

Hidden secrets:

what the talk of South Asian women living in the UK's South West illuminates about how they engage with conflict in their lives, with associated implications for community conflict practitioners

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Abstract

In this paper I analyse talk about conflict taken from focus groups and three individual interviews with South Asian women living in a city in the South West of Britain. In particular, the study looks at ways that the women position themselves within the dominant social structures of family and community, and the options they have in negotiating difficult situations. I was interested in identifying the discourses that emerged from their talk about conflict they encountered as children and in their lives today, and in doing so to identify the ways that participants dealt with conflict drivers and power relationships in their daily lives. I was also interested in what barriers - if any - prevented women accessing support around conflict. The findings show close links to outcomes of studies of mental health in the South Asian communities in the UK and US which have identified conflict within the family as a key cause of psychological stress, and as such, are relevant to all those working with South Asian communities in the UK. The results are also relevant to those working with conflict in community settings, including managers of cohesion and urban regeneration programmes, community mediators and facilitators and those from other agencies working at a local level, including schools and the police. Potential considerations for future research and practice are discussed, as is the relevance of international conflict transformation and peace building work to local community cohesion practice, and the relationship between conflict studies and discourse analysis.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

As one in 12 people in Britain belong to a minority ethnic community (Home Office 2005), the challenge of managing widely disparate cultural beliefs and approaches held by those living in urban communities is still very much a work in progress. One consequence of this diversity of view is intra and intergroup tension and conflict, triggered among minority groups by their lack of social capital and exacerbated in part by the different conflict and communication styles that communities employ (Kimmel 2000). Handling such diversity requires a high degree of cultural competence at all levels of society (Suurmond 2005), supported by an informed understanding of the range of approaches co-existing in our cities.

This aim of this research was to embark on a process of exploring how conflict is experienced and talked about by individuals from the largest of the minority groups in Britain, that of the South Asian community. Between 1991 and 2001, Britain's South Asian population grew from just under 1.5 million to just over 2 million people, with approximately 28,000 people (roughly 1%) living in the South West¹. This study looks at how a small group of South Asian women in the South West talk about the conflict they encountered in childhood and in their daily lives, and identifies the dominant discourses that emerged from the resulting texts.

In the following chapter I look at literature relevant to this study, including conflict theory drawn from the international arena and examples of relevant practice from conflict transformation and post-conflict rebuilding work that could be useful in local settings in the UK. In addition, I sketch the development of psychosocial studies around identity, language and power and look at their relevance to conflict work. As

¹ In the 2001 UK census, just over 16,000 people living in the South West of England identified themselves as Indian, just under 7000 as Pakistani and just under 5000 as Bangladeshi (Ballard 2002). Most people of Indian origin migrated to Britain from two states, Gujarat and Punjab, after the Second World War, with migration reaching its peak in the early 1960s. Those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin arrived in Britain from the time of the labour shortages of the late 1950s, into early 1960s (Reid-Galloway 2003).

a third strand of literature I consider the relevance of discourse studies to conflict analysis and research, and explore the links between discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis and conflict practice.

The methodology used in this study is outlined in Chapter 3, including how participants to the study were selected; the format and questions used for both focus groups and individual interviews; and the methods chosen for the analysis. In Chapter 4, I discuss the results of the data analysis from a discourse analysis perspective, summarising the main themes that appear for the discussion of the results in Chapter 5. In this discussion, the results are examined in the light of recent studies both into the impact of multi-lingual living on the identity of individuals and studies into the mental health of the South Asian community both in the UK and the US. In conclusion, I look at possible further areas of research to emerge and pointers for those working with community conflicts that involve the South Asian community and other minority groups in the UK and elsewhere.

In Chapter 6, I reflect on my experiences in putting together this study. This looks at how researchers are inevitably influenced by their own cultural programming, perceptions and approach, which impact both on the topics chosen to work on and how on how data is interpreted, filtered through a lens of social experiences, values and political biases (Fairclough 1989). This last section expands on the understanding that as a representative of the majority white population, my very different life experiences will have impacted on the conversations I had with the participants, and on my reading and analysis of the data collected. In effect, it acknowledges that this study is co-authored by the participants and myself, and as such, is the creation of a new version of events.

Chapter 2 A review of relevant literature

Since the current discipline of 'conflict resolution' developed post-World War 2, much work has been done on unpicking conflicts across and between cultures. Theory from a range of disciplines - including international studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication, politics and many, many others - have contributed to continuous development in international conflict resolution theory and practice. This continues to change rapidly as more is understood about the central role of identity and cultural assumptions in driving conflict responses. With the development of social constructionist theory has come a deeper understanding of how every conflict is embedded in culture, inextricably linked to the ways we 'name, frame, blame and attempt to tame' it. In fact, whether a conflict exists at all could be seen as a cultural question, as there is now considerable unease about labelling something as 'conflict', a Eurocentric approach to issues which may be understood by those in the situation as a normal life condition, unworthy of distinct attention (Le Baron 2003).

However, as conflict resolution theory has matured, especially in relation to understanding and working with cultures according to their own frames of reference, many useful models for those working in community settings have emerged. These include an understanding of the three lenses - universal, cultural and individual - through which all humans view conflict (Augsburger 1992) and Lederach's far-reaching fieldwork into how to avoid imposing culturally specific models of working (1995, 2003). Lederach in particular has drawn attention to the importance of working with people on hand, those from communities themselves, rather than importing 'experts' from outside and possibly with very different worldviews - the idea that conflict practitioners need to actively and respectfully engage with '*the human and cultural resources*' in any given conflict situation. Similarly, in her work on worldviews Mary E Clark explores how beliefs and assumptions are hidden deep within the language and traditions of any given society, and she suggests that conflict resolution theory has to recognise the significance of our own cultural frames on how

we view human nature (2002). This approach challenges conflict practitioners in international and local settings to develop a high degree of reflexive practice and cultural fluency, as well as to consider whether they are the most appropriate people to be doing the work under given circumstances (Lang & Taylor 2000; Suurmond 2005).

Galtung's ABC triangle is used in conflict analysis to highlight the close links between attitudes, behaviour and wider historical and social context in escalating and de-escalating conflicts (1976). Galtung, along with Lederach, was a key proponent of the approach known as conflict transformation, in part a response to the implication in the term 'conflict resolution' that ongoing struggles, which often involve extreme power inequalities between groups in society, can be 'resolved' once and for all. By shifting the emphasis away from seeing conflicts as depersonalised large-scale disputes over resources, for example, and back to how individuals are affected by, and act out, resulting conflicts, conflict transformation has a more overtly political subtext than previous approaches (Suurmond 2005). It recognises the importance of working at grassroots levels with the most deprived members of society in order to achieve *'outcome, process and structure oriented long-term peacebuilding efforts, which aim to truly overcome revealed forms of direct, cultural and structural violence'* (Reimann, 2003). The approach challenges traditional power structures and hierarchies to examine their impact on non-majority populations and to focus on supporting the development of social capital among minority groups to enable them to gain more social power (Galtung, 1976). In this way, conflict theory and approaches reflect developments in psychosocial theory and research into group relations, power and identity.

This perspective has a direct link back to the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault and his exploration of societal workings of power and knowledge, including what he termed technologies of power (Foucault 1980). Foucault noted how our

consent to many societal restrictions was obtained not so much by threat or coercion as by persuading us to internalize the norms and values of our social order (Suurmond 2005) through the development of culturally imbued discourses (or stories) which both articulate and reinforce society's 'rules'. At any one time some stories dominate others, thus becoming complicit in the creation of power in social relations (Winslade, 2005) and at times imposing on the living circumstances of other people who hold profoundly different perspectives of the social world (Gotsbachner 2001). These internalised discourses thread through our upbringing and daily social contexts, becoming evident in our everyday 'common sense' talk and interactions. In this way, language speaking can be seen as performative, active in the construction of cultural and racialised identities, with all the power relationships and inequities that accompany them (Burck 2005).

Parallel to the development of conflict transformation work in the international arena was the development of narrative mediation practice, used at a micro level to work between individuals. This emerged in response to criticisms that the generic format and mores of mediation as used in family and community work are based on a Eurocentric worldview, and are unresponsive to gender or cultural variants in how people communicate (Winslade 2000). Rather than empowering those taking part, mediation practice that focuses only on the individuals involved and fails to recognise the wider social context can in fact be disempowering through reinforcing established power relationships (Gotsbachner 2001). Narrative mediation differs in its approach, recognising the significance of stories and dominant discourses in informing the underlying attitudes of individuals in conflict, and in perpetuating a culturally acceptable version of events. It encourages people to see that their 'story' about a conflict is just one version of events, formed by selecting and discarding different aspects of what actually happened and then interpreting these through their own particular lens of experience. By revisiting and reinterpreting events, a new story (or discourse) can be constructed (Winslade 2001).

How we create the story of our own lives will depend on our upbringing. In Eurocentric cultures, for example, a good story will generally incorporate relationships between events, a sense of direction, an element of drama and a suitable timeframe (Gergen 1991). However, storyforms are different in different cultures - more or less linear, with alternative interpretations of appropriate relationship, etc - and therefore the accounts of self that are produced by individuals from one background will always differ from those of another. As these stories are recounted, both internally and externally, they are shaped by the language used to express them, and by the joint action of talk. Such ideas of language as a pre-condition of thought and as social action are central tenets of social constructionism, a theoretical approach to social sciences and the study of humans as social animals which encompasses philosophy, sociology and linguistics, among others (Burr 1995). From this perspective, all ways of understanding are historically and critically relative, as language and talk form social realities as they happen and reinforce dominant cultural storylines or discourses (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Through the language we use to tell our stories, we speak ourselves, and our cultural programming, into existence (Davies in Winslade, 2005).

This idea of attitudes coming from a cultural construction, or an internal 'interpretive repertoire' (Wetherell & Potter 1992), is particularly relevant to conflict studies, which have traditionally viewed people's accounts as immovable reflections of their internal feelings instead one of a number of possible narratives (Fairclough 1989). This awareness can help conflict workers avoid summing people up in ways that objectify or totalise them, as 'weak' or 'arrogant' for example, or their positions as 'right' or 'wrong'. As discourse analysis deals with reality, identity, meaning and power, it is useful for illuminating the frames of reference for people's understandings, and for revealing the underlying interests that often form the bedrock for conflict language and action. Identifying discourses in conflict exposes

deeply held needs, as well as what can be said and by whom and the subject positions disputing parties are arguing from and invite each other into (Winslade 2005).

On a bigger scale, this discourse perspective is highly suited to research concerned with proactive conflict prevention, as it can reveal how power relations are currently operating in a given community (Suurmond 2005). This in turn opens up the possibility of a shift in underlying communal discourses as people come to see the extent to which their language rests on assumptions that are shaped by relations of power (Fairclough 1989), the same process that Freire termed *conscientizacao*². Identifying discourses used in talk about conflict is useful for understanding how individuals relate to the structural frameworks of their own lives and of the wider society they live in, and in so doing locating the causes of violence and aggression in social realities instead of people themselves (Opatow 2000). Critical discourse analysis in particular sees people's accounts of their realities as uncovering and giving voice to abusive power relations (Fairclough 1989).

This paper develops a line of enquiry into how talk represents and possibly reinforces the specific conflict constructs held by diverse cultural groups living in Britain. It picks up on recommendations from research in an American high school which emphasised the importance of grounding any community interventions and strategies in local research into the ways that different cultural groups operate around conflict (Scott 2003). I argue here that discourse analysis is a valid approach to use in order to unearth such understandings and to inform practice in a range of support services.

² Freire (1970) sees *conscientizacao* (conscientisation) as the process of awareness raising that enables oppressed people to move from the status of 'object' to that of 'subject' as they recognise and embrace their power

Chapter 3 Methodology of the study

Participants were five women drawn from different sections of the South Asian community of a city in the South West of England, and included representatives of three separate nationalities - Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi (*see Fig 1 for participant details*). For the purposes of this study they are identified as belonging to a single, larger group - 'Asian' - as this is how they identified themselves in focus group discussions. The women originally came together in Autumn 2005 to explore specific understandings and responses to conflict within their different Asian cultural, linguistic and religious traditions, as part of an inner-city community conflict resolution project. Once the group had spent 2 days together, they were asked if they would take part in this study, which would generate texts for analysis via focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews (*see Appendix 1 for sample consent form*).

Focus groups

Two focus group sessions were set up so that the five women could have informal group discussions around the topic of conflict, each lasting 1- 1.5 hours. The focus group schedule for each session had been drawn up based on previous preparation work with the group (*see Appendix 2*). The first group discussion centred around **proverbs and metaphors** used in conflict situations, previously identified by the group and drawn from the Bangla, Urdu and Punjabi language traditions. The second focus group discussed **barriers to resolution** for conflicts within the Asian community, also previously identified by the group in broad categories such as trust, honour, family honour and respect. This session asked participants to analyse their understanding of these terms in more depth.

There were several advantages of starting the research with focus group discussions:

- The interactive quality of focus group discussion was key to unearthing the different language and cultural strands in the group.
- The focus group format allowed me to withdraw as much as possible from the content of the discussion and to act primarily as a facilitator for participants, encouraging the natural dynamic of the group interaction.
- Material from the focus groups - contributed by all participants - informed questions for the subsequent semi-structured interviews.

These discussions were taped, and before transcription, I listened to each session and recorded my memories of participant responses and emotions in a journal, as well as any impressions and thoughts that came to mind. Once transcribed, I read through each transcription several times line by line, waiting for patterns to emerge and marking anything of interest in a left hand margin. I then went back to the beginning of each text and condensed my impressions into clear groups and themes. Having done this for each transcript separately, I looked at where and how the themes from the two sessions overlapped. My impressions on first reading were refined into five distinct collections of ideas that re-appeared in both groups, and in the contributions of all the participants. These clear overarching themes were then used as the basis for the semi-structured interviews.

Fig 1 - Brief outline of participant details

Brief participant synopsis (NB all names changed for anonymity)	Age	Country of origin/ arrival in UK (if relevant)	Religion	Languages
Jamela - mother of 2, trained translator	28	Pakistan/moved to UK to marry aged 21	Muslim	Urdu, Hindi, English
Roopa - mother of 2, educational support worker for Asian families	43	Bangladesh/moved to UK to marry aged 25	Muslim	Bangla, English
Kishwar - mother of 1, carer	43	Wales/born Cardiff to Indian parents	Sikh	Punjabi, Hindi, English
Uma - mother of 4, Reiki healer	46	England/born Bristol to Indian parents	Sikh	Punjabi, Hindi, English
Delip - mother of 3, Actor/mediator	53	England/born London to Pakistani parents	None	English, Punjabi

Individual interviews

Three of the focus group participants were then asked if they would be interviewed for the study. The aim of the interviews was to further explore the participants' internal vocabulary and strategies around conflict, and in particular the impact of their early teachings and experiences on their adult interactions with conflict. The selection of interviewees was based partly on wanting a spread of nationalities involved - Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian - and partly responding to the situation in hand: two women were less available than the others, one travelling at the time of interviews, another with intense family issues to deal with.

I was aiming for an informal discussion with each of the participants, and had reassured them that there was no 'right or wrong' answer when we arranged a time to meet. Although I prepared a series of questions, I expected each interview to take a different turn as I was led by the participants' responses to what I asked. The interview questions were shaped to include a couple of easy-to-answer questions to help participants relax before I asked them to think more deeply about conflict. As the interview drew to a close, I asked them questions aimed at bringing them back to positive thoughts around conflict before finishing, and closed each interview by asking if they had anything they would like to add or comment on (*see Fig 2, Underlying aims of interview questions*). At the end of each interview, I checked that it had not been a distressing experience for them in any way, and asked them to get in touch if there was anything further they wanted to talk about or explore.

Before the first interview, I carried out a trial with a colleague to get a sense of how easy or difficult the questions were to answer. As a result of this trial, the questions were revised to include a gentler lead into the interviews, and to elicit a more general sense of personal and spiritual background. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and took place in their homes or a venue chosen by them.

Fig 2: Underlying aims of interview questions

Question 1: an invitation for them to talk about their upbringing

Question 2: identifying the significance of faith/religion in their early life

Question 3: exploring conscious memory about conflict teachings/experiences; gathering ideas of what sort of teachings might have been shared; gathering ideas of how teachings were shared

Question 4: asking for in-depth account of any memory of conflicts they have

Question 5: exploring gender difference/roles in relation to conflict

Question 6: looking for range of conflict handling approaches inside/outside the home

Question 7: exploring the qualities they would want to see in someone they turned to for help in a conflict situation

Question 8: exploring imagery and sources of hope in times of conflict

Question 9: an opportunity for them to comment, or add anything that came to mind

The interviews were taped, then transcribed and analysed. As before, I listened to each interview as soon as possible after it took place in order to make a note of any impressions/ memories I had of the interview itself. The interviews were transcribed using simple transcription notation, read through for general impressions and then analysed using discourse analysis. I chose to work with a restricted version of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) (Willig 2003), although my analysis of the text was influenced by critical discourse approaches as propounded by Fairclough (1989) because of my interest in power. I also took into account criticisms of the reliability and quality of much current discourse analysis (Antaki et al 2002) - see Appendix 3. I selected four stages of FDA to focus on - the discursive object, relevant discourses, positionings and subjectivity - as these would highlight the particular aspects of the text I was interested in:

- Ways in which conflict is internalised and expressed, directly or indirectly
- The types of discourse that individuals have access to around conflict and other issues
- The impact of these discourses on the relationships individuals construct at all levels of society
- The possible impact these constructions have on actual experience.

To analyse the text, I worked through each interview stage by stage, gradually selecting from the complete text the most relevant sections for detailed study. Each stage of the analysis was written up as I went along, leading to a continual revision of my analysis as new ideas and connections appeared. The impact of my own contributions - as questioner and as analyst - was in mind as I worked through the text, and any thoughts I had about this were noted in my journal for inclusion in the final dissertation (see Chapter 6, Reflexions).

Chapter 4 Life with the family: data analysis

Here, I group the results of the analysis into two sections. The first looks at the themes to emerge from the two focus groups and in the second, the analysis of the interviews summarises how participants talked about conflict and how accounts of their early experiences are reflected in their relationship with conflict as adults.

Focus group discussions

Throughout the focus groups, participants talked repeatedly of individuals presenting one face to the outside world, another to their family and a third internally, to themselves. The tension and internal conflict this generated was evident in discussion around how the use of money and 'wealth on display' could act as a smoke screen for marital unhappiness:

Extract 1

Roopa: In our culture people wear lots of jewellery and sometimes when their husband buy all those expensive saris but maybe as a couple they are very unhappy

about the practice of keeping quiet about disturbing truths, such as violence or abuse, to prevent knock-on impacts on family and friends:

Extract 2

Kishwar: There's so much face saving and they say oh no, this person is related to me, my daughter's married round here so I can't take it to the Gurdwara, and people get away with horrendous things.

and about individual desires being suppressed to maintain family and/or community harmony, including minimizing any later impact on children or siblings:

Extract 3

Uma: It's the protection isn't it of the family, regardless of what situation has come up, um, trying to cover up that situation because if it gets out in the open your family will get a black mark or will be tarnished.

During the group discussions, participants rarely talked about themselves or their individual aspirations or opinions in isolation. According to their talk, important life decisions are highly influenced by 'not disturbing' a web of relationships which bind the extended family to the wider community:

Extract 4

Jamela: It may be cos you are under pressure, other pressures to keep the relations or, it's like, you don't say something to save a marriage cos if that marriage breaks down then others will, that will have a knock-on effect on the other relationships.

Central to this web are the institutions of family and marriage. Marriage plays a dominant role in holding the community together, and is expressly described as linking families rather than individuals:

Extract 5

Jamela: In our culture, family marriage between two people is not just a couple thing it's a whole family thing

The terms 'insider' and 'outsider' were used repeatedly in the two focus group discussions, generally in the sense of who could be trusted. This idea is expressed most clearly in the following extract, where the participant is explaining the dilemma of whether to turn to professional help from within the community or from without:

Extract 6

Kishwar: With an outsider, you trust that person in the sense that you think that person is independent of from the inside people but that outsider may not be aware of the background of your problems or um or the cultural aspects of the problem.

This extract also hints at the anxiety expressed by all participants about talk about others' business within the community, hence the importance of being 'independent of ... the inside people'. The high level of anxiety around being accepted or rejected by the community was emphasised by a number of references to painful situations - described with such words as pain, suffering, violence, cruelty, vulnerability, fear and sarcasm - giving an overall impression of overt and latent tension. However, this bias in participants' talk could be because the group was discussing barriers to conflict resolution, and conflict is so often associated with pain and difficulty.

The numerous references during the group discussions to specific family roles implied an allowed/expected code of behaviour for each one, with the roles most often referred to being those of wife, mother, daughter, grandmother/granddaughter and mother in law:

Extract 7

Uma: I suppose in all Eastern cultures they say that a woman only leaves her parents house in her ... car or sedan chair to take her to her in-laws, and you leave that house in your coffin, that's what we're taught from when we're very very young. And I can remember my grandparents saying that to me from when I was five years old.

At times, these roles are discussed in contrast to behaviours demonstrated in key male gender roles - father, son and brother - sometimes linked to clear hierarchies of power within the family structure. Stresses caused among families by the diverging values of older and younger members of the community, including the changing role of women, came up repeatedly:

Extract 8

Uma: We come up against a lot of conflict within our family where the elders are expecting their respect just because of their status and their age, but what they're actually talking sometimes is a load of rubbish

All of the main themes which emerged from the focus group discussions were evident in the subsequent individual interviews in one guise or another.

Interview analysis

This section outlines ways that the participants constructed conflict through their talk, and ways that they positioned themselves and others in relation to conflict situations. It also considers how these positionings impact on the choice of actions available to them.

Conflict as 'family business'

Through all the interviews participants talked about an experience of conflict that ranged along a continuum from actual overt conflict situations to latent tensions. The most common construct for conflict was as something to be contained within the family unit, a construction that contained three different aspects: how conflict inside the family was seen by family members; the roles taken by family members to sort out conflicts; and a reluctance to engage with 'outsiders' to help with family matters. In the following extract, Roopa demonstrates the first two of these:

Extract 9

- R Especially I remember is among two sister conflict, my two aunts, and that's my gran ... grandad resolve it, granddad and er my mum was involved and they talked to the both, both you know, both parties and ...
- I Do you mind telling me what they were fighting about?
- R Little family matters, it's not something major but went on and on and husbands getting involved, and it spread to children.
- I And you were saying your mum was involved as well?
- R Yes because she is older sister they respect her and listen to her.

When asked about the conflict, Roopa describes how a small disagreement can rumble on when unaddressed, and how it can escalate. She also highlights the timing of the intervention, with family members stepping in as the conflict 'went on and on' and 'spread to children'. Roopa's perception of how the conflict ended seems to contain a gender bias, with her initial statement that her grandfather resolved it before adding as an afterthought that her mother was also 'involved'. Asked again about her mother's input, Roopa's factual explanation of her mother's status as elder sister demonstrates unquestioned power structures within the family as well as the

significance of the part her mother actually played in the resolution. One interpretation of this could be that a generally accepted hierarchy within the family, based on age and gender, was relied on to encourage those in conflict to actively participate in looking for a resolution.

A dependence on those inside the family community at times of conflict is clear in Jamela's response when asked who she might turn to in a conflict situation. As with Roopa's family, the role of 'big sister' is specifically mentioned:

Extract 10

J: First of all I'd think like my husband and my sister, that they can emotionally support me, but if I'm in conflict with my husband or with my sister, then then emotionally I'm done, aren't I? ((*loud laughter*)) I won't be able to turn to anybody here, I don't think so.

I: So what, what, why not, what is it when you say you wouldn't be able to turn anybody here?

J: Well my mum and dad, my mum and dad are back home, my big sister is back home and these are the people I, my close ...

When talking about the need for emotional support in conflict, in contrast to practical support she mentions earlier in the interview, Jamela seems to come to an alarming conclusion - that she is 'emotionally done' if she falls out with her husband or sister, her only two close family members living in Britain. Her alarm is suggested by the repeat of 'then', followed by laughter. She is emphatic that there would be no other help 'here', meaning Britain, conveying a sense of isolation and vulnerability through her wistful repetition of 'back home', meaning Pakistan, and she seems clear that there is no possibility of turning to others outside her 'close' family, underlining her reluctance with 'I don't think so'.

The marriage sketched here seems to contain a balance, with Jamela relaxed with the idea of turning to her husband for emotional support, but also acknowledging that she could fall out with him. In all three interviews, participants talked about conflict in marriage as an acceptable/accepted inevitability, at times at a normal level of argument and dispute between wife and husband, but at others, much more

bitter and intense. In the following extract, Roopa articulates this dynamic more clearly, extending it to reflect on the experience of 'a lot of our Asian ladies':

Extract 11

R: In our culture, mens, it's changing now but when we brought up like um Dad if he is angry we have no, even mum didn't shout or scream at him, and um, and as a woman, that's that's in a way, they, she used to, you know, try to make, you know, not really arguing or quarrelling, she she tried to explain things but not in a raising voice or something like that, that's why I I I felt, not only my mum, a lot of our Asian ladies they actually sometimes suffer quietly, they cry, get upset, stop talking for a few days maybe, (*getting quieter*) that's how they did, a not making face-to-face argument, that's why I said I haven't experienced too much of argument ...

Here, Roopa struggles to explain the gender relationships that she saw and experienced as a child. Her faltering grammar and repetitive wording gives a sense of anxiety and almost panic, as if she is struggling to say what is not allowed to be said. Her use of 'you know' seems to be appealing to a common knowledge between participant and interviewer, maybe as woman to woman as she is clearly aware of talking to someone with a different cultural experience. The way Roopa talks about this marital conflict suggests that her perception as a child was that her father was entitled to express himself forcefully in conflict situations whereas her mother, 'as a woman', was not.

Through the extract, Roopa moves from the past tense to the present tense and back to the past. She starts by saying things are changing, as if to distance us from what she and her mother experienced in her Bangladeshi childhood, but by line 6 she is talking about the same dynamics in action in the present tense, as if still the case today. This impression is reinforced by a fall in her generally animated tone. As she reverts back to the past tense, she uses an interesting passive/negative construction - 'a not making face-to-face argument' - to sum up the strategies women employ/ed to deal with or avoid conflict with their husbands. Echoing Roopa's experiences of conflict in marriages around her, Jamela's use of the imperative in the following extract - 'you keep quiet, you suffer it' - implies both a lack of options and an

acceptance of the status quo even at the cost of suffering, a term that is used by both Roopa and Jamela:

Extract 12

J: If you don't want people to know like then you keep quiet, you suffer it, or maybe you take it to marri... try to talk to the other person, some people get involved, and you just leave it at that stage because you think no, this is going to get out of my hands, or what's going to come if more people get involved.

Although Jamela starts to talk of 'marri' (possibly marriage guidance) and involving others in the conflict, this is not considered viable, with the only outcome she can foresee being a lack of control with unimagined consequences. The phrase 'What's going to come if more people get involved' implies a degree of fearfulness, reinforced by her repetition of 'people get involved'. The anxiety is unspecified, but apparently linked to the idea of people knowing your business, and as a result, the conflict is 'just [left] at that', or unresolved, in order to avoid talk or censure.

In summary, this construct of 'conflict as family business' expresses of way of being in the world that centres around a tight and ordered family unit. At its most benign, this unit is talked about as providing physical and emotional support for those it encompasses; at other times, entrenched gender and age-related power hierarchies are represented as suffocating and debilitating. All participants demonstrate concern around sharing private matters beyond the family circle, above all out of a sense of anxiety about where involving others might lead.

Conflict as 'bringer of shame'

It is this sense of anxiety that is central to a second, parallel construct for conflict to emerge from the texts, also involving the family unit but seen through the prism of its relationship to the wider community. This construct of conflict as a bringer of shame was most clearly expressed as a threat to family reputation, with knock-on effects for all family members, be it around social standing, marriage or health. Rather than being something that is clearly articulated and on the table, with a

possible route to resolution, this type of conflict has an element of obscurity about it, caused primarily by talk among the community and therefore hard to counter. A good example of this was a story told by Kishwar at the start of the interview when asked about her childhood:

Extract 13

K: It was a wintery night and I had the light open but no curtains done, my mum came home and told me off and she really shouted and I said 'why are you shoutin for?'. She goes 'do you know only bad women stand by the window with the light open and no curtains?' ... I never forget that day and she went mad, she goes 'what you want people to talk about me saying I'm not bringing my children up not right?'.

With its passive grammar, its repetition of how angry her mother was and the accusatory tone of her mother's questions (or how they are remembered), this short extract demonstrates the depth of anxiety felt by Kishwar's mother about how she will be seen within her own community and the way that this pressure was cascaded onto Kishwar. The knowledge that her mother is sharing about 'bad women' (as a euphemism for prostitutes) may relate more to her mother's upbringing in India than to S Wales in the 1970s, when this incident took place. The lasting impact of this incident on Kishwar, evident in her declaration that she will 'never forget that day', seems to be underlined by a later illustration of how the behaviour of individuals and their families was indeed discussed through the community (in this example, by her mother and father at home). In this extract, she also introduces the concept of 'shame':

Extract 14

K: A lot of like my street friends like in our culture and society there was children who started stealing and you know going shop lifting and everything and you heard about it and I'd hear my dad or mum talking about it but not mentioning names and saying that you know their parents are really getting ill through this shame ... for the parents it was a big conflict in the family and you know, a hurt thing on the other children, the brothers and sisters, it's not just about you know the person who's doing it, I think a lot of effect happens to the people and the family who are not doing that thing ... they pay more for the shame and hurt.

Here, Kishwar illustrates both constructs of conflict discussed in this paper: as 'family business' when she talks of 'a big conflict in the family' and then as a parallel

bringer of shame and poor reputation, leading to 'a hurt thing on the other children'. Linking conflict to physical ill health and emotional pain, Kishwar suggests that those around the person who commits the crime 'pay more for the shame and hurt'. Kishwar does not make clear exactly how they 'pay', although the final statement seems to contain an undertone of threat or menace that could be interpreted as referring to a rejection of the whole family by the wider community because of the behaviour of one member.

Kishwar's casual use of the phrase 'you heard about it' implies an acceptance by her, and in the community, of the discussion of others' business. Through the extract, Kishwar moves from telling a story from her childhood to explaining the impact to me - acknowledged as being outside 'our culture and society' - and then to commenting as an adult on current community dynamics, suggesting that little has changed since her childhood. By linking the account of what she heard to what she personally feels about the impact on the other siblings, she appears to restate deep-held community beliefs about the concept of family 'shame'.

In the extract, Kishwar seems to distance herself from those involved by defining them as her 'street friends', an interesting qualification of friendship possibly implying that these people were outside her family circle and therefore could not reflect badly on her. The idea of being adversely affected by the behaviour of someone in your family or circle also came up at the start of the interview with Jamela. Below she describes the pressure to conform put on her 'liberal family' in Pakistan by her grandfather:

Extract 15

J: I would say we were quite like a, liberal family comparing to the rest of society um (.) my grandfather he always used to say you are one of the .1 percent of the population and I never liked that comment (.) he didn't, because he really used to say, sort of, in a negative sense really, so (.) and he was, he was like, he was thinking you're too liberal, you're too, you don't mix in the society.

The pressure described here comes from her grandfather, with the implication in the text that it was never delivered directly or overtly but in a way that prevented real discussion around the issue - 'he was thinking you're too liberal'. Conflict is implicit in the tension between Jamela's 'liberal family' and 'the rest of society', with the grandfather's comment that the family was in the '.1% of the population' and didn't 'mix in the society' seeming to suggest a sense of the family sitting outside community norms. Tension is also evident within the family, demonstrated by repeated criticisms from the grandfather - which Jamela 'never liked' - implying intergenerational conflict between father and son with elements of a struggle for control. The level of concern about conforming demonstrated by the grandfather suggests that he experienced his son's position as uncomfortable and a personal threat.

Pressure to conform from within the family, but in relation to how the family is viewed by the external world, was also described by Roopa when talking about her upbringing:

Extract 16

- R I feel that it was a lot of bitterness, tension. I didn't enjoy my childhood.
I Didn't you?
R No
I Because there was a sense of tension?
R Tension, always you have to do well. Pressure, lots of pressure, and you know, because you know I said it is a closed community, everyone wants to know your results and everyone after your own business (*anxious laughter*)).

Here conflict is described in a number of ways, experienced as 'bitterness' and 'tension' and 'pressure, lots of pressure'. As she explains earlier in the interview, the 'bitterness' between her parents came from extended argument over the children's education, 'tension' as a result of high expectations around education, and 'pressure' from the whole extended community - 'everyone wants to know your results and ... after your own business'. She describes her large extended family as a 'closed community', inside of which individual achievement was seen as a family

achievement, and as a way of maintaining family status in relation to the wider community.

Reputation, then, lies at the heart of this construct of conflict as a bringer of shame, inextricably linked to anxiety about censure and judgement from the wider community. Concern about being seen to be at fault underlies tensions between generations, between friends, between husband and wife, exacerbated by the accepted practice of talking about others' business. Participants' descriptions of mental stress and ill health induced by anxiety suggest an unrelenting pressure to conform, or to be seen to conform, which affects all members of the community both emotionally and physically.

Actions and aspirations: the impact of subject positioning

In this study, the participants' positioning of themselves and others varies according to the time of life they are discussing, as they were asked to reflect both on formative childhood memories and on current responses to conflict. On a number of occasions, participants moved freely between the past and present when discussing examples of conflict.

A key positioning for all three was that of 'good family member', whose thoughts, actions and aspirations matched those of their extended family. The implication in the texts is that participants would not choose, or sanction, ways of acting that would cause distress to their families in order to fulfill a personal ambition, even if this was at personal cost to themselves or another. In the construction of conflict as a bringer of shame, individuals within the family are positioned as guardians of their family's good name and reputation in the wider community. Family members are therefore highly interdependent, compromising everyone's freedom of action. They are positioned either as responsible social actors who put others ahead of themselves

when considering how to deal with difficulties or as selfish, irresponsible social actors with little regard for the pain they cause other family members. These 'ways of seeing' inevitably impact on the options available to family members in conflict situations. For example, the social pressure to be a 'good family and community member' can cause individuals to become immobilized even in the face of suffering, and constrains the actions they take.

Within the family circle, the participants inhabit longterm positions such as daughter, wife or mother which materially affect the ways they experience the world and themselves. These in turn create relational positions with others in the family, informing communication and conflict dynamics between partners, generations, siblings and extended family members. Age and gender affects how the participants position themselves within the family power hierarchy, and what they therefore perceive as their related rights and responsibilities, with implications for action. For example, as young women none of the participants expected to be involved in discussions or interventions around family conflict, as Jamela explains:

Extract 17

J: I would say I was adult there, I was 21 when I left there, but if there's like conflict between the family, you won't get involved in that, so I can't really say.

Such an unquestioning acceptance of family status seems to enable families to address conflict situations by relying on these subliminal attachments to create leverage/encourage active participation from those in conflict. For example, in relation to assuming mediator roles within the family when conflict broke out, Kishwar's aunt, her father's elder sister, automatically positioned herself as a 'third party' with the right to mediate:

Extract 18

K: She tried to explain to my brother, you know, why are you doing this to your dad, it will be a shame if you become bad ... if your dad's a big man in the society or the Temple you know, you don't want to be doing these things. If you've got a problem talk to your dad, talk to me, talk to my, talk to your mum

This extract clearly illustrates the power hierarchy in Kishwar's family, with the father first, followed by the aunt and then the mother, emphasizing the seniority held by men over women, and sisters over wives or relatives by marriage. Kishwar's memory of the aunt's appeal to Kishwar's brother to think about why he is 'doing this to your dad', or how his choice to truant is impacting on his father, ignores any impact on the boy himself because of missing school and education. Again, it is interesting that Kishwar only mentions her father's place in the wider world, rather than her mother's, positioning her father as someone with a reputation to protect and her brother as a threat to that reputation.

Through the three texts, the gender positioning of men varies. On the one hand, men are presented as dominant over women, entitled to shout where women are not; in Roopa's case in particular, women in marriage are positioned as muted and almost self-censoring:

Extract 19

R: ... Even my mum wasn't brought up that way, to argue back
 I: Whereas your father would be more vocal?
 R: Yes, yes, because he is the man ((*laughter*))

From her perspective as a child, Roopa's mother did not have the right to answer back and her actions in conflict were therefore restricted to finding other ways of expressing her frustration. Her father, however, was entitled to be 'more vocal' and was. Late on in the interview, Roopa reflects on how she currently deals with conflict between herself and her husband, attempting to position herself differently to her mother ('woman fighting back' as opposed to 'woman accepting quietly'), but in fact repeating the same cycle of understandings and behaviours that she witnessed as a child.

Extract 20

R: Like someone comes from work they're tired they tell you something off or something it's better to stay quiet that time ((*laughter*)) and later, you know. But I have come out a bit differently, I do say it, and again, I I do take ((*sigh*)) some of my mum's technique.

Although Roopa asserts that she has 'come out a bit differently' and does 'say it', here she appears to be describe herself and husband in a similar dynamic to that of her parents - if 'someone' comes home and shouts, this is understandable because 'they're tired' and it's better to stay quiet - before acknowledging sadly (indicated by the sigh) that she is still using her mother's conflict management strategies. For Jamela, the relationship between her parents was different, although she does acknowledge that similar dynamics were at play beyond her home:

Extract 21

J: In my particular family, in our household, I would say my, my father, he, he, he was, he never, like, other people, other men in society back home, they like, I am the man of the house, they would like to dominate you, or like ... give you an impression that I am the man of the house, so this is my say, and this is how things go. But my father wasn't like that so if my mum didn't like it, he wouldn't force her or anything, they were like on equal basis. It won't be like ((*laughter*)) 'I'm the man so you shut up', but she would be like, she'll be fighting her place.

Beyond the family unit is a wider community, and for participants who are both family and community members, this can involve moving between different and sometimes contradictory positions. When talking of the trouble her school friends got into, for example, Kishwar positions herself as 'someone in the know' (ie in the mainstream of community) and as 'someone who cares' about those in shame, before moving to a position of judgement by restating deep-held community beliefs about the concept of family 'shame', thus perpetuating its existence and its influence on the way that all community members live their lives:

Extract 22

K: I think a lot of effect happens to the people and the family who are not doing that thing ... they pay more for the shame and hurt.

This positioning of community members as judge and jury appears to entitle them to reject rather than support families in difficulty. This seems to be linked to overt or more obscured positionings as 'insider' or 'outsider', with reference to the power relationships, and therefore options for action, that go with those oppositional positions. Roopa demonstrates this when talking about her daughter's approach to conflict situations, as compared to her own:

Extract 23

R: Because sometimes we don't want to open up that much to outsider but their generation they don't mind open up, that's interesting yea. Cos we sometimes say oh it's better to keep it inside, not to spread.

An alternative positioning to joining in with the community, for example, is to choose to remain outside, either as a family unit or as an individual, as demonstrated by Jamela's childhood experiences in Pakistan. Clearly, belonging to a social group has many advantages, including the right to judge others, while being on the outside allows more freedom of thought and action but invites the possibility of being isolated and therefore vulnerable.

In conclusion, there are a number of different and sometimes contradictory positions taken up by the participants in the interviews. Within the family itself, positionings include 'good family member', 'guardian of the family reputation' and 'good wife, mother or daughter', all of which imply a high degree of interdependence between family members who are reliant on the behaviour of others to maintain their position in the community. By also positioning themselves as 'good community members', with the associated position of 'guardian of community morals and values', participants demonstrate how individuals can maintain multiple and sometimes contradictory roles - the pressure felt by all to avoid community censure is somehow lost when they themselves are involved in discussing the business of others and

passing judgement. Similarly, participants willingly positioned themselves as 'insiders' or 'outsiders' when referring to the wider Asian community as opposed to a much bigger majority population in Britain - but also found themselves using the terms to describe their family positioning in relation to the local Asian community, or indeed themselves in relationship to the family.

The texts imply a number of ways in which these positionings impact on the actions of participants. The responsibility accompanying the positions of 'good family member' and 'guardian of reputation' seems likely to limit both freedom of thought and freedom of choice of participants. The interview extracts in this analysis highlight the dominance of traditional ways of thinking and behaving, recycled through talk, positioning and actions by participants and those they know. Managing the contradictory positions of family and community member, and the anxieties associated with overstepping acceptable lines of behaviour and then having actions magnified through community talk, can lead to self-limitation and reduced expectations as to what life might bring, exacerbated by the experience of being separate from mainstream British culture and therefore removed from options open to others.

Chapter 5 A time of change: discussion of results

In the following discussion, three of the key themes to emerge from this analysis - that of internal conflict caused by the positionings outlined in the previous chapter, of family conflict arising from the pressures of maintaining reputation, and of the insider/outsider dilemma - are explored in relation to recent research in the areas of multi-lingual living and mental health studies. In conclusion, I summarise possible implications for conflict and other support practitioners working with South Asian communities in this country and elsewhere, and suggest possible further research studies relating to this line of inquiry.

Internal conflict

In both the focus group discussions and the interviews, participants expressed again and again the tension felt by individuals as they struggle to live with family and community pressures. In particular, they referred to a sense of acting a part versus being themselves, a covering-up of hidden secrets, of hiding their emotions and feelings and of internalising pain as they monitor their behaviour both at home and in public. These themes have interesting parallels with the findings of a recent research into multi-lingual living and studies into mental health issues and domestic violence in South Asian communities in the UK.

The sense of 'acting v being' has resonance with a study of the experiences of multi- and bi-lingual residents in the UK, in which participants described their experiences in terms of a 'doubled' life, with descriptions of an 'inner core' and 'outer self' (Burck 2005). As Burck points out, the ideas of inner and outer are powerful metaphors for the separation of a private self from a public face, and between thought and self-presentation. This 'doubleness' was particularly noticeable among

people who experienced a childhood lived in one language and adulthood in another, and for those whose first language and culture were experienced as 'under attack', generally as a minority group with experience of racism or derogatory comments at the hands of a dominant population. All the focus group participants in this study have lived in the UK as members of minority groups. Two of the three interview participants experienced moving language and country in adulthood, identified in Burck's research as leading to a loss of identity and a disruption of both individual and family narratives.

Narratives, stories that we construct to make sense of our experiences, are a large part of our identities and are one way we attribute meaning to our lives (Suurmond 2005), essential to create order out of chaos. However, through the mere act of imposing a storytelling structure on our own experiences, we draw on cultural biases we are unaware of as we shape the story we tell and furnish it with shared cultural assumptions, or discourses, that we understand as 'common sense'. When Kishwar talks about her mother's reaction to open curtains at night, she demonstrates exactly how such knowledge is passed from one generation to the next, and how discourses become internalized to the point where even minor actions become infused with cultural assumption and individuals monitor and control their own behaviour according to these prevailing standards of 'normality' (Burr 1995).

Individuals living in one distinct culture inside another, as do these participants, are faced with the task of merging multiple identities and cultural perspectives, and accommodating the contradictory discourses that these carry with them. For example, although all the women in this study live in Britain, where divorce is commonplace, they choose to remain in marriages that women from other cultural groups might choose to end because of the pressures of community norms, including strong internal programming about family honour and appropriate behaviour. Such social compliance and control, a self-monitoring of action if not thought, suggests an

internally constructed version of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon (see Appendix 4), which epitomized the power of surveillance as a method of social control through its suggestion to inmates that they would be being watched at all times, whether they were or not (Macey 2000). In this study, participants repeatedly indicated a sense of being watched by their own wider community, and of monitoring their behaviours in response.

This sense of having your actions minutely scrutinised and of 'bottling up' conflict - such as when faced with the dilemma of speaking out to help someone in need or keeping quiet in order to maintain family or community harmony - puts individuals under considerable mental stress. Although the links between conflict and mental ill health are well documented in international studies³, this work has generally taken place in violent post-conflict zones and I can find no evidence of research into this in the UK. However, several recent studies have shown high levels of unreported psychological distress among South Asian women living in Britain (Reid-Galloway 2003) with a variety of health problems - both physical and mental - related to marriage, marital and family conflict, domestic overwork and isolation. A recent review of the mental health status of South Asian women in the UK reports on the prevalence of depression, suicide, deliberate self-harm and eating disorders in this community, with acculturation issues and 'culture conflict' given as additional causes for stress (Anand & Cochrane 2005).

Family conflict

Power is a central pivot of all conflict, as much at play inside families as in society at large. Through all the accounts in the focus groups and interviews ran a clear

³ It is estimated that 40-70% of refugees suffer from acute clinical depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Mental health problems are likely affect an individual's ability to generate positive social capital, an inherent attribute of which is active community membership and participation for collective action. A high prevalence of mental and psychosocial disorders among its members weakens a community's ability to form relations of trust, cooperation and mobilization for collective action (Baingana and Bannon 2004)

understanding of the power hierarchies that accompany different family roles in their families, linked in particular to age and gender difference. Although the women in the study came from different South Asian backgrounds it is interesting to note that they shared, or assumed they shared, an understanding of what these roles entailed. Looked at in detail, however, there were clear differences in experience, both of marriage and relationships between men and women.

In this study descriptions of marital conflict most clearly articulate the difference in gender roles and 'allowed' behaviours for women and men, and a picture is drawn of many women controlling their actions - as in 'stop talking for a few days' - in order to appease their partners. The overall impression in this study is that the discourse of 'good wife' encourages women to withdraw in the face of conflict and even become invisible, a wise strategy perhaps since Asian women (as opposed to men) carry responsibility for keeping a marriage going; if it fails, she is seen as to blame and as 'letting down the family honour' (Parmar et al 2005). The maintenance of this power inequality rests on both the willingness of women to part with their own rights in order to conform with a system that works against their self interest, what Fairclough (1989) would term the 'manufacture of consent', and in a subtle form of coercion via their children. Damage to children's future marriage prospects has been shown to be an underpinning cause of why many Asian women stay in marriages despite great suffering (Kumari & Nirwal, 2005) and was also mentioned in the focus group discussions.

Nonetheless, despite the suffering identified at one point or another in all of these interviews, none of the participants questioned the idea of marriage or whether to marry. Indeed, all agreed that marriage was central to family and community life, acting as glue for the whole community as it brings together families and not just individuals. Several contradictory and/or overlapping discourses about marriage exist in mainstream British society, including the 'in love' discourse stressing the

importance of romantic love which is often used to mask the more pragmatic 'marriage as a financial transaction' discourse that underlies the institution⁴ (Burr 1995). But as women of South Asian backgrounds, (most) participants in this study were willing partners in arranged marriages and none considered divorce a viable alternative to suffering. On the contrary, all expected to live out their lives accommodating their in-laws. Inevitably, living with different value systems to the mainstream puts intense pressure on the traditional approaches of the South Asian communities and individuals, and especially the young. Participants were aware of changing times and difference of approach in their offspring, and could see increased tensions between the generations on the way.

Language and family relationships are closely intertwined, with the languages spoken and given meaning from within family heavily influenced by the meanings of wider social contexts (Burck 2005). When parents and children are primarily living in different languages - for example between home and school - schisms between older and younger generations are often exacerbated by their different 'language perspectives', the products of their linguistic and cultural contexts. Examples in this study of intergenerational tension reflect other reports of tension in the UK's South Asian communities between the expectations of the older generation and the aspirations of their second and third generation offspring in the UK (Seabrooke & Milne 2004). These become especially pronounced as younger generations increasingly define themselves as British Asian - or as a product of both cultures - leading to the undermining of the shared cultural understandings that create a 'community of interpretation' (Gergen 1991), including family bonds, assumptions about inter-generational reciprocity and traditional support structures.

⁴ Recent calculations put an appropriate annual salary for women at £24,500, if all household chores, childminding and other skills are costed appropriately (The Guardian, Family section, 25.3.06)

Trusting 'outsiders'

Ten years ago, a study into why support services were not accessed by South Asian women suggested that one reason was because of the inappropriateness of services on offer (Beliappa 1991). Similarly, the results of this study imply that in part, the community does not turn to outside agencies for assistance because of an anxiety about a lack of understanding about issues of importance for South Asians. In this study, the terms 'insider' and 'outsider' were used with ease by participants, who definitely saw themselves as belonging to a South Asian culture that was distinct from the surrounding majority white British culture. The term 'insider' was generally used to refer to people who could be identified as sharing an Asian microculture that encompasses norms of communication and behaviour, shared expectation and perceptions, and a similar approach to family and community roles (Kimmel 2000). The importance afforded to this shared perception is clear in a number of the extracts in this study, including references to the role of women in marriage, the status of men in the family and community and in the reluctance to engage with professional 'outsiders' to address support needs for the family.

While participants identified themselves as 'insiders' (of a wider South Asian community), it is interesting to note that the overwhelming sense of the wider community to emerge in the analysis was that of competition and anxiety, rather than support. The fear of being talked about, represented by excessive community interest in activities, achievements and frailties, is summed up by the dominant discourse of 'shame', which in this account appears to operate as a holding mechanism, ensuring community members stay in line. This and related discourses around status and power can be seen to be related to the traditionally collectivist nature of South Asian communities, including the importance put on group allegiance (Le Baron, 2003). Participants clearly articulated a sense of pressure to avoid any damage to family reputation by maintaining an external image of happiness,

contentment and wellbeing, findings supported other research studies (Seabrooke & Milne, 2004).

Implications for conflict work

Current methods of conflict analysis used in international conflict transformation and other approaches do appear to indicate ways of understanding better how the distinct cultural groups in Britain view and respond to conflict. Similarly, the narrative mediation approach of identifying competing stories in the way parties view conflict situations, and the importance placed on revealing discourse for what it is, suggests that discourse analysis could prove a useful tool way of identifying entrenched positions and ways of challenging these. For practitioners interested in the ongoing societal change associated with conflict transformation, critical discourse analysis is particularly interesting in the way that it links individual consciousness to societal structures and wider power inequalities. Below I list three specific areas of interest and/or concern to emerge from the study that could usefully be explored further.

Understanding realities Discourse analysis conceptualises national identity, sexuality, gender and race as social constructions whose social and political meanings are contextually bound (Mottier 2002). Its possible uses in conflict work include research into how proposed interventions match with people's realities, including the level of integration of key discourses for a given community - for example, the concept of 'shame' within the South Asian community - into support services on offer, and an awareness how this impacts on people's choice to access, or otherwise, these (Suurmond 2005). It is equally important that services and those working with them operate from an understanding of their own dominant discourses, and how these affect interaction with groups from backgrounds that differ to their own (see Fig 3). An attitude of 'we're happy to help anyone' does not address this issue, as

Fig 3 Working with an awareness of culture difference (adapted from Francis)

- Pay explicit attention to questions of culture in preparatory research, including culture/power perceptions and language capacities
- Identify cultural differences between yourself and those involved in the conflict. Explore the implications of those differences, both in terms of what is respectful to those involved and of what will be needed in addressing the conflict.
- Pay explicit attention to the ways in which women are affected by and can have an impact on the conflict
- Pay explicit attention to the role of power in the conflict and assess the likely impact of proposed action on changing power dynamics
- Be aware of the extent and limits of one's own power and responsibility - do not use language to dominate, be open about your own values and goals, be wary of your motivations and need or desire for power
- Build in processes for feedback, monitoring, reflection, evaluation and adjustment in relation to all aspects of practice.

the level of cultural assumption integral to systems in place very often inadvertently excludes minority groups through a lack of sensitivity (Kumari & Nirwal, 2004; Seabrooke & Milne 2004).

In addition, it is crucial that practitioners are aware of the dangers of grouping disparate populations together, and assuming that they will share entirely similar issues and values. For example, analysis of the results of the 2001 UK Census clearly confirm that the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi components of Britain's South Asian populations *differ* from one another in significant ways⁵, and that they are likely to follow their own distinctive patterns of adaptation and acculturation. Their convergence into a single, homogeneous pan-Asian pattern of behaviour is most unlikely (Ballard 2002).

Conceptualisation One issue that was repeatedly cited as a barrier to assistance in the studies of South Asian mental health was that of terminology and

⁵ In the 2001 UK Census, roughly half of the Indian community living in the south west identified themselves as Hindu, a third Sikh, a quarter Muslim and the remainder Christian. In the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities, 92% identified themselves as Muslim (Ballard 2002)

conceptualisation. For example, in the study about care for Asian elderly with dementia the lack of understanding of the illness was linked to the fact that there was no equivalent word for dementia in Asian languages, and that the condition was not conceptualised as an organic disease or treatable illness (Seabrooke & Milne 2004). My impression is that there are similar barriers in working with conflict in the South Asian community, both in terms of terminology and in concept. For example, in some South Asian languages, the words used to describe pain can signify both a physical pain or an expression of emotional pain or distress (heartache), a subtlety that is easily lost in translation (Riat & Burns, 1998). In addition, given the collectivist approach of the community, it is likely that the Eurocentric construct of conflict - and especially that of expecting individuals to be able and willing to address conflict from their perspective alone - makes little sense. Labelling some of our interactions as conflicts and then dissecting them into smaller components is a distinctly Western approach that may obscure other aspects of relationships (Le Baron 2003). To illustrate this idea, Le Baron cites an interview with an elderly Chinese man living in Canada who indicated that he had experienced no conflict at all for the previous 40 years - possibly achieved through a cultural preference to see the world through lenses of harmony rather than conflict, as encouraged by his Confucian upbringing⁶.

Working from within As already indicated, local support services are often found to be unsuitable and culturally inappropriate to the needs of Asian communities (Rai-Atkins et al 2006), who view the individual in a holistic way, as a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual being (Seabrooke & Milne 2004). However, some research has indicated that South Asian women would welcome initiatives that could reduce domestic stress and prevent family breakdown, but that a lack of awareness of existing local support means that many Asian women cope with their distress alone,

⁶ 'Proper conduct' from a Confucianism perspective includes a suppression of the seven passions of joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hatred and desire. A person may experience these passions, but they should be displayed in moderated form only, if at all. The more 'educated' the person, the less demonstrative he/she will be. (Bailey 2000)

through prayer, crying and hard work (Qureshi et al 2000; Beliappa 1991). Men, on the other hand, are more suspicious of the motives for intervention in family life, a finding that indicates a need to work with conflict in a way that does not undermine current gender relations in families.

As power balancing is a key element of standard mediation and conflict resolution practice, this is not as easy as it might seem and is precisely the type of dilemma that is difficult for practitioners raised with a Western and possibly feminist perspective. One way forward is to train and work with community members as they are ideally placed to work with internal conflict issues. This 'insider partial' role - someone known to the parties and familiar with the history of the situation and the web of relationships - has traditionally been rejected in mediation, for example, in preference to bringing in an 'outsider neutral' mediator who can clearly be seen as impartial. However, the importance put on relationship in high-context cultures⁷ suggests that such interpersonal trust is a key means of establishing communication when working with groups that view outsiders with suspicion (Le Baron 2003; Lederach 2005). For those working with any cultural group different to their own, it is essential to be fully aware of cultural implications of any interventions they embark on through a process of investigation and self awareness (*see Fig 3*, adapted from Francis 2004). A key aim should be to develop what Le Baron (2003) describes as 'cultural fluency' - a familiarity with the nature of cultures and how they intertwine with relationships in times of conflict and harmony.

Summary

The traditionally collectivist approach of Britain's South Asian communities is in a time of transition as those born in the UK adapt to local conditions and mores. In

⁷ 'High-context' and 'low-context' communication refers to the degree to which messages are conveyed in ways other than speech. In low-context settings (more usual in European/Western communication), more attention is paid to the literal meanings of words and less to the context surrounding the words; with high-context communication, implied meanings arise from the physical setting, relational cues or shared understandings. Insider partials tend to be preferred in traditional high-context settings; outsider neutrals are more common in low-context settings (Le Baron 2003)

particular, this is affecting relationships within families and communities, with evidence that growing intergenerational tension and conflict are leading to a breakdown of family cohesion and support systems. A culture of secrets and shame is encouraging individuals to internalise the confusion associated with such change and transition, as demonstrated by high levels of psychological stress within the community. This in turn is leading a restricted ability to build social capital and engage with the wider mainstream, so limiting access to support in conflict situations and hindering the exploration of alternative conflict strategies.

Working with the South Asian community to provide conflict support requires working with the value systems that they currently hold, informed by traditional thinking and faiths, as well as those they are moving towards. Practitioners from the community itself will best understand its internal pressures and dynamics, and are most likely to create support structures that engage with community values and hierarchies, even where these are at odds with mainstream society. Building community conflict projects around this understanding should assist in providing appropriate and respectful assistance in conflict situations for all our diverse communities.

Chapter 6: Last word ... personal reflections

At the start of this study, I identified that trust of me, as an interviewer from a different cultural background, could make collecting meaningful data difficult. I was concerned that individuals might feel anxious when talking about conflict within their communities, perhaps particularly to a white researcher, and might be reluctant to present themselves in a bad light. What I had not anticipated, however, was that trust within the community itself would be such an issue, so that even speaking openly in a small focus group about conflict felt potentially unsafe for participants. However, because this group had already met a number of times to discuss conflict before the collection of data began, some trust was already established between themselves and with me, allowing them to speak relatively freely in the focus groups and interviews. As a result, my impression is that the texts do touch on real difficulties within the community, and as such, do warrant attention.

The findings of the study seem to suggest that much of the hidden conflict within the South Asian community is related to internal power inequalities, in particular between men and women. As a woman who grew up with the strongly feminist Western perspectives of the 1970s, this level of inequality, and its acceptance, is hard to empathise with. One possible consequence of this is that expressions of gender relations strike me as more conflictual than may actually be experienced by those in the situation, who could accept them as a norm. In further studies of this kind, it will be important to start with a clear understanding and explanation of the researcher's own worldview in relation to conflict, and to explore in more depth than here how key terminology - such as the word 'conflict' itself - is conceptualised by the researcher and those being researched.

Another major root of anxiety and conflict expressed in this study is the tension experienced in maintaining attitudes and values that are radically different to the surrounding majority population. Without the experience of living as a minority group, this sense of being beleaguered is hard to understand and easy to misinterpret, reminding me that my role as co-creator (author) of meaning began with the questions I asked and my responses during interviews, and informed both my selection of data and my interpretation of that data. By the end of the study, I had come to feel that although the data here does demonstrate conflict triggers and

strategies used by individuals within the Asian community that differ to mine, such data needs sifting very carefully to avoid over-simplification, including an over-emphasis on the differences between cultural groups rather than the similarities shared by all human beings.

For me, this is the major dilemma of a research study such as this: emphasising difference through broad generalisations, such as between majority and minority groups. For example, the idea of 'majority population' is in itself problematic, as although many white British people may broadly share a European genetic history, the numerous distinct local and social cultures that exist refute the idea of one group with shared characteristics - at its most simplistic, social norms in Lancaster are not the same as those in London or Glasgow. Where there is shared experience is at the most basic human level - we all fight, laugh, cry, worry about what people think of us, avoid upsetting those who love us, and we all need strategies to help us deal with difficult situations in a positive, helpful fashion. These experiences are common to all human beings, regardless of upbringing.

Despite these drawbacks, I feel that taking the time to understand more deeply how different cultural programmings impact on how people think about conflict, and how they respond to the tension it brings, could usefully inform the development of respectful community services for all. I look forward to building on this study to continue this work in more depth.

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Appendix 1 Sample consent form

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Research consent form

Title of study:

Hidden secrets - what the talk of South Asian women living in the UK's South West illuminates about how they engage with conflict in their lives, with associated implications for community conflict practitioners

Name of researcher: Hen Wilkinson

This study aims to explore the range of approaches to conflict found within the cultural groups represented in the central Bristol community. The study is being done as part of a Masters degree jointly run by the School of Psychology, Birkbeck College, University of London and the Institute of Family Therapy. The study has received ethical approval.

The study consists of a three-hour focus group with individuals from four different language groups living in central Bristol exploring language around conflict (part recorded) and subsequent individual interviews. The interviews will last about 1.5 hours and will be tape recorded to help analysis. Only the researcher and possibly her supervisor will hear the tape, and any transcript made will not have your name on it (it will be numbered). Any names you mention will be changed.

The results of the study will be written up in a report of the research for my Masters degree at Birkbeck College. You will not be identifiable in the write-up. The study is supervised by Dr Virginia Eatough, who you can contact on the above address and phone or via email: v.eatough@bbk.ac.uk.

If you are happy to take part in this research, please fill in and sign the slip below.

Title of study: Hidden secrets: what the talk of South Asian women living in the UK's South West illuminates about how they engage with conflict in their lives, with associated implications for community conflict practitioners

Name of researcher: Hen Wilkinson

I have been informed about the nature of this study and willingly consent to take part. I agree that the focus group and interview can be tape recorded.

I understand that anything I say will be kept confidential. I will not be identified in any record of the research, and nor will my participation in the study be made public in any way.

I also understand I may refuse to answer questions if I wish, and I can withdraw from the study at any time. I am over 18 years old.

Signed:

Dated:

Appendix 2 Focus group and interview schedules

Focus group 1: proverbs

Bangla	Urdu	Punjabi
Ek hate tati baje ne (One hand do not make clap)	U Taali do hathon se bajti hai (You need two hands to make a clap)	Thow hath anal rota baki thi ei (It takes two hands to make a chappati)
Vora kolchi nore kom (The full vessel doesn't move)		
Khali kolci baje bashi (Empty vessels make most noise)		
chadere o kaloke ache (Even the moon has a dark side)	charagh yalay Audhera (It's dark underneath the lamp)	
	Wisdom is bigger than the buffalo	Khon wada jidi akal wadee (The more knowledgeable person is the oldest person)
Naahte na janhle uthan baka (If you can't dance you say the floor is uneven)		

Focus group 2: Barriers to resolution

Face saving	respect
Honour/trust (<i>izzat</i>)	hidden secrets
Favoritism	'black mark' family
Family history	education
Reputation	confidence in professional bodies

Generational barriers because of control

Interview schedule

- Question 1: Can you tell me what the word 'conflict' means to you?
- Question 2: Can you tell me if there were times as a child when you remember adults talking about how to deal with difficult situations?
- Question 3: Can you describe a specific time to me?
- Question 4: Can you give me some examples of how the women and the men in your family approached difficult situations?
- Question 5: Did the same people deal with conflicts in the same way inside and outside the home?
- Question 6: What sorts of ideas or images give you hope when you find yourself in a difficult situation?
- Question 7: Can you remember a time when you turned to someone else for help in a conflict?
- Question 8: What qualities are important in a person you might turn to?
- Question 9: Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 3 Discourse analysis in practice

10 criteria for distinguishing discourses, Parker (1992)

1. A discourse is realised in texts
2. A discourse is about objects
3. A discourse contains subjects - space for types of self to step in
4. A discourse is a coherent system of meanings
5. A discourse relates to other discourses
6. A discourse reflects on its own way of speaking
7. A discourse is historically located
8. Discourses support (or are linked to) institutions
9. Discourses reproduce power relations
10. Discourses have ideological effects

Critical discourse: 10 guiding questions, adapted from Fairclough (1989:92)

A Vocabulary

1. What experiential values do words have? Eg words based in ideology, rewording or overworking
2. What relational values do words have? - euphemistic expressions, formal/informal words
3. What expressive values do words have?
4. What metaphors are used?

B Grammar

5. What experiential values are evident - eg sentences active or passive, positive or negative?
6. What relational values do grammatical features have - imperative, questions, are 'we' and 'you' used and how?
7. What expressive values do grammatical features have?
8. How are simple sentences linked?

C Textual structures

9. What interactional conventions are used? - does one contributor dominate another?
10. What larger-scale structure does the text have?

Experiential value = a clue to the text producer's experience of the natural or social world ie knowledge and beliefs

Relational value = trace/clue to social relationships indicated by discourse in text

Expressive value = subjects and social identities, an indicator of the speaker's evaluation of the reality referred to

Appendix 4 Bentham's Panopticon

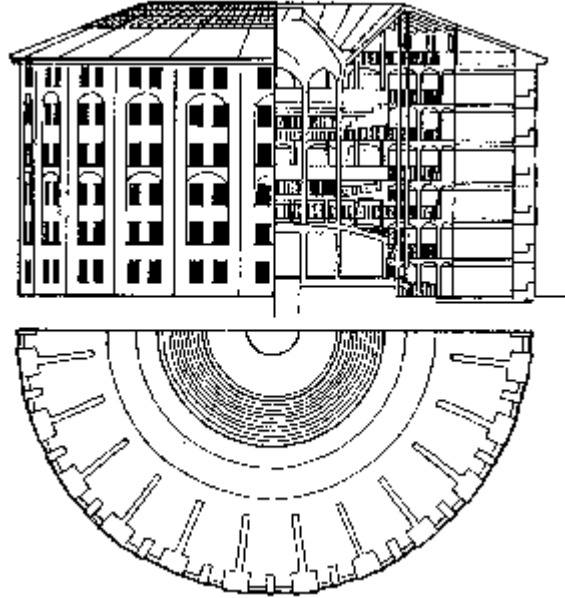


Image: University College London Library

Theory of Surveillance

The "all-seeing" *panopticon*, proposed as a model prison by British philosopher and legal reformer [Jeremy Bentham](#) (1748-1832), was designed to be a round-the-clock surveillance machine. No prisoner could ever see the 'inspector' in the centre, so could never know when he was being watched -- mental uncertainty that in itself would prove to be a crucial instrument of discipline.

French philosopher Michel Foucault described the implications of 'Panopticism' in his 1975 work *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (NY:Vintage Books pp. 195-228):

"Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. ... in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. [*With the Panopticon*], Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so."

Material taken from <http://cartome.org/panopticon1.htm>, March 16 2006