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**Subcultural Acculturation:  
A Dialectic approach to consumer  
acculturation of second generation  
British Pakistani Men.**

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Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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CASS Business School

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	5
Authorization .....	6
Abstract .....	7
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	17
2.1 An Evolutionary Approach to Consumer Acculturation.....	17
2.2 Postassimilationist Ethnic Consumer Research .....	22
2.3 Beyond Postassimilationist Ethnic Consumer Research.....	28
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	76
4.1 Consumer Subcultures .....	76
4.2 Popular Boy Subculture.....	92
4.2.1 Parents' Background and Future Plans .....	92
4.2.2 The Expectations of Popular Boys' Parents.....	100
4.2.3 The Popular Boys' Consumer Acculturation.....	107
4.2.3.1 Outfits .....	107
4.2.3.1.1 The 'Look' .....	108
4.2.3.2 Keeping up with the right look.....	112
4.2.3.2.1 Putting their look to a test.....	119
4.2.3.2.2 Fitting into the British Youth Culture Without Offending the Parents' Concept of 'Ideal Son' .....	121
4.2.3.2.3 'Don't Mix us Up With Gangsta Boys' .....	126
4.2.3.2.4 Contested Identities.....	133

4.2.3.2.5 When Parents and Sons do Not Agree on the ‘Right Look’ .....	134
4.2.3.2.6 The Confidence That Comes With the Shared Ideals of the Two Identity Defining Cultures .....	137
4.2.3.3 The Consumption of Leisure: Clubbing and Bollywood Movies .....	139
4.2.3.3.1 Clubbing .....	140
4.2.3.3.1.1 Consumption of Clubbing: .....	140
4.2.3.3.1.2 Why Not Raves? .....	152
4.2.3.3.1.3 Monitoring Each Other’s Clubbing Performance .....	158
4.2.3.3.1.4 Clubbing: The Epicentre of Contradictions	165
4.2.3.3.2 The Bollywood Lifestyle .....	170
4.2.3.3.2.1 Dad, Bollywood Heroes are Better Pakistani Sons! .....	171
4.2.3.3.2.2 As a Pakistani I too Can Pursue the Western Middle-Class Consumer Lifestyle .....	186
4.2.3.3.2.3 As a Pakistani I too Can Marry the Girl I love .....	193
4.3 The Gangsta Boy Subculture.....	212
4.3.1.2 Expectations of their Sons.....	232
4.3.1.3 Fathers’ Masculinity Projects and the Immigration Ideology .....	236

4.3.2 Gangsta Boy Consumer Acculturation.....	244
4.3.2.1 Historical Development of the Gangsta Subculture ..	245
4.3.2.1.1 Anatomy of the Gangsta Identity .....	250
4.3.2.2 Outfits.....	265
4.3.2.2.1 ‘The Look’ .....	265
4.3.2.2.2 Cultural Sources that Define the Look .....	267
4.3.2.2.3 Resolving Contradictions .....	272
4.3.2.2.3.1 Asserting a Tough Masculinity:.....	274
4.3.2.2.3.2 Expressing Wealth .....	284
4.3.2.3 Leisure .....	289
4.3.2.3.1 Music and Raves .....	290
4.3.2.3.2 Marijuana Consumption .....	304
4.3.2.3.3 Selling Marijuana.....	309
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	317
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION .....	355
CHAPTER 7: LIMITATIONS.....	360
REFERENCES .....	363
APENNDICES .....	374
APENNDIX A: Sample from field notes .....	374
APPENDIX B: Sample Interim Analytical Document.....	376
APPENDIX C: Informant Descriptions .....	394
APPENDIX D: Glossary .....	402

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Adnan Zahid

June 15, 2010



Subcultural Acculturation: A Dialectic approach to consumer acculturation of second generation British Pakistanis.

## **Abstract**

The extant literature has been very effective in identifying different types of identity projects, running the gamut from assimilative, integrationist, to rejectionist; where the individual migrants either accept, combine or reject the 'home' and 'host' national cultures. However, the literature has ignored the heterogeneity within these cultures and the factors that shape these formations. The role in acculturation of subcultures within the host country and the distinctions in the culture of origin are under-theorized. In this dissertation I aim to address this gap in the literature by looking at the various 'home' and 'host' cultures, and I seek to provide some explanation of the reasons for the choice of assimilative or rejectionist identity projects. To that end, I conducted an 18 month ethnographic case study of second generation Pakistani men in a medium-sized town in England. My work is in the tradition of consumer culture theory, an area of inquiry that is concerned with exploring the intersection of consumption and larger socio-cultural dimensions. As opposed to the "individualistic" consumer identity projects described in the literature, I find that consumer acculturation is subcultural among these youths. I find two distinct subcultures, which I name as 'popular-boy' subculture and 'gangsta boy' subculture. And these subcultures of acculturation are developed as a synthesis of the two contradictory forces that these youths encounter. These two contradictory forces are the parents' demands on the youths, which are shaped by the parents' immigration ideologies and the demands of the mainstream white society that they are living in.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

An estimated 200 million individuals in the world live as immigrants. In recent years developed nations have had a growing share of migrants who have emigrated from economically less developed countries (ELDCs) seeking economic prosperity. In 1975, 40% of migrants resided in developed countries, but today, over 60% of migrants reside in developed countries. As a result of this increase in immigration, the immigrant population made up almost 9% of the population in developed countries in 2005, compared to fewer than 5% in 1975.<sup>1</sup>

This sudden influx of outsiders from ELDCs has sparked debates on the social impact of this immigration in the developed nations of the 'West'. For instance in Europe, as a result of the increased presence of immigrants, a view that is becoming popular amongst the host countries is that immigrants take jobs away from native citizens, endanger cultural values and undermine the state. These immigrants often hold cultural values that are perceived by the host culture as incompatible and at times are seen as inferior to those held in the Western countries that are their new homes. These immigrants, the majority of whom occupy socio-economically disadvantaged positions, are experiencing alienation and domination in their new environment. In the aftermath of recent events (such as the bombings in New

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<sup>1</sup> Trends in International Migration Flows and Stock, 1975-2005

York in 2001, Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005, the 2004 ban of the headscarf in France, the 2005 Paris riots, and the 2006 Danish cartoon controversy), the question of immigration has become even more critical for Western European countries where the term ‘immigrant is virtually synonymous with Muslim’<sup>2</sup>. According to conservative estimates the population of Muslim immigrants in Western Europe exceeds 13 million. These events have made the religious identity of immigrants coming from predominantly Muslim countries salient, and both policy debates and academic research have shifted towards explanations of these migrants’ acculturation in terms of their religion. The primary question that is being asked is: Can Muslims integrate into modern Western liberal democracies?

This shift to focusing almost exclusively on the religious identity of Muslim immigrants has resulted in a conceptual myopia, where the experience of these immigrants from ELDCs is interpreted in terms of their religious identity alone. Their religious identity is seen in a sense as the only determining factor, and the focus of research is on understanding how the religious precepts of Islam will aid or hamper the integration of Muslims in the West. This reductionism is even more pronounced for second generation immigrants from Muslim countries. There has been a dearth of serious inquiry into questions relating to the generational differences in the level of commitment to and interpretation of ethnic and religious aspects. Such avenues

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<sup>2</sup> The Gallup Coexist Index 2009: A Global Study of Interfaith Relations.

of research have been silenced in the clamour surrounding the threat of Islamic radicalization of disenfranchised second generation youth. Findings that highlight the claims made by a large proportion of Muslims in the ‘West’ of their attachment to their religion are used to justify such a narrow research agenda. The claims of these immigrants are not interrogated by investigating the actual acculturation process, and contextualizing these claims in the identity projects of these immigrants. In this research, I will put aside claims of religiosity, and return to the question of how second generation migrants from ELDCs acculturate in the developed countries of the ‘West’.

Uncovering second generation immigrants’ consumer acculturation is especially important given that previous research has focused mostly on the acculturation of the first generation. First generation migrants anchor their identity projects with reference to the idea of a mythical ‘homeland’ that they can always go back to if things do not work out. This is an untenable proposition when it comes to the second generation who are unlikely to have such attachments with an imagined home; on the other hand the attraction of the host culture for them is more pronounced for them than for their parents. These factors suggest that their acculturation will be distinct from their parents’ and warrants attention. Although second generation immigrant acculturation is under-studied, it has, in the contemporary climate, become more urgent as a result of the moral panic that surrounds the alleged existence of a substantial population of alienated second generation immigrant youth. Demographically, the second generation – those whose parents were

immigrants from ELDCs, but who themselves were born in the West – outnumber their parents in Europe. My research attempts to understand the acculturation of second generation migrants whose parents emigrated from ELDCs. However, I do not wish to focus on questions pertaining to how their religious identity influences their acculturation. Instead, I wish to focus attention on the larger question of ELDC immigrant acculturation, which has been overlooked owing to the action of a few ‘Islamic radicals’.

Consumption is a very important site of culture today, and focusing on the consumer identity projects of immigrants can provide insights that can increase our understanding of the immigrant experience and inform strategies geared towards the resolution of social problems that both the host and migrant populations face as a result of the immigration of individuals from ELDCs into the more developed countries. Existing literature on consumer acculturation predominantly reports integrative identity projects, where consumers playfully construct hybrid consumer identities, adjusting easily to their new environment and receiving enthusiastic reception by their hosts (see, for example, Mehta and Belk, 1991; Penaloza, 1994; Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard, 2005; Oswald, 1999). The reason for this convergence in findings is that the host culture in the acculturation contexts studied does not see the immigrant culture as inferior or conflicting with the sensibilities of the host culture. On the contrary, most of the literature sees the immigrant culture as ‘exotic’.

The situation will be very different for immigrants from ELDCs, who are often seen as culturally inferior. Their lower status in the global economy is seen as the consequence of their dated political organization, cultural norms, and religious beliefs, reminiscent of an evolutionary stage the developed liberal democracies of the 'West' progressed through decades ago. For Muslim immigrants the situation has become even more pronounced. Taking the example of Muslim immigrants in the UK, Richardson (2004) analyses the coverage of Muslims in British broadsheet newspapers and concludes that the coverage is overwhelmingly negative. He finds that many of the domestic reports present a split between 'Islam' and 'the West', between 'Muslim' and 'Westerner', sometimes doing this by proxy – excluding on the basis of their immigrant status – but mostly by explicitly referring to the differences that arise from their religion, which is considered inferior to the modern West (Richardson, 2004). I expect the situation to be different for ELDCs with predominantly Muslim populations, also due to the recent association of Muslims with terrorism. The stereotype of Asian Muslims as terrorists gained currency in the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings in London. Three of the four bombers were Asian Muslims. Pictures of Muslims of Asian origin now often make the front page of major newspapers, accompanied by stories about perpetrators or planners of terrorist attacks in Britain. Much of the coverage in the print media and television focuses on the terrorism aspect of British Islam. Similarly, the two-part drama, 'Britz', televised on Channel 4 in October 2007 told the story of a brother and a sister, incidentally Asians, pitted against each

other, the sister plotting to explode a bomb and the brother, an MI5 agent, bent on stopping her. Although this drama tried to highlight the role of the war on terror and foreign policy in alienating Muslims, it still ‘played on’ the stereotype of Muslim terrorists. Similarly, novels with terrorism as the defining theme are received with enthusiasm. Thus, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid was even short-listed for the Man Booker Prize 2007. Numerous other novelists have trained their sights on Muslim terrorists to write fast-paced thrillers. For instance, Frederick Forsyth’s *The Afghan* and John Updike’s *Terrorist* are examples of such works by authors of renown and literary merit. A recent report produced by the Islamic Human Rights Commission, covering the representation of Muslims in newspapers and on television and their depiction in cinema and in literature, argues that the depiction of Muslims is predominantly negative.<sup>3</sup> They note that the BBC and ITV covered the 7/7 bombings in such a manner that the impression one takes from the coverage is that every young Muslim could be led into extremist activity if he re-discovered his Islamic identity. The combined effect of such coverage is that the religious identity of British Pakistanis becomes predominant, and when they express their religious identity they have to do so in the face of powerful negative stereotypes.

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<sup>3</sup> ‘The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation’. A report by Saied R. Ameli, Syed Mohammed Marandi, Sameera Ahmed, Seyfeddin Kara and Arzu Merali for the Islamic Human Rights Commission.

When we start to look at acculturation contexts where the immigrant culture is *dominated*, the dynamics of acculturation become very different. For example, Ustuner and Holt (2007), in their study of a dominated context, report the acculturation processes as being very different from those reported in the earlier studies. They describe the nihilistic identity projects of the second generation squatter women. The young women - who are disheartened by their inability to realize their ideal lifestyle, and despise the village aesthetic imbued in their mothers' project – give up on pursuing a meaningful identity project altogether. The context of Ustuner and Holt's study is not transnational domination, and in their case the immigrants are favourably predisposed towards the dominant culture and want to assimilate. What happens when immigrants find themselves in a dominated position and might not want to assimilate? How do immigrants as consumers acculturate in a social context where all aspects of their identity are under scrutiny?

The 2001 Census reported the Muslim population in Britain as being in excess of 1.5 million, and, according to some sources, it reached 2.4 million in 2009<sup>4</sup>. Bari quotes a figure of 1.8 million in 2005, and suggests that almost 60% of this population is British born (Bari 2005, p. xi). Almost half the Muslims in Britain (42.5%) have a Pakistani ethnic background (2001 Census).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article5621482.ece>



Second generation Pakistani youth provide a good context for exploring the broader questions of acculturation discussed above.

This thesis is organized such that in Chapter 2 I critically review the extant literature on consumer acculturation, in order to highlight the gaps in the extant literature, and discuss how my research seeks to address these gaps. In Chapter 3 I discuss the methodological basis of my research, justify my choice of ethnography as the method, and then discuss some methodological issues relevant to my research. I then describe and reflect on my fieldwork. This discussion will lead to the findings of my research in Chapter 4: the argument that I will attempt to construct connects the immigration ideologies of first generation parents to the consumer identity projects of their sons. For each subculture – the popular boy and gangsta<sup>5</sup> boy – I begin by describing the immigration background of their parents, the aspirations of these first generation immigrants, and then discuss the internal and external contradictions that arise from these aspirations. Next, using the consumer identity projects of the sons, I show how these identity projects are resolutions to the contradictions that evolve from their parents' immigration ideologies. In Chapter 5 I discuss the relevance of my findings to research on consumer behaviour and sociology. Chapter 6 presents a summary of the research

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this document the word gangsta is used to refer to the research respondents; whereas, the word gangster is used to refer to the real life gangsters.

findings, and Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by discussing some of the limitations of my research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter I critically review the extant literature on consumer acculturation and highlight some of the gaps in the literature my research seeks to address. I have organized my critique by dividing the literature on consumer acculturation into three approaches that approximate a chronological development, from one set of assumptions to the next, each building on and refining the previous. I locate my research in the most recent approach that in my opinion attends to the limitations of prior approaches.

Acculturation generally refers to the outcomes and processes that conspire when people socialized in one (minority) culture migrate and interact with a new (majority) culture. Consumer acculturation is the study of the role of consumption in the various modes of acculturation. In the following section I present a critical review of the literature on consumer acculturation, highlighting the theoretical gaps in the extant literature and showing how my study seeks to address these gaps.

### **2.1 An Evolutionary Approach to Consumer Acculturation**

The earliest research on immigrant consumer acculturation, which I call the ‘evolutionary approach’, has focused on the differences in consumer preference across cultures (Deshpande, Hoyer, and Donthu 1986; Hirschman 1981; and Wallendorf and Reilly 1983). This earlier research is based on an assimilation model, which is, in essence, an evolutionary model that assumes

eventual assimilation into the dominant consumer culture. This research was primarily geared towards uncovering the impact of the level of acculturation – assimilation into the dominant culture - on consumer choices.

The research often attempted to highlight differences in product attribute evaluation, levels of brand loyalty and product preferences between the immigrant and the host populations. For instance, Hirschman (1981) showed how Jewish consumers are more willing to adopt new products and transfer more consumption information to others compared to non-Jewish consumers. She argued that the ethnic norm of high achievement in the Jewish community acculturated children to be disposed towards seeking more information, and she hypothesized that this predisposition, when translated to the consumption space, would affect two areas: innovation diffusion; and information transmission. By allowing respondents to select the level of their ethnic identification, she attempted to show how the strength of ethnic affiliation (the acculturation level) accounted for differences in consumption attitudes (Hirschman, 1981).

Deshpande, Hoyer and Donthu (1986), using a combination of subjective and objective items, compared Hispanic consumer preferences to Anglo consumer preferences. Their research found that consumers who manifested a weak identification with their Hispanic identity were closer to Anglo-consumers than those consumers who strongly identified with their Hispanic identity in terms of a lesser preference for prestige brands and ethnically advertised brands. In another study, Donthu and Cherian (1994)

found that Hispanic consumers who strongly identified with their Hispanic identity were less value conscious, more brand loyal and were more affected by advertisements targeted towards Hispanics than are those who did not strongly identify with their Hispanic identity. In another study, O'Guinn and Faber (1985), using a 21 item instrument to measure the level of acculturation, reported results which confirm the findings of the research discussed above. They found that the differences between low acculturated and high acculturated Hispanic consumers were more pronounced for durable items than they were for non-durable items.

Using a method that significantly differed from the earlier studies (which were based on questionnaires), Wallendorf and Reilly (1983) used 'garbology' to study the food consumption of Mexican Americans. Comparing the food consumption of Mexican Americans, Mexicans and Anglos, they found that the consumption behaviour of Mexican Americans did not lie somewhere in between that of Mexicans and Anglos. They reported an outcome that in the previous literature has been referred to as 'overshoot' (Lee and Tse, 1994). In other words, rather than assimilating towards the current cultural style they assimilated towards stereotypical American consumption patterns.

These earlier studies of consumer acculturation also focused on the situational factors that mediate the consumer behaviour of immigrants. This research argued that the level of acculturation displayed in a given situation depended on the circumstances (Stayman and Deshpande, 1989; O'Guinn and

Faber, 1985). Depending on whether the immigrants are interacting with their family, business associates, friends etc. they will act appropriately and display different levels of assimilation. O'Guin and Faber (1985) found that a situational consumer acculturation scale better explained consumption choices compared to a general acculturation scale, arguing for a role-specific acculturation level. They argued that individuals perform different roles in the course of their everyday lives, and that each role may manifest a different level of acculturation (for instance, at home individuals may behave closer to their ethnic norms and at work closer to their host culture). Stayman and Deshpande (1989) reported confirmatory findings for the mediation effect of situation on immigrant consumption behaviour. Their study compared the food preferences of Mexican and Chinese immigrants against those of Anglos. They found that Chinese and Mexican immigrants preferred traditional Chinese or Mexican food when with parents, and traditional Anglo food when with business associates. They concluded that immigrants showed different levels of consumer acculturation depending on the situation.

Most of these earlier studies on the consumer acculturation of immigrants looked for an outcome of acculturation. They were premised on a view of acculturation as a 'linear and stable process in which one goes from one mode to the other' (Sandikci, Ekici, and Tari, 2006, p 429), and where assimilation is seen as the eventual outcome of acculturation and the other outcomes are intermediary stages. In this conceptualization, the immigrant starts off with consumption styles which are typical of the country of origin;

but, as the consumer acculturates more into the host culture, consumption preferences move sequentially from a consumption style that matches that of the country of origin to one of assimilation – when the consumption style of the immigrant becomes like that of the host country. The underlying assumption is that movement is in one direction. In other words, as acculturation increases, the individual adopts more and more of the host culture, eventually ending up assimilating it.

The earlier research assumed that the host culture, which the immigrant aspires to, and the culture of origin of the immigrant are both homogenous (Jamal and Chapman, 2000). Penaloza (1994) argued that a modernist view of a socially integrated and culturally homogenous nation underlay the framework of assimilation. This position sees both the host and immigrant cultures as fixed. But cultural meanings change and individuals actively engage in the construction of meaning. Such a perspective then does not cover the emergent nature of culture and does not account for the possibility of individuals interpreting cultural meanings in different ways (Chung, 2000). Such a theoretical position in our contemporary postmodern times is untenable. Thus, as Jamal and Chapman (2000) pointed out, in criticizing the treatment of ethnic minorities as homogenous subgroups, '[i]t is also significant to look at how ethnicity or ethnic identity is perceived and consumed by the immigrants themselves in a post-modern world' (*ibid.*, p 372).

Another theoretical problem with the traditional approach to consumer acculturation is the use of the 'object signification' framework – whereby

objects are understood to have inherent meanings that customers acquire by consuming them. For instance, the preference for specific food groups by Hispanic consumers is understood as an affiliation with either the host culture or the culture of origin (Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). This approach assumes that categories of consumption objects are imbued with distinct meanings and are preferred on the basis of these inherent qualities (Holt, 1997). Holt (*ibid.*) criticized the object signification framework by arguing that the meaning of a particular cultural object for a particular individual in a particular context is always constructed depending on the individual's reference group. The research discussed above focused on the differences in choice of consumption objects, using these differences to claim different levels of consumer acculturation. It did not question the meaning these objects held for the consumers.

## **2.2 Postassimilationist Ethnic Consumer Research**

Recognizing the limitations of the 'traditional' approach to acculturation, other scholars have used different approaches to study the question of immigrant consumer acculturation (see, for example, Penaloza, 1994; Oswald, 1999; Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard, 2005; Jamal and Chapman, 2000; Sandikci, Ekici, and Tari, 2006; and Ger and Ostergaard, 1998). These studies diverge from the evolutionary view of stability in outcomes, eschew the assimilation scheme predominant in prior studies (Penaloza, 1994), and focus more on how acculturation plays out in consumer identity formation, rather than adopting a narrow focus which focuses on product preferences.



The first acculturation study that broke away from the assumptions of previous ethnic consumer research was that of Penoloza (1994). Instead of describing migrant assimilation as the eventual outcome, Penoloza showed that assimilation is but one of the potential outcomes of the consumer acculturation process. Drawing from the experiences of first-generation Mexican immigrant respondents from diverse backgrounds, her study mapped out how migrant consumers learned to buy goods in their newly adopted host country, the USA. Her analysis showed that Mexican immigrants combined a variety of acculturation practices, and that, instead of a single acculturation outcome, a combination of acculturation practices were deployed. Penoloza's study was also the first study to show that acculturation is mediated by market forces which, via commodifying ethnic differences, blurred the boundaries between the host and home cultures.

Based on that very premise that market forces commodify ethnic differences studies by Askegaard *et al.* (2005) and Oswald (1996) focused on migrant consumer identity projects. However, whereas Penaloza's study (see above) was primarily concerned with consumer practices, Oswald's (1999) ethnographic analysis of a Haitian family in the US focused on identity formation. Oswald argued that Haitian consumers playfully switched between the taste of the Haitian elite and the American middle class, depending on the situation – neither rejecting nor assimilating it. Mostly ignoring the macro socio-cultural structures and the potential impact of how ethnicity is constructed from without, and how that construction shapes the immigrants'

understanding of his/her ethnicity, Oswald argued that acculturation is essentially an example of 'culture swapping' where migrants' ethnic identities move between 'several worlds at once' (p. 303). Oswald attributed this situation to the postmodern consumer culture where '... ethnicity has been commodified, alienated from history, reified, and reduced to a set of symbols circulating on the global market and available to every one' (p. 314) Thus giving the agency solely to the immigrant, Oswald argued that the influence of structure, whether socio-cultural or institutional, is limited: the individual can choose to react to these structures as he or she wishes. These structures, according to Oswald (1999), are real only if the immigrant accepts them as such, or as Oswald put it 'to the extent that one internalizes the discourses of authority, including marketing communications, as one's own, such discourses shape one's identity' (p. 316), for otherwise ethnicity is nothing but a commodified symbol detached from its historical connotations.

Askegaard *et al.* (2005) disagreed with this agentic post-modern depiction of acculturation and argued that their Greenlandic respondents in Denmark were not comfortable with Oswald's 'plastic notions of ethnic identity' (p. 169). Rather than playfully culture swap between their host and home cultures as they saw fit, Greenlanders wanted, yet struggled 'to extract a sense of real identity from acculturative experiences that are often anxiety provoking' (*ibid.*, p. 169). Askegaard *et al.* (2005) argued for the importance of socio-historical structures in shaping immigrant consumer identity projects, and they identified four distinct identity positions that their Greenlanders

respondents used in their struggle to forge an ethnic identity in Denmark. Although Askegaard *et al.* offered a more balanced theory than Oswald (1999) in terms of the influence of structure and migrant-agency on the acculturation process; they limited their discussion of such structures to only three acculturative agents, namely the discursive elements of home, host and global consumer cultures, and ignored the impact of other critical social structures. Neither did they show which particular acculturative agents created which of the distinct consumer identity projects that their Greenlanders respondents forged.

The studies above went further than the models of acculturation suggested by Berry (1980) and were not limited to the traditional theories of consumer acculturation. By providing evidence of the existence of both a home and a host culture at the same time; and immigrants switching between the two, these studies questioned the ‘models of acculturation that divide consumers into stable dispositional categories’ (Askegaard *et al.*, 2005, p. 169). These studies showed that a single stable outcome should not be expected, and that immigrants often switch between the subjectively interpreted and variously understood conceptions of the home and host cultures, a result that contradicts prior research.

However, the postassimilationist studies discussed above describe migrants individually pursuing various hybrid identities. These descriptions fit in with the integration mode of Berry’s (1980) acculturation model, and, with the exception of Ustuner and Holt (2007), none of the studies provide evidence

for rejectionist or marginalized modes of acculturation (Ustuner and Holt, 2007). A similar point is made by Lindridge and Dhillon (2005), who point out that existing studies assumed that ‘an ethnic minority individual is both able and capable of constructing consumption laden multiple identities as a means of negotiating differing cultural situations’ (p. 409) Their study on Indian Punjabi Sikh men living in Britain provided evidence for a mode of consumer acculturation that is not present in the traditional four-fold typology. They studied men who had rejected their own ethnic culture and who had adopted values from the dominant British culture, as the situation was frustrating for them when they were not accepted by the dominant culture. Lindridge and Dhillon found that, with regard to the sample group, that their marginality resulted in a complete rejection of symbols that represented any culture, and was replaced by an alcoholic consumption identity.

Furthermore the postassimilationist studies do not adequately consider the socio-cultural structures which are likely to shape the acculturation process. The acculturation identity projects are presented as a matter of individual selection from the portfolio of identity projects available to migrants. The explanations are reduced merely to psychological factors.

Ustuner and Holt (2007) filled this gap in the literature by studying a very different context, namely the acculturation project of poor migrant women in a non-Western country. They argued that, when the migrants were stripped of all sorts of capital (social, economic and cultural) and the dominant ideology of the host culture was diametrically opposed to that of the migrants’ home

culture challenging its 'taken-for-granted existential anchors' (p. 43), and there was no developed consumer culture that celebrated the various symbols of the home culture, then the migrants faced a very different consumer acculturation process, one which Ustuner and Holt described as a 'dominated acculturation'. Via ethnography in a squatter neighbourhood, focusing on the acculturation projects of the first and second generation rural-to-urban migrant women, Ustuner and Holt (2007) found that the first generation women developed a common counter-hegemonic acculturation project via reterritorializing the modern village women in their new social context. The second generation girls, on the other hand, who were very much under the influence of the dominant urban culture, initially pursued the urban culture as a myth, not necessarily taking part in it full-on as consumers but instead imagining a future where one day they too would leave their lives with the squatters behind and become members of that culture. However, five years later, when Ustuner and Holt revisited the ethnographic site, they found that only one out of nine second-generation girls was able to forge an urban consumer identity. Seven gave up on any identity project, and one forged the first generation women's counter-hegemonic identity project. Ustuner and Holt (2007) concluded that dominated acculturation was ubiquitous among poor migrants. The particular socio-cultural forces that structured the poor migrants' lives did not leave much agency for them to forge consumer identity projects other than what Ustuner and Holt described as 'shattered identity projects' (p. 55).

### **2.3 Beyond Postassimilationist Ethnic Consumer Research**

Although the above studies taken together have contributed immensely to our understanding of consumer acculturation, but they have failed to theoretically consider the impact of heterogeneity in the host and home cultures on the consumer acculturation of immigrants. Although they criticized earlier ethnic consumer research for taking an essentialising approach to considering home and host country cultures, they fell short of enhancing our understanding of this dimension. For example Askegaard *et al.* (2005) described Danish culture as a ‘having’ oriented culture whereas Greenlander culture was a ‘being’ oriented culture. However, in distilling national culture into a single characteristic, the literature ignores the great heterogeneity that exists within all national cultures and the various ways that these intra-country cultural differences can play out in acculturation. Similarly, Penaloza (1994) did not go beyond making a brief reference to the importance of heterogeneity in the culture of origin when she stated that: ‘Informants from urban areas experienced fewer difficulties than did their rural counterparts because they had inhabited a consumption environment in Mexico that more closely resembled that in the United States’ (p. 48) She did not address the mediation of these internal distinctions in acculturation projects. In the same vein, Oswald (1995) emphasized that the immigrants from Haiti were extremely class conscious and that rural/urban distinctions were important, but she too focused on middle-class Haitian immigrants and therefore failed to consider the impact of such rural/urban distinctions on the consumer acculturation

projects of immigrants. Furthermore, these studies focussed on acculturation into the ‘mainstream’ culture of the host country and this focus perpetuated the essentialising assumptions criticized above. A notable recent exception in the literature, however, was a study by Wamwara-Mbugua *et al.* (2008), which highlighted the importance of the African-American subculture in the consumer acculturation of Kenyan migrants. Wamwara-Mbugua *et al.* argued that, in the presence of a relevant subcultural group (the African-American subculture for the Kenyans), the immigrants had to respond to what Wamwara-Mbugua *et al.* described as ‘triple acculturation forces’; and they argued that, when the immigrants had a negative experience at the hands of the dominant culture, then they turned to subcultures to meet their consumer needs.

I argue that the literature on consumer acculturation has failed to sufficiently address the issue of the heterogeneity in the home and host cultures. To develop a deeper appreciation of the acculturation experience of immigrants, it is imperative to move beyond simplistic understandings of the home and host culture. The recognition that national cultures are not homogenous but a multiplicity of cultures – along with the distinctions of social class, race etc – necessitates the extension of theory such that it is able to explain the acculturation into other than the ‘mainstream’ culture. Similarly, as discussed above, the differences in the home culture of immigrants have not been adequately addressed. For instance, the pattern of acculturation based on differences in the origins of immigrants has not been investigated. I see these

as the most important limitations in the existing literature, and my research seeks to address these gaps.

Another limitation is that postassimilationist research on consumer acculturation has focused on first generation migrants; the consumer identity projects of second generation migrants have received little attention. First generation migrants anchor their identity projects with reference to the idea of a mythical 'homeland' to which they can always return if things do not work out. According to Mehta and Belk (1991) first generation Indian migrants showed a strong inclination towards possessing and maintaining an Indian identity. They found that, 'Even among immigrants who have become U.S. citizens, the dream of return migration is strong' (p. 409). However, the acculturation of second generation migrants, who may find the idea of a mythical homeland less relevant, has not received the attention it deserves in the literature on consumer acculturation. Notable exceptions are research conducted by: Ustuner and Holt, 2007; Lindridge and Hogg, 2006; Lindridge and Dhillon, 2005; and Lindridge, Hogg and Shah, 2004. Lindridge and Hogg (2006) interviewed 16 second generation female university students whose parents were immigrants from South Asia in order to study the role played by the family in the acculturation projects of these girls. The focus of their study was not just on consumer acculturation, but on the acculturation process in general. They found that the mothers were the embodiment of Indian cultural values and that they actively sought to pass these values onto their daughters.



Fathers and brothers, on the other hand, were the acculturation agents who supported these young women in adapting to the mainstream culture. Lindridge, Hogg and Shah (2004), using second generation female university students, investigated the role played by family and friends in the negotiation of cultural and consumer borders. They found that families are important in the maintenance of Asian values, and that friends support socialization into the British culture. Across a variety of consumption categories – outfits, food, leisure, and music – they found that these young girls switched between cultural identities according to the demands of the situation. For instance, when they were at home under the watchful gaze of their parents they did not go clubbing and did not drink, but when they were at university with their friends they regularly did so. These two studies (by Lindridge and Hogg, 2006; and Lindridge *et al.*, 2004) demonstrated the importance of studying the acculturation of second generation immigrants, and theorize that the dissonance that earlier research has attributed to cultural changes only apply to the first generation, and are not relevant to the second generation. Thus, as Lindridge *et al.* (2004) found, the second generation ethnic minority individual ‘happily exists and interacts between two contrasting cultures’ (p. 234). Lindridge *et al.* (2004) described this mode of acculturation as the ‘accommodative’ mode and they argued that:

‘The debate on consumer acculturation and identity needs to recognize that individuals can happily co-exist between/within two cultures, using

different consumption frameworks, within their imagined multiple worlds' (p 234).

The identity projects reported in this study reflect the hybrid identity projects reported in prior postassimilationist research, and are subject to some of the same limitations. In both studies (of Lindridge *et al.* (2004); and Lindridge and Hogg (2006)), the informants had a higher stock of relevant capital and their experience may differ from that of ethnic minority individuals who lack such resources. Lindridge and Dhillon (2005) addressed some of these limitations. Thus, they purposely selected a group of informants in order to challenge the existing acculturation models, which in their opinion romanticized ethnic minority identities. They selected the informants through advertisements placed at a centre that provided help to individuals with substance abuse problems. By conducting in-depth interviews with these informants, who were second generation Sikh men, they found their attempts to conform to White British society failed, which was compounded by their alienation from their own ethnic culture and which led to feelings of anger and depression. The only outlet they had available was to define their identities in terms of a social identity. Thus, Lindridge and Dhillon (2005) reported that:

'For participants, alcohol consumption provided a means to construct a social identity around a bar, whilst offering an escape from the psychological and socio-cultural acculturation anxieties experienced' (p. 412).

Their research is important because it highlighted the difficulties in the consumer acculturation of second generation migrants, and challenged the playful hybrid identity projects reported in earlier studies of second generation immigrants. The limitation of their research, however, was that they selected individuals who had been unable to manage the difficulties and who, as a result, had rejected both cultures. However, not all socio-economically disadvantaged second generation migrants are unable to deal with these difficulties and experience such exaggerated levels of identity loss.

Another limitation in the acculturation literature is that the unit of analysis is the individual consumer (but see Ustuner and Holt (2007) below, for an exception). In other words, studies tend to assume that the acculturation process involves an individual migrant consumer who is out there in the world strategically pursuing a particular acculturation project on his or her own. This is not to argue that these studies claim that each migrant individual's project is different. Indeed most of the identity projects look alike, so they are compiled under particular headings, reified as ideal types: assimilation; maintenance; resistance; segregation (Penaloza, 1994); hyperculture; assimilation; integration; pendulism (Askegaard *et al.*, 2005). But all of these ideal types are examples of individuated rather than group consumer identity projects. The only exception is found in Ustuner and Holt's (2007) study, which showed that consumer acculturation could indeed be a group identity project. They found that, when migrants shared a 'common' past and were segregated from the mainstream culture in their new living arrangements (as was the case for the

first generation women living in the squatter village) then they were likely to develop a group consumer acculturation project. The question I wish to raise is whether having a common past, such as the same country of origin, or living in the same ethnically segregated neighbourhood, are satisfactory conditions for the development of unique group consumer acculturation projects.

Finally, an important limitation in the consumer acculturation literature is that, with the exception of Ustuner and Holt (2007), that the existing literature operates using what I consider to be a ‘black-box-model’, in other words a model where particular acculturative agents are fed into a black-box which churns out various acculturation outcomes – be it consumption tactics or consumer identity projects. The only exception to the black box model is found in Ustuner and Holt’s study where, among nine second generation girls, seven were found to have shattered identity projects, one had assimilated the host culture, and one had pursued the first generation women’s counter-hegemonic identity project. The consumer identity projects studied by Ustuner and Holt (2007) challenged the hybrid identity projects reported in earlier research. They claimed that this divergence in the findings was due to differences in the following socio-cultural structures:

*Social class position* Whereas the postassimilationist studies cited above tended to study people with sufficient capital (economic, social and cultural) to participate in the new environment, the participants in Ustuner and Holt’s study had very limited capital. Ustuner and Holt claimed that this factor

was important, because constructing hybrid identities required basic levels of economic, social and cultural capital.

*Consumer Culture* The earlier studies were carried out in countries dominated by the postmodern consumer culture, with a form of consumer culture that celebrated cultural difference. Ustuner and Holt, on the other hand, chose to study a country where the orthodox consumer culture of the past still dominated, and where minority cultures may not be celebrated.

*Ideology* Whereas earlier research contexts enjoyed relative ideological compatibility between the dominant and the minority migrant cultures, Ustuner and Holt studied a context where fundamental ideological conflicts existed between the dominant and minority cultures.

By highlighting the differences in these underlying socio-cultural structures and the divergent identity projects that are patterned by the distinct configuration of these structures in their context, Ustuner and Holt, made a strong case for taking socio-cultural structures into account. However, even though they clearly described these structures they did not attempt to disentangle the differential impact of each of the structures which were salient in their context – orthodox consumer culture, low cultural capital and ideological conflict - and admitted that they were unable to specify how these structures created dominant acculturation: a combination of the three, of two, or just one single structure being the primary antecedent of dominated forms of acculturation.

In order to disentangle the differential impact of each of these structures I will need to study a context that allows me to explore the interplay of different states of these structural dimensions. To this end the context I propose to study promises to advance our understanding of the interplay of these structures.

Ustuner and Holt (2007) argued that ‘postmodern consumer culture celebrates marginal cultural ideals, which bestows legitimacy on the migrants’ home cultures (p. 9), and therefore postmodern cultures encourage hybrid identities. They supported this argument by reporting that in their case – where a more orthodox form of consumer culture was prevalent – that there was no evidence of hybrid identities. This claim was based on the assumption that every minority culture is equally amenable to commoditization and the majority culture is willing to embrace minority cultures with impartiality. Although the Pakistani presence has a long history in Britain, as I have discussed above the acceptance of their culture in the dominant culture is limited. Thus, they do not enjoy the same kind of acceptance in the dominant culture that other minority cultures do. By focusing my study on British Pakistanis, I can engage with their proposition that an orthodox form of consumer culture is a prerequisite for the existence of dominated forms of acculturation.

Finally, Ustuner and Holt (2007) assume that, when second-generation migrants lack capital (cultural, economic and social), the dominant ideology will become too powerful to resist, merely because it is the dominant ideology.

For example, they reported that all the young second-generation squatter women aspired to the Batici lifestyle. While this complete commitment to the dominant ideology might be true for second generation Turkish squatter women, for whom the older system represented suffocating patriarchal hierarchies and the new promised liberation, it may not be the case when such liberating benefits are not present. In such situations individuals may look elsewhere for resources to construct identities: strands within the minority or majority cultures. By studying the context of British Pakistani men I attempt to untangle the hegemonic influence of dominant ideologies from the liberatory benefits. The question would be: what happens when the dominant ideologies do not hold such promises? Would individuals from the minority culture – with low levels of capital - show high levels of commitment to and aspirations to align with the dominant culture?

To sum up, the most important limitations of the existing acculturation literature are its treatment of national cultures (defining them as homogenous entities), its focus on first generation migrants, and its lack of understanding of social structures that pattern acculturation projects. Following Ustuner and Holt (2007), I argue that, if our interest is in understanding ethnic minority acculturation patterns, then advances will be made by attending to key differences in social and cultural structures that lead to different patterns of acculturation. In order to address the limitations of prior research, in this study I focus on first and second generation working class British Pakistani men.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The choice of research methodology depends on the research question (Bryman, 2004). My research question is: How do second generation Pakistani youth acculturate in the United Kingdom? The aim of this research is to explore the role played by consumer identity projects in the acculturation of these persons and to consider the cultural categories and assumptions governing their consumer identity projects. With these research objectives in mind I have chosen to use qualitative research methods, as they are better suited to the purpose of my research, owing to the methodological advantages inherent in such methods. Qualitative methods are suitable when the objective of the research is to understand behaviour as opposed to predicting it; researchers use such methods to determine the motives, meanings, and reasons of the respondents. They seek explanations which Geertz called 'thick descriptions' (see Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). McCracken (1988) highlighted the advantages of qualitative interviews, which are equally applicable to other qualitative methods:

'The purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kind of people, share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one constructs the world. . . . Qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it. It is, in other words, much more intensive than extensive in objectives' ( p.17).



Although in-depth interviews have been used extensively in interpretive consumer research (Holt, 1998; Thompson and Haytko, 1997; Thompson, 1997; Fournier, 1998; Henry, 2005; Holt and Thompson, 2004 etc.), it was felt that in this specific case the inherent limitations of this method would compromise the reliability of the data. Elliott and Elliott (2003) suggested that interview methods are unreliable because of the limitation of asking questions and, more importantly, because people often do not always do what they say. From my initial reconnaissance of the field I felt that these young men had reason to conceal certain aspects of their lives from individuals who had not won their trust, and in some cases would tend to exaggerate other aspects. Elliott and Elliot (2003) argued that the ethnographic method with its use of prolonged engagement and persistent observation 'reaches parts other research approaches cannot reach' (p. 222), and attends to the aforementioned limitations of qualitative interviews. I therefore used the ethnographic method which has been extensively used in prior consumer studies (see, for example, Ustuner and Holt, 2007; Kozinets, 2001; Allen, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Oswald, 1999; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Celsi, Rose and Leigh, 1993; and Hill, 1991).

Before providing a detailed account of my fieldwork I will discuss some of the methodological issues that are particularly relevant to my research. In what follows, I will raise these issues and discuss some of them in detail, and for some I will direct attention to sections in subsequent chapters where these issues are addressed.

At the practical level the ethnographic method is distinguished by the kind of data it collects and the specific techniques that are used to analyze the data. According to Atkinson and Hammersley (2007), ethnographic work includes the following features:

- Rather than studying people under conditions created by the research, such as experiments, people are studied in everyday contexts.
- A variety of data sources are used, with participant observation and everyday conversations as primary sources of data.
- Data collection and analysis are both relatively ‘unstructured’ – a fixed and detailed research design to gather data is not specified from the beginning, and the categories used to analyze the data are generated from the process of data analyses, rather than using earlier models.
- In order to obtain an in-depth understanding, the focus is usually on a small number of cases.
- The data produces verbal descriptions, explanations and theories, and statistical analysis and quantification often play no role at all.

As is clear from the list above the research design used in ethnographic research is open-ended. Such a flexible design is a consequence of the philosophical view of ‘naturalism’ which forms the basis of the earliest ethnographic work. Naturalism was proposed as a philosophical view that

seeks to address the limitations of 'positivism'. Here positivism is used in the sense used by Atkinson and Hammersley (2007), who identified its basic tenets as: the use of experiments where quantifiable variables are manipulated via experiments to uncover the relationships between them; universal statistical laws are developed to explain the social world; and phenomena directly observable are given priority. The naturalistic position argues that the social world should be studied in 'its 'natural' state, undisturbed by the researcher' (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007, p. 7) Rather than fidelity to a set of methodological principles it should be to the social phenomena under study (*ibid.*, p. 7) Furthermore, naturalists argue that social reality cannot be reduced to simplistic causal relationships, but they hold instead that human action is mediated by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules and discourses; and that, when these are taken into account, rich descriptive interpretations are developed, rather than universal laws that positivist research offers. This philosophical position, rather than a methodological position, is well-suited to my research which is committed to understanding phenomena.

The first issue that needs attention in ethnographic studies is the role of the researcher. With regard to the role of the researcher, Atkinson and Hammersley, (2007) point out that both positivists and naturalists believe that it is possible to isolate the data uncontaminated by the researcher: positivists achieve this through the methods that are supposed to bracket off the impact of the researcher; and naturalists achieve this by turning the researcher into a 'neutral vessel of cultural experience' (*ibid.*, p. 15) They argue that such an

assumption is misplaced, as the researcher will bring with him orientations shaped by his own socio-cultural background, and will be selective in procuring data. He will also have an effect on the people he studies. Thus, the researcher can never be a neutral vessel of cultural experience. This is not, however, a cause for despair for Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) argue that:

‘By including our own role within the research focus, and perhaps even systematically exploiting our participation in the setting under study as researcher, we can produce accounts of the social world and justify them without placing reliance on futile attempts to empiricism, of either positivist or naturalist varieties’(p. 18).

Keeping in mind the implications of the reflexivity of social research, in the following section I discuss in detail the mediating effects of my presence in the research context (see the section on Field Experience). This detailed discussion qualifies my interpretations of the social reality I studied.

Another feature that distinguishes ethnographic methods is that most ethnographic studies begin with a set of ‘foreshadowed’ problems that are identified from a pre-fieldwork engagement with extant theory (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007, p. 21), and these problems are then investigated by selecting an appropriate setting. Sometimes the setting comes first, and the issues spring from the nature of the setting (*ibid.*, p. 28). My research followed this route – I will discuss this in detail in the section on Field Experience – when an opportunity arose that gave me a chance to study an interesting group;

and the issues that I eventually investigated arose from the nature of the setting.

Once in the field, the choice of the kind of role the researcher decides to adopt – ranging from a complete participant (an insider) to a complete observer (an outsider) – becomes very important. Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) discuss the impact of this choice, and argue that the roles taken by the ethnographer provide access to different sorts of information, and expose them to different methodological dangers. The danger with the position of a complete observer is that he relies on what can be observed and his own prior knowledge to infer the perspective of the participants; and thus runs the risk of ‘not just missing out an important aspect of the setting, but of misunderstanding the behaviour observed’ (*ibid.*, p. 87). The danger with the insider, which according to Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) is more common, is the danger of the researcher ‘going native’. In the worst case this may result in the researcher just abandoning the task of interpretation in favour of the joy of participation, but often it may lead to a biased interpretation because of ‘over-rapport’. From this over-rapport two problems may emanate. First, ‘one may be identified with a particular group and one’s social mobility in the field and relationships with others become impaired’ (*ibid.*, p. 87) and secondly one may personally identify with one perspective (of the members you have ‘over-rapport’ with) and fail to treat these as problematic (*ibid.*). During the course of my fieldwork, to maintain mobility in the field, I had to use considerable tact in managing my relationship with the respondents. One

reason for this was that the two distinct groups of youths I was engaging with vied for my attention, and I had to ensure that both believed in my loyalty to their group. I managed to adopt a position between the complete observer and the complete participant, not becoming a member of the groups, so that I was seen as one of them, and yet was constantly, questioning their behaviour to ensure an honest interpretation that incorporated the perspective of the respondents – keeping the dangers discussed above at bay. This is also the position recommended by Atkinson and Hammersley (2007), who stated that:

‘While ethnographers may adopt a variety of roles, the usual aim throughout is to maintain a more or less marginal position, thereby providing access to participants perspectives but at the same time minimizing the dangers of over-rapport’ (pp. 78-80).

Owing to the prolonged engagement with the participants, and the intimate role of the researcher in the field, ethnographic methods give rise to distinct ethical issues. Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) highlight the following four ethical issues that are often confronted in ethnographic research: the informed consent of the respondents; maintaining their privacy; protecting them from harm; and minimizing their exploitation. Owing to the nature of my research I was exposed to two of these more than the others: protecting them from harm; and minimizing their exploitation. As far as the individuals were concerned I ensured that they remained anonymous, and that even a close reading of the text would not disclose their identities even to

somebody who was familiar with the research setting. But this is not the only avenue through which harm may reach them, for, as Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) have argued:

‘At the very least, being researched can sometimes create anxiety or worsen it, and where people are already in stressful situations research may be judged to be unethical on these grounds alone’ (p. 213).

I strove hard to avoid causing anxiety and stress in the youths. I was able to win their trust which made it easier for them to talk to me without feeling anxiety; I also tried not to push them on sensitive issues, but allowed them to divulge information at their own comfort level. Nonetheless, it was sometimes impossible to avoid provoking anxiety when trying to understand a sensitive aspect of their life. However, while I was conservative when it came to the individuals under study, I took a bolder position with regard to the consequences of the publication of my research findings. I acknowledge the risks associated with the publication of the findings, especially with regard to the implications my work may have for the persons I studied or those persons belonging to that group (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007, p. 215), but I believe it is an unavoidable risk. I can only hope that my findings are put to good use. Another ethical issue that I wrestled with throughout the course of my research was the question of exploitation. I did not want the people I studied to feel they were fodder for research; I wanted to establish a reciprocal relationship where their effort was rewarded, but these things cannot be

measured and in the end it is a matter of individual judgment (*ibid.*, p.217) In return for their time, I reciprocated with sincere friendship, which I have maintained to this day. Their enduring friendship has allayed my anxieties regarding this ethical issue, and their behaviour gives me the reassurance that they have not felt exploited; if not that, then I am doubly indebted to them for their time and their graciousness in that they never made me feel that I had taken advantage of them. With respect to these ethical issues my position is close to what Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) have called ‘ethical situationism’. Thus, rather than clinging on to ethical universals, I have relied on my own judgment to evaluate the legitimacy of my actions in the field. The guiding principle for me was what Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) associated with ‘ethical situationism’, a point of view which ‘places particular emphasis on the avoidance of serious harm to participants, and insists on the legitimacy of research and the likelihood that offence to someone cannot be avoided (*ibid.*, p.219).

### **3.1 Data Collection and Analysis**

The primary method of data collection used in my research was participant observation. Recognizing the importance of a disciplined daily writing of observations I followed a regular regime of daily note-taking. Owing to the nature of my research I felt that taking notes during the interaction with the respondents would disrupt the fieldwork by both preventing ‘natural’ participation and by generating distrust, a situation which



is often the case in ethnographic research (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007, p.142). At the same time, aware of the dangers of relying on memory, I carried with me a diary at all times, and, whenever the opportunity arose, I made notes. These notes were often not detailed descriptions but instead consisted of important points I could later use to sketch out the details of the observations. Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) discuss the importance of such note-taking, and argue that:

‘A single word, even one merely descriptive of the dress of a person, or a particular word uttered by someone usually is enough to ‘trip off’ a string of images that afford substantial reconstruction of the observed scene’ (p.144).

In these notes I strove hard to record verbatim important statements made by the respondents, and tried to capture important non-verbal aspects of behaviour. I was attentive to note the context of the interactions, relating them to who was present, where, and under what circumstances the events transpired. These aspects proved to be crucial during the analysis stage. For, as Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) suggested:

‘It is equally important that records of speech and action should be located in relation to who was present, where, at what time, and under what circumstances. When it comes to the analysis stage, when one will be gathering together, categorizing, comparing and contrasting instances, it may be crucial that ‘context’ (participants, audience, setting etc) can be identified’ (pp. 146-147)

From these diaries I wrote detailed accounts of the fieldwork whenever I got the opportunity during the day; and every night I consolidated the notes on the day's fieldwork (see Appendix A for a sample of my daily note-taking). From the initial notes, I was able to recall the important aspects of the interactions in the field, and was able to write daily reports of my fieldwork. While writing these notes I reflected on the day's interactions in the field and, during this time, analytical ideas often occurred to me, which I incorporated in the field notes. In addition to ideas relating to the ongoing fieldwork, I also reflected on my own preconceived ideas with respect to the interpretation of the events. I separated these notes from the observations in the field by putting them in brackets, a practice that prevented confusion during the analysis of the data, where a clear distinction between the two was necessary. For each day spent in the field I made a separate file, and by the end of my field work I had a chronological account of my field experience. This formed the largest part of my data set. In addition to these field notes, I conducted in-depth interviews with first generation Pakistani fathers; these interviews were transcribed immediately after the interviews and were saved separately. I interviewed 10 first generation Pakistani fathers (see Tables 3 and 4). These were pre-arranged interviews, often lasting over an hour, and were semi-structured.

Another important aspect of ethnographic fieldwork is that the formulation of problems and hypothesis is an emergent feature of ethnography, and this gradual development of ideas guides the fieldwork and in turn helps

revise the analytical ideas. Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) recommend that to do this well the researcher should regularly process the field notes and reflect on the fieldwork in analytic memoranda and working documents. They state that the ‘construction of analytic notes and memos . . . constitutes precisely the sort of internal dialogue, or thinking aloud, that is the essence of reflexive ethnography’ (p. 151) Throughout the fieldwork I developed my ideas by writing ‘working papers’ based on the data I had collected at that point. These working papers were documents which enabled me to develop interim interpretations, and then to test and revise my ideas with further work in the field (for example of one of these working papers, see Appendix B.) The analysis presented in this working paper went through multiple revisions, and only traces of the analytical categories developed there are recognizable in the completed thesis. Nonetheless, the working papers I constructed during the course of my fieldwork were crucial in developing a robust interpretation of the behaviour of the respondents.

As the amount of data increased I started organizing it for the purpose of analysis. I found the method of physical sorting easiest to work with. Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) claim that this method (whereby ‘[m]ultiple copies of the data are made, and each segment of the data is stored in folders representing all the categories to which it is deemed relevant’ (p. 154) is widely used by ethnographers. This physical sorting worked in the following way. First, after reflecting and analyzing the field notes I produced ‘working papers’ where important aspects of the phenomenon being studied were

identified and developed. Next, in subsequent readings of the field notes I identified segments that were relevant to specific analytical ideas/aspects, and created new documents that contained data relevant to that category. Often a set of observations would become part of multiple documents (for instance, a comment about outfits could apply to issues relating to masculinity, status competition, and parental influence). I found this method suited me, as I was able to focus on individual aspects in detail when necessary, and was also able to relate them to the broader context by referring to the documents I had developed by combining relevant categories.

I analyzed the ethnographic data in tandem with the process of data gathering. As is often the case in ethnographic research, data gathering and data analysis overlap, and there is constant interplay between the two. As suggested by Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) theorizing ‘ought to involve an iterative process in which ideas are used to make sense of the data, and data are used to change our ideas. In other words, there should be movement back and forth between ideas and data’ (p. 159) According to Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) ethnographic research should have a ‘funnel’ structure - over time the research problem is developed so that its scope becomes clearer. Likewise, in the earlier stages I used the data to develop broad concepts and categories, and subsequent work enabled me to identify those categories which were central to the phenomenon under study. After this initial analysis, in the subsequent fieldwork I focused on these to clarify their meaning and to explore their relations with other categories. These concepts were developed and tested in

the field, and analyzed again in the light of the data gathered. This iterative process involved repeated detailed readings of the corpus of data, and I continued this process until I was sure about the validity of my interpretations and when additional data became redundant in the sense that it did not add to my interpretations.

### **3.2 Ethnographic Writing**

To conclude this section on the methodological issues relating to ethnography, I will discuss some pertinent issues on ethnographic writing. According to Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) an ethnographic study ‘is produced as much by how we write as by the processes of data collection and analysis’ (p. 191). We can write about our social experience in the field in different ways, and it is important that we recognize the importance of writing in the ‘production’ of social scientific texts, and that crafting the ethnographic text is an integral part of the ethnographic project (*ibid.* p. 191). Atkinson and Hammersley prescribe reading - in addition to ethnographic texts other genres through which authors explore social worlds – with a critical eye, with the aim of cultivating one’s ability to write insightful texts of one’s own. I prepared myself for writing by first reading some ethnographic monographs that had won acclaim in academia, such as: *Off the Books: The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor*; *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*; *Street Corner Society*; and *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City and Outsiders*.

The ethnographic text above all attempts to persuade the audience that the findings are worth paying attention to. Through his text the ethnographer attempts to translate his data into a text of social science argument, and attempts to convince the reader of the relationship between his data and the theory and the concepts he develops (Atkinson and Hammersley 2007). Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) identify three dimensions of convincing, namely authenticity, plausibility and criticality; and suggest that ethnographic texts must achieve at least authenticity and plausibility to be convincing. My ethnographic account was guided by the ideas developed by Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993), in that I attempted to achieve both authenticity and plausibility by making use of the strategies delineated by them. According to Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) authenticity is established by providing enough detail that assures the readers that the author acquired intimate knowledge of the field and by showing that the author was genuine to the field experience. They suggest that, in order to convince the reader that the author has immersed himself in the field, the text should: convey a very detailed knowledge of the everyday life of the respondents; provide detailed accounts of the respondent's thoughts; and bring to life the interaction of the author with the members of the group studied. I paid particular attention to this aspect in the ethnographic account I produced by providing details of my relationship with the respondents and details of their everyday life. By doing so, I tried to establish complete immersion in the field setting. Genuineness to the field experience, according to Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993), is established by

showing that a disciplined regime has been followed to gather and analyze the data, and the author has successfully qualified personal bias. I devoted attention to both these aspects during my fieldwork, and I discuss these endeavours in my ethnographic account with the aim of reassuring the reader as to the credibility of my research. Whereas ‘authenticity’ focuses on the setting of the research, the dimension of ‘plausibility’ focuses squarely on the reader, and seeks to convince the reader that the story makes sense, given the reader’s personal and disciplinary backgrounds. According to Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) the dimension of plausibility implies that, for a work to convince, it should make a connection by dealing with issues the readers can relate to and it should also show that the research makes distinct contributions to a disciplinary area. I feel that the subject matter of my research made the task of making a connection with the reader a relatively simple task, and that by discussing existing theories I was able to demonstrate the distinct contribution made by my research. I tried to follow closely the guidelines furnished by Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) in producing convincing ethnographic texts. I feel that in my account I have been able to establish both authenticity, and plausibility with some success, and have crafted a convincing ethnographic text.

### **3.3 Field Experience**

I conducted an 18 month long ethnographic study of working class Pakistani second generation youth in the small town of Bolchester (a

pseudonym for a small town in the Midlands). According to the population Census of 2001, the population of Bolchester was 94,000 and Pakistanis were the largest ethnic minority representing approximately 1.3% of the 3.40% ethnic minority individuals in the town. The largest population of the Pakistani community, approximately 500 of the total 1200, lived around the Hanger Lane area, where they represented 15% of the population.<sup>6</sup>

My fieldwork commenced in October 2008 and lasted until March 2010. The choice of the research site was as a result of an incident that I witnessed towards the end of September 2008. I often travel to Bolchester to visit my family. On one such visit, while I was sitting in a restaurant finishing my food and thinking about the interviews I had planned to carry out for my PhD, a Pakistani youth walked into the restaurant. He had a swollen lower lip and a black eye. Owing to my acquaintance with his brother I got to know the details of the incident. Husnain, who is Hubaib's younger brother, had exposed another Asian youth, Shahid, who drove around in a car which was less expensive than Shahid was claiming. Husnain's actions had riled Shahid who had been looking for an opportunity to put Husnain in his place. With two side kicks in tow Shahid had cornered Husnain in an alley outside the restaurant, and had attacked him. At this stage of my research, my aim was to compare the consumer identity projects of working class Pakistani youth (those who had

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<sup>6</sup> The names of places and informants have been disguised to protect the identity of my informants.



dropped out of college early and taken up working class jobs) with those of middle class Pakistani youth (those who had a university degree and who had taken up professional middle class occupations). Based on my exploratory findings via interviews with a small sample drawn from both working class and university educated youth, I was convinced of the importance of class differences in the subsequent acculturation of Pakistani youth. When I witnessed this incident, I was naturally intrigued because these young men matched the characteristics of one set of respondents I had decided to focus on in my study. Immediately after the incident, both Hubaib and Husnain started talking about reclaiming respect, because, according to them, the incident would be talked about among Asian youth and the brothers would lose respect if they did not retaliate. It was the first time I had heard the term ‘gangsta’, when Hubaib expressed his anger at these youths<sup>7</sup> who thought they were gangstas, and Hubaib wanted to show them who the real man was. It was an aspect of the life of working class youth that had completely eluded my initial interviews with individual working class youth. These were interviews I had conducted during the first year of my research prior to entering into the field. During this phase of my research I interviewed 10 Pakistani youths. My interviews were focused on the life of working class youth as consumer, but,

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<sup>7</sup> Note on the usage of the attributional noun ‘youths’ and ‘youth’: I have consistently used ‘youths’ to refer to a narrow group of young men, and preferred to use ‘youth’ for larger diffuse groups.

because I had a very limited understanding of the immediate social environment of these youths, I was not able to ask revealing questions. That night on the train journey back to London, where I was living, I reflected on the events that had transpired after the initial incident. I realized that for both Hubaib and Husnain, the references to the term ‘gangsta’ was not only intelligible, but it was the term that was deployed to interpret both the actions of Shahid and also the considerations of an appropriate response from the brothers. I realized that my goal of understanding the acculturation projects of the working class youth required a closer interaction with these youths *in situ*, observing their everyday life, participating whenever I could; and only through such interaction would I be able to understand the cultural framework that governed the motives, meanings, and reasons for their behaviour. Convinced of the advantages of a closer engagement with the working class youth I decided to move to Bolchester.

During the first months of my fieldwork I became acquainted with Hubaib and his friends - Kamran, Imran, Mehmood, Samir, Rahman, Masood, Junaid, and Waqar - whom I call the gangsta boys for reasons explained later. I first became acquainted with Hubaib in the local gym in Bolchester, where he used to work out everyday. After moving to Bolchester, I explained the objective of my research to him and he agreed to introduce me to other local youth. He introduced me to his other friends and very soon I started spending my evenings with Hubaib and his friends. During the first few months of fieldwork, every night Hubaib would pick me up and we would drive to either

one of his friends' houses or we would find a convenient place to park and then spend the next few hours just talking. I initially moved to my paternal uncle's house in Bolchester and occupied the guest room. One by one I got introduced to and started to spend more time with the youths in this cohort. With the exception of a few, most of these young men were married and were working full-time, and so their leisure time was limited.

During this time I started noticing another 'type' of Pakistani youth, who dressed and behaved very differently from Hubaib and his friends. We would see these youths walking around in the city centre during the day, or sometimes driving around at night. Hubaib and his friends saw these youths as different, and their evaluation of these young men was often derogatory – they were called 'pretty boys', 'pussies' and 'batty boys' (a reference to them being gay). Hubaib often made fun of his younger brother for hanging out with them, and teased him by calling him a 'wannabe popular boy'. I had not expected to find two distinct groups of working class Pakistani youth in Bolchester. The importance of these youths, as a negative reference point for the gangsta boys, made me realize that the acculturation of these youths could not be explained in isolation from other identity relevant subcultures. I decided to expand my inquiry to include those youths whom I refer to as the 'popular boys'. I found that, like the gangsta boys who used the popular boys as a negative reference point, that the popular boys used the gangsta boys as a negative reference point. I realized that these two groups were distinct and represented two contrasting acculturation strategies.

Here I would like to explain and justify my usage of the terms ‘gangsta boys’ and ‘popular boys’. The youths in the group I refer to as gangsta boys, used this term to refer to themselves and their friends; it was a label they were proud of. Their comfort with the label, and the fact that this title expressed salient aspects of their identity project made it an unproblematic choice. The label for the second group of youths, however, proved to be more challenging. The gangsta boys used a pejorative term to refer to these youths, but the term did capture the salient aspects of their consumer identity projects. Initially I considered using that label, but, after considering the ethical issues, I decided to look for a neutral term. The label ‘popular boys’ emerged from subsequent fieldwork; the youths often claimed that they were popular amongst the middle class white youth and they expressed the desirability of such popularity. The term captured salient aspects of their consumer identity projects which were perceived to be popular among the white middle class youth. As the term did not connote any pejorative meaning and the youths felt comfortable with the label, I therefore used this term to describe the second group of Asian youth I studied.

My background proved to be an important factor in the development of my relationship with both the gangsta boys and the popular boys. I had grown up in a middle class family and neighbourhood in Lahore, where I attended Aitchison College, an elite public school in Lahore. Both my parents met an unfortunate accident when I was 6 months old that left me in the care of my grandmother. As is common in Pakistan, my paternal uncles, who lived in the

same house, shared the responsibility of rearing their brother's sons. Both my paternal uncles who lived with us were high school dropouts, and had started their own business at an early age. However, they were convinced that getting an education was the way to social mobility, and 'bought' us the best education, with appreciable difficulties. To make up for their inability to provide academic support themselves, they got us a personal tutor. My classmates, on the other hand, were sons of doctors, lawyers, public servants and successful businessmen. The majority of the youths were committed to their education and, after graduating from the college, most made their way to prestigious universities in the West, including myself (to Oxford for an undergraduate degree in Mathematics and Computation). My own commitment to higher education was reinforced by my peers and family. I was confident of my future success in securing a respectable middle class profession, and throughout my years in formal education I had no cause to consider the possibility of failure, or a working class job. As a result I spent most of my life ensconced in the protective environments of educational institutions both in Pakistan and abroad. After completing my degree at Oxford I moved to the United States where I was an IT professional, and lived in an affluent neighbourhood in Redondo Beach, Los Angeles. Even though I had always aspired for, and eventually achieved, the consumer lifestyle of the successful middle class white person, my commitment to a Pakistani identity, which included a conservative attitude towards sexual relationships and a cautious approach to Western culture, was not completely lost on me. With time, my

religious identity superseded my national identity, and I became more practicing. Thus, I prayed five times a day, grew a fashionable beard, and generally strove to live a life governed by the moral precepts of Islam, which included avoiding drugs, alcohol, and going to nightclubs. I was very open to volunteering information about myself to the youth in the field, because I deemed it important in building trust. Both the gangsta boys and the popular boys became aware of a summary biography of my life very early in the research, and, as I will explain below, this influenced their relationship with me.

During the first few months of my fieldwork I was living at my uncle's house. In the Pakistani community in Bolchester, youth, unless they are family, do not visit their friends at home. This situation is a result of conservative Asian values. Thus, the house is the space inhabited by the women of the house, who are discouraged from going out, and therefore men who are not family are discouraged from visiting. As a result, in these early days our most regular 'hangout' was the house of one of Hubaib's white friends, Parker. Parker lived with his sister, but, unlike the Pakistani houses, his friends were welcomed. On other occasions, when Parker was busy, we would drive around the town and park in a quiet place and talk. Hubaib was my gym partner as well, and, after working out, we often walked around town where we would invariably meet others, and walk around town, window shopping. Four months into my research I decided to rent out my own flat in the city centre. I was encouraged by both the popular boys and the gangsta boys, who were quite

partial to the idea of having a conveniently located ‘hangout’ place, where they would be able to relax. I was able to find a flat in the city centre within a week, and immediately moved in. Once I moved into the flat the boys started visiting very regularly. Some of them made the habit of visiting me daily. The Pakistani style tea<sup>8</sup> I prepared became very popular, and two of them came daily for a cup of tea. Those who were taxi drivers would drop in on slow nights, and sit and talk to me until they received a call from a customer. Often I ended up having marathon sessions with the gangsta boys; typically, Hubaib arrived around 6 pm. and soon after him a couple of others. My job was to have a good DVD ready for the occasion. We usually ordered discounted food from Hubaib’s uncle’s restaurant, and settled down for the movie. Later I would prepare tea and we would talk until the early hours of the morning, when they would make their way home – although Husnain made a habit of sleeping on my sofa. Throughout the night other gangsta boys would drop in to meet their friends. Almost once a month we drove down to Birmingham or Wolverhampton for Indian food, and twice for clothes shopping. In the 18 months I spent in the field I became friends with many of these young men; and so, when it was time for me to leave, the last few nights were spent in their

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<sup>8</sup> This tea requires some effort and expertise to get right. The preparation begins by boiling the tea bags in water. Once the water has come to a boil, copious amount of milk and sugar are added. The mixture is allowed to come to a boil a number of times until it is thick and creamy, after which you take the tea bags out and serve it.

company packing my belongings with their help, while one of them scrubbed the floor and the other the bathroom.

The gangsta boys, as I will describe below, often took part in activities that they sometimes want to keep from individuals who have not earned their trust. During my early days in the field I often reflected on the difficulties of this challenge. I realized that amongst these youths the word of a member of the group was enough to prove my trustworthiness. Most often this was done in an unobtrusive way. Thus, for instance, when I first met Mehmood, Hubaib openly spoke about his exploits indicating to Mehmood that I was a trusted person, somebody who was 'safe' to talk in front of. Mehmood picked up the signal immediately and warmed up to the conversation. Similarly, when I went to a 'party' with Junaid, where other Pakistanis had gathered in a house to drink and smoke marijuana, I was met with cautious looks, but when Junaid said, he is 'safe' and that he knows Hubaib, Imran, Kamran and Mehmood, the others visibly relaxed. Early on during my fieldwork my role as the researcher was salient in their minds, and many of them joked with me about my taking notes about all the conversations that took place between us. With time, as our friendships developed and their trust in me increased, I was upgraded to the category of a friend. For instance, before Waqar had made a habit of dropping by at my flat for a cup of tea at least once a week, he acted with caution. When I asked him questions, he would laugh and sidestep the questions. For instance, he would say: 'You are doing it again. You are doing your research making notes'. However, as I never took notes in front of them (in order to keep the



proceedings from becoming artificial), he was referring to the way in which they teased me, by saying that, when they had left, I would sit down and write down everything they had said. This teasing was accompanied by tackling me on the floor, and by laughter. As his confidence in me grew he stopped dodging my questions and opened up to me.

Although I was able to gain their trust, I was always seen as an outsider by the gangsta boys. This was primarily because I never participated in the leisure activities that defined their subculture, and a commitment to these activities was a prerequisite for a legitimate place into their 'group'. This is probably the reason why they never agreed to take me along to a rave. They always refused to take me along on one pretext or the other. Sometimes they said they did not have space in the car. On other occasions they went without telling me and sometimes they just claimed that it was too dangerous and that they did not want the responsibility. I realized that they just did not feel I would enjoy the experience, and in fact I would hamper them from enjoying the experience. Some of them appreciated my religious inclination, and when others said things which they felt would be offensive to my sensibilities, they would interject. This happened most with Hubaib, who always respected my religious beliefs, and, when one of them went into intimate details about his sexual life, he would object on my behalf. I tried to alleviate their concerns about these issues and encouraged them to relax in my presence. I managed to play down my personal preferences, and succeeded. For example, during my early time with these boys they were uneasy in my presence about their

marijuana consumption, but that changed after I got a little ‘high’ – and did not consider it a breach of my religious ethics – on second-hand smoke in the confined space of a two-door car, with as many as three joints consumed within an hour. According to Hubaib, Parker and Kamran, who were present, and recounted the story to others, I was ‘hit hard’. I took the incident very lightly, and that gave them a signal that, although I was religious, I was not going to judge them with severity. Despite my efforts, on account of the combination of my religiosity, and academic inclination, I was always seen as somebody who could only analyze their life from a distance, but, because I came from a very different background, I could never identify with their lived experience. My university background and my pedestrian orthodox lifestyle – I had not grown up on Hanger Lane, like them – relegated me to a category closer to the mainstream. This factor determined the relationship that developed between us. From their perspective, I had a very limited exposure in life and was protected from the difficulties and challenges of working class life on the ‘mean streets’ where institutional credentials counted for nothing and where what was important was ‘street smartness’ and ‘street credentials’. Their attitude towards me was somewhat condescending: they were educating me, broadening my horizons, giving me a glimpse of a world that was beyond my reach. Owing to this attitude, the gangsta boys were not particularly inclined to spend their leisure time with me, and I had to exert considerable efforts in claiming time from them. I did not fit into the instrumental view of life they espoused: they worked hard and played hard! I was neither useful to them for

their work, nor did I fit in with their leisure activities. This made my research aimed at the gangsta boys more challenging, and I had to constantly pester those who were friendlier to spend time with the others. This also meant that my role was often more of an observer than a participant.

My relationship with the other group of youths – the popular boys – developed along very different lines. I first approached Zayed through my cousin who knew Zayed's sister. Whereas for the gangsta boys my background proved to be a barrier, in the case of the popular boys it proved to be extremely advantageous in developing a relationship. My urban background (university education, religious inclination and perceived mainstream success), as will be explained later, earned me a position of respect in the eyes of the popular boys. They used the appendage '*bhai*' with my name which is generally used to express the relationship of respect between elder and younger siblings, but its usage extends beyond siblings to denote respect. Zayed introduced me to his cousin, Saif, who introduced me to Zayed's younger brother, Salman, and thus in a matter of months I was well acquainted with the core group of respondents. Unlike the gangsta boys who were all working full-time, the popular boys had more leisure time, and, once I moved into my flat, a bulk of their leisure time was spent with me. The popular boys spent a lot of their time in the city centre, and my flat became their first stop. Almost daily, I was woken up by one of the popular boys, who came for a cup of tea, and sometimes to drag me into town with them. We would spend a couple of hours walking around the city centre – window shopping and socializing – returning

to my flat for dinner. Every Wednesday we went to watch a movie in the cinema. On one occasion 10 of us went to watch the latest Hollywood release. We also drove down to Birmingham to watch Bollywood movies and to eat in Indian restaurants. Once we travelled to Birmingham to attend a religious talk. We watched dozens of Bollywood movies at my flat and, over tea, dissected these movies and discussed the Bollywood actors and actresses. For a few months we used the sitting room in my flat as a cricket pitch, and with a soft ball and a plastic bottle had daily matches. One of the popular boys was the designated ‘master chef’, and a few times a week he orchestrated the preparation of prawn curry, egg fried rice, or fish and chips. My flat became a second home for the popular boys: my bedroom was used for rejuvenating naps; my washroom was used for showers after gym or before clubbing; my kitchen was used for meals; and my living room was used as an entertainment centre. There was a sense of ownership which some of them felt towards me and towards my flat; on the one hand they made use of it, on the other they cleaned it, brought food, DVDs, and in one case a sofa. They came unannounced not deeming it necessary to ask me if I was busy. Often I would sleep for hours, and they would be in the living room, watching movies and cooking food.

Our relationship developed without any conscious effort from either side. I was able to relate to the life of the popular boys. At their age I had been a student in England and was trying to enjoy my university life while remaining true to my conservative Pakistani values. The dilemmas the popular

boys often spoke about invoked memories of similar dilemmas I faced during my first few years as an undergraduate student in England. I was able to participate in the leisure activities of the popular boys comfortably, and was able to follow their everyday conversations. I became for them a kind of role model, somebody who understood their lives and who could help and advise them, in addition to the fact that they enjoyed my company. The popular boys sought my advice mostly on matters of education and matters of romance. They wanted to know what jobs paid the most money and what degrees they should pursue to land these jobs. On the romantic front, my advice was even more important. Some of them were in relationships, some of them had recently broken up with their girlfriends, and all of them were going through tumultuous times because their romantic life was an important aspect of their lives. Often I sat with them and spoke to them about how to keep their – in most cases Asian girlfriends – happy. With my age and experience I was supposed to know the answers to these questions, and my guidance was valued.

A question that is relevant to my relationship with the popular boys is to what extent my personality influenced their subsequent behaviour. During my time in the field the popular boys started looking up to me in educational and religious matters and I feel they perceived that I would appreciate religiosity and educational achievement. Aware of the possibility of this interference, I tried to play down my religiosity and to communicate to them that my relationship with them was not dependent on their moral uprightness.

Based on my experience with the popular boys in the field I can say with confidence that I was able to partially neutralize the impact of my personality, but this factor probably did influence their interaction with me and must be kept in mind. Religion often came up in our conversations, and they expressed a desire to be more practicing. Some of them started going to the Friday prayers with me. During the month of fasting they started praying with me. It showed most in their reluctance in opening up to me about their relationships with white girls, and glossing over details of their clubbing experience. Only after months in the field, by encouraging them to talk freely, and by sharing incidents from my past was I able to win their confidence in these matters.

I went into the field with a very impoverished understanding of the life of the youth. The prolonged engagement with the youth in the field allowed me to identify important aspects of their life, and I was able to appreciate the social and cultural framework they deployed in their everyday life to make sense of it. For instance, in my earliest interpretation of the life of the popular boys, the role of white girls was all but ignored; the popular boys did not have white girlfriends and they never spoke about them. In fact they gave an impression that they did not care about them at all. However, it was by observing them in clubs and on the streets, where they strove to impress white girls, that I realized its significance, and in subsequent conversations was able to understand the symbolic potency of a 'posh white girlfriend'. In the case of the gangsta boys, the method proved to be of even more use. The advantage of the prolonged engagement *in situ* was that I could complement my

understanding of their lives as they talked about it by observing their lives as they lived it. The following example shows how the ethnographic method can reach areas which other methods cannot. One of the gangsta boys was strip-searched by a policeman. The incident may seem ordinary, but from the way the gangsta boy developed a narrative around the incident and planted it into the gangsta 'gossip vine', I realized the importance of such events in the life of these youths. Such nuances of the lived experience of the respondents are very difficult to capture in interviews. These incidents take place in 'real time', and are not even appreciated by the youth themselves.

Another advantage of the ethnographic method is that it allows the research to secure the trust of the respondents. Both the popular boys and the gangsta boys were reluctant to share certain aspects of their life with me in the early days of my research. This reluctance, which was important to their identities but which was closely guarded, made it even more important that I should win their trust. I was able to achieve this through the prolonged engagement with the youths. I had to convince them that I was interested in their lives, that I was willing to reciprocate by giving them my time and that I was not going to judge them. In an interview it is very difficult to achieve such levels of trust.

One of the disadvantages of the ethnographic method is the danger of intrusion. Methods that rely on prolonged interaction with the subjects in their natural setting may disrupt the normal activities of the people being studied. (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988) A related issue is the impact of the biases of the

researcher (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). These are criticisms that apply generally to all qualitative methods, but are even more pronounced in ethnographic studies. During my fieldwork I tried hard to minimize intrusion, and also to avoid any bias on my part, but it is impossible to control these aspects completely. I have therefore tried to reflect on my own personal background and to identify ways in which it may have sometimes disrupted the youths' normal activities. I feel the biases that arose from my religiosity were neutralized to an extent by my attachment to a specific school of thought in Islam. One of the defining principles of this school is that the individual should avoid judging others. Thus, my spiritual teacher teaches that we should only be concerned about our own spiritual states and should never reflect on the actions of others. This understanding allowed me to maintain a non-judgmental attitude towards these youths. However, I sometimes found it hard to understand the educational under-achievement of these youths. Coming from a background where the utility of a good education is taken for granted I often interpreted their lack of commitment to education unsympathetically. My bias may have coloured my understanding, and hindered an appreciation of the challenges these youths faced in performing well.

Another source of intrusion was the 'artificial' space that was introduced because of the flat I rented in the city centre. Before this flat, the gangsta boys used to end up at a white friend's house or in desolate parking lots. The popular boys with no place to go drove aimlessly around the city centre until late at night. My flat gave them an easy 'hang out' place, and



significantly altered the course of their daily activities. It was a well thought out decision on my part; I had to weigh the disadvantage of intrusion against the advantages of regular and easy access to the subjects of my research.

When I decided to carry out an ethnographic study I made the decision without considering the challenges of such a prolonged engagement. I now attribute this impulsiveness to a naïve understanding of what the method entailed. For me the biggest challenge of the research was that my life was slowly taken over by the subjects of my research. After I rented the flat my personal space was completely invaded by these youths. In order to claim their time, I thought I had to relinquish rights on my time, and I was not able to maintain a balance. Almost every waking hour of my time in the field I was in the company of these young men. This meant that I had very little time for myself. All my activities depended on the whims of these youths. I tried to keep conversations limited to areas that would help me understand their life better; and my social life was circumscribed by my research concerns and those persons whom I was studying. My personal hobbies were supplanted by their hobbies. For instance, for months I went without reading a book, a habit that had been in place for more than 20 years. Instead I had to sit through hours of Hollywood and Bollywood movies which they found entertaining, and which sometimes involved watching the same movie two or three times a week with different sets of people. Every night I had to clean up after these boys. I remember making as many as thirty cups of tea a day, which also meant washing up thirty dirty cups a day. The boys tried to be helpful, but this was

only episodic and random. One of them might wash the cups for me after a gap of weeks of leaving it to me, so that at times it became tiring. Suppressing my preferences proved to be an ongoing challenge, which sometimes led to frustration. For example, I have a habit of devoting some of my time daily to listening to my spiritual teacher, reading the Quran and to reciting ‘*awrad*’<sup>9</sup>; but this was the first activity that suffered from the amount of time I ended up spending with these youths. On two separate occasions, seeking some personal space, I locked myself in my room and switched off the lights pretending I was not in when they came knocking on my door. This strategy, however, became ineffective after one of them accidentally damaged the lock on my door, and after that my door was never locked. Eventually, I learnt to keep myself calm through some meditation in the morning and some before sleeping. It worked for me, and on most days I felt up to the challenge.

A related challenge owed itself to my past friendships, which were based on reciprocity, but my relationship with the youths was different. I spent a lot of time listening to the life stories of these individuals, their problems, their dilemmas, and in return I was not sharing as much with them. They opened up to me, which was good and implied that I was doing a good job, but I was not opening up to them, which meant that the narrative of my life was at a standstill. I have often made sense of my life by sharing it with my closest friends, and, with the support of these like-minded individuals, I have

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<sup>9</sup> Litanies in Arabic.

navigated the problems in my life. In the 18 months of fieldwork I had the distinct feeling that I had to suspend my life, only to return to it after the conclusion of my fieldwork. Achieving detachment from the exigencies of my life proved to be difficult, and I acknowledge that I suffered psychologically at times, although I have set many things right since.

Some of these challenges are dealt with in a Hollywood movie I watched with the popular boys; I vividly remember identifying strongly with the character of Donnie Brasco in the eponymous film, who plays the part of a FBI agent who infiltrates the Mafia. His character slowly acculturates into the culture he is immersed in, and his friendships become so strong that he loses sight of the objective of his mission. Although the changes in my personality were not as dramatic, and I did not lose sight of the goal of my research, the movie did highlight for me some of the ethical dilemmas I faced due to my relationship with the youths. I also mention this movie because, when we were watching it, the youths were quick to comment on the similarities between what he was doing and what I was trying to achieve, and we discussed some of these issues. I was their friend, but my relationship with them also had another motive. Was I taking advantage of their openness and the friendship they had offered me? Was I betraying them by analyzing their lives, in some case in an unflattering manner? These questions weighed heavy on my heart. In the end I found moral support in the belief that I was contributing to their lives by being a friend on whom they could depend for support and advice; and that I was

addressing the larger question of underachievement prevalent in Pakistani youth.

Despite the challenges of the ethnographic work, the experience proved to be a profound learning experience for me. My early life was spent in Pakistan where society is strictly segmented along the dimension of class, and where the rich have little occasion to interact with the less fortunate, except in their capacity as employers. Like other youth from an upper middle class background I was encouraged to keep the company of young people from 'good' families, and my elders supervised my socialization with a keen eye, making sure I was not corrupted by the company of 'lesser' people. My college experience was equally elitist. When I travelled to England I found myself surrounded by highly educated Pakistani youth, and I rather naïvely came to the conclusion that British born Pakistani youth were all successful in their academic endeavour. Like, most people today, my life was lived in comfort, surrounded by people who faced little, if any, structural resistance to upward mobility. My tastes, preferences, and lifestyle had been shaped by the high cultural capital I had hoarded over the years, and was reinforced by the friends I had surrounded myself with. All this was to change, once I started my fieldwork. These were youths who belonged to working class families, had grown up in impoverished neighbourhoods, had underperformed academically, and had grown up in the West and who expected an unpromising future. I was able to empathize with these youths, and such a connection with individuals who have a completely different lived experience results in an expansion of

perspective. Prior to my ethnographic work I had always looked at youth involved in deviant behaviour with derision, considering them immoral and uncouth. I realized such pronouncements were often the result of an impoverished understanding of the lived experience of these youths who were beset by very different difficulties which often limited their strategies. It also encouraged me to re-evaluate my own sensibilities, which appeared normal and universal to me, but in fact they were a result of my unique social circumstances. For example, I had never acknowledged the influence of my family's socio-economic situation on my academic performance, and subsequent career chances. My fieldwork experience forced me to re-evaluate my own achievement, and allowed me to situate them in a context that made these achievements seem less heroic. The experience has given me the ability to suspend my judgment about others until I have considered their lives in detail. I think it is important to see their actions from their perspective before pronouncing a judgment based on my assessment of the situation. This ability to humanize is what makes us human.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### 4.1 Consumer Subcultures

In this chapter I present the findings from my 18 month long fieldwork. The data set I have used to develop my findings consists of participant observations from my prolonged engagement with Asian youth in the field. In addition, the data set includes in-depth interviews with first generation migrant fathers and second generation youth. I begin by describing the socio-cultural environment the pioneer generation came from. I show how in 1960s' Pakistan, a well-defined class hierarchy - along the urban rural divide - was in place due to the modernization project undertaken by the government. I then argue that this hierarchy was internalized by the first generation of migrants who emigrated at that time and that, over the years, this hierarchy developed to take a unique form *vis-à-vis* the local context in Bolchester. I then describe how status competition in this hierarchy has shaped the expectations of first generation Pakistani parents with regard to their children, which has in turn influenced the consumer acculturation projects of the second generation.

Pakistan won independence from British imperialism on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947. Pakistan in 1947 inherited a single textile and a single sugar mill and a very feeble institutional infrastructure; and at the time of independence Pakistan remained largely rural (Ali, 2004). In 1958, General Ayub Khan imposed martial law on the country, which lasted a decade, and he embarked

on his modernization plan. This period was marked by government policies geared towards supporting the industrial sector, which contributed to the emergence of an industrial elite in the bigger cities. The resulting increase in the demand for industrial labour, and the surplus of labour in rural areas owing to the introduction of green revolution technologies in agriculture, saw increased levels of migration from rural to urban areas. During this time there was a 40% growth in the urban population due to internal migration (Hasan, 2010). These migrants occupied work at the lowest rung of the labour market in the cities. Economic development in the urban centres paved the way for a more comfortable lifestyle, but only for the privileged classes. In addition to better economic prospects, urban centres also promised freedom from the entrenched caste system and the feudal control which was prevalent in rural villages (Hasan, 2010). General Ayub envisioned progress through educational, scientific and technological improvements. For instance, on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1961 he addressed the nation with the following words:

‘The mass-man of today is changing fast in every dimension. The speed and tempo of life is becoming more and more dynamic and breathless. The spread of universal education is breaking the crust of ignorance and prejudice.’

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<sup>10</sup> In Rais Ahmad Jafri (ed.), *Ayub: Soldier and Statesman*, 1966, Mohammad Ali Academy, Lahore.

General Ayub's vision of progress was synonymous with the industrial, educational and technological advances in the urban centres, and this further marginalized the rural population.

The decade of martial law between 1958 and 1969 coincided with increased levels of migration to Britain, and significantly influenced the sensibilities of the migrants of that time. General Ayub Khan promoted centralization in West Pakistan, which resulted in increasing economic, social, educational and cultural inequality. It resulted in the formation of an internal social hierarchy where the Urdu speaking West Pakistani elite occupied the top rung and the remote rural villages the bottom (Dadi, 2010). Whereas the urban centres thrived both economically and culturally, the rural poor experienced increasing levels of poverty and hardship. For the rural migrants the urban cities became symbols of progress, and their rural background became a symbol of the pre-modern era. Thus, as Hasan (2010) stated in his study of migration in Pakistan, 'whoever gets an education or saves enough money in business migrates to the bigger cities where there are better jobs, lifestyle and business opportunities' (p. 39).

The diametrically opposed socio-economic situation of the rural and urban and semi-urban areas of Pakistan shaped the ideologies of immigrants, and equipped them with contrasting resources to manage their lives in the host Western countries. Thus, urban migrants and those that came from smaller cities or villages near urban centres in the Punjab were generally more skilled, better educated and more familiar with urban life. They were exposed to liberal



Western values, a higher standard of living, access to education etc, whereas those who migrated from Mirpur or other remote villages in Punjab were still entrenched in pre-modern feudal control and caste-based systems of social organization, and conservative modes of thinking (Werbner, 2005).

Migrants from Pakistan started arriving into Britain in large numbers after World War II, from the early 1950s, and this inflow reached its peak in the late 1960s. The population of Pakistanis in Britain in 1961 was 24,900, which increased to 127,565 in 1971 (Ballard, 1994) as a result of the ‘chain migration’ which followed after the ‘pioneer’ generation had settled in England. ‘Chain migration’ here refers to the social process whereby immigrants from a particular town/village follow others from the same town/village to a particular destination, either an urban location in the home country, which is more common, or an immigrant receiving foreign country. (For a description of the chain migration process, see Shaw, 1988 and 1994.).

In Britain the post-war boom resulted in labour shortages in the low-skilled industrial labour market (for example, the textile industry), and so the British government encouraged migration from the ex-colonies. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s a steady stream of migrants arrived from West Punjab and Azad Kashmir. Most of the migrants came from specific areas in Pakistan, a situation that had come about because of the patterns of recruitment during British rule and because of a history of prior migration from these areas. (See Shaw, 1994, and Ballard, 2003, for a detailed discussion of this pattern.) In 1962, in order to limit migration, a work voucher scheme was introduced by

the British government whereby migrants with guaranteed jobs waiting for them in Britain were granted entry whereas others were discouraged. With the announcement of this scheme, there was a sudden surge of migrants from specific areas in Pakistan, primarily due to the exhortations of the migrants of the pioneer generation who wanted to bring other kinsmen into Britain before the law was changed.

Initially, the pioneer immigrants shared living spaces with migrants from different areas in Pakistan. These single men, who were without the family structure they had left behind, dealt with the challenge of the new environment by sticking together with other Pakistanis. It was not uncommon in those days to find Pakistanis, from Mirpur, remote villages in the Punjab, and from smaller cities, all sharing the living space in communal houses. However, the situation changed as more migrants arrived to join their fellow kinsmen, who in many cases had assisted their kinsmen in their migration. The internal differences within the migrant community became salient. The literature shows, however, that the Pakistani immigrants did not mix indiscriminately, but that the social structures of the villages they migrated from, loosely organized around occupational status and endogamous groups, determined the social life of immigrants in Britain (Shaw, 1994). However, the question of class differences resulting from the urban/rural divide has not received much attention in the literature. Werbner (2005), for instance, highlighted this theoretical lacuna in the extant literature on the Pakistani community, and pointed out that the studies had assumed a highly

conservative, uneducated rural origin for the migrant community. Shaw (1988) has emphasized the importance of the rural-urban distinction with regard to how Pakistanis view themselves:

‘Among Pakistanis themselves the connotations of being from a city or from a village are important, because many Pakistanis have their own prejudices in this respect. For instance people from the cities tend to view themselves as superior to Pakistanis from the villages, regarding the villagers as uneducated, ill mannered, crude and short tempered’ (p. 17).

Shaw argues that, while rural migrants are seen as uncivilized, urbanites are considered better educated and are more respected than villagers as the urban lifestyle is considered to be better than the village lifestyle. But even her work does not go further than a mere recognition of the importance of the rural-urban divide amongst the Pakistani community. My 18 month fieldwork, on the other hand, suggests that for the Pakistani community in Bolchester the urban-rural distinction has become the most potent distinction as far as the Pakistani community is concerned, and the pioneer generation is acutely aware of this distinction, which in turn has a considerable impact on their aspirations. It is therefore important to draw attention to this distinction in general terms at the outset.

The Pakistani population in Bolchester is mainly comprised of three very large extended families. One is from the rural areas in and around Mirpur district in the province of Kashmir, which at the time of their

immigration was very underdeveloped. According to Ballard (2003), the district's location and terrain made irrigation difficult, which left peasant farmers with a low crop yield and a peasant population which was relatively impoverished. The second extended family finds its origins in the remote villages of the Jhelum district, which were only marginally better off than the Mirpuri migrants. The third extended family comes from the medium-sized city of Jhelum. In addition to these three extended family groups, two families of urban migrants from Lahore are prominent in the Pakistani community. As the number of migrants in Bolchester increased, and being motivated by the need to emphasize the urban-rural distinction of their origins, the rural-urban divide became important in their new country, especially on the part of migrants from the urban areas of Pakistan who saw this as an opportunity to claim their superior status.

The roots of this urban-rural distinction can be traced back to the national discourse of Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s, which was heavily in favour of modernization. This discourse privileged urban centres and relegated the remote villages to occupy a marginalized position. In this climate, large numbers of Pakistanis from remote villages in Kashmir and smaller cities in Punjab migrated to the United Kingdom. These young migrants, under the influence of the Pakistani national discourse, believed in the ascendancy of the urbanites and for many of them this belief determined their struggle for social status. Shaw (1988) has commented on this desire to improve one's status:

‘Indeed such evaluations provided much of the force behind coming to England in the first place to earn money in order to improve one’s status as a villager, to build new houses, start a business, educate one’s children or move to a city in Pakistan’ (p 27).

During my fieldwork I interacted with many first generation migrants of various backgrounds (for example, taxi drivers, chefs, restaurant owners, factory workers, and property holders) who had emigrated from a range of different places (such as from Kashmiri villages and from cities). From my discussions with them about the Pakistani community I was able to understand how these first generation Pakistanis viewed other Pakistani migrants, and was able to assess and compare the status they had possessed when they had emigrated from Pakistan with that which they now possessed in their current social milieu. The urbanites saw themselves at the head of the status hierarchy. Thus, Adeel, a migrant from Lahore who once owned a car repair shop and now managed a restaurant, explained to me as follows:

‘The Pakistani community in Bolchester can be divided into the Mirpuris<sup>11</sup> [from rural Kashmir] and the Jhelumis [those belonging to smaller

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<sup>11</sup> The Pakistanis from smaller cities and villages near the urban centres and the urbanites use this term to refer to all the migrants from villages in Kashmir. Mirpur is a small district in Kashmir and not all the Kashmiri migrants are from this area. But, because it is geographically the most distant district from the cities, it is used to emphasize the distance of the Kashmiri migrants from the cities.

cities]. The Mirpuris are crooks. These people never saw money in the villages they came from and when they came here their only concern was making money. They cheat the system. While they are working they claim benefit from the council. They get into illegal activities. The others who are from the smaller cities are often law-abiding and hard-working. . . . The Mirpuris love money and do not spend a penny on themselves. They live like beggars. Their houses are dirty, their personal hygiene is dirty. The people from smaller cities have more exposure and, because they are closer to Lahore, they are more cultured. They spend money on themselves.’

Nawaz Khan, another urbanite, explained:

‘These Mirpuris are *jahil*. They have no background. They come here and they cheat and steal to make money. They are *ghatya* people and we do not like associating with them. Only a few families out of them have done well for themselves. The rest of them are misers. They live in the run-down areas and all the money they make they save and buy land in their ancestral villages. Their children are *ghatya* like their parents. They have no manners and no culture. They get married to cousins from their families and on the side have white girls and sometimes even have children with them. They do drugs and are time wasters, never focus on their education and are only concerned about making money, like their parents.’

These urbanites think that they are the most cultured Pakistanis, because they belong to urban cities and are modernized both in terms of lifestyle and values. This background, according to them, enables them to integrate into and be accepted by mainstream white society. Although even these urban migrants do not socialize much with mainstream UK society, they nonetheless believe that mainstream UK society respects them, because of their lifestyle and values. Their idea of respect and acceptability in mainstream society does not mean that they need to mingle with them freely; for them, the successful performance of a mainstream lifestyle automatically earns them the respect of mainstream society. They claim that, because they come from a privileged urban background, they do not love money for the sake of money like the 'other' Pakistanis do; rather they earn money so that they can live a comfortable lifestyle. It is important to note that the privileged urban background they are proud of is not an economic privilege but is based on socio-cultural ascendancy. Thus, they see themselves as modern in modes of thinking while they see the villagers as primitive and backward. They proudly talk about how they themselves and their children freely spend money on their clothes, food, cars, and houses while, according to them, the Kashmiri Pakistanis dress shabbily, eat poorly, and live in cheap housing. In the families who have emigrated from urban areas in Pakistan the women dress in English outfits and work, for instance, in prestigious retail stores (such as the House of Fraser and Laura Ashley) and can speak English fluently. Such attributes are considered to be potent signs of their modernity, as opposed to the

backwardness of the other Pakistanis, who in most cases do not allow their women to work. These urban migrants claim superiority even over the migrants from smaller cities, because they claim that even migrants from these cities are not as ‘modern’ as they are. The parents’ generation claims this status openly; and the second generation echoes the prejudices of their parents. For instance, Katrina, whose father, Amjad Khan, hailed from Lahore, articulated this prejudice when she recounted to me an incident that took place in Kays’, a Turkish take-away in Bolchester:

‘What happened was, the guy spoke to me and said you are Amjad’s (the name her father is known by in Bolchester) daughter right. You see everyone knows my father. And then Shabana was with me (Shabana is her friend and is from the ‘Agha’ family) and she said, ‘I am from the Agha family’, and the guy goes I don’t know them.’

In the ensuing conversation she explained how her family was well-known, whereas the Aghas were not, although they want to be known like her family. These urban Pakistanis feel that they are the most respected in the Asian community not because of their economic success – some other Pakistanis have made more money – but because of their lifestyle which also happens to be closer to that of mainstream UK society and because of their origins and connections in Lahore. They firmly believed that their values were respected universally across the Asian community, but conversations with rural migrants showed that their modernity did not earn them respect among the



conservative rural migrants. In fact they believed that these modern Pakistanis had lost their identity because of their desire to be respected by mainstream UK society. But for the urban elite the evaluation of the subordinate rural migrants is not important: they are *jahil*, what do they know?

Like the urbanites, the migrants from smaller cities also emphasized their superiority over individuals from Kashmir and echoed the feelings of the urbanites. According to these first generation immigrants from smaller cities, the urbanites were more educated and cultured, and they therefore idealized the lifestyle of the urbanites and made great efforts to emulate it. Ijaz, a migrant from Jhelum, explained to me:

‘If I was from a background Mr. Khan is from (referring to a particular urban migrant) I would live in Pakistan. He has so many connections, and has family in Lahore.’

Pervez, another first generation migrant from Jhelum, explained:

‘There are differences between us and the individuals from Lahore. We are simpler people. We are not like the people from Lahore who have a lavish lifestyle and come from educated backgrounds.’

However, these migrants confused urban backgrounds with better education; the urban migrants are not necessarily more educated, but the urban background is understood to imply a more modern outlook which the migrants from smaller cities equate with education. The immigrants from these smaller

cities show the two urban families a lot of respect, which these families owe solely to their urban background and lifestyle; a lifestyle which in essence is a consumer lifestyle – bigger, cleaner, tastefully decorated houses, Western outfits and ample spending on family leisure activities. Whereas the rural migrants from remote villages consider the modern lifestyle a departure from the conservative Pakistani identity, the migrants from smaller cities find it desirable.

To reinforce their superiority, these urbanites, on the slightest pretext, started reciting the names of the influential individuals they knew in Pakistan, who often visited their house in England. For instance, when Amjad Khan's daughter got married in Pakistan, the function was held at the house of the then Defence Minister of Pakistan, and he liked to mention this fact to his acquaintances. The mayor of Bolchester, a Kashmiri Pakistani from a remote village, attended the wedding, and Amjad Khan claimed that the mayor was awed by the grandeur of the wedding and the status of the people who attended. Some of the first generation migrants from smaller cities also asked me about the wedding. 'Was the wedding really in the house of the Defence Minister? they would ask, appreciably impressed by the connections of this urban family. The migrants from the smaller cities strove to develop links with the urban migrant families in Bolchester. The parents invited them to their weddings and birthdays and encouraged their children to befriend children from these families because they were regarded as 'good' Pakistani friends to have. When I spoke to Zayed about his father's opinion about his friends,

Zayed told me that he liked Husnain because he knew Husnain's family. An incident that supports my observations took place in January 2010, as a consequence of the free bus service Amjad Khan offered to students at the local university. Amjad Khan, a restaurateur in the city centre, in order to attract student customers, started a partnership with a local white bus driver for a free bus run from the restaurant to the university. This free offer affected the business of the taxi drivers, a substantial number of whom belonged to the family of migrants from Jhelum and who were very upset. They first tried approaching Amjad Khan to negotiate a deal, but it did not materialize. Nawaz Khan, who was in partnership with his brother in the restaurant business, heard that two taxi driver brothers from the Agha<sup>12</sup> family had been defaming the restaurant. He called them for a meeting to discuss this. He later told me that when he confronted them, they denied ever saying disrespectful words. They assured him that they thought highly of him and his family, and wanted their friendship to strengthen. This incident shows how migrants from smaller Pakistani cities made a considerable effort to maintain close ties to the urban immigrant families in Bolchester. Just as important for the small city migrants was the distinction between them and the migrants from smaller villages in Pakistan (from Mirpur in particular, because it serves as the archetype of the villager. On numerous occasions during my fieldwork I witnessed this attitude.

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<sup>12</sup> The family of migrants who claim their origin to the city of Jhelum are known in Bolchester as the Agha family, owing to the common last name of the men in this family.

For instance, when one girl from a popular boy family had been seeing a Mirpuri boy; the boy's family has approached the girl's family at least twice to discuss marriage, but on both occasions the girl's family had refused. The girl's father believed that the family had a higher status than the Mirpuris. The role of marriage as a symbolic articulation of the intricate internal distinctions of class and caste in the Pakistani community has been extensively discussed by Werbner (1990).

The migrants from smaller cities have the most to gain by adopting the lifestyle of the urban Pakistanis, because, not only does it earn them acceptance in mainstream UK society but it also distances them from the marginalized Mirpuris' lifestyle. Acceptance in mainstream society serves a symbolic purpose for migrants in that it provides evidence of their success in, and their acceptance by, the dominant culture.

The Kashmiri migrants and others from remote villages in the Punjab are aware of their marginalized position in the local status hierarchy. Most of them accept their position and have decided to compete for social status in the Kashmiri community only, which is primarily achieved through economic success. Their thrift is not just mentioned by non-Kashmiri Pakistani immigrants but even by other Kashmiri migrants. When I spoke to Kamran about first generation migrants from Kashmir he said:

‘They love money too much. My father is from Kashmir as well, but he is an exception; he always spent money on himself. But the others love money. They still live in the Pakistani areas. They save all their money and even take

money from their children so they can buy land in Pakistan or buy properties in England. Like Channa's father. He took all his money from here and money from his sons to buy land in Pakistan.'

When I asked Kamran what they did with the money, he replied: 'They probably have it all under their bed. That is how much they love money'. Although Kamran believed in the stereotype, he denied that his father behaved like the Mirpuris. However, a close examination of Kamran's father's spending revealed otherwise. Thus, like other Mirpuris, he did not spend his money on his lifestyle: he did not own a television and he claimed that he had not bought any new clothes for the past 10 years. He did not own a car, apart from his taxi. In fact, all his money had been used to buy land in Mirpur Pakistan, his ancestral village, and also property in England (which his elder son had been paying for until recently). Kamran's own thinking reflects an orientation that is associated with Kashmiri migrants. Thus, when we were talking about Muneer, a successful businessman from a rural village in Pakistan, Kamran said: 'Their family has no respect in our village. They have not even bought a house in Kashmir'. This simple statement reveals his attitude: it is really important to have respect in your village and this comes from owning a big house in that village. This attitude of the Kashmiri migrants makes sense when it is set against their social context: the larger Pakistani community refuses to respect them, no matter how much money they make they are still 'villagers' – uneducated, miserly, uncultured, backward thinking etc. For this reason, most

of them take the decision to focus instead on their ancestral villages in order to gain respect.

My findings showed that the acculturation projects of the second generation youth were significantly influenced by the expectations their parents had for them. The discussion above provides the background that informs the immigration ideologies of the pioneer generation, and consequently their expectations of their sons. In the following section I first discuss the immigration ideologies of the parents of the popular boys and gangsta boys; and then show how these expectations influence the acculturation projects of the youth.

## **4.2 Popular Boy Subculture**

The acculturation projects the popular boys pursued were appreciably influenced by the expectations their parents had of them. The purpose of this section is to describe the initial experiences and immigration ideologies of the parents. Next, I discuss how these experiences shaped their expectations of their sons. I conclude this section by describing how the parents' aspirations and expectations were subsumed in the ideal of a 'good son' and how they communicated this ideal to their sons.

### **4.2.1 Parents' Background and Future Plans**

The majority of these parents emigrated in their youth from smaller cities around Lahore where the agriculture sector accounted for most of the employment. Typically, prior to their emigration from Pakistan, these young

men attended local schools. But, encouraged by the economic gains made by earlier migrants, who had emigrated from Pakistan to fill the labour shortage in the UK in 1950s, they decided to emigrate. From what I gathered from interviews with first generation parents, the decision to emigrate was motivated by expected economic gains. This was their sole motive. None of them mentioned that the decision to emigrate was as a result of other factors, such as the anxiety caused by the status others from their neighbourhood had acquired as a result of remittance money. However, in my view the first generation migrants were not comfortable in admitting that their status anxieties were the motivating force behind their immigration. I agree with Shaw (1988) who claimed that the decision to emigrate was often driven by status motives, in other words the desire to reap the benefits of emigration in terms of bigger houses and other forms of ownership, such as electronic goods. These young men were assisted in finding factory jobs and accommodation by friends and family who had migrated before them. As a result, these young men spent the first few years in their new country living among a group of other young men like themselves. They shared living spaces – as many as eight lived in small two-bedroom houses. They all worked in the same local factories, and they all socialized with other single men from their ancestral village. They recollected that at that time they were only interested in making money, and so they worked 16 hour shifts and avoided all unnecessary expenditures, including expenses on clothes, food, and leisure activities. Afzal Agha remembered his earliest days of immigration as a time of frugality. He recalled that he lived in

a small house, where the four bedrooms were shared by a dozen young migrants like him. They saved money by cooking together and never eating out. The only leisure activity was that once every few months they would all go to the cinema to watch a Bollywood movie and treat themselves to Pakistani food at a restaurant. They primarily occupied working class positions, such as working in factories. The Iron Square factory in Bolchester was a big employer, and Pervez, Akram and Afzal worked there. Their social life was limited to the house they shared with other migrants, where over communally cooked meals they would reminisce about life in their village and talk about their future plans. For most of these young men future plans consisted of buying their own house and bringing over a wife from Pakistan. Most of them imported wives from back home who were selected by their parents from the extended family (usually first cousins) as soon as they had saved enough money. Once they were married, these men moved out of the shared accommodation into cheap housing in Asian areas in British cities. During this phase of their lives they completely devoted themselves to work and family life. Their time was taken up completely by work and family. All other social ties were curtailed and were only resurrected once they had reached a sufficiently high level of economic sufficiency. Pervez, one such immigrant, described his early married life to me:

‘I used to do the taxi for 16-18 hours a day. I worked really hard. That did not leave much time for anything else. I hardly socialized; I used to just spend time at home’.



He now owns seven properties, all rented out and jointly owned with his brother, and he still works, although he has reduced his working hours substantially.

Compared to the migrants from the smaller cities, the migrants from Lahore had a very different immigration experience in the UK. Nawaz Khan arrived in England from Saudi Arabia, where he had been working in the cargo department of Saudi Airlines. Before Saudi Arabia he had done manual work in Germany. He claimed that he hailed from a very aristocratic Lahore family; his father had at one point been amongst the richest businessmen in Lahore, but later lost all his money. On his mother's side he claimed that his extended family boasted successful businessmen and politicians. Although his father had met with hard times towards the end of his life, he had left his children with a large house in the centre of the city. Nawaz Khan explained that his decision to emigrate from Pakistan was motivated by a desire to live a more comfortable lifestyle, which he could not achieve in Lahore because he was not educated enough. His brothers supplemented the savings he had made while working in Saudi Arabia. He was able to save because he did not have to remit money to Pakistan, as his family already enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle. With this money he was able to begin his immigration experience in England with a business of his own – he owned a corner shop. Similarly, his brother Amjad Khan arrived in England not as a manual worker, but as a business owner – he managed the restaurant the brothers had jointly bought.

Today, although the popular boys' parents are not economically better off than the gangsta boys' parents, they boast a consumer lifestyle more in line with mainstream UK society. The popular boy parents are not investing their money back in their ancestral village by building houses. Compared to their initial years in Britain, when they were expected to send large money payment back to those who were left behind (such as elderly parents and younger brothers and sisters), most popular boys' parents are relieved of this obligation with siblings growing up and emigrating to England and elderly parents passing away. So instead of sending money back home or building large houses in the villages, the popular boys' parents began to invest their money in order to improve their lifestyle. Most have moved out of the Asian neighbourhoods, and moved into either mixed British-Pakistani neighbourhoods or primarily British neighbourhoods. Unlike the gangsta boy parents who were focused on buying more land and property with the intention of amassing more wealth, the popular boy parents invested their money in order to improve their lifestyle. This difference in their spending behaviour is accounted for by their projects to earn respect through better lifestyles.

It is important to note that, even though the popular boy parents are currently living in White neighbourhoods, their goal was not necessarily to acculturate with the white British culture or to start socializing with their neighbours. Indeed, none of the popular boy parents socialized with their neighbours. Living in the white neighbourhood is both a symbol for mainstream society and the Asian community. As discussed earlier, living a

mainstream lifestyle is considered sufficient for earning the respect and acceptance of mainstream society. Choosing to spend their money on a more expensive house showed that they were willing to spend money on improving their lifestyle, unlike the ‘stingy uncultured’ Mirpuri villagers, words which are often used by urban Pakistanis migrants when expressing their opinion about rural migrants. They choose to buy a house in the White neighbourhood to impress other Pakistani families. However, popular boy parents still only socialized with their extended family or other Pakistani families who, like them, were either committed to the distinction they were trying to effect or with the families from Lahore. They would get together via occasional dinners, marriage functions and birthday parties. These occasions are important because they constitute opportunities to display their newly earned middle class economic status, which they do by welcoming their guests into richly furnished rooms and offering them a variety of expensive foods – the quantity of food should be such that, after everyone has eaten, there should be a lot left and meat dishes should be prominent. Husnain’s mother when talking about another Pakistani family, whom they knew in London, said:

‘They are very miserly. They spend money to show off, like the Mercedes they have bought, but when you go to their house they save money on the food. The food is never enough. This shows the lack of their family background.’

Similarly, when Akram Agha married his daughter to Rasheed Agha’s son, he spent a lot of money to impress the community. The invitees, apart

from other popular boy families, were the urban immigrant families and a select few Kashmiri families. The ceremony was held at a large three star hotel near Tret, a small town outside Bolchester, and the food was catered by Barne, an expensive restaurant in Birmingham. The father paid for the ceremony, as is the custom in Pakistan, where one function is paid for by the bride's father, and one by the groom's father.

One of the main reasons for the differences in lifestyles of popular boy parents and gangsta boy parents is the differences in their initial immigration ideology. Both popular boy parents and gangsta boy parents immigrated to the United Kingdom because they felt that their villages/cities did not provide them with opportunities to improve their lives culturally or economically. As none of the parents had undergone higher education, there was very little opportunity for them to improve their lives in the larger cities in Pakistan. After hearing about the living standards in the UK from fellow villagers and extended family members who had immigrated to the UK before them, they decided to follow their path. They believed that hard work in UK would gain them quick access to high economic gains. The difference between the two groups' immigration ideology, however, shaped how they managed their relationships with Pakistan, how they managed their earnings in the UK and how they shaped their expectations of their children –most importantly of their sons. More specifically, while most of the gangsta boy parents had emigrated from Pakistan with the intention of returning in a few years, the popular boy parents had emigrated with the intention of making England their permanent

home. As a result of these differences, while the emigrants from remote villages invested little in their lives in England, saving what they earned to build a house and to make strategic investments which they believed would enable them to return to their villages on their retirement, the popular boy parents spent money to enjoy the lifestyle that had attracted them towards migration in the first place. Only two popular boy parents were inclined towards retirement in Pakistan. Nawaz Khan, who is today a very successful businessman and who is considering returning to Lahore, said: 'I am just waiting for my sons to get settled, and then I will sell my properties here and move back to Pakistan'. As he comes from an upper class family in Lahore, and he had only immigrated because his family had met economically difficult times, now that he is rich again he can move back with his money and enjoy the privileged life in Lahore. The second popular boy parent who expressed such a desire was Afzal Agha; with the money he had saved he had bought a house in Lahore, and now his family spends extended holidays in Lahore. As I showed earlier, those who migrated from smaller cities accepted the ascendancy of the urbanites, and for them the reference group back in Pakistan was no longer the extended family or the neighbours in their ancestral cities. Their reference group is the Lahorites who enjoy an upper-middle class lifestyle. So, when popular boy parents make enough money to buy a house back in Pakistan, their goal is to buy one in an upper-middle-class neighbourhood in Lahore, rather than build one in their ancestral city. And when the popular boy parents visit Pakistan they try to stay in Lahore and

socialize with their extended family there, and try to create ties with the upper-middle class Lahorites rather than strengthen their ties with relatives back in Pakistan. For example, Akram Agha's family, on their recent visit to Pakistan, spent most of their time in Afzal Agha's house in Lahore and spent most of their time forging social bonds with others from their cities who had found their way to the urban centres. Afzal Agha's eldest son, Haroon, often visits Pakistan. According to Zayed, Haroon is doing so in order to look for business opportunities in Pakistan, because he is seriously considering moving to Pakistan. However, not all popular boy parents have the economic and social capital that is required to make a successful move to cities like Lahore. Instead, most of them are content with the 'urban' lifestyle they are pursuing, through which they reproduce the urban-rural distinction.

#### **4.2.2 The Expectations of Popular Boys' Parents**

The immigration ideology of popular boy parents is also manifested in their expectations of their children –mostly their sons. They always compare their sons to the sons of their upper-middle-class extended family members living in Lahore or well-to-do British Pakistanis living in the UK; and they wish to make sure that their sons receive an equivalent if not better education than such persons and succeed in having lifestyles that are like those of well-to-do Lahorites and other British Pakistanis.

Popular boy parents see education as the key to achieving social status in the Pakistani community settled in the UK, and their extended social

network in the urban cities of Pakistan. When I started spending time with popular boys they were quick to recognize in me the values their parents appreciated. I was invited to their house and introduced to parents like a prized trophy. Likewise, when Husnain's cousin arrived from Lahore, he too was introduced promptly to the parents. The popular boy parents, who were very particular about the friends their sons kept, were pleased that their sons had befriended me. Once, when Saif stayed the night at my flat, I received a phone call from his parents who urged me to help him get focused on his education; and they said that they were happy that he was spending time with somebody like me. His father said: 'I do not let him stay the night with his friends. But with you I am reassured. You are a very good person for him to spend time with'.

The popular boy parents said that they had had to work hard for decades to attain the economic level they had reached. They believed that they had no choice but to work as factory labourers or taxi drivers, because they had not received a higher education. They believe that their lives would have been much easier and better if only they had had a university education. They could have attained economic success much easier and faster. For them it was critical that their sons should succeed in receiving a university education which they had failed to have. They worked very hard to encourage their sons to achieve this goal. To encourage them to study, they supported them financially through college and university. If their sons dropped out of college they did not allow their sons to take full-time lower level or manual jobs, because they believed

that if their sons started working they would not go back to complete their education. Many parents admitted that they even beat their children when the children lost interest in their studies.

Popular boy parents also wanted their sons to live a lifestyle that was very similar to those of other well-to-do Pakistanis. Their understanding of what that lifestyle consisted of was very much shaped by their own memories of youth. In other words it was frozen in time. One of the most important characteristics of a good son relates to how he does *not* spend his leisure time. A good son does *not* go out to clubs with his friends, he does *not* have any relationships with girls, and he does *not* consume any alcohol. Rather, a good son stays at home in the evenings doing his homework or spending time with his parents, watching TV together. A good son is respectful to his parents and abides by their expectations. And most importantly a good son is committed to his education and works hard to earn his university degree.

The ‘good son’ therefore works hard to become a member of the British professional middle class in terms of economic status, and yet culturally leads a Pakistani lifestyle enacting the Pakistani cultural and religious value systems that his parents were raised with back in Pakistan. The popular boy parents always stayed away from middle class British culture, and developed a very superficial understanding of what that constituted. Over time, they came to define this culture with respect to people’s sexual promiscuity, irreverence for parents and family life, and an inclination to drink heavily. And they found these values to be completely opposite to conservative Pakistani



values, such as respect for parents, respect for the institution of marriage - which is the only mode of relationship between the sexes- and refraining from alcohol and drugs. The popular boy parents forged a Pakistani identity around these values, seeing them as a source of distinction from the white middle class culture. They therefore defined a 'good son' as one who completely embraced this Pakistani identity, in other words a son who embraced conservative Pakistani values and not 'immoral' Western values.

For the popular boy parents it is also very important to define the ideal of a good son, such that it enables them to distinguish themselves from the rural Pakistani immigrants. Whereas their attitude towards urbanites was favourable, they looked down on the gangsta boy subculture. The popular boy parents believed that the gangsta boy subculture was reserved for the sons of migrants with rural Pakistani backgrounds. According to them, Pakistani youth who dropped out of education to join the ranks of Asian youth, who dealt in drugs, pursued leisure activities from which they did not return until the early hours of the morning and who had children with non-Pakistani girls, reflected the background of their parents. These parents, because they were villagers, were not 'good parents'; they were not good role models for their children and had not made sufficient efforts to bring up their children well. When I asked Afzal Agha about the youth he did not wish his sons to grow up like, he said that it was youth who drop out of education, get involved in drugs and white girls. He explained that this was a result of bad parenting. In other words, the parents were too busy making and hoarding money and did not spend enough

time keeping an eye on their sons. Nor did they support them financially, and, as a result, the sons got into bad company and dropped out of college so that they could make money. Similarly, Nawaz Khan referred to Hubaib's friends as 'druggies'. According to him they were sons of lowly villagers, who ignored their children, and their children grew up to reflect the 'classlessness' of their parents. Raja Akmal highlighted another theme which often came up during conversations with popular boy parents. Thus, he claimed that most of these rural migrants, who arrived in the UK with no experience of Western lifestyle and culture, could not resist the powerful temptations of the new lifestyle and culture. The temptations of Western society – sex and alcohol – proved to be too powerful for the immigrants from the remotest villages of Pakistan, and their sons followed their example. The popular boy parents were of the view that their status in the local community depended on the behaviour of their sons. The subculture their sons belonged to was therefore important for these parents. The gangsta subculture had earned itself a negative reputation, and among the popular boy parents, was a sure sign of immorality and lower status, and so they strove hard to prevent their sons becoming part of this subculture.

Popular boy parents were totally committed to their definition of a good son and communicated it to their sons very clearly and openly. They completely rejected their sons' desire to take part in university student leisure activities, such as going to pubs, going out clubbing or developing friendships with white girls. They want them to attend these universities but did not approve of them taking part in social activities; and the parents were very strict

about enforcing these rules. For instance, many parents would stay up until the early hours of the morning in order to catch and chastise their sons who had returned from night clubs. Others, like Pervez, kept an eye on the company their sons kept, and gathered information about them from the taxi drivers in the taxi rank. Some taxi driver parents and family members would park their cabs outside local clubs, not only to pick up a customer, but to 'catch' any young member of their family who had attended the club. Many of them would telephone their sons soon after eight in the evening to ensure they were not out late. The parents berated them and some would withdraw their financial support in order to discipline them. On the other hand, sons who conformed to their parents' ideal would become favourites. They received additional financial support and freedom from their parents. One such son was Abraham who had gained his parents' trust by studying and getting into university. He was therefore allowed to stay out at night, unlike Salman, whose father had forcefully prevented him from going out by sitting outside his room. The same was true for Husnain who had recently started university in Wolverhampton. His father had increased his allowance and had given him the freedom to spend time with his friends. This was unlike the situation for Hubaib who was still struggling to get into university and who had been told by his parents to get a job to meet his expenses. Hubaib is now 25, and since he has dropped out of college, his parents have supported him. Recently, though, his father became frustrated by Hubaib's refusal to enrol at a university, and so he started

pressurising him to get a job, thereby hoping this would force his son to choose university rather than hard work.

This desire of the parents for their sons to become British middle class economically and conserve their Pakistani identity culturally creates immense difficulties and contradictions for popular boys. They are expected to do well at university without ever engaging in its social life. They are expected to work together with white girls on projects set by their tutors, but without ever socializing with them outside classes. They are expected to work hard and achieve something their parents had only dreamt about (*i.e.* gain a university degree) without having any cultural and social capital to do so. The popular boys do not have the cultural capital to pursue a university education, because they did not grow up in households where such an education was taken for granted and parents had the cultural resources to support and advise their children about their choice of degree and one which would best suit their ability. Their offspring are expected to abide by Pakistani values which are very different from those of their fellow university students. They are expected to accept arranged marriages, even though they are surrounded by the discourse of love-based marriage. They are expected to accept not having any relationship with a woman, even though they are surrounded by women who openly show their interest in the other sex. They are expected not to go out clubbing, even though clubbing is one of the most common leisure activities among British university students.

In the following section I discuss how popular boys resolve these difficulties and contradictions via their consumer acculturation projects.

#### **4.2.3 The Popular Boys' Consumer Acculturation**

In the section above I discussed the socio-historic context of the Pakistani community in Bolchester. I then discussed the position of the popular boy parents in the status hierarchy of the Asian community in Bolchester. I then showed that the background and the current position in this hierarchy of these parents determined their status-seeking project and, in turn, the expectations they had of their sons. I then showed that these expectations were beset by internal contradictions which the popular boys sought to resolve through their consumer identities. Berger and Heath (2007) argue that certain domains of taste are more identity-relevant, and that consumers diverge in these most to signal their identity. For the subculture of the popular boys, the most identity relevant consumption areas were clothing and leisure activities. In the following section I show how the popular boys resolved the contradictions discussed above through their choice of clothing and outfits and leisure.

##### **4.2.3.1 Outfits**

Popular boys' outfit consumption choices are very much shaped by mainstream British youth culture. In order to achieve the 'right look' popular boys closely studied the popular culture sources and the lifestyles and clothing of their fellow university students. Here I first describe what that 'right-look'

is, and then I identify the types of popular culture sources that the popular boys used to learn and keep up with this look. I then describe the ways in which the popular boys put their looks to the test. The section concludes with a discussion of how that look is not in fact a 'natural' result of their social context (*i.e.* being a university student). I argue that from among the numerous other youth subcultures that they could have adopted, the popular boys purposely adopted the 'mainstream' university student look, because this was very much in line with the look of the parents' 'ideal son' whom they expected to become a respectable member of the professional middle-class. I argue that performing the role of the ideal son for their parents in their choice of particular clothing was especially important for the popular boys who had so far not been very successful in fulfilling this ideal, as it took some of the pressure off these young men.

#### **4.2.3.1.1 The 'Look'**

The popular boys described their outfit style as the 'smart' look, the look of responsible boy who are serious about their education. They also called it the 'lover boy look', the 'university student look', and 'the general look of Bolchester boys'. This style was comprised of branded jeans, brightly coloured cardigans, elaborately designed shirts, leather jackets, canvas shoes and a distinct set of accessories.

Armani, Gstar and Diesel were the popular brands for jeans among popular boys. The popular boys always wore jeans that started off slightly

loose at the waist and then narrowed down as they moves towards the shoe, where, if the need arose, were turned up at the bottom for a clearer view of the shoes. This was important, for as Salman explained: ‘You have to show the shoes. I always wear jeans that are tight at the bottom so the shoe is visible’. They liked jeans that were a couple of inches larger than their size, so that they would sag down and reveal the top half of their designer boxer shorts.

The popular boys’ favourite tops were buttoned-down cardigans and V-neck jumpers; they each owned these two items in a variety of colours. The popular brands were River Island, Top Man, and All Saints. The combination of dark blue jeans, a V-neck T-shirt, and a cardigan on top was almost a uniform for the popular boys. The tops were always in bright colours, such as bright blue, green, pink, purple and yellow. Almost all the popular boys wore this set of clothing for most of the time. For example, when Abraham came to see me on one occasion, he was wearing his blue G-Star jean, turned up at the bottom, resting on the shiny black trainers he had bought recently from Top Man in memory of Michael Jackson, as Abraham said ‘he used to wear such shoes’. These trainers were shiny, flat, with a white sole, and were ankle length. He was wearing a yellow V-neck T-shirt, and on top a leather jacket with silver buttons. His T-shirt and jacket were tight-fitting, and his jeans sagged down so that the ‘D&G’ boxer shorts showed above. He was wearing a thick white and gold bracelet on his wrist and a pink and silver beaded necklace hung from his neck. Later the same day when Farhan came to see me, he was wearing the same pair of jeans as Abraham’s, and in the same way, but

on top he was wearing a tight-fitting V-neck Henleys T-shirt, which was grey with a skull painted on it, and the brand name written over the front in silver beads. For two days in a row Saif dropped by to see me. On both occasions he was wearing the same pair of jeans: a black, tight-fitting pair that had a shiny finish bought from Roscoe and Crombie. On the first occasion, he was wearing a white All Saints shirt with a pattern of thin black curves on it. On the second occasion he was wearing a grey and white Top Man shirt with lapels on the shoulders and silver buttons. He had rolled up his sleeves and his shirt hung just over his belt. His shoes were black canvass shoes, which were very flat and thin in shape.

The popular boys liked wearing shirts, but they did not wear plain shirts either in design or colour. Instead, their shirts were colourful and had lapels on the shoulders and sleeves. Shirts were considered ‘smart’, but plain shirts, according to them, did not go with the popular boy look they were trying to imitate. Plain shirts were for older men. As Husnain explained, ‘When I am older I want to dress up like my dad in trousers and nice shirts’. The shirts he was referring to were the plain shirts his father wears. They recognized plain shirts as legitimate clothes for the successful middle-aged man, but their youth demanded a youthful look which was created by the kind of shirt they described above. All the popular boys owned black canvass shoes. Salman also had a grey pair, and Saif had recently bought a white pair. These shoes were considered to be ‘smart’, because they were thin, sleek and look neater.



Even though the popular boys seldom shopped for clothes in Bolchester and preferred shopping in Birmingham, when they did shop in Bolchester, they shopped at Roscoe and Crombie, Jingo, Top Man, New Look and River Island. Roscoe and Crombie was the most expensive clothes shop and specialized in the brands and styles of clothes the popular boys chose to wear. By the entrance of the shop a plaque proudly displayed the names of the brands the shop stocks, such as Gstar, Diesel, J Lindberg, Penguin, and Peter Werth. These brands were priced in the middle range and were not as expensive as the brands the gangsta boys wore. The most prominent items of clothing in the shop – both in terms of display and number of items – were bright coloured cardigans, bright coloured shirts, and smart jackets. All the popular boys agreed that this was the best shop for clothes in Bolchester. The products were expensive and the popular boys visited it on special occasions - birthdays and Eid (the Muslim religious festival akin to Christmas) - when they had more money. Shops they frequented more often, because the clothes were in their price range, were Top Man, New Look and River Island. The shops not only stocked cardigans and jumpers, but also the beaded necklaces and bracelets which were popular with these boys. Although Roscoe and Crombie and these retail stores stocked clothes that were of a similar style, the former stocks higher-end brands. For instance, a pair of Diesel jeans cost about £100 whereas Top Man jeans of the same style cost about £40. Similarly, Peter Werth cardigans were twice the price of Top Man cardigans. Even more expensive brands (*e.g.* Armani, Linea, Howick, and DKNY) were stocked at House of

Fraser, the largest retail outlet in Bolchester. The popular boys only bought from this store when the products are heavily discounted. On Boxing Day this year three popular boys travelled to the House of Fraser in Birmingham to take advantage of the discounts.

#### **4.2.3.2 Keeping up with the right look**

The two critical resources popular boys used in order to study and keep up with the ‘smart’ look were the youth that they see around in town and malls that follow the “look” and music videos of the artists popular with university students. Even though most popular boys did not like to admit the influence of other young people on their outfit selections, when pressed further they revealed that they did in fact study the young persons who adopted ‘the look’ and tried to fit in with them. For example, when I asked Zayed how the popular boys came to adopt this style, he responded that he was among the first of the popular boys to wear a cardigan. He explained that the first time he bought a cardigan was when he was shopping in Birmingham with Atif (another popular boy friend from Birmingham). He said:

‘I went to the All Saints shop and I saw a black cardigan. I thought it was very good. I tried it on and I liked it. It was fitted and you could see the cuts in my biceps. After that I bought many more cardigans in all kinds of colours’.

When I pressed Zayed about other's influence on him, whether or not he saw anyone else wearing the cardigan, he responded by saying, 'No. I just liked it'. Whereas when I asked Saif the same question, even though he too first claimed that he was the first to wear a cardigan among popular boys, he then admitted the influence of other youths choice of clothing on his own choice. He said:

'I have always been into clothes. I have always been into fashion. In school I used to wear the best track suits. Back in the day Tommy Hilfiger was in. Remember? At that time I used to wear that'.

When I asked him how he kept up with fashion he said:

'I would see people wearing the clothes, and you know what is in. I would follow the styles of those people. You know those people who are dressed smartly. . . You are not into fashion, are you? You will not understand it. It is difficult to explain if you are not into fashion. I was, so I could easily tell what was in. And cardigans, bright coloured jumpers were in and still are.'

If those who are dressed 'smartly' were one source of inspiration for the popular boys' clothing style, the other source was the American hip hop artists who were popular among mainstream university students. Below, I briefly describe the developments which have taken place in the hip hop culture whereby hip hop, which was originally part of a marginal subculture, eventually reached a wider mainstream audience.

The new school of American hip-hop that gained widespread international popularity in the 1980s originated from New York. It pioneered

an aggressive style, replete with taunts and boasts about rapping. The image portrayed by the singers was that of tough street bad boy attitude. Gangsta rap became the most popular genre of hip hop and the 1990s were dominated by gangsta rappers, such as Notorious BIG, Nas, Snoop Dog, Dr Dre, Tupac Shakur and the Wu Tan Clan. The music and personal life of Tupac Shakur and Snoop Dog provide useful examples of the substance of the gangsta rap music popular in the 1990s. Both Shakur and Snoop lived lives marked by violence and gang-related activity, which eventually led to Shakur's murder in 1996. Snoop too dealt with a murder charge in 1993. Their music, at this stage, dealt with growing up with violence in urban ghettos, racism, and conflicts with rival rappers. Until the late 1990s, the success of gangsta rap had still not reached the pop mainstream, but, with the arrival of artists like Sean Combs, gangsta rap started making inroads into mainstream pop. Along with the lightening of the sound of gangsta rap the lyrical focus also shifted. Gangsta rap artists started borrowing musical styles from R&B, and samples from popular 'soul and pop' songs. Whereas gangsta rap prior to the late 1990s was focused on depicting the poverty, gang violence and hardships in urban ghettos, later mainstream artists were busy projecting lavish lifestyles of extreme affluence, using expensive jewellery, cars, clothes and women as props in their music videos. The look espoused by the rap stars closely followed the evolution of the music. The earliest rap artists appeared in their videos wearing baggy jeans and white vests or black hoodies. With the increasing popularization and commercialization of rap music, designer brands

began frequently featuring in music videos. Thus, flashy, brightly coloured designer tracksuits slowly replaced the tough street look of the earlier days. As it stands today, mainstream rap artists often collaborate across genres, the most frequent being with popular R&B artists. R&B enjoys a 'comfortable' position in mainstream pop music and through these collaborations rap music has gained access to mainstream pop music.

This brings us to the current generation of rap stars who are popular among the younger popular boys. The two most followed rap stars of this generation are: Kanye West and Lil Wayne. These artists regularly collaborate with R&B artists and their music tops the R&B charts. R&B music primarily works on romantic themes; and the themes of violence, gangs, and exaggerated affluence are absent from these songs. Lil Wayne even plans on releasing an R&B album titled 'Luv Sawngz'. A typical example of such collaborations is the song 'Kiss Kiss' that brings together Chris Brown and the rapper T-Pain. The video is shot in a college setting, in which Brown, both as a 'nerd' and a 'jock', tries to win over a pretty girl that goes to college with the two personas. The jock tries to impress the girl by bullying the nerd, while the nerd tries to impress her by being nice to her. In the end the nerd wins the day, gets a kiss and the girl drives off with him at the end of the video. This song is in sharp contrast to earlier rap songs and videos, where scantily clad women are used as symbols of the successful life of the rapper. Their role in the music video is merely to flaunt their body; they are a background element to the narrative of

the video. In this video I see the two personas vying for the girl, and the ‘nerd’ is successful by treating the girl nicely.

The current generation of popular rap stars has ventured beyond the tough street look of their predecessors, and embraced a ‘smart’ look consisting of shirts, ties, sports jackets and sleeker trainers. The baggy jeans, vests and tattoos have been replaced by flashy, baggy and expensive tracksuits and hoodies, which in turn have been replaced by the ‘smart suits’, jackets and shirts worn by artists like Kanye West, TI and Chris Brown. The popular boys, who were avid followers of rap music, had adopted this style with gusto. The jeans the younger boys wore sagged down to reveal their designer boxer shorts. They often wore caps tilted to the side, like rap stars. Salman and Abraham both owned T-shirts that expressly mentioned famous rap stars. Abraham’s T-shirt had ‘Lil Wayne the Best Rapper in the World’ printed on the front and Salman’s red T-shirt had ‘Kanye West’ printed on the front. Salman wore white trainers, black jeans, a black shirt, a white tie and a white jacket on top to his graduation night. When I asked him what inspired his look, he responded by saying that he had seen a rap star wearing the exact same combination and he had decided to wear it for his graduation. He remembered the name of the artist, TI, but did not remember where he had seen the artist wearing the combination described. According to Salman, the style of the rap stars had become much more ‘mainstream’ than it used to be, primarily because of the acceptance of their music into the mainstream. Earlier on their songs used to be about gangs and money-making, but now they sang about love and life, and

this had won them popularity, and they had also started dressing smartly and had become legitimate sources of style for him. He told me that American rap stars had also popularized the waistcoat, and so he now occasionally wore a waistcoat – in fact he has at least three pictures on his Facebook page of him wearing a waistcoat. In one photo he was wearing black jeans, a white shirt, a black waistcoat and a black tie. When I went shopping on one occasion with Salman, he was looking for a small back-pack. When I asked him why he needed one when he already had a ‘messenger bag’, a bag made from canvas and swung across the shoulder, he explained: ‘That bag is not ‘in’ anymore. Everyone is wearing it. This small back-pack I am looking for is in fashion now’. He then informed me that a few R&B singers had started wearing this bag in videos, and he was sure it was going to become popular. Abraham, unlike Salmon, on the other hand, denied being influenced by rap stars, and maintained that the caps he chose to wear, the way he wore his jeans and the check shirts he wore were all personal choices based solely on his personal taste. This assertion seemed dubious; however, as he liked music by artists such as Kanye West, Lil Wayne, The Game, and Chris Brown, and his look was a close reflection of the style of rap artists. Husnain admitted this influence. When talking about his most recent purchase he told me that the shirt he had ordered online from Top Man looked exactly like the shirt Chris Brown wore in the song ‘Kiss Kiss’. Earlier when he had wanted to buy an Ed Hardy hoodie, he told me that he had seen Bow Wow (another hip hop artist) wearing that hoodie and he had liked it. Many of the popular boys had also

taken to wearing charcoal grey jeans. According to Abraham the colour became desirable because Chris Brown started wearing that colour, and that is why he had bought them. Husnain also gave the same reason for buying charcoal grey jeans.

Recently, a new look had gained currency among the younger popular boys. Salman as usual was the first to adopt this style, but soon afterwards Abraham, Farhan, Basit, Sunjay, Husnain and Amir all followed his lead. This new look is described by the popular boys as the ‘gangsta-nerd’ look. The look consists of a checkered shirt buttoned up to the very top, P-caps, and old style black rimmed glasses. Salman claimed to be the innovator of this style, and the rest of the popular boys who went clubbing confirmed Salman’s claim. He told me that he picked the look up from music videos, especially Chris Brown’s song ‘Kiss Kiss’. He called the look the ‘gangsta-nerd’ look, because it was not totally nerd: ‘The glasses are nerd, the buttoned shirts are nerd but the caps are not. The caps are gangsta’. Here, what Salman called ‘gangsta’, was the style of the mainstream hip hop artists, who had transcended their marginal identity and moved into the mainstream. For instance, Abraham and Amir completed their nerd look by wearing a red cap which 50 cent, a popular American rap star, wore in his music videos. Salman explained his stylistic innovation in the following words: ‘Well I see ideas of trends and just adjust it to me. I like making styles. . . . I am confident in expressing style’. This style was not just popular among the Asian popular boys; Afro-American young men and also girls had also adopted this look. When Salman was leaving for Pakistan he



gave a party, the theme of which was the ‘nerd look’. Many of the popular boys came to the party dressed up in this way and quite a few girls donned the nerd glasses and school uniform. Salman considered the theme a success. This look began to gain popularity in clubs, and the popular boys proudly displayed this look, deriving satisfaction from the fact that they were the first innovators of this new popular look.

#### **4.2.3.2.1 Putting their look to a test**

The ‘smart’ look that the popular boys had carefully put together was a true reflection of the style displayed by mainstream British youth. I visited night clubs in Bolchester on a number of occasions and noted the clothing of the young people queuing up to get into these clubs. The young men wore colourful cardigans and T-shirts, gaudy shirts, jeans sagging down to reveal boxer shorts, and canvass shoes. The popular boys did not look out of place when they dressed up and their outfits were received with enthusiasm by their university friends whether Asian or non-Asian. For example, when Salman wore his red jacket to Tramps on a student night, many girls commented on his outfit on his Facebook account.

For popular boys, there were two ways to ensure that they were indeed successful in performing the ‘smart’ look. One was ‘fitting in’ with the look of the rest of the British youth they saw at the clubs, shopping centres and other spaces that were frequented by these persons. And the second one was being able to impress what they called ‘posh white girls’. They believed that the best

test of their ability to the mainstream British youth style lay in their ability to date, or at least get the telephone numbers of, popular white university girls. Although initially only a few openly admitted to having relationships with white girls –given that this was such a ‘no-no’ for their parents and they thought that, being an older Pakistani male, I shared the same norms with their parents - there was always a contest among popular boys to see who would be more popular with posh white girls. This contest was also a contest about who best fitted in with mainstream British youth. They were of the view that the admiration of white girls was a natural result of acculturation to that particular youth culture. And so, the more and better they adopt the ‘smart lover-boy’ style, then the more successful they believed they would become in impressing these girls. So for example, most popular boys took the ‘cardigan look’ to the next level by wearing bright pink cardigans to go clubbing or when going to college. For example, Abraham said: ‘Whenever I wear pink jumpers I get loads of attention and compliments from white girls. They really like it’. Husnain had similar thoughts and explained that ‘Pink sweaters are for girls. They love them. Only certain kinds of boys wear them. Whenever I wear a pink sweater to college, girls find excuses to touch me’. Abraham, Husnain, Farhan, Zayed, Saif and Salman all owned brightly coloured jumpers and cardigans, and they all agreed with Husnain on the attractiveness of brightly coloured cardigans. Zayed and Saif pointed out that other Pakistani youth could only dream about impressing the kind of girls they were able to ‘pull’: ‘Like the girl from school. She was hot. Ain’t it Saif. Everyone thought she

was hot. I met her in a club and she gave me her number. I went out with her once'. Zayed believed it was because of the way the popular boys dressed and carry themselves that 'posh girls' were attracted to them. He said, "'posh girls' like men who dress smartly and are not aggressive, but are respectful'. He explained 'aggressive' as the propensity of some youth to fight and argue and 'respectful' as the ability to speak to girls with respect without crude sexual references. He was not alone, for Abraham, Salman, Zayed, Saif, and Farhan also often asserted that they were different from other Pakistani boys, and that too primarily, because of the way they dressed and carried themselves. 'You see a bunch of Asian kids and you can tell us apart', claimed Salman and explained that they were the best-dressed out of the Pakistani youth and the most well-behaved – the least aggressive, polite and friendly. Zayed said:

'I gave the Pakistani kids a good name. Before us they were not respected and were seen as troublemakers. I dressed smartly and behaved proper. I became popular in school. There were so many girls who wanted to go out with Saif and myself'.

#### **4.2.3.2.2 Fitting into the British Youth Culture Without Offending the Parents' Concept of 'Ideal Son'**

The popular boys' choice of which white British youth culture to fit in with was not a 'natural' result of them being university students or them living in Bolchester. There are numerous marginal youth cultures both among

university students and among non-university attending youth. The popular boys purposefully selected the mainstream youth culture because it was the one that complied best with their parents' definition of the 'ideal son' – in terms of both their clothing styles (dressing in smart, well-fitting, clean and presentable clothes) and also some of their values: middle class youth working to gain a university degree to attain professional jobs and a middle class lifestyle after graduation.

In the popular boys' minds, the goal of mainstream youth was to have a university education and this made more suitable role models compared to other white youth cultures, such as chavs, emos or goths who did not share the same social-class sensibilities. More specifically, popular boys described chavs as the lowest class of white people in Bolchester: they were on the dole', 'dodgy', 'bagheads (they consumed crack)', and they 'get pregnant before they are 16 years old so they can get government support'. In order to explore whether they all had the same definition of what a 'chav' is, on a number of occasions, while walking around the city centre with different groups of popular boys, I asked them to point out chavs to me. And they all pointed to the same kind of youth, namely young men wearing tracksuit bottoms, tracksuit jackets, and caps who looked less presentable and who seemed not to care too much about what others thought of them. Saif, further explained that it was not always the individuals' clothes that gave away their 'chavness', but the company they kept was also an indicator. In a group of youths, even if only one of the youths was dressed like a chav, the rest would be given the same

label. This happened when I came across two young men and a woman in the town, and asked Saif about this group, and he told me that they were all chavs. When I pointed out that one of them was dressed nicely, he asserted that chavs hang out with chavs. One of the boys was wearing a white tracksuit bottom with black lines on the side, big trainers of indeterminate make, a T-shirt, a white and black jacket, and a cap. The other one was wearing clothes that would not have looked out of place on one of the popular boys.

The popular boys looked down upon any subculture that was marginal and not mainstream. To them these subcultures were populated by youth who were rejected by and who rejected the values of mainstream middle class youth. They were not likely to be economically successful in the professional world and to lead the middle class lifestyles which they and their parents so desired them to lead. As their parents' working class past was still fresh in the parents' memories, the popular boys reflected their parents' economic class insecurities and were afraid of being perceived as 'belonging to the working class'. They therefore strove to distance themselves from all the marginal youth subcultures which were not likely to fit with their understanding of middle class values. Thus, the popular boys defined themselves as much in opposition to these marginal subcultures as they did in relation to mainstream youth culture. For example, I once asked Saif about the people he looked at to choose his clothes and he said, 'You know people who are dressed smartly. Not chavs'. The popular boys were so concerned about being mistaken for a chav that they felt that they had to continually keep up with changes in fashion.

According to the popular boys chavs were constantly taking up styles popular among the mainstream middle-class youth culture and this meant that the popular boys had to give up brands and styles that the chavs had started adopting. For example, they thought that Ed Hardy, an expensive designer brand, was becoming too popular among chavs, and the popular boys were very frustrated with this situation because, even though they really liked the brand, they felt they could no longer wear it. According to the popular boys, their favourite retail store in Bolchester, Roscoe and Crombie, stopped stocking Ed Hardy clothes just because chavs started wearing them. Farhan, agreed to this evaluation and asserted that it was not actually only the clothing style but also the hair style that chavs had started to adopt. Farhan explained that the 'smart' haircut the popular boys preferred consisted of short spiked hair with lines made on the sides with razors. And with chavs adopting this style, he said that he was thinking of growing his hair long. The popular boys regarded this task, of changing fashion in order to avoid being labelled a 'chav', as a never-ending game. Thus, a few years earlier the popular boys had worn Rockport clothes, but when the chavs adopted that brand, then the popular boys decided to stop wearing it too. The same had also happened in the past with certain styles and brands of jeans and tops.

For the popular boys, chavs were not the only marginal subculture against whom they defined their style. Indeed other white subcultures, which were not necessarily working class, but which had rejected middle class values were also not welcomed by the popular boys. For example,

once when I was inquiring about how popular boys defined the 'right' style of jeans, Farhan explained: 'I like jeans that are not too loose, or too tight. I like jeans that are slightly loose at the top and tighter at the bottom' He said: 'The others get ripped because they slide under your shoes'. When I asked him why he did not wear tighter jeans as a solution, his response was clear cut: 'Nah man. Emos wear them'. The popular boys defined 'emos' as persons who wore 'very tight jeans, very tight T-shirts, have weird hairstyles, and put nail polish on'. Emos were the latest incarnation of goth who could easily be spotted in town due to their rather unusual looks. Even though emos or goths were not necessarily working class, the popular boys still did not want to be associated with them. According to the popular boys: 'Goths are a group of youth that consists of 'nerds', people at school who were not cool and had no friends – rejects; after school they got into the goth look because they did not belong to any other group'. They were not respected by mainstream society and, instead of conforming to the mainstream aesthetic they had constructed their own style – wearing all black, with pictures of skeletons, having body-piercing and long gelled hair in weird styles. The emos were like goths, but they had a slightly different aesthetic. They wore very tight clothes as opposed to the baggy clothes of the goths. They were not as extreme as the goths. For instance, they did not have a lot of body piercing. Like goths they too were only respected in their own subculture. They did not care what other people thought and were into their own style.

Chavs, emos and goths were – these are labels the popular boys use to categorize youth who dress in particular styles - are not at all attractive to the popular boys and they defined themselves in opposition to these marginal youth cultures. For example, when Abraham and Saif were talking about the dressing style of the emos, they started talking about the Converse shoes they wore which were ankle-length, sleek, very thin-shaped canvass shoes. To explain to me what they looked like Saif gave the example of the ankle-length shoes Abraham had recently bought, but immediately he explained in detail how Abraham's shoe was more stylish, making clear the distinction between their fashion sensibilities and those of the emos. Saif said: 'They wear very dull-coloured very thin Converse shoes. Abraham's are very shiny and looks stylish'.

#### **4.2.3.2.3 'Don't Mix us Up With Gangsta Boys'**

If being taken for a member of non-mainstream youth was a fear of the popular boys, another nightmare was being perceived as a gangsta boy. Given that they had the same ethnic origin as gangsta boys, then it was more likely that they would be seen as gangsta boys. Such a mistake would be considered a huge failure by the popular boys. It would mean that all their efforts to perform the 'smart look' had been in vain. It would also mean that they had failed to adopt the persona of their parents' 'ideal son'.

Very much influenced by their parents' views, the popular boys defined gangsta boys as young Pakistani men who acted tough and who wore clothes



that were supposed to communicate this toughness. They were quick to give examples. Thus, according to, Saif, Hubaib and Imran the gangsta 'dress code' consisted of jackets, 'hoodies', track suit bottoms and big trainers. Except for Husnain, who occasionally wore a hoodie, none of the other popular boys did do. Jassim told me that he owned quite a few hoodies, and used to wear hoodies and tracksuits when he was younger, but, when he started dressing smartly he stopped wearing hoodies. He felt that hoodies did not qualify as 'smart clothes'. In fact, according to him, they gave the wrong impression because of their popularity with gangsta boys. Abraham, Saif and Husnain explained to me the differences in the gangsta style and their style. They said that the popular boys wore jeans that hung low on their hips and were narrower at the bottom to complement their canvass shoes, whereas the gangsta boys always wore jeans that did not sag down to reveal their boxer shorts but were instead held in place at the waist with a belt. According to the popular boys, gangsta boys wore baggy jeans, which were loose all the way down and which they pulled in behind the front label of their bulky trainers. The gangsta boys never wore cardigans or canvas shoes. They only wore bulky trainers. Indeed, when Husnain broke off with his gangsta boy friends and slowly started investing more in his popular boy identity, one of the first items of clothing that he changed were his shoes. Early on he wore his bulky black Nike AirMax trainers, but later replaced them with black canvas shoes. The popular boys were aware of the differences between their clothes and those of the gangsta boys and often pointed them out.

The popular boys and gangsta boys not only had different styles of dressing, but they also wore a different set of clothing brands. Popular boys liked to wear Top Man, All Saints, River Island, Henley's and New Look, whereas gangsta boys preferred Armani, Rockport, Stone Island, Versace, Adidas and Prada. On rare occasions, when both groups started to wear the same brands of clothes, the difference lay in the style of the clothing item worn or the combination of clothing in which the item was used. For example both the gangsta boys and the popular boys wore Diesel and Gstar jeans, but the styles and cuts they wore were different. When they wore Gstar T-shirts, the gangsta boys wore them on their own, whereas the popular boys wore them under Top Man shirts.

Similarly, with regard to their attitude towards brands the views of the popular boys and the gangsta boys were very different. With the popular boys, showing off the brand of their clothing was of secondary importance, as the primary importance was that of style. For example, according to Zayed:

'People do not care about brands anymore. I do not like wearing clothes with the logos on the front, a small logo is fine. I mean when you are wearing something nice people should be able to tell. It does not matter what you wear as long as you make it look nice'.

When Farhan and Zayed, were making plans about going shopping, this topic came up again. Thus, Farhan and Zayed had specific shops in mind (*i.e.* Top Man, River Island, TK Max), but they agreed that not only was displaying the logo important but that it was also not important even to wear a specific

brand. They thought that one could wear a cheap brand and still look good in it, provided one knew how to make the right combination. Of the popular boys, Husnain and Salman were the most confident when it came to wearing non branded outfits. Husnain had recently bought two shirts for £15 each. One was a dark grey shirt with labels on the shoulder and a band collar; and the other was black and red check. He proudly shared with me the fact that ‘I only got these shirts for £15, but I have received so many compliments!’ On another occasion he claimed that he could carry off all kinds of clothes. He said that he did not have to buy expensive clothes; he looked good in whatever he wore. This attitude was in stark comparison to that of the gangsta boys for whom the brand and the display of the brand were the most important criteria when choosing clothes. Specific brands were known for being expensive – primarily, through references made in Drum and Bass music - and buying these brands enabled them to express an image of monetary success and an image of being a big gangsta. In Bolchester, the most salient factor with respect to gangsta identity was the ability of the individual to sell the most drugs; a point that was been reiterated by each of the gangsta boys. Other attributes, such as being tough were of lesser importance. If you are a big gangsta then you are able to sell a lot of drugs and make a lot of money, and you can show how much money you have made by buying expensive brands and expensive cars. For the popular boys on the other hand, being part of the mainstream meant that a monetary distinction was less important than an aesthetic one, at least for the university students. When popular boys claimed that they did not care about

brands as much as other people, the ‘other people’ they were referring to were the gangsta boys who believed that expensive brands were desirable as they were status-conferring items.

The popular boys were keen to ensure that they were perceived to be different from gangsta boys whom they and their parents defined as uneducated, working class, crack-heads, who have illegitimate children from chav white girlfriends on the side. They wanted both their parents and their mainstream fellow university students to know that they did not belong to the gangsta boys. By ensuring that they did not dress like gangsta boys they felt that they were distancing themselves from the values that the gangsta boys embodied; and at the same time by adopting the ‘smart look’ of mainstream university students, they were able to satisfy their parents’ ideal of the perfect son, in other words a son who would obtain a university degree and enter one of the professions.

In fact, when the opportunity arose they would sometimes dress up in clothes that they considered were those worn by a professional person. For example, when Zayed and Saif used to work at a local call centre – an office environment where they could dress in formal clothes – they immediately, added trousers and shirts to their wardrobe. ‘I bought expensive trousers, Zara trousers, and shirts, and long velvet jackets.’ When Zayed had to go see a lawyer in Birmingham on a routine matter, he wore brown trousers with a white shirt, and snakeskin pointed shoes. When I asked him why he dressed up for the meeting, he explained: ‘I do not get much of a chance to dress smartly,

you know, so when I was going to the lawyer I thought I might as well wear smart clothes. I will not be out of place’. The rest of the day he walked around in those clothes and looked quite happy. Similarly, when Saif, had to see some potential clients for his brother-in-law, a self-employed IT consultant, he wore trousers and a shirt: ‘I was going to see all these people for business and it makes a good impression if you are dressed up. So I wore trousers. It is also good to sometimes dress up smartly’.

The popular boys were intimidated by these spaces populated by middle class professionals, and they therefore felt that they had to be ‘presentable’ and not ‘look out of place’ in order to be taken seriously. This deference to what they perceived to be ‘prestigious’ vocations highlighted the influence of their parents’ belief in the importance of their sons gaining middle class jobs. The boys felt the need to perform the ‘look’ for this professional audience and to earn their respect by dressing like them. They vicariously enjoyed the respect they felt they were shown when they dressed up like professionals. This belief was evidenced strongly when they talked about their future employment plans. For instance, when I asked Saif why he had chosen architecture as a profession, he explained, ‘I would really like to go to building sites, wearing smart shirts and ties’. When I broached the topic of dressing smartly with Husnain, he said:

‘I really like dressing well and taking pride in my appearance. I am too young though to wear trousers and everything, but in a couple of years I will

start wearing trousers and shirts. I really like the way my Dad dresses and my cousin Saqib, they wear really nice trousers and shoes’.

When I asked him why he wanted to spend so much money and time on the way he dressed, he said: ‘I just like dressing up and looking good’. Salman was also fond of looking smart, and he was in fact the only popular boy who dressed smartly without the excuse of an occasion justifying it. When I bumped into him once, he was wearing grey Zara trousers, a white shirt and a black blazer-type jacket from River Island and expensive-looking dress shoes, which he said he had taken from Haroon’s wardrobe. When I commented on his clothes, he became self conscious and thought it necessary to explain: ‘I do not normally dress like this, but sometimes I like dressing smartly, for no reason, but just to please myself’. As far as the popular boys were concerned, such clothes, because they were associated with successful professionals, were imbued with a sense of success.

It is important to look at the people the popular boys mentioned when asked to name individuals whose dressing style they were impressed by. Husnain was most impressed by his cousin Saqib, who lived in the US and was a successful IT manager. According to Husnain, his cousin had style. He wore the best clothes and looked very smart in Armani, Jaeger, Cerruti and Sulka clothes. For Zayed, Saif, Salman, Abraham and Farhan, Haroon was their role model. Haroon, after completing a degree in law, had started his own business with a friend from Birmingham. The business involved buying and selling mobile phones and, according to the boys, it was very successful. They all

echo Zayed's feelings, who told me: 'My brother wears the best clothes. You know trousers and shirts; he buys them from Spain when he goes there. And shoes, expensive dress shoes. He has a whole line of shoes in his wardrobe. I always wear his clothes. They are sick.'

These 'role models' who enjoyed respectable middle class jobs, and who adopted a 'professional look' with flourish, highlighted the aspirations of the popular boys who wanted to adopt the professional look not only for their parents but also for the white middle class they so wanted to be members of.

#### **4.2.3.2.4 Contested Identities**

The two critical identity-defining-cultures for the popular boys were that of their parents and of mainstream university students. The popular boys found it much easier to convince the former group of their difference from the gangsta boys, at least with respect to their clothing choice. The same could not be said with regard to mainstream university youth, however. Given that the popular boys shared the same ethnic origin as the gangsta boys they considered themselves to be under the constant threat of being perceived as just another British Pakistani (a member of gangsta boys or any other British Pakistani group) by their fellow university students. For this reason, they always felt the need to look their best in social spaces where they might be under the gaze of university students. When they were caught otherwise they felt uncomfortable. For example, I once bumped into Salman at the local bowling alley, when he was wearing tracksuit bottoms and a rain coat. The bowling alley was within

walking distance of his house and he had just popped around to meet his friends – white youth from his school - who were there. He was surprised to see me there, and the first thing he said to me was, ‘I am dressed like a tramp’, as if he had to apologize for the state of his clothes even though I had said nothing about his clothes. Similarly, when Saif, came to see me on his day off work in tracksuit bottoms and a T-shirt, he was quick to point out that he was dressed like a tramp because he was not planning on going out, and that he never dressed like that if he had to go into town. ‘I only dress like this if I am not meeting anyone, for instance, when I am just driving around at night with Zayed’, he told me. On other occasions, he was always presentable and smartly dressed, because he and the other popular boys considered themselves to be different from other Pakistani youth.

#### **4.2.3.2.5 When Parents and Sons do Not Agree on the ‘Right Look’**

Even though the ‘university student look’ that the popular boys were trying to adopt was mainly in line with their parents’ idea of how an ideal son would dress up, there were rare occasions when parental perceptions of the ‘smart look’ and those of their sons did not match. On such occasions, popular boys developed strategies to please the demands of both cultures.

Popular boys parents had a conservative and traditional idea of respectable clothes and were not familiar with the current clothing trends of mainstream youth found fault with particular aspects of the ‘popular boy look’. Almost all the parents despised the sagging jeans their sons had taken to



wearing. Zayed told me how his father and elder brother always chastised Salman and Abraham for their jeans sagging down. Husnain's father, a successful businessman, often commented on his son's jeans. Once when I was with him he told his son to pull up his jeans in the following words, 'Your father has such respect in this town and is so well dressed and your trousers hanging down your ass'. And on another occasion when he was in a lighter mood, he said, 'Husnain walk carefully or your pants will fall off and everyone will be staring at your ass'. Farhan's father, Akram Agha, also did not like these jeans and often told him to pull them up.

Another aspect of the popular boy look that was not appreciated by their parents was their haircuts they sometimes had, which sometimes included designs and letters stencilled on their head and eyebrows. It was considered a feminine trait and their parents did not like it all. Husnain's parents hated his close-shaved haircut. His mother considered the close-shaved head the style of the gangsta boys. 'You look like a Mirpuri', she once told him after he returned home with a new haircut.

These parents also disliked the accessories the popular boys wore to enhance their look, such as caps, earrings, and beaded necklaces. While they were considered to be important for the popular boys in terms of what mainstream society did, they were considered to improper by their parents.

The popular boys responded to their parents' concerns by concealing these elements from their parents wherever possible. When concealment was impossible, they ignored their parents' remarks, but never

gave up on these important elements of ‘the look’ they were trying to imitate. According to Zayed, when Abraham, Salman and Farhan were at home they tried to keep their jeans tight, but when they left the house they unloosened their belts and allowed their jeans to fall to the desired level. When Abraham had the letters ‘LV’ (Louis Vuitton, an expensive designer clothes brand) stencilled on his head he concealed them with a prayer cap from his father. Most of the accessories were easier to hide. Thus, caps are taken off in the presence of parents; and the beaded necklaces and earrings were carried in bags or pockets, only to be taken out at the appropriate time. When Amir and Abraham came to my flat to get ready to go clubbing, they arrived with shoulder bags that contained an assortment of gels, perfumes, earrings, caps and necklaces. First, Abraham took out his ear studs and put them on. He then withdrew his beaded necklace from under his shirt where it lay hidden from his parents, and took out his beaded bracelet. With all the accessories in place he put copious amount of gel in his hair and formed it into spikes, a style his parents would not like as they preferred a simple side-parting. Amir, too, went through a similar ritual. Whereas concealment worked very well with a number of items of the popular boy style that offended parental sensibilities, in some cases concealment was not possible. This was true for instance with the lines that the popular boys often had stencilled on their eyebrows, or some styles of jeans that were so loose and of such a style that they could not be pulled up. Also, skinny fit jeans which had become popular with the younger popular boys were another example where concealment was not possible. When the

popular boys were wearing such styles, they decided to ignore the comments their parents made about their clothing style, preferring to upset their parents rather than to compromise their popular boy look.

#### **4.2.3.2.6 The Confidence That Comes With the Shared Ideals of the Two Identity Defining Cultures**

As described above, in most cases the mainstream youth culture's definition of the 'right look' was very similar to that of their parents and, where there was a conflict it was often easily avoided by concealment. As a result outfits as a consumption field was not too laden with conflict and tension. Thus, the popular boys felt much more secure about their behaviour vis-à-vis their parents with regard to their choice of clothing than they did with regard to their choice of leisure activities. This enabled the popular boys to experiment with individual-stylistic touches with what they regarded to be the 'smart look' in clothing. For example, Salman said that he added his personal touch. He said: 'These days I am into caps, but I do not wear them like other people do. I wear them slightly tilted to the side, and I pull it off. People like it'. This individualistic style manifested itself mostly in the selection of accessories, such as: beads, wallets, braces, caps and bandanas, all of which were used to construct an individualistic style. For example, when Husnain's cousin was getting married, he decided to wear braces with his suit, and told his mother to buy him some. When I asked him why he wanted to wear braces,

he said: 'It is the classic style. No one else wears them anymore, and I like being different from everyone else. I know I can pull it off'. Likewise, Abraham and Zayed had been wearing a leather shoulder wallet for some time. When I asked Abraham why, he said: 'It is cool. And no one else wears it' He also had T-shirts with personalized slogans printed on them. He had recently bought a tight blue V-neck T-shirt and had paid £10 to have 'Lil Wayne the Best Rapper in the World' printed in white on the back of it. This too was his way of being different and adding his individual touch to the 'smart' look. Other popular boys wore beaded necklaces and bracelets to create their own style. For example, Abraham wore black and white beaded bracelets on his wrist most of the time, and on special occasions wore a white and gold one. Emran always wrapped a bandana around his wrist, and Amir wore silver bracelets and chains.

Although these efforts might be seen as trying to distinguish themselves from the fashion of mainstream youth and to be a little bit different, a closer look at the phenomenon revealed that it was not so. Thus, most popular boys wore the same brands (Top Man, All Saints, New Look, Henleys) and the same style of clothes (cardigans, jumpers, canvas shoes) and with the same clothing combination (V-neck T-shirt, brightly coloured cardigan and beaded necklace). Their claim to individuality was based merely on superficial cosmetic changes they made to their overall look by adding accessories (*e.g.* shoulder wallets, braces, ear studs, bandanas wrapped around the wrist, and/or silver bracelets and chains). Yet, this attempt to express their own individual

style was important to them. It was a sign of confidence in their ability to adopt the university youth aesthetic. By adopting these cosmetic changes they were showing that they were comfortable with ‘the look’ and can innovate within it: They know the vocabulary of the smart look and can develop their own personal touches to it.

#### **4.2.3.3 The Consumption of Leisure: Clubbing and Bollywood Movies**

The two leisure activities which were most important for shaping the popular boy consumer identity projects were:

- Clubbing which included not only physically being in clubs but also preparing for the clubbing experience and talking about it – both past experiences of and future plans to go to clubbing.
- Watching Bollywood movies, talking about them and listening to their soundtracks.

In the following section, I first discuss the popular boys’ consumption of clubbing as a leisure activity and then discuss what it is that makes clubbing so appealing to popular boys, in other words why they prefer clubbing to other music-related social activities such as raves. I then describe how the popular boys monitor each other’s ‘clubbing performance’ by their ability to attract posh white girls in clubs. Finally, I discuss how clubbing is one of the most contested consumption activities for popular boys, and how it is indeed the

most vulnerable aspect of their consumer acculturation projects with regard to complying with mainstream British youth culture.

Next I discuss the popular boys' consumption of Bollywood movies, and show how this activity resolves some of the contradictions that they face as a result of their desire to engage in clubbing and other aspects of mainstream youth culture in Britain.

#### **4.2.3.3.1 Clubbing**

##### **4.2.3.3.1.1 Consumption of Clubbing:**

For popular boys the experience of clubbing does not come 'naturally'. With the exception of two boys (Salman and Abraham), for most popular boys it is a complicated and even an uncomfortable experience. When in clubs, most popular boys are always aware of their surroundings, cautiously reading their audiences' gestures and gazes and constantly altering their performance in response to the reactions. For them, complete immersion in the experience is not possible. Rather it is a detached activity performed for the gaze of the mainstream white youth and fellow popular-boy Asians. In the following section, I first compare the popular boys' clubbing experience to that of mainstream white youth, and show how for the former it is a self-reflexive performance, whereas for the latter it is a natural socialization activity. I then, discuss the differences in the ways in which older versus younger popular boys engage in clubbing and show that, even though their desire to belong to

mainstream white middle class does not change over time, their preferences about which types of clubs to go to changes.

The typical 'night out' for white middle class youth usually begins at a local pub where they arrange to meet with their friends for a couple of hours prior to their entry into the club. The most popular pubs among the youth in Bolchester were Drummons, Sin and Lloyds bar. These are different from the traditional English pubs; they are decorated with new and modern furniture and have loud up-beat music with numerous TV screens hanging from the ceiling. The youth warm up to the night ahead with a few drinks in these local bars, from where they walk in small groups to the clubs. Most of these groups are comprised of both sexes. Typically, the girls arrive together; and order something to drink and take a table. Soon the boys arrive and join the girls. For the next couple of hours these individuals, who are well acquainted, talk animatedly on subjects that are relevant to their lives. Before leaving, the girls always go to the ladies room to 'freshen up' – making adjustments to their clothes and applying fresh makeup – and then they leave as a group to go to the club of their choice. They are all dressed smartly and gain easy entry into any club they choose to go to. Most of the boys are dressed in colourful cardigans, collared shirts, and canvass shoes. Likewise, the girls are most usually in mini-skirts or short revealing dresses; their hair is recently styled and make-up is applied to enhance their attractiveness. Once they are in the club they slowly get warmed up to the music. They have a few more drinks, and soon they are completely immersed in the clubbing scene. They

confidently appropriate the dance floor, giving into the music, switching partners as the night progresses, and by the end of the night they are completely immersed in the experience. These youth are completely comfortable in clubs; they confidently approach members of the opposite sex, sing along with the songs and are not self conscious at all.

The young white boys who come to clubs in groups of twos and threes are the most relevant group for a comparison with the popular boys. These young white youth enter a space where they are acquainted with others and are surrounded by other individuals like them – white middle class. This, coupled with the fact that they are already relaxed under the influence of alcohol, results in a non-reflexive enjoyment of the experience. These men walk into the clubs and walk straight to the bar where they get themselves a ‘warm-up’ drink. They sip away and scan the dance floor, identifying groups of girls who are not accompanied by boys and whom they find attractive. After finishing their drink they dance their way to the group of girls they are interested in and start dancing with them. For the next hour they repeat this process of approaching girls, dancing with them, talking to them, until they find a group of girls who are interested in chatting to them. They then retreat from the centre of the dance floor so that they can talk to these girls and take things further. Often what happens is that they are not able to bond with girls in the club, and then the night consists of a constant movement from one set of girls to another other, where the boys openly flirt with them, and then move onto the next group.



Compared to this immersion, the popular boys participate in this leisure activity very-self consciously. They are always aware of their presence in the space, and they seem to be purposefully performing in a certain manner. Inside the clubs it is impossible not to spot the small groups of Asian youth huddled in corners. They generally nurse their Red Bulls and watch the crowd on the dance floor. In both the local clubs in Bolchester, Sins and Tramps, they could be found occupying the fringes of the dance floor – away from the crowded centre where most of the white youth are – and yet from the animated look on their faces one would conclude that they were enjoying the experience. When I went to Tramps to meet Abraham, I also gravitated towards the group of Asian youths in one corner. Like the popular boys I was not under the influence of alcohol and could not overcome my inhibitions. I was intimidated by the disorder that prevailed on the dance floor, where in a cramped space a large number of youths in various degrees of drunkenness were dancing and falling over each other. The popular boys often talked about the ‘looks’ they got from girls if they accidentally bumped into one on the dance floor and standing in the club these incidents occupied my mind. Thus, although I was dressed well, I was not confident, and I felt that if I bumped into a girl she would think I was a desperate Asian man who was getting a kick out of rubbing against her and then I would get that ‘look’ which would be embarrassing. The nod of acknowledgement I received as I joined the group of Asian youths standing in the corner communicated their understanding of the sense of dread that came over me when I tried to approach the dance floor. Generally standing in groups

of threes and fours they seemed to be listening to the music, but most did not venture any further. The predominantly white crowd of young men and women kept walking past them; and they hardly seemed to know anyone. The popular boys mostly talked amongst themselves, and generally avoided excessive movements that might attract attention, but only moved their bodies enthusiastically to a song they recognized. They were alone in the club, but enjoyed being in the club with their friends, in the proximity of this leisure activity. Likewise, on my visits with the popular boys I learnt to enjoy the experience from a distance, revelling in the camaraderie I shared with them. Standing in the corner with them, we would constantly talk amongst ourselves, make jokes about what other people were doing, and, if a song I recognized came on I would even try and dance to it, laughing at each others' moves. The popular boys constantly observed other people, and when they caught sight of somebody watching them they became self conscious and would try harder to give the impression that they were enjoying themselves. While the non-Pakistani young persons generally danced with abandon, not caring what other people thought of their behaviour and were confident to approach any girl they found attractive, most popular boys exhibited extreme self-consciousness, as if they felt they were constantly being observed and if they slipped up in their behaviour, other persons would see their discomfort and conclude that they did not belong to this mainstream white youth culture. During their clubbing experience, most popular boys hardly moved from where they stood or sat, and when they did so (*e.g.* for a quick cigarette in the open smoking area where

they would talk to other Asian boys over a cigarette), then they would quickly return to the same place and continue to watch people.

The two exceptions to the above described popular boy performance in clubs involved Abraham and Salman. As opposed to the other popular boys, most of whom were currently college drop-outs and as a result had been away from their white-college-network for awhile, Abraham, Salman and Farhan were still students at the college, and were thus very much immersed in the tastes of their college peers—for example they loved R&B music and dancing—and were confident with regard to their behaviour in the mainstream youth culture because they have been given a lot of encouragement from their peers. As a result, Abraham and Salman were not shy about getting onto the dance floor. They immediately started mingling and rubbing shoulders with their white girl friends they know from college and enthusiastically danced and sing along with the songs being played. However, their behaviour was still very different from that of the most of the white youth. They repeatedly told me of their popularity as good dancers, and thus were well-aware of their performance. While dancing, rather than letting their bodies become one with the music and dance to the rhythm, Salman and Abraham imitated the artists whose songs were being played. For example, they had perfected the dance moves of Chris Brown, a popular R&B singer. One move, which was their favourite, involved taking off the cap on their head using the elbow and a sideways movement of the head; and another one involved flicking the cap off catching it with the foot and then flicking it back again. They practiced these

moves at home by watching videos online and copying them in front of a mirror, and they often performed these moves for me too when they visited me. They said that they worked hard to perfect these moves so that they could get the attention of their most valued audience: posh white girls. They claimed that ‘girls in the clubs go berserk when I pull it off’.

Even though clubbing symbolizes, for the popular boys, the epitome of white mainstream culture that both younger and older generation popular boys so want to fit in, their preferences with respect to the clubs that they choose to go is very different. The younger popular boys preferred to go to local clubs, and follow student events in these clubs, whereas the older popular boys would go to clubs in other larger cities or to ‘exclusive clubs’ in London (see further below).

The older popular boys were primarily interested in going to ‘exclusive clubs’ those to which only those customers on the guest list and who obey the strict dress codes are admitted. According to the popular boys, the patrons of these clubs are ‘posh people’, in other words people with a university education and prestigious jobs, and who dress ‘smart’ and are cultured. During the year and a half in which I conducted my ethnography the older generation of popular boys only patronized clubs which they believed catered to white middle class professionals. For example, the only local club that they patronized was Bushwhackers; a club with very strict door policies and with a reputation of refusing entry to gangsta boys, and this, according to the popular boys, was a sign of its exclusivity. Apart from this local club, they occasionally

drove to London to go to exclusive clubs. The popular boys believed that the most successful middle class professionals lived in or visited London, and that the exclusive clubs in London were frequented by such professionals. As the older popular boys so wanted to become part of this professional middle class culture, they felt they had to patronize London clubs and ‘breathe the air’ there. For example, when in Saif, a 23-year-old popular boy, got ‘off tag’<sup>13</sup>, the first activity he wanted to do was to go clubbing in London. So Zayed and Amir requested Zayed’s brothers’ friends to arrange their entry to very exclusive clubs in London. Zayed explained his desire to visit such clubs as: ‘I do not like going to clubs where everyone is drunk and they keep bumping into you. I wanted to go to the exclusive clubs where the crowd is very nice’. When I asked what he meant by ‘nice’, he told me that he meant cosmopolitan London professionals, people who are from around the world, working hard in London, yet who also know how to have a good time. They shared the same space and met for night outs in these exclusive clubs. An important aspect of these ‘posh’ people was that they did not get excessively drunk. They could be ‘high’ on drugs such as ecstasy, but they were not out of control. This was probably important for the popular boys because, according to them, they were usually

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<sup>13</sup> A ‘tag’ is a device that is attached to the ankle of a person by the police in order to track that person’s movement. It is often used, as in this case, to confine a person to a specific premise during certain hours. Here, he was not allowed to leave his house between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am.

racially abused by people who were intoxicated as a result of drinking too much alcohol and who had lost their inhibitions. During their trip Zayed and friends managed to get into exclusive London clubs, such as Mangoes, Fabric, Funky Buddha and Mayas. According to Zayed, all of these clubs were very difficult to get into and for him the harder it was to get into, the more exclusive the club was and thus the more worthwhile to get into. When I asked how his brother's friend managed to get them into such clubs, he told me that his brother's friend knew the bouncers and, when they told the bouncers, who they were they let them in. According to Zayed there was no way they would have been admitted to such clubs if it were not for his brother's friend.

Of the clubs that they had visited Zayed liked Maya's best. He described the place as full of 'classy people'. He said: 'Nobody was pissed and everyone was talkative. The interior was very sick (*very expensive*) and the crowd was mainly professionals, very smartly dressed, and friendly'. He said, he had conversations with other patrons, and they were interested in talking to him. These older popular boys appreciated the acceptance they received in these exclusive clubs where, unlike the clubs in Bolchester, most of the customers were from out of town and did not know each other and were therefore more willing to talk to strangers. In Bolchester, where the majority of the clubbers were middle class white who knew each other well, the popular boys felt out of place. The same was true in clubs in other big cities like Birmingham, where Gatecrashers was a favourite destination for the older popular boys. The welcoming nature of the other patrons made Zayed and his

friends feel very comfortable, and once again made them realize how they so wanted to be cosmopolitan, high-flying international professionals one day. During their three-day London visit they tried to go to as many clubs as possible. They spent their time primarily in clubs. Zayed explains their schedule as follows:

‘I got up late, took a shower changed and then headed off to central London. Then I went from club to club until very late in the morning and the same routine was repeated the next day. On the third day, Saif and I wanted to go sight seeing but Amir wanted to go clubbing again, so that is what I did’.

They did not stay in any one club for long. They would spend a few hours in one club and then move onto another. Summarizing his experience, Zayed proudly said that he has never gone to so many clubs in his life.

After that visit to London, Zayed, Saif, Amir and Hubaib began to make plans for a night out with me. Whenever the topic came up in conversations, they talked excitedly about how I would drive down to London, stop in Southall for a good meal, before heading for a ‘top’ club in London and later on would have *sheesha* (the Arabic name for the water-based smoking pipe with fruit flavoured tobacco) on Edgware road to round things off. The events that would transpire in the club never featured prominently in these plans of a night out in London. When they did talk about the choice of club, they never talked about the girls that they might meet there, or the music, but they spoke about the popularity of the club: ‘I need to go to the most exclusive club in London’, said Saif. Even though our plans to go to clubbing in London

did not materialize, and I have not been on such a trip, Zayed and friends went clubbing in London on a number of occasions. When describing their trips, the only aspect of their experience that they wanted to talk about were the décor and the rankings of the clubs, and the 'posh' look of the patrons. They had nothing to say about the actual experience. They had even taken photos of the clubs and offered to show them to me.

The only time I had a chance to go to clubbing in a bigger city with the older popular boys involved a trip to Birmingham, where we were refused entry to the club. I describe that episode in detail later. In the meantime, it is important to note that, when entry was refused, I suggested going to another club in Birmingham, but they all refused to do so because no club fitted their description of 'exclusive'. When I asked why they were reluctant to try other clubs, they said that exclusive clubs were those with strict door policies; and these policies would result in a specific mix of individuals in the club, namely smartly dressed mostly white professional persons.

These older popular boys' preference for 'exclusive clubs' – which according to them were frequented by the professional class – was a manifestation of their middle class aspirations. However, all the older popular boys were struggling for a start on the path that they believed would lead them to the middle class lifestyle they aspired to. They were almost all college drop-outs (see Table 1 for details) or behind their peers. They were either working at lower level jobs or trying to work their way back into university; and they carry their histories with them. The local clubs reminded them of a time when



they believed that they were going to make their dreams come true. So when they faced a choice of whether to go to a local club or drive to Birmingham, they tended to decide against the local club option even though it was much more convenient. In addition to appealing to more professional crowds ‘out of town clubs’ were also free from the associations that the local clubs had in older popular boys’ minds. Thus they could perform the middle class aesthetic, and feel they belonged in that milieu, at least during their time at the club.

The younger popular boys (aged 16-19) did not face the same dilemma as the older boys. These boys still believed that they will go to college. Being at a local club did not remind them of an unattained dream, but rather it functioned as a promise that one day they would be a member of the middle class. Thus, the younger popular boys (Abraham, Sunjay, Basit, Farhan and Salman) happily went to local clubs. They went there on student nights, Mondays and Thursdays, when the clubs were teeming with students from local colleges and they avoided going to clubs on nights when students were not in the majority. They especially preferred Bushwhacker on Thursdays, because of their strict door policy which allowed only ‘smartly dressed’ students to enter. And the younger popular boys, who desired to be counted among the ‘posh’ students, found it very appealing as it allowed them to feel like members of the exclusive university youth culture.

To sum up, irrespective of the material realities of their lives – whether or not they were on the path to becoming middle class at least economically speaking – both younger and older popular boys wished to belong to the

mainstream middle class culture. However, while the older boys desired to be accepted by and be members of the white middle class professional culture, the younger ones wanted to belong to the mainstream white university youth culture. The difference in their preferences of which clubs to go to shows that the sub-segments of the mainstream white culture to which the popular boys wished to belong changed with age.

#### **4.2.3.3.1.2 Why Not Raves?**

Given that the popular boys desired to be the members of the mainstream middle class youth, and believed for them clubbing was the main leisure activity, it should not come as much of a surprise that clubbing was the most important identity defining leisure activity for the popular boys. What is more interesting, however, was the popular boys' complete rejection of the opportunity to take part in any other music/dance platforms, even when their acceptance by those platforms could be much easier than their acceptance by some of the clubs?

In the next section, I describe raves as the alternative dance/music activity which the popular boys rejected at face value without even having tried the activity. I then describe some of the inconveniences that they were exposed to at club entrances, and discuss how those inconveniences do not at all make popular boys question whether they should go to raves instead of clubs. Their rejection at clubs made these clubs seem even more exclusive,

provoking the popular boys to perform the mainstream white university youth culture better next time.

During the course of my fieldwork numerous big raves were advertised in Bolchester. The popular boys had never attended such events. Even when a world-famous drum and bass DJ was playing in a club in Birmingham, the popular boys did not show any interest in attending. They rejected the idea outright. Zayed said: 'I do not like going to these raves. The music is too aggressive. Many pricks go there, people who are looking for trouble. And the (rave) clubs are too rough'. And the rest of the popular boys there listening to us, Saif, Salman and Farhan, agreed with Zayed. They said that 'raves' were for rough, working class, aggressive youth mostly enjoyed by chavs and gangsta boys. And then started to recount stories of gangsta boys who were regular 'ravers', where the underlying theme of these was that these youths belonged to backward Asian families, and were all college dropouts, drug dealers, with white chav girlfriends and unpromising futures. In other words, they repeated their parents' prejudices and 'spiced them up' with some of their own.

As the popular boys were acutely aware of the negative impression which gangsta boys had among university students, they did not wish to be confused with them and therefore avoided going to raves and even listening to the kind of music - Grime and Drum and Bass - that was strongly associated with the gangsta boy culture. These negative associations made raving a leisure activity the popular boys chose to avoid completely, even though going to

raves could be much more convenient than risking rejection at the entrance of a night club.

Popular boys faced close scrutiny at the entrance of most of clubs. In order to be admitted they felt that they had to adhere perfectly to what they called the 'smart' dress code. Any slight deviation from that code, they believed, would result in the refusal of entry by the club. They also thought that a large-male-only-Asian group in a queue always drew too much attention at the entrance and almost always resulted in a 'red-flag' from the bouncers. And so they developed strategies to deal with these difficulties. Thus, in most cases, they queued in pairs and acted as if they did not know the other popular boys in the queue. If being rejected entry was a risk they took, the bigger risk was being spotted by their extended family members who would purposely park their taxis in front of the clubs, supposedly waiting for customers, but in reality checking whether any of the sons of the family were in the queue. Because of these difficulties, one would suppose that the popular boys might be better off going to raves which have less strict entry policies, but this was not the case. The difficulties of gaining entry to clubs did not diminish their enthusiasm for the clubbing scene. In fact the entry difficulties seemed to make the clubbing scene even more exclusive and more desirable for most popular boys. Take for example, one clubbing episode when I accompanied Zayed, Amir, Saif, Husnain and Husnain's urbanite cousin to a club in Birmingham. Even though we had dressed up according to the dress code, and were waiting in line in pairs, rather than as one large group of all-male Asians, with the

exception of Zayed and Amir, we were still refused entry on the pretext that we were not dressed appropriately. The immediate reaction of the popular boys was that they were excluded because they were Asian. They even voiced this opinion by shouting it out to the bouncers. Other small groups of Asians were also refused, and this was taken as evidence of the management's racism. Interestingly, however, this initial reaction only lasted for a few minutes and it was very soon altered following what we observed outside other clubs. As a group, we walked towards other clubs in the area, debating among ourselves about whether it was worth going to another club. Husnain's cousin who was visiting from Pakistan wanted to go to another club, but Saif and Husnain were not interested. Outside two of the clubs I saw Asian youth getting involved in verbal arguments with the bouncers and with the white youth queuing with them. After watching the Birmingham Asians' behaviour the popular boys started reinterpreting their rejection at Gatecrashers. Saif and Husnain said that they were not surprised that the management had refused them entry because the Asian lads in Birmingham 'were trouble'. They said they were like the gangsta lads in Bolchester, looking for trouble by adopting aggressive behaviour. They then started to find reasons why they themselves were not admitted. They decided that they should have dressed more smartly. They thought that Zayed and Amir did the right thing by dressing smartly. They felt that we – the rejected ones – were not appropriately dressed. I was wearing blue jeans, casual shoes, and a smart blue Jaeger (an expensive clothes brand) jumper. Saif, was wearing black jeans, canvas shoes and a black jacket over a

white shirt. Husnain was wearing canvas shoes, a black T-shirt and a Y3 jacket. Husnain's cousin was wearing blue jeans, canvas shoes, a white shirt and a v-neck black jumper. On the other hand, Amir, one of those who had been allowed to enter, was wearing blue jeans and a pink shirt, and the other, Zayed, was wearing blue jeans, smart shoes and his All Saints leather jacket. Both Husnain and Saif thought that their casual jackets and canvas shoes would have been fine in Bolchester, but in this club, considering the fact that the vast majority of Asians were gangsta boys, they were not 'smart' enough. They then started to blame themselves for not planning the trip with sufficient care, particularly the fact that they had not given enough consideration to their outfits. Saif even talked about the clothes he should have worn, his 'smart' All Saint's shirt and his dress shoes. Compared to Zayed's black jacket which had a very thin collar and was light and devoid of any unnecessary pockets and buttons, Saif's had an elastic collar, large silver buttons, four pockets, and was made out of a shiny synthetic fabric.

By the time we were back at the parking place, all the popular boys had agreed that they themselves were responsible for not being permitted to enter any of the clubs. They were of the view that the management had not been racist; rather they themselves had failed to perform the 'smart look' successfully. We drove around for an hour debating whether was worth going to another club. Two other clubs were mentioned, which, according to the popular boys, were exclusive, and so we tried getting into one of them, but at the door we were told the club was full. This time around we did not stand

around to argue. Later, Husnain – a relatively new convert from the gangsta culture – suggested that because we had come all the way from Birmingham we should go to the rave. However, the others were totally against this option opted to go home without going anywhere near the rave. So we returned to Bolchester without even setting foot in a club.

The popular boys desired to fit into the mainstream white culture so much that, even when they faced difficulties or rejection, they interpreted them as their own fault. I believe that these interpretations were a manifestation of their vulnerability with regard to their identities as Asians. Thus, when they considered that other Asians were not following the norms of mainstream youth culture, they quickly called them ‘gangsta lads’. And they believed that it was up to them to communicate their difference from those Asians to their white audience. It is also important to note that, even though the popular boys were not creating any commotion at the entrance of the club, and were peacefully waiting their turn to enter the club, when the bouncers refused to admit them the popular boys thought that, if the mainstream white culture failed to understand the difference between them and the other Asians, it was in fact their own fault. In other words, they believed they deserved to be refused entry. The episode also shows that, even in a context where the alternative is going home without having any fun at all, the popular boys still refused to take part in other social activities, such as raves, which would put them in a more contested place in their relationship to the mainstream white youth.

#### **4.2.3.3.1.3 Monitoring Each Other's Clubbing Performance**

If obtaining admittance to a club is a sign of being considered a member of white mainstream youth culture, the other test is attracting white posh-girls in clubs. The ability to get the telephone numbers of posh white girls is a potent status symbol among the popular boys. Stories about their 'successes' with white girls poured out unsolicited from the popular boys and they became very animated when they recounted these stories to each other. For example, the two older popular boys, Zayed and Saif, liked to tell of the times when they used to go to local clubs and how they were very popular with the white girls. According to these stories, numerous girls would give their mobile numbers to them and wanted to date them. Some stories were told many times, such as the one where an attractive white girl walked up to Saif in a club, took his phone off him, entered her number on his phone and asked him to call her. Zayed often reminded the others of how he was able to go on a date with a girl from their college, for, even though she was desired by many Asian and white students in college, she picked Zayed. Similarly, Abraham was very proud of his popularity with girls in clubs, and, when I accompanied him to clubs, he always liked to show me the girls he had dated.

The most conspicuous show of this achievement was told by Amir and Abraham over the week of the Christmas holidays. Amir had made plans to spend the whole week in London and Birmingham clubbing. He roped in Zayed, and booked rooms at Travel Lodges in London and Birmingham. When the time came Zayed backed out of the plan. Amir was stranded, because he



had told his parents he was going to London to shop with his friends for a whole week, and he could not go back home now. On the other hand he claimed that he would not be able to afford the living expenses on his own. He asked me if he could stay at my flat for a few days. For the next few days he played out his exploits publicly for the pleasure of Zayed, Husnain, Emran, and Saif who regularly visited during this time. The very first night he called me to inform me that he was going to stay the night in Birmingham. Apparently, Abraham and Amir had gone to Gatecrashers where they had befriended two white girls and now they were spending the night with them in a Travelodge. He even called Zayed and invited him over, 'I am with these really hot girls. One is from Scotland and the other is half Arab'. Zayed, declined. The next evening he arrived at my flat with Abraham and after changing they went to meet these girls. They spent hours with them and he returned later that night to recount the events to Zayed, Saif and Husnain. The next two days, during the day he would speak to the Scottish girl for hours, often, putting her on loud speaker so the rest of us could hear their conversation. He went into detail about how they had flirted with the girls, what they had spoken about and how he had been more successful than Abraham. He emphasized that, however, that they did not have sex. The other popular boys thoroughly enjoyed his performance, interrupting his stories with their past exploits, and in the case of Husnain, even spoke to the Scottish girl. Abraham and Amir used their cultural capital to the limit to impress these girls. Throughout the day they exchanged text messages where he would send them lyrics from R&B songs and receive

the same back from these girls. At night they would dress up like rap stars to take them out to dinner or a club. When he was going out, Amir, even changed his boxer shorts. While in the house he was wearing plain boxer shorts, but when he got ready for the girls, he donned his Ed Hardy boxer shorts that showed over his sagging jeans. The red colour of the boxer shorts matched the red colour of his jacket, under which he was wearing a black Ed Hardy T-shirt. Both Abraham and Amir wore pointed leather dress shoes – Abraham had bought a pair recently, owing to their popularity with American rap stars – and to top it all off they both donned their red P-caps that a famous American rap star (50-cent) had brought into fashion. Amir said before he left for the date: ‘I look like a rap star’. This went on for the whole week Amir was at my flat. The other popular boys, who had spent the weekend abstaining from clubbing, enjoyed the episode with relish and talked about Amir and Abraham in their absence. They cracked jokes at their expense, but there was a palpable air of appreciation. Another interesting theme that was discussed in the week was Abraham’s behaviour. Abraham became too emotionally attached to the half caste girl he was seeing. Amir brought the issue up when he showed us the video he had made over dinner. He gave us the background as follows:

‘Girls mess around, you know. When my girl told me she would probably get married soon, I played along, telling her that she must invite me and I would attend wearing the traditional Pakistani clothes and everything. When Abraham’s girl told him, he reacted differently. He said: What is going to happen to me. I want to marry you’. It was hilarious.’

In the video Abraham got on his knees and proposed to the girl with Amir's ring over dinner in an Indian restaurant. Husnain burst into laughter when he saw the video, and both Amir and Husnain attributed this propensity of Abraham to have premature emotional attachments to Bollywood. Another important aspect was the lively competition that was taking place between Abraham and Amir, both were trying to convince the other popular boys that the girl was mad about them and desperately wanted to spend time with them. Abraham would go to the other room and come back telling us how the girl was sweet talking to him. Amir would then tell us what Abraham's girl really thought about Abraham and had said so to Amir. They wanted to beat the other at the game, and earn the respect of the others by convincing them of their white 'girl-pulling' skills.

It is not always necessary to date a white girl to be considered successful, even a smile would do. For example, Zayed had recently been out to Birmingham with Amir. On his return he came to my flat while the other popular boys were there, I started asking him about the night out. The audience became excited when he started talking about his interaction with a white girl. This white girl, according to Zayed, was very attractive and posh. She was in the club with a friend, and was dancing nearby where Zayed was standing with Amir. Zayed continued the story: 'She kept checking me out. Then she walked past us and she looked me in the eye and smiled at me'. Zayed was happy about the smile and the other popular boys acknowledged this achievement.

Even when Zayed was not able to get her telephone number, just the fact that the girl had smiled was enough to acknowledge Zayed's success.

However, they all agreed that Salman was by far the most successful with white girls, and they all respected him for that. His Facebook was full of pictures with white girls in clubs and comments by white female friends. Most of his socialization with these girls took place in clubs. Although Salman was younger than most of the popular boys, the older popular boys looked up to him because of the skills he has developed in attracting posh white girls. He was studying for his A levels at the local college where he was very popular. He owed this popularity to the fact that his identity project has been developed according to the middle class culture. Salman has put in a lot of effort in cultivating a music taste that spanned multiple genres, importantly the genres that were popular among the youth – R&B, hip hop and Retro – his iPod was full of these songs and, according to his brothers, he slept wearing his earphones: 'When he gets up, the first thing he has to do is listen to his music. Once I had his headphones he woke me up, took the headphone off me and the next thing I know he was brushing his teeth with his headphones on'. At home he spent a lot of time tuned into MTV and watched music videos, and in this way he was completely abreast with new songs in the genre. He knew the lyrics to numerous songs and claimed that he was also popular in college because he could sing very well. Salman was also the most well-read of the popular boys. He even borrowed a book from me (*A Short History of Nearly Everything* by Bill Bryson, containing information on subjects ranging from

physics to geology). He used such knowledge acquired by reading to impress his peers. The other popular boys, on the other hand, were uncomfortable talking about subjects they had no knowledge of and Salman was much more keenly interested in gaining knowledge. Husnain and Salman were the most articulate of the popular boys and were much more adept at holding interesting conversations. It was this characteristic which Salman claimed gave him 'an edge' over the other Pakistani boys. He was confident enough to converse with white girls and impress them with his talking skills. The following characteristics were salient ingredients of his masculinity: sensitivity (he did not treat women as sexual objects but instead strove to know them as individuals by listening to them); maturity (he was not aggressive and dealt with issues by talking); intelligence (appreciative of education, learning and thoughtful stimulating entertainment); and fun (he was not just a book worm, but also enjoyed leisure activities, such as clubbing). His masculinity project, coupled with his cultural capital in the middle class student youth culture had earned him a special position with the popular boys. The older popular boys always insisted on taking him along when they went to clubs. For example, when I asked him why Sunjay and Basit wanted to take him to London with them, Salman said: 'They want to go with me because I get so much attention; and, if they are with me, they get attention as well. (Otherwise), they do not know what to do in clubs'.

For popular boys, attracting just any girl does not 'do the trick'. Only particular types of girls are considered 'acceptable' targets. The boys refer to

these girls as ‘not chavs’, ‘smartly dressed girls’, ‘private school girls’ – the image that these terms conjure is that of a middle class girl, one who is smartly dressed, carries herself well and goes to college. This is their idea of a middle class girl. Walking around town with them I often asked them to point out girls they would give attention to if they met her in a club, and they always pointed out girls who were dressed smartly and carried themselves well, and who were in the company of middle class boys or girls. These girls were never overweight, their clothes were ironed and clean, and they wore branded T-shirts and shirts and carried designer handbags. An aspect of their look that the popular boys picked up on was their makeup and hairstyle. Saif explained the importance of these aspects to me, asserting that ‘posh’ girls are always made-up and their hair is styled by expensive stylists. These girls were never loud or rowdy like those girls referred to by the popular boys as ‘chavs’. Unlike the posh girls who came into the city centre either to shop or meet friends in coffee shops, the ‘chavs’ came into town to ‘hang around’ with ‘chav’ boys. Their favourite hangout place was the corner outside McDonalds in the city centre. Here they would stand around, smoking cigarettes in large groups. These girls were generally overweight and were dressed in loose tracksuit bottoms, hoodies and trainers. They never wore makeup and their hair was in different states of disarray. These were all characteristics the popular boys had picked up on and used to decide on the ‘poshness’ of the girls.

The popular boys used their success with ‘middle class white girls’ not only as a reconfirmation of their acceptance in middle class white culture, but

also as an indicator of their superiority to the gangsta boys. When I asked them what kind of a Asian guy would be able to attract a ‘posh’ girl, Zayed, Saif and Husnain answered by referring to the ‘gangsta boys’, stating that they would never be able to attract such girls. They said that the gangsta boys had too aggressive an image, they were not courteous to women and they did not dress well. For example, Salman often compared his attitude to that of the gangsta boys. According to him the gangsta boys were not interested in learning at all. In fact, they made fun of boys who had done well at school and talked about intelligent things. Salman said: ‘If I start talking about evolution and the evidence for evolution they will get bored’, and he said that the gangsta boys, had an aggressive mentality. They went around looking for trouble and chances to fight with others – for them the ability to fight was the most impressive symbol of masculinity. Salman, on the other hand, was not interested in fighting at all, not because he was scared but because he thought that this did not make you a man. The gangsta boys were also rude and saw women as sexual objects. Their conversation about women was always about sex, whereas Salman respected women. He said: ‘You see them shouting out at young girls, like ‘sexy’ or something’.

#### **4.2.3.3.1.4 Clubbing: The Epicentre of Contradictions**

Clubbing, from the perspective of the popular boys parents, symbolised all the negative values they associated with white British culture: wasting time; drinking; drugs; and illicit sex. And for this reason, they were strongly opposed

to it as a leisure activity. However, on the other hand, clubbing was an essential leisure activity among many mainstream white university youth, which the popular boys found difficult to ignore. Their parents' strong antagonism to them participating in the clubbing scene and the mainstream youth culture's strong desire for it created a difficult socio-cultural position for the popular boys. They were torn between complying with their parent's wishes and engaging in youth culture. However, the popular boys attempted to resolve this difficulty by adopting two strategies: by completely hiding all of their clubbing activities from their parents; and by re-defining what the ideal Pakistani son was through the discourse of Bollywood movies. I discuss the former strategy here in the clubbing section and the latter in the Bollywood section.

Their parents, based on their observations of the behaviour of other Pakistani youth, such as gangsta boys, were of the view that, if their offspring start clubbing, then what would invariably follow would be white girlfriends and drinking. They were therefore firmly against clubbing. And so the popular boys did their best to hide their clubbing activities from their parents, even though, according to them, it was much easier said than done in a small town like Bolchester. For example, Zayed described an occasion when they were almost caught when Zayed's uncle saw him queuing to get into a local club. He said:

'My uncle was in his taxi outside the club waiting for a customer. Saif and Amir had gone in already, but I was behind them and then I saw him. I got



really scared. I got out of the line and legged it. I called Saif and told him what had happened. I returned after fifteen minutes when he (my uncle) was gone.'

Zayed told me that, after the incident, he had avoided his uncle for a month because he knew his uncle was going to tell him off: 'When I saw him in town weeks after the event he started swearing at me'. Similarly, in one of our later clubbing outings, we approached the club with great caution. The popular boys asked me to be on the lookout for taxis driven by their extended family members. When I identified Saif's father's taxi, we quickly ducked into an alley, and we came out only after his father had gone.

Hiding the fact that they went nightclubs sometimes involved developing a well-thought-out strategy. For example, Abraham who regularly went to clubs explained the preparation he had to make in order avoid getting into trouble with his parents. He said he first talked to his sister, who was married and lives in a separate house, and told her that he would be staying at her house. The reason for staying there on club nights was that he had the keys to his sister's house and he could go there as late as he wanted without raising any suspicion. In order to ensure he would not be caught by his extended family on the way to nightclubs, he always pulled his hood over his jacket and wore a scarf round his face so that only his eyes showed. He also took the route that was not popular with drivers. Similarly, Salman would tell his parents he was staying at a friend's house in order to avoid his parents finding out about

his clubbing activities. Likewise, when the older boys went to London for clubbing they told their parents they were going sightseeing in Scotland.

It is interesting to note that not only did the popular boys hide their clubbing activities from their parents but also from their brothers. Both older and younger popular boys hid the fact from each other. For example, on their return from London, none of the older popular boys spoke to their younger brothers about their trip. In fact they expressly asked me not to mention it to them. This was in stark contrast to what gangsta boys did. Thus, when they took part in 'illicit' leisure activities, rather than hiding them from their younger brothers, they would describe their activities to their younger brothers in such a way that their lifestyles became very attractive in the eyes of the younger boys. And as these stories circulate from one group of youngsters to another, some older boys became mythologized into the outcast heroes, a reputation that all gangsta boys would love to attain. On the other hand, the popular boys not only hid such activities from their younger brothers, but would sometimes punish their younger brothers if they caught them clubbing. For example, one night, when Salman was returning home from a club with Farhan, he decided to drop by and see me in my flat, and his older brother Zayed was there. Zayed started swearing and threatening them that he would tell their parents about his brother's outings. And indeed later that month he did. Thus, when, on one occasion, Zayed discovered that Abraham, Salman, and Farhan were at Tramps (a club), he went in and dragged them out and later got them into trouble by telling his parents about their outings. When I later

asked Zayed why he tried to stop his younger brothers from going clubbing, even though he regularly did so, he said: 'It is not the right thing to do, is it? I do not want him wasting time. He is too young. I only started going to clubs when I was 19 years old, and he needs to concentrate on studying'. In other words, the older popular boys were imposing their parents' values on the younger ones. This shows the contradictory position the popular boys both adopted and were immersed in. Thus, although they went clubbing, they did not consider it the right thing to do. So even though they took part in it, the moral accounting surrounding the activity was still in place. The difference between the gangsta boys' attitudes towards their younger brothers and the popular boys' attitudes towards their younger brothers also demonstrated the values of the different white cultures that the two groups were influenced by. For gangsta boys it was working class youth who valued outcast heroes, and thus developing a reputation among youngsters by being involved in 'illicit' activities would not be contrary to the values of that white culture. On the other hand for the popular boys, whose white reference culture was that of mainstream white university youth culture, involvement in the 'illicit' activities pursued by the gangsta boys was not attractive, and also would not be approved of by their parents. The popular boys were keen to fit into the values of a particular white culture rather than to stand out from it. Being an outcast was unlikely to be a valuable cultural position among mainstream university youth. The popular boys did not personally consider clubbing to be morally wrong, provided you did not drink and did not have a physical relationship

with a white girl. They believed there was nothing wrong with clubbing *per se*. However, according to them, their parents had very strict moral beliefs whereby they regarded clubbing as part of a larger network of activities that included drinking and having white girlfriends. Their fathers, according to the popular boys, were very *shareef* (morally upright), and they had never gone to clubs, nor had relationships with white women and had never drunk alcohol. They did not understand the pressures of life in England for young people. There was a lot of peer pressure, and when so many young Pakistanis were drinking and sleeping around, the popular boys believed that going to clubs occasionally was not that bad compared to other things that were happening. According to their moral sensibilities, what was immoral was having sex before marriage, drinking alcohol and eating non-halal food.

#### **4.2.3.3.2 The Bollywood Lifestyle**

The popular boys were constantly struggling to reconcile their desire to acculturate to the white middle class culture with their desire to adhere to the precepts of the ideal of a good Pakistani son. In this struggle, their place in the white middle class culture was always contested, leaving them desiring to acquire a stable status-conferring space in their lives where they were relieved of these tensions. The lives depicted in Bollywood movies offered just that space. They enabled popular boys to reconcile the contradictions of the two parent subcultures – the conservative Asian and the white middle class – and offer the popular boys an opportunity to pursue an identity that was inspired by

their Asian roots, and yet was compatible with the white middle class culture. In the following section I show how the narratives of Bollywood movies and the characteristics of Bollywood heroes were deployed by the popular boys to reinterpret the ideal of a good Pakistani son, so that they could construct and enact a particular British Pakistani identity and take part in white middle class culture without feeling guilt. I focus on three major contradictions that the popular boys faced and describe how Bollywood movies enabled them to resolve them.

#### **4.2.3.3.2.1 Dad, Bollywood Heroes are Better Pakistani Sons!**

The popular boy parents desired their sons to adhere to a particular ideal of ‘the good Pakistani son’. This ideal was shaped by the traditional conservative values of their parents, who had been raised in rural Pakistan, and who believed that the ‘old’ Pakistan (which they called ‘home’) still existed and had not yet made the transition into modernity. According to these values, an ideal son should never drink alcohol, never go clubbing and never engage in any physical relationship with a woman prior to marriage. These ideals were embedded in both their religious belief system, which clearly rejected any consumption of alcohol, and also in their cultural traditions which describe men’s and women’s roles in society in rather strict and patriarchal terms.

The popular boys on the other hand were painfully aware of the disparity between the values of a Pakistan ‘frozen in time’ in their parents’ minds and the youth culture in Pakistan and Britain today. They were

completely against their parents' privileging the characteristics of the Pakistani-born youth over the British-born Pakistani youth. They believed that modern youth in Pakistan was not what their parents thought they are and they believed that their parents' trust in these Pakistani bred youth was misplaced. For example, Zayed and Husnain, who had both spent time in Lahore, pointed out that Pakistani youth was as morally 'bankrupt' as British Pakistani youth, if not more so. Thus Zayed claimed: 'I live in England where there is a pub in every street, yet I do not drink. They live in Pakistan but they do!' According to the popular boys the temptation to drink was significantly higher in England where it was so readily available, whereas in Pakistan alcohol consumption is illegal and can only be procured from bootleggers. As the popular boys did not have any inclination to consume alcohol, their parents' 'no-alcohol rule' was not a contested territory for them. What was problematic, however, was their desire to engage in the clubbing culture in Britain, which also involved their desire to freely engage in relationships with women like their British counterparts did. The popular boys strongly believed that their parents' ideal was unrealistic in the context in which they lived, and that they were more 'Pakistani' than those Pakistani youth living in Pakistan, who desperately wished to replace their Pakistani identity with a modern Western identity. The popular boys wished to resolve the tensions they experienced as a result of their parents' unrealistic demands on them to comply with an 'ideal' that no longer existed. They wanted to be 'good' Pakistani sons, and yet also be able to freely engage in the British middle class youth culture that they were

surrounded by and so desired to be part of. This required the popular boys to redefine what it meant to be a 'good Pakistani son.' And Bollywood movies do just that. They helped the popular boys reinterpret their parents' ideal of a good son in a way that was compatible with the lifestyle that they wished to pursue.

One of the Bollywood movies cited by almost all the popular boys as one of their favourites was 'Dil Wale Dulhanya Lay Jayengay' released in 1995. This movie is directed by Yash Chopra and stars Shahrukh Khan and Kajol. The movie was a huge box office success both in India and abroad. It was also the first successful Bollywood movie to portray non-resident Indian (NRI) characters in a positive light.

The first shot of the movie shows a middle-aged man walking from his house in central London to his corner shop. The voice over tells us about his yearning for his homeland, which has increased with every passing year of the 20 years he has spent in England. This is followed by a song about village life in India and the call of the land to the *pardesi* (the one who has left his land) to return. Once he is in his shop, the male hero (acted by Shahrukh Khan, a celebrity Bollywood actor) makes his first appearance. He comes to the shop at closing time and, after the Indian shop owner refuses to sell him beer, he tricks him and runs off with a case of beer. The shop owner gets very angry and feels frustrated at the state of the young Indians who have forgotten their roots, who drink beer, and lie and treat the elderly with no respect. Soon afterwards, the heroine (a leading Indian actress) is introduced: she sings a song about the man of her dreams (the male hero), urging him to come and 'sweep her off her feet'.

So, at the very beginning of the movie the three main characters and the tensions and desires of each are introduced: the old man who holds on to the 'old' Indian values; the young man (the hero) who is a product of Western culture; and the young woman (the heroine) who is waiting for the man of her dreams. A letter follows this initial introduction. The old man gets a proposal for his daughter from the son of his best friend in the village. He is ecstatic. He breaks the news to his daughter, who is shattered, but, being the obedient daughter she agrees to the match.

Before they leave for India for the wedding the daughter is allowed a trip to Paris with her friends. In Paris, fate brings the young hero and the heroine of the movie together. Initially, the heroine dislikes the hero's Western ways, but she slowly falls in love with him when he shows the Indian side of his personality. A scene that powerfully reinforces his Indian values takes place when the heroine accidentally gets drunk and crashes out on his bed. In the morning she finds herself in fresh clothes, and when she inquires how this came about, the hero implies that they had sex while she was drunk. The heroine is devastated by this news and starts crying, whereupon the hero then confesses that he was joking. When she refuses to believe him, he claims with passion that, although he might not act like an Indian, he is in fact an Indian at heart, and knows how to treat an Indian girl (implying that he would never take advantage of a conservative Indian girl). After the end of the holiday in Paris, the girl discloses to her mother that she is in love, but the father overhears and, disappointed with his daughter, decides to fly out immediately to India to get



her married. In the meantime, the hero tells his own father about the heroine, and his father urges him to get the girl he loves. The boy flies to India after the heroine.

Next, we see the hero befriending the groom to be and trying to befriend the family. Over the course of the next few days, the hero wins everyone over, including the father of the heroine, by showing a mix of Indian values: the way he treats the heroine's mother and the way he respects her father. In other words, he shows that, although he is Western from the outside, he is in fact Indian inside. In parallel the groom who hails from India is depicted as a man who does not consider women as equal to men, and treats them like objects. This is an important motif, since the groom represents the son the heroine's father would have raised had he decided not to immigrate. He often refers to the groom as the '*Punjab da puttara*' (the son of the Indian soil); but when we discover the groom's attitude to women and his preference for alcohol, the myth of the respectful traditional son of the Indian soil is shattered. We are told that the present generation of Indian youth is not better than those who were brought up in the West'. In fact, the non-resident Indians embody the essence of traditional Indian values much more than the youth raised in India.

The climax of the movie unrolls with the discovery by the heroine's father that the man who has been living in their house is the same man his daughter fell in love with in Paris. The hero gets a thorough beating from the family in front of the distraught heroine, and is put on a train. When the hero gets on the train to depart from the village and, as the wheels slowly start

moving, the hero beaten and bleeding with tears in his eyes looks at his love, and the father at that point lets go of his daughter and tells the daughter to go, because no one can love her like this man. And the two lovers are thus united.

It is not surprising that this movie was a massive success in the West among non-resident Asians. Both the story and the execution resonated with Asian young men and women who were raised in the West. Although initially the hero displayed traits that are not appreciated by the parents' generation, at the end he had the moral high ground in comparison to the young man raised in India.

No wonder therefore that this movie was one of the favourites of the popular boys. The narrative enabled them to redefine what it meant to be a 'good' Pakistani son. They no longer had to adhere to their fathers' traditional values to become a 'good' son. They could freely engage in British middle class youth culture. They could go clubbing, have fun, and engage in relationships with British woman, and yet still be 'more Pakistani' than young men actually living and raised in Pakistani. However, they could only do so if they were careful about how they treated and approached Pakistani girls.

More so because according to the fathers an ideal son never engaged in any physical relationship with women prior to marriage. This belief came from the way in which the fathers regarded women. Women were not regarded as men's equals. They were the property of the men. And their sexuality should be under the strict control of the men. Thus, a young woman should have no relationship whatsoever with men apart from their husbands, and only after

marriage. This expectation held for both brides and daughters. In the case of daughters, the fathers saw the daughters' bodies as theirs and the brothers' property. The fathers and the sons were responsible for protecting the daughter's virginity, because it symbolized the honour of the family. Any harm to that ideal would shatter the reputation of the whole family. The fathers regarded brides in very much the same way as they regarded their own daughters. When a bride entered the family, they then became a daughter of the family – a property of the family – and thus it was up to the men of the family to ensure that the bride was morally fit. So an ideal son should protect the honour of both his family and the family of other men by not engaging in physical relationships with women.

Seeing women as the property of men was quite different from the Western belief system in which the popular boys were being raised, where women are supposed to be men's equals and have the same rights (sexual or otherwise) as men. In Bollywood movies this contradiction is solved by depicting non-resident Asians who believe in equal rights and treat women with respect, and yet accept sexual liberation only for Western but not Asian women. Thus, non-resident Asians are Western from the outside: they treat women with respect and they see them as their equals. But, on the other hand, they are Asian inside. In other words, as a 'good' Asian son they do not 'harm' the 'good' Asian girls by engaging in any sexual relationship with them. It is up to the men to ensure that Asian girls keep their virginity for their husbands.

This double standard is promoted via the non-resident Asian identity in Bollywood movies, where Asian men are ‘good Asian sons’ even though they engage in Western youth culture and have physical relationships with white women, provided they end up marrying a ‘good’ Asian woman. A ‘good’ Asian woman is a woman who has not been involved in any physical relationship with man, but is only allowed to dream about her hero –an Asian hero- who will sweep her off her feet and marry her. Bollywood movies help popular boys resolve the tensions that they face. The moral high ground of the new non-resident Asian identity enables them to engage in white middle class Western youth culture, and yet still claim that they are more morally upright than Pakistani youth raised in Pakistan. According to the popular boys, Pakistani youth raised in Pakistan do in fact drink alcohol and engage in physical relationships with Pakistani girls whereas, even though the popular boys might go clubbing much more regularly than their Pakistani counterparts, they never drink alcohol and engage in physical relationship with Pakistani girls: They only engage in physical relationships with white girls. Nonetheless, it is still a rather contested space for popular boys. The popular boys did not discuss their relationships until they had known me for over six months. Early on they denied such involvement and claimed that they never got involved in such relationships. Zayed, Husnain, and Saif completely denied going out with a white woman: ‘I would give our numbers to white women and after that never bothered calling them’, Saif told me. Zayed told me about this girl who was sought by every Asian and white youth in school. He said that he was able

‘to pull’ her in a club and she gave him her number but he never took things further. He said that he just went out for a coffee with her and that was the end of it. Salman claimed that he would limit his relationships with girls to the telephone only: ‘I never went out with them or anything, I would speak to them over the phone for a week or so and then I would stop calling them’. Their early denial was evidence of the guilt they felt about their relationships with white girls. The following conversation highlights some of these contradictions. Why do you go? ‘I used to go for a laugh!’ What do you mean by ‘a laugh’? ‘I just go to clubs together. Dance together. Have a laugh. Crack jokes.’ But you could have done that just driving around Bolchester, and so why did you have to go to a club? This question was met with sheepish grins. You went for girls? Zayed said: ‘Yes. But I never did anything. But we were always able to get telephone numbers. Remember, Saif, when that girl from school gave me her number, the one that everyone was after?’ What did you do after you got the number? ‘I just had coffee with her. That is it.’ Why did you not go out with her? ‘I never wanted to. I would never marry a white girl.’ Then why go through all that trouble? ‘You know just knowing that I could get her telephone number and go out with her. I would not do anything more. It is just knowing that you can do it, but you do not.’ On other occasions I had similar conversations with them and they never failed to mention that they were able to get telephone numbers but never went any further. I often asked them why they did not ‘go all the way? Zayed, with whom Saif agreed, said: ‘Because it is *gunah* to have sex before marriage. Also, I want my wife to be a

virgin and I cannot expect to have it when I myself am not a virgin. I want to save it for my wife'. All the popular boys expressed similar opinions about relationships with girls. Salman, for instance, who went clubbing twice a week, bragged about his success with white girls, but was quick to point out that he never went out with a white girl. He said he would normally have a two week fling, where he would speak to the girl on the phone regularly, hang out with her in school, and then move on. He said, 'I cannot imagine myself marrying a white girl, and consider having sex before marriage not right'. I asked him why he should not marry a white girl. He said, 'They do not have any respect for themselves'. This he explained was in terms of the way they dressed (they exposed too much flesh) and the way they acted with other boys (they made crude jokes). Although Salman was a second-generation British Pakistan his views on white girls reflected the views the older generation of conservative Pakistani men had with respect to white women. The term the first generation used for white women is '*baghairat*' (without shame) because of the way they dressed and because they had relationships outside marriage. On numerous occasions, these popular boys had made similar remarks about white girls walking around town, dressed in skimpy clothes. These were the same girls the popular boys strove to impress in clubs, but these comments showed that they did not respect these girls. For the popular boys they were symbols that confirmed their middle class status. Similarly, when Abraham came back from his holiday in Malia, a beach resort in Greece, he told me how he had met an Indian girl there and they had liked each other. He said: 'I did not sleep with

her, but did a lot of other stuff (*winked*). I would walk hand in hand for hours and talk about our families and future plans'. He said that he could never have had this kind of intimacy with a white girl, who was only into sex.

Only after I had won their trust, did they start opening up and every one of them recounted to me stories about their relationships. Zayed told me about his first white girlfriend, Katie, whom he went out with for a year, and Farah, his second girlfriend, whom he went out with for two years. Abraham, Farhan and Salman told me about their exploits in clubs, where they 'pulled' white girls and sometimes went out with for extended periods of time, and with whom they were involved a physical relationship. The popular boys always followed these confessions with comments justifying their actions. They wanted to convince me and themselves that, by having a physical relationship with a white woman, they had not become bad Pakistani sons. When Abraham related to me the events that conspired in the club in his recent visit, he said: 'I was just standing there and this girl walks up to me and kisses me. I said to her, *aajao*. I danced with her, took her Facebook and mobile details and now I am going to hook up with her'. I asked him whether she was a '*gori*'. He replied: 'Of course. Do you think I would do this with a Pakistani girl? I am not that *baghairat*. I respect Pakistani girls. I would never do this with a Pakistani girl. *Goryan* don't care'. Similarly, when I met Salman in Pakistan, he was itching to unload his guilt:

'Adnan man, I am a bad boy. I really messed up. Before leaving I just went on a shagging spree. I thought to myself what the heck. I am leaving for

at least six months. Every fit girl I knew I made out with her. That is all they wanted, they would call me, I would go, do the business and leave. . . I feel really bad for doing all of this. But in my heart I know I am not a bad person. . . I would never do this with Asian girls, but *goryan* do not care!’

This attitude, shared by all the popular boys, was a direct reflection of the narrative that has gained currency in recent Bollywood movies – movies that the popular boys watched and identified with. As one of them claimed: ‘Indian movies hit you. You can identify with them and relate to the characters’.

A recent favourite Bollywood movie of the popular boys was ‘Dostana’, where numerous sequences show the male characters clubbing, drinking and flaunting their sexual promiscuity, but these traits are not presented as undesirable. The movie begins with a dance number on the beach where both male characters are shown dancing with bikini-clad white girls. The scene finishes in a night club where again white girls are dancing around the two heroes. In the next sequence, one of the male heroes (Samir) is woken up by a phone call. It is his mother, who asks him about his work and stresses to him the importance of prayer and piety, to which he responds by claiming he has been praying all night. The play on words is very effective: The mother says that he should have been saying ‘Rab, Rab (God, God)’, all night. Samir says I was doing exactly that, ‘Rub’; the camera then zooms out and next to him in bed is an attractive white girl.



To convince the viewer of the legitimacy of their Indian identity, like other movies of this era, the narrative shifts to the heroine, who embodies many of the traits a traditional Indian girl is supposed to espouse – respect for parents, a caring and loving nature, and disapproval of sexual promiscuity. The male characters, by falling madly in love with her, are showing how they too champion these values. They themselves are more than willing to be sexually promiscuous with white women, but, as soon as they come across a real Asian woman who is not willing to, they show their ‘Indian side’ by respecting it and appreciating it. Thus, in the ‘trademark’ Bollywood singing and dancing sequence they sing in unison, ‘Who is the hottest girl in the world?’ and then point to Neha, ‘Desi Girl. Desi Girl.’ (Desi is a term used to refer to individuals belonging to the subcontinent.)

This is exactly the attitude the popular boys espoused. They all claimed that when they were in a relationship with a Pakistani girl they never pushed her to be physically intimate. Their intention was ‘pure’. They wanted to get married to a Pakistani girl, and they claimed they would never get into a relationship with such a girl unless they were sure that they wanted to marry her. When Abraham went with his friend to Malia, a beach resort, and met an Asian girl he acted completely differently to how he acted when he was in a relationship with a white girl. He said: ‘We spent hours walking on the beach, talking to each other knowing each other. I wanted to see if she would fit in with my family. I did not want to do anything with her until I was sure’.

Compare this to how he interacted with a white woman in a club: 'I did everything with her in the club and never saw her again'.

When the popular boys were in a relationship with an Asian girl they even stopped going to nightclubs. Abraham, Salman, Saif, Emran, Amir and Zayed all claimed that they completely stopped going to clubs and pursuing white girls when they were in a serious relationship with an Asian girl. On his graduation day party, Husnain was debating whether he should or should not go to the club. Eventually, he decided against it, he said, 'I consider it cheating. I am with her and I cannot cheat on her by going to a club'. Compare the attitude of the popular boys to the events that led to the climax of the movie 'Salaam Namaste'. The movie follows the romantic involvement of two young modern Indians, Nick (Saif Abraham Khan) and Ambar (Preity Zinta), who have left their homes in India to pursue successful middle class careers in Melbourne, Australia. Both characters have easily settled into a modern identity, and the manner in which their relationship evolves strongly reflects this modern identity which is free from conservative Indian values. After dating for a few months they start living together and Ambar discovers she is pregnant, whereupon Nick refuses to take responsibility and this results in a temporary break-up. However, Nick eventually realizes his mistake and returns to Ambar. Ambar, the pregnant girlfriend, decides to leave Nick, who is not willing to marry her. Depressed with the turn of events, Nick, goes out to a club, gets drunk and brings home an Australian girl. In the morning the Australian girl tells him that they did not have sex. In fact, he cried all night

talking to her about Ambar. This discovery that he had been 'loyal' to Ambar brings Nick great relief and he rushes to find Ambar. On a popular radio show he confesses his undying love for and his desire to marry Ambar; and recruits Indians through the show to find Ambar. Many Indians living in Australia, volunteer to help this young 'Indian' man find his 'Indian' girlfriend. The narrative privileges romance and marriage to an Indian girl over all other definitions of Indian identity. Nick womanizes but because this attitude is only for white women he redeems himself in the end.

The popular boys felt suffocated by the contradictions and tensions that arose in their lives because of the conservative ideals of their parents and their desire to fit into the white middle class. They often spoke about this situation,. When I discussed the issue with Zayed and Saif, Zayed said:

'Our parents do not understand our situation. They think that it is easy to live here without ever going to clubs. I know that out there other Pakistanis are doing all kinds of things. I do not drink, I do not sleep around, and I do not mess around with Asian girls. Compared to what others are doing we are good. They think if you go to clubs, then you will drink and then you will have sex with a white woman, have kids with her and marry her. That is why they are against clubbing. But I know our limits'.

Whereas their parents' demands were somewhat unrealistic, the Bollywood narrative was 'comforting', because it assured them that they were better than the Asian youth their parents pined about; and that being promiscuous with white women did not make them 'bad' Pakistani sons. Thus,

provided they were not engaging in physical relationships with Asian woman they were ‘good’ Pakistani sons.

#### **4.2.3.3.2.2 As a Pakistani I too Can Pursue the Western Middle-Class Consumer Lifestyle**

Most popular boys’ understanding of what they considered to be the ‘real’ Pakistani lifestyle was shaped by the stories of their parents growing up in Pakistan. In these stories, Pakistan was described as a place which, even though it offered an abundance of natural beauties and real friendships and solidarity among its people, it was a place where there was economic hardships. For example, Afzal Agha (the father of Zayed, Abraham and Salman) described how he could not pursue an education because he had to help his parents and had to start working in the fields in his village at the age of 13. He wished to pursue a better lifestyle; and so, when in his late teens he had the opportunity to immigrate to the UK, he had seized it. He believed his family was lucky because his immigration helped his brothers to immigrate as well. By working hard in the UK they were able to improve the material living conditions of their parents and their extended families in Pakistan. The parents told stories of how growing up in Pakistan they had no hot running water inside the house and how they had to walk miles to school and had to study by candlelight. Through these stories the parents created in the minds of their sons an image of Pakistan as a place where rural folk lived very impoverished lives. Thus the popular boys came to regard Pakistanis as being poor rural backward

folk deprived of modern amenities, and who did not know how to live in today's modern world.

The popular boys often recounted their experiences with their extended families in Pakistan that highlighted the naïveté of rural Pakistani folk. One such experience that the other popular boys enjoy listening to immensely was Zayed's experience with his uncle who lived in Pakistan. One day Zayed was driving home with his uncle, who had come to England to visit the family. They passed a farm where the sign read 'Free range Eggs'. His uncle suggested that they should stop. After taking the trays of eggs from the farmer his uncle just walked back to car, ready to leave. When Zayed asked him how much he had paid, his uncle replied, 'But the eggs are free'. Whenever Zayed recounted this story it was received with much laughter by the popular boys. Such stories highlighted the impression that the popular boys had of simple Pakistani folk. According to the popular boys, being a Pakistani implied being naïve and backward, not having the knowledge, taste and capital to pursue a middle class lifestyle where one chooses his outfits, home décor and accessories, and via these choices defines himself, and communicates his identity to others. This created undue pressure on popular boys who want to pursue the white middle class consumer lifestyle, but who believed their Pakistani background could indeed be an impediment to achieving it. Bollywood movies to some extent solved these tensions and contradiction for the popular boys. These movies showed them that indeed Asian youth can and do pursue a middle class consumerist lifestyle, as well, if not better, than their Western counterparts.

Thus, these movies enabled the popular boys to bring the two worlds together, where they could both celebrate their Asian origins and also pursue a Western middle class consumerist lifestyle simultaneously. In the following paragraphs I describe some of the favourite Bollywood movies of the popular boys, and discuss how these movies helped to resolve the contradictions and tensions described above.

One of the Bollywood movies that the popular boys enjoyed watching over and over again was a 2001 movie called '*Dil Chahta Hai*', directed by Farhan Akhtar. The heroes in the movie were Aamir Khan (Aakash), Akshaye Khanna (Siddharth - Sid), and Saif Abraham Khan (Samir) – popular young Bollywood actors – and they played the roles of college-aged, upper middle class youngsters. The movie is about these three heroes' friendships and the sequence of events which made their relationship stronger over time. For the popular boys what was most interesting about this movie was the heroes' lifestyle. I once had a chance to watch the movie with Husnain, Zayed and Saif. This was not the first time they had watched the movie, and so they knew the script really well, and they spent most of the time commenting on the tastes and consumption choices of the three heroes. For example, Zayed commented on the décor of Aakash's room: 42 inch TV screen, leather couches, modern lighting. 'That is a sick TV', he said. The next comment came from Husnain on the scene where the three heroes were driving to a resort in Goa in a Mercedes: 'That is the SL (referring to the car). It came out around that time'. Zayed then told the others how he used to drive his brother's friend's SL when

he was younger. Zayed, admiring their luxurious vacation, commented on the ways in which the heroes were riding a water scooter. He thought that it looked like so much fun, and said that one day he would like to try it too. After the movie was over, and while we were discussing it, it was clear that the popular boys, Husnain, Zayed and Saif, really enjoyed the fact that the heroes' lives were much like those of British youth. The heroes had the taste, the knowledge and the capability to pursue the urban lifestyle. From home décor, to clothes, to cars, to vacations, their consumption choices indicated that being Asian was not necessarily an impediment to pursuing the urban Western lifestyle.

*'Dostana'* was another successful movie released in 2008 which the popular boys enjoy immensely. Many of them had seen it more than three times. I saw the movie with them twice at my flat. The movie is set entirely in Miami. The plot revolves around three main characters, Samir, Kunal and Neha. Samir and Kunal are young immigrants, one from India and the other from the United Kingdom and both are Indian. They pretend to be gay lovers to get a flat, where the other occupant is Neha who is an Indian girl who allows only female tenants, as she does not want to share a flat with boys due to her traditional mentality. Samir works as a male nurse and Kunal as a photographer. The two heroes and the heroine live an urban Western middle class lifestyle. The apartment that they rent is located in an expensive locality. It is surrounded on all sides by high-rise buildings which are visible through the wall-to-wall clear glass windows and doors in the sitting room. On one side the glass doors open to a balcony with a view of the buildings outside from

their apartment which is somewhere near the 20<sup>th</sup> floor. The flat looks very contemporary with wooden floors, colourful walls and modern furniture. The living room has leather couches with colourful cushions, and a flat screen TV. The wooden-framed mirrors line the corridor that leads to the living room, with plasma lamps located in each corner. And at the centre, there is a large shelf displaying exquisite pieces of art. The rooms of the protagonists are very 'urban', with red and green couches in non-mainstream shapes, paintings adorning the walls, and colourful shelves, again, with glass decorative pieces. The three protagonists develop a friendship over dinners in expensive restaurants, dancing in night clubs and shopping trips in large malls in Miami. In song sequences they are shown bonding in cafes, and they constantly walk around with Starbucks coffee cups. At night they dance in big expensive-looking nightclubs; and during the day they walk from multi-storey shopping malls with armfuls of shopping bags with Versace printed on the side. In one sequence the three are shown buying clothes in a mall surrounded by Ed Hardy clothes. The three protagonists drive around Miami in Samir's pink Cadillac. All three wear designer clothes. Kunal, who is well built, wears tight-fitting cardigans, T-shirts and vests showing off his body. Samir wears brightly coloured shirts and scarves that match his shirts. In one sequence they are both shown wearing immaculately tailored tuxedos. The female character, Neha, also always dresses up in designer clothes. She works for a fashion magazine in an ultra-modern office, which is decorated with minimalist furniture and clear glass. As the movie continues the two heroes fall in love with Neha, who



is oblivious to the fact that they are ‘straight’, and falls for another man. In the end the two heroes accept her love for the other man and the three friends are reconciled.

While watching the movie, the popular boys commented on the heroes’ tastes in clothing and home décor. For example, Husnain pointed out the vest the hero was wearing and said that it was a Gucci vest, and that the famous American rap star, 50 cent, wore the same vest in one of his music videos. This comment reminded Abraham about the suit a Bollywood star was wearing in another movie and he told us that he had had exactly the same suit made for his graduation night. At the time his sister was in Pakistan, and so he sent all his measurements and told her to get a suit made just like John Abraham, and in the same colour too. Similarly, Saif described how he very much liked the jacket Shahrukh Khan was wearing in a song sequence in his film ‘Billo Barber’ and how he wanted to buy a jacket just like his. In addition to outfits, the popular boys also commented on the décor of the protagonists’ apartment. For example, Husnain admiring the flat, stated how he loved the apartment: ‘It is perfectly designed for the characters. What I like best is the swimming pool’.

Another favourite movie and one which impressed the boys was Karan Johar’s second movie, ‘*Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*’ (in English, ‘*K3G*’ *Happiness and Sorrow*, 2001). Like other successful Bollywood movies in the West, the protagonists in this movie also belong to the upper middle class. The Raichand family is a family of successful businessmen, and throughout the movie their wealth is glamorized. The movie begins with the celebration of an

Indian festival in the family house, which is a large mansion - a remnant of the colonial times - surrounded by acres of open fields. In the second half of the movie the narrative shifts to the affluent suburbs of Hampstead in London, where the elder brother, Rahul, has moved after a 'show down' with his father. The elder brother works as a professional and every morning he wears a suit and drives in his BMW to work, although we never find out the exact nature of his job. His house is spacious; the front door opens into a large lounge, with wall to wall carpets, white leather couches and matching white tables. In one corner of the lounge is a glass kitchen table, and next to it is a small kitchenette boasting modern fixtures. In the middle of the living room is a large plasma TV and the tables display glass decorative pieces. Impressed with the interior décor of the house, Zayed commented that he really liked the house from inside. According to him, it was 'posh' – which he explained further as not crammed with things, but sparsely decorated with nice couches: 'simple and classy'. Equally modern and elegant were the lifestyles of the younger brother, Yash, and his girlfriend Pooja, who is also his sister in law's younger sister. The younger brother moved to London on the pretext of getting an MBA, like his elder brother, but his real purpose is to find his brother and convince him to make up with his father. He enrolls at the college his sister in law's younger sister is enrolled at. She is shown as living the white middle class lifestyle with panache. She wears designer clothes and is obsessed by her beauty and style. She is the most popular girl in college. Both white and Asian boys shower attention on her. Yash drives into the college in a red Ferrari, and walks out in

a sleeveless T-shirt, casual jeans and designer shades. He is an instant hit with the white girls, who gasp ‘Oh my gosh’ when they first set their eyes on him. This sealed the deal for the popular boys, for whom a successful performance of urban Western lifestyle is acceptance by the white girls. In fact, among themselves the popular boys competed with each other for the best enactment of that style, and they commented that the hero in the movie was much like Salman, ‘the most successful popular boy’ who was *the* stylish ‘hunk’ among the popular boys, and whom every girl at his college desired.

The popular boys loved watching these Bollywood movies as they showed them that modern Asians can and do adopt urban modern lifestyles just as their Western counterparts did. Being Asian was not in fact an impediment to claiming such a lifestyle. The popular boys could celebrate their ethnic background and at the same time pursue an urban Western lifestyle, where they could decorate their rooms in a modern minimalist style, take vacations at fancy resorts, enjoy clubbing, and dining in fine restaurants in London.

#### **4.2.3.3.2.3 As a Pakistani I too Can Marry the Girl I love**

The popular boys were surrounded by a Western discourse which told them that modern day marriage should be based on personal choice and romantic love, rather than be arranged by their parents. This romantic ideal of love – if not necessarily marriage – was assumed or openly narrated in various forms of pop-culture, such as in the lyrics of popular songs, in movies and in fiction. According to this ideal, romance between a man and a woman

develops through friendship and culminates in a sexual relationship prior to marriage. And when both parties are willing and ready, it turns into a marital bond.

However, this romantic ideal was in stark contradiction to what the popular boys' parents desired their sons to pursue. The parents have no conception that romance should lead marriage decisions. For them marriage was a decision which involved the extended family of both parties, and the compatibility of the families was much more relevant or important than the compatibility of the bride and groom as a 'couple'. Almost all the first generation Pakistanis in the UK had had arranged marriages, in some cases where they had not even met their spouse before the wedding ceremony. For example, Zayed's father was in England when his parents in Pakistan decided on a bride for him. Likewise, Husnain's father, Nawaz Khan, told how he could not understand the modern youth's obsession that they and their chosen marital partner should be compatible as a couple. According to Nawaz, it was the marriage which made a couple compatible, rather than the other way around. After a couple of years of wedded life with children, couples have no choice but become compatible. For Nawaz what really mattered was the status of the family one was marrying into, and whether or not their status was compatible with the status of one's own family. He said: 'Marriage is not about two people. It is two families marrying and there has to be compatibility between the families'. All the popular boy parents are married within their

extended family. According to them through their marriages they strengthened the bonds of family and most of them wished the same for their children.

The completely irreconcilable views on marriage of the parents and the popular boys present a strong contradiction for popular boys, all of whom were well aware of their parents' desire to arrange their marriages to a distant cousin. This contradiction is resolved through the consumption of Bollywood movies, which provided an alternate form of 'modern romance' Asian style. In order to demonstrate what that alternative is, and how it helped the popular boys resolve the difficulties and tensions, in the following paragraphs I describe the narrative of romantic love in Bollywood movies that was very popular among popular boys. The first movie was very much in the spirit of 'mythical love' which emphasizes the eternal nature of love, where its defining trait is loyalty and endurance through hardships and difficulties. This narrative reminded the popular boys that love between a man and a woman was indeed an important part of the Asian tradition, and was not necessarily completely condemned and rejected, as their parents want them to believe. Next I describe movies that take the idea of romantic love one step further, and promote a modern narrative that contradicts the age old wisdom of conservative Asian values. The relationship between the hero and the heroine starts as a friendship and culminates in love, thus legitimizing the 'going out' phase or even a phase that involves a physical relationship before marriage.

***The mythical love narrative:*** The movie '*Parineeta*', is a 2005 release, directed by Pradeep Sarkar and starring Saif Abraham Khan (Shekhar) and

Vidya Balan (Lolita) in pivotal roles. The movie is a period drama set in the Calcutta of 1951. Shekhar and Lolita are neighbours and childhood friends,. Shekhar is from a rich, business family, but Lolita is an orphan who lives with her retired uncle. Her uncle owes money to Shekhar's father, who is a shrewd businessman and has mortgaged her uncle's house, which he plans to take over to build a hotel. Meanwhile, Giresh (Sanjay Dutt) moves into the neighbourhood, and, beguiled by Lolita's beauty, showers his attention on her, Shekhar gets jealous, but Lolita, who is completely devoted to him, cannot understand his jealous behaviour. One night, Shekhar vents his anger, and Lolita starts crying, Shekhar seeing this tries to comfort her and Lolita accidentally performs one rite of the Hindu marriage with Shekhar. He decides to perform another rite, and between them they consider that they have entered into a valid marriage by means of this private ceremony. Following this event, Shekhar is sent out of town on a business deal. When Lolita's uncle with the help of Giresh pays back the money he owes to the father he is extremely angry, and, in a fit of rage, insults both Lolita and her uncle. When Shekhar returns, his father tells him that Lolita and Giresh have got married. Shekhar is heartbroken and, unable to cope with his loss, he agrees to marry the girl his father has chosen for him. On his wedding day Giresh returns to see him one last time, and reveals to him that he did not marry Lolita, because Lolita told him she was already married. Shekhar realizes his mistake and against his father's wishes marries Lolita, instead of his father's choice. And so love endures. This narrative reminded the popular boys that 'real love' between a

man and woman was indeed an important part of the Asian tradition. Even though it required enduring hardship and sacrifice, they were assured that, if both the man and woman were committed to their loving relationship, then in the end they would be rewarded by a happy marriage.

***The modern love Asian style narrative:*** This narrative focuses on the importance of friendship as a precursor to romantic love and a happy marriage. One of the favourites of popular boys within this genre of Bollywood movies is ‘*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*’, directed by Karan Johar and released in 1998. The story revolves around one hero and two heroines, starring Shahrukh Khan (hero), Kajol (heroine) and Rani Mukherji (heroine). The narrative revolves around the lives of Rahul (Shahrukh Khan), Anjali (Kajol) and Tina (Rani Mukherji). Rahul and Anjali are two very close friends who attend to St. Xavier's College in Mumbai. One day Tina, who happens to be the daughter of St. Xavier's principal, transfers from Oxford University in England to St. Xavier's. By Tina joining the school the protagonists find themselves in a complicated love triangle. Tina is very aware of her sexuality, which she accentuates by dressing provocatively in dresses and maintaining a distance from the boys, the exact opposite of the tomboy, Anjali, who is very sporty. Soon afterwards, Tina befriends both Anjali and Rahul, and the three start spending time together. Rahul falls in love with Tina. Complicating the relationships among three friends further, Rahul's love for Tina coincides with Anjali's realization of her love for Rahul. When Rahul shares his feelings for Tina with Anjali, she is heartbroken and leaves St. Xavier's. Meanwhile, Tina

and Raul get married. However, during childbirth Tina dies, leaving behind a daughter (named Anjali after their mutual friend, who disappeared). Years later, on her eighth birthday Anjali Jr. is given a letter by her governess, a letter her mother Tina left for her. In this letter Tina tells her daughter about Anjali and reveals that, while Rahul had been blind to Anjali's love, Tina had noticed Anjali's emotions and pitied her deeply. In the letter she urged her daughter to reunite Rahul and Anjali, because she felt that their close friendship made them ideal partners for each other. After this revelation the movie focuses on the turn of events initiated by Anjali Jr. that lead to the two best friends becoming close once again. However, in the meantime, Anjali is engaged to a family friend Aman (Salman Khan). The climax takes place on Anjali's wedding day when Rahul confesses his love for Anjali, and in an emotional scene, where almost every significant character is in tears, Aman steps down, in favour of Rahul. Thus, romantic love wins over traditional arranged marriage.

Another favourite Bollywood movie of the popular boys, which fortified the 'love over arrangement based marriage' discourse was '*Hum Tum*' ('You and Me'), released in 2004, directed by Kunal Kohli, and starring Saif Abraham Khan (Karan) as the hero and Rani Mukherji (Riya) as the heroine. The movie follows the repeated encounters of the two lead characters over a span of several years, where their relationship starts as a friendship and evolves into love at the climax. The first encounter takes place on a plane from Delhi to New York City, where the protagonists are seated next to one another. They are both travelling to the US to unspecified universities for their undergraduate



degrees. During the plane journey, they become friends. When the plane has a stopover in Amsterdam for a few hours, they decide to do a tour of the city together. Towards the end of the tour Karan kisses Riya and she slaps him for being so forthright and does not talk to him during the rest of the journey. Three years later, another serendipitous incident brings the two protagonists together, during Riya's wedding. Once again, the two bicker, but eventually become friends and part on good terms. The next meeting takes place, after a few years, in Paris where Karan, who now is a successful cartoonist and is commissioned by a publishing country to write a novel on his cartoon characters, is visiting his father. He learns that Riya's husband passed away in a car accident and that she lives with her mother and runs a boutique. During the time they spend together in Paris their friendship grows stronger, and this time they part as close friends. Soon after this, Riya visits India where Karan tries to introduce her to childhood friend, Mihir. Riya is not impressed by Mihir and instead prefers spending time with Karan. Meanwhile, Mihir falls for another girl, Diana, and, on their engagement night, Diana reveals that, had Karan been successful in setting Riya up with Mihir, they would not have found each other. Riya gets upset with Karan for attempting to 'set her up' with somebody and in the sequences that follow their argument they end up sleeping together. In the morning Karan, who feels he is not good enough for Riya, apologizes for what happened between them and offers to marry her. Riya misinterprets his confusion for guilt, and tells him that she would not want to marry him if he is only committing to her because he feels guilty. She

leaves the country without letting anyone know. Once she leaves, Karan realizes that he is love with her and tries to find her, but without success. Eventually, on the launch of his first novel, in a press conference in an Indian city they are united. After speaking to the journalists, he walks out when Riya – who had been present in the audience – stops him. The dialogues in this climactic scene move along these lines. Karan, asks her did you read the novel? To which she responds in tears that she did and it reminded her of her best friend (referring to him). Karan, says, I do not like your friend because he brought tears to your eyes. Riya, warns him to watch his words because she refuses to hear anything against her friend. Karan than takes her in his arms and proclaims his love for her, whereupon she starts crying and emotionally moving music from a romantic duet in the movie starts playing in the background. The camera zooms out. The last sequence of the movie takes place in a hospital where Karan and Riya, who are now married, have their first daughter and bicker with each other over how she is going to be raised, as the end credits roll. The popular boys were very fond of this movie. Saif, Zayed, Abraham and Husnain had watched it twice at my flat and at least twice more on other occasions. Farhan, Salman, and Sunjay had seen the movie at least twice as well.

Finally, I consider '*Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham*', a Bollywood movie much appreciated by the popular boys and which negotiates the contradictions between the traditional ideas of marriage and the modern narrative. They had all included this movie among their favourite movies, and had viewed it in my

flat. The movie was released in 2001 and is directed by Karan Johar. The male protagonists are Amitabh Bachan (as the father, Yash Raichand), Shahrukh Khan (as the adopted elder son, Rahul) and Hritihik Roshan (as the younger son, Yash Jr. again). The first scene introduces Yash Jr. playing for his college cricket team in a prestigious boarding school in India. As he faces the last delivery I hear Rahul's voice in the background who is advising him to think of his parents whenever he is in a difficult situation. The narrative follows Yash Jr. stopping to meet his grandmother on his way home from boarding school, where he overhears her talking about the incident that led to his much loved elder brother leaving his parents. On his insistence, his grandmother relates the incident to him, and the next hour and a half of the movie recount these events in a long flashback. We are transported to the Raichand mansion, where, at Diwali (a Hindu festival), the elder brother arrives in a helicopter, supposedly arriving after completing an MBA in an unspecified university in London. We are shown the love and affection the parents have for their son. On his return, he falls in love with Kajol (Anjali), who is from a lower class family in an impoverished, yet culturally rich, locality, Chandni Chowk, in Mumbai, where Rahul visits to ask after his nanny. The romance develops over the course of repeated chance encounters. Rahul is enamoured by the innocence and liveliness of Anjali and slowly, as he spends time with her, he falls in love. Soon the father decides to have his son married to his friend's daughter, who is equal in social standing. To him his son's opinion in the matter is irrelevant. Thus when he informs the grandmother of his decision and

she inquires about the son's opinion, he says, 'I cannot expect him to make decisions like that'. The mother comments to the effect that, although such an approach was appropriate for their times, things have now changed, to which Yash replies firmly, 'Nothing has changed'. When Rahul tells Yash about his love, he expresses his resentment at Rahul's choice of a girl from such a humble and inferior background. Rahul decides to abide by his father's wishes and goes to meet Anjali one last time. When he is met with the scene of the funeral of Anjali's father, his resolve melts, and he marries Anjali on the spot. When he takes his wife home the father turns him away and Rahul leaves the country to live in London. Yash Jr., on hearing this story, decides to travel to London with the intention of persuading his brother to return. He pretends to be a friend of Rahul's sister-in-law, who lives with Rahul, Anjali and their son, and takes up residence in his brother's house – who does not recognize Yash Jr. because he has grown from a chubby teenager into a 'hunk'. The two brothers bond together, with Rahul unaware of Yash's true identity. Yash Jr. realizes that Rahul still loves their father and is convinced that, if Rahul met their father, his heart would change, and so he calls his father on the pretext that he is missing them. In a dramatic meeting Rahul and Anjali meet Yash again, but he still refuses to accept Anjali as his daughter-in-law. In a dramatic confrontation between the younger son and the father both point of views are presented. The father says, 'Rahul, did not fulfil the responsibilities of a son,' to which the younger son responds: 'He (Rahul) always fulfilled the responsibilities of the son. But he made one mistake, he fell in love'. In the

climactic scene Rahul, at the insistence of Yash Jr., visits his father in their house in India. He finds his father crying and in the ensuing emotionally heavy dialogues, where the entire cast of the movie is moved to tears, the father and son reunite. The father tells his son that parental anger is in fact their love and children should not leave their parents when their parents are old and need them most. Yash then apologizes to Anjali, accepts her as the daughter of the family, and the entire family is reunited!

While in the mythical love narrative, hardships and sacrifices are promoted as the precursors for an enduring ‘real love’ between a man and a woman, in the latter (the modern love Asian style narrative) the script follows a narrative where the hero and heroine initially develop a close friendship, but which in time evolves into romantic love without them realizing it. Then the lovers face difficulties in the form of either parental opposition or confusion about their own emotions, which are resolved in the climax.

Both types of narratives introduced an alternative to the popular boys’ parents’ definition of romance and marriage. The modern narrative takes the mythical love narrative one step further and goes against the age old wisdom of conservative Asian values, and legitimizes the ‘going out’ phase of the relationship. But this discourse is still very different from the romantic narrative of Hollywood movies, where a sexual relationship is pursued without any intention for making a commitment to each other. This difference is very obvious considering the events in ‘*Hum Tum*’, when the act of sex comes right at the end, after both of them have fallen in love, and even then it results in

guilt. In other movies, such as '*Kuch Kuch Hota hai*', '*Kal Ho Na Ho*', '*Dil Wale Dulhanya Lay Jayengay*', '*Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham*' etc. the romance begins with friendship and culminates in love, never reaching the stage of a sexual relationship before marriage.

For the popular boys this discourse on romance promoted by Bollywood movies helped resolve the contradictions between their parents' desire for them to pursue an arranged marriage and their appeal to the Western idea of romantic love based marriage. It created for them a space where they could pursue a romance that did not contradict the Asian values their parents promoted. As long as one did not court an Asian girl with the goal of engaging in a physical relationship, but rather became friends, waiting to see whether the relationship would evolve into a romance, he can in fact have a romance-based marriage rather than an arranged one.

The influence of Bollywood movies on the popular boys was so strong that most of them preferred Bollywood romances over Hollywood ones. The popular boys said that the relationships depicted in Bollywood movies were much deeper and stronger, and the love depicted in Bollywood movies was 'true love'. With the exception of a few Hollywood movies, they did not identify with the Hollywood romances as strongly, because they lacked certain values, such as loyalty. For example, Saif referred to a Bollywood movie and said to me:

'You will love Veer Zara. The way they (the hero and the heroine) are loyal to each other and never tell anyone else about their romance (is very

important). Like in *Parineeta* (another Bollywood movie), the girl is loyal (to the hero). I like these movies for their values’.

When I asked him specifically which values he liked, he said ‘loyalty’; and this view was echoed by the other popular boys too. According to them, white people were not loyal to the idea of romantic love and their idea of romantic love did not emphasize loyalty as a virtue. The Hollywood movies, however, that they did describe as being just as good as Bollywood movies were *Titanic*, *Notebook* and *A Walk to Remember*, which promote the themes of loyalty, commitment and a depth of emotion that other Hollywood movies did not always emphasize. In all three movies either the male or the female protagonist dies, but, the love of the surviving partner lives on. These are the only Hollywood movies that ‘made an impact’ on them.

Not surprisingly most popular boys identified very strongly with the romance narrative promoted by Bollywood movies, and pursued romantic relationships with Asian girls in the Bollywood style. Those who were in a relationship relied heavily on the Bollywood discourse to make sense of their own romantic experiences; and those whose relationships had broken down used the Bollywood discourse to deal with the loss. Some actively strove for a Bollywood style romance. For example, Husnain, who was the only popular boy in a relationship, enjoyed Bollywood romantic comedies. Husnain loved talking about his girlfriend, a Pakistani girl, and told me how much he loved her and he related his experience to Bollywood movies. He talked to her

everyday for at least three hours, and when he could not (*i.e.* when he was out socializing with other boys) he constantly sent her text messages. Husnain was planning to marry her in the future, and until then, he said he would not even think about having a physical relationship with her. His relationship started through the internet, after chatting to each other and developing a friendship, and then they started having telephone conversations. Within a few months he had fallen in love.

Likewise, Amir, another popular boy who recently broke up with his girlfriend used Bollywood movies to make sense of his experiences. He described his girlfriend as follow:

‘She was not a Muslim, but she dressed and behaved like one. She wore long clothes, covering herself properly. I met her at work and slowly our friendship developed.’

He explained that the relationship had evolved into a romantic one, because, once he realized that he was in love with her, he wanted to convert her (*to Islam*) and then marry her. He said that his intentions were pure, because his goal was to marry her. He explained:

‘I did not have any sexual relationship for 7 months. She respected my decision. And once I was in love with her it just happened. I felt bad about it and repented’.

Amir’s relationship, although with a non-Muslim, was very much in line with the romantic discourse of Bollywood. After his break-up he often asked me whether there were any tragic Bollywood movies that I knew off. He



said that such movies helped him to deal with his break-up. These movies, according to him, handled romantic love the way he felt it. ‘What do you think white people want out of a romance?’ he once asked and answered himself, ‘Sex. They are only interested in sex’. His romantic ideal, stemming from Bollywood movies, was not what he perceived to be the Western mainstream ideal, and therefore, he resorted to watching Bollywood movies, because they resonated with his experience. Similarly, Saif, whose relationship with a girl had recently broken up, dealt with his loss by listening to Bollywood songs.

Other popular boys, like Abraham, actively sought Bollywood style romances. Abraham was friends with many Asian girls, and was always on the phone with one or other of them. He confessed that he had developed these friendships, hoping that one of them would develop into love, and then he will ask his parents to ask for her hand for him. He often related his experiences to Bollywood movies.

After watching ‘*Hum Tum*’ with Amir, Abraham, Husnain and Saif, I invited them to speak about the movie. Our conversation started on the relationship between the lead pair when Saif commented:

‘I really liked the relationship shown in the movie. How they slowly fall in love, by first becoming friends. That is what love is, if there is no friendship how can there be love’.

Husnain immediately steered the conversation from the movie to real life experience: This is how Asian relationships are, and they are more like

friendship. I know so many Asians whose relationship is like that. They always start as friends'. Following his lead I asked the individuals present how their relationships had evolved. Saif and Amir both confessed that their relationships had followed exactly the same route – friendship and then love. I asked them to compare the Asian idea of romance to the Western idea. They responded by saying: 'Their romance is all about sex. It starts with sex with no friendship. And most of the time it never ends up in love. They are not after love they are after sex'. The others agreed with his evaluation. Saif said that his was like that as well. Saif, then in turn asked me: 'Adnan, would you have an arranged marriage?' I insisted that he answer the question first, 'Nah, man. How can you marry somebody you do not know. You have to love them, and that happens if you spend time with each other as friends'. Again, they acquiesced, with Abraham stating most emphatically: 'Our parents can't expect us to marry like that'. His comment then resulted in a comparison between the ideas of marriage prevalent in their parents' generation. Saif told us that his parents had not even seen each other before marriage. Amir started to talk about how for them marriage was about the girl belonging to an equal family, preferably, within the extended family. According to the popular boys, the relationships such marriages produced were practical and functional where the spouses did not enjoy a romantic involvement. This topic was always very uncomfortable because they were talking about their own parents' relationships and did not want to talk about their parents' marital issues. From what they said, one can surmise that their parents' marriage for them was not ideal. The conversation

about the movie did not end there. Thus, by this time Emran had arrived as well, and he initiated a discussion about female characters in Indian movies. They all excitedly spoke about their favourite characters and how they would happily marry the character from specific movies. I asked them if they could recall a Hollywood character they would marry. The popular boys found it very difficult to think of one, barring Saif, who named the lead character from *Notebook*. Again, I observed the resolution of the contradictions between their parents' cultural values and the values they perceived to be white cultural values, this time through the attributes of the characters in movies. Thus, Indian heroines only fall in love after developing a friendship and stay clear of physical relationships, while, according to the popular boys, in Hollywood movies the girls were too ready to get into a physical relationship. The popular boys often compared arranged marriages and the modern Asian friendship-love-marriage after viewing Bollywood movies. They talked about the merits of the modern Asian style of marriage, and insisted that it was not possible to love somebody without knowing them, and, for this reason, arranged marriages were full of risk. They could not see themselves agreeing to such an arrangement.

In addition to Bollywood movies, Bollywood songs also played an important role in the way in which the popular boys made sense of their romances. They provided them with a language to talk about their relationships, a cultural framework to make sense of their experiences, and an approach for expressing their feelings towards their loved ones. They enjoyed

listening to these songs both in private and in social get-togethers. For example, whenever we drove around town, they invariably played Bollywood songs in the car. Sometimes we just parked and we listened to a song quietly, everyone is in his own world relating the lyrics of the song to his loved one and tuned into the mood of the song. They also listened to Bollywood songs in private. For example, Husnain had been listening to three songs repeatedly. Whenever he was talking to his girlfriend on the phone, he always had a Bollywood song playing in the background. The same was true with Saif, who was trying to get over his recent break-up (he had broken up with his girlfriend a year ago, but he had not got over it). He enjoyed listening to Bollywood songs on his own, especially those that were about lost love.

The idea of love evoked by these songs was that of an eternal love, a love that is so strong that it incapacitates the lover, who would rather die than live without his/her love. Consider the following vignette from a very popular Indian song (many popular boys loved this song and listened to it often):

Mere Maula Maula Mere Maula, Man Matwala Kyun Hua Hua Re  
Man Maula Maula Mere Maula, Mere Maula..

(My God, My God, I know not why my heart is acting all crazy).

Kis Taraf Hai Aasmaan, Kis Taraf Zaameen

Khabar Nahi, Khabar Nahi

(I am not aware which way the sky is and which way the ground is.)

Oo Oo, Jab Se Aaya Hai Sanam, Mujhko Khud Ki Bhi

Khabar Nahi, Khabar Nahi

(Since you have come in my life I have even become unaware of my

own existence.)

Oo Oo, Hosh Gul Sapno Ki Mein Bandhu Pull, Aankh Kab Khuli

Khabar Nahi, Khabar Nahi

(I have lost my mind. I dream fantastic dreams while awake).

The most explicit example of this resolution was the conversation I had with Abraham about his favourite Bollywood movie. When I asked him about his favourite Bollywood movie, he said it was '*Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham*'. It was his favourite because it dealt with issues close to his heart; the theme he appreciated most in the movie was the rift between the father and his son. The events that led up to the rift between them hinged on a theme that was a prominent feature of Bollywood movies, namely the tension between traditional and modern values. The theme was that a son's initiative in choosing his own spouse should not lead to a breakdown in the relationship between father and son. The fact that Abraham remembered this sequence in detail - and recounted verbatim the key dialogues between the father and son – provided evidence of the fact that Bollywood provided them with an alternative discourse on romantic love.

The discussion in this part of the chapter began with a description of the life of the popular boys' parents prior to their emigration from Pakistan, and their position in the Asian social hierarchy was also considered. Their immigration ideologies and their desire to achieve status through the achievements of their sons were discussed. It was shown that contradictions were inherent in their expectations and aspirations that their offspring would

acquire a white middle class status but without them acquiring the values of that class. The social practices of the popular boys were described, which included their clothing and fashion choices, their cautious participation in clubbing, and it was shown how the discourse of Bollywood movies helped the popular boys resolve these contradictions and tensions which they experienced as a result of living between two sets of cultural values: the conservative values of their parents; and what the boys perceived to be white middle class cultural values. The boys' choice of clothing seemed to be the least problematic aspect of their lives, and they were confident about this. Clubbing, on the other hand, proved to be rife with tensions between their parents' conservative Asian values and what the boys perceived to be liberal Western values and which these boys resolved through self-imposed barriers between themselves and their parents. They also devised strategies for dealing with matters, such as choice of clothing and clubbing, which their parents disapproved of. Finally, the Bollywood discourse enabled them to 'patch up' the tensions by presenting an alternate dialectic resolution of the conservative Asian, and liberal 'western values', especially in the area of romantic love.

#### **4.3 The Gangsta Boy Subculture**

Like the acculturation projects of the popular boys (see above), the gangsta boys' acculturation projects were very much influenced by their parents' ideologies which the latter had acquired in Pakistan before immigrating to England. However, unlike the popular boys who faced tensions

in their consumer acculturation projects due to their parents' inherently conflicting ideals for them, the gangsta boys faced two different sorts of tensions.

The first type of tension arose from the contradiction which existed between the patriarchal Asian values that the gangsta boys were exposed to inside the home and the docile masculinity that their fathers exhibited outside of the home in white middle class society. More specifically, the gangsta boys had grown up watching their fathers make all the decisions on behalf of the family, laying down the rules for their children, and having the right to interfere with the lives of their wives and sisters as they saw fit. This made the gangsta boys believe that their fathers were the head of the immediate nuclear family in the UK and the extended family in the ancestral village in Pakistan. For this reason, the gangsta boys early on began to define their masculinity in terms of power and respect. However, when they reached a certain age, they realized that their fathers' power was limited to their family. Outside the home, they did not have the same kind of power and they did not receive the same kind of respect as they did from their family. Watching their fathers work 16 hour-days as labourers and/or taxi drivers, having to fulfil the demands of the customers and bosses without hesitation, and, on top of all that, living a very simple working class lifestyle with no luxuries, and with no economic achievements in the UK to show for their hard-work, emasculated their fathers in the eyes of the gangsta boys. The contradictions between their fathers' masculinity inside and outside of the house made the gangsta boys feel very

insecure about their own masculinity. They felt powerless in a society where the ‘winner-takes-all’ and one which was ruthless and sometimes racist. This vulnerability about their masculinity therefore made attaining respect and power among their peers the most salient aspect of their shared consumer acculturation projects.

The second tension experienced by the gangsta boys owed its origin to their parents’ inability to provide a well-defined identity project for the gangsta boys to pursue. Unlike the popular boys’ parents, who had a strict view of what was an ‘ideal son’ and who endeavoured to put pressure on their offspring to achieve this ideal, the gangsta boys’ parents had no such ‘blue print’ for their sons. More specifically, the popular boys’ parents’ immigration ideology dictated that they and their sons should endeavour to differentiate themselves from the ‘lowly’ Asians who had come from rural areas in Pakistan, and who did not know how to live their lives, and whose children were nothing but trouble. They wanted their sons to become middle class professionals, and, in order to achieve this goal, exerted pressure on their sons to obtain a university education and supported their sons financially so that they could do so. They told their sons that they had to achieve a middle class status in mainstream British society, for otherwise they would be nothing more than ‘lowly’ Mirpuris. The gangsta boy parents’ immigration ideology, on the other hand, was very different. They did not claim to be superior to other Asians; and neither did they want to claim a cultural space for themselves in Britain. Rather they regarded their lives in Britain in pragmatic terms. Their goal was to make



as much money as possible and go back to their ancestral village when they could ensure the financial stability of their families. Thus, what other Asians or the mainstream British society thought of them was not necessarily relevant to them. As a result, they did not expect their children to take part in British society or to prove that they were ‘better’ Asian sons. In a way, the gangsta boys’ parents’ demands were much easier to handle than those of the popular boys’ parents. They did not require their sons to achieve an all-encompassing ideal character. Neither did they govern their sons’ behaviours at all times. They only demanded that their sons fulfil simple responsibilities. For instance, once they were of working age, they expected their sons to contribute to the family budge, and to adhere to particular – and sometimes only symbolic – Pakistani norms and values. This however, put the gangsta boys in an alienated position, for they did not wish to go back and live in the parents’ ancestral villages and neither did they wish to work non-stop like their fathers and have nothing to show for their hard work. Furthermore, they received no support from their parents financially or socially in order to improve their status and become British middle-class. Their parents did not pressure them to pursue a university education and neither did they support them in such an endeavour. Thus their parents did not offer their sons a dream to pursue. As a result, the sons saw their future life as being the same as their parents. This disempowered them; they felt aimless and powerless in a society they did not belong to. In order to resolve these difficulties, the gangsta boys pursued what I have called a gangsta subculture.

The following sections are organised as follows. The first focuses on the gangsta boys' parents. First I describe the gangsta boys' parents' backgrounds, immigration experience and their plans for themselves and their families for the future. Next, I describe the gangsta boys' parents' immigration ideology and compare it with that of the popular boys' parents. Then I describe the parents' expectations of their sons, and show how these expectations are very different from those of the popular boy parents. I use that comparison to show how the particular immigration ideologies of the gangsta boys' parents created the two contradictions described above.

In the second section, I describe how the gangsta boys attempted to resolve these tensions by adopting via forging a group consumer acculturation project which I describe as the gangsta subculture. I first describe how that particular subculture developed over time amongst second generation Pakistanis, and the values that this subculture embodies. Next I discuss the two main consumption fields where this subculture enacts its values: outfits and leisure activities. I conclude this section with a discussion of how the second generation immigrants' acculturation projects have not developed in isolation and/or randomly, but have been influenced by the first generation immigrants' expectations and immigration ideologies, and the inherent contradictions within them.

#### **4.3.1 The Gangsta Boys' Parents: Their Backgrounds, Immigration Experience, Ideologies and Expectations**

Whereas the popular boy parents came from cities or big villages in Pakistan, the gangsta boy parents came from remote villages. These small villages were agricultural villages, where rural society was divided into two major classes: the landed feudal class and the serfs. Most parents of gangsta boys came from very humble backgrounds, and whose families were agricultural or manual labourers. This meant that their life was very tough; they worked in the fields all day long and for their work merely received a share of the crop which they then traded to obtain other household necessities. The popular boy parents, on the other hand, claimed that their families were not poor. For instance, Raja Akmal asserted that his father was a local government official and wielded significant power; they had their own land which his brother still worked and rented out. He claimed that his life in Pakistan was comfortable and they were not like the Mirpuris (the gangsta boy parents), who did not have any land. In fact, according to him, they (migrants from small remote villages) had nothing. They were the poorest people in the villages they came from. Similarly, the Agha brothers recalled their early life in the village in favourable terms; their father was in the military and they too owned land and were respected in their village. Their emigration to the UK was not determined by concerns about survival; instead, they emigrated in order to attain the lifestyle of the urban class. The gangsta parents, on the other hand, had emigrated from Pakistan out of necessity, and with the sole intention of making money in order to improve the situation of their family in the village. For instance, Mr. Shahbaz migrated to England when he was 14 years

old. He belonged to a family of farmers in rural Mirpur, and said that, if he had stayed there, he would have had no future, other than to be a farmer like his father. His uncle had been able to immigrate to England and had arranged for Mr. Shahbaz's migration. He said that he was very young and did not have any say in the matter. His parents decided for him. Thus, he would go to England, earn money and then send the money back. When he got to England he was very young, and therefore, had to spend a couple of years in school before he could join the workforce, which he did, according to him, when he was 16 years old. He said that he did not have a favourable experience in school. He said that he could not speak any English when he migrated and he suffered a lot of racism at school, which he suffered with patience. When I asked him about any specific incidents, he could not recall any, but said that in those days there were very few Asians in Bolchester, and white youth abused him by calling him 'Paki'. He claimed that, when he was young, the situation was very different from the situation today. The only option he had then was to patiently take the abuse, whereas today young Pakistanis would fight back if they wanted to. For the first few years he worked at the Iron Square Factory, where so many other migrants had worked over the years. During this time all the money he made he sent to his parents back home, who bought land with it. Over time, the money he sent was used to convert the small mud hut where his parents lived into a four-bedroom concrete house. During this time Mr. Shahbaz stayed with his uncle's family. He moved into his own house almost a decade later, after he got married and was able to afford a house of his own.

Like Mr. Shahbaz's story, the stories other gangsta parents recounted also highlighted the economic conditions in rural Pakistan which forced people to immigrate to the UK. Mr. Akbar, another gangsta boy parent, understood the history of his family in terms of successive migrations caused by economic circumstances. His family, he said, inhabited a very sparsely populated barren and remote village of Pakistan. The nearest source of water – a well – was half a days journey away. When he was only an infant his family migrated – on foot and walked for 8 days – into a more arable place where they settled and where his extended family lives to this day. This small village was where he grew up. He recalled that their village had no electricity during his childhood (electricity did not arrive until 2001), and that they used to bathe in a small reservoir of water located a half hour's walk from their house. Their house was a small mud house. His family too was a family of farmers, and the village did not offer other avenues of income generation, and so, when the opportunity arose, his family was only too willing to send him away to England, hoping that he would be able to help them in turn. He continues to do this day. He is the only brother who migrated; the rest of his siblings are in Pakistan. With the money he has sent his family they have been able to build a modern house – replacing the mud house – and to buy land. Even to this day his extended family is supported by him and his sons. On the other hand, none of the popular boy parents, I spoke to, had such responsibilities in Pakistan.

Like the popular boy parents, the gangsta boy parents in the first few years in England lived with other single Pakistani men, often sharing a room

with half a dozen other young men like themselves. They spent very little money on themselves, so they could help their family back home, and they saved to buy a house when their family arrived. Once they were married their lifestyle did not change much. They continued to work 16 hour shifts, they spent only a few hours at home, where they would quickly eat and sleep before returning to work. There was no leisure time; there was only time to work and then time to recuperate to begin work again.

The gangsta parents were never interested in settling down and therefore showed no interest in fitting into white British society. Their lifestyles show this lack of interest in enjoying their lives in Britain. None of the gangsta parents spent their money on upgrading their houses, even after decades in Bolchester. Thus, most gangsta boys still lived in poorly maintained houses in the Asian neighbourhood, so much so that two gangsta boys admitted to me that they were embarrassed to invite people into their homes because they were poorly furnished, with cheap furniture and carpets etc. However, although the gangsta parents were unwilling to spend money improving their houses in England, they were proud to talk about the money they had spent on the '*kothi*' they had built for themselves in their ancestral villages. Thus, they never failed to mention the number of bedrooms in these houses, or the fact that the house had marble flooring, and the bathrooms were tiled. During my fieldwork I visited Mirpur to see for myself the large mansions these migrants had built for themselves. Like Ballard (2003), I was awed by the profligate expenditure on these houses. Ballard had described the

intense status competition that shown by the construction of these often five-storey houses in Mirpur. Similarly, their expenditure on leisure activities in Britain was extremely paltry. They claimed they had no time for leisure. Thus, they did not recall going to the cinema or a restaurant with their family; and the only 'vacations' they remembered were their trips to Pakistan to attend or arrange a marriage. Many of them were taxi drivers, who never spent money on food outside the home. On the other hand, the popular boy parents were keen to spend their money and live a middle class lifestyle.

The future plans of the gangsta boy parents were determined by their desire to return to Pakistan. When they were young their mind was set on earning as much as they could earn and then sending it to their families back home; with this money the family back home was expected to buy land, so that, after sufficient land had been bought, the young migrant would be able to return and the family would live a respected – understood in terms of land ownership – prosperous life. These were the future plans of most of the gangsta parents, and they confirmed the prior findings that report similar aspirations of rural migrants (see Ballard, 1994), but very soon these plans changed. According to Mr. Baladust, the money they made was never enough. They were wary of falling into poverty again, and that fear drove them to amass more wealth; the dream of returning persisted, but what changed was the amount of money and the land considered adequate for this move. As a result, these parents today own large tracts of land in their ancestral villages, have built impressive houses in these villages, and own properties which they rent

out in England, and yet they keep delaying their plans of return to their ‘homeland’. Despite their amassed wealth, however, they continue to maintain a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity in this country. They remain uninterested in fitting into the British way of life, and Britain will forever remain to them a ‘foreign land’. For most of them the delay in returning to Pakistan was only intended to be temporary. They reiterated to me that the desire to return was strong, and the only thing that was stopping them was money. When I pointed out to them that they could afford to return with what they had already earned, they explained that they wanted to safeguard against unforeseen accidents, and therefore wanted to earn more before they returned. Many also emphasized that they wanted to work until their retirement age, when they would be eligible for the government pension, and after that they would return to Pakistan.

#### **4.3.1.1 The Immigration Ideology of the Gangsta Boys’ Parents**

The parents of the gangsta boys, like those of the popular boys, considerably influenced their sons’ identity projects, but there were significant differences in the expectations the gangsta and popular boy parents had for their children. It is suggested that these differences accounted for the different trajectories of their offspring’s acculturation projects. The purpose of this section is to describe and discuss the immigration ideology of the gangsta boy parents and the expectations they had for their children. Throughout this section I compare the experiences of the gangsta parents with those of the



popular boy parents, and explain how the differences between their experiences structured their aspirations and consequently their expectations for their sons. I will then show how their history and current status has shaped their aspirations, and consequently their expectations for their offspring.

Over the years most of the gangsta boy parents had not ‘visibly’ improved their economic status in England significantly. They all lived in predominantly Asian areas where housing was cheaper than white areas. Whereas the popular boy parents, on the other hand, had moved out of working class jobs, the gangsta boy parents who were still fit to work had working class jobs. Thus, Mr. Shahbaz, Mr. Zaffar and Mr. Hussain were taxi drivers. Mr. Khizer ran a fish and chip shop; and the others had all retired. As explained above those who were gainfully employed wished to return to Pakistan after retirement, but those who had already retired had made their journey back to their ancestral village.

The most important difference between the popular boy parents and the gangsta boy parents was how the gangsta boy parents were determined to return to their ancestral villages, whereas the popular boy parents had accepted England as their permanent residence, and only a few, who had been able to cultivate ties in the urban areas of Pakistan, had thought about returning. For the gangsta boy parents, immigration was just a temporary situation, until they were able to return to their villages. So their social status was actually governed by their status back home in Pakistan. They did not consider their lives in the UK as their real lives. Their real lives, real social connections, real

audience, real status competition was indeed back home in their ancestral village in Pakistan. Like, Mr. Hussain (Adnan's and Bilal's father) who had retired to Pakistan, others too wanted to retire to Pakistan. Mr. Hussain was almost 70 years old, and for 40 years he worked hard and saved money, which was sent back to Pakistan where he had invested it in land, a big house and in buying machinery used in building site excavations. Today, he lives in Pakistan where he supports himself by renting out his machines and supplements this income by the pension he receives from the Pakistan government. Mr. Khizer, Mr. Afzal, and Mr. Shahbaz also wanted to retire to Pakistan to live in the houses they had built in Gujjar Khan and Mirpur, respectively. Out of the gangsta parents I spent time with, however, only two had been able to bring their dream of return to fruition. Shaw (2002) has written about this phenomenon as follows:

‘A significant proportion of now-retired pioneer-generation men have returned to their concrete and brick remittance-built houses in their villages of origin, where they enjoy the status of England-returnees; their wives usually remain in Britain with their children and grandchildren’.

The gangsta boy parents, never considered England their permanent residence; they had immigrated with the intention of earning enough money to retire to a comfortable life in their villages, and this dream persisted to this day. They felt that Pakistanis who tried and live their life in this country, with no intention of moving back, cut themselves off from their Pakistani roots and

were trying to live the lives of the white people, which would never bring them happiness. They believed that they could only be happy in the villages they had left in their youth. According to one gangsta boy parent, 'This country eats you up, and empties you out like termites eat away wood', and said that every Pakistani should aim to return to their village. His views were not unique. I heard other gangsta parents expressing similar views; his comment was referring to the first generation Pakistani experience. It was an expression of the frustrations of living in a land where you were not part of the mainstream, where your social life was limited to the family, and you were disconnected from your land and culture. This alienation was a lived reality which, according to Mr. Akbar, ate you up slowly. The daily existence where you constantly pined for your land and culture stretched over decades, and slowly hollowed you out from inside, so much so that you become insensitive to the absence of any 'real' space to belong to.

Typically, the money the gangsta boy parents (Mr. Shahbaz, Mr. Khizer, Mr. Afzal and Mr. Hussain) all shared the same living pattern. Money was sent back home to acquire large plots of land, and then for years they had sent back more money to build large houses. Once they had acquired a house, they would either buy more land in Pakistan (like Mr. Khizer and Afzal, who had both acquired land in Pakistan which they rented out to ensure a constant stream of income); or like Mr. Hussain, who had bought building machinery, which he rented out; or like Mr. Shahbaz, who had bought properties in England with the intention of renting them out. From these investments, they

believed they could ensure a constant stream of money, which they would use to live a comfortable life in the house they had built in Pakistan and where they would live when they eventually retired. When I asked Waqar, Rahman and Kamran about their parents' retirement plans they asserted with confidence that their parents had always wanted to return to their villages. Kamran said:

‘My father planned it well. Once we are grown up and independent, my parents are going to go to Pakistan and live in the house they have built. My father has invested all his savings in these two properties, and he plans on living off the rent’.

Waqar confirmed that his father had planned a similar return to Pakistan. Kamran, referring to people his father knew who had migrated like his father from rural Pakistan, said:

‘All migrants like my father want to go back. They do not want to live here; they are waiting for the right time. Like my father's cousin who owns a grocery shop now. He has acquired a house here to rent and very soon he will move back to his house in Mirpur. Everyone is like him’.

The gangsta parents when they talked about the popular boy parents claimed that these parents are miserly. One gangsta parent declared, ‘They do not even have a house in their village! According to these parents, having a big house in your village is important, and the Pakistanis who wasted their money in the UK had not only failed to earn respect in their ancestral village, but they

were also deprived of a strongly rooted identity, because they had nowhere to go to in Pakistan and no connection with that country. These houses in Pakistan, even though they were uninhabited, served as conspicuous status symbols in their ancestral villages. For the gangsta parents it did not matter if these houses were empty, for, as long as they had a house in their ancestral village, they earned the respect of people in their village who believed that these families had been successful because they owned these huge houses. On the other hand the popular boy parents never showed any desire to move back to their ancestral villages; for most of them England was their permanent home. If they *did* want to move back to Pakistan, it was not to the villages they had come from but to the urban centres. Compared to the attitude of the gangsta boys about the houses they had built in their ancestral villages, the popular boy parents often talked about the stupidity of the gangsta parents who, instead of spending their money on having a good life (buying a house in a good neighbourhood, spending money on furnishing the house, and spending money on the family), built these 'haunted houses' in their old villages.

Intent on bringing their retirement plans to fruition, the gangsta parents were not inclined to spend their money in England. They spent very little money in improving their lifestyle in this country, which to them was wasteful, and instead invested their money in order to be able to live a comfortable life later. For instance, one gangsta boy parent confessed that for the past 20 years he had not bought anything for himself. He wore the same pair of pyjamas he bought 10 years earlier, and he did not own a television, just

so that he could save money to invest in the rundown property he had bought, so he could rent it out. The gangsta boys often talked about this miserliness of their parent. Thus, one gangsta boy, Kamran, said:

‘My father never gave us money. I had to earn for ourselves. They were saving money. . . Like he kept on talking about going out to dinner as a family. But that never happened. He was too busy working and a dinner out would be too expensive’.

Another gangsta boy said: ‘I never went out to eat in a restaurant, like other families. I saved money’. These youths, when asked about their parents’ future plans, recited the same stories. Their fathers wanted to go back, and, to achieve that end, they worked according to a plan: they worked for 16 hours a day, and spent as little as possible until the time when they could retire to Pakistan where they would live off the money they had made. The popular boy parents, on the other hand, believe in spending their money on improving their lifestyle. Once the popular boy parents owned a house in the white neighbourhood, they used their money to claim cultural superiority amongst Asians. For instance, Akram Agha, spent thousands of pounds on building a conservatory, on beautifying the front garden of his house, and on expensive furniture and a 42 inch television. Nawaz Khan, another popular boy parent, spent thousands of pounds on his driveway and on expensive Spanish tiles in his kitchen and living room. He recently bought a £30,000 Bentley, and proudly related to me the comments he had received when he was driving around the Asian area: ‘Nawaz Sahib, do not drive your car around in this area;

it is more expensive than the houses here'. On New Year's Day, Akram Agha took the whole family to London to see the fireworks and to enjoy a small holiday. Other popular boy parents, too, spent money on family dinners, trips to the cinema and occasionally to amusement parks. Zayed often recounted his weekend activities, and almost once a month his whole family would go to Birmingham to watch a Bollywood movie and eat out at a 'good' restaurant. The popular boy parents often denigrated the gangsta parents by pointing out that they were greedy and did not spend money. They said they dressed poorly, drove cheap cars, their houses were cheaply furnished, and they are so miserly they did not even spend money on eating well. While the popular boy parents socialized with confidence, inviting other Asian families into their houses, the gangsta boy parents had no time or confidence for socialization, and never socialized beyond their immediate family. I have visited many popular boys, and their parents always invited me in and showed me their houses with pride. The gangsta boy parents, on the other hand, never invited me into their houses, and my interactions with them took place solely outside the confines of their house – on the streets, at the taxi rank, or in a restaurant. One young gangsta boy confessed to me that their house was so simple that they never invited people inside. When I brought the obsession of the first generation of Mirpuri migrants with money into a conversation with Baladust, a migrant from Mirpur who worked as a plumber, he spoke about the people from his village:

‘They have never seen money and when they come here they are just concerned about making money. They build these huge houses in Pakistan and then keep on making money, but never spend anything’.

According to him, the money was saved to achieve an early retirement in Pakistan. He said that he was once a taxi driver and was like others from his village:

‘I too started working 16 hour shifts like the others. We used to joke to each other ‘that our sons probably ask their mothers if they had a daddy?’ because they hardly saw us. I just wanted to make money’.

The popular boy parents on the other hand took pride in the fact that they lived their lives to the full and spent the money they earned on their families.

While the popular boy parents regarded Pakistani migrants from the rural areas of Pakistan as ‘lower’ in status, and tried to differentiate themselves from them by pursuing a more affluent lifestyle, the gangsta boy parents did not view the Asian population around them in this way. The gangsta boy parents realized there was a difference between the city and village people, but they did not consider a city background an advantage. According, to them, migrants from the city were better equipped to settle into life in the West. They knew how to decorate their homes, how to enjoy Western food, and how to dress in Western clothing. It was the perception of gangsta parents that, while rural people were simpler, that the urbanites had earned modernity at the cost



of their 'honour'. Their formulation of the term 'modern' had two components. The first was an appreciation of the urban cultural background; and the second a belief that modernity often resulted in dishonour. For many of these rural migrants, as is the case with most of rural Pakistan to this day, family honour was exclusively defined in terms of how the men were able to control the women in their family. Men, who are able to keep their womenfolk cooped up in the confines of the house and protected from the gaze of other men, were believed to have safeguarded their honour. This concept was reflected in the evaluation of the modern families by gangsta parents: these modern families gave freedom to their women who wore Western clothes in public, and, because they were exposed to the gaze of unrelated men, they had besmirched the honour of the family. One gangsta parent, Pervez, claimed that people like him were not interested in claiming status through a 'modern' consumer lifestyle; they were happy the way they were. The reason he gave for feeling satisfied with the situation was that those individuals who strove to live a Western lifestyle had become too 'modern' and lost their honour because 'their daughters walk around in English clothes and are too independent'. This was a criticism of the popular boy families that all gangsta boy parents shared. The gangsta boy parents showed little interest in competing for status in England, in the sense that the popular boy parents defined status, and they were content with claiming status along the old conservative patriarchal values they had emigrated with. The central tenet of these patriarchal values was that respect is earned by keeping the womenfolk of the family in check. By keeping them

confined to the house, not allowing them to work, by not allowing them to attend universities outside Bolchester, by not allowing them to wear Western clothes, and by arranging their marriages unilaterally, they were, according to the gangsta parents, keeping their womenfolk in check. The popular boy parents, on the other hand, were committed to claiming a status in the Asian community and a cultural space in white mainstream society. These differences in the immigration ideologies determined the distinct set of expectations these parents had for their sons. In the following section I compare these differences.

#### **4.3.1.2 Expectations of their Sons**

These first generation gangsta parents, because of their immigration ideology, were most concerned about making money. They therefore infused in their definition of a 'good son' attributes that would contribute towards the fruition of their retirement plans. Their primary definition of a 'good son' was a son who earned money and handed it over to his parents, without spending much of it on himself. Although like the popular boy parents, they too valued a university education, they were not as committed to such an education. Most of the gangsta boys were only supported in their education while they showed complete commitment, but once their interest dwindled, the parents withdrew their support and impressed on them the importance of contributing financially. Also, when the gangsta boys started earning money they were not under any pressure from their parents to study. Waqar, who dropped out of education after his GSCEs, started working at a factory very early. He said that he was

never given any money to spend and was encouraged to work to meet his expenses. In fact when he started work he gave £400 a month to his father so that he could buy a house. Imran and Mehmood, too, started helping their father out very early, handing over all their earnings to their parents. Kamran, who learned the building trade with his father, had been working for almost five hours a day, since the age of 13, at the two houses his father has bought. All the gangsta boys said that their parents never ‘gave them grief’ while they were contributing economically; it was only when they stopped doing so that their relationship with their parents soured. Waqar, who had recently fallen out with his father, told me that his father was not talking to him because he did not have a job. For the gangsta boy parents, then, the most important aspect of the ideal of a ‘good son’ was his ability to help financially, and when a son failed to do so, then his status as a ‘good son’ was revoked. An incident that highlighted the importance of this aspect of the ideal of a good son for the gangsta boy parents was recounted to me by Kamran as follows. One of the houses his father, Mr. Shahbaz, had bought in the name of his eldest son was sold by the son without Mr. Shahbaz’s consent. Kamran’s parents expected him to work hard and buy the house back, and therefore, when Kamran expressed his desire to go to University again, his mother said to him: ‘I do not want you to go to university. I want you to work and buy the house back’. Like Kamran’s, parents other gangsta boy parents were also primarily concerned about earning money, and often believed that a university education was not a useful investment. They justified their decision by pointing out that a

university education often led you nowhere, giving examples of university educated men who were working as taxi drivers. When I spoke to Adnan, a 36-year-old taxi driver with parents from rural Punjab, he spoke at length about why he, and in fact many other youths like him, do not get into higher education:

**When we are growing up we grow up with little money. Our parents do not give us pocket money, and we want to spend money like all the people around us. Going through university and then making money just does not seem like an attractive option – it is planning too far ahead and delaying having fun. So we dropped out and start working. At least this way, even if we have to give our parents money, we have enough left for ourselves’.**

**When I asked whether his parents objected to him dropping out, he said: ‘No. As long as we are working they do not make an issue about us not studying’. I asked Imran if his parents explicitly encouraged him to drop out and work. He replied that nothing was said explicitly, but it was just a realization on his part that his parents needed his help. Kamran, gave me the same answer when he described his decision to work early was motivated by the economic pressure he realized his parents were in. He said: ‘They never said it, but in a sense they made it clear that they would prefer that’. When I asked how they did that, he said: ‘By constantly talking about how they were poor and needed more money’. The gangsta boy parents through the simple lifestyle they pursued in the**

**UK were able to impress on their children the importance of becoming economically productive, an outcome which would help their retirement project. On the other hand, the popular boy parents were totally committed to educating their children, and were proud of spending money on their children, and gave them weekly allowances so they could spend money on themselves. Furthermore, the popular boys who started working part-time were never expected to help their parents. Their money was theirs to spend.**

The gangsta boy parents were primarily only interested in their sons' economic productivity, and elements of their social behaviour were of less importance. Although the gangsta parents did not expressly give their sons permission to embrace the white culture completely, they feigned ignorance about their son's activities. They believe that by living in British society it was only natural that their sons should adopt aspects of the dominant culture (for instance, drinking, drugs, relationships *etc.*) particularly when they were young. Mehmood liked quoting his father's attitude about this: 'When you live in a *haram* (a non-Islamic) country, you should develop the patience to tolerate *haram* (un-Islamic behaviour)'. Mr. Baladust, another gangsta parent, explained to me:

'I know that my son is going to mess around. I have two options either I try and stop him or I ignore these things and let him grow up. I feel the second approach is better because this way you do not push your sons away'.

When Kamran's parents found out about his daughter with a white working class girl, they decided to ignore the existence of their granddaughter. It worked very well for both father and son: the son continued his relationship, while the father was assured of the monthly support from his son. All the gangsta boys shared stories with me that confirmed the existence of an implicit agreement which was summarized succinctly by Imran: 'As long as I do not do things in their face, they do not go around trying to find out what I get up to' When I asked Waqar if his parents knew about his son going out with a Polish girl, he said they did, but they never spoke to him about it. This was very different to the exacting expectations the popular boy parents had of their sons, who were expected to adhere to a strict moral code.

#### **4.3.1.3 Fathers' Masculinity Projects and the Immigration Ideology**

These first generation gangster parents, however, were not completely, uninterested in a cultural Asian identity for their children. Thus, they would insist that their sons should marry a cousin from their ancestral villages, and they would require their sons to adopt the role of the patriarch. They gave their sons little choice in the selection of a spouse. Often the parents would unilaterally decide on a conservative Asian girl, who they felt would be respectful, would take care of them and would permit the continuation of the patriarchal system. Out of the 10 gangsta boys, only Waqar, Kamran and Rahman had followed their parents' desires to marry a cousin from Pakistan. The others had all married cousins before they were 20 years old. Kamran,

Waqar and Rahman often talked about the immense pressure their parents exerted on them. Once, when we were discussing what would make Pakistani parents happy, Kamran, said: 'I know what will make them happy: if I married a cousin from Pakistan'. Waqar laughed and agreed with him. This was a sensitive aspect of their lives; and they were unwilling to speak about marriage when other gangsta boys were around. When I individually discussed the matter with the gangsta boys, Mehmood said: 'I think this is the least we can do for our parents. They do not ask for much. They raise us and all they ask is that we allow them to choose a wife for us. I think that is fair'. Kamran, was less enthusiastic about the idea, and he was not convinced that he would be able to get along with a girl from Pakistan, However, he said he was considering, in his own words, 'sacrificing my happiness to please my mother'.

We turn now to look at the masculinity projects of the gangsta boy fathers, who were the personification of a patriarchal masculinity. Inside the confines of the house the gangsta boy fathers ruled supreme. Their word was the last word and was never questioned. The gangsta boys grew up seeing their mothers being constantly subservient to their fathers and deferring to them in every important decision. Their fathers made decisions for their wives, sisters, daughters and sons; and their authority was never questioned. The fathers were the sole authority in the house; and this authority and power became the cornerstone of the masculinity the gangsta boys aspired to. Thus, whenever I asked the gangsta boys to describe how their father was at home, they emphasized his authority and rules before anything else. They all said that their

father decided for the family and the others followed. Many of the gangsta boys completely accepted this authority, and endorsed the way Pakistani families were structured, with the father as the bread-winner and the decision-maker for the family and at the head of the family hierarchy. The gangsta boys are all grown men, but even so showed immense respect for their father. None of them dared to smoke in the house or in front of their father. Once, when I was having a cigarette with Majid, who was 32 years old and had even served a prison sentence for selling drugs, his father drove past in his taxi, whereupon Majid darted behind the nearest rubbish bin, claiming he would have gotten into trouble if his father had seen him. Similarly, Waqar whose father was on the taxi rank in the evenings refused to be seen in town late at night. When I walk to the local take-away for a late night snack he insisted on taking the longer route that by-passed the taxi rank. When I started spending time with Junaid and his cousin Asjad outside the take-away where Asjad worked, I often spoke about their parents, and the image of their father they evoked was that of an authoritarian patriarch. On one such occasion, we were accompanied by Sadaqat whose father was from Mirpur. I steered the conversation towards a general discussion of life inside the house, and Sadaqat said: 'When I am in my house I just lay low. I just do not want to be on his (father's) radar. Because he just starts telling me off'. The others completely identified with his description of life inside the house. Junaid said: 'That is exactly what I do. I just sit quietly in a corner. No matter what you do he finds some fault to shout at you'. These were stories that were repeated by the other gangsta boys as well; the fathers



were feared by all the gangsta boys, who had to live a very sedate life inside the house in order to steer clear of their father's displeasure, which, according to them was easily earned, because their fathers liked asserting their authority.

Another symbol of the authority of the father in this patriarchal system was the circumscribed social space for the mothers. The gangsta fathers did not allow their wives, and often their daughters, to work. The mothers were all housewives who sat at home looking after the 'man's' house, his children and safeguarding his '*izzat*' (his respect) by not interacting with strangers without need. This can be compared with the popular boy mothers and sisters, who were almost all working mothers. Husnain's mother worked at House of Fraser, Saif's mother worked at Morrisons, and Zayed's mother worked in a factory. According to some gangsta parents and youth, this in gangsta households invariably changed the power dynamics of the house. Thus, the fathers believed that, if they allowed a woman to work, she would start believing she was independent of the husband and would try to assert power, a very unfavourable outcome as far as the gangsta parents were concerned. The power and respect the father commanded in the house and within the extended family had a very strong impact on the gangsta youths, who came to understand masculinity primarily in terms of power and respect. Mehmood explained the influence of his father's authoritarianism on his own masculine project:

'You have heard about the alpha male, right? The alpha male in a group of lions. Well that is what it is. He was an alpha, and everyone listened to him

– my mother, me, my sisters and other relatives. And this is exactly what I wanted to be. I wanted to be the alpha male. Have all the respect and power’.

However, although the gangsta parents enjoyed this authoritarian position at home, the situation at work was the complete opposite. The gangsta boy fathers, most of whom occupied working class jobs, adopted a docile form of masculinity outside the home. As discussed above, their immigration ideology prioritised the project of making money over all other concerns. They wanted to stay out of trouble and therefore opted for a docile and submissive masculinity. They worked really hard and were courteous to their customers and bosses, even when abused. Anecdotal data from the field showed that, with a few exceptions, most of the first generation Pakistanis had stayed out of trouble by sticking to a docile masculinity in their interactions with white society. Many informants began their stories of specific men fighting racism, by emphasizing how most of the first generation Pakistanis never resorted to violence. The gangsta parents themselves often spoke about their composure in the face of racism versus the aggression of the youth today. Mr. Shahbaz proudly proclaimed that throughout his 20 years of night-shift taxiing, where a person was particularly susceptible to racism, he had only punched one white person. He said: ‘You cannot argue with a drunk person. You just act courteous and let them say what they are saying. After all it doesn’t matter what they say. They are customers’.

Their ideology also dictated caution in spending, so much so that they spent very little on themselves or their families. As discussed earlier, they did not go on holidays, they did not go on family dinners, they did not go to the cinema, they did not beautify their house and they did not give their children much to spend. Their voluntary simplicity in a society that measured success in terms of consumer lifestyle gives an image of powerlessness and failure.

This contradiction between the authoritarian and powerful man in the house and the meek and simple masculinity outside created a tension for the gangsta boys. The youth, who defined their masculinity in terms of power and respect, found it difficult to imagine enacting the docile masculinity of their fathers in mainstream society. None of the gangsta boys approved of this docile masculinity. They criticized both their fathers' peaceful response to abuse from customers and bosses, and they criticize their miserly lifestyle. I asked each of them whether they would live the way their fathers did, and all of them answered in the negative. Waqar, said:

'I cannot live like that. He doesn't enjoy his life. He makes all this money and doesn't spend it so he can finally retire. I want to enjoy now. I will never live his life'.

Imran, too, said:

'I cannot wait like they have. For thirty years to make and save money and then finally, have enough that you can start spending it. I want to spend money now and earn money now'.

Others also expressed their disapproval, and pointed out that their fathers, by being so miserly, deprived themselves and their family of a good life, something they would not want to do to their children. Similarly, the gangsta boys always interpreted their fathers' peaceful response to abuse as cowardice. According to the youth their parents were too scared of the law, and, because of this fear, never stood up to people when they were mistreated. Mehmood, explained:

'They were always scared of something going wrong. They feared that they would be sent back to Pakistan if they broke the law. That is why most of them just put their head down and worked'.

The gangsta boys believed that their parents were scared of deportation, and were not aware of their rights; they were therefore extremely scared of breaking the law. The young men, on the other hand, knew that nobody could send them back because this was their home, and, free from such fears, they could be more confident in their response to any form of perceived racial abuse. This exposure to their father's 'reduced' masculinity outside the house led to the realization that, by following their father's example, they would not be able to command the respect of mainstream society. This realization threatened their masculinity project and made them vulnerable.

In the discussion above I have shown how the gangsta parents espoused an immigration ideology that was oriented towards eventually returning to

Pakistan. They did not consider their life in England to be their 'real life'; it was just a temporary phase which they wanted to pass through in double quick time. They were not interested in claiming a status in the Asian community or mainstream white society in England, at least not by investing economically in it as the popular boy parents did. They were intent on saving money and investing in order to expedite their retirement to Pakistan. These parents therefore, first and foremost, demanded from their sons economic productivity, and at the same time expected them to uphold the symbolic patriarchal values. These expectations, which were not as demanding on them as were the parental expectations of the popular boy parents, resulted in the two contradictions I hinted at the beginning of this section. The first of these arose because these expectations failed to propose a complete identity project for the youth in mainstream white society. Although their parents - who were driven by the idea of returning to their ancestral village and were not interested in fitting into mainstream society - did not need an identity narrative oriented towards mainstream white society, their sons on the other hand did. Unlike their parents they were not interested in moving back to their parents' village because that was as much of an alien land for them as England was for their parents. The second generation youth found their parents' idea of a 'good son' completely inadequate in dealing with mainstream society. While the popular boy parents' idea of a 'good son' enabled the popular boys to fit into mainstream society, the gangsta boys found themselves lost when it came to dealing with mainstream society.

The second contradiction and difficulty gangsta boys had to deal with arose from the tensions between the masculinity of their father in the home and the one they saw their father adopting outside the home, in particular in the workplace. The gangsta youth based their idea of masculinity on what they saw at home – an all-powerful patriarch father who commanded power and respect – and yet, when they imagined themselves living the docile masculinity of their fathers in the absence of the attraction of a heroic return to the homeland, they felt emasculated. In the following section, I show how the gangsta subculture these youth adopted addressed these contradictions and offered them an alternate identity to their parents, which promised them the power and respect they sought.

#### **4.3.2 Gangsta Boy Consumer Acculturation**

In this section I describe how the gangsta boys resolved the tensions discussed above, in other words, by forging a group consumer acculturation project which I describe as the ‘gangsta subculture’. I first describe how the gangsta boys were acculturated to this particular subculture. I then describe the history of that subculture, and the values that this subculture embodies. Next I discuss the two main consumption fields where this subculture enacts its values: outfits and leisure. I conclude this section by discussing how the second generation immigrants’ acculturation projects have not developed in isolation or randomly, but have been influenced by the first generation

immigrants' expectations and immigration ideologies, and the inherent contradictions within them.

#### **4.3.2.1 Historical Development of the Gangsta Subculture**

The gangsta boys were first introduced to the real gangstas on Hanger Lane. Hanger Lane is a street where the majority of houses are owned by Pakistanis. The most prominent features of this street are the pockets of Asian youth that one comes across walking down the street. These teenaged Asian youth congregate in the Lane and, then in groups of five and six make their way to the Perdiswell Youth centre which is a short walk from the street. This youth centre was set up after the time the gangsta boys had grown out of hanging out on the lane. Whereas the gangsta boys limited their leisure to the lane, the youth in their early teens today preferred the youth centre. These young boys spent their evenings at the youth centre, where, parked in cars in the parking lot, they smoked marijuana all the while exchanging stories about their fights, their girlfriends, and other topics of interest. The gangsta boys like the boys who hang out in the youth centre today, started spending time on the lane during their early teens; walking up and down the street in small groups, smoking cigarettes and talking. Some were brought to the lane as a result of their work. For example, Samir, Bilal, Imran and Mehmood worked as delivery drivers for Monty's, an Indian takeaway on the Lane. Others started to hang out there because they did not have any social network or friends that they could hang out with. For example, Rahman who in his early teens did not

socialize much and spent most of his time at home, found himself isolated and lonely after he dropped out of university to become a taxi driver. To deal with his isolation he started hanging out with the Asians on the Lane. Similarly, Kamran, Hubaib's closest friend decided to spend more of his time in the Lane when Hubaib left the country for a year to study in Pakistan. Upon his return from Pakistan, Hubaib ended up on the Lane because, during the time he was away in Pakistan, Kamran had developed new friendships there, and had introduced Hubaib to them.

With the exception of Hubaib<sup>14</sup>, none of the gangsta boys had became part of any white or Asian subculture before they started to spend more time on the Lane. Although the Lane was a street near the city centre which has predominantly Asians living around it, none of the youth lived on that street. Most of them lived quite far away. Only Imran, Mehmood, and Kamran lived within walking distance of the Lane. However, the Lane had an attraction for these youth who ritually got together there. The culture on the Lane was the first culture they embraced and felt comfortable with. They all described that they early on felt that they were 'different' from the white kids, and were aware of their Asian identity. For example, Kamran said that, as he grew older, the differences in the ways in which he was raised became clearer to him. He said: 'At that age I strongly believed that drinking and having sex was really bad'. Similarly, Rahman claimed at university the white students were only

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<sup>14</sup> Who in his early teens spent time with white skateboarder youth.



interested in clubbing, drinking and flirting with girls, but he was not interested in these activities owing to his upbringing. Although they all said that at that age they considered drinking and sex morally wrong, which motivated their decision to not hang out with white youth, they also admitted that the fear they had of their fathers was also a big reason for staying away from the white culture. Their fathers believed that, if their children spent too much time with the white youth, they would eventually become like them. They therefore enforced segregation. Kamran said:

‘When I was younger I was really scared of my father seeing me with my white friends in town. I was always on the lookout for him and if I was with my friends and saw him I would try and hide’.

Others too, like Waqar, who avoided walking around town when his father was on the taxi rank, had to avoid being seen by their fathers. This control their fathers had over them was completely alien to the sensibilities of their white friends, and this put the gangsta boys in a compromised position, which was open to ridicule from their white friends. Furthermore, their moral worldview created a distance between the gangsta boys and their white peers, who in their teens got attracted to drinking and girls. Hanging out in the Lane with Asian boys relieved them of the burden of always having to defend their father or family’s way of life to their friends. Ironically, however, as they started to become solely embedded in the Lane’s Asian social network, they became more and more isolated from the white youth. Indeed, most argued that

their attitude towards white kids had changed considerably, especially towards the end of high-school which also coincided with their deeper acculturation to the gangsta culture.

These youths came to the Lane without a well-defined identity narrative. At the time, their Asian identity was just awakening. For a few, like Kamran and Rahman, it was a question of finding a culture that they could call their own. Both Kamran and Rahman believed they would have been loners if they had not joined these Asian kids on the Lane. And for Hubaib, it was as a result of pressure from other Asian youth, who had constantly questioned why he only hung out with white people. This realization, that they wanted to be with youth like themselves, motivated their search for a more relevant identity, an Asian one, outside mainstream white culture. They picked gangsta subculture amongst many other potential Asian identities (*e.g.* the popular boy identity) because the values of that culture resonated with them. Due to their patriarchal upbringing and the contradictions discussed above they came to define masculinity in terms of power and respect. They realized that the lifestyle that their fathers were living and wished them to pursue (*i.e.* having a working class job, and saving every penny earned, with the goal of retiring to a comfortable life in their ancestral village) did not offer those values which they associated with being a man. Their fathers were content with the power that they had over their own nuclear family (their mothers, sisters and sons) and the respect they received from their relatives and villagers back in their ancestral villages in Pakistan. Their fathers did not care at all about what

mainstream white society and fellow Asian immigrants thought of them. For the young boys, on the other hand, receiving respect from relatives in the remote villages in Pakistan meant nothing. They wanted to win respect in their immediate environment. The emasculating life style of their fathers drove them to search for alternative masculine narratives that promised instant power and respect that extended beyond the confines of the extended family, and which was acquired through a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption. This was exactly what they got on the Lane: a narrative that privileged a masculine identity built around power and respect, thereby resolving the contradictions they faced in their own fathers.

It was on the Lane that the gangsta boys were first introduced to stories about Nadeem. At the time, Nadeem was in his early thirties. He ran a successful drug venture, and would drive down Hanger Lane in his various sports cars, with Drum and Bass music spilling out of his car, leaking into the street and reaching these youth. The youth watched him going through a whole range of expensive sports cars, rapidly changing from a Mercedes 190 Cosworth, to a BMW and a Porsche. Even though Nadeem was not the only one who displayed his 'success' in this manner, he was the leader of the group. And, as such, he was very charismatic, and so his adventures were the ones most circulated in the Lane.

#### 4.3.2.1.1 Anatomy of the Gangsta Identity

The stories about Nadeem (now in his early forties and serving a seven-year prison sentence in the HMP Hewell Prison, in Redditch), were interwoven with stories about other gangsters – Asian gangsters from Birmingham, such as Tyson and the Alam Rock Boys, and white gangsters from around Bolchester. And it was these stories that built the narrative that defined gangsta identity for the youth. What most resonated with these boys were not stories about the pragmatics of what gangstas had to do to ensure the continuation of their gangsta businesses, but those stories which had a moral subtext describing how a ‘good gangsta’ lived his life, what kind of values he embodied, and how he managed his relationships in the street and among friends and with the larger community. Via these stories the gangsta boys distinguished what was right from wrong, and developed a value system that came to define what I call a ‘gangsta subculture’. The following are the attributes of this culture:

***Gangstas Command Respect:*** One of the critical characteristics of a gangsta is his ability to stand for himself and physically defend himself and his community when challenged. For example, one particular story that had been related to me through multiple sources several times was a fight that Nadeem and his close friends had had with a gang of racist white skinheads from out of town. According to the story, after getting drunk, this group of white men had been looking for trouble in town. They happened to be walking around the taxi rank, and started provoking Asian taxi drivers with racist comments. They found themselves in front of Tariq’s taxi. Tariq was with Nadeem, Wajid and

Majeed chatting and waiting for customers. The white skinheads challenged Tariq, Nadeem, Wajid and Majeed to a fight. The latter were outnumbered two to one, but they were not intimidated for one second. They took the challenge and got into the fight, and they beat each and every skinhead to the ground. This story not only highlighted the toughness of the gangsta, but also emphasized that the gangsta did not go looking for trouble; he only fought when challenged and when his respect was being threatened. Nadeem and his friends stood up to white men, even when they were outnumbered, and so gangsta toughness was not as much about winning a fight as about having a heart and not being scared. This idea of toughness was reinforced by numerous other stories, where the admiration of the gangsta boys was reserved for the gangsta who stood up for his respect, even if he was beaten down.

Thus being beaten or the ability to beat up was not necessarily important for the gangsta boys. In fact, ruthless displays of toughness were not at all admired. There needed to be a sound reason for demonstrating one's physical strength. Only then could one gain the respect of others. Otherwise, it would be considered immature behaviour. They described gangstas who were too ready to fight as 'losers'. For example, they saw Shamraiz, who got into fights at the slightest pretext, as somebody who confused the toughness of the gangsta with a propensity towards violence. And they compared him to Nadeem, who did not fight with anyone unless he had to.

One of the most legitimate reasons to fight, according to the gangsta boys, was to secure the 'honour of the Lane'. For example, in the

mythologized stories about Nadeem's fights, Nadeem was never depicted as a ruthless troublemaker. Instead, he was described as the man who reclaimed the Lane for the Asians by physically threatening racist white people. Imran and the other gangsta boys said:

'Bolchester never used to be what it is today. Today, nobody is racist to you. It was never like this. Back in the 80s when my uncles were young, Bolchester was very racist. The BNP used to have its headquarters in Bolchester. You know Fort Royal Park that is where the Asians used to live. The white people know how I feel about pigs, so they would cut off pigs' heads and shove them on pickets and put them in that area outside Asian houses. They used to spit at old women and men. And Pakistanis took it all without saying a word. Nadeem and his friends changed all of this. They started beating up every racist 'gora' (white person). They beat up so many people that the white people started fearing and respecting Asians'.

In this version of the history of the Asians in Bolchester, Nadeem and his group became the men who were able to claim a cultural space for the Asians in a predominantly unwelcoming white town by demonstrating their physical power and toughness towards those who deserved it. And according to the boys, as a result, Nadeem and friends were respected among the Asian community.

Even though ruthlessness was not advocated, the gangsta boys believed that, if people intended physical harm to a gangsta, then they should be punished in the severest way possible. Thus, when it came to it, the gangsta

could not afford to shy away from using extreme measures. To assert their power and to discourage others harming gangsta youth, the gangsta has to send out a very strong signal. Only then would third parties know ‘do not mess with a gangsta’. For example, a story that the gangstas like to recount was about the brutality of the Kramer brothers, a pair of white local drug dealers, who, according to Mehmood, buried at least a dozen men who tried to harm them and who threatened their business. Similarly, there was another very popular story about Wajid and Nadeem which emphasized gangsta toughness. According to this story, when Nadeem and his friends were running a successful drug business, a white person decided to give evidence against them to the police. And as Mehmood described it, ‘Wajid, went into this guy’s house at night while he was sleeping. He slipped into his room and put a knife to his face, and said to him, ‘You mess with us, and you will lose your eyes’’. According to the story, after this incident, the man left town and was never seen again.

***Gangstas are ‘connected’:*** Successful gangstas also derived their power from the connections that they developed in diverse ranks of society, and the ability to use them to their advantage when the need arose. According to various stories, the gangstas had connections in high places (with lawyers, the police, and, in some cases, politicians) and also at the lower levels with people belonging to a whole range of crafts and trades. By means of these connections the gangstas could make things happen very quickly, outside the regular workings of the businesses or bureaucracy. Gangstas had such

influence over their diverse contacts, that one telephone call, or even the mere mention of the name of a gangsta, would solve the problem. For example, Mehmood described how his relation to Nadeem opened doors for him more than once.

‘Once I had to buy some bulbs in large quantities to supply to somebody. My uncle gave me a number and told me to tell the person that I was related to Nadeem. I called the number and that guy upon hearing my relation to Nadeem sorted me out with bulbs at a very low cost . . . Likewise Nadeem knows this person in Spain who owns a villa. When I want to have a vacation, Nadeem calls up the guy, and the guy opens his house to me. I have been to his villa a couple of times for holiday.’

According to these stories, sometimes the connections were with members of what they thought were the highest ranks of white society. For example, in these stories, Nadeem had friends who were Oxford graduates. Kamran once said about Nadeem’s friends: ‘During day, they do normal jobs but in the night they are big drug dealers’, potentially working with or for gangstas like Nadeem.

These stories show that the gangstas were people who could wield power and influence over mainstream white society. Compared with their fathers who had no such power and influence whatsoever in mainstream society, the gangstas could make things happen by means of a couple of phone calls. Sometimes even a mention of the gangstas’ name was enough. This influence, according to the gangsta boys, was a perfect example of the



gangstas' power. They were not only respected among the close-knit Asian community but also within white mainstream society, and even among those persons who occupied high levels in that society.

*Gangstas are 'street-wise'*: One of the most important values of the gangsta subculture is to be 'street-wise'. Rather than conforming to middle class routes to success, which required a university degree, and a 9-6 office job that imprisoned them to a cubicle all day long and demanded that they wear suits and execute the boss' orders submissively, according to the gangsta subculture, those who were really successful in life were those persons who found a way to 'beat the system' and make money without working like a slave like their fathers did and still do. So not surprisingly, one of the most popular stories about Nadeem's early youth was about his decision to leave school. According to these stories, Nadeem was a very good student in school, and one day he realized that, if the purpose of education was to make money, he could do that more efficiently without going through the system. According, to his nephews this happened when Nadeem was in his late teens. The details about his initiation into the drug business are sketchy, and nothing concrete is known, apart from the fact that he was able to make connections with Asian drug dealers. He ventured into Birmingham and beyond where he made connections both with big drug dealers and also prominent people in the rave scene. Raves were crucial for a thriving drug business, because these were events where the most drugs were consumed. Nadeem started arranging raves and advertised them all over Bolchester, and he then provided drugs for these

events. Nadeem was a street-wise drug dealer who for years managed his business well and never got caught, until his subordinates got him into trouble by making mistakes. According to the gangsta boys, Nadeem even had corrupt policemen on his payroll. Adnan, a gangsta boy from an earlier generation, spoke of Nadeem with respect, and admitted that even their generation idealized him. Recounting an incident to highlight Nadeem's intelligence, he said:

‘Nadeem used to live near a dead end. His house was the last house, and he used to deal from his house. One day I went to pick up some marijuana from him. When I got the stuff and was about to leave Nadeem stopped me. One of his men came in a car and stalled behind the police car, pretending his car had broken down. He then asked me to leave immediately’.

By arranging for the car to stall behind the police car, he had basically made their raid ineffective. The police wanted evidence, and, if they had followed Adnan and found drugs on him, Nadeem would have been in trouble, but now the police could not follow Adnan.

Stories about Nadeem's smartness were generally accompanied by stories about unsuccessful gangstas who did not know how to ‘manage’ the streets. These gangstas were regarded as unsuccessful because they did not know how to ‘beat’ the system. Instead, they were seen as too occupied by the outcome, namely living the high life. For example, Hubaib describing Aamir

Abraham, a young Asian youth who had recently been caught for dealing in drugs, said:

‘These guys are stupid. They get carried away in the heat of the moment. They plan things and only look at what will happen when they are successful, but cannot see what can go wrong. They do not think about the consequences’.

Bilal, whom I visited in prison where he was awaiting a decision on his case, was also seen as somebody who took things ‘too far’, in that he was so desperate to live the high life, that he took risks and these resulted in him being caught.

***Gangsters are rich and they spend their money:*** If being street-wise and making lots of money without falling into the traps of the middle class requirements is highly valued by the gangsta subculture, then showing it by living the ‘high-life’ was essential. Indeed, according to the gangsta boys success did not exist unless it could be displayed. This attitude was very much a reaction to their father’s way of living, in that they tried to save every penny they made either to invest in income properties or towards their retirement in Pakistan. The most important aspect of a successful gangster was his wealth. A gangster was not able to enjoy the status of a successful gangster, unless he had been able to sell large quantities of drugs and from these sales make a lot of money. Nadeem was regarded as a successful gangster. According to the youths he was making over £10,000 a week and that made him a successful gangster. Thus, for gangsta subculture, success was defined only in terms of

one's ability to consume conspicuously. During my regular conversations with gangsta boys, they all loved to discuss local gangsters and their lifestyles in detail. One of the main symbols of success, according to them, was driving very expensive sports cars. So the details of who drove which car and of what year and model was a story that they very much enjoyed re-telling. For example, all the gangsta boys remembered the story of the Nissan Eva, a very expensive and fast sports car owned by Channa. They even knew the history of that car, how it was first stolen in Japan and imported to England, where, after passing through one owner, Channa purchased it and drove it on the Lane. They were all very impressed by that car and the other similar cars the gangstas drove, and were not shy to admit it. For example, Kamran described their fascination as follows:

‘I was very young, and at that time we were fascinated by the lifestyles of these men, Ihtesham, Nadeem and my uncle. It was the cars. They all drove around in flashy cars and those cars impressed us. . . . Hubaib and I knew we wanted to follow in their footsteps: I wanted to be gangstas like them’.

In addition to owning expensive cars, the other way of showing off one's success was by living in a large house full of all sorts of amenities, and throwing conspicuous parties where drugs were in abundance, dressing up in expensive clothes, and having heavy gold accessories. In the stories that circulate among the boys, gangstas made millions and lived ‘like kings’. For example, according to these stories, in his day Nadeem used to make over

£1,000 a day, and lived *the* high life. All the boys admired him for that. For example, Imran voiced his feelings by saying:

‘I would love to live it up like them. The big house, the Jacuzzi and plasma TV. Throwing parties for friends with plenty of drugs to go around. And not having to work for it’.

In fact throwing conspicuous parties was so important that some of these parties became mythologized amongst the boys. For example, one night, when Mehmood, Hubaib, Husnain, and Kamran were visiting me, they spent a good part of the three hours talking about famous gangstas in and around the Bolchester and Birmingham areas. One of the topics of interest was the way in which these gangstas spent their money on parties. For example, they talked about the ‘Alam Rock Boys’, a crew of Asian men in Birmingham. This group, according to them, was very successful. They made and spent a lot of money. When they went to raves, they had a small tent of their own with crates of drinks, roll-up joints, and an assortment of pills which they would dish out generously.

In the absence of a concrete middle class identity project, the gangsta boys had come to believe that the primary source of respect in mainstream society was money and that the expensive goods that money can buy were universally accepted symbols of success. They therefore thought that by making and showing money they could claim a place in mainstream society which only respects the rich and successful. This desire to attain power and

respect resonated with the defining values of the gangsta culture, and became a very attractive subculture for these youths.

The gangsta boys choose to pursue the gangsta subculture among various other Asian subcultures (for instance the popular boy subculture), because the above described characteristics of the gangsta identity deeply resonated with these youths. The gangsta identity was a critical resource for these youths in resolving the two tensions that they faced: emasculation that they experienced due to the lifestyle that their fathers lived; and the inability of their parents, unlike the parents of popular boys, to provide them with a concrete identity project to pursue.

First of all, the gangsta identity promised an alternative masculinity for these young men. Via the gangsta subculture, these youths could reclaim the power and respect that their fathers had displayed in the house, but lacked outside. The gangsta boys did not like with the emasculated life style of their fathers. Even though they were very respectful to their fathers at home, they did not respect their lifestyle. At home they followed the rules laid down by their father and complied with their wishes. For instance, they did not listen to music in the house, they did not bring their friends home, they never went home drunk, and they never took their girlfriends home. These were all acts interpreted by gangsta boy parents as signs of disrespect to the leader of the family. Rahman and Waqar explained that at home they were very '*seedhay*' (docile). In other words, they would mind their own business and avoid attracting their father's attention, as he would reprimand them on any pretext in

order to assert his authority. Thus, although they respected their fathers at a symbolic level, none of them respected the life their father actually lived. According to the gangsta boys, their fathers were too concerned about making money and sending it back home, rather than spending money on the family in England and providing them with a more 'comfortable' lifestyle. Furthermore, the gangsta boys also felt that, although their fathers had worked hard, they had failed to become really rich. This was because their fathers never thought 'outside the box'; and they were too scared of the law and always tried to follow the law, and therefore did not have a lot to show for their hard work. None of the youths intended to follow in their parents' footsteps. For these young men, the gangsta identity presented an alternative to their fathers' masculinity: you could make your own rules to beat the system and make money; you could spend the money; and demand respect by fighting back against those who were not willing to respect you. Gangstas were tough and feared by people. They made a lot of money by 'outsmarting' persons in mainstream society, and they then spent their money on expensive sports cars and gold chains, and on partying hard at raves. Their toughness, connections, and money earned them power and respect. These qualities were attributes aspiring gangsta boys desired to emulate, because they enabled them to define their masculinity in a way which was more masculine than that of their fathers. In other words, for them, the gangsta identity was their preferred role model, not that of their fathers.

The other reason why the gangsta identity so deeply resonated with these youths was that, it promised an 'ideal', in other words a direction for the future, a blueprint of how to live their lives in Britain. Because the gangsta boys' parents never envisaged a life in Britain, they did not provide their sons with a vision of how to live a life in Britain in the future. The parents did not support their sons financially so that they could gain a university degree; and nor did they care much about the whereabouts of their children. As a result, these youngsters felt lost in a society where there was no future for them. Rahman, confessed: 'I had no place to go and if I had not gotten to the Lane I would have been a loner and would have had no friends'. Others too spoke about how their fathers were still strongly connected to their villages and their extended families, and how they completely neglected their children. Many of them said that they hardly saw their fathers. In fact, their fathers would be at home when they were at school and, when they came home from school, they would be working on the taxi rank, or at the take-away, or at the Iron Square Factory. Indeed some of the boys' fathers were so 'hands-off', that, when their sons were compelled to share with their fathers their feelings of anomie (*i.e.* their feelings about the lack of norms and standards in society), their fathers would fail to show any interest in helping them to sort out their feelings and to give them a sense of direction for the future. For example, Kamran described his experience as follows:

'One day, when I was 20 years old, my English aunty convinced me to talk to my father. So I sat him down and told him that I had been smoking



marijuana for the last four years. And then I pointed to the Lane and said: ‘This placed f\*\*\*ed my life up. It is here that everything happens’. My father just smiled at me. And asked me are you going to sort your life out? I continued doing what I was doing.’”

Having been left with an emasculated masculinity and no clear future direction to pursue, the values that they had distilled from the lives of the older Asian gangstas seemed to be the best option for these youths. As Junaid said:

‘I wanted to be a gangsta. That is all I could see. I only cared about making money. It was a way of getting respect. I wanted to have power and respect and the only way I saw it was by gangstaism’.

Rahman echoed Junaid’s feelings when he gave his reasons for his decision to ‘hang out’ with the gangsta crew: ‘What else was there? What else could I do? For us the only thing to do was to try and be gangstas’. He explained that the earlier generation paved the way for these youth who wanted an authentic identity of their own. Likewise, when I brought the topic up with Waqar, he claimed that he had nowhere to go, and that he just tagged along with the others. These young lads in their early teens were looking for an identity project that would provide them with a meaningful identity to look up to and emulate. With no father figure whom they felt they could meaningfully identify with, it was this ‘gangsta subculture’ which gave them the identity project they felt they needed.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the ‘real’ gangstas of the older Asians and the younger generation Asians whom I have called gangsta boys. Thus, although they talked incessantly about real life gangstas like Nadeem, they were not willing to take the risks that a real gangsta had to take to support the lifestyle he lived. The gangsta boys I studied were not involved in the drug-selling business in a big way, although some were engaged in it in a small way when they needed to make some ‘quick’ money to finance their leisure activities. They believed that the situation in Bolchester had changed completely, in that the police had become better at catching drug dealers, and so the chances of getting caught had increased tremendously. When I spoke to Kamran, Rahman and Waqar about the situation they agreed that none of the youths in their group had the courage to do what Nadeem had done. Imran made a similar point:

‘I can talk about him all day long but I cannot do what he did. I do not have the balls. I would never risk it unless there was a million pounds in it. Then I would take the risk of getting caught’.

Thus, for these young men, the gangsta subculture was an identity project, a cultural space, not a means of making a living, where they could resolve the two tensions identified above, namely the lack of a satisfactory father figure and a sense of aimlessness about the future. And given that they were not really engaged in gangsta business, the only way for them to enact their gangstaism was by means of consumption practices and choices. This

made their consumption all the more critical for their acculturation projects. In the following section I discuss how they achieved this.

#### **4.3.2.2 Outfits**

The gangsta boys' choice of outfits was motivated by a desire to be seen as a successful gangster. Their style of clothing was therefore shaped by what they perceived to be the gangsta culture and by their desire to express the values of the gangsta culture. In order to achieve the 'right look' they relied on the lifestyles and clothes adopted by the 'real life' Asian gangsters and on the individuals they perceived to be 'gangstas', individuals who, like them, were striving to adopt and express a gangsta identity. They observed local and out-of-town drug dealers, especially those in Birmingham, and imitated the look of these individuals.

In the following section I describe what constituted the 'right look' for the gangsta youth, and then consider the sources they used to cultivate this look. I conclude by arguing that 'this look' was not a natural consequence of their status as working class youth, but instead a choice which allowed them to resolve the two contradictions discussed above, but without pursuing the risky gangster life.

##### **4.3.2.2.1 'The Look'**

Their wardrobe consisted primarily of Armani, Maharishi, Rockport Gstar, Prada, Versace, Dolce and Gabbana, Stone Island, Fly53, and Diesel

hoodies, jackets, jeans, and T-shirts. All these brands are expensive brands, and are normally associated with more wealthy persons who have sufficient disposable income to spend money on a £150 jacket. Typically, the style for winter consisted of blue jeans, jackets and hoodies; and in the summer T-shirts replaced the hoodies. The jeans were always dark shades of blue and the tops were dark shades too – black and blue were the favourite colours. They shied away from bright colours, although on rare occasions I saw some of them wearing brighter colours, but only when they had a matching shade in their trainers. When I went to dinner with Imran, Waqar and Hubaib they were dressed in the following way: Imran was wearing blue Diesel jeans, a black T-shirt with Diesel stencilled on the front, a black Rockport jacket, a Nike cap and his black bulky Nike trainers. Hubaib was wearing blue jeans, a plain black T-shirt, a black Maharishi jacket, with Maharishi stencilled all over it, and his bulky black Nike trainers. Waqar was wearing a black Nike tracksuit, and bulky black trainers. Their ‘look’ or ‘uniform’ was complemented by a set of accessories: caps, shades, gold teeth and gold accessories. Hubaib and Waqar both wore Armani, Gucci, or Dolce and Gabbana shades. Kamran always wore his Christian Audigier cap, and Imran was never seen without his Armani cap. Waqar, Samir, and Imran had gold teeth and also wore gold chains.

These brands were available in high-end high street shops in Bolchester, such as Block 98, Jingos and Urban Outfitters. As the range of clothing in these shops was very limited, the boys would often go to

Birmingham, a 40 minute drive from Bolchester, to buy their clothes. In Birmingham, specific retail outlets in the city centre specialized in these brands, and Selfridges a multi-storey retail outlet stocked a wide range of these brands. Bolchester is a small town and the shops did not stock a wide range of clothing; Birmingham on the other hand is one of the largest cities in England and the shops stocked a wide range of different brands and styles. These high end brands of jeans, hoodies and jackets were expensive items and cost from £60 to £200. T-shirts were cheaper, starting at about £20, but with some of the most expensive ones costing over £60.

Three things were common to all these brands: they were associated with the gangsta culture; they were expensive, and they all had very clear ‘identity markers’ either proclaiming a direct link to the gangsta culture or loudly displaying the brand name. For instance, Kamran wore a green T-shirt with a big picture of a white marijuana plant in the centre; and Waqar’s T-shirt had a picture of Bob Marley with a long joint in his hand on it. Some of the T-shirts had brand names on the front. For example: Hubaib’s black T-shirt had ‘Boy Better Know’ printed in the centre in white; Imran’s black T-shirt had ‘Rockport’ printed all over it in different sizes of white text; Waqar’s T-shirt had ‘G-Star’ printed in a circle in the middle’ and Kamran’s T-shirt had ‘Fly53’ printed on it in calligraphic script. Their hoodies and jackets similarly had brand names printed on them in prominent places.

#### **4.3.2.2.2 Cultural Sources that Define the Look**

The 'look' described above was learned from three main sources: Drum and Bass artists (the music gangsta boys preferred, see further below); Asian gangsters from the earlier and current generations; and individuals who liked them were striving to express a gangsta identity.

Grime and Drum and Bass MCs (the people who add lyrics to the music) often referred to expensive fashion brands in their tracks. This gave the brands legitimacy and these brands were then desired by the gangsta boys. For instance, Hubaib became fixated with Ed Hardy and Gucci and spent hours scouring websites looking for T-shirts with those names. This desire for Ed Hardy T-shirts was motivated by the music scene; and his favourite Grime artist, Skepta, mentioned the brand in a number of his songs. Before I had listened to these songs I did not understand Hubaib's desire to buy that brand, and I asked him why he liked Ed Hardy to which he replied: 'The design is very good. They do a lot of artistic and creative stuff with the designs and I am an artist'. As asked him whether the fact that Skepta was singing about Ed Hardy had anything to do with his choice of clothing and he said: 'Actually, to be honest, it is that. Ed Hardy is an exclusive and expensive brand and not many people wear it. And Skepta talks about it'. Skepta's latest album had a song entitled 'Ed Hardy Party', with innumerable references to various items of Ed Hardy clothing, and thus the brand had become desirable. Ed Hardy clothes are based on designs by a famous tattoo artist, Don Ed Hardy, and are manufactured by Christian Audigier. The designs have huge skulls and hearts on them with intricate beadwork. From among the gangsta boys, Hubaib

became a fan of Ed Hardy clothes before the others did because of his interest in Grime. He was introduced to this style of music by Maxwell, an Afro-American gangster boy from East London. The other boys, on the other hand, were 'lukewarm' about Grime and their loyalty still lay with Drum and Bass. Waqar, Mehmood, Imran, and Samir all claimed that they started wearing specific brands because of the MCs mentioning them in their songs, although they could not furnish me with specific examples.

While for Hubaib and Kamran, Ed Hardy had been introduced through the music scene, with the other boys the introduction of the brand followed a different route. Waqar told Hubaib and Kamran about his introduction to the brand: 'I thought Ed Hardy was a white peoples' brand, but then I saw 'a big fish' wear it'. Later I asked Waqar what he meant by 'a big fish' but, without giving a name or too many details he said that 'a big fish' in their terminology was a successful and big drug dealer who had made a lot of money from such a practice. Some of the gangsta boys were reluctant to give me names, though. On another occasion, Imran mentioned a gang of Asian 'real life' gangsters in Birmingham, and, as he liked wearing Armani, he said: 'The Alam Rock boys wear Armani'. The influence of real life gangsters was strongly reflected in the reasons the gangsta boys gave for wearing gold accessories. Waqar, Samir, Babur and Imran all had a gold tooth. According to Mehmood, 'It all started from Birmingham, where Tyson, a big drug dealer my uncle knows, has all but one tooth gold, the other 31 or whatever is gold. It is the drug dealer thing'. Waqar gave the same reasons for having a gold tooth: 'It is the gangster thing.

I know somebody in Birmingham, a big drug dealer; all his teeth are gold, except for one'. Waqar had two adjacent gold teeth on the side of his top row of teeth, and on his next trip to Pakistan he was planning to get two adjacent gold teeth on the right side, so that the gold teeth were in a symmetrical position. When I asked Imran about the gold teeth, he told me: 'Bro you have to go to a rave with me, and then you will see why I have it. You have to meet one of my mates, Tyson'. When I asked him whether he was a 'big timer' he said: 'Yes. He runs the show in Birmingham. I just have to make two phone calls in Birmingham and the whole of Birmingham will come behind me (referring to Tyson's connections in Birmingham)'. Similarly, they claimed they wore gold chains because real life gangstas did, like Nadeem who according to them used to wear 15 thick gold chains.

The third source they borrowed from with regard to their choice of fashion was what other individuals who belonged to the gangsta culture wore but who were not gangsters in real life. When I spotted Kamran wearing FLY53 T-shirts regularly, I asked him why he liked that T-shirt. He said it was because it was 'a gangster brand'. When I asked him how he knew that he said: 'Other people wear it. People who are in the scene'. Of the gangsta boys, Kamran was the least knowledgeable, and he was aware of that. Thus, when the boys talked about cars, music, and brands, Kamran generally remained quiet, contributing only with 'one-liners' when was able to contribute. Once, when the boys were talking about cars, I asked him whether he knew much about cars. He replied by saying: 'Not really. But I like pretending that I do. I



just pick up things from Hubaib and repeat them. . . . I have to say something'. However, he compensated for his lack of knowledge by exuberantly participating in activities where a specific knowledge was not a prerequisite. For instance he consumed the largest amount of drugs when they went raving. He was more of a follower and that is how he responded to my questions about Fly53 and the gangsta scene; to him it was what Hubaib, Imran, Mehmood, Waqar and Samir were into. Many of the gangsta boys traced the history of the style back to their trips to Alam Rock in Birmingham when they were young. The gangsta boys claimed that this area in Birmingham was the hub of the drug-dealing trade in the region. All the big drug dealers operated from this area. According to the gangsta boys, they were enamoured by the lifestyle of the gangster through people like Nadeem, but Nadeem got caught when they were still in their early teens, and, in Nadeem's absence, these youths started travelling to Alam Rock, which they were convinced was where they could see drug dealers up close, and observe their lifestyles in order to copy them. Imran said:

'I started taking the train to Alam Rock where I would just hang out. The '*apnay*' (Pakistani) in Birmingham all copy the '*sheedas*' (Afro-Americans) there. I used to go from Bolchester to Birmingham and I saw all these '*sheedas*' and '*apna*'y dressed like gangsters and that is what I wanted to dress like'.

When I took a trip to Alam Rock in Birmingham I was surprised to see the similarity between the way the gangsta boys dressed and the young Black and Asian youth in Birmingham. An image that particularly struck me was that of an Afro-American youth who was wearing: a white Adidas hoodie with blue stripes on the arms; underneath the hoodie a blue shirt that matched the stripes on the hoodie; dark blue jeans; and black Nike trainers. Hubaib, Imran and Kamran all owned the same hoodie: Hubaib a black one with red stripes; Imran a white one with red stripes; and Kamran a grey one with green stripes. Often they matched the colour of their T-shirts with the stripes on these hoodies.

Thus, the gangsta boys' favourite music and 'real life' and aspiring gangstas had a strong influence on their choice of clothing and accessories. They chose to wear the gangsta 'uniform' which even involved going as far as Birmingham to see what gangstas were wearing. Their clothing and accessories had to be kept 'up to date'; they had to keep up with changing gangsta fashion. Thus, the youths constantly updated their styles and brands by closely following the latest trends in the music scene and by observing what other gangsta youth they rubbed shoulders with on the street and at raves were wearing.

#### **4.3.2.2.3 Resolving Contradictions**

The youths I spent time with all had working class jobs, except for Junaid who was unemployed. Imran, Mehmood, Rahman and Samir were taxi drivers. Kamran and Hubaib worked in restaurants. Waqar was a delivery

driver for a local Indian take-away. Like them their white friends had working class jobs. Ben was a carpenter. Mathew was a hairdresser. Parker worked at a call centre and Tom was a seasonal building worker. The gangsta boys' education and job situation put them squarely in working class white society, but their lifestyles were very different from those of the white working class that surrounded them. This was also true of their choice of fashion items, in other words clothing and accessories. Thus, whereas the gangsta boys wore expensive brands and cultivated a specific style, their working class white friends were neither obsessed with buying expensive brands and nor do they show a desire to adopt a specific style of dressing. When I discussed his outfits with Ben, he explained to me that he did not really care about wearing specific brands like his Asian friends did. When they went out raving his Asian friends were dressed 'up to the gills' in branded items, but he would go in whatever he had been wearing during the day. Similarly, Parker claimed that he had gone to raves wearing tracksuit bottoms; and both Parker and Ben agreed that, because they did not go to raves to pull girls, they did not feel under pressure to dress up. Also, with the 'open door' policy of raves, they could wear casual outfits and still get in. Tom, unlike Ben and Parker, was known on the Drum and Bass music scene because of his brother, a DJ, wore jeans and short-sleeved collared shirts to raves. All their white friends wore shirts and, in some cases, cardigans, clothing items the gangsta boys avoided completely. This contrasting orientation of the gangsta boys and their working class white friends towards outfits suggests that the styles of the gangsta boys did not

originate from the working class culture but were adopted because they wished to follow the gangsta subculture as it solved their identity problems, as was discussed above.

Earlier I argued that the gangsta identity appealed to these Asian youth because it addressed two specific contradictions they faced: the emasculation that resulted from the contrast between their fathers' authoritarian masculinity inside the home and their docile one outside; and the alienation they suffered as a result of the lack of guidance by their parents with regard to the future direction of their lives. I then argued that, although the gangsta boys were enamoured of the lifestyle of the real life gangsters, they avoided the risks involved and invested in their consumer identities instead. In the following section I show how the values of the gangsta culture were expressed by consumption choices. The gangsta narrative enabled the young men to resolve the tensions and difficulties they experienced by providing them with a masculine identity and lifestyle that removed the feeling of alienation by situating it in the Asian community and allowing them to claim respect from mainstream society. The gangsta boys felt that mainstream society respected gangstas because they were tough and wealthy; and convinced of this, they cultivated a style of dressing that emphasized these aspects of the gangsta identity and which enabled them to resolve the contradictions through a consumer identity and not a 'lived' gangster identity.

#### **4.3.2.2.3.1 Asserting a Tough Masculinity:**

As discussed earlier, the gangsta boys wanted to portray the tough masculine gangsta masculinity, and by looking like tough manly men they believed they would earn the respect of mainstream society. Their tough masculinity was in opposition to what they saw as the effeminate mainstream masculinity. According to the gangsta boys, mainstream white youth cultivated a 'pretty boy' look, which was interpreted by them as a symbol of an effeminate masculinity whereby young men dressed up all clean and pretty to impress 'posh' white girls. Their tough masculinity was adopted in opposition to this effeminate form of masculinity and they strove hard to steer clear of outfits that were associated with the popular boy masculinity, and to stay close to styles they considered to be associated with the gangsters.

Their clothing style, which they called 'gangsta' was very important for the gangsta boys, and they spent considerable effort in getting the style right. They often drove to Birmingham and spent about £200 on clothes. They liked to take other boys with them who understood the 'look' so that they could seek their advice. I went on shopping trips with Hubaib and spoke to others about their shopping experiences. A description of one such trip should suffice as an example of the effort that went into a single purchase for the gangsta boys. When Hubaib wanted to buy a jacket for the summer; Parker and I accompanied him on his shopping trip, which started in Bolchester and ended in Birmingham, a 40 minute drive from Bolchester. He first went to JD Sports in Bolchester, a small shop that specialized in sportswear and which primarily stocked Nike and Reebok clothes. Not satisfied with the range of jackets in

these shops, we drove to Birmingham Bull Ring, a large shopping centre in Birmingham city centre with a number of big sports shops, where the range of brands and styles was wider. Hubaib visited JD Sports first, his favourite shop when he wanted to buy trainers or summer jackets. He spent almost an hour agonizing over jackets; he wanted to buy a light jacket for the summer. He tried on at least five or six jackets, and discussed each jacket with his friend Parker – the style, the colour and the material. He was after a jacket that fitted well, ‘not too tight’, and with a simple style, nothing too colourful. He rejected jackets as either being too mainstream (‘Every one wears similar jackets’, he commented on one) or for being too ‘white boy’, implying that it was a style pretty boys wore. He eventually opted for a black and white Nike jacket, because, he said, of its simple colours and style,. The jacket was made of very light water resistant material, with the bottom half being black and the top white. It had a hood which, for Hubaib, proved to be decisive. When he pulled down the hood in front of the mirror, and brought his Gucci shades into position –slipping it down from the centre of his bald head to rest on his nose – he really liked ‘the look’ and elicited a nod of approval from Parker.

The gangsta boys categorized styles of clothing into ‘pretty boy’ and ‘gangsta’. The ‘pretty boy’ category referred to what they considered to be the mainstream type of masculinity of boys who dressed up to impress girls and to fit in with mainstream sensibilities. The ‘gangsta’ category referred to clothing items associated with the styles of the real life gangstas; clothing that exuded toughness and power. For instance, when I went to shop for clothes with

Imran, he categorized every item of clothing into one of the two categories, openly expressing disdain for one style and an appreciation of the other. We met in a newly opened store in Bolchester, TK Maxx that specialized in expensive brands at discounted rates. Imran was accompanied by Fareed, another Asian youth, who was serving a two-year sentence in a correctional facility on charges of kidnap, and was let out for one Sunday a month. The average cost of an item of clothing in TK Maxx was almost 50% less than a similar item of the same brand from shops such as Roscoe and Crombie. Browsing through the racks of clothes, Imran gave a commentary on almost every clothing item he came across. In the aisle that stocked men's jumpers, he found a cardigan with pink and grey lines, and commented: 'Are we in the women's section? These are like women's clothes'. When I asked him what kind of boys wore these clothes, he said pretty boys, those who are like 'zananees' (women). According to the gangsta boys, cardigans were a sure sign of popular boy masculinity, and none of them ever wore cardigans.

Similarly, the jeans the gangsta boys wore were neither the baggy jeans made popular by the American rap stars, nor were they too tight, like the drainpipe jeans many white youth wore in Bolchester. The T-shirts too were neither too tight, nor too loose; they were never tucked into the jeans but hung loosely over the jeans. Their interpretation of the gangsta look consisted of, from the top: very short-cropped hair, adorned by a cap or an expensive pair sunglasses; a dark coloured (black, blue or grey) loose T-shirt with a prominent brand name (*e.g.* G-star, Rockport, Boy Better Know, Fly53); a hoodie with a

zipper, again dark coloured; and a dark blue pair of jeans tucked over bulky Nike trainers. This, according to them constituted, the look of the gangsta. The gangsta boys did not wish to adopt the ‘look’ of the current generation of American rap stars. As discussed in the section on popular boys, American rap music has shifted into the mainstream, and the gangsta boys despised being part of anything mainstream. When the current generation of American rap stars were brought up in our conversations, the gangsta boys were quick to claim that the current generation had shifted away from the roots of gangsta rap. Rap artists like 2Pac – who was still popular amongst the gangsta boys – spoke about life on the street and the challenges of that life, whereas the current generation of rap artists targeted the mainstream audience, and ‘everyone’ was listening to them. Their look too has been adopted by mainstream society and therefore these gangsta boys did not want to be associated with this look and the gangsta boys now categorized that style as the ‘pretty boy’ style.

Shirts, trousers, and cardigans were not part of their wardrobe. In the eight months I spent with these young men, none of them wore trousers or shirts. In fact on a number of occasions they chose not to adopt this ‘style’ of clothing even when wearing such clothes would have been an advantage, for instance, where wearing a collared shirt would have gained them access to a club which was denied because of their hoodies. Clothes such as trousers and cardigans were, in their mind, associated with mainstream society, especially the Asian popular boys who were, according to them, essentially ‘lover boys’



who dressed up ‘to pull’ white girls. For the gangsta boys the Asian popular boys represented an Asian identity which was not authentic (see further below at section 4.3).

The outfits of the gangsta boys were complemented by a set of accessories which were also used to assert a non-mainstream identity: caps, shades, trainers, and gold chains. These were considered to be necessary accessories, and every gangsta boy I spent time with recognized the importance of these in the overall look he was trying to achieve. Among these the most important were trainers. The gangsta boys wore Nike, Reebok or Adidas trainers; they refused to wear any other kind of shoe. Hubaib, however, bought a pair of Airmax 95 Nike trainers in black. As he was already wearing a pair like that, I asked him why he was buying another to which he replied: ‘This is the classic model’. He further explained to me that this was the model that became popular when he was in his teens. It was the pair that rap stars put on display first in their music videos and they featured in movies about gangsters. As discussed above, the first generation of American gangsta rap stars – such as 2Pac, Notorious BIG, and Ice Cube – were considered legitimate by the gangsta boys and so they did not shy away from their style. It was the current generation of rap stars who had become very ‘mainstream’, and whom the gangsta boys despised. When I asked him for specific examples, he was unable to provide any, but maintained that it (Airmax 95 shoes) was popular among the rap stars. The Asian gangsta boys, Imran, Waqar, Kamran, Samir, Sheddy, Ihtesham and Majid, as well as their white friends Tom,

Bennet, and Parker, all wore trainers that were stylistically similar to the AirMax 95s. The AirMax95 had an approximate two-inch sole; the upper body of the shoe was round and full and went up to the ankle. Their bulky shape made them prominent, whereas some of the sleeker models got hidden away under the jeans. The other trainers the gangsta boys wore shared this bulkiness with the AirMax95s. The trainer was a very prominent symbol of the gangsta identity. The gangsta boys would label an individual as a 'non-gangsta' if he was wearing another style of trainer. When Imran bumped into an acquaintance on the taxi rank, the first thing he noticed was the canvas shoes his friend was wearing – the shoe was blue and white, sleek, and flat – 'Bro you can't get off the airport in London wearing these. What the f\*\*\* are you wearing? Look at these (pointing to his blue Nike trainers), this is the real shit, the gangster shit'. I later spoke to Imran about canvas shoes and he said: 'I don't wear that shit!' I asked him what he thought of boys who wore such shoes, and he said: 'They are not gangstas are they? They are lover boys'. Pretty boys, according to the gangsta boys, were the mainstream white kids, who went to university, and who dressed up and went clubbing to pull 'posh' white girls. Waqar and Kamran also make fun of canvas shoes and laughed at Husnain whenever he met with them wearing his black canvas shoes. Kamran likes telling me about Tariq, a local Asian boy who started wearing crocodile skin, moccasins. Kamran said: 'He is a pretty boy. I remember whenever he used to walk by us in those shoes I would take the piss out of them'.

For the gangsta boys the trainers had acquired a legitimate place in the overall look they were trying to evoke, and the canvas shoe symbolized the type of masculinity they had attempted to distance themselves from. This negative masculinity was ascribed a number of attributes, the ones most mentioned being: 'lover boy', 'into Bollywood', and 'into the white flex' (meaning they wanted to be like the middle class white youths). Imran described this 'other group' to me:

'There are two kinds of Pakis in Bolchester, those who are into the '*sheeda*' flex (African-Americans) and those into the '*gora*' flex (scene) (white people). The others are lover boy types who watch Bollywood movies and fall in love; they are into the clubbing scene and dress up like white people'.

When I asked how this other group dressed, he said: 'They wear cardigans, pink sweaters and have mullets (a particular type of hairstyle)'. These young men were ascribed an effeminate masculinity, as: 'They cannot stand up for themselves and do not know how to get respect'; 'They are pussies!'; 'They dress up like gay people'. The gangsta boys religiously avoided brands that were strongly associated with these men, namely Gap, Top Man, and River Island. In Mehmood's Facebook he had criticised boys who wore GAP clothes as Gay and Proud (using the letters in the word GAP).

The boys were totally committed to their chosen 'look' and did not compromise it, even when the situation demanded a change of style. Hubaib, Waqar, and Imran all told me stories of how they were refused entry into clubs

because of the way they were dressed, and yet they refused to change their style. Hubaib told me:

‘I was in Tramps, dancing away; they let me in because of my uncle’s connections with the local club owners. I was wearing a hoodie and a jacket on top and I had my hood over my head. The bouncer walks up to me, that prick, and he asked me to take one of the tops off. He was apologetic but he wanted me to either take the hoodie or the jacket off. I would not do that for those pricks. So I told them to get lost and just left’.

Hubaib had therefore refused to change his tough gangsta look, which was important to him because it was his claim to power and respect. Imran, too, was refused entry a number of times: ‘I have been refused entry so many times. I have tried everything. And I know I get refused because I dress too much like a gangster’. When I asked him why the club refused him entry, he said:

‘It is not their image. They have a different flex. I even tried dressing up once, because I was even refused with my white girlfriend, and it was embarrassing. So I dressed up for the bastards, wore a collared shirt for them bastards’.

When I asked him what it was not the club’s image, he said: ‘I think it was because of the gold tooth. I look too much of a gangsta’. Imran was vexed when he was denied entry into Bushwackers again. This time he said that he was with a white friend, but even then he was not allowed in. Similarly, Waqar

had been refused entry to the local clubs because of his 'look'. He told me how he once dressed up in smart trousers, a collared shirt, and 'shit flicker' shoes (dressy shoes that narrow to a small squarish tip, which is curved upwards) and even then he was refused entry. 'I am never going to try to get into a club in Bolchester again. They are racist', he announced after completing his story. I argued the point with him, telling him about all the popular boys that got in on a regular basis, but he retorted: 'You want me to dress like gay people? Cardigans and those plimsole shoes (referring to the flat canvas shoes the popular boys wore)'. Rahman was with us and he enjoyed this comment immensely, and they both laughed heartily at this criticism of popular boy masculinity.

In the examples above the cost of not altering their style was merely refusal into a club, but, even when the cost was substantially higher they resisted changing their style. For instance, when Hubaib's mother got him a job in Bolchester at the Jaeger counter in House of Fraser (a high end retail store with branches on high streets across England), he declined the job only because he did not want to change his style of clothing. He would have worked for 20 hours per week at £6, and the job was not demanding. As the section stocked expensive Jaeger suits, Hubaib was required to wear a suit to work and to attend to customers (mainly middle-aged white middle class men). Most of the employees at House of Fraser were white, and all employees dressed formally, were clean shaven had meticulously styled hair. As Hubaib was short of money and was desperately looking for a job, he mulled over the decision

for days. He told me that the Jaeger job was very easy and was well paid and he was tempted to take the job, but eventually he decided not to take it because he said: 'I don't want to be wearing a suit all day'. He preferred working at his uncle's restaurant where he could go dressed in his everyday clothes. Similarly, he expressly told his brother not to put his pictures in his suit at his cousin's wedding on Facebook. When Kamran had to make an appearance in court owing to a lawsuit he had filed against his brother, he wore his most expensive jeans, a shirt and a jumper on top. 'I wanted to make a good impression', he said, 'So I wore my Versace jeans, a shirt and a tie, and over it I wore a smart jumper'. When I asked what his brother was wearing, he said: 'He was wearing trousers, a shirt and a tie'. I asked Kamran why he wore jeans, not trousers, and he said: 'I do not even own a pair of trousers. And I did not want to overdo it'.

These incidents showed that the gangsta boys were unwilling to change their tough masculinity look even when the advantages that they might accrue were substantial. The tough 'gangsta look' allowed them to negotiate an identity that ameliorated the emasculation they would otherwise feel if they followed in the footsteps of their fathers by investing in a docile identity outside the confines of their home.

#### **4.3.2.2.3.2 Expressing Wealth**

In the discussion on the attributes of the gangster identity, I argued that expressing wealth was an important aspect of the gangster identity. Through

conspicuous consumption of symbols of wealth, such as expensive fast sports cars, gold accessories and expensive branded clothes, they attempted to communicate success to mainstream society. The gangsta boys, who had not made the kind of money the real life gangsters did by dealing in drugs, acted out the gangsta identity by cultivating a consumer identity that projected an image of wealth. In this section I show how they invest in their outfits to achieve this.

For the gangsta boys, the style of clothes and the brand or make of clothes were important. They claimed that the brands they bought were expensive and that not everyone could afford to wear these brands; the average retail price of a T-shirt was £40; a pair of jeans more than a £100; and a top between £150 and £200. They chose these clothes as they were exclusive and expensive and only affordable by wealthy persons. This was the reason why they chose certain brands. When I asked Mehmood to explain the popularity of Armani amongst the gangsta boys, he said: 'What it is, it has to be expensive. If it is expensive it is limited. There are other expensive brands as well. They just have to be expensive, and for us it was Armani'. Here he explained his choice in terms of the price tag of the clothes. Similarly, when I asked Imran to explain his reasons for buying a black and grey camouflage FLY53 jacket, he said, 'It is expensive'. When I said that was a sufficient reason, he said: 'Nah. It has to look gangsta as well. With big logos'. I asked Imran on another occasion why he liked Armani so much. He said: 'I have no answer for you. I don't know why I started wearing it. It just looks sick and it is *expensive*. Girls

like it when you wear Armani'. When I asked him why it had to be expensive, he said: 'It just shows you have money. You can impress people. They know you are successful'. Whereas Imran preferred Armani and called himself 'an Armani man', Waqar wore Stone Island and Samir wore Prada. These were all expensive brands, and the gangsta boys did not wear just one item of clothing of a particular brand, but they dressed from head to foot in a specific expensive brand. This, according to them, was the most effective way of showing they had money. By using these expensive brands the gangsta boys exhibited the hedonistic values of the gangsta culture.

Although the gangsta boys all aspired to wearing expensive exclusive brands, and quite often did so, because of their limited economic means they had to deploy sophisticated strategies to maintain an 'image' of wealth. The first element of this strategy was wearing clothes with prominent logos. The visibility of the brand logo was important because the gangsta boys dressed to impress. An expensive purchase that was understated was not worth the money. Therefore all the brands they favoured had very prominent logos: Ed Hardy clothes were recognized by the huge tiger plastered across them or the words 'Ed Hardy' printed on the front of the hoodies and T-shirts. Maharishi hoodies had a huge wild cat on the front, and Gucci had tri-coloured stripes. With brands that did not have distinct logos, the boys preferred styles that emphasized the brand name. All the gangsta boys wore clothes where the first thing that registered with the onlooker, they hoped, was the brand name. For instance, when I met Imran at the taxi rank, the following brand names



registered immediately: on his black P-cap 'Armani' was embroidered in bold blue capital letters; on his grey T-shirt 'Diesel' was printed repeatedly, forming a concentric circle in white beginning from the centre of the T-shirt and spreading outwards; and his black jacket had 'Armani' printed in white on the collar and on the front just below his left shoulder. When Hubaib and Waqar took me out to dinner at a local take away, Hubaib was wearing Diesel jeans, a black T-shirt with 'Boy Better Know' printed in white on the front, and a black Adidas jacket with white stripes (the signature design of Adidas) and Adidas stencilled in white on the front. Waqar was wearing: a black Armani cap, a yellow Ed Hardy T-shirt with the bead work and bright red heart on the front; a black Gstar jacket with Gstar stencilled all over it; and loud black bulky Nike trainers with a multi-coloured sole. When the gangsta boys went shopping they paid particular attention to the size and prominence of the logo. When I went clothes shopping with Imran and Fareed, their discussion over the purchase highlighted this concern. Fareed picked up a plain blue T-shirt by Calvin Klein, and expressed a desire to buy it. Imran picked up another blue T-shirt, also by Calvin Klein, but with the logo in a large white font on the front. Imran persuaded Fareed to purchase the second one on the basis that, although they were the same price, one had the brand name printed more prominently and was therefore, in his view, a better buy. Imran said: 'There is no point in spending money on a brand without other people knowing what brand it is.'

In addition to purchasing outfits with prominent logos the gangsta boys deployed strategies to put together effective ensembles by spending the least

amount of money. Mehmood explained to me how the ‘right look’ could be achieved without spending a lot of money if one shopped around carefully. He said:

‘I was very clever about getting the look right. Other guys would spend around £400, whereas I would get it right by spending just £200. I got into the look before these guys. The jeans do not matter; you can wear any decent pair of jeans, it does not have to be expensive, what really mattered was what you wore on top. No one looks at your jeans in a rave. You did not have to buy the most expensive Armani product; I would go and look for a hoodie or jacket that had the biggest Armani written on it. This way you save money, but also show others what brand you are wearing.’ To achieve the look with the least expense the gangsta boys preferred buying clothes at discounts, or sometimes they bought fake branded clothes from specific clothes markets in Birmingham and Bolchester. By deploying these strategies they believed they were able to express an image of wealth which was beyond their economic status, and by doing so they felt they were seen as gangstas.

The gangsta boys regarded expensive clothes as a means of expressing wealth, and therefore buying an expensive brand was important for them. As far as they were concerned, any brand that was expensive was potentially a gangsta brand, as long as it was not too strongly associated with mainstream white youth. For instance, when I asked Kamran why he wore FLY53, he was unable to provide details of the gangsta style, other than the visibility of the logo. Similarly, Imran, thought it was a desirable brand because it was

expensive and it had big logos. The official brand positioning was completely lost to the gangsta boys. FLY53 is a local brand manufactured in Bolchester, which dubbed itself as the 'outfitters for the resistance'. According to the official story, Captain Lenny 'Wolfman' Grubbs retired from his rock and roll life performing for popular rock bands to live in the Midlands. Around him a small clique of artists gathered. Their collective output ranged from music to graphic design in the form of T-shirts. The T-shirts over time became popular and expanded into a complete clothing range. According to their website, 'the brand continues to collaborate with musicians and artists, injecting integrity, creativity and quality into an increasingly bland corporate market'. This positioning was completely lost on the gangsta boys, who had either opted for the brand because it was expensive or because it displayed its logo prominently.

The gangsta boys, by buying loud and expensive clothes, were able to emphasize the hedonism which was a defining value of the gangsta culture. They felt that this attribute, like that of the tough masculinity, enabled them to secure the respect of mainstream society, like 'real life' gangsters.

#### **4.3.2.3 Leisure**

I argued above that the primary motivation behind developing the tough masculine successful gangsta look was to communicate an image of being a 'successful gangster'. In this section I argue that the motivation behind their choice of leisure activities, like their choice of clothing, is driven by the

intention to live according to the values of the gangsta culture. First, I describe how the gangsta boys listened to and related to Drum and Bass music and went to raves in order to emphasize the values that defined the gangsta culture. I then show how their drug usage and drug-selling were used to bolster their affiliation with the values of the gangsta culture.

#### **4.3.2.3.1 Music and Raves**

In this section I show how through their consumption of ‘Drum and Bass’ music and raves the gangsta boys celebrated the values of macho masculinity, street smartness, and hedonism. Drum and Bass Music is a form of music that originated from London where it was popular among marginalized African-American youth. It offered an alternative to the American gangsta rap that initially resonated with these youths, but, as it became popular among mainstream youth, it lost its following amongst the marginalized African American youth. The origin of raves dates back to the early 1950s in London where the term was first used to describe the parties of the Soho beatnik underground. Today, a rave is an event held at a large arena which could be a club, a sports arena, or an empty warehouse, and where people congregate to dance to electronically engineered music. A Drum and Bass rave is an event where people gather in large numbers to dance to Drum and Bass music.

All the gangsta boys claimed that Drum and Bass music was the only genre of music they listen to. Samir, Waqar and Hubaib had all installed

powerful speakers in their cars and they drove around with Drum and Bass music playing in their cars. Both Imran and Mehmood had a collection of Drum and Bass CDs in their cars, which they claimed was the only music they listened to while driving around. According to the gangsta boys, this genre of music was not for the mainstream effeminate youth. As Waqar once claimed, 'It is too aggressive for them'. When I asked what he meant by the statement, he explained that this fast-paced, bass-oriented music was aggressive, something only youth like him could listen to. Imran made a similar argument, but added that the tune and the lyrics both combined to make this music inaccessible to mainstream white youth. When I asked Hubaib to explain the popularity of the genre among his peers, he explained that the music spoke about the tough life of the street where every individual had to stand up for himself. This, according to him was the life of these MCs. Hubaib gave me the example of MC Wiley, a famous Drum and Bass MC, who often wrote songs in response to comments made by others about him. Hubaib claimed that their life was like these MCs, in the sense that they had to stand up for themselves to be respected; they had to be tough and had to put people in their place. This understanding was echoed by other gangsta boys, who perceived their life as a constant struggle to earn respect by being macho men who were not scared of fighting for their respect. The Drum and Bass music and its association with tough masculinity made it a very important leisure activity for the gangsta boys, because, through their association with this music, they could live up to

the macho values of the gangsta culture. In a similar vein, Majid explained to me how he got into the Drum and Bass music:

‘After dropping out of the school I started spending more time on the Lane. It was there I first heard this music. Nadeem, Ihtesham and some other older men used to listen to it. I got into the music very slowly. Initially, I did not like it, but once I started picking up the lyrics I really got into it’.

When I asked Majid what he liked about the lyrics, he said:

‘It talked about life on the street. . . . Life on the street is tough. You are on your own, every individual for himself. You had to stand up for yourself. . . . The music talked about the life of the individual on the street. The tough life of making money, getting respect.’

Mehmood, Hubaib, Imran and Waqar all confirmed this perception of the music. They all emphasized the ability of the music to talk to them in a direct personal way; the music talked about how on the street you have to earn respect by being tough and putting people in their place. The gangsta boys interpreted their life in terms of issues of making a living and earning respect on the street – in the eyes of both Asian and White people who were situated in their social milieu. When Mehmood beat up a close friend who had cheated him on a business venture, he explained his action in these terms:

‘I had to beat him up. Word would get around that he had cheated me and, if I stood by, I would lose respect. People would think I could not take

care of my problems, could not stand up for myself. So I called him up, and when he came I went bang. One punch in the face and he was down. Then I told him, 'Never fuck about with me'.

Similarly, when Imran beat up a Pakistani youth who had threatened his street reputation by trying 'to pull' Imran's ex-girlfriend, he explained: 'I had to do it bro. You cannot let somebody do that to you because then you lose all respect. You have to be able to defend your respect' Hubaib, too, emphasized the resonance of the lyrics with the life he thought he lived: 'They talk about life on the street. That is where I live. They talk about beef, something I face all the time'.

Talking about his argument with a local Pakistani lad with Kamran, who was trying to affect a reconciliation he asserted: 'I do not want to sort out the Ozzie issue. I like having the tension. It keeps me going on'. When I pushed him to explain more he declined to comment. Hubaib's issue with Ozzie started over some comments Ozzie made about Hubaib, who responded to those comments. Later the fight was discussed on Facebook where they both sent messages back and forth. The online argument was very interesting because it mimicked the lyrical style of Drum and Bass music. This incident was also very interesting because it highlighted the complex relationship between the 'real life' circumstances of the gangsta boys and the identity they were trying to adopt. The music talked about life on the street, and if they have some elements of that life missing, they would create them, to make the

identity more authentic. Drum and Bass music works as a potent symbol because it talks about a marginalized street life and an aggressive response to this marginalization to secure respect. The gangsta boys believed that their street life was similar to the ghetto street life that the MCs were describing. In other words, they were just as marginalized as these Afro-American youth, and they were just as tough. The music effectively symbolized the values of macho masculinity and the gangsta boys appropriated it in order to communicate this value.

Drum and Bass raves were the most important leisure activity for the gangsta boys. At these events they had the opportunity to act out the gangsta culture. All the gangsta boys were regular ravers. Whenever they could afford it they went to raves. In their late teens (18-19 years old) they went twice a week, but frequency had now dwindled to once every two months and yet the significance of the event had not decreased.

The gangsta boys use Drum and Bass raves to emphasize the value of the macho masculinity of the gangsta culture in two ways. First, they constructed a narrative around Drum and Bass raves that defined it as a dangerous space that could only be occupied by 'manly men' like them; Secondly, they wove stories about their raving that highlighted their ability to endure the demands of hardcore raving, which, according to them, only strong brave men could endure. According to the gangsta boys, Drum and Bass raves attracted the most dangerous men from around the country, including, for example, drug dealers and murderers. The presence of these men made raves a



dangerous place, a place that only manly men could survive in. For example, according to Imran:

‘You never know who the next person is. All the gangsters come to these raves. They have guns and knives and they are dangerous f\*\*kers. You have to be very careful, always on the watch. You do not want to be dead. . . . Even the bouncers let these people in with guns and shit. It is not a safe place’.

Mehmood went to raves because:

‘Raves are seen as dangerous places by mainstream society. There are always stories about violence in raves. People getting shot, stabbed or killed. When we go to raves and our reputation as ravers spreads. People make a link: that we too are dangerous men.’

When I asked Mehmood who thought they were dangerous men, he explained that it was everyone they interacted with. Knowing that this association would put fear in the hearts of people who found out about their raving, the gangsta boys were vocal about it. So when the gangsta boys recounted stories of their raves, their goal was to show the manliness of their endeavours.

The gangsta boys constructed a heroic narrative around their raving. Whenever the gangsta boys got together they invariably started reminiscing about past raves. One of them would start the conversation by asking the others if they remembered the rave in a specific city, whereupon another one of them

would pick up the cue and start retelling the whole incident: how they got there, who drove, what each of them got up to, how they got back *etc.* According to this narrative they were men who endured long drives to and from raves. Under the influence of drugs they would party until the morning and work the next day. By means of these stories they reassured themselves and conveyed to others that they were not part of the mainstream. They partied like gangstas and they did not get exhausted by the rigors involved in pursuing this leisure activity. For instance, once when Imran, Hubaib, Kamran and Waqar were around, Hubaib asked: ‘Do you remember when I went to London for the rave?’ Imran replied: ‘Yes. Maxwell called us from London when he was there, and we were in Bolchester. And then I drove like mad and in an hour and a half we were there. Maxwell was shocked to see us’. They then spoke about how Imran drove to London in an hour and half – a journey which would have taken two and a half hours . This was offered as evidence of their manliness. On other occasions they talked about how raving required physical endurance. ‘You dance for 7-8 hours, and you get dehydrated, you sweat so much. Your legs are about to give way. But I do it’, said Hubaib.

Once I was invited to an impromptu rave in Bolchester. It was a party at Junaid’s friend’s house. I arrived at the venue and found the small room inhabited by a dozen Asian boys. On the table they had bottles of Jack Daniels and coke. Drum and Bass music was playing loudly from an upstairs room, and the small space between the table and the fireplace was occupied by boys dancing to the rave music. They kept swapping places to allow everyone a

chance to dance in the cramped space. While dancing wildly, Babur, Imran's cousin, proclaimed: 'This is how *'jaatak'* (young manly men) party. White people cannot party like us'. Others chimed in agreement: 'If I went to a rave I would take it over. Nobody can party like us. The white boys do not have the balls to party like this[, Bilal claimed, who had recently been released from prison where he was serving time for a kidnapping charge. (Basit, Fareed and Rahman, to make money, had kidnapped a white youth who was known as a successful drug dealer.) Another added: 'They cannot handle even one of our (*jaataks*) manly youth'. These comments were appreciated by everyone and were followed by a show of manliness: they jumped around banging their chests together and making comments to the effect that they were real men.

Raves as a leisure activity were also used to highlight their street smartness, which they interpreted as the ability to easily meld into the crowd at raves. According to the gangsta boys, individuals like me and mainstream white youth, did not fit into the rave scene because we are not street-wise. According to them, I lived in cloistered places, disconnected from the street culture and that put me at a disadvantage when it came to spaces where street credentials were respected and appreciated. According to the gangsta boys, raves were an event where being street-wise was an unequalled advantage. You survived in that dangerous place by being street-wise and clever. They claimed that situations could arise where, if you were not able to 'think on your feet' you would end up in a gutter. Whenever I expressed the desire to join them at a rave they refused to take me along. They claimed that I would make

their experience less enjoyable because they would have to keep an eye on me. 'I cannot take you along, you would not know what to do, and that attracts attention and trouble', asserted Hubaib. He further explained to me that raves were not for individuals who were not like them. They said that mainstream white youth and Asian youth would not know how to deal with the rave scene . They said individuals who attended these events picked up on these things and that spelt trouble.

In the gangsta culture, the value of being street-wise took precedence over institutionalized forms of learning, and the gangsta boys used raves to emphasize this value. They defined being street-wise as having the ability to survive in a dangerous environment (*i.e.* the Drum and Bass rave), an ability that could not be learnt in school, but only on the street. It was important for manly men who grew up on the street to learn how to survive in dangerous environments. This ability made them macho and made them superior to what they considered to be effeminate university students.

In addition to giving gangsta boys a chance to enact their tough gangsta manliness, and to show off their street-smartness, raves were also consumption fields where they expressed their wealth and hedonism, both defining values of the gangsta culture. It was an occasion where the gangsta boys loudly proclaimed these values to the audience of other gangsta boys, who understood the language of their subculture. Once the decision to go to a rave was made, the gangsta boys started preparing for it weeks in advance, ensuring that they

were able to pursue the activity in a manner that accentuated the defining values of the gangsta identity.

Of first importance was the right 'look'. They needed to convey the appearance that they were making lots of money. The most critical ingredient of the look was their choice of clothes; and creating the right look for a typical rave cost about £200. Outfits for the 'big' raves cost more. A big rave was an event that took place at a big venue, with popular musicians making appearances and a large turnout. Mehmood described his spending for raves as follows:

'I used to spend a couple of hundred pounds shopping for clothes for the rave. I usually bought my clothes from Birmingham. Bolchester shops do not have the kind of things I bought, for them I had to go to shops in Birmingham, where I could buy the brands I wanted for good prices. I used to buy Armani jackets and hoodies'.

Imran said:

'I was making a lot of money in those days and I used to spend all of it. I never saved anything. I had no responsibilities and whatever I made I had to spend. I bought the most expensive clothes. Armani jackets, Rockport, Gstar – all the brands that were 'in'.

Likewise Kamran, Waqar, Hubaib, and Rahman all claimed that before a big rave they always went shopping. In most cases they would end up going

to Birmingham where they would buy expensive branded clothes to wear to the rave. Many of them had favourite rave outfits, which they only wore when they go to raves. Going through Hubaib's wardrobe I noticed clothes I had never seen him wearing during my everyday interactions with him. When I asked him why he did not wear those clothes, he said: 'These are for raves only. I do not want to wear them all the time. I save my best clothes for the raves'. This collection included a Maharishi hoodie, a Maharishi jacket and a Gstar jacket, amongst others. Similarly, Kamran, Mehmood, Imran, Samir, Waqar and Majid never use expensive branded products for everyday use. All the gangsta boys had a pair of trainers that were kept on the side, only to be brought out when they were going raving. These trainers always looked shiny, clean and new.

In addition to their choice of clothes and shoes, accessories were also an important ingredient of the gangsta look: gold chains, gold teeth, gold rings, branded shades and caps were obligatory. Of these, the gold accessories were the most potent symbols of wealth. For examples, Samir wore five or six gold rings and two heavy gold chains to each rave. Similarly, Waqar, in addition to the pair of gold teeth, wore a thin gold chain and two gold rings. Imran wore two gold chains, a gold ring and a thick gold bracelet. I twice met with the gangsta boys just before they were leaving for a rave. I have to admit that their looks present an impressive sight: heavy gold chains hanging around their necks, numerous gold rings on their fingers, flashing their gold toothed smile,

sporting close-shaved haircuts, and wearing black Armani jackets over hoodies with prominent brand names.

I wanted to know why they were keen on wearing so much gold to raves. When I asked that question of Imran, he said:

‘It is all about showing off money, isn’t it? I don’t wear them when I am at the rank. People know I am not very wealthy. I would not be driving a taxi, if I were. But at a rave no one knows what you do, so you can wear gold and people will think you are wealthy’.

His explanation echoed those of the other gangsta boys who argued that they wore gold to make people think that they were rich and successful. Even though they all knew that this was only a performance to last during the rave event, they still performed it. The rave became a space where they could reject their fathers’ approach to money and spending, and live out their own values and lifestyle. Unlike their fathers who only wore pyjamas and never spent any money on themselves and their leisure, the gangsta boys were keen to communicate to the world and to themselves that they were capable of making money and spending it. They wished to show that they were capable of dressing up in the most expensive brands, and of carrying it off.

Raves were also occasions where they indulged in excessive drug-taking and celebrated the hedonism of the gangsta culture. The average drug expense for a rave was over £200. In addition to marijuana, the gangsta boys

would buy pills and cocaine, and some of them would also spend money on drinks. On the topic of these expenses, Imran explained:

‘I used to spend over £400 on a rave back in those days. I was selling drugs all over the place, and making a lot of money. I spent all of it on raves. I would buy pills, cocaine and marijuana and would give it out to all my friends as well. The expense is one of the reasons why I do not go raving that often. I cannot afford that kind of money any more’.

In early June, Mehmood, Kamran and Hubaib came to see me. Mehmood started telling me about the drug-selling he had become involved in again. The conversation was as follows:

**Mehmood:** ‘You cannot make enough money doing taxi-driving; you need some money for unseen expenses’.

**Me::** What kind of expenses?

**Mehmood:** ‘Like Bassman’s birthday party in early July.’ (Bassman is a popular Drum and Bass musician and every year a huge rave takes place in Birmingham on his birthday)

**Me:** ‘How much would you need?’

**Mehmood:** ‘£400 at least. The drugs you take in you have to use all of them in there. For the experience you need to do these drugs. And I buy drugs worth £400 if not over. I need them to really enjoy the experience!’

**Me:** ‘Why do you think you need such drug binges? Can you not enjoy the rave without excessive drugs?’



**Mehmood:** ‘How I see it is that I work for six months without a break, seven days a week, and then I need these nights of complete abandon!’

**Me:** ‘What is in the experience?’

**Mehmood:** ‘I have experienced it and it is brilliant. You get totally smashed on all the drugs and it is great.’

He was not able to explain the experience in much detail, but kept on emphasizing the ‘excessiveness’ and doing it to the extreme, a theme that kept coming up. Kamran, Imran, Samir, Majid and Waqar all enjoyed raves in the same way. They too, spend hundreds of pounds on drugs and maintained that the rave experience needed to be enjoyed in this manner. The gangsta boys recounted numerous stories about raves which highlighted their excessive drug consumption and how ‘f\*\*ked’ (meaning completely under the influence of a variety of expensive drugs) they got in the rave. Hubaib liked telling how Kamran always ended up completely knocked out after a few pills, joints and drinks: ‘He just stands against a wall, almost toppling over. He is a sight to look at’. Imran too liked talking about how they consumed fistfuls of pills: ‘I have done every possible drug when I go raving. I get completely smashed. That is how you enjoy raves’. This manner of enjoying the rave sat comfortably with the hedonism that was a defining trait of the gangsta culture.

In this section I have shown how Drum and Bass music and raves were used by the gangsta boys to proclaim the values that defined the gangsta

culture. In the following section I show how they achieved the same end through their consumption and sale of drugs.

#### **4.3.2.3.2 Marijuana Consumption**

Marijuana consumption was the primary form of leisure activity for the gangsta boys. Unlike raves which only took place about twice a year, marijuana consumption was a more regular event, in fact almost an everyday social ritual around which the gangsta boys arranged their other activities.

Most smoking sessions would generally start after 9 pm and seldom finished before 11 pm, but the times varied depending on their work commitments. For example, when Hubaib started working in his uncle's restaurant he waited until his shift ended at 10 pm. Likewise, when Imran swapped his day taxi shift for the night shift his brother did, he smoked with his white girlfriend between jobs. And when Kamran started working at Pizza Express at night, he delayed smoking until after 11 pm. The preferred meeting place was a friend's house, but that did not always work out. The nature of the activity was such that the young Pakistani men living with their parents could not meet at their houses, and so they relied on their white friends who were not living with their parents. Their Pakistani parents, especially their fathers, did not like their sons wasting time, and they would never tolerate marijuana smoking under their roof. None of the gangsta boys even smoked cigarettes inside their house; they claim their father would beat them up if they smoked inside their house. As discussed earlier, the house was the space where the

gangsta boy fathers make the rules and demanded the respect of their subservient sons. Gathering in the house for such marijuana 'sessions' would undermine their authority and the gangsta boys were not keen to challenge their father's authority. Parker's flat was the most popular haunt for these young men. Parker was a working class white friend of the gangsta boys. He had been unemployed for almost a year and supported himself on the money he received from the local council. His flat was a small one-bedroom flat, with a large lounge, where the gangsta boys spent most of their time smoking marijuana and playing games on his Playstation. Before Parker rented this flat he was staying with his sister, and so the boys used to smoke marijuana in Hubaib's car. After gym Hubaib and I would pick Parker up from his sister's house and Kamran from his house. I would drive to a secluded place (usually an empty parking place or a quiet neighbourhood), and they would roll joint after joint and smoke marijuana for a couple of hours. As the night progressed, other cars would pull up next to Hubaib's and the party would grow in number. Later on during my fieldwork when I rented a flat in the city centre and equipped it with a DVD player and a Playstation, the gangsta boys started choosing my flat for their sessions with increasing regularity. Once they were 'high', they would start talking on subjects of interest to them, for instance movies, the gym, raves, and local gossip.

According to these boys, marijuana authenticated their gangsta identities. All the powerful and respected Asian gangsters consumed marijuana. It was, and still is, in American gangsta rap circles and on Drum

and Bass music scene. Consuming marijuana was a gangsta activity because only those who dared to smoke could claim their power over the mainstream youth who are too scared to defy the law. The gangsta boys were reflexive about the associations between marijuana consumption and their claims to be gangstas. For example, Hubaib and Kamran explained their consumption in these words: 'It fits in with the whole look, the clothes the music, everything, the gangster look. All the American rap stars smoke it' Kamran further explained that if one was trying to portray the image of tough masculinity one had to smoke marijuana, otherwise it would not be a legitimate image. Only manly men were able to smoke marijuana. In fact, when Husnain tried to introduce his popular boy friends to marijuana, Kamran commented: 'Husnain is trying to make gangsta boys out of these pretty boys'. According to Kamran, smoking marijuana was a sure sign of the gangsta identity which was the opposite of effeminate masculinity: only manly men were brave to enjoy this 'illegal' leisure activity. Similarly, according to Husnain the popular boys thought that they were tough men, and ye, they knew nothing about marijuana. He spoke about this distinction when I asked him about a YouTube video he had watched on preparing marijuana. The video was over two hours long and painstakingly went into the details of the complex processes that go into the preparation of marijuana. Husnain said: 'None of them know what good quality marijuana is. They do not know the varieties of marijuana that can be prepared. I know all of this'. All the gangsta boys competed with each other to

make the biggest ‘spliffs’, and claimed that they were bigger men if they made bigger joints.

Smoking marijuana symbolized power over the mainstream youth. By pursuing this illegal leisure activity with gusto, the gangsta boys believed that they were showing mainstream society that they were not bound by mainstream society’s rules or norms and they were proud of that. The stories which described their ability to break mainstream society’s laws and rules had become mythologized among these boys. One of the stories that the boys like to tell emphasized their skills in ‘fooling’ the police. It was as follows. On the day of Eid (a holy day for Muslims), Waqar rented a Maserati for the day and Imran, Mehmood and Samir went on a trip with him. They drove to London for food. To enjoy the day they each bought ample amounts of marijuana that would last them the day. They smoked marijuana throughout their trip but on their return journey they were stopped by the police who searched them thoroughly. Mehmood claimed that everyone had smoked their drugs but he had some left which he had stashed in his shoes when the police stopped the car. He then went into detail about the search, how he ‘kept his cool’ throughout by casually talking to the policeman while he was scared inside. According to Mehmood, because he kept his cool the policeman did not bother to check his shoes thoroughly, and, had he given any external sign of anxiety, he would have been caught. After returning to Bolchester he first called Samir and told him that he had marijuana on him when he was checked by the police, and then he called Waqar to recount the same story. Very soon this story

spread among all the gangsta boys who expressed their appreciation of how Mehmood had kept his wits about him. Mehmood was pleased about the circulation of this story. He said:

‘These stories are very important because they increase your status. It shows that you are not scared to take on the law and you are a seasoned campaigner. The word gets around, everyone finds out and they know that you have balls. In addition it gives an amazing buzz. The adrenalin rush of defying the law is great’.

Even though marijuana smoking was a significant leisure activity for these boys, they never consumed it publicly. Yet everyone knew they were doing so. Thus, their social network ensured that word got around. According to these boys, everyone knew if someone smoked marijuana, and once someone is named as such, then they associated other elements of gangsta identity with that person. Thus, if someone was smoking marijuana, he was likely to be tough, street-wise and brave. The gangsta boys were able to effectively create a network which allowed them to convey and communicate their macho masculinity. For instance, some of the boys used their Facebook accounts to proclaim their marijuana consumption. Hubaib, on his Facebook account updated his status to: ‘Hubaib Iron Lung Khan . . . is making a new Amsterdam well outa reach of the West Mercia police’. The reference to ‘Iron Lung’ was a reference to Hubaib’s ability to consume large quantities of marijuana. The word iron was itself associated with toughness; and the rest of

his status description was a direct reference to his marijuana consumption. Hubaib was bragging about how he was beyond the reach of the law, and how he behaved as if he was in Amsterdam where marijuana is legal. Waqar on his Facebook pages referred to 'rolling up a fat cheesy 1', the reference to 'cheesy' being a reference to a special type of marijuana which was grown in Bolchester, and which, according to the gangsta boys, was of the highest quality. In other words, it had a strong smell and could give a strong high. This type of marijuana was difficult to procure and had become a strong symbol of connections in the gangster culture. The reference to the 'fatness' of the joint on gave the impression that he was manly in the sense he was a person who was able to stomach large quantities of marijuana. In fact anyone who got high on small quantities became demoted in the manliness hierarchy. Similarly, Mehmood glamorized his marijuana consumption on his Facebook page when he referred to: 'the herb working its way to my brain lighting up like a Christmas tree'. By sharing his mental state he was able to announce his marijuana consumption; he added a wink symbol at the end of the message which was a sign of his ability to pursue this illegal activity with levity and to show that he did not feel intimidated by mainstream society's rules and norms.

#### **4.3.2.3.3 Selling Marijuana**

Most gangsta boys engaged in small sales of marijuana. Like the consumption of marijuana, selling marijuana also served the purpose of emphasizing their manliness and the power they exerted over mainstream

society. The gangsta boys often talked about their drug-dealing and emphasized the street smartness and daring that was required for this endeavour. Taken together these two values highlighted the power they believed they had over mainstream society. Each of them claimed that he was at one time a successful drug-dealer. Imran could not stop talking about his successful days: 'I was pushing a couple of thousand pounds worth of marijuana, and making £400 a week. Everyone called me; I was selling to so many people'. When I asked him if he was scared of the police, he said that he was not. He said that he did not care about them, and in any case they were too stupid to catch him because he was too clever for them. On one occasion, Imran, Kamran, Hubaib and I went to pick up Husnain from his university, and on the way they picked up an ounce of marijuana. I was a little anxious but they reassured me that they had done this many times. Throughout the drive they spoke about the whole issue lightly. They spoke about their criminal records, as all of them, except for Kamran, had criminal records for selling drugs. They casually told me that Kamran would take the blame this time and, because it was his first offence, it was not a 'big deal'. Their comments conveyed to me how they were not scared of policemen and did not respect mainstream laws. They were willing to take the risk because they were manly men. What baffled me was that they made no money from the drugs but sold them on cost price. I brought this topic up with Mehmood, who explained to me that they did not always sell drugs for money. Sometimes they sold it to stay 'connected' in the scene, so that people knew that they were still selling



drugs. This event was followed shortly by Kamran and Waqar acquiring a large supply of marijuana, and they started 'pushing' it. They found it hard to sell because it was not of a good quality. I asked Kamran why they were finding it hard to get rid of, and he explained, 'It is shit. I knew it was shit when I bought it. I knew it would be hard to sell and as it is I have made a loss on this'. When I asked him why he had bought it, he said: 'I just had nothing to do. and to keep myself busy I decided to sell it'. I asked whether it was just of boredom and he said: 'Not just that. I have not been selling drugs for a while. You need to stay in the circle otherwise people stop calling you for drugs'. This fitted in with the earliest drug dealing stories Kamran had told me. According to him he was not known in school until he started selling drugs, and it was not till then that everyone started seeing him differently and started giving him respect, because he had the connections and the bravado to push drugs. Kamran said: 'All the white boys had to lick balls to get drugs. And I could get it from my uncle. They started showing me respect'. Husnain went through a similar process of earning respect at his college. Thus, when he started selling drugs through his brother's connections, he quickly became popular and was known as a tough manly man among his white peers. Husnain (who had now adopted a popular boy identity) on the occasion described above had arranged the marijuana for his brother and his friends. He then touted this achievement in front of his brother's friend, showing them that he was as manly as they were because he could still do it.

Although selling drugs promoted their cause to convey this manly powerful masculinity, the primary motivation behind this activity was financial, in that it supported their performance of the gangsta values. The first expense that was directly met by selling marijuana was the expenditure that was needed for their drug usage.

Marijuana was by far the largest expense of the gangsta boys. On average they smoked £10 worth of 'skunk' each day. Added to this was their expenditure of cigarettes, which meant the total spent on smoking was approximately £15 a day. This expense for many of these working class men was burdensome and they looked to finance their marijuana smoking through alternate means. Every few months they would resort to selling drugs to support their own consumption. Often Waqar, Kamran, Hubaib and Mehmood used their connections in Birmingham to buy 28grams of cheese, which cost £200; and by selling it at £10 a gram they are able to save 8 grams for their own consumption. This daily expenditure could be met by pushing small quantities of drugs. For larger expenses, too, the gangsta boys resorted to selling drugs, but these larger expenses warranted larger shipments of drugs and greater efforts to make the necessary cash. When Bassman's birthday party was coming up (Bassman was a popular Drum and Bass DJ and his birthday rave attracted lots of popular DJs and MCs and was a 'big event'), Mehmood, told me that he had started pushing drugs. He told me that he never used his hard-earned cash on these leisure activities. That money was for his family. He financed his leisure activities by selling drugs. He claimed he needed at least

£400 to enjoy the experience in the loud hedonistic manner I discussed earlier. Similarly, Imran told me how he used his drug money to finance his leisure activities:

‘I made £500 a week. I was loving it. I did not care about school or anything. I had the money, and all I cared about was raves and parties. I bought expensive clothes, and all kinds of drugs at raves with the money. I burned it all’.

Most of the gangsta boys, like these two, become involved in ‘big-time’ drug dealing because they wanted to live the hedonistic lifestyle of the gangsta discussed earlier. A notable victim of this desire to live the hedonistic lifestyle of the gangsters was Bilal, whom I interviewed in the Blackenhurst correctional facility in Redditch. Bilal, is now serving an 18 month sentence for the possession and intent of selling marijuana, while at the time of the interview he was awaiting a sentence. Bilal, grew up in Bolchester and was close friends with Samir, Kamran and Imran. I arranged to meet him through Kamran, who accompanied me to the correctional facility and Hubaib drove us there. I had not known Bilal before this meeting, but, once I introduced myself as a friend of Kamran, he opened up to me very quickly. When I asked him why he started selling drugs, he said:

‘I wanted to the lifestyle of the gangsters. The fast cars. The big parties where you would throw around money buy pills. All of that needed a lot of money. I could never make that kind of money by working. I would make £200.

That was nothing. It was easy selling drugs and making money. So I got involved. I made a lot of money and spent it!’

He explained to me how, after Nadeem and his gang had been caught, there was room for people like him to earn quick money by selling drugs. He made some connections in Birmingham and via Birmingham started getting big shipments in and made a couple of thousand pounds in a week. He claimed to have spent all the money he made on partying hard and on expensive cars and clothes. When I asked him if he regretted selling drugs, considering the situation it had landed him, he told me that he did not regret it at all. He had loved the lifestyle that he could afford with the drugs, and had no intention of stopping once he was released. In fact, he had made many connections while in prison, and said that when he was released he would be able to make even more money. Like him Majid too maintained that he had become involved in selling drugs because he wanted to live the hedonistic lifestyle of the gangster.

Those gangsta boys who were currently not involved in selling drugs often expressed their desire to do so, so that they could adopt what they perceived to be the hedonistic lifestyle of the gangsta culture. This subject often came up when the gangsta boys got together. For instance, when in late September 2009, Imran and Hubaib came to my flat and spent a couple of hours there, the conversation often turned towards stories of drug business. I started talking about the money that could be made by selling drugs and Imran confessed that he would be willing to risk going to prison for as long as 15

years if there was a possibility of earning £1 million. I asked him why he needed the money. He explained that money was the most important thing in life; once he had such a large sum of money he would be able to live the life he wanted to live, a life of hedonism and conspicuous consumption. Imran said: 'I want it all. An expensive sports car and a big yard (house) where I can throw parties with free drugs for everyone. Huge plasma TVs all around and expensive furniture'. This was the lifestyle they believed successful gangsters lived. Another incident that highlighted the role of drug dealing in the gangsta culture took place in January 2010 when a local gang of Chinese drug dealers were caught. The Chinese family rented a house from Waqar. He had received a call from the police, and, when he arrived at his flat, he found that it had been converted into a marijuana-growing farm. All the rooms, even the bathroom had been fitted with lights, flooring, ducts, humidifiers and ventilators that were required to grow marijuana. This discovery led the gangsta boys into their own plans for growing marijuana. Hubaib and Kamran, who were already planning to set up a marijuana farm in Pakistan, desperately tried to get hold of the equipment. So did Waqar who wanted to start his own farm in a rented property in Bolchester. Imran, too, was interesting in getting the lights so that he could grow some marijuana. I asked each of them why they wanted to go into this business. The response was always the same: the money would enable them to live the gangsta lifestyle and adopt their values. Hubaib said that he wanted to make enough so he would be able to buy a red Lamborghini. Waqar wanted enough so that he would not have to work, and would be able to go

raving every week and buy all the clothes he wanted. Imran saw it as an opportunity to materialize his long-term plans of retiring to a life of raving and drug abuse.

In this section I have argued that drug consumption was a leisure activity that the gangsta followed because of its strong roots in the gangsta value system. It expressed a macho masculinity and gave them a sense of power over mainstream society. Drug selling was considered to be acceptable because the financial benefits would enable them to live the lifestyle of the gangstas, in other words enjoy conspicuous consumption.

In the section above I first discussed the background and immigration ideology of the gangsta parents. I then highlighted the contradictions, tensions and difficulties the youths experienced. I concluded by describing the evolution of the gangsta identity and I showed how this identity had been distilled into specific fundamental values, which then become the foundation around which the gangsta boys constructed their identities. The discussions on the popular boy and gangsta boy subcultures taken together show that the immigration ideology of the first generation Pakistani immigrants was an important social structure which influenced the second generation's acculturation project.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

In this chapter I discuss the contributions of my study to the extant literature. I begin by discussing the contributions to the literature on consumer acculturation, followed by the literature on consumer subcultures. I then discuss how my research contributes to the literature that has emerged from the sociological study of subcultures. Finally I consider the recent research on acculturation carried out in the field of sociology.

With regard to the extant consumer literature on acculturation (Mehta and Belk, 1991; Penaloza, 1994; Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard, 2005; Oswald, 1999) I make two primary contributions. First, my research shows that immigrant acculturation is socially structured by the immigrant ideologies of parents and their economic and cultural capital. Secondly, it shows that, contrary to earlier findings that consumer identity projects in fact seek to resolve the contradictions between the two cultures, rather than a selective adoption of elements from the host and home culture.

Postassimilationist scholars of consumer acculturation, such as Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard (2005), Penaloza (1994) and Oswald (1999), worked on the premise that immigrants playfully choose between a variety of identities. With the exception of Ustuner and Holt (2007), most of the existing consumer acculturation literature has overlooked the impact of social structures on acculturation outcomes (see, for example, Penaloza, 1994; Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard, 2005; and Oswald 1999). For instance,

Penaloza (1994) discussed the impact of friends, media and institutions (commercial, religious and educational) in general terms, not as particular structures that generated particular acculturation outcomes. She concluded that:

‘Informants’ consumption patterns were inherently eclectic, drawn from both US and Mexican cultures, and are more accurately viewed as the result of rather complex dynamics of cultural influences, marketing strategies, and individual agency. . .’ (p. 51).

The impact of the structures, according to her, did not impose a specific acculturative outcome on the individuals; the individual could choose to transcend the pressure exerted by a specific social structure. Similarly, in their study on Greenlandic migrants in Denmark, Askegaard *et al.* (2005) perceived transnational consumer culture as a generic acculturative agent; but they failed to specify how it specifically impacted on the formation of the identity positions reported. The identity positions were seen as the ‘discursive outcomes of negotiating between the three institutional acculturation forces we have identified: Greenlandic, Danish, and global consumer culture’. (*ibid.*, p. 166) These studies did not seek to elaborate on the ‘black box model’, where individuals are exposed to a variety of acculturative agents/ structures which produce a variety of consumer identity positions; these studies failed to elaborate on how the identity positions were patterned by specific structures. They were unable to explain why one immigrant pursued a Danish cookie identity project and another pursued a Greenlandic hyperculture identity



project. Similarly, Oswald (1999) argued that immigrants negotiate differences between their ethnic culture and mainstream culture by strategically using their ethnic heritage to their advantage. Structural factors do not interfere in this playful mixing of the two cultures.

These studies were based on the assumption that the migrants had the required social, cultural and economic capital to engage with the consumer culture in such a way that they could easily move between the home and host country ethnic/cultural identities. Furthermore the research focused on contexts where the ethnic culture had been sufficiently ‘commoditized’ and was an accepted cultural identity. For example Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard (2005) studied the Greenlandic culture, which was a culture which was not stigmatized in Denmark. Even though this situation could apply to some migrants, many others lack the necessary capital, and do not have a readily available ethnic identity in the consumer culture of the host country. As a result, their ethnic identity is stigmatized, as is true in the case I have studied. The question then becomes: ‘What happens when migrants lack such resources? How do they acculturate to their new homes when there is incompatibility in between the two cultures?’

Like, Ustuner and Holt (2007), who set out to explore the impact of social structures on consumer acculturation, I selected a context that would challenge the predominant model of consumer acculturation. Whereas they studied the impact of social structure on the projects of migrants from rural Turkey to urban Turkey, I extended their theory by describing how

international migration from an economically less developed country to a country in the developed world was socially structured. My findings extend the findings of Ustuner and Holt (*ibid.*). Thus, whereas they focused on the lack of cultural capital, I focused on the tensions between the home and host cultures, and reported acculturation outcomes that challenged the free consumer choice model reported in post-assimilationist research (Penaloza, 1994; Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard, 2005; and Oswald, 1999). I found that consumer acculturation was not a choice that the individual makes free from structural pressures. In fact, on the contrary, the structures excluded certain modes of acculturation and made others more tenable.

My findings question the assumption of individual agency and highlight the importance of social structures in the patterning of consumer acculturation. I found that the immigration ideology of the first generation Pakistani parents shaped the second generation's consumer acculturation. I found and observed two groups of men with distinct acculturation projects: the gangsta boys; and the popular boys. I showed that the parents of the popular boys and the gangsta boys are loyal to very different immigration ideologies and these influenced the identity projects of the second generation in different ways. Thus, the gangsta boy parents, who had migrated from rural areas of Pakistan, saw Britain merely as a temporary home and therefore worked to bring their plans to return to fruition. With this goal in mind they failed to give their sons a well-defined foundation on which they could base their lives. In the absence of a 'roadmap' and with the contradiction that existed between

their fathers' authoritarianism at home and timidity outside, they gravitated towards the gangsta subculture, a subculture which promised them the possibility of resolving such contradictions. The popular boy parents, on the other hand, were keen to become respectable and respected in mainstream British society and in the Asian community, and, as a result they had a very well-defined ideal for their sons. This ideal, however, had some inherent contradictions because, on the one hand, it demanded that their offspring obtain mainstream success, but, on the other, it required them to maintain their parents' 'conservative' and traditional Asian values and forms of behaviour. This imposed contradictions on the youths. The popular boys therefore had to pursue consumer identities geared towards resolving these difficulties and tensions. My findings suggest that their acculturation projects were substantially influenced by the social structures of family and social class, a topic that has received little attention in the previous literature.

A notable exception to the literature's reluctance to acknowledge the social structuring of acculturation was a study conducted by Ustuner and Holt (2007), which showed that, when the migrants lacked the social, economic and cultural capital to playfully choose between different consumer identities, then the migrants faced a dominated form of acculturation. In their study, seven out of a group of nine second generation girls declined to pursue any acculturation project at all (which Ustuner and Holt defined as 'shattered identity projects') while the other two pursued completely different acculturation identity projects from the others. Thus, one

totally acculturated to the urban lifestyle and the other forged a religious conservative identity that was, in contradistinction to the 'urban-modern lifestyle', promoted by the dominant taste-makers in the city. The fact that out of the nine second generation respondents seven ended up in the same situation shows that the social structure played an important role in their acculturation. Rather than freely pursuing a consumer acculturation project, the social structures prevented them from achieving their ideal.

However, whereas Ustuner and Holt (2007) found that social class is a critical structuring agent, my findings, on the other hand, found that social class is not the only structuring agent. I found that the second generation migrants who belonged to the same social class could have distinct and different acculturation identity projects. I found that the parents' immigration ideologies, which had been shaped by their urban or rural backgrounds, were a critical structuring agent for the second generation Pakistanis in Bolchester.

This study is also the first study that considers subcultural consumer acculturation. As opposed to earlier research (with the exception of Ustuner and Holt's (2007) first generation mothers) where the unit of analysis was always the individual, I documented consumer acculturation as a group phenomenon. Earlier research, for instance by Jafari and Goulding (2008), explicitly focused on the individual consumer; they regarded consumption as an individual pursuit, "(Consumption) provides a fertile ground for individuals to practice their individuality" and in another place they write, "Our study focuses on the complex line between the nature of the self and the consumption

behaviours.” (Jafari and Goulding 2008; p 76). Similarly, Oswald (1999), who studied Haitian migrants in the United States, describing individual identity projects, stated: ‘Even members of the same family play out their ethnicity individually, depending on day-to-day encounters with the host culture’ (p. 311). Askegaard *et al.* (2005) identified four identity positions which the immigrants pursued individually, in each case selecting a specific position based on personal preference.

The only exception was the research carried out by Ustuner and Holt (2007) who described the collective consumer acculturation of women in common structural positions. Both the mothers and the daughters in their study collectively construct their consumer identities – the mothers pursuing a counter hegemonic reactionary project and the daughters an assimilative project. They described how the mothers collectively tried to recreate village life in the squatter and how the daughters had developed collective rituals in which they experienced the dominant ideal of the Batici woman which they did not live out in everyday life. In my view, the collective consumer projects reported in their research were very different from the subcultures of consumption reported in this thesis.

The concept of a subculture of consumption was introduced into consumer research by Schouten and McAlexander (1995). They defined a subculture of consumption as ‘a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity’ (p. 43) and they said that these groups were

characterized by ‘an identifiable, hierarchical social structure; a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargons, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression’(p. 43). They claimed that this concept of a subculture of consumption was a ‘robust’ categorization that dealt with the problems inherent in *a priori* ascriptive categorizations, such as class, gender and ethnicity. They agreed with McCracken (1986) who suggested that social categories have no substance until they are accepted as relevant categories by people and conveyed through consumption patterns. In the case of the youths studied here, I found that they identified strongly with their subcultural identities and that, grouping them merely in terms of their ethnicity, would fail to provide a full understanding of their consumer identities. Thus, their self-selected categorization, as popular boys or gangsta boys, provided a better way of understanding of their consumer acculturation. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) elaborate further, “A subculture of consumption comes into existence as people identify with certain objects or consumption activities and, through those objects or activities, identify with other people. The unifying consumption patterns are governed by a unique ethos or set of common values’ (p.48) According to this conceptualization of subcultures of consumption, consumption forms the centrepiece around which the group is formed. The collective consumer projects reported by Ustuner and Holt (2007), in my opinion, did not form a subculture of consumption, because it was not consumption that brought the individuals together. In the case of the mothers, for instance, the collective projects were a reaction to the consumer ideology

that threatened their traditional social life. The use of the analytic category of subcultures of consumption warrants a much more central role of consumption in the formation of the group. In my study, I found that consumption was a central aspect of the identities pursued by the youths, and justified the use of this category of subculture acculturation; and developed the collective consumer projects reported by Ustuner and Holt (2007) further.

Another key contribution of this study is that it shows the importance of the heterogeneity in the culture of origin. Previous studies on consumer research treat the nation cultures as geographically bounded homogenous entities. However, Chung (2000) pointed to the dangers of thinking that a single dominant culture applied to all. In this study, I found that immigrants from the same country might end up being exposed to very different home cultures. This was particularly so in the case of second generation immigrants whose primary exposure to the 'homeland' was through their parents. Although Penalosa (1994) admits the distinct advantages of urban background, she does not seek a detailed understanding of this variation. In the current study, the fact that parents had different backgrounds (some rural and some urban) proved to be a significant factor in the immigration ideology of the first generation parents. Thus the popular boy parents, who came from urban or semi-urban backgrounds, believed that they were higher up the Asian social hierarchy, and they expected their sons to reproduce this hierarchy. The consumer acculturation projects of the second generation to a great extent reflect their parents' immigration ideology. The rural-urban divide resulted in

there being two groups of young men each with their own type of consumer subculture: the popular boys and the gangstas. The gangsta boy parents who had come from a village background always looked towards their ancestral villages, and never accepted England as their permanent home. The desire to return to their villages to live in their large mansions was present in every gangsta boy parent. This immigration ideology affected the consumer acculturation of the sons. Similarly, the popular boy parents wanted to reflect their differences from the rural migrants through their lifestyles and through their sons. Their immigration ideology influenced their sons' identity projects (see further below).

Finally, this is the first acculturation study that documents a dialectic relationship between the home and host cultures. Unlike other studies which see these cultures as fields from which consumers pick and choose, I argue that the process is dialectical. In other words, the immigration ideology of the first generation exposed the youth to tensions and conflicts, and the acculturation projects were the synthesis of these conflicts and tensions. These tensions caused by the conflict between the parents' expectations of their sons and the material circumstances of the youth and who were enmeshed in a culture that clashed with their parents' expectations. Thus, as the gangsta boy fathers exposed their sons to an authoritative masculinity inside the home, the youths therefore defined masculinity in terms of 'power'. However, their idea of masculinity was challenged when they witnessed the timidity of their fathers outside the confines of the home. It is argued that this lack of power, which



their fathers accepted because they never aspired to respect and power in England, emasculated the youth. The second source of tension was a result of the gangsta fathers' failure to provide their son with a concrete identity which they could pursue. Thus, they demanded a very rudimentary attachment to Asian values from their sons and expected their sons to work and to make a financial contribution to their plans to return to Pakistan. This, however, left the youth in a difficult and conflicting position, because mainstream society respected material success whereas their fathers adopted a frugal lifestyle. All their fathers wanted to do was make as much money as they could in England and then to use it to increase their material status in Pakistan by buying houses and other property. In other words, their fathers were aiming to climb the social hierarchy, not in England, but in Pakistan. Their sons, on the other hand, who did not necessarily wish to return to Pakistan, wished to climb the social hierarchy in English society. It is submitted that, faced with these contradictions the gangsta boys forged a consumer identity project that resolved these tensions and difficulties through a dialectical relationship between the home and host culture. Thus, the value of tough masculinity, which was an important ingredient of the gangsta culture, allowed the young men to assert their power outside the confines of the home. The gangsta consumer identity was supported by money made by selling drugs which reinforced their gangsta identity, and also allowed them to hand over money earned through legal jobs to their parents. One of the defining characteristics of the fathers' ideal was frugality in spending, which ran counter to the

mainstream appreciation of the show of material affluence. The episodic spending which was a hallmark of the gangsta subculture enabled the youths to resolve this contradiction. The raves provided them with an opportunity to enact an image of affluence and success. These were 'ritualistic' nights where, dressed in their expensive brands and gold, they would spend lavishly on drugs and viscerally enjoy a feeling of success.

An important example of the resolution of the tensions concerned relationships with white girls. Their parents expected their sons to marry their cousin from villages in Pakistan, but the youths often expressed their frustration with this situation and claimed that they could not have a satisfactory relationship with a girl from a remote village in Pakistan who did not understand their lives in England. The gangsta culture they adopted resolved some of these tensions for these youths. The gangsta culture 'looked down on' romantic involvement with a girl. Girls were sexual objects who were there to be used with 'no strings attached'. The gangsta boys conveniently resolved the tensions between the two cultures by marrying a cousin and keeping a white girlfriend on the side.

This dialectical relationship between the two cultures, Pakistani and British, was even more pronounced in the case of the popular boys, whose parents desired them to attain respectability in mainstream society. Their expectations of their children were different from those of gangsta boy parents. Thus the parents of the popular boys were keen for their children to get a reputable job in order to distinguish them from the children of parents who

were rural migrants. Their expectations were different. The popular boys experienced tensions because of the inherently contradictory expectations of their parents. Popular boy parents expected their sons to engage with mainstream culture, to the extent that they achieved mainstream success, but they expected them to remain untainted by mainstream white culture. The youth, however, removed from the surroundings where the conservative Asian values of their parents had originated, and, in direct contact with the contradictory and alluring values of mainstream white culture, experienced powerful contradictions. These contradictions are resolved through the subculture these popular boys adopted. Thus, for instance, in their clubbing activities, which was their primary leisure activity, by pursuing their own conservative version of clubbing the popular boys were able to resolve the conflicts created by their parents' expectations and their desire to participate in youth culture. Thus they adopted a compromise: by attending clubs they felt accepted by white youths and felt confident about their position in the mainstream culture, but, in order not to betray their parents' values, they avoided drinking and womanizing. Similarly, the Bollywood discourse allowed them to resolve the contradictions between conservative Asian sensibilities regarding romance and the liberal Western idea of romance. The Bollywood narrative on romantic love transcended the conservative notions of romance of the popular boys' parents, who regarded romance as a consequence of marriage and not something that existed prior to marriage. They also regarded

a physical relationship between the couple as something that took place after marriage, not before, unlike the more liberal practices in non-Pakistani society.

The gangsta and popular boy subcultures offered the boys a way of dealing with the contradictions stemming from the immigration ideologies of their parents, and these subcultures suggest that a dialectical relationship existed between the host and home cultures. The consumer acculturation reported here is different from the hybrid identities, where both majority and minority cultures were (see the postassimilationist research of, for example, Oswald, 1999; Penaloza, 1994; and Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005). For instance, it was not the situational code-switching Haitians deployed, adapting to the expectations of both host and home cultures (Oswald, 1999). When one of Oswald's informants celebrated her son's birthday twice, Oswald understood her behaviour in terms of culture-swapping and stated:

‘By celebrating her son's birthday twice, once at a fast-food chain with American children, then again at a barbecue with the family, Odette can both strengthen her son's ties to the host culture, on the one hand, and also maintain ties to her ethnic culture, on the other’ (p. 310).

The dialectical relationship described above is also distinct from the four identity positions described by Askegaard *et al.* (2005) (*i.e.* hypercultural, integrationist, assimilation, or oscillating pendulum), where the mode of negotiation is rejection of one culture and complete acceptance of the other, or

oscillating between the two cultures. This study, on the other hand, describes the construction of acculturative subcultures around values that come about via a dialectical negotiation of the home and host culture, a mode of acculturation which is distinct from those reported in the extant literature.

This study also contributes to the literature on subcultures of consumption on three critical points. First, the existing literature seeks to explain the consumption ideology of consumer subcultures by focusing heavily on the internal dynamics of the subculture and in relation to the mainstream culture, focusing on explaining how the members of the subculture under study – be it Harley Davidson, or the Star Trek subculture - define their values in contradistinction to the values of the mainstream society. For example, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) described how the consumption ideology of the Harley Davidson subculture was organized around the core values of personal freedom, machismo, and American patriotism. Kates (2002), in his study of the gay subculture, claimed that ‘the subcultural meanings of blatant sexuality, safety, and gender flexibility are expressed, particularly as opposition in response to a presumably unsympathetic, orthodox mainstream culture’ (p. 396) The consumption of the subculture is geared towards expressing these oppositional meanings. I extend these studies by showing the importance of oppositional *subcultures* to the development of a consumer subculture. More specifically, in this study I show that the development of the popular boy subculture and the gangsta boy subculture were substantially influenced by each other. Thus each groups looked at the other group when

deciding on brand 'legitimacy'. For instance, when 'Ed Hardy', a coveted brand in the popular boy subculture made inroads into the gangsta subculture, the popular boys decided to curtail their use of the brand. Similarly, brands such as Top Man, All Saints, and New Look, which had become central to the popular boy subculture, were avoided by the gangsta boys. The prevalence of these negative evaluative criteria confirmed the findings reported by Banister and Hogg (2006), who argued that consumers '[r]ather than seeking to maximize the positive messages that their clothing communicated, the main concern of these participants was with an effort to minimize possible negative communication on the basis of their clothing' (p. 453). Similarly, leisure activities, such as raves that were seen as the primary choice of gangsta boys had become stigmatized in the popular boy subculture, and even though entry to such events was much easier than entry into exclusive clubs, the popular boys were never tempted to go to raves. The gangsta boys also felt threatened when popular boys started consuming marijuana. They believed that, if the popular boys started consuming marijuana, then their own tough gangsta masculinity (which was symbolised by consuming marijuana) would be compromised.

The second contribution this study makes is that it has described two subcultures that were at what Irwin (1973) calls the 'articulation' stage of their lifecycle. Irwin in his study of the surfing subculture identified four stages in the lifecycle of a subculture of consumption: articulation, expansion, corruption and decline. The existing studies on subcultures of consumption

have focused on subcultures which were in their expansion stages (see, for example Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Kates, 2002 and 2004; and Chalmers and Arthur, 2008). At the time Schouten and McAlexander (1995) conducted their ethnographic study, the Harley Davidson subculture had been in place for a long time. The subculture had expanded to accommodate a variety of subgroups each with its own hierarchy. Although each subgroup was committed to the Harley Davidson motorcycle and related consumption objects, each group interpreted the 'biker ethos' to suit its own cultural or socioeconomic situation. These subgroups maintained a formal hierarchy of officers; and members attained these positions by exhibiting a commitment to the group's consumption values. Some visible indicators of the commitment were: tattoos, club-specific clothing, pins proclaiming participation in events, and motorcycle customization. The diversity within the subculture and emergence of the formal hierarchy were indications of the 'expansion' stage of the subculture. It is important to describe the subcultures of consumption with reference to the particular stages in their life cycles. My findings suggest that different relational dynamics are in force at different stages of the subculture. For example, both Schouten and McAlexander (1995) and Kates (2002) described established hierarchies and active status competition within the subcultures. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) noted that these hierarchies were visible in the group's riding formation, where the higher the status of the rider the closer he was to the front of the riding party. They found that some subgroups of the Harley subculture required members to pass through an

interim 'prospect' stage before they were accepted as full members. Kates (2002) in his study of the gay subculture described how informants constructed the term 'ghetto queen' to describe those extreme gay consumers who had forsaken their individuality by becoming overcome by the gay scene, and who adopted the stereotypical gay consumer identity without critical thought, as opposed to the 'higher status' gay men who did not follow a predefined popular gay consumer identity but who claimed they were individually distinct by 'eclectically and individualistically combining elements of subcultural meaning' (Kates, 2002, p. 396). However, my study suggests that these findings might be dependent on the life stage of the subculture. The establishment of a social hierarchy and concerns for individualistic distinctions within a subculture might be more important at the later stages of the lifecycle of a subculture than at the earlier stages. Other issues, such as those related to an identity formation at a collective level, might be more salient at the initial stages. In my study of members of both subcultures (*i.e.* the popular boy and the gangsta), status competition was not a focal concern. What was much more critical for both the popular boys and the gangsta boys were their claims to be different from the 'opposition' subculture or mainstream society. Their efforts were primarily directed to defining the boundaries of their subculture, and, as a result, their consumption was directed towards this end. It is important to note that I am not suggesting that no status competition existed within the subcultures. The gangsta boys, indeed, used their prowess in smoking marijuana to claim a status, but this activity was also used to distinguish



themselves from mainstream society and the popular boys. Similarly, while the popular boys often bragged with each other about their success with women, which gained them respect in their own subculture, they were also keen to do so because it showed that they were much better and more successful than the gangsta boys.

Finally, this study contributes to our understanding of how particular brands, styles and consumption activities become repositories of the core values of subcultures. While existing studies describe the values of consumption-oriented subcultures in detail, they do not describe the development of a narrative that imbues the subculture's brands with such qualities. For example, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) described how the members of the Harley Davidson subculture went to the subculture seeking personal freedom, machismo and patriotism, values they found reflected in the meanings attributed to the Harley Davidson motorcycle, but Schouten and McAlexander did not explain why Harley Davidson was associated with these values. Likewise, Kates (2004) described how particular brands become legitimate props of a subculture on the basis of their support for gay rights and how this support gave them legitimacy amongst the gay subculture. But his study did not show what specific values were allocated to which brands and how that association came to be. In this study, on the other hand, I describe the socio-cultural processes by which particular brands, style and consumer activities become repositories of the values of the subculture (for instance the N95 Nike trainers the gangsta boys wore). These trainers were first introduced

through gangsta rap. The gangsta boys identified with the music and associated the trainers with the machismo of the gangsters. Over the years, rap music and the clothing styles associated with the music became mainstream. The gangsta boys were loyal to the classic style because it expressed their commitment to the pioneers of gangsta rap. I also described in how raves as a consumer activity had become associated with the values of the gangsta identity. Similarly, the brightly coloured cardigans that the popular boys wore had become imbued with the values of the popular boy subculture through the brand's associations with university students and other young people who were seen in the company of 'posh' girls - boys who wore a less masculine style of clothing, unlike the masculine and aggressive styles worn by the gangsta boys.

My research also contributes to the study of subcultures. Recent research on subcultures (*e.g.* by Thornton, 1995; Gelder, 2007; Muggleton, 2000) has been directed towards establishing the irrelevance of structures, such as class and ethnicity, to the formation of subcultures. The premise of this earlier research is based on the assumption that, in the postmodern world subcultures are merely another lifestyle choice that is made free from structural determinants, to further the project of playful identity creation. My research suggests that the irrelevance of social structures posited by recent research is premature.

The study of subcultures can be traced to the pioneering work carried out at the Department of Sociology at Chicago University in 1892. Analysts

from the School were primarily interested in studying ‘deviant’ social groups – groups that are perceived to deviate from the normative ideals of adult community - which they later called ‘sub cultures’. These deviant subcultures were seen as solutions to the problems of adjustments faced by individuals in similar situations. When individuals lack the characteristics that are required to claim status in a society, a viable solution for such individuals is to get together and establish new criteria for status based on characteristics they do possess, and through this process subcultures emerge. An influential individual in the Department, Albert Cohen (1955), explained the emergence of subcultures as a response to status problems. He argued that:

‘Our ability to achieve status depends upon the criteria of status applied by our fellows, that is, the standards or norms they go by in evaluating people.... If we lack the characteristics or capacities which give status in terms of these criteria we are beset by one of the most typical and yet distressing of human problems of adjustment. One solution is for individuals who share such problems to gravitate towards one another and jointly to establish new norms, new criteria of status which define as meritorious the characteristics they do possess’ (taken from Gelder and Thornton, 1997, p. 51).

This view of the formation of subcultures – a response to status problems –was reflected in much of the research of the Chicago School (see, for example, Becker, 1991) Becker understands subcultures as alternative spaces where individuals solve their status problems. In his book *The*

*Outsiders*, Becker (1991) studied a group of musicians who aspired to playing jazz for an audience of like-minded peers, but who were frustrated by their vocations as performers in bars and taverns. These musicians redefined their social world by defining outsiders as 'squares' and insiders as 'hip'. To be 'hip' was to possess a mysterious attitude which could be acquired through the mainstream institutions and which set an individual apart from all other people who are described as 'square'. This alternative status hierarchy allowed them to solve the status problem they faced because of their dominated position in mainstream society. Becker (1991), referring to this 'hip' and 'square' attitude, stated that: 'This attitude is generalized into a feeling that musicians are different from and better than other kinds of people and accordingly ought not to be subject to the control of outsiders in any branch of life' (p. 86). In this loosely connected subculture the individual could seek status on his own terms, independently from the criteria used by the world of the 'squares'; their behaviour was therefore governed primarily by subcultural concerns. As Becker (1991) stated: 'They take into account the way their fellows will evaluate what they do, and how that evaluation will affect their prestige and rank' (p.183)

The Chicago School became known mainly for its ethnographic studies of delinquent subcultures. The explanation they used for the genesis of the delinquent subcultures was that 'the establishment of a deviant subculture is an 'adaptation' by individuals who are aware of society's success goals but who cannot operationalise them' (Young and Atkinson, 2008, p. 9). Owing to their

failure to meet the achievement norms of mainstream society, the delinquents congregate to define their own terms of status, often in opposition to the mainstream, as a reaction to their underachievement weighed against the criteria of the mainstream. Cohen (1972) stated:

‘The delinquent subculture is not only a set of roles, a design for living which is different from or indifferent to or even in conflict with the norms of the ‘respectable’ adult society. It would appear at least plausible that it is defined by its ‘negative polarity’ to these norms. That is, delinquent subculture takes its norms from the larger culture but turns them upside down. The delinquent’s conduct is right by the standards of his subculture, precisely because it is wrong by the norms of the larger culture’ (taken from Gelder and Thornton 1997, p. 28).

The research of the Chicago School was the earliest that dealt with subcultures, and their research agenda was carried forward by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) established at the University of Birmingham in 1964. CCCS profoundly shaped the interests and methods of subcultural analysis for the next two decades. Whereas the Chicago School did not limit its work to a specific category, the CCCS turned their attention to the study of ‘youth’ subcultures. One of the primary shortcomings of the work produced from the Chicago School that the CCCS aimed to address was that the earlier work did not attempt to situate the structural strains in a specific socio-historic context. The new theory developed by the members of the CCCS

was different, because it focused on the evolution of social class in post-war Britain and lent their subcultural theory historical depth by locating the structural problems and their solutions to a specific place and time.

The orientation of the research carried out at the Birmingham School was described in Phil Cohen's (1972) paper, 'Subcultural conflict and working class community'. Cohen argued that youth subcultures were a sign of a class in decline. When the parent culture was no longer cohesive, the youth respond with a symbolic resolution to the crisis of class. He described in detail the breakdown of the traditional working class community in post-war Britain, and argued that the youth were the most vulnerable to these changes. He stated:

'It seems to me that the latent function of subculture is this: to express and resolve, albeit 'magically', the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture' (p. 96).

He argued that the 'Mods, parkas, skinheads, crombies all represent, in their different ways, an attempt to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in their parent culture' (p. 94). Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts (1976), in their Introduction to *Resistance to Ritual*, described the position of the Birmingham School in more detail. To expand the theoretical landscape, Clarke *et al.* turned to the concept of hegemony. They said that 'we must first situate the youth in the dialectic between a 'hegemonic' dominant culture and the subordinate working class 'parent' culture of which youth is a fraction' (taken from Hall and Jefferson 1976, p. 38) The ruling class, they

argued, become hegemonic when they it was able to exercise a special kind of power – a power to frame alternatives and contain opportunities so that the granting of legitimacy to the dominant class became natural. According to their conceptualization, hegemony required the consent of the subordinate class, and had to be constantly won and worked for. They regarded youth subcultures as one response among many to the hegemony of the dominant class. Youth subcultures were seen as a strategy of resistance – they operated by winning space and issuing challenges to the domination of the other classes They provided youth subcultures with a creative agency, albeit on an ideological plane only, as symbolic challenge to the hegemony of the dominant class. Clarke *et al.* (1976) stated:

‘In addressing the ‘class problematic’ of the particular strata from which they were drawn, the different subcultures provided for a section of working class youth (mainly boys) one strategy for negotiating their collective existence. But their highly ritualized and stylized form suggests that they were also attempts at a solution to that problematic experience: a resolution, which because pitched largely at the symbolic level, was fated to fail’ (taken from Hall and Jefferson 1976, p. 47).

Subsequent research at the CCCS at the University of Birmingham was based on the premise that youth subcultures were symbolic expressions of the resistance of the working class youth to the dominant culture. Hebdidge (1976), for instance, in his study on the subculture of the ‘mod’ reads into the styles appropriated by the youth a strong undercurrent of resistance to the role

of the passive consumer which the dominant culture has reserved for them. Hebdidge wrote:

‘The mod dealt his blows by inverting and distorting the images (of neatness, of short hair) so cherished by his employers and parents, to create a style, which while being overtly close to the straight world was nonetheless incomprehensible to it. . . The basis of the style is the appropriation and reorganization by the subject of elements in the objective world which would otherwise determine and constrict him’ (taken from Hall and Jefferson 1976, pp. 93-94).

Hebdidge (1974) in his study of black youth read into the ‘rude’ boy subculture elements of resistance. He argued that, while the first generation Jamaican immigrants just accepted failure, the youth actively resisted the domination by mainstream society. He argued that:

‘The young black Briton was less inclined to shrug and forbear, and the reassessment of the African heritage currently underway in Jamaica and the USA was bound to provide channels through which his anger could be directed and his dignity retrieved’ (p. 41).

The position of the CCCS differed significantly from that of the earlier American research agenda. The earlier research envisioned a single established status hierarchy where individuals at the lower rung aspired to middle class values and goals. The subcultural problem owed itself to the disjunction



between the limited working class means of achievement and the middle class goals of success. The subculture was a result of status failure, because of rejection by middle class institutions or a reaction to the anxiety caused by the inability to achieve the dominant goals. There was a consensual view of society – everyone believed in the American dream of success, and the youth culture was a collective compensation for those who were not successful. The research from the CCCS approached the youth subculture with a very different orientation. It argued that the youth inherited from their parents a specific attitude towards a ‘problematic’ common to the class as a whole, which mediated their understanding of different aspects of their social life. The youth subculture then was presented not as a reaction to status failure, but rather, it was a form of resistance to the domination of the working class.

Although the CCCS work on subculture profoundly shaped subcultural studies, it did not go unchallenged. With its emphasis on class as the primary social referent, its refusal to use, barring Willis, methods that would enable a concrete engagement with the youth cultures, and its over-privileging of spectacular styles, the CCCS approach became the subject of extensive criticism (see for example, by Cohen 1980; Frith 1983; and Thornton 1997). Cohen (1980) took issue with the methodology adopted by the analysts at the Birmingham School, which was based on the underlying assumption that subcultures were a collective resistance to the domination of the working class, and which, according to him, prevented alternative interpretations of the youth subcultures. Cohen (1980) noted that everything is decoded in terms of

resistance and opposition even though it was might be accepted and supported. This was an issue that was also raised by Frith (1983), who argued that the consumption and cyclical-style shopping in the youth leisure sphere may simply be fun and hedonistic rather than tactical or confrontational. Cohen (1980) argued that the analysts from the Birmingham School had failed to support their bold interpretations of youth subcultures with sufficient data. They had refused to use methods that directly engaged with the youth, and, in the absence of such an engagement, Cohen argued that claims they made were not convincing. Any inconsistencies in the styles of the subcultures were glossed over by using the concept of 'bricolage', interpreting at times even inconsistent styles in order to find evidence of opposition and resistance. Cohen (1980) wrote: 'This is, to be sure, an imaginative way of reading the style; but how can we be sure that it is also not imaginary' (p. *lix*). In a similar vein Muggleton (2000) criticized the failure of the CCCS to analyze the subcultures on the phenomenological level. Criticising Cohen's paper on the mod and skinhead subculture, Muggleton (*ibid.*) stated:

'It does not attempt a reconstruction of the subjective motives and meanings of the mods and the skinheads, but presents a semiotic interpretation of the subcultural solutions. . . . Style is read as text and only the semiotician is entrusted to crack the code' (p. 13).

This approach, according to Muggleton, was problematic because it did not establish the connection between their social scientific explanations and the subjective reality of the subjects of the study.

Thornton (1995), similarly, in her study of what she called ‘club cultures’, criticized the work of the Birmingham School and departed from the assumptions she believed were the limitations of the Birmingham tradition. She claimed that her study was ‘post Birmingham’ in the sense that she did not ‘over-politicize’ the cultural consumption of youth. Instead she returned to the work of the Chicago School subculturalists, and their preoccupation with alternative status social hierarchies, which permitted the determinations of, among other structures, class at bay (Gelder, 2007). Thornton (*supra.*) argued that club cultures were *ad hoc* communities where individuals could seek distinction and status within the taste cultures of the club cultures, in a sense transcending class ascriptions. Via distinctions in these spaces young people were able to compete for social power and strive for a sense of self-worth. According to Thornton (1995):

‘Rather than characterizing cultural differences as ‘resistances’ to hierarchy or to the remote cultural domination of some ruling body, it (her analytical position) investigates the microstructures of power entailed in the cultural competition that goes on between more closely associated social groups’ (p. 206).

Like Thornton, others have argued that, to maintain conceptual relevance, the studies of subcultures have to move beyond the preoccupation with class which was a hallmark of the CCCS (see for example, Hughson in Young and Atkinson, 2008).

Muggleton (2000) in his book *Inside Subculture* carried this agenda forward by emphasizing the impact of post-modernism on the position of subcultures in social life. His position was that in the post-modern world the problematic of class is not an important social referent. Members from across the class spectrum articulate similar values and sentiments, particularly those of individual freedom and autonomy. In fact with the erosion of the boundaries of class, gender, and ethnicity, traditional subcultural boundaries have also dissolved. His argument was that, in the contemporary consumer culture, no stable meaning could be assigned to a specific style or subculture. Subculturalists were not so much interested in group identities, as they were in claiming a unique individual identity. To realize their ideal of freedom from conventional structures, subculturalists creatively 'surfed' the consumer market to construct temporary ephemeral identities, geared towards seeking individual distinction, which was celebrated in post modern society. Like Irwin (1973), Muggleton (*supra*) proposed a subcultural identity which was a casual consumer choice, with no connection to gender, ethnicity or class specific ideologies. This postmodernist perspective privileged individuality over collectivism and difference over conformity.

Above I have discussed some of the important theoretical developments in the study of subcultures. The earliest work studied a variety of 'deviant' subcultures, in other words those social groups which lay outside mainstream society and which were governed by values which were different to those in the mainstream culture. Later work focused exclusively on youth subcultures and relied primarily on social class as an explanation: subcultures expressed resistance to hegemony. More recent work, however, has understood subcultures as lifestyle choices, deployed to express individual distinction, and where structures (such as class, gender, and ethnicity) are of incidental importance only. Whereas the earliest work was sympathetic towards deviant subcultures, in later work there was a noticeable admiration for the spectacular subculturalists, and more recently, they have been returned to the *ordinary* because in the post modern world everyone is seeking the same goal: individual distinction using subcultures as casual consumer choices. In what follows I will use the findings of my research to critically engage with these theoretical positions with regard to the study of subcultures.

The gangsta boy subculture reported above suggests that, contrary to the claims of recent analysts, social class is an important referent for the youth who are part of this subculture. Hebdige (1974) argued that racial distinctions 'overlay basic class distinctions and intensify fundamental class conflict' (p. 30), whereas the post-modern analysts reported that social class had become irrelevant. However, I found that the racial situation of the Pakistani youth intensified the basic class conflict, and that, because of this intensification, the

structure of class became visible. The values and styles of the gangsta boys encouraged a return to the explanations of subcultures that had been made by the CCCS. The gangsta boys were not interested in becoming part of mainstream society, but they were interested in challenging the domination of that society. According to the gangsta boys the mainstream society appreciated monetary success through the institutional routes of a university education and professional jobs. This success was then expressed via conspicuous consumer goods: expensive cars, branded clothes, designer watches and the like. The youth, however, mocked the 'legitimate' route to such success. The ideal of the gangsta can be seen as a potent symbol of resistance to their domination: the gangsta was a tough successful and connected man who was above mainstream society and he able to live the consumer life, which the middle class desired, with flourish. For instance, according to the gangsta boys, an expensive car would put them at the top of the status hierarchy thus undermining the effectiveness of such symbols in expressing legitimate success. I argued earlier that one of the most important contradictions that the gangsta boys faced was due to the disjunction between their fathers' powerful masculinity at home and their powerlessness in working class vocations. The manner in which the gangsta subculture responded to this contradiction should be read as an active form of resistance to class domination. The value of tough masculinity that was an important value of the gangsta culture was a direct reaction to the emasculation felt in the domain of work. The gangsta boys' leisure activities were imbued with a 'hyper masculinity' through which they resisted the

domination of mainstream society. For instance, they framed their use of marijuana as resistance to the rules of mainstream society. However, the various elements of the gangsta culture did not cohere as tightly as the stylistic elements described by analysts at the Birmingham School, where a complete homology with focal concerns was read into every element of subculture style (see, for example, the study of mods and skinheads by Hebdige, 1973). My point is that the claim by postmodern analysts that social class has become irrelevant to subcultural formation is premature, and that the subcultural style of the gangsta boys is best understood by critically using the theoretical framework of researchers from the CCCS.

The comparison of the popular boy subculture to that of the gangsta boy subculture lends further credence to my argument that the gangsta boy subculture was a solution to the problematic they encountered as a dominated class. The popular boys aspired to mainstream status and, rather than resisting, they wanted a legitimate space in mainstream society. Their subculture was akin to the club cultures Thornton studied, where distinctions were a means to attain a mainstream status and a sense of self-worth. The mainstream white culture with its specific 'taste culture' regarding outfits and leisure activities was the relevant social field for these youth who competed for a place in this field. The popular boy subculture was closer to the post-modern subcultures discussed above, where individuals express the values of freedom and subcultural affiliations are casual consumer choices. The divergence between the two subcultures reported above suggests that no single explanative

framework has ascendancy over alternatives. While the position advocated by the CCCS enables a richer understanding of the gangsta subculture, the popular boy subculture was better understood by using the theoretical formulations developed after the influence of the CCCS (the Birmingham School) waned.

Finally, my research confirms some of the theoretical developments in the sociological literature about acculturation. Scholarly research on immigrant assimilation can be traced to the Chicago School of sociology where the immigrant experience was seen as a gradual incorporation into the mainstream American way of life. This traditional model posited that over time subsequent generations of immigrants would follow a linear path, beginning with adaptation to the eventual adoption of the mainstream way of life (Chacko 2003). This model, though adequate in explaining the experience of European immigrants, failed to explain the experience of the multitude of later non-European immigrants to the US. More recent work recognizing the complexity of the assimilation process has factored in the impact of economic, social and cultural factors, and has moved beyond the traditional model (see, for example, Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou and Bankston 1999; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; and Lee and Zhou, 2004).

My research contributes to this recent research which recognizes the pluralistic and fragmented environment immigrants find themselves in and asks the central question which 'is not whether the second generation will assimilate to US society but to what segment of that society it will assimilate' (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, p 55). Using data from a detailed questionnaire



conducted in 1990 (*Children of Immigrants: A Longitudinal Study* (CILS)) a model of immigration acculturation was developed in two separate volumes (Portes and Rumbault, 2001; Rumbault and Portes, 2001). The model moved beyond the assimilation model in important ways. Thus, instead of assuming eventual assimilation into the mainstream, they developed a segmented assimilation model. A set of background factors, which included the resources the parents immigrate with, the reception the immigrants received, and the family structure of the immigrants interacted to produce three patterns of assimilation: ‘dissonant acculturation’, ‘consonant acculturation’, and ‘selective acculturation’. The corresponding expected outcomes for these patterns that resulted from specific configurations of the external factors (such as racial discrimination, labour markets and subcultures) were: downward assimilation for dissonant acculturation, upward assimilation matches consonant acculturation, and upward assimilation with biculturalism when selective acculturation takes place. My findings do not sit comfortably with this model which was developed to explain the immigrant experience. Applying this model, the gangsta boys would fall under the category of the dissonant acculturation which is the assimilation of migrants into local deviant youth subcultures. In this model the dissonant acculturation is a result of family breakdown. Thus, ‘when families and communities are not able to provide adequate social support or control to steer adolescents away from the youth culture that surrounds them’ (Zhou and Bankston, 1999, p. 215) then the youth reject the parents culture and become ‘over Americanized’ (*ibid.* p. 194).

Zhou and Bankston reported that all immigrant first generation parents were committed to the education of their sons, but that some were not capable of appreciating the support required to enable their sons to achieve these goals. When the sons decided to give up on their parents' dream, conflicts arose and this conflict pushed the youth to alternatives, such as gangs where they were able to feel part of a 'family'. However, in my study I found that the gangsta boys were not cut off from their parents' culture at all, and that their relationship with their parents was not strained. This situation was as a result of the immigration ideology of their parents who, unlike those reported, were not as committed to education and achieving a middle class status. The gangsta identity was not as a result of a desire for a stable 'family' but in fact the gangsta culture was a dialectical resolution of the contradictions within the parent culture. It was a form of selective assimilation which according to their model is only possible for upwardly mobile immigrants who when they adopt the middle class lifestyles face parental pressures to maintain cultural values, and resolve them by maintaining parts of both the cultures - reported in the case of Filipina migrants (Espirito and Wolf, 2001). My findings suggest a selective assimilation even in the case of the downwardly mobile immigrants, and calls for a revision of the model. Another important limitation of this model is that they regarded the identity projects of the downwardly mobile immigrants as a an assimilation into an already existing subculture, whereas my research shows that the gangsta boy subculture was not a mere mimicking of an existing subculture, but was a 'new subculture' which was made in

Britain, but was nonetheless very 'Pakistani'. The same critique holds for the bicultural upwardly mobile immigrants, who in my study corresponded to the popular boys. As I have shown above the popular boys were not maintaining two separate sets of cultural values, but instead their culture was a resolution of the contradictions between the two cultures.

The acculturation projects reported in my research support the findings reported by Lee and Zhou (2004) in their work on Asian-American Youth in the United States. Based on individual case studies included in this volume of work in this research area, they emphasized the distinct character of the Asian youth cultures that had emerged as a response to their exclusion at the hands of mainstream white society. They stated:

'As this volume reveals, Asian American youth have had to strike a balance between these two cultures – that of their parents and that of their host country – and in the process, they have created unique cultural forms and practices' (p. 319).

For instance, in her contribution to the volume by Lee and Zhou (2004), Namkung (2004) studied 'import car racing' in Southern California and showed how these youth, excluded from 'muscle car racing' (an Anglo dominated culture) developed a distinct culture which provided a pan-Asian identity for the youth. The import car racing culture developed with its own set of dressing style, music preferences, slang *etc*, which enabled the Asian youth to respond to the issues these youths faced. For instance the masculinity and

hyper-heterosexuality that was imbued in the import car racing culture was a response to the ascription of effeminate masculinity to the Asian youth by the mainstream white society. My findings echo these findings. As I have shown, both the popular boy and the gangsta boy cultures were made in the UK, but were unquestionably Pakistani in the same way that import car racing was made in America but was 'unquestionably Asian American' (Namkung, 2004, p. 174). In general my findings fit very well with those reported in this volume. However, they differ one important way in that the guiding assumption in the explanations for these cultures was 'exclusion' by mainstream society, which in our context did not prove to be crucial. What was more important were the difficulties that arose for the gangsta boys due to the internal contradictions of the parents' ideologies, and for the popular boys between the mainstream white and the parents' ideologies. My research has contributed to acculturation studies by highlighting some important differences that are a result of the peculiarities of the specific context, and my findings expand the scope of this burgeoning body of literature.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

My study has analyzed how second generation immigrant males from Pakistan acculturated to Western culture. In contrast to prior research that reported on individualistic acculturation projects, I have found that the second generation immigrant youth pursued subcultural acculturation projects. The second generation immigrants developed these subcultures of consumption to resolve the tensions they faced. I found that these youth gravitated towards one of two distinct subcultures (*i.e.* the popular boy or gangsta) depending on the different tensions, conflicts and difficulties they had to deal with as a result of their Pakistani family origins. The tensions the second generation youth encountered originate from the immigration ideology of their parents. I found that the immigrant ideologies of the first generation migrants varied according to their life before they emigrated from Pakistan. The popular boy parents had immigrated to the Britain with the intention of staying there, and aspired to middle class success through the second generation's success. However, they expected their sons to maintain their conservative cultural values, which were often in contradiction with the values of mainstream society. The second generation, however, while pursuing mainstream success was tempted by the values of mainstream society, and this situation created tensions for them. The gangsta boy parents immigrated with the intention of returning to their ancestral villages with money that would allow them to improve their living

conditions. For this reason, they did not strive to seek middle class success in England, and voluntarily lived a simple frugal life. They did not encourage their sons to assimilate into the mainstream culture, but supported them in pursuing a locally-situated identity. The gangsta boy fathers were authoritarian at home and timid outside. This ‘two-faced’ masculinity was hard for the boys to relate to. They liked the power their fathers exhibit inside the house, but did not appreciate their fathers’ timidity outside. It indeed emasculated them, and created tensions regarding their masculinity. I found that my informants gravitated towards the subculture that resolved the corresponding tensions they faced. My ethnographic work with the youth *in situ* enabled me to understand their subcultural identities as they played out their lives. It showed how these identities were defined in opposition to other subcultures, and how they were sustained through interaction.

### **6.1 The Popular Boy Subculture**

The popular boy parents immigrated to the West, or more specifically to Britain, to enjoy the comforts of the urban life they were denied in their own country, Pakistan. They emigrated from the margins of urban centres and desired to live an upper-middle class urban lifestyle, but Pakistan did not offer them the opportunities to pursue such a lifestyle. They believed that in Britain they could achieve such a lifestyle. Their sons would have the opportunity to get an education and obtain respectable middle class jobs, and their sons’ success would earn the family a middle class status. They therefore supported

and encourage their sons to get a university education and professional jobs. They also wanted their sons to champion conservative Pakistani values. These values were dear to the parents because they distinguished them from the second generation migrants from the remote rural areas of Pakistan. The expectation of the parents for their children to partake of material middle class success, but without adopting the values of mainstream society, was the source of the contradictions the second generation experienced. The youth found themselves caught between the temptations of the liberal Western culture and the expectations of their parents; and they were troubled by their own inadequacy in achieving middle class success. The popular boy subculture offered them a relief from these tensions. The identity revealing consumption categories of the popular boy subculture are outfits, clubbing, and the consumption of Bollywood movies. These second generation youths through their choice of middle class outfit styles, their cautious participation in clubbing, and their identification with the narrative of Bollywood movies, were able to resolve the contradictions they faced. In the field of outfits, which their parents did not perceive as a threat to their conservative values, these youth face negligible contradictions, and confidently adopted their interpretation of the middle class style. The situation was very different, however, with regard to the consumption of clubbing which the parents rejected completely. However, clubbing was one of the most important consumption activities of mainstream white youth, and, without participating in this activity, the popular boys would never be able to gain legitimacy. The popular boys resolved this

contradiction by engaging in the activity, and justifying their consumption by adapting their parents' ideal of a good son by borrowing from the more modern avatar of the conservative Asian values promoted by Bollywood movies. The Bollywood narrative loosened the moral strictures on the youth by assuring them that their Asian identity remained intact even though their 'immorality' was directed towards white women. The narrative also resolved the contradictions between their parents' conservative ideas about marriage, and the liberal ideas about such relationships in mainstream society. By investing in these three consumption categories (namely, clothing choice, clubbing and Bollywood movies), the second generation youth were able to negotiate the contradictions between their parents' aspirations and the pressures of the mainstream white society.

## **6.2 The Gangsta Boy Subculture**

The gangsta parents immigrated from remote poverty stricken villages in Pakistan and this journey was initially regarded as only a temporary move. These immigrants wanted to work hard, make money, and return with that money to their villages to buy land with which to live a materially comfortable life. These parents therefore invested very little in improving their lives in their 'temporary' abode in Britain. Their dream was to return to Pakistan where they would buy a large expensive house and 'boost' their status hierarchy there. The role of the second generation towards the fruition of this goal was merely to make a financial contribution to their return. Their expectations of their sons,



unlike those of the parents of the popular boys, were less demanding. These fathers, however, wielded respect and power in the household, which was the family structure prevalent in their village. The youth learning from their father's example defined masculinity in terms of power, but refused to accept the contradiction in their father's masculinity which was timid outside the home. The second source of tension came from their parents' failure in offering them a well-defined identity oriented towards their immediate culture. The gangsta identity, built on the values of tough masculinity, material success, and the idea that they were above the law, allowed the gangsta youth to respond to the internal contradictions of their fathers' immigration ideology and the domination of mainstream society which, in the boys' eyes, only respected material success. The fathers who were authoritarian figures in the house were exemplars of a masculinity that commanded power, and yet their masculinity outside the house was very timid. The youth, who were not willing to live with such a contradiction, claimed power over the mainstream through their irreverence of mainstream laws and their aggressive masculinity. The love of Drum and Bass music and their participation in raves allowed them to reinforce the image of tough masculinity, and emphasized their connection to the 'gangsters'. The rave also acted as an arena where they could exaggerate their economic success, which they also did, for instance, by wearing very expensive branded clothing and accessories. Through their consumption these youth strove to emphasize the values of the gangsta identity which were a dialectical solution to the contradictions they faced.

## **CHAPTER 7: LIMITATIONS**

There are a number of limitations in my study. First of all, during my fieldwork I focused on migrants whose parents had low economic, social, and cultural capital when they first immigrated to the UK. Although some of them were able to accumulate economic capital, their educational level did not change. My findings are therefore only applicable to that particular population. Had I selected second generation migrants with parents who immigrated with a higher cultural capital and education I might have uncovered very different acculturation patterns. Educated parents might have helped their sons in achieving educational success, and also it is possible that some of the issues the youth I studied faced would not be relevant to youth who had educated parents. My research findings only apply to second generation men, and the issues that are particular to second generation women have not been explored in my research. Their situation would be very different, primarily because in Asian families daughters are the guardians of family honour, and their behaviour is closely monitored, and controlled.

Another significant limitation of my research is that I relied on interviews with first generation fathers. Thus, I have only talked about the influence of the paternal, and the maternal point of view has not been touched upon. However, as Islamic cultural conservatism makes access to mothers very difficult, I had to rely only on interviews with fathers. This exclusive reliance

weakens the strength of my interpretations. For, as I have shown, most of the fathers did not actively participate in the rearing of their children – they were too busy earning a living. The moral upbringing of children is mainly the responsibility of mothers, and, because I have not been able include their point of view, my research can only claim a partial interpretation of the influence of the parents.

The youth I spent time with also exhibited a very rudimentary attachment to their religious identity, and it is possible that religion may offer a narrative that is relevant to the acculturation process of young persons. I also did not consider the acculturation projects of young second generation women, who would be influenced by a very different set of expectations on the part of their parents. A further limitation of my study was that Bolchester is a small town with a relatively small Pakistani population, but Pakistanis are the largest ethnic minority in the town. Cities like Birmingham and Bradford that boast a much larger Pakistani population may offer other solutions for young Pakistani men, but which were not available to the youth in Bolchester. Other cities like London which is home to a wider variety of ethnic minorities, might change the dynamics of the Asian social hierarchy, which was important in this context. For instance, in Southall, London, where Indians form the majority, the Pakistanis have more reason to unite against the traditional rivalry between the two nations. Another limitation pertains to the long-term effectiveness of these subcultural solutions. As these youth enter different stages of their lives –

pass their university age, get married, or have children – their priorities will change, and the usefulness of these identities may diminish.

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## APENNDICES

### APENNDIX A: Sample from field notes

Ethno 27<sup>th</sup> Feb

Husnain and I got picked up by Zayed, Saif, Agha and Salman in the courtesy car they had got after Saif's car had had an accident. It was a seven-seater, and everyone loved the car. Agha is a friend of Saif's. He is 22 year old and recently graduated from Durham University in accounting. He used to live in Worcester and the family shifted a year earlier to Birmingham. According to him growing up they avoided hanging out with a lot of Asians, and because of their dad all the brothers studied, went to University and have professional jobs.

(Is this the case with other Pakistani youth as well: to do well in University do you have to stay away from other Pakistanis? Does his father think along those lines? Why?? What will his sons achieve from education? What does Agha think about this?)

We headed out to Birmingham to possibly watch an Indian movie, Delhi 6, and meet up with another of their friend called Qasim. Zayed was wearing Hubaib's jacket that he had picked up from Husnain's home. Later on Husnain and Hubaib had a huge fight over the jacket. Hubaib hated that Husnain let Zayed wear it, he himself hardly wore it, it was for special occasions only. He said that I take such good care with my clothes now he has given it to Zayed. The jacket was a grey Gstar jacket. Zayed had left his jacket at home which was a leather jacket from River Island, Hubaib also criticized that jacket as a smart boy jacket etc. (It was interesting to see how clothes were categorized as 'tough' and 'smart' by the youth. The smart boy jacket became for Hubaib a symbol of an effeminate and undesirable masculinity.)

On the way I got to speak to Agha. We had a very interesting discussion. I asked him about his life in Worcester growing up. He told me that he had had white friends in school, because there were very few Asians, but as soon as he went to College he completely changed his set of friends and then only hung out with Asians. He said, "Asians understand each other because of the shared background: they understand the hierarchy with reference to fathers who are the 'authority' in the house". In University as well he had only Asian friends. Many of them not British Pakistanis but Pakistanis from Pakistan (These were all urbanites from Lahore and Karachi. It is interesting to see how Agha developed close friendships with these urbanites, and felt that he was closest to them in his identity project.). He said University was the best time of his life, he chilled with his friends all the time, they went clubbing, played poker and talked endlessly in each others' rooms. He said before University you had



always to go back home but in University you could chill out with your friends all the time. I asked him about how he changed in University, specifically, in tastes. He said it was a complete makeover. He said, “earlier I used to be very much into dressing up like rap stars, hoodies, close shaved hair, caps, baggy jeans. In University I started dressing smartly, more in line with white middle class tastes”. He explained, the jeans were not that baggy anymore, the hair grew and he never had the closed shaved hair again, he stopped wearing hoodies, would wear jumpers and cardigans. In terms of other tastes, his music tastes changed as well, from rap and drum and bass, it switched to more Indie music. Same was the case with movies, whereas earlier he enjoyed action movies and in your face comedies – sexist and racist jokes – now he enjoyed more intelligent movies. He said that his attitude towards women changed as well, earlier it was focused on the anatomy of women, treating them like objects and the only criteria was fitness, now, he looked beyond that, paid more attention to their personality and what they talked about. (These comparisons are interesting because they show, and as he himself claimed, that he thought that going to University allowed him to transcend the culture of the working class Asian youth who were in a sense ‘lower’ than the middle class white individuals. Is this how I feel as well? Do I evaluate the culture of the working class youth as inferior to the one I belong to? Does my background, like Agha’s background predispose me to completely misunderstanding their culture and/or evaluating the culture of these boys as ‘better’ because it is closer to mine. Does this make a critical analysis of their culture impossible?)

(This is the movement into the ‘middle class’ white culture. He slowly distanced himself from the styles and tastes of the working class Asian youth, and became closer to the urbanites. This is an important movement as far his identity is concerned. With these Pakistani friend he started going to clubs dressed up smartly, and became confident in his place in the ‘middle class’ white society. Is this also what the other boys are aspiring to? Is Agha seen as an individual who is successful? What about his parents and how do the parents of the other youth perceive Agha.)

## APPENDIX B: Sample Interim Analytical Document

### Hubaib and his friends

The core group consists of Hubaib, Kamran, Imran, Samir, and Waqar. The group formed in their late teens when they started hanging out on 'the Lane'. 'The Lane' is the name given by the young Pakistanis to the street that runs through an area that is populated, almost exclusively, by Pakistanis.

Apart from Hubaib most of the other members of this group lived on or around Wylds Lane. It was here on the lane hanging out together they developed a culture of their own, structured around leisure activities, hobbies, consumption choices and music tastes. Based on conversations I have had with these young men I have been able to understand these formative years of the group.

The importance of the location is central to the acculturation projects of this group, by no means were these young men the only group of young men hanging around the lane, there existed other small cliques. The lane provided these young men a space of their own, a space that connected these Pakistani youth, a space that was 'Pakistani'. The space was the most visible element of their Pakistani identity. Everyday they would congregate on the lane and spend hours on the lane. Hanging in the house of a friend was out of question for two reasons, going to a house with mothers and sisters lurking around would seriously limit their activities; and more importantly, young men are not welcome in Pakistani houses, more so in the case of houses of rural migrants, even if they are friends of the sons of the family (Do you think it is important to discuss this? Young men are looked at with mistrust, specially, if there are young women in the house. Something that is attributable to the conservatism of rural migrants from Pakistan)

When I brought up the lane with Hubaib he claimed that *everyone* used to hang around the lane. The 'everyone' he was referring to was the Pakistani youth, whom he was interested in befriending in those days. (I will discuss this later on when I speak about how Hubaib is different from other Pakistani kids owing to his urban background.) These kids would spend most of their time smoking cigarettes and talking about things that interested them. One of their friends who had passed the driving test got a job in the local Pakistani

takeaway that operated from Wyld Lane, and the rest of the friends would hang around outside the takeaway waiting for their friend so once there was a delivery they could go with him in the car. Hubaib and his friends were really into Raves, although, Hubaib was the only one who was well informed on the music scene, particularly, in the genres of drum and bass and grime, but all the members of this group shared the passion for raves. And they all consumed marijuana. Most of the stories that were told about the early days had raves and marijuana as the centerpieces.

In their late teens these boys were going through a phase when they did not have the responsibility of working and were still supported by their parents and could afford to spend hours on end together, just hanging out on the lane and going to raves every weekend. Four years later when I started my ethnographic work most of them had started working full time and their meetings had become infrequent. In the following section I will first discuss the aspects of their identity projects that are shared by all members of this group, followed by a discussion of the differences between Hubaib and the rest of his friends, highlighting the differences that arise because of the background of parents.

### Marijuana Consumption

None of these young men have given up on marijuana and it is something that is often the motivation for their infrequent meetings today. I spent most of my time with Hubaib and Kamran, but Imran would always make an appearance when he needed some marijuana, or had some good quality marijuana that he wanted to share with his friends. Similarly, in the last two months the only times Hubaib and Kamran have met Samir is for a smoking session. I have tagged along for a number of such sessions. Usually, the planning is done over the phone, the boys meet in a quiet, secluded place, pile up in one car, get the spliffs going and the conversation gets rolling. The sessions on average exceed two hours, and thoroughly stoned they part ways.

Although, all of these young men smoke marijuana everyday they do not always gather in large groups to do so. Hubaib, either smokes with Kamran or one of his white friends. Imran smokes with his white girlfriend. If they do not have any company they smoke on their own, but most of them are regular marijuana smokers.

On separate occasions I have asked these boys why they smoke, and the answer always is that it puts them in a state where all their worries fade out into the background and their mind is at ease. According to Kamran, “I can shut out all the bullshit!” For each of them, though, the specific worries are different. Becker posits that the use of marijuana for a specific purpose or the derivation of pleasure from the usage of marijuana is a socially constructed experience. A user learns what to feel and gradually learns to enjoy this feeling. These friends started smoking marijuana together and over time learned to use it in a specific way, to mitigate the discrepancies between their actual and ideal life. (More details when I talk about the differences between Hubaib and his friends, culled from their discussion of the ‘problems’ in their lives that marijuana helps them not think about.)

Marijuana consumption serves another purpose as well - it fits in with the tough, urban look these young men aspire for. According to Kamran, “It fits in with whole look, the clothes the music, everything, the gangster look. All the American rap stars smoke it.”

Hubaib agrees to Kamran’s views, in his opinion, the look they tried to achieve in the early days, the masculine ideal they were reenacting, was inspired by the American rap stars who all smoked marijuana and rapped about smoking it. Marijuana smoking then is a central piece in their masculine identity. I asked them how if they could not smoke in public it went with the look? I was informed that word gets around; everyone knows if you smoke marijuana and then they are able to piece the other elements of the masculine identity together. Smoking weed therefore if necessary to lend authenticity to the gangster look, if you do not smoke weed, then the rest of it is just an act and you are not respected.

### Music and Raves

The boys also congregate a few times a year to go to a Rave. A few years ago when they used to hang out around the lane they would go to raves at least once a month. Raves are very thoroughly planned outings for the members of this group. The most care is directed towards having the right ‘look’ for the event. Raves are opportunities for these young men to ‘dress to impress’. (Redhead 1977) Later we will see how the ‘right look’ and the motivation behind attending these raves vary within the group.

## Masculinity

In order to understand the acculturation style of these young men it is important to understand the concept of masculinity these individuals identify with. Growing up on the lane these men got into the urban youth culture, the rap and hip hop music from the US, and drum & bass and Grime that have their origins in London and Birmingham. This masculinity is defined by a hardness and toughness, not just in attitude but in looks as well. Their understanding of masculinity reflects the low cultural capital, an emphasis on the body and physical strength over intellectual abilities.

Hubaib explained to me in detail their concept of masculinity and how the music related to it. According to him the music they listened to was relevant to life on the street, it was about 'beef' the singers had with other people, many songs were in fact responses to comments other musicians had made about the singers. Hubaib, emphasized that 'Grime' was the most aggressive form of music, and many of the singers had stabbed other people as well. None of the members of this sub culture though, had resorted to such violent behavior, then how did this music make sense to them? Why did it resonate with their life?

It resonated because it aligned with their conception of the street life they were living. These men felt that life on the street was tough, you had to stand up for yourself or else you will not get respect, they would state. No body is worth trusting and what is important is that other men should fear you, if not that then at least respect you. The music made sense to them because it talked of a life where respect on the street was earned by showing that one was tough and also by showing that one was a success. Both these concerns are central to the lifestyle of these young men, but here again, Hubaib and his friends manifest different styles of resolution of these concerns.

## Status Symbols

For these individuals who are low in cultural capital the most favored expressions of distinction are directly related to symbols of monetary achievement. The concern to show money is shared but Hubaib's urban and his friends' rural background and upbringing results in interesting differences within the group. Notwithstanding these differences, the theme that unites

them is the importance they lend to the visibility of the status symbols deployed.

For these young men therefore the first and most important status symbol is a 'good' car. A good car is a car that is expensive and is fast. Hubaib owns a BMW and since he has had that car he feels he has more respect than he used to have. His car becomes the center of conversation whenever he meets with his friends. They comment about its speed, they comment about the attention it draws. A very telling example of the importance of cars came up when they were talking about the early days when the only car available to them was Waqar's mini. They were so embarrassed of sitting in that car that they would always have their hoods down and hated bumping into other people they knew while they were in the car.

These young men recognize the importance of having a good car and also of having 'knowledge' of good cars. I remember going to the cinema with them to watch *Transporter 3*, after the movie for at least half an hour the conversation revolved around the Audi he had driven, and almost everyone expressed a desire to own that car. I asked them: Why is the car so desirable? They informed me about how fast it was, how it did 0-60 in so many seconds, how the engine technology was sophisticated, and the shape was amazing. What they did not touch upon directly was that such cars are also very expensive. In everyday conversations between Hubaib and his friends invariable cars come up, the salience of 'cars' as a topic is an indication of the importance of cars in their subculture. Once when Mehmood was telling them about his trip to Amsterdam, the feature that he was most impressed by in Amsterdam was the number of BMWs and Mercedes cars he saw on the streets there. On another occasion Samir came to meet us in his car. He owns a Honda civic, a car that is not a source of prestige because it is not that expensive or particularly fast, but Samir had invested in the car displaying both 'knowledge' and money, and therefore as soon as he pulled up next to us everyone in the car commented about how 'sick' the car was. From the outside Samir had gotten the car lowered and had a spoiler added, both signs of fast cars; he had also invested in an engine kit that allowed manual adjustment of speeds each of the gears could achieve. His strategy of enhancing the car was perfect: the engine change is not as obvious unless somebody sits in the car with him, therefore an external investment was necessary, because it works as a visible, easy to understand symbol.

Apart from cars none of the other symbols hold equal importance. The reason for this is the urban background of Hubaib and the rural background of his friends makes consensus difficult. This difference has led to a different approach to showing money, which I will discuss later, but here I want to emphasize that status revealing, conspicuous consumption was very important to them.

#### The relevant 'others'

Subcultural identity is often articulated against another subculture. For Hubaib and his friends it was important to show that they are different from both the 'typical Pakistanis', 'Smart boys' and 'middle class white culture'. According to Hubaib and his friends 'Typical Pakistanis' were people who did not have any white friends because white people did not like them. They had a very 'Pakistani mentality': 'Pakistani mentality' was a term that came up often but was never satisfactorily explained. I learned that this term did not have a specific meaning; it was flexible and therefore could be easily used to label other individuals. A few instances of the usage of the term can help us understand it better; the first time this term was used was when we were driving down Wylds Lane and Kamran saw a Pakistani kid standing by a Taxi, when we passed him, Kamran said, "I hate you!" Hubaib laughed heartily in response to his comments. I asked Kamran why do you hate him? "I do not like him because he is a typical Pakistani". I asked him why was he a typical Pakistani? He said he was typical because he did not like white people and whenever they met he started going on about how he hated college because it was full of white people. He said if you hate white people so much you should get out of this country. A few days later when I asked Kamran again to explain what a typical Pakistani was, he said that it was somebody who was "cunning and crude". He explained that both words meant the same thing; it referred to somebody who was devious, friendly in front of you and bitched about you behind your back. I observed their subsequent usage of the category and realized that there was no such thing as a 'typical Pakistani', it was always used to categorize individuals they did not like, individuals who did not acknowledge them and did not give them enough respect. It was often deployed to categorize a particular group of young Pakistanis, but when one of them was nice to Kamran, he automatically, became an alright guy and not a typical Pakistani.

The second kind of people they are adamant on distinguishing themselves from are what they call the ‘smart boys’. According to them smart boys are those boys who dress too well, by that they mean a specific ‘look’: bright colored cardigans – bright blue, parrot green, and pink; non-baggy jeans, compared to their baggy jeans which are typical of the urban youth look; shirts; leather jackets; and tastes more in line with either middle class white tastes or Bollywood. This look also includes a specific hairstyle compared to their closed shaved heads the smart boys had longer hair meticulously waxed. Smart boys are also boys who have Pakistani girlfriends as opposed to white girlfriends.

Whenever I mentioned my time spent with one of the ‘catalogue boys’, I received responses that betrayed the antagonism; Kamran once said to me, “I hate these smart boys. I know them, he (referring to the person I had spent a day with) used to work under me, he is devious.” On another occasion he took offence to the fact that I preferred spending a day with them instead of hanging out with him and Hubaib. Similarly, Hubaib on numerous occasions voiced his opinion on these boys, often when he fought with his brother he would say, “You think you are a cool guy now because you hang out with those smart boys.” He even came out with a limerick making fun of their soft masculinity, their pink cardigans and how he would beat the catalogue boys up. These comments were not in response to any provocation on the part of the catalogue boys who always were civil to Hubaib, but rather they are symptomatic of the status competition.

A third group consists of middle class white people. Hubaib and his friends have chosen University going white boys as the representatives of white middle class. Often when we went for a delivery to the Worcester University the boys displayed their dislike for these boys commenting and laughing on their clothes and hairstyles. Interestingly, the comments here too were directed at the soft masculinity they felt these boys approved of. When we were parked outside the student hall on one of our deliveries, a young man walked out who was wearing a waistcoat over his jeans and shirt, Hubaib and Kamran made numerous comments about him, calling him a ‘Smart boy’. On another occasion I was with Hubaib at the restaurant when it was busy, full of white customers, almost all of them University students because it was student night. Hubaib instead of working at the front preferred making pizzas. He told me that he hated white people. I found the statement odd because he has quite a few white friends. When I probed further he said I hate these kind of white



people my friends are different. I asked him in what way? To which he replied these boys probably are into drinking and watching football. His refusal to stand and serve them betrayed a lack of confidence when facing those who were perceived by the wider society as on their way to success when compared to Hubaib and his friends who were college dropouts.

Hubaib and his friends are working class, and the white people they have expressed negative feelings about are always middle class, University going students. All his friends respond defensively when it comes to University going students, as if, these students make their subordinate position salient, and their response is belittling their achievements, by claiming that these kids have no idea what life on the streets is like, they do not know what the real world is like and are experientially deprived.

### The Urban Migrants

Literature on immigrant acculturation ignores the distinctions that exist within the immigrant community based on the origins of the immigrants from the country of origin. My fieldwork shows that for British Pakistanis these differences are central to their identities. In the following section, using Hubaib's family I will discuss in detail the sensibilities of the urban migrants from Pakistan.

His parents immigrated to the UK when he was 3 years old. His father belongs to a respectable family from Lahore, one of the most affluent urban centers of Pakistan. Upon arriving in England his father bought a corner shop and the family settled into the flat above the shop. Migrants from middle class urban families are free from the obligation of sending money to relatives in Pakistan and therefore are able to save money and invest in promising ventures. His father did exactly that and in a few years was able to establish himself in the property business. In sharp contrast to migrants from rural areas of Pakistan who migrate into extended family networks in UK, Hubaib's family shied away from the neighborhood where Pakistani families are concentrated, and decided to live in the suburbs of Worcester; his uncle's family live in a predominantly white neighborhood. This choice is also a clear statement of the belief that they are different from the 'other migrants', a symbol of distinction. Throughout my ethnographic work whenever I had a chance to talk to his parents this distinction invariably came up, and Hubaib's

parents and uncle would give voice to this sentiment, making clear to me that they considered migrants from rural areas as inferior. I remember when Hubaib's younger brother got into a fight with a local Pakistani kid, whose parents belonged to the rural areas of Pakistan. Following this event his uncle was adamant that the police should be involved, he said, "If we do not put these mirpuris in their place they will start thinking too much of themselves!" (Tuba this was said in the Punjabi language should I use translations?) He then told me many stories of how in the past he had put these mirpuris in their place, often getting the police involved. It is interesting though that the kid who hit Husnain was not even from mirpur, he was from rural Punjab. But for these urban migrants immigrants from both rural Punjab and Mirpur were the same: inferior and classless. Hubaib's brother has a habit of imitating the *mirpuris* way of speaking Punjabi, his performance gets his uncle very worked up and he starts shouting at him. He feels that Husnain will develop a habit of talking like that other people will mistake him for a *mirpuri*, which will be a very unfavorable situation. The antagonism was very strong and real and every time I met Hubaib's elders my belief was reaffirmed. Hubaib's father likewise was very critical of the youth from these areas, often berating him for having such 'loser', 'waste of time' friends. He would often talk about the first generation rural migrants being miserly and not spending a dime on themselves, dressing poorly and not living in well-kept houses. The term he used for these immigrants was 'classless'. Although, this opinion was held about migrants from rural areas in general, in specific cases sometimes their opinion changed. This happened when they were talking about local Pakistani men who 'respected' them and recognized their 'higher' status.

Such feelings were not exclusive to the men of the house, Hubaib's Mum and Aunt held similar attitudes towards the women of these families. On a number of occasions I spoke to them about other people in Worcester, they told me that they never interacted with many of them because they perceived them as culturally inferior. The word they used most often to describe these women was that they had a lot of '*jahalat*', loosely translated as ignorance. They were quick also to give examples of their *jahalat*; most often talking about marriages within extended families, specially, importing spouses from overseas; claiming that they did not teach their children good morals; not teaching them how to behave properly in public; and how they did not encourage their children to study, and would rather have them bringing in money than studying. Hubaib's Mum once told me a story about a mirpuri girl who had visited her work place, she works at House of Frasier. In her

description of that visit she deployed all of these stereotypes: she started off by explaining to me what she was wearing, traditionally Pakistani clothes, which Hubaib's Mum never wears outside the house unless she is going to visit other Pakistani families or going to watch a Bollywood movie, furthermore, she said the clothes were too bright and flowery; then she told me about how her eyebrows were made, apparently, they were too thin; then she went on to point out the lack of social etiquette the woman displayed, not talking respectfully to somebody who was older and showing *attitude*, which she explained, "she thought too much of herself". What is very interesting though is that even for the women in the family this general opinion changes when it comes to people who acknowledge their higher status. I have heard good things only about Pakistani women who are completely traditional in values, always wearing traditional clothes, not knowing the English language, very timid and what they call 'simple people'.

In both the cases there is a perception of status differences and whenever their status is threatened negative stereotypes are deployed, in other cases when their status is acknowledged and not threatened they are inclined towards positive evaluations.

This belief finds its' roots in their lives before migration. In Lahore they had a successful business and employed labor from rural areas of Pakistan, even in their houses the domestic help consisted of rural migrants. Such distinctions are common in the developing world; see for example Ustuner and Holt, 2007 for a discussion of this in the case of Turkish rural migrants. (Ustuner and Holt, 2007)

His parent's recognized that to move up the social class hierarchy their children must get a good education. Within their extended family, which was spread over the globe, getting a good education had become a status symbol. Families whose children were able to join the ranks of the professional class in Pakistan and elsewhere were deemed to have progressed. They therefore invested a lot of money in the private school education of their sons.

The urban migrant families therefore find themselves in a situation very different to that of the rural migrants, their choice of locality to live in and the fact that the bulk of the Pakistani migrants consist of rural stock, leaves them with a very limited social network. Hubaib, therefore, grew up in a

predominantly white neighborhood. He attended a private school and the only other Asian student in his class was Kamran, his best friend today.

I have witnessed Hubaib and his father getting into a number of arguments that highlight the sensibilities his father holds. Hubaib recently stopped going to college on the pretext that he did not like the course he was enrolled in. His father was not pleased about this at all and threatened to kick him out of the house if he did not start going to college. He said that the children of his brothers in the US and Pakistan were all settled into high end careers after completing University degrees and Hubaib on the other hand was 24 years old and had still not started college. His father said that he was willing to support him financially as long as he was serious about going to college and if he did not want to study then he was on his own.

Similarly, his mother on returning from Pakistan after a vacation had taken up this issue with vigor. She had spent time with her husband's family in Pakistan and seen how the children there are focused on getting an education, spend time at home and respect their parents. All things which were missing in Hubaib and his brother. Hubaib told me that his mother was being very harsh with him since her return, giving examples of a specific cousin who was described as, 'very respectful and very smartly dressed'. I found it interesting to see that the way Hubaib dressed was an important site of contestation. Both his parents did not approve of his dressing style and appreciated the styles of their cousins in Pakistan, who according to his mother dressed smartly in jeans and shirts.

For this urban family the reference point is their family in Pakistan, they expect their sons to turn out like the children of their extended family, who occupy a higher status in the social hierarchy in Pakistan. Their children on the other hand are a constant source of worry and according to the parents - because of their superficial understanding of context their children grow up in - are acculturating to the *mirpuri* culture. This point was driven home when one of the catalogue boys visited the restaurant while Hubaib's father was there. His father really liked the way the kid was dressed and he stated, "why can Hubaib and Husnain not hang out with kids like him." He failed to recognize that although, the way this kid dressed was close to the clothing style popular in the upper classes of Pakistan, it went against the sub cultural style Hubaib was a part of.

## Consumer Identity and Cultural Confusion

Hubaib finds himself in a situation where the acculturation project of his peer group is not appreciated by his parents and the expectations of his parents do not resonate with his life experience. Embedded in these tensions he undertakes a consumer identity project that differs both from his peers and his parents, yet, is relevant to his position as a working class young man in UK. Like his peers he identifies with the urban youth culture because it resonates with his life on the streets, but, whereas, his peers – discussed later – acculturate to a Pakistani version of working class culture, for Hubaib his identity as a consumer takes precedence over all other articulations of his identity. He invests a lot of energy in distinguishing himself on the basis of how his consumption is different from the ‘relevant others’.

One may ask why did Hubaib choose an identity that celebrated the working class culture, rather than, like the catalogue boys an upwardly mobile identity that is more in line with white middle class culture? To understand his choice we need to look at his past. In his early youth he tried out a number of subcultural identities, he got into skate boarding and heavy metal when he was fifteen, and most of his friends at that time were white. He got into graffiti later on and that too was shared with other white youth. At this time his white friends started getting involved with girls and started drinking, both of these activities Hubaib could not take part in, owing to his conservative parents. The exclusion was also a reminder to him of his different ethnicity. To find a place where he could exist comfortably he decided to try out the scene on the Lane. He admitted to me that it was very difficult for him to get into that scene initially, mainly because he did not live on the lane and he did not have other family members who lived around the lane or participated in that culture. His parents opposed his decision to hang out with the local Asian kids vehemently but he chose not to listen to them. The catalogue boy culture was not spatially centered on an area and the alternative was situated around the lane and the ease of access explains Hubaib’s initial choice.

### Clothes

Hubaib is into the urban youth look, hoodies and jackets most of the time. I have never seen him wearing shirts, cardigans or trousers. His style is very important for him and he spends a lot of time deciding what he wants to wear. He matches the colors he wears, stating that one should not wear too many or too few different colors. While on the subject he mentioned that even

rap stars color coordinate, the color of their T-shirts or hoodies always matches the color of the trainers they are wearing. He showed me a website he visits often where you can buy trainers in a large variety of colors. Bright colors are in, bright green, blue, red, yellow to match with the bright colored tops. When he watches TV he always notices the brands that are being worn by the celebrities. His favorite channel is BET (Black entertainment Television) and he often picks up cues from shows on this channel, for instance the Gucci jacket that one of the rap stars was wearing in an interview.

The brands he is into are always expensive, Ed Hardy, Armani, Gucci, Maharashi etc, and also consecrated by the urban youth hip-hop scene. Recently, he got fixated with Gucci; his cousin was traveling to the US, he asked her to bring him anything with red, green and yellow – the Gucci colors. Gucci had become important because some rap stars had started wearing Gucci clothes. According to Hubaib when these brands are first consecrated by rap stars they become important status currency. They are expensive and difficult to find and if you are the first person to wear these brands, you get noticed.

Three things are common to all these brands, they are expensive, they are associated with the urban youth culture and finally, they have very visible identity markers. This third thing is important because Hubaib dresses to impress and an expensive purchase that is understated is not worth the money. Ed Hardy clothes are recognized by the huge tiger that is plastered over the hoodies and T-shirts, Hubaib's maharishi hoodie has a huge wild cat pasted on the front, and Gucci has the tri-colored stripes. To perform this look effectively Hubaib requires lots of money. Whenever he complains about not having enough money he adds that he needs more money so he can buy more clothes. Although, his parents have lots of money, his mother never gives him money to buy clothes that do not meet her tastes that are more in line with middle class tastes. This frustrates Hubaib and foils his attempts to perform the look with flourish. Recently, when his cousin was in the US he asked his Dad to send her money so she could get her Ed Hardy shades. His refused, stating that he was not going to send 250 dollars for shades, while Hubaib already had Armani and Dolce and Gabbana shades; he was willing to send the money if Hubaib wanted to get some nice Polo T-shirts. Hubaib irritated told his Dad that in that case he wanted nothing. Later he confessed to me that the Ed Hardy shades were impossible to get from the UK, whereas, he could buy the Polo shirts from England. I reminded him that he would never have the money to buy the shirts if he spent the money his Dad gave him on shades. He did not

care, what mattered was getting those shades, because they were very difficult to get. Later on Husnain told me that Skepta who is Hubaib's favorite drum and bass singer talks about Ed Hardy shades in his songs and that is why Hubaib wants them. The incident highlights the importance of 'the look' for both father and son and also the differences in the relevant reference groups: for the father upper class Pakistanis and for Hubaib the urban youth subculture.

The urban look is also very important and Hubaib always has to maintain it. When Hubaib's uncle from the US brought him a Bally leather jacket he went up to his room and tried it on. He was not happy with the look; the leather jacket over a T-shirt did not give him the urban look he was looking for. He immediately rummaged through his wardrobe and took out his favorite hoodie and wore the jacket over the hoodie, with the hood pulled back over the top of the jacket. The correct look was achieved. This incident also highlighted the importance of expensive brands; the Bally jacket was over 500 dollars and could not be easily passed on to the younger brother. Hubaib creatively configured his clothes to achieve the urban look in the expensive leather jacket. The next day when we went to watch a movie with Hubaib's friends Husnain decided to wear the jacket, minus the hoodie, Hubaib's friend made fun of him, that he looked like a smart boy going to Birmingham Star city to watch a Bollywood movie with his girlfriend.

Urban brands are appreciated in working class white culture, the group for which Hubaib is primarily performing, but brands that are associated with white middle class not appreciated. Hubaib, therefore, never wears brands such as Gap and Aber Crombie and Fitch. Similarly, dressing smartly, in shirts and sweater, is not in line with the urban look and Hubaib never wears such clothes. As discussed earlier his interpretation of masculinity is inspired by the urban youth culture and when he sees other men wearing clothes not consecrated by that culture he understands their choice of clothes as an expression of their soft masculinity and calls them, 'smart boys'; when a Pakistani youth wears such clothes he calls them a '*khusra*', which means transvestite.

#### Trainers

Hubaib told me how a few years ago trainers had become a status symbol in the urban youth culture. Hubaib was really into distinguishing himself on the basis of the expensive and exclusive trainers he wore at that time and still was. When we walk around town he always looks at the footwear

of other people, making fun of some and appreciating others. Any person whose trainers are worn and dirty is dismissed as somebody who has no sense of style, this includes me by the way. He always tells me that I need to buy new trainers. He takes meticulous care of his trainers. I was shocked the first time I saw him driving his car in his socks because he did not want the trainers to have wrinkles that would eventually start appearing because of the pressure that is applied whilst driving. On numerous other occasions he kept an old pair of trainers in his car and he would switch trainers when driving.

Once again we see here how he defines his identity in terms of consumer choices. Something that is absent in his Pakistani friends.

### *Haircut*

Hubaib is also very particular about his hair. He only gets it cut from Tony, who has been his barber for a few years now. According to Hubaib no one else can get the right look. To me his cut looked smart easy to get, very short on the sides and back and short on the top. When I mentioned this to him he explained to me in detail the complexity in the haircut, at the top the number two grading on the machine is used and at the bottom and sides a number 1, but the process starts with a number 3, followed by a two and a half and then a two on the top; then the back and sides are blended into the top, by using 1.5 on parts closer to the top and 1 on others. These days he makes fun of his brother all the time who is growing his hair long, he calls him a microphone; he also makes fun of the catalogue boys' hairstyle. For Hubaib haircuts speak volumes about a person, whenever he sees Pakistani boys with longer, well groomed hair, he calls them smart boys, he perceives these boys as soft – cannot stand up for themselves, are into the Bollywood culture, have a Pakistani girlfriend etc; - on the other hand when he sees white boys with such hairstyles, he calls them college boys – boys who are at college and have no idea about what life is in the streets.

### *Cars*

His father bought the boys a BMW. As I discussed above in the subculture Hubaib is a part of and beyond that subculture as well, for instance amongst the younger Pakistani youth and even the catalogue boys, cars are important markers of status. Hubaib always observes other cars whilst driving, he has educated himself through TV programs like Top Gear and the internet and deploys his knowledge of cars often within his group of friends. I



remember coming out of the cinema with them after watching Transporter 3, the conversation for the next half hour was about the Audi in the movie; they talked about the engine power, the fact that it did 0-60 in 8 seconds or something, that the design was awesome and in the end everyone of his friends expressed the desire to have that car! On another occasion Hubaib stated that he could not wait until he was 25years old – the insurance payment goes down – so he could drive around in his father’s S class Mercedes. He believes that the BMW has increased his status in Worcester, he often tells me how he drove to college and every white chick was checking him and his car out.

He gets very irritated when he sees another Asian kid with a good car, this challenge to his status is not taken well, like he once said: “We drive the best car amongst the Pakistani youth.” I remember once when we were driving around we spotted another Asian kid in a better car than Hubaib’s – a better car is always either a car that is faster or more expensive, any make will do, Mercedes, Audi or another BMW, as long as the model is faster or more expensive – Hubaib and his brother got really anxious and started talking about the car, “How can they afford that car?” “That F\*\*\*ing prick!” Presently, we passed Imran in the Taxi rank, Hubaib parked by his car and the first thing he said to Imran is, “Have you seen Adil?” (Adil is the Pakistani kid who was driving the car) Imran knew exactly what Hubaib was talking about and replied, “It is a rented car. They rented it for his brother’s wedding.” As soon as the brother heard this they visibly relaxed. They started making jokes about Adil and his friends sat in the car. According to Hubaib and his brother, Adil and his friends looked stupid posing, pretending they owned the car, they looked so funny. The status was restored and Hubaib and his brother were relaxed.

### Body Building

For the last few years Hubaib as increasingly become more involved in working out. He has been working out for almost five years now, but before this year it had been a few months at it and then long breaks. I accompany him to the gym five days a week and we have many conversations about working out. He spends a lot of his time researching on workout routines and diet. In the gym he always gets irritated when another Pakistani man lifts more than he does, or has bigger muscles then him. I have never seen him criticize white people in the gym, if a white person is stronger/ bigger than Hubaib he does not get worked up but acknowledges the other’s better body. When it comes to Asians the situation changes, for instance when Adil comes to the gym, Hubaib

always brings up the fact that is all he does in prison and when Adil is in the gym, he criticizes his access fat. He always uses some explanation to discount the body of Asian men. For Hubaib the body then is a very important site of status competition, a competition which is primarily with other Asian lads in Worcester. He wants to be the strongest and biggest Asian man in Worcester. He said to me once, "I want to show these other Pakis what a good body is!"

A secondary reason for working out is attracting attention and getting recognition from white youth in his subculture. Often his facebook status alludes to the weight he is pushing in the gym, most of his friends on facebook are white people he knows through the music scene, people he probably only sees when he goes to raves.

Finally, his body building can not be separated from his status seeking through expensive brands. He wants to look big, but not in any T-shirt, rather in his own words, "In the summer I want to look big in an Ed Hardy T-shirt!"

### Gold

Many of his friends regularly buy gold rings, chains and some of them even have a gold tooth. Like properties gold is a safe investment for these young lads, buying gold is not exactly spending money, it is an investment. The added advantage of gold is that it is a visible sign of money, these young men, therefore, prefer the 'shinier' Pakistani gold over the less shiny gold available in UK. The shinier it is the more visible it is.

### Pakistan

Whenever Hubaib is with his Pakistani friends they like making fun of life in Pakistan. I remember sitting with Mehmood, Kamran and Hubaib and they digressed onto Pakistani during a conversation about transportation. They first talked about the slow trains in Pakistan, talking about a Bollywood movie in which the hero and a crew of junior artists dancing and singing on top of the train. Then Hubaib mentioned motorcycles in Pakistan with families of six and seven perched on them. The imagery Hubaib came out with and Mehmood's addition to it really cracked them up. On another occasion while they were talking about cars, Samir mentioned the Tata truck that was parked outside a random house in Worcester; he called it a 'weird Pakistani truck' (Tata is actually an Indian make), and this comment was received with hearty laughter. On many other occasions I have sat through conversations about the corruption

in Pakistan, the low standards of life, the violence and the unbearable heat in Pakistan.

The discussions about Pakistan take a different color when it is carried out in front of white people. Whenever the topic comes up, Hubaib, glamorizes aspects of Paksitan that are in line with the gangster culture: the guns, the weed, the fights; he often talks about the comfortable life he has in Pakistan because all his cousins there are rich and high class urbanites, he talks about parties he goes to, restaurants he visits and the rich and famous people he hobnobs with. None of his friends talk about Pakistan in this way, they remain silent when Hubaib is 'hyping' up his life in Pakistan. Here again we see the difference between rural and urban backgrounds, whereas, Hubaib is confident about his parents' background, his friends are not able to. Some of his friends have spoken to me about these differences. Kamran once said to me, "for Hubaib Pakistan is Lahore which is an exciting place, for me it is fuckin mirpur, it is a village with nothing in it!"

(Here the cultural capital is very important. On other occasions during my interviews I have seen Paksitanis with high cultural capital hype up the village life of their parents and putting down the city life, turning the status hierarchy upside down. But because these men lack the cultural capital to convert their village background into the working class sub culture they often feel ashamed of their background)

## APPENDIX C: Informant Descriptions

Table 1: The Popular boys

Name	Age	Education	Major	Born in	Occupation	Married to/Kids	In relation with/Engaged to	Lives in	Parents from
Zayed	23	College	Public Services	UK	P-Buying and Selling mobile phones	NM	NA	P	M
Saif	23	College	Engineering	UK	P-Cashier	NM	Canadian Cousin (A)(E)	P	M
Salman	18	HS	NA	UK	NA	NM	NA	P (Pakistan)	M
Basit	24	BSc	Accounting	UK	Accountant	NM	NA	P	RV
Husnain	20	BSc	Media and Culture Studies	UK	NA	NM	British Asian(R)	P	U
Haroon	31	BSc	Law	UK	Buying and selling mobile phones	M(2) British cousin(A)	NA	P	M
Farhan	17	HS	Public Services	UK	P-Cashier	NM	NA	P	M

Emraan	23	BSc	Politics and History	UK	NA	NM	British Asian(R)	P	M
Jassim	20	BSc	Criminology and Law	UK	NA	NM	NA	P	RV
Sunjay	20	HS	Public Services	UK	P-Super Market clerk and P-Telesales	NM	NA	P	M
Abraham	20	BSc	Criminology and Law	UK	P-Super Market clerk	NM	British Asian(R)	P	M
Amir	24	College	Public Services	UK	P-Telesales	NM	British white (R)	P	M
Zeeshan	19	HS	Public Services	UK	P-Restaurant waiter	NM	NA	P	U
Fahd	16	HS	NA	UK	NA	NM	NA	P	M
Azeem	24	BSc	IT	UK	Software Businessman	M(1) British		P	M

Table 2: Gangsta Boys

Name	Age	Education	Major	Born in	Occupation	Married to/Kids	In relation with/Engaged to	Lives in	Parents from
Husnain	24	HS	NA	UK	NA	NM	NA	P	U
Waqar	23	HS	NA	UK	P-Delivery driver	NM	British white (1)(R)	P	RV
Kamran	24	HS	NA	UK	P-Pizza Chef and P-Construction worker	NM	British white (1)(R)	P	RV
Mehmood	26	College	Accounting	UK	Taxi Driver	M(0)Pakistani cousin (A)	British white (1)(R)	P	RV
Imran	23	HS	NA	UK	Taxi Driver	M(2) British cousin (A)	British white(R)	P	RV
Majid	29	HS	NA	UK	NA	M(2) Pakistani cousin(A)	NA	P	RV
Samir	23	College	IT	UK	Taxi Driver	M(0) Pakistani cousin(A)	British white (R)	P	RV
Rahman	27	HS	NA	UK	Taxi Driver	NM	NA	P	RV

Junaid	27	HS	NA	UK	NA	M(2)	NA	P	RV
Bilal	25	HS	NA	UK	NA	M(2) Pakistani Cousin (A)	British white (2)(R)	P	RV
Qasim	16	HS	NA	UK	P-Waiter	NA	NA	P	RV
Masood	27	HS	NA	UK	P-Delivery driver	M(2) Pakistani cousin(A)	NA	P	RV
Adnan	36	HS	NA	UK	Taxi Driver	M(0) Pakistani girl from the ancestral village	British white (2)	P	RV

Codification for the Youth:

Education: P: Primary (from 1-5); M: Middle (6-8); HS: Highschool; College: for 2 year College

BSc: Undergraduate 3 year college; Ms: Master; PhD: Doctorate.

Occupation: P for part time, otherwise it is fulltime; NA means not gainfully employed.

Marital Status and Family:

Married with kids: M for married, the number of kids in parenthesis; such as M(2) for married with 2 kids, if not married I use NM. I also specify what the relationship of the wife was before marriage and use (A) to show that the marriage was arranged.

Unmarried: For those who are unmarried and engaged or in a relationship I specify the details like above. The number of children are shown in the parenthesis. R signifies relationship, E signifies engagement.

Lives with: P for parents, and O for his own apartment etc.

Parents from: U for urban (Lahore), M for mid-size town, RV for rural village

Table 3: popular boy Parents

Name	Age	Education	Migrated in	Is from	Occupation in Pakistan	Occupation in UK	Names of the Children	Lives in	House in UK	House/Land in Pakistan	Extra House in the UK
Afzal Agha*	Late 60s <sup>15</sup>	M	1964	M	Farmer	Factory worker	Haroon, Zayed, Abraham, Salman	W	Two story	House (U)	House(1)
Akram Agha*	53	M	1967-8	M	NA	Taxi Driver	Saif, Sunjay, Farhan	W	House with Land	None	None
Nawaz Khan*	55	HS	1989	U	NA	Property Management Business	Hubaib (GB) <sup>16</sup> and Husnain	W	House with Land	None	House(20)
Ahmed	56	M	1971	RV	NA	Taxi Driver	Jassim	W	Two story	House(V)	None

<sup>15</sup> In some cases it was impossible to get exact years of emigration, or an estimate of the correct age. The individuals were only able to give approximate ages. Some claimed after they immigrated they had given false dates of birth to qualify for work available only to youth over the minimum working age.

<sup>16</sup> In this section all the sons are popular boys, except for Has, who is gangsta boy.



									House		
Khurshid Agha	Late 60s	HS	1965-6	M	NA	Owens a taxi company	Basit	W	House with Land	None	House(2)
Mushtaq	56	PhD	2001	U	Teacher	Islamic Teacher	Amir	A	Two story house	None	None
Shakeel Ahmed*	59	College	1973	U	None	Restaurant Manager	Imran	W	House with Land	House(U)	House(1)
Raja Akmal*	55	M	1998	M	Landowner	Chef	Fahd	Mixed	Two story house	House(V)	None
Majeed Agha*	48	HS	1973	M	None	Partner in Taxi business	Azeem	W	Single story House	None	None

Table 4: Gangsta Boys Parents

Name	Age	Education	Migrated in	Is from	Occupation in Pakistan	Occupation in UK	Names of the	Lives in	House in UK	House/Land in Pakistan	Extra House in
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							Children				the UK
Mr Zafar	54	M	1972	RV	None	Taxi Driver	Waqar	A	Single story House	House(V) House(M)	House(2)
Mr Shahbaz*	53	HS	1967	RV	None	Taxi Driver P- Construction worker	Kamran	A	Single story House	House(V)	House(2)
Mr Akbar	63	M	1968	RV	None	Factory Worker (Retired)	Mehmood, Imran	Mixed	Double story house	House(V)	House(1)
Mr Jehangir	Early 60s	M	1960s	RV	None	Taxi Driver	Majid	A	Double story house	House(V)	House(2)
Mr Khizer	Late 50s	M	1960s	RV	None	Taxi Driver	Rahman	Mixed	Double story house	House(M)	House(2)
Mr Shabir*	Early 60s	M	1960s	RV	None	Taxi Driver	Junaid	A	Double story house	House(v)	House(1)
Mr	67	M	1959	RV	None	Factory	Billal,	Mixed	Double	House(V)	House(2)

Hussain*						Work	Adnan and Channa		story House	Land(V)	
Mr Baladust *	61	M	1963	RV	None	Plumber	Qasim	A	Double story house	House(V)	House(0)

Codification for Parents:

Education: P: Primary (from 1-5); M: Middle (6-8); HS: Highschool; College: for 2 year College

BSc: Undergraduate 3 year college; Ms: Master; PhD: Doctorate.

Is from: U for urban (Lahore), M for mid-size town, RV for rural village

Lives in: W for White neighborhood, A for Asian

House/Land in Pakistan: V for Village, M for medium sized city and U for urban.

Extra House in UK: Number of houses indicated in parenthesis.

\* Those who were interviewed in depth

## **APPENDIX D: Glossary**

*Apnay*: A term used to refer to South Asians.

*Baghairat*: This is a word from Urdu, and it means to be without honor.

*Bhai*: A word of respect used to refer to the elder brother.

*Chavs*: This word is used to refer to individuals the participants felt occupied the lowest rung in the socio-economic hierarchy.

*Cool*: It is a word that is used to describe an object that is positively evaluated because of an attribute.

*Ghatya*: This word is used to categorize individuals who are supposed to have an inferior world view, and moral paradigm.

*Gori / Goryan (pl)* This term refers to non Asian British girls.

*Halal*: Permissible according to Muslim religion.

*Izzat*: Respect.

*Jaatak*: A macho Asian Man.

*Jahil*: The urban migrants use this to denote a rural uneducated person.

*Kothi*: A big house.

*Posh*: This term refers to individuals who are perceived to belong to the upper classes, because of the manner in which they carry themselves.

*Sharif*: Somebody who lives by the moral precepts of the Pakistani community.

*Sheeda*: Terms refers to individuals who have origins in Africa.

*Sick*: It is a word that is used to describe an object that is positively evaluated because of an attribute.

*Spiff*: Is a cigarette of marijuana.

