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Examining ‘Good’ Mothering and Value Transmission: How British-Born South-Asian Mothers Seek Generational Change

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Abstract

Sociological literature has begun to examine how mothers occupying non-normative positions negotiate the transmission of cultural capital and habitus, and how the norms of good mothering shape this process. However, less is known about second-generation mothers' experiences, despite evidence of changing gender relations within ethnic minority communities. Drawing on interviews with British-born South-Asian mothers who held upwardly mobile aspirations, we highlight several forms of departure from intensive, middle-class mothering. Informants face additional responsibilities for transmitting cultural and religious capital, pursuing the ideal of the child as 'skilled cultural navigator', enabling their children to negotiate hybridised identities. They reinterpret the norms of intensive mothering, pushing against key tropes including expert-dependence, self-sacrifice and overprotection. These findings extend knowledge of the mother's role in creating a reflexive habitus, by showing how second-generation mothers socialise their children with reflexively chosen cultural and religious practices, based on egalitarian gender norms.

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Keywords

cultural capital, gender, habitus, intensive mothering, religion, second generation, South Asian, value transmission

Introduction

Parents play a significant role in transmitting values to children, including the reproduction of class, cultural and religious values, and gender attitudes (Franceschelli and O'Brien, 2014; Perales et al., 2021). Cultural capital is transmitted from parents through the habitus, as children are socialised with values, habits and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990). The mother's role is critical in transmitting and enhancing cultural capital (Lareau, 2011), particularly in immigrant families (Erel, 2012). Sociological literature on motherhood has shown how mothers transmit cultural capital through the habitus in ways that depend on their social class position (Lareau, 2011; Reay, 2004). While middle-class mothers focus on the ideal of the child as a project to be managed (Halldén, 1991), working-class mothers typically follow a 'natural growth' approach (Lareau, 2011). The transmission of cultural capital and habitus has been shown to be intertwined with the normative notion of good mothering (Gillies, 2005). The dominant norms of good mothering are based on an intensification of parenting practices (Faircloth, 2020), founded upon middle-class values and dispositions (Cappellini et al., 2019). Intensive motherhood is recognised as a global script of good mothering, positioning mothers as responsible for all aspects of their child's development (Arendell, 2000; Faircloth, 2020). While research has increasingly examined how mothers occupying non-normative positions negotiate these norms (Banister et al., 2016; Dow, 2016), much less is known about how second-generation mothers transmit cultural capital and habitus to their children, and how good mothering norms shape this process. Yet, there is evidence of change towards more egalitarian gender relations within South-Asian communities, as British-born South-Asian women seek upward mobility (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016; Shah et al., 2010).

We address this literature gap, revealing how upwardly mobile second-generation mothers seek to reconfigure gender norms and reinterpret the norms of intensive motherhood, through the intergenerational transmission of values to their children. Through qualitative interviews with 19 British-born South-Asian mothers who held upwardly mobile aspirations, we highlight the additional responsibilities faced in transmitting cultural and religious capital. We identify several forms of departure from existing knowledge of middle-class, intensive mothering. Instead of following the ideal of the child as a project (Halldén, 1991), we identify how informants pursued the ideal of the child as a 'skilled cultural navigator' (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 47). This approach involves transmitting cultural capital in ways that maintain or enhance their children's social position, while enabling them to negotiate hybridised identities between two cultures (Pradhan et al., 2019). These women reinterpret the notion of good mothering, pushing against key tropes of intensive mothering such as self-sacrifice, expert-dependence and overprotection (Hays, 1996; Molander, 2021). We extend understanding of the mother's role in creating a reflexive habitus (Ingram and Abrahams, 2015; Sweetman,

2003) by showing how second-generation mothers socialise their children with reflexively chosen cultural and religious practices (Mellor and Shilling, 2014), based on egalitarian gender norms.

Cultural Capital, Habitus and Good, Middle-Class Mothering

The family is an important context for the intergenerational transmission of resources and capital (economic, social status and cultural) including ‘values, aspirations, skills, religion and languages’ (Franceschelli and O’Brien, 2014: 1192). Bourdieu (1986) identified three forms of cultural capital: embodied, as seen in enduring skills and dispositions; objectified, through cultural artefacts, like books; and institutionalised, such as through educational qualifications. Cultural capital is ‘imprinted and encoded in the habitus from childhood’, with the family playing an important role in familiarising children with common dispositions and ways of being in the world (Franceschelli and O’Brien, 2014: 1193). Habitus reflects ‘durable and transposable dispositions . . . which generate organised practices and representations’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 53). Parents transmit knowledge and resources to their children, which are internalised, informing individual actions, and shaping social reproduction across generations (Franceschelli and O’Brien, 2014). Parental socialisation is important in habitus formation, providing the ‘link between individual and class trajectory’ (Reay, 2004: 59). Since mothers usually spend most time with children, they are central to the intergenerational transmission of class, habitus and cultural capital (Reay, 2004).

Motherhood literature shows how middle-class mothers use their time, economic and cultural resources to equip their children with the skills, dispositions and tastes required to consolidate their class position, improving their life-chances (Lareau, 2002). Mothers are held morally accountable for ensuring their children reach their full potential and often feel the need to display practices of good mothering to others, as well as themselves (Finch, 2007). There is strong evidence that ‘the power to define what is good parenting forms part of the cultural capital of the middle-classes’ (Perrier, 2013: 656; Skeggs, 2004). Thus, contemporary discourses of good mothering normalise middle-class parenting practices, which have become well established as the ‘proper’ way of performing good, middle-class mothering (Cappellini et al., 2019; Gillies, 2005).

Lareau (2002) finds that middle-class parents are guided by the logic of ‘concerted cultivation’, actively developing children’s cognitive and social skills. These parents view the child as a project to be managed and feel responsible for their development (Halldén, 1991; Wall, 2010). The norms of good, middle-class mothering are dominated by an intensification of parenting practices, linked to neoliberal cultural scripts (Faircloth, 2020). Arendell (2000: 1195) regards intensive mothering as the ‘normative standard by which mothering practices and arrangements are evaluated’. Such intensive mothering requires devotion to ‘the day-to-day labour of nurturing the child, listening to the child, attempting to decipher the child’s needs and desires, struggling to meet the child’s wishes, and placing the child’s wellbeing ahead of their own convenience’ (Hays, 1996: 8). Sociological literature on intensive parenting regards intensive mothering as firmly underpinned by middle-class values and dispositions and focuses on developing children’s

future stocks of cultural capital (Cairns et al., 2013; Perrier, 2013). While much literature has focused on white middle-class mothers (Perrier, 2013), a growing body examines how women occupying non-normative positions negotiate good mothering norms.

Alternative Norms of Good Mothering from Non-Normative Positions

Sociological literature has examined how parents who occupy non-normative positions transmit values to their children and experience the good mothering norms. Halldén (1991) found that working-class mothers view the child as an autonomous being, rather than a project to be managed. Instead of focusing on children's accrual of cultural capital, they are encouraged to 'unfold' at their own pace (Halldén, 1991: 338). Similarly, Lareau (2002: 748) found that the working-class ideals of good mothering focus on 'the accomplishment of natural growth', allowing children to grow, within certain boundaries. This less intense approach is based on the notion that providing 'love, food and safety' ensures that children thrive (Lareau, 2002: 748). However, these mothers often find it harder to transmit cultural capital to their children (Reay, 2004). While low-income mothers may distance themselves from working-class stereotypes (Skeggs, 2004), they can struggle with upward comparisons to unattainable norms of good mothering and sacrifice (Banister et al., 2016). Yet, Molander (2021: 208) found that single fathers in Sweden could re-interpret the norms of intensive parenting, pushing away from 'anxiety ridden self-sacrifice' to view themselves as 'good enough' fathers. However, how upwardly mobile mothers transmit cultural capital and habitus (Lawler, 1999) and position themselves in relation to the norms of good mothering remains under-explored.

Sociological literature also examines how ethnic-minority mothers position themselves. Black and ethnic minority mothers are often pathologised and 'othered' for apparent deficiencies in their motherhood practice (Elliott et al., 2015; Hamilton, 2016). Institutional policies privilege white middle-class mothers (Collins, 1994), often deeming black mothers as undeserving, 'bad' mothers (Reynolds, 2020). Yet, research on African American women's experiences highlights these women feel less accountable to intensive mothering but encounter alternative mothering discourses, such as integrated mothering (Collins, 2009; Dow, 2016). Similarly, Peng and Wong (2013) identify how transnational mothers renegotiate dominant norms of mothering to construct diverse arrangements, such as collaborative mothering. Less is known about how second-generation mothers transmit cultural capital and habitus to their children and how the norms of good motherhood shape the process. This is an important gap, given research that suggests increasing numbers of British-born South-Asian women with upwardly mobile aspirations have begun to transform class and gender relations through their pursuit of higher education (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016; Shah et al., 2010).

British-Born South-Asian Women: Negotiating Mobility

British-born South-Asian women are often the children or grandchildren of South-Asian immigrants, whose parents and/or grandparents may have been part of one of several periods of mass South-Asian migration. Second- and third-generation South-Asian

mothers will likely have grown up being strictly monitored, due to their perceived role in preserving their family's ethnic identity (Dwyer, 2000). Young second-generation South-Asian women typically 'occupy a symbolic place as the guardian of family honour and integrity' and may well have been socialised with traditional gender norms that are intertwined with South-Asian family hierarchies (Dwyer, 2000: 478). Their mothers may have worked to support the family, while also encountering the 'second shift' of housework and caring responsibilities (Dion and Dion, 2001).

However, research increasingly has shown how British-born South-Asian women are becoming upwardly mobile, challenging traditional gender norms during adolescence (Shah et al., 2010). Many will have reached adulthood at a time of rapid increase in South-Asian women's participation in higher education (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016). Both working- and middle-class South-Asian parents have been found to mobilise ethnic capital within the family habitus to encourage children to pursue higher education, careers and upward mobility (Modood, 2004). Such ethnic capital operates within parent-child relationships, through the transmission of values, aspirations and enforcement of norms (Shah et al., 2010). As British-born South-Asian women negotiate access to higher education and marriage, they become reflexive, 'skilled cultural navigators between their parental culture and wider society' (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 47). Such reflexivity becomes an important 'means of social mobility', particularly for working-class South-Asian women (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 56).

Yet Bourdieusian scholars have suggested that upward mobility can significantly impact a person's habitus in struggles to negotiate new social fields (Friedman, 2016; Reay et al., 2009). Socially mobile black middle-class mothers can experience discomfort among their white counterparts, feeling psychologically devalued and subjugated as 'as an undesirable other' (Rollock et al., 2012: 270). Similarly, upwardly mobile Black Caribbean parents arm their children against racism and oppression, cultivating self-esteem and pride in their cultural values (Vincent et al., 2012). The ability to self-define and self-valuate is an important way of resisting objectification, a form of activism against racism (Collins, 1986, 1994). Such motherwork necessitates extra burdens of protecting children from racism and inequality (Elliott et al., 2015), and empowering children to 'get on' – to use Bourdieu's (1990) term – in unequal fields (see Collins, 1994).

While upward mobility can cause habitus to become divided (or cleft), rendering people feeling torn between two worlds (Bourdieu, 1990; Friedman, 2016); a heightened reflexivity, which becomes a 'positive and empowering resource' for habitus change (Ingram and Abrahams, 2015: 140), can also result. However, relatively little is known about the impact of upward mobility on British-born South-Asian women's habitus, particularly once they become mothers. Our study provides insight into how these women feel empowered to create a reflexive habitus (Sweetman, 2003) enabling them to reconfigure gender norms, while reinterpreting the norms of intensive motherhood.

Methodology

In-depth interviews were conducted with 23 South-Asian mothers: 19 were UK-born (17 second-generation, two third-generation) and four were first-generation. Since our focus is on the mothering practices of British-born South-Asian women, the interviews

with second- and third-generation women form the main empirical base (data from the first-generation mothers are used to contextualise the findings).

Informants were mainly from North-West England, recruited via personal contacts, snowball sampling, South-Asian community and women's groups, and other relevant websites and organisations. Except for one informant, who was expecting her first child, the informants had between one and four children, ranging from four months to 15 years old. However, most informants had at least one child at pre-school or primary school; only three had a child in secondary school, suggesting that the women's aspirations for their child's social mobility are largely future-oriented projects (Wall, 2010). Although most identified as Muslim, two described themselves as Hindu (Chanda and Jasvinder), while one was Sikh (Raveena). Most British-born informants were raised in working-class families, based on their parents' employment and education level (Lareau, 2002). The sample included women who had to different extents negotiated access to education, careers and marriage. The second- and third-generation women shared the same religion as their husbands and most hailed from the same ethnic group. Husbands were often of the same generation as informants, although nine married first-generation immigrants. Only three women married husbands from a different South-Asian ethnic group. Most informants were educated to graduate level, including all the first-generation informants. Most of the British-born informants self-identified as middle class, in terms of their cultural and economic capital (e.g. holidays, family activities and hobbies, home ownership), and were typically employed in graduate/professional roles. However, five of the Muslim women had not continued their education beyond secondary or further education, with most employed in administrative roles. Four of these women found it difficult to identify as middle class but had middle-class aspirations.

Interviews typically lasted between one and two hours, generating over 43 hours of data. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, enabling a rich description of informants' lived experiences to emerge. A conversational style was adopted, beginning with 'grand-tour' questions (McCracken, 1988) exploring informants' family background, education and career, leading to discussions of their journey to becoming a mother. Interviews explored several broad themes (e.g. experiences of pregnancy and preparing for motherhood/birth, early motherhood experiences, returning to work and everyday mothering practices). Informants generally required little prompting and embarked on detailed depictions of their transition to motherhood. It soon became apparent that informants were drawing on their upbringing and experiences of education and marriage to make sense of their motherhood experiences. Often, they discussed their mothering practices in relation to what 'good' mothering meant to them. Data were interpreted using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), beginning with the familiarisation process, involving reading the transcripts, note-taking, highlighting patterns and points of interest. An initial set of codes was then generated, and the iterative process of searching for themes across the data was undertaken. Codes were gathered around emerging themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and refined by circling back and forth between relevant literatures. Themes and subthemes were examined and reviewed for their internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990), to ensure the data within them 'cohered together meaningfully', while there were 'clear and identifiable distinctions between themes' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 91). The wider analytical themes illuminated how informants made sense of their mothering experiences.

The findings first examine how informants view good mothering in relation to their past, where South-Asian norms of intensive mothering were prevalent. Although their parents, especially mothers, were usually keen for their daughters to pursue education/mobility, informants were largely socialised with traditional gender norms. The second theme examines how informants view good mothering in relation to their present, maintaining status as good mothers by pursuing the ideal of the child as ‘skilled cultural navigator’ (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 47). The final theme identifies several forms of departure from the norms of intensive motherhood, as the women sought to create a reflexive habitus (Sweetman, 2003).

Good Mothering in Relation to Their Past: South-Asian Norms of Good (Intensive) Mothering

In this theme, we examine how informants understood good mothering in relation to their upbringing and their mothers’ performances. Informants were typically raised within a working-class habitus, with prevalent traditional patriarchal gender norms. Their mothers negotiated South-Asian norms of intensive mothering, shouldering much of the domestic and childrearing responsibilities, transmitting South-Asian values and ensuring their children become ‘good’ sons and daughters. While informants’ parents often held aspirations for their daughters’ education and social mobility, the transmission of values was largely intertwined with traditional gender norms.

Informants felt that their mothers felt the need to be self-sacrificing, a central tenet of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). South-Asian norms of intensive mothering position middle-class mothers as the gold ‘standard’, whose ‘sole purpose’ is to become a ‘good wife and good mother . . . raising good citizens for the nation’ (Ganguly, 2022: 772). Expected to conform to patriarchal authorities, they selflessly put their family’s needs first (Sangha, 2014). As Anita reflected: ‘it was very difficult because you grew up learning that you’ve got a role . . . you’ve got be a selfless mum, you’ve got to cook and clean’. Similarly, Madina felt she had a ‘typical’ South-Asian upbringing, describing her mother as a ‘serious homemaker’. Their mothers came from working-class backgrounds yet held themselves accountable to middle-class South-Asian intensive mothering norms, and felt judged on their capability as homemakers, from raising respectable, well-educated children to maintaining a clean, tasteful home.

Yet, following their migration to the UK, informants’ mothers often contributed to the household income. As many were not educated beyond school age, they typically worked in low-paid, manual jobs linked to local factories. As Raveena explained, her mother was:

carrying two gender roles . . . on the one hand you’re told, this is your job as a wife, you have to make sure that the kids and the house and everything fine . . . but then you also have to do a man’s job and earn a living.

Informants found it difficult to grow up watching their mothers ‘suffer’ with the ‘double burden of intensified work and domestic responsibilities that migrant working-class mothers often face’ (Dion and Dion, 2001: 512). For example, Nabeela felt that her mother had to ‘compromise her personality’ and ‘quickly learn to provide a household’.

While performing traditional gender roles can help middle-class, first-generation immigrants to 'bolster' their identities as 'good' South-Asian parents (Mehrotra and Calasanti, 2010: 799), informants understood that their mothers 'sacrificed the most', rendering their habitus during their own upbringing as a 'site of gender inequality'.

Informants perceived differences in their gender socialisation, compared with their brothers, which they linked to South-Asian intensive mothering norms. These norms emphasised how good mothers raise their children to respect their family and become 'good' sons and daughters, obedient to the family structure and roles (Mehrotra and Calasanti, 2010). Such responsibilities assume even greater importance following migration, as South-Asian mothers become the 'bearers of culture' (Sangha, 2014: 418), transmitting cultural and religious values to children: 'It was always the mother who's the driving force . . . if the kid does something good, it's bringing respect to the family, if the kid does anything bad . . . their mum didn't teach them anything' (Ameena). Their mothers reportedly felt responsible for preserving the family's honour and reputation, linked to their daughters' role as future bearers of South-Asian cultural traditions and values (Dwyer, 2000). As Jasvinder reflected, 'my mum brought us up with . . . [a] very orthodox upbringing . . . girls have a certain role, boys have a certain role'. She recalled how daughters' behaviour was monitored much more than sons': 'I think it was a fear of . . . we don't want our daughter to get spoilt . . . she's the embodiment of shame and respect.' Similarly, Raveena suggested that her parents found it difficult to challenge traditional gender norms: 'they become very tight-knit and very ingrained in the way that they think . . . for our mum and dad's generation it was still . . . the Indians do it this way' (Raveena). Informants' mothers often lacked the time, cultural and social capital to be reflexive of how they transmitted values and heritage, as Rafeeqa explained: 'my mum was working all the time . . . it was like "this is just how we do things"'.

Despite differences in gender socialisation and the prevalence of traditional gender norms, many informants perceived that their parents, particularly their mothers, were keen not to 'repeat the cycle' in which 'the women in the family suffer' (Raveena). Their parents allowed and often encouraged their daughters to pursue higher education, albeit with tighter restrictions than their brothers. Education was considered a source of social mobility and cultural capital for the family (Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera, 2010). As Naeema recalled, her parents were keen for her to 'push the boundaries' and gain social mobility, although she resented being deprived of the opportunity her brothers were given to live away at university. Others said their mothers viewed encouraging education as part of a good mother's religious and moral duty (Al-deen and Windle, 2017). Education helped show devotion to their children, ensuring they did their homework, although they may have lacked the cultural and linguistic capital to help. As Ashira remembered, 'if we used to get bad marks in school, it was the end of the world at home'. Although informants thought that their parents had struggled to challenge traditional gender norms, they drew on their family's ethnic capital (Modood, 2004), pursuing higher education and careers as a route to upward social mobility. However, some parents were less supportive and these informants found it harder to negotiate access to higher education. For example, Namra recalled how her 'mum didn't really have much of a clue' about going to university. Nevertheless, these informants viewed their careers as a source of independence and held middle-class aspirations.

On becoming mothers, informants were keen to transmit cultural and religious capital to their children, as part of their concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2002). However, they also sought to equip their children with the skills to assert themselves and negotiate their identities, enabling them to become ‘skilled cultural navigators’ (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 47).

Good Mothering in Relation to Their Present: Child as ‘Skilled Cultural Navigator’

In this theme, we show how informants’ performances of good mothering involved maintaining their newly acquired (or aspirational) position as middle-class mothers. Compared with their white middle-class counterparts, for these second-generation mothers, middle-class norms of good mothering created additional responsibilities related to the transmission of cultural and religious heritage. Although second-generation middle-class mothers still seem to feel ultimately responsible for their child’s development, as a project to be managed (Halldén, 1991), they appear to frame their approach around the ideal of the child as a ‘skilled cultural navigator’ (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 47). This approach involves transmitting religious and cultural capital, and middle-class dispositions, alongside the skills to negotiate hybridised identities between the two cultures.

For women like Rafeeqa, the transmission of cultural and religious heritage was intertwined with the norms of good, middle-class mothering, and ensuring that her children (especially daughters) reached their full potential:

I’ve invested a lot in . . . storybooks and puzzles from India . . . because education is really important to me . . . I would like [my daughter] . . . to have a career . . . because I think what it gives to a woman is . . . very special. It gives her, her own space, independence, monetary freedom. (Rafeeqa)

Their performances of motherhood were focused on transmitting cultural and religious heritage in ways that would enrich their children, giving them the skills and dispositions to match or surpass their current position (Vincent and Ball, 2007). Informants sought to maintain their identity as good, middle-class mothers to both their South-Asian peers and other mothers within their social milieu. Yet, within their family and South-Asian communities, their performance of good mothering was also linked to the transmission of heritage and hybridised identity formation (Pradhan et al., 2019). As Ashira explained:

Our culture is the British culture, and we marry that with our religion and our ethnic background . . . So, for me . . . I don’t see it as a problem . . . [my daughter]’s going to get the best of both worlds.

Being able to teach their children to become self-confident in constructing hybridised identities was both a source of pride and distinction, ‘prized in a cosmopolitan society’ (Pradhan et al., 2019: 92):

It’s about trying to get them to embrace society and how to sort of hold themselves if they are confronted with issues . . . whereas we felt we had to be a certain way to fit in with the way people – you don’t . . . you can be proud of who you are . . . nothing can hold you back. (Namra)

Namra's approach differed greatly from her own upbringing, in which she felt she had to 'compromise' her identity and try to 'fit in'. Instead, she sought to empower her children (e.g. how to 'hold yourself') to transmit middle-class dispositions, such as being confident and 'embracing' their 'authentic', hybridised identities (Ternikar, 2019: 146). Namra's approach was emblematic of how informants wanted to equip their children with an understanding of their religion and what this symbolised (e.g. modesty and wearing a headscarf). Understanding the significance of these practices empowered their children to deal with possible racism, foreseeing changes in such practices as their children aged:

at school, all girls wear their scarf. But when she gets older . . . if you wear them . . . with all these extremists and radicalisation . . . people can tell you're a Muslim. I want her to be savvy and confident in herself . . . I wouldn't force her to wear it . . . my approach is to teach her the basics and relate it to modern life . . . then it's up to her. If . . . people make nasty comments, she can brush them off. (Namra)

Namra's account reflects broader findings surrounding motherwork. She illustrates how marginalised mothers often educate their children about their heritage and its meanings to equip them with skills needed to challenge/counter racial oppression (Collins, 1994; Elliott et al., 2015; Vincent et al., 2012), yet she recognises her daughter's agency in navigating her own decisions.

Informants viewed the transmission of linguistic capital as a key aspect of their heritage that would contribute to their children's future cultural capital. The women were generally fluent in both English and their parents' native language, typically speaking a mix of both with family members (Bloch and Hirsch, 2017). Jasvinder explained: 'with my dad and my mum especially, even now, we have a strange language . . . I could have a whole sentence in English and Punjabi mixed completely'. Having the 'requisite linguistic capital' enabled their children to maintain connections with elder generations, reaffirming their identity and ties within the South-Asian community (Pradhan et al., 2019: 94). For Namra, a Muslim of Indian descent, this meant that she and her children could 'still speak and . . . still mingle and integrate', providing the ability to 'switch' between languages and 'negotiate an existence within two cultures' (Lindridge et al., 2004: 223). However, the women also saw multilingualism as a desirable cognitive skill that enabled their child's development and helped maintain their middle-class social positioning as 'skilled cultural navigators' (Erel, 2012). As Anita explained: 'I think it just gives you more access, and why not . . . it's another skill.' They viewed the transmission of linguistic capital as a form of concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2002), increasing their child's stock of future cultural and social capital.

Feeding the family was another key aspect of transmitting heritage and cultural capital to their children. Informants wanted to socialise their children with knowledge, tastes and middle-class dispositions to help 'maintain collective cultural and religious identities' (Ternikar, 2019: 146). As Raveena, a Sikh of Indian descent, explained: 'food is a really important part of our culture'. Foodwork was both a source of autonomy and way of strengthening cultural identity (DeVault, 1994; Ternikar, 2019):

In Asian cooking, there's no measurements . . . it's literally put a handful of this in . . . it's a lot of judgement . . . this would go well with that. You don't have to stick to a plan . . . you can individualise it, based on what you want. (Raveena)

The women were transmitting culinary capital to their children, teaching them to appreciate food from their own cultural and religious heritage, while enjoying cosmopolitan, middle-class tastes (Cappellini et al., 2016), creating ‘fusion’ foods that amalgamate different styles of cooking (Lindridge et al., 2004: 223). For example, Raveena made her ‘own take on lasagnes, Chinese, we do noodles, we do Italian, we do fajitas . . . it lets you experiment’. Informants also regarded teaching about food as a future-orientated project, ensuring their child’s healthy development, education and maintaining middle-class identities (Oncini, 2020). For example, Chanda saw cooking as a useful future ‘skill’, envisioning when her children would ‘live away’ at university. Anita was keen for her daughter to learn about ‘nutrition’ and the ‘qualities of food’ to have the ‘skills’ to ‘understand her culture’ and ‘take the best part’ of both western and South-Asian cooking.

Intensive Mothering vs Good Mothering: Creating a Reflexive Habitus

While the transmission of values was intertwined with the aims of intensive mothering, and aspirations for their children’s health and social mobility (Cairns et al., 2013), informants’ views of good mothering differed from the norms of intensive mothering in three ways. First, the women relied primarily on personalised understandings of culture, religion and gender to socialise their children, rather than deferring to the authority of experts (e.g. elder generations, religious leaders). Second, they aimed to give their children autonomy and choice in how they negotiated their identity (e.g. how to dress), rather than viewing the child as vulnerable and in need of constant caregiving. Third, some of the additional responsibilities of second-generation mothers were outsourced to other family members, pushing back against intensive mothering’s expectation for ‘anxiety-ridden self-sacrifice’ (Molander, 2021: 208). As such, the women sought to create a reflexive habitus (Sweetman, 2003), enabling them to reconfigure gender norms.

While intensive mothering renders mothers as dependent on the authority of expert advice (Hays, 1996), informants placed primacy on their personalised understandings of culture, religion and gender when transmitting values to their children. As young women, they had engaged in ‘complex forms of resistance, negotiation and compromise’ (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 43) to negotiate access to university, career and marriage. On becoming mothers, they could differentiate between patriarchal gender norms, culture and religion, which enabled them to transmit values without reinforcing traditional gender norms (Joly, 2017). For example, Madina explained how she ‘liked to separate culture and religion’ because her parents often ‘confused’ traditional gender norms with culture and religion. The women contrasted their understandings of these norms to their parents, as Marjana explained: ‘my kind of thinking is completely different to my mum’s’. They felt that their parents would ‘mistakenly mix’ traditional gender norms, South-Asian culture and religion (Franceschelli and O’Brien, 2014: 1201), and followed traditional modes of religious socialisation. Anita, a Muslim woman of Pakistani heritage, reflected that her parents were more concerned with following traditional practices and maintaining family honour, giving her little choice in how she practised religion: ‘they were just obsessed about me wearing the headscarf . . . it was more how I was seen, how I was perceived’.

In contrast to their parents, informants ‘felt entitled to develop their own understanding’ of culture and religion, rather than ‘accepting prescriptions or restrictions’ based on traditional gender norms (Joly, 2017: 827). Instead of ‘relying on religious elites for guidance’ (Mellor and Shilling, 2014: 287), they reflexively learned to make decisions about which values to transmit, based on personalised understandings of culture and religion: ‘I love my religion . . . and there’s one or two parts of my culture that I’m happy about . . . I’ve picked out the good bits of each . . . and I think, yes, I can use that’ (Marjana, Pakistani heritage Muslim). They sought to develop a habitus for their children through ‘a reflexive, evaluative and transformative engagement’ with personalised understandings of culture and religion (Mellor and Shilling, 2014: 287).

The transmission of values was an opportunity to transmit egalitarian gender norms, particularly with regards to domestic responsibilities. For instance, Chanda, a Hindu of Ugandan heritage, felt strongly about treating her children equally and wanted to ‘try and be as fair as possible’. She reflected: ‘when I was growing up, I felt my mum was more attached to my brother than she was to me’. Chanda gave both her son and daughter opportunity to play with ‘a little rolling pin and board’ so that they could learn skills, such as making chapattis. Samia, a Muslim of Pakistani descent, purposefully encouraged her son to ‘help out with certain chores around the home’, a habit that he now regarded as ‘normal’. Samia was reflexively cultivating habits based on egalitarian gender norms: ‘because then it becomes second nature, you don’t think twice about it’. Rather than deferring to the authority of experts (e.g. elders/religious leaders), women like Ashira confidently relied on their own understandings of gender, culture and religion: ‘if you read the book [the Qur’an] . . . you know what women are entitled to . . . there’s so many rights that females have’. In sharp contrast to their own upbringing, they sought to create a habitus in which children were socialised with egalitarian gender norms.

Rather than viewing the child as vulnerable, at risk and in need of never-ending caregiving (Hays, 1996), the women sought to provide their children with the moral framework, skills and ability to strengthen and take pride in their hybridised identities (Collins, 1994; Vincent et al., 2012). Religion was an important parenting resource for transmitting values and forming ‘good habits at a young age’, such as ‘being respectful’, teaching children ‘truth’, ‘honesty’ and ‘how to be a “good person”’. As Ashira reflected: ‘it’s your moral guidance, it’s to teach you right from wrong’. Religion formed part of their habitus, as a means of transmitting ‘moral values, guidelines for behaviour and aspirations’ (Franceschelli and O’Brien, 2014: 1198). However, in contrast to their own upbringing, values and traditions were passed on ‘by choice, not by force’:

I want [my daughter] to use what sits with her best, rather than imposing it on her . . . I wouldn’t judge her against my cultural or my mum’s cultural markers to say this makes a really good daughter, or wife, or mother. (Anita, a Muslim of Pakistani descent)

Instead of socialising their children into ‘unthinking routines . . . without their conscious awareness’, their view of good mothering involved creating a habitus that gave children the ability to ‘learn and make decisions about their individual practices’ (Mellor and Shilling, 2014: 289). Ashira (a Muslim of Pakistani descent) explained:

the way our religion works, nobody else can influence you . . . so even if you wear the full garb . . . and you're wearing the headscarf, if you're doing it because you're forced to and you really don't want to, there's no point . . . I'll provide her with everything as far as I can and her dad can, and then it's up to her . . . it's about what she believes inside.

Informants sought to empower their children to choose how they negotiated their identity, promoting the child's autonomy and independence (Molander, 2021). However, they were also reflexively aware of the significant amounts of time, effort and resources required to pass on their cultural and religious heritage. They regarded themselves as ultimately responsible for the transmission process, even if their husband was from a different ethnic and/or religious background: 'it's my department to do all of these things, and I will do it because I want it to represent something for her. I think it's more for [daughter] . . . that she should see both sides' (Jasvinder, a Hindu of Indian heritage, raised as a Sikh). Yet, while intensive mothers are expected to be self-sacrificing and give up their own self-interests (Hays, 1996), informants took a more 'realistic' approach, accepting the need to outsource elements of the transmission process. For instance, Fatima felt that teaching her daughter to pray for the required five times a day was not possible, especially when her second child was very young: 'we used to do it in the morning but since I've had [son] I just find that hard'.

To overcome their time scarcity and lack of cultural capital, informants often mobilised social capital to outsource cultural and religious practices within their support networks. Typically, this meant drawing on their husband and wider family members. Regardless of the husband's generation, husbands were often supportive of informants' efforts, with several women reporting 'like-minded' views of gender norms. These informants felt they had 'shared' values with their husbands, as Jameela explains: 'we share everything in life . . . not just views – everything'. Wider family members were involved in taking children to places of worship, as Chanda explains: '[my daughter] gets some of the culture and religion from my mum and my aunty' who 'do things with her and take her to the temple'. Raveena planned to enlist the support of her parents-in-law, who would take her son to the Gurdwara. Most Muslim women, including Namra and Anita, ensured that their children attended religious classes, learning Arabic so that they could read the Qur'an. Women with first-generation husbands often viewed them as an important source of cultural capital, delegating some responsibilities to them. Their husbands' family could also contribute, enabled by free/low-cost mobile and internet-based communications.

Most women constructed their own 'diversified arrangements of maternal duties', helping to develop autonomy by 'releasing' some of the responsibilities of the transmission process from the norms of intensive motherhood (Peng and Wong, 2013: 510). However, those with lower levels of cultural and social capital, whose middle-class identity was 'aspirational', found it more difficult to outsource elements of the transmission process and struggled to 'push back against intensive mothering's never-ending care for a vulnerable child' (Molander, 2021: 208). They often compared themselves with other mothers and felt judged about whether they were teaching their children appropriately. For example, Namra (a Muslim of Indian heritage) compared herself to her sister-in-law, a stay-at-home mother, whose 'focus is her children':

sometimes I just don't know what I am or who I am. You just get lost . . . you think how should you be? You should be happy more . . . you're comparing them . . . will it turn out all right or do you still feel that you have to keep your foot on it . . . you constantly worry about that situation . . . will it turn out all right?

For these women, creating a reflexive habitus was more difficult, as they often felt overwhelmed by their personal responsibility to manage the transmission process, despite not always 'being there'. Nevertheless, they utilised local places of worship and drew on friends and family members to help, wherever possible.

Conclusion

Our article addresses an important gap in sociological literature on the intergenerational transmission of values by examining how second-generation mothers transmit cultural capital and habitus to their children and how the norms of good mothering shape the process. We provide insight into how British-born South-Asian women with upwardly mobile aspirations seek to reconfigure gender relations on becoming mothers. Informants transmit cultural capital to their children in ways that differ sharply from their upbringing, creating a reflexive habitus that enables them to position themselves as good mothers, while reinterpreting the norms of intensive mothering.

We show how second-generation mothers understand the concept of good mothering in relation to their upbringing and their mothers' performances of good mothering. Understanding good mothering in relation to their past stems from their upbringing within a working-class habitus, where traditional gender norms were prevalent. They perceived how their mothers negotiated South-Asian norms of intensive mothering (Ganguly, 2022), shouldering much responsibility for the transmission of values. They recognised that despite their parents' aspirations for their daughters' upward mobility, they often struggled to differentiate traditional gender norms from the transmission of culture and religion (Franceschelli and O'Brien, 2014).

Our findings reveal the additional responsibilities that second-generation mothers must negotiate, in transmitting cultural and religious heritage, to maintain their status as good, middle-class mothers. However, we extend Halldén's (1991) middle-class ideal of the 'child as a project', suggesting that upwardly mobile second-generation women frame their good parenting approach around the ideal of the child as a 'skilled cultural navigator' (Bagguley and Hussain, 2016: 47). This approach involves transmitting religious and cultural capital to enable children to match or surpass their social position (Vincent and Ball, 2007), while negotiating hybridised identities between two cultures. The transmission of linguistic and culinary capital was an important source of autonomy and way of strengthening cultural and religious identity (Ternikar, 2019).

While pursuing the ideal of the child as 'skilled cultural navigator' was intertwined with intensive mothering aims (Hays, 1996), informants reinterpreted the notion of good mothering norms in three key ways. First, they relied primarily on personalised understandings of culture, religion and gender to socialise their children, rather than deferring to the authority of experts. Being able to creatively transmit religious and

cultural heritage helps ethnic minority mothers to resist external definitions of good motherhood (Collins, 1986). Second, they gave their children autonomy and choice in how they negotiated their identity (e.g. how to dress), rather than viewing the child as vulnerable and in need of constant caregiving. Equipping their children with the skills and abilities to be confident and proud of their hybridised identities was a means of ‘strengthening their position as they navigate a racially unequal society’ (Collins, 1994; Vincent et al., 2012: 439). Third, they sought to outsource some of the additional responsibilities that second-generation mothers held, pushing back against intensive mothering’s expectation for ‘anxiety-ridden self-sacrifice’ (Molander, 2021: 208). By re-interpreting norms of intensive mothering, they sought to release some of their maternal responsibilities (Peng and Wong, 2013). However, informants with lower levels of cultural and social capital were sometimes less confident in their mothering practices, finding it more difficult to outsource elements of the transmission process (Elliott et al., 2015). These women may struggle to experience and transmit self-definition and self-valuation (Collins, 1986), which can help ethnic minority mothers cope with racism. For some, middle-class aspirations may be fragile (Rollock et al., 2012), implying that further research on aspirational middle-class minority mothers is needed.

Finally, we extend knowledge of the mother’s role in creating a reflexive habitus, by showing how upwardly mobile second-generation mothers seek to transmit cultural and religious habits in a ‘constructively critical’ way, enabling their children to develop ‘their own religious outlook and set of practices’ (Mellor and Shilling, 2014: 285). By reflexively crafting the habitus, based on egalitarian gender norms, they sought to give children the ability and autonomy to ‘learn and make decisions about their individual practices’ (Mellor and Shilling, 2014: 289). However, there remains a pertinent need to examine the experiences of low-income or working-class mothers, and whether our findings extend to different ethnic and religious groups. Since informants’ ideas about social mobility were future-oriented projects, later stages of mothering when practices surrounding social mobility are realised, also warrant attention. Nevertheless, our article highlights the important role that second-generation mothers play in transforming class and gender relations, and suggests scope for reinterpreting the norms of good mothering through the intergenerational transmission of values.


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