

## Chapter 6

# The Rubik's Cube of Identity

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### **Abstract**

This chapter is an autoethnographic account of my working-class background into the lonely world of academia. It shares a small glimpse into my life journey from an intersectionality lens of being British born, of Pakistani heritage and a Muslim male. Thus, my working-class identity is one of several challenging identities amalgamated into one and silently interchangeable. This chapter is a rare occurrence to view my world from an introspective position. It shares the heavy constraints and challenges those of us who come from marginalised groups face daily. You will read how I cannot sever integral parts of myself which are deeply infused with the academic I am becoming. All of which I have struggled to maintain both personally and professionally. Subsequently, this chapter shares the complexity of these identities, my constant negotiation of them and my ongoing adaptation of now being uncomfortably viewed as middle-class.

*Keywords:* Dual identities; Islamophobia; microaggressions; role models; minoritised groups; othering



My story is not as simple as solely identifying from a working-class background. The latter is one of several complex layers of the dual identities amalgamated into one. Byrne (2019) argues that the categorisation of the working class is not homogenous; it is aligned with an intersectional approach related to race, gender, religion, etc. Thus, the negotiation of my identity has been fraught with many challenges from which I view the world through the lens of intersectionality; British born, Pakistani heritage and a Muslim male. Subsequently, to avoid concealing my true self, I write from the perspective of multiple social identities to delineate belonging, both in my personal and professional settings.

The start of this journey initiated well before my arrival into the world. My father certainly envisaged a utopia he had heard about from those who came before him. Amidst his intentions, my father envisaged a better life for himself, his nine children, a safer environment, security in freedom and most importantly, the opportunity for a free and well-renowned education. Interestingly, the multitude of themes that arose with my father's arrival in the late 1960s in Britain are undoubtedly ones that have echoed throughout my own life, even in the modern day I write this.

My father's desire to better himself through education and the dream of a career was passionate and one he desperately wanted to pursue. The attempts for my father to enrol himself into education was short-lived and of disappointment. The language barrier was a significant hindrance due to not being a native speaker of the country he had just moved to. Thus, he felt he did not have time as a commodity since his allegiance lay with the financial care of his family back home and here. He also knew that he would not have the support of his family, who would question why he was pursuing several years in education in the Western world, where access to money was rife. Ironically, he escaped the clutches of a working-class background from Pakistan, straight into the same grasp in the western world. Therefore, in his life, this was the first face of immediate gratification that surfaced and would continue to do so for most of his life.

## **Unwelcome and Subliminal Messages**

My father arrived in a country that was at times unwelcome to migrants and particularly those of colour. He was not oblivious of the systematic prejudice apparent in society. In particular, living in a town with a football stadium in the 1970s and 1980s brought numerous racial

tensions. I was far too young then to understand that my skin colour was contentious to some people. I do recall clearly that we were never allowed out during a football match, lest we were embroiled in violence during those times. This caution was further perpetuated by mistrust of the police and their lack of training regarding community cohesion and issues of institutional racism, which was later exemplified through the McPherson report (1999).

Often enough, work demands were complex, with my father trying to fulfil his work duties amidst those who were unwelcome. He recognised that his job security often lay at the hands of such people, and thus, he realised that he was often expendable and was required to work hard. Admittedly, my father would agree that he could never speak out against unjust treatment due to the lack of support and an unawareness of how. Thus, how could he emancipate himself from a system he did not fully understand or was supported in (Freire, 2014). Interestingly, I have also felt this echo throughout my personal and professional life.

The McGregor-Smith Review (2017) stipulates that discrimination and bias arise throughout the careers of individuals and well before the start of it. I did not need this report to specify this because those around me were already highlighting the problematisation of my working-class, race and religious identity as I was growing up. Amidst a tight-knit South Asian community, I recall the subtle subliminal messages community elders were sending. All of which were in relation to the ugly face of systematic prejudice which I have viewed throughout most of my career; the lack of a diverse workforce (in particular, role models), micro-aggressions, the 'othering' and struggling to 'achieve the same progression opportunities as their White counterparts' (The McGregor-Smith Review, 2017, p. 9). Subsequently, I grew up aware of systematic oppression and later learnt how to deal with it accordingly.

My father was incredibly patient through the racial and working-class discrimination he often faced in the working world. It is disheartening for me to hear that he had become desensitised to this treatment and, in many ways, accepted his fate but was never defeated. I now recognise that a small part of my father's high expectations of me doing well in education was to evoke what Freire (2014) refers to as the 'critical consciousness'. Both my parents understood that there was empowerment in being educated, ascertaining positions of power and having a professional career. Subsequently, my education has enabled a better critical consciousness, and thus I can engage with emancipation even if there are societal and institutional complexities.

## **The Move Towards Betterment**

Ultimately, my parents envisaged manoeuvring me away from a working-class background and into a more privileged position even before the birth of their nine children. Having grown up in a predominantly South Asian area, undoubtedly also working-class, my father recognised a high level of cultural and material deprivation. He noticed continuously; parents purposely advocated immediate gratification over a deferred one which temporarily increased their cultural capital. This subsequently devalued education's ideology, which did not sit comfortably with him.

Subsequently, my parents decided to leave a predominantly South Asian community early in my childhood and move into an all-white middle-class neighbourhood amidst affluent schools. It was evident to the surrounding neighbours that we were different; our ethnicity and working-class background were apparent in our external visage. Often enough, we were made to feel unwelcome, but my parents expected a high level of decorum in not responding to the racial and class negativity. Crew (2020) stipulates that classism is a bias that is hard to reverse. Amalgamate that with issues of race, and the complexity heightens. For this reason, it was often best not to engage in any negative dialogue lest the outcomes became worse.

To add further salt to injury, we were also often made to feel a sense of guilt at leaving the 'safety' of the South Asian community and often looked upon as those who had created some form of treason. Knott (2018) states that Muslim communities from Britain primarily identify themselves by their faith, ethnicity, language and kinship. I remember overhearing conversations with others in the South Asian community, that by moving to a predominantly white area, we would lose the characteristics stated by Knott. However, my parents were not overly concerned about spatial segregation but more focussed on our schooling and education. Without a shadow of a doubt, I had a disciplined upbringing which at times was constraining, but this was in line with my parents ensuring my 'roots' were not forgotten.

## **Language, Religion, Culture and Family**

Both my parents had a high expectation that we learn our mother tongue and use it daily. Thus, my command of the English language was not at a mastery level, and this was evident among my school peers due to being bilingual. For this reason, my language was undoubtedly in line with what Bernstein (2002) refers to as 'restricted codes.' Consequently, my English language was often a hindrance to my academic achievement and one that remained with me for a good part of my education. Moving to an all-white school was challenging and one where I had to make a conscious effort in altering the way I spoke and conducted myself. Thus, not only was I learning my parent's native tongue but also the English language simultaneously.

I certainly resonate with Matthys (2012), who states that when you move away from class cultures regarding speech, writing and thinking, there are risks of alienation from that culture. Ironically, from being advised by community elders not to leave, it was this same South Asian community where the 'othering' became apparent. Moving to a middle-class area and a well-established school did not come without its problems when I mixed with peers from my South Asian community. My use of the English language drastically differed from theirs, and my ideology regarding numerous topics was also varied. I was often 'othered' by exercising my agency, and derogatory comments were usually made about me not being 'fully Pakistani' and racial slurs with my association with 'sounding and acting white'.

For this reason, there are still times when I am conscious of the way I converse with others. Often enough, trying not to use overly academic jargon and revert to adopting slang and colloquialism that is now alien to me. Subsequently, this repeatedly thrusts me back to my working-class roots, giving me a more welcoming approach from specific audiences. However, this negotiation of my identity is not necessarily a choice but one of necessity. One that I found I could not escape, no matter where I have lived and who I associate myself with.

Crew (2020) states that accents and social class in Britain have a long history. I have never made any pretence about not being from a working-class background within my professional context. I am often reminded of that social class and my heritage by professionals making comments such as, 'you are very well spoken' throughout my career. Often enough, I have felt that this is alluding to a particular stereotype and even profiling that has been both overt and covert in nature. However, my ability to code-switch my language has been beneficial in accessing various audiences of people. I now feel it is of great advantage, particularly when engaging my students in Higher Education.

My cultural and religious upbringing resonates with what Scourfield, Gilliat-Ray, Khan, and Otri (2013) discuss regarding issues of embodiment and habitus; I unconsciously amassed habits and moral behaviours regarding my Muslim identity. These echoed a 'hidden curriculum' in that my norms, values and beliefs were achieved through observations and imitations. These were not just enacted values but also the espoused ones regarding my Muslim identity and how I was expected to foster those ideologies daily.

Adding further complexity to this was my Pakistani heritage and abiding by those separate norms that were not in line with religiosity. This often created confusion; on one side, I was expected to adhere to scripture, and on the other side, cultural norms which were opposite to each other. The additional layer of being British, and identifying with that more than my Pakistani heritage, certainly evoked an identity crisis; who am I? Where do I belong? How should I behave?

Subsequently, not only was I from a working-class background but then torn between a traditional Islamic upbringing and Pakistani culture. All of which I was navigating through a secularised multicultural society. Consequently, living as a minority within a minority, I had to deal with an increased level of cognitive dissonance whilst trying to develop a more cohesive and personal identity (Suleiman, 2016).

In the outside world, I often felt a sense of betrayal to both my religious and cultural identity by engaging with things that I knew would be displeasing. Subsequently, in the latter environments, I also felt a sense of guilt at wanting to be my authentic self (away from both religion and culture) but not having the confidence to do that. This was one of my earliest recollections about the complexity of negotiating my identity depending on my social positioning.

### **University, the Silent Departure, and Ineffective Role Models**

There was no presupposed notion of not attending university; it was an expectation set by my parents from a young age. There was never any dialogue about the choice of this – only the anticipation of where and what academic discipline I would forge for my future career. In fact, even the field required dialogue and approval from my parents. Subsequently, the academic rigour expected from this was challenging at times. There was intense pressure to secure high grades, complete additional work, read vast amounts of books for pleasure and ensure that our focus was solely on schooling. The work ethic they instilled in me certainly comes from my working-class roots and remains with me to this very day.

Yes, both my parents remain uneducated, but I resonate entirely with Goodall and Montgomery's (2013) literature, which states that parents from ethnic minorities find engagement with schools challenging but desire to take an active involvement with their children's education. Both my parents were incredibly active in supporting me in my education; it was important for my working-class parents to ensure that my siblings and I had better lives than they did. Their ideology of this was synonymous with education and success.

For me, the opportunity to attend university was dual in nature. I was already prepped to participate, so the decision was not negotiable. But more significantly, the intention of going to university also concerned my complex identity. I resonate with Knott (2018), who states that university offers young Muslims the opportunity to forge their own identities, away from what they have been initially exposed to.

Whilst negotiating my identity, a lot of what I was navigating through did not always sit comfortably with me. I had become constrained, and a part of me felt shackled by expectations and adherence to norms that were not befitting of my nature and ideology of life. My inquisitive mind searched for the world's mysteries outside religious, cultural, and family boundaries. Thus, I saw university as a form of escapism that I grasped, and subsequently, it was the first time in my life where I felt free to explore, seek and trial and error.

Amidst my short time at university, it felt like a great adventure and a new sense of freedom. Admittedly, my focus shifted away from university, and I lost both focus and passion for it. An integral element of this was the consequence of my identity crisis and searching for the 'self', which was still unknown to me at that time. If I did not 'know thyself', how could I ever understand my life, the journey ahead and what my ultimate destination was. So, staying at university at that time was not part of my identity journey.

My decision to leave university, after the first year, was one that I look back in slight bewilderment; what was I thinking, and why was there no support from the university? However, these fleeting thoughts are now from someone who is somewhat wiser and looks back with reflectivity. I resonate with Malik and Wykes (2018), who argue that Muslim students are a particular group most likely to leave Higher Education with no award. Unbeknown to me, I had become part of the statistics immersed in widening participation issues in Higher Education sectors.

Sharing my decision with my parents was one of the most challenging conversations I had with them. They tried to convince me to stay and continue, but my decision had been made at heart, and there was no changing that. Reflecting on this time, I remember the complete devastation my parents experienced. I now realise that leaving education was a sense of betrayal of their hard work, inability to pursue education themselves and the impression of not wanting more from life as they had once dreamt for themselves and their children.

At that age, the problem with my own experience was the lack of role models in line with my lived experience. I resonate with Bhopal and Jackson (2013), who state that universities lack the representation of BAME staff. The DfE (2021) states that BAME teachers and leaders are under-represented within the teaching workforce; statistics show that in 2019, 85.7% of all

teachers in state-funded schools in England were white British, and 92.7% of head teachers were white British. Yes, there seems to be a call for male role models, but Tembo (2020) states that no such call is made for those under-represented in the profession. I look back and realise how alien I was in a system dominated by white academics. Thus, how could I ever explain the complexities of my identity crisis and a new sense of freedom to those unfamiliar with me and my background?

Boliver and Powell (2021) state that the Office for Students now expect a strategic and systematic plan to encounter those issues related to ethnic inequalities and deploy initiatives to support those from minoritised backgrounds. This was not the case with my sudden decision to leave university at a different time. There were no meetings, suggestions for an alternative plan or my voice being heard. Subsequently, my departure from university was relatively silent, which most likely went unnoticed at the time.

### **The Return to University and a Career Was Born**

I had numerous jobs in London that I feel did not involve any career potential. However, at that time, the concept of deferred gratification was not something I understood. Having spent years refining my spoken language, this often alluded to others that I was highly educated. Once again, the presumption that those who speak well are more likely educated. Confusingly, it constantly surprised people that I had left university. Over time, there were a number of these conversations, and I started to develop a sense of regret that I had the potential for betterment but seemingly threw away that opportunity. UCAS (2021) states that in 2019, British South Asians Higher Education participation was a mere 50%. Looking at these statistics, I realise that I possibly perpetuated people's negative impressions of working-class and ethnic backgrounds by leaving education.

During my time working in London, it was not surprising that I naturally drew closer to those from a working-class background. There was familiarity with them, a sense of belonging, understanding and no judgement. I now thank these people because their encouragement and advice enabled me to want more. They reignited my passion and focus for betterment, and subsequently, I chose to return to university. Even now, many years on, I am still drawn to minoritised groups for these very reasons.

Going back to university was not an easy venture for me. Boliver (2016) states that students from ethnic minority groups are considerably under-represented in elite universities. I was not confident to apply to more reputable Russell Group universities because I was unsure about my academic abilities. It was unfortunate that I did not understand the concept of impostorism back then because that is what it was. I was fighting the internal battle that I had marginalised myself, by perpetuating the claim that working-class boys are least likely to attend university. Ardy, Branchu, and Boliver (2021) state that those from ethnic minorities have a higher risk of not completing their degree programmes. I was weary about not further contributing to more statistics if I did not complete it.

Also, the university I attended seemed unimportant because I needed to stay in my locality due to ease of travel and convenience. Donnelly and Gamsu (2018) state that studying locally is often situated by those from disadvantaged back- grounds. I indeed related to this because

the affordability of working full time and completing studies in the evenings was financially more manageable. I was fortunate to have this flexibility; otherwise, I would not be where I am today.

Leaving employment for full-time education was not an option, and thus, I had to do both. Working full time and completing my studies in the evenings was incredibly challenging. I did not have a laptop, so I had a reliance on the on-campus facilities. Eventually, I purchased an archaic desktop computer which was often more problematic than good. I also did not possess a car and needed to get to the other side of town, so I was always late. Comments were often made about this, but no one ever sat me down for me to explain my circumstances. It was an incredibly stressful time, and if it had not been for a key few people in my life, I most likely would have left.

Completing my degree did not feel as liberating as others around me might have wanted. I thought I was incredibly behind both in academia and my career and thus, needed to catch up with others. After a few very challenging years of studying and working simultaneously, I was undoubtedly exhausted, but my drive to betterment was strong. I completed my teacher training qualification and had a very successful career as a Primary school practitioner, where I held a number of strategic and transformational roles.

I felt this achievement was a turning point in my life where even though I still felt working class, I was now treated by others as someone who had manoeuvred into a different realm that was alien to me. It was a surreal experience to suddenly be viewed as middle class due to my education and career. However, I took no benefit from that due to still feeling working class. Ultimately, I thought I existed in two different worlds, further exasperating my identity crisis.

During my time working in Primary schools, I decided to complete my Master's degree and continue my pursuit of knowledge and education. Again, I finished this over some years whilst working full time amidst some senior roles. Completion of my Master's degree was undoubtedly my first monumental feeling of success. Until then, any achievements felt like a catch-up programme, and thus, the intrinsic rewards were nothing compared to achieving a postgraduate degree.

My graduation was incredibly memorable because both my parents were present. This was very symbolic because even though I had dropped out of university, I had managed to acquire the highest qualification in my family. For me, the Master's degree had repaired the internal damage of disappointing my parents many years before. Subsequently, my venture into a postgraduate qualification gave birth to my passion for research, writing and making a difference in a different capacity than I was used to.

## **An Outsider Amidst the Insiders**

There has been a counterapproach to the issue of gender diversity in schools, with a call to ensure more male role models are recruited (DfE, 2017). Subsequently, I was very much valued in Primary schools due to being a South Asian male. All the head teachers I encountered encouraged me to be a positive role model for ethnic minority communities.



Even though this experience was somewhat optimistic, a diverse workforce in related educational sectors has not been similar. Bhopal and Jackson (2013) state that universities lack the representation of BAME staff and are also under-represented within senior levels. I have earlier stated the significant disparity between ethnic minority groups in education compared to white colleagues, which became even more apparent in Higher Education.

Consequently, I have sometimes felt like an outsider trying to establish positionality and credibility in an environment where I am aesthetically different. Thus, it surfaces the question of what institutional aims and objectives set regarding race equality show? Subsequently, I have often wondered if education establishments are even aware that they might be viewed as perpetuating overt and covert discriminatory practices, by not evidencing a diverse workforce. In particular, I resonate with Vieler-Porter (2021), who states that the problematisation of educational outcomes cannot be fully addressed when there is an under-representation of BAME educators. Thus, it is safe to say that people like myself bring value to organisations from which the better ones will harness.

### **Islamophobia, the Power of Language and Microaggressions**

Bush, Glover, and Sood (2006) argue that BAME educators and leaders are prone to barriers through covert and overt forms of discrimination. Ipsos MORI (2018) found that Muslim graduates and younger Muslims felt that prejudice increased and thought they lacked opportunity. I must admit that there are truths in this matter, as uncomfortable as this might be to read. The impact of fundamentalist Islam has sadly impacted many Muslims who are in line with British life, both personally and professionally. Consequently, the birth of Islamophobia has undoubtedly cast a dark shadow over me throughout most of my career. Islamophobia has enabled the rhetoric that Muslims, such as myself, are a monolithic group different from those in the West.

Further adding to the complexity is what Farrell (2016) argues regarding policy and political rhetoric surrounding the notion of Muslims being a suspect community. Consequently, anti-terrorism strategies such as British values have reinforced Muslims 'othering' and marginalisation (Bamber, Bullivant, Clark & Lundie, 2018). However, Muslims like myself do not feel their faith conflicts with Britishness; I have a strong sense of belonging with our nationality and have commonality with other British and ethnic groups (Ipsos MORI, 2018). I further resonate with The Runnymede Trust (1997), which found that Muslims are routinely challenged regarding their values, loyalties and commitments. Subsequently, I have often kept my religiosity intensely private throughout my career, lest I create the impression of orthodoxy and conservatism, which is not my reality.

There have been numerous times when I have had to renegotiate my faith by modifying my exterior, such as trimming down my beard to secure a job position, ensuring I pray in places that are not visible and never discussing issues of faith in a professional setting. I will undoubtedly avoid political dialogues where faith is the centre of the topic lest there are repercussions. Thus, my voice and agency are constrained, even with freedom of speech and individual liberty in the free world I reside in.

Du Bois (1903 cited in Holloway, 2015) talks of 'double consciousness' and how it depicts the feeling of having more than one identity and how this complexity makes it challenging to develop the self. Thus, for me, it has become second nature to look at myself as a Muslim academic through the eyes of others. This has engaged me with a sense of self-criticality and constant reflexivity in how my behaviour might be perceived. Me adopting a liberal stance with my faith is a personal choice. However, I must advocate liberalism to those around me, which I feel is not a choice.

I resonate with Said (1997), who maintains that 'Islam is synonymous with terrorism and religious hysteria'. Islam is synonymous with terminologies such as terrorism, radicalisation, extremism, etc. Subsequently, I often wonder, now that these terms are associated with Islam, is it possible for people to divorce those connotations from me as a Muslim? If we think about something long enough, does that not then form our ideologies and thus, impact the way we behave?

Subsequently, when I am new to an establishment where no one knows me, I am often left internally dejected by my thoughts that people are consciously and inadvertently profiling me. This has been evidenced by comments such as, 'you're not how I thought you might be'. Maybe part of the problem is that I am yet to challenge these assumptions, but that is not so easy when new to an establishment and trying to forge positionality.

A problem often not spoken about, most likely due to the challenge of evidence, is that of microaggressive behaviours that I have experienced and viewed within professional settings. At times, comments have been made regarding my various identities, be it working class, ethnicity, faith or even sexuality. Subsequently, focussing on those areas where there is an awareness of discriminatory attitudes has made me feel the subject of stereotypes. The more covert experiences of microaggressions certainly resonate with Rollock (2012), who states that such behaviours can be subtle such as being interrupted, spoken over and even having the legitimacy of contributions questioned. All of which I have unfortunately experienced throughout my career.

Yes, I am protected by law; the Equality Act (2010) and the Protected Characteristics (2010), etc. However, I am not protected against covert discrimination with classism, race, faith, etc. I have found that they are all incredibly challenging to evidence. Thus, even within the chartered waters of law, I have often felt I am navigating through such storms by myself. In saying this, such oppressive behaviours have only made me a better person and a more effective academic.

## **Meritocracy Challenged and Imposter Syndrome**

Numerous times, my meritocracy has been challenged within a professional setting. The commitment to diversifying establishments is not necessarily a new phenomenon but has undoubtedly evoked challenges for me. When I have secured a new job, a promotion, recognition of my hard work etc., there have been open reminders of my marginalised identities through comments such as, 'you secured that due to being male, due to being Pakistani, the establishment diversifying etc'. Consequently, at times I have felt that my

meritocracy is negated, and the self-feeling I have been reduced to a 'poster boy' to fill the 'status quo' regarding diversity.

Wilson, Reay, Morrin, and Abrahams (2020) make a pertinent point regarding how we counteract the tokenistic use of bodies through familiar networking, spaces where we can engage in open dialogues and create support structures. My minoritised identities, which include that of being working-class, naturally flock to others like me who identify as coming from marginalised groups. Even within professional settings, I now can decipher who is inherently part of my 'tribe' and theirs with little effort.

The complexities of these dual identities have been fraught with issues of accepting myself as an academic and novice researcher. If one looks at the amalgamation of my intersectionality and marginalisation issues, the concept of failure has undoubtedly contributed to imposter syndrome (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011). The 'othering' that I have experienced has made me question myself as a professional and thus, at times, shadowed my true potential. For this reason, I have had to try to ensure that the stains of impostorism did not become yet another face of my day-to-day identity.

Subsequently, I have grown much more confident with accepting that my agency has a voice, credibility and respect from experienced academics and other professionals alike. I have learnt that reminding myself of my meritocracy is not self-indulgent. I am still navigating my self-confidence as an academic and reminding myself of my hard work and value. This slowly removes my notions that I cannot work at elite universities, even though my working-class background is sometimes reluctant to accept this (Binns, 2019).

## **My Identity, My Students and Our Familiarity**

I have come to understand that class can be invisible at times, and thus the exterior can often be deceptive in who comes from what background. Due to the way I articulate myself and often enough, the way I dress smartly, I feel there is a misconception about my class background. Amidst conversations with both students and peers, I have always made an effort to ensure that my true self is brought to the surface with no pretence about being someone I am not.

Crew (2020) states that staff in new universities were more likely to identify as working-class. This aligns with my identity and the positive change the universities are now adopting in recruitment. I come from a working-class background, and I proudly hold onto that identity. For this reason, I feel my class disclosure has enabled a whole perspective and ideology on how academia is and should be viewed; academics come from varied backgrounds.

My working-class background and coming from an ethnic minority group have been beneficial in the establishments I have worked in. It has enabled me to have lived experiences that are often alien to those in other classes but familiar to those from similar backgrounds. Joseph-Salisbury (2020) argues that a diverse teaching force could assist with raising positive academic outcomes for students due to them feeling represented. These experiences have helped me create an effective rapport with students and colleagues.

What is significant to appreciate is that students from minority backgrounds will be drawn to institutions where there are BAME staff (Bhopal & Jackson, 2013). I have found that those from marginalised groups will often rely on me for support, guidance and encouragement due to our familiarity and accessibility. Even though Bhopal and Jackson further argue that this is burdensome due to working over and above, I feel it is a service to all the students under my care.

Subsequently, it is vital for me as a practitioner, with a lived experience of being marginalised, to ensure that my students have a good understanding of issues of race, class and identity formation. I envisage that this will enable them to think critically and establish a firm acceptance of their belonging and own acceptance as British citizens, regardless of their backgrounds (Habib, 2018).

### **The Face of Oppression, My Agency and Structure and Who Am I?**

Young (2011) stipulates there are five faces of oppression, and one in particular, 'powerlessness', is essential for me to recognise. Undoubtedly, there is a division between the working and middle classes. Thus, the labour division also exists; professional and non-professionals. The latter are classed as powerless; they 'lack the authority, status, and sense of self that professionals tend to have' (Young, 2011, p. 76).

I have had the privilege of a high education, professional development, authority, influence, a rise in status and recognition, which Young (2011) refers to as 'respectability'. This is all well and good, but what has been essential to me is not forgetting that I come from a working-class background. Thus, I was undoubtedly from the powerless; a place where I lacked authority, presence and autonomy and often felt expendable. Now having manoeuvred into being categorised as middle class, I am in this constant state of reflexivity, lest I inadvertently become one of the oppressors.

Manoeuvring away from a working-class identity echoes a sense of guilt. Not because of any conscious abandonment of that identity but merely because others see the illusion of middle-classness, which I feel is not befitting how I view myself. To many, my background may seem irrelevant whilst considering my current position. Some may even say that I need to describe myself as middle class and move on actively. However, I have not been able to adhere to this class adaptation, and there has been no metamorphosis for me to transcend into another being of some sort.

This chapter was never going to be merely about me being a working-class academic. It would have been impossible for me to have written this 'story' without it intersecting with my gender, race and faith. Giddens (1976 cited in Best, 2003) states that both human agency and structure are intertwined. Altering the structures around me is not plausible because each of these social systems I belong to is deeply rooted in their ideologies and practice. Thus, my agency is often interchangeable depending on the various environments I belong. Therefore, the academic you meet will depend on who you are, where you meet me, in what context and why. Subsequently, I often see my multiple identities as that of a Rubik's cube; each identity face revolving depending on where I am and whom I need to be within that context.

I am working class at my core and always will be. Amidst that identity, I am also British, South Asian, Muslim and male. I cannot let go of my history to date; I cannot forget my parents' sacrifices and challenging lives; I cannot let go of my work ethic; I cannot compromise on the relationships I have forged with working-class friends, peers and students. To commit to anything else would be inauthentic, disingenuous and an abandonment of myself. Even if I make attempts to alter myself, I always feel displaced. Thus, to ignore any one of my multiple identities would consequently negate an integral part of who I am.

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