information-rich key informants, I also employed *snowball sampling* which necessitated that I asked situated people to nominate prospective study participants who could potentially provide insight into a phenomenon because they know a lot about it and could also lead me to many different sources (Emmel, 2013). This sampling method was necessary whilst searching to recruit females who could potentially provide me

with an insight into their gendered experiences of being amateur boxers and trainers. I asked my study participants if they could reach out to any females who may qualify and be interested in sharing their experiences. They were requested to share my contact details and ask any prospective study participants to contact me if they were willing to provide an interview. I selected this approach to maximise my chances of recruitment given that 'cold-calling' individuals may not have had the same credibility as being recommended by a mutual friend. Shaw and Holland (2014) have argued that the purpose of snowball sampling is to facilitate the inclusion of participants who could not have been directly accessed by the researcher. This method was also advantageous as the quality of the data generated is likely to be improved if greater trust is engendered through the referral of a previous study participant (Gratton and Jones, 2014).

Pitney and Parker (2009) have commented how "some findings prompt you to look for confirming data or explore aspects of a phenomenon that you did not anticipate. In these cases, you may need to interview participants whom you did not originally consider" (p. 42). Whilst I began my research with predetermined criterions about who I would sample, I found during fieldwork, however, that my data would have been enriched further by speaking with the head and assistant trainers at the Karmand Centre Amateur Boxing Club. They were both white males from working-class backgrounds and had been involved with the sport and local community for decades. They were not willing to partake in one-to-one interviews because of time constraints but were happy for me to record our conversations before/ during/ after training in my research diary. I gathered that speaking with individual boxers would only provide me with personal and limited insights towards addressing my research questions. The trainers, however, had years of experience working alongside BrAsian families and communities within boxing and would be able to share a breadth and depth of insights and perspectives. Researchers, after all, select an individual, number of individuals or a group whom they have an interest in and who they feel will provide information-rich views (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). These may be members of a subculture or community who have knowledge of the setting or the phenomenon that is of interest. The implications of my approach aligned with Holloway (1997) who has noted that "sampling is not fixed in advance but is an ongoing process guided by emerging ideas" (p. 142). In sum, the essence of my sampling strategies was to privilege the pragmatic approach over theoretical orthodoxy. I made choices for

pragmatic reasons, seeking out the richest information, the most appropriate comparisons within the time and resources available whilst always being mindful on the audience for the research (Emmel, 2013). In the forthcoming section, I will acknowledge the long-standing debates that have featured in qualitative research which have questioned how large sample sizes ought to be (Mason, 2002; Roy et al., 2015; Low, 2019; Staller, 2021: Braun and Clarke, 2021). I will, however, detail that the perspective taken within this research has aligned with Nick Emmel (2013) who has concluded that "to ask how big the sample size is or how many interviews are enough is to pose the wrong question" (p. 138).

3.3.1.3 Sampling Size: 'How Many Is Enough?'

"It is not the number of cases that matters, it is what you do with them that counts"

(Emmel, 2013, p. 154)

Steinmetz (2005) noted that the logic of positivism/ empiricism appears the be the epistemological unconsciousness of the social sciences. For instance, the assumption that the larger the sample, the more scientific a study becomes (Kvale, 1996). Emmel (2013) has observed how there is an unwritten pseudo-quantitative logic in the social sciences that deems n = 30 as the desired figure for a qualitative sample size. Pursuing a large heterogeneous sample would have made it difficult for me to examine the data in all of its nuances and complexities and would have inevitably led to much data not being used and wasted. Roy et al. (2015) have reminded us that qualitative analyses are less focused on frequency and more focus on the quality of experiences. Morse (1998) has written that with just the right amount a data, a researcher "must know what it is and be able to describe the phenomenon and explain all of its quirks and nuances. Because the phenomena in which we are interested do not usually follow demographic trends, we almost certainly have too much data about some particular event or experience, and gaps and holes in our data about other events" (p. 734). Throughout my analysis, I sought to bring insights into context, meaning and processes thus "maximising understanding of [a case] in all of its diversity" (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 180).

In total, I interviewed 8 males and 3 females, as presented in table 1. I also had multiple conversations with and observed several dozen boxers and trainers throughout fieldwork. This was an iterative process, as I was contemporaneously transcribing and coding my data.

As Mason (2002) has emphasised, qualitative research is not undertaken in neat, linear and sequential stages. It involves moving back and forth between different elements of the research process and researchers should not assume nor aspire to deal with any one element at a time. I did not fret too much about the number of participants that I had recruited but focused on the richness and quality of the evidence that I had gathered. Emmel (2013) has wrote, after all, that "reporting 1 or 200 cases were collected is not as important as the ways in which insights into events and experiences are used for interpretation, explanation and claims for research. The key consideration is validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry (which) have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observation/ analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size" (Emmel, 2013, p. 141, citing Patton 1990). In other words, my decision to cease data generation and begin writing-up was not informed by the size of the sample but rather a judgement on the adequacy of evidence (Staller, 2021).

Data saturation has been dubbed by researchers as the gold standard for making methodological decisions about the adequacy of their evidence and sample sizes (Guest et al., 2006; Roy et al., 2015). Constantinou et al. (2017) have described it as the "the flagship of validity for qualitative research" (p. 585). Sandelowski (2008) stated how data saturation occurs "when researchers sense they have seen or heard something so repeatedly that they can anticipate it" (p. 875). Data saturation, at this point, is where "nothing new is generated" (Low, 2019, p. 132). I agree with Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2021), however, that the concept of saturation is a rhetorical device rather than a methodological practice on determining the appropriateness on the data set and sample size. It is often deployed as a as post-hoc rationale or acceptable rhetorical justification of a more pragmatically determined sample size. Data saturation is "the rabbit pulled out of the hat, the magic trick that reveals and maybe also conceals" (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 211). Low (2019) has concurred by arguing that 'information redundancy' is a "logical fallacy, as there are always new insights to be made as long as data continues to be collected and analysed" (p. 131). Understanding saturation as the point, at which, no new information emerges is a logical impossibility, as anyone who has gone back to reanalyse a data set has discovered. Analysis is never complete; there is always something to discover, some new insights to be revealed (Low, 2019).

So, if saturation is not an adequate method for ceasing participant recruitment, then what is? I made the judgement to halt sampling and data generation by 'taking stock' of my progress by testing the depth and adequacy of the evidence that I had generated before deciding on whether I should continue further sampling and data generation (Mason, 2002). My deliberations considered both ethical and practical issues. From an ethical perspective, I deemed that I would have merely been exploiting a participants time and emotional energy if I had *generated data from them just for the sake of generating data.* Put differently, it would have been unprincipled to gather participants insights just for the pursuit of the glorified *n* = 30. From a practical perspective, I reflected on the ample data that I had recorded in my research diary which amounted to approximately 78,000 words of ethnographic observations and interview transcriptions. I would have problematised my ability to study the richness, depth and nuances of the data without 'taking stock' and testing the empirical data before me. As Roy et al. (2015) have argued, large sample sizes and data sets "may make it difficult to examine data in all of its complexity" (p. 250). To discover how sensible and workable my data was towards producing a set of convincing and credible arguments, I developed a few trial themes and start a trial run of writing-up the data in the form of analysis chapters. I shall return to the data interpretation and analysis methods that I employed, later in this chapter. To summarise, I was able to cease sampling and data generation following the stocktaking exercise of trialling and testing data wherein I concluded that I had sufficient data for addressing my research questions.

Table 1: Study Participants (Interviews)

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Level/ Tenure	Interview Duration	Date
Qayoom	Male	British-Pakistani	24	Amateur/ 8 Years	1 Hour, 9 Minutes and 16 Seconds	18/09/2020
Ahsan + Uncle Issy	Male	British-Pakistani	26 + 46	Amateur and Trainer/ 12 Years + Parent	40 Minutes and 29 Seconds	21/09/2020
Yusuf	Male	British-Pakistani	24	Amateur/ 4 Years	29 Minutes and 6 Seconds	21/09/2020
Muhammad Ali	Male	British-Pakistani	24	Professional (Olympian)/ 13 Years	26 Minutes and 28 Seconds	26/09/2020
Sanaa	Female	British-Pakistani	22	Amateur and Trainer/ 8 Years	52 Minutes and 43 Seconds	27/09/2020
Safiyaah	Female	British-Pakistani	22	Amateur/ 4 Years	1 Hour, 10 Minutes and 30 Seconds	01/10/2020
Harris Akbar	Male	British-Pakistani	21	Amateur/ 12 Years (GB Podium Squad)	29 Minutes and 48 Seconds	03/10/2020
Saif	Male	British-Pakistani	30	Amateur and Trainer/ 14 Years	43 Minutes and 52 Seconds	03/10/2020
Rahith	Male	British-Pakistani	21	Amateur/ 4 Years	42 Minutes and 49 Seconds	27/10/2020
Ambreen Sadiq	Female	British-Pakistani	24	Amateur and Trainer/ 14 Years	1 Hour, 4 Minutes and 21 Seconds	29/10/2020

3.3.2 Ethnographic Methods

Ethnography entails the researcher participating, either overtly or covertly, in peoples daily lives for an extended period of time, observing what happens, listening to what is said and/ or asking questions through informal and formal interviews. In other words, generating whatever data is available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). The role that a researcher may assume within an ethnography may range from 'complete participation', on the one hand, wherein the researcher observes whilst fully participating to 'complete invisibility', on the other hand, where the researcher takes the 'fly on the wall' approach (Hennink et al., 2020). Within the context of this study, complete participation at the main research site was the only feasible option to generate data (figure 4), as attending the gym to just sit down, take notes and not partake in the session would have drawn far too much attention from other individuals, who would have questioned why I was not training. As Hennink et al. (2020) have argued, ethnographers ought to blend into research contexts without drawing attention to themselves in order to generate authentic and credible data. Sugden (1996) stated that "it is only through total immersion that she or he can become sufficiently conversant with the formal and informal rules governing the webbing of the human interactions under investigation so that its innermost secrets can be revealed (p. 201). For O'Reilly (2012, p. 112), "participating enables the strange to become familiar", as the researcher is able to examine mundane, taken-for-granted and unremarkable (to the participants) features of everyday life. I was able to seamlessly integrate given my insider status to commence obtaining *thick description* within the social setting which incorporated situating people's behaviours and actions within local frameworks to examine interpretations and look for meanings (Geertz, 1973).

Figure 4: Complete Participation (Fieldwork)

Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) have reminded us that not all oral accounts are produced by informants directly responding to an ethnographers questions: they may be unsolicited. I decided that the most organic way to commence generating data was to join unsolicited exchanges by overhearing conversations in passing and then getting involved. These 'naturally occurring' accounts have been deemed to be useful sources of information about the social setting, perspectives, concerns and the discursive practices of the people who produce them (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Okely (1983) was generally unable to go beyond observations and notes from unsolicited accounts in her research with Gypsies, as even asking questions informally would have aroused suspicion: "the gypsies' experience of direct questions is partly formed by outsiders who would harass, prosecute or convert [..] I found the very act of questioning elicited either an evasive and incorrect answer or a glazed look" (p. 45). I also maintained the assumption, based on insider knowledge, that starting conversations by posing random and direct questions towards individuals that I had known for years, irrespective of them knowing about my research, would have been problematic and may have led to them feeling spontaneously puzzled and responding with artificial accounts. Herein, I was sympathising with Agar (1980) who observed "in the streets […] you don't ask

questions [..] you should not have to ask […] to be accepted is to be hip; to be hip is to be knowledgeable; to be knowledgeable is to be capable of understanding what is going on and what is what based on minimal cues" (p. 456). I, however, did not passively rely on the content of unsolicited accounts but used these as entry points to enter conversations and initiate probes and tangents about what I deemed was insightful. The aim, after all, is not to generate 'pure' data that are free from potential bias. There is no such thing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019).

I was aware of the strict rules that governed the gym. Put simply, if you were not training during the session then you were transgressing the rules. I was not given any special treatment during training sessions because of my research, as this would have risked jeopardising standards and providing the impression that the trainer was privileging some gym users over others. That being said, I had to surreptitiously use the small amounts of time during warm-up exercises, the one-minute intervals in-between rounds and the cool-down activities to generate data. I was unable to use a notepad to make fieldnotes, as this would have undoubtedly alerted others and disrupted the natural order of the research setting. Therefore, I used my iPhone to record any relevant data. The limited time I had between rounds and during water breaks meant that I could only note a series of short words and sentences rather than comprehensives accounts. At the earliest possible opportunity following training sessions, I would then combine these notes that acted as prompts with a recollection of my memory to recontextualise and fully transcribe important events (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998). To structure my data, I conformed with the guidelines advocated by Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) which required me to include: (1) the date, time, and place of observation; (2) specific facts, numbers and details of what happened; (3) sensory impressions: sights, sounds, textures, smells, taste; (4) my personal interpretations of the event; (5) specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations and insider language; and lastly, (6) questions about people or behaviours at the site for future investigation.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) have argued that fieldworkers understandably maintain much of their attention towards what people say or do. They have, however, urged them to also recognise other sources of data such as documents, artefacts and photos that may illuminate the significance of other aspects of social life. Sparkes and Smith (2014) have also lay claim that visual imagery offers a different way of 'knowing' the world, which goes beyond

knowledge generated and communicated through written and spoken words alone. I had the opportunity to record data on the images that surrounded the walls of the Karmand Centre Amateur Boxing Club, before it was refurbished, whilst I was conducting fieldwork (figure 5). I will report my findings and interpretations within the forthcoming analysis chapters. However, I was able to glean an abundance of information that 'showed' me rather than just 'told' me about the history of the club, the majority demographic that had trained there over the years, who (in terms of gender, 'race', ethnicity and religion) had accomplished the most and much more. As Sparkes and Smith (2014) have argued, visual images can act as unique forms of data that have the ability to amass complex layers of meaning in a format, which is both accessible and easily retrievable for researchers.

Figure 5: The Karmand Centre Amateur Boxing Club – Before Refurbishment (Upstairs View)

Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) noted that it is distinctly advantageous to complement observational techniques with interviewing to probe and develop ideas that have been generated from the ethnographic methods. I, therefore, utilised my fieldnotes to update the interview schedule that I had drafted before fieldwork. Meaning that I was able to insert

questions and lines of inquiry that were not previously thought about. This was an iterative process and I continued to inform my interview schedule throughout fieldwork based upon observations and oral accounts right until data generation had ceased. Data from ethnographic and interview methods were not generated over two separate phases but rather contemporaneously. For instance, I would partake in a training session, conduct a one-to-one interview and then return the following day to join a training session and continue with my ethnography. Being in the gym environment and having conversations with fellow boxers was ideal for recruitment, as I would be in the position to ask individuals if they wanted to elaborate on the subject that we were discussing over a one-to-one interview thus enabling them to partake in a "conversation with a purpose" (Holloway, 1997, p. 94).

3.3.3 Interviews

Qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual, and therefore, the job of the interviewer is to ensure that relevant contexts and subjects are foregrounded so that situated knowledge can be generated (Mason, 2002). The assumption is not that facts are reported and that data is merely excavated but rather how knowledge is constructed and reconstructed through the interactions and co-production between the interviewers and the interviewees (Kvale, 1996; Mason, 2002). I employed interview methods to appreciate how the study participants knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions were meaningful properties of social reality. Mason (2002) argued how utilising qualitative interviews enables the generation of social explanations that lay emphasis on the depth, nuance, complexity and roundedness of the data. This would not be possible through a more superficial analysis that seeks the representativeness and generalisations of large sample sizes.

I initially sought to conduct narrative interviews which would have provided my study participants with the platform to share their stories. Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016) have observed how narrative interviews involve no fixed agenda and typically allow the interviewees to dictate the direction, control and pace of an interview by presenting stories in ways that make sense to them. I realised within my opening few interviews, however, that this method was not as useful given that the interviewees were unable to articulate their responses for sustained periods of time. I, therefore, resorted to utilising semi-structured

interviews as this method was naturally the most apt for generating data. This necessitated me to utilise an interview schedule to navigate the conversation. I observed how this interview approach was more advantageous than the narrative interview, as I had the flexibility to probe on opinions, ideas, feelings and attitudes. This was appreciated by the study participants as it also provided them with some structure and displaced them from being in the situation where they would feel the necessity to narrate without any direction or purpose.

Participants provided consent for the interviews to be recorded on my iPhone thus enabling me to capture the nature and content of their accounts. This option was privileged over transcribing the interview in writing which would have inevitably led to me producing an incoherent account and disrupting my rapport with the interviewee, as I would have been too occupied with notetaking. As Measor (1985) has noted on the topic of researchers following what is being said and providing appropriate responses: “God forbid you should miss laughing at someone’s joke” (p. 62). Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) have emphasised that researchers ought to be active listeners; attending to what is being said to assess how it relates with the research focus and how it may reflect upon the circumstances of the interview. I observed, however, during an early interview that a study participant was influenced by the visibility of my iPhone and the fluctuating illustrations that the phone screen, as his vocals were recorded by the microphone. He had distinctly changed the tone in his voice, choice of language and his general speech patterns. To some extent, he appeared to be replicating the formality you would expect from an operator at a call centre. I responded swiftly yet subtly upon observing this by discreetly covering my phone screen to minimise the impact of its presence. This made a discernible difference, as I observed within minutes how the interviewee began to speak in a more casual and relaxed manner thus providing an account that was authentic and credible. Subsequently, I remained prudent in the interviews that followed to ensure my iPhone was not placed in visible sight of the interviewees which could unduly influence the data generation.

I had lesser control on when and where the interviews would be scheduled though the participants preferred to meet either before or after training sessions as this was convenient for them given their busy schedules. This was, at times, problematic, as some interviews had to be cut short if, for instance, the start of the training session was approaching or if the

participants were too tired from training and wanted to go home. To summarise, the lengths of the interviews were predominantly dependant on how much time the participants could make available. Dexter (2006) has warned researchers, elsewhere, about the dangers of conducting an interview in an environment unsuited to it. Likewise, Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) argue that interviewing people in their own territory is the best strategy. It enables them to relax much more than they would in less familiar surroundings and it may also provide insight into their sense of themselves and their world (Herzog, 2005). I allowed most of the study participants to dictate where they felt most comfortable about participating in an interview. I ended up, therefore, conducting interviews in multiple locations based on the participants preferences which included the corner of the gym before/ after the training session, in the car and at a local restaurant. There was, however, greater complexity when arranging interview locations with the female study participants.

I maintained the approach of allowing the young women involved with this research to recommend preferences about the days and times that they would be happy to partake in an interview. I was, however, more assertive about negotiating a mutual location for the interviews to be held at. This was predominantly because I deemed that it may be unwise and problematic to generate data from a young BrAsian woman that I had met for the first time in a completely private setting. Therefore, I had insisted upon conducting the interviews in settings that featured other members of the public in the background. I also had to remain mindful about the surrounding community. For example, I interviewed Sanaa at her gym that was based in rural Leeds and Safiyaah in the outdoor seating area at the University of Leeds. With Ambreen, however, she recommended meeting at a local café near her residence in Bradford because she was heavily pregnant and could not travel too far. I was mindful about this recommendation because we both had friends and relatives in the local community and was conscious about how the pair of us being seen during the middle of a working day, at a hospitality establishment, may be taken out of context and misinterpreted. I, therefore, attempted to mitigate these factors by purposefully sitting in the corner of the café away from the entrance and windows to conduct the interview. I also endeavoured to gloss the appearance of our meeting by flooding the table with paperwork (research information sheets and consent forms) to maintain the impression that our meeting was for professional purposes.

3.4 Data Interpretation and Analysis

"Today on the street, I met, separately, two friends of mine who had gotten angry at each other. Each one told me the story of their quarrel. Each told me the truth. Each told me his reasons. Both were right. It is not that one saw one thing, the other something else; or that one saw one side of the matter, the other a different side. No: each saw things exactly as they happened, each saw them according to exactly the same criterion; but each saw something different, hence each was right. I found myself perplexed by this double existence of truth."

(Fernando Pessoa)

Qualitative data analysis entails a process of immersion within the data to identify and interpret the study participants distinct perspectives, beliefs, behaviours and how these all assume social and/ or cultural meanings. It involves producing a 'story' from the data, but not in the fictitious or imaginary sense, rather a coherent presentation of peoples experiences that reflect the depth, nuances and complexities of their accounts (Hennink et al., 2020). Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) have suggested that "good qualitative research allows chaos. If the problem could be precisely defined, if the meanings were known beforehand, if it were clear that a theory would explain a particular experience … qualitative research would be irrelevant" (p. 258). Hennink et al. (2020) have claimed that researchers balance their qualitative data analysis with a 'scientific' component that incorporates process, technique and rigour; and a 'creative' component that enables interpretive meaning and the development of innovative ideas. I employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method to identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meaning within the data (table 2). The analysis was not computer assisted. Hennink et al. (2020) have noted that the use of software often appears as the hallmark for assessing the standard and quality of qualitative research. Using software may provide a systematic and transparent analysis, however, this overlooks the "essentially humanistic approach to qualitative research" (Gibbs, 2014, p. 279) in how the quality and rigour lies in the ability of the analyst irrespective of a software program being used (Hennink et al., 2020).

Table 2: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Phase	**Description of the Process**
1) Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing the data, reading and rereading the data and noting down any initial ideas.
2) Generation initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systemic fashion across the data set.
3) Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes.
4) Reviewing themes	Checking how these themes work with the coded extracts and entire data set overall.
5) Defining and naming themes	Refining the specifics of each theme via ongoing analysis; ask what the overall story the analysis is telling.
6) Producing the report	Select vivid and compelling extracts, relate back to the research questions and literature to produce a scholarly report of the analysis.

Phase 1 involved immersing myself within the data by listening to the audio recordings, transcribing and then reading and rereading the transcripts and fieldnotes. This phase required me to read beyond the surface meaning of the data by actively, analytically and critically attending to the latent level of the data to comprehend the underlying themes, assumptions and conceptualisations that shaped the meaning of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Phase 2 began the systematic analysis of the data through coding which entailed labelling features of the data that may have been potentially relevant to the research questions. An example of this was “fear” and “pressure” relating to parental involvement. Codes were interpretations of the data and sought to go beyond the participants’ meanings and semantic surfaces of the data. Braun and Clarke (2012) suggested that if the analysis is a brick-built house then the codes are individual bricks and tiles that construct themes which are the walls and roofs. Phase 3 involved shifting from codes to themes that “capture something important about the data in relation to the research question[s] and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006,

p. 82). Herein, I sought to identify the broad topics around which codes clustered and shared some unifying meanings and features that could be used to constitutes themes and sub-themes. Braun and Clarke (2012) argued that “analysts are like sculptors, making choices about how to shape data and craft their piece of stone (the “raw data”) into a work of art (the analysis)” (p. 63). Searching from themes was an active process rather than one of discovery and I used evidence and ideas to develop themes and sub-themes around generational differences, parental motivations and aspirations for their children, gendered outcomes and so on.

Phases 4 and 5 combined entailed reviewing and defining the themes that I had constructed to ensure that they worked against the data and enabled me to produce a coherent and convincing argument pertaining to my research questions. In these phases, I recognised that qualitative data analysis would not be possible without writing and testing the persuasiveness of my themes. As Braun and Clarke (2013) have suggested, you can have insights and thoughts about your data but you cannot complete your analysis and then write it up as qualitative analysis is writing. Phase 6 was the final stage of the analysis which involved using generated themes to formulate this thesis. To summarise, thematic analysis assisted me during the interlinked processes of analysis and writing to transform an abundance of (messy and complex) information into a streamlined analysis that tells a clear, coherent and compelling story about the data and what they mean (Braun and Clarke, 2013). It is important, at this stage, to recognise that the data did not, and still does not, represent neat, tidy and rigid variables of analysis but ‘unfinished’ categories that are subject to shifting through the ongoing processes of meaning-making and interpretation (Mason, 2002). I was conscious whilst clustering themes and sub-themes together to produce my analysis chapters to avoid compartmentalising the boxers’ accounts into tight and reductive categories, as this would have problematised my ability to acknowledge the nuances and overlaps within the data. Taking this approach enabled me to signpost my analysis with arguments from previous chapters.

Braun and Clarke (2012) have argued that data do not speak for themselves - you must not simply paraphrase the content of the data. Your analytic narrative needs to tell the reader what is interesting and why. This must subsequently then be connected to the broader research questions and the scholarly fields within which the analysis is located. Remaining

attentive to the research questions was a priority throughout and this informed how I condensed the codes and sub-themes into producing the three analysis chapters featured within this thesis. The data in the analysis is therefore structured with chapter five examining how the study participants had been constrained from partaking in and/ or making any serious commitments to the sport of boxing by their parents. Chapter six analyses the importance and necessity for parents providing the necessary support to their children who have aspired to engage in and/ or make any serious commitments to the sport. Lastly, chapter seven is dedicated towards exploring the complexities involved with parents either enabling or constraining engagement through an examination of the female experience. These chapters are weaved together through the thematic thread on how the boxers perceived, understood and explained the reasoning of their parents in either supporting or constraining their personal projects.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Gaining ethical clearance from the University of Leeds was a necessary first step before embarking upon fieldwork. Institutional approval is not, however, the sole requirement for ethical conduct in the qualitative research journey. Ethics, after all, is not a static event but a continual process. Informed consent from the study participants, for example, was not a singular event that occurred at the start of fieldwork but rather and ongoing process that had to be negotiated and re-established on a regular basis (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). There are widespread views in qualitative research that obtaining a signed consent form is sufficient evidence of informed consent, as it provides the researcher with an audit trail demonstrating that the participant actively 'opted in' to partake in the study (Seymour and Ingleton, 1999; Miller and Bell, 2002; Lichtman, 2013). For the ethnographic phase of the research, it was not feasible to gain written consent from every individual that entered or left the gym, as this would have jeopardised the consent that I had obtained from the head trainer, on the basis that I was distracting those coming to train by plying them with unnecessary paperwork. Therefore, I was happy to accept verbal consent presuming that the individuals had familiarised themselves with the purpose of my research.

Every participant that agreed to take part in an interview was happy to sign a form and also provide consent verbally at the start of the audio recording. I had assured my participants that they reserved the right to withdraw their consent and request that their data be destroyed without the need to provide any justification. This was subject to a particular deadline that was deemed fair by the participants (3 months after fieldwork) to ensure writing-up was not significantly disrupted. No participants withdrew their consent or requested that their data was discarded. Prior to commencing fieldwork, I was aware that my insider status would be advantageous towards participant recruitment. I had to ensure that my pre-existing relationships with many of the participants did not impose any undue pressure meaning that they would feel obliged to partake in the study to avoid jeopardising our friendship. This, however, was not reflected when I sought to recruit participants as the frank and direct nature of some boxers personalities resulted in them unapologetically refusing to be involved because they had no interest and saw no benefit. To summarise, ensuring that I did not inadvertently impose any coercion or duress on prospective participants was not an issue as the boxers had no qualms in telling me no without any feelings of guilt or pressure.

Throughout this chapter, I have outlined how I addressed ethical dilemmas that emerged during fieldwork. For example, I detailed my reasons for not attending to matters on anonymity and confidentiality given that all the study participants maintained the boxing persona of being confident and outspoken about their views. Furthermore, omitting identifiable features from the data would have decontextualised meaning and/ or implicated another person altogether (Mellick and Fleming, 2010). I also reflected on how *generating data just for the sake of generating data* to pursue a large sample size would have been unethical in exploiting the participants time without the legitimate research requirement to do so. Leuenberger (2010) suggested that it is widely assumed how “researchers complete their field research, then disappear into the halls of academia, publish their results and build their careers on the backs of those from whom they took the data” (p. 26). This assumption reflects that researchers are insincere towards their participants and exploit their insights without having any genuine interest in them beyond the remit of their research. Being an insider with the gym, I have not ‘crashed out’ of the research setting within which I conducted

fieldwork and to date, maintain good and healthy relationships and regularly share my appreciation with all those that contributed towards data generation

3.6 Research Limitations

Handel (1997) argued that family research has, traditionally, been deficient in focusing exclusively upon one relationship (the parent-child or marital relationships) and has often generated data from one rather than multiple informants. Handel (1997) emphasised that "no member of any family is a sufficient source of information for that family" (p. 346). This has subsequently initiated a burgeoning interest for social scientists to generate accounts from multiple family members (Handel, 1997; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Becher, 2008). In this study, I was predominantly concerned with speaking to those who would be the most significantly impacted by parental decisions – the children. By chance, I did interview a father through opportunistic sampling who corroborated and expanded on the views provided by his nephew, the initial study participant. It could be argued that a methodological limitation of this study is how the research strongly focused on parents yet without the parents. Future researchers would benefit from studying family dynamics by recruiting multiple informants to explicate and explain the heterogeneity of perspectives, beliefs and whether the accounts provided by family members support or contradict one another. Options may include speaking with two, three or four family members simultaneously through paired or focus group interviews and/ or conducting ethnographic observations on the interactions between family members (Roy et al., 2015).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodological decisions that were made throughout this research. I started by attending to how my positionality shaped my research encounters and influenced data generation and interpretation throughout this study. I then outlined the research design and methods that I adopted by commencing with a description and justification of the sampling decisions around location, strategies, access, recruitment and sample size. This was then followed by a presentation and explanation of the qualitative multiple methods approach that combined ethnography and interviews to generate data. I then detailed how and why I used thematic analysis to analyse and interpret the data. I described the ethical considerations that were necessary for this research. Lastly, I made note

of the methodological limitations. To restate, I have not endeavoured to represent the research process in neat, linear and sequential stages. I was often involved in the iterative process of shifting back and forth between the different stages of the research which were usually overlapping and operating contemporaneously. The forthcoming analysis chapters will now examine how the boxers perceived, understood and explained the reasoning of their parents in either supporting or constraining their personal projects.

The ‘Archetypal Trajectory’: Family Expectations

“*You go to school, you go to uni, you get a degree, you get a nice job, 9-5, you start a family young and that’s it* […]”

4.1 Introduction

In this opening analysis chapter, I shall empirically examine and sociologically theorise how the study participants have been constrained (or may have been constrained) from partaking in and/ or making any serious commitments to the sport of boxing by their parents. This analysis will be structured by what I call the 'archetypal trajectory' which refers to the path that the study participants have bequeathed by their families for navigating and negotiating their futures. It draws upon numerous (and often overlapping) reference points such as the necessity to attain a university qualification, secure a respectable job and then prepare for marriage and a family life. The study participants are, I contend, expected to align with this trajectory and any deviation (such as engagement in boxing) risks social, cultural, religious and economic repercussions for the individuals and their families. I introduce and utilise Bourdieu's interlinked concepts – capital, habitus and field – to make sense of the struggles, investments and motivations informing the study participants (and their families) decisions within their respective social spaces. I also incorporate Archer's understanding of reflexivity, within the analysis, to provide explanation on how structural and cultural powers have conditioned the decisions made by individuals or more specifically, the parents, to constrain their child(ren)s engagement in boxing. Lastly, the analysis also intertwines the family practices approach which foregrounds how family is 'done' (Morgan, 2011) and 'displayed' (Finch, 2007). I maintain this theoretical enmeshment throughout all of the analysis chapters whilst explicating how the study participants parents have shaped their engagement in boxing.

I begin by providing a detailed examination of the initial milestone in the 'archetypal trajectory' – that being 'prioritising education and securing employment'. I focus my analysis on three case studies which include: a parent engaging in competition with the extended family regarding the educational and occupational accomplishments of their child; how a mother expected her son to put family priorities first by focusing on securing a reliable job instead of spending his time and energy in boxing; and lastly, how interpretations of religion were significant in governing the decisions made by an elder son and how they aligned to the interests of the immediate family. I argue, based on the boxers' accounts, how constraint is mainly imposed through parents reflexively deliberating upon objective structural and cultural powers, in relation to their subjective concerns, and what they personally care about

the most, to redefine the personal projects of their child. This often entails parents wanting the best for their child through courses of action that they have familiarity with. The boxers, however, are not “passive agents to whom things simply happen” (Archer, 2007, p. 6) but active agents in exercising some governance in their lives by negotiating the extent of their engagement rather than having their involvement in the sport curtailed in its entirety. I conclude this substantial section by highlighting the recurring theme of *risk* in the ‘doing’ and ‘displaying’ of family practices. This is identified in a breadth of ways, for example, how foregrounding pretentious displays risk damaging intra-family relations; how ‘unsuccessful’ family displays may risk the household’s symbolic status and community izzat; and lastly, how family is done (or not done) can risk deviating from interpretations of religious obligations.

I then move onto examining the study participants experiences with the next milestone – ‘marriage and family making’. This section extends the arguments proposed from the previous, by emphasising how an education and secure employment are essential foundations for individuals getting married and having the resources to raise a family. I analyse examples of orthodoxy and heterodoxy with reference to the taken-for-granted and often unquestioned assumptions on marriage and family practices. Lastly, I acknowledge the purposefully maintained narrow focus throughout the chapter which limits the extended family and the *biradari* as the ‘audiences’ to family practices. I present how widespread knowledge on BrAsian marriage practices may be subject to ethnocentric interpretations and stereotypical generalisations resulting from ‘unsuccessful’ displays being seen by ‘unintended’ observers.

4.2 Prioritising Education and Secure Employment

In *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), Avtar Brah drew upon the experiences that were endured by South Asian Muslims who had migrated to Britain following the Second World War to provide explanation regarding the choices and constraints that second and subsequent generations must now negotiate in their current personal lives. This intersectional analysis between *history* and *biography* shed light on how the personal problems that the children of these migrants are born into must be connected to the social issues that their (grand)parents encountered. For example, the South Asians that came during the 1950s had the pick of almost all the jobs that white workers did not want. These were unskilled jobs that involved unsociable working hours, dangerous working conditions and low wages. As such, they came to occupy some of the lowest rungs of the British employment hierarchy (Brah, 1996). In addition, as ex-colonial subjects, they belonged to a group that was once ruled by the British empire. From the beginning, therefore, the encounter between Asians and the white population was circumscribed by colonial precedents as Zubaida has pointed out:

"These cognitive structures (beliefs, stereotypes and 'common-sense' knowledge) in terms of which people in Britain experience coloured [sic] minorities must be profoundly imbued with accumulations of colonial experience. The beliefs and stereotypes acquired and disseminated by generations of working-class soldiers and middle-class administrators in the colonies are available to our contemporaries. Many of these cognitions are derogatory, some are patronising, a few are favourable, but there is one theme underlying all of them: the inferiority and servility of 'native' populations. In this respect, immigrant communities from ex-colonies are not entirely new to the British people. At times when the economic and political conditions are conducive to increased tensions between the communities, the more negative elements of these cognitions are aroused and modified."

(Zubaida, 1970, p.4).

These migrants took the perspective that they expected an uninterrupted and quality education for their children in return for the hardship and sacrifices that they were made to endure whilst rebuilding the economy (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). In the main, Asian parents were initially quite favourably disposed towards Western education given that it represented an

important means of social mobility. As Brah (1996) identified, Western education remained a coveted possession in the 'Third World' hence it was no surprise that Asian immigrants held the British education in great esteem. Educational qualifications acquired in Britain, they assumed, would enable their offspring to get better jobs than those which they had themselves (Brah, 1996). For Ijaz and Abbas (2010), the lack of a basic education and poor English in conjunction with prejudice and discrimination severely impacted the prospects of upward social mobility for the Asian migrants and subsequently resulted in them having no other option but to work in the precarious industrial and manufacturing trade for the majority of the 1970s and 1980s.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, the migrants recognised the importance that institutionalised forms of cultural capital would have in (re)producing socio-economic advantages for the younger generations. The most discernible conversion of capital would be when the highly educated children assumed respectable and well-paid jobs to yield greater financial income than their (grand)parents could have possibly imagined earning themselves. Such processes may be facilitated by families tapping into their social networks for advice and recommendations regarding how they can engage in the bureaucratic protocols of getting their child(ren) a place at an institution. These types of capital could subsequently lead to improved levels of prestige and social status. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) have argued how symbolic capital is constituted when specific forms of social, cultural or economic capital are recognised as legitimate bases for claiming prestige, respect and/ or authority within a given social field. This derivative form of capital can also provide symbolic power and authority over other agents within a field. This is articulated best by Swartz (1997) who has asserted, "symbolic capital is 'a form of power that is not perceived as power but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others" (p. 90). A unique property of symbolic capital is that unlike economic capital or institutionalised types of cultural capital, it is not intrinsic in an individual or objectifiable form. In other words, it is developed as a result of social interaction(s) and exists through the "eyes of others". As Webb et al. (2002) have explained, "prestige and a glowing reputation, for example, operate as symbolic capital because they mean nothing in themselves, but depend on people believing that someone possesses these qualities" (p.xv).

Exteriority is an important element to Bourdieu's symbolic capital. In other words, it is done for and examined by others. Whilst economic capital (the amount of money in the bank) or institutionalised cultural capital (number of qualifications) is not reliant on the validation and legitimisation of others, symbolic capital is. It is part of the ongoing evaluation between the 'examiner(s)' and the 'examined' in which the observing audience sets the standard and decides whether a 'family has done well or not'. To further elaborate on this topic, I will position symbolic capital alongside Finch's (2007) family displays which highlights that "families need to be displayed as well as done" (p. 66). This involves conveying to each other and relevant audiences that the family things which you are doing confirm that such relationships are family relationships (Finch, 2007). In sum, the core message underpinning display is that 'this is my family relationship, and this is why it works'. Display entails socio-cultural significance as it was often used as a strategy by the elder generation of migrants to communicate 'back home' with other relatives that *they have had a successful transition to life in the UK and are 'doing well'.*

There are questions that I will put to the test throughout the present and forthcoming chapter(s) which broadly include: What are the motivations underlying the displaying of family practices? Who are the external audiences and how are they receiving and responding to such displays? Can displays be unsuccessful or misrecognised? Are families always united in their objective to seek legitimation and validation that they reflect the cultural ideal of the 'normal' family? Is the accumulation of symbolic capital always actively sought for and valued? How do these factors affect the agency that the study participants have whilst partaking within the sport of boxing? The questions presented do not exhaust the issues that I am seeking to explore nor do they constitute the structure to which I will undertake my analysis. I will endeavour to address these matters and more relating to how the boxers' perceived and understood parental constraint/ support. It emerged from the analysis of data how the prioritisation of education and alternative employment was used in three strategic ways by the boxers family's to shift their energies away from the boxing ring and more towards the books and labour market. These included: a parent engaging in competition with the extended family and the *biradari* regarding the educational and occupational accomplishments of their child; how a mother expected her son to put the priorities of the family first by focusing on securing a reliable job instead of spending his time and energy in

boxing; and lastly, how interpretations of religion were significant in governing the decisions made by a son and how they aligned to the interests of the immediate family.

4.2.1 'Look at My Son … The Teacher'

Education has become an arena of competition amongst the younger generation of individuals living alongside the *biradari*. Given the conditions under which transnational migration took place for the elder generation, they were never expected to assume distinguishable occupations that held social prestige. It was, therefore, perfectly respectable for many members of this generation to operate businesses like grocery stores and corner shops or work in the taxi profession. As they started from a lower economic base, due to the financial costs of migrating to the UK and starting a new life, the measurement of success was based on who was able to earn 'fast money' (Brah, 1996). The accumulation of money and wealth, however, is no longer sufficient for a family to maintain a prominent position in the dynamic hierarchies of 'families that have done well'. Education is also needed. Children now have at their disposal the capabilities and opportunities that their (grand)parents did not have such as proficiency in the English language, citizenship rights and access to educational institutions. Education is deemed a necessary milestone for those endeavouring to enter professions that are universally recognised and respected such as medicine, law or education. Those that are unable to fulfil the expectations of their generation may be classified as 'failures' destined to end up working for the family business or another job that yields lesser degrees of social appreciation. Not only are they characterised as letting themselves down, but also their parents and ancestors whose sacrifices and hardwork to provide their children with the best possible opportunities would have been in vain. Rahith described how his mother was extremely focused on him pursuing a degree that would lead to him entering the teaching profession. It was what she deemed to be best for him. She found little value in him spending the majority of his time and energy partaking in amateur boxing and instead wanted to show her support for his lifelong development elsewhere:

> *Because of the course that I have been studying at uni, my mum would be most happy if I became a teacher because there are a lot of benefits in terms of helping the next generation and you get a lot of holidays as a teacher. So, plenty of family time* […] *She*

> *must think that it will be better for me in the long-term especially when I have a wife and kids.* **(Interview with Rahith)**

Here, Rahith highlighted how his mothers' emotions were utilised as methods of control to steer him down the teaching route, as completing a degree and working in education would have made her a happy parent that had raised a successful and obedient child. Such comments indicate that if Rahith was to diverge in his career choices, then it would play on his mothers' emotions and possibly lead to her unhappiness. It can be suggested that this form of emotional control was strongly influential and mounted pressure on Rahith to fulfil his mothers' aspirations for him. As Rytter (2011) has observed, these intergenerational contracts are onerous on the children as they feel pressured to meet their parents' expectations whilst negotiating their own future plans. Rahith dreamed about excelling in boxing given that he felt how education was not right for him. Yet his mother thought that university was the best pathway to pursue. Interestingly, the interview that I conducted with Rahith was following a meeting where I supported him in understanding a university assignment that he was struggling on. He expressed how he was failing many modules and felt out of his depth on the degree programme that he was enrolled on which suggested that education was not purely his choice or a domain where he thought he could channel his talents and abilities. The psycho-emotional element was apparent within this case as despite Rahith's mothers intentions for empowering her son and encouraging him to do his best, there was also the risk that he was being set up for ultimate failure. Rahith seemingly demonstrated how the agency to negotiate his own future was limited and that he would be unable to save himself from failing and causing disappointment given that he was constrained to doing what his mother had envisaged for him rather than doing what he was good at.

In addition, there was a focus on the benefits that the teaching profession would entail, as Rahith's mother provided the impression about how she valued the amount of annual leave that teachers benefitted from throughout the year. This could, therefore, allow for him to enjoy plenty of family time during the holidays. This aligns with Becher (2008) who argued how BrAsian parents favoured their children regularly interacting with the family by eating evening meals together and spending most of their annual leave at home in order to sustain love and intimacy between one another. Evidently, Rahith's mother had shown greater enthusiasm for a profession that would not significantly disrupt the family rituals of

prioritising time together. To this extent, Becher (2008) has noted how, at times, these family centred expectations have been constraining on the opportunities applicable for younger generations, as they have to factor in the times they may be scheduled to work and the geographical proximity of their prospective jobs when trying to enter the labour market. The failure for a family to demonstrate that they are 'doing' and 'displaying' family practices that are culturally appropriate may result in its overall strength being brought into question by external audiences. Especially amongst the *biradari* where the everyday mundane acts of simply just eating together in the evening are constructed as the cornerstone of successful family practices.

Unsurprisingly, Rahith's mother demonstrated familiarity with the benefits that are enjoyed by teachers which include several months for annual leave across the year. This may be attributed to the exposure that she would have experienced whilst taking her child(ren) to compulsory education and discovering how teachers holiday patterns tend to align with the academic calendar followed by students. There was no evidence gleaned from Rahith providing an indication of whether his mother had an understanding of the boxer's regime that would either substantiate or contradict her justification to steer him towards the teaching profession given the holiday benefits. Fletcher et al. (2014) are useful at this stage, as they have previously argued how many elder generations of BrAsians either have little knowledge of sports and leisure domain and/ or hold it in low value. This can, they argue, be attributed to a historical context where the first generation of migrants arrived *en masse* with the intention to work, save money and then return home. Sports and leisure were antithetical to this objective and thus never valued or appreciated as a serious occupation (Fletcher et al., 2014). As Brannen and Nilsen (2006) have observed, the family as a social field, is not a neutral space but influenced by specific historical and socio-economic conditions, which can determine both the strategies and content of transmission. I did, however, see Rahith attending numerous evening boxing sessions during my ethnographic observations and occasionally he would even train at the boxing gym twice in a day. It would not have escaped his mother how he was committing many hours, some even during unsociable times, to a sport which would have affected the time he should be allocating for his family. There were, however, additional motivations that seemingly underpinned the cultivation that Rahith was experiencing from his mother:

> *I would say because there is a respect for that profession in our area, I am the only person in this new generation in our family that has gone to uni and that will come out with a degree. I am going for a proper profession through the education route whilst everyone else in my family have just applied for jobs online and got them. They have jobs and I am going to have a career. I think it is what my mum wants to show to everyone, no matter how close you are with your other families, there will always be that bit of competition and I feel that there is that bit of competition with us lot so my mum would be able to show me off a little bit if I became a teacher by saying 'look at my son, he has gone off and studied, got himself a career that will be stable for the rest of his life and he won't have to worry about jumping jobs.* **(Interview with Rahith)**

Franceschelli (2016) found that the extended family was a key source of parenting support during times of important discussion and debate, for example, when there were decisions needing to be made around which university a child should go to or which occupation they would achieve greater financial and symbolic success in. Franceschelli (2016) described a warm image as to how relatives living nearby would come over and have a conversation with the children around a table prior to arriving at a collective decision. These findings, however, are distinctly at odds with the extract presented above which characterises the extended family as a competitor rather than a source of comfort and support. Precarious employment was perceived as subordinate, as suggested, in how many of the jobs had minimal requirements and could easily be applied for and offered online. These jobs were seen to lack career stability and formed a negative talking point that would inevitably have damaging consequences for the reputation of a family.

As Werbner (1990) has identified, relationships between families are often competitive, with each family being concerned about its own reputation. The family wants to look pure; they do not want anyone to think that there is something wrong with them and/ or having the community cast pernicious aspersions on them. Failure to acquire a university degree and secure employment could lead to negative gossip between parents, at social gatherings, when discussing the progress made by their child(ren). These findings highlight how snobbery amongst the education and jobs held by the younger generation are factors that contribute towards fragmenting the intimacy of the overall family by invoking a competitive spirit which wants to see children superseding each other. Virginia Woolf (2002) has wrote how "the

essence of snobbery is that you wish to impress other people" (p. 62). Morgan (2019) has lay claim that snobbery is chiefly important given that it relates to hierarchical differences of class. He argued how the phrase *snobberies of position* best captured "the cuts, the snubs, the put-downs and the sense of exclusion felt by those who are on the receiving end of snobbery" because of their titles or occupations (p. 6). Underpinning the manifestation of snobbery, within the context of occupations, is how individuals who occupy particular jobs and positions tend to possess desirable amounts of social, cultural and economic capital that legitimises their place within the social order. Rahiths' account suggested how professions that do not entail the requisite of a university education are looked down upon because of their precarity. As Mike Savage (2015) has observed, people working precariously, usually in a series of short-term jobs, tend to have no recourse to stable occupational identities. The instability that they endure in both their personal and professional lives, therefore, leads to them being loathed and laughed at by others because of the precariousness of their lives (Savage, 2015).

There are, however, more implicit meanings to the data that extend beyond what is presented on the surface. Such as the belief that educational accomplishments could lead to a transformation in lifelong opportunities. Granted, an individuals resume and chances of employability may increase through the acquisition of a university degree. However, from a sociological perspective, there is reason to be suspect vis-à-vis the prevalence of social inequalities. Heidi Safia Mirza (2009) adopted the term 'migrant effect' whilst describing how migrants pursued upward social mobility for themselves and their child(ren) by encouraging their offspring towards attaining educational success. Underpinning this belief was a strong undercurrent of meritocracy, in that, individuals would be adequately rewarded for their hardwork, efforts and abilities irrespective of their social identities and backgrounds (MacNamee and Miller, 2009). To be clear, I am not criticising this outlook as it was evidently an important perspective that made transnational migration plans make sense. It would be hard to argue otherwise, that the efforts of the elder generation have not paid off in terms of settling in a new country and enabling their kin to pursue their dreams. I am, however, suggesting that there is a naivety to the prevalence of discrimination which falls trap to the 'myth of meritocracy' and how educational success can guarantee upward social mobility. For example, I have argued elsewhere, that even within university contexts how Islamophobia

operates with fluidity and has evidently impacted the experiences and aspirations of Muslim students either in their current studies or those wanting to pursue taught postgraduate courses and doctoral research (Chaudry 2020; 2021). To develop a greater understanding of the family dynamics and relationships that Rahith was reflecting upon, I probed him further to explore why he believed there to be a toxic competitive culture manifesting within his broader family. Beneath was his response:

> *The answer is that everyone just wants the best for themselves, I think in the community some examples are, if I go buy a nice car, my cousin will feel that in the next few months that he needs to buy a better car. These things just don't stop because others are always trying to prove that they are better than you, so that they can look down on you.* **(Interview with Rahith)**

Here, Rahith offered an example regarding the extent to which competitivity exists and operates within the extended family and the *biradari*, as he described how even his cousin would not want to feel that his counterpart had superseded him. This was illustrated through the example of purchasing prestige cars. These anecdotes demonstrate how wealth is a principal criterion towards how a family is evaluated within and by the community as 'doing well'. Morgan (2019) also argued how *snobberies of possession* fall under the remit of snobbish practices which foregrounds materialistic assets. However, it is not enough to own many possessions but rather to possess the 'right' things and to display them in the 'right' way (Morgan, 2019). I argue that the monetary value associated with owning a prestige car would display to external audiences how a family have their priorities in order by being financially comfortable and able to afford luxuries that others cannot. Subsequently, the family may be commended for their accomplishments in getting to such a stage, as the noticeable wealth communicates to external audiences that *this is my family, and this is why it works and is successful.* Moreover, when I questioned Rahith about what he believed that his mother was trying to achieve by engaging in such competitive practices, he implied that the struggle for *izzat* was at stake:

> *It has got to be reputation hasn't it. She wants to show that we are doing well and not struggling out here like many others. She wants to show to everyone that we are popular, we have money and that we should be respected because we have a nice car,*

nice house and good jobs. She definitely wants that respect, She doesn't want others to talk down to us, she wants them to look up to us instead. **(Interview with Rahith)**

Rahith further elaborated on how family displays are examined by the *biradari*. The focus of the *biradari* spyglass is whether a family is living a life of luxury and hardship through an evaluation of their economic and social capital. Those who convincingly demonstrate that they are not struggling tend to have *izzat* bestowed upon them. Both Bachu (1985) and Ballard (1994) have used the phrase '*izzat*-competition' whilst describing the competitive dynamics and affects that occasionally surface within the *biradari*. Furthermore, Bachu (1985) has discussed how *izzat* "generates constant competition, both between individuals and even more between closely related families" (p. 15). Bourdieu (1986) has postulated how individuals/ groups engage in struggle and conflict within social fields to take specific dominant positions. As the amount of power, influence and respect that they yield is incumbent on the volume of capital they possess. Therefore, the competitive element emerging from the data can be understood through the desires for families to accumulate, exchange and monopolise different types of power resources that will subsequently elevate their symbolic positions amongst the *biradari*. It is, as Bourdieu (2000) has previously mentioned, symbolic capital which "recuses agents from insignificance, the absence of importance and meaning" (p. 242).

An often understated point with family displays is how the ongoing appraisal may attract envy, jealousy and bitterness between families, as those parents who feel that they have failed their child(ren), based on their minimal accomplishments, are bound to feel a natural sense of enmity. This can, eventually, lead to individuals engaging in malicious deeds like spreading rumours and gossip that a family may have acquired their wealth through illegal activities such as drug dealing or money laundering. This form of income is particularly frowned upon amongst BrAsians, as it is perceived as *haram* (forbidden) in Islam. The repercussions on reputation and relationships may consequently be devastating, in how, others could show a discernible reluctance to accept gifts that have been purchased with suspected haram money. Rahith feared that the competitivity amongst families, that he was being dragged into, could lead to him or his family falling victim(s) to what is understood within Islam as *nazar* (the evil eye). Many Muslims believe that *nazar* is perceived to be the root cause of the harm and misfortunes that an individual may experience, as a result of the

jealousy and envy that has been projected upon them. Rahith provided a hypothetical example regarding the deleterious effects that *nazar* can have by talking about his body:

> *You don't want to get nazar, let's say for example I have a flashy body , six pack and big biceps, if somebody a bit tubbier than me who doesn't look as good as me in their physical appearance, the might look at me with that evil eye and think 'oh look at him showing off' and all of a sudden before you know it, I could end up with the worst injuries of my life and I can't train anymore and that person is in better shape than me. It is like a bad luck sort of thing.* **(Interview with Rahith)**

Rahith later extended his discussion on *nazar* to the broader context of competition between kin and how his relatives may unwittingly project the evil eye onto him or his family. Rahith demonstrated the primary role that Islam played in shaping his habitus given that he was fearful of the implications that may materialise with being immodest. I gathered how he felt that the inter-family competitivity and value placed on maintaining/ elevating the *izzat* was a generational matter which elders adopted and enforced to maintain control whilst contemporaneously battling to take a dominant position within the social field that is the *biradari*. Rahith was not sowing the seeds for intergenerational conflict but rather remained cautious to the the religiously recognised repercussions that may emerge from striving for *izzat*. As Ali (1992) has proclaimed, "younger Muslims are increasingly using the 'language of Islam' to challenge narrowly defined cultural prohibitions. Indeed, it is the 'language of Islam' which has been mobilised to contest hegemonic constructions by conferring an "incontestable legitimacy" (p. 121).

The analysis insofar has accentuated how Rahith's mother had encouraged him to attain a university degree so that he could secure a respectable teaching post. Her justification, according to Rahith, centred around how the teaching trade would privilege him with a degree of career stability notwithstanding how the profession would be conducive to having a family life. I argued, based on Rahith's account, how his mother simply wanted the best for him given the familiarity that she (and her generation) would have with the teaching profession which is generally held in high regard, as opposed to sports and leisure (Fletcher et al., 2014). There were, furthermore, peripheral motivations that surfaced during the analysis, in how, the sense of competition between relatives alongside the desire to elevate family *izzat* amongst the *biradari* also played a pivotal role for influencing how Rahith's

mother defined his personal projects. In the struggle for an elevated position amongst relatives and *biradari* members, the accumulation of social, cultural and economic resources that would lead to generation of symbolic capital was being prioritised given that Rahith was being pushed towards pursuing a career in teaching that would have generated the valued currencies of a respectable salary, networks and social recognition. The data suggested how Rahith's mother was ultimately concerned with attaining the best for her son whilst contemporaneously benefitting herself from *biradari izzat*. It was, therefore, the following combination that shaped her attitudes to limit her sons investments in the sport of boxing. Rahith, however, has continued with training and competing, therefore indicating, how he is not a passive recipient to parental influence. But rather, how he exercises some governance over his life by being an active negotiator in defining his personal projects alongside his mother.

I argue, in this case, how the 'displaying' family seemingly took precedent over the 'doing' of family given the privilege that has been paid towards caring about the appraisals of external audiences. Rahith had verbalised his prudence towards family displays amidst the risks associated with *nazar* suggesting that the planning and execution of family displays may not always be done in unison with every family member concurring. To summarise, I lay claim how the pursuit of symbolic capital does not only constrain individual agency but also risks rupturing bonds between relatives given the competitive culture that may materialise as families strive towards making pretentious displays. This analysis, has therefore, offered the first of three socio-culturally specific insights regarding the risks that are associated with displaying family. Moving onwards, I will maintain my focus on how parents constrain their child(ren)s engagement within the sport of boxing. I will examine how Qayoom was required to assume the role of the breadwinner to support his family's financial income, amidst some unprecedented circumstances which led to a deterioration of his father's health. In turn, he was required to hang up the gloves and assume an important milestone of the 'archetypal trajectory' - getting a respectable and financially stable job.

4.2.2 'Family Comes First'

> *"A child of privilege can afford strategic confusion, a child of the masses cannot. Change opportunities are likely to come to the child of privilege because of family background and educational networks; privilege diminishes the need to strategise."*
>
> (Sennett, 2006, p. 80)

This quotation can either be accepted or contested in many ways. For example, there is nothing to suggest that those from privileged backgrounds may not engage in strategic planning for their futures. Likewise, those from disadvantaged backgrounds may not necessarily think about how their present choices will affect them in the long term. Thomas Quarmby (2011) has expressed how the socio-economic circumstances of the family may have great significance on shaping how children engage with sports and physical activity. Furthermore, Evans and Davies (2006) observed how middle-class families were able to facilitate higher levels of participation in sports and physical activity as they were not faced with as much (financial) barriers than those from lower socio-economic families. This literature, however, has predominantly focused on the experiences of young children and the financial demands have generally revolved around parents needing (and struggling) to fund equipment, travel costs and membership fees. In contradistinction to these studies, I found how the economic struggles of the family were brought into sharp focus in different ways. For example, Qayoom was told by his mother that it was no longer financially viable for him to spend the majority of his time boxing especially after his father could no longer generate an income on medical grounds. This was articulated when I asked him to explain why he was no longer planning on competing after being in the sport for nearly a decade:

> *I had other responsibilities* [beyond boxing] […] *it was my ill-father and mother who suffers from high-blood pressure, and I've got an elder sister who I had to get married and a younger brother. So, I was the main standing person in the family to sort of earn and look after my family, help my sister get married off, raise money for that, pay bills for the house and I had to prioritise that. Mum just said that I had to take on more responsibility which meant reducing how much time I spent boxing.* **(Interview with Qayoom)**

Having suffered from numerous medical complications, Qayoom's parents were no longer able to financially provide for the family. This meant that his mother had to stop any part-time work from home (sewing) and the father had to retire from his job as a security guard. There were, however, still other obligations outstanding that mounted additional pressures such as the requirement to pay the bills and raise funds for his sister's wedding. It was no longer tenable for Qayoom to spend the most of his working week in the gym, as opposed to earning an income. He had to step up. *Family had to come first*. There was a gendered element at play here which curtailed Qayoom's agency. If, for example, he continued with boxing and allowed for everyone else to bear the burden of generating an income then he would have risked evoking *sharam* upon himself because of the difficulties that his family would have had to endure whilst he pursued personal interests. Hopkins (1996) has observed, in similar circumstances, how men have been characterised as 'poofters' by members of the community, as they were perceived to be failing the fundamentals of 'male behaviour' and considered to be "insufficiently male, inadequately masculine and inadequately gendered" (p.96).

BrAsian weddings are notoriously elaborate and ostentatious. They are opportunities for families to enact cultural rituals imported from 'back home' within local settings. Furthermore, they are important occasions for bringing together a widely scattered diaspora of migrants to sustain collective unity through the celebration of a special event. The social span of the wedding can incorporate both close and distant kin alongside old and new friends, members from the local and non-local *biradari*, business acquaintances and even the relatives of relatives. It is very uncommon for individuals to be solely invited without the invitation extending to their whole family, as such practice may cause offence. Thus, it is likely for many weddings to feature circa 500-600 guests per event. Irrespective of a family's financial state, they are expected to engage in particular practices that are found across every event which include feeding the guests to a three/ five course dinner, paying for the bride/ grooms clothing, exchanging gifts, offering jewellery and renting prestige cars. The wedding itself can become a focal setting for the competitive seeking of status. For Werbner (1986), the status marking aspects of the wedding are obvious in how the size, prodigious expense, abundance of food and opulence are considered when attendees deliberate on its success(es) and failure(s). I have drawn upon this "thick description" of the wedding to characterize the

breadth, depth and nuance to which such events can be appraised and how this relates to the pressures that a family may experience when their social image is at stake. Given that everything is under constant examination from start to finish, a family may be scorned for the most miniscule of reasons. The impression that attendees have on how well a family has done (by cultural standards) in organising and executing a wedding that involves the gathering of the *biradari* is likely to last a lifetime and will always be a talking point whenever a family is mentioned.

The events themselves are not usually examined in isolation, as the preparation and aftermath are also taken into consideration. For example, regarding who has helped organise the proceedings, how much everyone has contributed and what everyone's feelings are about the compatibility of the bride and groom. It is estimated that the cost to fund a wedding and pay for the combination of religious and cultural rituals can exceed well into the tens of thousands of pounds (Bhopal, 2019). This contextual backdrop provides some explanation behind the pressures that Qayoom would have faced in supporting his family throughout this very important milestone, at the expense of engaging with boxing. Interestingly, there appears to be an intersection between how the 'doing' of gender and culture contribute towards the 'doing' and 'displaying' of family. With Qayoom fulfilling his financial expectations as the eldest son, and the family proceeding on with preparing to host the elaborate and ostentatious wedding of their eldest daughter. This case can be deemed as an example of where the family focuses on the 'doing' rather than just the 'being' or 'having' and how this influences the beliefs, expectations and actions that surround parenthood, kinship and marriage (Morgan, 1996).

I have elaborated on my interpretation of the data to argue that it is implicitly underpinned by concerns of display. For example, there would, be no reason for a mother to make such drastic changes to the lifestyle and choices of her child if, alongside paying the bills, it was for funding a modest wedding that would take place behind closed doors with a minority of people. Given the extensive cultural rituals that are required to performed before the presence of hundreds of guests, I would lay claim that there was a consternation to avoid having an 'unsuccessful' family display which could have repercussions for the image of a family amongst extended relatives and the *biradari*. Put simply, there was a risk that the family would fail to represent itself appropriately. These risks would subsequently lead to

further suspicions and constitute evidence that a family may have become deviant from *biradari* norms, with the eldest son being characterised disobedient and astray. Qayoom elaborated by telling me how his mother had a particular career path that she envisaged him going down. Her focus was on his best interests and the reliable accumulation of economic capital:

> […] *at the end of the day, my mother wanted me to pursue a different career such as being an electrician or a tradesman, something that's in demand, something that will never, you know, go out of fashion or would stop bringing the money in* […] *She was aware of the financial hardships we had experienced as a family and wanted me to find the right job to help us and prevent me from experiencing personal hardship in the future.* **(Interview with Qayoom).**

There was an element of calculation taking place here with the mother deliberating upon which options where the most apt for her son to take given the financial demands of the family. This supports Goldthorpe (1996) who has argued how those from families of less-advantaged class positions must calculate the costs and benefits of every career move they make whilst demonstrating a degree of caution and restraint unless they can assure themselves (and others) of success. Likewise, Margaret Archer (2007) has asserted how our personal powers are exercised through reflexive deliberation in delineating our ultimate concerns, defining our projects and determining our practices in society. The recommendations provided by the mother aligned with the familiarity held by BrAsians regarding self-employed jobs like construction, electrics and plumbing which are held in esteem as they require expertise, can benefit the family and generate respectable earnings. Pursuing an occupation that the family has familiarity and prior exposure with (albeit from the jobs of friends and relatives) provides a sense of comfort and assurance that it is a safe and credible route to a lifestyle, as opposed to amateur boxing where there is little knowledge, and it is deemed as a hobby and leisurely activity rather than a serious occupation. As Irwin and Elley (2013) have observed, parents tend to draw upon familiar and often socially proximate reference points (e.g. their own jobs and/ or those of other family members and neighbours) when speaking to their child(ren) about possible future jobs. However, Archer (2007) has urged caution by stating that people cannot make what they please of their situations and in doing so they would be committing epistemic fallacy. It is an

overstatement to argue that “the efficacy of any social property is at the mercy of the subjects’ reflexive activity” (Archer, 2007, p. 12). As Andrew Sayer (2010) has observed “we are not omniscient, omnipotent beings; some influences get beneath our radar, especially in early life, in our ‘formative years’, shaping our dispositions and responses without our even noticing them” (p. 112). Put differently, we are all fallible and making an incorrect decision may produce a major objective penalty.

Irwin and Elley (2013) identified how some parents in their study cultivated their children based the attributes they recognised within them and how they may relate to their future occupational chances of success. This demonstrated how the parenting was very child-centred and future focused, as the parents were driven and determined to provide the encouragement and support that they never received from their own parents. Therefore, by providing intensive motivation by their actions and interactions, the parents believed that their input would make a significant difference to the future successes of their children. In contrast, I found that the parenting methods adopted by Qayoom’s mother were predominantly centred around the collective interests of the family rather than solely the individual. Her decisions suggested that she was foregrounding a family orientated socialisation for her son wherein he could remain conscious to the demands and needs of others. I would suggest that the parenting tactics within this instance ought to be seen as an example ‘good’ parenting given that Qayoom’s values were being moulded to put others before himself. His talent and capabilities as an aspiring amateur boxer, however, were discarded for a profession that his mother had some familiarity with. This, I would suggest, links to how the mothers’ biography connected with her methods of cultivation, as her knowledge and lifelong experiences would have undoubtedly shaped the aspirations and expectations she had set for Qayoom. I argue that the parenting approach identified here was assertive but not prescriptive, as whilst the mother had constrained Qayoom from training regularly and competing, he still found some room for negotiation in defining the limits of his engagement. For example, Qayoom mentioned to me that despite no longer fighting competitively how he continued to train occasionally in order to maintain fitness whilst balancing family commitments.

This analysis has demonstrated how parental aspirations vis-à-vis the career choices of the child are shaped by a multitude of complex and overlapping factors relating to the family circumstances, social and economic contexts, symbolic status and ideas of 'good' parenting. In this section, I argued how Qayoom's mother cultivated his career trajectory by recommending that he ceased engagement from boxing to acquire a profession that she had some familiarity with. The data suggested how the decision made by Qayoom's mother to constrain his involvement in boxing was largely due to structural and cultural properties objectively moulding their family situation and thus *inter alia* possessing the generative powers to limit his overall involvement (Archer, 2007). Following deliberation upon the objective situation (financial circumstances) in relation to their subjective concerns (maintaining family *izzat* amongst the *biradari* alongside the mother wanting the best for her son in the future) the personal project of pursuing amateur boxing was abandoned. Theoretically, I have maintained a family practices approach throughout this chapter by predominantly focusing on the risks associated with how the 'doing' of family is displayed. Whether they be displays that are 'unsuccessful', misinterpreted or transgressive by cultural norms. In the forthcoming section, there will be a milder emphasis on display with the focus predominantly being on the 'doing' aspect. I will, however, not distance the theme of risk, as I will examine in another case how interpretations of Islam were salient in shaping the decisions made by Yusuf and how he demonstrated that by 'doing' family how he would contemporaneously be 'doing' religion. To this extent, parental influence and obligation towards the collective interests of the family were strongly governed by religious interpretations. These evoked the perception that any transgression from parental expectations risked deviating from Islam and thus diverging from the 'right path'.

4.2.3 'I Want to Make My Parents Proud'

In our everyday lives, we unconsciously engage in the most mundane of tasks that are generally carried out for the benefit of other individuals. These may be enacted through perceptions of self-responsibility and/ or concern for others. Page (1996) has argued that this type of altruism is often taken-for-granted yet an important factor for the maintenance of social cohesion. It is through the sense of caring for others that people feel bound to the norms and commitments of society. As Zokaei (1998) put forth, helping others and/ or showing sympathy and a willingness to act in consideration to other peoples interests can

also have personal benefits such as the feeling of belonging to a society notwithstanding the positive feelings it can allow someone to generate about themselves. Zokaei and Phillips (2000) found that in their examination of intergenerational altruism and community relations amongst BrAsians how altruism was frequently asserted to be a key determinant of social interaction. They claimed that the notion occupied a central position in the Islamic worldview which shaped interactions towards relatives and *biradari* folk. Islam, as Franceschelli (2016) argues, has the potential to shape agency by strengthening parental control, as mothers and fathers may reinforce to their child(ren) how Allah (God) is constantly monitoring their actions and decisions. Islam, therefore, may be utilised not only for transmitting theology but also to generate greater compliance to expectations from the child(ren). Yusuf strongly emphasised how Islam informed the decisions that he made in his everyday life. Particularly, around how his choices and actions affected his family. I shall explore this further shortly, however, before doing so, it is important that I present the context in which Islam was thought about when adhering to parental aspirations which included the expectation that Yusuf prioritised working towards a respectable job that could offer a secure and stable salary. Yusuf expressed at numerous points during fieldwork how his parents offered lukewarm support regarding his involvement in boxing. They were happy for him to train, however, they did not want him to compete or partake to an extent that it would occupy most of his time:

> *I would say that they have been supportive for wanting to keep myself fit and keep myself strong so I can be in a position to provide and support my family. That is all about mindset and you have to be physically and mentally strong for that, that's what boxing does. But they don't want my boxing to takeover everything, for me as an individual I know what my priorities are and don't get me wrong they trust my decision making. But if I turned around and told them that I want to do boxing, then I think they would be worried and ask me 'Why do you want to do this? Please don't!' I need to look at the outcomes and everything in the round, I love the sport and I am going to continue in it for a while, but I need to consider what is best both for me and my family in the long term and how I can support them.* **(Interview with Yusuf)**

Central to the support that Yusuf's parents offered him was how his involvement within amateur boxing would yield benefits that were transferable to the physical and mental demands of having your own family. They appeared to be under the impression that the

arduous nature of boxing training would somehow condition him for the stress, fatigue and rigours that will come with being a father/ husband in his later life. This suggests that they had his best interests at heart. The parents advice drew upon their lifelong experiences of having a family to project benign intentions by way of preparing him to assume his responsibilities of being a husband and a father. They made it unequivocally clear that they were not satisfied with Yusuf pursuing a career in boxing. They saw little value in the sport amidst the backdrop of what they cared about the most – putting family first. Yusuf acknowledged his parents concerns and responded by limiting his involvement. This suggested how he accepted the long-term responsibilities that he has for supporting his family. Yusuf's habitus somewhat aided him in deciphering what is familiar, normal and comfortable. When I probed Yusuf vis-à-vis what his parents envisaged him doing, he provided an insightful description of them before talking about the occupational expectations they held:

> *My parents are those typical archetypal Asian-Muslim parents, Alhamdulillah they are very cultured. They would support me for going into these quintessential types of jobs that they knew were respected and well paid like a doctor or a dentist* […] *I think they would be worried and very unsure about it* [pursuing a career in boxing] *because the goals and aspirations that they have for me, in terms of becoming a police officer. They want the best for me and think that I won't be able to be successful in life by committing to boxing.* **(Interview with Yusuf)**

Yusuf expressed how his parents being "typical archetypal Asian-Muslim" somehow influenced their decision-making, potential biases and understandings of the world. Most of the occupational ventures which they claimed to admire had universal respectability and symbolic status that BrAsian communities awe and have long desired for their children (Rytter, 2011). The data suggested how the parents deliberated upon the courses of action available before encouraging Yusuf to pursue occupations that they had a degree of familiarity with. This would have entailed considering the implications involved with endorsing a particular cluster of options. From their experience, being a doctor, dentist or police officer would not contravene with his ability to support a family. Boxing was unchartered territory and therefore subordinated as a prospective option. According to Archer (2007), the process of deliberation entails a visual projection of the outcomes of

different scenarios. It appears that Yusuf's parents were only able to visualise his success through universally recognised occupations. Moreover, I found how religious beliefs had a dominant influence on the outlook held by Yusuf and how he arrived at decisions concerning the family. When justifying his choice to put his family first, he utilised the language of Islam:

> *So, in my household I am the eldest son and initially I have gained that responsibility as the 'breadwinner' and obviously I feel that I owe it to my parents. Also like in Islam we look at that aspect of looking after our parents, it's just what I see as general knowledge. I want to work hard, and I want to make my parents proud. The stuff I do is for them just as much as it is for me because I want to get to the top and make my parents proud. I feel like Islam has guided me through that Alhamdulillah because I have kept on the right path and have not gone astray, I have always done what I think it right ethically, morally and religiously.* **(Interview with Yusuf)**

Children internalise the value of parents from an early age and thus learn to behave in accordance with the family ethos to whom they owe a debt of gratitude for their upbringing (Ballard, 1994). Islam provided Yusuf with a language to guide his behavioural expectations. Yusuf believed that he was Islamically obliged to repay the care and affection that his family had provided for him by fulfilling the aspirations that they had for him and making them proud. Family life is the cornerstone to many Muslim households, as respect and obedience towards the parents has been constantly stressed within Islamic teachings. For example, the following verse from the Quran strongly emphasises the necessity for individuals to provide care for their parents as part of their expression of faith:

"Your Sustainer has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your lifetime, do not say to them a word of contempt nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility and say: My Sustainer! Bestow on them Your mercy, even as they cherished me in childhood."

(Quran, 17: 23-24)

These data that have been presented throughout this section show how religious transmission was assimilated by Yusuf to the benefit of his parents, as it provided him with a sense of moral guidance on how he should honour his parents. The data, however, is limited

in understanding the extent to which the parents adopted Islam to strengthen the control and governance that they had over their child(ren). Although it does indicate how early processes of religious socialisation have been fruitful towards Yusuf developing an Islamic morality that is now to their benefit of reciprocal care and respect. Yusuf adopted interesting terminology when he claimed to have remained on the "right path" and not gone "astray" which aligns with the semantics of a prominent Quranic verse:

"Oh People of the Book, do not be fanatical in your religion except in truth. Do not follow the whims of people who strayed before, and made many stray, and stray once again from the right path."

(Quran, 5: 76)

For Yusuf, Islam was an important resource to draw upon when controlling 'un-Islamic' practices and delineating the boundaries of what constitutes the 'right path' and what it means to go 'astray':

> *I know in Islam it always teaches you to look for the right way. Like my perceptions of looking at things right is how should I look at it Islamically.* **(Interview with Yusuf).**

The narrative presented underlines the significance that Yusuf's habitus had on his actions, feelings and thoughts. Through intergenerational transmission and the processes of early and hard socialisation, the dispositions that he acquired during childhood "literally mould[ed] the body and became second nature ... operating in a way that was pre-conscious and hence not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification" (Thompson, 1991, pp. 12-13). The attitude and behaviour that Yusuf responded to his parents' aspirations with may be recognised as what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 127) have termed a "fish in water" when characterising how when a [his] habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted. In other words, when the habitus matches the logic of the field, it becomes attuned to the family-specific doxa, the unwritten "rules of the game" and underlying practices ('what is done'; 'to be done'; and 'why it is done') within that field. Should Yusuf, as he put it, gone 'astray', by contesting and disobeying his parents, then his habitus would have felt disconnected from the doxa of the family and the *biradari*. Put simply, he would have found himself at risk of feeling like a "fish out of water".

Emotionally, the decisions made by Yusuf contributed towards alleviating any potential feelings of guilt that may have surfaced if he was to put himself before his family. This is a very subliminal feature within this case, however, I would advocate that the combination of wanting to make his parents proud alongside his values and beliefs about the 'right path' and 'going astray' regarding obedience would have mounted a degree of pressure for him to ensure that his involvement in amateur boxing did not impede on his trajectory towards securing respectable employment. Hochschild (1979) has described emotional capital as knowledge about feelings rules, appropriate to different situations, in effectively meeting the practical and interactional demands of those situations. The ability to feel and manage one's feelings constitutes emotional capital – which is itself embedded in the habitus and thus a mix of conscious and nonconscious ways of being and doing that become habitual and natural to the well-socialized individual (Cottingham, 2017). Yusuf deliberated upon his values and beliefs, that have been informed by his upbringing and faith, to think about how his actions would shape the emotions felt by himself and his parents. In seeking to manage any future emotions, he prioritised the prospects of his parents feeling proud and rewarded whilst minimising the chances of any self-guilt or wrongdoing.

This section has underlined the strong emphasis that interpretations of Islam have had on how Yusuf accepted the advice to limit his involvement in amateur boxing to ensure that it did not damage the prospects of fulfilling the occupational aspirations that his parents had for him. The data suggested how the parents were uncertain about how a career in boxing would align with preparing for family life. They recommended that he invested most of his energy into pursuing occupations that were universally recognised for paying generous salaries and being respected. Yusuf responded by drawing upon the language of Islam to justify putting his family first, as he implied how it was his duty, as a Muslim, to reciprocate the love and affection that he benefited from by listening to his parents. In doing so, this case provides an example of how 'doing' family overlaps with 'doing' religion, as Yusuf demonstrated with his actions how obeying his family and attending to their needs constituted remaining on the 'right path' and not deviating from Islamic prescriptions by going 'astray'. I suggested that any such resistance to parental orthodoxy may have resulted in him feeling like a "fish out of water" by rebelling against that family-specific doxa that holds parental views' as sacrosanct.

There has been a degree of similarity emerging from all of the cases that have been analysed insofar regarding the reasons underpinning the ways in which parents have constrained their children from partaking in boxing. Despite the variance in situations, I have highlighted how parents have limited the extent to which their children have trained/ competed to focus on attaining an education and/ or respectable job that would foreground the priorities of the family. These have ranged from competition between relatives about which child is more successful, taking greater responsibility for the family finances and supporting the family more broadly through a reliable and respected profession. The data has suggested, based on the boxers' accounts, how constraint was mainly imposed through parents reflexively deliberating upon structural and objective circumstances in relation to their subjective concerns, and what they personally cared about the most, to redefine the personal projects of their child. This often entailed parents wanting the best for their child through courses of action that they had familiarity with. The sport of boxing was not held in similar value and respect in contrast with teaching, healthcare, the police and other manual trades thus any engagement was limited. The boxers, however, were not "passive agents to whom things simply happen" (Archer, 2007, p. 6) but active agents in exercising some governance in their lives by negotiating the extent of their engagement rather than having their involvement in the sport curtailed in its entirety.

To summarise, there has been a recurring theme that has interweaved throughout this analysis pertaining to the *risks* associated with 'displaying' and 'doing' family. These have included how foregrounding pretentious displays risk damaging intra-family relations; how 'unsuccessful' family displays may risk the tarnishing the symbolic status of the family; and lastly, how family is 'done' (or not 'done') can risk deviating from interpretations of religious obligations. This analysis thus provides an enrichment to the superficial literature that exists on the risks associated with family practices. I have endeavoured to demonstrate throughout this analysis insofar how the intersections between culture, religion, class and the values and beliefs maintained within the *biradari* have also been influential towards constraining the study participants engagement in boxing. This demonstrates how the immediate family field is only relatively autonomous and vulnerable to the heavy influence that may be projected by external fields and systems of power. In sum, the analytical points that have been presented constitute an important milestone for what I call the 'archetypal trajectory', which is a path

the study participants have bequeathed by their families for navigating and negotiating their futures. It draws upon numerous (and often overlapping) reference points to clearly outline the direction the study participants ought to be taking – which in this chapter has included prioritising an education and/ or secure and respectable employment. There are arguments from this section that I will explore further throughout this chapter. For example, how education and employment constitute the necessary foundations for later and equally important milestones that the young individuals are expected to achieve. Given this backdrop, I shall now examine how engagement in the sport of boxing is constrained by parents amidst the milestones of getting married and starting a family

4.3 Marriage and Family Making

"A constraint need not have impinged or impacted, it could just be foreseeable."

(Archer, 2013, p. 21)

Common interpretations of Islam emphasise marriage as an important element of religious practice with Sherif (1999) reporting how "throughout the Islamic world, marriage is at the heart of social and religious life" (p. 619). Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) identified how young BrAsians tend to experience processes of socialisation from an early age to prepare them for marriage. This is mainly attributed to the belief that marriage in Islam (the *nikkah*) is thought to not just be a contract between the bride and groom but also their respective families. Previous studies have noted how young BrAsians were discouraged from partaking in sports and physical activity, as their parents believed that the activities would either constitute an unnecessary distraction and/ or that they would inevitably lead to the individuals transgressing from religious and cultural norms, that could subsequently affect their prospects of marriage (Kay, 2006; Dagkas et al., 2011; Knez et al., 2012). There is no shortage of populist press or academic texts that have provided sensationalised and dramatic accounts about BrAsian marriage practices. These outputs have usually promoted pathological and stereotypical representations by using the trope of 'arranged marriage' to accentuate patriarchal oppression and symbolise BrAsian 'otherness' (Wade and Souter, 1992; Abdo, 2006; Bhopal, 2019). Sanaa expounded how she experienced pressure to fulfil her expectations of aligning to the 'archetypal trajectory' of attaining a degree from university, securing a respectable job and then preparing for marriage and a family at a young age. Her

account was mostly centred not around experiences of constraint but rather constraint in a hypothetical sense. In other words, prospective constraining factors relating to the 'archetypal trajectory'. She lay claim that there was a perception amongst relatives how her involvement in boxing was proving to be an undesirable barrier for the milestones that she was expected to meet. Sanaa did not, however, substantiate the claims made by previous researcher who have illustrated parents as being the primary enforcers of oppression:

> *I think the desire that some of them* [extended family] *have or me, as young woman, is that you go to school, you go to uni, you get a degree, you get a nice job, 9-5, you start a family young and that's it. Sometimes I'm asked, 'ooh when are you getting married? You are in your 20s'. I be like, but actually I don't need to be married so young and there are other things that I need to achieve before that. My mum and dad are calm with it as well so that's the main thing.* **(Interview with Sanaa)**

These issues have not personally constrained Sanaa's engagement in boxing, as I will demonstrate in chapter six. They do, however, provide an insightful view pertaining to the reasons as to why constraint may be experienced by others. In this instance, there was a consternation by extended relatives about how Sanaa was delaying important milestones in her life. As Finch (2007) has acknowledged, it is not only the immediate family that can provide feedback on displays given that representations and interactions of the family are not solely confined to the private sphere. A key finding here, however, was how Sanaa felt empowered to continue boxing amidst the parental support that she enjoyed (I will present in the final analysis chapter how deliberation undertaken by the parents led to them offering their support). From an alternative vantage point, these data oppose other authors' characterisations of young BrAsian women as 'objects' of patriarchal practices (Wade and Souter, 1992; Abdo, 2006; Bhopal, 2019). Kalwant Bhopal (1997), for example, has argued how "The South Asian family itself is based upon an authoritarian and hierarchical structure where [women] are at the bottom of the hierarchy […] Women are important instruments in the competition for prestige [...] In the South Asian context, the existence of an unmarried daughter brings with it the connotations of uncontrolled dangerous sexuality, as well as shame and dishonour for the parents whose duty it is to marry her off. Unmarried daughters are seen as a burden and their parents are seen as having failed, not only themselves, but the culture and community. It is through these cultural forces that patriarchy operates, to keep

women controlled, dependant and in an inferior position" (pp. 486-487). Herein, Bhopal (1997) inadequately utilises a patriarchal lens to privilege and promote hegemonic and colonialist-inspired discourses of Western cultural superiority that fails to recognise any heterogeneity between BrAsians (Ahmad, 2006).

Contrastingly, Sanaa expressed how she was able to negotiate her own progress on the 'archetypal trajectory' which entailed mitigating constraints which was aided through parental backing. By attaining an education, accumulating some experience in the labour market and getting married in her early twenties, Sanaa felt that she would waste her opportunity to achieve in the sport of boxing. Her decision to continue boxing ought to be understood as form of resistance as she "acted autonomously, in [her] own interests" (Gregg, 1993, p.172) by "questioning and objecting" (Modigliani and Rochat, 1995, p.112) the timeline that she was expected to abide by. Sanaa did not reject the idea of wanting to getting married one day. This is important given that BrAsian marriage practices have been portrayed as inherently oppressive with particular emphasis being placed upon women as 'objects' and 'victims' rather than active subjects (Bhopal, 1997). This case, rather, accentuates the diversity and nuances involved with Sanaa, in essence, being allowed to navigate her life in her own time. Likewise, Safiyaah and her parents were also challenged about how her involvement in boxing could be detrimental towards her prospects of getting married:

> *Some relatives would be like, 'yeah my kids are going to go to uni and you are just going to be a boxer'. It was just small and little stuff about marriage lie, 'if she boxes, she won't wanna get married' or 'if she becomes a boxer then no one will want to marry her'. Just stupid stuff like that. I find it so funny* […] *I feel like they just thought that I would never get married or won't want to get married just because I boxed. Me and my parents know that we should wait until the time is right. I don't believe boxing will mess with my chances of getting married when I'm ready.* **(Interview with Safiyaah)**

Foremost, the excerpt highlighted the little value in which boxing was regarded. It was undoubtedly trivialised and perceived as subordinate to studying at university. Here, Safiyaah expressed how a minority of her relatives had ridiculed her parents about how her endeavours within the sport of boxing risked being at the expense of preparing for marriage. I will present in the final analysis chapter how and why Safiyaah's parents deliberated upon

supporting her endeavours in boxing. On the surface, Safiyaah claimed to be apathetic to these stigmatising views by telling me how she would respond by laughing the incidents off without taking any serious notice. Although, I would argue that these may be seen as an example of microaggressions, through there subtle yet stunning manifestations, that may be cumulative, and have the potential to harm the psychological wellbeing of the recipient (Chaudry, 2021). Nonetheless, demonstrating apathy in the face of staunch criticism exemplified the robust emotional capital that she possessed which was capable of self-regulation and management, to ensure that she did not respond with an unintended outburst of anger and infuriation. I will return to this broader issue, around the study participants emotional (and physical) wellbeing, in the final analysis chapter to present how they enjoyed parental support regarding their involvement because of the physiological and psychological benefits yielded from partaking in the sport.

Both Sanaa and Safiyaah demonstrated many similarities in resisting any prospective constraints to their involvement in boxing. They were able to exercise agency and negotiate the timelines of their own lives which was predominantly enabled through parental backing. The role played by the parents to supporting their daughters stands in stark contrast with other research which has portrayed BrAsian parents as exercising extreme patriarchal restraints on the lives of their daughters (Wade and Souter, 1992; Bhopal, 1997). Bhopal (1997; 2011) has argued how education provides young women with a degree of personal independence for liberating themselves from traditional social structures. She has put forth how: “a process of social change is taking place for independent South Asian Women. As they become highly educated […] these women are moving away from the traditions of arranged marriage […] They no longer want to follow in the footsteps of their mothers, they demand freedom of choice and most importantly the freedom to reject arranged marriages that they feel are oppressive and degrading for women” (1997, p. 492). The implications of Bhopal’s (1997; 2011) remarks are that those who engage in traditional practices, such as arranged marriages, are only doing so because they are ‘uneducated’. Put differently, an education would entail an epiphany to see through the patriarchy and oppression that are supposedly inherent in BrAsian marriage practices. The findings here, however, suggest how choice and agency can be exercised by young BrAsian women irrespective of their education status, as

both Sanaa and Safiyaah had not studied at university. Despite some concerns from a minority of relatives, they were able to navigate their own lives and define their own personal projects.

Insofar, I have examined marriage and family making solely from the female vantage point. However, I found how such expectations were not mutually exclusive to young women, as evidenced by my interview with Rahith who also endured pressure from his mother to focus on his studies to prepare him for married life:

> **Rahith:** *She probably want me to study harder, spend more time in the library and do the best possibly in a career instead of a sport. She expects a career and for me and to get married.*
>
> **Izram:** *Why is there so much emphasis on this?*
>
> **Rahith:** *Just because on how I feel everyone has been brought up in the past, since earlier generations, men have always done all the work, in the Asian community*.

These findings provide the rationale behind the parental pressure imposed by Rahith's mother on him acquiring a university degree, as she felt that there was an inextricable connection between having an education and successfully getting married and running a family. To this extent, Rahith would have the financial means to fulfil his family obligations if he were to focus on the books rather than boxing. I found that the exchange above also captures the how Rahith's agency was disrupted by the fusion of *history* and the *future,* as his aspirations to box were superseded by his mother's desires for him to align with the 'archetypal trajectory'. These constraints were largely grounded in gendered constructions that sought to characterise men as the 'breadwinners'. It was therefore imperative that Rahith did not jeopardise the expectations of becoming the main income-earner through endeavours that are seen as 'casual' and leisurely' such as boxing.

To summarise, these findings illustrate the heterogenous nature in which the study participants have sought to respond to the wider structural and cultural forces that have operated to limit their agency within the sport of boxing. Sanaa and Safiyaah's decisions aligned with the notion of *heterodoxy* which "implies an awareness and recognition of the possibility of different or antagonistic beliefs" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164). These beliefs essentially conflict with previous assumptions within that field and can result in

transformation. Both Sanaa and Safiyaah sought to explore alternative possibilities by interrupting any expectations which included deferring marriage to make progress in boxing. This essentially resulted in them deviating from the ruling doxa within the social field illustrating how their habitus is not fixed and subject to change. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) have explained "it's [habitus] durable but not eternal" (p. 133). The findings therefore reject previous characterisations that have objectified young women by highlighting their differences, diversities and ability to dictate their own lives. Moreover, I would contend that Rahith's case was best understood through the lens of *orthodoxy* which refers to how the arbitrariness of the doxa is not just recognised but also accepted in practice. In other words, the "rules of the game" are known and played accordingly, as Rahith accepted how his time in boxing was becoming untenable given that it was conflicting and competing with the 'archetypal trajectory' that his parents had aspired for him which included getting married.

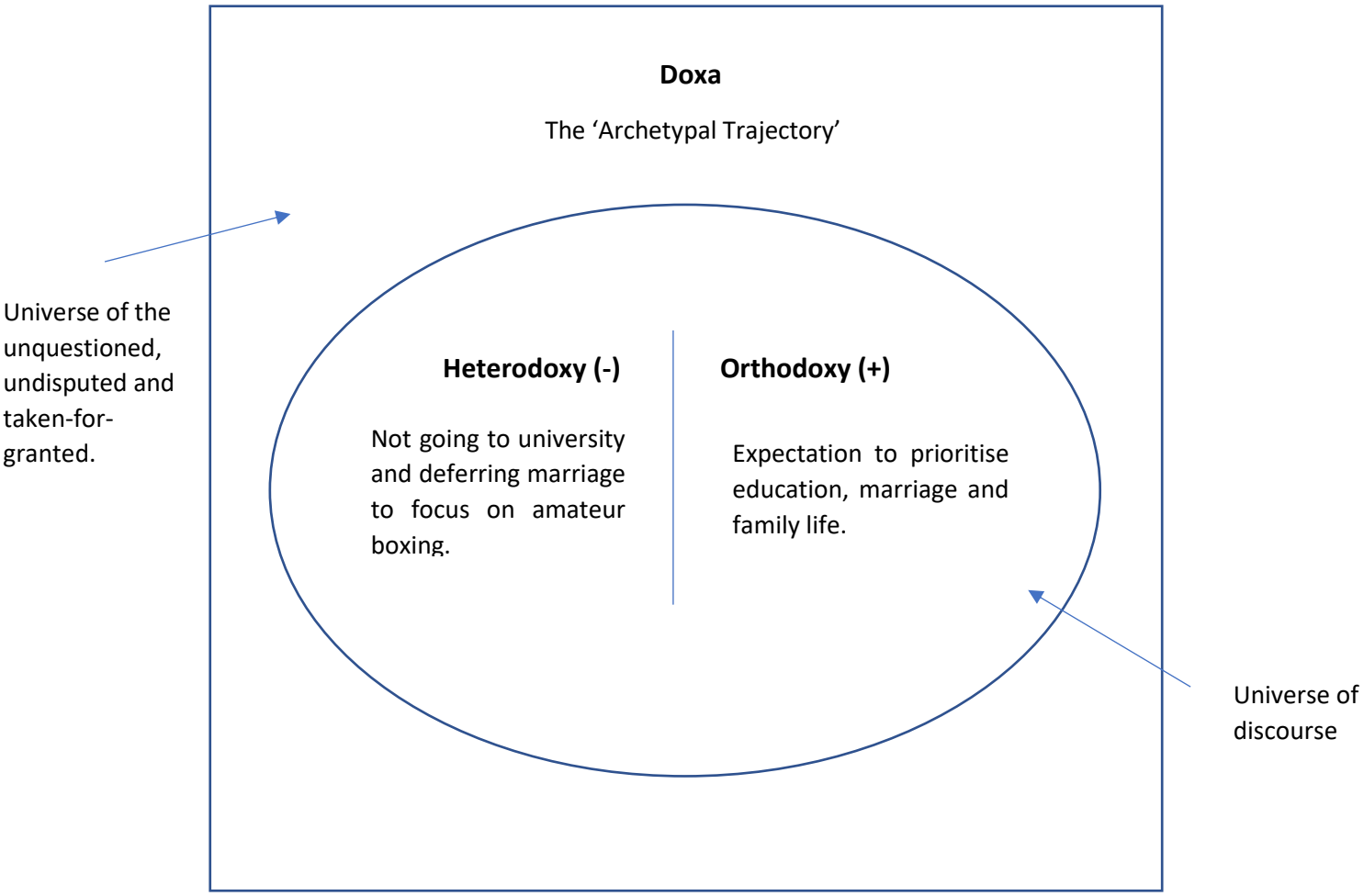


Figure 6: The Relationship Between Doxa, Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Reflecting the Empirical Findings (Adapted from Bourdieu, 1977, p. 168)

Insofar, I have purposefully maintained a limited focus on the external audiences vis-à-vis the 'doing' and 'displaying' of family practices. However, I found that there was a very significant observer beyond the realms of the extended family and *biradari* when I was conducting my ethnographic observations. In the concluding analysis section, I will bring the fore a conversation that I had with the (white) head boxing trainer at the amateur boxing club where I was conducting my main fieldwork in. I will argue that the perceptions gleaned in the conversation were indicative of the widespread knowledge regarding the necessity for BrAsians to achieve the essential milestone of the 'archetypal trajectory' in their lives by getting married. This analysis will, however, also foreground how others' views on marriage practices may, inadvertently, conflate 'arranged' with 'forced' whilst contemporaneously portraying such practices as being oppressive. Theoretically, I will extend current understandings on displaying family practices by arguing how displays may be characterised as 'unsuccessful' when individuals/ families expose themselves to the criterions of 'unintended' observers who, through their partial observations and little knowledge on cultural scripts and conventions espouse sweeping stereotypical generalisations about BrAsian marriage practices.

4.3.1 Stereotyping

What are the contemporary popular understandings of the 'arranged' marriage in Britain today? Ahmad (2006) has argued how the practice of arranged marriage is regularly drawn upon to illustrate the otherness of the BrAsian in contrast with different communities in Britain. Often, studies have focused on women as being 'objects' of the process whilst men assume the role of 'controllers' (Wade and Souter, 1992; Bhopal, 1997; 2011; 2019). Furthermore, representations that have stereotyped and pathologised BrAsian marriage practices have usually accentuated, albeit erroneously, how the majority of matches tend to be consanguineal (Rao, 2000; Bhopal, 2011). These studies have largely (and incorrectly) conflated the practices of 'arranged' and 'forced' marriages without paying adequate attention to their qualitative differences. The arranged marriage is where parents, with their child(ren)s consent, take a prominent role in selecting a suitable spouse for them. In contradistinction, the forced marriage is where either one or both concerned parties are coerced into a marital contract without providing full consent. This, however, is *haram* in Islam. They key difference here is consent, which is essential for the former but not for the

latter. To summarise, BrAsian marriage practices have regularly, within a Eurocentric perspective, been portrayed as primitive because they supposedly suppress individual freedoms to sustain cultural norms (Rao, 2000; Bhopal, 2011). Some have suggested that these criticisms have surfaced and gained traction because the arranged marriage is at odds with the 'love' marriage wherein the notion of marriage is rooted in the belief that there is an intimate partnership between two people based on romantic love (Kay, 2006). The love marriage, however, has become increasingly common amongst younger generations of BrAsians wherein individuals have found prospective spouses that they have met at university, work or social media. The love marriage does not, however, sit as an isolated phenomenon given that it is not uncommon for there to be an overlap in how individuals may fall in 'love' with prospective spouses that they were 'arranged' to get married with. Having established an enduring relationship with the head trainer Dave, from a young age, he quizzed me after a training session about my relationship status, future marriage plans and when I would achieve this essential milestone on the 'archetypal trajectory'. Beneath is a snapshot of the exchange that we had:

> **Dave**: *"Tiger* [my boxing nickname]*, when are you getting married mate. Are you seeing anyone at the moment?"*
>
> **Izram**: *"You know how it is Dave* (wink). *I ain't getting married yet."*
>
> **Dave**: *"Listen mate, you know I'm here for you, you don't have to marry some fat bird from Pakistan. If you've got a lass and you want me to speak to your parents about her, I don't mind. I've done it before.*
>
> **Izram**: *"hahahah don't worry Dave. I'll be alright. You know my parents. My brother married who he wanted".*
>
> **Dave**: *"I'm just saying mate. Well, the offer is there".*

These remarks, I believe, were underpinned by a combination of humour and curiosity to question my relationship status and marriage plans. Dave leapt to the conclusion, upon my response that I was not 'seeing anyone', that I was bound for a 'forced' marriage with someone from 'back home'. He then started to produce generalisations, based on a previous experience, where another boxer from the gym had asked him to speak to his parents and

'arrange' the marriage between himself and his girlfriend. The boxer was too apprehensive about revealing to his 'traditional' parents that he had a pre-marital relationship. I would suggest that this was a strategic move employed by the boxer, as he believed that bringing in an 'outsider' with no family influence would strengthen the likelihood of convincing his parents. Having trained the fighter for many years, Dave commanded the respect of his parents thus his intervention would have been effective. I argue how this backdrop would have led to Dave assuming that there is a commonality in how BrAsians have to negotiate onerous and complicated encounters when proposing marriage partners to their families. There was an implicit colonial tone being utilised when Dave mentioned how he was happy to speak with my parents if I required an external intervention from a *white man willing to save me from the prejudice of cultural diktats*.

Van Es (2019) has argued that by representing ourselves in particular ways, we are able to reject the specific and essentialist attributes that are ascribed upon us. It was this very standpoint that informed my response when I uttered that my brother enjoyed the freedom to choose his own wife. Here, I was not reinforcing ethnocentric interpretations towards BrAsian marriage practices by elevating Western ideals that regard the love marriage as superior, instead, I was attempting to quash the stereotypical view that *all* BrAsians are destined for an arranged/ forced marriage. Broadly, I would contend that these findings contest the stereotypical and ethnocentric views that BrAsians do not possess the individual agency to exercise choice about their future spouse. I am not suggesting that cultural barriers do not exist. However, they are not unchangeable nor unnegotiable, as evidenced in the data, and can be steered around and surpassed.

The analysis has illustrated how the concept of display may be further expanded in relation to the audience element. Often, the literature on family displays has presented the concept and phenomenon, to the extent, that the individuals and families are in control of 'who observes what'. I would propose that this concept may be further enriched by postulating how family displays may be witnessed by 'unintended' observers who see a partial view without any deep context. For example, it has been argued by Finch (2007) how circumstances or cultural expectations may necessitate "the need for display [to be accentuated] and more intense" (p. 72). Heaphy (2011) has elaborated by mentioning how, for example, lone-parent families may be at higher risk of being judged as failing to display

family appropriately hence they may work harder to ensure that they are legitimated and validated as a 'good', 'normal' and respectable family based on cultural ideals. In doing so, those producing the displays may not be able to manage the breadth of potential audiences whilst risking having their family practices misinterpreted, miscommunicated and/ or rejected as 'acceptable' by onlookers. This analysis is an example, of how a partial experience has led to an 'unsuccessful' display from an 'unintended' individual that was tasked with merely providing support and assistance rather than observing the perceived workings around how families organise and arrange the marriages of their children. There was a failure to engage in cultural relativism. I argue that the boxer referenced in Dave's example would more than likely refute that his experience somehow exemplifies the stereotypical characterisation that Dave has employed to paint all BrAsians with the same brush. On the topic of how display works, Finch (2007, p. 73, emphasis original) formulated the questions "*how* displaying is done, and to *whom*?" This analysis, to some extent, addresses these questions by presenting the 'unintended' nature in which displaying can be 'done' and 'seen'.

4.4 Conclusion

This opening analysis chapter has examined how the study participants have been constrained (or may have been constrained) from partaking in and/ or making any serious commitments to the sport of boxing by their parents and/ or families. In doing so, I drew upon a frame of reference which I named the 'archetypal trajectory' to provide explanation. This, in essence, highlighted how achieving the milestones of prioritising an education, securing respectable jobs and the importance of getting married and building a family were deemed as more important than engaging in boxing. I argued, throughout, how the study participants were expected to align with this trajectory and any deviation (such as partaking in boxing) posed social, cultural, religious and economic repercussions for the individuals and their families. I began by providing a detailed examination of the initial milestone in the 'archetypal trajectory' – that being 'prioritising education and securing employment'. I then focused my analysis on three case studies which included: a parent engaging in competition with the extended family regarding the educational and occupational accomplishments of their child; how a mother expected her son to put family priorities first by focusing on securing a reliable job instead of spending his time and energy in boxing; and lastly, how interpretations of religion were significant in governing the decisions made by an elder son and how they aligned

to the interests of the immediate family. I argued, based on the boxers' accounts, how constraint is mainly imposed through parents reflexively deliberating upon structural and objective circumstances in relation to their subjective concerns, and what they personally care about the most, to redefine the personal projects of their child(ren). This usually entailed parents wanting the best for their child(ren) through courses of action that were familiar to them. The boxers, however, were not "passive agents to whom things simply happen" (Archer, 2007, p. 6) but active agents in exercising some governance over their lives by negotiating the extent of their engagement. I concluded this substantial section by highlighting the recurring theme of *risk* in the doing and displaying of family practices. This was identified in a breadth of ways, for example, how foregrounding pretentious displays risked damaging intra-family relations; how 'unsuccessful' family displays risked the household's symbolic status and community izzat; and lastly, how family is done (or not done) risked deviating from interpretations of religious obligations. I then moved onto examining the study participants experiences with the next milestone – 'marriage and family making'. This section extended preceding arguments by emphasising how an education and secure employment constituted essential foundations for individuals getting married and having the resources to raise a family. I analysed examples of orthodoxy and heterodoxy with reference to the taken-for-granted and often unquestioned assumptions on marriage and family practices. Lastly, I acknowledged the purposefully maintained narrow focus throughout the chapter which limited the extended family and the *biradari* as the 'audiences' to family practices. I presented how widespread knowledge on BrAsian marriage practices may be subject to ethnocentric interpretations and stereotypical generalisations resulting from 'unsuccessful' displays being seen by 'unintended' observers. I shall now maintain a contrasting focus, in the forthcoming analysis chapter, by examining the ways in which parents supported their child(ren)s engagement in the sport of boxing.

The (Overly) Supportive Family

"Look at the respect Amir Khan's dad gets because he produced Amir Khan, parents out there want to show their friends 'look at the child we raised with good parenting and giving him the support that he needs'. It is kind of proven that a lot of the lads out there that get support from their parents go on to do quite well, that is evident in a lot of sports."

5.1 Introduction

In the previous analysis chapter, I examined the boxers' perceptions and understandings on how and why their parents had discouraged and constrained them from partaking in boxing and/ or making any serious commitments to the sport. This chapter will therein take a contrasting focus by examining the types of support that were identified and what the possible underpinning motivations may have been. The family, and in particular, parents, have been recognised for their important role in providing the necessary financial and logistical support that enable sporting opportunities and engagement (Quarmby and Dagkas, 2013; Fletcher, 2020). They also fulfil a significant and central role in offering the emotional comfort to aid their child(ren) in making sense of their sporting experiences (Nunomura and Oliveira, 2013). This analysis will pay particular attention to how these support avenues are provided, accessed and why they are so necessary. In addition, I am interested in examining, based on the boxers' accounts, the prospective parental motivations underpinning the support that they provide their child(ren) endeavouring to achieve in the sport of boxing. Fletcher (2020) reminds us after all, that it is difficult to comprehend why parents would make such allowances and subsequent investments without considering the ancillary benefits possible for themselves. In a similar vein, Brown (2018) has asked "is it possible that parents could (and maybe even should) get something out of this?" (p. 1499).

Firstly, I will examine the processes wherein the boxers are socialised into the sport. I present what I have named the 'Amir Khan Effect' in analysing the influence that Amir Khan's accomplishments have had on capturing the imaginations of younger generations to also succeed in boxing. I illustrate how there is an "if he can do it, so can I" logic which has fuelled the boxers' motivations. This, I argue, is rooted in neoliberal thought which downplays the influence of structural and institutional forces by foregrounding hardwork, dedication and commitment as the determinants to success. Which is especially problematic given the rise and permeation of Islamophobia across every cornerstone of society (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012; Akel, 2021). I also argue how Amir Khan's ascendancy has been instrumental towards disrupting the longstanding values that trivialise the social worth of sports. This section of the analysis contributes towards addressing the question of parental motives by adopting a Bourdieusian perspective which illuminates the capital(s) at stake. In particular, I make the connection between parental success and the accumulation of capital(s) by arguing that the

invaluable financial and emotional support offered by parents, in aiding their child(ren) to achieve within boxing, constitutes 'good' parenting and yields a symbolic capital from the recognition and appreciation of the community. By drawing upon the example of Amir Khan, I concur with McDonald and Birrell (1999: 284) who have stressed the benefits of focusing on particular sporting celebrities or incidents, as a way of examining the intricate and fluctuating character of power relations and patterns of social inequality in contemporary society

Secondly, I present and examine the support strategies that were identified during fieldwork and data analysis. These entailed: parents providing emotional encouragement and practical aid through trying periods such as 'making weight'; economic funding to enable the boxers to continue with the sport without having the obligation to find safe and secure employment; and lastly, how support and guardianship was demonstrated through active protection from the harmful repercussions of Islamophobia. I argued, based on the boxers' accounts, how their parents engaged in reflexive deliberation to consider their circumstances, and ultimate concerns, before deciding upon either supporting or constraining their child(ren)s personal projects. This approach was useful for decoding structural circumstances that were not of their own choosing and making sense of the differing course of action taken (Archer, 2000; Baker, 2019). Lastly, I examine what Fletcher (2020) has called the "dark side of parental support" (p. 30). More specifically, I focus on how the mixture of financial support and emotional comfort in conjunction with unreasonable expectations can amount to 'pushy parents' emitting unhealthy levels of pressure. Herein, I identify the consequences that parental pressure has on the dynamics of parent-child relationships and the child(ren)s engagement with the sport. I highlight that without robust and effective interventions from either the gym or the trainer that the boxers leaving the sport becomes a consequential yet inevitable outcome.

5.2 Role Model Influence – The 'Amir Khan Effect'

"From a personal point of view, Ali's fights were received with great anticipation in my family household. My mother (not even a sport fan, never mind a boxing fan) would cook special South Asian dishes, the house would be filled with an air of excitement and my brothers would enthuse about Ali's greatness. The fight itself would be watched, commentated and enjoyed in admiration. Any small act of 'defiance' or 'playful misdemeanour' by Ali was lapped up with great applause and recognition. Quite simply, Ali belonged to us and we would observe with a mixture of awe and envy, especially at how white people respected Ali the Muslim."

(Saeed, 2002, pp. 51-52)

Reminiscing back to his childhood memories, Amir Saeed (2002) described vividly how the former heavyweight boxing champion of the world, Muhammad Ali, captured the attention of global audiences during his reign at the elite levels of the sport. With his 'lightning-fast' hand speed, ferocious punch power and charismatic personality, Ali enthralled spectators that tuned in to watch him compete. For Saeed (2002), an important relational aspect was how Ali's religious identity connected him with many BrAsian communities that did not necessarily identify themselves as sports fans never mind boxing fans. This was underpinned by an element of belonging, as many BrAsians believed that Ali belonged to them given their shared religious identities and thus they felt obliged in supporting his ascendancy to the pinnacle of world boxing. It was, however, not only his Islamic identity nor his proficiency in the ring which yielded such support but also how he was hailed by 'white people' for being one of the greatest entities to ever lace up a pair of boxing gloves.

Muhammad Ali, has however, been succeeded in recent years, as the most proximate role model by a second-generation BrAsian from Bolton who has sought to emulate his accomplishments both inside and outside the ring. Having entered the scene as a virtually unknown fighter, Amir Khan made an immediate impact that few will ever be able to match. To date, he has enjoyed considerable success as an amateur and professional boxer which has included an Olympic Games silver medal and multiple world championships. Notably, was how Khan made his professional debut just days after the London 7/7 bombings, which did not only result in a catastrophic loss of lives and livelihoods, but also how it led to a spike in

Islamophobia (Abbas, 2007; Burdsey, 2007; Cole and Maisuria, 2007; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012). It was a seminal moment for BrAsians watching nationwide when Khan celebrated victory after his professional debut by draping himself in a Union Jack flag that had 'London' written across the centre, in memory of those that died from the bombings. Khan was seemingly disrupting a hegemonic narrative by demonstrating how BrAsians could embrace hybrid ethno-religious identities that valued both religion and nationality. This was an important starting point, as the youth saw in him, a true representative of themselves, as opposed to the 7/7 bombers. In sum, the Amir Khan 'story' cannot be eviscerated from a socio-political climate, in which, racial and religious hostility, hatred and violence notwithstanding the repercussions of the evermore Islamophobic anti-terror legislation which constitute the everyday realities for many BrAsians (Burdsey, 2007).

The political salience that Khan possessed beyond the sporting arena was not, however, the reason that led to the continuous growth of his fanbase. The considerable prominence attached to him amidst the prevailing socio-political backdrop was without doubt an important starting point. Notwithstanding the awe and appreciation that he also accumulated from the entire nation, who applauded him for being a 'British' and 'Muslim' boxer that was representing his country on a global scale. Nevertheless, it was his pugilistic capabilities which really excited the younger generations, in particular. Put differently, the Amir Khan 'story' symbolised that upward social mobility, especially in the sport of boxing, was a possibility and issues around faith, ethnicity or class were not *absolute* constraints. The purpose of this overview was to outline how the socio-political backdrop was influential in connecting both younger and elder generations of BrAsians with the sport of boxing through the vehicle of Amir Khan, as a role model. Whilst speaking to amateur boxing trainer Saif, he described the positive impact that Khan's ascendancy in world boxing had in drawing BrAsians to the sport. Saif reflected on how the number of BrAsians partaking in amateur boxing proliferated following Khan's emergence into the public spotlight:

> *Let's get things absolutely straight, In terms of Asian communities, in boxing, prior to Amir Khan, it was very rare* […] *Asian boxers were few and far between. After Amir Khan came onto the scene, it exploded, exploded, so credit to the guy for getting a lot of Asians and their families into boxing.* **(Interview with Saif)**

These findings have been echoed elsewhere in a similar fashion by Sabir Khan, secretary of the Medina Mosque in Bolton, who described the local implications that Khan's global feat had on the level of engagement amongst the local boxing clubs: "It's amazing what has happened amongst the Bolton [amateur boxing] clubs. I think that the youths of Bolton, especially the Indian and Pakistani boys, they seem to have a hero type of person, you know. It's like they can sort of relate to Amir Khan" (BBC Radio, 2005). Saif argued how the accomplishments of Khan were instrumental towards not only improving participation numbers but also capturing the attention of BrAsian families. This suggests how Khan was able to disrupt the longstanding and enduring views held by elder generations of BrAsians about the value of partaking in sports as a serious occupation (Fletcher et al., 2014). They evidently saw as a fruitful endeavour that their own offspring could also pursue. I aver, nevertheless, how there is an essence of neoliberal perceptions on meritocracy which underpin the 'Amir Khan Effect'. These foreground how aspiration, hardwork and dedication are sufficient for success irrespective of an individual's identity and background. It was mentioned in the previous chapter how, within the context of transnational migration, that there are strong views vis-à-vis meritocracy rooted within BrAsian communities. These beliefs, after all, were essential in justifying the migrational endeavours of the elder generation. The 'Amir Khan Effect', I argue, ought to be interpreted as the *impression* that Khan (a community role model) provided for younger generations who perceived his trajectory as a blueprint, for which, they may be able to emulate for themselves someday. Examining the 'Amir Khan Effect' further provided a fascinating insight into how study participant and former Rio 2016 Olympian, Muhammad Ali, was drawn towards visiting his local amateur boxing club for the first time after watching his childhood hero compete:

> *As a young kid, looking up to Khan as a role model made us think that we can achieve something in this sport* […] *I thought, I want to do that. So, my dad took me to the gym when I was eight and ever since then I have loved it* […] *I think like Khan was the man to get a lot of Asians into the sport, even with myself. I would say that it's because of Khan I started as I thought that maybe I can do well in this sport. My dad was always putting boxing on at the time and Khan was the only Asian on TV worth watching who was doing well* […] *At an early age, you need to see someone like Khan to know 'yeah*

> *if he can do it so can I'. We looked up to him because he was the only Asian, he was one of us.* **(Interview with Muhammad Ali)**

Here, Muhammad Ali described his journey into the sport. It was through watching Khan's contests where he reflected on his own chances of tasting success. This was epitomised through the sentiment "if he can do it, so can I". In other words, 'If a second-generation BrAsian, from a working-class background can do it, then what is stopping me?'. Such exposure to Khan's accomplishments led to Ali embracing neoliberal beliefs regarding the possibility of 'making it against the odds' irrespective of his identity and background. This, however, meant that he had naively overlooked collectivist issues in turn for individualist ones. He placed the onus for future success on himself without due awareness towards the wider (and potentially constraining) social forces that may impede his aspirations. For Flax (1999), the discourse of individualism endeavours to assert how we are unique individuals and that are group memberships (race, religion, class or gender) are not relevant to our opportunities. Such perspective, I would suggest, takes the stance (albeit inadvertently) that social inequalities are a phenomenon of the past with only 'melancholic migrants' and/ or 'feminist killjoys' being 'stuck' on matters around discrimination and obsessed with finding racism and sexism where it 'no longer exists' (Ahmed, 2004). Consequently, the structural and institutional inequalities that mar the everyday lives of individuals are downplayed through neoliberal rhetoric that celebrates the self-regulating, autonomous and individualised subjects, free from any constraints.

What is also illustrated here is how the role model offers an important site of vision and future investment for the youth through representations on the possibility of visibility, symbolic capital and self-improvement. It was by virtue of the social position(s) held and the social functions performed by Khan which produced the 'Amir Khan Effect', as those who looked up to him in a positive light sought to imitate him and aspire to such roles and positions for themselves. That being said, Richard Delgado (1990) has warned us about the deceptive image surrounding the role model: "the most important reason for rejecting the job of the role model is that it requires you to lie – that you tell not little, but big, whopping lies […] Suppose I am sent into an inner-city school to talk to the kids and serve as a role model of the month. I am expected to tell the kids if they study hard and stay out of trouble, that they can become a law professor like me. That, however, is a very big lie: a whopper" (p. 1228).

Exposure to a role model, alone, was not the sole driving factor that enabled Muhammad Ali to enter and advance in the sport of boxing. But also, how his father took a pro-active approach in facilitating his involvement. Turman (2007) has expressed the importance that exposure plays for adequately socialising individuals into their respective sports. This, however, cannot be limited to individuals watching sports on the television or reading about the results in the media. In other words, the enactment of specific activities alongside interacting with fellow athletes are crucial ingredients towards improving interest and participation. Ali described how his father had played a vital role in developing his interest with the sport by purchasing him quality training equipment and taking him down to the local gym as an eight-year-old for him to get a flavour of the requirements and demands that come with being an amateur boxer. Quarmby and Dagkas (2010) have observed the temporal influence on the development of young people's habitus and taste for sporting activities, as parents that invest sufficient lengths of time in taking their child(ren) to and from training whilst also partaking in some exercises with them are increasingly likely to favourably shape their interests and preferences. Throughout the interview, Ali praised the support that his father had provided for facilitating his development. This suggested that Ali's response to parental influence was welcomed and appreciated.

The empirical accounts presented align with the family practices approach which underlines the necessity to adopt a practical approach towards family life. In other words, family ought to be more about 'doing' rather than 'having' (Morgan, 2011). From a parental perspective, Ali's father used boxing as a context wherein he could fulfil his obligations as the 'good' and responsible father by providing moral support and assuming the role of 'parent-taxi'. He was, as a result, able to spend time bonding with his child whilst simultaneously keeping him out of trouble and away from the streets. As Gillies (2008) has observed, parents have always been held responsible for the behaviour and development of their child(ren). Coakley (2006) has argued, elsewhere, how some parents feel that they are able to meet their responsibilities whilst steering their child(ren) towards character-building activities that are enjoyable but also valued across society.

The reasons why some of the study participants elected Amir Khan as their chosen role model required further exploration during fieldwork. Apart from being outspoken on social and political issues alongside his victories amongst the amateur and professional ranks, there was no description nor explanation, apart from his shared social identity traits, as to why some study participants had reorientated their life trajectories towards replicating his biography. To elaborate, there have been other public figures, with similar characteristics, that have experienced similar trajectories albeit in different sports or professions. Speaking with Harris Akbar generated a greater insight into the opportunities that some of the study participants recognised in replicating the Amir Khan 'story':

> **Izram:** *What is it about him* [Amir Khan] *that everyone wants to follow in his steps?*
>
> **Harris:** *Amir Khan is globally recognised, he goes to Pakistan and he has the police force out just to chauffer him down the motorway in peace and not face any traffic, he has got a lot of money, he is a multi-millionaire, he has got success, he has got fame, he has got everyone that you dream for, it is a happy life and he has done well for himself, since he has become an elite level boxer he has never had to struggle again. He has not had to worry about finance, and he has lived a happy life.*

Clearly, Harris Akbar described how he, and others were, motivated by the symbolic recognition that Khan earned as a professional fighter. This was highlighted when he talked about the special treatment that Khan enjoyed when returning 'back home' which included receiving military-style escorts around Pakistan. It was the fruits of fame (recognition, autonomy, social favours and economic security) which were highly sought. From a Bourdieusian perspective, these findings illustrate the beneficial way in which capital can be converted and amalgamated. As the fighter's ability (physical) led him to becoming a multi-millionaire (economic) and subsequently establishing numerous networks and relationships (social). These combined resulted in the elevation of his social prestige (symbolic) whilst making him the beneficiary of global status. This example highlights how engagement and success in boxing may be deemed as legitimate and 'proper' projections to fame given the hardwork and labour that is required to become a world champion. Allen and Mendick (2013) for example, proposed a binary, based on their study participants' accounts, that differentiated between legitimate and non-legitimate ascendancies to fame. These considered the ways in which individuals earned their fame. Reality TV processes where

perceived as ‘undeserving’ pathways to becoming famous, whereas entrepreneurs like Bill Gates, for example, were hailed as exemplary for achieving success and recognition for the ‘right’ reasons using the ‘right’ routes by way of his skill, passion and intelligence (Allen and Mendick, 2013). The analysis insofar suggests how the fame and recognition that Harris Akbar (and others) were striving for, as boxers, would have been deemed legitimate given the praise and appreciation that figureheads like Amir Khan received. Put differently, earning money and establishing social relationships from boxing would be perceived as ‘right’ and ‘proper’ through the “eyes of others” wherein symbolic capital exists. This case further illustrates how the prospects of accumulating capital may contest the values that perceive sports as a trivial endeavour given that it exemplifies the positive reception that involvement in boxing can generate amongst local and transnational communities. This will be an important reference point, later in the chapter, whilst explicating the motivations underpinning parental support.

The excerpt also incorporated ‘migrational-like’ terminology that is usually found when describing the experiences of the elder generations. Here, I am referring to the reference made to the term ‘struggle’ and how becoming an elite boxer would constitute an effective route towards eliminating the possibility of ever struggling again and enjoying a better life. These words were particularly rooted in an economic context regarding how success in the professional ranks would guarantee a happy life that was undergirded by a sense of financial security. I draw upon Loic Wacquant (1998) here who postulated how individuals may be driven to the sport through economic motivations by aspiring to become professionals one day and earn life changing sums of money:

“There is no denying that entering 'pro' boxing partakes of a project of material uplift and economic mobility. An intimate acquaintance with hardship is a powerful ingredient in the genesis of the fistic calling. The prospect of financial gains, large or small, the (statistically improbable) hope of astronomical 'paydays' that will allow you to buy a house, retire, and provide for kin and kids are prominently featured in the 'vocabularies of motives' that fighters deploy to explain, to themselves and to others around them, why they are in the business of hard knocks”

(p. 326).

Wacquant (1998) is loquacious here, regarding the risks that individuals wilfully take towards transforming their lives and livelihoods. This chimes with the data that I gleaned wherein Harris talked about how the possibility of becoming a multi-millionaire was an enticing factor towards the sport. Harris elaborated by laying claim how betterment for his family was also at the heart of his motivations. Yet again, he framed his sentiment through the biography of Amir Khan:

> *Amir Khan came from Bury, he didn't come from the richest part of England, he lived in places like where we did. It obviously influenced us guys because we thought if he can do it and in the space of 10-15 years, he is getting married, having kids, living in a mansion with a pool, he can buy any car he wants, he is making a success of himself, why can't we do it? We looked at him and thought if he can do it then I am going to do it, I want to get my mum and dad out of the places we are living.* **(Interview with Harris Akbar)**

The quotation presented earlier by Wacquant (1998) observed how individuals would mull over a 'vocabulary of motives' for justifying their engagement with the "business of hard knocks" (p. 326). This spanned from buying a house, to retiring, to providing for kin and kids. In a similar vein, these 'vocabulary of motives' are nested within the interview extract above in how Harris implied that having a family and living a luxurious lifestyle was the objective upon entering the sport of boxing. Once more, there was reference to the possibility of achievement that was identified with Muhammad Ali. This was through the remarks around "why can't we do it?" which ignores the influence of wider social and institutional forces by placing the chances of success on the individuals will and desire to win. This was done by evaluating how Khan's working-class background did not hinder him from yielding global success. DiAngelo (2010) has argued that perceiving upward mobility as the rewards of individual merit also suggests how those who fail do so because of their individual deficiencies. This perspective, therefore, suggests that categories like race, religion and gender are just 'labels' that are irrelevant to our successes and failures.

I would, propose, however, that the interview extract above held significance for an alternative reason given that Harris concluded his 'vocabulary of motives' by asserting how his focus was on ameliorating his parent's area of residence by sponsoring them in moving elsewhere. There was no data obtained throughout the fieldwork, as to whether Harris'

parents were aware that their son aspired, to one day demonstrate his gratitude by rewarding them with a better life. I did find, however, that Harris and his father shared an intimate relationship (this will be presented and expanded on later in this chapter) hence it is unlikely that he/ they would not have anticipated any materialistic gratefulness from their son once 'he made it'. The focus of this chapter, nevertheless, is not centred around 'what the child(ren) want(s) for their parents' but 'what the parents (and family) want for their child(ren)' and the extent to which they will support them in achieving their objectives. The preceding analysis has contextualised how the boxers, their parents, families and communities would have become engaged with boxing. Throughout, I have examined how replicating the accomplishments of a role model was a motivation that underpinned the study participants entry into the sport. These accomplishments have, however, not just been centred around victory in the ring but also the growth of wealth, the establishment of social networks and the prestige that comes with being a reputable fighter. I have utilised the empirical accounts to illustrate how supportive parents may materialistically benefit from the deeds of their appreciative children. The following extract provides a more plentiful insight as to how parents may benefit from the achievements of their child(ren):

> *Asian families want that* [fame, recognition and wealth] *for their kids, they wanna follow in his* [Amir Khan's] *footsteps and want their children to have a good life, they want them to be a professional athlete in a country that only has a few Asians, for example, one single Asian footballer. Look at the respect Amir Khan's dad gets because he produced Amir Khan, parents out there want to show their friends as to 'look at the child we raised with good parenting and giving him the support that he needs'. It is kind of proven that a lot of the lads out there that get support from their parents go on to do quite well, that is evident in a lot of sports.* **(Interview with Harris)**

Harris elaborated on the obvious motivations that underpinned parental support vis-à-vis mothers and fathers wanting their children to have good lives by enjoying the fame and wealth that individuals like Amir Khan have earned. Boxing, after all, has been presented within this chapter as a legitimate means towards acquiring fame and fortune. The fear, therefore, that local, national or international communities may disapprove and refuse to offer respect and appreciation has been non-existent based on the boxers' accounts. The perceptions of the *biradari*, as such, did not constitute a deterring factor as parents

deliberated upon providing support. Beyond the parental wishes that aspired for the prosperous futures of their child(ren) lay an implicit self-benefit. I argue that this ought to be understood through the perspective that if a child fails then the parents are believed to be responsible for such failure. On the other hand, if the child succeeds then the parents would be deemed regarded as meeting their expectations. When the child enjoys success then parents are held in high esteem and may even be interviewed or consulted by others interested in enhancing their own parenting. To the extent, that parents internalise these expectations and blame themselves when their children fail to meet expectations; at the same time, when development surpasses expectations, parents often feel that they require extra credit. The extract above illustrated a supplementary benefit in how mothers and fathers would be praised as 'good' parents for producing sporting superstars. For example, the *izzat* Khan enjoyed following his accomplishments was not solely attributed to his personal efforts, as his father, Shah Khan, was also recognised by many as the emblem of a 'good' father given that he had supported and guided his son towards becoming an established figure on the global scene. Shah Khan was hailed as the architect of his son's achievements. For Finch (2007), parenthood is multifaceted. In other words, there is a component where parents strive to do a good job by their standards, and another that is concerned with 'displaying' their parental practices and having them commended by other audiences. These parental practices tend to be connected with predefined values that construct ideals about what is 'good' parenting and what is not.

To expand, the achievements of children in a sport are both visible and objectively measurable. Such public visibility therefore produces reflections that come to symbolise the moral worth of parents. Athletes, for instance, assume valuable moral capital in neighbourhoods and communities. This may (and often does) oblige parents to 'invest' in their child(ren)s engagement as failing to do so may be indicative of their moral failure as responsible guardians (Coakley, 2006). Ryan Dunn et al. (2016) have drawn upon analogies from the financial literature to characterise how parental support in their child(ren)s engagement with sports and physical activity can be viewed as a form of investment behaviour whereby they expect future returns either through the materialisation of economic capital, physical wellbeing and/ or symbolic capital. In the financial literature, the notion of *investor sentiment* offers a greater insight than Bourdieu's capital by describing how

investments/ trades shape reactionary behaviours. In other words, how the size of the investment (whether that be in time, money or energy) influences investor expectations regarding their returns as those that have invested highly may project behaviours that lead to pressure, stress and anxiety. On the other hand, those that have provided a minimal investment may feel more relaxed about the prospects of any returns. This will be an important discussion to revisit later in the chapter when I focus on the mechanisms that produce parental pressure. I have, however, drawn upon this literature here to outline the additional motivations driving parents into supporting their children partaking in boxing which revolve around yielding profits and benefits for themselves. I contend that when children receive awards or attain upward mobility then this is seen as objectified proof of parental moral worth. This is often made clear by parents who describe the sporting achievements in which awards are earned by (them and) their talented child(ren). Hirschhorn and Loughead (2000) have observed how often, some parents will attempt to live vicariously (e.g. living through the success/failure of another's athletic performance) through their child(ren) and will believe that the performance of their child(ren) is a direct reflection of them.

The foregoing analysis has examined the circumstances through which Muhammad Ali and Harris Akbar decided to partake within the sport of boxing. The analysis suggested how Muhammad Ali sought to succeed by 'overcoming the odds' that were stacked against him. Conversely, Harris Akbar endeavoured to symbolically and materialistically ameliorate his parents lifestyles. As Porpora (1989) has argued: "actors are motivated to act in their interests" (p. 208). It was presented earlier in this chapter how there was an element of socialisation occurring through their exposure to role models. Notwithstanding how the family, in Muhammad Ali's instance, played an integral part in facilitating his involvement from an early age, with his father taking him down to the local amateur boxing club. I however, lay claim, that it is important to appreciate the ways in which people act and the choices that they do (and do not) make without overemphasising the effects of socialisation and social determinism. In other words, our way of being in the world ought to be understood beyond "predisposed ways of thinking, acting and moving and through the social environment" (Sweetman, 2003, p. 532). We are not 'passive' agents to whom things merely

happen. We are (most of us) active agents that exercise a degree of governance in our everyday lives.

Both Muhammad Ali and Harris Akbar initiated reflexive deliberation by asserting 'if he can do it, then why can't I/ we?' whilst observing the ascendancy of Amir Khan. This considered how an individual with a similar social background and identity had penetrated the global boxing scene and thus paved the way for future generations to follow suit. Such deliberations, therefore, considered what the chances and probabilities of success would be before the study participants defined their personal projects of pursuing a career in the boxing. Archer (2012) has argued how reflexivity has become mandatory during late modernity where individuals are faced with a plethora of opportunities. Individuals are thus left to scrutinise their projects which may result in them either maintaining a commitment to their original plans or abandoning these in exchange for other endeavours. Ultimately, it is reflexive deliberation that mediates between how structural and cultural forces shape individual agency (Archer, 2003). I argued, however, that these deliberations were rooted in neoliberal thought and downplayed any prospective structural and institutional constraints whilst foregrounding individual responsibility and will. The hypothesis that 'those who enjoy parental support are more likely to excel in their chosen sports, then those who do not' was averred by Harris. This merits further sociological investigation into how different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) have been significant for enabling/ constraining engagement. In the forthcoming section, I will explicate how the study participants perceived and understood their parents deliberations and decisions to support them in the boxing endeavours. Furthermore, I will underline the importance that access to various forms of capital had on the decisions made by parents to promote participation. This will, therefore, enable me to decode the circumstances that were beyond their control (Archer, 2000; Baker, 2019). I am also able to further understand why some opportunities were available whilst other constraints could not be negotiated.

5.3 Support Strategies

There are numerous authors who support the view that the family maintains the strongest influence on an individuals propensity to take up sport (Wheeler, 2011; Quarmby, 2016; Fletcher 2020). Within the family itself, parents are thought to be the most influential socialising agents for their child(ren)s early learning experiences and certainly the first point of socialisation into sports and leisure activities (Fletcher, 2020). Given that children remain in the family environment for many years, this provides ample opportunity for parental influence which can last a lifetime (Quarmby, 2016; Fletcher, 2020). Wheeler (2011) has detailed the common practices adopted by parents in encouraging their child(ren) to engage in sports. These are fivefold and include: (1) parents offering their support through time (to provide transport) or money (to buy equipment); (2) by providing verbal encouragement; (3) through coaching and advice based on any previous experience with the sport; (3) by giving incentives and rewards to enhance motivation levels; and lastly (5) by providing positive role models, whether it is themselves or others that may have a beneficial impact on the child(ren).

Fletcher (2020) has posed that there may be negative implications for the longevity of young people's sporting interests if they are not adequately supported by their parents. Whilst I have discussed the reasons behind why parents may navigate their child(ren) towards more vocational fields in the previous chapter, it is important that I foreground the significance that my study participants stressed about having a supportive family in their boxing endeavours. Wheeler (2011) has argued that children whose parents support and encourage them are increasingly likely to start and stay in sports than children whose parents do not. Saif explained that his parents did not provide the sufficient support that he required to excel within boxing. His father had previously represented the British team, whilst serving in the army, as an amateur boxer and this perhaps shaped the parents judgement to withhold providing any support.

> *For me, my dad boxed as part of the Great Britain army team, so we have always had that boxing in us in a sense, but they* [parents] *never wanted me to box, but I always kept on bugging them then eventually they started letting me put the Ali tapes on. I suppose at first, they didn't want to expose me to the game, but they started putting the fight tapes on and I got engaged with it. My mum definitely never wanted me to do it, she hated it,*

> *still hates it* […] *I didn't have my parents pushing me, supporting me, all over my boxing, for me, boxing was just by me and for me and he just let me do my thing. In terms of having someone there that was a lot more proactive, yeah, maybe it could have helped me and helped me stay in the sport and one day make it, but it is what it is sort of thing. But it was me, all me, all solo*. **(Interview with Saif)**

Brackenridge (2006) proposed an invaluable framework to conceptualise models of parenting, which she has termed the 'Parental Optimum Zone'. This sought to discern the optimum discourses, knowledge, feelings, behaviours or in other words, 'states', that parents demonstrate as their child(ren) engage with sports. These states include: 'inactive' (no knowledge or commitment); 'reactive' (reluctant commitment and engagement); 'active' (satisfactory awareness and engagement); 'proactive' (full commitment and support); 'hyperactive' (overly excitable) and lastly; 'opposed' (unduly critical). The states maintained by Saif's parents, I would suggest, overlapped between 'reactive' as they never wanted him to box, and as time passed, they demonstrated both 'inactive' and 'opposed' states as they showed little commitment towards supporting him and advocated, as he told me later in the interview, that he focused his energies on academic pursuits rather than continuing his engagement with the sport. With a poignant tone, Saif described how he craved "proactive" parenting to provide him with the necessary support that he required at the time, as trying to succeed "solo" was unsustainable and ultimately led to his under-achievement. This is supported by Strandbu et al. (2020) who have stressed how youths' needs for parental support becomes more important as they enter higher age brackets and when individuals enter levels of competition that are elitist and serious.

The data illustrates how the mother hated (and still hates) the sport and that collectively the parents did their utmost to conceal any exposure of the sport from Saif. Their initial tactic included not permitting him as a young child to watch any fights as they saw the risk in him finding an interest by consuming such material. This approach, however, was not long lasting as Saif eventually got his way and began watching Muhammad Ali's classic contests. I suspected that there was a connection between his parents' sentiments and feelings for the sport and the fact that his father once competed alongside/ for the British Army. Nevertheless, I failed to glean any further information about Saif's fathers experiences despite my repetitive prompting which suggested to me that he did not want to disclose anymore

details on a topic he deemed sensitive. These findings conflict with the literature which suggests that individuals whose parents were involved in sport (or had been previously) were likely to participate with their backing (Dollahite and Hawkins, 1998; Wheeler, 2011). Thus, it can be speculated that there may have been other influential experiences or factors of the sport that the parents wanted to conceal Saif from based on the fathers tenure. There is no dearth of academic evidence highlighting such prospective issues, for example, the prevalence of racism (Woodward, 2004; Rhodes, 2011); the inherent corruption of institutions, promoters and managers (Wacquant, 2001) or perhaps, the unrewarding nature of the sport, which transpires through the lack of money to be earned following years of rigorous training regimes and personal sacrifices (Wacquant, 1995). To summarise, Saif's parents did not explicitly tell him why they did not want him to box but instead used their energy to guide him towards academic pursuits and vocational occupations. They arguably demonstrated their feelings through their lack of support which proved detrimental for his prospects. These findings are consistent with the academic evidence that advocates the importance that parental/ familial support has on how individuals experience and progress within sports and physical activity (Dollahite and Hawkins, 1998; Wheeler, 2011; Fletcher, 2020).

The absence of parental support led to Saif reflecting on whether it was sustainable to continue with the sport. He explained that it was the disinterest from his parents which ultimately resulted in him ceasing any engagement in boxing. Saif, as a result, engaged in a self-contained inner dialogue leading directly to action without the need for validation by others. Here, I suggest that external validation through dialogue with the parents was not deemed necessary, as their (in)action and attitudes towards his involvement in boxing had clarified their views and positions. The interview extract was ambiguous regarding the particular support that Saif deemed was absent during his time as an amateur boxer. Here onwards, I shall examine the key avenues of parental support that were identified within the data and argue as to why they were essential for prolonging the study participants engagement in boxing. This analysis will initially present how parental support through various means produces positive outcomes, however, the concluding section of this chapter will highlight how, sometimes, support can go too far. I will argue how undue parental/ family pressure can have negative implications which include individuals eventually walking away

from the sport. It has been identified, elsewhere, that parental support may also backfire and produce negative outcomes, for example, Franceschelli (2016) found that the sacrifices and investments made by parents were not always appreciated, as some individuals had demonstrated 'standing on their own two-feet' by leaving home and starting their lives anew. Resulting in their mothers and fathers not being able to reap the rewards from the upbringing that they had provided. This analysis, will, however, foreground how an unintended consequence of parental support is that is can, at times, be excessive and thus detrimental to the wellbeing and sporting engagement of the child(ren).

5.3.1 Emotional Encouragement and 'Making Weight'

Nunomura and Oliveira (2013) have argued how young athletes that do not benefit from the emotional support of their parents risk finding it very difficult, if not impossible, to succeed. Encouragement in the form of parental support consists of word and behaviours that athletes perceive to create and sustain athletic involvement. Anderson et al. (2003) identified a positive correlation between parental support and athlete enjoyment while being inversely associated with the child(ren)s levels of anxiety. Kidman et al. (1999) examined parents behaviours at sporting events and found actions such as clapping and praise, as the most frequent manifestations of parental support. Further, Côté and Hay (2002) have suggested that engaging in conversation and/ or understanding the reasons for a young persons feelings may prove to be an effective method for providing emotional encouragement, that may subsequently lead to a fruitful promotion of their self-esteem and confidence levels.

The flux of emotions that a pugilist is likely to experience whilst partaking in his/ her trade are plentiful. From a fear of opponent to an anxiety that one may not be adequately prepared and at the right weight classification for a contest. Sacha (2017) has described the integral process of mentors (trainers, peers, family members) performing intimate labour exercises with their fighters in an attempt to control emotions like fear, shame, angry and pride. An important period in amateur and professional boxing consists of 'making weight' which refers to the process of reducing body weight to compete in weight categorised sports (Sitch and Day, 2015). The process of making weight has been suggested to include frequent, rapid, and large weight loss and regain cycles (Steen and Brownell, 1990). In Smith's (2006) study of amateur boxers making weight, all 156 athletes were found to have drastically reduced their body weight by 1.7% in the final 24 hours before the weigh-in. Steen and Brownell (1990)

found that depending on the amount of time left before a contest, athletes may engage in a multitude of aggressive methods which include dehydrating the body, fasting, ingesting laxatives and tactics that induce vomiting.

Research that has focused on the making weight process has largely indicated the negative impact that it is likely to have on an athlete's emotional wellbeing. For example, how sustained weight loss programmes may lead to a significant increase in negative mood states like anger, fatigue and tension (Hall and Lane, 2001; Landers et al., 2001; Koral and Dosseville, 2009). I was able to understand how these issues were attempted to be mitigated, whilst speaking to Harris who explained how his father provided emotional encouragement by joining him in his dieting regime to support him in coping with the rigours of training hard and making weight:

> **Izram:** *In what way has your family supported your boxing?*
>
> **Harris:** *My dad always tries to come to my fights, and he is always there for me, motivating me to do better. I also remember one time I was really struggling to lose weight so my dad went on the same diet as me to motivate me and that may not seem major, but it really means a lot when you look back at it. Especially when you are always doing it alone.*

Foremost, Harris talked about the value that he felt in having a father that always endeavoured to show his support at his contests whether they were being staged domestically or internationally. Being ringside was seemingly appreciated as Harris lay claim that his father's presence and visibility empowered him to excel as a fighter. An example was then offered on the subject of making weight and how his father's strategy to diet alongside him proved invaluable during a period fatigue and exhaustion. What can be deduced from these instances is how emotional support was demonstrated by Harris's father imposing his presence, at times where he may have felt lonely and isolated whilst meeting the demands of the sport. Having seen that his son's motivation may have been withering away when competing and making weight, the father took an unprecedented step in leading by example and letting his son know that he was not alone in his struggles. Diane Reay (2000) has utilised the concept of emotional capital in order to explore how mothers' involvement in their child(ren)s education implicated their chances and emotional wellbeing. Reay (2000)

identified how fathers operated on the periphery, as women were deemed responsible for taking responsibility regarding the majority of emotional involvement and management. It was thus concluded that parental emotional engagement was gendered. Bell (1990) also posited that women are seen to be responsible for the economy of emotions that operates within families. Bell (1990) has equated mother with book-keeping by arguing how one of the major roles of mothering is to balance the family's emotional budget. The data, here, however, conflicts with previous literature as Harris' father assumed a primary role in supporting his emotional wellbeing and thus aiding him in better managing and controlling his emotions of loneliness and isolation whilst making weight. I would suggest that he felt empowered to do so, as it would not have compromised his sense of masculinity given the boxing backdrop in how 'tough guys' and 'warrior' have to go through the gears of sacrifice and perseverance whilst making weight in combat sports. In other words, his emotional support was offered under the perspective that it was a 'no less manly' thing to do.

In his essay entitled: *The Prizefighter's Three Bodies* (1998), Wacquant acknowledged the masculine nature of making weight. He has written how the first commandment of the pugilistic catechism lays down the culinary taboos and observances presumed to maximise the fighter's vigorousness and strength in combat:

"When he enters the phase of intensive training that precedes a bout, a fighter must follow a rigorous diet of steamed vegetables, white meats, boiled fish, fresh fruits, and tea or mineral water, and avoid at all costs greasy, fatty, and sugary comestibles. What to eat and not to eat, how much to ingest and when to do it: these seemingly trivial matters consume the attention and conversations of pro boxers in the unremitting effort to 'make the weight' for their fight […] *The occupational lore of boxing features a fine-grained taxonomy of edibles and elaborate theories on the latter's effects upon different body parts and functions. Many pleasurable foodstuffs (cake, candies, and assorted 'junk food,' for instance) are thought to slow down and weaken a combatant and are therefore viewed as harmful, metaphorical equivalents of drugs. Indeed, fighters often mention food, alcohol and drugs in the same breath as that which they have to draw away from in order to purge and purify their bodies for confrontation in the ring. Beyond their obvious material purpose - to shed excess pounds and bring the fighter down into the contractually- agreed weight range - prandial observances serve to create a double sense, of separateness from the everyday world and*

dissociation from its inhabitants on the one hand, of submersion in the pugilistic plenum and tight association with its members, who share and live by these rules, on the other hand. Fasting also contributes to generating a sentiment of self-mastery and elevation that radiates all the way into the ring on fight night."

(Wacquant, 1998, pp. 340-41, emphasis original)

This quotation has not been drawn upon to accentuate how making weight symbolises a performance of hegemonic masculinity. Instead, I have presented it to substantiate the arduous dietary requirements that are involved when pugilists enter intensive phases of training before competition. It is, through the deliberations of what and how much to eat and what to stay away from which consumes the lives and lifestyles of a fighter. Temptations to indulge in 'junk food' have to be quashed for sustained periods of time for the fighter to reap the rewards from training. Wacquant (1998) moves beyond the simplistic implications of making weight by arguing that it involves more than just shedding excess pounds. It is, rather, the disconnect and separateness that fighters experience from the everyday world which risks a psychological toll. From avoiding 'night outs' to refraining from consuming culinary favourites – the pugilists world is demanding and antithetical to eating/ behavioural practices that are characterised as detrimental to the performance of the combatant. Harris was able to articulate on the challenges that he had faced throughout his whole career regarding making weight. This elaborated from the emotional dimension of making weight to the pragmatic methods that were adopted and how they were facilitated with parental support. I was able to glean vital information by prompting him on topics that I had pre-existing knowledge of from my time as a competitive amateur boxer. For example, an important exchange that we had focused on a *turning point* that he had in his earlier years where he went from being mediocre level to someone with a formidable international standing.

> **Izram:** *What I remember of you Harris was there was a big switching point in your career. You started off as this 'chubby boxer' who couldn't win any fights and then it all just switched, and you became like this dominant force in amateur boxing. What led to that switching point?*
>
> **Harris:** *What happened was that in my first 10 fights, I lost like 5 of them. Then it was a national final and I got a 'bye'* [walkover] *all the way to the final because it was such*

> *a high weight for a young age, and I was a 'fat kid'. The other guy came in and he was in shape, carrying no fat, his body was right for the weight, and he was like a bulldozer and came in like a tank. I lost that fight. I lost it really badly* […] *After the fight, some guy came up to my dad and goes 'look man, he is at the wrong weight, he is too fat to be against these boys, come down to my gym, let's start losing some weight'. Me and my dad agreed. I went on a diet that helped me lose weight which my dad also joined, big up to my dad. I lost 14 kilograms. After the weight loss, we started working on my boxing more than my condition then I realised that I am unreal at this. Then the wins started to come in, the titles started to come in, the medals started to come in and everything just went from there. Soon as I got to a decent weight and got really fit it just switched for me. I was living a really unhealthy life before that, when I fixed my lifestyle then I became a lot better. It was all down to the diet. I reckon diet is the biggest part of boxing because anyone can go out and box and learn to throw a jab, but it takes some discipline to eat stuff that isn't very nice for like 8 weeks.*

Harris illustrated the epiphany that he had following a momentous defeat where he was charged with competing at the wrong weight category, against opponents that had frames and physiques that were more suited to the division. He and his father were then advised that he ought to significantly reduce his body-fat if he were to stand any chance of success in the sport. Within the sport of boxing, fat continues to be pathologized and fat individuals are viewed as self-indulgent, lazy and uncommitted. Monaghan (2001) has understood how the condition of the body has wider social meanings as the 'strong, fit, muscular and fat-free' physique is characterised as the somatic representation of health in contrast to the fat body that is deemed to be transgressive. The data indicates how Harris may have been inculcated by such perceptions, as it was not until he reduced his body-fat percentage when he felt stimulated to do better in the sport. Put differently, he associated fat burning and weight loss with living a healthy and committed lifestyle that was conducive to the demands of boxing. This, however, is not always the case as the dangers of weight loss within short/ medium lengths of time have been illuminated elsewhere by authors who have identified emotional distress, severe dehydration and a reduction of strength and power as symptoms of rapid fat/ weight reduction in combat sports (Morton et al., 2010; Kim and Park, 2020). Harris, nevertheless, believed that reducing his body-fat percentage substantially was an

instrumental factor in attaining elite level success. The excerpt depicts that, in solidarity, Harris's father joined him on this arduous journey to offer support which ultimately led to a transformation in his capabilities and achievements, as he described how the wins, titles and medals started to emerge after losing 14 kilograms of excess weight. I also found how there was 'backstage' support from the mother which was pivotal in the corporeal transformation for Harris:

> **Izram:** *What were you eating, then what did you start eating?*
>
> **Harris:** *I was just at the start eating loads of fried stuff. You know what Asian households are like. Loads of curries, rotis and loads of fried parathas. I ate loads of fried chicken as well. Loads of chips. It made me massive eating that home food. I was about 58 kilograms, but I was really short and tubby for the weight. What happened was I went on a diet, and I ate more meals throughout the day, my mum was cooking making better stuff, loads of grilled chicken, broccoli, sweet potatoes and fruit pots. I lost a lot of weight and felt better. I went from like 57 kilograms to 43. That was in the space of 4/5 months.*

Food has been viewed as a key area through which the social and cultural boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are defined (Douglas, 1984; Chattoo et al., 2004). Chattoo et al. (2004) have argued that the phrase 'you are what you eat' is especially pertinent for BrAsians given that it depicts how culinary preferences and habits can be seen as a 'performance' of ethnicity. Harris' father embodied the role of the spectator and engaged in seminal conversations such as the necessity for him to reduce his body weight. His mother, however, conducted the 'hidden work' (Shaw, 2008) of transforming his diet and ensuring that he consumed freshly prepared healthy foods. Morgan (1996) has commented that the preparation and provision of food is symbolic of the care work the women undertake in their families. Transforming the menu meant that the 'unhealthy Asian food' (curry, chapattis and parathas) was substituted by the healthier options of grilled chicken, broccoli and fruit. It was through deliberating upon her sons objectives which led to Harris' mother laying aside the traditions associated with cultural eating practices in BrAsian families to ensure that he was able to benefit from her support by consuming the best food for meeting his goals. This analysis has demonstrated the instrumental significance of collective family contributions towards supporting the personal project of the boxer. The mother and father both rallied

around to change their behaviours, routines and attitudes by either starting a diet or cooking products that would not normally be prepared and served within the household. Their course of action to support Harris evidently illustrated how they were not majorly constrained by cultural forces pertaining to culinary expectations within the family domain.

Criticisms have been levelled at Archer for 'favouring' agency at the expense of acknowledging the weight of structural and cultural influences.[17] This has supposedly reasserted neoliberal thought by placing the responsibility of life outcomes on the individual (Burke, 2017). Failure, therefore, is seen to lie in the faults of individuals who cannot negotiate and overcome structural and cultural forces through reflexive deliberation. I disagree with such appraisals as the conceptualisation that Archer's reflexivity entails can provide a more nuanced insight into what circumstances and constraints are non-negotiable. In other words, what cannot be overcome no matter what actions an individual takes? Here, I would argue that expectations on the performance of gender (fatherly emotional support) and the performance of ethnicity (eating practices) were not robust enough reasons for the parents to withhold their support. This, however, cannot be disconnected from the contextual backdrop of the support provided. Boxing, after all, is often associated with hegemonic displays of masculinity with making weight symbolising sacrifice and perseverance in the face of great difficulty. Therefore, emotional support cannot be 'feminised' if an individuals sense of masculinity remains intact. Furthermore, whilst cultural eating practices are common and identified as a means of embracing culture, any divergence does not necessarily mean that an individual's cultural roots are being eroded. Especially, against the boxing context when dieting is seasonal and usually undertaken in preparation for contests. To summarise, reflexivity ought to be contextualised. For example, would the mother have entertained changing the food that she cooked for Harris, if the food that would have aided his weight loss was *haram*? This mere example further illustrates the importance that context has on the enaction of agency; where it starts, where it ends and what are the factors that may limit agency. This chapter will now continue by drawing upon the boxers' perceptions and understandings on how their parents have supported their engagement in boxing. I shall therefore turn to analysing how economic support has benefitted the participants

[17] Archer (1995) has, herself, criticised this form of theorising in *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* by describing it as 'upwards conflation' which presents the "oversocialised view of man" (p. 82) and social structure as passive.

involvement. To this extent, I will also foreground the implications for those who have not been privileged enough to receive financial backing from their mothers and fathers in pursuing the sweet science.

5.3.2 Economic Support

Loïc Wacquant (2004) has described how socio-economic disparities can be accentuated within the boxing sphere by the expenses that each pugilist acquires to his/ her equipment. For example, 'the mere dabbler boxer' may wear the same tracksuit and trainers to each session whilst loaning the gloves and sparring headgear available at the club on a daily basis. Conversely, 'the full-fledged pugilist' would don designer sportswear, pristine boxing boots and custom-made gear (trunks, gloves, headgear) that s/he guards under lock and key because of the value of the product(s). These phenomena can be indicative of the economic support available to the fighters and how much they (and their parents, families and/ or relatives) are vested in their sporting engagement. Thomas Quarmby and Symeon Dagkas (2013) have highlighted how structural conditions, such as low household income, may inhibit the extent to which young people can engage with and experience sports and physical activity. For example, in their research, they found how the lack of financial backing from parents meant that equipment could not be purchased for young people to partake with certain activities.

Throughout fieldwork, I identified, however, that the basis to determine the economic support enjoyed by the fighters (athletes) was much more complex than it has been given credit for within the sports and leisure activities literature. This can be attributed to how the study samples for previous research in this area have predominantly focused young school-aged children who would have required small but constant financial aid from their parents, for example, the payment of subsidiary fees or replacement of trainers. Rather, I found that the economic support required by the fighters, from their parents, revolved around being able to compete without the expectation of acquiring a job to start making significant contributions towards the family income. This connects to the narrative presented in the previous chapter regarding the role that socio-economic circumstances played in forcing some study participants towards the 'archetypal trajectory' milestone of prioritising safe and secure employment. I deduced that those who were able to compete without worry about getting a 'proper' job and earning a salary *had* the financial backing of their parents whilst

those who were expected to focus their attention on a full-time occupation *did not*. Qayoom expressed to me how those who enjoyed strong financial support, by way of a family business, were in a more favourable position to partake in the everyday rigours and demands of boxing and have better prospects of succeeding:

> *Look at how much you have to train in boxing. How much hard work you have to put in. Probably everyday you have to work out. On top of that you have to focus on paying your own bills, you may also need a full-time job as well if you really want to support yourself whilst trying to be successful. Unless your family has a business.* **(Interview with Qayoom)**

The excerpt above was on the subject of Qayoom leaving the sport as he espoused the difficulty of continuing in the absence of any sustained financial support from his family. He implied that the chances of success in boxing may be greater if an individual comes from a strong economic base. This remark is similar to the hypothesis proffered by Harris Akbar, earlier in this chapter, who argued how those who enjoy parental are more likely to excel in their chosen sports. Qayoom stated, from personal experience and observations, how those that came from families with fruitful businesses were able to focus on the intrinsic challenges of boxing without having to worry about acquiring a full-time job. From this perspective, Muhammad Ali and Harris Akbar enjoyed the unwavering support of their parents as they came from wealthy families that had multiple streams of income from reputable businesses. For example, Muhammad Ali's father was a landlord with a large property portfolio whilst Harris Akbar's dad owned a busy and successful grocery store. Their parents were, therefore, able to promote their participation by deliberating upon their privileged personal circumstances amidst structural and cultural powers to realise that the family was not desperately reliant for them to become the main earners. To this extent, Chris Shilling (2004) has observed how the dominant classes have better opportunities for conversion, as they have greater support and access to sources of economic capital that places them in an advantageous position in contrast to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. I was involved in numerous conversations during my observations wherein some boxers told me how "they wished" that their parents circumstances would enable them to offer the financial support that they required from competing. They would often substantiate their claims with other success stories about fighters that had accomplished at (inter)national level because

they came from wealthy backgrounds. These parents wanted nothing more but their child to continue perfecting his/ her craft in the gym and focus on winning.

Archer (2010) has argued how reflexive deliberation disrupts the structure/ agency dualism, that has become hegemonic in contemporary social theory, by seeking explanations for actions and outcomes. She has stated how reflexivity mediates between the objective structural and cultural contexts that confront individuals who thus utilise their personal powers to deliberate on how to respond to defined projects based on their ultimate concerns (Archer, 2010). It was discussed in the previous chapter, how the conversation between Qayoom and his mother was significant for him quitting his dreams to become a boxer given that she had deliberated upon their circumstances and informed Qayoom regarding the negative implications that his involvement would have on the financial health of the family. Muhammad Ali and Harris Akbar, however, came from privileged backgrounds with their family businesses and were not faced with similar barriers towards participation. Qayoom's experience demonstrated how his time within boxing was contextually negotiated, in the presence of, and with the participation of others, which in this case, was his mother. I have utilised this case not to merely protract the analysis from the previous chapter but to accentuate the importance that financial support plays in promoting longevity for those participating in boxing.

It transpired during my fieldwork observations how there were further negative repercussions for BrAsian boxers vis-à-vis the absence of financial support that extended beyond merely how long they could remain involved with the sport. As I examined the photo gallery, at the main research site, I noticed how there was disproportionate championship achievement, and this formed the basis of an important question that I later posed to the head trainer. Beneath foremost is the fieldnote:

> *Browsing the wall instantly takes one on a chronology of the club's history and its historic fighters. Most are pictured facing the camera with a sinister look in their eyes whilst flexing their biceps or compressing their abs. Other photos include training/ competition photos with snaps of fighters having their hands raised by a referee after a bout or moments where they are bullishly pounding an opponent during a contest. Turning the* ***champions wall*** *located above the ring, those that have pioneered the club's status to the helm of national amateur boxing are offered their own plaque*

> *which features their name; chosen fight/ mug shot; win/ loss record and the titles that they achieved. Despite the entire photo gallery suggesting that the club has predominantly featured Pakistani-Muslim boxers, this is not represented on the champions wall as only one of the circa 20 fighters to achieve national glory was Pakistani-Muslim. Deeper analysis illuminates that those most triumphant were the 'Gypsy/ Travellers' and African/ Caribbean pugilists. It also appears that the accomplishments for many fighters were at a younger age as the club has excelled in a number of schoolboy and junior competitions, however, only achieved one senior title in its 50-year history.* **(Fieldnote)**

Despite being part of the club for nearly fifteen years and having full awareness of its history and achievements, I still felt slightly taken aback whilst making this observation. To put this into context, in a gym where previous decades have seen hundreds of BrAsians train there and represent it on the national circuit, only one individual had won a domestic championship. Even then, it was a novice tournament and not one which elite competitors were eligible to enter. This accentuated to me how there were more deeper and underlying issues that were impinging on the success prospects of the boxers. The champions wall illustrated how there were clear ethnic disparities as the achievements were predominantly emerging from 'Gypsy/ Traveller' and African/ Caribbean individuals. I then posed this pressing question to the head trainer, with great caution, whilst being mindful not to cause any offence, as such interest risked casting an aspersion on the trainers ability to produce championship fighters:

> **Izram:** *Dave, how come you've had so much Pakistani-Muslims train here and box for you over the years, yet they've only won two national titles?*
>
> **Dave:** *Because they're always f*cking about Tiger, with mosque and that. Then they have to go work … you need lads that are just gonna knuckle down and worry about their boxing. You have to be dedicated and not distracted by owt else. The Travellers, they have the right lifestyle for it. They are working during the day shifting metal or brick laying, then they are in the gyms on the evening.*

Initially, I was under the impression that Dave was attributing the achievement disparity to the religious commitments that BrAsians must attend to which include daily prayer, fasting during Ramadan and being attentive to what they can (and cannot) eat. He argued that these were merely distractions and not conducive to the focus and dedication that a pugilist must have towards his trade. Dave then substantiated the point that he was trying to emphasise, which is more pertinent to this analysis, by providing an example of a recent fighter that had to stop boxing because he did not have the financial support of his family to continue engaging with the sport into adulthood:

> **Dave:** *You're all ok as schoolboys and juniors, but when you hit senior level, you p*ss off. It's such a waste. Take A*** for example, he had 8 fights and won 7 of them. He had a title in him. He called me the other night and told me that he was packing in because his mum needed him to get a job and start working.*

Dave's perspective on the achievement disparity entailed numerous homogenous and essentialist assertions that blamed religious obligations and ethnic practices as the factors contributing towards the under-achievement of BrAsian boxers. He, for example, characterised the necessity to attend mosque and fulfil other religious duties as a negative interference. The salient concern held by him, however, was highlighted in the example he provided relating to the likelihood of BrAsian fighters not receiving adequate economic support from their parents and having to instead, obtain a job and relinquish their commitments as boxers. Yet again, this analysis links with the narrative presented in the previous chapter vis-à-vis the 'archetypal trajectory' and how socio-economic circumstances may result in individuals having no other option but to abandon their engagement in boxing to search for safe and secure employment. During the car journey home from the training session where these remarks were made, Zaid elaborated on his personal observations by attributing the dearth of consistent and sustained economic support enjoyed by BrAsian fighters to the issue of cultural priorities:

> *Dave was right ya know. We are never given the time to settle. Ya hit 17, boom, gotta go straight into work. Check this, how much do we have to raise up for things? At least 50-60k for a wedding, wife's gold, new yard. That's why we end up in call centres settling for 20k jobs. Those man* [Gypsy/ Travellers], *food and rent. Straight up!* […]

> *Since COVID, every man is getting their nikkahs done at yard, it's the best way man, save sh*t loads.* **(Conversation with Zaid)**

Zaid suggested how responsibilities towards preparing for cultural ceremonies like extravagant weddings obstructed the prospects of experiencing long and sustained involvement in boxing. He suggested that upon entering the legal working age how it would be expected to achieve important cultural milestones such as hosting a large wedding and also working towards entering the property market. Zaid argued how these occasions were largely unnecessary by drawing upon the adaptations that were made by the *biradari* during the COVID-19 pandemic. He claimed how this period demonstrated that marriage could be undertaken without the need to spend excessive sums of money. Zaid remained focused on the economic implications and put forward that it was more desirable to just complete the *nikkah* process when getting married. Pnina Werbner (2005) has identified that there are wedding rituals, such as the *mehndi*[18]*,* which also take place amongst BrAsian communities. Not only are these costly to organise but they are also transgressive of strict Islamic precepts and can share the aesthetic traditions, dances and weddings songs of Hindu and Sikh ceremonies. There was, however, an ethnic juxtaposition provided by Zaid between BrAsian and Gypsy Traveller fighters, as he attributed their success to their superfluous perspectives on cultural practices. In other words, he implied that preparing for and hosting ostentatious weddings is a phenomenon that is exclusive to BrAsian communities. I would aver that the perspective maintained by Zaid on cultural mores and wedding expenses demonstrated an ignorance to the transferability of Gypsy/ Traveller communities who equally host ostentatious and expensive weddings[19] (Jensen and Ringrose, 2014).

The analysis undertaken throughout this section has predominantly highlighted the repercussions for those that have not received economic support as opposed to those that would have benefited from their parents funding their engagement. The purpose of this approach was to stress the importance of economic support and foreground the consequences for those that are not privileged enough to receive financial backing from their

[18] The '*mehndi'* is usually an event that takes place before the '*nikkah'*. It involves wedding guests putting mehndi (henna) on the bride and groom and tends to be dominated with singing and dancing.

[19] This is the basis for the Channel 4 documentary *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings* which is a British documentary that explores the traditions through which British Traveller families prepare for weddings (Jensen and Ringrose, 2014).

parents as they box. It was highlighted how the economic support required by the boxers was profoundly different to that acknowledged by previous researchers. I found that it was not financial aid around paying for equipment and gym memberships which was needed but rather parents covering family expenditure and not urging their child(ren) to leave boxing for other employment. The findings suggested that socio-economic circumstances were an influencing factor whereby those that had family businesses could afford to financially back the sporting involvement of their child(ren) whilst others could not. Having a dearth of economic support would consequently lead to higher drop-out rates as the BrAsian boxers entered working age. Not only did this reduce their longevity within the sport but also their achievement prospects, as it was identified within the amateur club that I was observing, how there were disproportionately low levels of championship achievement for BrAsian boxers. The head trainer had erroneously attributed this to religious commitments that were deemed as a distraction and also the necessity for the fighters to quit the sport and search for other employment. Further examination illustrated how those that I was speaking to had ascribed the absence of economic support, and the emphasis for them to exchange boxing for employment, towards cultural matters like the need to prepare for and host extravagant and ostentatious weddings. Such matters connect with the 'archetypal trajectory' narrative that was presented in the previous chapter which foregrounds how the study participants ought to focus on essential milestones like securing employment and getting married as opposed to 'wasting their time' in the sport of boxing. To conclude, I argue that the findings here accentuate the importance that economic support from the parents has on the success prospects for those partaking in boxing. These support the hypothesis made by Harris Akbar earlier in this chapter regarding the increased chances of success for those who benefit from the (economic) support of their parents. I shall now turn to the final yet equally significant method of parental support that I identified throughout fieldwork. Islamophobia, as a widely pervading phenomenon, was something that the individuals who I spoke to believed was an impediment for the achievement prospects of their relatives who were competing as amateur boxers. I shall, therefore, examine how they recognised manifestations of Islamophobia in boxing and the measures that they took to safeguard their relatives from its crippling and deteriorating effects.

5.3.3 Protection from Islamophobia

"If being an Islamophobe (or if you prefer, committing Islamophobic acts) is a learned activity, then so is detecting it, pointing to it and condemning it."

(Sayyid, 2014, p. 21)

Are young people curious about racial and/ or cultural characteristics? Are they aware of racism and how it operates? Parents play a central role in developing their child(ren)s awareness towards 'race' and racism (Priest et al., 2016). Boutte et al. (2011) have argued how young people tend to absorb their parents attitudes and perceptions on these matters from an early age. They become socialised in forming opinions about themselves and those from different racial/ ethnic backgrounds. It was found by Priest et al. (2016), however that an unavoidable consequence is that many young peoples understandings around 'race' and racism are, therefore, likely to be limited and similar to their parents until they enter adulthood. From this point onwards, it is through the combination of personal experience and/ or intellectual curiosity wherein individuals begin to broaden their horizons and fully grasp the crippling effects that racism has on health, wellbeing and prospects (Pilkington, 2013; Arday, 2018; Chaudry, 2021). The issue on how 'race' and racism may constitute an obstruction to progress was foregrounded by Ahsan and his uncle Issy. It was originally planned that I would interview Ahsan alone, in the boxing gym located in his back garden. This, however, was not to be the case as his uncle Issy was also present and became enthralled by the topic of the research. With the consent of everyone involved, the individual semi-structured interview suddenly turned into a paired interview. This was an entirely organic transformation of events and I knew that it was necessary in order for me to glean in-depth and rich qualitative data. If anything, I felt privileged that another individual was willing to give men an insight into their most private and intimate thoughts and experiences. I share my sentiment on this matter with Sullivan (1998) who stated that: "at the forefront of my mind was always the thought that to be permitted a private view of another person's past, their pain, and their sorrow, was a privilege" (p. 74). Being made privy to privileged information left me with feelings of "gratitude and debt to the person[s] who has/d just shared many intimate details" (Liamputtong Rice and Ezzy, 1999, p. 41).

I had a pre-existing relationship with Ahsan and Issy. They were both regular attendees at the amateur boxing club that I competed for. Ahsan spent numerous years training there himself whilst Issy attended in the capacity of an observing parent who brought two of his sons on a regular basis. Due to unprecedented circumstances with the gym and head trainer, they had both left immediately leaving a question mark on the nature of their departure. This interview, therefore, was mutually convenient as it was an opportunity for me to generate data for my research whilst it was deemed as an emancipatory and cathartic exercise for Ahsan and Issy who wanted to get some things 'off their chests'. From the outset, it was clear that their emphasis was on highlighting the injustice that Issy's two sons (and Ahsan's cousins) had experienced from the head trainer and club they had trained at for half a decade:

> **Ahsan:** *My two little cousins started boxing 5 years ago, they are also British-Pakistani Muslim boxers as well, they both had a lot of potential. But the gym that they were at, they had been there for 5 years, and if you had walked into the gym, you would think that they just stepped into the gym despite 5 years of training. We didn't see that place benefitting themselves our helping their development, we didn't see them progressing, we didn't see what we needed to see. So, Issy asked me to start working with them.*
>
> **Izram:** *They were there for 5 years and they were not progressing, how so?*
>
> **Ahsan:** *We feel that they weren't getting enough attention from the trainer that we wanted them to get. There was favouritism. 100% there was favouritism. He* [the trainer] *just used the lads* [cousins] *to put them in the ring so that the better boxers could get sparring and an opportunity for development. He wasn't working with them, so they were not improving. The thing about favouritism, it is a culture everywhere. Every gym that you go to will have its favourites.*
>
> **Izram:** *Why were the other lads favoured over your cousins?*
>
> **Ahsan:** *It might have been the way they boxed, the swagger that they had coming in. There was a lot of boxers that were good there don't get me wrong, but he could have started working with them from an early age. It might be due to* [skin] *colour. I don't know. Only he will know. There's a lot of reasons why.*

This exchange revealed how Ahsan started training his two younger cousins, in his back garden, at the request of his uncle Issy. He set forth that he became a trainer as Issy wanted a change of direction and guardianship for his two sons who were being mistreated by their former amateur boxing trainer. They believed, following a period of deliberation, that the development of the two young individuals was insufficient, as opposed to those that were getting preferential treatment. They then chose to take an alternative course of action by leaving the gym and changing their training arrangements. An interesting revelation that emerged was how Ahsan believed that the lack of attention his cousins received from their former trainer was because of their "colour". Ahsan was, however, very censored on this subject despite any attempts by me to prompt him into providing further details. I gathered that because he knew that I had a relationship with the club and trainer in reference, he feared that I may disclose these claims and place him at risk (in any sense of the word). The dearth of information elicited from this specific exchange ought to be attributed to a limitation vis-à-vis my role as an 'insider' within the boxing community and how the study participant feared that there was a possibility that his remarks may be circulated to the head trainer and club in subject. I found that my repetition on the importance of research confidentiality was dismissed for the time being given my positionality and background. Ahsan was speaking, at this stage, in cautious terms for the reasons mentioned above. Issy, however, was not interested in such an approach and unleashed an uncensored outpouring which described how his two sons were subject to Islamophobia which thus led to himself and Ahsan having to interject and remove them from their former club:

> *He is taking all the p*kis for mugs, and they are all too blind to see it. You think he is a father figure, but he is manipulating you all and using you as sparring partners for all the travellers. Firstly, he has fucked all your styles up! Instead of working on your own strengths and styles, he is shoehorning that come-forward aggressive style on you all out of some need to maintain a club reputation for being fighters. Secondly, you boys aren't or weren't getting the bouts like the white boys and look how many of you are down there. You have just been target practice for his favourites* […] *he just doesn't concentrate on 'our lads'. He doesn't put enough time as he needs to as he did with his favourites. Look, I understand it might be natural that you concentrate on your favourites, but kids have got goals. But let me tell you now, the favourites were not*

> *Pakistani-Muslim, they were predominantly white. They* [two children] *were training hard just like you were, but they weren't getting no fights, they weren't getting picked out, they were basically sparring partners for the good fighters. For the fighters that were getting bouts, they were going in the ring sparring them and saying 'you've done well, you're gonna get a fight soon, but keep carrying on' but it doesn't make sense, because you give one lad an opportunity and the other lad is just as good, but he ain't allowed that opportunity.* **(Interview with Issy)**

This was a very uncomfortable perspective to hear. I feared that I had to strike a balance in not contesting any/ everything that Issy had to say, as I did not want to provoke nor upset him as he trusted me to vent his opinions. On the other hand, I did not want to be seen vehemently agreeing with his account, as if it transpired within the (boxing) community that I agreed with his perspectives then not only would it implicate my fieldwork and access to prospective participants but also my personal relationships. Thus, I listened to what he had to say with full focus and to some extent, sympathy. Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) have noted how we, as qualitative researchers, enter people's lives during times of stress and crisis and take the obligation of listening about their experiences in detail. Part of this obligation is to facilitate participant disclosure, as Ely et al. (1991) have acknowledged that some people do not have many opportunities to talk about their experiences and may well take advantage of this catharsis process. Hearing the term "paki" being bandied around initially put me at unease, however, I recognised that I ought to rapidly desensitise myself from the pernicious undertones of the word to ensure that Issy could provide an uninterrupted account. To me, this appeared to be Issy providing an untold story whilst simultaneously giving himself some relief from the consternation that it had caused him. Ramos (1989) has used the term 'pandora's box' whilst Etherington (1996) has talked about the 'tin-opener effect' to illustrate how those that partake in qualitative research may do so to speak about aspects of their lives that may have not been previously discussed. Lupton (1998) has suggested that "confessions is deemed to be a difficult but rewarding process" (p. 92). In other words, it has been acknowledged that the confessional nature of an interview can provide a sense of catharsis and purification through the method of telling one story to another. Following a turbulent period at their previous boxing gym, Issy requested Ahsan to start training his children. The value of the BrAsian boxers, according to Issy, was that they acted as sparring partners and

'human punch bags' for the "travellers" who were developing and perfecting their craft. It was suggested that "the white boys" were the trainers favourites and benefited from him arranging regular bouts for them. Evidently, Issy was comprehending the treatment of his children (and other BrAsian fighters) threw the lens of 'race' by suggesting that the "white boys" had been privileged as opposed to the "p*kis" who had been marginalised and used as sparring partners. He continued with his account by providing anecdotal examples and explanations behind why he thought that BrAsian fighters were being discriminated against:

> *He has taken the right p*ss out of you all. Look at all the wasted talent that has left the gym, look at H****, he never gave him a chance, always said he was too chubby and that he ate too much shit. He was technically sound and in there for years working hard and he held him back, like many of you lot, just because he thought he ate chapattis and curries when he got home. Look at him now, put all his eggs in one basket for boxing and it backfired on him. He is now drug dealing. WE are gonna have to prove THEM wrong and takeover and dominate the boxing scene. They can't be arsed with us because of our religion and culture. To them, we are just too much 'aggro' and we ain't made for this sh*t* […] **(Interview with Issy)**

This was unquestionable a racially and religiously divisive matter for Issy, as he started utilizing terminology like "WE" and "THEM" to create an aura of racial/ religious conflict. Although this was difficult for me to pinpoint as he did not clearly describe who was "WE" and who was "THEM". I would suggest that the "WE" he was referring to was BrAsians, whilst "THEM" was a mixture of whites, travellers and non-Muslims, given the context of the interview. He brought up an example of a BrAsian fighter that had spent years under this trainer to only end up becoming a drug dealer later in life, as the trainer showed no serious interest in working with him and supporting his development as an amateur boxer. Issy had argued that this was due to the trainer stereotyping the discipline and lifestyle of this individual by drawing upon cultural stereotypes, for example, how he consumed chapattis and curries regularly after training sessions. The central argument was how Issy believed that the trainer saw the BrAsian modus vivendi to be at odds with the culture of boxing and thus too problematic to accommodate. This was highlighted during the following instance where the trainer had supposedly excluded a BrAsian boxer from the gym given his refusal to spar during the month of Ramadan, as having a 'bust lip' would have risked nullifying his fast:

> *They are bumming us. For example, [****] threw this Asian lad out of the gym because he was fasting and didn't wanna spar because if he got busted in the mouth and started to bleed, he would break his fast. Think about that, Ramadan wasn't even during boxing season, so there was no need to force him to spar when he was fasting. He said, 'if you are gonna fast, you can't be here, you choose your religion, or you choose your gym. You wanna fast, you're not gonna give it everything so what is the point in being here?'* **(Interview with Issy)**

To practice religion or attend training? This was the predicament that a BrAsian boxer was placed in, according to Issy. By endeavouring to do both, the individual was permanently excluded by the trainer, as he tried to protect his fast by avoiding sparring. This was deemed as wholly unacceptable by the trainer who refused to accommodate for this period and asked the fighter to leave his premises and never return. It was put forth that this instance was even more unreasonable on the grounds that it occurred out of boxing season suggesting that this may have just been an excuse and opportunity for the trainer to seize this moment. Furthermore, there was no indication that the trainer sought to make any accommodations such as adjusting training hours which would enable BrAsian fighters to train and possibly spar after sunset. Fasting (*sawm*) is the fourth pillar of Islam and requires Muslims (that are able) to fast for the entire month of Ramadan. This period includes abstaining from food, drink, smoking and sexual activity during daylight hours in addition to extra prayer and devotion. Akel (2021) has argued how Muslims ought to be given the opportunity to make adjustments to ensure that they can fulfil their religious commitments and practices, such as observing Ramadan. The example presented above, however, has demonstrated a flagrant disregard for this righteous period through the discrimination and exclusion of BrAsians based on their religious observances.

In response, Ahsan and Issy took greater control in managing their cousins/ sons agency within the sport. They deliberated that the right course of action would be to revisit the personal projects of the two young individuals and make necessary adjustments such as affiliating them with a BrAsian gym to minimise the chances of ever experiencing Islamophobia in the sport. For Archer (2007), the alternative courses of actions that individuals embark upon taking tends to follow upon the process of reflexive deliberation, wherein individuals exercise their personal powers to monitor themselves, with regards to

their circumstances, and what they ultimately care about the most, which in this case, was the development of the young individuals whilst protecting them from Islamophobia. In amateur boxing, regardless of who trains the competitors, they must be affiliated with a registered club to compete. Ahsan described how their thinking, particularly around club affiliation, had changed as a response to their previous experiences:

> *We pick our gyms carefully now. [***] is an Asian gym, they get all the Asian boxers, but they also get white boxers as well. It's like reverse, if you go to an Asian gym, the white lad will still stick out and be a good boxer, but there will be good Asian boxers as well and they will make each other better. [***] would get the Asian lads fights, and they will get the white lads fights. An Asian coach will concentrate on the Asian lads as much as he does with the white lads, he will concentrate on both sides.* **(Interview with Ahsan)**

McPherson et al. (2001) utilised the term 'homophily' when referring to the tendency for individuals to associate and bond with those that share a social identity and/ or characteristics. In other words, it means 'the love of sameness'. McPherson et al. (2001) have argued that by interacting only with others who are like ourselves, anything that we experience as a result of our position gets reinforced. It comes to typify "people like us" (p. 415). Within this analysis, the practice of homophily does not only prioritise blood relations but also those from the *biradari*. Ahsan felt that gravitating towards a BrAsian gym with a BrAsian trainer constituted a sustainable solution to ensure that the gym and trainer would not prejudice the fighters, especially during religious periods. I aver that this instance reinforces the perspectives held by Ahsan and Issy who deemed that their cousins/ sons earlier experiences in boxing were marred because of their ethnic and religious identities.

Both Ahsan and Issy later explained how they were able to affiliate their youngsters elsewhere because of the social networks that they had established within the *biradari*. Accepting fighters that have competed for other gyms is deemed as a taboo practice within amateur boxing and usually characterised as 'poaching'. This refers to a gym/ trainer recruiting fighters that have already been trained by another club and using them to gain symbolic credit amongst the boxing community by brandishing them as 'your own product'. Bourdieu's (1986) understanding of capital conversion is apt here, as it provides an insight into the mutual benefits involved for both parties. For example, Ahsan and Issy would have mobilised their social capital (networks and relationships within the boxing community/ *biradari*) and

invested economic capital (gym membership fees) to accumulate physical capital (their cousins/ child's pugilistic ability) and possibly even a symbolic capital (the prestige of supporting their ascendancy) in the long term. Likewise, the BrAsian coach would have profited from his social relationships with Ahsan and Issy by taking in additional economic capital notwithstanding the probability of elevating the club's symbolic capital by having the two young individuals represent the club. Albeit, with the risks of being accused of poaching.

This analysis has focused on how parental (and family) support has been demonstrated through protection, guardianship and guidance. I would profess that this section has illustrated the complexities through which support can be provided that extends beyond financial aid and emotional comfort. Both Ahsan and Issy were suspicious about the progression that their cousins/ sons were making and made a swift intervention on the belief that they were being marginalised because of their ethnic and religious identities. They had accused their cousins/ sons former amateur boxing club and trainer of being Islamophobic through disproportionate treatment in contrast to the "white boys"; how the trainer maintained cultural stereotypes which undermined the perceived discipline and lifestyles of the BrAsian fighter(s); and lastly, how the trainer, in subject, supposedly excluded a BrAsian fighter from his gym, as he was fasting and training contemporaneously. Ahsan and Issy decided upon deliberation to tap into their social relationships and affiliate the two young individuals with a BrAsian gym to minimise the prospects of them ever experiencing Islamophobia in boxing. On social capital, Leonard (2005) has argued that children are not seen separately from their parents. In other words, children accumulate a social capital themselves as a biproduct of their parents' relationships and are able to cash in on their generated social capital throughout their lives (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). These findings, however, showed no indication that the decisions and 'cashing in' was made directly by the children, as suggested by the literature. They were, rather, just beneficiaries of their father's social capital. The accounts' suggested that the two young individuals responded to parental (and the cousins) influence with compliance, as there was nothing to suggest that they resisted or were unhappy with the judgements made by their elders. Speaking to the two young individuals may have provided insights with the power to either confirm or contradict the following accounts. This would have merited further ethical clearance because of their ages, however, an amendment to my ethics application was not necessary as Issy and

Ahsan made it clear that they would refuse access. They believed that the two young individuals would not have had anything additional or alternative to contribute.

To summarise, I have examined insofar the key avenues of parental support that were identified within the data. These entailed emotional comfort during the arduous phase of dieting; practical aid to assist a boxer in making weight; economic support for enabling fighters to continue with the sport without obligation to find safe and secure employment; and lastly, support by way of protection from Islamophobia. The analysis has accentuated how the boxers' perceived and understood parental support as instrumental towards facilitating participation. I have argued how the courses of action taken by parents to either support or constrain their child(ren)s personal projects has followed reflexive deliberation wherein they have exercised their personal powers in relation to their circumstances and what they care about the most. In the forthcoming section, I will examine the dark side of parental support. In other words, when parental support goes too far and what the repercussions entail for the boxers.

5.4 'Pushy Parents'

The phrase 'pushy parent' is well established in the sporting and familial lexicon (Brackenridge, 2006; Fletcher, 2020), yet there is no 'one size fits all' understanding to this characterisation. In other words, there is much literature that has focused on extreme cases of parental aggression (usually from the fathers) (Willms, 2009; Harne, 2011), as opposed to the more everyday mundane examples such as overly excited or emotionally involved parents. For Turman (2007), "forms of parental pressure represent behaviours that foster improbable and impossible expectations or levels of accomplishment for a child" (p. 153). O'Rourke et al. (2011) have understood parental pressure in sports as "directive and controlling parental behaviours designed to prompt athlete responses and outcomes that are important to the parent" (p. 400). Roberts et al. (1994) presented a typology of pressurising parental attitudes that are usually transmitted to the child(ren), which include: (1) the need to outperform their opponents and peers; (2) emphasising to others how good they are; (3) demonstrating their superiority; (4) stressing that they have accomplished what others could not; and lastly (5) exhibiting their supposed dominance.

There is, I argue, no paucity of literature on the motivations underpinning some of the pressurising approaches taken by parents. For example, Ryan Dunn et al. (2016) have identified how family financial investment in youth sports and leisure activities influences parental pressure, as it is deemed as a monetary investment, for which parents anticipate will yield profits, of some sort. By this, I am thinking in Bourdieusian terms regarding the multiplication and conversion of capital(s) and how parents may aspire for their economic investments to either multiply or produce social, symbolic, physical and/ or emotional capital. Thus, the more financial resources that are invested by families, the more levels of pressure they are likely to exert subsequently impacting the levels of enjoyment and commitment maintained by the child(ren) (Ryan Dunn et al., 2016). Gould et al. (2008) have suggested that parents can exert a negative influence in less visible ways. For example, the child(ren) may feel obliged to work hard and accomplish beyond expectations so that they do not 'spoil' the economic investments made by their parents. It has been reported that parents have endeavoured to keep their child(ren) motivated by offering extrinsic awards and/ or financial incentives, however, these have led to increased levels of pressure and anxiety for them to perform (McCarthy and Jones, 2007; Keegan et al., 2009). I observed at the gym where I was conducting fieldwork how the head trainer mitigated the impact of pressure by not allowing parents to observe training sessions which could (and has) lead/ led to them casting pressure and judgements on the performance(s) of their child(ren):

> *The trainer prohibits external influence or interference when the boxers are working under his instruction. The storeroom of the gym has recently been loaded with chairs and tables where observing parents and siblings used to sit and watch their boys train. The justification behind this approach has been that parental pressure from fathers casting unscrupulous judgments on their sons' performances has resulted in several occasions where the boxers have had enough and walked away from the sport. The trainer recognises that boxing is an onerous and gruesome sport that takes over lives and livelihoods of all those that lace up the gloves. Banning outside spectators is just one way in which the trainer can alleviate the pressures of the sport by keeping 'nit-picking' and 'know-it-all' fathers away.* **(Ethnographic Observation)**

This fieldnote depicts the duty of care maintained by the head trainer and how he responded to the emotional requirements of the boxers by disallowing their parents to observe their training sessions. It also aligns with the traditional literature on family sport socialisation in how pressure tends to be greater from the male parent (Lewko and Ewing, 1980). I heard anecdotal stories, on many occasions, around how boxers would return home after a tough training session and become subject to a scorning by their fathers because of their performances. These individuals would subsequently return to the gym feeling fraught and panic-stricken. Over time, the trainer lay claim how numerous talented boxers eventually turned away from the sport because of the undue influence that their parent(s) had on their involvement. It was the head trainers decision to minimise parental presence at training to ensure that the fighters could remain focused without feeling a simultaneous sense of embarrassment or pressure from their parent(s) being nearby. I found that some boxers wanted the space and agency to pursue their interests without any undue pressure. This was, likewise, identified by the head trainer who understood the necessity for his fighters to train in a 'parent-free zone' and thus responded by barring them from spectating training sessions. Rahith elaborated on this topic described the fears that boxers had/ would accumulate(d) whilst awaiting the verdict of their father. He suggested how this could prove to be emotionally onerous for some:

> *If you are on top of your child too much in putting them through their paces, he is going to fatigue, he is going to mentally think that if I don't perform well today that I am going to get a hammering from my dad and that can become quite frightening.* **(Interview with Rahith)**

Rahith characterised the feeling of fear held by some boxers and how the prospects of them experiencing an unjust appraisal has the tendency to leave them anxious and frightened. There have been counterarguments made which have put forth how the performance debriefing and scrutiny projected by parents onto their child(ren) is their idea of 'good' parenting as they perceive to be showing attention to their development. As Elliot and Drummond (2015) have pointed out, there are those that, albeit unwittingly, recognise their attitudes and behaviours and a demonstration of visible 'interest' and 'support' as opposed to showing no general interest at all. This is supported by Fletcher (2020) who has suggested that a father who scorns his child for a poor sporting performance could justifiably be

perceived negatively for applying undue pressure, while also commended for being ambitious and caring about his child's performances. These tensions appear to be consistent with Harwood and Knight (2009) who have showed that lack of mutual understanding and consensus between parent and child around behaviours, attitudes and levels expectations is a major contributor towards intra-family polarisations and drifts. Hebblethwaite (2015) has reflected on the perceptions of interfering and 'meddling' that were felt by her sample of (grand)parents, as they were eager to be supportive and involved, but were extremely cautious about giving unsolicited advice. She found that whilst it was not always possible to strike the right balance, that by being prudent, they were able to achieve the desirable outcomes of being 'visible' and supportive whilst providing the child(ren) with the necessary amount of space and agency.

This literature somewhat proposes how there may be positive factors associated with parental pressure. For instance, how continuously appraising the child(ren)s performance may be an example of a parent remaining visibly interested (Elliot and Drummond, 2015). I would, however, propose that the focus ought to be on outcomes rather than intentions. If, for example, a parent is visibly supportive and has benign intentions yet the manner through which they relay their support is crippling and detrimental towards the child(ren)s overall wellbeing then they must revisit and reflect on how they come across. The preceding literature has been dominated from purely a parental perspective rather than how the behaviours, actions and attitudes of mothers and fathers filter down to the child(ren) and what the prospective implications are. This is mainly a methodological issue that has marginalised considering young peoples' perceptions. The data unveiled the harsh realities for those experiencing parental pressure whilst engaging in boxing. Ahsan told me that, in his capacity as an amateur boxing trainer, how there were coercive practices at play which meant that the boxers were sometimes being pushed towards breaking points by their parents. Subsequently, they would either quit the sport or engage in dispute with their parents:

> *From what I have seen from doing this coaching stuff, there are parents who are pushy and just want to get them in there and push them to do things that some of the kids may not want to do* […] *Eventually the kids don't want to do it anymore and they pack in* [quit]. *They will either rebel or pack in* […] **(Interview with Ahsan)**

These findings illustrate how parental pressure inversely correlates with athlete enjoyment in their sport. Those that become overbearing and apply undue quantities of pressure are likely to 'burn their child(ren) out' as they would have to engage in constant disputes with their parent(s) on a regular basis in conjunction with meeting the rigours and demand of their respective sport. It is through stress whereby a boxer may 'burn out' and respond by subsequently dropping out. Central to these parental practices are perceptions that overemphasise winning whilst contemporaneously holding unrealistic expectations from their child(ren) (Elliot and Drummond, 2015). Morrissette and Graham (2003) have noted how the desires of individuals to partake for fun and enjoyment can rapidly be dashed when their parents are only interested in seeing them win. Dreams of their child becoming an elite superstar manifest through their thoughts and strongly shape their involvement. Rather than providing cautious encouragement, the parents become obsessed with illuminating any mistakes and projecting criticisms. When this occurs, the individuals have to contend with their own disappointment as well as parental criticism (Morrissette and Graham, 2003).

An important finding that emerged was around how parental pressure could impact the parent-child relationship, as Ahsan utilised the term "rebel", when presupposing how the child may respond. I interpret this as a young individual responding by retaliating to the pressure and hostility they may be feeling through an unreserved expression of their thoughts, feeling and emotions to their parent(s). Similarly, Siegenthaler and Gonzalez (1997) have remarked that when a young individual arrives at their breaking point, following conflict with their parents, then they are less likely to focus on participation and experience. This, I would argue, can result from parents not providing their child(ren) with a break. In other words, they are constantly present, appraising their abilities and performances without offering the child(ren) an opportunity to unwind and mentally recharge. Morrissette and Graham (2003) observed how overly involved parents may completely transform their family lifestyles and routines to tailor them around the sporting practices and commitments of the child(ren). For example, personal interests could become adjusted and/ or begrudgingly suspended and the home could become another space of advice, tips and criticisms that consumes the life of the child and slowly 'burns' their passion and enjoyment for the sport. Stress and fatigue may consequently begin to materialise whilst relationships also become strained as either parent or child will find little time to schedule in any socialising and

relaxation. Saif expounded how the pressure being imposed on the boxers, by their parents, was stemming from community yardsticks and expectations. This would descend upon the parents and subsequently down to their child(ren). It was following the ascendancy of figureheads like Amir Khan, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, wherein the expectations and pressure for younger generations to meet a new standard had grown exponentially. Parents had felt that a 'glass-ceiling' had been smashed whereby their child(ren)s social identities and backgrounds where no longer a barrier to success. In other words, it had been done, so it can be done again. Saif, did however, without further elaboration, acknowledge that the expectations that parents set for their child(ren) must be done with a sense of prudence:

> *I'll tell you what, in our community, you get that a lot where parents pressure their kids into exceling* […] *They are pressuring them because of expectations, there is nothing wrong with you as a parent to have expectations of your child, whether you are a mother or a father, you have to have expectations, but there are ways of applying it and there are ways of doing it. That is the number one factor behind it, expectations. These link to some of the benchmarks that have been set, whether these benchmarks of been set by Amir Khan* […] **(Interview with Saif)**

The "benchmark" being referenced here, I would suggest, was not solely in relation to Amir Khan's pugilistic proficiency nor his corporeal constitution. Rather, the social standing and image that he earned from his accomplishments as an amateur and professional fighter. This excerpt, foremost, illustrates the logic around meritocracy, that has featured throughout this analysis, in how there is a perception amongst parents that new possibilities have emerged for younger generations. Through the hardwork and dedication displayed from role models like Amir Khan, the belief had been instilled that upward social mobility can now be achieved. Based on the boxers' accounts, the data also unveiled other underpinning motivations beyond parents wanting the best for their child(ren). These entailed parents wanting to enjoy some ancillary personal benefits for themselves given the investment of their time, energy and money. This connects to the *izzat* that individuals like Shah Khan (the father of Amir Khan) received, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, for supporting his son towards attaining global status. It was whilst discussing the investments and allowances made by parents to facilitate and support their child(ren)s engagement in sports and physical activity that Brown (2018)

asked: “is it possible that parents could get something out of this?” (p. 1499). This analysis would suggest that the answer to this question is a resounding YES.

In conjunction to the benefits that the young individuals may accrue through their involvement with the sport, I would argue how mothers and fathers also actively seek the praise associated with being the architects of their child(ren)s accomplishments. Avtar Brah (1996) argued how the *first generation* of migrants where aware of the structural forces and inequalities hindering any prospects of them achieving in Britain. Resulting in their focus turning towards their children. If their children were successful, then they would be characterised as successful and praised accordingly. Likewise, if their children failed then they would subsequently be perceived as failures. As Hirschhorn and Loughead (2000) have reminded us, parents often believe that their child(ren)s performances are a direct reflection on themselves and the parenting they have provided for them. I argue, therefore, that wanting the best for their child(ren) whilst pursuing the validation from others about being ‘good’ parents may lead to negative outcomes for the boxers with mounting levels of expectations and pressure being imposed on them and subsequently having destructive effects on their wellbeing and enthusiasm to partake with the sport.

5.5 Conclusion

This second analysis chapter has examined the boxers’ perceptions and understandings of how their parents provided them (or should have provided them) with the necessary support and resources to facilitate their involvement in the sport of boxing. The analysis demonstrated how a role model with a similar social identity and background was influential towards inspiring younger generations and their families into engaging with boxing. I argued, however, that the perception of a ‘glass-ceiling’ being shattered was naïve and rooted in neoliberal thought which erroneously downplays the impact of structural and institutional forces by foregrounding hardwork, commitment and dedication as the key ingredients to success. This is especially perilous amidst the prevailing backdrop of Islamophobia that continues to run rampant throughout wider society. In addition, the data suggested that ‘Amir Khan Effect’ had done not only enticed younger generations but also captured the attention of their parents and disrupted longstanding values about the social worth of sports. I suggested how this was the basis for parents to give their support through a multitude of approaches such as providing emotional encouragement and practical aid through trying periods such as

‘making weight’; economic funding; and lastly, support and guardianship by actively protecting the child(ren) from the harmful repercussions of Islamophobia. I argued, based on the data, how parents engaged in reflexive deliberation which entailed evaluating their circumstances and ultimate concerns before deciding upon either maintaining or abandoning their child(ren)s personal projects. By connecting the analysis with the Bourdieusian perspective on capital, I examined the additional motivations that some parents sought through their investments. In other words, the support offered by some was a method of displaying ‘good’ parenting and yielding symbolic capital from external audiences. Foregrounding the boxers’ perceptions and understandings of parental interests, throughout the analysis, was essential for understanding how undue levels of pressure could have detrimental implications for longevity of their engagement. The forthcoming (and final) analysis chapter will now examine parental constraint and support through the female experience to provide an alternative vantage point into how parents and wider social relationships influence engagement in the sport of boxing.

‘Females Can Fight Too’ – Negotiating Gender, Culture and Religion

“They [aunties and uncles] *would go up to my parents and say, why are you letting your daughter do this? Why are you sort of accepting it? Why are you supporting it? They were like to me why are you boxing? Why would you want to break your nose? You’re a girl, you are too pretty to be in the ring”*

“It is with the emergence of the second and third generations that problems appeared, and the questions arose: parents who saw their children losing, or no longer recognizing themselves as part of, their Pakistani, Arab and Turkish culture seemed to think that they were losing their religious identity at the same time. However, this is far from being the case: many young Muslims, by studying their religion, claimed total allegiance to Islam.”

(Ramadan, 2004, p. 215)

6.1 Introduction

This final analysis chapter explores both parental constraint and support through the examination of the female experience. Special attention is paid towards how the study participants religious, ethnic and gendered identities have intersected and subsequently contributed towards their experiences of prejudice, marginalisation and exclusion from the sport of boxing. To maintain an analysis that is nuanced, multi-layered and information-rich, I focus on the narratives of three female fighters, who have an extensive breadth of experience as both competitors and trainers. Central to this chapter will be to highlight how the young women have enjoyed the unwavering support of their parents despite the criticisms that have been projected at them by their extended families and the *biradari*. The chapter outlines how, alongside the backing of their parents, that the young women in this study have demonstrated an innovative approach towards negotiating and navigating their involvement in boxing by engaging in reflexive deliberation. They have disrupted intergenerational flows of transmission which endeavour to inculcate younger generations with norms, values and beliefs that are antithetical to their personal projects. It is through reflexive deliberation that the prevailing doxa on gendered expectations suffers. In other words, the unquestioned becomes questioned. In their engagement with the sweet science – the gendered and racialised stereotypes that paint BrAsian women as being figures of victimhood and uninterested with physical activity are also disrupted.

Firstly, I will examine the key motivations that inspired the young women to partake in boxing and how they were rooted in yielding its prospective health benefits. I found how they sought to glean the cathartic and liberating experience of training and competing, which offered them a 'sense of escape' and 'relief' from the crippling effects of racism and bullying, that they were encountering in their personal lives. Herein, I also illustrate the instrumental role that the young womens parents played in encouraging them to box so that they could profit from the psychological benefits and ameliorate their emotional capital. The parents, I argue, deliberated on their circumstances, and what they cared about the most, to justify supporting their daughters endeavours in boxing. This analysis also demonstrates how the priorities of the family (for example, the wellbeing of the children) supersede gendered expectations. In other words, symbolic capital is forfeited for physical and emotional currencies based on the priorities of the family.

Secondly, I analyse the response that the young women and their parents experienced from the extended family and the *biradari* for supposedly transgressing gendered expectations. This element of the chapter foregrounds the consternation felt by relatives and friends who were concerned that the young womens decision to box was a treacherous course which risked abandoning obligations towards religion and culture. This section will then be followed by two thematic sections which illuminate the key concerns of them (1) training in masculine spaces; and (2) maintaining a physical appearance that diverges from religious and cultural conventions. An important trend that runs throughout this section is how the young women justified their decisions and resisted any opposition through engaging in reflexivity whereby the doxa was challenged through, for example, the differentiation between faith and tradition. Put differently, the young women displayed a robust defence of themselves by articulating the differences between what is religion and what is not religion. The thread that binds this chapter together is the role that the parents play in either enabling or constraining agency. Whether there is resounding support or condemnation from the extended family or the *biradari* – the final say as to whether the young women can (and should) box lies with the parents and what course of action they believe is in the best interests of their child(ren).

6.2 Emotional Management

"Unless we take emotions seriously, we will produce alienated and alienating accounts of life and fail to understand why anything matters to people."

(Sayer, 2010, p. 112)

There are numerous studies that have illustrated the transformative and liberating nature of partaking in sports, as it represents a 'time-out' from the mundane obligations and constraints of everyday life (Rana, 2017; Tjønndal and Hovden, 2020). Elias and Dunning (1986) characterised sports as a 'quest for excitement' wherein the rules and inner logic of participation evokes individuals to engage with their embodiment, creativity, emotionality whilst experiencing bodily flow and joy. The modern competition of sport has, therefore, been represented as antithetical to the drudgery of work and everyday life (Elias and Dunning, 1986). For Tjønndal (2019a), the coalescence of joy, freedom and mastery that can be experienced in boxing spaces have been strongly influential in allowing females to feel a sense of empowerment and challenge stereotypical notions of femininity. The boxers' accounts that

will be analysed throughout this chapter illustrate the cathartic feeling that they experienced from being involved with the rigours of the sport. They indicated how the underlying motivations that drove their initial engagement revolved around ameliorating their emotional capital and profiting from the prospective psychological benefits that may be accrued from the arduous and demanding sport. Sanaa revealed how she had been subject to experiences of racism and bullying as a young child which drove her to the brinks of 'breaking-point'. She sought the boxing gym as a space to release the burgeoning anger and frustration that had accrued and was subsequently damaging her mental wellbeing. Her account suggested, however, that she did not randomly end up selecting boxing but rather how her father played an instrumental role in encouraging her to take up the sport. Sanaa recognised how he was worried about her health and wanted her to do something about it:

> *Initially it was my dad who got me into it [boxing]. He thought that I needed a change which would be good for me. I was 14 when I started and was really shy, I didn't have any confidence and I got bullied in high school because I was like the only Asian girl in my whole high school. It was mainly to get me out of my shell* […] *being the only Muslim girl pretty much in the whole of my year, I looked different to everyone else so that is like automatically something for people to pick on* […] *I would go training in the evening after having a sh*t day at school (am I allowed to say that? Hahahaha), erm, it was just a place to release any built-up tension, any anger, any frustration, if you've got stuff going on in your life, you can just go training and forget about everything and for that hour or two hours after training, you feel amazing. I think that's what kept me going.* **(Interview with Sanaa)**

This account reflected the decoupling from everyday life that Sanaa embarked upon wherein boxing had offered her a 'place of refuge' from the racism and bullying that she was experiencing at school. Sanaa described how boxing represented a space for her to overcome her personal worries and anxieties, as she was required to provide her full concentration and engagement with the skills, logics and rules of the game (Vallerand and Miquelon, 2007). In other words, there was no room for her to be consumed by the worries and problems coming from outside the so-called 'inner logic of sport' (Elias and Dunning, 1986). Brent and Kraska (2013) have similarly observed how "fighting provides a 'release' and even a 'liberating' experience from the constraints of an overly-socialised and overly-regulated lifestyle" (p.

365). As the emotional turmoil that is likely to unfold in a boxing gym can lead to boxers losing their peripheral vision (Brent and Kraska, 2013) and feeling “an incredible freedom” (Andreasson and Johansson, 2019, p. 10). The sense of escape and relief felt by Sanaa, as she remedied the tensions from being subject to racism and bullying at school, through her discovery of boxing, is best illustrated by the words of Stenius (2015): “it’s like I disappear somewhere else, I’m just in a deep flow. I am not present in my body anymore; I am outside my body, not feeling the blows. They run off my body like water and fade away” (p. 86).

Ambreen, like Sanaa, also experienced a troubled upbringing that was marred by a combination of racism and bullying at school and within the local community. Sanaa explained that these experiences had a deleterious effect on her confidence and self-esteem. Ambreen, however, had an altogether contrasting response through her inability to manage her emotions, as most of the encounters at school often led to her having violent outbursts given that others would provoke her into fighting against them. Ambreen expressed that her lack of control and regulation over her anger had problematised the circumstances of her family, as they were often required to relocate their residence to enrol her in a school that she had not yet been excluded from. Ambreen had, earlier in the interview, shed light about how her father always suspected that she was a “tomboy” and had encouraged her to try boxing out so that she could avoid getting into trouble whilst focusing on her personal development. This would not only benefit her but also improve the likelihood of her family finding some residential stability without the need to relocate everytime she got excluded from school. Beneath is a quotation that depicts the significance of the context which resulted in Ambreen eventually being persuaded by her father to seek emotional remedy through the sport of boxing:

> *It was just the feeling of what I got from the sport. I think growing up I didn’t have the best of childhoods; I experienced a lot of bullying* […] *I would get it mostly for being a Pakistani. I always felt like I was having to defend myself all the time, I got into a lot of fights at school, me and my family did move around a lot because of it, we went to so many different schools because of the bullying and all the fighting. It* [boxing] *was just a way of controlling my anger as well because as you know, growing up is not easy but when you get bullied on top, it is even harder, it was just a way of controlling my anger and focusing it on something more productive and for mental health as well. I only*

> *went down* [to the boxing gym] *after my dad recommended it to have a laugh with my brother, I remember how it was only small at the time, and I felt like a kid in a candy store, I was like 'oh my god, this is sick' but as soon as I started punching the bags, I absolutely loved it, I just fell in love with it from that day and I never looked back. Six months later when my coach said why don't you try competing, I was like, 'yeah, why not', but I can't express what it was, it was just that feeling of being in control and knowing that you are good at something.* **(Interview with Ambreen)**

Venting anger has been associated with the positive improvement of an individuals psychological state and closely aligns with catharsis theory (Bushman, 2002). Catharsis theory assumes that partaking with aggressive and/ or energy-consuming activities, like hitting a punch bag, is an effective method to purge and release any accumulated feelings of anger (Bushman, 2002). Sigmund Freud advocated how individuals were at risk of exposing themselves to severe psychological symptoms and/ or nervous breakdowns if they failed to act upon any negative emotions building up inside of them. Breuer and Freud (1893-1895/1955) suggested that expressing anger, in a controlled fashion and environment, was better than simply bottling it up inside. Freud developed his therapeutic ideas on emotional catharsis through the hydraulic model of anger. The hydraulic model outlined how frustrations often lead to anger and that anger may gather amass inside an individual, like hydraulic pressure within a closed environment, until it is released. If an individual decides to bottle up their anger and restricts it from being released, then it will eventually lead to them exploding in an aggressive and uncontrollable rage. The central idea of catharsis theory, therefore, is to relieve the accumulated pressure that has been formed by anger, inside the psyche, in small fragments as opposed to preserving it inside until the point where there is a risk of a more dangerous and explosive result. It was through the emancipatory nature of hitting the punch bag alongside pushing the body beyond its limits that attracted and maintained Ambreen's engagement towards releasing her feelings of anger in 'small fragments' within a controlled and regulated environment. Contrary to the dangerous and explosive ways that she had previously done so which led to her being excluded from school on multiple occasions.

Contemporaneously, it was also the feeling of mastery and control that Ambreen discovered from her engagement with the sport which was beneficial towards her improving her emotional state. This was expressed through an indescribable sense of achievement that emerged as she discovered her abilities as a pugilist. Lenskyj (1986) has put forth how partaking in boxing seems to incorporate a release from feelings of social control that are experienced elsewhere. It is the liberating moment of being in the ring which produces an aura of escapism as pugilists are given the space to have a 'time-out' and forget the fears, existential questions and multiple conflicts emerging from their everyday lives. Sanaa and Ambreen described how their fathers motivated and encouraged them to take up boxing in order to improve their health and wellbeing. For Sanaa, it was hoped that being in a gym environment would improve her confidence and prevent her from continuously bottling up her emotions. On the other hand, Ambreen was persuaded to train at the local boxing gym for similar reasons and to develop greater control and restraint on her anger. As her regular outbursts at school were problematising residential matters which meant that her family were often required to change households whenever she got excluded. Connecting these cases was how the fathers acted in the best interests of their daughters and the family by drawing upon the benefits available from partaking in boxing to ameliorate their circumstances. Both Sanaa and Ambreen lay claim that they experienced a remarkable improvement in their mental wellbeing overtime as they trained and competed. They both attributed their positive improvements to the unwavering encouragement that they received from their fathers and how becoming boxers had subsequently aided them in better managing their emotions:

> *Like I said, I didn't have the best of time growing up, if you have problems going on, for example, anxiety, stress or anything else, I think it can massively help from a mental health point of view. That's what dad wanted for me. That is the biggest element to it. The mental side of it rather than the physical. Some people train for that aesthetic to look good, whatever, for me it is to genuinely to feel* [mentally] *good. And that's what keeps me going with training.* **(Interview with Sanaa)**

Sanaa lay claim that her aim was not to develop an aesthetically pristine physique but to escape from the daily anxieties of her life by enjoying some independent time and focusing on the rigours of boxing without worrying about anything else. This highlights how it was the

intrinsic nature of boxing that Sanaa found restorative rather than the people or the community that she was immersing herself within. Sanaa also perceived how her father desired for her to alleviate the destructive psychological symptoms that were consuming her at the time. This was, therefore, the justification that underpinned the unreserved parental support that he provided her from the outset. Moreover, Ambreen explained how an instrumental factor that supported her transformation was how her father permitted the head trainer at her boxing club to deploy whatever disciplinary method that he deemed would be necessary towards fixing her anger issues:

> *Growing up and coming from my background, boxing definitely helped so much with my mental health, it helped me control my anger because with all the bullying, I had some anger issues, and just the discipline, having complete discipline, if got in trouble in school, my coach wouldn't let me train, he wouldn't let me compete, he wouldn't let me spar, it was sort of like putting myself and my life in order* […] *my dad was ok with the grilling's that I got because he could see what it was doing for me.* **(Interview with Ambreen)**

Ambreen characterised how it was the disciplinary element of the sport that was highly embraced and engrained in the culture of the boxing gym. This subsequently facilitated her anger management as she would be sanctioned by the trainer if it emerged that she misbehaved at school by, for example, losing her temper. Dortant and Knoppers (2013) have identified that within the context of a boxing gym how the meaning of discipline aligns with the ability to obey: "… that's part of boxing training. That's boxing. You come in and you shut up, you train, you do what the trainer tells you to do, that's just discipline" (p. 541). Boxers that do not follow the trainers expectations risk being sanctioned with a light punishment. Reasons can include being late, excessively talking in the gym or showing a lack of enthusiasm towards training. In Ambreen's instance, these expectations were extended into her personal life with the condition that she demonstrated greater restraint of her anger. If she failed to do so then the trainer would punish her in a way that was meaningful, for example, by not allowing her to partake in certain activities. Dortant and Knoppers (2013) have similarly observed how a trainer would issue an individual with 50-100 press-ups if they failed to display the appropriate attitude towards boxing. Therefore, instilling a sense of fear that any deviation risks punishment.

It was the constitution of these disciplinary practices that supported Ambreen towards getting her life in order. This was enabled through Ambreen's father allowing the trainer to exercise discipline against her where necessary. If she were to be proportionately rebuked or excluded from an activity, as a punishment for her attitude or behaviour – then so be it. Basit (1997) has argued how young BrAsian women tend to be closely protected by their parents as they are seen as the epitome of family honour. This case demonstrates how the father relaxed any sense of guardianship by exposing his daughter to the strictness and regulation embedded within the world of boxing for her own good. He was being cruel to be kind by refraining from intervening on the occasions when the trainer would impose any type of sanction or punishment. Therefore, allowing for her to benefit from the inherent discipline of the sport. Safiyaah also claimed to be a beneficiary from the sport in the sense that her involvement aided the recovery of multiple complex health issues. Safiyaah told me how she had discovered the sport for herself as opposed to Sanaa or Ambreen who were specifically directed by their fathers. This, however, was not problematic as Safiyaah expressed how her parents offered their full and unwavering support in a multitude of ways once they realised the health benefits it was yielding for her. Safiyaah poignantly explained how she had overcome a period of hardship in her life and that it was the discipline of boxing that had supported the recovery of her health. This meant that she was now able to do the most mundane of everyday activities such as consuming enough calories and sleeping on time:

> *I tried loads of things, football, dance but I tried boxing and just liked it.* […] *I got into a really bad eating disorder, everything I tried doing wasn't helping that but when I started boxing and training, I was getting hungry so I would want to go home and eat everything so boxing kind of supported the recovery of a number of my illnesses* […] *I would say the discipline. The discipline sorted my whole life out. A life that no family, no doctors, no consultants and not even I could sort out. Soon as I got into boxing, it gave me the schedule to train, eat, sleep, look after yourself and your own mental health. So, every time something felt wrong, I would just hit the gym. I never understood when lads used to say, 'I go to the gym when I am angry', but now I know what they meant. It really sorts you out.* **(Interview with Safiyaah)**

Safiyaah suffered from a severe blend of physiological and psychological health issues that included anorexia, bipolar disorder and depression. By aligning herself to the arduous regime of training, eating and sleeping (on time), she was able to eradicate the illnesses that were tarnishing the quality of her life. It was after months of immersing herself within the culture of boxing when she felt healed from a range of symptoms relating to her physical and mental health. This was a seminal period for her as the recovery that she experienced was invaluable and substantially better than that which may have been provided by a family member or medical professional. The quotation above is also striking as it incorporates 'gym-rhetoric' similar to what has been presented earlier in this chapter around individuals releasing their anger in the gym. Safiyaah, likewise, identified that the physical aspect of throwing punches with force and partaking in strength and conditioning activities proved to be a liberating endeavour from the destructive emotions that were continuously building up inside. It was ultimately the emancipatory nature of boxing that was able to offer her with a remedy for the physical and emotional problems that she was enduring. A remedy that she felt could not be sought from anywhere else.

The data presented insofar has illustrated the overarching motivations of three female amateur boxers that sought to take up the sport. I found that they were all driven by the desire to ameliorate their emotional states alongside their general mental and physical wellbeing. They all espoused how immersion within the rigours of training and the cultures of their respective gyms strongly influenced the regulation of their anger and frustration. It was the cathartic and liberating feeling that they gleaned from partaking in training activities notwithstanding the emphasis of discipline from the gym that subsequently led to an improvement in their health and wellbeing. I am acutely aware of the sociological criticisms involved in explicating traditional emotion discourses through a gendered lens which frames women as 'more emotional' than men (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2005). As these perpetuate and reinforce traditional gender roles. This has not been the intention of this section. Instead, I have sought to depict the most salient motivation to box that has emerged from the boxers' accounts which highlight the need to improve their health. The preceding analysis demonstrated how the young women aspired to gain better control of their tempers and also shift away from feelings of isolation and depression. In other words, they sought to develop their ability to use their emotions effectively for numerous purposes. For example, through

the improvement of their self-regulation, they would acquire the invaluable resource of controlling themselves from undesirable behaviours and outbursts that may be caused from feelings of anger and frustration. On the subject of emotions, Zembylas (2005) has wrote how emotional norms, just like other norms, delineate a zone within which certain emotions are permitted and others are not permitted, and can be obeyed or broken, at varying costs; they reflect power relations and thus are techniques for the discipline of habitus in emotional expression and communication. It is evident in the data that has been presented wherein emotional norms where violated, for example, with Ambreen's outbursts in school, as the emotional resources and assets required to suppress these episodes were missing-in-action. Although these issues began to change for the better once the young women had developed their patience and forbearance through training.

Emotional capital has not explicitly featured in Bourdieu's work yet it still ought to be understood through the ideas pertaining to the interconnections and convertibility between the various forms of capital and how different emotional orientations can provide opportunities for the conversion of emotional capital into other forms of capital (and vice versa). The concept of emotional capital holds prominence as it does not only illustrate the importance of emotions within a particular habitus, but also how emotions relate with cultural, social, economic and physical forms of capital (Zembylas, 2007). This was evident on a multitude of fronts in the boxers' accounts. For example, in the case of Ambreen, by developing greater emotional capital which included the ability to maintain patience and restraint, she was able to continue her education by staying in school and subsequently enabling to her acquire a cultural capital (institutionalised). Additionally, by working on her emotional capital, Ambreen was also able to also develop her social capital by establishing various networks and relationships in the boxing domain.

An important yet understated factor was the support and encouragement that the boxers' claimed to have received from their parents. Sanaa and Ambreen revealed how they were initially driven to the sport by their fathers. Moreover, Safiyaah started boxing on her own accord but was supported and encouraged to continue once her parents identified the benefits that her involvement was generating. The parents had evidently decided that the circumstances permitted their engagement in boxing. In the forthcoming sections, I will elaborate on the importance of parental support and how it generated resistance from

external audiences. This will accentuate the stakes for the parents, as they deliberated upon whether to support their daughters or not amidst objective structural and cultural powers, and what they personally cared about the most. The analysis will illustrate that the young women understood how their interests were prioritised by their parents who shunned norms and expectations to facilitate their involvement and support their wellbeing.

These findings contrast with previous research that has stressed the supposed role that parents play in impeding the sporting participation of young BrAsian women through fears that it would violate religious and cultural norms (Sfeir, 1985; Kay, 2006; Walseth, 2006; Dagkas et al., 2011). There are, however, different interests here which foreground family priorities alongside the best interests of the young women. To this extent, I will examine throughout this chapter how parental support was invaluable towards empowering the young women in continuing with boxing whilst withstanding the pressures emerging from external audiences. There was no shortage of coverage when these young women began to compete. For example, Ambreen became the first ever BrAsian national amateur boxing champion whilst Sanaa and Safiyaah competed nationwide and racked up much media recognition. The forthcoming section will now focus on the immediate responses from external audiences as the young women featured on television, in newspapers and across social media platforms as amateur boxers.

6.3 The 'Backlash': Transgressing Gendered Expectations

"Blood, bruises, cuts and concussion, which accompany boxing's intrinsic aggression, violence and danger, are popularly considered to be legitimate and even 'natural' for men (Messner, 1992: 67), but absolutely at odds with the essence of femininity. Boxing, as Wacquant (1995: 90) argues, is deeply gendered, embodying and exemplifying 'a definite form of masculinity: plebeian, heterosexual and heroic.'"

(Hargreaves, 1997, p. 35)

In the paper entitled: *Challenging Stereotypes: The Case of Muslim Female Boxers in Bengal,* Mitra (2009) found how the young women that constituted her sample were supported by their parents in training and entering tournaments, as they recognised the benefits that partaking in boxing could yield. Mitra (2009) observed how some fathers encouraged their daughters to box despite being questioned by relatives and neighbours whether it was

religiously appropriate for women to box. Support from the immediate family was invaluable for resisting any criticisms, as the young women felt empowered given that they enjoyed the support of their mothers and fathers. Bourdieu (2001) has discussed how women tend to be constructed as aesthetic objects, and logically within their assigned role(s), take on the aesthetic functions in their homes and the social world. Furthermore, the home is not just a physical space but one that is infused with social and cultural elements. Stride et al. (2018) have argued how spaces within the home may be socially constructed in numerous stereotypical ways such as specific domains being demarcated along gendered lines. Identity is not only discovered at home but also constructed and shaped against norms, values and expectations. This is substantiated by Leonard (2004) who suggested how gendered ideologies and socialisation processes that are established from an early age may have an enduring impact. In *Masculine Domination,* Bourdieu (2001) has elaborated on how the home may constitute a site wherein gendered power relations are (re)produced through a combination of hierarchies and expectations. He argued that women tend to occupy specific socially constructed responsibilities such as managing the symbolic capital of the family. It is, as a result, incumbent upon them to maintain a positive public image by complying with gendered expectations:

Being ... socially inclined to treat themselves as aesthetic objects and, consequently, to pay constant attention to everything concerned with beauty, the elegance of the body, its attire and its bearing, within the division of domestic labour women quite naturally take charge of everything concerned with aesthetics, and more generally with the management of the public image and social appearances of the members of the domestic unit – the children, of course, but also the husband, who often delegates his choice of clothing to this wife. It is also women who see to and look after the décor or everyday life, the house and its internal decoration, the element of gratuitousness and 'purposefulness without a purpose' which always finds a place there... Being assigned to the management of the symbolic capital of the family, women are quite logically called upon to transport this role into the company, which almost always asks them to provide the functions of presentation and representation, reception and hospitality ... (Bourdieu, 2001, pp. 99-100)

Ramji (2007) has described, elsewhere, how the sacred value placed upon young BrAsian women, by their families and communities, has often led to them experiencing increased levels of guardianship in most aspects of their lives. The underpinning rationale for this has been to ensure that they can transmit religion and culture to future generations, as women are deemed to be centrally involved in the primary socialisation of children. For Basit (1997), regulating gendered norms and expectations, particularly with women, has been an important approach towards preserving the cohesiveness within BrAsian families. The prevailing doxa is how the individual must prioritise the values and aspirations of the collective before their own. Anything in contrast is attributed to the toxicity of the West which promotes individualism and 'selfish interests' (Khanum, 1992; Afshar, 1994). The purpose of the preceding section was to highlight the overwhelming support that the young women received from their parents regarding their involvement in boxing. This was largely because of the ways in which their engagement benefited their overall health and wellbeing. There were, however, concerns raised by relatives once it became widely known that the young women were training and competing as amateur boxers. The following excerpt presents the questioning that Ambreen and her parents were subject to by the extended family after she featured in the local newspaper for winning her debut contest:

> *Ok, it was like a sort of backlash, I think it was after my first fight when I was 15, my coach was someone who was proud of all his boxers, what my coach would do is that anytime one of his boxers were involved in a competition, he would always contact the local newspaper and he would put it in the newspaper that so and so has won a competition. Obviously when it came to mine, he wanted to put it in the newspaper also, so it went into like the Keighley News, Telegraph and Argus, but yeah, I got sort of an 'out there' backlash. Back then, the sport wasn't known as a female sport, it was known as a boy's sport* […] *They* [aunties and uncles] *would go up to my parents and say, why are you letting your daughter do this? Why are you sort of accepting it? Why are you supporting it? They were like to me why are you boxing? Why would you want to break your nose? You're a girl, you are too pretty to be in the ring* […] *It was blown way out of proportion.* **(Interview with Ambreen)**

There was an onslaught of questions from relatives when it emerged that Ambreen was boxing competitively. It was the parents, in particular, that bore the brunt of concerned members from the extended family, as they were deemed to be failing to safeguard their daughter and uphold their obligations of being responsible mothers and fathers. Familial social interactions are not always private. Therefore, others, such as the extended family, who observe family displays may constitute sources of feedback and their feedback may not always be affirming. James and Curtis (2010) have suggested that feedback often reflects wider cultural norms, values and beliefs. I found, however, that Ambreen's parents were not overly influenced by cultural practices, as the father had married a Portuguese woman (the mother) and, therefore, diverged from BrAsian marriage expectations quite early in his life. I would suggest that diverging from cultural sensibilities by not marrying within the *biradari* set the gauntlet for Ambreen and the rest of her immediate family to make decisions about their lives based on personal interests rather than cultural blueprints. It was put forth that Ambreen was transgressing the norms of appropriate femininity by engaging in a violent sport where she risked tarnishing her facial features, for example, by potentially having her nose broken. This could also subsequently jeopardise her chances of finding a suitable spouse. An important and empowering moment for Ambreen was when her parents sought to withstand the backlash from relatives by fully supporting her sporting endeavours:

> *They sat me down and were like 'look, if you want to do your boxing, then do it, and we will support you 100% and we don't care about what anybody else says, you do it and we will support your 100%'. Which I thought was brilliant because not a lot of parents would do something like that. I was quite lucky in a way to have supportive parents encouraging me to go for it, don't worry about anybody else and that they will support me 100% […] I think it was definitely culture and not religion which was impacting the way others thought about this issue.* **(Interview with Ambreen)**

Ambreen suggested how it was the erroneous conflation between culture and religion that led to her involvement in boxing being scrutinised. There were several anecdotes provided throughout the interview where Ambreen held the perception that the discomfort from others about her training and competing was emerging through misguided beliefs that failed to identify the distinction between faith and tradition. Stride and Flintoff (2017) have proposed that the fear of family respect "going down the drain" (p. 12) is arguably the biggest

obstacle faced by young BrAsian women with regards to the involvement in sports and physical activity. This was, however, not the case for Ambreen who enjoyed the unwavering support of her parents in order to better her wellbeing. Neither Ambreen nor her parents accepted the criticisms that she was deviating from Islamic beliefs to partake in boxing. Ambreen had, in fact, emphasised the value that she placed on being a practising Muslim which entailed praying regularly, giving charity and fasting. An example was even provided about when she championed institutional changes to dress codes to ensure that the kit she wore in the ring was consistent with Islamic prescriptions on modesty. This will be further explored later in this chapter. Ambreen was of the view that it was transgression from cultural expectations rather than religious teachings which fuelled the subsequent “backlash” from relatives.

Walseth (2006) argued that second and subsequent generations of BrAsians have become increasingly resistant towards assimilating to their grandparents and elderly relatives culture, especially when it constrains their agency. In other words, there has been a tacit refusal to uncritically conflate cultural practices with the responsibilities of being a Muslim and in turn, younger generations have turned to the sacred scriptures for themselves. This is supported by Ali (1992) who proclaimed how young BrAsians are utilising the language of Islam to challenge narrowly defined cultural prohibitions. Indeed, it is the language of Islam which has been mobilised to contest hegemonic constructions by conferring an "incontestable legitimacy" (p. 121). This is a generational advantage for those to have experienced an upbringing in the West, as the opportunities to acquire an education and gain the capabilities to discern between faith and culture are widespread. By drawing upon their literacy skills and translating Arabic verses from the Quran, young BrAsians are able to distinguish between what their duties are to Islam and what is merely folk talk (Ryan, 2014). For Walseth and Fasting, (2003), young BrAsian women are now better placed to justify their participation in sports and physical activity by directly drawing upon religious sources. Islam, as Walseth (2006) has argued, has proven to be an important framework for justifying physical activity presuming that it is undertaken in accordance with religious mandates. Ambreen defended her involvement by arguing how her criticisms were rooted in culture and that being an amateur boxer did not hinder her ability to fulfil her religious obligations. It was through such navigation that Ambreen was able to manage the multiple priorities in her life and justify her

decision to box. This was predominantly down to parental support and a clear understanding between what was religion and what was not religion.

Masculinity and femininity float free from men and women per se and take on qualities that are simultaneously present in bodies, structures, practices, discourses and ultimately symbolic universes that provide the material for the ontological fabric of gender relations and gender identity in everyday life (Brown and Graham, 2008). For Bourdieu (2001), the abundance of unquestioned practical actions and truths that are enacted on a regular basis have developed a social orthodoxy wherein even "the most intolerable conditions of existence [and practice] can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural" (p. vii). This was exemplified when Safiyaah mentioned how a minority of her relatives projected condescending remarks towards her about partaking in boxing despite the benefits it was accumulating for her health. The quotation beneath illustrates how her parents were happy about her involvement yet this was not shared by others who undermined and downplayed her ability to fight:

> *My parents were just happy and they were just pleased that I was out of the house before because of my illness. When it came to the fighting aspect, some of them* [relatives] *were just like shocked, they was like 'you're not a fighter Saf, we don't think you can fight'* […] *Not gonna lie I have had some extended family make some dodgy comments.* **(Interview with Safiyaah)**

With the encouragement of her parents, Safiyaah's health began to revitalise as she attended the gym regularly following a long and problematic period of self-isolation at home. Some of her extended family, however, had little interest in the value that her engagement had for her physical and mental recovery, as they were of the view that she was not conforming to expectations of femininity. Safiyaah recalled experiencing comments that predominantly focused on her corporeal composition and how she did not have the physique of a fighter. Brown (2008) has suggested that the body is a site which articulates social, cultural and historical processes that, through practice, embed symbolic oppositions into and onto itself. With Bourdieu (2001) understanding masculine domination as a phenomenon that legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding it in biological nature that is itself a naturalised social construction. In other words, oppressive ideologies that have endured time and space are maintained under the guise of a biological fundamentalism, which evokes a

dehistoricization of traits and dispositions that are rendered as products of evolution instead of socially constructed, rehearsed and ritually performed social enactments.

Safiyaah felt belittled for not having a physique that signifies strength, power and aggression. Whitehead and Barrett (2001) advocated that we should avoid recognising masculinity as something that is exclusive to men: "since masculinity is something that one does rather than something that one has, it would be appropriate to say that [wo]men do masculinity in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings, depending on the resources available to them" (p. 18). This premise rejects the viewpoints held by Safiyaah's extended family who claimed that she did not have the intrinsic physiological capabilities to train and compete. Instead, their perspectives, I would suggest, were rooted in socially constructed positions that identify the female body as being weak, frail and unable to withstand the rigours of physical combat. In my observations, Safiyaah demonstrated a contrastive image to the one held by her relatives. She would, for example, clench her fists on occasions whilst talking to me about personal and stimulating topics. Therefore, demonstrating fragmented outpourings of strength and aggression that are associated with boxing. I attribute this to the inculcation of a pugilists habitus of movement which is been 'burned in' through thousands of practice hours to provide the boxer with the psycho-physical grammar for engagement with an opponent. It also aligns with the aesthetic trait of looking tough which is deemed as an important indication regarding the "instrumental readiness of a fighter" (Wacquant, 1998, p. 335). There was, however, concerns raised from some of Safiyaah's elderly relatives that the identity transformation which she was undertaking, by becoming an amateur boxer, would have repercussions for her chances of finding a suitable spouse. The following snapshot is illustrative of a conversation wherein it was put forth that divergence from the gendered expectations of appropriate femininity risked penalisation when it came to marriage prospects:

If she becomes a boxer then no one will want to marry her […]

(Interview with Safiyaah)

Bourdieu (2001) exposed the logic that underpins the economy of symbolic exchanges and more precisely, the social construction of relations of kinship and marriage alliance which assigns to women, their social status as objects of exchange, defined in accordance with male interests that help (re)produce their own symbolic capital. They are, according to Bourdieu

(2001), seen as tokens in circulation that institute relations between men and operate as instruments towards the (re)production of social and symbolic capital. By transgressing from the numerous gendered expectations, Safiyaah had excluded herself from being considered by others for the practice of arranged marriage. Bourdieu (2001) has observed how the value that is placed upon women is tentative and subject to them being protected from wider corrosive influences that may jeopardise the interests of the protectors:

"The acquisition of symbolic capital and social capital is more or less the only possible form of accumulation, women are assets which must be protected from offence and suspicion and which, when invested in exchanges, can produce alliances, in other words social capital, and prestigious allies, in other words symbolic capital. To the extent that the value of these alliances, and therefore the symbolic profit they can yield, partly depends on the symbolic value of the women available for exchange, that is to say, on their reputation and especially their chastity – constituted as a fetishized measure of masculine reputation, and therefore of the symbolic capital of the whole lineage – the honour of the brothers or fathers, which induces a vigilance as attentive, and even paranoid, as that of the husbands, is a form of enlightened self-interest" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 45)

Masculine domination, as put by Bourdieu (2001), constitutes women as symbolic objects who exist through and for the gaze of others as welcoming, attractive and ideal objects. They are consequently expected to act feminine; that is to maintain a smile on their faces, act friendly and remain attentive. It is through these gendered expectations and the dependence on others (not only men) that supposedly constitute their being. Masculine sports, however, require competitors to be physically dominant, aggressive and boisterous which are all qualities that are antithetical with performing hegemonic versions of femininity. Safiyaah evidently rejected the gendered expectations being imposed upon her by choosing to craft her own identity that was conducive to her personal interests. Siraj (2012) observed, elsewhere, in her research, how a BrAsian mother sought to regulate the unfeminine behaviour of her daughter by telling her to "walk without thumping her feet", "sit upright" and "not leave open the top button of her shirt" (p. 193). Safiyaahs' interview emphasised how her parents had wholeheartedly supported her engagement in boxing. They were not interested in regulating her identity nor her behaviour against the backdrop of appropriate conventions of femininity. They were certainly not deterred about the implications boxing

would have on finding a suitable spouse. They just wanted her to get better. I aver, based on Safiyaahs' account, that they privileged the interests of their daughter at the expense of enforcing gendered expectations. Sanaa expressed, in her experience, how the doxa; the order of things and what constitutes being normal for her elder relatives was disrupted upon them learning that she started boxing. Her parents, as a result, had to withstand much displeasure:

> *My immediate family are really supportive as I said, my dad is actually the one who got me into boxing, he has pushed me to do my classes and instruct. Extended family a bit of a mixture* […] *the older generation, who don't quite understand and can't quite see that link between a girl and a sport that is quite physical you could say, they are like 'why does your daughter do that to like my parents', what about having kids? Is it gonna affect that if she is getting hit?' All those types of comments get thrown about. But like my parents don't really take much notice of that because they know what I am doing and are fully supportive of it. And neither do I to be honest, I will just stay quiet and let them ramble.* **(Interview with Sanaa)**

Here, Sanaa described how the older generation were predominantly concerned with the intrinsic violent element of boxing and how it could lead to her potentially becoming unable to have children. As mentioned previously, there is a focus that monitors the activities enjoyed by young BrAsian women to ensure that they do not jeopardise fulfilling cultural expectations such as producing children or transmitting faith and tradition to subsequent generations. Sanaa expressed the difficult predicament that she found herself within. The nature of being 'properly' related to these individuals meant that she had limited options at her disposal to respond with. She could not choose to 'unrelate' herself nor could she become confrontational as this may have irreversibly damaged relationships (Mason and Tipper, 2008). Rather, her response was to remain silent and allow the criticisms being projected towards her to be exhausted in order to minimise any further uproar whilst demonstrating her disdain for the opposing views. The numerous cases that have been analysed insofar chime with Bourdieu's (2001) observations of the Kabyle[20]. I would suggest that the relatives

[20] The Kabyle people are a Berber ethnic group indigenous to Kabylia in Northern Algeria. Pierre Bourdieu's ethnographic study of the Kabyle society was concerned with gender and sexuality; and with the social structures that shape social, political and personal lives. This study substantially contributed towards *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), *The Logic of Practice* (1990) and *Masculine Domination* (2001).

of the young women had perceived their transgression from gendered expectations as digressing from the "universe of the undiscussed" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 168) given that it aligned with the heterodox position that challenges and contests the undiscussed. As Qadir (2015) has mentioned, heterodoxy questions the arbitrariness of the current order by foregrounding the taken-for-granted assumptions and questioning the unquestioned.

Bourdieu's (2001) analysis in *Masculine Domination* has, however, failed to capture expressions of reflexivity and resistance, as found within this analysis. This ought to be attributed to the general Bourdieusian oeuvre that errs on the side of social (re)production rather than social change. This analysis has demonstrated how the young women, with the support of their parents, had constructed their own life scripts by digressing from gendered expectations and choosing to train and compete as boxers. Bourdieu's gender theorising in *Masculine Domination* is insightful towards illustrating the perpetuation of gender inequalities but inadequate for understanding expressions and examples of resistance. As Mottier (2002) has observed, Bourdieu offers a "gloomy explanation of the permanence of gender inequality, but no answer to the crucial questions of how this order can be transformed or how women [or men themselves] can stop being accomplices [or perpetuators] to the symbolic domination" (p. 354). It is through the overemphasis that Bourdieu's maintains on the constancy and resilience of habitus that flaws his analysis and renders it unable to explain social change:

"[…] *constancy of the habitus that results from this is thus one of the most important factors in the relative constancy of the structure of the sexual division of labour: because these principles are, in their essentials, transmitted from body to body, below the level of consciousness and discourse, to a large extent they are beyond the grip of conscious control and therefore not amenable to transformations or corrections"* (2001, p. 95)

Bourdieu (2001) theorised that it is the enduring nature of a gendered habitus which enables the status quo to remain unchallenged: "the old structures of the sexual division seem still to determine the very direction and form of these changes" (2001 p. 94). It is, therefore, the case, according to Bourdieu (2001), that females would decline future opportunities and endeavours that may become available to them if they conflict with the gendered norms, values and beliefs they have internalised. Scott Lash (1993) argued that such issues are a result of Bourdieu's prioritisation of social reproduction and how it "inhibits the possibility of

any strong theory of social change" (p. 354). In other words, there is an imbalance between structure and agency with the former being overemphasised at the expense of the latter. Mottier (2002) argued that Bourdieu's (2001) greatest error in *Masculine Domination* was his failure to acknowledge the plurality of gender scripts available in modern social life. In sum, Bourdieu (2001) was unable to conceptualise, as a result, the heterogeneity of female subjectivity that enables critical agency and contributes towards the resistance and divergence from structures of power. If Bourdieu (2001) is an example of how and why women become objectified, then this analysis is an example of how and why women resist any attempts at being objectified.

Archer (2007), in contrast, explains how subjects make their way through the world by engaging in reflexive deliberation. For Archer (2007), reflexivity has progressively replaced routine action in late modernity. Archer (2007) has argued that it is the late modern situational logic of opportunity that enables individuals to be more reflexive about their personal projects and ultimate concerns without being impeded by the embodied and structured dispositions, as postulated by Bourdieu (2001). Archer (2010) firmly believes that the world has evolved from the times of Bourdieu and therefore his approach is historically specific: "the young of the new millennium are no longer Bourdieu's people because they no longer live in Bourdieu's world" (p. 287). Archer (2012) explained the influx in reflexivity by arguing that the waning of social guidelines means that individuals must think about how to deal with novel and unforeseen circumstances. I acknowledge, however, that Archer (2012) is not useful for making the argument that the young women in this study encountered an absence of social guidelines, as clearly, they were familiar with the expectations emerging from the extended family and the *biradari*.

Throughout this section, I examined the responses that mainly came from the extended family when it became known that the young women were training and competing as amateur boxers. They all found themselves becoming involved with the sport to remedy the deleterious effects that racism, bullying and other health problems were having on their quality of life. The young womens' accounts illustrated how they were supported by their parents in dissenting from gendered norms and expectations in order to advance their personal projects. I argue, based on the boxers accounts', that the parents engaged in reflexive deliberation, by evaluating their circumstances and how they could help their

daughters to recover from the racism, bullying and health problems that they were experiencing. The young women subsequently felt empowered to train and compete given the support that they enjoyed from their parents notwithstanding the innovative ways in which they distinguished between religion and culture to defend themselves from any charges that their involvement was religiously forbidden. By providing support, however, the parents underwent a capital trade-off (Reay, 2004) in forfeiting their symbolic and social capital in exchange for the development of the physical and emotional capital of their daughter(s). The theoretical examination between gendered habitus and reflexivity was undertaken to challenge the prevailing perceptions that young BrAsian women are docile, passive and unable to express resistance or agency toward structures of power (Bhopal, 2019). They are, rather, skilled negotiators that are able to navigate back and forth between faith, culture and their personal projects (Ballard, 1994; Bagguley and Hussain, 2016). In the forthcoming sections, I will provide a more detailed analysis of the specific criticisms that emerged from the data and how the young women responded. These included concerns about them training and competing within masculine spaces and the implications that immodest and revealing dress codes would have on their appearances.

6.3.1 Masculine Spaces

How can we describe the environment wherein the sweet science is undertaken? Loïc Wacquant (1992) has answered this by summarising the boxing gym as being a "quintessentially masculine space" (p. 234). For Matthews (2016), the boxing gym constitutes a male preserve that symbolically perpetuates gender disparities. Boxing is, as observed by Oates (1987), "a purely masculine activity and it inhabits a purely masculine world" (p. 70). Wacquant (2004) identified how women were not welcome, in the boxing gym that he observed, because it was deemed that "their presence disrupts if not the smooth material operation of the pugilistic universe, then its symbolic organisation" (p. 50). Furthermore, Wacquant (2004) found that there were stringent rules being enforced towards women if they did, for any reason, enter the boxing gym: "only in special circumstance […] will the girlfriends or wives of the boxers have license to attend their man's training session. When they do so, they are expected to remain quietly seated, motionless, on the chairs that line the flanks of the ring; and they typically move carefully along the walls as to avoid penetrating the actual training floor" (p. 51). Fulton (2019) sought to explain the gendered culture and

dynamics of the boxing gym by arguing how it is deemed as a safe space by men to enact hegemonic performances of masculinity given the discourses, narratives, rhetoric and imagery that may be found. The social order defined by participation in combat sports sanctions a certain conception of masculinity (Bourdieu, 2001) and defines the legitimate boxer as fearless, strong, courageous; someone with heart; the alpha male. The relative scarcity of women in competitive boxing combined with the hypermasculine nature of the trade and its mythology makes gender a highly salient factor in the boxing gym (Oates, 1987; Hargreaves, 1997; Wacquant, 2004; Paradis, 2012). Women, therefore, may often find themselves being positioned on the periphery in boxing spaces that have been constituted by enduring masculine values.

Mohammad (1999) observed that BrAsian parents have remained attentive towards protecting their young women from exclusionary spaces that reinforce gendered disparities: "[the] feminine space is the space of the home. It includes spaces for women and for their close male relatives and is a domain into which the entry of other men is restricted. Spaces outside the home are largely masculine" (p. 230). There was an acknowledgement and to some extent, uneasiness, that permitting young women to enter masculine domains would either expose them to prejudice or corrosive Western influences. This is no longer tenable. There has been a proliferation of young women from BrAsian communities studying at university (Ijaz and Abbas, 2010; Bagguley and Hussain, 2016) and accessing the labour market (Khattab and Hussein, 2018). These may not always been seen as essential, but the family can take comfort that their (grand)daughters will be protected by institutional rules and regulations. Boxing, however, has not yet been widely accepted given the concerns that the sport is densely populated with men and that the prevailing culture is not conducive to the gendered expectations of 'appropriate' femininity. Sanaa expressed, in her capacity as a personal trainer, how she was receiving messages from other young BrAsian women for advice about how they could get involved with boxing. They wanted to partake, however, found it challenging to do so without the support of their parents:

> *I have had girls messaging me saying stuff like 'I am 16 years old and I want to do a bit of boxing, but I have got to lie to my parents to come to your class. I have to say stuff like I am going to a gym instead of going to a boxing class. For that reason, I cannot bring my own boxing gloves because, I don't have money to buy them, and I can't ask*

> *my family for money for that'. The reasons why they would not allow them to go is because it is in a male dominated environment. But that isn't the gym's fault that it is a male dominated environment, that's just how it is.* **(Interview with Sanaa)**

These findings are contrastive with Oates (1987) and Wacquant (1992; 2004) who found that female involvement in boxing was predominantly constrained through exclusionary gym policies that perpetuated gendered stereotypes. For example, Oates (1987) found that the worth of women in boxing was confined to them being card girls at shows wherein they could enact their "zestful feminine ways" (p. 72). Alternatively, Wacquant (2004) gathered that the value of women's contribution towards boxing was limited to the backstage roles they could perform by "taking full charge of household maintenance and the children, cooking the required foods, and providing unfailing emotional and even financial support" (p. 51). Rather, it was the absence of parental support which impeded the chances of involvement for the young women that Sanaa was referring to. The extract illustrated how the unnamed teen would resort to lying to her parents about her location in order to attend training sessions given that they strongly stood against their daughter entering the boxing gym. There may have been benign intentions underpinning these parental practices such as the parents wanting to preserve *purdah* (literally meaning curtain) for their daughters by maintaining gender segregation where possible. This would involve the family taking steps such as monitoring dress codes and/ or regulating social interactions to protect their women from the male gaze (Soni, 2013).

Sfeir (1985) and Yaldai (1987) both put forward how there has been a degree of apprehensiveness amongst BrAsian families that sports and physical activity environments risk giving rise to the transgression of gendered expectations. For example, the prospects of women wearing revealing clothing and occupying mixed-gender spaces has resulted in their involvement being contested (Kay, 2006). Beneath is a snapshot of my conversation with male study participant Qayoom, when I asked him whether the culture of his boxing gym was conducive towards respecting the gendered regulations that young BrAsian women must adhere to:

Izram: *Do you think that the gym you went to would be welcoming for female Muslim boxers?*

Qayoom: *No because it's quite masculine because of the strong and sexual language and how the lads communicate with each other. It would not have been the best of environments for catering towards the needs and development of a female Muslim boxer because of the masculine and sexual language that takes placed there. There is a lot of people talking about, let's say whilst they are training, they will say 'I shagged this bird that day' or 'I shagged this girl that day', so for a female to be there training whilst hearing all this stuff, that's gonna make her feel that OK, what if they try it on with me sexually or what if they manipulate me through boxing terms by saying 'ok let me teach you how to do this, let's go out of the gym and have a meeting'. There may be all sorts of scenarios going through the female's head.*

Qayoom described how the culture of his boxing gym entailed fellow fighters accentuating their masculinities by engaging in locker-room talk about their sexual experiences. Martschukat (2021) has argued how the emphasis on having sex can be attributed to men endeavouring to eliminate any uncertainties and perceptions about their "completeness as men" (p. 99). As those suspected of being sexually dysfunctional or unable to attract the opposite sex are vulnerable to being projected with homophobic slurs (Anderson, 2010). These findings, in addition, support Fulton (2019) in how the culture, dynamics and hierarchies of the boxing gym produce a safe space for men to enact hegemonic performances of masculinity through, for instance, vulgar conversations about their sexual experiences. Wacquant (1998) discerned that the language used about women in the boxing gym was usually demeaning and sexually related, for example, the boxer's girlfriends would be labelled as their "squeeze" by the head trainer (p. 52). To elaborate, the female presence in the gym was seen as a sexually distracting one; given that fighters were expected to abstain from sexual intercourse during training camps. This was crudely articulated by Wacquant (1998): "Inhabitants of the pugilistic planet believe that having sex makes fighters physically weak: it 'drains their legs,' takes away their 'snap' and endurance, and impairs their recuperative capacity. Mentally, it 'messes their minds,' makes them 'soft,' and deprives them of aggression and focus - in short, it blunts their 'fighter instinct' - whereas 'staying away for that pussy' gives them added reserves of rage for the fight" (pp. 342 – 343).

There was also the belief, however, that prolonged periods of sexual abstinence risked jeopardising the longevity of relationships: “Bachelors often fear that if they do not provide adequate sexual services to their partner, she will cheat on them or leave for a more bed-oriented companion. In most cases, however, spouses or lovers negotiate a mutually agreeable enforcement of the rules of pugilism as they apply to the bedroom” (Wacquant, 1998, p. 344). Wacquant (1998) presented an invaluable insight into the crudeness of the boxing gym and how socially taboo subjects and language are continuously normalised and perpetuated by the occupants of the ‘male preserve’. This is an important backdrop for considering the factors that influence parental decisions to restrict their young women from entering a sport that has been historically characterised as “for men and about men” (Oates, 197, p. 72). I further observed the toxic masculine environment of the gym during fieldwork and how it may prove to be exclusionary towards women. There were explicit conversations occurring that have the potential of instilling anxieties, on young women, about the possibilities of eventually becoming vulnerable to the sexual advances of others. The fieldnote beneath illustrates an instance that I witnessed regarding the nature of sexualised talk in the gym:

> *There was a huddle around Dave as I arrived for this morning’s training session. He was showing the rest of the gym lads a very talented 9-year-old doing pad work in the ring. Z*** leaned over his shoulder and said, “go on Dave you ol’ dinosaur, when did you get an Iphone?” he laughed and told him about how he lost his previous Nokia phone on holiday and then replaced it with a smartphone. Another lad training at the same time overheard the exchange and came over and said “Dave. You know you can get porn on that. No need to pay for Babe Station anymore. Just go on google and type H D P O R N”. Everyone around laughed!* **(Fieldnote)**

Elsewhere, these conversations would most likely be characterised as inappropriate and would warrant disciplinary proceedings. The collective response when everyone laughed confirmed, however, that the prevailing masculine culture was normal. Lewis (2007) has argued that men are not born with such notions of masculine behaviours and that these orientations result from society imposing varying understandings and meanings upon them. These findings demonstrate that the boxing gym may be characterised as a space wherein individuals experience a socialisation that exposes them to perceiving obnoxious tropes on

masculinity as acceptable to some extent, funny. Inasmuch Bourdieu (2001) has made a perspicacious observation in how performances of masculinity ought to be seen as relational in nature. In short, masculinity has much to do with men seeking the approval of other men alongside the approval of women: "Manliness, it can be seen, is an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of fear of the female, firstly in oneself" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.53). This perspective offers an important vantage point to understand why some boxers may engage in masculine locker-room talk in the gym. As those who deviate from notions of how 'real men are supposed to act' and what 'real men are supposed to represent' risk being feminised by others (Lewis, 2007). Qayoom expressed that he had never trained alongside a female BrAsian during his time in amateur boxing. He suggested that their parents sought to protect them from such male dominated spaces:

> **Izram:** *Did you ever train alongside any female Muslim boxers?*
>
> **Qayoom:** *I can't say that I have, no. Maybe it's the fact that they do not feel comfortable training in a gym full of boys and you know like when you go to a gym, not everyone is going to be nice. A female may have the thoughts like 'ok I'm a female, what happens if they start making sexual comments towards or around me, what if when I am hitting the bags, you know how when their bodies jiggle, what if someone calls her fatty' it could lead to insecurities. There is potentially even the thing that families won't allow it because of their women mixing with men, in the boxing ring, when you are training.*
>
> **Izram:** *But why would the families allow males to box and not females?*
>
> **Qayoom:** *Because the males may have a better chance in the gym, if there is bullying, you would be able to take a better stance. But if you are a female, she may not be comfortable all sorts of things may go through her head 'what if this person starts harassing me?'; 'what if they start asking for my number?'; 'what if outside the gym the come talk to me and a family member sees that?'. It can cause issue with family members because it's about community reputation and if the daughter is boxing, people could say 'oh she is mixing with males' it sort of like disgracing their family reputation. For example, if a female* [BrAsian] *goes to a boxing gym, there will be*

> *people saying, 'oh she trains with men … she is probably sleeping with one of the men'. When you box, you develop a close relationship with the people you are training with and if a female was to get close with a person she is training with or if they communicate in a way where she genuinely is seeking help to improve her boxing, it could spark controversy because everyone she asks for help will be male*.

This exchange illustrated the factors inherent within the culture of boxing that could contribute towards the reputational damage of a family amongst the *biradari*. It was suggested, firstly, that females may be subject to experiencing remarks about their corporeal compositions by other trained men within the gym that could subsequently lead to them feeling at unease. Further, there were questions posed about how such comments and observations may engender the females eventually encountering the sexual advancements of other males. The hypothetical scenarios that were presented, for example, on being harassed endeavoured to characterise the anxieties that women are likely to feel within androcentric contexts. The central concern was on the consternation of females training around men in spaces that are designed for them and regulated by them. The taboo talk, therefore, that risks excluding women is not conspicuously visible nor adequately held to account as it constitutes the norm. As Bourdieu (2001) has observed, the masculine gender often appears as non-marked in opposition to the feminine which is explicitly characterised. The androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses and/ or practices aimed at legitimating it (Bourdieu, 2001).

Qayoom made an implicit connection between how the risks of experiencing demeaning comments and sexual advancements may be misconstrued by observers as evidence of reciprocity. In other words, moments of gender-mixing may be contentiously taken out of context to erroneously infer that the women are actively engaging in sexual relationships rather than focusing on training and competing. It was speculated how these instances may produce incendiary implications within the *biradari* through gossip and rumours operating as devices to cast a negative light on the female. This would be reputationally damaging for the young woman and her family. Ballard (1979) described gossip as "an important sanction against non-conformity" as it discusses "a girl's reputation" and the importance of reputation for the "status and prestige of the family as a whole" (pp. 116-117). Gossip can be perceived as a method for social control as it curbs undesirable behaviours to keep reputation intact, as

noted by Shaw (1988; 2000). Kay (2006) suggested that BrAsians tend to live in close-knit communities with potentially 40-60 *biradari* members living in close proximity. Meaning that gossip may become rapidly widespread in a short period of time. To this extent, Bourdieu (1986) postulated how symbolic capital cannot be institutionalized, objectified or incorporated into the habitus. It exists and grows only in intersubjective reflection and can be recognized only there. Economic and cultural capital have their own modes of existence (money, shares; examinations and qualifications); whereas symbolic capital exist only in the 'eyes of the others'. It can, therefore, be deduced that the accumulation and/ or maintenance of a symbolic capital rests with the perceptions of the collective as opposed to the attitudes, choices and behaviours of the individual in accruing economic capital, for example. Hence, the analysis suggests that some BrAsian women may be constrained, by their parents, from training in masculine spaces such as the boxing gym because it could detriment the accumulation and/ or maintenance of personal/ family symbolic capital and lead to wider suspicions and reverberations of the female transgressing sacrosanct gendered expectations.

The hypothetical scenarios that were characterised in the data about corporeal insecurities were rooted in the disruption of ethnic identity boundaries given how masculine-associated behaviours, such as sweating or shaking your body parts, conflict with hegemonic understandings of femininity. Walseth (2006) has likewise argued: "to participate in sport implies that one attracts attention to oneself, one competes in front of others, and one might be watched screaming for the ball or showing aggression while making rough tackles. This is not regarded as an ideal feminine behaviour. To be involved in sport also has the consequence that one spends a lot of time away from home, sometimes one arrives home late after training and sometimes one even sleeps over away from home" (p. 91). I asked Qayoom whether he would support any of his female relatives if they wanted to attend his boxing gym:

> **Izram:** *Would you be happy with a female relative of yours boxing or going to your gym?*
>
> **Qayoom:** *I wouldn't, no, because of the sexual language that goes on down there and because of you know the uniform standards and stuff like that. I believe that if there were female-only boxing classes and if the uniforms were changed to respect the culture, then I could see a lot of female Muslims going towards boxing then.*

Qayoom revealed an honest and insightful response about why he would be apprehensive if a female relative wanted to train at his boxing gym. He firstly elaborated on the prevalence of the hegemonic masculine culture that normalised individuals engaging in constant sexual talk. This was a deterrent for Qayoom as he put forth how he would not permit his female relative(s) to be exposed to such spaces. This is an influential factor as to why some young BrAsian women may be confined to the home space to ensure that there is a degree of privacy and security over the ways they choose to express themselves (Stride et al., 2018). It is an undoubted reality, however, that the home space may pose constraints and challenges on the numerous types of exercises and activities possible. Qayoom also raised doubts about the attire that any female relative(s) would be obliged to wear and how any prospective dress codes could violate female gendered expectations of preserving modesty. The forthcoming section will return to a deeper analysis on the issue of appearance; however, I will currently focus on the challenges posed by the necessity to respect culture and the assertion that female relative(s) engaging in the sport within female-only environment may be deemed more acceptable.

For Bourdieu (1990), doxa is the shared beliefs (and orientations of gender-segregation) which construct 'a *generalised* sense of "what is done" in the field' (Atkinson, 2011, p. 340, emphasis original). Subsequently, the thoughts, taste (preferences), beliefs, interests and understandings of the surrounding world that constitute the habitus are (re)shaped through historical and contemporary cultural, social and institutional mechanisms of socialisation (Bourdieu, 1990). Cultural values have been elevated by elderly generations given how boundaries between faith and tradition have often been blurred. These have subsequently filtered down and shaped the behavioural dispositions of younger generations as identified in Wray's (2002) study on BrAsian women's experiences of gender-integrated/ segregated exercises spaces. One of the respondents said that she was afraid of men entering the class: "And you know this is a problem for Muslim ladies. And they feel shy 'somebody looking at me'. Every lady needs exercise, but they feel shame, just shame, they're shy'" (Wray, 2002, p. 132). Similar perspectives were identified by Østberg (2003) who illustrated how Islam is embodied during early socialisation where children learn how to pray, that they are not supposed to eat pork and the regulations on gender-integration/ segregation. There was an emphasis on the notion of comfort within the data and how the young women suggested that

their parents may be negotiated into accepting their involvement with the sport if it was confined to gender-segregated spaces. Conversely, the female boxers would be comfortable knowing that their parents had no objections against their involvement. This is illustrated beneath whereby Safiyaah described her motivations to form female-only training sessions.

> *I set them up* [ladies-only training sessions] *myself. I contacted the manager at the gym and asked him if I can do my classes in his space, he was fine with that. It's been a really good response; a lot have been pleased that there is finally something in Bradford for the women because a lot of them and their family's don't feel comfortable if the sessions are being led by a male or if there are other males training* […] *Some of them just feel that little bit more comfortable with a female trainer. I feel it is just a girl's thing how some are more comfortable with a female trainer. They wouldn't want to sweat or shake their body parts in front of a guy. Some of them want to maintain that femininity and only be in the presence of a guy when they are dressed up not when they are sweating and in pain from the training.* **(Interview with Safiyaah)**

This excerpt captures how the young female boxers alongside their family's demonstrated greater acceptance and comfort with regards to training sessions taking place in a gender-segregated environment and being led by a female. There was the view that training within a secluded area of the gym would enable the participants to partake without fear or consternation about who was observing them.

To recap, the data throughout this section has illustrated experiences pertaining to the problematic nature of women training in close vicinity of the male gaze and how it can result in them feeling uncomfortable and unable to fully examine their physical identities. The findings on the potential harassment that young women may have been at risk of encountering underlines the perceptions held by some about the necessity to safeguard them. Furthermore, the claim that there are finally facilities and arrangements in cities like Bradford for women to partake in gender-segregated boxing demonstrates evidence of positive improvement towards accommodating young women in ways that are both religiously and culturally compliant. These contemporary revelations also indicate how there is a burgeoning demand and interest for young women wanting to interact with a physically demand combat sport. Therefore, challenging the gendered and racialised stereotypes which

espouse how young BrAsian women are physically frail and generally disinterested in sports or physical activity (Carrington et al., 1987; Carroll and Hollinshead, 1993).

Sanaa, like Safiyaah, was able to improve female participation in the sport by developing an inclusive environment that consisted of running female-only sessions within a secluded part of the gym. Spatiality was very important and upon my arrival, at another gym located within West Yorkshire, to interview Sanaa, there was no way for me to observe her leading the training session, as it was in the hall upstairs for which male entry was restricted. This set up was discernibly different from what I had witnessed previously as usually sessions of all ages and abilities (junior, senior, boxercise) occur within the same training area of the gym albeit at different times. Following the session, I observed more female BrAsian fighters leave that one class than I had previously ever seen during my 15 years in the sport. This ought to be attributed to the facilities available whereby the fighters do not have to worry about transgressing feminine norms that could subsequently attract the attention of the androcentric gaze. Sanaa described how the inception of her gender-segregated classes improved access for BrAsian women into the sport:

> *I have the ladies class here to try to bring women in, so when a girl asks their parents if they can go boxing and their parents respond with who is doing it then they can say it is a ladies-only class with no men there and it is in a secluded environment where there won't be any men walking in or past. That may be more accepted. As opposed to a situation where a girl tells her parents she is going to a boxing session where she will be the only girl in a gym full of 20/30 guys, that does not quite sound the same. It is all about accommodating our women and giving them better options.* **(Interview with Sanaa)**

Shaw (1994) observed how monitoring the endeavours of young women tends to be prioritised by the *biradari* to safeguard them from spaces where their religious and cultural integrity may be brought into question. The findings gleaned for this study have indicated how some parents were neither too permissive nor too oppressive with regard to controlling their daughters personal projects. They did not robustly contest the young womens involvement in boxing on the basis that conditions pertaining to gender-segregation and appearance (to be examined next) were met. The family objectives at play here were to allow the young women with a degree of freedom and autonomy whilst contemporaneously

protecting them from deviating away from religion and culture. The hegemonic masculine gym culture that has been presented through this section constitutes a threat to the honour of the young women given how it could transpose into men within the gym making sexual advances towards them. Having access to gender-segregated spaces therefore offers the young women a degree of protection from these instances. Notwithstanding how their parents can take comfort in the fact that they are engaging with the sport without the increased risk of establishing premarital relationships or behaving in a way that can damage the symbolic capital of the family. It must, however, be noted that even if gender-segregated spaces are accommodated that those under pressure to avoid gender-integrated spaces are highly likely to be trained inadequately and may not experience a wholesome gym experience. As there are so few women in boxing and historically, women have had to spar with men to improve their skills and prepare for competition (Paradis, 2012). Without the freedom to interact with the other sex, an essential component of training is thus likely to be excluded from preparations.

The analysis undertaken throughout this section has predominantly focused on the problematic nature of the spaces where the sweet science is practiced. It was presented that the boxing gym is an intrinsically masculine context that (re)produces and maintains gender hierarchies given that it is a domain constructed *by* men and *for* men. The enactment of hegemonic expressions of masculinity is not only normal but emboldened by fellow individuals who recognise the gym as a 'safe space' to escape the everyday constraints on their identities in order to speak and behave in an unregulated fashion. It was illustrated, however, that spaces which encourage sexually related language may be exclusionary towards females given the fears and anxieties of encountering the sexual advances of other men and/ or the reputational damage that can occur as a result of being seen and/ or interacting in such spaces. I identified how these factors strongly shaped parental reluctance in permitting their young women to train and compete in such spaces given that their religious and cultural integrity may be at risk alongside the *izzat* of the entire family. The nature of this analysis has, however, been contrastive from that presented by Bourdieu (2001) in *Masculine Domination* who paid disproportionate attention towards explicating *problems* at the expense of any *solutions.* It was identified that gender inequalities vis-à-vis the opportunity to partake in the sport of boxing may be ameliorated through the provision of gender-

segregated accommodations that safeguard young BrAsian women from the androcentric gaze. The participants' accounts indicated that there is room to be cautiously optimistic given the progress being made in providing gender-segregated accommodations for women to box. These are, however, in the embryonic stages and require collective support to be successful. It can, therefore, be concluded that parents are less likely to constrain the involvement of their young women if conditions pertaining to religious and cultural prescriptions are met. This analysis provides an important insight as to how the matter of gender-mixing and masculine spaces can be adequately addressed. The forthcoming section will now focus on the factor of appearance and how there were, in addition to penetrating masculine spaces, concerns about the dress codes that female boxers ought to conform to. The analysis shall illustrate what aspects of the amateur boxing dress code were characterised to be at odds with the religious and cultural requirements of the young women and how these concerns were projected. The ways in which the young women subsequently responded shall also be examined.

6.3.2 Appearance

Dress is used as a signifier for essentialised and polarised identities in dominant paradigms, to explain the lives of young BrAsian women through a binary opposition between traditional and Western, which is often straightforwardly read from appearances. Dwyer (2000) wrote how her study participants used the Asian/ English dichotomy to describe their clothing choices. For instance, in different contexts, Asian clothes were associated with tradition, faith and ethnic culture whilst English clothes were used as signifiers for Westernisation and modernity. For Anwar (1998), the wearing of Western dress by BrAsian women is indicative of abandoning religious and cultural values. There is an abundance of academic evidence that has illuminated the domains of sports and physical activity as spaces of tension, wherein ideas of traditional and modest clothing are replaced by modern, revealing and breathable attire. In turn, previous studies have found how the involvement of young BrAsian women has been restricted by their parents through fear that conforming to the required dress expectations may compromise their *izzat* and religious obligations around modesty (Kay, 2006; Dagkas et al., 2011; Ratna, 2011; Stride and Flintoff, 2017). The conversations that I had with the young women unearthed how they and their parents were criticised by the extended family and the *biradari* for deviating away from expectations around dress and appearance. Ambreen

explained how those who objected to her involvement and decision to compete publicly did so as they perceived how the contest dress requirements for boxers were incompatible with feminine cultural and religious obligations towards modesty:

> *They* [external audiences] *would say stuff like, it is a boy's sport, she is wearing shorts and a vest, her legs are out her arms are out, things like that basically. People were like worried about me not being culturally or Islamically appropriate*. **(Interview with Ambreen)**

Ambreen suggested that revealing her arms and legs by wearing a vest and shorts during training/ competition was frowned upon as it was deemed to be both religiously and culturally inappropriate. Mitra (2009) found how the young women that she observed in India responded to the potential criticisms of others by travelling to the gym wearing a *shalwar kameez* before getting changed into shorts or tracksuits for training. This indicated that the decisions they made on personal appearance were strongly influenced by their extended family and the *biradari* from whom they sought to avoid criticism by dressing appropriately in public settings. Ambreen hit back at the hypothesis that she may be wearing shorts and a vest because of dubious sexual motivations to form/ maintain romantic sexual relations by arguing that it is simply not possible given the nature and requirements of amateur boxing:

> *Obviously, you know what it is like to compete, when you are boxing, when you are in that ring, you look your worst because you are dribbling and you have blood everywhere, sweat everywhere, the last thing you care about is appearance. The last thing you would think about is, do I look good for these guys to check me out, it was silly because that was the community's views that she is only doing it to get boys attention, but it genuinely was not, because you definitely don't look like a superstar or a supermodel when you are in the ring. It was mainly the uniform and the cultural necessities and stuff like that, I think that was the main concerns of the community.* **(Interview with Ambreen)**

Ambreen endeavoured to strengthen the persuasive nature of her argument by resonating the points that she made with my personal experience in the sport. This demonstrated the advantageous nature of my positionality in this research as she felt able to elaborate her account by presupposing that I would understand her perspectives. Ambreen was aware that

taking up boxing would cost her in terms of physical exposure and possible social criticism. Although she did not fold under this criticism and chose to question and resist the assertions that were being projected towards her. Ambreen found it hysterical that shedding blood, sweat and tears within a gym context would be deemed as a method to develop sexual relations and inadvertently claimed that it would, in fact, have the opposite effect, as the rigors of training would undoubtedly lead her to becoming unattractive in the eyes of other men. The data elicited suggested that the young women always felt that they required a justification for their appearance and dress choices. For example, Safiyaah, lay claim that whilst her dress sense was not conventional for a BrAsian woman that, it nonetheless, adhered to the religious requirements on modesty:

> *For me it is clothing that covers you up. If you go in the gym you will see for example girls wearing leggings and a bra. I wouldn't dress like that but can wear something that covers up to my bum and a pair of leggings. That is modest to me. As long as I am covered, that is enough.* **(Interview with Safiyaah)**

It was conspicuously evident to me when I met Safiyaah to interview her how she had exchanged the more 'traditional' ways of observing faith for innovative and contemporary strategies. For example, she wore a bright red 'turban-styled' hijab that was tight fit and more revealing (in terms of face and hair) as opposed to a 'traditional' headscarf. This implied to me how she resorted to a 'tick-box' approach on appearance whereby she covered her head albeit with a fusion of fashion that hybridised being both modern and modest. Franceschelli and O'Brien (2015) observed how clothing styles were an indicator used by their study participants to explain what modern and modesty meant to them. It emerged that being modern signified having a contemporary outlook and wearing Western clothes such as jeans, dresses, leggings, t-shirts and tops. Being modest, on the other hand, was described as the justification behind the practice of covering up to reduce womens perceived sexual allure. Safiyaah demonstrated evidence of religious bricolage which factors the socio-cultural context of modernisation into consideration when religion is (re)interpreted[21]. Dwyer (2000) was told by a study participant: "[by] wearing Westernised clothes … we're covering ourselves and there's nothing wrong" (p. 481). Another claimed, "it doesn't say in the religion … you've

[21] In Islamic studies literature, the interpretation of religious sources against the backdrop of the socio-cultural context is referred to as 'Ijtihad' – independent reasoning (Kamrava, 2006).

got to wear [South] Asian clothes or anything, it just says that you've got to be covered" (p. 481). These assertions can be likened to Safiyaah's approach whereby she justifies her dress sense and interprets modesty not by what clothes she is wearing but how she is wearing them. In other words, if they cover her body and are Islamically-correct then they cannot be refuted.

Zine (2008) suggested that young women are adopting their religious identification as the anchor of their sense of self and as a form of resistance to the social pressure affecting their lifestyles. Therefore, young women like Safiyaah are justifying wearing shirts and tracksuit bottoms on Islamic grounds as they may conform towards religious notions of modesty more than traditional attire like the *shalwar kameez* that can be tight fitting and revealing. This analysis demonstrates the reflexivity undertaken in how a considerable amount of thought has been place upon distinguishing religious prescriptions from cultural practices. The situational logic of opportunity has acknowledged how late modernity has produced an abundance of offers, opportunities and choices for young people (Archer, 2007). Walseth and Strandbu (2014) have argued, therefore, that the self-identity's of young people are not formulated through adherence to tradition "but shaped reflexively in the middle of a confusing mess of opportunities and offers" (p. 496). Put differently, as the demands and necessity to become reflexive grows, the significance of doxa wanes. Confronted with alternative ways of existing has thus enabled young BrAsians to revisit and appraise traditions and stated truths through the "re-interpretation and re-negotiation of Islam as a discursive tradition[22]" (Walseth and Strandbu, 2014, p. 496). Safiyaah expressed to me, as our conversation progressed, how the contentious issue of appearance was a reason behind why there were not many female BrAsians involved with boxing. She anecdotally drew upon a national tour that she had previously undertaken and how some other young women revealed to her that their parents had restricted them from boxing because of the dress codes:

> *I did a tour last year and spoke about my story. Some girls were like to me, we want to box but we are scared to tell our parents and go and do it. Some of them are just scared but they just need to get on with it. They and their parents are just scared about what*

[22] "An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present" (Asad, 2009, p. 20).

> *our relatives and the community will say really. But I have done it and we have* [immediate family] *not cared about what anyone will say.* **(Interview with Safiyaah)**

The young women involved in this research, however, were not anxious about engaging in dialogue with their parents. Rather the contrary, they were encouraged by their mothers and fathers based on the health, wellbeing and personal development reasons that I presented earlier in this chapter. Safiyaah revealed an abundance of instances where she would be questioned by extended relatives and the *biradari* about training in masculine spaces and wearing sports kit. I questioned her about how she coped and responded. Safiyaah stated that her supportive parents constituted an emotional anchor for her, as they were solely interested in her development and wellbeing despite being it at odds with the values and beliefs of the *biradari*. Not only did this firm support from her parents enable her to continue with the sport but it also conditioned her emotional capital in developing the ability to withstand the tropes being aimed at her:

> *I have a very good* [immediate] *family. If something happens, we will just laugh it off* […] *I'm not bothered about these things because I have got very thick skin* […] *I have one goal that I am determined to get on with. I don't have time to stop and respond to every little thing people say otherwise I won't get to where I need to be.* **(Interview with Safiyaah)**

Sanaa, like Safiyaah, also shared a similar perspective by claiming that she was able to protect herself from the perspectives of others because of the strong support network that surrounded her and how it strengthened her emotional resolve:

> *Alhamdullilah, I have got a very good team behind me, it just hurts me why some people hold these views. I have thick skin, but these little stupid comments can put people off.* **(Interview with Sanaa)**

There are discernible similarities between the two excerpts presented above given the masculine stance that they both adopted to 'posture' and conceal their emotions by suggesting that they both have "thick skins". This is against a backdrop of gendered discourses which frames women as 'more emotional' than men (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2005) and reinforces traditional gendered stereotypes. By claiming to have "thick skin", Safiyaah and Sanaa suggested that they both have the emotional resources and capabilities (capital), to

suppress their feelings and remain stoic in the face of vulnerability. In other words, they feel obliged to 'suck it up' and 'toughen up'. This is a type of behaviour that is not biologically hereditary but rather a learned human performance of hypermasculinity to avoid the consequences of being framed as soft or feminine. Masculinity was, therefore, drawn upon as a defensive mechanism to extinguish the criticisms that were being projected towards Safiyaah and Sanaa through the display of emotional robustness. This would have entailed processes of internal conflict wherein the young women endeavoured to conceal their 'true' feelings in order to manage and preserve social expectations and outward perceptions. It would not have been deemed conventional for a trained pugilist to burst into tears at the first sight of disapproval and, doing so, would have just merely substantiated the critics perspectives about the young women not having the character to partake in the pugilistic trade. This argument will be developed further in the forthcoming section when I elaborate on how women have to 'prove themselves' by serving longer and more gruelling apprenticeships to gain acceptance as boxers. Demonstrating emotional restraint and resolve became a consistent issue for Sanaa who had become accustomed to maintaining her calm and composure amidst the prejudicial and provocative remarks that were being projected at her, for example, on her dress choice:

> […] *If someone says to me 'why are you wearing that?', I will just be like 'thank you for your comment, no, really, thank you'. It will put them in a position where they don't know how to respond. 'Thank you for that have a wonderful day', what can they say back? They have tried to insult you and you have killed them with kindness.* **(Interview with Sanaa)**

The strategy employed by Sanaa was to refrain from being pugnacious as others ridiculed her dress and appearance. The utilisation of this emotional capital was to remain in command of the situation whilst contemporaneously making the other look and feel foolish for their effort(s) to demean her. Often, her unexpected response of not engaging in an argument would truncate the conversation as the others would feel taken aback and not having anything to add. Hochschild (1979) has described emotional capital as knowledge about feelings rules, appropriate to different situations, in effectively meeting practical and interactional demands of those situations. Sanna exemplified her emotional capital by effectively managing her emotions through masking and pretending about her authentic

feelings (Cottingham, 2017). The ability to feel and manage one's feelings is constitutes the emotional capital - itself embedded in the habitus and thus a mix of conscious and nonconscious ways of being and doing that become habitual and natural to the well-socialized individual (Cottingham, 2017). Habitus, in an emotional sense, refers to the "socially constituted, prevailing ways of feeling and emoting, as well as the embodied and axiomatic understandings and norms about feelings and their expression" (Gould, 2009, p. 10).

Possessing emotional capital, however, is not the moral nor the sustainable solution towards improving the experiences and longevity of young women in the sport, as it individualises their problems and negates any structural and/ or institutional obligations to address their respective cultural and religious demands. The study participants had identified this issue during the struggles that they faced in generating wider inclusion for young BrAsian women in boxing. They drew upon a plethora of examples whilst describing how the institutional dress codes of wearing a vests and shorts during competition were deemed to be at odds with *biradari* expectations regarding how young women should adhere to religious and cultural expectations on appearance and modesty. These pressures ultimately inspired Ambreen in seeking institutional transformations from the domestic governing body, England Boxing, previously known as the Amateur Boxing Association (ABA). Ambreen sought an inclusive dress policy for competition that would accommodate the religious and cultural needs of prospective and currently female Muslim boxers:

> […] *What we did then was we contacted the ABA and asked if it would be possible to change the uniform, because on the end of the day, any sort of job that you go into has a uniform or some sort of dress code. Being a boxer, wearing shorts and a vest is like a uniform, so we contacted the ABA if there was anything we could do in terms of changing the uniform and at that time they were sort of against it because there wasn't enough girls and women competing at the time and there wasn't a demand for the change. As the time went along, they changed their mind and allowed us to wear leggings and longer shorts. They didn't do it straight away, but as time went on and more girls came into the sport with these requests, that's when they decided that they need to change it. Which was actually quite nice because not many would do that. Eventually down the line, the change of uniform meant that girls were allowed to wear leggings and tights underneath their shorts to ensure that the legs were covered. They*

could wear a t-shirt underneath the vest, to cover up the arms. Now you are actually allowed to wear the hijab as well if you want to cover your hair whilst competing. **(Interview with Ambreen)**

The wearing of the hijab remains a hotly disputed matter in the West. It has often been perceived by Islamophobes as a sign of subordination and subservience (Walseth and Strandbu, 2014). BrAsian women, however, maintain numerous reasons for wearing it whether as a display of resistance or as an embodiment of faith and an expression of what religious women perceive to be the correct way of covering their bodies in this world (Pfister, 2011). It was after a long and sustained period of campaigning in addition to many institutional deliberations when Ambreen succeeded in her efforts to get the ABA to introduce modest alternatives to their competition dress requirements. Meaning that female BrAsian fighters would be permitted to box whilst covering their skin and wearing a hijab. Dagkas and Benn (2006) have suggested that whilst sports and physical activity per se are not problematic, situational factors regarding the participating environments can be such as mandatory immodest dress codes. There is an implicit element that cannot be ignored here given how the adaptation of institutional policies (such as England Boxing's decision on modest attire) are done so whilst remaining conscious to the public image of the sport. As combatting inequality, marginalisation and social inclusion are political goals in their own rights – and can change the overall image and aesthetic appeal of amateur boxing. The pressures imposed were evidently instrumental towards achieving institutional change, as England Boxing would have exposed themselves to accusations that they were marginalising and excluding BrAsian women from the sport if they did not respond accordingly. In sum, the institutional adaptations were religiously and culturally compliant and thus responsive to *biradari* concerns about the ways in which young women are expected to uphold expectations of modesty.

The analysis sought to examine how and why revealing dress codes and immodest appearances underpinned the criticisms projected young women in boxing. It was identified throughout this section that the support they enjoyed from their parents (because of the reasons presented earlier in this chapter) was instrumental in aiding them to withstand the opinions of their extended relatives and the *biradari*. I argued that the transgression from gendered expectations around dress and appearance largely produced erroneous concerns

and suspicions that the young women would eventually end up engaging in pre-marital relationships and sexual promiscuity. This would, I averred, have repercussions for the *izzat* of the entire family. There were some compelling and innovative responses to these issues, for instance, Ambreen expressed how boxing would be the last place that she would resort to if she sought to establish sexual relationships given the (unattractive and unfeminine-like) blood, sweat and tears that pugilist are required to shed. The young women demonstrated great emotional resilience, as they restrained themselves displaying any outburst of anger, frustration or sadness whilst they were staunchly belittled by others. They suggested that it was the unwavering support that they received from their parents which gave them the resolve to remain stoic in the face of adversity.

Having emotional capital, I argued, was not an ethical or sustainable solution for the young womens longevity in boxing and that there needed to be institutional changes to enable them to train and compete whilst having the choice to uphold the gendered expectations of corporeal modesty. Accommodating religious and cultural mandates around dress is an important starting point for alleviating parental concerns, as it minimises the young womens chances of deviating from expectations around appropriate femininity. To conclude, it has emerged that the young women involved with this research have demonstrated increasing levels of reflexivity to negotiate and navigate their opportunities as amateur boxers. They have ruptured the intergenerational transmission of norms, values and beliefs through acknowledging them as either outdated, flawed or antithetical to their personal concerns and projects. This has predominantly occurred through the differentiation between cultural and religious prescriptions, as requirements pertaining to Islam were foregrounded at the expense of cultural practices that were often seen as obstructive and therefore sidelined. This was exemplified on the decisions around dress codes and how the young women adopted the 'tick-box' approach for evaluating their adherence towards religion. For instance, if a tracksuit covered the entire body, then it was fit for purpose irrespective of it being characterised as Western attire. It was argued that traditional clothing like the *shalwar kameez* that is often worn by older generations may not necessarily be religiously compliant, as they can be tight and revealing and therefore not always suitable. This analysis, in sum, further substantiates the argument that the prevailing doxa on gendered expectations is suffering at the hands of growing reflexivity wherein the young people make informed decisions about what they want

to do in their lives. The unquestioned is being questioned and popular opinion is no longer as popular.

6.4 Conclusion

This final analysis chapter explored parental constraint and support by examining the narratives of three female fighters and how their religious, ethnic and gendered identities intersected and subsequently contributed towards their experiences of prejudice, marginalisation and exclusion in boxing. The data suggested how the young womens' motivations to box were linked to yielding the prospective health benefits. In other words, they sought the cathartic and liberating experience of training and competing, which offered them a 'sense of escape' and 'relief' from the crippling effects of racism and bullying, that they were encountering in their personal lives. The chapter highlighted how their engagement was enabled through the unwavering support that they enjoyed from their parents despite the criticisms that were projected at them by their extended families and the *biradari* for supposedly transgressing gendered expectations. The analysis demonstrated how the boxers' perceived and understood their parents to be prioritising the interests of the family (for example, the wellbeing of the children) at the expense of their symbolic capital. In conjunction to the support that the young women received from their parents, I argued how they, themselves, also engaged in reflexive deliberation to disrupt the intergenerational flows of transmission which endeavoured to inculcate them with norms, values and beliefs that were antithetical to their personal projects. Furthermore, I examined the consternation felt by relatives and friends and how the young women responded to charges about training in masculine spaces and maintaining a physical appearance that diverged from religious and cultural conventions. To conclude, this chapter was bound together by an explication on the role that the parents played in either enabling or constraining agency. Based on the boxers' accounts, they had the final say on whether the young women could (or should box) and their decisions tended to align with best interests of their child(ren).

Conclusion

“Other things may change us, but we start and end with the family”

(Anthony Brandt)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the arguments and contributions to knowledge emerging from this thesis. The research questions are not answered sequentially throughout but rather the salient findings from this study are brought together to highlight the key conclusions. The opening section incorporates a summary of each analytical chapter whilst contemporaneously highlighting the significance of the arguments within the broader academic context and the contributions to knowledge. This thesis has demonstrated throughout how the boxers' perceived and understood parental influence towards their engagement in the sport of boxing. The findings highlighted how parents either enabled or constrained their child(ren)s personal projects. Based on the boxers' accounts, it was argued that parents engaged in reflexive deliberation, which allowed them to evaluate their child(ren)s personal projects, with reference to objective structural and cultural powers, and what they (the parents) cared about the most, before concluding on whether they should promote or prevent their child(ren)s involvement in boxing. Interpretations of 'good' and responsible parenting, aspirations for their children, household circumstances, personal motivations and the norms, values and expectations of living amongst the *biradari* were all issues that intersected and were recognised by the boxers as the most influential factors underpinning the levels of parental support that they experienced. The boxers lay claim how their parents were mostly acting in the best interests of their children, although their practices and approaches appeared to be, at times, ambiguous, unclear, contradictory and contested. Family relationships and dynamics often endured fraught moments as deliberations were undertaken against the backdrop of ideas around how the family ought to be 'done' and 'displayed'. These were inseparably infused by religious, cultured, gendered and classed beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions.

7.2 Key Arguments and Contributions to Knowledge

7.2.1 Understanding Parental Influence

This study sought to examine the influence that parents had on shaping their child(ren)s perspectives towards and engagement within boxing. The research questions, therefore, explored how the boxers' perceived and understood the ways in which their parents either supported or constrained their participation with the sport. The boxers' accounts illuminated

how there were several factors that shaped the levels of support that parents were willing to provide. These included the parents' personal motivations, the aspirations that they had for their children, how the parents valued boxing and communicated those values, and also, the influence that being located amongst the extended family and the *biradari* had towards parents supporting or constraining their child(ren)s personal projects. This research predominantly obtained evidence from the boxers who were able to offer insights into the reasoning of their parents and how the support that they provided was always contextually specific and shaped by reflexive deliberation. The chapters that undertook the data analysis to address the research questions constituted the following structure (1) *The 'Archetypal Trajectory': Family Expectations* (chapter five) which focused on cases and/ or reasons for constraint; (2) *The (Overly) Supportive Family* (chapter six) which analysed cases and/ or reasons for support, and lastly; (3) *'Females Can Fight Too': - Negotiating Gender, Culture and Religion* (chapter seven) which examined cases and/ or reasons for support or constraint through the lens of the female experience. These analysis chapters were weaved together through the thematic thread on how the boxers perceived, understood and explained the reasoning of their parents who shaped their perspectives towards and engagement within the sport of boxing.

Chapter five examined how the study participants had been constrained from partaking in and/ or making any serious commitments to the sport of boxing by their parents. Their parents withheld any support or encouragement and instead expected them to align their personal projects with the 'archetypal trajectory'. This referred to numerous (and often overlapping) reference points such as the necessity to attain a university qualification, secure a respectable job and then prepare for marriage and family life. Put differently, they were expected to follow the linear and deterministic visions that their parents had for them. These expectations were predominantly shaped by the family operating as an open system with permeable boundaries to the norms, values and beliefs of the *biradari*. The study participants explained how the parental constraint that they experienced was largely shaped by their parents doing what they thought was best for their child(ren). There was also an attentiveness, at times, towards how the family practices would be displayed amongst the external audiences of the extended family and the *biradari.* For some, this factor was significant for imposing and justifying constraint. I presented how elder generations have

generally maintained little knowledge of the sports and leisure domain and/ or hold it in low value. Historically, the first-generation of migrants arrived *en masse* with the intention to work, save money and then return home to Pakistan. Sports and leisure were deemed as antithetical to this objective and thus never valued or appreciated as serious occupations. This chapter illustrated how these values remain enduring amongst some parents and how they are being transmitted to their children through the reorientation of priorities towards jobs that are deemed to be respectable and in their best interests. I found how parental reflexiveness, based on the boxers' accounts, towards the appraisals of external audiences was a prevalent theme as they remained attentive towards the feedback that extended relatives and the *biradari* may provide on issues like the child(ren)s accomplishments; the ability of the family to sustain *biradari* traditions by hosting extravagant and ostentatious weddings and also; whether the children were adequately prepared for married life. Finch (2007) argued that the essence of family displays are to demonstrate that "these are my family relationships, and they work" (p. 73). She suggested that family displays are primarily concerned with communicating meanings towards those within the immediate family unit. However, I found throughout this chapter (and the thesis) how the external audiences (extended relatives and the *biradari*) operated as the primary observers and thus yielded a significant influence towards shaping family practices.

Chapter six examined the importance for parents to provide their child(ren) aspiring to engage in and/ or make any serious commitments to boxing with the necessary support. I argued how the 'Amir Khan Effect' had been instrumental for enticing both younger and older generations located amongst the *biradari* towards appreciating boxing as a serious pathway wherein symbolic status and materialistic success was a possibility. I developed my argument by laying claim how the knowledge and value of sports and physical activity (like boxing) can be improved amongst the *biradari* through the positive representation of role models. This has the potential to contribute towards dispelling stereotypes that trivialise the value of sports like boxing. Another argument throughout this chapter centred around a sense of naivety from parents supporting their child(ren) who foregrounded hardwork, dedication and commitment as the key determinants to success whilst downplaying structural and institutional forces. I suggested that this was perilous amidst the prevailing backdrop of Islamophobia that was operating across every cornerstone of society. The remainder of

chapter six was structured by the reporting of boxers' experiences regarding the parental support that they enjoyed which included: parents providing emotional encouragement and practical aid through challenging periods such as 'making weight'; financial support that enabled them to continue boxing without having the obligation to find safe and secure employment; and lastly, protection from overt experiences of Islamophobia at the local amateur boxing club.

Chapter seven analysed cases and/ or reasons for parental support or constraint through an examination of the female experience. The young women interviewed for this study highlighted how their parents offered unwavering support, as they foregrounded 'good' and responsible parenting over the perceptions of other people. This chapter illustrated how the boxers' perceived and understood their parents attitudes towards them taking up the sport as very encouraging to facilitate their physical and psychological recovery from the crippling effects of racism, bullying and broader health problems that they were encountering in their personal lives. The wellbeing of the young women was prioritised and the parents did not only support them but also defended them from the criticisms that were being projected by others. Parental influence herein was seen as invaluable by the young women for empowering them to withstand the appraisals of extended relatives and the *biradari*. There were, however, also stories provided by the interviewees about how some other parents had constrained their daughters from partaking in boxing based on the attentiveness towards community perceptions combined with interpretations of 'good' and responsible parenting. These examples described how some other parents had reservations that their daughters involvement in boxing would lead to them transgressing sacrosanct religious and cultural expectations given the 'immodest' dress codes and requirements to train within masculine spaces. There was a fear that any transgressions would be met with prejudice towards the young women and how the parents would be characterised as failing their child(ren). Yet again, how the family would be displayed amongst external audiences constituted an important factor given the reputational damage that a family could face if their daughters were suspected and/ or accused of deviating away from gendered expectations. In this chapter, I observed based on the variations in parental support, that the cultural concepts of *izzat* and *sharam* were not fixed, static or immutable but dynamic, evolving and constantly negotiated in different ways depending on different situations, for example, through the

prioritisation of the wellbeing of the young women. These findings starkly contrasted with others (e.g. Hamilton, 2018; Bhopal, 2019) who have utilised these concepts to produce deterministic and universal discourses that represent BrAsian families and communities through homogenous, essentialist and stereotypical terms. To summarise, the stories of the three young women involved with this study disrupt the gendered and racialised discourses that fail to recognise the diversity of BrAsian womens agency and erroneously portray them as being oppressed figures of victimhood and subservient to men.

How then can we understand the influence that parents have on shaping their child(ren)s experiences in boxing? There has been a heterogeneity of explanations offered throughout this thesis in addressing this overarching research question. Why have some parents supported their child(ren)s personal projects whilst others have constrained them? Why have some cared about the perceptions of external audiences whilst others have not? Why have parents made contrasting decisions based on interpretations of 'good' and responsible parenting? Why have parents in similar circumstances not responded in a uniform fashion? To answer these questions, I would argue that an understanding of reflexivity sheds light on the variation in individuals' responses to novel social situations. I have mentioned earlier how the boxers perceived and understood their parents influence as contextually specific and predominantly shaped by reflexive deliberation, which entailed them evaluating their child(ren)s personal projects, with reference to objective structural and cultural circumstances, and what they (the parents) personally cared about the most, to conclude on whether they should either promote or prevent their child(ren)s involvement in boxing. Reflexivity, in this study, entailed a multitude of inseparable factors, that did not always have equal weighting and the effects were dependent upon context, such as the households socio-economic circumstances, established and enduring values about respectable jobs, cultural and gendered expectations, the perceptions of the extended family and *biradari*, the child(ren)s overall wellbeing and interpretations of 'good' and responsible parenting. Despite these factors (to some extent) being relevant to the boxers and their parents, the different agential responses and courses of action suggested how they are all heterogeneous subjects that seek very different outcomes, despite sharing similar structural social positions. Hegemonic discourses, therefore, that characterise the beliefs and practices of BrAsian families and communities as static and permanent are brought under question with these

findings highlighting how the lack of uniformity amongst parents and their children suggests that they are active rather than passive subjects in defining and/ or adjusting their personal projects without being universally tied down to any dogmas of faith and/ or culture.

Family image has been a strong and reoccurring theme throughout this thesis when examining how the decisions that parents arrived upon were shaped. Whether they were encouraging their child(ren) to spend the majority of their time focusing on university and securing respectable jobs or supporting them towards becoming boxing champions. To elaborate from the previous paragraph, however, this has not been an immutable priority as demonstrated in the final analysis chapter wherein some parents suspended caring about family image and the perceptions of others to prioritise the rehabilitation of their child(ren) by encouraging their engagement within boxing. In other words, they demonstrated an assertive agency that *family comes first.* As Archer (2007) has argued, the deliberative process is an emotionally charged one rather than being a simple exercise of instrumental rationality. This is because our emotions (as distinct moods) operate as commentaries for our concerns which supply the "shoving power" leading to action or the resistance resulting in inaction (Archer, 2007, p. 13). Emotions motivate us to act in certain ways. They are highly discriminating evaluative commentaries to events and circumstances and how people negotiate them is telling is telling because it reveals something about their situations and ultimate concerns (Sayer, 2010). Moreover, it was also examined how parental interpretations of having a "family which works" (Finch, 2007, p. 73) were not always contingent upon the confirmation of others. Whilst some families may hold what other people think or say in high regard – they also have the ability to temporarily suspend caring about what impressions their family practices emit to address more immediate priorities. An important distinction to make here is how temporary suspension is different from 'unsuccessful' displays. For instance, with the latter, parents may work towards creating a particular impression and this may not be accepted or validated by external audiences. The conceptual development here centres around the family being reflexive to their social situation(s) and becoming momentarily uninterested about how their family is being displayed in order to address more paramount issues.

7.2.2 Parental Motivations and The Aspirations for Their Children

Parenting is an intimate, intensive and intuitive endeavour infused with religious, cultured, gendered and classed beliefs, values, attitudes and dispositions. Despite the heterogeneity in approaches and perspectives, the boxers believed that their parents were always acting towards their best interests. Chapter five presented a historical insight on how elder generations felt that the challenges experienced as migrants had limited their prospects of upward social mobility (Brah, 1996). They, however, believed that subsequent generations would not (and should not) have to endure similar social constraints and that it was incumbent upon them to take advantage of their citizenship rights by pursuing a coveted Western education or striving for success in boxing. I argued that parental support was a necessary requirement for parents getting the best out of their child(ren) and increasing the likelihood of success amidst their personal projects. This was shown in chapter six when Saif explained how it became unsustainable for him to continue partaking in boxing given the absence of financial, emotional and practical support from his parents as they had other aspirations for him that lay beyond the confines of the boxing gym. This subsequently led to him evaluating his social circumstances and deciding to abandon his personal project of pursuing a career in boxing.

Understanding the relationship between parental motivations and the aspirations that they had for their child(ren) was also examined throughout the thesis. I drew upon the question previously advanced by Brown (2018) who asked: “is it possible that parents could get something out of this?” (p. 1499). In other words, are there also personal incentives for parents as they make investments and provide allowances towards their child(ren)s personal projects? The analysis suggested how some boxers’ perceived their parents as remaining mindful towards personally benefiting from the achievements of their child(ren)s personal projects, as perceptions of family image were generally held in high regard presuming that there were no mitigating issues. There was an implicit view about how the overall family image could be enhanced through the parents discernibly nurturing their child(ren) and providing them with their unwavering support that would facilitate them in striving and achieving in their respective personal projects. To elaborate, the young individuals would profit from the materialistic fruits and symbolic recognition of their accomplishments whilst the parents would enjoy the glorified reputation of being the architects of their child(ren)s

successes. The logic here was that if the children were successful, then the parents would be characterised as successful and praised accordingly. Likewise, if the children failed then the parents would subsequently be perceived as failures. As Hirschhorn and Loughead (2000) have reminded us, parents often believe that their child(ren)s performances are a direct reflection on themselves and the parenting they have provided for them.

This argument was substantiated by drawing upon the Bourdieusian perspective on how capital is accumulated, converted and amalgamated. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) have argued, symbolic capital is constituted when specific forms of economic, social, cultural or within the context of this thesis, physical capital are recognised as legitimate bases for claiming prestige, respect and/ or authority within a given social field. The ongoing evaluation between the 'examiner(s)' and the 'examined' was yet again brought to the fore wherein extended relatives and the *biradari* set the standard and appraised whether a 'family had done well or not' against the backdrop of cultural norms and religious interpretations. I progressed my argument by situating symbolic capital alongside Finch's (2007) displaying families which postulates that "families need to be 'displayed' as well as 'done' (p. 66). I argued that reflexiveness towards family practices entailed historical socio-cultural significance given that elder generations of migrants constantly appraised their own (and others) family displays to communicate 'back home' in Pakistan about how successful their transition to the UK had been. To summarise, I argue that it is erroneous to understand parental support through the narrow lens of self-gratuity and personal interests. They may contemporaneously seek the positive reputation associated with interpretations of 'good' and responsible parenting, however, this does not supersede their benign aspirations for wanting the best for their child(ren) through approaches that they deem to be the most apt. This argument was substantiated by the boxers' accounts who suggested how their parents demonstrated the autonomy to temporarily suspend fretting about how the family was being 'displayed' to act in the best interests of their child(ren) (e.g. through supporting their daughters involvement in boxing).

7.2.3 Risky Family Practices and 'Unintended' Audiences

Brian Heaphy (2011) observed how the risks of being judged as failing to 'display' family appropriately have been especially high for lone-parent families given the explicit deviation from norms about the 'good' and 'proper' family that functions through unity between parents whilst foregrounding care and responsibility for their child(ren). For Heaphy (2011) family displays may, at times, be misunderstood, 'unsuccessful' and rejected if they do not align with cultural ideals of the desirable family. Likewise, Dermott and Seymour (2011) have put forth that family displays may not always emit positive impressions about family relationships and "if displays are not successful then the cost may be high" (p. 109). The theme of risks associated with the 'doing' and 'displaying' of family practices has been under-explored within the literature yet it was one that recurred and interweaved throughout chapter five. The three empirical cases identified included: how the foregrounding of pretentious displays, which seek to impress external audiences, with false representations about the ways in which the family functions risked damaging intra-family relations; how 'unsuccessful' displays risked tarnishing the *izzat* of the family; and lastly, how the ways in which family is 'done' (or not 'done') risked deviating from interpretations of religious obligations. These cases provided detailed empirical contributions towards enriching the current superficial knowledge on the relevance of risk in family practices.

Finch (2007) expressed the importance of 'degrees of intensity' during family displays and how, depending on certain circumstances, that it may be the case whereby family relationships ought to be accentuated. There was, however, no recognition about the prospective risks and repercussions that the intensification of displays could have on family relationships. In chapter five, I identified how the pursuit of education qualifications, respectable jobs, materialistic wealth and symbolic status were seen by some parents as ways to convey narratives to external audiences about the achievements of the family. I argued, however, that pursuing pretentious displays risked rupturing family bonds and relationships. As greater attention was being paid towards family image rather than the implications that such parental approaches may have on the relationship with the child and his/ her emotions and opinions towards the extended family and the *biradari*. The analysis also suggested how the planning and execution of family displays was not always done in unison with every family member concurring.

Heaphy (2011) argued how those families who display in alignment with cultural ideals and hegemonic discourses of the 'normal' family are more likely to be "recognised, validated and legitimated" (p. 30, emphasis original). The boxers' perceived and understood how parental attentiveness towards the appraisals of external audiences were deemed to have a strong influence on shaping family practices, as identified in chapter five. The prospective risks of producing an 'unsuccessful' display evoked deliberation between Qayoom and his mother wherein they collectively decided that the multitude of complex and overlapping factors relating to household circumstances, gendered expectations (that he should assume the role of the breadwinner), social and economic conditions, family image and perceptions of 'good' parenting meant that he had to abandon his personal project of pursuing boxing for an occupation that his mother viewed as both respected and financially reliable. Finch (2011) has acknowledged a criticism of family displays by asserting "my article did not explore, to any depth, the possibility of 'unsuccessful' or 'misrecognised' displays. This is an area which would repay further development" (p. 202). Scholars have responded by examining the implications for families, upon the occasions, wherein their displays have been judged as 'unsuccessful' by external audiences (Gabb, 2011, Heaphy, 2011, Walsh, 2015). Their inquiries, however, were limited to focusing on the aftermaths of 'unsuccessful' displays. This study contributes towards the conceptual debates on 'unsuccessful' displays by arguing how families possess the ability to anticipate the possibilities of producing 'unsuccessful' displays through engaging in reflexive deliberation and thus respond by taking strategic measures to mitigate the prospective risks and chances. I maintain the argument, however, that despite parents contemporaneously seeking the reputation associated with interpretations of 'good' and responsible parenting and making decisions to avoid 'unsuccessful' displays that their underlying intentions are wanting the best for their child(ren).

Chapter five examined the case study of Yusuf who was discouraged by his parents from making any serious commitments to boxing. His mother and father had their own occupational aspirations for him that would enable him to become a family-man and eventually assume the role of the breadwinner. These aspirations would have been jeopardised if Yusuf spent much of his time at the boxing gym rather than preparing to become a police officer. Yusuf agreed with his parents and his response drew upon the language of Islam to put the wishes of his parents first. He implied that it was his religious

obligation to reciprocate the love and affection that they had provided for him by obeying them. In doing so, Yusuf demonstrated how 'doing' family overlapped with 'doing' religion given that his outlook of obeying his family and responding to their needs constituted remaining on the 'right path' and not deviating from Islamic prescriptions by going 'astray'. Such resistance to parental orthodoxy may have resulted in him feeling like a "fish out of water" by rebelling against the taken-for-granteds which hold parental views as authoritative. In sum, it was the possible risks of deviating away from interpretations of religious mandates which shaped Yusuf's decision to concur with the aspirations that his parents had for him. The empirical cases analysed throughout chapter five illustrated the relevance of risk on family practices. This thesis has identified how risk is contextually specific and may operate in a discursive and interweaving fashion yet its pertinence must not be downplayed whilst striving towards gaining wholesome insights and understandings about family dynamics, relationships and practices.

Dermott and Seymour (2011) asserted that "the requirement to display family may involve a wide range of potential audiences that are not restricted to family members" (p. 17). There has been considerable scholarly attention towards understanding occasions where family displays may be rejected, misunderstood or characterised as 'unsuccessful' (Seymour, 2011; Lowson and Arber, 2014; Walsh, 2015). This has not been the same, however, for considering the multitude of prospective audiences. Walsh (2015) rightfully asserted that whilst Finch (2007) emphasised family displays as being primarily concerned with providing meaning towards those within the family unit that external audiences requires further investigation. I have attended to these assertions by illuminating the significance of extended relatives and the *biradari* as external audiences who yield the influence to shape family practices. An underlying assumption throughout, however, has centred on families generally being aware about the wide range of potential audiences that may be observing their displays. Often, the literature on displays has presented the concept, to the extent, that the families maintain control over 'who observes what'. The analysis in the fifth chapter extended the debate around audiences by postulating how family displays may be at risk of being witnessed by 'unintended' audiences who see a partial view without any deep context. This may subsequently mean that they are misinterpreted, miscommunicated and/ or rejected as 'acceptable' by onlookers who make ethnocentric interpretations and produce stereotypical

generalisations about BrAsian family practices. On the topic of how display works, Finch (2007, p. 73, emphasis original) suggested that the following questions of "*how* displaying is done, and to *whom*?" would benefit from further empirical investigation. This thesis contributes towards addressing these questions by presenting the idea of 'unintended' audiences.

7.2.4 'Female Really Can Fight Too'

Few studies have examined the involvement and experiences of BrAsian women in boxing (Mitra, 2009; Kipnis and Caudwell, 2015; Tjønndal and Hovden, 2021). These studies suggested how, in some communities, that it is not deemed socially acceptable for BrAsian women to box competitively due to conflicting and contradictory social influences that have constrained the young women's agential capacities. Such assertions have contributed towards the perpetuation of gendered and racialised reductionist accounts and stereotypes like "Asians are women not interested in sports" and how "Muslim girls are forbidden by their parents from participating" (Fleming, 1994, Walseth, 2006, p. 75; Ahmad et al., 2020). Previously, religious and cultural factors have also been characterised as barriers towards participation with institutional issues around inflexible dress codes and the organisation of training spaces, on the one hand; and the role that families and communities play in regulating the choices made by young women, on the other (Tjønndal and Hovden, 2021). Young BrAsian women have, consequently, been characterised as oppressed with little agential powers and subservient to patriarchal practices. I was interested in examining how the family, extended relatives and the *biradari* interlocked and influenced how the young women involved with this study experienced boxing. I examined the narratives of three female fighters who had a breadth of experience and great symbolic status as both competitors and trainers to ensure that my analysis was nuanced, multi-layered and information-rich. The findings suggested how they were active rather than passive agents in defining their personal projects and negotiating their choices. This was facilitated by the support that they enjoyed from their parents. I argued how the achievements of the young women in boxing disrupt stereotypes that have generally been constructed through the essentialist lens of culture about BrAsian females being disinterested towards sports and physical activity (Carrington and McDonald, 2001).

As I mentioned previously, the parents of the young women were influential in promoting their daughters engagement in boxing and demonstrated the autonomy to temporarily suspend their attentiveness towards how their family was being 'displayed' amongst external audiences. This would enable the young women to glean the remedial benefits whilst alleviating the crippling effects of racism, bullying and overall health problems that were marring the quality of their lives. In other words, the parents foregrounded the wellbeing of their daughters based on their social circumstances and what mattered to them the most. This was not without sacrifice, however, as some parents that supported their daughters in profiting from the health benefits of boxing were required to withstand criticisms and ultimately forfeit their own symbolic capital, amongst certain groups, to facilitate the accumulation of their daughters physical and emotional capital. To summarise, the boxers understood how their parents were aware of their intentions to train and compete (as they had predominantly encouraged them) and this emboldened the parents in privileging matters relating to their daughters health and wellbeing rather than worrying about gendered expectations of appropriate femininity.

The young women in this study justified their involvement in boxing by drawing upon the 'language of Islam' which aided them in differentiating between cultural interferences and religious prescriptions. Islam, as Walseth (2006) has argued, has been an important framework for justifying physical activity presuming that it is undertaken in accordance with religious mandates. I argued that this was predominantly down to the young women demonstrating increasing levels of reflexivity to negotiate their opportunities as amateur boxers. They were, therefore rupturing the intergenerational transmission of norms, values and beliefs by acknowledging and ignoring what they deemed as flawed and antithetical to their personal projects. In sum, the prevailing doxa on gendered expectations was disrupted at the hands of burgeoning reflexivity wherein the young women began to make more assertive decisions about what they wanted to do with their lives. As I argued, the unquestioned began to be questioned. The interviewees revealed how other young women had taken similar approaches in negotiating their involvement by seeking institutional adaptations that would accommodate their religious requirements on dress codes and gender-segregated training spaces. This had profound influence on gaining the support of

their parents who initially maintained reservations that their daughters engagement may conflict with religious and cultural expectations.

In *Masculine Domination,* Bourdieu (2001) mostly highlighted problems and formulated critiques but offered few solutions. As Mottier (2002) observed, Bourdieu offered a "gloomy explanation of the permanence of gender inequality, but no answer to the crucial questions of how this order can be transformed or how women [or men themselves] can stop being accomplices [or perpetuators] to the symbolic domination" (p. 354). I argued that this resulted from the general Bourdieusian oeuvre that errs on the side of social (re)production rather than social transformation whilst failing to capture expressions of resistance, agency and reflexivity. Based on the boxers' accounts, it was evident how some parents were concerned that enabling their daughters involvement in boxing could damage their *izzat* amongst external audiences through accusations that they were failing to uphold 'good' and responsible methods of parenting. This research has shed light on how female participation can be negotiated, justified and permitted by parents presuming that institutional adaptations are made which enable clubs/ venues to accommodate the religious obligations of the participants. This would subsequently protect the parents *izzat* from any undue criticisms about their daughters choices and behaviours.

I averred how it was not ethical nor sustainable for the young women to rely on the robustness of their emotional capital to withstand the criticisms of external audiences and that negotiating and justifying their involvement by ensuring that training spaces were religiously compliant demonstrated a step forward towards alleviating the concerns of families and communities whilst encouraging wider participation. To summarise, I argue that parental constraint and the cultural concepts of *izzat* and *sharam* are not unnegotiable. Mothers and fathers constantly deliberate upon the most apt courses of actions towards reaching the best outcomes for their child(ren) whilst partially remaining mindful about how their family is being 'displayed' amongst external audiences. The analysis within this thesis has demonstrated that parents are willing to provide their unwavering support presuming that the young womens engagement in the sport is both beneficial for them and religiously compliant. Not only does this approach maintain 'good' and responsible expectations of parenting but also prevents the young women from transgressing away from religious prescriptions and minimises the likelihood of extended relatives and the *biradari* falsely

interpreting the motivations of their involvement and subsequently projecting negative feedback.

7.3 Final Remarks

I commenced this thesis with the words of Michael Young (1958) who lay claim that sociological investigations ought to consider failures in conjunction with successes. This research found that the (under)achievements of BrAsians in boxing cannot be adequately understood without appreciating the significance of parental influence. Decisions made by parents to either empower or impede their child(ren)s participation in boxing were not arbitrary nor were they determined by religious or cultural blueprints. Rather, they were formed following reflexive deliberation where parents evaluated their social circumstances alongside their personal concerns prior to advancing, adjusting or abandoning their child(ren)s personal projects. Acknowledging how family, the extended family and the *biradari* all interacted and communicated with one another offered a wholesome insight towards understanding the myriad of enablements and constraints shaping parental influence. The social world, after all, is not made of an aggregate of individuals. Rather, individuals interact and form/ maintain relations. Indeed, these very interactions and relations, in turn, create either opportunities or impediments. To finish, it was Muhammad Ali who once famously asserted that “the fight is won or lost far away from witnesses - behind the lines, in the gym, and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights.” Traditionally, this quote has been interpreted vis-a-vis the arduous training regimes that pugilists must subject themselves to. Those who eat clean, go to bed on time and train for the longest are guaranteed glory. This premise now seems to be delusive. Indeed, in the absence of multifarious forms of parental support – navigating through the hardest sport in the world becomes that bit harder.

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