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Explorations of Visibility and Invisibility:

An Exploration of the Experiences of British Sikh Women in the Workplace

By

Navneet Sangha

Portfolio submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of:

Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DPsych)

City, University of London

Department of Psychology

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City, University of London
Northampton Square
London
EC1V 0HB
United Kingdom

T +44 (0)20 7040 5060

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To my nieces Millie and Kheeve, this portfolio is dedicated to you.

Declaration

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Abstract

Over the last decade, research has emerged investigating the unique experiences of ethnic minority women in the workplace at the intersection of gender and ethnicity. In recognition of the significant challenges faced by Muslim women in the UK labour market, intersectionality scholarship has broadened in its scope through the study of British South Asian Muslim women in the workplace (Tariq & Syed, 2017). Comparatively little research has been done investigating the experiences of British Sikh women, which is partly attributable to British Sikhs being regarded as an economically successful 'model minority' (Wong & Haglin, 2006). Survey data suggests British Sikh women are increasingly achieving degree-level qualifications or above (British Sikh Report, 2019), heightening access to professional and skilled occupations. The absence of scholarship on British Sikh women in the workplace attests to how the masculinised representation of the Sikh identity, coupled with prevailing social representations of South Asian women as meek, docile, and apolitical (Anitha et al., 2012) render them socially invisible. To this end, this research aimed to increase the visibility of British Sikh women through exploring the lived experiences of eight British Sikh women in the workplace, using semi-structured interviews and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology. Three superordinate themes emerged from the analysis, with corresponding subthemes denoting the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and contextual aspects of the participants' experiences. The first superordinate theme entitled: 'The Self: Identity Meaning and Negotiation Outside the Workplace' encompassed the participants' understanding of the self, which was expressed as a complex, dynamic process of giving meaning to, and negotiating, intersecting identities. The second superordinate theme: 'Being With Others in the Workplace', reflected the participants' experiences of interpersonal engagement with managers, peers and clients which included the experiences of otherness and belonging, appraisal of sameness and difference, and experiences of feeling distinctive or indistinctive. The final superordinate theme: 'Working Out and Managing Experiences of Discrimination' captured the participants' reflections on barriers to career ascension, their process of discerning elusive forms of discrimination, and experiences of coping. The findings draw upon the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1991) and identity process theory (Breakwell, 1986); illustrating how organisational practices can either perpetuate or dismantle social systems of domination which can be either threatening or conducive to identity. It is proposed that increasing access to ethnic minority role models and promoting White allyship can help foster inclusive work environments. Counselling psychologists can enhance their practice through eliciting discussions on identity and power in therapy, to demonstrate their understanding of the unique challenges faced by British Sikh women as a minoritised and marginalised group.

Preface

This portfolio comprises of an empirical research project, an academic article, and a clinical case study. A theme permeating the portfolio is the idea of visibility, and of being seen, both fully and accurately (Roberts, 2005). In psychoanalytic thought, the experience of being seen fully and accurately forms the basis of differentiation from the primary caregiver during development, allowing for the establishment of an authentic self (Winnicott, 1984). Early maternal failures arising from impositions from the primary caregiver to the infant culminates in the defensive development of a 'false self' (Winnicott, 1984) and subsequent relational connections which are inauthentic in nature. In short, the developmental experience of not being seen infringes upon one's ability to form relationships that allow one to be seen. The focus of this portfolio thus attends to dimensions of visibility, given how central the experience of being seen is to the development of the self.

At the time of undertaking this research, socio-political events, such as the death of George Flyod in police custody (Hill et al., 2020) and the Covid-19 pandemic have illuminated social inequalities, culminating in increased visibility for ethnic minorities across the globe. This has brought race-relations to the fore in the United Kingdom; further reflected in dialogues concerning counselling psychology as a profession, and the extent to which it fulfils its commitment toward anti-discriminatory practice (Milton & Coyle, 2003). It struck me that over the course of training, surprisingly little attention had been given to the focus of diversity, and the way in which social injustices affect the lives of marginalised or socially 'invisible' individuals. I considered how the invisibility of minoritised and marginalised groups could therefore be perpetuated by the counselling psychology profession itself.

My motivation for pursuing this research topic came about following my observation of the inconspicuousness of British Sikhs on a social level (Phillips, 2020), as well as my personal experiences as a working British Sikh woman. I am not a practising Sikh, which means that one would not necessarily be aware of this aspect of my identity unless they were to ask me directly. Despite this, my Sikh identity is core to my sense of self, and the values underpinning Sikhism are central to my professional identity. My Sikh identity, whilst important to me, has often remained invisible in the workplace, with the visible aspects of my identity (such as my ethnicity) being acknowledged, and commented upon more. Within my professional life, I have experienced both visibility and invisibility. I am

reminded of a previous interaction with a colleague who misidentified me as someone else, another young South Asian woman. In that moment, I was not seen as a unique individual. Instead, I was seen under an indiscriminate racial category. Upon reflection of these experiences, I realised that they had been invisible to me- only entering conscious awareness through engaging with colleagues on my course within discussion forums in the aftermath of the George Flyod incident (Hill et al., 2020). Sharing my experiences was liberating- I could finally say what had long remained unsaid- making the once invisible and inconspicuous, visible.

Part A: Empirical Research Project

An Exploration of the Experiences of British Sikh Women in the Workplace

In the interest of enhancing the visibility of British Sikh women, this section on the portfolio focuses on an exploration of their experiences in the workplace. In my literature search, the invisibility of British Sikh women was reflected in the dearth of literature on British Sikhs, and in the absence of scholarship on British South Asians in general. The scarcity of research creates the false misconception that British Sikhs are exempt from discrimination- a form of invisibility they experience on a social level. British Sikh women face additional layers of invisibility, due to their non-prototypicality as 'women' (conceived as synonymous with Whiteness), or as 'Sikh' (associated with a turbaned male), resulting in 'intersectional invisibility' (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This means that they are easily overlooked and disregarded when it comes social reform.

In embarking upon this research, I was keen to give my participants a voice in a safe context for exploration. I considered how for some participants, opportunities to speak candidly about experiences in the workplace may seldom have been made available to them as an invisible population. Through using semi-structured interviews, I became intimately acquainted with the participants' lived experiences. This process illustrated how being seen fully led to the experience of feeling valued, enhancing social connectedness. The painful experience of not being seen was, on the other hand, linked to social ostracization, and devaluation; underscoring how the workplace can have a powerful effect on the self-concept.

Part B: Publishable Paper

The second part of my portfolio, a research article written for the 'Gender, Work and Organization' journal, was inspired by the empirical research portfolio. Drawing on identity process theory (Breakwell, 1986) and the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1991), I discuss the various forms of visibility and invisibility experienced by British Sikh women in the workplace. I argue for the refinement of the definition of 'inclusion' and highlight how this research can extend our understanding of 'visibility', which can in turn help inform social policy and diversity and inclusion initiatives within organisations. 'Gender, Work and Organization' was selected, as previous British studies examining intersectionality in the workplace have been published within this journal, including research on British South Asian Muslim Women. In addition, the journal has a high impact factor, which I felt would allow for broader dissemination.

Part C: Clinical Case Study

Lastly, the clinical case study presents my practice as a counselling psychologist utilising the psychodynamic object relations approach (Fairbairn, 1958). The case is taken from my final year placement within a primary care IAPT service, treating a female client over the course of 13 sessions. The case study captures how viewing me as an 'ideal object' allowed the client to drop her defences. The therapeutic relationship was instrumental to change; it allowed the client to make her authentic and vulnerable self-visible to me, which revealed her need for the other.

Evaluation of the Portfolio

Throughout the portfolio, I highlight how experiences of not being seen can be invalidating and detrimental to one's self-worth. Being seen, on the other hand, supports wellbeing and a sense of self-worth, promoting authentic relational connection. As counselling psychologists, creating a validating environment from which the client can safely explore thoughts, feelings, and desires is crucial to the formation of a robust therapeutic relationship. The importance of seeing the client, without imposing my own thoughts onto them, became apparent to me over the course of training.

My journey towards becoming a counselling psychologist is demarked by layers of invisibility and visibility. At the beginning of the programme, unconscious, aspects of myself were unknown- obscured from personal view. Whilst I was aware of anxieties experienced with certain clients, I could not understand from where these feelings originated. The process of being seen over the course of therapy allowed my unconscious beliefs and fears to surface, which in turn, allowed me to understand my personal motivations, fears and desires. Through understanding myself better, I found I was more able to contain difficult affect- such as hostility and hatred- that my clients directed towards me within therapy.

I began working analytically during my second-year placement within a primary care IAPT service. In my anxiousness to 'perform' in my therapeutic work, I adhered strictly to the therapeutic frame and eagerly presented the client with interpretations early on in treatment. Imposing affects, desires and wills on the client can lead to the revival of early (aversive) developmental experiences, such as rejection and abandonment (Benjamin, 2013). Upon reflecting on my approach, I realised I had become overactive, and had run the risk of imposing my ideas on the client. I recognised how such interpretations- when offered prematurely and inaccurately- could be experienced as impositions, contravening the experience of being seen fully and accurately.

In coming towards the end of training, I acknowledge how as a practitioner, one must carefully navigate between positions of visibility and invisibility. Whilst the inconspicuousness of the therapist allows for therapeutic neutrality (Borton, 2001), a degree of visibility- wherein the authentic self is present- is required to build a relational connection. In my practice and development as a trainee counselling psychologist, I have learned how to carefully navigate between these positions. Being neutral- yet authentic- has allowed me to maintain a sense of humanness with the clients that I work with. This authentic, visible- yet neutral way of relating has given me the confidence to work more with process; something which I found rather daunting at the beginning of my training. Understanding my unconscious motivations, beliefs, and emotions has further given me insight into the ways in which I co-create the therapeutic space. My therapeutic work has thus illuminated to me the power of making the invisible, visible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will present literature to lay the foundation for the current research, which is concerned with exploring the lived experiences of British Sikh women in the workplace. In the UK, British Sikhs have high rates of employment (British Sikh Report, 2019), and their high degree of economic success has been frequently cited (Johnson, 2013). Despite this, little is known about their occupational experiences. This is concerning, as recent reports suggest one in seven British Sikhs have experienced discrimination in the workplace (UK Sikh Survey, 2016). Whilst survey data must be approached with caution given broad definitions of terms such as 'discrimination' (Jhutti-Johal, 2017), it underscores the need for research on British Sikhs to discern how they may experience and cope with the workplace as a minoritised population with intersecting identities. Gaining this knowledge is critical in fulfilling counselling psychology's commitment toward social reform and culturally competent practice (Fouad et al., 2006) through increasing visibility of this socially invisible population.

In view of the marked disadvantages experienced by Muslim women within the UK labour market, (Karlsen et al., 2020) and the social disadvantages experienced by Muslims due to Islamophobic discrimination, there has been an increase in scholarship on British Muslims (e.g., Tariq & Syed, 2017). Literature however suggests that diasporic turban-wearing Sikhs are likewise subjected to Islamophobic discrimination based on instances of misidentification (Mahalingam, 2012) which has caused a recent surge in hate crimes targeted towards Sikhs (Phillips, 2020). Reports highlight how the UK government has failed to address the discrimination faced by turban-wearing Sikhs, rendering them as 'invisible' to policy makers (Sherwood, 2016). Scholarship has thus tended to emphasise identity challenges faced by turban-wearing Sikhs who experience high levels of visibility due to the physical distinctiveness of their identities. However, a recent survey found that less than half of respondents reported keeping their hair (British Sikh Report, 2019). Despite this, there is limited scholarship investigating the identity challenges of non-turban-wearing Sikhs (Jaspal, 2013).

As pointed by Ahluwalia and Alimchandani (2013), gaining an understanding of diverse religious communities is paramount to counselling psychology practice. Understanding

some of the identity challenges and types of discrimination experienced by Sikhs who visibly mark their religious identities and those who do not, is therefore important to facilitating culturally competent practice**.** Existing research on British Sikhs has highlighted how the need for distinctiveness plays an important role in identity within this population, even amongst those who display limited religious observance (Ballard, 1994). The shared legacy of trauma and loss following the Indian partition of 1947, and the Sikh genocide of 1984 have contributed to this need for distinctiveness amongst Sikhs who are marginalised as a minority population within India (Ahluwalia & Alimchandani, 2013). As such, Sikhs may not have a strong connection with Indian identity. This is an important consideration for research and practice, as grouping the experiences of Sikhs under broader social categories may further perpetuate the marginalisation they have experienced socially. Research is thus required which specifically focuses on the experiences of British Sikhs, given that their historical legacy differs from that of other Indian groups.

Unlike other South Asian populations, British Sikhs contend with conflicting social representations. Misidentification and Islamophobic discrimination both position Sikhs as terrorists, whilst 'model minority' stereotypes (Wong & Haglin, 2006) present Sikhs as aligned with British values (Sian, 2011). Like Asian Americans (Sue et al., 2021), British Sikhs are rendered invisible within social reform, as model minority stereotypes perpetuate the false impression that they are exempt from discrimination (Sue et al., 2021). Given that the workplace is a microcosm of social tensions, attitudes, and biases (Atewologun et al., 2016) research is required to understand how such social representations manifest in day-to-day workplace experiences, and the impact these experiences have on the self. Whether one's Sikh identity is externally visible or invisible may have a bearing on the type of social representation one is subjected to. Those who wear religious attire for example may more often be stereotyped based on social representations of Sikhs, whilst those with 'invisible' Sikh identities may be subjected to broad stereotypes based on race. Having an externally invisible Sikh identity may be experienced as identity threatening, as such individuals may more readily be generalised under broad racial categories such as 'South Asian' or 'Indian' which they may not personally ascribe to.

British Sikh women's female gender identities may cause them to face unique identity challenges in the workplace. Given that the turban is considered a masculine emblem of the Sikh identity (Gupta, 2016), turban-wearing Sikh women may experience

hypervisibility as they are considered non-prototypical Sikhs (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Non-turban wearing Sikh women may conversely be rendered invisible, given that the Sikh identity is both masculinised and associated with wearing the turban. British South Asian women in general are marginalised based on discourses which misrepresent them as apolitical, domesticated, and docile (Anitha et al., 2012). The reproduction of this form of invisibility may be particularly harmful to South Asian women in the western workplace, where assertiveness is highly valued. As outlined above, British Sikh women occupy multiple positions of marginality as a function of their minoritised ethnic, religious, and gender identities. Research situated in the work context can provide a unique insight into how these various social representations are re-enacted.

Rationale for Inclusion and Exclusion of Literature

The 'invisibility' of British South Asian women became apparent to me whilst carrying out a literature search, as I was only able to locate few studies investigating the experiences of South Asian women in the workplace (e.g., Tariq & Syed, 2017). As such, I expanded my literature search to include research on Asians in the workplace. Much of this research seemed to focus on 'Asian Americans' (e.g., Huang, 2021); a panethnic term predominantly used to describe East Asians. Whilst one American study on Asian Americans was included within the review, other American research papers on Asians were excluded due to the difference in meaning of 'Asian' within British and American contexts. When 'intersectionality' was included as a search term, a plethora of literature capturing the experiences of Black women was found (e.g., Settles et al., 2019). It was acknowledged, however, that their experiences may be too qualitatively different from the experiences of British Sikh women given their differing histories, and the divergence between Britain and America in terms of legacies of domination. British literature capturing the experiences of other South Asian groups (such as South Asian Muslim women) was included, as it was believed that this could provide some insight into the intersectional experiences of British Sikh women, given shared aspects of gendered, ethnic, and national identities. In addition, research investigating the experiences of ethnic minority women in general, which included the experiences of South Asian women, were incorporated into the review (Opara et al., 2020) in view of the limited research on South Asian women in Britain.

Given the breadth of occupational research, it was decided that research investigating the integration of professional, gendered, ethnic and religious identities would be most relevant in this review. This inclusion criterion was based on the research question, which sought to investigate the lived experiences of British Sikh women in the workplace. Research which examined other 'non-work' identities, such as sexual orientation, were not included in the review. This decision was made in the interest of refining the literature to enhance its relevance to British Sikh women, with its inherent focus on the intersection between ethnicity, gender, and religion.

Finally, given the widespread application of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) within occupational scholarship, this review critically evaluates the utility of this theory in the context of British Sikh women in the workplace. In addition, optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) was considered based on previous research which has applied it to the study of Black women in the workplace (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Studies using identity process theory (Breakwell, 1986) were also included, as this theory was felt to be compatible with the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1991) and IPT studies have also frequently applied the model to those with marginalised intersecting identities (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010).

Aim and Outline of Literature Review

The aim of this literature review was to present a rationale for the study of British Sikh women as a unique population, who hold minoritised status in India and across the diaspora. Brief explanations of terminology used within this paper will be initially described. Following this, an introduction to the Sikh identity will be provided, including information regarding religious and cultural customs and the status of Sikh women within Sikhism and the Sikh community. The extant literature on identity process theory (Breakwell, 1986) will next be critically evaluated and contextualised to the study of British Sikh women in the workplace. Literature on professional identity and intersecting 'non-work' identities, such as gender, ethnicity, and religion, will be evaluated (Ramajaran & Reid, 2013). Finally, the relevance of intersectionality theory to the workplace will be critically explored in the context of the current study.

1.1 Terminology

Britishness

What constitutes as 'Britishness' has attracted a plurality of perspectives. Within academia, the 'ethnic' and 'civic' models of British nationality have been used to explain national identity. The 'ethnic' conception of national identity refers to ancestry, placing emphasis on the fixed nature of national identity. According to Jivraj and Simpson (2015), the 'civic' conceptualisation on the other hand refers to a 'voluntary association of people' who congregate to 'share legal and political rights and duties, including speaking a national language' (p.67). Research has found that British South Asian communities boundary their British identities via racial, civic, instrumental, historical, lifestyle and multicultural categorisations (Vadher & Barrett, 2009). For the purposes of the current study, 'Britishness' was therefore understood to denote British citizenship, in line with the 'civic' definition (Jivraj & Simpson, 2015). This decision was made because the study included British Sikh women who were born in Britain, in addition to those who were not. Accordingly, it was acknowledged that participants may boundary their identities in different ways.

Sikh

Takhar (2016) notes the heterogeneity which exists within the Sikh community, making it difficult to identify a single definition of what it means to be 'Sikh'. The Sikh *Rehat Maryada*[1] identifies different categorisations of Sikhs, including: *mona* (clean shaven); *kesdhari* (keeps hair but is not necessarily initiated); *Amritdhari* (initiated Sikh) and *patit* (an individual who has been initiated but has stopped living the baptised way of life) (Takhar, 2016). The 'Amritdhari' Sikh is viewed as representing the ideal, as they have marked their commitment to the Sikh faith through undergoing baptism (Takhar, 2016). Sikhism is a religious categorisation; however, research has found that those who identify as Sikh may also do so on a cultural or ethnic basis (Ballard, 1994). This study therefore did not preclude anyone based on degree of religiosity, or adherence to the Sikh faith and anyone self-identifying as Sikh was included to account for the heterogeneity which exists within the Sikh community.

1 The Sikh 'code of conduct', denoting practical guidelines on personal, communal, and religious aspects of living

Punjabi (ethnicity)

Phinney (1990) defines ethnic identity as an individual's self-identification towards an ethnic group; a sense of belonging derived from membership towards the group; one's attitude towards ethnic group membership; and degree of ethnic affiliation and participation. The 'Punjabi' identity can be defined as a cultural and ethnic identity, with a distinct language, cultural customs, and traditions. As highlighted within the British Sikh report (2019), respondents self-identifying as 'Punjabi' represented approximately 40% of responses and was the fourth most popular response behind 'Sikh', 'British' and 'British-Sikh' categorisations. This highlights the continued importance of retention of a Punjabi identity amongst British Sikhs within the British diaspora. Within the current study, all participants were ethnically Punjabi, though varied in the extent to which they self-identified as such.

'Woman' and Gender

Sex and gender have been differentiated in terms of their respective meanings. Whilst 'sex' denotes the biological basis of identity, 'gender' refers to a set of behavioural attributes and social characteristics (Burkitt, 2008). By this definition, the former refers to an immutable set of characteristics, with the latter indicating a greater degree of fluidity and flexibility. In the context of gender and sex, considerable heterogeneity exists**.** The term 'transgender' refers to individuals whose gender identity does not necessarily match the sex category assigned to them at birth, whilst the term 'cis gender' refers to individuals whose gender identity is the same as their sex category (Serano, 2013). Other classifications exist in the literature, such as the term 'non-binary' and 'gender non-conforming' which includes individuals who do not ascribe to transgender or cis-gender categorisations (Fenway Health, 2020).

1.2. A Brief History of Sikhism

Sikhism is monotheistic dharmic religion founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in the fifteenth century within the Punjab province of North India and what is now eastern Pakistan (Nesbitt, 2016). Sikhs believe that there is one formless and omnipresent God (*'Waheguru'*), with whom a relationship can be established through the practice of

meditation on God's name (*'nam'*) or word (*'shabad'*). The egalitarian teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and his ten successors emerged at the time of the Mughal conquest which prevailed within the sixteenth century, during a period of social and political turmoil. The central focus placed on equality was viewed as a criticism of caste and gender inequalities that existed within India at the time. Sikhism's focus on equality additionally served to distinguish the faith from other prominent religions such Islam and Hinduism (Nesbitt, 2016).

Guru Nanak established Sikhism as a monotheistic religion, citing God as a formless being, transcending the cycle of birth and rebirth. He further proposed God as 'truth', adding a social principle to the faith emphasising untruthfulness as 'ungodly' (G. Singh, 2005, p.27). The teachings of Guru Nanak were followed by teachings of ten successive gurus, each making unique contributions to the Sikh faith, extending Guru Nanak's teachings. The final living Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji baptised five Sikh men, referred to as the *'Khalsa'* or 'pure' who bore outward symbols of the Sikh faith. The Khalsa additionally consumed a mixture of sugar water to symbolise their initiation to adhering to the core principles of Sikhism. These symbols are still worn by baptised Sikhs today and include: *kesh* (uncut hair worn in a turban); *kangha* (comb); *kirpan* (sword); *kachera* (white shorts undergarment) and finally the *kara* (steel bangle).

The *Guru Granth Sahib,* which is the holy book of Sikhism, was declared as the successor to the final living Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru Granth Sahib comprises of a compilation of hymns and scriptures compiled by the Gurus and notable *Sants* or 'saints', iterating the importance of meditating upon the *'nam'* (name) and relinquishing one's ego to focus on God and Guru. This is emphasised as a means through which the continuous cycle of birth and rebirth can be transcended. The continuation of the message of Sikhism was thus invested in the scripture (the Guru Granth) and the community (the Guru Panth) following the death of Guru Gobind Singh Ji (Nesbitt, 2016).

1.3. The Sikh Identity

The Sikh community have forged strong ethno-religious ties, marked by a distinct set of cultural traditions and religious and linguistic bonds (Nesbitt, 2016). The distinctiveness of the Sikh identity can be explained, in part, by the fact that most Sikhs can trace their ancestry to the Punjab and the fact that proselytization is forbidden in the Sikh religion.

Indeed, many Sikhs today commonly perceive the 'Punjabi' cultural identity to be synonymous with Sikhism (Ballard, 1994; Nesbitt, 2016). It is important to note that although proselytization is forbidden, one is permitted to practice Sikhism of their own accord and importantly, small communities of practising Sikh converts do exist from different ethnic backgrounds in parts of the world (Takhar, 2016).

Since the inception of the Sikh religion, Sikhs have attempted to retain their distinctiveness from Hinduism as well as Islam, marked by movements such as the *Punjabi Suba* movement which called for the demarcation of Hindi and Punjabi speaking states (Ali et al., 2021) to preserve Punjabi as a regional language following the 1947 partition of Punjab. Hindu-Sikh relations have been challenged since. Tensions mounted in the early 1980's when interest in an autonomous Sikh homeland intensified following the Indian government's 'Operation Bluestar' attack on the Sikhs' holiest shrine, *Harmandair Sahib* (The Golden Temple), which led to the massacre of thousands of Sikhs.

Within Britain, the distinctiveness of the Sikh identity has been concretised through the passing of legislation following the *Mandla v. Dowell-Lee* (1983) case, where a Sikh youth was denied entry to Park Grove School in Birmingham because his father had refused to cut his hair and to stop wearing the *dastar*[2] . This led to the recognition of Sikhs as an ethnic group by the House of Lords. Exemptions have further been made under the Race Relations Act (1976) exempting turban-wearing Sikhs from wearing the motorcycle helmet (G.Singh, 2005). The Sikh identity as one which is ethno-religious has been thus acknowledged within the British legal system.

More recently, some members of parliament and Sikh organisations have called for the placement of an additional 'Sikh' tick-box within the ethnicity category to allow for clearer identification of the needs of the Sikh community (Canton, 2020). The argument for a separate 'Sikh' tick box on the census continues to remain a point of contention amongst Sikhs in Britain. Those in favour argue that the addition will allow for clearer identification of the needs of the Sikh community, whilst those in opposition argue that adding a Sikh ethnic tick-box is divisive and misleading, as it mispresents Sikhism as an ethnic group (I. Singh, 2018).

[2] The 'dastar' is an item of headwear worn by baptised Sikh men and women.

1.4. The Sikh Diaspora in Britain

The earliest documented permanent settlement of British Sikhs arose in the 1930's by Bhattra Sikhs in Glasgow, who subsequently established small communities within Wales, Northern England, and Scotland before spreading to Birmingham, Manchester and Peterborough (G. Singh & Tatla, 2006). The first period of mass migration to Britain occurred in the nineteen-fifties following the end of colonial rule of India, where Sikhs settled and formed communities predominantly within areas of London and the Midlands. It is reported that these early migrants had initially intended to work in Britain and return to India, however through becoming accustomed to British life and its relative comforts, opted to settle in Britain (G. Singh & Tatla, 2006). By the 1970's, British Sikhs who came as 'twice migrants' from countries such as Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania settled in Britain obtaining employment within skilled professions (Nesbitt, 2016).

Historically, British Sikhs started their own businesses following the recession in the late 1970's and early 1980's which had caused to redundancies and labour shortages in Britain (Ballard, 1994). Today, approximately a third of British Sikhs are business owners and home ownership is amongst one of the highest of any group in Britain (British Sikh Report, 2013). Across the millennial generation, an increasing number of British Sikhs have gone to university (British Sikh Report, 2018). This has been accompanied by a shift in the types of subjects chosen, with more millennial Sikhs opting to pursue degrees in broader subject areas (Thandi, 2018). This suggests that second and third generation British Sikhs could be better positioned to achieve social mobility than their parents.

Sikhs have striven to demark the uniqueness of their identity in response to socio-political events, both within India and the British diaspora, where they are a minoritised population. British Sikhs in the workplace may likewise wish to demark their distinctiveness from other South Asian groups, rejecting broad classification of their identities (Espiritu, 1992). The Sikh diaspora in Britain maintain an identity which positions them as holding values consistent with British values of secularisation and middle-class occupancy (Chakraborti & Garland, 2004) in contrast with social representations of British Muslims, whose value systems are viewed as antithetical, and even threatening, to British values and customs (Cinnirella, 2014). For British Sikh women in the workplace, a distinctive 'Sikh' identity may thus allow them to assimilate with the White majority and provide them with a positive sense of self-esteem through ingroup membership (Tajfel, 1981) whilst simultaneously affording them with group-level

distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991). As underscored within the following section, British Sikh women face the additional challenge of negotiating their female gender identity, necessitating an approach which accounts for the intersectionality between gender, religion, and ethnicity.

1.5. The Status of Women in Sikhism and the Sikh Community

One of the founding principles of the Sikh religion is equality, which includes equal status afforded to men and women. Historically, the Gurus openly objected to practices they perceived to be demeaning to women. Some of these practices included female infanticide and veiling of women (Rait, 2005). In line with the core tenets, select women were given important roles during the time of the Gurus. Amongst these prominent Sikh women was Mai Bhago, a warrior who led a battalion of 40 men against the Mughals and later became the bodyguard of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Mata Khivi Ji is further cited as a prominent female figure within Sikh history who contributed to the institution of *Langar*[3] (Jawandha, 2010). Other ways in which the Gurus attempted to abolish caste and gender inequality included assignment of the surnames 'Kaur' and 'Singh' for Sikh females and males respectively, challenging patrilineality (Mooney, 2020).

Critical inspection of Sikh history and literary texts on the other hand suggests that the Sikh identity is masculinised (Jakobsh, 2014). This can be seen in the inauguration of the Khalsa, led by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, where five men were initiated. Mai Bhago's role in taking up arms is masculinised, as she was instructed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji to disguise herself as a man when leading her battalion (Jakobsh, 2014). This provides some explanation for why gender equality remains an issue within Sikh religious institutions today. As pointed by Bains (2020), women are largely excluded from representing the *panj piare*[4] within religious services and events commemorating the birth of the *Khalsa.* Within Gurdwaras, positions of authority are also predominantly assumed by men, highlighting the persistence of gender inequalities within religious institutions.

Gender inequality persists within the Sikh community, reflective of how society was traditionally organised before Sikhism emerged as a religion. Historically, the social

[3] Langar is a community kitchen which serves free food within the gurdwara, or religious temple, to all, regardless of their background or beliefs.

4 The 'five beloved ones' were selected by Guru Gobind Singh Ji to take *Amrit* (a mixture comprising of sugar and water) marking formal initiation into the Sikh faith.

status of families within the Punjab relied on the extent to which *izzat* (honour) was maintained, which was linked to wealth, power, land ownership, and women's chastity (Tatla, 1999). Flouting these obligations would result in *behzti* (dishonour) and ostracization from the Punjabi community. Although antithetical to Guru Nanak Dev Ji's vision of equality, such patriarchal beliefs continue to be important in securing the prospects of a family. Cultural attitudes around the status of women in society manifest in preference given to the birth of sons originating from the practice of males inheriting land and fortune from their parents. Traditionally, the responsibility of caring for elderly parents rested with sons and sons were viewed as more valuable in terms of ability to generate wealth, whilst females traditionally did not work outside the home and were therefore viewed as less valuable (Rait, 2005).

A recent article listing inspirational Sikh women in the UK indicates a potential shift in gender roles of women in the Sikh community, as it mentions British Sikh women who have excelled in their respective fields (Wilson, 2016). The 'City Sikh' website, dedicated to promoting career development amongst British Sikhs and other ethnic groups, similarly lists prominent Sikh women who have ascended professionally. Whilst there remains a lack of scholarship detailing the experiences of British Sikh women at the intersection, these sources suggest Sikh women are beginning to challenge gender inequalities in the Sikh community, which previously would have prevented them from having paid employment outside the home. This has further been reflected in the rise in the proportion of diasporic Sikh women opting to wear the *dastar*, which can be viewed as an attempt to reconnect with the egalitarian principles of Sikhism (Gupta, 2016) through challenging expectations of mainstream society as well as of Punjabi cultural norms (Jakobsh, 2015).

Nonetheless, the persistence of gendered forms of oppression within the Sikh community has been illuminated by a recent report describing how British Sikh women are silenced from disclosing sexual and domestic abuse to preserve community-based honour (Waheed, 2021). The report further highlights how the pressure to uphold the reputation of Sikhs as an affluent, hardworking, and giving community silences victims (Waheed, 2021). Research on British Muslim women suggests career ascension is potentially compromised by cultural and religious obligations to perform gender roles (Arifeen & Gatrell, 2020). It is unknown whether gender role expectations similarly limit career ascension amongst British Sikh women who may feel the pressure to uphold multiple roles. For British Sikh women, the egalitarian stance of Sikhism towards women coupled with community-based sexism thus creates an identity paradox.

In view potential conflict between Sikh religious values and cultural gender inequality, British Sikh women may need to find a way to intrapsychically manage identity conflicts. In this vein, theories which can account for how multiple, and seemingly conflicting identities are negotiated are required to understand the intersectional experiences of British Sikh women.

1.6. Identity Process Theory (IPT) and its Applicability to the Study of British Sikh Women in the Workplace

As previously mentioned, the study of British Sikh women within the workplace requires an understanding of how multiple identities are intrapsychically negotiated and organised, particularly when they are incoherent or in opposition**.** To date, social identity theories have dominated occupational scholarship (Ashforth, 2001; Tajfel, 1981). Social identity theory presupposes that identity is informed by establishing in-group and out-group distinctions, with positive in-group identification being the end aim to preserve one's self-esteem. A key criticism of social identity theories is their assertion that group membership alone forms the basis of social identity (Bowleg, 2017) and therefore cannot account for the co-existence of multiple intersecting identities. The model also presupposes that the sole motivation for group membership is to enhance self-esteem. This notion has been challenged by optimal distinctiveness theory which highlights how competing needs for group assimilation and individual differentiation play a role in identity (Brewer, 1991).

Breakwell's (1986) identity process theory (IPT) appears to be compatible with the study of populations with intersecting identities for several reasons. Firstly, it accounts for how different identities are held in mind simultaneously and negotiated accordingly. Secondly, it accounts for why a change in context may present as a threat to the self-concept and thirdly, it acknowledges that there are identity motives other than one's need for self-esteem which regulate identity (Vignoles et al., 2002). The theory comprises of two overarching principles: assimilation/accommodation and evaluation. The former denotes the process of absorption of novel information into the identity structure, whilst the latter refers to the assignment of values to identity constructs.

Within IPT, the motivational principles of continuity, distinctiveness; self-efficacy; and self-esteem sit beneath the overarching assimilation/accommodation and evaluation principles. The psychological coherence facet was subsequently incorporated to account

for the psychological need to consolidate individual aspects of one's identity to form a coherent whole (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). Further revisions to the model have included the addition of 'belongingness' and 'meaning' motivational principles corresponding to the need for closeness and acceptance from others and the need for significance and purpose in one's life (Vignoles et al., 2002). As posited by the model, identity threat occurs when the motivational principles are thwarted, which leads to mobilisation of coping strategies which can be intrapsychic, interpersonal, or intergroup in nature, to alleviate the threat (Jaspal, 2014).

The model is supported by empirical research utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods (Jaspal, 2012; Jaspal, 2013; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Vignoles et al., 2002). Most notably, the model has been applied to the study of British Sikhs (Jaspal, 2013). Using a qualitative design, Jaspal (2013) conducted semi-structured interviews with a cohort of 10 British Sikhs, to elucidate the qualitative nature of British Sikh identity. Participants were found to distinguish Sikhism as a religion centralising gender equality as a principle, whilst denigrating Islam as an orthodox, intolerant religion. In addition, continuity was a poignant identity motive, as participants vocalised the need to continue the legacy of Sikhism to circumvent assimilation with Islam or Hinduism. Continuity and distinctiveness were further experienced as threatening within the British context.

This research highlights how distinctiveness and continuity principles may be important amongst British Sikhs. As illustrated by Jaspal's (2013) findings, social events play an important role in shaping identity, such that Islamophobic representations enhanced the need for group distinctiveness. Qualitative research conducted by Jaspal and Coyle (2010), which investigated the relationship between identity and language amongst second generation South Asians similarly found that denigration of the out-group was used to positively enhance in-group distinctiveness. In addition, the need for individual autonomy was communicated by one participant, who expressed that they speak Punjabi in England and English in India as a way of demarking their individuality. Whilst IPT research has predominantly focused research on ethnic minorities within cultural contexts, more research applying the model to local contexts (such as the workplace) is needed to understand how other roles (such as professional role identity) can satisfy the need for individual autonomy.

Other work applying the IPT framework to the study of British South Asian men identifying as gay has similarly underscored the influence of social context on identity motives

(Jaspal, 2012; Jaspal, 2021; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2014). For example, within their qualitative study investigating the intersection between sexual, religious, and ethnic identities in a sample of British Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu men self-identifying as gay, Jaspal (2012) found that Sikh and Hindu participants experienced their homosexuality as a threat to their sense of social belonging, highlighting how (perceived) cultural homophobic representations led to identity threat.

As Breakwell (1986) proposes, a change in context can present a threat to the self-concept; requiring adaptation to a novel environment. As such, British Sikh women in the workplace may adapt their identities to accommodate contextual change. Assuming a professional role may require one to appraise the pre-existing identity structure, and to make 'space' for it. It may call for the individual to ask themselves: Can I be an engineer and still be a British Sikh woman? Incompatibility between the self-concept and incoming identity-salient information may lead to a re-evaluation of value and content dimensions of identity, and processes of assimilation and accommodation may be resisted to preserve motivational principles of identity (Breakwell, 1986). The macro-context is inextricably linked to the microcosmic work environment. As such, social attitudes towards British Sikhs may be reflected in workplace practices or behaviours (Acker, 2006). In the workplace, negative social attitudes towards British Sikh women's identities therefore may in themselves be experienced as identity threatening.

Whilst the IPT framework has not yet been applied to the study of individuals in the workplace, literature has emerged illustrating how contextual change can present a threat to identity (Jaspal, 2021). Recent work by Jaspal (2021) investigating the experiences of British South Asian men identifying as gay over the Covid-19 lockdown attests to how a change in context causes threats to multiple motivational principles. The study, which used semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, found that participants feigned heterosexuality as a coping strategy to mitigate threats to self-esteem and continuity. Feigning heterosexuality further incurred a cost to authenticity, which was experienced as distressing by participants.

Other research adopting the IPT approach has similarly indicated the importance of 'authenticity' to the self-concept. For example, Jaspal and Wlliamson (2017) found that feigning HIV negative status was deployed by HIV-positive Colombian gay men as a coping strategy, which posed a threat to authenticity. 'Authenticity' as the 'alignment between one's internal experiences and external expressions' (Roberts et al., 2009, p.

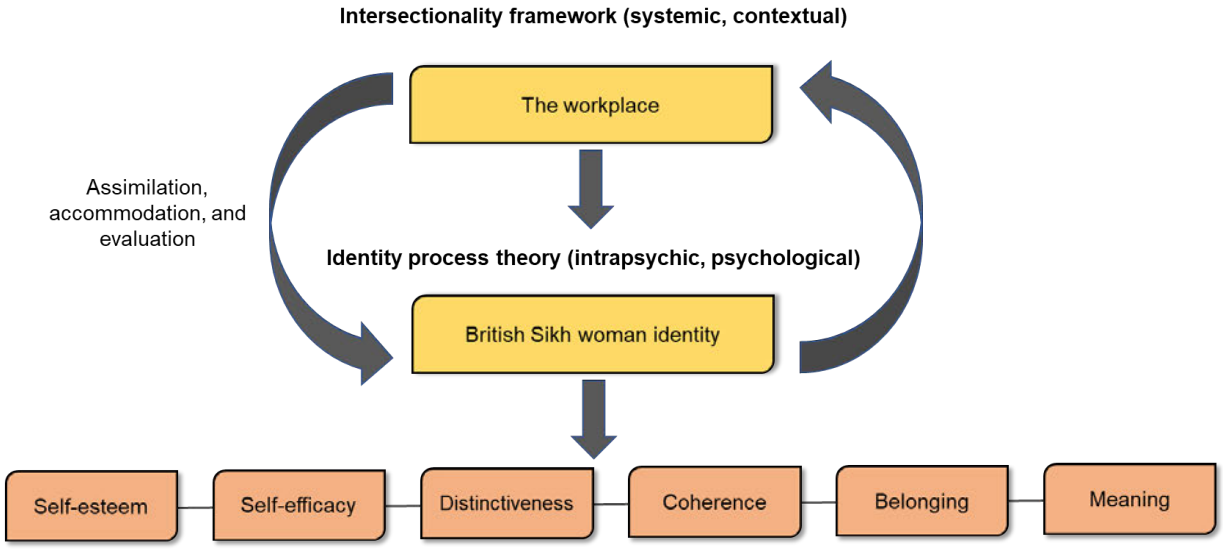
151) and ‘self-verification’, conceptualised as the need to be seen by the other in the way in which one views themselves (Swann et al., 2009; Swann & Burhmester, 2012) appears to be an important aspect of identity, as illustrated by workplace scholarship which has demonstrated the adverse impact inauthentic external expressions on mental health (e.g. Hall et al., 2012).

An integration between identity theories and intersectional scholarship may be fruitful (Hurtado, 2003; Syed, 2010), as having a lower status position in society is identity threatening (see fig. 1 below). As illustrated above, IPT has been applied to minoritised individuals who are marginalised within the broader social context; however, no research has so far applied IPT to the workplace. Investigating the experiences of British Sikh women in the workplace could potentially yield insight into how the micro context leads to identity re-negotiation and accommodation of a professional identity. Verkuyten (2005) argues that status and power differences which appear at a social level are not necessarily enacted at a local level, where individuals define and negotiate status positions. This is relevant to the study of the work context, as organisational practices may perpetuate social power dynamics (Acker, 2006), but may equally contest them. The joint application of IPT and the intersectionality framework could provide an insight into workplace conditions which mirror wider social attitudes, in addition to which identity motives these experiences threaten and how this is subsequently coped with. IPT and the intersectionality framework are epistemologically compatible, as the intersectionality framework focuses on the systemic and social, whilst IPT is predominantly an intrapsychic and psychological theory of identity

For British Sikh women, who are marginalised by virtue of their gender, ethnicity, and religion, identity threats in the work context may present as every day microaggression experiences such as ostracism (Sue et al., 2007) which could threaten the belongingness motivational principle of identity. Context, as well as contextual change, thus plays a critical role in shaping the nature of identity threat and subsequent deployment of coping strategies (e.g., being inauthentic to promote inclusion and mitigate threats to belongingness).

Figure 1

Integration Between Identity Process Theory (IPT) and the Intersectionality Framework



Another notable strength of IPT in the study of British Sikh women rests in its ability to explain how multiple identities are managed and simultaneously negotiated. Using a sample of 12 British Muslim gay men, Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) undertook semi structured interviews with participants to explore participants' lived experiences of negotiating sexual, religious and ethnic identities. In their study, Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) found that participants used external attributions as explanations for their homosexuality, rather than accepting personal agency as a way of achieving coherence between Muslim and gay identities, which were perceived as incompatible. The notion of identity 'coherence' is highly relevant to the study of British Sikh women, who must not only negotiate ethnic, gendered, and religious identities, but must also integrate their professional identity which may be experienced as either compatible or incompatible.

The following section evaluates the extant literature on professional role identity to understand how ethnic, gendered, and religious identities may be negotiated alongside a professional identity amongst British Sikh women.

1.7. Professional Identity and Personal Identity Negotiation

Professional identity is an aspect of an individual's professional self-concept related to values, attributes, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999). As previously highlighted, identity motives can have intrapsychic and individual components, as well as social components. Work identity can similarly be understood based on individual, relational and collective parameters (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). For example, an individual working as a psychologist may have a collective work identity related to their profession, whilst also holding in mind their relational role (e.g., that of therapist treating clients). In addition, they will have personal attributes, such as conscientiousness or work ethic which make them distinguishable as individuals within their role.

Professional identities are further dynamic, as roles which may have previously confined to a work-based role may develop into a non-work relationship (e.g., a friendship) (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). An individual's professional identity is important, as it constitutes a way that individuals define their self-concept and informs work attitude and behaviour (Siebert & Siebert, 2005). According to career construction theory (Savickas, 2005), individuals require a sense of their past, present, and future self to have meaning in their work and general life. Markus and Nurius (1986) state that 'possible selves' are considerations of who one could become in the future, and function as incentives for future behaviour. 'Possible selves' are informed by social comparisons made between the self and socially salient others in one's social milieu (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Whilst the idea of a 'possible self' is an under-researched area of professional identity construction literature, it is clearly applicable to one's professional identity, IPT, (Vignoles et al., 2008) and the workplace.

A key limitation of organisational scholarship is its exclusive focus on professional identity, without acknowledging the role of gender, ethnicity or religion in the construction and negotiation of professional identity. As underscored within the previous sections, British Sikh women have a set of complex intersecting 'non-work' identities (Ramajaran and Reid, 2013). British Sikh women have identities which are highly visible, such as gender and ethnicity. Other identities may be 'invisible' such as religion (Héliot et al., 2020) and sexuality (Clair et al., 2005) and thus rely on disclosure to make the identity visible to others. Religious identity can also be made visible through wearing religious attire (Héliot et al., 2020).

For Sikhs, wearing articles of faith has been a point of contention within western work contexts, where they have had to forcibly choose between keeping their *kes* (hair) or leaving their jobs (Kaur, 2020). As such, personal identities, such as ethnic identity or religion may be experienced as either conducive or inconducive to British Sikh women's professional identity (Huang, 2021) reflective of attitudes within broader society as well an organisation's attitude toward difference. Organisational scholarship has commonly emphasised that marginalised aspects of one's identity have the potential to threaten one's professional identity, particularly in cases where they are viewed as incompatible or 'interfering' (Settles, 2004). This may be the case when stereotypes associated with one's identity (e.g., women not being good at Maths) are incompatible with one's professional role (e.g., Mathematician).

Identity interference was investigated by Settles et al. (2009) in their long-term study measuring identity interference amongst women scientists. 'Woman' identity centrality, and 'scientist' identity centrality were compared against several outcomes including: self-esteem, depression, science performance, and woman and scientist identity satisfaction. Identity interference at the first time point was related to poorer psychological wellbeing, lower woman satisfaction and poorer science performance at the second time point, two years later. This highlights how perceived incoherence of two identities can have a detrimental effect on wellbeing and overall performance.

Whilst this study usefully links identity interference with psychological outcomes, it overlooks the effects of internalising negative stereotypes on identity satisfaction. As highlighted within Settles et al.'s (2016) study on undergraduate women in STEM, lower public regard, coupled with a negative academic climate (negative environment within the academic department) and woman-scientist interference were associated with lower psychological well-being. Negative academic climate and identity interference in turn impacted self-esteem and lowered perceptions of science performance. This underscores how an organisation's climate for diversity, combined with the belief that one's identity is devalued, can have an adverse impact on professional and academic performance. In applying this finding to the study of British Sikh women in the workplace, an organisation's recognition and valuing of Sikh identity may yield positive organisational outcomes and promote psychological wellbeing. This underscores the critical role of organisations in perpetuating or refuting social attitudes.

Within IPT (Breakwell, 1986), individuals are understood as agentic, with the power to deploy coping strategies to circumvent identity threats. Construction and enactment of professional identity has similarly been conceptualised as an agentic process within organisational scholarship (Brown, 2017; Roberts et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2014). Identity work refers to the strategic way in which individuals craft, maintain, enact, revise, or discard social, personal, and professional role identities (Brown, 2017). Roberts et al. (2008) similarly refer to 'strategic impression management', which encompasses a range of strategies used to influence how one is viewed by others at work. Roberts (2005) states that such strategies are deployed when the way in which one wishes to be seen differs from the self-concept.

Whilst there is no research directly applying the notion of strategic identity management on samples of British Sikhs, research has applied the concept to those with marginalised ethnic identities, highlighting how are used by ethnic minority individuals to circumvent racial devaluation at work (Roberts et al., 2014). Using multiple regression analysis, Roberts et al. (2014) measured the relationship between racial identity centrality and the strategic enactment of the identity through deployment of strategic identity management strategies in a sample of Asian Americans. The researchers found that high professional centrality, coupled with high racial centrality predicted use of 'affiliation', where common workplace attributes are emphasised to facilitate interpersonal cohesion. In their quantitative study, Roberts et al. (2008) similarly measured the use of strategic identity management strategies amongst women in science and Black medical students and found that social recategorisation was used to decrease salience of ethnic identity in medical students who positioned their professional identity as more central. Positive distinctiveness, that is, motivation to project a stigmatised group in a positive light was found amongst both groups who held stigmatised identities more centrally.

The findings extend literature on identity centrality and conflict amongst those who have marginalised identities, through illustrating how negative stereotype categorisation may be circumvented in professional environments. In addition, it suggests that different strategies may be deployed by different ethnic groups. As highlighted by Roberts et al. (2014), Asian Americans' use of affiliation and lesser use of avoidance relative to Black medical students within Roberts et al.'s (2009) study may be because Asian Americans have access to positive stereotypes, such as the model minority stereotype, which they can leverage. Kenny and Fernando's (2018) study, which found that British Sri Lankan employees agentically self-identified as 'South Asian' and 'Sri Lankan' to leverage

positive stereotypes, supports this view. This has clear implications for the study of British Sikh women in the workplace, as they are likewise subjected to stereotypes, which are racialised, gendered, or represent the intersectionality between both (Anitha et al., 2012).

The studies on impression management, whilst useful, are limited in that they have tended to disaggregate marginalised identities within study designs. For instance, Roberts et al.'s (2008) study disaggregated gender and ethnicity by studying women in science and Black medical students in isolation, even though over seventeen percent of the former study arm comprised of Black women, whilst seventy-five percent of the latter study's participant sample comprised of Black women. This is a limitation, as intersecting gender and ethnic identities are inextricably linked (Bowleg, 2008).

Like intersectionality scholarship, occupational literature has largely overlooked the role of religion (Héliot et al., 2020). This is surprising, given that religious beliefs have been found to govern perceptions and practice of work (Alanezi & Sherkat, 2008). A qualitative study conducted by Reeves et al. (2013) explored attitudes and experiences towards wearing the hijab in the workplace, in a sample of Muslim women. Participants cited a fear of being discriminated against amongst reasons for opting not to wear it. Positive and negative experiences were reported amongst those who did wear the hijab, such as organisations being supportive toward their need to pray and expressing an interest in how the hijab is used to cover one's hair. Negative experiences included being subjected to discriminatory remarks by management, as well as being subjected to the stereotype of being subservient to men and therefore lacking in leadership potential. Outward endorsement of one's religious identity can thus have both positive and negative consequences, which in turn appears to depend on the extent to which the workplace fosters a climate for inclusion (Shore et al., 2011). This highlights how an organisation's climate for religious endorsement is inextricably linked to authentic self-expression. As previously mentioned, authenticity may present an important intrapsychic need (Jaspal & Williamson, 2017).

Likewise, a divergence in the experiences of British Sikh women identifying as *Amritdhari* (baptised) and non-baptised may be poignant. Given widespread Islamophobia, Muslim women are subjected to racialised and gendered stereotypes of homemaker and terrorist (Healy et al., 2011). Islamophobic discrimination linked to misidentification directed towards Sikhs largely effects Sikh men, as they most commonly wear the turban (Gupta, 2016). Given their non-prototypicality, it is possible that Sikh women wearing the turban

are subjected to different forms of discrimination relative to their male counterparts. British Sikh women with invisible 'Sikh' identities may conversely be subjected to gendered and racialised forms of discrimination, due to the visibility of these aspects of their identity.

As highlighted within Héliot et al.'s (2020) systematic review, religious identity can be conducive to workplace performance outcomes, such as improved wellbeing (Henderson, 2016). Moreover, whilst the extant literature on integration of 'work' and 'nonwork' identities have emphasised conflict (e.g., Settles et al., 2009), there is research suggesting that religious values can be synergistic with professional values (Wittenberg et al., 2017). Wittenberg et al. (2017) administered a survey to nurses working in palliative care, asking them to recollect a time when a patient or family member had discussed spirituality with them. The results were subsequently analysed using inductive thematic analysis. An interesting finding which emerged was that self-disclosure of the nurse's spiritual and religious beliefs was reported as enhancing the nurses' own faiths. In returning to IPT (Breakwell, 1986), these findings seem to support the need for identity continuity and coherence, as alignment between professional and religious values and beliefs enhanced religious identity. Secondly, the nurse's endorsement of their religious identities potentially allowed them to maintain a consistency between their personal, religious, and professional work identities. Alignment between religious and professional identities thus appears to serve important intrapsychic needs.

Several factors can thus impact the endorsement of religion in the workplace including an organisation's climate for religious expression, as well as the centrality of religion to one's self concept (Héliot et al., 2020). Religion can further serve to enhance coherence and continuity between one's personal and professional identities (Wittenberg et al., 2017). It is noteworthy, however, that none of the aforementioned studies included the study of Sikhism. Given that Sikhs demark their Sikh identities in religious or ethnic ways (Jaspal, 2013), the relationship between 'Sikh' identity centrality and identity expression in the workplace may be more complex. Distinctiveness appears to be important need amongst British Sikhs (Ballard, 1994; Jaspal, 2013). Distinctiveness may thus be demarked in various ways by British Sikh women who centralise their British Sikh identities. Wearing religious attire may be one avenue through which (group-level) distinctiveness from other groups is conveyed.

Occupational scholarship has commonly used SIT (Ashforth, 2003), and has tended to focus heavily on occupation and role identity at the expense of understanding the role of 'non-work' identities (Ramajaran & Reid, 2013). Strategic Impression Management research using quantitative designs (e.g., Roberts et al., 2014) have highlighted how strategies may be used to counter negative stereotypes but does not give insight into experiences that lead to deployment of such strategies. Moreover, scholarship on professional and personal identity negotiation predominantly suggests an inherent conflict between the two. However, there is evidence suggesting that religious identity, for example, can be synergistic with one's professional identity (Wittenberg et al. 2017).

The utility of understanding the lived experiences of British Sikh women at the intersection is thus underscored by the literature, given that they may encounter stereotypes based on ethnicity, gender, and religious identity which they must strategically negotiate alongside their professional identities. The intersectionality framework has clear added value to IPT (Breakwell, 1986) and occupational literature. To date, IPT research has predominantly focused on the effect of macro-level context change, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, on identity (Jaspal, 2021). Occupational scholarship has problematically studied the role of gender, ethnicity, and religion in isolation, overlooking how the intersectionality between such identities affects individuals in the workplace. Intersectionality, on the other hand, accounts for how identities relate to one another and acknowledges the role of systems of power and oppression in framing the experiences of socially marginalised (and privileged) individuals. This has utility when applied to the workplace, where social systems of domination may manifest in workplace behaviours.

1.8. Intersectionality and 'Inequality Regimes'

Intersectionality is a conceptual framework which confers the interrelatedness of identity structures such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other classifications. In their seminal works, Crenshaw (1991) highlighted how women of colour are marginalised by exclusively anti-racist or anti-sexist political agendas. As women of colour sit between the nexus of both, political and social reforms often fail them (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theorists have stressed how the intersection between components of identity can simultaneously place individuals in positions of dominance and oppression within society (Collins, 2002). Research situated within the workplace is important, as organisational structures often reflect beliefs and tensions which are prevalent within

wider society, that perpetuate and maintain inequality, affecting those who are marginalised (Acker, 2006; Showunmi et al., 2016).

Since its inception, the intersectionality framework has given rise to the study of specific populations such as Black men (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014); Black bisexual men (Bowleg, 2013); British Muslim women (Tariq & Syed, 2017)**;** and most frequently Black women (Dickens et al. 2019; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Smith et al., 2019), with much of this research focusing on experiences in the workplace. To date, there has been no published research examining the intersectional experiences of Sikh women, and while the applicability of the intersectionality framework to the study of Sikhs has been acknowledged (Ratti, 2019), scholarship has been confined to opinion articles examining gender inequality within the Sikh community (Mooney, 2020). As such, this review will draw on research on the experiences of ethnic minority individuals in the workplace in general, evaluating applicability to the study of British Sikh women in the workplace.

1.8.1. The Experiences of Asians in the Workplace

Owing to the social 'invisibility' of Asians (Sue at al., 2021) there is a lacuna of research on Asians. This has recently been addressed through studies investigating the experiences of Asians in the workplace (Huang, 2021; Fernando & Kenny, 2018). Huang (2021) used a qualitative design to investigate the work life experiences of second-generation 'Asian' Americans, which included East, South East, and South Asians. The 'model minority' myth was reported amongst participants and was viewed as having a positive impact on their careers, whilst one participant described this as an obstacle toward career advancement. Predominantly, participant narratives suggested the primacy of ethnicity, though the narratives of some female participants suggested they believed Asian men face fewer challenges in the workplace. Participants also expressed experiences of being othered, and of experiencing microaggressions based on their ethnic identity. This highlights the emergence of subtle, and elusive forms of discrimination, which render targets as invisible (Sue et al., 2007), replicating previous findings (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). Within Huang's (2021) study, participants also cited receiving less pay than White counterparts for doing similar work.

This research thus extends previous literature on the 'model minority' myth (e.g., Wong & Haglin, 2006), through highlighting how this seemingly positive stereotype can be

experienced as both conducive and inconducive to one's professional role. In another qualitative study, Kenny and Fernando (2018) similarly found that British Sri Lankan employees within their sample actively endorsed the 'model minority' stereotype to their advantage vis-à-vis self-categorisation as 'South Asian' or more specifically as 'Sri Lankan'. Self-categorisation as 'Sri Lankan' was used strategically to circumvent negative stereotypes associated South Asians (e.g., 'clannishness'). Self-categorisation as 'South Asian' was drawn upon within narratives to emphasise participants' positive qualities, such as diligence and competence.

This research underscores the differences between British and American work contexts. The broad categorisation of 'Asian American' (Espiritu, 1992) has its own legacy in the context of race relations within America, which limits generalisability to the British context. As illustrated by Fernando and Kenny's (2018) findings, in the UK, South Asians may not ascribe to broad ethnic categories. As previously illustrated, British Sikhs may also reject broad categorisations, to counteract Islamophobic discrimination, and may draw upon their 'model minority' status (Sian, 2011) to positively enhance their distinctiveness in the workplace.

The studies examining the experiences of Asians or South Asians in the workplace did not adopt an intersectional approach, although Huang's (2021) findings noted how the intersection between gender and ethnicity framed participants' experiences. This underscores the utility of adopting an intersectional lens to investigate the experiences of Asian women in the workplace, given that they are subjected to gendered and racialised stereotypes of being meek and docile (Anitha et al., 2012; Ro, 2020; Rosette et al., 2018). Little is known regarding how these gendered and racialised stereotypes effect South Asian women at work. Moreover, British research applying the intersectionality framework is required, given that historical legacies of domination differ between the UK and America.

1.8.2. Intersectionality Research in the British Workplace

In acknowledgement of the need for British studies adopting the intersectionality framework, Opara et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to research the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic or 'BAME' professional women in the workplace in a UK sample. The researchers found that

participants strategically leveraged their 'British' identities, such that Britishness (conveyed by accent) was viewed as affording them privileges within the workplace. British nationality further represented multi-culturalism, and this value was viewed as conducive to decision-making within the workplace. The study also highlighted 'identity impositions' experienced by the participants, referencing expectations others had of them of how they must behave, based on stereotypical assumptions and remarks. Intersecting gendered and ethnic identities played a role in the Black women's experiences, whilst British Pakistani Muslim women cited the intersection between gender, ethnicity, and religion in relation to their occupational experiences. As indicated by the study findings, the intersection of British national identity plays an important in the professional work setting.

Opara et al.'s (2020) study provides insight into how 'BAME' professional women are seen within the workplace, and how they leverage their 'Britishness' in a White majority context, which can be conceptualised as an agentic form of impression management (Brown, 2017). It is however unknown whether the participants' intersecting seniority effected their ability to leverage their Britishness (Atewologun & Sealy, 2014). Intersectionality scholarship has tended to classify privilege via binary 'White', male gender and heterosexual categories. Privilege and marginalisation are both non-binary and contextually driven, such that one can occupy privileged and marginalised positions at any given time (Atewologun & Sealy, 2014). British Sikh women may similarly experience intersections of power and marginalisation, as they may occupy positions of authority within their organisations. Given prevailing stereotypes of South Asian women as meek and apolitical (Anitha et al., 2012), research examining lived experiences of South Asian women within (privileged) leadership positions is required to understand how social stereotypes affect their ability to enact their seniority. As suggested by Rosette et al. (2018) Asian women may experience penalties if they enact behaviours which counteract the stereotype of docility.

In a notable study, Atewologun et al. (2016) examined the intersection between ethnicity and seniority in their qualitative study investigating the use of 'identity work' (Brown, 2017) amongst a sample of Black and Asian professional men and women. Participants recorded identity salient professional encounters which were subsequently analysed deductively through the 'intersectional sensibilities' method, an approach which attended to gender, seniority, and race within participant's accounts. For an 'Indian' participant, her seniority, ethnicity, and gender led her to feel under greater scrutiny as a 'role model' for

another younger, less senior Indian woman within her organisation. Further tensions were reported in managing the usually asymmetrical dynamic within managerial relationships. An Indian woman commented on how she was primarily viewed as another ethnic minority woman by her supervisee, a Black woman within middle management, which raised the dilemma of whether to report instances of discrimination that were shared to her in confidence. This highlights how intersecting positions of power and seniority can be dilemmatic, particularly with subordinates who also have marginalised gender and ethnic identities.

Showunmi et al.'s (2016) study similarly explored the leadership experiences of White, South Asian and Black women using semi-structured interviews, and applied the 'intersectionality sensibilities' approach to analysis. Stereotypes and lack of access to networks and mentoring were cited as factors impacting the working lives of ethnic minority women. Ethnicity and religion were more prevalent in the narratives of ethnic minority women, whilst class and gender featured more in the accounts of White women. One Asian woman reported that ethnic minority women are perceived as less assertive and confident, whilst an African-Caribbean woman reported her belief that Black women's actions are challenged at a senior level. As illustrated in these findings, Asian women face different challenges to Black women, as the stereotype that Asian women are unassertive is seen as inconducive to leadership (Rosette et al., 2018). However, Showunmi et al. (2016) did not disaggregate broad 'Asian' categories in the presentation of their findings, so it is unknown whether stereotypical assumptions regarding the ability to enact leadership characteristics affects all 'Asian' groups in similar ways.

The aforementioned studies address prior gaps in the literature, through presenting intersectionality as non-binary. However, they apply a deductive approach to analysis of the data. Intersectionality scholars, such as Bowleg (2008) advocate for a deductive analytical approach when conducting intersectionality research, which requires researchers to become 'intimately acquainted with the sociocultural realities of historically oppressed groups' (Bowleg, 2008, p. 318). This approach arguably prevents novel insights from emerging from the data as workplaces may be either threatening or non-threatening to one's identity, and thus the extent to which oppression factors into workplace experiences of those with multiple marginalised identities may vary across individuals and organisations.

As illustrated above, most intersectionality research has focused on broad ethnic categories such as 'BAME', 'Asian' or 'South Asian', which British Sikh women may not personally ascribe to. In addition, there is utility in applying intersectionality to the study of specific South Asian populations due to differing legacies of domination and oppression that exist across groups. The British Sikh identity is for instance rooted in the history of colonialism and linked to representations of Sikhs as a 'martial race' and a 'model minority' (Sian, 2011). Like organisational scholarship, intersectionality research has also predominantly focused on gender and ethnicity and has overlooked the role of religion. In this vein, literature applying an intersectional lens to gender, ethnicity, and religion will be evaluated in the next sections and will be contextualised to the study of British Sikh women.

1.8.3. Research Examining the Intersectionality Between Ethnicity, Gender, and Religion in the Workplace

As previously discussed, intersectionality research has largely overlooked the intersection between ethnicity, gender, and religion. Four recent British studies have attempted to fill this gap through investigating the experiences of South Asian Muslim women within the workplace at the intersection of gender, religion, and ethnicity (Arifeen & Gatrell, 2020; Arifeen & Syed, 2019; Tariq & Syed, 2017; Tariq & Syed, 2018). Tariq and Syed (2017) used semi structured interviews and inductive thematic analysis in their study investigating the workplace experiences of British South Asian Muslim women in leadership positions. Participants reported experiencing discrimination based on their gender or religion and discrimination experienced due to the intersection between both. For example, one participant noted how she had been overlooked for promotion because of the stereotype that Muslim women leave work once they have started a family. This finding is in line with literature suggesting that career ascension is particularly compromised in South Asian women (Ro, 2020) and corroborates statistical research suggesting Muslim women are particularly disadvantaged within the UK labour market (Karlsen et al., 2020).

Airfeen and Syed (2019) interviewed British Pakistani Muslim professional women, adopting an inductive narrative analytic approach, where themes were extrapolated using NVivo software in stages. Participants vocalised feeling pressurised to 'fit in'. One participant recalled becoming more assertive to counteract the misinterpretation that her

politeness signified subservience. The experience of having to adapt to working alongside men was also highlighted as a way in which the participants felt pressurised to assimilate into the workplace culture. Participants also expressed lacking in 'cultural scripts' or knowledge of workplace practices such as networking, and other cultural frames, such as jokes and reported the experience of feeling excluded due to White and male hegemonic practices such as drinking alcohol. In support, previous research has similarly found that relational experiences outside of work, such as 'pub culture' activities exclude individuals from cultural backgrounds which forbid engagement in these activities (Healy et al., 2011). This suggests the prevalence of subtle forms of discrimination that are embedded within organisational structures, as well as the prevalence of stereotypes linked to the intersection between ethnicity and gender affecting South Asian women.

The research highlights how British Muslim women face cultural challenges that hinder career ascension. In Arifeen and Gatrell's (2020) study, cultural and religious boundaries which formed part of participants' 'ethical selves' regulated engagement in career-advancing activities viewed as inconducive to religion and culture, described as 'glass chains'. For one participant, the religious expectation to marry and bear children at a young age was perceived as career limiting. Other participants voiced workplace practices which they felt unable to partake in due to religious observance or cultural expectations.

British Sikh women in the workplace may similarly experience marginalisation at the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and religion. However, literature suggests that British Sikh women may have different experiences to Muslim women by virtue of their intersectional identity. As suggested within a recent blog, Sikh women were discouraged from pursuing degree-level education in previous generations (Bansi & Bansi, 2020). Recent statistics taken from the British Sikh report (2018) however suggest that a high proportion of British Sikh women have achieved a university degree or above, particularly those within younger generations. This suggests an intergenerational shift in attitudes towards women within the Sikh community, such that educational attainment of women may be supported, enabling access to professional careers. However, British Sikh women continue to be subjected to gender discrimination within the Sikh community (Hundal, 2015). Research exploring the lived experiences of British Sikh women at the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and religion is therefore warranted; to understand how intersections of marginalisation (and privilege) affect the quality of their experiences in the workplace.

1.8.4. Relevance of Intersectionality to the Study of British Sikh Women

As reflected within this section, there is merit in understanding the intersectionality between gender, ethnicity, and religion, given that religion has become racialised in Britain and across the diaspora (Meer & Modood, 2012). This can be seen amongst the British Sikh population, who have acquired 'model minority' status in Britain (Sian, 2011), which has rendered them invisible. British Sikh women are further marginalised by social representations and stereotypes of South Asians as meek, docile and apolitical (Anitha et al., 2012). This social representation is reflected by the lacuna of research on British South Asian women in the workplace (Anitha et al., 2012). This appears to perpetuate the myth that South Asian women are invisible outside their cultural context.

As highlighted within this review, British Sikh women may experience various forms of oppression and devaluation within personal, social, and cultural contexts, as well as in the workplace which may impact career ascension and quality of workplace experiences. Being minoritised and marginalised socially may cause them to assume 'tokenistic' status (Kanter, 1977) as a group who are fewer in number, and therefore highly visible within their organisations. British Sikh women's ethnic identities and heightened levels of physical visibility may cause them to be both invisible and visible in their organisations (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). The social invisibility of Sikhs and of Sikh women may additionally be reflected in marginalising workplace practices. This necessitates research exploring their lived experiences, to understand the manifestations of visibility and invisibility they experience (Buchanan & Settles, 2019).

Intersectionality researchers have diverged in their view of how intersectional research should be conducted (Atewologun et al., 2016; McKinzie & Richards, 2019). Research has tended to focus exclusively on identity, negating the role of power structures, and marginalising work-place practices (Acker, 2006) on the self-concept (McKinzie & Richards, 2019). 'Inequality regimes', a term coined by Acker (2006) refers to practices that maintain gender, class, and racial inequality within organisations, defined by a disparity in the access to higher positions; workplace decision making; power and control over goals; pay; and quality of relational experience within the workplace. Consideration of 'inequality regimes' is therefore crucial when understanding the experiences of British Sikh women (Acker, 2006) as workplace conditions may directly impact the quality of their occupational experiences.

1.9. Rationale and Relevance to Counselling Psychology

British Sikhs are socially invisible, which is reflected in the dearth of research on British Sikhs. British Sikh women face additional layers of invisibility and marginalisation due to prevailing stereotypes of South Asian women as meek, docile, and apolitical (Anitha et al., 2012), in addition to gender discrimination within the Sikh community itself. The workplace is a microcosm for social power structures and tensions, and as such, organisational practices may lead to an enactment of these dynamics (Acker, 2006). The study of British Sikh women in the workplace is thus crucial to understand whether social representations of British Sikh women at the nexus of gender, ethnicity, and religion affect the quality of their workplace experiences.

As a discipline, counselling psychology has demonstrated its commitment towards eliminating discrimination and oppression, through providing a voice to marginalised communities (Fouad, et al., 2006). By giving representatives of British Sikh women a voice, this research hopes to increase their visibility through drawing on personal narratives to understand their lived experiences. To this end, this research aims to address the question: What is it like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace?

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1. Introduction

The current chapter will explore how the study will address the research question: What is it like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace? The rationale for utilising a qualitative design will be discussed, along with the epistemological and ontological positions which were considered before selecting the research methodology and procedures to carry out the research. Finally, issues of validity, reflexivity and ethical considerations will be explored.

2.2. Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is concerned with capturing the essence and texture of lived experience, rather than determination of cause-effect relationships, as opposed to quantitative research (Willig, 2013). As such, quantitative research is based on a deductive approach, with inferences originating from pre-existing theoretical frameworks whilst qualitative research adopts an inductive approach, and is concerned with meaning-making, interpretation, and process (Yilmaz, 2013).

Although qualitative research does not privilege a single methodology or epistemological position over another, identifying one's epistemological stance is considered critical to selecting a methodology coherent with one's world view (Darlston-Jones, 2007). Qualitative and quantitative research designs are accordingly aligned to different ontological, epistemological, axiological, and rhetorical assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research is based on the premise that reality is subjective, privileging a multiplicity of perspectives. It therefore attempts to understand phenomena under study from the perspective of the individual (Elliot et al.,1999). Epistemologically, the researcher is considered an active participant in the research process who attempts to lessen the disparity between themselves and those being researched (Yilmaz, 2013) which differs markedly to the approach undertaken within quantitative research. These distinctions were central to my decision to adopt a qualitative approach for the study of British Sikh women in the workplace. Quantitative research assumes a positivist position, focused on objectivity and making generalisations across data sets. Applying a positivist, objective approach to the study of marginalised populations potentially runs the risk of overshadowing the voices of such individuals, and of exacerbating marginalisation

further. As pointed by Liamputtong (2010), social researchers are concerned with improving the lives of those at the periphery of society, in line with the ethos of counselling psychology (Toporek et al., 2006). Qualitative research's concern with giving voice to underrepresented groups was thus felt to be most compatible with the study's focus on understanding the lived experience of British Sikh women.

A further merit of qualitative research is its view of human experience as inextricably linked to context. This view acknowledges the dynamic nature of lived experience; emphasising that the experience and interpretation of a phenomenon does not occur within a vacuum. Intersectionality theorists have further debated whether qualitative or quantitative approaches are most appropriate (Bowleg, 2008). Arguably, quantitative research possesses the power to demonstrate the presence of discrimination, and findings can be more readily operationalised. However, qualitative research can provide a more nuanced understanding of the day-to-day manifestations of engrained systems of power and oppression (Rodriguez, 2018). British Sikh women have multiple marginalised identities, and the workplace is inextricably linked to issues of power, oppression, and privilege that are prevalent within wider society. The current research's concern with person-in-context and focus on giving voice to an underrepresented group with multiple marginalised identities was thus felt to be most compatible with a qualitative approach.

2.3. Epistemological Position

Epistemology is concerned with asking the question: 'How and what can we know?' (Willig, 2013, p.37) and is informed by the ontological positioning of the researcher, or the belief they hold about what exists. Objectivism assumes the existence of entities or objects independent of experience (Crotty, 1998). It assumes that there is a 'knowable' truth that can be discerned through the deployment of quantitative methodologies (Landridge, 2007) and that 'things exist as meaningful entities independently of consciousness and experience' (Crotty, 1998, p.5). Alternative perspectives, such as social constructionism and relativism give credence to multiple perspectives and support the notion that there may be more than one 'truth'.

While objectivism purports the notion that a single objective truth exists that can be discovered through application of empirical methods, constructionism proposes that our truth is formed or constructed when objects are encountered (Willig, 2016). This supports

the view that many ‘truths’ exist in the world and that no single objective truth exists, tantamount to a ‘relativist’ position. Social constructionism is based on the idea that our experience of an object or context is mediated by factors such as language, culture, and history (Willig, 2013).Social constructionism ‘replaces the self-contained, pre-social and unitary individual’ who ‘comes into existence and is maintained’ (Burr, 2015 p.122) not intrapsychically, but through the social world. Radical social constructionist perspectives would therefore support the view that language essentially precedes thought, and that cognition does not exist without language.

My epistemological view is that phenomena, objects, and institutions exist independently of our perception of them, but that equally valid individual Interpretations of these phenomena exist, constituting as ‘truths’. In other words, the notion of the existence of ‘objective truth’ is supported akin to realist ontology, while individual experiences of these truths are equally valued akin to a relativist epistemology**.** My epistemological stance regarding this research could therefore be considered that of ‘critical realist’ (Willig, 2008). Inherent to the research question is the proposition that there are objectively real aspects to the participants’ experience (i.e., some aspects of one’s self-categorisation as ‘British’, ‘Sikh’, and of being a woman), together with an acknowledgement that subjective truths of what constitutes as ‘Britishness’ or of being ‘Sikh’ exist. Similarly, there is the assumption that social structures and institutions exist independently of our experience or contact with them. In adopting a critical realist stance, it is therefore acknowledged that experiences are constrained by objective realities. With respect to this research, social attitudes and tensions represent an objective truth, which when manifest in the workplace, constrain and limit the experience of marginalised individuals. At the same time, recipients of such objective realities may experience them differently. Critical realism thus acknowledges that phenomena such as discrimination may be perceived in a manner of different ways.

Willig (2013), notes that the critical realist refutes the idea that raw data can give researchers a direct view of reality, stating that it is necessary to interpret the data to better understand the phenomenon under study. This notion differs to that of the ‘naïve realist’ who would view data as a direct reflection of reality. Distinguishing between the naïve and critical realist positions further informed my decision to adopt an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodological approach over a descriptive approach.

2.4. Ontological Position

Ontology is concerned with what exists in the world and ontological realism is the premise that the world exists independent of human thought (Pilgrim, 2020). Relativism exists on the other end of the spectrum, resting on the assumption that reality is an intellectual construction (Larkin et al., 2006). The research question, which is concerned with the qualitative experiences of Sikh women in the workplace, is underpinned by the ontological assumption that the material world exists beyond our knowledge or thoughts about it and is not merely an intellectual construction. In addition, it is underpinned by the assumption that the subjective reality of what it is like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace will differ for each participant. In theory, all the participants could experience the same events, but their subjective reality could potentially be unique and individual to them. The critical realist ontological position of this research therefore sits between the nexus of relativism and realism.

2.5. IPA: Philosophical Underpinnings

Interpretive phenomenological analysis is a qualitative methodology proposed by John Smith (1996) concerned with generating an in-depth understanding of lived human experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This approach was selected due to its compatibility with the research's aim of understanding the lived experiences of British Sikh women in the workplace. Phenomenological philosophical enquiry informs this methodology and is based on the work of Husserl and Heidegger (Shinebourne, 2011). Husserl placed an emphasis on understanding the conscious through observing experience (Landridge, 2007) and further introduced the idea of 'intentionality': the view that we initially recognise an object and then assign intentionality to that object through being consciously aware of it (Smith et al., 2009). Relatedly, Husserl (1927) made the distinction between things that are experienced and the manner with which they are experienced, proposing that all experience must constitute an experience of something, thus denoting *intentionality.*

Heidegger later extended the work of Husserl through introducing existential and hermeneutic aspects of phenomenological thinking. Fundamentally, the work of Heidegger introduced the idea that experience is informed by *intersubjectivity* or shared experience with others and pointed to the embeddedness of the individual within their

social, cultural, and historical context (Shinebourne, 2011). Both Husserl and Heidegger refuted the separation of the objective from the subjective, suggesting instead that the objective or 'real' was understood through consciousness itself (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Husserl believed in 'reduction' referring to the process of 'bracketing out' presuppositions to allow the philosopher to see the true essence of the phenomenon. Heidegger on the other hand emphasised the embeddedness of the philosopher's historical and cultural context in the process of phenomenological work (Finlay, 2008).

The philosophical contributions of Husserl and Heidegger have become central to our current understanding of IPA. Smith et al. (2015) proposes that IPA methodology is comprised of phenomenological, idiographic, and hermeneutic components. The *idiographic* is concerned with study of specific entities and in the context of IPA, is taken to mean the study of the individual and the study of a specific situation or event (Larkin et al., 2006). Within IPA, this can pertain to study of the individual in context. The *hermeneutic* is fulfilled within IPA through the maintaining a balance between 'bracketing out' preconceptions and being consistently reflexive in acknowledging how our experiences and perceptions colour the interpretive process (Findlay, 2008). Findlay (2008) terms this balancing act an 'interpretive dance'. However, the extent to which this can be fully achieved has been contested, with no specific guidance being given on how bracketing should be executed (Giorgi, 2011). Nonetheless, a strength of IPA over other approaches is its idiographic focus, denoted in a commitment to the specific study of the individual or event in question (Larkin et al., 2006) before making broader, general claims (Smith et al., 2015).

As summarised above, IPA gives credence to individual lived experience, using interpretation as a way of accessing the meaning of the subject's experience (Willig, 2013). A key assumption attached to IPA is that realities are understood through an interpretive lens, framed by our experiences, thus rejecting the notion of a single truth. This aspect of IPA speaks to the hermeneutic philosophical view underpinning the methodology (Smith et al., 2009). The interpretive nature of IPA is also expressed in the researcher's quest to understand the experience of the participants. As noted by Smith (2004) this represents the operation of 'double hermeneutics' where 'the participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world' while 'the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant making sense of their personal and social world' (p. 40).

2.6. Rationale for an IPA Approach

IPA was therefore deemed a suitable approach in that it would allow for an in-depth focus on the individual experiences of British Sikh women, capturing the essence of what it is like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace. Notably, this focus on individual experience within a specific context was felt to fulfil the idiographic and phenomenological commitments of IPA. The hermeneutic, interpretive aspect of IPA was felt to be compatible with my own personal beliefs regarding how knowledge is accessed. As a trainee counselling psychologist, I work with clients using a psychodynamic approach. Inherent to this approach is the assumption that underlying unconscious beliefs and desires can be accessed through observing and interpreting in-situ therapeutic encounters and conscious processes presented by the client. In line with IPA methodology, the assumption is made that the true content of the conscious can be accessed through interpretation. This position led me to preference interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology over a purely descriptive phenomenological analysis approach, which would assume that the captured data would constitute a true representation of the participants' experiences. It was decided that an inductive approach to data analysis would be undertaken. This decision was based on the belief that deductive approaches would constrain the narratives of the British Sikh women in the study, through imposing frameworks and theories during the analytical process. For this reason, neither the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1991) nor identity process theory (IPT) (Breakwell, 1986) were used as a-priori guides during the interpretive process.

Both narrative analysis and thematic analysis were initially considered as potential methodologies. Like IPA, thematic analysis is considered a phenomenological and experiential research methodology, concerned with accessing the lived experiences of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, IPA and thematic analysis diverge with respect to methodological process. A key tenet of IPA is its concern with the idiographic, reflected in the analytic process which entails an in-depth case by case analysis before discerning points of convergence and divergence across participant accounts (Miller et al., 2018). In contrast, TA sources themes across participants, and seeks to make broader generalisations across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Whilst TA's concern with accessing subjective, lived experience was felt to be of relevance to the study of British Sikh women in the workplace, it was thus felt to overlook the idiographic which

was felt to be an important aspect of understanding the lived experience of the participants.

Narrative analysis similarly shares features with IPA, in that it is concerned with phenomenology and how individuals interpret their experiences, though focuses on how a story is recollected rather than content per se (Griffin & May, 2018). A strength of narrative analysis is its compatibility with a variety of ontological and epistemological positions, as narratives can be interpreted as direct representations of inner experiences or as performative and socially constructed (Goodbody and Burns, 2011). In considering the most suitable approach, narrative analysis was discarded for two reasons. Firstly, narrative analysis's key focus is on stories and the chronological sequalae of narratives, whilst IPA is concerned with the essence of lived experience. As I was primarily concerned with understanding the content of participants' lived experiences, IPA was felt to align more with the research question. Secondly, narrative analysis has been criticised for lacking the methodological clarity and rigour of IPA (Griffin & May, 2018). In contrast to other qualitative methodologies, IPA research is accompanied by a standardised set of guidelines on how to execute the research, with further guidance on assessing quality and rigour (Smith et al., 2009; Nizza, et al., 2021). IPA was thus felt to be methodologically more rigorous as an approach than narrative analysis.

Discourse analysis was additionally considered as a potential methodology; however, it was subsequently discarded. DA and IPA both give credence to discourse and its importance in understanding the nature of individual experience. Nonetheless, they diverge on their perspective on cognition and inherently, claims regarding self-agency which is an important consideration with respect to identity research. A social constructionist informed DA approach would place greater emphasis on the performative role of language and would assume that our sense of self is a by-product of intersubjective communication (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Of note, within DA, discourse precedes the cognitive whilst IPA values language as one of many ways of accessing the cognitive, essentially proposing language as a by-product of the intrapsychic (Willig, 2013).

While IPA identifies that access to the understanding of individual experience is to some extent constrained by social context (Eatough &. Smith, 2008), IPA's view that one has an ability to interpret intersubjective activity suggests a degree of agency in the way in which one's social world is constructed (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Whilst a DA approach

was considered, I felt unable to follow through with this methodology due to its focus on analysis of discourse as a construction of reality. In my view, DA would therefore negate the importance of a-priori knowledge of pre-existing identity structures on the experiences of participants.

2.7. Method

2.7.1 Sampling Considerations and Recruitment

Purposive sampling was originally considered as it was felt to be consistent with the IPA approach's focus on capturing the experience of a phenomenon rather than collecting data from a particular participant group per se (Smith et al., 2009). However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions prohibiting all face-to-face contact and closure of venues where the study would be advertised, snowball sampling was undertaken as the primary sampling strategy to enhance access to the population of interest with the view that purposive sampling would be employed as a secondary strategy to source additional participants if required. The final sample consisted of eight participants, all recruited via snowball sampling. The first three participants were recruited via three source informants known to the researcher. These informants were from the Sikh community and were known to have access to the Sikh population. Kirchherr and Charles (2018) recommend the use of multiple seeds as a method to diversify samples within the snowball sampling technique. Three source informants were thus selected to increase the diversity within the sample. The informants were sent flyers to distribute to potential participants via WhatsApp which contained information on the study, in addition to my contact details and the contact details of my supervisor (see Appendix A for flyer).

Determining the characteristics of the sample population presented a challenge due to the complex way in which British Sikhs choose to self-identify (British Sikh Report, 2019). British Sikhs have been found to identify religiously and/or culturally as Sikh (Jaspal, 2013), which has been partially explained by the shared cultural heritage of majority of Sikhs. In view of this, it was decided that participants who identified religiously and culturally as Sikh would be included. A further consideration when determining criterion for inclusion was degree of religiosity, and whether religious participants who bore outward symbols of the Sikh faith would have radically different experiences from those who did not. This was explored because Smith et al. (2009) suggest carrying out separate

IPA studies when characteristics of a sample of participants diverge in a particular way. After careful consideration, it was decided to include both religious and non-religious Sikhs. This decision was made on the basis that inclusion of both religious and non-religious participants would allow for a balance between sample homogeneity and sufficient capture of individual experience. In retrospect, it was acknowledged that the sample was rather heterogenous, which is further discussed in the 'Limitations and Future Directions' component of this portfolio.

2.7.2. Participants

It was decided that eight participants would be recruited to this study. Smith (2015) suggests that participant number can vary within an IPA study depending on the scale of the research. The number of participants to be recruited was accordingly based on guidance by Smith et al. (2009) suggesting inclusion of between six and ten interviews for PhD research. The rationale for selecting eight participants was also based on the idiographic commitments of IPA outlined above.

As the study was aimed at eliciting the experiences of British Sikh women within the workplace context, working women over the age of eighteen were included. Individuals who had a serious mental health illness that could impact their ability to consent to participation in the study were excluded from participation. In addition, potential participants presenting with suicidal risk were excluded from the study to mitigate any further risk of psychological harm to them. The participants' demographic information was disclosed during the interviews, and they were informed that this information would be included in the final write-up of the study (see table 1 below). Of note, the final sample included a diverse range of participants. Two of the participants were baptised Sikh women who wore the turban, one of the participants expressed wearing the kara (steel bangle), and another participant expressed religious observance of a spiritual nature which included praying each morning. Some participants identified religiously as Sikh, whilst others described their Sikh identity in more cultural terms.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age range	Professional industry of work
Deepa	20-35	Corporate, graduate scheme
Nina	20-35	Corporate, graduate scheme
Harpal	50-65	Healthcare
Sharandeep	20-35	Corporate
Amrit	20-35	Corporate, IT
Raveena	20-35	Social care
Gurleen	20-35	Corporate, financial sector
Jusjeet	50-65	Third sector, healthcare

2.7.3. Procedure

2.7.3a. Screening Procedure

Participants were requested to contact the researcher via email or telephone to confirm their interest in participating in the study. Following this, the participants were contacted by the researcher to arrange an initial screening call to ensure they fulfilled the study criteria and to outline the aims of the study (see Appendix B for the screening call protocol). Questions covered asked whether participants identified as British Sikh women, whether they were working, and whether they were experiencing ill mental health or suicidal ideation. Once participants were deemed to be suitable at this stage and confirmed that they still wished to participate in the study, a convenient time to execute the interview over 'Zoom' was arranged. After the screening call, a participant information sheet was sent to the participant via email, outlining the aims of the research in addition to information regarding confidentiality (see Appendix C). All participants who expressed interest in participating in the study were deemed suitable based on inclusion criteria.

2.7.3b. Interview Procedure and Protocol

Before the interview was started, a consent form was emailed to each participant to read through and sign to confirm that they agreed to participation and use of their data for the stated purposes (see Appendix D). Participants were requested to sign the form and email it back to the researcher at least twenty-four hours before the scheduled time for the interview.

Before the interview took place, I introduced myself and my role as the researcher of the study and informed the participant that the anticipated length of the interview was 60-90 minutes. Interview length ranged from thirty to ninety minutes. The interviews were recorded using a password protected Dictaphone. Following the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to ask the researcher further questions pertaining to the study and were additionally emailed a pack containing information on services they can contact should they have felt affected by any of the themes discussed during the interview (see Appendix G). A debrief sheet was sent to each participant outlining the purpose of the study (see Appendix F). Participants were given the option to receive a summary of the results of the study through writing their email address on their consent form, which four of the participants opted in for. The interviews were subsequently transferred to an encrypted memory device for the purposes of analysis and the recording from the Dictaphone was erased. All the consent forms and confidential information, including interview recordings, were stored on the encrypted memory device, and were subsequently erased following completion of the study.

Semi-structured interviews have been frequently used to collect data for IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009) with the requirement of the researcher to remain both neutral and facilitative in their approach (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). Willig (2013) proposes that questions within the interview schedule should be open-ended and non-directive to provide participants with the opportunity to share their experiences in an open way. Smith (2015) accordingly suggests the use of a ‘funnelling technique’ where the opening questions are characteristically general and are subsequently honed down to more specific questions about the phenomena.

When designing the interview schedule (see Appendix E) opening questions were constructed with the aim of developing an initial rapport with the research participant whilst maintaining integrity to the research topic. The first few questions were aimed at accessing participants’ views on their identity as British Sikhs in a general sense (e.g.,

‘How would you describe yourself in terms of your identity?’) before moving on to asking questions about how their British Sikh identity is experienced within general life contexts (‘How has your identity as a British Sikh woman played a role in your life so far?’).

The interview protocol was reviewed and iterated several times, as it was observed that the original questions asked more about identity**.** It was determined that these original questions were incompatible with the research question and the IPA approach. While the iterated version of the protocol asks initial questions about participants’ identities, the focus is moved onto eliciting information about experiences of being a British Sikh woman in the workplace and the accompanying positive aspects and challenges. The interview protocol was reviewed by both my research supervisor and City University’s ethics committee to ensure that the questions were coherent with the research question and chosen methodology before being used in the study. Care was taken to remain non-directive and as neutral as possible regarding how the questions were worded, through balancing value-laden questions. An example of this is the decision to ask participants about the positive aspects of being a British Sikh woman in the workplace before asking about potential challenges.

2.8. Analytical Strategy

Smith et al. (2009) outline a set of key strategies underpinning IPA analysis, which are characterised by initial descriptive analysis of the data followed by the employment of interpretive strategies to make sense of the descriptive (Smith et al., 2009).

Initially, the raw interviews were transcribed verbatim, and were read and re-read several times. During this process, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009), notes were made reflecting descriptive aspects of the accounts which captured each participant’s subjective experience. Initial observations made regarding the use of the participant’s language and the context of the participant’s experience were noted alongside the right-hand column of each transcript, and any interpretations or presuppositions made at this stage were documented to return to at a later stage in the analysis (see Appendix ‘H’ for example of worked transcript). As noted by Willig (2013) the phenomenological aspect of IPA is concerned with the nature, meaning, and quality of individual experience. I accordingly returned to the transcript and generated emergent themes that captured the experiential aspects of participants’ lived experiences.

Next, overarching clusters were produced for each transcript, containing a set of emergent themes. To generate these clusters, relationships between the emergent themes were identified. As shown in the emergent theme and quotation table (Appendix I), relationships between emergent themes sometimes reflected a common experience. Willig (2013) suggests that consultation with the original text is required in the generation of these clusters, to ensure that the themes remain relevant to the original text. To ensure closeness to the original material, I therefore returned to the original transcripts and linked clusters in with interpretations and direct quotes from participants as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2003). This process was repeated for each participant transcript**.** As a result, there were clusters of emergent themes for each participant. These clusters along with their corresponding emergent themes were organised into a table format using Microsoft Excel (see Appendix J). The final stages involved looking across the participant transcripts to establish subthemes. This too involved returning to the transcript, in line with the 'hermeneutic circle' referred to in phenomenology and IPA research, where the 'part is interpreted in relation to the whole and the whole interpreted in relation to the part' (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p.12). Maintaining the 'hermeneutic circle' was essential, in that it ensured that the subthemes generated continued to reflect the participants' narratives.

Over the course of the analysis, I named and renamed the subthemes to ensure accurate theming of the data. For example, several participants referred to the experience of not being seen, or of 'standing out', which was felt to refer to the experience of visibility and invisibility. However, this was renamed to 'layered distinctiveness' to capture the differential experiences of visibility more accurately. This is in line with IPA guidance, which places emphasis on divergence and convergence between participant accounts (Nizza et al., 2021). During this stage of the analysis, data captured within the emergent themes that did not fit with subthemes were discarded.

The final stage of the process involved organisation of subthemes into superordinate themes, which were then organised to denote a narrative journey. The superordinate themes were: 'The Self: Identity Meaning and Negotiation Outside the Workplace'; 'Being with Others in the Workplace'; and 'Working out and Managing Experiences of Discrimination' (see Appendix K for master table of superordinate themes and subthemes with quotes). The pattern extrapolated from the superordinate themes highlighted the participants' intrapsychic journey of the phenomenon under investigation (i.e., the

phenomenological experience of being a British Sikh woman), toward understanding the participants' experiences in context.

2.9. Reflexivity

2.9.1. Personal Reflexivity

The hermeneutic component of phenomenology underpinning IPA led me to reflect further on the tensions which can arise between 'bracketing out' presuppositions and maintaining reflexivity toward the material (Finlay, 2008). I accordingly considered how my attempts to 'bracket' would present a multitude of challenges given the interpretive nature of the research, and how my own shared identity with the research participants as a British Sikh working woman would permeate all aspects of the research process. My personal reflexivity involved reflection on my personal motivations and interest in undertaking the research. From a methodological point of view, I considered how my own familiarity with topic and views on what it is like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace, might lead me to recruit like-minded participants with similar viewpoints. The steps which were undertaken to ensure that I maintained a reflexive position throughout the research process will be explicated below.

Shaw (2010) describes reflexivity as an 'explicit evaluation of the self' based on intersubjectivity. The intersubjective notion of 'double hermeneutics' is of particular relevance here. Whilst interacting with research participants, assumptions regarding 'sameness' were inherent. One of the ways in which this manifested was through the participants' use of Punjabi to communicate key terms. I considered how symbolically, this signified me as an 'insider'. Within the categorisation of 'insider', there are various manifestations, including 'total insiders' who share multiple identities or profound experiences with respondents, or 'partial insiders' who share a single identity component, with some distance from the community under study (Chavez, 2008). Positive and negative implications to undertaking research from an insider position have been documented. Positive aspects include ease of rapport building, more balanced power dynamics, and insight into the cultural context of interviewees allowing for a more nuanced detection of implicit communication during interactions (Chavez, 2008; Ross, 2017). On the other hand, insider status may curtail overt discussion of important topics (Ross, 2017).

As an interviewer, I found that participants expressed comfort in discussing sensitive topics which would have otherwise been approached with trepidation had I been an 'outsider'. However, I also found that being in an insider led me to overlook nuances in communication that I took for granted as an insider. An example of this was when participants spoke about culturally driven gender expectations they felt confined by. In retrospect, these topics may have provided valuable insight into how these gender norms intersect with the participants' religion and identities as British women within the workplace. As posited by Dwyer and Buckle (2009), a researcher can neither fully occupy the 'insider', nor the 'outsider' position, and rather sits between the nexus of both. Similarly, I found myself moving between both positions, which varied in accordance with who I was interviewing and the type of experiences being recollected. For example, I recognised my 'outsider' status when interviewing the baptised Sikh women in the study, as their experiences of being Sikh differed markedly from my own. My 'outsider' status was poignant to me when these participants vocalised their alignment towards their 'Singhni[9] Sikh' identity, which highlighted to me my difference to the participants both in terms of my Sikh identity and my identity as researcher. Being reflexive thus involved an openness to their lived experiences, without allowing my preconceived notions of how it may be like to be a Singhni Sikh woman in the workplace to overshadow their narratives.

In the context of data collection, my own preconceptions regarding how a British Sikh woman typically may experience the world became more apparent. Throughout the interviewing process, I was consciously aware of how subtleties in my communication could have suggested approval or disapproval. In addition, I was aware of my identification with the research participants and how preconceived notions regarding what I may find in the data led me to ask follow-up questions on some points and not on others. This was particularly poignant to me when asking questions regarding how participants chose to identify themselves, or when I asked additional follow-up questions relating to negative workplace interactions. As the interviews progressed, I became increasingly aware of these subtle biases, and as a result, probed further when participants recounted positive experiences of the workplace.

As part of my reflexive process, I reflected on my personal motivations for engaging with the topic. As a self-identifying second-generation working British Sikh woman, I have observed how the roles of women have shifted over generations, with an increasing

[9] The term 'Singhni' is often used to describe a female baptised Sikh woman

number of women seeking paid employment outside the home. A close family member, who identifies as a British Sikh woman, once told me that a senior member of her organisation said they refused to listen to her input because she is both Asian, and a woman. This story motivated me to understand how British Sikh women, who have multiple marginalised identities make sense of their day-to-day experiences within the workplace. In reflecting upon my motivations to pursue the research topic, I realised that hearing about instances of discrimination in the workplace, coupled with my desire to raise awareness of this could cause me to be more attuned to negative narratives. I discussed this with my supervisor, who highlighted how negative experiences are disproportionately represented in the literature. We discussed the value of giving voice to different narratives. My reflexive awareness thus involved an openness to positive experiences, acknowledging how doing so could provide valuable insight into inclusive workplace practices. To facilitate this, I kept a reflective diary to monitor my thoughts, feelings, and reactions toward the participants' narratives following the interviews.

2.9.2. Methodological Reflexivity

From a methodological point of view, I considered how changing my participant recruitment method to snowball sampling could impact the study. The method of snowball sampling I had selected was intended to curtail recruitment of like-minded participants, as whilst the participants were distantly known to me as members of the Sikh community, they were not part of my social circle. Whilst snowball sampling has been identified as a useful method to locate small communities who are difficult to reach, it is possible that participants calibrated their responses to questions based on my shared identity with them. My sample was heterogenous and included women who expressed varying levels of religious observance. As a non-practicing Sikh, participants who identified as *Amritdhari* (baptised) may have felt less able to be candid regarding certain experiences because of our difference.

Preconceptions about what information is expected to arise during data collection and analysis can therefore limit the extent to which a researcher is open to allowing unexpected meanings to occur (Giorgi, 2011). As highlighted by Giorgi (2011) having this openness is essential to interpretation work within IPA. Crotty (1996) notes how it is impossible for the qualitative researcher to be objective. I accordingly considered how by virtue, my shared identity to research participants could limit the extent to which I could

bracket my preconceptions. Similarly, I considered how the research participants' preconceptions of me as an individual who shares the same identity as them may have informed the level or breadth of information they chose to share with me. This was a particularly important consideration, given the small size of the Sikh community. To mitigate this issue, I reiterated confidentiality and anonymity. Moreover, I reinstated my professional role through ensuring I maintained a professional, yet relaxed approach to the interviews.

Prior to undertaking the interviews, I considered how I could ensure that I remained reflexive throughout the research. Before conducting interviews, I made my role as researcher explicit, as someone who has her own knowledge and experience of the subject matter, but equally as someone who is open to learning about the participants' personal experiences.

Throughout the process of data collection, I kept a reflexive diary which included recollections of when perspectives diverged with my own. This process heightened my awareness of how participants' responses resonated with me and thoughts and feelings which emerged during the process. Whilst I had originally considered listening back to audio recordings of interviews to help inform my reflections, I found that I could recall instances where I felt uncomfortable with the answers provided by my participants, and how this shaped the responses I gave. Through reflecting on this process, I made a conscious effort to sit with my discomfort during prospective interviews to ensure that I did not inadvertently evade exploration of topics I found uncomfortable.

Data analysis was inevitably coloured by my own preconceptions of themes within the data deemed relevant to the research question, and beliefs based on previous reading. This was highlighted in subtle ways, through my choice of terminology (e.g., the use of the word 'distinctiveness' to describe visibility and invisibility). Acknowledging how personal perceptions are impacting upon the data analysis process and engaging in a continuous and iterative process of returning to the material to 'bracket out' preconceptions is suggested by Finlay (2008). In practice, however, this elicited further tensions between being descriptive and interpretive in that excessive 'bracketing' led to my reticence to interpret the material. Submitting a draft version of my analysis to my supervisor highlighted instances where I had resorted to descriptive forms of interpretation, which I modified to become more interpretive in later iterations.

Yardley's (2017) method of 'disconfirming cases' where the researcher purposefully looks for themes incongruent with their own assumptions was used. This method helped to acknowledge and address how my interpretations had influenced the process of analysis and further informed my decision of whether to keep or discard interpretations. Overseeing interpretations in this way also enabled me to maintain an inductive approach to my data, by discarding interpretations felt to be too heavily informed by prior reading of literature.

2.10. Evaluating Research

Qualitative researchers hold varying perspectives about what constitutes as knowledge about the world and diverge in their epistemological positions. Determining the validity of findings derived from qualitative researchers can therefore be a challenging task (Yardley, 2017). Unlike quantitative research, no consensus on assessing validity within qualitative research studies exists (Noble & Smith, 2015). As qualitative research is conducted based on epistemological and ontological assumptions, assessment of quality and rigour must mirror the researcher's positioning (Willig, 2013). As this research is concerned with the hermeneutic, it is important that reflexivity plays an important role in ensuring and enhancing the trustworthiness of the data analysis process (Willig, 2013).

General guidelines have been introduced for assessing rigour and validity of qualitative research (Elliot et al., 1999; Yardley, 2000), in addition to specific guidelines for establishing the quality of IPA studies (Smith, 2011). The current research utilised both Yardley's (2000) criteria and Smith's (2011) IPA-specific guidance to establish rigour, validity, and quality. The reasons for this were twofold. Given the study's focus on British Sikh women's experiences, Yardley's (2000) criteria was felt to be particularly relevant, due to its focus on cross-cultural competence. Secondly, as the study used IPA methodology, Smith's (2011) guidance was considered alongside Yardley's criteria to ensure quality and rigour from a methodological perspective.

Yardley's (2000) first principle; 'sensitivity to context', was fulfilled through ensuring sensitivity to how the social, cultural, and historical context shaped my own beliefs and that of my participants. Maintaining sensitivity to context was felt to cohere with the critical realist philosophical underpinnings of the research which acknowledges how institutions constrain our experiences. It was further felt to cohere with IPA's concern with person-in-

context. This criterion was considered throughout the whole research process. Within the initial stages of the research process, exploration of existing theoretical frameworks within the literature review, such as the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1991), explored the role of sociocultural context in perpetuating systems of power and oppression. Awareness of context was maintained throughout the study through considering how, for example, the interview context and shared identity between myself and the participants was shaping what was said or not said. I therefore maintained a reflexive awareness towards these issues through being attuned to my way of communicating with the participants in real-time. I further ensured a rapport was established with participants to create a sense of safety conducive to discussion of their lived experience.

Yardley's second principle; 'commitment and rigour', refers to methodological rigour, the criteria for which varies depending on the type of methodology used. Commitment and rigour were fulfilled through adopting specific criteria outlined by IPA researchers to produce high-quality research studies (Nizza et al., 2021). According to Nizza et al., (2021) there are four markers of good quality IPA studies which include: 'Constructing a compelling unfolding narrative'; 'developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account'; 'close analytic reading of participants' words'; and 'attending to convergence and divergence'. In accordance with the guidelines, care was taken during the analysis to ensure it followed a coherent narrative. This was achieved through organising the analysis so that it followed a micro-meso-macro journey of the participants' lived experiences. Careful attention was given to the naming of subthemes and superordinate themes to capture the experiential significance of the participants' lived experiences. Throughout the analytic process, an array of different features were attended to, including tone; use of repetition; emphasis; and use of metaphors to allow for an in-depth level of analysis, in keeping with the interpretive component of IPA. Finally, quotes were selected which reflected the breadth of perspectives across the participants. To provide a balance between convergent and divergent perspectives, some quotes were omitted from the final write-up. This was the case where there were felt to be an excess of quotes which reflected the same point.

Yardley's third criteria, 'transparency and coherence', refers to transparency in the disclosure of relevant aspects of the research process and coherence in the ideas proposed within the study to produce a convincing argument (Yardley, 2000). Transparency was achieved through including information on how I interpreted the

interviews and what led me to reach such conclusions, as suggested by Elliot et al. (1999). This was further achieved through the presentation of the procedures in this research process.

In line with the 'coherence' principle, a clear organised structure has been presented to allow for greater clarity on which themes were observed, allowing for critical assessment of relevance of themes to data. In addition, coherence was partially achieved through presenting superordinate themes and corresponding subthemes in a cogent, narrative structure as outlined above.

Yardley's final criteria, 'impact and coherence', refers to the spread and influence of the research topic in question, which Yardley (2000) proposes as a key marker of rigour and validity. As noted by Yardley (2000), qualitative research's focus on socio-cultural issues means that it is well positioned to not only provide explanations, but solutions to problems. The ethos of counselling psychology as a profession is additionally concerned with social reform (Fouad et al., 2006). This research could thus help to raise awareness of issues uniquely effecting British Sikh women and other ethnic minority women in the workplace, so that reforms can be implemented which improve their experiences and access to opportunities. In the interests of actioning the research to increase awareness of this underrepresented group, a publishable paper will be submitted to a high-impact journal as one way that the research findings could be disseminated.

As highlighted by Fassinger and Morrow (2013), researchers should consider creative and meaningful means through which social justice research can be disseminated, such as workshops; presentations; and dramatized performances. Recent socio-political events, such as the death of George Floyd (Hill et al., 2020) have ignited an interest in social reform, both politically and institutionally which has led to the establishment of forums for ethnic minority individuals within organisations to express issues such as discrimination affecting them in the workplace. Another way that research could be disseminated is through presenting research within such forums, and to organisations, in the form of presentations and workshops to help normalise the experiences of British Sikh women and other ethnic minority women who can relate to the study findings. In addition, it could help organisations to refine their understanding of inclusive work practices.

2.11. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from City, University of London's ethics committee prior to recruitment and data collection (see Appendix L). Amendments to the original ethics application were made in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, including a request to change from purposive to snowball sampling; conducting interviews over 'Zoom'; and spending additional time at the end of the interview to debrief participants (see Appendix M). The BPS code of ethics and Conduct (2018) has been used as guidance for the ethics of the study through considering principles of 'respect'; 'competence'; 'responsibility'; and 'integrity'.

Before agreeing to participate in the study, participants were asked to read through a participant information sheet and sign a consent form (see Appendix C and D respectively) outlining how their data will be used; information on confidentiality; the purpose of the study; and information regarding dissemination of research findings. These measures were taken to ensure that potential participants were provided with enough information on the nature of the study to make an informed decision as to whether they should participate. These measures were also taken to avoid any deception to the participants and to inform them of their right to withdraw up to the point of data analysis.

Thompson and Russo (2012) note how confidentiality could be compromised in the write-up of the study, due to disclosure of demographic information that could make participants identifiable. I considered this aspect of anonymity in the context of my study, as in the interest of validity of findings, I have decided to include background demographic information to allow for the contextualisation of the participants' experiences. To protect participant confidentiality, I used pseudonyms and included demographic information; allowing for validity issues to be addressed adequately, whilst maintaining anonymity of the participants. Background information provided has therefore been confined to the participants' age range and broad industry of work. The decision was made not to include any information regarding the participants' locations, as this was considered identifiable information.

Given the nature of the study, and the potential for disclosure of sensitive information, I considered how confidentiality could become a pertinent issue if the participant were to disclose risk from or to others. Although the participants were made aware that issues of risk would need to be disclosed by the researcher, my identity as a trainee counselling psychologist led me to reflect on the boundaries of confidentiality further. In the interest

of maintaining my role as researcher and to protect individuals from harm, the screening interview was used to screen out any individuals with suicidal thoughts. To address any potential risks that could arise, participants were provided with details of the complaints procedure and the details of the research supervisor. At the end of the study, a document containing information on services offering mental health and work-related support was given (see Appendix G). Additional time was left at the end of the interview to allow for more time to attend to the distress of the participants, in view of the virtual format of the interview. This was felt to be important to further mitigate any potential harm to participants from taking part in the study.

Relatedly, having a shared identity with the participants was a pertinent ethical consideration. The snowball sampling method used meant that participants were recruited via source informants that were known to me. From an ethical standpoint, I therefore considered the importance of maintaining confidentiality and boundaries with the participants to avoid any departure from my professional role as researcher. Through maintaining a professional distance with my participants, I aimed to create a safe environment through which participants could be candid with me without concerns regarding breaches of confidentiality. Whilst source informants were used to help gain access to participants within the population of interest, no information about participants or information discussed during interviews was disclosed. This was to ensure that the participants' confidentiality and anonymity remained protected.

I considered the participants' right to withdraw from the study, and how allowing participants to withdraw their data at any stage of the study could create tensions with the academic requirements of the study. After careful consideration, it was decided that participants could withdraw from the study up to the stage of data analysis. This was felt to maintain a satisfactory balance between the need to mitigate psychological harm to the research participants, whilst meeting academic requirements.

The duty of the researcher in the context of informed consent is to communicate the 'nature, purpose and consequence of research' (Thompson & Russo, 2012, p. 38) and involves ensuring that the participant has the capacity to consent to participation. The latter has been addressed in this research through the study's exclusion of participants who have a diagnosis of a serious mental health problem impacting capacity to consent.

The participant information sheet (see Appendix C) includes information on the context and purpose of the research in addition to how the study could potentially benefit the

field of counselling psychology. Care was taken not to mislead participants on potential benefits through manner of wording in the participant information sheet. No definite claims were therefore made about how the research would create an impact to the research field or wider society to avoid deception to research participants.

Chapter 3: Analysis

Introduction

As posited by Smith et al. (2009), themes can be organised in accordance with emergent narrative; cultural; contextual; or temporal features of the data. Accordingly, the order of the superordinate themes was felt to follow a coherent narrative structure, which moved from the intrapsychic towards the interpersonal- and finally, the institutional or contextual.

Overall, three superordinate themes emerged from the data capturing the narratives of the participants. Each superordinate theme had two to three corresponding subthemes. Central to the first theme: **'**The Self: Identity Meaning and Negotiation Outside the Workplace', was the intrapsychic aspect of identity negotiation which captured the unique meanings of intersecting identities for each participant. With the second superordinate theme: 'Being with Others in the Workplace', focus moves to the interpersonal and the interaction between the participants' self-identity and their identity as seen by the other as a minority within their work setting. This included a focus on group membership and its role in the women's' experiences at work. The analysis moved towards the contextual and wider social issues within the final superordinate theme entitled: 'Working Out and Managing Experiences of Discrimination'. This superordinate theme captured views and experiences regarding barriers to opportunities in the workplace as a function of the participants' intersectionality, and how this was subsequently managed.

During the process of data analysis, difficult decisions had to be made to omit material which was felt to be less relevant to the research question. The data was gathered in the form of direct quotes, which were unedited to preserve the participants' accounts of their lived experiences. For the most part, participants spoke in English during the interviews, however occasionally used Punjabi words and phrases to describe aspects of their experiences. In such cases, English translations were provided in brackets. Pauses occurring within the text were indicated by: '…', and parentheses were inserted to describe verbal and non-verbal reactions. Words that were emphasised by participants were underlined. Each participant was given a pseudonym to preserve their anonymity, and all identifying information was changed to protect their confidentiality.

Table 2

Superordinate Themes and Corresponding Subthemes Across Transcripts

Superordinate Theme	Subthemes
The Self: Identity Meaning and Negotiation Outside the Workplace	1. Being 'Sikh', British, and 'Punjabi' 2. Negotiating Boundaries of Intersectional Identity
Being with Others in the Workplace	1. Layered Distinctiveness 2. Belongingness vs Otherness 3. Sameness vs Difference
Working Out and Managing Experiences of Discrimination	1. The 'Invisible Ceiling' 2. Is it Because I'm 'Brown'? 3. Coping and Strategising for Survival

3.1. Superordinate Theme One: The Self: Identity Meaning and Negotiation Outside the Workplace

This superordinate theme captures the participants' intrapsychic experience of the self, drawing upon the process of negotiating 'Sikh', 'British', 'Punjabi' and 'Indian' identities. The phenomenological meanings and qualitative experiences of each identity are additionally explored; capturing sense of pride, ownership, freedom, and group membership. Understanding this complex process of negotiation was felt to allow for an understanding of how the participants viewed themselves away from the work context, within their private lives. It therefore provided the foundation for understanding how the self is subsequently re-negotiated and understood based on interactions with other people, and how the workplace context itself subsequently played a role in the participants' self-concept and sense of self. The subthemes which emerged were: 'Being 'Sikh', 'British', and 'Punjabi', which captured the participants' meaning-making process of each identity; and 'Negotiating Boundaries of Intersectional Identity'; capturing the subsequent process of negotiating identity structures.

3.1.1. Subtheme One: Being ‘Sikh’, British, and ‘Punjabi’

The participants diverged in their perspectives of ‘Britishness’ and what this identity construct offered to them. For some participants, Britishness offered little more than residency; for others, it was expressed as integral to their sense of self. Similarly, the meaning of ‘Sikh’, ‘Punjabi’, and ‘Indian’ identities varied considerably across participants. For some, being ‘Sikh’ was linked to an internal set of values and belief systems which were applied to the workplace, while for others, a strong sense of distinctiveness and group membership was derived from their Sikh identity within personal and social contexts which was not necessarily reflected in workplace experiences.

Amrit, a third generation British Sikh, expresses an intergenerational sense of belonging in Britain:

> *‘Coz like my grandad always said to me like yeah Britain’s my home like I came here, you know I’ve lived here and blah blah I have a job here so erm so and then I think and that obviously got passed down to my mum and my mum just passed that onto me like she always thinks of herself as British and I think of myself as British and erm in terms of how it’s like played a role well I guess like in terms of because like I see myself as British I don’t really feel like an outcast anywhere' (Amrit, p.6).*

Amrit’s sense of belongingness and ownership towards Britain is seemingly reinforced by her repetition of the word ‘home’. The long history of settlement in Britain conveyed further infers a sense of permanence in being rooted in Britain, as though she is indisputably British. It can be inferred that Amrit is expressing a counterargument towards those who would refute her Britishness, as within the excerpt, she recalls her grandfather referring to himself as British despite the racism he had endured. In the workplace, this may mean that Amrit feels she must prove the legitimacy of her Britishness to the White majority.

Harpal, on the other hand, expresses Britain as a place associated with acquiring residency and benefitting from British ‘systems’. She describes Britain as a place that she has ‘adopted’ and a place that has ‘adopted’ her:

> *'And I’ve adopted Britain as the country I’ve chosen to remain having, having done my education here and having lived here for this length of time so whether*

I'll move again at some later stage of my life I don't know but it's like it's almost like my adoptive parent' (Harpal, p.9).

Harpal then goes on to distinguish between Britain as her adopted country and India as her 'motherland'.

The word 'adopt' suggests a sense of embracing Britain by choice, and of Britain embracing her and has maternal connotations. Her repeated use of the word 'adopt' conveys a sense of willingly being taken care of, and of being protected by Britain, which carries with it a tender quality. Indeed, Harpal later expresses being 'protective' of Britain, suggesting a sense of loyalty toward Britain, despite referring to this aspect of her identity as one which she associates merely with acquisition of residency. She refers to the value and structural systems that she associates with Britain:

'You know erm so but I would say the Britishness is around…the fact that you…there's the presumption that there is erm…the police are less corrupt…you could be in India or in Kenya or you could be in the US…and you sort of think nah…just…our police officers are hopefully not as you know…in the same way that they are so I guess it is what we've been brought up to believe about Britishness' (Harpal, p.5).

'You know it's like which is your mother land? You know, interestingly enough, my mother country, my mother land is India even though I would never want to live there, my mother land is India because I see myself as Indian' (Harpal, p.9).

Harpal suggests that her 'presumption' regarding lack of corruption is based on ideas about Britain, rather than her experience of Britishness itself. This suggests a relationship with Britain based on idyllic representations, rather than reality. Nonetheless, her use of the collective 'our' within the excerpt suggests that she views herself as part of Britain and Britishness. Harpal distinguishes between Britain as her 'adopted country' and describes India as her 'mother land' within the second excerpt, conveying how for her, India is theoretically where she belongs by virtue of her Indian identity. This suggests that while England is her 'adoptive country', where she chooses to live, it does not negate her sense of belonging to her country of origin. Harpal's attachment to her Indianness is later reflected in her appraisal of 'sameness' and shared experience with other Indian women at work. The centrality of Harpal's Indian identity to her self-concept thus translates to her experiences at work.

Raveena similarly reflects on the significance of being British and the meaning of this identity structure to her:

> *'Yeah definitely, well I mean we wouldn't be able to if we were back home in Punjab or anything like that (laughs) it's like you do what you're told and you sit at home, make the rotia (chapatti), and that's it, you get married so yeah that's definitely the British side…yeah hundred percent there are a lot of privileges that come with it (Raveena, p.33).*

Raveena refers to the 'privileges' afforded to her by Britishness. Interestingly, whilst Raveena is a second or third generation British Sikh, she describes the Punjab as 'back home', suggesting a sense of connectedness with her cultural roots. She contrasts the type of life she would have if she lived in the Punjab to the freedoms she has within British society. In Raveena's account, a sense of gratitude is conveyed at the 'privileges' she has in being British. It can be inferred that for Raveena, Britain represents opportunity, with a freedom to choose her own destiny; in juxtaposition with the traditional path she imagines would be bestowed upon her in the Punjab. Poignantly, her sense of privilege extends to the workplace, as evidenced by her later reference toward being given the freedom to work, obtain an education, and have a career; all of which would not be possible if she were 'back home', which conveys a universal, predetermined path.

Five of the participants expressed a sense of 'pride' in their Sikh identity. For these participants, their Sikh identity took precedence over their British identity, which was felt to be more secondary and fulfilling specific functions. Harpal expresses how the value of inclusivity within Sikhism brings about a sense of pride for her:

> *'I think because I'm very proud of being erm a Sikh because what Sikhism represents, what Sikh values represent, I think that for me I feel proud of being a Sikh because of how much contribution they also make to every community wherever they are around the world' (Harpal, p.2).*

Harpal repeats that she is proud of being Sikh several times within the excerpt. Harpal emphasises that being a Sikh is not something she should shy away from, by conveying her enthusiasm in expressing this aspect of her identity and making it known. For Harpal, Sikhism is about the values and equal treatment of individuals regardless of faith or gender. She expresses how the generosity of Sikhism is unparalleled, later favourably comparing Sikhism to Hinduism and Islam. As expressed throughout the excerpt, Sikh

egalitarian values such as equality and fairness which have been passed down to her intergenerationally, play an integral part in Harpal's professional identity on what she later describes as on a 'subconscious' level. This highlights how Sikh values play an influential role in how she views the workplace, and how she conducts herself within the work context.

Amrit speaks to her sense of pride in the context of the positive perception Sikhs have within Britain:

> *'British Sikhs are kind of perceived as being like very hard working really like you know erm they've like integrated well into like erm British society you know and they speak about like helping others…so I think erm that's why I that I was saying that kind of makes me proud because I guess that's how we're kind of perceived' (Amrit, p.6).*

Amrit denotes the Sikh community's ability to integrate into mainstream British society as a source of personal pride, capturing how it feels important for Amrit to assimilate to belong. It could further be inferred that a sense of earning one's place within Britain is conveyed in Amrit's dialogue, as she later stresses the contribution and impact Sikhs have made to British society. Amrit seemingly derives a sense of belonging in Britain by virtue of the successes of the Sikh community which affords them a place within Britain Importantly, her externally driven sense of pride, contrasts with other participants' more internally driven sense of group membership and pride. This suggests her sense of belonging could more readily come under threat within the workplace, depending on whether she is viewed positively by the White majority.

Jusjeet describes her father as a proud Sikh man, and recounts how emotive the experience of connecting with this aspect of her identity is:

> *'Just kind of the proudness he felt and when I think of- and so- when you sit there, you don't realise what you absorb really as a young person and I'd feel kind of…I'd see the tears in his face, kind of- in his eyes, and now right, when I see anything that…I associate with Sikhism and stuff I do, I can feel these goose bumps you know…sort of I dunno…it's weird I suppose yeah…like I said, I am who I am' (Jusjeet, p.16).*

Jusjeet describes the connection her father had toward his Sikh identity and is recalling seeing her father watching media coverage on the television on Sikhs. Jusjeet is

expressing how she has ‘absorbed’ and taken in her father’s pride in being Sikh without realising it. For Jusjeet, the sense of pride she feels through identifying as a Sikh elicits a powerful, visceral reaction in her and the acknowledgement that her identity is static and unchangeable. It can be inferred that Jusjeet is almost reliving this and connecting with her physical experience in the moment. The phrase ‘it’s weird’ could possibly suggest the difficulty Jusjeet experiences in articulating her powerful emotional experience. Jusjeet’s final statement: ‘I am what I am’, powerfully communicates how she celebrates her Sikh identity as something that she need not apologise for.

The meaning of Raveena’s identity as a Singhni Sikh is one which is religious, as shown within the following passage where she describes keeping her hair:

> *‘Every time you remove your hair, it keeps coming back; that’s how persistent it is. Unless you kill it from its root, it will keep coming back and that’s because God wants you to have it and for me, those kind of things made sense so it was kind of like, well why am I not doing it? If my Guru’s telling me, and I call myself a Sikh, well why am I not doing what he’s telling me to do? Then how can I really call myself a Sikh?' (p.17).*

For Raveena, her decision to keep her hair was driven by the process of questioning herself, to understand why she was not following God’s guidance. What can be deduced here is Raveena’s sense of removing her hair as something which is illogical and irrational. Raveena perhaps feels as though she had been sinful in not keeping her hair, as though she had failed to do what was required of her as a Sikh. One could deduce that this was an uncomfortable and disconcerting realisation for Raveena, as she could not find an adequate answer to the questions that she had posed for herself. The tone of the excerpt further gives the impression Raveena is disapproving of herself for having not adhered to the rules of Sikhism. The tone of the excerpt also suggests that Raveena felt disarmed by the questions to herself, as she was unable to satisfactorily answer them. It can be hypothesised that Raveena possibly a sense of guilt in her realisation that she did not have the answers. This suggests that for Raveena, having a Sikh identity she believes to be authentic marked by close religious observance, is a necessary precondition toward categorising herself as a Sikh. The fixed nature of Raveena’s identity as a baptised Sikh woman described here suggests that her religious identity remains fixed and immutable in the work context. This highlights how for Raveena, her religion is something she may actively endorse in a professional context.

Raveena further describes the path towards baptism as a Sikh as predetermined:

> *'So it just erm…for me, it was just kind of letting go and it just kind of being like right I give it to Maharaj (God), whatever God wants to happen it will happen' (Raveena, p.17)*

She describes a process of 'letting go', inferring that she entrusted God or *Maharaj* to make the decision on her behalf. A sense of acceptance is conveyed in Raveena's process of 'giving' the decision to God and allowing fate to run its course. What can also be deduced is a sense of relief and liberation in allowing God to make the decision, which she later describes as a 'comfortable', though an initially 'anxiety provoking' experience.

Like Raveena, Gurleen also describes her identity as a Singhni Sikh as a journey:

> *'I thought maybe I am made just for this life, you know kind of thing, and then I tried it, and then really really liked it, I really liked like going to kirtan programmes and stuff like that and I thought okay, maybe this is for me so I took one step at a time because I knew, had I gone straight to the dastar and taken Amrit…God forbid, that I probably would've turned back coz it would've been a drastic change for me' (Gurleen, p.25).*

For Gurleen, becoming a Singhni Sikh was a natural and considered transition; a route that she was destined to pursue as implied by her explanation of how she was 'made' for that way of life. She expresses how she considered 'maybe this is for me' with each step she took towards taking *'Amrit'*[10]. At each milestone toward baptism, Gurleen has used her feelings as guidance, with an appreciation of the gravitas of the decision to take *Amrit* to ensure her readiness for it. By saying 'God forbid', Gurleen insinuates that contravening the rules one must follow after baptism would be unacceptable to her. A sense of being held by this process is inferred, in that Gurleen can consult her inner barometer and trust fate, so the decision to take *Amrit* does not completely rest with her. The concept of fate, which is central to the Sikh religion, later re-emerged in Gurleen's account of her workplace experiences. This highlights how Gurleen's religious identity as a Singhni Sikh woman plays an important role in her sense-making process across contexts, inferring the static nature of her identity. As indicated in a later account of her workplace experiences, fate plays an integral role in Gurleen's appraisal of workplace challenges in that she does not feel wholly accountable for career setbacks she

10 Amrit is a mixture taken by individuals during the Sikh initiation ceremony

experiences which highlights how her religious identity as expressed on a personal level, influences her professional life.

In their descriptions of different identity structures, the participants spoke to the various meanings, values and functions attached to their identity structures. Having privilege and freedom by virtue of Britishness was reflected upon, with participants referring to opportunities they would not have otherwise had. Poignantly, this sense of privilege and opportunity was linked to one participant's professional identity, and the freedom afforded to her by virtue of Britishness. A sense of pride, which was either internally driven or based on external perceptions of society in general was attached to 'Sikh' identity, which later had implications in terms of motivations to endorse this identity in the workplace. The Singhni Sikh women spoke to the concept of fate in their journey toward becoming baptised Sikh women, and the gravitas of the decision to undertake the path. Each identity structure thus appeared to uniquely contribute to the self-concept, which informed how identities were subsequently boundaried and negotiated. Crucially, the meanings assigned to identity structures provide insight into how religion was either publicly or privately endorsed. These meanings seemed to be reflected in workplace attributions and behaviours, such that spiritual beliefs were used to make sense of workplace challenges, or otherwise played an integral role in informing the ethos of the participants' professional identities.

3.1.2. Subtheme Two: Negotiating Boundaries of Intersectional Identity

All of the participants described a process of negotiation, drawing upon the discrepancy and consonance between British, Sikh and Punjabi identity structures. A temporal, lifelong process of finding one's identity and of forging their sense of self was denoted in the participants' narratives. Across the transcripts, a process of selecting aspects of identity that took precedence over other less salient aspects was evident. The process of negotiation involved management of conflicting value systems. Some of the participants alluded to there being clear boundaries between 'Sikh', 'Punjabi', and 'Indian' identity structures. For some participants, these 'boundaries' were flexible and negotiated readily and with ease. For others, the rules and stipulations governing identity structures meant that the boundaries were more fixed. This played a role in how professional identities were subsequently negotiated in the work context.

The conflict between ‘Sikh’ and ‘Punjabi’ value systems are described by Nina:

> *'I feel like Punjabi culture’s very…let’s have chicken and whisky! (laughs) I don’t know how much Sikhism would condone that' (Nina, p.3).*

> *'So for example the caste system I wouldn’t but, having meat and drinking is something I would still do- so I think it’s still clarifying what the lines are, the barriers, and how strongly I guess you believe you’re a Sikh but like I said I’m not overly religious' (Nina, p.3).*

Whilst the discord between the value systems is acknowledged, the laughter and framing of Nina’s response in the first excerpt could be inferred as minimising the seriousness of engaging in behaviours that contradict the tenets of Sikhism. Her stating ‘I don’t know how much’ implies ambiguity, and attenuates the barrier between her Sikh and Punjabi identities. By minimising the difference between value systems of her identities, Nina potentially allows them to be coherent with one another, allowing them to co-exist for her in an unproblematic way. It can be inferred that Nina does not feel conflicted in holding Sikh and Punjabi identities concomitantly despite the disparities between them, as she expresses how she selects aspects of each with ease. Nina exercises a sense of agency and choice in defining the boundaries comprised within her identity through selecting the ‘lines’ and barriers’ between identities for herself. Interestingly, Nina switches from a third person perspective to a first-person perspective in the excerpt. By doing this, Nina allows herself the permission to engage in practices that are disallowed within Sikhism through making the religious aspect of her British Sikh identity less salient and expressing religiosity as less important to her. The excerpt highlights how Nina experiences her identity as one which is complex, multifaceted, and agentic; in contrast with her experience of being viewed as solely by her colour of skin within the workplace by White colleagues.

In contrast For Gurleen, who identifies as a ‘Singhni Sikh’, the process of negotiating British Sikh identity is less fluid and presents challenges:

> *'Erm there’s been a lot of challenges, a lot of challenges, I mean, with Sikh women simply because being an Amritdhari like, staying intact with Sikhi, we’ve got a lot of erm rules, if want to call it a code of conduct that we’ve got to follow and being in a…being in a country where you know, a western country where you’ve got a lot of modernisation here you know, it’s challenging I mean I want to wear*

sleeveless tops yeah without having under hair like showing kind of thing, armpit hair showing… erm and it is hard, it's challenging, because there's times where you know you look at somebody and think oh I wish I could do that, I wish I could wear that or you know I wish I could go kind of to the beach with shorts (inaudible) just simple things like that' (Gurleen, p.4)

Gurleen stresses the words 'a lot' when speaking to rules she is required to follow as a baptised Sikh with a tone of obligation and responsibility, implying the gravity of rule breaking. The rules of Sikhism are conveyed as being at odds with the modernised culture of the west that Gurleen refers to. It can be inferred that Gurleen feels somewhat inhibited by the complex rules that she is obliged toward, and a sense of wistfulness and longing is implied as she observes others that do not have such rules to follow. As highlighted within Gurleen's later use of the word 'intact', her Sikh identity is one which must be retained and vehemently protected from Britishness, which poses a threat to her Singhni Sikh identity. Unlike Nina, Gurleen's experience of being a British Singhni Sikh is more fixed and boundaried. In her account, Gurleen later references the interest her physically discernible difference as a Singhni Sikh elicits from work colleagues. Gurleen recollects these experiences in a tone of enthusiasm; educating colleagues about the articles of faith she wears. This suggests that the challenges in retaining her Singhni Sikh identity in the social setting do not re-occur in the workplace. This indicates that her identity is less amenable to threat when actively shared and valued by others.

Raveena similarly preferences her religious and cultural identity:

'I'm not sure if I'm honest with you…it's just something…. that, I've gotten…. as I've gotten older, like I said, it's just something that just doesn't ….fit at the forefront for me…so it's like I wouldn't automatically…I don't want to say I'm not British because that is you know that is my identity, I was born and bred here so I definitely would say I'm British, but I think it's just the erm cultural differences, the way that we live life and it's just like you…there's a very distinct kind of path that we take in the sense that we're not White people or we're not British' (Raveena, p.6)

'it's kind of important for me to keep that at the forefront coz I don't want to lose who we are in terms of what our ancestors kind of went through and did to get here and all of that kind of stuff' (Raveena, p.6)

Like Nina, Raveena expresses a sense of agency and choice regarding aspects of 'Punjabi' culture that she has opted to retain or discard. Interestingly, Raveena also alludes to the importance of retaining her Punjabi culture, whilst acknowledging her 'Britishness' as an inevitable, obvious aspect of her identity as indicated in her emphasis of 'is' within her comment. It can be inferred that for Raveena, maintaining her Punjabi culture requires more effort to retain, as she consciously places it at the 'forefront' relative to her 'Britishness' which also suggests a preference for her Punjabi identity. Seemingly, placing her Punjabi identity at the 'forefront' allows for its retention, in recognition of the struggles of her 'ancestors'. Raveena's description of her experiences denotes a journey in how she has come to negotiate her identity. Like Nina, a sense of choice is implied, which contrasts with Gurleen's sense of obligation. Raveena's need to retain her Punjabi identity in social settings suggests that she may endorse it in the workplace as a way of preserving it.

Deepa voices the boundaried nature of her British Sikh identity, which is partly driven by social rules driven by the Sikh community:

> *'It feels like there's maybe some boundaries and barriers there, but I guess it depends on the setting and like where it kind of is…like…like yeah like I would say I'd be a bit more traditional in some ways even with like boys and things like that like you wouldn't just bring anyone home and like you know yeah I think…it's like a weird mix isn't it? I guess you keep the tradition in some ways but then you're modern in other ways so' (Deepa, p.5)*

Deepa draws a barrier between her 'British' identity, associated with modernity and her 'Indian' identity associated with 'tradition'. Deepa describes this combination as 'a weird mix', implying the discord between tradition and modernity, which she negotiates based on the setting. Deepa retains tradition and negotiates this with modernity by engaging in a process of selection and assimilation. As suggested by the excerpt, Deepa is able to consolidate the two, by combining them in a way in which suits her. This suggests that within the workplace, Deepa is likely to be able to unproblematically integrate British and Indian identities, through selecting aspects of each depending on who she is with. This is later evidenced in her interactions with clients at work who share her cultural background.

Jusjeet on the other hand describes the process of consolidating the facets of her identity as a confusing experience. She expresses a sense of having to shift and work out how she should be:

> *'So you kind of adapt your sort of behaviour and how you are like you- I wouldn't go up to a room to sort of (inaudible) on the back and say 'ey' you know whatever but if it was a gorah (White person), or somebody you know or totally different…or another ethnicity, it-it was different, but I guess in the process I became quite…with- not withdrawn…but I became quieter as I got older because it was almost like, how should I be, like this or that?' (Jusjeet, p.3)*

Jusjeet reflects on how her initial carefree manner of relating with White peers shifted into withdrawal as she considers how she should be as a Punjabi person, with an air of seriousness, as though shifting from naïve joy to reality. This is echoed in her sombre tone. For Jusjeet, this 'adaptation' she describes is imposed upon her and forced as suggested in her later recollection of being 'shoved' (p.3) and her use of the words 'should' and 'shouldn't' (p.3), implying restriction. Her hesitation in describing this experience recreates Jusjeet's experience of feeling inhibited. She later refers to being 'stuck in between two cultures', suggesting a lack of reconciliation and confusion. It can be inferred that Jusjeet's experience of her 'Britishness' is one of freedom, whereas her 'Asian' or 'Punjabi' identity is one she associates with being inhibited. This could suggest that Jusjeet may experience conflict between her role within the British professional context, and her cultural identity. This is later suggested in her appraisal of sameness and difference, where she refers to the numerous challenges she has as a British Sikh woman that are not understood by White peers at work.

The meaning of identities , and subsequent negotiation of identity were informed by cultural context; peer relationships; and family. The process of negotiating British, Sikh, Punjabi and Indian identities was an evolving journey for participants. In some instances, 'Britishness' was more central to the self-concept, and was subsequently relegated to a less primary position over time, with other identity aspects taking precedence over the course of development. Being fixed in between two cultures was described as an experience, potentially leading to a sense of entrapment. For others, the negotiation between seemingly conflicted identities was unproblematic, due to the flexibility to select aspects of each that fit the self-concept. For participants who defined their sense of self based on religious observance, boundaries were fixed- with an emphasis on preserving

their ‘Sikh’ identity within a threatening British context. Overall, this superordinate theme illustrates how the British Sikh women’s experiences of the self within private and social domains influenced how they experienced the self in the workplace. Entering the workplace presented participants with new challenges, as in some cases, it caused a reappraisal of the self-concept formed within the social context.

3.2. Superordinate Theme Two: Being With Others in the Workplace

This superordinate theme captures the participants’ experiences with other individuals within the workplace, whether this be managers, colleagues, or clients. Within this superordinate theme, the experience of the self is understood and appraised based on how one is perceived by the other, interactions with others in the workplace, and how participants viewed others. The participants’ experiences of adapting to this process is evident within this superordinate theme, as a myriad of strategies are deployed to manage the discord between self-identification of how work colleagues in the majority perceived them. The subthemes, entitled: ‘Layered distinctiveness’; ‘Belongingness vs Otherness’; and ‘Sameness vs Difference’, capture how the sense of self is experienced, negotiated and re-negotiated when presented with the work context.

3.2.1 Subtheme One: ‘Layered Distinctiveness’

This subtheme encapsulates the participants’ experiences of wanting to be distinctive as a Sikh person, whilst being seen as indiscriminate or ‘brown’ by others in the workplace. In relation to the previous superordinate theme, this captures how the workplace brought about reappraisal of the self, as the self-concept, which was previously agentic and distinctive, was challenged under circumstances where participants were not seen in the way in which they experienced themselves.

The experiences of the participants varied, with some experiencing a high level of distinctiveness, whilst simultaneously being unseen on a personal level. Several participants voiced the negative impact of being seen as indistinctive, which was linked to feeling invisible. Interestingly, the need to be viewed as Sikh was not a uniform experience for all, as one participant expressed how she wanted to be viewed purely as

a professional, with a distinct skillset. The theme therefore speaks to the multi-faceted experience of distinctiveness.

Nina expresses her experience of not being seen as a Sikh in the workplace:

> *'I don't think they knew I was Sikh, I don't know what they thought, until later. I think they just see a brown face- and they don't really know what I'm about; what I'd be interested in; what I believe; and I think sometimes that- that puts up a barrier for people, I feel like' (Nina, p.19).*

Nina's framing of her experience creates an impression of loneliness and isolation, as suggested by the word 'barrier'. It can be inferred that Nina experiences her individuality as not being valued by colleagues within the workplace, as they are seen by Nina as not trying to know her as a distinct individual beyond the colour of her skin. Nina's experience of being viewed as 'brown' further conveys an experience of meaninglessness, as she becomes reduced crudely to the colour of her skin. During the interview, Nina expressed a sense of being othered and cast out, conveying sadness and dejection as communicated in her sombre tone.

Sharandeep also conveyed how her indistinctiveness manifested as being misidentified as Muslim in the workplace:

> *'I think people are just very ignorant…er for example, like you know it's Ramadan at the moment so I had someone actually er ping me the other day saying erm happy Ramadan just assuming because I'm brown that I do celebrate it (laughs) erm I just said I don't- thank you but I don't celebrate like, just things like that like I think erm…I think people just need to…not necessarily be educated, but you know…they just need to understand that just because you're all brown, you're not just…you don't all belong from the same sort of culture or religion' (Sharandeep, p.6)*

Like Nina, Sharandeep was experienced differently by White peers in the workplace to how she identified herself. During the interview, Sharandeep expressed a strong sense of identification with her cultural Punjabi identity, accompanied by pride in her Sikh identity. Sharandeep's description of her experiences of being misidentified suggests that work colleagues made no effort to understand her beyond her skin tone, to establish her true identity. Sharandeep's laughter and framing of her experience suggests that having to explain that she is not Muslim was an uncomfortable and awkward experience.

Amrit similarly conveys the invisibility of her Sikh identity and her experience of being viewed as a British Indian woman in the workplace:

> *'I don't really put it out there that I'm Sikh in the workplace and then I guess erm not many people know as well so for example I'm not…for example, because obviously I don't wear a turban or anything, I have my hair cut…the only way to identify me as Sikh would be through my erm steel bangle '(Amrit, p.10)*

Amrit previously expressed a strong identification toward her Sikh identity and a rejection of identifying as South Asian or Indian. It can be inferred that Amrit feels perhaps a lack of control over how she manages her identity in the workplace, and that the only way she could be seen as a Sikh in the workplace is if it were outwardly visible. Whilst Amrit wears a *kara,* or steel bangle signifying her membership to the Sikh faith, she communicates a sense of this being insufficient to distinguish herself as Sikh to her White peers in the workplace. It can be inferred that the physical invisibility of her Sikh identity, may lead to a loss of her Sikh identity at work, causing her to adopt separate work and non-work identities. Expanding on this further, it could be hypothesised that Amrit may find it difficult being her authentic self with White colleagues because she keeps her Sikh identity hidden. Later, Amrit refers to the pressure she feels to represent the Sikh religion in an 'ideal' textbook way and fears being discredited by colleagues for not being a prototypical version of a Sikh.

Indeed, Amrit expresses a sense of discomfort at the prospect of explaining her Sikh identity in the workplace:

> *'I just think that like oh yeah I'm in a corporate environment, like you have to be like professional and like you just you know I just think like people there are very like, if I tell people I'm Sikh and this is what we've done, maybe they'll start asking like so many questions…I might just feel a bit like you know trapped in a corner' (Amrit, p.21)*

For Amrit, resigning herself to the 'Indian' identity that has been bestowed upon her is less effortful than the pressure of having to explain her Sikh identity. It minimises the likelihood that further questions will be asked. The excerpt highlights Amrit's belief that expressing her Sikh identity in a corporate environment is unprofessional and therefore not appropriate for the setting, conveying her need for personal and professional identities to be separate. It can also be inferred that Amrit anticipates that she will be

interrogated against her will; trapped and intimidated by the array of questions she envisages her Sikh identity will attract, leaving her with no option for escape. The excerpt conveys anxiety and fear, as illustrated in the metaphor Amrit uses of being 'trapped in a corner'. This illustrates her vulnerability and powerlessness as though she is like a mouse being trapped in a cage. Later, Amrit goes on to say that she would feel freer to express her Sikh identity if there was a-priori knowledge of Sikhism in the workplace. Amrit's expression of her distinctiveness thus appears to be contingent upon whether the work environment affords her the space to express it. The discord between Amrit's internal membership towards her Sikh identity and inability to outwardly express it within the workplace suggests that she cannot actively project herself in a way that mirrors her self-concept.

Raveena and Gurleen, who both identify as Singhni Sikh women, voiced their experiences of being physically distinctive as Sikh. Unlike the other participants, whose Sikh identity was not made physically visible other than through wearing the *kara* or steel bangle, Raveena and Gurleen experienced a high degree of visibility because of their turbans. Both participants expressed how this high physical visibility enabled them to 'stand out' and be unique.

> *'So one of the things I always do say in initial meetings wherever that is work or personal life, I've always made a point to say well you know ask me questions, I'd rather you ask me questions than just stand and stare at me kind of thing s*o *you're getting to know me, you're seeing me for who I am and not just what you see on me' (Raveena, p. 9).*

Raveena conveys being reduced to her physical appearance, without the other processing and taking her in as a person. Whilst Raveena is distinctive as a Sikh in a physical sense, she wishes to be seen beyond this difference as someone who can be met on a human level. She later expresses her discomfort in her process of trying to make sense of what the other person is thinking in their mind whilst she is being 'stared' at. The way in which Raveena appears to manage her discomfort at being looked at is to try to make the other person feel comfortable in her presence, as the ambiguity associated with not knowing their thoughts is disconcerting for her.

Throughout the excerpt, Raveena conveys how she can follow sociall expectations whilst 'standing out' by virtue of her Singhni Sikh identity. Raveena's experience as a Singhni Sikh is one which allows her to be different and distinctive, as she is not following the

status quo by following a path that other people ordinarily follow. As expressed later, she sees this as an 'extra push' (pg.8) or an additional effort to impart this knowledge as a Singhni Sikh than it would be for a non- Singhni Sikh woman, which represents how she feels more aligned with the Singhni Sikh identity rather than with the wider Sikh community. Raveena expresses her need to convey how it is a 'normal' occurrence to be a working Singhni Sikh woman, emphasising that Singhni Sikh women can be distinctive whilst being embedded within society.

This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *'That's really important to kind of say well yeah we do exist and you know it's a very normal thing that I'm a Singhni and I work you know I have a career, I have a profession so it's just very important for me to just also spread that knowledge as well to kind of be like ooh we do exist and we are here kind of thing' (Raveena, p.8).*

Raveena conveys that the Singhni Sikh identity is somewhat hidden and inconspicuous in society. For Raveena, the responsibility to impart knowledge about Sikhism is therefore one she readily takes on and has passion for. The phrase 'oooh we do exist', emphasises Raveena's wish to emphasise that Singhni Sikh women exist in reality, and are not merely part of folklore or imagination. The word 'ooh' and the tone with which it was expressed conveys that Raveena is expressing how other people might experience surprise and awe that Singhni Sikh women have a presence within society and the workplace. It suggests that in making herself seen, Raveena exercises her power and agency to modify people's preconceived notions around the existence of Singhni Sikhs. It can be inferred that Raveena imparting this knowledge fulfils a self-esteem need for her in terms of being 'seen' at a group level, beyond her physical distinctiveness.

Gurleen, like Raveena, recounted instances where her religious attire invited questions from White colleagues:

> *'I mean I know in my team at my old work there was erm loads of goreh (White folk) asking me- English people- just saying oh you know have you got the sword then? Coz obviously they (coughs) everyone does like Sikh in R.E at school and they're like we know about your 5 K's, so where are your 5 K's? Like how long's your hair? You know erm how often do you wash it? You know well how do you tie your turban? Where's your kirpan like your sword? Erm do you wear the*

shorts? You know all these questions, I was so enthusiastic about talking about it I was- I had that enthusiasm in me- I was just like yeah ask me more, ask me more- I just really wanna talk about it with you, I just wanna share the knowledge, I just wanna share you know, how proud I am of my identity' (Gurleen, p.20)

Unlike Amrit who experienced the prospect of being asked questions as interrogations, the multitude of questions asked to Gurleen are experienced as genuine interest and opportunities to 'share' and impart knowledge about her identity. The way she lists the questions she was asked suggests the ongoing attention given to her distinctive appearance. Gurleen expresses this with a tone of excitement, as though awaiting the next question with a fervent sense of anticipation. It can be inferred that this interest in Gurleen's physical appearance allows her to be 'seen' symbolically on a personal level, as it allows her the opportunity to express her individuality. Gurleen later expresses how being asked such questions indicate to her that she is not being 'neglected'. It can be hypothesised that for Gurleen, a sense of self-esteem is derived from being thought about and not forgotten, paradoxical to Nina's experience of her colleagues displaying an indifference toward her.

In being physically distinctive through wearing the turban, Raveena and Gurleen recounted how this allowed them to 'stand out', however Raveena reported one instance of being identified as 'the one with the turban' (pg. 24) by a colleague who had forgotten her name. Her experiences of this are captured in the following excerpt:

'That's like me you know seeing someone with a hijab and saying that hijab lady…It's offensive and it's kind of getting people to recognise you know, you can't just identify someone by an article of clothing or a head covering or anything like that…erm I am still a person at the end of the day, as proud as I am of my turban' (Raveena, p. 25)

Raveena assertively communicates how unacceptable it felt for her to be identified by her turban, likening this experience to identifying someone by their *hijab,* the Islamic headscarf. The excerpt highlights how although Raveena experiences a sense of distinctiveness in being a Singhni Sikh, being identified solely by her turban was a depersonalising experience which paradoxically eliminated her individuality. Raveena's statement that she is 'still a person', suggests she felt that she was not being considered as a person, but as 'an item if clothing', implying that she felt degraded in some way by

the comment. The excerpt highlights the importance for Raveena to not only 'stand out' in a physical sense, but to be celebrated as an individual on a personal level.

Interestingly, being distinctive as a Sikh did not appear to be important to Harpal, who expressed being viewed as an 'Indian' woman in the workplace. In contrast, she vocalised the centrality of her professional identity at work:

> *'I'm not sure that I am seen as 'oh' Harpal's a Sikh woman.... it doesn't really…that doesn't really bother me…whether I'm…I think for me what's important is I'm seen as an individual who has skill sets…who has erm some contribution to make you know to the deliverables you know I don't want to be judged as a Sikh woman' (Harpal, p.15)*

Throughout the excerpt, Harpal made numerous references to not wanting to be seen as a 'Sikh' woman or 'Asian woman' in the workplace, emphasising the relative importance of being distinctive as a unique professional who can deliver. Harpal's framing of her experience suggests that being viewed by her ethnic or religious identity presents a threat to her professional identity, obstructing the experience of being recognised for her merits. Unlike other participants, Harpal wants her professional and personal identities to be separate, illustrating how social context plays a crucial role in the salience and expression of her identity.

3.2.2. Subtheme Two: Belongingness vs Otherness

The experiences of 'belongingness' and 'otherness' are inextricably linked to being with the other, as they denote interpersonal, group processes. 'Belongingness' and 'otherness' in turn had implications for the participants' self-concept and self-esteem**.** For several of the participants, belongingness entailed being part of an 'in group' with others that shared similar experiences or aspects of their identity. On the other hand, other participants cited acceptance and validation from others as fostering a sense of belongingness, which did not necessitate having a shared ethnic or religious identity. Rather, the opportunity to exchange elements of their identity was of importance.

Otherness encapsulated the qualitative experience of being part of the 'out group' or of being an outsider, experienced as either an overt or covert process. Importantly, the experience of being an outsider meant that participants experienced a lack of belonging.

Whilst the experiences voiced by the participants referred to their difference from White colleagues, the phenomenological experiences of being on the periphery and experiencing exclusion appeared to be most central within their recollections. In instances where 'otherness' was experienced, a variety of mechanisms were deployed to cope including withdrawal; making attempts to find common ground with the in-group majority; and making their minority identity less salient.

Deepa recounts her experiences of working alongside other Sikhs:

> *'And even with some of my clients and stuff, erm I say some it's just one (laughs) but he's… (laughs)...he's really like 'oh kidda' (hello) and like he kind of likes to speak…I feel like he feels more comfortable as well…and I feel like that's helped me kind of get on with them better' (Deepa, p.10)*

Deepa describes the community connection she experiences in encountering a client who shares her identity. The phrase *'oh kidda'* is an informal way of greeting someone in Punjabi, which signifies a sense of familiarity between them, as though they are already friends. Deepa communicates this in a playful tone, which signifies that the encounter is one in which she felt at ease. A sense of belongingness is implied, as saying *'oh kidda'*, signifies membership to an in-group which Deepa is already a part of by virtue of her identity. Deepa continues to convey this sense of belongingness throughout the interview, referring to the experience as a 'community feel'.

Harpal similarly alludes to a sense of community amongst other Sikh women in the workplace:

> *'Because I can see…I can see somebody and I'm thinking alright okay oh she's a Sikh woman wow you know? So you feel proud, you feel that sense of unity there erm…and you almost kind of feel I want to support them wherever they're going; if there's a way I can support them, I'd like to support them you know? If I can pave that way in any way I can, I'd like to pave that way too' (Harpal, p.15).*

Harpal communicates her experiences here with enthusiasm, mirroring the sense of 'unity' she describes. A sense of group membership and belongingness is implied, in Harpal's wish to support other Sikh women in any way that she can. This infers a willingness to assist other Sikh women which is boundless, suggesting that she too experiences a familial connection with other Sikh women in that she has a vested interest in helping them to succeed. An intimate connection and sense of togetherness is implied

in this excerpt. The achievements of other Sikh women have personal resonance to her, as though their achievements become her own. It can be inferred that Harpal derives a personal sense of pride and self-esteem through personally resonating with the experiences of other Sikh women through collective group membership.

Amrit similarly expressed an affinity towards other Sikhs in the workplace:

> *'Whenever I see a person with a turban, I'm like oh my god a Sikh person! That's like the same now… whenever I see someone else that's Sikh I'm like oh my god it's like a Sikh person! It's like that instant connection' (Amrit, p.12)*

Amrit describes this experience as an 'instant connection', inferring belongingness characterised by a connection that is already there by virtue of shared identity, which does not need to be developed over time and is rather pre-established. She later likens her experience of encountering other Sikhs to meeting 'a friend' (pg. 16), implying sanctuary in this deep connection. For Amrit, this connection is an intense one, bringing with it a responsibility to be a reliable source of protection as suggested in her later recollections of encountering another Sikh at work.

As denoted within Gurleen's experience of her current work setting, a sense of belongingness need not be accompanied by shared identity or sameness with others:

> *'I mean with we still haven't met but she's organised a lunch for us now next month and she's made sure, like coz I told her about my dietary requirements like you can't, I can't eat fish, egg, meat and stuff like that and she goes okay that's fine she goes, I've booked in pizza express for us if that's okay? And you know I felt really like kind of…enlightened erm I was kind of like really gifted in the you know, within…I felt like that's so nice for someone to genuinely do that for you' (Gurleen, p.21)*

Throughout the excerpt, Gurleen communicates how feeling included, valued, and recognised for being a Singhni Sikh was a profound experience for her. Her manager's willingness to have a vegetarian meal was seemingly an emotionally touching experience for Gurleen as her religious identity was fully embraced. It can be inferred that Gurleen's manager's efforts to actively include Gurleen by adopting a part of her lived experience as a Sikh person fosters a sense of belonging. It is moving for Gurleen that her manager would go beyond what is required and make a sacrifice for her to ensure that she feels actively included. It can be inferred that this experience gives her a sense of social value

and self-worth, as she is deemed important enough to be valued by peers in the workplace.

Contrastingly, experiences of otherness brought about a sense of feeling like an outsider for other participants:

> *'Where I work is very erm there's…it's just White people and from the day I had my interview I've felt a bit like they don't really…not I dunno it's almost like not like they're scared to talk to me…but they don't know what to say sometimes- they think that they're just going to offend me so in my interview for example; I felt like the lady who was running the course was a lot more vocal and friendly with everyone else there apart from me' (Nina, p.5)*

Nina is seemingly placed in the excluded position of observer witnessing relational connections being made, which conveys a sense of isolation and loneliness. For Nina, being othered is a hugely emotionally taxing experience; as she undergoes an array of psychological processes to try to work out whether she is being othered, before trying to adapt herself to assess whether changing the way she interacts with her colleagues improves her experience of otherness. It can be inferred that the experience of not being valued and included poses a threat to Nina's self-esteem.

The adverse experience of feeling othered and self-doubting prompts Nina to deploy strategies to actively include herself:

> *'Erm but in that situation I was like okay it's fine, just be yourself, make effort, maybe it's they feel like you're not making enough effort and I'd do that and I'd see like…I wouldn't really see much change like minimal changes in people…you'd click with like I said one or two erm and every time we used to go on these three day trips erm I used to try and do the same…and then after the first three or four… I was literally like I actually…. I'm doing what I can and not really getting much back, I can't be bothered' (Nina, p.15)*

What emerges here is Nina's discomfort; she must first forcefully convince herself to initiate conversation with colleagues whilst simultaneously monitoring her own behaviour. Nina then observes the effect this has and monitors whether this leads to better engagement on the part of her colleagues. Her perseverance with this is contrasted with the 'minimal changes' Nina sees in her colleagues, which culminates in her indifference. Nina's way of coping with the indifference of her colleagues towards her is to become

indifferent herself, though she expresses engaging in the process of changing her own behaviour and monitoring the outcome several times before she renounces her attempt to engage them. A sense of disappointment is implied, as Nina's initial perseverance conveys that she was hopeful that changing herself would work. It can be inferred that Nina becomes somewhat apathetic in her interactions with her work colleagues; she gives up, which is further signified in her reflection of this process as one which is 'tiring'. This captures the sheer exhaustion Nina feels when trying to be included.

For Jusjeet, her sense of 'otherness' was experienced during her formative years, when she realised that she was different to White peers. This was subsequently re-experienced in the workplace:

> *'So erm, I thought to myself…bloody hell, at that age, that was a huge thing that was a huge thing, because it has a real impact on who you are and then I thought well I'm not actually one of them, meaning the goreh (White folk) like…I said because…I'm a different colour'; but I guess you do, I mean, so to be quite honest it was a real kind of oh, so…so, where do I belong ? Coz up to eleven, twelve, it didn't come into my head' (Jusjeet, p.6)*

Within the excerpt, Jusjeet recalled the moment at which she had begun to experience overt racism, when Ugandan Indians had begun to emigrate to the UK. In her experience, Jusjeet speaks about how she had had transitioned from being part of the in-group, where she had belonged to being othered. Jusjeet describes this as a moment of realisation; she discovered how her being a different 'colour' meant that she did not belong anymore, as she was being categorised alongside other Indians who had newly settled in Britain. For Jusjeet, this was a life changing moment, in which her sense of self and who she associated with as the 'in group' radically changed. Jusjeet explains how she had questioned herself by asking: 'where do I belong?', signifying that in that moment she did not feel as though she belonged anywhere.

Jusjeet reflects on her realisation that she was part of an 'out-group' which occurred over the course of her training:

> *'I actually (laughs) I actually erm erased it from my brain until, I guess it came up when I was training [names profession] because obviously you look at yourself and so erm, I thought to myself…bloody hell, at that age, that was a huge thing, that was a huge thing, because it has a real impact on who you are and then I*

thought well I'm not actually one of them, meaning the goreh (White folk)' (Jusjeet, p.6).

It can be inferred that for Jusjeet, this was perhaps a rather traumatic experience for her, as she describes how she had actively attempted to 'erase' this from her mind, finding that it had incidentally re-emerged over the course of her training for her job which required introspection. The enormity of Jusjeet's revelation is emphasised by her repetition of the word 'huge', signifying how instrumental this situation was in the formation of her sense of self. Interestingly, the shift from her position of insider to outsider is accompanied by her reference to her White peers as *'goreh',* a Punjabi term used to describe White people. Through using this term, Jusjeet denotes a shift from being a part of the White in-group during her formative years, toward establishing herself within the Punjabi in-group. Using the term with me as her interviewer establishes that she views me as part of this in-group. Jusjeet's historical sense of otherness was realised and revisited through being in a workplace context which brought this up. Being confronted with this memory of being cast out perhaps could cause her to become more vigilant toward signals that she is being othered within the workplace.

3.2.3. Subtheme Three: Sameness vs Difference

This subtheme captured the participants' experiences of feeling the same as, or different to others. Several of the participants recounted their experiences of being amongst other Sikhs; citing experiences of feeling responsible for their wellbeing and in some instances, difficulties instigating boundaries within a professional environment. Two of the participants voiced their experiences of realising their difference to White peers, and of being culturally misunderstood because of this. Interestingly, one of the participants described being the only Sikh or Indian woman in a majority Muslim school, highlighting how experiences of difference were not confined to being within a White majority context.

Amrit shared her experience of sameness upon encountering another Sikh during a workplace event:

'I just felt scared for him…I was like oh my god…I don't know why…but in my head I was like oh my god what if people are like I dunno what if people are like you know judging him like secretly or something and I was feeling uneasy…I was like oh my God…I was just like in my head I was like yeah well done…keep going

(in soothing tone) don't worry, it's fine, be confident I just felt like really uneasy…I was like oh my god, what if people don't understand him? What if people don't, you know like there's a turban on his head…What if people are thinking cer-, obviously he had a big, a proper big turban' (Amrit, p.17).

Amrit's recollection of feeling 'scared' for the Sikh man who she saw presenting at the event illustrates how responsible and emotionally invested she feels in his success. For Amrit, the prospect of the man being judged privately is immensely anxiety provoking for her. It seems that she is hypervigilant, as she hastily attempts to discern the audience's thought processes, conveying concern and worry. From the excerpt, it can be deduced that Amrit thinks the audience are passing negative judgement on the man, as she is praising him and telling him to keep going in her mind, as though attempting to soothe him. Amrit's concerns are around the man not being understood because of his highly distinctive turban, visibly marking him as a Sikh. This illustrates how Amrit's experience of sameness elicits a sense of responsibility toward the success and wellbeing of another Sikh in the workplace.

What is disconcerting for Amrit is that others are unaware of their shared identity, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

'it's just weird because obviously like he looks so different to me he wears a turban, a beard and everything but we're both Sikh but I look so different and I'm just like oh my God people don't even know that I'm Sikh like am I…maybe I should you know tell more people that I'm Sikh and explain a bit more you know about it I think erm as I mentioned before like I kind of felt like oh my God…I kind of felt like a bit of a struggle with my like who I am so like I said before I kind of just want to tell everyone that I'm Sikh as well and like it's fine, he's Sikh he's got a turban; what it means and stuff and like afterwards I kind of like just wanted to go up to him and be like: 'well done that was really good' (Amrit, p.18)

It appears that Amrit is wanting to make her shared identity with the man known and experiences the physical invisibility of her Sikh identity in the workplace as uncomfortable. The loss of this closeness due to their physical dissimilarity and invisibility of her Sikh identity causes Amrit anxiety, as she is unable to outwardly convey her internal connection towards the man. It can be inferred that this disconnection leaves Amrit feeling as though she has let the man down by not outwardly expressing an allegiance towards him. For Amrit, this potentially highlights a significant loss in her self-concept, as the Sikh

identity is one which not only offers her a sense of pride, but gives her a sense of belonging. As Amrit's Sikh identity gives her a strong sense of personal pride and social worth, losing this aspect of identity in the workplace could cause her to have lowered self-esteem. The sense of emotional overwhelm and confusion in this experience is illustrated by her repetition of the phrase: 'oh my God'.

For other participants, 'sameness' brought about comfort in not having to explain cultural aspects of their identity. Harpal describes how being amongst other Indian women allowed her the opportunity to share cultural experiences within the workplace:

> *'They can almost understand your pain sometimes erm so say if you've got your in-law issues you know, erm and there are certain things you are having to do to kind of keep the peace with your in laws say for instance erm or whatever else it may be…Then I think just knowing that you've got your colleagues there who provide almost that emotional support erm and not making judgement, not making a judgement on it…erm not making a judgement on their in-laws, not making a judgement on them because they're taking too long and even making a decision about something…It's about just accepting that that is where they are' (Harpal, p.23).*

Harpal describes shared understanding and empathy as the key benefits of working alongside other Indian women in that cultural differences can be mutually understood without judgement. Harpal described how White colleagues 'challenged and pushed' (p.24) on aspects of Indian culture that are at odds with British cultural norms, suggesting that she felt under scrutiny by her peers and under pressure to provide justifications for experiences and customs they could not understand. It can be inferred that Harpal experiences sameness as a comfortable experience in which she feels accepted; free from the scrutiny and challenges of being with peers who do not understand her experiences. Her repetition of 'not making judgement' implies a sense of liberation; contrasting with her experience of being 'challenged and pushed' by peers, which suggests an experience of feeling constrained and forced.

Like Harpal, Jusjeet talks about experiencing cultural challenges not understood by White peers:

> *'The expectations I think, they don't, I suppose they're not aware of the expectations that we have that are very different to their own so erm we've a lot*

more to contend with in that respect, I think we do- we have to find more ways; we need more resources to be able to get through stuff that we deal with in life…than they do, although at the same time, it's all relative' (Jusjeet, p.22).

Jusjeet places emphasis on the difference between South Asian and White colleagues through using the pronouns 'they' and us, signifying the separation between in-group and out-group. From Jusjeet's point of view, South Asian people experience significantly more challenges than her White counterparts, requiring more resilience and 'resources' to manage. Throughout the excerpt, Jusjeet described how the ability of her White colleagues to fully comprehend these challenges is limited.. The act of comparing conveys that Jusjeet views the complaints of her colleagues as unwarranted, and perhaps an overexaggerated response to their challenges.

In contrast to the other participants' experiences, Deepa experienced being the only Sikh woman in a previous work setting, which was predominantly Muslim. Within the interview, she voiced her awareness of her difference which was not known by others at her place of work:

'Throughout the whole year when I was there, I never answered the question about what I actually was- so I think part of it is like as [names profession] you don't want to say too much about your personal life anyway and kind of just keep it private…erm but then the other part was a bit like…do I want to explicitly say no I'm not Muslim? Or like I'm Indian like I've because I didn't know if they would change their opinion or just like maybe be less respectful or whatever I just I kind of just didn't really know so erm I never really said what I was until probably like the last week of the year erm when I was leaving but' (Deepa, p.16)

Deepa denotes the challenges of maintaining a professional boundary with the individuals she worked with, by not divulging her identity to them. Deepa's way of managing this was to deflect the questions. This seemingly kept Deepa's identity ambiguous, which allowed her to maintain her professional identity. Deepa also states her reason for not making her ethnic or religious identity known was to counteract the possibility of being judged for being different. Deepa's experience of difference therefore seemingly led her to make her difference less salient. Deepa later expresses how her fears of being judged negatively were unfounded; illustrating how her experience of difference was a private one which did not culminate in feeling othered..

Whilst Jusjeet vocalised how difference brought about feeling misunderstood, she expressed the difficulties with having a shared identity and sameness with clients in her field of work. She discusses one instance where shared identity and 'sameness' brought about difficulties in asserting boundaries:

> *'Sometimes they're not aware of boundaries and things like that, they wanted me to sort of go come to their functions and things like that they- I've come to their house because that was outreach aswell, and I had to lie and say I don't drink tea or coffee because they wanted to make me tea; coffee; they'd make stuff and say look what I've cooked for you and- you know bless them, they were lovely, but I had to throw the textbook out of the window. I had to-I just had to adapt different ways of working with them' (Jusjeet, p.32).*

For Jusjeet, sameness led to overfamiliarity, heightened by the 'outreach' setting of her assignment, in which she was required to visit people's homes. The trial-and-error way of adapting with other Sikh clients is illustrated in Jusjeet's internal process, where she later gives herself the impetus to 'go with it' in her mind, inferring her uncertainty regarding her new way of working. Jusjeet's repetition of the phrase 'I had to' suggests a sense of duty, in that her professional identity could not overshadow or take precedence over the fact that she shared her identity with clients. Seemingly, Jusjeet does not want to reject the clients' attempts to relate with her through appearing overly professional. The conflict that Jusjeet is presented with is negotiated by her through circumventing boundary setting altogether. It can be inferred that Jusjeet's sense of group belonging and community connection places her in a difficult position, where she is left with a narrow set of options of how she can respond. For Jusjeet, sameness brings about a conflict between her need to identify with the group, implying closeness, accompanied by a need to maintain professional distance. Jusjeet negotiates working in a way that preserves her sense of belonging to the group, whilst retaining her professional identity.

Sharandeep similarly refers to how experiencing 'sameness' and shared identity with her managers at work brought about a deviation from professional boundaries:

> *'My managers there were two Punjabi men but I felt like erm…I don't feel like they kept a professional relationship with me yeah they crossed that barrier a bit erm…and they probably thought that they could because I'm Punjabi they're Punjabi as well' (Sharandeep, p.7).*

Within the excerpt, Sharandeep describes a situation in which her managers had behaved in a flirtatious manner towards her, which Sharandeep experienced as a boundary violation. For Sharandeep, her experience of sameness and shared identity brought about strong feelings of discomfort; which she later describes as 'creepy', emphasising her discomfort and sense of disgust within the situation. Sharandeep expressed how she navigated this boundary violation through asserting professional boundaries more. It can be inferred that Sharandeep sought a sense of safety in her professionalism, which acted as a protective barrier against the barrier that had been 'crossed' by them. Sharandeep's way of coping was to therefore minimise the sense of familiarity brought about by a shared identity, creating a relational distance through reinstating her professionalism.

Entering the workplace and being in the presence of others led participants to appraise their self-concept, which had been developed and negotiated during formative years during schooling; with family; and within cultural settings. Being distinctive in the workplace as British Sikh women led to experiences of the participant's identity being misunderstood, with the way in which others (predominantly the White majority) viewed them in the workplace differing from the self-concept. These experiences of misidentification, distinctiveness and indistinctiveness were experienced as depersonalising experiences by the participants. Being with the other additionally led to an appraisal of sameness and difference; with sameness being experienced as a close familial connection for some. For others, it led to dilemmas in the workplace, with professional boundaries being challenged. Workplace interactions were further experienced as either conducive or inconducive to the participants' sense of belonging, and by extension, their self-esteem. Experiences of belongingness involved a sense of acceptance, and a willingness to recognise and embrace difference, whilst otherness was experienced as a result of subtle exclusory behaviours.

3.3. Superordinate Theme Three: Working Out and Managing Experiences of Discrimination

Across the transcripts, participants reflected on how their identity as British Sikh women was being received by the White majority within the workplace. This process of reflection was complex and was not uniformly experienced in the same way by all the participants.

Participants' narratives moved on to encompass discussion of how workplace experiences reflected wider social issues of power and access to opportunities. Namely, experiences of discrimination were discussed in relation to barriers to opportunities for career ascension. The participants reflected broadly on the role of their identities as ethnic minority women in the workplace, which encompassed a process of 'working out' whether discrimination had taken place. Several of the participants then reported to have experienced discrimination directed towards them and voiced how they had coped with this. This superordinate theme comprised of three subthemes including: 'The Invisible Ceiling'; 'Is it Because I'm 'Brown?'; and 'Coping and Strategising for Survival'. As highlighted within this superordinate theme, the participants' narratives transitioned from descriptions of understanding of the self and the experience of the self as a function of interpersonal interactions, towards discussion of wider contextual and institutional issues that affected them as professional women.

3.3.1. **Subtheme One: The 'Invisible Ceiling'**

Across the transcripts, the participants reflected on the presence of what Harpal had termed the 'invisible ceiling'; referring to invisible barriers preventing access to opportunities, that whilst prevalent in the workplace, were intangible. For participants who voiced their experiences of feeling limited by the 'invisible ceiling', the 'invisible' aspect metaphorically captures the covert nature of the barriers. Several of the participants disavowed the notion that barriers existed and described feeling as though they were treated equally within the workplace. From their perspective, the 'ceiling' was 'invisible' in that it did not exist.

In the excerpt, Harpal refers to what she describes as 'invisible ceilings', reflecting institutional issues impeding the advancement of those from ethnic minority backgrounds. She recalls several examples of when she has experienced these barriers in effect:

> *'You're almost- you're not given the information- the support that you can see your peers will get…Your peers are almost coached to progress into roles…neither of us were, even though the potential's been there but you kind of see that erm…You can see individuals who've not got the level of educational background moving into more senior roles because they've almost been coached into shadowing managers but they're almost kind of been given opportunities within the work*

environment to progress which aren't availed to us as you know, Asian women' (Harpal, p. 11).

In Harpal's experience, the 'invisible ceiling' here is apparent for her, in that she and another South Asian woman had not been coached into a more senior level position. A sense of unfairness is communicated in Harpal's experience, as she observes how those with less experience have been afforded opportunities that she has not. As Harpal is describing her experiences, trepidation and tentativeness are apparent, as though she is being cautious not to appear overly dogmatic in her position.

Harpal goes on to describe further how in her experience, the glass ceiling manifests as an 'amplification' of mistakes:

'Because there will invariably be things that your colleagues and other people will be…almost building up…erm…maybe this is being very cynical…erm I almost kind of feel if you make a mistake, it is amplified' (Harpal, p.18).

In Harpal's experience, she cannot make mistakes, as these will be 'amplified' and made larger than they are. It can be inferred that for Harpal, the glass ceiling manifests in covert ways in which she is being targeted. Harpal infers the calculated way in which this is done, as her colleagues are privately 'building' evidence against her. One could infer this as being a highly anxiety provoking experience for Harpal, as she must read the mind of the other and recognise their intentions. Linguistically, Harpal uses hedging to try to soften her statements, which is reflected in her comment: 'maybe this is being very cynical'. This could possibly reflect Harpal's conscious awareness of how her experience may be dismissed by others as cynical. It could additionally reflect her internal process of being careful about what she can and cannot say, mirroring her hypervigilance. The potential impact of this on Harpal's self-concept is that her sense of value and self-efficacy is undermined, as she is placed in a less powerful position relative to dominant others who have the power to undermine her professional identity. This is perhaps highly threatening for Harpal, who centralises her professional identity.

Nina expresses the structural inequalities that prevent her from accessing positions of seniority in the workplace:

'You almost feel like you've got the White males, you've got the White women and then you've got the diversity issue underneath which you still have to work your

way up first before you even hit that piece of being a British Sikh woman' (Nina, p.12).

The 'invisible ceiling', for Nina, manifests as a layer of boundaries, including gender inequality, to access what she terms as the 'diversity issue underneath'. The word 'underneath' implies that issues surrounding diversity are not only considered last, but are obscured from view completely which makes the struggle to succeed even greater. This suggests that in Nina's experience, issues surrounding diversity are unacknowledged in the workplace, and there are several significant obstacles that would need to be overcome for Nina to surpass the 'invisible ceiling'. In Nina's recollection of her experience of the 'glass ceiling', a tone of despondence is conveyed, as Nina communicates how great of a challenge, and potentially unattainable, it would be for her to reach levels of seniority. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

'You wonder well why aren't there erm any Indian women there? And because you don't see it, you just don't really picture yourself there which is probably a huge thing because I haven't really seen it, you don't really expect yourself to get there then' (Nina, p.11).

For Nina, representation from those who look like her is vital to her ability to 'picture' herself in a senior position. Her despondence stems from this lack of representation, as for Nina, this means that the likelihood of her becoming senior within organisations in which White males dominate is marginal. It can be inferred that Nina perceives the covert, institutional barriers to be too inhibiting for her to overcome alone, as she sees this as a significant challenge which requires more power, and therefore a greater number of ethnic minority women in positions of seniority. It can be inferred that this is a saddening experience for Nina, imbued with a tone of powerlessness; as in her experience, she has no internal locus of control over her prospects. Like Harpal, her sense of self-worth in the workplace is threatened; she is powerless to excel in her career, which would otherwise potentially give her a strong sense personal pride in the workplace.

Other participants voiced feeling they were treated equally, and that it was ability, and not identity that determined whether opportunities were availed to them as British Sikh women in the workplace. In Deepa's experience, one's ability takes precedence over identity when being considered for opportunities:

'I wouldn't really say that I'm viewed any differently erm coz it's a lot based on like performance and erm and first is whether you've passed your exams I think where the viewpoint comes is, is say if you're like lazy or hard to get on with or- or you don't- so I think it's a lot- I would say even if it was a factor or something at first, I think your work ethic and stuff comes through a lot more and that becomes how you're viewed' (Deepa, p.7).

Deepa's framing creates the impression that those who are lazy or difficult to get on with invite unfair treatment through displaying these characteristics. For Deepa, one has the self-efficacy to influence the extent to which their work ethic takes precedence when it comes to how they are viewed within the workplace. In Deepa's experience, discrimination can essentially be overridden by showing ability. It can be inferred that the ability for Deepa to regulate and manage the impression she makes on others in the workplace is a source of self-esteem, as it enables her to avoid discrimination and the 'invisible ceiling'. Deepa further expresses how her identity provides 'something extra' and repeats how she views her identity as a 'bonus'. This emphasises how she views her identity as an aspect of herself that adds to, rather than takes away from her opportunities.

Throughout the excerpt, Deepa recollects experiencing an 'eye opening moment', which illuminated to her the barriers experienced by people from ethnic minority groups. However, Deepa repeats that she herself has not experienced any discrimination in the workplace as illustrated in the following excerpt:

'I wouldn't say it that …it has in any sense is held me back but I guess it's like that moment that I kind of mentioned earlier where I realised that oh actually it potentially could maybe to others …I don't know…if it did play a part ...yeh I don't know...but overall I've liked it I wouldn't really change it like I'm very glad…like I am a British Indian...I like it' (Deepa, p.3).

Deepa seemingly separates herself from the experience of those who have experienced discrimination, through repeating how being discriminated against does not have personal resonance. Distancing in this way could be inferred as another way that Deepa preserves her positive connection with her ethnic identity, through emphasising that she has never experienced discrimination herself. Potentially, reconciling her positive experiences of being in the workplace with the knowledge that discrimination exists is a confusing process for Deepa, as suggested by the hesitation in her dialogue. Repeating

that her identity has never impacted her but could do to others could be a way in which Deepa is attempting to reaffirm to herself the positive qualities and experiences associated with her ethnic minority, which are psychologically called into question through her awareness that discrimination effects other people who share her identity.

Poignantly, Sharandeep like Deepa, experienced herself as being at an advantage because of her British Sikh identity:

> *'I feel if anything, I think it may have benefitted me in getting certain positions because they're seen as a more diverse company erm which is a good thing- so I guess that's a positive that I've experienced but again, that could be just me; they feel I've got the right skills and attributes for the job but I think it might help in that sense if they are trying to build a more diverse and inclusive work erm force that's when it does help, because I am erm British Sikh' (Sharandeep, p.9)*

Sharandeep refers to what some could describe as the practice of tokenism in the workplace (Kanter, 1977). However, she presents this as being advantageous to her rather than exploitative, in that diversity initiatives allow her access to opportunities within the workplace. Importantly, Sharandeep sees her ethnic and religious identity as a bonus rather than the sole reason she had opportunities availed to her. It can be inferred that this allows her to retain a sense of self-esteem in that her 'skills and attributes' qualify her for the roles, rather than her identity being the defining factor.

Raveena also expresses having not experienced discrimination in the workplace by virtue of her ethnic or religious identity:

> *'I'm quite lucky in the position I'm in now because I'm, it's quite a multicultural environment; we have a lot of different women and men from different backgrounds and things so I'd say the position I'm in currently with my current job erm I have better opportunities than I've had before and everyone's a bit more aware of I think…different backgrounds and different identities and things like that- not to say it's perfect- there's obviously some things that still could be educated on, but I'd say my opportunities-wise is a lot better, whereas I think in the past erm my experience has been quite hindered so it's kind of not been able to get the correct experience….or erm…just not being able to get a job because of experience, or things like that' (Raveena, p.7)*

Being in a multicultural workplace where there is an awareness of equality and diversity allows Raveena greater access to opportunities than she has experienced in other workplaces. Whilst Raveena acknowledges there is room for improvement, she communicates feeling that she is being treated fairly. Throughout the transcript, Raveena emphasises the unique contribution she wants to make to the work environment, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *'So I think it's kind of…not even the faith and religion side of it I think it's very much, it's important for me to kind of…bring my own skill set to things' (Raveena, p.20)*

Raveena distinguishes her professional identity from religious aspects of her identity, emphasising the unique contributions she can make to organisation through bringing her own skill set. This speaks to Raveena's wish to be seen beyond her religious or ethnic identity as someone who is otherwise similar to anyone else in the workplace. Throughout the excerpt, Raveena speaks confidently about the contributions and pride she has in producing work of a high standard. As illustrated throughout the excerpt, Raveena had positive reflections regarding the role of her Singhni Sikh identity at work and her ability to contribute and ascend in her workplace.

For Gurleen, her religious identity seemed to play an important role in her sense-making process, as she referred to the idea of 'fate' as a reason for her not having progressed to where she had wanted to be early on in her career. In the following excerpt, she describes how she had initially wondered whether she struggled in getting further in her career because of her identity as a Singhni Sikh woman, however, then reconsiders this:

> *'I thought oh I wasn't getting anywhere with my erm jobs, but then I realised after it was because of where I was with my studies and my qualifications erm so I was just an [names profession] for about three years, and I did think hang on a minute, I am very early on in my career and all of a sudden now erm, I was [names profession] so it's a big jump, and I know that's all you know down to God's blessings and stuff and it's wherever he wants to put me at that time you know in what age kind of thing so I know it's also down to God and it's down to where I am in my studies, I'm only one exam away so I know that that plays a big part too' (Gurleen, p.23)*

Central to Gurleen's sense making process is the idea that the setbacks she experienced in being unable to get work occurred because of not being sufficiently qualified and because it was not her fate. In telling herself to 'hold on a minute', she is re-evaluating her initial thought that her ethnic or religious identity had played a role in her initial challenges with ascending within her professional field. Here, Gurleen expresses having not felt that any discrimination had inhibited her from excelling in the work environment. In this circumstance, Gurleen communicates a sense of ease and trust in knowing that her questions about why things had not happened immediately for her have already been answered by an external force beyond herself. This can be contrasted to her experience of feeling discriminated against, which is expressed as an unsettling experience full of unanswered questions.

Participants thus varied in the extent to which they felt their identities as British Sikh women precluded them from opportunities in the workplace. Whilst some participants exercised self-efficacy, highlighting ability as the determining factor effecting career ascension, others communicated a sense of powerlessness in their ability to ascend professionally. Broad, systemic issues affecting access to opportunities were reflected on before experiences of being confronted with the dilemma of working out whether discrimination personally affected them was thought about.

3.3.2. Subtheme Two: Is it Because I'm 'Brown'?

As described in the previous subtheme, participants discussed systemic issues, such as lack of numerical representation of ethnic minority women in their organisations affecting career ascension, aptly referred to by one participant as the 'invisible ceiling'. Where there were experiences of discrimination, some of the participants discussed their experiences of trying to establish whether they were being discriminated against because of their ethnic or religious identity. For some, this was a complex process, which involved a process of comparing against White peers, or eliminating all other potential explanations for being passed over for opportunities or treated differently.

Nina recalls her process of attempting to discern whether she was being treated differently in the workplace by her peers because of her ethnic identity:

> *'Yeah…I think…I think it's because I've never had an issue with people like…uni school…I've never had a issue with making friends… I like to think I'm easy to*

talk to and other people have said that to me so when I wasn't…when I transitioned into work and grad scheme etc, and I was struggling in that aspect I think naturally, I thought what is it because I'm the only brown person? That's the only logical explanation I can have in my head' (Nina, p.19).

Here, Nina's process of working out can be seen, as she remembers prior interactions, concluding that she has never experienced problems in forming relational connections with others in the past. Nina eliminates her personality as the possible cause of her being excluded, which leaves her with no other 'logical explanation'. This highlights that she has exhausted all other options, and had not reached this conclusion lightly. It is as though Nina feels compelled to provide justification to her conclusion, to guard against the possibility that she would be criticised or challenged for holding this view. This is shown throughout the excerpt, as Nina recalled having tried numerous strategies to make herself feel more included, with minimal success**.**

Gurleen similarly underwent a process of discerning whether she was being discriminated against, when she was being criticised for her work:

'So things like that, belittled me coz I felt like hang on a minute…we did the same thing, you know it's both been submitted, you know they've both gone to site for approval and stuff I said well why, why am I not getting the recognition you know? So that…that was a bit kind of er…disheartening because I thought…Is it coz I'm brown? Is it because I've got a turban on my head? You know, what is it?' (Gurleen, p.17).

Within the excerpt, Gurleen references several occasions where she had been told by her manager that the work she had submitted had been incorrect and had failed to receive recognition for work that White peers had received praise for. Like Nina, Gurleen expressed attempting to take on the feedback and improve her work to no avail. This prompted Gurleen to have a trusted colleague check her work before submitting it, so that she could then process whether it was the quality and accuracy of her work, or another reason, which had invited the criticism. Gurleen seems somewhat exasperated in her tone in the excerpt, as though she is demanding an answer regarding what part aspect of her identity she is being discriminated against over. This is conveyed in the succession of questions she poses, where she asks whether it is because she is 'brown', or whether she is being criticised because she has a 'turban' on her 'head'. A directness is conveyed here, which is in stark contrast to the perceived indirect manner through

which Gurleen feels she was being discriminated against. For Gurleen, the discrimination is being guised as a critique of her work, and she is confronting this to demand that the true reason for the 'critique' be made explicit. There is a sense that Gurleen is making a stand, passionately defending herself against the discrimination she is experiencing. This contrasts with the more passive 'belittled' position Gurleen found herself assuming when she was instructed to make changes to her work.

Like Gurleen, Jusjeet refers to an 'intangible' type of discrimination she has experienced, which is covert and nuanced. Jusjeet described situations where she has offered her insight into work-related matters that have been dismissed, and other occasions where she had been allocated more difficult pieces of work. In the following excerpt she considers what factors in to this unequal treatment:

> *'I think that if it was somebody else, and normally the somebody else is White, they would be heard so what is that about? I don't know…Is it because they do think we're robust and whatever? Is that kind of still being played? Even with the so-called best educated sort of White kind of… Like for example, they talk about ticking boxes…about you know, erm erm sort of fair pay and erm and all that kind of crap- it's not like that…it's difficult actually, it's not as tangible to grab hold of' (Jusjeet, p.24).*

Like both Gurleen and Nina, Jusjeet compares the way in which she is responded to, to the experiences of White peers and finds that she is being treated differently to them. The hesitation in Jusjeet's speech denotes the ambiguity of the situation, which conveys that this more intangible and covert form of discrimination is more uncomfortable to recollect than her overt and direct experiences of discrimination where she spoke of racially motivated attacks perpetrated by the National Front and White peers at school during her formative years. As indicated in Jusjeet's use of the word 'played', she considers this as a weapon being used to justify unfair treatment and suggests that it is an excuse that Jusjeet is very much familiar with. It can be inferred that for Jusjeet, the legislation that is in place is a façade, and allows the real inequality of the workplace to remain concealed. For Jusjeet, the elusive nature of this type of discrimination leaves her stuck, as it is it difficult to prove, which resigns her to passive acquiescence. Jusjeet's experience within the workplace encompasses knowledge of systemic issues that are unjust, which personally affect her. It can be inferred that these unjust systems threaten

Jusjeet's sense of social value within the workplace, as they render her as less important or worthy of equal treatment relative to White peers.

The process of testing the hypothesis that differential treatment or barriers to career ascension occur due to the British Sikh women's ethnic identity is evident within this subtheme. Overall, it captures how the experiences of British Sikh women in the workplace involves encountering elusive forms of discrimination, which are 'intangible'. The exhausting and stressful nature of these experiences is highlighted in this subtheme, as hypothesis testing requires the participants to draw comparison; with the hypothesis that it is discrimination being tested as a last resort. Elusive discrimination appears to be threatening; it is not clear-cut and has the potential to be challenged and dismissed.

3.3.3. Subtheme Three: Coping and Strategising for Survival

Four of the participants discussed the ways in which they coped with discrimination they experienced or anticipated within the workplace. For some participants, they disavowed its presence altogether as they described not wanting to be seen as overexaggerating the importance of situations that arose. For others, coping strategies were more behavioural in nature and involved reaching out to support networks that would allow them to progress in their careers.

Harpal repeated that the utilisation of 'strategies' is paramount to one's survival in the workplace as a British Sikh woman, which is captured in the following excerpt:

> *'To have that level of resilience to be able to survive in an environment…the world out there isn't fair, it's never going to be fair…it's about being able to ride those storms; It's about being able to have your own strategies to be able to survive that' (Harpal, p.20).*

Harpal uses the word 'survival' and the metaphor of 'riding those storms', illustrating just how significant she believes hardships are in the workplace. This suggests that one's ability to continue to exist in the workplace relies upon the extent to which one can remain resilient in the face of these hardships. The metaphor suggests that the work environment can be quite a threatening one, with the potential to obliterate those who are unable to 'ride the storm' and remain unscathed by attacks which challenge them. For Harpal, one

must accept that the world is an unfair place, as this is not something that can realistically be changed.

Harpal uses the metaphor of using a guide map to climb a mountain to illustrate how strategies can benefit in the workplace:

> *'They're a little guide map to help you get to where you want to get to. These are just little tools just part of the tools of getting there…Your professional role is one element; but these tools are what's going to enable you to move up that mountain you know, so if you're a climber and you've only got, I dunno, you know you've got the skills of climbing but you haven't got all the tools to help you get up, your climb is gonna be harder okay and there may be a couple of falls before you realise you need some other…you know you need a slightly different route to try to get to where you need to get to' (Harpal, p.18).*

The metaphor of a 'mountain' here described as a demanding uphill journey with obstacles which one must undertake to excel professionally as a Sikh woman in the workplace. For Harpal, having a professional role is insufficient to excel professionally, and additional guidance in the form of a 'guide map' and 'tools' are necessary. This colourful metaphor depicts the importance of having a strategy to make the journey less difficult. Harpal emphasises here the importance of resilience in the face of setbacks, which she likens to experiencing a 'couple of falls', in that one must persevere and simply take an alternative route to achieve the end goal. It is as though she is carefully instructing and coaching someone of what they must do to overcome hardships in the workplace, which speaks to an earlier comment she had made in the excerpt about her willingness to help and assist other Sikh people in the workplace to succeed. For Harpal, remaining resilient in the face of challenges is a trial-and-error process, where setbacks or 'falls' are inevitable. Using the metaphor of a mountain and emphasising that one must have the tools to climb also depicts the experience as one which is daunting and risky.

Whilst Harpal emphasises the importance of adopting strategies to allow one to excel within the workplace as a British Sikh person, she expresses how repeated challenges to her resilience have led to her decide not to pursue opportunities, as a means of self-preservation:

> *'I guess it's kind of moving back and you just kind of think I'm going to stay here because I'm safe here, do you know what I mean? Erm and that isn't necessarily*

how I kind of feel many of us should be leading our lives in the world of work but that could be because my level of resistance isn't as- as strong as probably some of the other people have…I kind of feel I just can't cope with that stuff now, at my time in my you know my working life I kind of feel I- I've seen enough, and I don't want to be putting myself out there anymore' (Harpal, p. 21)

Harpal makes several references to feeling 'traumatised' following an incident where she had made an error had purposefully been amplified, emphasising the intense fear-inducing impact the experience had had on her. Harpal reinforces the importance of maintaining resilience in the face of these challenges, though here expresses how her resilience has been lost. She reflects on her internal process here, in which she analyses whether it is worth it for her to continue to try to put herself forward, knowing that there is a possibility she will experience further challenges to her resilience. From a psychological point of view, Harpal appears to be weighing up the costs and benefits of persevering toward higher positions in the workplace with remaining in a place of 'safety', where she does not need to deal with the prospect of unfair treatment. The word 'safety' and phrase 'self-preservation' used by Harpal suggests that she is protecting herself from a situation that she experiences as psychologically harmful to her. This implies an instinctive process of withdrawal to avoid further psychological harm.

Jusjeet recollects her experiences of covert discrimination, and how she copes with this:

'I think at work, I don't go in looking for it, I don't go in thinking about it- but there is this one kind of thing about unconscious bias did come up erm because of erm er salaries, I will just say that right and erm…and that niggles me, because it hasn't been…settled yet and-and- but the thing is, there's four people, three are black and one is White so…I you know, you don't know…but what is going on there right erm….it's not overt, it's kind of yeah…I do think that they do see us more robust, they do see you as…I think it just happens…and if you do bring it up, they do find a way to bat it down don't they?' (Jusjeet, p.27)

Jusjeet describes throughout the excerpt how she does not go out 'looking for it' inferring a conscious and deliberate process of choosing not to search for racism. This suggests that if she looks for it, she will invariably find it. Jusjeet's way of coping with knowing that she is being discriminated against is to not 'see' it, suggesting a form of self-preservation. Jusjeet notes that 'unconscious bias' is at play regarding an issue concerning pay, but that this is 'batted away' if this is brought up. The phrase 'batted away' gives the

impression that whenever Jusjeet challenges her employers, they deflect and avoid addressing her concerns. There are several pauses throughout the excerpt here, indicating a sense of trepidation. Interestingly, Jusjeet also mentioned not wanting to 'play the race card', when describing her experiences of covert racism:

> *'Right, erm because unfortunately when I hear people say ooh I'm going to play the race card- it just irritates me. I don't like that, that's not fair, I haven't raised my kids to think like that either but if there is something blatant that you can get a hold of, then do something about it*'' *(Jusjeet, p.25)*

In the above excerpt, Jusjeet highlights her dislike of those who she feels use their race as a weapon within situations that do not warrant bringing up race as an issue. It may be inferred that for Jusjeet, calling out covert racism is risky, as she may be accused of weaponizing her race, and may be challenged for having insufficient evidence to support her claims. Having 'something blatant' and tangible as evidence removes the ambiguity, which allows for action to be taken to address it. The ambiguity means that Jusjeet must be cautious and refrain from talking about issues of concern. It can be deduced that this leaves Jusjeet at the mercy of those in a position of power.

Sharandeep expresses similar sentiments regarding 'playing the race card' in a situation where she had witnessed a colleague in a senior position making a discriminatory comment during a social event organised by work:

> *'I just didn't feel comfortable, because I didn't want people to think that I was erm making a big deal out of nothing or playing the race card- I just didn't wanna, you know? Just in case I'd have to be like put into a room with her or something' (Sharandeep, p.5)*

Sharandeep describes how she had not felt comfortable to report the individual who had made the comment, due to concerns that this would be minimised by others. Like Jusjeet, Sharandeep does not want to be seen as using her race, or the argument of racial discrimination, to her advantage. It can be inferred that Sharandeep's way of coping with the remark made by her colleague is to minimise the significance of it to herself. The way in which Sharandeep conveys this experience suggests she felt somewhat under the spotlight, as though she was being observed intently for her reaction.

Raveena reported having predominantly positive experiences within the workplace and stated not having experienced discrimination based on her Singhni Sikh identity, though

described being overlooked on occasion because of her gender. She however reported how recent political events had led her to consider whether discrimination was taking place covertly, and expressed her way of coping with this:

> *'It's not so much my identity that I kind of associate with in the workplace, it's more being a woman but obviously having the identity that I do, and the appearance I do like I said there could be so many things that I'm just not aware of…and they are things that I do think of you know- the conversations people might have- and you just don't know what's going on behind the scenes like I said earlier so I think that's something that's at the back of my mind, but I try not to let it dictate my day to day routine when I'm in the workplace' (Raveena, p.29)*

Raveena speaks to her awareness of 'behind the scenes', or covert instances of discrimination which may be taking place, which she consciously compartmentalises as a way of coping. It can be inferred that Raveena anticipates that allowing her awareness of discrimination to be at the forefront of her mind would impede her professionally. This is suggested in Raveena's comments within the excerpt regarding her name and how she could be discriminated against during selection processes, where she voices how such considerations could impact her self-esteem. Compartmentalisation therefore appears to preserve Raveena's self-esteem, allowing her the confidence to pursue professional opportunities within the workplace. Interestingly, Raveena disaggregates her ethnic and religious identities from her gender identity, suggesting that she views ethnicity and religion as primary to her self-concept.

3.4. Concluding Remarks

This chapter illuminates the intrapsychic; interpersonal; and contextual experiences of being a British Sikh woman in the workplace. The initial superordinate theme: 'The Self: Identity Meaning and Negotiation Outside the Workplace' reflected the participants' intrapsychic understanding of intersecting identities, and the extent to which they could be readily negotiated outside the workplace, within social settings. Being with others at work, as reflected in the second superordinate theme, introduced an interpersonal aspect to the participants' experiences of being British Sikh women in the workplace. Namely, group processes, and being a minority within the workplace led to an appraisal of what it was like to be with the other. This included reflection on experiences in which participants were identified in ways that were similar or different to how they experienced themselves. Poignantly, being in the workplace introduced an additional professional identity in need of preservation and recognition. The final superordinate theme: 'Working Out and Managing Experiences of Discrimination' sheds light on the interaction between the participants' intersecting identities, the way these are received by the other, and their interaction with the work context. Being British Sikh women in the workplace elicited discussions around whether discrimination had been directed towards them, and whether identity presented a barrier toward career advancement and opportunities at work. In instances where discrimination was voiced, participants discussed various strategies that were either intrapsychic or behavioural which were deployed to manage discrimination.

In the following chapter, the findings will be grounded in literature on identity to provide a theoretical framework to the ideas presented here. The discussion chapter will expand upon the superordinate and corresponding subthemes, with an exploration of findings that support or differ from the findings of the current study.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Introduction

The research sought to answer the question: what is it like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace? Aspects of identity seemed to take on various meanings for the participants and were negotiated based on these meanings. Degree of religiosity, group membership, need for distinctiveness, cultural connectedness, intrinsic values, and sense of pride appeared to play a crucial role in the choices participants made to affiliate themselves with aspects of their identity which had a bearing on how the self was subsequently experienced in the workplace. Establishing and negotiating one's identity appeared to be a fluid, and in some cases, an ongoing process.

In a predominantly White majority context, participants were either viewed as highly distinctive or indistinctive as British Sikh women. Both circumstances led to a loss of identity, and a sense of not being seen. In the case of the women who identified as 'Singhni Sikh', this manifested as being highly identifiable on a physical level and being invisible on an individual level. Some of the women who identified as Sikh experienced a loss of this identity. In their experience, they were viewed as 'brown', 'Indian', or 'South Asian' by peers in the workplace. Some managed this through exercising self-efficacy; imparting knowledge about their identity to try and modify other people's perceptions of them at work. Belonging, when combined with feelings of sameness, invoked a strong feeling of responsibility for other Sikhs in a White majority context, driven by an instant, familial connection. On the other hand, otherness was accompanied by interpersonal disconnection and loneliness, which was managed by attempting to foster interpersonal cohesion and common ground.

Experiences of discrimination, which posed a threat to the self, were identified and managed in different ways. A process of establishing whether discrimination was taking place occurred through testing alternative hypotheses; a taxing process of drawing comparisons between themselves and White colleagues' experiences. For some, their identity was not perceived as a barrier toward accessing opportunities in the workplace at all and was in some cases viewed as a bonus. However, for those who experienced or witnessed discrimination happening were cautious to raise it, as they anticipated judgement from colleagues for highlighting covert discrimination. Practical tools such as engaging networks, as well as building up resilience to withstand discrimination were seen to be instrumental to one's survival in the work context.

In line with the interrogative premise behind IPA methodology (Cuthbertson et al., 2020), the chapter will draw upon previous literature to reflect upon and substantiate findings derived during the analytic process. To this end, the findings will be discussed in the context of identity process theory (Breakwell, 1986); intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991); and previous findings which support or diverge from the findings of the current study Finally, limitations and suggestions for future research as well as future directions will be explored.

4.1. Negotiating Intersecting Identities

Multiple identities were managed by the participants by assigning meanings to identity components, before undergoing a complex process of negotiation. Interestingly, the salience of identity structures when discussed in the context of the participants' personal lives, had an influence on their wish to express it within the workplace. In addition, it was found that identity components were ordered in terms of importance, with some aspects taking precedence over others.

As participants had multiple intersecting identities (e.g., national, ethnic, religious, gendered), identity negotiation and the primacy of aspects of identity were evident across participants. For example, Raveena stated that her 'British' identity was not at the 'forefront' for her, and Deepa stated that she would never describe herself as 'British'. Similarly, other participants placed the 'Punjabi' cultural identity structure in a more primary position relative to their 'Sikh' religious identity. This supports previous findings which suggest that aspects of identity are more salient than others (Bowleg, 2013), with salience being determined by the extent to which identity components fulfil motivational principles (Vignoles et al., 2002). The participants in the current study described an immediate connection with other Sikhs in the workplace, which reflected the intrinsic nature of their Sikh identities within both personal and professional context. Participants also voiced a sense of purpose and meaning and self-esteem in relation to their Sikh identity. With the exception of Amrit, who expressed a sense of belongingness in being British, Britishness did not appear to fulfil as many of the motivational needs as proposed within the IPT model (Breakwell, 1986).

In the current study, the principle of identity coherence which refers to the process of integrating multiple constituents of identity was evident in the participants' recollections

(Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). In line with previous research (e.g., Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010) tensions between identities were observed. For example, discord between Sikh and Punjabi value systems led to the mobilisation of strategies to manage the conflict and therefore alleviate identity threat. Nina, for example, managed the incoherence between Sikh and Punjabi value systems through modifying the meaning and personal salience of her identities by self-identifying as non- religious.

The modification of meaning as a method of reconciling conflicting identities has been reported elsewhere (Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016; Rabinovich & Morton, 2016). This highlights the use of an intrapsychic strategy for curtailing potential threats to identity. Similarly, another way in which coherence between identity structures was managed was through selecting and combining components of each identity on the basis of meaning. Within the current study, the participants' experiences of negotiating multiply held identity structures supports both the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1991) and IPT theory (Breakwell, 1986), as participants in the study did not disaggregate each component of their identity, through identifying as either 'Sikh' or as a 'woman'. Rather, the mutually constitutive nature of identity was implied in the participants' narratives of the cultural and familial influences on their identity. For example, Deepa spoke about how she would not drink alcohol at weddings, alluding to culturally informed gender roles that prohibit women from drinking alcohol. Jusjeet and Harpal similarly referred to the responsibilities they had as British Sikh women towards the family, which were not understood by White peers in the workplace. These examples denote the intersectionality between culture and gender, in line with previous literature on South Asian Muslim women highlighting the challenges associated with balancing culture and religion with the workplace (Arifeen & Gatrell, 2020; Arifeen & Syed, 2019; Tariq & Syed, 2017).

However, unlike the studies exploring the intersectionality between ethnicity, gender, and religion in British Pakistani Muslim women, the participants in the current study did not state being discouraged from pursuing their respective careers by family. Karlsen et al's (2020) recent report investigating employment trends across and within South Asian groups suggests that Muslim women of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi women continue to experience downward mobility in the UK labour market. This suggests that the intersection of religion plays a critical role in shaping the career trajectories of South Asian women, possibly attributable to the ongoing (Islamophobic) social victimisation of Muslims, as well as continued exposure to cultural barriers. This signifies a possible divergence between the experiences of British Sikh women and British Muslim women,

underscoring the importance of disaggregating broad ‘South Asian’ categories within intersectionality scholarship.

The notion of ‘boundaries’ and ‘barriers’ featured as a method of differentiation between identity structures. For some participants, identity was flexibly negotiated, whilst for others, identity was more immutable. Deepa and Nina, for example, alluded to the ability to select aspects of identity in a way that best suited them. This was poignant in the narratives of the Singhni Sikh women, who discussed how their religious identities were outwardly endorsed within the workplace. In support, previous literature has found that a high level of religiosity is associated with enactment of one’s religion in the workplace (Gebert et al., 2014). In Gurleen’s narrative, ‘Britishness’ was conveyed as a threat to the maintenance of her Sikh identity, which can be conceptualised as a threat to the continuity motivational principle. In their qualitative study applying IPT theory to a sample of British Sikhs, Jaspal (2013) similarly found that continuity and distinctiveness principles were most threatened and defended against. As suggested by the current findings, a strong motivational drive for continuity across time and space of one’s identity could also be a factor heightening endorsement of the Sikh religious identity within the work setting. Interestingly, Gurleen’s recollections regarding her experiences of being a British Sikh woman in the workplace suggested that she did not experience threats to continuity or distinctiveness at work, despite experiencing some identity threat in the social context she described outside of the workplace. Her ability to enact and therefore retain her ‘Singhni Sikh’ identity within the workplace suggests that the workplace was conducive, and not threatening, to the self-concept.

For other participants, identity was more fluid and flexible. For Deepa, this flexibility involved combining British and Indian cultures, balancing tradition with modernity. This process of selection and negotiation contradicts classical debates concerning cultural identity negotiation, which have proposed that British South Asians find themselves affixed between two cultures (Ghuman, 2003). This argument would predict negotiation of British and Indian cultures to be dilemmatic. The way in which identity components were negotiated is contrastingly indicative of a complex and dynamic process. For example, Deepa ascribed rules associated with ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ based upon context, with the former reserved for cultural settings. This highlights how compartmentalisation and preservation of the meanings associated with identities, which are contextually driven, promote flexibility and identity coherence. The flexibility of Deepa’s identity was reflected in her workplace experiences, as she seemed to be able

to endorse her ‘Punjabi’ or ‘Indian’ identity with clients who had the same background as her in the workplace, whilst retaining her professional identity.

The different meanings assigned to identity structures was exemplified in the participants’ narratives of ‘Britishness’. Harpal, who emigrated from East Africa with her family and obtained residency later in life, reflected on the benefit of British systems, referring to India as her ‘motherland’. Similarly, Raveena denoted the freedoms afforded to her by virtue of her Britishness. For other participants, Britain was referred to as ‘home’, denoting an intimate sense of belonging within Britain. These findings replicate Vadher and Barrett’s (2009) study which investigated British national identity in a cohort of British South Asian adults, highlighting how participants’ conceptualisations of Britishness varied. For some, ‘Britishness’ conferred nothing more than residency within Britain, whilst for others, British systems such as National Health Service were referred to in their conceptualisations of Britishness.

Whilst ‘Britishness’ conferred a variety of different meanings and perspectives, a sense of ‘pride’ in being Sikh was frequently cited. As proposed by social identity theories of ethnic identity, participants accentuated the positive qualities of the Sikh religion and community highlighting an intrinsic motivation to maintain a positive social, and by extension, ethnic identity (Tajfel, 1981; Vignoles, 2011) which seemed to fulfil self-esteem needs. Positive qualities, such as the generosity of the Sikh community were compared favourably against the tenets and religious attitudes of Islam and Hinduism. This is consistent with Jaspal’s (2013) study which found that participants emphasised the freedoms afforded by the Sikh religion whilst juxtaposing this with the supposed orthodoxy of Islam. The unique qualities of the Sikh religion thus not only appeared to serve self-esteem needs, but additionally allowed for the maintenance of the Sikh identity as one which is unique and distinctive. Interestingly, workplace conditions seemed to influence the endorsement of the distinctive Sikh identity. This reflects how context can influence and constrain identity.

This has implications for the workplace environment, as previous research has found that specific South Asian populations may be categorised under a ‘panethnic’ identity by the White majority which can flexibly endorsed to one’s advantage (Fernando & Kenny, 2018). The term ‘panethnicity’ has predominantly been used within American literature to denote the homogenous categorisation of ethnic minorities, such as ‘Latino’ or ‘Asian’ (Espiritu, 1992).

In the current study, participants similarly alluded to the experience of being homogenously categorised as 'South Asian', 'Indian' or in some cases 'brown'. This was particularly the case for participants who did not wear religious attire marking their 'Sikh' identity. For some participants, panethnic categorisation (Espiritu, 1992) by the White majority in the workplace was unproblematic, whilst for others, this was experienced as a threat to distinctiveness. This was particularly the case for two participants who voiced the centrality of their Sikh identities in the absence of outward religious expression. This finding adds to the body of literature concerning identity in the workplace, as it explains how some individuals who are assigned an ethnicity that they do not personally identify with might experience a threat to the self in the work context (Breakwell, 1986; Petriglieri, 2011), and how wearing religious attire may promote group level distinctiveness.

Of note, the findings pertaining to the participant's self-concept and negotiation of identity outside the workplace extends previous research. It underscores individual differences in identity meaning and negotiation amongst British Sikh women who identify solely religiously- as was the case with the Singhni Sikh women in the study- compared with those who described their Sikh identity in cultural terms. Importantly, the Singhni Sikh women in the study seemed to express having inflexible rules attached to their religious identities. This need for retention and preservation of their identity appeared to contribute to the endorsement of their Sikh identities in the workplace. In contextualising the findings within the framework of intersectionality, this research also highlights how gender appears to play a role in identity negotiation outside the workplace, and how for some, these challenges extended to participants' experiences within the workplace.

Previous research, such as Vadher and Barret's (2009) study, have tended to group broad South Asian categories and thus have not attended to the role of religion in identity. In addition, little research has previously been undertaken which has explored the role of religious identity in shaping professional identity and workplace experiences. Extant literature has examined identity negotiation amongst South Asians within social settings or the work setting, however a paucity of research has examined identity negotiation across both (Banerjee et al., 2022). Poignantly, the current study bridges social and workplace contexts through illustrating how identity meaning and negotiation processes within social contexts can be retained or are adapted within the workplace.

4.2. Professional Identity and Motivational Needs in the Workplace

Professional identities are identity structures in themselves (Swann et al., 2009), and as such, have motivational needs attached to them. In the current study, professional identity became more salient and assumed importance in the work context, with one participant vocalising her wish to be viewed solely as a professional, and not by her ethnic or religious identity. Not only does this highlight the significance of context in self-identification (Ashforth, 2001), but it also suggests that professional identity can potentially promote distinctiveness at the level of the individual, vis-à-vis personal values, attributes, and unique capabilities attached to the job role.

Whilst previous research has integrated social identity theory into studies exploring professional identity (van Os, et al., 2015), they focus heavily on intergroup comparison as a way in which professional identities are upheld. They have also tended to focus exclusively on professional identity, overlooking the relationship between professional and personal identities. The findings from the current study add to the body of literature by exemplifying how professional and personal identities can be dually negotiated to fulfil the need to be both distinctive, whilst simultaneously meeting the intrapsychic need to belong (Brewer, 1991). This was implied in 'Raveena's' narrative, where distinctiveness was fulfilled via her 'Singhni Sikh' identity within the workplace, and individual autonomy was achieved through her uniqueness as a professional.

In this study, professional identity was salient in the workplace; however, cultural, ethnic or religious identities were not simply discarded. Harpal for example expressed Sikh values of equality and diversity, which she presented as the underlying ethos of her professional identity, despite her wish to be seen solely by her professional identity. Whilst social identity theory has proposed that identities are ranked hierarchically, suggesting a clear demarcation between each (Ashforth, 2001), the current study suggests that values from one identity domain can influence another. This supports the view that multiple identities can be co-activated (Rothbard & Ramajaran, 2009).

Interestingly, participants varied in the degree to which ethnic, cultural, or religious identities were enacted; suggesting the presence of intrapsychic and behavioural manifestations of identity in line with the IPT model (Breakwell, 1986). Deepa for example expressed a strong affiliation towards her self-identification as 'Indian', which she enacted in the workplace with colleagues with the same cultural background. Similarly, both Raveena and Gurleen had the opportunity to endorse their 'Singhni Sikh' identities

through imparting knowledge on the Sikh religion to White peers. In contrast, 'Amrit' expressed the belief that her Sikh identity was inconducive to the professional context and expressed the invisibility of the Sikh religion at an organisational level.

These findings suggest that professional contexts which promote inclusion and diversity likely allow for greater integration between work and non-work identities (Ramajaran & Reid, 2013). Secondly, it highlights the importance of recognising minoritised religions such as Sikhism, as well as more widely practiced religions to foster a fully inclusive workplace. The finding supports quantitative research which has found a positive association between perceptions of an organisation's climate for diversity (i.e., fairness of employment practices; access to opportunities; and respect for individual characteristics), feelings of inclusion and overall job satisfaction (Brimhall et al., 2014). From the perspective of identity motives, the Singhni Sikh women's positive experiences of increasing the visibility of the Sikh religion denotes how the need for self-verification plays an important role (Swann et al., 2009).

Quantitative research, such as Brimhall et al.'s (2014) study are fruitful in terms of elucidating causal relationships between job satisfaction within the workplace and constructs such as inclusion and organisational diversity initiatives. However, they are limited, in the sense that they do not tell us what it is like to experience 'inclusion'. To complicate matters, the term 'inclusion' has been ill-defined within the literature (Shore et al., 2011). The findings suggest that from an organisational perspective, inclusion includes the specific acknowledgement and embracement of religious, cultural, and ethnic groups. 'Amrit', for instance, vocalised the lack of recognition of the Sikh identity in the workplace, which formed the basis of her decision not to endorse it with colleagues. Ramajaran & Reid (2013) posit that workplace conditions may indirectly prevent individuals from endorsing personal identities and may compartmentalise them as a way of coping. Compartmentalisation can be identified as a coping strategy deployed by Amrit as a way of safeguarding her religious identity from threats to self-esteem (Breakwell, 1986). As such, this highlights how different motivational needs can take precedence, and how other motivational needs (in this case distinctiveness) may be sacrificed to preserve the most prominent need (in this case self-esteem).

4.3. Coping in the Workplace: Deploying 'Strategic Invisibility'

Within the current study, different forms of 'strategic invisibility' were used, which involved downplaying (and thus making invisible) ethnic or religious identity (Lollar, 2015; Smith et al., 2019) to manage interpersonal relationships in the workplace. In line with the IPT model, this 'strategic invisibility' appeared to safeguard against threats to belonging (Breakwell, 1986) and can be viewed as a form of identity work (Brown, 2017) aimed at influencing the way in which one is seen by the other.

The decision to keep religious, ethnic, or cultural identities hidden within the workplace was also expressed by 'Deepa', who reported her experiences of working within a Muslim majority work setting. When investigating minority and majority workplace dynamics, literature has predominantly focused on White majority work contexts (e.g., Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). Interestingly, Deepa expressed challenges regarding the preservation of her professional identity through limiting self-disclosure regarding her ethnic and cultural identity. In addition, Deepa's choice to remain ethnically and religiously ambiguous also appeared to be driven by a need to make her difference less salient.

The current findings extend previous research on experiences of Asians in the workplace (Huang, 2021; Fernando & Kenny, 2018) through illuminating how different in-group, out-group configurations can impact the self and choices to disclose more 'invisible' or ambiguous forms of identity in the workplace. As suggested by the current findings, the decision to limit self-disclosure of personal identity seemed to be partially linked to the self-awareness of distinctiveness, which carried with it the potential for rejection or social isolation. Being in an environment where Deepa viewed herself as different and distinctive thus mobilised her need for assimilation (Brewer, 1991) which was achieved through remaining ethnically ambiguous.

'Strategic invisibility' (Lollar, 2015) overlaps with the concept of identity 'concealment' and 'passing', used to within IPT research (Jaspal & Williamson, 2017) and literature on 'invisible' stigmatised identities in the workplace (Clair et al., 2005). The act of 'concealment' involves hiding a stigmatised aspect of identity to avoid social devaluation (Jaspal & Williamson, 2017). As noted by Clair et al. (2005) 'passing' causes a person to be classed incorrectly as another social group which is not socially devalued, allowing the individual to benefit from the privileges of not being marginalised.

The findings derived from the current study diverge from these conceptualisations in that 'strategic invisibility' was used to attenuate distinctiveness as a way of assimilating, rather than as a strategy to circumvent social stigma. This highlights how the need to assimilate can occur in the absence of racial devaluation and marginalisation in non-White spaces. Within this study, 'Deepa' was able to remain ambiguous and assimilate because like the other individuals she worked with, she was South Asian. Not wearing religious attire marking her Sikh faith allowed Deepa to assimilate. Of note, 'Singhni' Sikhs who wear religious attire would not have access to this type of strategy as a way of assimilating. As illustrated by the current findings, Singhni Sikhs may use other strategies, such as emphasising commonality between themselves and others in the workplace to promote belongingness.

Interestingly, in contrast to previous research investigating the experiences of Black women and Black men within the workplace (Atewologun & Singh, 2010; Hall et al., 2012), 'identity shifting', which refers to act of changing one's behaviours to assimilate with the White majority, was not found within the current study. As highlighted within the literature, different ethnic groups experience different types of 'stereotype threat', which refers to the fear of being reduced to a negative stereotype about one's group (Steele, 1997). Research has found that Asian Americans are negatively stereotyped as having qualities inconducive to leadership (Sy et al., 2010), while Black people are stereotyped as unintelligent (Diamond, 2006). The positive contributions of the Sikh community have been documented in publications (British Sikh Report, 2019), suggesting that in Britain, Sikhs may have to some degree acquired 'model minority' status. The term 'model minority' originated from America and is used to describe communities who have obtained a higher degree of economic success relative to other minority groups (Wong & Halgin, 2006), upheld by the majority as being more elevated in comparison to other ethnic minority groups.

It is possible that the prevalence of positive stereotypes regarding the ability of South Asians minimised the need to deploy identity shifting as a strategy to counter negative stereotypes. Having access to positive qualities conducive to one's professional identity may have, to some extent, safeguarded the participants from the harmful effects of stereotype threat. In contrast with previous research (Roberts et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2014) the participants who had an 'invisible' Sikh identity whilst viewing it as central to their self-concept chose not to endorse their Sikh identity overtly. This may have been

partially due to the positive stereotypes associated with having an ‘Indian’ or panethnic (Espiritu, 1992) ‘South Asian’ identity in the workplace.

4.4. Invisibility and Visibility: Layered Distinctiveness in the Workplace

The meaning of one’s identity is said to vary according to context, and the way others conceive one’s identity is thought to play a crucial role (Brah, 2000). In this study, the workplace is the context that brought about a renegotiation of the self. This assertion is corroborated by theories of identity which demonstrate that one’s motivational needs attached to identity are negotiated according to social conditions (Brewer, 1991). For example, within optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), one’s identity is determined by the need for distinctiveness and belongingness. Relational experiences within the workplace similarly seemed to play a central role in the experiences of being British Sikh women in this study.

Many of the participants referenced different forms of distinctiveness or indistinctiveness they experienced. Raveena and Gurleen discussed their physical distinctiveness as Singhni Sikh women, and how this was embraced as an opportunity to educate others. Conversely, the prospect of explaining the Sikh identity induced fear; was experienced as an imposition; and was actively avoided by Amrit. Interestingly, in addition to high levels of physical visibility experienced by Gurleen and Raveena, other participants the invisibility they experienced on an interpersonal level. This included not being recognised as ‘Sikh’, and being merely viewed as ‘brown’. In addition, invisibility manifested in an inability to be seen past physical distinctiveness, or at a group level, a lack of acknowledgement of the Sikh religion within their respective organisations.

The freedom to express religious identity within the workplace has been linked to job satisfaction; organisational commitment; and citizenship behaviour (Kutcher et al., 2010). The centrality of religion to the self-concept has further been found to affect the endorsement of religious identity within the workplace (Héliot et al., 2020). As highlighted within previous research, outward expression of religious identity is performative, signalling one’s membership to a religious group (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013). On the other hand, religious identity can be an invisible component of one’s intersectional identity and its visibility within the workplace therefore relies on disclosure.

Interestingly, two of the participants who did not wear the *dastar* or other articles of faith (other than the *kara* or steel bangle) reported the invisibility of their Sikh identity. Amrit, for example, alluded to the intimidating prospect of being asked questions about her Sikh identity, and being challenged on her authenticity as a Sikh which resigned her to accepting being categorised as 'Indian' or 'South Asian' rather than disclosing her Sikh identity at work, despite not self-identifying as such. Whilst this reflects Amrit's need to preserve her self-esteem and demonstrates self-efficacy in outward identity expression to the other, it also reflects the process of assimilation-accommodation as outlined within the IPT model. Assimilation refers to the appraisal of one's identity in light of incoming identity-salient information. Accommodation refers to adapting or changing one's identity in response to experiences (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). Throughout the interview, Amrit expressed susceptibility to external influences on her sense of self, highlighting a predominant process of accommodation, or adaptability to her external environment (Sneed & Whitbourne, 2003). This highlights how the extent to which someone uses accommodation or assimilation can inform one's susceptibility to external influences. This informs the stability or continuity of one's identity across time and space and identity endorsement in the workplace.

The performative function of projecting religious identity externally has been previously explored (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013). The Singhni Sikh women in the study voiced how wearing religious attire enabled them to 'stand out' as Sikhs, marking group belongingness and distinctiveness. These findings further extend recent work pertaining to visibility, hypervisibility, and invisibility (Buchanan & Settles, 2019; Roberts, 2005). Raveena, a Singhni Sikh woman referenced the need to impart knowledge on her Singhni Sikh identity, emphasising their existence within mainstream society. As turbans have traditionally been worn by male adherents of the Sikh faith (Gupta, 2016), Singhni Sikh women experience intersectional invisibility, due to their non-prototypicality (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Attempts to increase visibility of the 'Singhni Sikh' identity thus appeared to be driven by a need to assimilate at a group level. Hypervisibility was also experienced as Raveena was referred to as 'the one with the turban', contravening the experience of being seen fully and accurately (Roberts, 2005). The centrality of her professional identity additionally seemed to cultivate a need to be seen distinctive on an individual level as someone who makes unique contributions to her organisation.

Findings from the literature have highlighted some of the challenges associated with negotiating personal and professional identities within the workplace (Settles et al.,

2004). In the case of Amrit, keeping her Sikh identity invisible and remaining indistinctive represented a way in which the perceived incompatibility between her 'professional' and Sikh identities was managed. As such, this represents a form of 'identity work' (Brown, 2017) and can be conceptualised as 'concealment', a type of interpersonal coping strategy (Jaspal et al., 2020) with the possible aim of curtailing threats to self-esteem.

Identity conflict can thus ensue if there is a misalignment between one's internal experiences and external expressions, resulting in feelings of inauthenticity (Roberts et al., 2009) and obstructing the experience of being seen fully and accurately by the other (Roberts, 2005). Buchanan and Settles (2019) assert that the conditions of invisibility and visibility are imposed by those in a position of power, as illustrated within the current study. The experiences of being 'seen' and not being seen seemed to accordingly vary across the participants, suggesting that the organisational practices of their places of work were either conducive or inconducive to their outward expression of their personal identities. Experiences of invisibility and visibility also appeared to vary according to whether participants outwardly expressed their 'Sikh' identities.

4.5. Otherness and Belonging

Experiences of being 'othered' and of 'belonging' with work peers in a predominantly White majority context were recalled in this study. Madrid (1998) defines the experience of 'otherness' as producing a sense of isolation, alienation, and disconnectedness. In the current study, experiences of exclusion and of being on the periphery in social interactions were mentioned. Nina discussed feelings of alienation when observing White colleagues engaging socially and reported the lack of reciprocity she experienced when attempting to establish relationships with her co-workers. The experiences of being 'othered' and of being excluded from both professional and social opportunities have been found in previous studies on ethnic minorities in the workplace (Holder et al., 2015; Settles et al., 2019). In this study, an initial process of comparing interactions with others was undertaken to ascertain whether discrimination was taking place, due to the intangible nature of the experience. Within Holder et al.'s (2015) qualitative study exploring the experiences of racial microaggressions and coping strategies in a cohort of Black women in corporate leadership positions, a similar 'hypothesis testing' strategy was found amongst participants, where alternative explanations for being excluded were initially exhausted before concluding that racial discrimination was taking place. The

findings attest to the elusive, invisible nature of experiences of discrimination in the occupational context and the psychologically taxing nature of such experiences.

Workplace ostracism is described by a set of behaviours defined by acts of omission, which exclude, shun, and ignore the target (Robinson et al., 2013). Up until recently, workplace ostracism has received little scholarly attention, possibly due to the misconception that it is a relatively benign form of mistreatment (Robinson et al., 2013). As exemplified in the above finding, the ambiguity associated with workplace ostracism leads the target down a line of 'hypothesis testing' (Holder et al., 2015), initially attributing the cause of ostracization to themselves. Ostracization in the workplace has been linked to low self-esteem (Ferris et al., 2016), and low work effort when encountered alongside workplace incivility (Anjum et al., 2019). Attributing the cause of social rejection internally could be one of the reasons those experiencing ostracization experience low self-esteem.

The current study highlights how on an individual level, experiences of being othered present a threat to the belongingness principle of identity (Richman & Leary, 2009; Vignoles et al., 2002), culminating in increased efforts to belong through initiating social interaction, in support of previous literature on ostracization (Maner et al., 2007). On an interpersonal level, disengagement and withdrawal presented as a secondary interpersonal strategy for coping with a lack of belongingness, once attempts to connect with colleagues had been unsuccessful. Jaspal et al. (2020) note that threat to motivational principles of identity can lead to deployment of more than one coping strategy. Exclusion and rejection may thus undermine one's sense of social value and ability to control one's external environment, presenting threats to both self-esteem and self-efficacy motivational principles. In the context of the current study, it is possible that the experience of otherness therefore led to deployment of different coping strategies in a trial-and-error manner through a process of reappraising the outcome of social engagement. The inability to alleviate the threat through increasing social interaction may have led to the use of disengagement and withdrawal as a last resort, culminating in increased social isolation.

Within the current study, Jusjeet recollected a previous instance of being othered during her formative years, which later re-emerged over the course of her training for her job. Previous research has highlighted individual differences regarding perceptions of social rejection. It has been found that previous experiences of racialised bullying can increase vigilance and anxiety regarding future discrimination (Wu et al., 2015). The current study

adds to the body of literature through highlighting how social pain associated with previous experiences of ostracization can be re-experienced (Goodwin et al., 2010). Re-experiencing previously compartmentalised experiences of being othered could potentially have an adverse impact on wellbeing and could impact interpersonal relations in the workplace. Intersectionality is also of relevance, as British Sikh women and other ethnic minority women may view rejection sensitivity through the lens of ethnicity; gender; religion; or a combination of these categorisations (London & Rosenthal, 2013). Within the current study, both Jusjeet and Nina who recollected either historical or current workplace instances of ostracization, appeared to view ostracization through the lens of ethnicity. This potentially illuminates how historical experiences of discrimination toward a particular identity can shape one's sensitivity toward future discrimination.

Research has tended to focus on adverse experiences in the workplace (Holder et al., 2015; Settles et al., 2019), whilst comparatively little research has focused on positive experiences. Within this study, positive relational experiences, such as the experience of belonging were reported by several of the participants. Belongingness was characterised by experiences of being accepted in the work context by White peers, but also extended to experiences of having a powerful, familial connection with other Sikh peers. Experiences of feeling othered and experiencing belonging denote how interpersonal interactions within the workplace can reproduce structural inequalities (Healy et al., 2011), but also gives insight into practices and behaviours challenging inequalities inherent within organisations.

Gurleen's manager's willingness to eat a vegetarian meal as a marker of respect towards her Sikh faith, fostered a sense of belonging. This illuminates the role of managers and other individuals in positions of power as strategic actors with the capacity to perpetuate or challenge structural inequalities. For some participants, belongingness occurred in the presence of other Sikh colleagues; driven by an instant, familial connection. Usage of Punjabi words and phrases acted as a signifier of belonging. This was the case for Deepa, who recounted her experience of having a Punjabi client who greeted her using a colloquial Punjabi word. Taken together, these findings highlight how belongingness can be enacted through inclusive organisational behaviours, and how it can also be experienced through having a shared identity with others.

Globalisation has led to the drive toward increasing diversity and inclusion within the workplace. However, research on inclusion is in its infancy, with the lack of consensus

on what is meant by ‘inclusion’ limiting scholarship (Mor Barak, 2015; Shore et al., 2011). Without clear consensus on what ‘inclusion’ looks like, or what it means, inclusion and diversity initiatives within organisations are likewise limited in their scope to suitability address issues such as ostracization in the workplace. Drawing on Brewer’s (1991) ‘optimal distinctiveness theory’, Shore et al. (2011) proposed that inclusion encompasses the experience of both belonging and being valued for one’s uniqueness. The participants’ positive recollections of being seen as ‘Sikh’ within the workplace, whilst being viewed as a unique individual with a professional skill set, supports the theory that distinctiveness is central to the experience of inclusion. In addition, the extent to which organisations foster a sense of belongingness appeared to play a key role in the British Sikh women’s experiences. As highlighted in the current findings, an important distinction can be drawn between the experience of being the same, and of being different to others, in that sameness need not be a pre-requisite to the experience of belonging. Rather, the experience of belonging entailed a sense of acceptance, marked by clear demonstrations of inclusive behaviours.

4.6. Being the Same and Being Different

Relatedly, being with the other encompassed experiences of encountering those who shared aspects of the participants’ identity, denoting ‘sameness’. Most commonly, sameness was described in the context of shared ethnic, religious, or cultural identities, rather than gender alone. Again, the primacy of ethnic or religious (i.e., ‘Punjabi’ or ‘Sikh’) group membership over gender was therefore implicit in the participants’ accounts, supporting intersectionality research which has highlighted the centrality of ethnicity (Bowleg, 2013). Of note, the microcosmic work environment led to a shift in the centrality of ethnicity, highlighting how context shapes and constrains identity.

Whilst positive experiences were reported in relation to having a shared identity, boundaries between professional and cultural or religious identities were challenged during experiences of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’. In being the same, two participants reflected on experiences of working with individuals who shared their cultural or religious identity, which threatened the integrity of their professional identity. Previous research has explored the impact of short- and long-term contextual changes to identity (Breakwell, 1986; Either & Deaux, 1994), proposing that a change in context can cause a change to the meaning of identity structures. For some participants, having a professional identity,

with associated rules, value systems, and boundaries, became increasingly more challenging to uphold when personal and professional became dually salient (i.e., being a British Sikh woman working with the Sikh community on a work assignment). In line with identity interference literature (Settles, 2004), professional and personal identities differed in their meaning dimensions which led to a process of finding a way of satisfying both.

Sharandeep for example reported experiencing sexual harassment, which was managed through increasing the rigidity of professional boundaries. Previous research has explored racialised sexual harassment experiences of Black women, and linked women's sexual harassment experiences to decreased job satisfaction; lower organisational commitment; and ill mental health (Willness et al. 2007). This study provides an extension to the previous literature through highlighting how sameness, shared identity, and overfamiliarity can lead to the contravention of boundaries manifesting as intra-group level sexual harassment. In addition, the findings illuminate how professional identities may be reinforced and made more salient as a way of managing boundary violations.

The intersectionality framework is of relevance here, as Sharandeep's intersecting gender and ethnic identity contributed to her experiences of sexual harassment. Intersectionality research has predominantly focused on the experiences of ethnic minority men and women in White majority workplaces (e.g., Kenny & Fernando, 2018). With the exception of several quantitative studies, (Buchanan et al., 2018; Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Woods et al., 2009) there is a dearth of literature investigating sexual harassment in the context of intersectionality (Brassel et al., 2020). The current findings highlight how the interplay between gender and the privilege of seniority become more poignant in instances of intra-racial sexual harassment. The stressful and awkward experience of sexual harassment and having the need to strategise is also illuminated in the current findings, as professional identity reinforcement was used strategically to create interpersonal distance between Sharandeep and her male manager. This finding highlights the need for additional qualitative research examining the lived experiences of those with multiple marginalised identities experiencing sexual harassment, to illuminate the interaction between intersections of privilege and marginalisation in the context of social identities (e.g. female gender) , and professional identities (e.g. manager).

As highlighted within the current study, whilst perceiving a close, immediate connection with other Sikhs could be experienced positively, it also seemed to elicit a tremendous

sense of responsibility. Having an 'invisible' Sikh identity in the workplace and feeling unable to express an internal sense of kinship towards another Sikh was a highly disconcerting experience for Amrit. Organisational conditions, policies and leadership styles have an impact on opportunities to enact religious identities and can create pressures to diminish non-work identities in the workplace (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). As suggested by the current findings, organisational cultures which foster expression of non-work identities could potentially have positive implications for intra-group relations and could reduce identity conflict. On the other hand, organisational climates that do not recognise minoritised groups, such as British Sikhs, can further perpetuate the invisibility experienced by them within wider society. The invisibility of the Sikh identity was reflected in several of the participants' narratives, as they vocalised lack of recognition of Sikhs within organisational publications, and a lack of general understanding of the difference between Sikhs and Muslims amongst White peers in the workplace. As tokens within their respective organisations, British Sikh women may thus feel unable to express their authentic selves at work, due to the lack of recognition of Sikhism at an organisational level.

'Authenticity' is conceptually related to definitions of visibility (Lollar, 2015; Roberts et al., 2009) as they both encompass a need to be seen in by the other in a way which mirrors the self-concept (Swann et al., 2009; Swann & Burhmester, 2012). The inability to endorse one's authentic self within the workplace can have a detrimental effect on one's mental health (Hall, 2012), and can inhibit the formation of authentic relationships in the workplace (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). The current findings support the idea that an organisation's climate for authentic self-expression constitutes 'inclusion'. In support, B.Singh et al. (2013) found that organisational climates which were supportive of diversity fostered psychological safety to express ethnic identity. The disparate experiences of the British Sikh women within this study suggest the role of organisations in either challenging or perpetuating systemic power structures.

4.7. The Workplace and 'Inequality Regimes'

The 'glass ceiling' metaphor has been used within the literature to account for the various limitations women experience which obstruct career advancement (Acker, 2006). Other variations of this metaphor have been used to capture the unique, and sometimes greater challenges faced by ethnic minority women in the workplace (Tan, 2008). Research has

emerged which supports this view. For example, Showunmi, et al. (2016) found ethnic minority women cited lack of networking opportunities, prevalence of stereotypes, and lack of assertiveness as barriers to leadership which uniquely impacted them due to the intersectionality between gender and ethnicity.

The term 'invisible ceiling' was aptly used by a participant within the current study to describe the unique challenges experienced as a British Sikh woman in the workplace. Lack of access to mentorship and coaching into senior positions, which were availed to White women, was cited amongst the reasons for difficulties in reaching more senior positions, in line with previous research findings (Showunmi et al., 2016). Literature on professional identity construction has highlighted how the development of a workplace identity differs for Black women when compared to White women (Smith & Nkomo, 2001). The construction of a professional identity further involves consideration of one's 'possible self', which refers to one's hopes and fantasies regarding who they could be in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Given that the construction of a 'possible self' involves making social comparisons between the self and others (Markus & Nurius, 1986), lack of access to ethnic minority role models may limit this process of making social comparisons, and therefore may limit one's ability to envision a 'possible self'. This could provide one explanation as to why the process of professional identity construction differs for ethnic minority women.

In Nina's account, lack of representation of ethnic minority women accounted for the 'invisible ceiling', making it seem futile and unrealistic that she would be able to progress to a senior position. It has been well established that British woman from 'BAME' backgrounds continue to be underrepresented within senior positions (Showunmi, in press), despite affirmative action initiatives. As illustrated within The Fawcett Society's (2020) Sex and Power report, there are no women of colour represented within the most senior positions of the Civil Service and BAME women constitute less than one per cent of university vice chancellors. British Sikh women, in addition to other ethnic minority women, may therefore not have the confidence to apply for senior positions due to the lack of role models within organisations signalling career ascension as a realistic and attainable goal.

This suggests that although diversity and inclusion initiatives may help ethnic minority women access employment, career advancement continues to present as a challenge. Indeed, the women in the study vocalised institutional barriers they felt precluded them

from career ascension. Nina, for instance, spoke of a hierarchy placing White men at the top, with White women coming second and 'British Sikh' women being positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy, which supports the 'double jeopardy' argument documented within intersectionality research (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) which suggests that ethnic minority women are doubly disadvantaged by their gender and ethnicity. Harpal expressed similar sentiments, and recollected experiences of not being afforded coaching opportunities availed to her White peers that would aid career ascension.

Kanter's (1977) seminal work on women in workplaces investigated how they were numerically fewer in number. They experienced high visibility, and therefore had pressure to be representative of all women. Interestingly, in line with Kanter's (1977) definition of tokenism, being under an increasing degree of scrutiny was also cited as an inhibiting factor. Harpal, who reported having felt under surveillance in the workplace, experienced the scrutiny as a deliberate act on the part of her White peers. Feeling under scrutiny, whilst not being recognised for one's achievements has been found to be an experience affecting both ethnic minority men and women in the workplace (e.g., Settles et al., 2019). Taken together, these findings highlight how racialised tokenism effects ethnic minority individuals at work. Interestingly, Harpal had experienced her version of the 'invisible ceiling' in female-dominated workplaces, which highlights how White women can also be complicit in perpetuating systems of power and oppression. This contrasts with conventional definitions of tokenism, which have broadly attributed experiences of tokenism to women being disadvantaged in male dominated professions (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014).

The role of White women in perpetuating systems of power and oppression has been documented within literature, highlighting how subtle behaviours instigated by White female leaders reinforce racist ideologies (Outlaw, 2021). The above finding highlights how the intersecting privilege of race and seniority coalesce. This intersecting privilege has implications in the context of the career ascension of women of colour, as those in a position of seniority can gatekeep access to workplace opportunities. Erskine and Bilimoria (2019) advocate for White women to become allies to afro-diasporic women, through interrogating White privilege and by extension, societal notions such as colour blindness which perpetuate systems of power and privilege within organisations. Erskine and Bilimoria (2019) assert that this requires critical self-reflexivity, with the agenda of creating equitability. Taken together, this highlights the need to examine intersectionality

through the lens of privilege (Atewologun & Sealy, 2014), with a focus on the intersections between identities affording power, and those which are marginalised.

Although some participants discussed barriers to career ascension which occurred as a function of their marginalised identities, other participants interestingly felt that no such barrier existed. Indeed, two of the participants expressed their ethnic identity as advantageous to their careers, referring to how affirmative action initiatives worked in their favour. Deepa, for example, reported being aware of the existence of barriers to opportunities though repeated that she herself, had never encountered said barriers. In the context of IPT (Breakwell, 1986), Deepa's distancing from experiences of discrimination could be conceived as a way in which she safeguards her 'Indian' ethnic identity from threats to self-esteem. In addition, Deepa reported that appraisal of one's ability supersedes discrimination which would otherwise limit career advancement.

The belief that one's ability can override discrimination demonstrates agency and represents an act of safeguarding the self-efficacy principle of identity (Vignoles et al., 2011). The concept of 'identity work' (Brown, 2017) is of relevance here, as it refers to the agentic deployment of strategies aimed at managing discrepancies between the self-concept (i.e., the way one wishes to be viewed) and the way in which one is viewed by the other. Proving one's ability in the workplace could therefore represent a way in which self-efficacy is exercised to manage how others view the self.

Interestingly, Gurleen spoke to the role of fate in her appraisal of her difficulty ascending within her career. Although she initially attributed the cause to discrimination, she later reappraised this belief and stated that it was ultimately a combination of God's will, timing, and experience that had factored into this initial difficulty. This highlights how a reduction in perceived self-efficacy, rather than high levels of self-efficacy were experienced as conducive to the self-concept, in line with previous research that has highlighted the role of external attributions in managing identity conflict (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). In the context of the workplace and career ascension, a reduction in self-efficacy and use of external attributions may safeguard self-esteem, in that career setbacks are less likely to be attributed to personal failures (i.e., internal causes such as one's capability). Having a moderate level of self-efficacy, where locus of control is attributed to both internal and external causes, therefore appears to be conducive to self-esteem for some individuals.

Contrary to previous research on Muslim women (Healy et al., 2011; Murray, 2016; Tariq & Syed, 2017), the participants in the current study did not report discrimination based

on the intersectionality between their religious and ethnic identities. There are several possible explanations for the divergent findings within this study. Firstly, literature on Muslim women has demonstrated that those wearing the *hijab* are more likely to experience Islamophobic discrimination than those who do not (Reeves et al., 2013). Most of the Sikh women in this study reported having 'invisible' religious identities, which may have reduced the likelihood of misidentification as Muslim and hence protected them from discrimination based on Islamophobia. Secondly, the Singhni Sikh women in the study wore turbans, which have previously been worn exclusively by male adherents of the Sikh faith (Gupta, 2016). Discrimination targeted towards Sikhs have been based on instances of misidentification post-9/11, predominantly towards men who wear the turban (Mahalingam, 2012; Phillips, 2020).

The invisibility of the Singhni Sikh identity, due to the non-prototypicality of a turbaned woman may have therefore safeguarded the women from Islamophobic discrimination. The intersectional invisibility afforded to the Singhni Sikh women in the study may have therefore given them an advantage in the workplace (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Smith et al., 2019). Importantly, the intersectionality between the Singhni Sikh women's religion, gender, and ethnicity did not preclude them from discrimination. Gurleen, for example recollected an experience where her work was deemed inadequate, whilst a White colleague had not been subjected to the same scrutiny. To decipher the cause for differential treatment, Gurleen underwent a process of elimination, querying whether it was her turban, or skin colour that she was being discriminated against for. In the context of intersectionality research, this highlights how individuals with multiple marginalised identities may delineate intersecting identities. Given that self-esteem encompasses one's desire to see oneself favourably (Stets & Burke, 2014) delineating ethnic and religious identities may have served as a way of protecting self-esteem attached to the centralised 'Singhni Sikh' identity. This finding also highlights how those with intersecting identities may disaggregate their identities, viewing them as mutually exclusive in identity threatening situations.

Research suggests that subtle, elusive forms of discrimination have become increasingly commonplace (Sue, et al., 2007). The term 'microaggressions' has been used to denote a taxonomy of behaviours, which take the form of subtle looks, snubs, or tones. (Sue et al., 2007). Gendered racialised microaggressions have been most frequently reported in relation to the experiences of Black women (e.g., Holder et al., 2015), whilst microaggressions based on the intersection between religion and gender have been

reported in the study of Muslim women (Tariq & Syed, 2017). In contrast to these findings, the participants in this study did not recount the experiences of gendered microaggressions or specific instances where their intersectional identities overtly hindered their career advancement. Rather, racialised microaggressions were reported, with the role of gender only being reported by one participant.

The elusiveness of racial microaggressions has meant that it has been difficult to define and operationalise as a construct. Lilienfeld (2017) recently criticised the widespread use of the term, calling for greater 'clarity and consensus to afford rigorous scientific investigation' (p. 140). Despite these criticisms, the harmful effects of experiencing microaggressions have been widely reported, linking microaggressions to depression (Ong et al., 2013), and even post-traumatic stress (Nadal et al., 2019). Nina, who spoke to her experiences of 'otherness' referred to the taxing process of modifying her behaviour to increase her level of inclusion and the exhausting process of working this out. Similarly, other participants vocalised the 'intangible' nature of microaggressions and discriminatory work practices. Jusjeet, for instance, referred to the experience of being given a more taxing workload than White peers, which she hypothesised to be because of the stereotypical assumption that South Asians are more 'robust'. As mentioned previously, Gurleen experienced her work being overlooked, and the work of White colleagues being commended, whilst at the same time being subjected to greater scrutiny than White peers.

Based on Sue et al.'s (2007) research, the encounters recollected by the British Sikh women in the current study can be defined as microaggression experiences. The elusiveness of microaggression experiences mean that targets are forced to expend psychological resource undertaking 'hypothesis testing' (Holder et al., 2015), and must then expend further energy in finding a way to respond. As found by Louis et al. (2016), the cognitively depleting nature of microaggression experiences can interfere with work performance. The experiences of British Sikh women in the study encountering microaggressions suggest that invisibility of one's achievements coupled with increased levels of scrutiny towards one's work is harmful to one's self-concept and sense of self-worth in the workplace. To date, most of the research on microaggressions has been confined to the study of African American populations (e.g., Holder et al., 2015), with little research being undertaken on South Asians, or Asians (Huang, 2021).

Nonetheless, literature has highlighted the negative implications of the 'model minority' myth, frequently associated with American Asians (Wong & Haglin, 2006) and British South Asians (Fernando & Kenny, 2018). Huang's (2021) qualitative study into the experiences of early in career Asian Americans found that microaggressions based on the stereotype of Asians as industrious and hardworking was experienced both positively and negatively. One participant for example, spoke of how she felt she was paid less money than White peers, despite doing similar work. Jusjeet similarly spoke of this in her narrative of workplace experiences, alluding to performative function of affirmative action initiatives in ensuring equal pay for all employees.

British Sikh women may therefore be negatively affected by the model minority stereotype, which may act as an elusive barrier to career advancement. As represented by the current findings, microaggression experiences range widely from experiences of ostracization to feeling that one's achievements are invisible. Such experiences could potentially obstruct career advancement, given that many roles rely on networking as a means of accessing promotion. Structural discrimination manifesting as microaggressions could be particularly harmful to career ascension, as British Sikh women may experience limited agency in challenging such assumptions due to their elusiveness.

4.8. Strategising for Survival: Behavioural and Intrapsychic Coping Strategies for Navigating the 'Invisible Ceiling' and 'Inequality Regimes'

The British Sikh in the women in this study adopted a variety of strategies to manage knowledge of the presence of discrimination, and the possibility that they could be subjected to it. Harpal, for example, expressed the need to have a considered plan to enable one to navigate the workplace as a British Sikh woman, though expressed that she had decided to withdraw, due to her depleted resilience in the face of repeated setbacks. Harpal used various metaphors and analogies, denoting the tenacity and resilience required to 'survive' in the workplace as a British Sikh woman. Other participants utilised intrapsychic means of coping, such as 'not going out looking for it', as described by Jusjeet, or compartmentalisation of knowledge regarding the presence of discrimination used by Raveena which allowed her to have the confidence to persevere within the workplace.

Huang (2021) found that early in career Asian Americans minimised the presence of microaggressions in their narratives, through dismissing such encounters as ignorant. Likewise, the compartmentalisation strategy used by Raveena speaks to the psychologically stressful experience of being aware of racism, and the prospect of being subjected to discrimination. Jusjeet's strategy of not seeking out discrimination similarly suggests the frequency of elusive forms of discrimination, that would readily be revealed if one were to 'look for it'. In returning to IPT theory, compartmentalisation of one's knowledge of the existence of discrimination and making the choice not to interpret social cues as discrimination can be viewed as an intrapsychic coping strategy of dealing with threats to self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as one's beliefs regarding their capability to perform (Bandura, 1994). Whilst previous quantitative research has highlighted individual traits as a greater determinant of job performance over self-efficacy (Judge et al., 2007), the interaction between one's intersectionality and the organisation's climate for diversity could play a critical role in one's perceived self-efficacy. As suggested by Raveena's narrative, conscious awareness of discrimination could potentially lead one to believe that they have little control over whether they are successful professionally.

Harpal's withdrawal highlights how exhausted she felt after putting herself forward for opportunities in the workplace, after having experienced ongoing discrimination throughout her career. This illustrates how for British Sikh women, the workplace could be particularly threatening to the self-concept. Harpal's narrative suggested that she had become resigned to accepting her lack of self-efficacy in the workplace, and to preserve her self-esteem, chose not to put herself forward for opportunities. Whilst previous research has highlighted the use of strategic invisibility as a way of assuming agency in the workplace (Smith et al., 2019), the current finding suggests that institutional inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) can be too powerful to overcome for those with marginalised intersecting identities. Repeated experiences of microaggressions inhibiting British Sikh women from advancing in their careers could thus be particularly harmful to the self-concept and may contribute to workplace attrition.

Sharandeep and Jusjeet's fear of being seen to 'play the race card' is further an example of minority stress, a term denoting the cumulative stress faced by stigmatised minority groups (Meyer, 2003). The phrase 'playing the race card' has been used to undermine the experiences of ethnic minority individuals by suggesting they can weaponize their ethnic identity to their advantage (Hirsch, 2020). As highlighted by McCluney and Rabelo (2019), those in a majority position have the power to stipulate the conditions of visibility

and invisibility within the organisational milieu. Occupying a relative position of power similarly gives one the ability to stipulate which actions are rendered discriminatory and which are not, as suggested by the term 'playing the race card'. The internalisation of this phrase by participants in this study exemplifies how the power disparity between the White majority and the British Sikh women in the study inhibited them from talking about elusive forms of discrimination. Remaining silent about instances of discrimination thus acted as a coping strategy, potentially as a way of circumventing potential costs associated with disclosure.

The behavioural and intrapsychic coping strategies used by the British Sikh women in the study attest to the exhausting experience of encountering the 'invisible ceiling' within the workplace. Repeated exposures to barriers toward career ascension culminated in reduced self-efficacy and depletion of resilience, leading to the deployment of withdrawal. Compartmentalisation of one's knowledge of discrimination or opting not to 'look for' discrimination was similarly deployed as a way of coping, through allowing participants to assume a sense of self-efficacy.

4.9. Implications for Counselling Psychology

This research has implications for counselling psychology practice. It illuminates how a seemingly homogenous population (i.e., British Sikhs) are in fact rather heterogenous in the way in which they demark their identities. In view of this research, counselling psychologists working with British Sikh women should be aware of the various challenges they may experience at the intersection of religion, ethnicity, and gender. As highlighted in this study, British Sikh women may centralise ethnic or religious identities, and may even conflate the two. Counselling psychologists working with British Sikh women should be aware of this, and work in ways that value their uniqueness and distinctiveness (see Table 3 below). This may be achieved through asking clients openly about how they choose to self-identify and the role their spiritual and cultural beliefs have in their lives. Having these conversations could help promote self-esteem and authentic self-expression.

Research suggests that White psychologists may experience discomfort and personal resistance in discussing race with clients in treatment, due to a fear of inadvertently saying something discriminatory (Ahsan, 2020). As highlighted within the current study,

experiences of invisibility, ostracization, and microaggressions are a reality for some British Sikh women. Exploration of these issues within therapy are crucial, given their psychological impact and relationship to work-related stress and self-esteem. Failure to openly discuss such issues could lead to the re-enactment of power dynamics, signifying to such clients that their experiences are unimportant. Intersectionality and dynamics of power should be considered in these discussions. Clients may not feel comfortable bringing these issues to therapy themselves and may be wary of elusive forms of discrimination being dismissed. Counselling psychologists must therefore adopt a reflexive approach to their work, interrogating their position of privilege (see Table 3 below for practitioner and workplace implications).

Table 3

Key Findings and Implications for Organisations and Counselling Psychology Practice

Key Finding	Organisational Implications	Implications for Counselling Psychology Practice
Perceived (structural) barriers to career ascension exist as a function of intersection between gender and ethnicity, including lack of role models limiting access to conception of a 'possible self' (Markus & Nirius, 1986).	• Increasing the numerical representation of ethnic minority women in leadership positions • Increasing access to female ethnic minority role models • Understanding how the workplace may be replicating systems of domination in society vis-à-vis unfair workplace practices and working to dismantle them. One of the ways this could be achieved is through managers interrogating their own privilege and working with key stakeholders to create a more equitable workplace.	• Exploring psychological impact of inherent systems of domination reflected in workplace practices • Psychologists introducing dialogue pertaining to difference and power in therapy; exploring systemic issues which implicate the lives of ethnic minority women
Distinctiveness needs play an important role for British Sikh women and can be met vis-à-vis group ethnic/religious identification. Need for individual-level distinctiveness can be satisfied through uniqueness in job role and professional identity.	• Recognising that South Asians, including Sikhs, may reject broad panethnic (Espiritu, 1992) labels. As such, individuals should address other employees in a way that they wish to be viewed. • Valuing the unique skills, attributes, and individual contributions of British Sikh women (and other ethnic minority women) • Recognising and addressing subtle behaviours rendering British Sikh women, and other ethnic minority women as hypervisible or invisible in the workplace (e.g., not recognising their achievements/ placing them under greater scrutiny).	• Fostering visibility experiences, as defined by Roberts (2005), within therapy. • Psychologists educating themselves about differences within broad social categories (such as 'BAME'). This includes becoming educated on historical legacies of marginalisation, cultural practices, and traditions. • Not making assumptions and asking clients how they view themselves in terms of their identities.

Identity coherence (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010) and continuity (Breakwell, 1986) are important psychological needs amongst British Sikh women. This involves having a sense of synergy between one's professional role identity and ethnic or religious identities.	• Recognising how 'non-work' identities, including religion and ethnicity may play a role for British Sikh women, and the need for synergy between professional and 'non-work' identities • Where required, making allowances to help increase coherence between non-work and professional identities (e.g., granting additional bereavement leave to accommodate cultural practices) • Valuing diversity, such that 'non-work' identities can be endorsed within the workplace, thereby promoting continuity	• Promoting authentic self-expression within therapy, through fostering a climate for safety. Where appropriate, this could be achieved through opening dialogues around identity, such as discussions regarding spiritual and religious beliefs.
The experience of 'otherness' brought about through experiences of ostracization are identity-threatening and can lead to reduced self-esteem. 'Belongingness' on the other hand enhances self-esteem and sense of social worth.	• Educating employees on the concept of microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) and how this is linked to ostracization amongst socially marginalised individuals. • Leaders (and employees) recognising and addressing their subtle behaviours that ostracise marginalised individuals, even if unintentional. • Mentorship of White individuals, to help foster an environment where privilege is interrogated. • Having White individuals as allies within organisations to challenge the status quo • Demonstrating inclusive behaviours, this includes choosing social activities that are not hegemonically Male, White, Christian, or heteronormative.	• Recognising the psychological impact of ostracism and the emotionally taxing process of 'hypothesis testing' and the potential impact on resilience • Recognising that clients may not feel comfortable to bring up experiences of microaggressions to White psychologists as they may anticipate this will be minimised. To foster a climate for safety, psychologists must demonstrate understanding of systems of domination within society. • In psychotherapeutic work, not inadvertently pathologizing experiences of ostracization/ microaggressions (e.g., as cognitive distortions within the CBT approach, or as projections within psychodynamic theory).

4.10. Limitations and Strengths

Notions of 'hypervisibility', 'invisibility', and 'visibility' have featured within literature exploring the experiences of Black women within the workplace (Buchanan & Settles, 2019; Dickens et al., 2019; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). As advocated by Buchanan and Settles (2019), more research is needed to determine the types of invisibility experienced by specific groups, what experiences they share, and why. This study extends recent research that has aimed to address the gap in the literature through focusing on the experiences of Asians (Huang, 2021) and studies which have examined the intersection between gender, ethnicity, and religion (Arifeen & Gatrell, 2020; Arifeen & Syed, 2019; Tariq & Syed, 2017). The intersectional invisibility of this group on a social level is reflected by the lacuna of research of British Sikh women in the workplace. This research addresses this lacuna; highlighting the utility of undertaking research on specific populations that are socially overlooked. The workplace is an important context for exploration of the lived experiences of British Sikh women, given that Sikhs have high rates of employment in Britain (British Sikh Report, 2019) and given the high proportion of British Sikh women who have obtained degree-level education (British Sikh Report, 2019).

Atewologun et al. (2016) highlight the need for intersectionality scholarship to place greater focus upon systemic issues implicating the lives of those at the intersection. The current research fulfils this commitment, through recognising how inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) impact the lives of British Sikh women within the workplace. In addition, through drawing upon the IPT model (Breakwell, 1986), the study gives a more nuanced understanding of the social conditions that impact upon the British Sikh women's experiences of the workplace. In doing so, the study extends the definition of organisational 'inclusiveness', conceptualised as the need for belongingness and distinctiveness (Shore et al., 2011), through highlighting the importance of an organisation's climate for authentic self-expression. The inability to enact one's self-concept was shown to thwart visibility and led to identity conflict. In addition to the principles outlined within the IPT model (Breakwell, 1986; Vignoles et al., 2002), authentic self-expression, and the need to be seen by the other in the way that mirrors the self-concept (Swann & Burhmester, 2012) therefore appears to be important.

From an analytical perspective, the use of IPA as a methodology has strengths over other methodologies, in that it allowed for an inductive, idiographic approach. Bowleg (2008)

advocates for a deductive approach toward interpretation, where the participant's narratives are immediately contextualised within the intersectionality framework. The current research did not adopt such an approach, which allowed for an openness towards the inner subjective worlds of the participants. It is my belief that this allowed for broader insight to be gleaned from the narratives.

Whilst this study has several strengths, there are also noteworthy limitations. Although the aim of the study was not to produce generalisable results per se, it is important to highlight the homogeneity of the participant group in terms of social class in the contextualisation of the findings. The participant group comprised of British Sikh women who worked within predominantly middle-class professions. Atewologun and Sealy (2014) advocate for the examination of privilege within intersectionality scholarship. As such, understanding how social class intersected with the participants' intersecting marginalised identities may have allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how this collectively factored into the experiences of the British Sikh women in this study.

It is acknowledged that there was considerable heterogeneity within the sample, as two of the participants were fully baptised 'Singhni' Sikhs, whilst other participants described their identity more in cultural terms. The age of participants also varied, and some participants identified as first or second-generation British Sikhs. As highlighted within the findings, the sub-groups contained within the sample expressed a difference in the type of experiences they had of the workplace. This was exemplified by visibility experiences reported by the Singhni Sikh women, where their distinctive physical appearance led to questions being asked about their religious beliefs. Smith et al. (2009) recommend the selection of a homogenous sample to allow for a contained analysis of the phenomenon in question. This is in line with the idiographic nature of IPA, with a central focus on making sense of individual experience through in-depth analysis to allow for similarities and differences to be gathered from the data (Smith, 2015). The heterogeneity of the sample could therefore be viewed as a limitation of this study. Future research could potentially explore the lived experiences of first- or second-generation Sikh women within a particular age range. Likewise, samples of religious or non-religious British Sikh women could be recruited as a homogenous sample within future research. This could provide a more nuanced understanding of the types of challenges experienced within these sub-groups.

Approximately half of the sample worked within corporate professions, which may indicate that issues expressed may disproportionately impact individuals within those specific occupational groups. Problems with inclusion and diversity disproportionately affect the field of STEM and higher education institutions, which is reflected in the amount of scholarly attention afforded to studying the experiences of those with marginalised identities within these fields (Bourabain, 2021; Dickens et al., 2020; Settles et al., 2019; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). In part, these problems could be attributable to ethnic minority individuals and women being numerically fewer in number within these fields (Kanter, 1977). Using more homogenised samples of British Sikh women working within specific occupations could thus illuminate inequality regimes and practices prevalent within different sectors.

Jaspal (2011) advocates for the delineation of ethnicity and religion within the study of South Asian populations, on the grounds that they can be clearly demarked. However, as highlighted within the current findings, a broad variation was seen amongst the sample in terms of the way in which they demarked ethnic and cultural boundaries. Two participants reported the centrality of the Sikh religion to their overall self-concept, despite limited religious observance. For some of the participants, boundaries between religion and ethnicity became infused in the participants' accounts, complicating the disaggregation of religion and culture in the interpretation of the findings. In line with previous literature, this highlights how distinctiveness needs may be poignant amongst British Sikh women (Jaspal, 2013).

4.11. Future Directions

The findings indicate that the nature of identity threat, whether this be interpersonal or intrapsychic, informs the type of coping strategy deployed. In addition, motivational principles appear to vary in their level of importance, with some principles being more primary, and others relegated or sacrificed. However, what remains unknown is why certain motivational principles are preferenced in this way. This could broaden our understanding regarding the decision to deploy specific coping strategies, which remains unknown (Pertriglieri, 2011). Some of the findings in this study suggest that individual differences may be responsible for the differential use of coping strategies. Whilst the qualitative design of this study allowed for a unique insight into the experiences of this under-researched population, quantitative methods could be used in the future to

establish the primacy of motivational principles, linking this to deployment of a specific coping strategy. Indeed, previous research has used quantitative approaches to measure salience of identity structures (Vignoles et al., 2002). More recently, the Identity Resilience Index (Breakwell et al., 2021) has been introduced to measure overall combined ratings of self-efficacy, self-esteem, continuity, and distinctiveness to assess level of identity resilience in response to identity threat. In future research, this measure could be used to predict identity resilience in response to workplace stressors, and subsequent utilisation of coping strategies. Positivist approaches, such as quantitative research methods could have utility in this regard.

Kanter (1977) proposed the term ‘tokenism’ to denote the practice of viewing minority group members within organisations as representatives of their category. In most of the experiences cited by the participants, they constituted the small minority of individuals within their respective organisations. Kanter (1977) historically proposed that the way to combat the harmful effects of tokenism, such as issues around visibility and hypervisibility, was to numerically increase the proportion of women within male-dominated professions. The current findings suggest that increasing representation of ethnic minority women in senior positions in the workplace may enable British Sikh women to envision themselves as leaders and may additionally allow them access to mentors to aid career ascension. In support, Holder et al. (2015) previously found that Black women who had mentorship from other Black women felt empowered and validated, highlighting the utility in mentorship from women of a similar ethnic background.

As illustrated within the current findings, this however only constitutes a partial solution to a somewhat complex problem. The ‘Singhni Sikh’ women in the study were not only tokens in their respective organisations but constituted a small proportion of society and of the Sikh population in general (British Sikh Report, 2018). Both participants recounted inclusive practices engendering a sense of belongingness and acceptance within their respective organisations. This finding helps to define ‘inclusion’ (Shore et al. 2011) to allow for its operationalisation within organisations. Organisations seeking to promote inclusion and diversity must therefore not only increase the numerical representation of ethnic minority women but must also attend to what Acker (2006) refers to as ‘inequality regimes’ that exclude people from ethnic minority backgrounds (see Table 3 above for recommendations for organisations). Given that subtle, more elusive forms of discrimination are more commonplace (Sue et al., 2007), as cited amongst participants

in the current study, eradicating them may be challenging within the work context due to their intangibility. Providing training within organisations on what microaggressions are, with education on their harmful effects, may help to legitimise the experiences of ethnic minority individuals who experience them. As highlighted by Erskine and Bilimoria (2019), to promote inclusivity, White women are required as allies to challenge the status quo at an organisational level. In addition to safe forums in which British Sikh women and other ethnic minority women can openly discuss organisational issues, a forum which includes those in positions of privilege would be advantageous to increasing inclusivity within organisations. Mentorship of White individuals and promoting reflexive awareness of privilege could be one possible avenue through which this could be achieved. An overview of organisational implications of the extant findings are summarised in Table 3 above.

4.12. Conclusion

The utility in understanding the lived experiences of specific populations with multiple marginalised identities is highlighted, in order to give voice to populations that are hidden and socially 'invisible'. The current research offers valuable contributions to intersectionality scholarship and the study of British South Asian women in the workplace. The findings illustrate how British Sikh women agentically negotiate their identities, and how intrapsychic and relational needs lead to identity renegotiation in the workplace. The socially driven nature of identity is highlighted, such that an inability to be seen fully and accurately by the other (Roberts, 2005) contravened the experience of visibility. Other motivational needs such as self-esteem, belongingness and self-efficacy played a role in the experiences of the British Sikh women in the study. Organisational climates for diversity and the presence of inequality regimes (Acker, 2006), including microaggression experiences had an impact on the participants' sense of self.

Intersectionality scholarship must begin to disaggregate broad ethnic groups, to gain a nuanced understanding of how the workplace is experienced by different groups at the intersection. In doing so, intersectionality scholarship can help to illuminate and dismantle engrained systems of power and oppression effect specific populations.

4.13. Post Reflexivity

Goldspink and Engward (2019) refer to the reflexive 'echoes' which resound for researchers during the interpretive process, with some experiences resounding as distal murmurs, and others resounding more loudly; resonating more closely with the researcher's personal experiences. As a working British Sikh woman, this research is close to my heart and I felt committed towards giving voice to other Sikhs, which I recognised was driven by my need to illuminate experiences that were negative and discriminatory to improve workplace practices. I reflected on this, and became more attuned to positive narratives, which were highly moving and gave me a sense of hope that inclusion exists in practice. This was poignant to me when I heard the narratives of the Singhni Sikh women, who recollected experiences of being valued and imparting knowledge on the Sikh identity.

I was struck, however, by how some of the negative experiences resonated with me; resounding loudly with my own experiences of the workplace. I felt myself at times assuming an 'outsider' empirical view of their accounts- trying to consider whether participants were misattributing other causes of ostracization and feelings of invisibility to discrimination. I realised that this was partly my own defensive reaction; I did not want to *see* these experiences for what they were. The hypothesis-testing process reported by participants felt all too familiar to me. I reflected on this, processing why I wanted to create this distance through diarising my thoughts and feelings. I felt relieved when I acknowledged that I could give a name to my own painful experiences, which further gave me the ability to see my participants' experiences, so I could make sense of them making sense of their world.

Doing this research has increased my self-awareness and has led me to become more attuned to the subtle dynamics of power and oppression that play a role in my identity as a soon to be qualified counselling psychologist. In doing so, I have reflected on my own privilege which came to my awareness over the course of this research. I realised that my research question, for example, did not consider minoritised sexual identity, which highlights my heterosexual privilege. I have thought about how I can foster a climate for safety within therapy for my clients, particularly those with multiple marginalised identities who are socially in a less privileged position to me. In doing this research, I have learned how powerful the experience of being seen, heard, and understood is to the self; how it can foster safety to allow for authentic self-expression and visibility.

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Appendix A

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

What is it Like to be a British Sikh Woman in the Workplace?

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study exploring British Sikh women's experiences at work.

Your participation would involve attending an interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes with me, at City University, London or within a quiet confidential place that is convenient for you.

All interviews are confidential, and your participation will remain completely anonymous.

If you would like more information, or would like to take part, please contact:

Navneet Sangha (researcher): [redacted] or

Dr Martina Gerada (research supervisor): [redacted]

This study has been reviewed and received clearance by the City University, London Research Ethics Committee. If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on 020 7040 3040. Alternatively you can contact them via email: [redacted]

Appendix B: Screening Protocol

Thank you for your interest in taking part in the study. This is just a quick for us to talk about the study and run through some questions to make sure that you would like to still take part. It is also to make sure that you would be a good fit for the study. Is now still a good time to speak?

1. The first question I wanted to ask was about whether you would identify as being a British Sikh woman?

If yes, then move onto the next question. If the answer is 'no':

'I am really sorry but because this study is interested in the experiences of British Sikh women, you wouldn't meet the criteria at this point. I appreciate your interest in taking part at this stage and I am sorry we are unable to continue'

2. The study is interested in looking at experiences of British Sikh women at work, and as such, I am looking to recruit working women into the study. Are you working at the moment?

If yes, move onto '3', if no:

'I am really sorry but as this study is focused on experiences of British Sikh women who are currently working so you would not meet the criteria for the study. I appreciate your interest in taking part and I am sorry we are unable to continue.'

3. The study will involve talking through personal experiences. As part of my role of researcher, it is important that I make sure that you feel safe enough to do this. Part of my role is therefore to make sure as much as possible that you are not likely to be negatively affected by what we talk about. Some of the following questions might seem personal, but they are just being asked to make sure that you would still be suitable for the study.
    a. Do you have a diagnosis of a serious mental health condition? *If the client is unsure, give examples.*
    b. Have you experienced any suicidal thoughts over the past two weeks?

If the answer is no, continue to '4'. If the answer is yes to either of these items:

As I mentioned before, I have a responsibility to make sure all participants feel safe and part of this is through making sure as much as possible that anyone taking part isn't likely to be negatively impacted by what is discussed. For this reason, you would not be suitable for the purposes of this study. I would like to thank you for your interest in taking part and let you know about services that you can contact for emotional support. I would like to email a list of useful services to you, would that be okay?

4. Thanks for answering my questions, it looks like you would be a good fit for the study. Would you still like to take part?

If yes, continue to '5'. If the answer is no:

Okay thanks for letting me know. Thank you for your interest and taking out the time to speak with me.

5. That's great, thank you for agreeing to take part. As mentioned on the flyer, I am interested in learning about the experiences of British Sikh women in the workplace. Your participation will involve taking part in an individual interview lasting between 60-90 minutes in a secure location that is convenient for you. Does this sound okay?

If yes, continue to '6'. If the answer is no:

Okay I understand, thank you for letting me know. Thank you for taking out this time to speak with me.

6. Thanks for agreeing to take part. Can we arrange a place and time to meet?

7. That is great. I will send you some more information on the study via email so that you can read through it before we meet, and I will confirm the date and time of our meeting in that email too. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Title of study: What is it like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace?

You have been invited to take part in a research study. It is important that you read this information sheet before you decide to take part in the study, so that you are aware of why the research is being done and what your role would be within it. Please take time to read this information sheet and feel free to ask us if there is anything that is not clear, or if you feel you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore British Sikh women's experiences within the workplace. The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of your lived experience. The study forms part of a thesis for the Counselling Psychology Doctorate at City University and will take 2 years to complete.

Why have I been invited to take part?

The study is aimed at capturing the experiences of British Sikh women within the workplace. Working British Sikh women who identify religiously and culturally as Sikh have therefore been asked if they would like to take part. Please be aware that choosing or not choosing to take part will have no effect on your employment prospects.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You also have the right to decline answering questions that you feel are too personal or intrusive. Your withdrawal from the study will have no impact on you or your rights in the future. If you do decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you do decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw up to the stage of data analysis.

What will happen if I take part?

The researcher will arrange a time to speak with you to do the study and you will be asked to read and sign a consent form.

The study will involve participation in an individual semi-structured interview which will last from 60 to 90 minutes. Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions on movement, all interviews will take place over Zoom or Skype. The interview will be audio recorded.

The researcher will ask you the research questions about your experiences related to the research topic in lay friendly language and you will be debriefed on the study once you have completed the interview.

The data collected will be analysed using an approach called Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which focuses on people's lived individual experiences.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Given the nature of the study, the interview may lead you to touch on sensitive topics that you may find difficult to talk about. You may find it helpful to talk to someone you trust about how you feel. If you do take part, an information pack containing details of relevant support organisations will be given to you after the interview. If you do choose to take part and find any of the issues discussed upsetting, you can stop the interview at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your participation in the study can help Psychologists work with and understand specific needs of working women who belong to the Sikh community.

Expenses and Payments

Unfortunately, we are unable to offer any reward for participation or reimbursement for any travel costs incurred.

Conflicts of interests

The researcher has reported no conflicts of interest.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to take part in the study, please contact the researcher to confirm your interest in taking part. The researcher's details are included below:

Name: Navneet Sangha

Email: [redacted]

Data privacy statement

City, University of London is the sponsor and the data controller of this study based in the United Kingdom. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The legal basis under which your data will be processed is City's public task.

Your right to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in a specific way so that the research is reliable and accurate. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal-identifiable information possible (for further information please see https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/public-task/).

City will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study as necessary. If you wish to receive the results of the study, your contact details will also be kept for this purpose. The only people at City who will have access to your identifiable information will be Navneet Sangha, the researcher.

You can find out more about how City handles data by visiting https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal. If you are concerned about how we have processed your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (IOC) https://ico.org.uk/.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

The researcher will be the only individual who has access to any identifiable information about you. During the write up of the study, all personal data will be anonymised. Recordings will be stored on an encrypted, password protected memory stick. Records of the study will be kept for a maximum time of 10 years at City University and will then be destroyed. Information given in the study will be kept confidential. However, any reporting of violence, abuse, self-inflicted harm or harm to others will have to be reported in the interest of protecting you and others.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be used to compile a thesis dissertation and could potentially be submitted for publication in a journal in the future. In addition, direct quotes from the interviews may be used in the write up of the study and the data from the study may be used in future research papers. Please be aware that the data will only be used in studies which have been granted ethical approval. Anonymity of participant data will be maintained. You can request to receive a summary of the results by writing your email address on your consent form which will be given to you before you start the study.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City, University of London Research Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns, or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: What is it like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace?

You can also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg
Research Integrity Manager

City, University of London, Northampton Square
London, EC1V 0HB

Email: [redacted]

Further information and contact details

For any further queries please contact Dr. Martina Gerada:

Email: [redacted]

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Title of study: What is it like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace?

Please initial box

1	I agree to take part in the above City, University of London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet which I may keep for my own records. I understand my participation will involve: • Being interviewed by the researcher • Allowing the interview to be audiotaped	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can choose not to take part in the project. I understand I will be able to withdraw my data at any point until data analysis has occurred without being penalized or disadvantaged.	
3.	I understand that the information will be held and processed for the following purposes: • Doctoral Psychology thesis • Possible future publication • Possible dissemination of findings at research conferences I understand that any information I provide is confidential and that no identifiable information will be contained within the project or reports on the project, or to any third party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation. I understand that direct quotes may be used within the study. I understand that my name will be substituted by a pseudonym to protect my anonymity. Any other identifiable information, including names, places and dates will also be changed to protect my identity.	
4.	I agree to City recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) explained in the participant information and my consent is conditional on City	

	complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
5.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

Please provide your email address below if you would like to receive a summary of the study once it has been completed:

Email: ……..

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me a little bit about what made you decide to take part in the study?

2. How would you describe yourself in terms of your identity?

3. In your experience, what does it mean to you to be a British Sikh woman? *What thoughts/images come to mind when you think about being a British Sikh woman?*

4. How has being a British Sikh woman played a role in your life so far?

5. How do you feel your British Sikh identity is viewed in the workplace?

6. Can you tell me a bit more about your experience of being a British Sikh woman in your workplace?

7. Have there been any positive aspects to being a British Sikh woman in the workplace?

8. Have you experienced any challenges in being a British Sikh woman at work?

9. Do you feel that being a British Sikh woman has impacted your access to opportunities at work? If so, can you explain how you feel it has impacted you?
10. Is there anything you feel is important to add?

Prompts:

How did you feel at the time?

How do you feel that experience has affected you now?

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Appendix F: Debrief Form

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

What is it like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace?

Debrief information

Thank you for taking part in the above study. Your contribution is deeply appreciated. We would like to take this opportunity to give you some information about what the purpose of the study is.

The research aims to explore the experiences of British Sikh women at work. Currently, there is limited research on British Sikhs and no research specifically investigating the experiences of British Sikh women in the workplace. This topical area is important as existing research suggests British South Asian women may experience conflict between western and eastern values, particularly in multicultural contexts. In addition, British Sikh women may feel that their identity negatively impacts their satisfaction at work and overall sense of wellbeing. This research can provide an insight into how such issues are managed and overcome by British Sikh women and can help raise awareness of how British Sikh women's needs can be best supported. Raising this awareness can help to provide culturally sensitive mental health services that are tailored to the specific needs of British Sikh women. Within occupational contexts, the research could help to foster the development of more inclusive work practices through harnessing an awareness of the issues impacting British Sikh women.

If you feel affected by any of the themes explored during the interview and would like to talk to someone who will listen non-judgementally, the Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123. You have also been provided with an information pack containing details of specialist services you can approach for further support.

We would like to thank you once again for taking part. If you have any further questions about the study, or would like to know more please do not hesitate to contact either of us on:

[redacted]

Appendix G: Information Pack

The Samaritans
Tel: 116 123
This is a helpline that offers non-judgmental listening support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Crisis Teams
Coventry: 024 7696 1111
West London Crisis Team: 0300 1234 244

These are numbers that can be contacted within each area for support in a crisis.

SANEline
Tel: 0300 304 7000.
SANEline is an out of hours confidential listening service that offers emotional support and guidance to anyone affected by mental health problems.

Asian Family Counselling Service
Tel: 020 8574 0912 (London), 0121 454 1130 (Birmingham)
Email: afcs@btconnect.com
Address: 4, Triangle Centre, 399 Uxbridge Rd, Southall UB1 3EJ and 1 Hampton Court, George Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 1PU
This is a service based in Southall, London and Birmingham areas offering culturally sensitive counselling support to those of South Asian origin.

Tamarind Centre
Harp Place, 2 Sandy Lane, Coventry CV1 4DY
Tel. 024 76227712 or 024 76225512
Email: info@tamarindcentre.co.uk
Website: www.tamarindcentre.co.uk/index.html
This service offers counseling for individuals with mental health problems from African Carribean and South Asian backgrounds.

South London Family Centre
Tel. 0207 8409020
Lines open: Mon to Fri 10am to 4pm
E-mail: southlondonfamily@yahoo.co.uk
Website: www.southlondonfamilycentre.org.uk/index.html
Address: 1 Othello Close, Kennington London SE11 4RE
Family mediation and counselling

Qalb Centre
Tel. 020 8521 5223
Email: theqalbcentre@hotmail.com
Address: Low Hall Lane, Walthamstow, London, E17 8BE
This service offers counselling and complementary therapies for Asian, African and African Caribbean people with emotional problems, difficulties with domestic violence and alcohol.

Tulip Mental Health Group
5 River Park Road, London, N22 7TB
Tel. 020 8889 6921
Email: info@tulip.org.uk
Web: www.tulip.org.uk/index.html
Tulip works with clients experiencing mental health needs ranging from emotional distress to severe and enduring mental health problems. The vulnerable groups served include women, refugees, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups and clients with a dual diagnosis.

City Sikhs
Website: www.citysikhs.org
City Sikhs is a voluntary organisation which runs career-related events for working professionals.

Appendix H: Worked Transcript for 'Amrit'

It's probably something that like I don't really want to like erm admit myself too…it's only because like obviously me like I obviously say that I'm Sikh and I know about the religion and stuff… I'm not a practicing Sikh

Okay

Whenever people learn about Sikhism it's about the turban, don't cut hair, like don't drink, don't eat meat

Yeah

And like for me, because I'm not a practicing Sikh…maybe in like the way in the workplace…the way I'm viewed maybe I won't be taken seriously

Yeah

They'll just be like oh well, I mean like doesn't your religion say this and you're not even doing that

Right

And obviously that's quite a big thing like cutting your hair and not wearing a turban and stuff and drinking and stuff so maybe like I would feel yeah…I'd be a bit…not scared but like erm but I would feel I am not really representing the religion

Okay

If that makes sense?

Yeah, yeah…and I'm just wondering with regards to your erm identity….you know it sounds like being a British Sikh woman has played a role in your life, a significant role…but I'm just wondering have there been any positive aspects to being a British Sikh woman in the workplace specifically?

I would say…not really…I can't really now…the only positive thing I can think of, is erm being able to identify myself as a British Sikh woman and then like when like other people are Sikh aswell (laughs)l…and I'm just like ah someone else...look a friend! Like

Yeah

I wouldn't…Like I said before, there's nothing really like …there's nothing like positive

Mmm

I feel like it's more about like for example if you asked oh if you identified as like a British Indian would it be something positive? Maybe then coz I'd just be like oh yeah…but like specifically being Sikh, erm I would say that the only positive I can think of is erm is that like I guess is for myself like I feel proud that I'm British Sikh company in a big company

Mmm

Like I'm here like you know doing my part…and like…. representing…and I'm making sure that there's another Sikh here

Mmm

So I guess that's a positive for me, that's the way like I feel

Mmm

And like …there's not really been a time where like something's happened in the workplace…like something good and it's because I'm specifically British Sikh

Right I see

If that makes sense

Yeah, no that does…and I wonder, Amrit, coming from the flip side, have there been, do you think have you experienced any challenges in being a British Sikh woman at work?

Erm…erm…In terms of challenges erm I think that…this is so weird to say but I think the biggest challenge is that…for example I'll tell you a story yeah

Sure

One time, so we were at a like erm…so for work we had to go for a day where we had presentations and stuff

Yeah

And we had people that were external from the company come in

Yeah

And were talking so like doing presentations and one of the people that were presenting was a person wearing a turban

Okay

He was quite old…he was quite old he was wearing a turban…he was obviously a Sikh yeh right…and then like I don't know why…and he kind of had like an accent aswell

Yeah

And then like I don't know why…but I just felt like…so it's so bad to say…but like I felt not uncomfortable…but I just felt really like uneasy

Mmm

Not uneasy because of him…I just felt scared for him…I was like oh my god…I don't know why…but in my head I was like oh my god what if people are like I dunno what if people are like you know judging him like secretly or something

Yeah

And I was feeling uneasy…I was like omg…I was just like in my head I was like yeah well done…keep going (speaking as though she motivating/ feeling proud) don't worry, it's fine, be confident

Yeah

I just felt like really uneasy…I was like oh my god, what if people don't understand him? What if people don't, you know like there's a turban on his head…what if people are thinking cer-, obviously he had a big, a proper big turban

Yeah

Appendix I: Table of Emergent Themes and Quotations for 'Amrit'

Emergent themes	Quotations with line number in transcript
Being 'Sikh' outside work, and Indian at work	*'So like I guess in a weird way I've kind of kept the British part, kind of lost the South Asian part and I've still kept the Sikh part and that's what I identify myself as'* ***(292-293)*** *'Yeah erm I guess when I'm literally thinking back on it, I think I'm viewed more as Indian but for example if the workplace ever had events or if the workplace ever done anything which was like Sikh related then I would obviously support those events and go to those events then maybe then I would be viewed more as Sikh'* ***(363-369)*** *'So from that perspective…I just feel like I'm not really Sikh in my workplace, I'm more Indian in my workplace (says 'Indian' with emphasis)'* ***(922-923)*** *I guess like not…I don't really put it out there that I'm Sikh in the workplace and then I guess erm not many people know as well '* ***(246-250)***
Being distinct and indistinct	*'I guess in like some way, I've kind of erm like… separated myself from like the other South Asians because I know like… being Sikh was just like kind of like drilled, not drilled, but coz it was just a huge part of me… I guess it's weird because some people would think the South Asian community are like one community, but I'd be like no I'm like British Sikh'* ***(281-290)*** *'Because of the whole turban thing, like erm that's such a difference in the South Asian community that Sikhs wear a turban and so I just wanted people to know like I'm Sikh…that I come from that bit yeah…and I also think…I think that's probably why I identify…that's why I would say…because I'm proud and I guess because of community and he family and everyone Identify us as Sikh…and obviously I wear a erm steel erm bangle which is like one of the things a Sikh has to wear for people to know that they're a Sikh so because obviously I'm there wearing it…and I feel so proud wearing it as well I'm like yeah I'm Sikh so-'* ***(311-324)*** *'Especially in a big corporate company or whatever, we're not really seen…unless we're wearing a turban…we're not really seen as Sikh, we're not really identified, there's not much going on for Sikhs'* ***(817-820)***
Lack of identification of Sikh identity in the workplace	*'For example, if I got like a monthly like BAME newsletter and the March April had about Sikhs in it then like I think if I like actually received that in my mail then I would probably talk more about it'* ***(460-467)***

	'If something official was sent out or something like…just something there, even it's a picture of like a khanda like we don't even have that…a symbol of a khanda anywhere…so whenever I think of religious symbols, no-one even knows about the khanda at all so from that point I'm like oh my god, I have to explain that you don't even know the religious symbol…' ***(522-523)*** *'I'm Indian, yeah I'm South Asian but like you know everyone knows about the Muslims and the Hindus, but Sikhs are here as well, like we might be little, but we're here as well'* ***(679-684)*** *'I just feel like if I'm working in like a big corporate company…I just feel like…why…I guess it makes me feel a bit like okay but like why are they not recognising Sikhs? Like you're a big corporate company you know…like we live in multicultural Britain, people do know who Sikhs are…so like why are not you even not having one little paragraph in like your BAME newsletter for like Sikh people?'* ***(686-690)***
Keeping identity hidden to cope with pressure to explain Sikh identity	*'They see everyone as South Asian So like me even cutting that down a little bit more and saying oh no actually In- Indian, I guess that cuts it down a lot and for me to say I'm Sikh from like Punjab that's cutting it down even more you know lets avoid all of that, let's just keep it to Indian' (159-165)*
Being a prototypical Sikh and representing	*'Whenever people learn about Sikhism it's about the turban, don't cut hair, like don't drink, don't eat meat And like for me, because I'm not a practicing Sikh…maybe in like the way in the workplace…the way I'm viewed maybe I won't be taken seriously They'll just be like oh well, I mean like doesn't your religion say this and you're not even doing that And obviously that's quite a big thing like cutting your hair and not wearing a turban and stuff and drinking and stuff so maybe like I would feel yeah…I'd be a bit…not scared but like erm but I would feel I am not really representing the religion'* ***(533-547)***
Fear of being asked too many questions about Sikh identity	*'I just think that like oh yeah I'm in a corporate environment, like you have to be like professional and like you just you know I just think like people there are very like, if I tell people I'm Sikh and this is what we've done, maybe they'll start asking like so many questions…I might just feel a bit like you know trapped in a corner'* ***(763-766)***
Acceptance of Sikhs by the White community in Britain	*'I think most Sikhs they feel quite proud whenever those stats are released and whenever those…it's funny because whenever stuff like that is released and like you always have people that are like White British say this is why we love the Sikh community, and we feel like a bit validated from that don't we? '* ***(834-838)***
Feeling validated	*'When I'm thinking about it, in like…in the workplace if I'm telling someone about like Sikh…like what is a Sikh blah blah…I would probably without even knowing, just add in that like oh yeah the stats*

	show that Sikhs happen to have the most businesses and like you know we're really hard working and we own more houses than any other religion I'd probably just throw that in…when I think about why…it would probably be just like….yeah and…like look at us, we're actually doing good, look at us you know make us feel like validated' ***(800-812)***
Experiencing community connection	*'Whenever I see a person with a turban I'm like oh my god a Sikh person! That's like the same now…whenever I like whenever I see someone else that's Sikh I'm like oh my god it's like a Sikh person! It's like that instant connection'* ***(409-412)***
Experiencing community responsibility	*'I don't know why…but in my head I was like oh my god what if people are like I dunno what if people are like you know judging him like secretly or something and I was feeling uneasy…I was like omg…I was just like in my head I was like yeah well done…keep going (speaking as though she motivating/ feeling proud) don't worry, it's fine, be confident I just felt like really uneasy…I was like oh my god, what if people don't understand him? What if people don't, you know like there's a turban on his head…what if people are thinking cer-, obviously he had a big, a proper big turban'* ***(585-603)*** *'And I was like…what if people are secretly like judging him or like just a bit confused about his turban or like just because you know maybe he's wearing a turban, maybe people aren't taking him seriously enough and like it's so weird that I felt that…coz like…I was like oh my god that's so like…I've never felt like that before because obviously when I'm usually around Sikh people it's like people my age, everyone's pretty confident or whatever or we're not in a corporate work environment We're just like chilling, it's fine but like that was the first time…it was obviously like my first like proper corporate job And that was the first time…like it was just so weird, I don't know why I felt like that for'* ***(605-616)***
Pride as a British Sikh	*''Yeah I think erm it's obviously because like it is my religion so erm that's what I obviously identify myself as…and I think it's because the Sikh community they're quite proud and they're quite like strong'* ***(298-300)***
Britain as 'home'	*'Coz my grandad always said to me yeah Britain's my home like I came here, you know I've lived here and blah blah I have a job here so erm so and then I think and that obviously got passed down to my mum and my mum just passed that onto me like she always thinks of herself as British and I think of myself as British and erm in terms of how it's like played a role well I guess like in terms of because like I see myself as British I don't really feel like an outcast anywhere'* ***(180-196)***

	'And it's really weird to me because I'm like grandad you used to get racially abused! but he's like yeah, that happened, that happened, but like I was able to work and make money here so, so like I was just like oh okay…so I guess erm that's why like maybe that's why I like identify with it so much' ***(250-254)***

Appendix J: Table of Emergent Themes, Subthemes, and Superordinate Themes for 'Amrit'

Superordinate Theme	Subthemes	Emergent Themes
Visibility and invisibility	Visible and invisible identity	• Being 'Sikh' outside work, and 'Indian' in work • Being distinct and indistinct • Lack of identification of Sikh identity within the workplace
	Pressure to explain 'Sikh' identity	• Fear of being asked too many questions (about Sikh identity) • Keeping identity hidden to cope with pressure to explain Sikh identity • Being a prototypical Sikh and representing
Meaning of identity	Personal meaning of identities	• Britain as 'home' • Pride as a British Sikh
Acceptance and belonging	External acceptance and validation	• Acceptance of Sikhs by the White community in Britain • Being validated
	Belongingness in the Sikh community	• Experiencing community responsibility • Experiencing community connection

Appendix K: Master table

Superordinate themes	Subthemes	Quotation
The Self: Identity Meaning and Negotiation Outside the Workplace	**Being 'Sikh' British and 'Punjabi'**	*'I see myself as British I don't really feel like an outcast anywhere' (Amrit, p. 6)* *'My mother land is India even though I would never want to live there, my mother land is India because I see myself as Indian' (Harpal, p.9).* *'That's definitely the British side…yeah hundred percent there are a lot of privileges that come with it (Raveena, p.33)*
	Negotiating the Boundaries of Intersectional Identity	*'I feel like Punjabi culture's very…let's have chicken and whisky! (laughs) I don't know how much Sikhism would condone that' (Nina, p.3).* *'Being an Amritdhari like, staying intact with Sikhi, we've got a lot of erm rules, if want to call it a code of conduct that we've got to follow and being in a…being in a country where you know, a western country where you've got a lot of modernisation here you know, it's challenging' (Gurleen, p.4)*
Being With Others in the Workplace	**'Layered Distinctiveness'**	*'I think they just see a brown face, and they don't really know what I'm about, what I'd be interested in, what I believe, and I think sometimes that, that puts up a barrier for people, I feel like' (Nina, p.19).*

		'I don't really put it out there that I'm Sikh in the workplace and then I guess erm not many people know as well' (Amrit, p.10) *'You can't just identify someone by an article of clothing or a head covering or anything like that…erm I am still a person at the end of the day, as proud as I am of my turban' (Raveena, p. 25)*
	Belongingness vs Otherness	*I felt like the lady who was running the course was a lot more vocal and friendly with everyone else there apart from me' (Nina, p.5)* *'Whenever I see someone else that's Sikh I'm like oh my god it's like a Sikh person! It's like that instant connection' (Amrit, p.12)* *'They can almost understand your pain sometimes erm so say if you've got your in-law issues you know' (Harpal, p.23)*
	Sameness vs Difference	*'My managers there were two Punjabi men but I felt like erm…I don't feel like they kept a professional relationship with me' (Sharandeep, p.7)* *'The expectations I think, they don't, I suppose they're not aware of the expectations that we have that are very different to their own so erm we've a lot more to contend with in that respect' (Jusjeet, p. 22)*
Working Out and Managing Experiences of Discrimination	**The 'Invisible Ceiling'**	*'You almost feel like you've got the White males, you've got the White women and then you've got the diversity issue underneath which you still have to work your way up*

		first before you even hit that piece of being a British Sikh woman' (Nina, p.12). *'I wouldn't really say that I'm viewed any differently erm coz it's a lot based on like performance' (Deepa, p.7)*
	Is it Because I'm 'Brown'?	*'I thought what is it because I'm the only brown person? That's the only logical explanation I can have in my head' (Nina, p.19).* *'Is it coz I'm brown? Is it because I've got a turban on my head? You know, what is it?' (Gurleen, p.17).* *'Like for example, they talk about ticking boxes…about you know, erm erm sort of fair pay and erm and all that kind of crap It's not like that…it's difficult actually, it's not as tangible to grab hold of' (Jusjeet, p.24).*
	Coping and Strategising for Survival	*'I just didn't feel comfortable, because I didn't want people to think that I was erm making a big deal out of nothing or playing the race card, I just didn't wanna, you know? Just in case I'd have to be like put into a room with her or something' (Sharandeep, p.5)* *'I think at work, I don't go in looking for it, I don't go in thinking about it' (Jusjeet, p. 27)*

Appendix L: City, University of London Ethical Approval

Dear Navneet

Reference: ETH1920-0156

Project title: What is it like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace?

Start date: 2 Mar 2020

End date: 1 Oct 2021

I am writing to you to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted formal approval from the Psychology committee: medium risk. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. You are now free to start recruitment.

The approval was given with the following conditions:

- please remove all track changes from the participant facing information

Please ensure that you are familiar with City's Framework for Good Practice in Research and any appropriate Departmental/School guidelines, as well as applicable external relevant policies.

Please note the following:

Project amendments/extension

You will need to submit an amendment or request an extension if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research project:

- Change or add a new category of participants;
- Change or add researchers involved in the project, including PI and supervisor;
- Change to the sponsorship/collaboration;
- Add a new or change a territory for international projects;
- Change the procedures undertaken by participants, including any change relating to the safety or physical or mental integrity of research participants, or to the risk/benefit assessment for the project or collecting additional types of data from research participants;
- Change the design and/or methodology of the study, including changing or adding a new research method and/or research instrument;
- Change project documentation such as protocol, participant information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, letters of invitation, information sheets for relatives or carers;
- Change to the insurance or indemnity arrangements for the project;
- Change the end date of the project.

Adverse events or untoward incidents

You will need to submit an Adverse Events or Untoward Incidents report in the event of any of the following:

a) Adverse events

b) Breaches of confidentiality

c) Safeguarding issues relating to children or vulnerable adults

d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher

Issues a) and b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than five days after the event. Issues c) and d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of the Psychology committee: medium risk, I do hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

Tina Forster

Psychology committee: medium risk

City, University of London

Appendix M: City, University of London Ethical Approval for Amendments

Dear Navneet

Reference: ETH1920-1311

Project title: What is it like to be a British Sikh woman in the workplace?

Start date: 2 Mar 2020

End date: 1 Oct 2021

I am writing to you to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted formal approval from the Psychology committee: medium risk. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. You are now free to start recruitment.

Please ensure that you are familiar with City's Framework for Good Practice in Research and any appropriate Departmental/School guidelines, as well as applicable external relevant policies.

Please note the following:

Project amendments/extension

You will need to submit an amendment or request an extension if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research project:

- Change or add a new category of participants;
- Change or add researchers involved in the project, including PI and supervisor;
- Change to the sponsorship/collaboration;
- Add a new or change a territory for international projects;
- Change the procedures undertaken by participants, including any change relating to the safety or physical or mental integrity of research participants, or to the risk/benefit assessment for the project or collecting additional types of data from research participants;
- Change the design and/or methodology of the study, including changing or adding a new research method and/or research instrument;
- Change project documentation such as protocol, participant information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, letters of invitation, information sheets for relatives or carers;
- Change to the insurance or indemnity arrangements for the project;
- Change the end date of the project.

Adverse events or untoward incidents

You will need to submit an Adverse Events or Untoward Incidents report in the event of any of the following:

a) Adverse events

b) Breaches of confidentiality

c) Safeguarding issues relating to children or vulnerable adults

d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher

Issues a) and b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than five days after the event. Issues c) and d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, please do not hesitate

to contact me. On behalf of the Psychology committee: medium risk, I do hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

Tina Forster

Psychology committee: medium risk

City, University of London

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