'Power and Resistance: Exploring the Conceptions and Experiences of Gender and Career Aspirations of Young People in Bangladesh'

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Abstract

The thesis investigates the conceptions of gender and career aspirations among young people in Bangladesh who participated in a gender-sensitive programme provided by an NGO against the backdrop of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5. The thesis adopts a qualitative methodology collecting data from the Southeast part of Bangladesh. This study aims to understand how the discourses of gender and career aspirations are shaped by other socio-patriarchal discourses in Bangladesh and how these young people negotiate their positions.

In 2015, the UN General Assembly proposed 17 goals to achieve global sustainable development as part of the 'Agenda 2030' (UN, 2015). SDG 4 is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", and SDG 5 is to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (ibid). As a UN member state, commitment to achieving the SDGs significantly shifted Bangladesh's education focus from quantity to quality (BANBEIS, 2022). However, quality inclusive education is a significant challenge for Bangladesh (Rahman, 2021; GED, 2022), and the primary evidence in Bangladesh around inclusive quality education is based on quantitative studies with scattered investigations (Asadullah, 2016; Golam and Kusakabe, 2018; Biwas and Biswas, 2020). In this study, I argue that it is necessary to understand the conceptions and experiences of young people in relation to gender and educational aspirations to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Davies, 2003; Francis, 2006).

The research design of this study draws on qualitative feminist research utilising photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews as data-collection methods that create a scope for the participants to share their experiences in their own words (Denzin and Guba, 2011; Coleman, 2016). The study consists of twenty female and male participants based on their self-identification. However, this study primarily focuses on the conceptions and experiences of the female young people and includes male perspectives to enrich the findings. Theoretically, the study adopts a feminist poststructuralist stance with Foucauldian theories and feminist ideas around power, discipline, and resistance to analyse how female young people are coerced, disciplined, and even punished to conform to

dominant discourses of gender and career aspirations. The study also brings the spotlight on how these female young people negotiate and exercise agency to make alternative discourses possible.

The study contributes to knowledge creation by employing a feminist poststructuralist analysis of power/knowledge and discourses in educational research with a focus on gender in a South Asian context. It is a valuable example of a Foucauldian study with a feminist stance exploring patriarchy, violence, and inequality that is considered marginal in Foucault's work (Ramazanouglu, 1993). Thus, the study furthers the Foucauldian debate. The research also creates knowledge by uncovering ways discourses influence female and male young people differently. It also discusses how power/knowledge is continuously constructed and re-constructed making space for alternative discourses. The findings can support teachers to understand young people's conceptions of gender and career aspirations to make schools, classrooms, and playgrounds more gender inclusive.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: _____

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The Prelude

My journey as a researcher started with the curiosity to know, 'why'. Why the world is different for different individuals? As a woman born and brought up within Bangladesh's socio-patriarchal discourses, I found many rules to be different for me. I have always been keen to understand why those differences exist for girls/women. Working as a development worker towards girls'/women's empowerment made me even more inclined to explore the gendered barriers to female education and career aspirations in Bangladesh. I sought to learn how understanding these dynamics may be connected to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and policy initiatives to bring change.

In this introductory chapter, I bring the spotlight on the issue of inclusive and equitable quality education in Bangladesh and the potential influence of gender. I discuss the historical background and education context in Bangladesh. I share my motivation behind this study, providing some insight into my background, experience, and scholarly interest. Then, I outline the research aim and research questions, further discussing how I address them. I define the key terms significant to this thesis. Finally, I conclude the chapter by providing the thesis structure with a brief description of the content in each of the chapters.

Background

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4[1] and 5[2]

Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Empowerment of Girls

[1] Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
[2] Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

In 2015, toward the end of the timeline for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs[3]), the UN General Assembly introduced the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the aim of achieving peace and prosperity among the UN member states through global partnership (UN, 2015). Broadly, the 17 SDGs work across poverty, health, education, equality, climate, and partnership with specific targets to achieve by 2030 under each category (UN, 2023). The SDGs are argued to be more comprehensive, respecting the inter-connectedness between the goals (Sachs, 2012).

In my thesis, I primarily focus on Goal 4, which is to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", and Goal 5, to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.". In line with the international development discourses, as a UN member state, Bangladesh also committed to achieve the SDGs as part of the 2030 agenda (Dutta and Rabbany, 2016).

As a result of this commitment, since 2015, the national attention of the Bangladesh government has increasingly moved from quantity to quality of education, with a focus on inclusivity and equitability (GED, 2022). For the first time, curriculum, teaching quality, and future student opportunities have come under the spotlight (Akhter, 2022). It also brought further attention to the goal of gender equality and girl/women empowerment through eliminating discrimination and ensuring access to economic and leadership positions (UN, 2022).

As the shift in attention in relation to education is recent, it results in limited academic literature in the area of education and gender impact in Bangladesh. The majority of the available scholarly literature primarily focuses on scrutinising government initiatives to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education that is in line with SDGs (Asadullah, 2016; Rahman, 2021; Akhter, 2022). In addition, these literature are primarily quantitative studies utilising data on different regions of Bangladesh (Golam and Kusakabe, 2018; Biwas and Biswas, 2020). Therefore, it is an area in need of in-depth qualitative research

[3] The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000, committed world leaders to achieve 8 goals across poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women by 2015

exploring issues of gender and education due to its interlinked nature (Dutta and Rabbany, 2016).

I formulate my research questions against the backdrop of this significant research gap, which is crucial to future educational policies in Bangladesh and beyond. In the following section, I briefly discuss the context and structure of education in Bangladesh, which follows the research questions of this thesis.

Historical Context

The Indian subcontinent became independent from British rule after almost two hundred years in 1947. It gave birth to two independent nations based on religion, India (Hindu majority) and Pakistan (Muslim majority). As the partition was based solely on religion, present Bangladesh (then East-Pakistan) became a part of Pakistan - 1257.6 miles apart from each other, with vast India in the middle (Khan, 2017). Apart from religion, in terms of language, culture, and tradition, there were hardly any similarities. West Pakistan consisted of multiple provinces, numerous languages, with Urdu being the official language, and diverse ethnic groups with varied cultures (Talbot and Singh, 2009).

Figure 1: Map of the Indian Subcontinent

Source: Socratic.org

On the other hand, the majority of the population in the then East Pakistan were Muslim, Bengali-speaking, and from the same ethnic Bengali background. The significant distance also made it difficult for the West Pakistan state to govern the East exclave (Riaz, 2016). This led to discontent against the discrimination and oppression faced by the people in East Pakistan across economic spending, job opportunities and public facilities. When the West Pakistan government declared Urdu to be the only official language of Pakistan (for example, in government offices and schools), it crossed the limit of patience for people in then-East Pakistan. It bred momentum for the right to speak our own language, Bangla, and for economic and political autonomy (Jamal, 2008). On 25 March, the soldiers of West Pakistan conducted a genocide in various parts of Bangladesh in the dark of the night. This led to the announcement of Bangladesh as an independent nation on 26 March 1971, which led to the liberation war (ibid). After a nine-month-long bloody liberation war at the cost of 3 million lives and 0.2 million girls/women being victims of sexual atrocities, Bangladesh became an independent nation on 16 December 1971 (Chowdhury and Sarker, 2018).

Education Context of Bangladesh

Born in 1971, Bangladesh is comparatively a young nation. After independence, the literacy rate in Bangladesh was only 17.61 per cent of the population of all ages (MoFA, 2023). During the post-independence era between the 1970s-80s, the Bangladesh government acknowledged the significance of universal education. Nonetheless, addressing the shortage of educated administrative personnel at the time became prioritised to build a new nation from scratch (Hussain, 2010). After the liberation war, the new nation experienced severe famine in 1974, followed by massive flooding that caused an estimated death of a million people (Muqtada, 1981). The initial years also saw political unrest and severe economic crisis, leading to the shocking assassination of the then Prime Minister and President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, considered the 'father of the nation', along with his whole family, except two daughters, in 1975.

It was a period of uncertainty leading to a military takeover. After more than two years of political turmoil, it resulted in the ascendence of Major General

Ziaur Rahman as the President of Bangladesh and as Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) party leader in 1978. Nonetheless, the political unrest continued, and he was also assassinated in 1981 through a military coup. During this period, there was also a decline in aid flow that intensified the economic crisis. This led to universal primary education and enrolment rates remaining stagnant and overshadowed by the pressing political issue at the time (Hossain, 2007).

During the 80s, the elite and the educated community in Bangladesh supported education as a way to rise in society. With some political stability achieved, gradually, education became a priority (Rahman et al., 2010). Since the population of Bangladesh was comparatively undifferentiated, with the majority of the people speaking *'Bangla'*, holding the Bengali ethnicity and Muslim religion[4], it worked as a positive force to boost education in Bangladesh (Chowdhury and Sarker, 2018). With time, primary school enrollment even exceeded the growth rate of schools, creating a scope for non-government interventions (i.e., NGO schools) (Hossain, 2007).

During the 90's, with an emphasis and focus on girls/women's empowerment through international development discourses (Momsen, 2008), education became a clear priority for Bangladesh with a goal to ensure girls' education (Mousumi and Kusakabe, 2021). The Constitution of Bangladesh established provisions for free and compulsory primary education under the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act 1990 (GoB, 1990). The Bangladesh government also invested heavily in constructing school buildings, providing teaching materials, employing and training teachers and administrators. This fuelled a rapid and large-scale expansion of school services to meet the increased demand for primary education. During 1990-95, the rate of seats per year at the primary level was in million (Hossain, 2007). The government of Bangladesh took initiatives like providing food rations and cash subsidies to families to encourage parents to send their daughters to school. The growth of girls' enrolment at the primary level was outstanding and surpassed the increase in enrolment of boys (GED, 2022).

[4] 80% of the population in Bangladesh are Muslim speaking Bengali or dialect of Bengali with same ethnic background (Government of Bangladesh, 2024).

During this period, education also came under donor attention, and they started investing heavily in the education sector after the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in Bangkok in 1990. Bangladesh became a signatory to the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA). Through the WCEFA, the international development discourses recentred their attention with a special focus on girls' education. The donor agencies also started to provide foreign aid heavily to developing countries like Bangladesh. Between 1990 and 95, the development partners provided half of the total financing for primary education in Bangladesh, making donor agencies a significant actor within the Bangladesh education landscape (Sedere, 2000). However, Hossain (2007) identifies that the Bangladesh government's existing commitment to expanding education enabled the nation to maintain national ownership of policy and avoided the threat of government control, unlike many other countries. Non-formal NGO schools also occupied a significant space in the education landscape of Bangladesh as the enrolment rate surpassed the growth of school seats (Sukontamarn, 2008). However, the relationship between non-formal education and the government has been complex. The government never prohibited non-formal education but, at the same time, refrained from expressing open support (Rahman, 2006).

The Bangladesh government also committed to international agendas such as the MDGs in 2000, which heavily influenced the nation's five-year budget plans to improve primary education enrolment, gender parity, and attendance in primary and secondary level education (Rahman and Islam, 2009). By 2015, Bangladesh had made significant developments in ensuring enrolment and gender parity of enrolment at the primary and secondary levels. According to the MDGs review report by the UN (2015), the net enrolment rate at the primary level was 97.7%. Bangladesh was also one of the few developing countries to achieve gender parity (in numbers) in primary and secondary enrolment.

Nonetheless, a perpetual challenge for Bangladesh appears to be secondary-level education, where the dropout rate is as strikingly high as 35.66%. The low completion rate at primary and secondary levels is also a significant challenge (BANBEIS, 2022), which coincides with the culturally accepted age of marriage for girls (approximately age group 7-16 years) (Kamal et al., 2015). Therefore,

enrolment and initial intake rates are identified as unhelpful indicators by many scholars to measure progress in education (Schurmann, 2009). A significant number of children with special needs also remain out of the schooling system due to a lack of suitable facilities, safeguarding, and trained teaching support (Akter and Rahman, 2018). Moreover, scholars also highlight the missing students and teachers who are not reflected in the data. For instance, the data does not capture the emerging NGO-provided "one-room, one-teacher" classes offering non-formal primary education (Asadullah, 2016). The aggressive expansion of enrolment-focused primary and secondary education to meet national and international goals also compromises the quality of education (Rahman and Islam, 2009; Rahman, 2021).

The Education System in Bangladesh

Education Structure

The education system in Bangladesh is large and complex, consisting of nearly 36 million students across three levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary education. A large number of students are educated through both formal and non-formal approaches. The formal education system is divided into pre-primary (age 5), primary (age 6-10), secondary (age 11-16), higher secondary (17-18), and tertiary education (age 18+) (i.e., University and University college). The primary language of teaching in formal education is *'Bangla'*, and English is taught as a second language. However, an English version of the formal education route has been introduced since 2008. Religious education and institutions also fall under the formal education system with a separate curriculum and examination system. The formal education system comprises approximately 175,000 institutions, over 1 million teachers, and nearly 36 million students (GED, 2022).

In Bangladesh, five-year primary education is compulsory, and the enrolment rate is nearly universal (BANBEIS, 2022). Although government schools principally provide primary education, the secondary education sub-sector is dominated by non-government schools (about 95%) supported by government subsidies. Governments' limited capacity and the vast need for education bring the NGOs

into the education landscape. In collaboration with the government, NGOs work in hard-to-reach areas by providing education to non-traditional age groups, for example, early childhood care and education, pre-primary classes, basic education, and lifelong and continuing education. Nonetheless, accountability and scrutiny of their work remain challenging (Siddiquee and Faroqi, 2009).

Access to Education and Dropout

Effects of poverty and lack of social safety - that most often leads to child marriage - are the primary influences of high dropout at the primary and secondary levels of education in Bangladesh (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2009; Arnab and Siraj, 2020; Naz and Saqib, 2021). According to BANBEIS (2022), 13.25 % of girls leave school before completing grade 5 (age 10) and nearly 36.44 % before completing grade 10 (age 15) due to the abovementioned factors. The gender parity observed in data at the primary and secondary levels disappears in higher secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education levels, with a lower percentage of girls than boys (ibid).

Poverty

In a developing country like Bangladesh, poverty is a prime factor that blocks access to education. More importantly, it impedes the retention and completion of education for girls in Bangladesh (Sabates et al., 2013). Even though the definition and measurement of 'poverty' may be complex and varied, it is widely accepted that a large percentage of the population in Bangladesh experiences severe poverty that affects their access to education (Hossain and Zeitlyn, 2010). Longitudinal empirical studies conducted in Bangladesh show that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to drop out or fail to attend school (Sohel, 2014).

Even though half of the education budget in Bangladesh is spent on primary education, a closer look reveals that it amounts to approximately £2 per annum per student. For parents, the importance of sending children to school is

significantly lower than the opportunity cost[5] of sending them to school. Instead, they prefer that their children engage in work and earn an income to support their families (ibid). Thus, even though it may appear on paper that the government has achieved significant success in primary and secondary enrolment rates, the formal education system continuously fails to retain students in school.

Scholars also identify the possibility of intergenerational poverty due to the failure to invest in children's education (Kabeer and Mahmud,2009). In Bangladesh, the Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) Act of 1990 makes five years of primary education free and compulsory for the 6–10-year age group on paper. It should make primary education accessible to all children regardless of economic status. Nonetheless, in practice, education is not free. In a poverty-stricken country like Bangladesh, where about 20% of the population lives under the poverty line[6], sending children to school is also associated with the opportunity cost of not engaging them in work and earning money, which directly impacts household income. However, the poverty line suggesting approximately GBP 1.76 per day to lead a basic standard life is heavily criticised by scholars as inadequate, one-dimensional (income-focused), and immoral (Edward, 2006; Schweiger, 2013).

Parents from disadvantaged backgrounds with low educational attainment may also fail to see the value of education. As Sohel (2014) finds in his study, parents value education when it results in better life opportunities (i.e., jobs) for their children. However, that requires children to complete education to a higher level and requires heavy investment. So, poor parents incapable of making that investment see no value in education. This is especially true for girls as they go to another household after marriage, and the in-laws' family reap the benefit of their education.

5 Opportunity cost of a choice is the value of the best alternative forgone where, given limited resources, a choice needs to be made between several alternatives.

[6] Poverty Line is a measure of the World Bank that identifies people living under $2.15 per day (approx. GBP. 17.76). The measure of poverty line has been criticised by scholars arguing

Child Marriage

Poverty is positively related to the rate of child marriage in Bangladesh. Poverty intensifies the effects of social and religious discourses, which leads to a high rate of child marriage and dropout of girls from school (Arnab and Siraj, 2020). According to Human Rights Watch (2015), Bangladesh has the fourth highest child marriage rate in the world, with 51% of the girls married before they turn 18. The 51% population equals a striking 38 million girls (Girls Not Brides, 2023). This trend is not observed in the case of boys.

Nonetheless, the accuracy of the correct age is also questioned. A study by Streatfield et al. (2015) assessed a random sample of 1766 women aged 15-29 from the Matlab Demographic Surveillance Data (HDSS) set in order to verify their reported age against their actual age. Matlab is an area in the Southwest of Bangladesh. In their investigation, they found that 56% of the girls/women in their sample underreported their age at first marriage. This finding may suggest a possibility of an inflated reflection of the extremely high percentage of child marriage in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, birth certificates are not completely digitised yet and can be created any time after birth by filling out the form with the required information. Sometimes, parents may under-report their daughter's age to escape the high dowry amount that increases with girls' age. On the contrary, parents may over-report their daughter's age to escape charges of child marriage. However, Streatfield et al.'s (2015) study was conducted by taking a limited sample within a small geographical area that does not reflect the situation in the whole country.

A strong relationship between poverty and child marriage is well-documented. Parents with economic hardship are found to be more inclined to marry off their daughters at an early age (Arnab and Siraj, 2020; Fattah and Camelia, 2022). Even though child marriage is prevalent in Bangladesh, the most affected people come from low socio-economic backgrounds (Sohel, 2014). In Bangladesh, parents of daughters see it as their duty to marry off their daughters 'on time', which, according to customary norms, is as soon as girls reach puberty (Asadullah et al. 2021). In many instances, parents are even found to see child

marriage as a way to discharge their economic burden. Due to the effects of poverty, some parents may also marry off their daughters early to ensure their daughter's economic security (Faroque and Amin, 2016).

Even though most studies show poverty as the prime cause of child marriage, child marriage is also influenced by discourses of social reputation and safety. Streatfield et al. (2015) also find that even though poverty is one of the main reasons for dropping out of school among the poorest participants in their survey data, among the participants from wealthy families, the main reason for dropout from school was child marriage. This can arguably be explained by the influence of social and cultural discourses in Bangladesh that foster the early marriage of girls to protect family honour and reputation (Asadullah et al. 2021).

Within the Bangladeshi socio-cultural discourses, a married girl represents the family's honour and is responsible for taking care of the family members. The majority of these girls never return to school (ibid). The law in Bangladesh dictates under the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) that the legal age of marriage is 18 years for a female and 21 years for a male with special provision[7] (Dutta and Hasan, 2022). Failure to meet the law has legal consequences. Yet, child marriage in Bangladesh is prevalent and socially accepted to a great extent, obstructing girls' education (Roset, 2016).

Along with poverty and family reputation, lack of social safety is another factor that motivates child marriage, leading to school dropout of girls. The dominant social discourses are infused with conservative patriarchal values and intensified by religious discourses, which make early/ forced marriage, violence against women and restricted movement of girls/women socially accepted (Banarjee, 2020). Direct violence such as abduction, rape, murder, and acid attack are not uncommon in Bangladesh. According to a report by Ain O Salish Kendra (2024), 114 women have been raped, and 325 children were tortured, leading to murder or suicide in the first three months of 2024. Another indirect form of socially accepted and prevalent sexual violence in Bangladesh is 'eve teasing'. Eve

[7] Special provision- Notwithstanding anything contained in any other provision of this Act, if a marriage is solemnized in such manner and under such special circumstances as may be prescribed by rules in the best interests of the minor, at the directions of the court and with consent of the parents or the guardian of the minor, as the case may be, it shall not be deemed to be an offence under this Act (Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017)

Teasing is used as a euphemism for sexual harassment, which may involve catcalling, pulling scarves, touching, groping, stalking and even more if there is an opportunity. The socio-cultural discourses rest the responsibility on girls'/women's shoulders to keep their bodies safe, perpetuating the common 'men are like that' or 'men will be men' discourse. However, Ghosh (2011) identifies 'eve teasing' as "an attitude, a mindset, or a set of behaviours to insult women and maintain male superiority within society (p.100)". I further discuss the discourses of gender and gender-based violence in Chapter 3.

Natural Calamities and COVID -19 Pandemic

Natural Disaster

Recurring natural calamities and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have severely impacted the education of young people in Bangladesh, with young girls being the worst affected (Asadullah et al., 2021). Bangladesh is situated on a low-lying deltaic and coastal landscape. This unique geographical position makes Bangladesh highly prone to natural disasters like cyclones and floods with an unequal gendered impact on people (Naz and Saqib, 2021). The rise of sea levels significantly worsens the situation, with some parts of the country submerging under water (Rahman, 2021). Bangladesh is a country with an area of 148,460 square KM and a population of 169.4 million (World Bank, 2021). The dense population within a small geographical area and extreme poverty further intensify their consequences.

Natural disasters like floods and cyclones disrupt schooling for children as the areas get submerged under water. The increasing threat of sexual harassment of young girls and women and time out of school as a consequence of these disasters lead to parents marrying off their daughters soon after they reach puberty (HRW, 2015). A mixed-method study conducted by Asadullah et al. (2021) in eight climate-affected coastal villages found that the incidence of natural shocks like floods and cyclones is positively related to child marriage, suggesting that more natural shocks lead to an increase in the number of child marriages. Natural disasters also intensify economic vulnerability, risk, and school dropout. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the research sample belonged to a particular vulnerable geographical area in Bangladesh that has had

repeated occurrences of natural disasters. In addition, the four sample districts for data collection, on average, have a higher rate of child marriage than other regions of the country.

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Similar effects are observed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh had one of the most extended periods of school closure. Due to a lack of infrastructure for switching to online education, the closure lasted 18 months (World Bank, 2023). Makino et al. (2021), conducting a study during the COVID-19 lockdown in Bangladesh, highlights the significant shift of study time turning into time for household chores, especially for girls. They also underscore the potential dropout of female students from school, leading to child marriage. In another study, Hossain et al. (2021) underline a striking increase in child marriage due to pandemic-enforced long-term school closures throughout the country, while many cases remain unreported. Even though there is a disagreement regarding the accurate percentage increase in child marriage, the exceptional increase is also confirmed by UNICEF (2021), BRAC (2021), the largest NGO operating at grassroots levels, and news media in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh tried to introduce online education. However, due to a lack of technology, infrastructure, and internet connection, only students in big cities could take advantage of it, creating a further urban vs rural divide among students (Das, 2021). Prolonged school closure with uncertain opening dates and social insecurities encouraged an accelerated rate of child marriage. It resulted in school dropouts and limiting the aspirations of young people. COVID-19 not only affected young girls with life-changing consequences, but young boys also dropped out of school and joined different types of jobs to earn a livelihood for their families (Rahman et al. 2021).

Quality of Education

With the emergence of the SDGs, the quality of education in Bangladesh has come under the spotlight (GED, 2022). Bangladesh's education policies have been tailored to align with the SDGs. Even though Bangladesh has made significant

progress with MDGs in the areas of school enrolment and gender parity, the quality of education is particularly challenging for Bangladesh. As discussed earlier, during the 90s and post-introduction of MDGs, Bangladesh invested heavily in increasing education enrolment rates with a special focus on female students. Even though Bangladesh achieved its enrolment and gender parity goals, that came at the expense of quality of education. The enrolment success achieved at the primary level also failed to translate into retention at the secondary level. According to BBS and UNICEF (2020), the 65% completion rate at the lower secondary level (grades 6-8) reduces to only 29% at the higher secondary level (grades 11-12).

Asaduallah and Chaudhury (2014) conducted a quantitative study with nationally drawn data from rural schools and households in Bangladesh to explore the relationship between years spent in school and student learning. They also looked to see if 'years spent in school' translated into skills development for girls. Their findings show a low level of learning even among the primary school graduates, where girls did worse. They further criticised government interventions primarily focusing on enrolment rather than the quality of education. Even though Asadullah and Chaudhury (2014) drew on data samples from rural Bangladesh, their study is not devoid of limitations due to the children attending different primary schools across the country with varying levels of quality of education, school type, teacher training, and management in rural areas. Moreover, they mention that a large number of participants in their sample are students of Madrasa (religious schools) that are widely considered to have poor-quality education with low-trained teachers (Rao and Hossain, 2011; Golam and Kusakabe, 2018.).

Quality of education is also related to student achievement. Student academic achievement is positively related to teaching quality, technology used, and school leadership (Ahmmed et al., 2022). Nonetheless, as I have mentioned, ensuring quality education is a significant challenge in Bangladesh due to schools being over-subscribed, a lack of funding, and teacher training that compromises the quality of education. Low salaries of teachers, high teacher-to-student ratio, and lack of teacher training facilities for teachers also impact the quality of

education, making private tuition a common practice in Bangladesh (Biswas and Biswas, 2000).

With the emergence of SDGs, the quality of education in Bangladesh has been scrutinised for the first time. There is a crisis of systematic and comparable databases on school quality indicators that make it challenging to undertake quantitative studies. This limitation also narrows the scope for further qualitative studies due to a lack of scholarly literature to analyse new findings. This creates space for research in inclusive and equitable quality education in Bangladesh.

Motivation behind Research

Coming from a conservative religious Muslim family in Bangladesh, the rules were always very different for me from my brothers. I grew up listening to what I could not do or achieve because of being a girl/woman. It contrasted with my parents' aspirations for me to become an eligible bride against high aspirations for my brothers to become doctors and army officers. Even though, as part of an urban middle-class family, affordability to continue higher education was not a significant barrier, it was deemed unnecessary for a girl/woman in my family. So, I grew up with the question, 'Why are the rules different for me?'. Even though there are examples of women being highly educated and financially independent in Islam (i.e. Khadija bint Khuwaylid), why does society primarily focus on specific aspects of religion that allow them to subordinate women? The only answer I received from my mother was, 'this is how it is for women'. Nonetheless, the questions and an urge to know why remained alive inside me.

After completing my undergraduate degree, I joined one of the prominent international donor agencies promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Naively, I thought, finally, I was part of an institution to bring change for girls/women in Bangladesh. However, it did not take long for that illusion to break. The experience made me aware of the politics and power relations involved behind the backdrop of development and the socially constructed ideas of "empowerment" of women, which cannot be a 'one size fits all' formula. It also made me aware of the top-down approach and the influence

of Western development discourses practised by the International third sector agencies that most often fail to capture the complex post-colonial history, geographical tension, and the 'tug of war' between religion and culture in countries like Bangladesh.

Moreover, project-based interventions with limited time (i.e. 3-5 years) and fixed budgets often focus on short-term quantifiable development goals that look good on paper but fail to achieve sustainable change. Instead, it helps to get more funding, continuing the vicious cycle of never-ending projects. Nonetheless, scholarly work shows that very little has changed for girls/women at the grassroots level in Bangladesh (Stake et al., 2020; Ferdous et al., 2020). It is necessary to understand the experiences of the young girls/ women themselves to achieve equality for girls/women. The recent halfway progress report by the UN Women and UN DESA (2023) on SDG goal 5 with the title, 'The world is failing girls and women,' is a sheer reflection of that.

My five years of experience working in the development sector and studying development studies in Bangladesh made me realise the prevalence of trying to fix complicated social issues with shortcut solutions. Very few agencies want to understand the complexity behind inequalities between men and women. The discourses associated with understanding the diverse and unique gendered experiences of girls/women and their educational aspirations are complex. I moved to the UK for higher education at a university whose motto was 'rerum cognoscere causas', which means "to know the causes of things". From there, I gathered the courage to ask why and hope to continue doing it as a researcher in the future.

Aim and Research Questions

The overarching goal of this study is to investigate,

- What are the conceptions of gender and career aspirations among secondary-level young people in Bangladesh in the context of moves toward inclusive education?

In this thesis, I try to answer this overarching question with support of four supporting research questions given below. Together, they provide an overview of the conceptions of gender and career aspirations of young participants in Bangladesh.

Supporting Questions

- What are the conceptions of 14–15-year-old young people, following a gender-sensitive curriculum, on gender and career aspirations in Bangladesh?

- What kinds of barriers are experienced by these 14-15-year-old young people in relation to gender and career aspirations?

- How do these 14-15-year-old young people negotiate space for their views on gender and career aspirations?

- What are the implications of the findings for developing equitable and inclusive education in Bangladesh?

Explanation of Key Terms

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I discuss the theoretical perspectives I adopt to conduct this research in detail. Here, I briefly discuss a few key concepts central to this thesis.

Language

The poststructuralist perspective holds the notion that all meaning, and knowledge originate through language, which is located within discourses (Derrida,1976; Foucault, 1980). According to poststructuralist theorists, meaning and language are socially constructed, which is fluid and dynamic (Foucault and Rabinow, 1984; Weedon, 1997). Adopting a poststructuralist perspective, in this thesis, I take the stance that language is key to individuals creating meanings of sex/gender, and it is ever evolving. This suggests that young people are constantly constructing and re-constructing the meanings in relation to

sex/gender through talk and actions in their day-to-day lives (Blaise, 2005). In this way, they actively take part in the construction of 'being' a girl and a boy in that specific time and place (Butler, 1990).

Discourse

In this thesis, I utilise a Foucauldian (1978,1980,1985) notion of discourse to understand the conceptions of gender and career aspirations of the participant young people in Bangladesh. Foucault (1978, 1980) suggests discourses comprise specific sets of knowledge and social practices that are drawn on by individuals in establishing reality and 'truth' in a given society. For instance, most societies have socially dominant cultural standards for how a girl/woman should look, behave, and/or perform their duties. This knowledge is socially constructed, drawing on discourses of ideal femininity in a given context (Rozario and Samuel, 2010).

Foucault (1978, 1980) also proposes that some discourses are more powerful and create hidden rules suggesting which knowledge is dominant, right, acceptable, and which knowledge is subjugated, wrong, or unacceptable (Blaise, 2005). Meaning, there are dominant discourses containing power relations that appear natural, and there are subjugated discourses that feel uncomfortable or impossible (Foucault, 1980; Weedon, 1997). Foucault also suggests that power is negotiated within discourses, which is a significant focus of my thesis. So, through discourses, I try to understand how young people negotiate, resist, and/or subvert dominant social discourses (Foucault, 1975; Foucault and Rabinow, 1984).

Power/Knowledge

In this thesis, I draw from Foucault's theories of power to understand the existing power relations within the discourses. Foucault (1980) suggests power as something not possessed by individuals but rather as something that circulates in net-like motion through relationships. It is expressed through discourses, with certain knowledge becoming more powerful and sometimes forming what Foucault calls regimes of truth. On the other hand, there is other knowledge

remaining non-dominant and subjugated. Drawing from Foucault's notion of power, in this thesis I explore the power relations involving sex/gender and career aspirations of the participant young people in Bangladesh.

Agency

Within the poststructuralist perspectives, agency is associated with making choices (Blaise, 2005). Foucault attempted to theorise resistance in the form of agency in his final works but could not finish the task (Clegg, 2006). Drawing from Foucault and poststructuralist ideas, Davies (1991) argues that "agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognise that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted" (p. 51). She also stresses the fragmented and transitory nature of agency within discourses that are not necessarily occupied across all discourses, suggesting one may exercise power within one discourse but may be powerless in others. This highlights the absence of absolute power.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters. A brief overview of each chapter is given below:

Chapter 2: Foucault and Feminist Poststructuralism

In this thesis, I adopt a feminist poststructuralist perspective with a focus on the work of Foucault. In this chapter, I discuss the theories proposed by Foucault to explore the power relations and operation of disciplinary power through discourses. I underscore the critiques and limitations of Foucault's theories utilising feminist academic literature. Finally, I discuss the feminist poststructuralist notions drawn from Foucault's work, which enables me to answer my research questions.

Chapter 3: Education, Gender, and Career Aspirations in Bangladesh

In light of academic literature, in this chapter, I critically discuss access to education and a move toward quality education in Bangladesh in line with SDG commitments. I explore the link between gender and education across textbooks, curriculum, learning to teach, attainment to aspirations, and major selection to career choice, reviewing literature crucial to achieving a quality, inclusive, and equitable education (UN, 2015). I conclude the chapter by outlining the research gap that my own study seeks to address; to explore the conceptions of gender and career aspirations among young people in Bangladesh.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In this chapter, I outline my research design. I discuss my ontological and epistemological position in this research, which motivates my methodological decisions. I discuss the methodological approach and data collection methods, justifying my choices using methodological literature. I discuss the methods used to analyse the data. I also highlight the impact of COVID-19 on my research and the necessary adjustments made. Finally, I discuss the pertinent ethical issues and considerations as the research involves young people.

Chapter 5: Diary of the Brave: A Critical Analysis

The research participants of this study were part of a gender-sensitive programme provided by an NGO. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the gender-sensitive programme and the contents used as part of it. I critically analyse the contents of the main component of the programme 'The Diary of the Brave' and provide an overview of my analysis.

Chapter 6: Discipline and Punish: Experiences of Young Girls in Rural Bangladesh

This is the first empirical chapter of this research, where I discuss my analysed findings utilising a feminist poststructuralist lens with a special focus on

Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power. I highlight how the participant young girls are disciplined in different stages through discourses and even punished if they are not judged to 'conform' accurately in Bangladeshi society.

Chapter 7: Power, Strategy, and Resistance: Creating Space for Alternative Discourses

In this second empirical chapter, I continue with the feminist poststructuralist lens and highlight the ways the participant female young people negotiate, resist, and sometimes subvert dominant discourses to make space for alternative discourses. I also discuss the potential role of the participant male young people in this process.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In the concluding chapter, Chapter 8, I recap and reflect on each of the research questions of my research to highlight the insights found through the study. I underscore remaining research gaps with the potential to be explored in the future. I also highlight this research's main contributions to knowledge creation, pedagogy, and policy implications.

Chapter Summary

In this introductory chapter, I introduced current educational challenges in Bangladesh that are in line with SDGs and the gender link to them, highlighting the significance and timeliness of this research. I discussed the motivation behind this study, drawing from my own personal and professional experience. I outlined the aim and research questions. In the final section, I briefly explained the key terms used throughout the thesis and outlined the thesis structure. In the next chapter, I discuss the Foucauldian and Feminist Poststructuralist theoretical ideas adopted to undertake the research.

Chapter 2: Foucault and Feminist Poststructuralism

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework that I adopted for this research. I start with a discussion of the work of Michel Foucault on power, resistance, and their operation in society from a Foucauldian lens. I focus on the Foucauldian analysis of power and knowledge and how specific 'regimes of truth' are constructed. I then highlight the limitations of Foucault's theoretical ideas to explain feminist issues around gender cautiously identified by feminist scholars. In the final section, I discuss the feminist poststructuralist ideas proposed to detangle the issues of gender and how feminist scholars have engaged with the perceived shortcomings of Foucault's theoretical concepts.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a theoretical understanding of how the social construction of gender may occur within the context of Bangladesh within discourses, as a result of dynamic and continuously changing power relations.

Foucault and Poststructuralism

Poststructuralist philosophy originated as a dismissal or rather a dissatisfaction against the rigid notion of fixed reality suggested by structuralist scholars (Berman, 1988; Radford and Radford, 2005). According to followers of structuralist ideas, meaning is constructed within a coherent system in a similar fashion for most individuals (De Saussure et al. 1966; Dosse, 1997) suggesting it to be relational and to an extent fixed (Koerner, 2013). Poststructuralist philosophy originated as a literary critique from scholars like Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, who proposed a different perspective of what is knowable, and of what can be done with that knowledge (Williams, 2014).

One key form of poststructuralist work that has profoundly influenced gender theorists and feminist research comes from Michel Foucault (Francis, 2000; Williams, 2014), which inspires the analysis in this thesis. Foucault used his

genealogy methodology to explore the history of ideas or as he called it "the history of systems of thoughts" (McHoul and Grace, 2015). In the following section, I discuss Foucault's conceptualisation of power/knowledge and efforts to explain resistance to bring social change.

Foucault's Notion of Power

Foucault (1978,1980, 1982) gradually separated himself from the essentialist position that sees the individual as a prior agent; an agent who produces a social world of power/knowledge that creates human subjectivity. His work made a radical departure on how power is conceived. While mainstream theories of power focused on defining the executer and distribution of power, who benefits and who loses, Foucault's (1982) interest lied in understanding the specific nature of power that shapes the actions and behaviour of individuals.

Foucault defines power/knowledge as "diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive" (Gaventa 2003, p.1). According to Foucault (1979), "power is not a thing, an institution, an aptitude or an object" (p. 93). Foucault (1982, 1988) sees power as something abstract that circulates in a net-like form similar to blood capillaries. Power is present everywhere which operates through relationships and is expressed through discourses and language. Individuals work merely as the carriers or sites of power rather than its points of application. In other words, power is something that passes through individuals rather than being applied to them (Foucault, 2003). This further strengthens Foucault's argument that individuals may exercise power in one discourse and be considered powerless within another.

Foucault writes about 'power/knowledge' and through which he suggests the constitution of power through forms of knowledge, understanding, and 'truth' in a given society (Gaventa 2003). Each society has its ‘regimes of truth’ that endorse which discourses are true and right, and which discourses are wrong. This ‘regimes of truth’ is not fixed and goes through continuous construction and re-construction. Even though knowledge is expressed through discourses, discourses are not produced independently of existing power relations.

Discourses are controlled, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures of selection, exclusion, and domination within the social system (Foucault and Rabinow 1984). Nonetheless, Foucault (1989) also argued that power is dynamic and always circulating which creates a possibility of subverting, resisting, and even subjugated discourses becoming dominant at a point in time.

This conception of power sets poststructuralist perspectives such as Foucault's apart from other theoretical perspectives that risk essentialism (McNay, 1994). It also offers feminist scholars a valuable tool and a possibility to achieve their emancipatory goals (Ramazanoglu, 1993). Foucault's power/knowledge framework proposes an individual is neither powerful for a perpetual period nor powerless or oppressed for an indefinite period of time. Instead, an individual can be powerful within one discourse and powerless within another at the same time (Foucault and Rabinow, 1984). It allows feminist researchers to move away from the narrative of women as helpless and powerless in the society (Butler, 1990). Foucault's conception of power also enables feminist scholars to explore and analyse how women may exercise power within certain discourses (Ramazanoglu, 1993).

Disciplinary Power and Panopticism

Foucault's (1975) second major and possibly most influential work is his genealogy of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish*. In this project, Foucault underlines the transformation of the penal system with the example of Europe from a 'punishment upon a body' to punishment as a 'technology of power'. In doing so, he provides a genealogy of the modern soul using the metaphor of the prison, as he argues, "the soul is the prison of the body" (Foucault, 1975, p.30).

In this project, Foucault adopted the model of the Panopticon proposed by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham to explore the reach of such disciplinary apparatus in today's world (Foucault, 1975). The Panopticon is a circular structure with prison cells and a tower at the centre. Each prison cell and its inhabitants are visible under constant surveillance. The genius of the

panopticon lies in the perpetual thought of being observed. As the prisoners cannot see the inspector, it leads them to self-regulate, a condition that Foucault calls 'panopticism'. Thus, the disciplinary machine works even without a supervisor achieving utmost efficiency. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault explains,

> "The prisoner, because permanently visible, begins a regime of perpetual self - surveillance that results in the internalisation of the supervisor. The Panopticon thus leads to panopticism, and the disciplinary machine leads to the disciplinary society and the production of the modern individual who, by internalising the supervisory gaze of the other, takes all the disciplinary tasks of society upon itself and forces itself to conform to social norms without any external authority imposing those norms" (Foucault, 1975, p.228).

Foucault argues that this internalisation of self-surveillance, regulation of behaviour, and actions go beyond the prison walls. He finds a reflection of similar disciplinary mechanisms across society, e.g. in factories, schools, barracks, and hospitals. Together these dominant institutions produce individuals that are highly influenced to conform to dominant social norms and to identify any individual departing from it. These individuals continuously self-regulate to maintain social order, often without any supervision. Caldwell (2007) suggests it as the perfect example of self-subjugation through self-discipline which is significant to this research.

Power, Discourse, and Regime of Practices

A central concept of Foucault's work around power/knowledge is discourse, a concept that he borrowed from structural linguistics and redefined its meaning (McHoul and Grace, 2015). Foucault (1972, 1978) suggests discourses comprise specific sets of knowledge and social practices that establish accepted reality in a given society. According to him, power is rooted in the micro-practices of social discourses that constitute power. He sees these cultural practices as historically contingent and fluid (Fraser, 1981). For instance, every society holds cultural standards of how a girl/woman should look, behave, or perform their duties. These knowledges are socially constructed within the discourse of 'ideal femininity' in a given context. Foucault (1972,1978) proposes some discourses are more dominant creating hidden rules about which knowledges are powerful,

right, acceptable, and which knowledges are subjugated, wrong, or unacceptable (Blaise, 2005).

In his lecture on 7 January 1976 defining subjugated knowledge Foucault discussed,

> “By subjugated knowledges I mean two things: on the one hand, I am referring to the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemisation […] Subjugated knowledges are thus those blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory and criticism – which obviously draws upon scholarship – has been able to reveal” (Foucault, 1976, p.81-82).

Foucault suggests subjugated knowledges historically existed but did not make its way as dominant, maybe because it did not align with the ‘regimes of truth’ at that specific time. Nonetheless, he argues that it is through these subjugated, low-ranking, discarded knowledges that generate criticism. Therefore, comprehending Foucault's analysis of power requires an understanding of his concept of regime of practices.

Knowledge and discourses are interlinked and inseparable. On one hand, knowledge normalises discourses and dominant knowledge produces 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1990). On the other hand, discourses entail a mechanism of power that regulates the behaviour of individuals in the social body. Failure to conform to that may lead to stigmatisation or discrimination (Foucault, 1975, 1978). In 'Discipline and Punish', Foucault (1975), through his exploration of prison practices tries to understand the conditions that made such practices acceptable at that particular time by analysing the regime of practices. Discussing his aim during this analysis, Foucault mentions,

> “It is a question of analysing a 'regime of practices' - practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect. To analyse 'regimes of practices' means to analyse programmes of conduct which have both prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done (effects of 'jurisdiction'), and codifying effects regarding what is to be known (effects of 'veridiction'). So, I was aiming to write a history not of the prison as an institution, but of the 'practice of imprisonment” (Foucault et al., 1991, p.75).

Drawing from Foucault's genealogy of prison practices some feminist scholars have analysed the practices and conditions that perpetuate patriarchal gendered

inequality against women within society that I also draw from (Davies, 1989; McNay, 1994. Duncan, 1994).

Becoming a subject

A major part of Foucault's work encompasses how one becomes a 'subject'. Foucault critiques the classical ways of thinking about the subject as a rational, unified being with a fixed core or essence. Foucault (1991) argues that subjects are constituted as a result of the interplay of power relations. Highlighting the multiplicity of power relations within a social order he discusses,

> "when I speak of power relations, of the forms of rationality which can rule and regulate them, I am not referring to Power — with a capital P — dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration — or between a dominating and a dominated class power relations having specific forms of rationality, forms which are common to them, etc" (Foucault, 1991, p.38).

Through his conceptualisation of power, Foucault offers the scope to explore the 'microphysics of power'. Instead of the traditional perspective of exertion of power from a locus (i.e. institutions, authority), Foucault argues that various loci of micropower, such as, family, school, and institutions are constituted through the ways in which individuals practice their subjectivities. Therefore, he underscores the significance of studying the bottom-up hierarchy of power relations involving individuals and institutions at the margins to understand subjectivity (Foucault, 1991).

According to Foucault (1991), similar to power relations, subjectivities can be multiple which may explain the contradictory nature of human beings. Moreover, to Foucault, the subject is always plural. In his interview published in the book Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth, Foucault explains,

> "You do not have the same type of relationship to yourself when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes to vote or speaks at a meeting and when you are seeking to fulfill your desires in a sexual relationship. Undoubtedly, there are relationships and interferences between these different forms of the subject; but we are not dealing with the same type of subject. In

each case, one plays, one establishes a different type of relationship to oneself" (Foucault, 1984; p. 290).

Nonetheless, Foucault cautiously reminds the readers of the complexity of constituting the self, a process that involves a certain level of learning and working. Thus, our subjectivity does not necessarily change instantly as our role changes (Kelly, 2013).

Foucault also sees subjectivity as distinct from the body (Foucault, 2003). Foucault's argument of the subject being historically specific and forging itself rules out the possibility of any kind of universality of self/subject, making it unique. With this argument Foucault also forwards the idea that the ways we engage with our consciousness to constitute the self/ subject is not fixed, instead, it is historically variable.

In addition, Foucault sees the subject as a form rather than a substance. As Foucault mentions, "It [the subject] is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself" (Foucault, 1997, p.290). Meaning 'the subject' is a form that is always evolving through the process of 'objectivation' and 'subjectivation' in historically specific practices that make our continuous transformation possible. This evolving mechanism possibly creates scope for change – a concept that inspired Butler's theory of gender performativity (see below) (Butler, 1990).

Foucault (1984) also highlights the existence of 'Techniques of self' in every culture in different forms during his working sessions with Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus at Berkeley, later published in his book, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. According to him, self-technology denotes a set of truth obligations. "The constitution and/or transformation of self occurs through discovering, learning, and/or telling that truth" (Foucault, 1984, p. 177-178). Since knowledge is produced through both language and practices, a regime of practices requires a certain form of power relations to operate (Hall, 2004). This specific form of power relations constructs the self, turning them into 'subjects'. In other words, according to Foucault, the subject/self is shaped through practices (Foucault, 2003) and Foucault was interested in investigating certain historical practices that may forge the subjectivity of people (Kelly, 2013). Thus, to understand the

construction of girls/women as selves/subjects within the context of Bangladesh, it is essential to explore the underlying power relations and the ‘regime of practices’ that are drawn on to forge these constructions.

Agency and Resistance

In his intermediate work, Foucault reconceptualised his notion of power as both productive and repressive. Instead, he focused on agency that is related to new, more positive, and possibly emancipatory discourses (McNay, 1994). Through this, he tried to redefine the relationship between power, agency, resistance and change in society (Caldwell, 2007). Foucault started analysing resistance and agency toward the end of his life which unfortunately remained unfinished (McNay, 1994). Even though Foucault's primary focus of work always encompasses power, Foucault (2000) struggles to explain the possibility of agency in the form of discursive resistance. In The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1 Foucault argues, “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1979, pp. 100–101). By this Foucault means that just as power is everywhere, discursive resistance is also everywhere which continuously tries to overthrow the dominant discourses (Caldwell, 2007). This may explain the multiple subject positions and possibilities of subversion of discourses by alternative subject discourses. Nonetheless, Foucault arguably struggles to explain how this resistance takes place (McNay, 2000).

Critique and Limitations: Foucault under the Spotlight

Even though Foucault's work has encouraged much productive and significant work in feminist literature in the last three decades, as I have begun to discuss, some areas of Foucault's theorisations have also received marked criticism (McNay, 1994; Allen, 2013). This creates a necessity for a more nuanced understanding of power relations within society following a feminist lens. In the following section, I further discuss the feminist critique of Foucault's work, nevertheless maintaining the significance of his work.

Foucault is accused of oversimplifying power dynamics and power relations in society by some feminist scholars (McNay, 1992). Foucault (1980) theorises power as something fluid and dynamic, beyond individual possession. While it creates an opportunity for feminist researchers to refute the representation of women only as helpless and vulnerable in history, Foucault struggles to explain how this emancipation can be achieved through his theorisation. Foucault is also accused of ignoring historical and social context by some scholars (Ramazanoglu, 1993). Foucault at times is critiqued to have a tendency to universalise power dynamics across historical and cultural contexts. This risks the potential failure to capture the complexities of lived experience (Gordon, 1991). Foucault has also been critiqued of Ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism denotes "people [being] born and socialised into a certain world view and almost inevitably perceive [ing] the world from their particular positionality, and, over time, come to believe their cultural/national superiority as a given, as 'normal' and 'natural'" (Besley and Peters, 2011, p. 3). Foucault is accused of Ethnocentrism due to his narrow focus on the Western social order and power relations.

Some feminist scholars have critiqued Foucault's theoretical framework for its ignorance towards intersectional factors (McNay, 1994; McCall, 2005). Foucault (1978, 1980) suggests that knowledge is produced within discourses. Specific sets of knowledge and social practices that establish accepted reality in a given society. However, Feminist scholars highlight that Foucault's theorisation of power as abstract and a monolithic force fails to adequately capture the complex intersections with, and intersections between other forms of oppression induced based on gender, race, religion, class, sexuality, colonialism (McCall, 2005). Feminist scholars actively critique Foucault for disregarding the influence of gender on power relations and knowledge production. He ignores highlighting how knowledge is gendered and therefore fails to explain the gendered experiences of individuals (McNeil, 1993). Weedon (1987) argues that Foucault's narrow focus on discourses and institutions refrains him from capturing the different nature of power relations based on gender within society. Moreover, he ignores the patriarchal structure shaping and perpetuating certain forms of knowledge. McNay (1994) further points out that Foucault's understanding of individuals solely in gender-neutral and/or implicitly masculinised fashion bodies eliminates the possibility of exploring other oppressive factors influencing

individual experiences, such as experiences of gendered bodies. In light of Foucault's work in Discipline and Punish treating the body of an inmate as the body of a man, Bartky (1998) continues to argue that Foucault treats the body as a unitary structure, where the body of a woman is similar to the body of a man, “as if men and women bore the same relationships to the characteristics institutions of modern life” (p.95).

As discussed earlier, toward the end of his life, Foucault moved in the direction of a more positive notion of power as agency and resistance. Foucault tried to shift from his notion of 'individuals as docile bodies' constrained through disciplinary power to self-determining agents who are capable of challenging and resisting the dominant discourses of domination in modern society. Nonetheless, McNay (1992) argues that Foucault's undifferentiated theory of power makes it difficult for him to explain how resistance occurs or how individuals negotiate power relations (Scott, 1990). May (1992) argues that this tendency undermines the possibilities for feminist intervention and social change. Nonetheless, this critique is centred around a feminist stance which is rooted in demands of emancipatory politics as it conflicts with the fundamental aim of the feminist project to rediscover and re-evaluate women's experiences (McNay, 1992).

Feminist Poststructuralist Perspectives on Gender

Foucault's theory of power mechanism gives poststructuralist feminists a tool from which to elucidate how power circulates and influences patterns of behaviour, gender, and other aspects (Francis, 2000). Foucault (1978) proposed the idea that sexuality is not an innate or natural quality of the body. Instead, according to him it is an effect of power relations that are historically specific. This helps feminist poststructuralists' arguments to view gender as a political and social construction. It also helps explain women's subjugated, controlled, and culturally specific notions of feminine sexuality (Weedon,1987). Foucault's notion of the construction of body through power shows that it is rather cultural and a social construction rather than natural, which makes a strong counterargument to earlier essential claims based on biological sex (Brodo, 1993).

Theorising gender and gender expressions can be complex and contested. There has been a critical debate around gender as innate or socially constructed for years (Rose, 2001). Nonetheless, a common ground attained by many non-essentialist feminist researchers can be argued to be the social constructionist view of gender as a social construction and fluid (Francis, 2000). This position then denotes sex/gender and the patterns of behaviour influenced by them to be contingent on society, generations, class, ethnicity, religion, historical timeline, and geographical position (Weedon, 1987). Stating that there is a common idea of sex/gender would be oversimplifying a complex and continuous debate. However, a common idea of sex/gender to an extent may be adopted as the organising the principles to further the debates (MacInnes, 1998).

Gender studies is an evolving field with multiple juxtaposed constructions of 'gender' from different feminist epistemological positions. The term 'gender' became popular in the 70s to denote differentiated sex/gender behaviour as socially constructed. Some social constructionist theorists argue that individuals are biologically sexed which follows the socially expected attributes and differentiation based on their prescribed sex (Oakley, 1972). On the other hand, theorists like Butler (1990) and Davies (1989) following a poststructuralist stance see biological sex itself as socially constructed suggesting it is us human beings who attribute what it means to be male/female and create the differentiation. In the words of Davies (1989) individuals create gender by participating in discursive practices. She says, “Gender is created by individuals and within individuals as they learn the discursive practices through which to locate themselves as individuals and as members of the social world” (1989, p. 229). As this research adopts a feminist poststructuralist perspective, the research follows this view.

Foucault's conceptualisation of power as dynamic and operating through discourses allows feminist scholars to overcome the struggle to explain resistance and contradiction that sex role theory arguably failed to explain, due to its view of individuals as fixed recipients of socialisation that reproduce social relations (Acker, 1992). Foucault's notion of power also helps feminist scholars explain the constitution of power between individuals and the gendered nature of society produced through gender discourses (1989). Some feminists even

problematise the terms' women' and 'girls' arguing it to be misleading and suggesting essentialism and homogeneity (Francis, 1999). This poses a new challenge to feminist scholars to define, what is a woman. Nonetheless, as the poststructuralist view lies on the ground of fluidity, it is not possible to have a fixed meaning of girls/women as meaning is always shifting (Jones, 1993). The categorisation of male and female is problematised as well since not everyone can be differentiated into a clearly identifiable category (i.e., someone identifying as non-binary).

Construction of the Female Body

Many feminist scholars with a poststructuralist stance have adopted Foucault's theory of panopticon and constant surveillance to explain the construction of the female body within discourses (Butler, 1990, Duncan, 1994, Brodo, 1993). Even though Foucault adopts the study of the panopticon in a prison as a metaphor to analyse disciplinary mechanisms in modern society, it also provides a theoretical tool to analyse the social construction of female body (Duncan, 1994). As Davies (1989) suggests individuals to learn discursive practices of how to become members of the social world. They create gender by participating in the discursive process. Jones (1993) further adds that along with discursive practices as an entry point for girls/women to constitute themselves, this social order is maintained and perpetuated by constant monitoring. This constant surveillance and disciplinary mechanism influence the construction of girls/women's bodies and their subjectivities (Jones, 1993).

Drawing from Foucault, poststructuralist feminist scholars see the body as a site of power (Bailey, 1993; Brodo, 1993; King, 2004). King (2004) suggests that a female body is inscribed with specific historical, political and economic practices. Within these social discourses, a girl/woman's body is discursively constructed as inferior and a threat to men. This generates the need to control and contain this 'female body' through constant surveillance and other disciplinary techniques. Women are primarily subjugated through their bodies based on stereotyped discourses drawing from conceptions of biological differences perpetuated by society (Brodo, 1993). Traits of 'being a man' are often held as the norm or standard against which women are measured. As

deviated from 'male' traits, women are considered "the active, strong, and moral half of a human whole" (Bailey, 1993, p.99). Therefore, women are the ‘other half' for men to compare themselves as superior (King, 2004).

Feminist poststructuralist scholars believe that femininity and masculinity are also socially constructed. Bartky (1988) argues that we are not born masculine or feminine, instead, a recognisably 'feminine' body based on gesture and appearance is produced through disciplinary practices. Exploring the obsession of women to achieve a particular body type from a Foucauldian disciplinary lens, Barkty (1988) points out the disciplinary mechanisms that influence women's self-regulation. She further argues that such disciplinary influence transcends race or class, meaning the disciplinary technologies of self may have variations but they touch all women at different intensities. Girls/women also self-regulate to achieve the desired body and look prescribed by patriarchal society. As Bartky asserts,

> “In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other” (Bartky, 1988, p.72).

Thus, how a girl/woman talks, walks, sits, behaves, and dresses up is regulated by themselves and other girls/women to maintain the dominant social order. Nonetheless, just as Foucault was critiqued for ethnocentrism, feminist scholars adopting his ideas have also been critiqued for colonising and appropriation of non-Western cultures portraying specifically Western notions of oppression of girls/women (Spivak, 2004). Butler (1990) has identified this effort of feminism to achieve a notion of a universal structure of domination to make their claim stronger as problematic. Due to the socially constructed and inscribed body of girls/women which is historically, politically, and economically specific to a given context, it is necessary to analyse and understand how a girl's/woman's body is constructed within particular contexts, such as the case of Bangladesh that I focus on in this study.

Gender as Performativity: Overcoming Foucault's Shortcomings

Through Gender Trouble (1990), Butler aimed to overcome Foucault's perceived theoretical shortcomings, to detangle debates around sex/gender and subjectivity that feminist scholars have been struggling to resolve. Butler took Foucault's conception of subjects as a discursive production rather than being innate and adopts a queer approach to investigate the socially constructed gender vs biological sex division. Butler (1990) suggests that this theoretical division creates an illusion of a subject's gender being centred upon fixed and binary biological sex that has been applied and maintained by patriarchy. This has also become a part of women's psychosocial self, constructing their ideas. This consecutively leads to regulating each other's behaviour and actions, and self-regulation is the highest stage of this disciplinary mechanism (Duncan, 1994). While Butler (1990, 2010) took inspiration from Foucault's work, they heavily critiqued Foucault's contradictory ideas around 'the body' that opposes his own conceptualisation of the body as a social and cultural construction (Butler, 1990). Therefore, Butler shares their own idea of construction of the body.

Performativity

According to Butler (1990), "Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 43-44). Therefore, Butler (1990) introduces the idea of gender performativity in Gender Trouble. Butler argues the non-existence of a natural body pre-existing a gendered social inscription, suggesting that one does gender (a verb) rather than is (a noun). According to Butler (1990), “Gender is a sequence of acts rather than a being” (Butler,1990, p. 25). Butler identifies gender as a very particular type of process consisting of a set of repeated acts within a stringent regulatory framework. This is not to suggest that the subject has free will to 'choose' their gender. Instead, Butler (1990) suggests that the subject is only allocated a handful of already determined choices within that strict regulatory framework.

Butler (1990) also argues that performativity is different from the usual notion of performance. They explain in an interview (1993), "Whereas performance presupposes a preexisting subject, performativity contests the very notion of the subject" (p.33). According to Butler (1990) language and discourses constitute gender identity, gender identity does not 'do' discourse or gender, meaning there is no gender identity that comes before language. Butler also parts from Foucault's idea of subjects being formed by the internalisation of disciplinary structure. Butler (1990) argues that the law of gender cannot be internalised as there is no being. Rather it is written on the body, as Butler calls it "the corporeal stylisation of gender" (p.172).

Nonetheless, Butler faces a lot of criticism for her notion of gender identity. Benhabib et al., (1995) like many other theorists, seem to confuse performance with performativity and struggle to understand how women can change the "expression" or act by which they are constituted. However, Benhabib is also critiqued as misreading Butler who always argued performance and performativity to be distinct from each other. Sociologists like John Hood Williams and Wendy Cealy Harrison (1998) question the new ontology of gender suggested by Butler (1990) as equally foundationalist as the previous one. Toril Moi (1999) also accuses Butler of an essentialist notion of subject.

Butler returns to these criticisms in her anniversary edition of Gender Trouble published in 1999. They acknowledge the omission of certain identities (i.e., transgender, intersexuality, consideration of race). Butler (1990) [1999] also admits their explanation of performativity to be inadequate. However, in Butler's lecture at Universidad Complutense de Madrid on June 8, 2009, they explained performativity as an account of agency. According to Butler (2009),

> “To say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment; the ‘appearance’ of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strictly binary frame), and the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power; and finally, there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, thus opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines” (Butler, 2009. p.i).

Through this explanation, Butler (2009) highlighted the continuous production and reproduction of gender through negotiations that open up the doors for agency and change. This way, Butler also resolves Foucault's unfinished task of explaining how change may occur within society.

In a male-dominated patriarchal society like Bangladesh, the perceived biological difference at birth decides an individual's opportunities and limitations. Therefore, the notion of sex/gender and the construction of girls/women's body in a specific context is crucial to this research to understand the intersectional power relations and how the participants construct conceptions of gender, body and career aspirations. This research adds to existing scholarship by exploring the construction of gender and the 'ideal Bangladeshi female body' in the context of Bangladesh.

Poststructuralism and Feminist Neoliberalism

In my thesis, as a theoretical framework, I primarily draw on feminist poststructuralist perspectives. Nonetheless, feminist ideas and conversations are formed within the political and social discourses that co-exist parallelly without strict boundaries. Therefore, Banet-Weiser et al (2020) stress the importance of accounting for continuities and changes when exploring the integration of ideas. Even though I do not adopt a neoliberal feminist perspective as a theoretical framework in my thesis, I briefly discuss neoliberal feminism here as I find it relevant while analysing my data, in terms of its influence on my participants' perceptions of gender equality.

Neoliberal feminism became popular in recent decades against the socio-cultural backdrop of popular feminism across media, literature, the wider feminist movement, and the international development agenda (Rottenberg, 2014). During the post-2010 period, women's marches and the international solidarity of womanhood were becoming stronger, and movements like #MeToo spread across the world (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). It was also the time when UN Women was established by the United Nations to exclusively safeguard women's rights all over the world (UN, 2023). Feminism became a part of the media, and feminist

ideas were articulated on everything from t-shirts, coffee mugs to stationery in our everyday lives.

Drawing ideas from this new kind of feminism, as a feminist literary critique Rottenberg (2014) coins the term, 'Feminist Neoliberalism', a system of thought that influences the construction of a neoliberal feminist subject. Rottenberg (2014) defines this neoliberal subject as someone taking full responsibility for her own "well-being and self-care, distinctly aware of existing inequalities, and one who celebrates feminism" (p.418). They turn it into their personal quest to break the perpetual gender inequality induced by structural discrimination against women. This may remind us of self-disciplining techniques of internalising the social norms as women's personal pursuits (Duncan, 1994; King, 2004). This way neoliberal feminism responsibilises girls/women who logically then become individually liable for their happiness and success. The neoliberal feminist self also sees failure to meet this standard as her personal failure which resembles Margaret C. Duncan's discussion of the politics of women's body images and practices. Duncan (1994) analyses images of women in sports magazines from a Foucauldian lens to discuss how women internalise the public messages of maintaining a perfect body according to social norms. Duncan argues that women tend to internalise this conception of the perfect body as a private goal and perpetually self-monitor to achieve it, in a form of panoptical surveillance (Duncan, 1994).

Another feature of the neoliberal feminist subject is their separation from any orientation toward the 'common good'. So, neoliberal feminism blurs the public-private divide by normalising women working outside but takes away focus from barriers responsible for the unequal share of responsibility between men and women. Moreover, it takes away the responsibility from the state or government (i.e., with childcare, maternity leave, and flexible working) and coerces women to internalise it as their own personal pursuit. Even though Rottenberg (2014) coined the term Neoliberal Feminism, other feminist analysts underscored the psychological impact of neoliberalism on individuals. Kanai and Gill (2018) suggest that neoliberalism reconceptualises the subjectivity of individuals itself and transforms subjects from within. In other words, neoliberal discourses discipline their minds to be entrepreneurial and responsible for their happiness

and success. However, the resources required to become this so-called entrepreneurial self are unevenly distributed and it comprises primarily privileged middle-class women (Scharff, 2016; Ringrose and Walkerdine,2008; Rotterdam, 2014).

Rottenberg (2014, 2017) particularly discusses the emergence of neoliberal feminism in the US context and also mentions its presence in the UK. Nonetheless, as we shall see, the growing popularity and prevalence of the feminist neoliberal stance makes these sets of ideas relevant to the analysis of my data.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed and highlighted Michel Foucault's seminal work on power, knowledge and discourses that heavily inspired feminist poststructuralist scholars. Feminist scholars drew from Foucault's ideas of discourse to strengthen their argument of gender and even sex being socially constructed. The construction of gendered ideas and female body is a result of interplay between discourses giving birth to certain ‘regimes of truth’ that help maintain the social order. Feminist scholars also drew upon Foucault's explanation of discourses and construction of subject being an outcome of power relations.

In this chapter, I provided a critical analysis of Foucault's ideas from a feminist lens and their shortcomings in explaining gender and intersectional issues related to body, sexuality, and girls/women's subjugated position in society. In relation to that I introduced Butler's notion of performativity, its criticisms and the redefinition of performativity by Butler to overcome Foucault's shortcomings to explain agency of women. Drawing from Foucault's work, Butler argues that the construction of girls/women is a result of power relations which is constantly negotiated, with continuous reproduction of norms that make emancipatory change possible. Even though not my adopted theoretical lens, I briefly introduce the concept of neoliberal feminism as it is relevant to my data analysis.

In this thesis, I apply Foucault, Butler, and other feminist scholarly ideas to understand how the participants of my research negotiate, subvert, and/or resist the dominant social discourses in Bangladesh to make alternative discourses possible. I try to build a theoretical understanding of society's construction of gender, the female body, and the career aspirations of the participant young girls in Bangladesh that may help make education more equitable and inclusive.

Chapter 3

Education and Gender Discourses in Bangladesh

Introduction

The experiences of female students have been a significant focus of education and gender scholarship (Wrigley, 2003). As discussed in Chapter 2, experiences are contingent on context and a specific time in a poststructuralist perspective. In Bangladesh, the backdrop of its colonial history, independence from Pakistan, its geographical context, and the influence of international development discourses create complex socio-religious discourses that generate distinct ‘regimes of truth’ and practices.

As outlined in the Introduction, this study aims to explore the conceptions and experiences related to gender and career aspirations of young people in rural Bangladesh and understand how they negotiate their positions. Understanding the discourses within which young people are situated and possibly influenced is essential to understanding their conceptions, experiences, and negotiating strategies.

In this chapter, I review the recent and significant literature from a feminist poststructuralist lens and shed light on the co-existence of dominant social and religious discourses of education and gender with complex power relations in Bangladesh. I review the social construction of the 'ideal woman' in Bangladesh. One by one, I unfold the dominant discourses of masculinities, femininities, and the duality of socio-religious discourses entangled within the context of Bangladesh that are associated with young people's conceptions and everyday lives. Finally, I discuss the construction of women and the gradual change in language within the international development discourses over time. This is significantly relevant in the context of Bangladesh due to the strong association of international donors and development agencies with female education and women's empowerment.

Construction of Ideal Girls/Women in Bangladesh

The social construction of girls/women in Bangladesh is heavily influenced by dominant Bengali and Indigenous cultural discourses, which is further complicated by the inclusion of religious discourses (Hussain, 2010; White, 2010). The image of the 'ideal' or a 'good woman' as self-sacrificing and devoted to their husbands is a prevalent view existing in different forms across all three dominant religions (Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity) in Bangladesh (Rozario and Samuel, 2010). These gender discourses also intersect with class. The experiences of girls/women from different classes are not the same. Their experiences also vary between urban and rural spaces.

Many scholars have pointed out that social class plays an important role in women's varied experiences in society. Following Bourdieu's model of class based on capital, Hussein (2017) argues that middle-class women in Bangladesh own 'respectable femininity' as symbolic capital embedded in gender and class that brings them symbolic benefit and class status. Symbolic capital, as proposed by Bourdieu (1986), is "a form of non-economic value; constructed, and validated through cultural processes" (Carter, 2023; p. 1). A middle-class Bengali respectable woman is usually expected to acquire education and cultural knowledge to make her a suitable companion to her husband. It is essential for her to protect her 'feminine virtues' and her place within the home by prioritising family responsibilities over working outside. Stay-at-home mothers and homemakers are considered 'respectable' women within dominant social discourses of gender in Bangladesh. Most often, women who choose to prioritise their careers are identified as selfish and receive less social respect (Hussein, 2017).

Even though socio-religious discourses discourage Bangladeshi women from engaging in economic activities outside their home sphere, they do not spare them from enhancing the economic condition of their in-law's family through dowry money and/or gifts from the parental family. The bigger the dowry, the higher the status of the bride within the in-law's house. Failure to make such a contribution may lead to rebuking, beating, insults, and even death (Rahman, 2018). The meaning of an 'ideal Bengali woman' may also vary between urban

and rural spaces which I discuss in more detail in the later part of the chapter. These aspects make the meaning of 'ideal Bengali women' fluid and ever-changing.

Discourses of Hegemonic Masculinity and Feminine Vulnerability

Dominant socio-cultural discourses of gender in Bangladesh define normative masculinity as authoritative, aggressive, and dominant over women. In Gender and Power, Connell (1987) proposed the absence of a single form of masculinity or femininity in Western society. Instead, she argued that there exist culturally dominant forms of gender that she identified as hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity. Hegemonic masculinity can be described as the culturally idealised depiction of masculine characters (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is "Dominance achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion that legitimise global subordination of women" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832). I argue that a reflection of hegemonic masculinity defined by Connell (1987, 1995) can also be observed in Bangladeshi society.

Utilising Butler's (1990) gender performativity theory and Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity ideas, Anwary (2015) explores hegemonic masculinity in Bangladeshi society where aggression among men is culturally reinforced and violence against women (VAW) is continuously normalised. Within such a conception, the enactment of VAW is considered a sign of a 'strong man' which is celebrated. Men inflict VAW and represent it as an honourable way of 'being men'. Bangladeshi socio-cultural discursive norms are used to maintain and reproduce these constructions, where men represent their hyper-masculinity through the repeated performance of intimate partner violence (IPV). Even though Connell’s (1993) theorisation of hegemonic masculinity as a social construction opens many doors for exploration, critics have also highlighted the oversimplification and limitations of Connell's hegemonic masculinity propositions as too structural and abstract (Hearn et al. 2012). Nonetheless, it is still helpful to understand the dominant masculine traits nurtured by society.

In Bangladesh, such hegemonic discourses are also found to be supported and perpetuated by many women (Huq et al., 2012). Women's internalisation of

patriarchal norms and compliance with the expectations of hegemonic masculinity makes them subject to violence and shapes their views regarding VAW (Fattah and Camellia, 2020). A multi-country study by WHO (2005) using ICDDR, B-Naripokkho survey found that women who experienced IPV are more prone to supporting violent attitudes and behaviours by men than women who have not experienced IPV. This process, which Kandiyoti (1988) calls the 'patriarchal bargain', is argued to encourage women to internalise norms supporting VAW. It is argued to create a subjectivity where, most often, women blame themselves for being the victim of violence by men (Fattah and Camellia, 2020). It also leads to underreporting of VAW or seeking legal support in Bangladesh, which is confirmed by scholars and women's activist organisations (Flood and Pease, 2009; Huq et al., 2012; Ain o Salish Kendra, 2024; UNDP, 2022).

Conducting a secondary research reviewing academic literature and newspaper articles Anni (2022) explores the construction of hegemonic masculinity in relation to VAW in Bangladesh. In her study, she highlights how norms of hegemonic masculinities are moulded by socio-cultural and religious discourses in Bangladeshi society that are accomplished through social activities. Along with physical violence in private spaces, she also underscores the prevalence of emotional violence in public spaces through eve-teasing[8], spreading false rumours, pulling scarves[9] or groping and bullying on social media in Bangladesh. UNFPA (2016) reveals an increasing trend of incidents of VAW in public places in Bangladesh in recent years.

Flood (2010) argues that along with men who commit VAW, men playing a passive role by not preventing violence directed at women also help maintain the discourses of such hegemonic masculinity through their silent support. Conducting a qualitative study utilising a survey method involving men at a Midwestern University college in the US, Austin et al. (2016) found that men's intentions to engage in prosocial bystander behaviour are strongly associated with their perception of their peers' attitudes and behaviour. When violent men are either supported by or receive silent recognition, they are argued to feel

[8] Eve- Teasing- the making of unwanted sexual remarks or advances by a man to a woman in a public place
[9] Pulling Scarves- In Bangladesh, girls/women generally wear salwar kameez (traditional attire) with long scarves). The scarf is symbolic of protecting the honour of girls/women by covering their bodies. Some perpetrators may pull the scarves of girls/women to harass them in public spaces.

reinforced to continue such behaviour. These men justify these actions as a method of exercising control over women's bodies by using violence and simultaneous victim blaming (Fattah and Camellia, 2020).

Some men are also found to exercise hegemonic masculinity through VAW if they feel their superior position is threatened. Ackerson et al., (2008) undertook a quantitative study using Indian National Family Health Survey with a sample of 83627 married girls/women aged 15 to 49 years between 1998 to 1999. They found a strong correlation between the education level of spouses and the incidence of IPV. They also found that in their sample, women with a higher level of education than their husbands were more likely to report IPV. This is argued as a means of maintaining the hierarchy of hegemonic masculinities when men's superiority and position of authority over women get challenged by some scholars (Fattah and Camellia, 2020).

The discourse of hegemonic masculinity is also bolstered by the perception of feminine vulnerability of women in Bangladesh. Predominantly Bangladeshi women are described as vulnerable, weak, and imperilled (Kabeer, 2014; Biswas et al., 2017). The normative binary framework of gender and patriarchal discourses in Bangladesh hail men as the 'protector' of women's honour and safety. As a father/brother, they are in charge of their daughter’s/sister's honour, and as a husband, their wife's body and sexuality (Anwary, 2015). This comes attached to the entitlement of the right to punish their wives for failure in their duties, like meeting sexual and emotional needs and maintaining the family lineage that restores a man's male privilege as a husband with a superior identity (Alim, 2009). Most men and women believe the need for a male guardian's permission is necessary to take any action. This practice is reinforced by Islamic religious discourses, even though it is also commonly practised among people of other religions (Rashid et al., 2014).

Hegemonic masculinity is also maintained by degrading any alternative identity construction (Butler, 1990). In Bangladeshi society, men doing chores or taking care of children could be perceived as symbolising the emasculation of a superior male identity construction. Women also forward and maintain these discourses of men's superior positioning. Sometimes, men who help with

household chores and child-rearing are compared with a ram/sheep, suggesting they are not manly enough (Alim, 2009). The social, patriarchal, and religious discourses mould ideas of women in a way that makes them incapable of thinking about themselves as an active subject; rather, they always remain the 'other' (Simone de Beauvoir,1949 [2023]).

Discourse of Victim Blaming

The circulation of discourses of victim blaming is another way in which the subjugation of girls/women in Bangladesh is normalised. As Schoellkopf (2012) argues, discourses of victim blaming encourage the offenders and maintain the status quo of masculine superiority. The normative discourses of gender allocate the responsibility of following the prescribed gender norms and practices on the shoulders of women. Failure to do so often frequently results in defamation, child marriage, physical and mental abuse, sexual harassment, rape, and even death (Khatun et al., 2012). Girls/women are under constant surveillance through victim blaming and defamation, indirectly encouraging them to self-discipline and follow social rules.

In Bangladesh, female victims of violence and bodily harm also face stigmatisation and social scrutiny to prove their innocence which is not observed during other types of crimes. In cases of crimes like robbery, murder (not involving a female body), and fraud, the offender is viewed from a social and moral justice lens. However, in case of sexual harassment and/or abuse of girls/women, the female victims are likely to become the centre of attention (Rahman, 2022). If the perpetrator is a stranger or acquaintance, female victims are often blamed as provokers using their appearance and bodily gestures that are argued to sexually attract men towards them, which makes the female victim responsible for the abuse. If the female victim is raped or harassed by someone they know, such as her boyfriend, she is often marked as a 'bad girl', and some people argue that she got involved with a man because she wants it (Khatun et al., 2012). The victims of sexual harassment or rape are also stigmatised by the concurrent social and cultural norms as impure or dirty as they had 'lost' their socially constructed notion of virginity and bodily chastity, being marked as 'impure'. Most often, they are considered a burden by their

family due to constant defamation by neighbours and extended family members that may even make parents wish the death of the already suffering victims. The most common and socially encouraged solution for such a disgraceful situation is accepting marriage with the rapist. This, as a result, encourages men who may share love proposals and get rejected more inspiration to undertake such heinous acts to marry the girl (Anwary, 2015).

A similar stance of victim blaming discourse is also perpetuated by the media, like newspapers, television, and social media, in disciplining girls/women. Media discourses construct and maintain social values and cultural norms (Islam and Siddique, 2022). Amin (2021) suggests whenever a crime is committed against a woman, the most common outcome is victim blaming. Islam and Siddique (2022) explore the representation of victims in five prominent newspapers in Bangladesh using statistical methods and textual analysis of victim's linguistic representation in Bangladeshi society. They find a similar exaggerated focus on the victim's character and lifestyle in case of sexual offence and suicide where the victim experiences the scrutinisation rather than the offender. They also highlight selected national daily newspapers exhibiting stereotypical views against women and their families. In addition, they argue newspapers' failure to maintain editorial boundaries of ethics and failure to be factual in their publication, especially when the offender is someone famous. They pointed out the media's strategy to conceal or share confusing stories to mislead readers to support the dominant offender group. Nonetheless, Islam and Siddique (2022) selected only 27 news articles from five major newspapers in Bangladesh for a single incidence of VAW. They also covered only the first ten days of news articles following the case's discovery which does not cover the entire timeline of the case. However, within the limited academic work in the area of victim blaming, their work provides an overview of the subjugated position of female victims of violence and abuse.

Discourses of Femininity/Masculinity

Similar to gender, femininity and masculinity are culturally constructed, internalised, and socialised. In recognition of intersectional factors such as class, ethnicity, religion, and sexual identities constituting the self, some scholars

refer to femininities and masculinities instead of their singular forms (Connell, 1995; Francis, 2004). Nonetheless, the plural terminology has also faced criticism that it suggests neat typologies (Francis, 2000). Masculine and feminine attributes are understood socially through the range of discourses available at any one point in time and place (most often through the most dominant/most powerful discourses) and constructed through repeated performing by individuals that philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler (1990) identifies as gender performativity. The discourses give individuals cues regarding appropriate behaviour for a particular gender identity construction (Blackstone, 2003). Following a sex role approach Islam and Asadullah (2018) analyse the content of textbooks in Bangladesh and show that girls/women are governed by the notion of being pretty, obedient, compliant, and carer of children; boys/men on the other hand are represented as brave, aggressive, strong, and the decision-maker of the family. These ideas are also forwarded and maintained by discourses of social and religious norms, textbooks, and teaching at school and media discourses (Cvencek et al., 2011; Heyder and Kessels, 2013), creating the ‘regimes of truth’ of Bangladeshi society.

Within Bangladeshi society, traditional patriarchal discourses bestow household responsibilities like cooking, rearing children and taking care of the elderly on women's shoulders. While productive responsibilities like earning, spending, and decision-making about important matters belong to men. Following a gender role approach, Alim (2009) explores the knowledge, perceptions, and gender role attitudes of villagers across two districts in Bangladesh, comparing pre-intervention baseline data as part of the Gender Quality Action Learning Programme provided by an NGO and post-intervention data. He finds a negligible change in people's attitudes regarding women working outside. Most respondents share a rigid view regarding cooking being solely women's responsibility. These views are also nurtured and perpetuated by women. Nonetheless, Alim's (2009) study is based on a pre and post-intervention survey from only two districts out of sixty-four districts in Bangladesh, which may only represent perceptions and attitudes of a particular region of Bangladesh. Moreover, the timeframe of little more than a year between the intervention and post-intervention data collection may also not be long enough to make significant changes in gender role perceptions and attitudes.

The sticky nature of socially prescribed femininity and masculinity is also observed in other South Asian countries. Tahir et al. (2021) explore gender/sex role behavioural change during the COVID-19 lockdown among Pakistani male and female participants and highlight that even though the unconventional situation of the COVID-19 lockdown moderately changed gender attitudes related to household chores, the gender-stereotypical perceptions around care responsibility and child-rearing remained unchanged. Their findings suggest that crises may restrict opportunities for resistance and/or subversion even further, intensifying existing inequalities.

In Bangladeshi society, another way girls/women are disciplined post-marriage is through isolation from the maternal family (Perry, 2017). In most cases, a woman is expected to sacrifice her past relationships and accept future possibilities to perform her duties. Women are also usually expected to let go of their maternal homes and dedicate their lives to the betterment of their husbands and in-laws (Alim, 2009). A common saying in rural areas compares wife beating with beating a cat, as a cat never leaves their carer's home, suggesting the social acceptance of VAW. It also suggests the limitation experienced by women in case of violence as they have no place to go or income to support themselves (Rao, 2012). One exception to maintaining ties with natal families is seen during pregnancy, especially while having the first child. It is a custom in Bangladesh that married women give birth to their children at the maternal home. In a convenient way, it transfers the financial burden of child delivery back to the daughter's parents (Perry, 2017).

Even though the increasing number of women going to work is slowly becoming more acceptable, the responsibility of chores and rearing children is primarily transferred from one woman to another (Hussein, 2017). Motherhood is one of the most dominantly constructed feminine associations. Women of respectable families in Bangladesh are usually expected to leave their jobs and become stay-at-home mothers once they have children. Women who choose to pursue a career are often identified as selfish and less respected. Working women are affected by socially prescribed acts of motherhood, and they are found constantly negotiating their own baggage of patriarchal discourses versus more emancipatory alternative discourses promoting their choices (Ali, 2012). As

discussed by Hussein (2017), who explores the notion of respectable femininity within the family utilising a qualitative approach, working women most often try to negotiate their work boundaries by sharing childcare responsibilities with their mothers-in-law. In Hussein 's study, she finds a complex power relation between the two opponents where the mother-in-law performs as a boundary keeper of women. She constantly inspects her daughter-in-law's boundaries, which either result in the daughter-in-law's being allowed to work or not based on stringent and continuous negotiation between them. Even when the daughter-in-law wins the negotiation and support, it does not come without constant rebuke and reminders of her as a bad mother. Nonetheless, there is very limited academic research exploring working women's negotiating strategies to maintain the work-life balance.

Duality of Socio-Religious Discourses

In the introduction chapter, I discussed the complex duality between socio-cultural and religious discourses in Bangladesh due to its historical events and geopolitical positioning. This duality of discourses also impacts gender discourses in Bangladesh, which are constantly negotiated. The Islamic religious discourses in Bangladesh contain elements of Sufism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Bengali Muslims are, at times, identified as less orthodox than many other Muslims. Bengali Muslims are often even labelled as having corrupted or polluted Islamic beliefs due to a strong influence of the Bengali cultural discourses (Rozario and Samuel, 2010), which was a significant political issue during the East vs West Pakistan conflict (see Chapter 1).

Integration of religion and politics has remained a salient feature of the Indian subcontinent since colonial times (Siddiqui, 2021). Thus, the imposed colonial discourses of modernity (i.e., secularism) create another layer of complexity in Bangladesh (Hussain, 2010). With modern Islamist movements around the world, Bangladesh is also facing the tension between fundamentalist Islamic discourses and Bengali traditional discourses intensifying. Islamic reform movements arrived in Bengal in different forms, such as the 19th century Faraizi movement (Ahmad, 1991; Ahmed, 2007, Hasan, 2012) and in more recent times as Tabligh-i Jama'at (Sikand, 1999) with an aim to purify and eliminate supposedly non-

Islamic elements within Bengali Islam. A negotiation between existing Bengali culture and the rise of the global Islamic movement to return to original Islam is quite evident in present Bangladesh. However, despite a substantial following, these movements have failed to bring about a radical Islamic transformation in Bangladesh till now (Rozario and Samuel, 2010).

However, the emergence of modern Islamic discourses has initiated a new subjectivity construction among Muslim women. The two prime political parties in Bangladesh have been the 'Islamic' pole, represented by the coalition of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Islamic parties, and the Awami League and its allies representing more secular views and Bengali polarity. In a fundamentally collectivist society with a strong patriarchal foundation and religious values, women's leadership can be seen as paradoxical (Riaz, 2010). Nonetheless, women's leadership in Bangladesh has become acceptable to a great extent. Both the major political parties are chaired by women. Bangladesh has been led by a female prime minister leadership for the last 23 years between the two parties mentioned above (since 2001).

With a large number of women joining the workforce, the construction of a 'modern Muslim woman' is becoming prominent in Bangladesh. Hussain (2010) argues this to be a result of women's negotiation with the new religious discourses (Hussain, 2010). Women wearing a veil is a tangible expression of Islamic identity. Previously in Bangladesh, mostly rural women were seen to wear a '*Burqa*' or '*Hijab*'[10]. However, more and more middle-class, educated, working women in the cities are seen to wear hijab to cover their heads along with traditional Bengali clothing such as saree and/or kameez (Riaz, 2010). The different styles and forms of hijab are considered a style statement along with being religious to some women. Instead of conforming with Western fashion, some women see it as following the Middle Eastern fashion trend that does not challenge the religious discourses.

10 Burqa and Hijab- A burqa is an enveloping outer garment worn by some Muslim women which fully covers the body and the face; Hijab generally refers to various head coverings conventionally worn by many Muslim women which can come in different forms.

Discourses of Purdah and Gendered Spaces

In Bangladesh, following the *'Purdah'* norms, spaces are often gendered and segregated between women and men, arguably as another mechanism to discipline girls/women. Scholars propose that gender and spaces are socially constructed and are continuously constructed/reconstructed through negotiation (Massey, 1996; Adapa and Sheridan, 2017). It suggests that both gender and space are fluid and contingent on a specific time and historical context (Massey, 1994; Spain, 2014;). Social scientists exploring gender and spaces identify ways in which women/girls can be spatially segregated from men/boys in ways that limit their access to knowledge. Men/boys may use this knowledge to produce and reproduce power and maintain the subordination of women (Spain, 1992, 2014).

Philosophers and sociologists like Lefebvre (1991) also suggest that space is produced by its everyday users. Space is argued to be a reflection of the social norms and existing gender relations within that space (Nusser and Anacker, 2013). Massey (1994) goes further to argue that not only is the spatial socially constructed, but the social is spatially constructed as well. People read spaces as heteronormative or homonormative and find their identity being regulated by peers and/or formal/informal public/private codes (Nusser and Anacker, 2013). Nonetheless, these fluid spaces are also negotiated and navigated continuously by individuals (Adapa and Sheridan, 2017).

The public/private dichotomy proposed by Moser (1989), where the public belongs to men and the private belongs to women, is still relevant to many socio-cultural discourses, including in Bangladesh. These male vs. female segregated, gendered spaces are denoted as the spatialisation of patriarchal power by Soja (1989). Nonetheless, the public vs. private dichotomy has been somewhat challenged, with more and more women joining the workforce and occupying public space through women's movements and policy interventions (Chant and Pedwell, 2008). Bangladesh has a remarkable history of women's movements that established women's rights and secured women's equal rights from the constitution to public policy (Banu, 2016). However, in Bangladesh, beyond social and patriarchal discourses, spatial segregation is heavily motivated

by religious discourses. These discourses work hand in hand to maintain the subordination of women (Rozario and Samual, 2010).

In Bangladesh, the public vs private division of space is primarily motivated by the Islamic notion of *'Mahram'* and *'Na-mahram',* which is not restricted to Muslims only (Gholamhosseini et al., 2019). Male relatives (i.e., son, uncle, and brother) with whom marriage is explicitly forbidden in Islam are referred to as *'Mahram'*. In Islam, therefore, sharing of space with *'Na-mahram'* people with whom marriage is permitted is conditional and restrained. As the public space consists of *'Na-mahram*' people, it affects women's mobility (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2001). Nonetheless, the meaning of *'Purdah'* may vary across Muslim countries, urban/rural spaces, and even class (Gholamhosseini et al., 2019).

Discourses of Purdah: Visible vs Invisible

The meaning of *'Purdah'* is fluid and socially constructed. '*Purdah*' does not hold a homogenous meaning across all Muslim countries. **'***Purdah***'** and wearing '*Burka'* or *'Niqab'* are also not interchangeable terms. The term '*Purdah'* (veil) can be figuratively defined as the veiled seclusion of women (Lata et al., 2022). In a broader sense, it suggests culturally accepted female behaviour, etiquette, and acts regulated through visible and invisible discourses. The visible form of *'Purdah'* is only observed in the form of seclusion within the household sphere or women wearing a veil in public space. Nonetheless, the reach of invisible discourses of regulation within society is difficult to grasp and thus scarcely researched (Haque, 2010).

'*Purdah*' in Bangladesh

Most often, the visible discourses of *'Purdah'* are associated with the image of women in *'Burkah'*, *'Hijab'*, and/or *'Nikab'*[11]. However, these visible discourses of *'Purdah'* are not seen everywhere in Bangladesh, especially in the urban areas. *'Purdah'* in Bangladesh generally means women wearing modest clothes and covering themselves in ways seen as 'appropriate' (Gholamhosseini et al., 2019). Here, in fact, it is the invisible discourses of *'Purdah'* that regulate women's

[11] A niqab is a garment, usually black, that covers the face, worn by some Muslim women.

spatial boundaries and their access to education and work (Lata et al. 2022). These invisible discourses facilitate perpetuating the social and patriarchal discourses of subordination of women through confinement from the outer world and economic activities. Even though there may be a variation in intensity in the case of public-private separation, women from other religions also experience it due to cultural discourses (Rozario and Samual, 2010). However, some feminist scholars exploring *'Purdah'* also identify it as a negotiating strategy to work in the public space and gain financial independence without challenging the dominant religious discourses (Hussain, 2010). According to Hussain (2010), It gives modern, middle-class, educated women an Islamic-legitimised way of going outside their houses and working in the public sphere.

The visible discourses of *'Purdah'* may also vary between urban/rural space and class. In rural Bangladesh, *'Purdah'* is a symbol of status and a way to remain hidden while navigating public space. On the other hand, disadvantaged working women are mostly seen to use their *'ওরনা'* (O*rna*), a long scarf, to cover their body and head over their traditional attire (i.e., saree, salwar- kameez) (Uddin, 2018). The discourse of *'Purdah'* is more strictly followed in rural areas than in urban areas. However, in a poverty-stricken country like Bangladesh, extreme economic need is one of the few instances that may overcome dominant social and patriarchal norms. For example, some women are seen to break the dominant gendered rules of *'Purdah'* to earn food for their family by working in public spaces and doing jobs considered appropriate for men (Kabeer, 2002). Therefore, women who are situated in a lower social class in society cross their spatial boundaries to meet the economic necessities of their families. Sometimes, it is argued that it is somewhat easier for most disadvantaged women to break the social rules as the social rules are more stringent for upper and middle-class women who symbolise family honour and reputation (Uddin, 2018).

Space, Body, and Violence

Women's spatial position is also related to violence against women's bodies, regulating their sense of security and movement (Akhter et al., 2019). If women operate businesses in the streets, their bodies are seen as ‘out of place’ making them more vulnerable to sexual and verbal harassment (Uddin, 2018). Women's access to and use of space is also contingent on time for security after dark (Chant and McIlwaine, 2016). As a result, women in Bangladesh are often seen accompanied by their husbands or brothers to their workplace for their physical safety.

Lata et al. (2021) explore the experiences of poor Muslim women and their access to income in public spaces in a Dhaka 'slum'[12] area utilising qualitative methods. The authors highlight the experience of physical and verbal abuse experienced by these women and their negotiating strategies to maintain earnings. The move beyond the private domain by these participant women does not come without a price. They face constant stigmatisation, harassment, and being labelled as 'bad' 'dirty', or even called prostitutes. As observed by Lata et al. (2021), some women play a key role in restricting and regulating other women within the household sphere, making a network of surveillance to maintain the *'Purdah'* discourse. They do it through rebuke, character assassination behind their back, and spreading their judgment, weaving a bad reputation for working women. Few women also do it to prevent working women from attaining too much autonomy, which may endanger their obedience within the joint family hierarchy of power dynamics (Banks, 2013). This is even observed among senior female members of the household (i.e., mother-in-law, sisters-in-law) who work outside, which makes the *'Purdah'* argument somewhat fragile. They find that people's assumptions have a significant emotional impact on the female informal worker participants. They put substantial importance on maintaining their reputation as ‘good and respectable women’ to uphold the dominant discourse of an 'ideal Bengali woman'.

[12] A slum is a highly populated urban residential area consisting of densely packed houses inhabited by extremely disadvantaged people.

To negotiate such social stigma and constant taunts, many women work as domestic helpers where they work within the household sphere, even though in someone else's house. They also work in female-majority garment factories that do not challenge the dominant gender-segregated spatial discourses (Farhana et al., 2015). This spatial segregation by gender is more pronounced in rural areas where social and cultural discourses hold a more dominant role in identifying men as the sole providers of a family (Hussain, 2010).

Construction of Girls/Women by International Development Discourses

Gender discourses in Bangladesh are not isolated from international development discourses (Asadullah et al., 2014). Since the 70s, women have occupied a significant focus of the international development agenda. In 1972, the United Nations declared 1975 as International Women's Year and the decade between 1975-85 as the decade for women (UN, 2020). These efforts to integrate women into the development process were broadly part of the Women in Development (WID) approach. This timeline of inclusion of women in development by donor organisations aligned with Bangladesh's independence which followed the formulation of the constitution and policies of Bangladesh. Therefore, international discourses heavily influenced Bangladeshi law and policies related to women (Nazneen and Masud, 2017). Moreover, a significant share of work in women's development in Bangladesh since its independence is undertaken by national and international non-government organisations (NGOs) funded by national and international donor agencies (Kabeer, 2017).

Following the inclusion of women in international development discourses, a general dissatisfaction existed about the development efforts in the countries identified as 'Third World countries' by the UN. This led to a growing awareness of women's absence from the development efforts of major donor organisations in those countries. For the first time, the women from these disadvantaged countries came under the spotlight (Kardam, 1991). Even though there was a lot of optimism among the aid agencies about improving women's lives in those countries only by integrating women into the development process, the reality

did not entirely reflect the desired outcome (Miller and Razavi, 1995). A common stance found in many studies on 'third world women' during the 90s stressed the growing impoverishment, work burden, and subordinate status of women, arguing a need for the emancipation of these women. Exploring the reasons for the failure to achieve the desired positive changes by scholars and donor agencies revealed a multitude of intersectional factors that needed attention.

Nonetheless, the labelling and conceptualisation of 'third world women' were heavily controversial and criticised. 'third world women' were defined in a specific way based on certain assumptions, notions, and arguments (Koczberski, 1998). The term 'third world' broadly suggested the economically poor and non-industrialised countries identified as derogatory, vague, and contested by many scholars (Dirlik,1994; Tomlinson, 2003). Mohanty (1991) defines third-world countries as “the colonised, neo-colonised and decolonised countries (of Asia, Africa, and South America) whose economic and political structures have been deformed within the colonial process” (p. IX), suggesting the structural dominance of the first-world countries over the third world. The relationship between the development organisations from developed countries carrying out development from a position of moral superiority undermines the Indigenous population, their culture, and their economic system, which is not free of power (ibid). In the face of criticism, over time, the language used by the donor agencies shifted to an extent, and the term 'third world' has now been replaced by 'least developed' countries by the United Nations (UN) and 'low-income' countries by the World Bank (WB).

By the term 'third world women’, the donor agencies are also criticised for assuming a homogenous group of women who were equally disadvantaged with the same needs and interests. These women were broadly described as "universally unproductive, economically inactive, house-bound, tradition-bound, lacking skills, and perceived to be relegated to lower-status tasks than men" (Koczberski, 1998; p.400). Even though these 'third-world women' identified by the donor organisations actively participated in the informal economy, agriculture, and household activities, they most often did not actively participate in the local formal economy (Mohanty, 1991). Therefore, their work remained unquantifiable and fell outside the domain of development. Due to

their absence in the formal economy, donor agencies marked them unproductive, under-utilised, and even wasted (World Bank,1998), echoing the neoliberal stance of efficient use of resources (Hill and Kumar, 2012).

The 'third-world women' discourse also resonates with the colonial discourse portraying women as passive, oppressive, and homogeneously ignorant based on the binary oppositions of first-world women. The 'third-world women' discourses also fail to identify the diversity of postcolonial women pointed out by postcolonial scholars (Spivak, 1988; Enloe, 1989; Mohanty, 1991). As Mohanty (2003) argues, "the Eurocentric feminist cross-culture scholarship fails to articulate the material complexity, reality, and agency of the 'third world women's bodies and lives" (p.500).

Although the donor agencies are now trying to move from top-down, externally formulated projects to more bottom-up approaches to gather knowledge from the grassroots level, the women themselves still enjoy little control over their conditional participation and gain (Williamson, 2010). The Voices to Choices: Bangladesh's Journey in Women's Economic Empowerment report published by the World Bank in 2019 (with a cover exhibiting a large number of women going to work) highlights the improvement in women's economic empowerment. Nonetheless, their economic choices, control, and decision-making power over economic resources remain limited (Kabir and Jahan, 2013; Alam et al., 2021). The earlier criticism of taking women as a homogenous group still continues within some international development discourses. While hailing the empowerment and leadership of women, the report tends to represent all Bangladeshi women as a homogenous group, failing to acknowledge their variable needs, struggles, networks, and access to resources.

Gendered Education Discourses in Bangladesh

Career Aspirations and Future Possibilities

Career aspirations among young people have been an area of interest among scholars and policymakers around the world (Archer et al., 2014; Forde, 2014). With the renewed focus on education, gender equality, and empowerment of all

women and girls under SDG goals 4 and 5, female education and the future opportunities for girls/women's empowerment have gained significant currency in recent times, both nationally and internationally (UN, 2022; GED, 2022). Nonetheless, ingrained gender barriers persist around female young people's access to education and career aspirations (BBS, 2021; Ahmed, 2018;). Even after significant improvements in enrolment at both primary and secondary levels, the success of educational enrolment in Bangladesh still does not translate into making a career or agency in career choice for girls (Hossain, 2021).

Gendered Discourses of Curriculum

Education curricula and textbooks are strong representatives of dominant social and cultural discourses that may influence young people's conceptions and career aspirations (Obura and Ajuja, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2015). Schools also play an agentic role in perpetuating such discourses encompassing gender and patriarchy that generally replicate the existing power relations in society (Zaidi et al, 2016). These concepts are represented in the curricula in both formal and hidden forms. The hidden curriculum, which refers to "the unspoken or implicit values, behaviours, procedures, and norms that exist in the educational setting", disseminates discourses of dominant career choices for young people permitted by society (Alsubaie, 2015, p.125).

Curricula and textbooks can also be gendered (Nagatomo, 2010; Lee, 2014; Elwood, 2016; Carlson and Kanci, 2017). Gender stereotypes forwarded through curricula and textbooks influence more than just the young students' subjectivities. It restricts their future possibilities by negatively affecting their agency and aspirations (Areo, 2001). Patriarchal values represented in the school curriculum are found to negatively affect girls more as a whole compared to boys (Meyer, 2008). Islam and Asadullah (2018), undertaking a quantitative content analysis of the government secondary school textbook, English for Today, in Bangladesh, investigated the gender stereotypes in the school curriculum. They pointed out an imbalanced representation of male-female characters and images in favour of boys/men, highlighting the underrepresentation of girls/women in English textbooks at primary and secondary levels in Bangladesh.

They found similar findings for Malaysia and Pakistan as well. The patriarchal norms and ideology (in the author's theoretical terms) forwarded through the curriculum place boys in an advantageous position compared to girls (Meyer, 2008). These ideas are also perpetuated through the educational literature used in the classroom, especially textbooks, images, gender-stereotyped discourses, language, and actions by teachers and students (Islam and Asadullah, 2018; Tyarakanita et al., 2021).

Gendered Discourses of Subject Choice

Gender differences are observed in subject choices by young students (Nipu, 2020). According to the education system of Bangladesh, after completing the 8th grade, students choose a group between science, business studies, and humanities, which guides their future education and career directions. The social and cultural discourses attach a significant level of prestige to the science group, which consists of subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. Students selected for the science group are hailed as bright students by friends, family, and the society that motivates parents to encourage children to take science. It also works as a strong motivating discourse for young students (Hasan et al., 2020). Therefore, the distinctive gendered subject choices of boys dominating STEM subjects observed in the UK are not evident in Bangladesh at the school level (Bramley et al., 2015).

However, a gender bias in spending by parents is observed due to the heavy reliance on expensive private tuition at the school level. Parents are found to be more willing to spend money on their son's education and private tuition than their daughters. The cost of private tuition also influences the choice of subject group. Since studying in the science group requires more private tuition support for subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are pressured by their parents to study business or humanities (Nath, 2018). However, the gendered pattern in subject and career choices along with STEM subjects becomes prominent at the university level and is influenced by parents, culture, financial motivations, and prestige (Islam et al., 2021; Nipu, 2020; Islam and Jirattikorn, 2023).

Gendered Discourses of Competence

Socio-cultural discourses constitute girls' and boys' ideas about their competence. These ideas consequently mould their career aspirations (Herbert and Stipek, 2005). This may explain women's conglomeration in low-paid jobs placed toward the bottom of the hierarchical ladder, as girls are found to devalue their competence by being less confident compared to boys (Huang, 2012). According to the SDG Bangladesh Progress Report (2022), boys are better at reading proficiency and mathematics at primary and secondary levels in Bangladesh (GED, 2022). A social discourse also persists that boys are naturally better at mathematics than girls (Akter et al. 2021). However, the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) (equivalent to GCSE) results reflect otherwise, where girls outperform boys both in terms of passing rate and in achieving the highest possible grade, GPA-5 (The Business Standard, 2022).

A quantitative study by Gee (2015) exploring the academic achievement of girls relative to boys in a sample of 1,203 children participating in a non-formal education program in rural Bangladesh finds no difference in achievement across the four selected subject areas including literacy (English and Bangla), numeracy, science and social science suggesting socially constructed ideas of girls' competence and achievability. On the contrary, Asadullah and Chaudhury (2014) tested students' competence levels using a quantitative survey method across 12 districts exploring rural students primarily from Madrasa backgrounds. They found that about half of the children did not pass the written competence test, and the results were more pronounced among girls. The studies show contradictory results and do not reflect the national data on educational achievement at the SSC level. The study is also limited in terms of its specific sample involving madrasa students who are disadvantaged in relation to funding, infrastructure, and teacher training. Hence, there is a need for more in-depth qualitative studies to explore the discourses associated with competence.

Aspiration

Even though the term Aspiration is prominent in development and policy discourse, there is limited and varied literature that makes attempts to

conceptualise it (Finnemore and Jurkovich, 2020). Aspiration is broadly defined as future dream, desire, ambition, wish and/or hope in different literature (Appadurai, 2004; Holloway et al., 2011). It denotes a determination and desire to achieve a goal that is difficult (Finnemore and Jurkovich, 2020). Some scholars also conceptualise it as an orientation towards a future that one wants (Huijsmans et al., 2020). Thus, some key concepts emerge from these conceptualisations of 'aspiration'. Aspiration is a difficult goal that requires one to imagine possibilities, something beyond what exists. It is a process that requires time and effort with an element of achievement in the future. This makes the journey as much as important as achieving the desired goal. As Callard (2018) suggests aspiration goes beyond thinking, imagining and reasoning. There is a need to take specific actions to attain certain goals. For example, if one aspires to be a doctor they need to study science in secondary education, make it to the admission list, study in a medical school and train for years.

Aspiration is socially constructed and fluid. Scholars suggest aspiration as more than individual intent. They are produced through social interaction and influenced by social life (Appadurai, 2004). Building on previous work and literature review, Huijsmans et al. (2020) highlight the significance of institutions and social relations along with day-to-day practices that mould aspirations. Conducting an ethnographic study exploring an Urdu-speaking Bihari camp in Dhaka, Bangladesh with participants from marginal and severely disadvantaged backgrounds, Afroze (2022) illustrates how gender and generational expectations drive young people's aspiration formation in that area. Drawing on the narratives of the participants, they argue that the constitution of young people's aspirations is connected with space, context, gender, and generational norms and practices. Young people's aspirations are also influenced by family values and practices. Conducting a qualitative study from a Bordieuan theoretical lens utilising paired interviews with 32 students from two schools in the UK, Hoskins and Barker (2017) underscores the significant influence of family-derived habitus[13]. Conducting a study with 29 young people from college level students in a disadvantaged East London area,

[13] According to Bourdieu is the 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72)

Baker (2016) also suggests a close link between aspirations and identities. According to him, young people's aspirations are driven by "who they are and the sort of person they hope to become" (p. 1213). Nonetheless, policymakers tend to define the aspiration of young people with a narrow focus as a way of climbing the social ladder to become middle-class (Jones. 2011). This approach is influenced by the neoliberal stance seen across all sectors of society globally in different intensities (Stahl, 2015).

Due to the influence of various factors, aspirations are fluid and dependent on capacity. Conducting a systematic literature review, Barhate and Dirani (2021) show how aspirations are fluid across generations which are influenced by social and historical factors. For example, Smola and Sutton (2002) identify that while Generation X preferred promotion more than pay raises showing loyalty toward the organisation, millennials may switch jobs more easily for career progression and pay raises. However, what one can aspire to is dependent on the capacity to aspire. Even though young people with disadvantaged backgrounds hold high aspirations for the future, they may lack the social, economic, cultural and/ or symbolic capital to achieve those aspiration. Such marginality was evidenced in Afroze's (2022) study that explored the disadvantaged young people in Bangladesh lacking the necessary cultural capital to achieve their full potential. Their findings also align with findings from other parts of the world, for example, Brown (2022) and Allen (2014). In this research, I primarily focus on the career aspirations of young people which are as complicated and contested as aspirations.

Career Aspirations

There is a large amount of literature exploring barriers experienced by female students' access to education (Sarkar et al., 2014; Mahbub et al., 2023). However, what motivates them to aspire for a career and work toward it is a less explored area. Existing research confirms the persistence of ingrained gender barriers faced by young people (Francis, 2002; Al-Bahran et.al. 2020). It is also the age when young people make their subject choices and CAs. CAs of young people therefore draw significant interest among scholars and policymakers (Archer et al., 2014; Forde, 2014). With the introduction of SDGs and a steady increase in women's participation in education and the workforce, research around girls' and women's

experiences in education has gained significant currency. Nonetheless, research exploring gender effects on CA is still very limited, especially in the South Asian context.

Career aspiration is what one aspires to be professionally (Ashby and Schoon, 2010). According to Cozart and Rojewski (2015), career aspiration refers to an individual's career-related ambitions or decisions…that may be a strong predictor of their occupational attainment" (p.3). Sommerlatte (2023) also underscores the importance of having a clear notion of one's needs and expectations to reach career aspirations. As a subdivision of aspirations, career aspirations are also influenced by numerous discourses.

Teacher-student Interaction and Career Aspirations

Teachers are another significant influence on young students' conceptions through their teaching, interaction, and perceptions (Muntoni and Retelsdorf, 2018; Berekashvili, 2012; Krkovic et al., 2014). Students draw from their interaction with teachers, which may influence their engagement with learning and action (Farooqi, 2020). Discourses forwarded through teacher interaction may also shape how students talk and act.

The teacher-student interactions within a classroom setting are also not power-free. Power relations exist within the classroom where teachers may control communications, speaking turns, student questioning, and assessment. They may also have control over educational discourses. As the implementor of curriculum, teachers make instructional decisions that are not power-free, often supporting dominant gendered discourses in society to persist (Wong, 2016).

Teachers' preconceived gendered notions may inadvertently encourage gender stereotypes through their explicit and implicit interactions within the classroom (Carlana, 2019). It may lead to lower expectations for female students and a failure to appreciate their competence (Liew et al., 2013). On the contrary, teachers may have higher expectations for girls. This is observed in some studies exploring expectations of school students' reading skills (Berekashvili, 2012; Krkovic et al., 2014). Scholars have found different levels of encouragement by teachers to students based on gender, which may negatively affect students'

intention to study subjects considered masculine. A gendered construction of the attainment and ability of students is also observed among the teachers (Mujtaba and Reiss, 2013). Rakshit and Sahoo (2023) investigate the effects of stereotypical beliefs of teachers on secondary school students' results in two states of India. Their study shows a biased attitude of the math teachers that according to them negatively affects the learning and attainment of female students in their math performance.

The socio-cultural discourses promoting male students as naturally good in certain subjects and female students' success as a result of hard work are prevalent in Bangladesh, which is also upheld by many teachers (Brandell and Staberg, 2008; Ara and Saeed, 2020). Gender norms also influence teachers' teaching methods and attitudes toward their students. This may lead to viewing girls as having weaker math abilities than boys (Leslie et al., 2015). A mixed-method study adopting a gender roles approach conducted in Bangladesh by Ara and Saeeed (2020) involving 118 students and 9 teachers finds the influence of socio-culturally produced gender roles in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. In her study, Ara (2019) underscores students' lack of awareness of gender influences and 'doing gender' within the classroom. Teachers mention that sometimes male students resist female teacher instructions because they struggle to accept instructions from female teachers. On the contrary, female students feel shy and keep quiet in class, especially in front of male teachers, due to religious and cultural norms that define 'ideal girls' as submissive, soft-spoken, and reserved in nature. This may result in female students always being self-conscious and self-regulating.

In addition to students, teachers are also impacted by the gender-stereotypical discourses upheld by family members, colleagues in school and society. It is especially experienced by female teachers in traditionally male subjects (i.e., mathematics, physics, chemistry) who struggle to do their socially prescribed femininity. Mim (2022) undertook a qualitative study involving headteachers, teachers, and students from schools in two cities in Bangladesh to explore the gendered experiences of female science teachers. She found a gender division between the female and male science teachers where most female science teachers are assigned as biology (soft science) teachers associated with

femininity. On the contrary, male science teachers dominated physics and chemistry (hard science) classes, which is generally associated with masculinity. This duality is also observed internationally (Hoferichter and Raufelder 2019). This reflects the influence of dominant social discourses in maintaining the hierarchy in science education and the gendered view of competence.

Nonetheless, very limited studies explore the gendered perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of teachers in Bangladesh. Within the socio-cultural discourses in Bangladesh, teachers are considered very respectable, which may make exploring any topic that involves teachers critically challenging.

Gendered Job Distributions

A gendered concentration is observed across job sectors in Bangladesh (Ferdous, 2014). Following the SDGs discourses, the government and international development organisations are working toward 'empowering' women and creating space for them in male-dominated job sectors. For example, 50 out of 350 seats in the Bangladeshi parliament are reserved for women who are elected indirectly by the political parties depending on their proportion of seats in the parliament (Constitution of Bangladesh, 2018). A 10% job quota is allocated for women in public service recruitment (Government of Bangladesh, 2018). Nonetheless, scholars point out that the quota system does not necessarily translate into gender parity in the job sectors due to a lack of supportive policy, family responsibility, and restrictive social discourses (Ferdous, 2014; Sultan and Jahan, 2014). Sultana and Ferdous (2017), based on secondary research through document analysis, show that the increase in the number of women in civil service concentrates on jobs that are not associated with influencing or decision-making responsibility. Data shows that men dominate the leadership positions. The authors underscore the stark disparity in leadership roles, where the female- male ratio in top positions such as secretary, divisional commissioner, and deputy commissioner were 5:75, 5:64, and 70:425 in 2016.

This trend of women's concentration in low-paid and non-leadership roles in a few traditional careers also translates into the private sector (Rahman and Islam (2013). In Bangladesh, the ready-made garments sector employs about 4 million

workers, and 53.65% of them are women as per 2021 data (Ethical Trading Initiative, 2023). Yet, women are paid less than men for similar work at every grade level (Asian Center for Development, 2020). Rahman and Islam (2013) highlight that women's wages in Bangladesh are only 84% of men's wages, meaning that if a man earns £1, a woman earns 84 cents for the same amount of work. The situation in the case of salary is even worse, with women's salaries being only 54% of male salaries according to 2010 data. Women are found to concentrate on jobs providing administrative support, school teaching, nursing, and social/ NGO jobs, highlighting the perpetuating nature of gendered job distribution (Kalam and Al Amin, 2016; Islam and Akter, 2018). The percentage of female staff in the public sector at every level is still considerably low and shows a concerning decline between 2017-18 and 2018-19 in Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2019) data. The only fields where an exception can be observed are gynaecology and obstetrician professions, as instead of challenging the religious and cultural discourses of maintaining *'Purdah*' for female patients, they accommodate them (Story et al. 2012).

Gender Discourses and Career Aspirations

Career aspirations, which can be described as what one aspires to be professionally (Ashby and Schoon, 2010; p.350), are shaped by a multitude of discourses (Akter. 2021; Suhi et al., 2022). The complex nature of students' career aspirations has inspired numerous researchers to investigate the role of dominant discourses shaping specific career aspirations (Skelton, 2010; Archer et al., 2014). Even though girls have better academic results at primary and secondary levels in Bangladesh (Asadullah and Wahhaj, 2016; World Bank, 2016), gender arguably remains one tenacious discourse influencing young people's career aspirations and future pathways (Akter, 2018).

Parents have a significant influence on the career aspirations of young people, where girls are comparatively more motivated than boys (Islam et al., 2021). Bangladeshi family structure is often collective in character and consists of close-knit family bonding. This means that both immediate family members (i.e., parents, siblings) and extended family members (i.e., grand-parents, maternal and paternal uncle/aunt) have an influence on the family and future of

children's life events (i.e., marriage, education, career) (Hossain, 2012). Akter et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study using a semi-structured survey with 181 randomly selected female secondary-level students across two Khulna, Southern Bangladesh districts. They found that 40.3% of the study's female participants aspired to be doctors as a direct influence of their parent's expectations. The students' aspirations were found to be influenced by the living status and occupation of their parents. However, only the mother's education level and the father's monthly income influenced their career aspirations. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the geographical location chosen for data collection for this study historically has a higher than average attainment and completion rate in Bangladesh, which may reflect higher aspiration among the participants than in the rest of the country (Khan and Israt, 2010; BBS and UNICEF, 2020).

Another related discourse influencing the career aspirations of young people is prestige, which also reflects the collective socio-cultural discourses where validation, others' opinions, and expectations construct students' conceptions and career aspirations. The idea of getting respect, prestige, and honour from society is a significant motivation for students (Nipu, 2020). In a poverty-stricken and extremely income-inequal country like Bangladesh, the financial incentive is another dominant factor influencing the motivations of students while aspiring for their careers and making career choices. Exploring the career perceptions of 384 undergraduate students in Bangladesh, Islam et al. (2021) identify personality, financial benefits, flexibility, and prestige as the most influencing discourses in constituting the students' career aspirations. Nonetheless, in this study, 62.2% of the participants were male, which may reflect female perceptions with limitations. Moreover, according to the study results, personality is the strongest factor influencing career aspirations. It may be because the participants are all adults from the undergraduate level and have more autonomy over their choices than young people.

Socio-economic and cultural discourses also influence the career aspirations and career choices of young people who identify certain jobs as male or female, reflecting gendered notions (Jamim et al., 2022; Suhi et al., 2022). For example, utilising a cross-sectional survey of 304 Khulna University students across four

disciplines under the School of Social Science, Suhi et al., (2022) find that the primary goal of students from small towns with parents with low-income and low-education backgrounds was to get a job. They were also less ambitious in terms of achieving professional success. On the contrary, students from affluent families with educated parents were motivated by respectable jobs and were more optimistic about their future professional achievements. However, the study was conducted with only Social Science students, which may not reflect the perceptions of students from all schools. The Islamic discourses forwarding the idea that a "woman should be provided by her husband" (Pio and Syed, 2013: p. 142) are interpreted by the socio-cultural discourses as women should not work as they are provided to restrict girls/women's mobility. Such dominant social discourses make it difficult for girls/women to work and demotivate their career aspirations.

While the quantitative studies provide a foundation to identify the discourses influencing career aspirations, they allow limited opportunity to understand gender-differentiated reasons behind young girls' career aspirations and the unique experiences of young female individuals in Bangladesh.

Toward a Gender-sensitive Education

The international discourses of SDGs pledge inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UN, 2023). "Gender-sensitive education policies and programmes are those that account for the different challenges faced by women and men based on sex/gender with an aim to establish an equal education system and access to educational resources" (European Institute of Gender Equality, 2021). A gender-sensitive education allows young students to separate assumptions around gender that are stereotyped generalisations. It is a teaching and learning process of how gender plays a role in our everyday lives (US Aid, 2021). Thus, It is necessary to understand the everyday experiences of young students and how they negotiate their positions to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education.

Even though there have been efforts made around the world to make education more equal for all, girls are still the first to drop out when confronted with a

crisis such as financial constraint, emergency situations, and/or global pandemic (Burzynska and Contreras, 2020; Dorn et al., 2020; Rahman, 2021; Akter, 2022). Textbooks and curricula still exhibit gender-stereotypical knowledge and ideas prescribed by the patriarchal society, limiting young people's gender agency and career aspirations (Kelly and Nihlen, 2017; Concordă, 2018; Asadullah et al., 2018). Gender-sensitive education and policies have drawn significant attention from scholars and policymakers in recent years to balance the gender differences in specific subject areas (i.e., STEM subjects) (Sinnes and Løken, 2012). Nonetheless, national and international organisations have undertaken research focusing on policy in the Western part of the world, and critical academic work remains limited. UN (2015) introducing the SDGs and driving the international development discourses confirms the imperative link between gender and education. Nonetheless, this shift toward inclusive and equitable quality education empowering all girls and women is a recent shift for many developing countries like Bangladesh, which makes critical research on the issue limited.

An inclusive and equitable quality education is not possible without a gender-sensitive curriculum, textbook, pedagogy, and policy initiatives. It requires exploring the intricate discourses that scaffold the conceptions of young people around their capabilities, possibilities, aspirations, and achievements. Even though Bangladesh is considered a development success story in many aspects on paper, the hidden qualitative issues often fade against the shining numbers representing success in enrolment and women's empowerment. These intricate discourses come under the spotlight with a move toward equitable quality education and empowerment of all girls/women. Therefore, qualitative studies understanding young students' aspirations and the effects of gender discourses are crucial to make education equitable and inclusive.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed recent and significant literature and discussed the construction of girls/women in Bangladesh. I offered an overview of masculinity and femininity discourses in Bangladesh. I discussed the complex duality of socio-religious discourses unique to the Bangladeshi context and the relationship

between discourses related to space and *'Purdah'*. I pointed out the construction of women in the international development discourses that reflect a very particular definition of women in the global south and a gradual change in their language. Finally, I highlighted the gendered education discourses in Bangladesh.

The chapter reveals the availability of limited studies exploring the invisible discourses, conceptions, and negotiating strategies of young girls in Bangladesh. As highlighted in the introduction chapter, most of the available studies establish the existence of gender discourses affecting girls/women through quantitative data (Rahman and Islam, 2013; Asadullah et al., 2018; Akter, 2022; Jamim et al., 2022. Even the scarcely existing academic research available primarily focuses on women. Moreover, very few studies have explored how discourses operate and how young girls as subjects negotiate their positions in rural Bangladesh. Given the significance of context and the lack of studies exploring young people's conceptions and experiences, there is a significant need to investigate these untapped experiences.

I further explored the link between gender at every level of education, from textbook to curriculum, learning to teaching, attainment to aspirations, and major selection to career choice. The influence of gender at every level of education and career aspirations is evident across the literature (Asadullah and Chaudhury, 2014; Sultana and Ferdous, 2017; Suhi et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the evidence in Bangladesh is primarily based on quantitative studies with scattered investigations that often lack rigour. To achieve equitable, inclusive, quality education for all, there is a dire and timely need for in-depth investigation exploring the conceptions of young people around gender and career aspirations to understand how they do their gender, negotiate their gendered positions, and career aspirations within the discourses they are situated in. This leads me to my research questions-

General Research Question

- What are the conceptions of gender and career aspirations among secondary-level young people in Bangladesh, in the context of moves toward inclusive education?

Supporting Questions

- What are the conceptions of 14–15-year-old young people following a gender-sensitive curriculum on gender and career aspirations in Bangladesh?

- What kinds of barriers are experienced by these 14-15-year-old young people in relation to gender and career aspirations?

- How do these 14-15-year-old young people negotiate space for their views on gender and career aspirations?

- What are the implications of the findings for developing equitable and inclusive education in Bangladesh?

In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology adopted to conduct the research.

Chapter 4 Research Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological underpinnings of this research work. I start the chapter by discussing my ontological and epistemological position that guided my methodological decisions. Then, I reflect on the methodological approach and methods undertaken in this research and the underlying reasons behind the decisions made. In the following section, I discuss participant selection, practical considerations during data collection, and adjustments made due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, I discuss the data analysis process. Finally, I underscore the ethical considerations taken and managed during data collection and the research process.

Research Design

In this research, I aim to explore the conceptions of gender and career aspirations of young people in Bangladesh by understanding their conceptions and negotiating strategies to make alternative discourses possible. As I have outlined, my research is inspired by a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework with a special focus on Foucault and the ways discourses construct gendered subjectivities. The research design, therefore, is inspired by a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework to facilitate a deeper understanding of the dynamic conceptions, subjectivities, and negotiating strategies of young people in Bangladesh.

My research is guided by a constructivist ontological position, meaning, I take the view that reality is subjective and dynamic, varying among people. Therefore, realities are multiple and constructed by individuals (Guba and Lincoln, 2017). In my research, I explore the realities constructed by young people, which are unique and shaped by the discourses that they draw on from where they are located.

My epistemological position is interpretivism influenced by feminist poststructuralism which suggests that knowledge is socially constructed, subjective and multiple (Guba and Lincoln, 2017) and "the world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it" (Grix, 2004, p.83). In other words, as Marten (2005) suggests, meaning is constructed, not discovered (Martens, 2005). Taking inspiration from Crotty's (1998) tree example, in my research, I take the view that it is the human beings who label themselves as 'women' and 'men', giving them a name and associated attributes that we understand as women/men. If the construction of knowledge and meaningful reality occurs through interactions between human beings and the world, as argued by Crotty (1998), the only way to understand the social world is to see it through the eyes of the participants of the social world themselves (Cohen, 1998). Thus, in my research, I rely on the participants' own views, descriptions, and life experiences to interpret their reality of gender and future career aspirations (Creswell, 2003).

While I adopt a feminist poststructuralist lens, specifically, taking inspiration from Foucault (1978, 1980) and Butler (1990)) to explore the data, my approach was a mix of the deductive and inductive process where I had a pre-existing overall theory to frame the research (i.e., feminist poststructuralism) but with an open mind to the possibilities of the research findings. My intention was to allow the participants to create their own understanding of the concepts that this research explores, such as gender and future career aspirations, which may be specific to the time and context.

Research Methodology

Drawing from a feminist poststructuralist theoretical perspective, I have adopted a qualitative methodology to conduct this research, which in turn inspired the data collection method to answer the research questions. While the methodology is the principle regulating the study (i.e., quantitative or qualitative), "a method is a technique or tool applied for the practical implementation of the study (i.e., survey, interview, observation)" (Slevitch, 2011, p. 75). As I frame my research within an interpretivist research

perspective, a qualitative research methodology is more fitting for this research (Guba and Lincoln, 2017).

In my research I explore the conceptions of gender of young people, how they do their gender and negotiate their positions that are context-specific and shaped by the power relations experienced by them within the discourses. Moreover, I study how these young people conceptualise their future career aspirations through conformation, negotiation and/or resistance. As I have discussed, I consider their constructed realities as unique, dynamic, and multiple. So, it requires a methodology and method that gives a scope of understanding the multiple realities of the participant young people that are situated within the multiple discourses of culture, family, education, and religion and acknowledges the researcher's interpretive ability at the same time. These considerations led to choosing a qualitative methodology to conduct the research.

Research Method

To conduct this research, I utilised a combination of photo-elicitation and open-ended semi-structured interviews as data collection methods to answer my research questions. In this section, I discuss the research methods selected and the considerations behind those decisions.

Photo-elicitation

Photo-elicitation is a research method where photographs and/or images are used to invoke richer interpretation and sharing by the research participants. In this regard, the photographs work as a stimulator to encourage the participant's description of a phenomenon (Harper, 2002; Richard and Lahman, 2015). The photographs/images can be related to the participant's world or be meaningful to them (Lapenta, 2004; Epstein et.al., 2006). In this research, I use images related to the participants to encourage discussion about their conceptions of gender and career aspirations.

During the interviews, I used images from two sources to encourage participant responses. First, I used images from the 'English for Today' textbook studied by the Bengali medium students in Bangladesh as part of their national education

curriculum. Second, I used images, stories, and exercises from "The Diary of the Brave" provided by the Centre for Men and Masculinities Studies (CMMS). As a researcher, these images were selected by me keeping in mind what may be meaningful to the participants and suitable to the research questions. The images were used as a medium for creating a comfortable atmosphere for the participants, developing rapport and evoking different aspects of dialogues and stories involving their gender and career aspirations (Epstein et al., 2006).

Open-ended Semi-structured Interview

In this research, my primary data collection method was open-ended semi-structured interviews in combination with photo-elicitation. Semi-structured interviews usually unfold in a more informal and conversational manner to create an opportunity for the participants to choose what they find important and how much they want to share (Longhurst, 2003). Guided by my epistemological stand as an interpretivist, I chose an open-ended form of interview to create a scope for the participants to share their stories and interpretations of their reality where I acted only as an initiator or guide. However, it was also imperative for me that discourses related to gender and career aspirations appear in the conversations to address my research questions. Therefore, I used the semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended inquiries to guide the discussion if necessary.

Formulating the Interview Schedule

I prepared a list of broad question themes to guide the interview. However, the semi-structured interviews unfolded in a conversational manner to provide more autonomy to the participants about what and how much they want to share. The pre-formulated discussion themes initiated the conversation followed by subsequent probes. Therefore, each interview progressed in a unique style (Alamri, 2019). Moreover, apart from the first or second themes, the questions also varied in terms of sequence between interviews led by the participants. During the interview, my goal was to create space for the participants to share their conceptions and experiences at their own pace and decide what or how much they want to share. I tried to ensure that the probes were open-ended and

constructed in a way to initiate unstructured responses leading to discussions about how they do their gender, what discourses they draw from and how they negotiate their positions of gender and career aspirations (McIntosh and Morse, 2015). Some of the main themes that I explored through my interview schedule were: A typical day in their life, a discussion about their family, how they spend time in school, and how they think their life would have been different if they had a different sex/gender, their future aspirations and motivations behind them.

Fieldwork and Data Collection

The following section discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the research, the ethical considerations contemplated to conduct the research, the timeline of the research and the challenges faced in conducting the data collection.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Fieldwork

I started my PhD with the grand idea that I would go to a remote village in Bangladesh, spend a month in the field and discover the stories of the young people. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic came into existence, and everything became uncertain (Omary, 2020). As per my supervisors' suggestion, I prepared two separate plans for data collection, Plan-A included a data collection plan in person and Plan-B included a data collection plan via a virtual learning medium (i.e., Zoom). After waiting for several months, time and resource constraints made it necessary for me to move forward with Plan B to collect my data via Zoom. Zoom was selected considering the data security management guidelines of the University of Glasgow.

Hiring a Field Facilitator

Moving forward with plan B required several adjustments and alternative methods to the data collection plan due to the physical distance between the researcher (me) and the participants. Given the social norms, technological limitations, and the local communication practice in Bangladesh, it was very

difficult to locate, explain and recruit participants for the research from the UK. Therefore, with approval, I had to hire a field facilitator who assisted me in communicating with the school authority and guardians/ parents of the participants to explain my research and obtain their consent for participation in the research. As per the data protection guidance, a formal contract prepared by the University contract team was signed by the field facilitator agreeing to adhere to the University of Glasgow's ethical and data management rules. The field facilitator also worked as a facilitator with the NGO, the Centre for Men and Masculinities Studies (CMMS) in schools in the city of Cox's Bazar in 2019. In addition to collecting informed consent, the field facilitator arranged the interviews in Cox's Bazar at the participant's homes so that they feel safe. Two students wished to participate in the interviews at school, which was arranged as well with the permission of the school authority.

Challenges Faced During Data Collection

COVID- 19 Pandemic Challenges

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I encountered several challenges rarely faced by researchers during regular times (Lobe et al., 2020). The data collection phase of the research was a trial-and-error process by being creative and finding safe ways to conduct the research while ensuring the participants' and field facilitators' health safety (Roberts et al., 2021).

The time difference was a significant constraint during the data collection. As I undertook the interviews from the UK, during the winter months the time difference with Bangladesh was six hours (GMT+6). It meant waking up at five in the morning in the dark to take the interviews while it was a bright morning in Bangladesh. The time difference also meant I could not take more than one or two interviews per day which made the data collection timeline longer. During this time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the schools were still closed (Reuters, 2022). Therefore, the field facilitator had to go to the participant's home to obtain the consent of parents/guardians and organise the interviews. The participants of my research lived in remote hilly village areas in Cox's Bazar, in

the Southern part of Bangladesh. So, the field facilitator needed to return to his home before it got dark for safety reasons.

In addition to the COVID-19 disruptions, on 13 October 2021, an incident occurred in Bangladesh where an unknown person placed the holy Quran at the Durga Puja Mandap leading to mob attacks and religious unrest across the whole country. The government shut down the mobile network and internet access. Paramilitary forces were deployed across the country to keep violence under control (The Daily Star, 2021). It also disrupted my data collection process for a week and delayed the data collection. Due to the hilly geographical location, internet connectivity was inconsistent and hard to reach. I had to take most interviews outside the participant's home on the veranda or premises area to get uninterrupted internet connectivity.

Data Collection and Management

Participant Selection and Recruitment

In this research, the participants were young people who participated in a gender-sensitive programme provided by an NGO named Centre for Men and Masculinities Studies (CMMS) in Bangladesh. CMMS is an NGO in Bangladesh working with young people to promote gender equality and stop violence against women by engaging them in their Bravemen Campaign programme (BCP). In this programme, they partner with schools and implement the programme through lectures, workshops, and modules over six months. During this period, the students are provided with a diary, called the ‘Diary of the Brave’ consisting of five chapters that discuss topics related to gender equality, human rights, adolescent changes, and social safety. Following each lesson, the students have to complete the exercises to encourage critical thinking related to social rules and discrimination in their day-to-day lives. I discussed the elements of BCP in more detail in Chapter 5.

Research suggests that it is the mid-teenage years when most students form their gender conceptions and career aspirations, which they stick to in the future (Maltese and Tai, 2011; Archer et al., 2014). Therefore, the three

selection criteria for participant selection were, 1) young students aged 14-15 years from grades 9 and 10, 2) students of the Bengali medium, and 3) students who participated in the gender-sensitive curriculum programme provided by CMMS in 2019. All participants were selected by the field facilitator from his list of students who participated in the BCP. In total, twenty interviews were taken maintaining an equal female/male (as informed by the participants) ratio.

The following table provides a glimpse of participant background:

Sl. No	Participant Name (Pseudo names)	Gender	Religion	Family Occupation	Participant Aspiration
1	Rahima	F	Muslim	F- Business, M- housewife	Want to be established
2	Sima	F	Hindu	F- Manual, M- housewife	Do not know yet
3	Runa	F	Hindu	F- Service M- Service	Doctor or Air force officer
4	Tonni	F	Hindu	F- Manual M- Housewife	Police officer
5	Nisha	F	Hindu	F- Manual M- Housewife	Government job
6	Hasan	M	Muslim	F- Manual M- Housewife	Doctor
7	Jamal	M	Muslim	F-Manual M- Housewife	Engineer
8	Safia	F	Muslim	F- Service M- Diseased	Doctor
9	Raima	F	Muslim	F- Service M- Housewife	Doctor/ public service
10	Piyal	M	Hindu	F- unoccupied (sick), M- Housewife	Police Officer

11	Naima	F	Muslim	F-Foreign service, M-Housewife	Doctor
12	Shimul	M	Hindu	F-Manual M-housewife	Entrepreneur
13	Samiul	M	Muslim	F-Service, M-Housewife	Not sure yet
14	Belal	M	Muslim	F- Farmer, M-Housewife	Army Officer
15	Faria	F	Muslim	F-Service M-Housewife	Judge
16	Mohua	F	Hindu	F-Business, M-Housewife	Nurse
17	Dipto	M	Hindu	F-Self-employed M-Housewife	Police officer
18	Rishad	M	Muslim	F- Business M-housewife	Engineer
19	Sajjad	M	Muslim	F-Manual M-Housewife	Army officer
20	Farhan	M	Muslim	F-Manual M-Housewife	Banker

Table 2: participant list

Timeline and Data Collection

I collected the data through open-ended semi-structured interviews between October 2021 to April 2022. In total, twenty interviews were conducted where ten participants were girls and ten were boys as per how they identified themselves. The data were collected in two phases. During the first phase, eleven interviews were conducted between October to November 2021. After phase 1 of conducting interviews, I transcribed and translated all eleven interviews and undertook my initial analysis to get a good understanding of my data. In Phase- 2, I conducted nine interviews in April 2022 to make a total of twenty interviews.

Reflection on Data Collection

After a lot of preparation, the first interview was arranged with the help of the field facilitator. I prepared the interview schedule and practised the interview in my head. When the field facilitator connected me with the participant in Zoom, his laptop's webcam did not work. He travelled a long way to arrange this interview, and the participant dedicated the time to participate in the interview. So, I had to continue the interview. However, it was very difficult to create a rapport with the first participant who could not see me. It also affected the data quality from that interview. So, the first day of collecting data online started with a hurdle. Although most interviews went smoothly and I was able to create a rapport with the participants, it was difficult in a few interviews due to poor internet connection. Nonetheless, I must acknowledge that the rapport could have been better in a face-to-face interview. I also would have got a better idea about the participant's surroundings if I could take face-to-face interviews.

As a researcher, my Bangladeshi national identity, age, gender, and urban upbringing made an impression on the participants. The participants felt comfortable as we both spoke in *'Bangla'* and they could express their ideas and expressions in their own language. As they use a specific dialect of '*Bangla'*, I struggled to understand a few words. The participants explained these words to me which I felt balanced the power-relations to some extent as they helped me to understand their experiences. Even though the male participants were comfortable speaking with a woman, some of the female participants were more comfortable speaking with me than the field facilitator due to our sex/gender. As an adult, most of the participants addressed me as '*আপু*' or '*আপা*' meaning sister, which is a cultural way of addressing anyone older than oneself. Some participants did not address me with any specific term. However, there was one male participant, Dipto, who addressed me as Ma'am. I mentioned twice that he did not need to address me as Ma'am (as female teachers are culturally expected to be addressed). I am a student like him as well. He agreed, and after some time, he started addressing me Ma'am again. It reflects that after all efforts, there still exists a certain level of power hierarchy between the researcher and the participants.

In a Bangladeshi culture of a close-knit family where extended families live together, it was quite difficult to have a private place to conduct the interviews. It was another reason most interviews were taken outside the participant's home on the veranda or premises area. In some cases, people or children were standing around the participant with curiosity about the virtual mode of communication, which is not very common in the village area. At times, it created an awkward situation, making the participants a little uncomfortable sharing their views.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a fundamental part of research work (Silverman, 2015). Since qualitative research most often involves human subjects and human interactions, ethical challenges may be more pronounced in qualitative research (Hennink et. al. 2020). Informed consent, confidentiality, and trustworthiness are the main pillars of ethics (Bryman, 2004). In this section, I discuss the ethical considerations contemplated and the justification behind the ethical choices.

Approval from the College of Social Science (CoSS) Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow was acquired before I started the data collection, fulfilling all the requirements. The study was conducted in accordance with the British Education Research Association's (BERA) (2018) ethical guidelines. Moreover, I sought guidance from the data protection impact assessment (DPIA) team and adhered to GDPR guidelines. All the data management advice by the DPIA was followed to conduct the research.

Gaining Access and Consent

The research participants for this research are 14–15-year-old minor young students according to Bangladeshi age of adulthood (GoB, 2019). As discussed earlier, COVID-19 restrictions and virtual data collection methods posed a significant challenge for me to access the gatekeepers and parents/guardians of the participants. Therefore, the field facilitator supported me in gaining the required informed consent. Following the University ethics guidelines, I sought informed consent from the parents of the children, CMMS (the NGO that provided BCP) and the school headmaster to ensure participant safety. In this

regard, the school and the NGO worked as a gatekeeper. First, the field facilitator shared the participant information sheet, privacy notice and consent form translated into Bengali to the Headmaster of the school and gained written informed consent from the school. Then, the field facilitator gained written informed consent from the parents of all twenty participants sharing the consent documents. I collected consent from CMMS over email. At the beginning of each interview, I explained the goal and purpose of my research and asked for the participant's verbal consent on record before starting any interviews to ensure that they were willingly participating. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time, even after the interview was over.

Confidentiality and Degree of Anonymity

The transcripts were made anonymous after transcribing the interviews. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used both in manuscripts and in the thesis. Nonetheless, it was highlighted in the participant information sheet that maintaining complete anonymity may not be entirely possible as all the participants were part of the BCP and they went to the same school. It was also clearly mentioned that confidentiality may not be possible in the event of disclosure of harm or danger to participants or others, i.e., domestic violence or child abuse. However, no such incident arose.

Possible Distress and Appropriate Referral

As qualitative research involves human subjects and tries to learn the answers from participants first-hand, the researcher must be aware and prepared for any possible distress of the participants during the interview process (Decker, 2011). The research involved sharing conceptions and experiences related to gender and career aspirations. The topic may be sensitive to some participants or evoke emotional incidents that are impossible to predict. However, if any such situation arose, as a researcher I planned to make the participants comfortable, take a break or even terminate the interview. Participants were explained about the research and interview themes before the interview began. It was mentioned before starting the interview that their participation in the interview was

completely voluntary. They could withdraw at any time and without giving reasons/justification or refuse to answer any question. Participants were informed that in case of any mental distress help from the school counsellor and community clinic were available for their support. However, no such incident happened.

Data Analysis Approach

Transcription and Translation

Transcription and translation of the interview data mark the beginning of the data analysis process. As I have mentioned, the research field location of my study was Cox's Bazar which is situated in the South-Eastern part of Bangladesh. Like most countries, Bangladesh has its own language, social norms, and culture, which was considered to make research participants comfortable during the interviews. All twenty interviews were taken in the language of origin, *'Bangla'*. As a researcher, I am a Bangladeshi, eloquent in the Bengali language and well acquainted with the Bangladeshi culture. Nonetheless, even after being a native Bengali speaker, at times I struggled at times to understand the participant's language, which used a Southern dialect and accent. At times, I verified with the field facilitator that my understanding was accurate.

The primary task was to transcribe all twenty transcripts. Then translate the transcripts from Bengali (the language of origin) to English (the language of translation) being true to the context and meaning. Transcribing and translating can be excruciatingly time-consuming and a slow process. However, doing this offered me a thorough understanding of my data and a preliminary idea of the themes appearing frequently in the conversations. Therefore, it worked as an initial stage of the data analysis. I included my observations and field notes to finalise my manuscripts for the next stage of the data analysis.

Analysing Data

After the strenuous process of transcribing and translating, data analysis can be an exciting phase of the research, where we get to immerse ourselves in the hard-earned data. I utilised a combination of manual and software coding technic to analyse the manuscripts. For the data analysis, I followed a combination of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021) and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis guidelines by Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2017). Nonetheless, RTA is not an atheoretical process (Braun and Clark, 2021). As Chamberlain (2004) points out, whether acknowledged or not,

researchers' assumptions, knowledge, and language are always driven by their theoretical lens. I adopt a feminist poststructuralist approach with a focus on Foucault's work, which reflects on generating, refining, and naming themes. The final phase of writing is also written using a Feminist Poststructuralist lens with a special focus on Foucault (1975, 1980, 1981) and Butler (1990, 1999).

Coding Data utilising Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

In my research, I wanted to uncover a rich story about the young people's experiences and negotiation strategies regarding gender and career aspirations. I utilised the reflexive thematic analysis approach offered by Braun and Clarke (2021) to analyse the qualitative data, identifying patterns and coming up with themes using the six phases.

Braun and Clarke (2021) define thematic analysis "as a method for developing, analysing, and interpreting patterns across a qualitative data set involving systematic data coding with the ultimate purpose of developing analytic themes" (p.4). The term 'reflexive' prior to TA recognises the researcher's critical reflection on their role, their research practice, and the process throughout the research (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Coming from an interpretivist epistemological stand, I recognise my subjective contribution to the research.

Nonetheless, my research is framed by a feminist poststructuralist perspective with a special focus on Foucault's work. Therefore, I analysed participant responses as being situated within discourses. I look at how the participants draw knowledge from available discourses, how they are influenced by discourses and negotiate their positions. Therefore, I utilised a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis approach in combination with thematic analysis as an additional layer of data analysis. Since Braun and Clark's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis approach can be easily combined with theory and other analytical approaches, it strengthened my analysis process.

In the following section, I discuss the six phases of RTA to develop the themes.

Phase 1: Familiarising myself with the data set

Once I completed the transcription of the interviews in Bengali (the language of origin), I read and re-read the transcripts in Bengali and familiarised myself with the data. I highlighted the phrases and words that appeared important and/or interesting to me. I also made annotations in the comment section to capture my initial thoughts and/or observations. This initial step was undertaken in Microsoft Word.

Once I was happy with my initial analysis, I translated the anonymised and pseudonymised transcripts into English. Then, the next step was to again read and re-read the transcripts in English. At this stage, I again highlighted and made annotations of points I found relevant to my research questions, interesting and/or I felt I may be able to use them later. I went through my initial highlighted phrases and notes from the Bengali transcripts and merged anything that I felt was missed or difficult to translate exactly in terms of essence. For example, a simple word '*গল্প*' can be defined as "a distinctive Bengali form of discussion which communicates equal relations, friendliness and emotional connection" (Ivy, 2020). The closest translation to this word in English is 'chat'. However, it does not quite capture the essence of the word in the original language.

Phase 2: Systematic Coding

At this stage, I moved to use qualitative data analysis software. The primary reason for that was the large amount of data that appeared quite difficult to manage using manual methods. Therefore, I used NVivo 12, offered by the University of Glasgow, to code my data. I identified the segments and quotes in data that seemed relevant to my research questions, potentially useful for future use and/or things that seemed interesting. My goal was to reduce the data through coding but also capture my analytic take on the data as the researcher. I systematically coded all the interview transcripts. At this point, I ended up with hundreds of codes.

Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes from coded and collated data

In phase 3, I went through all my codes and collated the codes that seemed similar and/or relevant to be organised under a group. To make it more manageable, I copied all the codes in the Excel sheet and started collating the relevant code labels. I compiled all the clusters of codes that I felt shared a core idea or concept, and that can help answer my research questions. At this stage, I was still not considering it a theme but a group of codes containing similar and/or complementary codes. For example, Aspirations, a code group containing all the ideas, concerns, and struggles of the participant 14–15-year-old young people related to their future career aspirations. After the clustering, I ended up with nine large groups of collated data: Aspirations, Behavioural Traits, Bravemen Campaign Programme, Demographic Information, Education, Family, Methodological Observation, Rag Bag and Social Rules.

I kept demographic information as a group so that I could check if there is any link between gender and career aspirations based on demographic information such as age, gender, religion, and family economic background. The data was also necessary to cite the participant quotes in the findings chapter. I also kept a group named Bravemen Campaign Programme to collate all the data containing participants' views on the BCP, their experiences and/or impact on them which may become relevant when I write the discussion chapter. The data groups contained a group named methodological observation that contained data that seemed mention-worthy while writing the methodology chapter. For example, as I mentioned earlier, a participant called me Ma'am. I explained that he did not need to call me Ma'am. He agreed but started calling me Ma'am after some time. These observations could go under memo. However, I found it easier to keep them as code because I had already made these observation notes on my transcripts. In addition, I had a group named Rag Bag that contained all codes that seemed interesting but did not quite fall under any particular group.

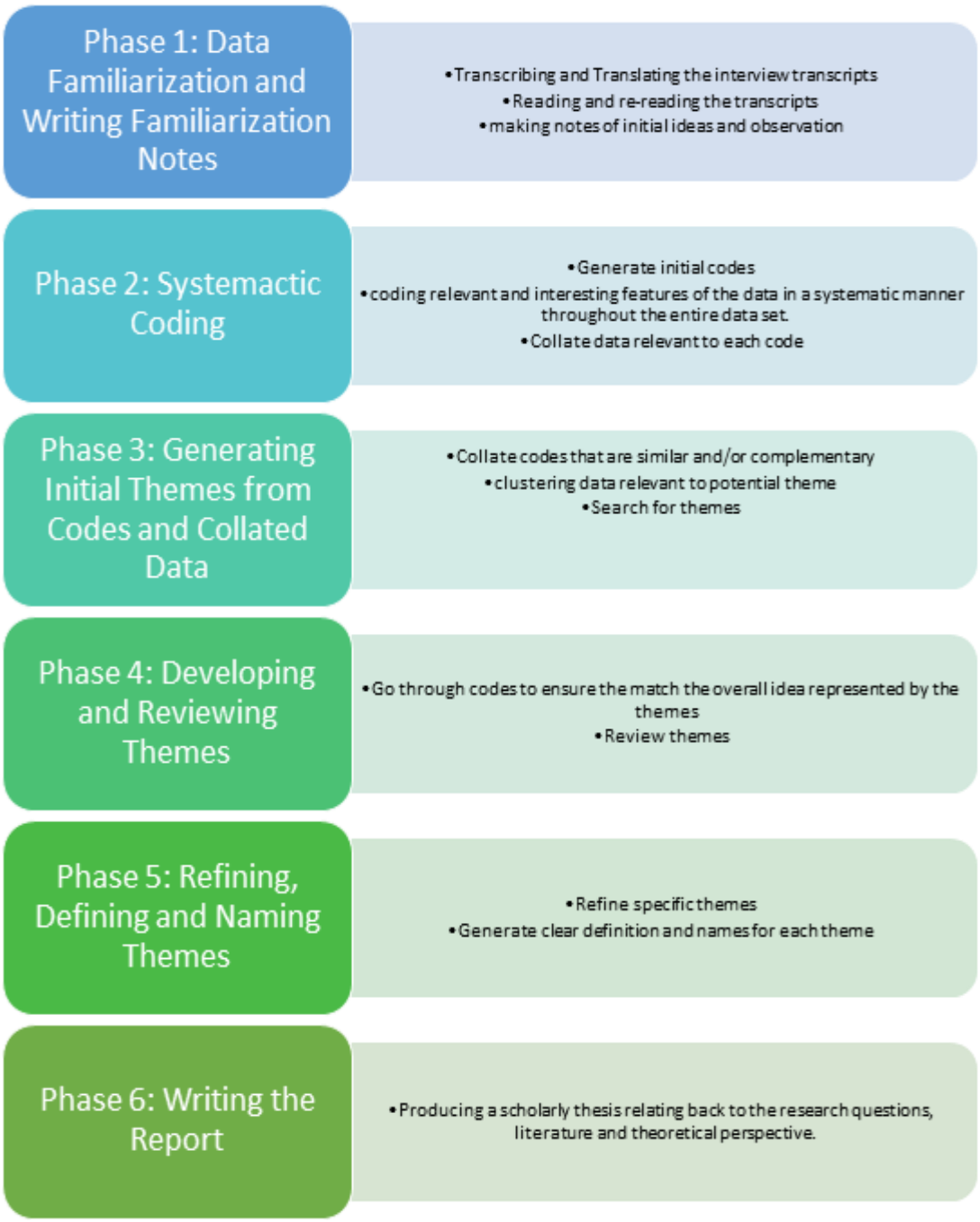


Figure 2 Six Steps of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021)

Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes

In phase 4, I went through the initial themes and re-engaged with the dataset to ensure the viability of the themes against my research questions. I identified the candidate themes passing the viability check as suggested by Braun and Clark (2022), but it required some re-development. At this stage, I refined the themes and brought a few candidate themes, i.e., Subject choices and perception of competence, under one broader theme: Education and Career Aspiration. I also

discarded a few candidate themes, like travelling with relatives and aspiring to study in the big city. As a researcher, it has also been a reflexive process going back and forth to make sure I was not trying to force a pattern and let the data choose it. At the end of the final exclusion and inclusion process, I was happy with the remaining themes that I felt shared distinct aspects related to the research questions.

At this stage, I engaged with Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) as an additional layer of analysis essential to my theoretical framework. After going through several approaches to FDA, I drew from Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine's (2017) guide to FDA. I found it helpful because they provide a flexible guideline for analysis, highlighting there is no one way to undertake FDA. While analysing the candidate themes in phase 4, I considered the following guiding questions to add another layer of analysis. The questions are guided by my research questions and my interest in understanding the existing power relations within discourses and how they are negotiated.

Guiding Questions for FDA	
1	Does the construction of objects vary over time?
2	How do the disciplinary techniques work within the discourses?
3	How do participant young people utilise knowledge?
4	How do participant young people negotiate their position?

Due to my theoretical framework as a feminist poststructuralist perspective with a focus on Foucault's work, I felt that utilising a combination of reflexive thematic analysis with FDA complimented the data analysis process. It also enriched my analysis, adding a directly theoretically-informed layer of understanding of young people's conceptions and experiences related to gender and career aspirations.

Phase 5: Refining, defining, and Naming Themes

This phase was very important for the thematic analysis. At this phase, I refined my themes further and named them. I also planned out the structure and flow of my data analysis. At this phase, I wrote theme definitions for each theme in a few words. Naming themes is also a significant task in this phase. The naming of the themes reflected my feminist poststructuralist theoretical lens, showing that the researcher's theoretical perspective will inevitably intertwine to a certain extent with the way TA is conducted.

Theme 1: Conceptions of Young People on Gender and CA	Theme 2: Disciplining Gender and CA	Theme 3: Negotiation/ Resistance by YP	Theme 4: BCP
Doing Gender	Regulating Body and Action	Exercising Agency	Source of legitimate knowledge
Gender and Space	Regulating CA	Alternative Discourses	Teacher support
Gender and sports	Regulating Career Choices	Sisterhood and beyond	

Table 1: Themes at the end of Phase 5

Phase 6: Writing the Report from Chosen Theoretical Lens

This is the stage where I fully engaged in academic writing guided by my theoretical lens and analytical tool. The purpose of this stage is to tell an overall story with conclusions drawn from the analysed findings.

Following this analytical approach, the findings are discussed in Chapter 6, which discusses the construction of girls and techniques of disciplining young

people in Bangladesh. Chapter 7 underscores a critical discussion of how young people conform, negotiate, subvert, and/or resist the dominant discourses of gender and CA to make alternative discourses possible.

Conclusion

To summarise, in this chapter, I discussed my constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemological position within which the research is located. I discussed the qualitative methodology guided by my epistemological stand. I also outlined the methods utilised to conduct the data collection, which were photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews with open-ended inquiries with the rationale behind utilising them. Moreover, the ethical considerations taken during the research were discussed. Finally, the chapter discusses the data analysis approach as reflexive thematic analysis and FDA guided by a feminist poststructuralist approach with a focus on Foucault's work. The chapter creates the foundation for Chapters 6 and 7, which discuss the findings of the research. In Chapter 5, I discuss the Bravemen Campaign, which is the gender-sensitive programme provided by CMMS and analyse their main component, "The Diary of the Brave".

Chapter: 5

The Diary of the Brave: A Synopsis and Critical Analysis

Introduction

Following the previous chapters introducing the context, relevance, and methodology of the research, in this chapter I provide a brief overview of the gender-sensitive programme I mentioned earlier (See chapter 4, p. 77) and critically analyse its main contents. I start by discussing an overview of the philosophy and history of the Centre for Men and Masculinities Studies (CMMS) which implements the 'BraveMen Campaign Programme (BCP)' to young people across rural Bangladesh. Then, I outline the structure and content of their principal component, 'The Diary of the Brave'. Finally, I provide my critical analysis of 'The Diary of the Brave' adopting a poststructuralist feminist lens. The overview and analysis are provided based on contents available on the CMMS website (i.e., information and reports) and the 'Diary of the Brave'.

The BraveMen Campaign: Inception and Background

According to the CMMS website, the inception of the BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP) followed as a result of a baseline survey on human rights in Bangladesh conducted by the Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission (BNHRC) in 2011. The study revealed that more than 60% of the respondents held the opinion that violence against wives is acceptable for 'disobedience' and 'bad behaviour' or when a wife's conduct affects the reputation of the family. It underscored the inter-mix of numerous discourses within the Bangladeshi society, for instance, social, religious, and political. CMMS, an NGO (non-government organization), then got involved with the BNHRC and started working toward developing a programme that aimed to influence young people's ideas to discourage male superiority and encourage respect for girls/women targeting school-going boys (CMMS, 2019).

As an initiative of BNHRC, the Brave Men Campaign officially started in 2012 as part of their Capacity Development Project. The project was funded by several donor agencies (e.g., UNDP, Swiss Confederation, SIDA, and DANIDA). CMMS and the United Nations Youth and Students Association of Bangladesh (UNSYAB) worked together as the programme's implementing partners.

Centre for Men and Masculinities Studies (CMMS)

CMMS is a non-government organization (NGO) in Bangladesh working since 2012. According to their website, the philosophy behind CMMS's mission is to establish,

> "A more equitable environment for every human being irrespective of gender, race, and/or sexuality by involving boys and men in Bangladesh along with evidence-based knowledge generation and creating a sharing platform on issues related to men and masculinities" (CMMS, 2023).

Instead of focusing only on girls/women like the majority of women's empowerment-focused NGOs and organisations in Bangladesh (Amin, 2011; Amin et al., 2016), CMMS focuses on boys/men in preventing violence against women and engaging boys/men in establishing gender equality. They assert their aim to achieve this by making boys/men aware of discrimination experienced by girls/women, fatherhood and caregiving responsibilities, and engendering unequal household practices. According to the CMMS website, they implement their programme across four levels, which cover feminist community activism, individual and household level, community and institutional level, and policy level. Some of their major activities between 2012- 19 were the Campus Hero TV reality show, Brave Men Campaign, Engage Men and Boys network, Maximus Tarun Kantha TV talk show, and MenCare Campaign Prio Baba.

In my research, I focus on BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP) as the selected participants of my research participated in this particular gender-sensitive programme. I identified the programme as gender-sensitive in line with European Institute for Gender Equality's (1998) definition that suggests policies and programmes "that take into account the particularities pertaining to the lives of both women and men, while aiming to eliminate inequalities and promote gender equality, including an equal distribution of resources". In other words, policies and programmes that address and take into account the gender

dimensions which have been attempted in the components provided by BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP).

BraveMen Campaign: An Overview

On their website, CMMS describes the BraveMen campaign programme (BCP) as a unique self-reflexive learning process targeting young people to embody positive forms of masculinities. They also vow to prepare girls to fight gender-based discrimination and violence in Bangladeshi society (CMMS, 2023). At first glance, the name 'The Bravemen Campaign' programme (BCP) implementing a programme to promote gender equality and fight VAW seemed odd and paradoxical. When I investigated further, I found that the organisation is aware of the juxtaposition, and they define their position clearly. The organisation explains the title choice by highlighting the inception of the campaign primarily being boys/men focused as a pilot project.

> "CMMS initially focused on boys/men to achieve their equality goal due to their belief in the significance of integrating boys/men to achieve gender equality. To make them aware of the existing everyday discrimination by making it visible to them and the need for gender equality. While most NGOs focus on girls/women, their goal was to involve, raise awareness, and engage boys/men in establishing gender equality through micro-level practices" (CMMS,2023).

Later, the programme became successful and larger, expanding to both girls and boys. The primary idea for the BraveMen Campaign was based on a television reality show titled 'The Campus Hero'. It was developed with an underlying theory of change involving male university students. The TV reality show was telecasted on a private television channel in Bangladesh between 2009 to 2010.

According to Imtiaz et al. (2015) discussed in the Report on BraveMen Campaign Phase II, the activity of BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP) is "based on a theory of change that aims to challenge the mainstream hegemonic discourse of masculinity, which normalises violence against girls and women" (CMMS, 2023). They claim to work toward creating a counter-hegemonic discourse by encouraging young boys/men to resist violence against women embodying positive forms of masculinity with an effort to "re-define the conventional

notion of bravery. According to CMMS, “brave men are not one who commit or ignore violence, instead one who reject and protest against it” (CMMS, 2023).

The BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP)’s approach involves girls/women and boys/men in micro-level gender transformative practices at home. Then, they connect this approach with community activism, working toward a more gender-equitable macro-level behaviour and preventing violence against women. The BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP) claims to be unique in its strategy that promotes learning through practice, experience, and reflection based on Paulo Freire’s theory of participatory education (CMMS, 2023). In the next section, I discuss ‘The Diary of the Brave’, one of the main components of the BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP).

The Diary of the Brave (DOB): A self-reflexive Diary

Redesigning the diary

In the beginning, BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP) used ‘The BraveMen Diary’ as their original intervention tool with the aim of motivating changes to the ideas of gender among the participants during the inception of the programme. The first phase of the BraveMen campaign included only male participants which also reflects the name of the campaign. At this phase, they used a version of BraveMen Diary focused only on male young people. In the second phase, the BraveMen Diary was modified for female participants as an experiment of inclusion of girls into BraveMen Campaign, and it was called the BraveGirl Diary, which continued till the third phase. Nonetheless, in the fourth phase in 2019, the diary was completely redesigned and revised focusing on Human Rights, Household works, Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) for both girls and boys. The name of the BraveMen Diary was then changed to ‘Diary of the Braves’ (সাহসীদের খেরোখাতা).

The Diary Contents

The diary starts with the message “This wonderful book is all about me and my bravery” depicting young people as superheroes (see appendix no.1). The foreword, which encourages the readers to engage with the diary highlights that the diary is organised in a way with an aim to enable young people to identify ways mothers are neglected in the Bangladeshi society (see appendix no.1). The diary encourages the young people to question “why does this happen?” in society with the belief that the young people will resist social discrimination against girls/women and work toward safeguarding human rights through establishing the rights of their mothers as the initial step.

Then, the diary continues with personal questions related to the students and their families. A few of the topics are the participants’ future aspirations, which rights are necessary to fulfil their aspirations, who is the most important person in their family according to the reader, and why. The diary is divided into five chapters. Each chapter follows a string of collecting information through questions, sharing information and knowledge through stories intending to invoke critical questions (i.e., why the society has different rules based on gender), and in the end, performing a few exercises to encourage more equitable behaviour and practices over seven days that the students log in their diaries leading to a reward such as a star sticker.

The first chapter is “My Mother”, which starts with exercises listing tasks done every day within the house, how the share of work is divided, whether the household chores are important and whether mothers get any breaks to take rest or any holiday for themselves. The chapter continues by sharing the story of Mili and Rony, who are siblings. When their mother got sick from the continuous burden of doing all household chores alone, everyone blamed only Mili for not helping her mother because she was a girl. Then the chapter invokes questions such as ‘How do you feel reading the story?’ and ‘Do you feel household work is only girls/women’s responsibility? The chapter ends with tasks like helping their mother with her daily chores and discussing them, encouraging friends to help their mothers, and organising a social event highlighting the importance of the

mother's work with friends. Each student is rewarded with a sticker if they accomplish all the tasks.

The second chapter, "My Rights", follows the same structure of collecting information through questions, invoking critical thinking, and exploring the 'why' and 'what if' of dominant social discourses that are more likely to normalise gender discrimination through stories and exercises leading to rewards when completed. The chapter starts by asking students about their perspectives on rights and which rights are necessary to lead a happy and healthy life. The exercises continue by asking questions such as rights that are enjoyed by the students, areas where women and men do not enjoy the same rights and why these differences exist between girls/women and boys/men in Bangladeshi society. The exercises also explore how the students would react if anyone was being deprived of their rights around them. Further, the diary promotes an alternative discourse of 'bravery' by offering students possible ways to work toward protecting everyone's rights in Bangladeshi society, as according to the BraveMen Campaign Programme (BCP) motto that is what brave men do.

The third chapter, named "My Friendship", starts with questions regarding friends, their best qualities, whether these qualities are seen in both girls and boys and students' thoughts about boys and girls studying/working together. Then, the chapter introduces a serious issue like sexual harassment and invokes questions such as who is responsible for such incidents, why boys/men do such acts within the Bangladeshi society, how it affects the girls/women mentally and their future aspirations, and how young people can fight harassment and discrimination. The chapter encourages young boys to protest such incidents and stand up for their female classmates/friends.

Next, chapter four, named "Move Forward by Breaking the Silence", further stresses fighting against injustice. The chapter starts by exploring things that young people like and the inspiration behind them, things they fail to do due to dominant social norms (i.e., girls playing football), features, and examples of showing self-confidence. Then the chapter moves to a serious issue like oppression against women in Bangladeshi society and how both boys/men and girls/women need to resist the dominant discourses within the Bangladeshi

society that oppress girls/women. Moreover, they highlight the existence of child sexual abuse (i.e., men sexually abusing young boys) which is a taboo in Bangladeshi society. The chapter explores how both male and female students feel about such incidents and possible ways of resisting the dominant discourse that allows sexual harassment of both girls/women and boys/men. The chapter also highlights important issues like dowry and physical/mental abuse associated with it. The exercises explore how men coming forward to end violence can make a difference in society.

The final chapter, chapter five, "Our growing up time" discusses the physical and mental changes experienced by girls and boys during puberty. It explores the changes experienced by young people, how they feel during such changes, and how they can overcome the distress of going through changes. The chapter discusses important issues like menstruation, nocturnal emission, hormonal changes, and potentially harmful sides of pornography. It may be important to note that due to the conservative socio-religious discourses, sex education is almost non-existent in the formal education curriculum, making pornography the only source of sex education to the young people, which can potentially influence views on gender that can exacerbate violence against girls/women (Khan and Raby, 2020). The exercises explore how misinformation regarding physical and mental changes during puberty can lead to boys losing their way, potentially leading to violence against girls/women. The chapter then moves to discuss the nutrients needed during this stage growth. It also encourages the students to think about how to raise awareness regarding the physical and mental changes during puberty with an aim to normalise them.

A Critical Analysis: Researcher's Perspective

Instructive Exercises and images

The diary texts are designed to provoke thoughts and questions among the young people. However, they are heavily instructive in tone and, I would argue, responsibilising in nature (Redmon et al., 2022). The diary begins with the message, "This wonderful book is all about me and my bravery", encouraging students to absorb knowledge, be brave and subvert dominant gender discourses

in Bangladeshi society to bring a positive change. Each chapter starts by asking questions related to the young student's life, family, surroundings, and experiences by instructing them to fill out the exercise boxes and encouraging them to ask the 'why' question. The images reflect the scenarios related to the questions and suggest when to question, further strengthening the textual instructions. Then further exercises instruct young students to, for example, help their mother with chores (chapter 1) and organise a social awareness session with friends about women's and men's equal rights and sexual harassment (chapter-2 and 3). Additional exercises direct the young students to encourage their friends to do the same and prove their contribution by mentioning their friends' names who performed the duties. They are encouraged to include a photo together, which leads to a sticker as a reward (Chapter 1). They are also encouraged to 'raise awareness' among people by holding social awareness sessions (chapter- 2) therefore arguably asking young people to shoulder the responsibility to inform and raise awareness of other young people. The diary ignores the existing power relations within discourses where young people may actually have limited scope to negotiate responsibilities and disrupt these dominant norms (Del Franco, 2014).

'Diary of the Brave' is certainly gender-sensitive in the sense that it not only responsibilises girls but also responsibilises boys, underscoring the significance of challenging and shifting perpetual patriarchal discourses. Drawing on Rottenberg's notion of feminist neoliberalism (2014) and Banet-Weiser et al. (2020)'s popular feminism, it can be suggested that the 'Diary of the Brave' texts provide a quicksand of self-responsibilisation where young people can easily be submerged. Although the underlying 'Diary of the Brave' content broadly forwards liberal feminist thought, which is diverse in itself, underscoring the importance of equal rights and equal responsibilities (Enslin, 2003), the curriculum arguably can be critiqued for neoliberal undertones responsibilising young people who may have limited opportunities to negotiate such responsibilities.

Depicting young people as “Superheroes”

The diary begins by depicting girls and boys as superheroes (see appendix no.1) with a quote suggesting all young people as homogenously brave and having superhero-like power. I suggest that this is problematic. As I have discussed above, this arguably burdens the young people, responsibilising them to challenge the subjugated discourses within the Bangladeshi society without providing them with any superhero-like power apart from the knowledge of how discriminatory and unequal the Bangladeshi society is. This may further lower their confidence and aspirations as a source of uncertainty and anxiety (Rose, 1996).

Defining Bravery and Self-confidence

Intending to deconstruct the meaning of “being brave”, the BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP) has an explicit description of a brave man in their slogan, “A brave man resists violence against women”, which is arguably an admirable effort to create an alternative discourse of bravery to encourage gender equality. However, the curriculum ignores the need to consider the existing power relations and potential barriers faced by young people to be “Brave”. The diary, which is instructive in nature all through, not only encourages boys to be brave, but it encourages girls as well.

The second chapter instructs girls/women to be confident, stressing that there is no reason for girls/women to feel inferior. This echoes the neoliberal discourses that suggest girls just need to decide that they are confident, and like a switch, it turns on (Rottenberg, 2014). It ignores the underlying norms that shape girls’/women’s conceptions and actions, especially within the socio-political discourses where violence against girls and women is prevalent and, in many instances, men are favoured for their superior position within patriarchal discourses (Islam and Siddique, 2022). According to Ain o Salish Kendra (2023), a women’s rights body in Bangladesh, 177 women were raped, and 280 children experienced some kind of violence only between January to April of 2023. Therefore, how far being confident and resisting dominant social discourses is possible and/or safe for girls/women is questionable.

Even though the diary, through narrating the story of Shanta, a character from the diary, introduces the idea that girls sometimes lack support from parents and experience victim-blaming (Khatun et al., 2012; Rahman, 2022), the following chapter responsibilises young people by encouraging girls and boys to protest any sort of violence against them without underscoring the power relations and role of others like parents and teachers. The CMMS website mentions community activities to raise awareness among parents but lacks details and discussion in the diary that is practised by young students.

The diary admirably discusses child sexual abuse of boys, which is a taboo in Bangladesh. However, responsibilises young people to share and protest such violence as an act of self-confidence. It entirely ignores the underlying possibilities of victim-blaming and shaming that may lead to further damage like losing self-confidence, child marriage or even suicide (Nahar et al, 2013; Khatun et al., 2012). The diary does hint at the possibility of victims of harassment and abuse lacking parental support. However, at the same time it instructs young people to be brave and self-confident by confronting such incidents. Therefore, they fail to bring parents' responsibilities under the spotlight, and at times neglect the power relations around negotiating responsibilities among parents, teachers, and young people.

Gender Binarisation and Patriarchal Gender Roles

The texts and images throughout the diary exhibit gender binarisation, identifying individuals only as girls and boys. The diary exclusively portrays young people as male and female. Gender binarisation is common in textbooks in Bangladesh (Nur and Farzana, 2024). Moore (2020) and Ruiz-Cecilia et al, (2020) respectively underscore the presence of heteronormativity and gender roles in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) textbooks highlighting the need for change.

The diary carefully avoids discussing any gender expression that may be considered as 'other' to socially accepted femininity and masculinity within the dominant Bangladeshi socio-religious discourses. A possible reason for such careful construction can be the dominant religious and social narratives

associated with other forms of sexuality and gender ideas that may be life-threatening for people associated (i.e., writers, teachers, and students.). For instance, from 2013 to 2016, several bloggers exercising freedom of speech to share their secular views considered anti-religious were brutally killed by religious extremist groups (Mahmud, 2022).

Following a gender role approach, the diary's efforts to deconstruct strictly identified gender roles like women being responsible for household work and men for the outside world, encouraging female education and equal rights, is certainly praise-worthy. Nonetheless, with the noble goal to deconstruct gendered discourses, I would argue that it fails by solely representing girls/women as 'mothers' at the very beginning of the diary. The Foreword (see appendix no.1) of the book highlights that the diary has been designed to enable young students to identify ways 'mothers' are deprived of their due rights and respect. Moreover, it is designed for students to question why it happens in Bangladeshi society. The Foreword stresses that the writers believe ensuring mothers' rights and honour is an effective pathway to establishing equal rights for all and stopping violence against women. The philosophy behind the diary seemingly reduces girls'/women's role only as mothers, therefore showing the influence of dominant patriarchal discourses deeply rooted within Bangladeshi society. It also sheds light on the extensiveness of such deep-rooted and naturalised patriarchal discourses (Kabeer, 2005; Chowdhury, 2009). It instructs and encourages young female people that it is essential for them to become a mother and furthers the discourse of 'a complete woman' by giving birth to a child. Moreover, it encourages and trains young boys to see girls/women only as mothers, reducing any dreams and aspirations of girls/women other than becoming mothers. The text also overarchingly suggests the rights and honour highlighted within the diary are not deserved by virtue of being a girl/woman; rather, it is by virtue of being a mother, ignoring all other roles of girls/women.

Selflessness and Fighting Inequality: Historical Figures and Events

The diary encourages young people through stories, to embody selflessness and be the beacon of change, burdening them with the responsibility to bring change. In between lessons and exercises, the diary shares stories of historical

figures and/or instructs them to discuss their story with their teachers. Among them are national and international figures who made outstanding contributions in their respective fields, like Mother Teresa, Maria Mitchell, Nelsen Mandela, Joan of Arc, Marie Curie, and more. The diary notably underscores the stories of their sacrifices and their proactive actions to fight against inequality and injustice by subverting the dominant unequal gender discourses during their time. Nonetheless, it ignores discussing their struggles experienced due to unfair socio-cultural inequality.

The stories also arguably suffer from inflated positivity and share a highly simplistic version of bringing change, as if one just needs to decide to change society, and it becomes a reality. For instance, the diary goes to great lengths to highlight Marie Sklodowska-Curie's contribution to the field of science, and her role as a precursor for women in science as the only woman winning the Nobel prize twice in different fields. However, it fails to underscore her experience of severe poverty in her early life and the patriarchal inequality she faced that constantly tried to eclipse her scientific contributions by other male counterparts, including her husband's (Le Guludec, 2023). For example, Curie's story carefully highlights only the positive outcome of her first Nobel prize experience but ignores sharing that Curie was not initially given recognition for her contribution to discovering radioactivity along with Pierre Curie and Henri Becquerel because the French Academy of Sciences refrained from suggesting her name because of her gender. It was only after her husband, Pierre Curie, a male scientist's protest, that she received the recognition (Langevin-Joliot, 2011). The diary also neglects to mention the important roles Marie Curie's mother, father, and husband played in her challenging discourses of inequalities to become a celebrated scientist in a man's world.

Similar magnified positivity is also shared through Maria Mitchel's story. Maria Mitchel was the first female astronomer in America who discovered a comet and made an incredible contribution to the fight for gender-equal pay that we are still fighting to achieve. The diary meticulously shares her outstanding achievements as a scientist, educator, and women's rights activist. However, in the book Maria Mitchell, Life, Letters, and Journals, Maria is found to write,

> "It is really amusing to find one's self lionized in a city where one has visited quietly for years; to see the doors of fashionable mansions open wide to receive you, which never opened before. I suspect that the whole corps of science laughs in its sleeves at the farce" (Mitchell, p.22).

Extracts from her diary during being a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science reveal her experience was not always so welcoming. Even though the diary hails Maria bringing her achievement as the first and only woman elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences under the spotlight, it does not mention Maria facing protests raised against her for her title as a 'Fellow' similar to other members and that on her certificate of admission the title fellow was erased, and 'honorary member' was inserted by Dr. Asa Gray. Even though a few years later Maria's name appeared on the list of Fellows, it did not come to her so easily.

The young people are expected to absorb these discursively constructed messages of self-sacrifice, proactiveness, and be inspired to disrupt the dominant discourses of inequality and injustice as they are depicted as superheroes. The young people are encouraged to embody the idea that to be successful and be hailed by people, they need to be self-sacrificing and protest any injustice or inequality, shifting the burden of changing society on their tender shoulders. A similar stance is observed in the literature on education exploring the marketisation of education encouraging market subjectivity among students where attributes such as being responsible, self-governing, and entrepreneurial are sought from students (Varman et al, 2011).

The diary stresses selflessness and serving the country over one's health and well-being. It shares the extraordinary journey of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who is considered the best Captain of the Bangladesh cricket team and highlights how he keeps playing for the country even after several injuries and numerous surgeries enduring unbearable pain and the possibility of permanent damage to his knees. Mashrafe's contribution to the Bangladesh Cricket team and the country is exceptional (Mukherjee, 2016). Nonetheless, normalising such sacrifice of physical and mental well-being and burdening young people with such high expectations of self-sacrifice to serve the country is problematic. Even when the diary shares Marie Curie getting sick toward the end of her life due to

radiation exposure, it hails her selflessness encouraging young people to embody that to serve society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the gender-sensitive curriculum received by the research participants as part of the BraveMen Campaign programme (BCP) programme. I provided an overview of the ideological and historical position taken by the CMMS which employs the 'BraveMen Campaign Programme (BCP)" to young people across rural Bangladesh. I outlined the structure and content of 'The Diary of the Brave' along with undertaking my qualitative critical analysis adopting a poststructuralist feminist lens. My analysis highlights the instructive nature of the texts, images, and stories responsibilising young people for change by depicting them as superheroes without providing them with any superpowers. I also underscore the problematic nature of defining "A brave man" as someone who resists violence against women and encourages young people to protest any injustice and inequality without reflecting on the obstacles and risks associated in Bangladeshi society with complex religious, social, and patriarchal discourses intertwined with each other. The critical analysis sheds light on the gender binarism presented in the diary throughout and the failure to be gender-equal even after its noble effort by portraying girls/women only as mothers. Moreover, the analysis brings forward the diary encouraging young people to be selfless and self-sacrificing to serve others and shoulder the responsibility of bringing change in society. Instead of encouraging them to focus on their dreams, happiness, and well-being, the diary obscures the role of other actors like parents, teachers, institutions, and society.

Chapter- 6

Discipline and Punish: Experiences of Young Girls in Rural Bangladesh

Introduction

In this first of the two chapters based on analysed interview data, I illustrate the tension between the socio-cultural and religious discourses that discipline female young people through mechanisms of coercion, gaze, and surveillance. Discourses are specific to a particular time and space and I argue that dominant socio-cultural discourses of gender in Bangladesh are notably different from dominant Western discourses of gender. Nonetheless, traces of similarities may be found due to the colonial relationship. In addition, traces of neoliberal discourse may also be found in some instances due to the major involvement of international donor agencies (Asadullah et al., 2014).

In this study, I explore the conceptions of gender and career aspirations of young people who participated in a gender-sensitive curriculum in Bangladesh. Even though the study consists of female and male participants, I primarily focus on the conceptions and experiences of the female young people, including their discussion of male perspectives, to enrich the findings. I contend that to understand how other social and religious discourses shape the discourses of gender and career aspirations, it is necessary to explore how social discourses constrain, dominate, and/or subjugate female young people through power and discipline (Foucault, 1980).

In this chapter, I draw from Foucauldian theories and feminist ideas discussed in Chapter 3, adopting the public versus private dichotomy utilised by some feminist scholars (Gavison, 1992; Higgins, 2000). Here, I discuss how ideal girls/women in Bangladesh are constructed through discipline. I explain how the mind, body, and actions of female young people are regulated, disciplined, and even physically punished if not followed to the satisfaction of the social and patriarchal institutions (Biswas et al., 2019).

Disciplining in Stages

Discipline through Regulating Space and Time

As discussed in Chapter 2, Foucault (1975), in his book, 'Discipline and Punish' highlighted the importance of enclosure as a fundamental element of discipline. However, according to Foucault,

> “The principle of 'enclosure' is neither constant, nor indispensable, nor sufficient in disciplinary machinery. Rather, it is used for 'partitioning' or separating individuals so each individual has his [or her] own place, and each place is individual. It is done that way because one must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions [...] their unusable and dangerous coagulation” (Foucault, 1975, p.143).

The interview narratives show that the female participants have a strictly demarcated private home sphere that can arguably be seen as the boundary of their own prisons. I highlight that the public versus private domain, where the private domain belongs to girls/women and the public domain belongs to boys/men, are socially constructed and perpetuated to discipline these female young people. Furthermore, they are partitioned or compartmentalised with invisible boundaries within their home sphere to prevent the 'dangerous coagulation' pointed out by Foucault (1975) because as long as girls/women are isolated, the patriarchal discourses maintain dominance. Apart from the home sphere, the participating girls are only allowed to go straight to their schools and private tuition, where they are under the surveillance of their teachers and peers.

While discussing their typical day, the participants shared their movements in different spaces. Rahima (15, female, Muslim) said, "It is easier for boys to go outside. Girls cannot stay outside late". Tonni (15, female, Hindu) further suggests a clear spatial division, saying, "Girls are born to take care of the household and boys are born to work outside. They do their job accordingly". Rishad, a male participant, highlights the gendered rules and privileges of navigating space that restricts girls/women's movement sharing,

> “We [boys] can go out whenever we wish. Girls may not be allowed to do that. It is due to the societal thinking. People may say the girl has a bad character. If

a girl goes out too much, then people at home may say bad things [about her character], things like that. People may think their daughter has a bad character" (Rishad, 15, Male, Muslim).

The interview narratives underscore strictly separated spaces between male and female young people to avoid confusion regarding the separation of spaces. Each body needs to follow stringent space and time regulations for discipline to be successful (Foucault, 1975). Moreover, it loudly echoes the notion of the public/private divide which is core to much feminist scholarship, where men dominate the public sphere, relegating women to the private sphere (Hansen, 1987; Mackinnon, 1989; Gavison, 1992; Bartky, 1990).

In addition to partitioning space, disciplining is also done through control of activity and partitioning of time (Foucault, 1975). In his book, 'Discipline and Punish', Foucault's elementary school example suggests that a minute division of time governs activities, such as using time through constant surveillance and efficiently eliminating distractions. This can be observed in relation to the female participants in my study. This is done so that they are constantly under surveillance and do not have any time left to think of any other possibility, restricting their opportunities. When asked about a typical day, Tonni shares the following.

"I wake up at 5 AM and then go to private tuition on time. After returning from there, I take a shower. Then we perform *'Puja'*[14] in our house. Then I go to school at 11 AM. Now school is only 2 hours. I return from there after two hours. After returning home I have rice and go for accounting tuition. After returning home I take some rest. Then I help mother a little with chores. Then I perform *'Puja'* in the evening. After that, I study. I get up from my studies at 10 at night. Then I have dinner and go to bed"(Tonni, 15, female, Hindu).

Such a division of time and tasks into infinitesimal parts is apparent among all the female participants. This continuously keeps them visible and under surveillance, which leads to self-regulation. Moreover, it also ensures that female individuals make efficient use of their time.

[14] Puja means an act of worshiping by people following Hinduism.

Prisoner within Class and Tuition

Foucault (1975) utilises the term 'docile body', which he describes as someone malleable, who can be subjected and improved as per social standards to become 'normal'. Even though Foucault tried to move from the notion of the docile body to individuals having more agency (see Chapter 2) in King's (2004) words Foucault failed to "recognise the significance of gender in the play of power despite the obvious pertinence of his material" (p.29). Feminist scholars identify the female body as a particular target of disciplinary power and argue that female bodies are more docile in everyday life than male bodies (Bartky, 1988; McNay, 1992). Feminist scholars like King (2004) also argue that gender determines the techniques and degrees of discipline exerted on the body, which is evident in the conversations with participants with Naima stating,

> "I do not do anything against the rules. Once I enter the school, I do not go out. But boys go out and skip class. They chat with their friends [boys], have fun, and share things with each other. We girls stay together and have fun. In class 6-7, boys and girls used to sit together. Even then, we never talked" (Naima, 15, female, Muslim).

This exhibits girls' overriding obedience to the rules and regulations employed by the school within the social context. Moreover, male privilege becomes stark in the conversations. For example, Jamal shares about his classmates,

> "We used to go to school. Nowadays students are very '*ফাঁকিবাজ*'[15] [neglectful]. In the morning, we have assembly. Here, students get a bit naughty. During the assembly, a few students would bunk the school. Then, we would go to the classroom and attend classes. Few students would even escape through the back door and skip the classes" (Jamal,15, male, Muslim).

When asked which pupils skip classes, Jamal clarifies,

> "No, only boys bunk classes. Boys usually do these kinds of things, not doing their reading or escaping classes. Sometimes, be rude to teachers" (Jamal,15, male, Muslim).

While describing the situation, Jamal talks in a naturalised gendered way, suggesting only boys, silently equating boys/men as the natural human 'subject' that situates girls/women as the 'others' as pointed out by De Beauvoir (1949).

[15] A Bengali word meaning neglectful, not serious enough.

Moreover, the interview narrative reflects how, within the socio-cultural discourses in Bangladeshi society, male students feel more entitled to break the rules, skip classes, and roam around outside as the public realm belongs to them (Lata et al., 2020). They are aware that their punishment is far less severe than for female students. Society turns a blind eye to them and spares them by forwarding the "boys will be boys" discourse explored by scholars like Cohen (1998), Epstein et al., (1999), Francis (2000); Taylor et al., 2009; Skipper and Fox (2022) against the backdrop of boys' underachievement. This naturalises the male deviant behaviours as the norm within the patriarchal discourses (Anwary, 2015). However, female students are not so privileged. If they skip classes and enter the realm of the boys/men, their name will be tarnished. She is labelled as "a bad girl" who is without character (Nahar et al., 2013).

Even within the classroom, the spaces are strictly demarcated between male and female pupils. All participants mentioned that they sit separately at school with girls on one side and boys on the other. A majority of the female participants also mentioned that they only have female friends. Many were even surprised when asked if they had male friends. These findings also support results found by Adler and Adler (1998), Francis (2000), Baines and MacIntyre (2022), and Fargo et al. (2022) studying classrooms, mealtime, playtime and student behaviour in British schools. Except for Sima, whom I found to be a rebellious spirit, always questioning society, all female participants stress that they do not talk with male students. When asked if there are any rules about girls and boys sitting separately, Runa (15, female, Hindu) mentions, "No, there are no such rules. We sit separately on our own. I do not feel anything wrong about it."

Tonni further shares about sitting separately,

> “Sometimes we [girls and boys] talk a little, if they forget to bring books and request us, we give them books to share… If they forget to bring pens, I may help.. [stressing] But that's it! We are not friends with boys” (Tonni, 15, female, Hindu).

Foucault (1995) explains the panopticon as, "a marvellous machine which […] produces homogeneous effects of power. A real subjection is born automatically from a fictitious relation" (p.202) and this is apparent among Runa and Tonni. They self-regulate without any direct coercion. Moreover, Tonni maintains her

ideal femininity (see Chapter 3), suggesting that talking with boys is 'bad' and stressing that boys are 'definitely not her friends'. However, when I asked Jamal, a male participant, he mentioned that he always talks with female classmates and has lots of female friends in the class. This exhibits the male privilege where male students can readily admit to mixing with female pupils but female students either keep away from boys or hide/deny contact to maintain their ideal feminine identity within the patriarchal discourses (Schwiter et al., 2021).

Regulating Body, Mind, and Actions

The Discourse of Bodily Harm, Fear, and Normalising 'Eve Teasing'[16]

The interview narratives show evidence of constant fear of harm upon girls' bodies and how these discourses inducing fear influence their ideas and actions. It also comes under the spotlight how family members and neighbours, who form society, normalise such male behaviour by maintaining it through discourses of hegemonic masculinity discussed in research undertaken by Anwary (2015), Fattah and Camellia 2020 and Anni (2022) (see Chapter 3).

Farhan discusses how some boys tease and harass the girls on their way to school. He mentions how society normalises and encourages 'eve-teasing' [17] by allowing them to get away with such acts and instead punish girls by shifting the blame on girls, identifying it as their 'misdeed'.

> “We have seen while returning home that few boys would stand on the road to 'eve tease' girls. They were older than us. When we used to protest against them, they used to threaten us. "Why are you guys' interfering? We are not saying anything to you; whatever we are doing, we are doing it with girls." We would say, "Why would you say such things to girls? You guys have sisters as well. Why would you do it with other girls." Then they used to threaten us, "Don't talk too much. Get out of here and would run us off". Then we used to make complaints to sirs [teachers]. Some teachers take it seriously, and some teachers don't. Due to these unruly boys, most girl's education is getting

[17] Eve Teasing is a form of expression used in the Indian subcontinent (i.e., Bangladesh, India) referring to the making of unwanted sexual remarks or advances by a man to a woman in a public place. “Eve-teasing” refers to public sexual harassment or street harassment to a girl/woman by a boy/man (Akther, 2013).

hampered. Especially because of the boys who stand in front of the schools" (Farhan, 15, male, Muslim).

Faria also shares about 'eve-teasing', "Yes, there are a few unruly boys who say bad things to harass [us]. But it's better not to take those things to ears and leave" (Faria, 15, female, Muslim).

A discourse of male domination is at play here where boys/men feel entitled to harass and/or assault girls, as underscored by many feminist scholars (see Bartky, 1988; Duncan,1994). They feel free to do such acts due to the favourable dominant patriarchal ideologies that protect them. These patriarchal ideas restrict female space within the public sphere and throw them further deeper into the private sphere of women that they consider as their 'safe zone', similarly argued by Bartky (1988) and Young (1988) (See chapter 3). The interview narratives show how the fear and vulnerability induced by socio-patriarchal discourses discipline female bodies and their actions. These findings also support similar findings discussed by Fattah and Camellia (2020) and Anni (2022) 's work (See Chapter 3), which highlight girls/women's internalisation of such patriarchal and cultural discourses against the backdrop of society forwarding aggressive and dominating attitudes as hegemonic masculinity discourses in Bangladesh. The social and patriarchal ideas of the perpetual possibility of harm to girls'/women's body work as a panopticon (Bartky, 1988). Women and girls see it as their personal responsibility to maintain this public versus private divide, as failure to do so may lead to harm to their bodies and blame by society (Anni, 2022). So, girls like Faria (15, female, Muslim) try to ignore and avoid such harassment by self-regulating themselves and making themselves invisible in public spaces.

Furthermore, even though the act of harassment is inflicted on female bodies by male individuals, it is the girls/women who are punished for it by society through 'victim-blaming' (see Chapter 3). Rather than holding the male individuals accountable, the social and patriarchal discourses normalise such male acts endorsing 'boys will be boys' discourses and punishing the girls through, for example, forced child marriage. This is similarly discussed by Akhter (2013), who pointed out school dropout, restricted mobility, early marriage, and psychological issues as the primary consequences impacting young girls as

victims. Confirming parent's constatnt fear Jamal shares, "Eve teasing exists. They [parents] always remain scared of it. So, they just marry their daughters off" (Jamal, 15, Muslim).

Discussing about blaming girls, Hasan also shares,

> "Many people wait outside the school. If they see any boy talking with a girl, they [make bad] comments [about the girl's character]. If girls are studying in a higher level [secondary], many people in society say this is not good, she should be married off soon" (Hasan, 15, male, Muslim).

Similar victim-blaming attitudes and physical/mental punishment and infliction of bodily harm are also found in the work of Schoellkopf (2012), Khatun et al. (2012), and Rahman (2022) discussed in chapter 3.

When asked why girls do not share such incidents with their parents or ask for help in school, Farhan explains,

> "Girls do not want to say anything out of fear. They do not want to share it with their parents. If they tell their parents, they take it negatively. They say you do not need to study. Stay at home. Since you are saying boys disturb you on the roads, you do not need to go to school anymore" (Farhan, 15, male, Muslim).

Moreover, Nisha (15, female, Hindu) explains, "When boys disturb/ harass a girl, her parents become forced to marry their daughter off quickly so that it does not harm their reputation"

The interview narratives reflect striking evidence of the discourse of victim-blaming and the induced fear of bodily harm and/or losing honour that influences female young people's construction of gender and aspirations. These discourses restrict the margins of liberty and expansion of space necessary to achieve their education and career aspirations. As discussed in Chapter 3, within Bangladeshi society, the female body is also associated with the family's honour, which must be protected (Uddin, 2018). These public socio-patriarchal discourses strongly influence girls/women as their personal quest to maintain their chastity and family honour. This is possibly another aspect of power relations that Foucault failed to grasp that can be inflicted on the female body (Ramazanouglu, 1993).

The Sacred Body of Women

Gender positions are performed and maintained through dressing-up or clothes worn as well. Within the discourse of 'ideal' femininity in the context of Bangladesh, the female body is considered sacred. It should be kept guarded against men's gaze, as discussed by Rozario and Samual (2010) and Gholamhosseini et al. (2019) (see chapter 3). Gholamhosseini (2019) explains the public vs private division of space to be primarily motivated by the Islamic notion of *'Mahram'* and *'Na-mahram'* in Bangladesh. However, it is not restricted to Muslims only, denoting a cultural influence. Rather than the visible expression of *Purdah* (i.e., wearing a '*Burqa*' or '*Nikab*'), '*Purdah*' in Bangladesh generally means women wearing modest clothes and covering themselves in ways seen as 'appropriate'. These invisible discourses of '*Purdah*' norms regulate women's spatial boundaries and access to education and work (Lata et al., 2022). Following these notions, female young people's space is further restricted through their attire and appearance.

Discussing about advice on appropriate dressing up Runa shares,"[My parents advise me] not wearing a short dress, my parents do not like me wearing short kameez or tight pants. [They ask me] to wear a scarf" (Runa, 14, female, Hindu). Highlighting how clothes-related advices are only for girls, Tonni shares, "Boys do not need to worry about clothes, so teachers do not need to advise them about wearing proper clothes" (Tonni, 15, female, Hindu).

The discourse of ideal femininity within the Bangladeshi context makes the female young people responsible for protecting and hiding their bodies. They see the failure to protect their body from harm such as assault, attack, and/or rape as their punishment for failing to conceal their body from the male gaze. It is a stark example of the deceiving nature of discipline where girls learn to think of this ideal and obedient body as one generating from within and learn to see their failure of concealing as their private failure (Spitzack, 1990). Moreover, the interview narratives suggest how the rules are only for girls/women as the 'other' and are not meant for boys/men.

The interview narratives also reflect female participants internalising social ideas to make themselves invisible or hidden. In Islam, religiously, girls are

advised or it is suggested that girls wear a *'Hijab'* and cover their hair from the age of seven. However, within the Bangladeshi social discourses, many girls are observed to start practising *'Hijab'* during their teenage years when they hit puberty. When asked Faria (15, female, Muslim) why she started wearing a *'Hijab'* she answered, "Well, the scarf of the school dress is a bit small. It cannot cover the front properly, so we wear a *'Hijab'* [to cover ourselves]". Discussing her reason for wearing a *'Hijab' s*he further explains, "Well, one reason can be doing '*Purdah*', again during this time, girls grow up, so do their bodies. So, girls start wearing *'Burqa'* and/or *'Hijab'* [to cover up their body]".

When asked if wearing a *'Hijab'* or *'Burqa'* to cover their bodies protects girls from harassment or attack, Faria answers,

> "Yes, it is observed in some cases. But the unruly boys even harass girls/ women wearing *'Burqa'* or *'Hijab'*. Boys who have a harmful nature would disturb any and every girl/woman. However, sometimes it is observed that if a girl wears a *'Burqa'* or *'Hijab'*, she is harassed a bit less"(Faria, 15, female, Muslim).

The interview narratives suggest one of the motivations to take up the *'Hijab'* is for religious reasons. However, being able to cover/ hide their body parts was also a significant reason for Faria and her friends to wear a *'Hijab'*. Faria also suggests covering their body as an effort to save themselves from physical and sexual harm. A strong and constant fear induced through the normalisation of violence against girls/women is observed here against the backdrop of religious values. The participant female young people wear a *'Hijab'* or' *Burqa'* with the hope of being invisible in the public sphere to protect themselves from harassment by boys/men and bodily harm. This supports similar findings in scholarly work by Kibria (2022), Mannan (2020) and Mamun and Huq (2023), who find the social perception of women with a *'Hijab'* as modest and a 'good woman' and this motivates them to do it along with family encouragement and social security attached to religious dressing. This exhibits a shift in the discourse of 'ideal femininity' in Bangladesh, with a stronger influence of the dominant religious discourses that Hussain (2010, p.326) identifies as the construction of 'modern Muslim women' in contemporary Bangladesh.

Body, Discourse of Poverty and COVID-19

Poverty

As noted in Chapter 1 and 2, Bangladesh is a developing country, and all participants highlight poverty as an influential factor in restricting girls' education and career aspirations, most often resulting in child marriage. Within an economic context where families struggle to maintain the cost of living, a female body is considered inferior and a 'trouble', as discussed by Naz and Saqib (2020) and Asadullah et al. (2021) (see Chapter 3). Discussing the gravity of the situation of child marriage, Mohua shares,

> "Many parents marry off their daughters being greedy. If they see the groom has money, and property then they do not care about age. They marry their daughter off. No matter how many times the girl says no, do parents listen to their daughters?" (Mohua, 15, female, Hindu).

Scholars like Kabeer (2011) and Chant (2010) highlight poverty as gendered. The interview narrative suggests how gendered economic discourses also play a significant role in parents' decision-making for girls. Parents see investment in female education as less economic or efficient than male education as it has no or limited return for them (Kabeer, 1988; 2005). These economic, gendered discourses are also supported by social discourses discussed earlier that suggest female education is pointless.

Discussing school tuition fees, Sima discusses,

> "In primary level, education is free, so they (parents) do not have to pay anything. But at a higher level, a time comes when the fees increase. Then, many parents wonder, why should I pay so much to send my daughter to school? For example, many girls have been married off in my class. Many girls were married off in class 6 or class 8. They have to move to their husband's home after marriage. My friend Amina she wanted to study but she was married off...in class 7 [12 years old]" (Sima, 15, female, Hindu).

It must be noted that even though Bangladesh was one of the few countries to attain gender parity in primary-level education in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) proposed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the dropout rate of female pupils at the secondary school level is alarmingly high (see Chapter 3). As discussed in Chapter 3, Streatfield et al. (2015) show that

even though poverty is one of the main reasons for dropping out of school among the poorest participants in their survey data, among the participants from wealthy families, the main reason for dropping out of school was child marriage. This suggests a strong influence of social discourses in Bangladesh to promote the early marriage of girls to protect family honour and reputation. Parents of daughters also see it as their duty to marry off their daughters on time which, according to customary norms, is as soon as girls reach puberty (Sohel, 2012; Arnab and Siraj, 2020; Asadullah et al., 2021). In many instances, parents see child marriage as a way out to discharge their economic burden. Some parents also believe marriage is a way to ensure their daughter's economic security, which is also motivated by poverty (Faroque and Amin, 2016).

The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

As discussed in Chapter 3, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an 18-month-long school closure in Bangladesh. The lockdown also restricted movements and access to income. Organisations and businesses remained closed due to government restrictions and received negligible government support, leading to extreme poverty in most parts of Bangladesh (Makino et al., 2021; World Bank, 2023). When poverty worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the socio-cultural discourses endorsing female education as valueless became more powerful and they intensified. A re-evaluation of the future of girls in these economically disadvantaged families was observed, and a large number of girls were married off even within the lockdown (UNICEF, 2021; BRAC, 2021).

Farhan discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic made things worse for girls as the schools were closed for a long time. He mentions a significant increase in child marriage in his neighbourhood and school.

> “There were many child marriages. Such an incident happened nearby. There was a girl from my own class who lived next to my house. Since school was closed, then we were just promoted to class 10. That friend of mine has been married off. Not just one. In my class, about 7-8 girls were married off. These can be called absolute child marriage because they have not reached the legal age of marriage” (Farhan, 15, male, Muslim).

Discussing child marriage during COVID-19 Jamal also shares,

“They [girls] have been isolated from the school [due to COVID-19 lockdown], and they were sitting at home. In our village area, there is a tendency, they [parents] do not like their daughter sitting at home. They believe daughters cannot be kept at home; they marry them off. Sometimes, we hear that the girl was studying, still her parents found a proper groom and married her off. Our village people have a mentality that why do girls have to study? Now, things have changed a bit. Many families are not like that. Many families want their daughters to go to school, learn things, and learn about how life operates, which may help to raise good children. But not many parents understand these things in the village area. They only want to marry off their daughters. They see daughters as 'trouble'” (Jamal, 15, male, Muslim).

When asked how the girls were married off in lockdown, Safia shares,

“We have heard a lot of the girls from school have been married off during the lockdown. Since no one gets to know during the lockdown, parents marry off their daughter, hiding it. We get to know after the girls have been married off” (Safia, 15, female, Muslim).

The interview narratives confirm the intensification of gender inequality in the form of an increase in child marriages during critical times like the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, a strong discursive rural/urban binary is also present in Jamal's narrative, where gender equity and liberalism are primarily equated with the modern and urban discourses.

As Foucault (1980) points out, "power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth; it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit”(p.93). Such production and re-production of truth is observed through the interview narratives. Hence, I argue that poverty intensifies the dominance of social and patriarchal discourses. As a result, it also diminishes the scope of resistance and/or liberty of female young people. Even after the increasing influence of discourses of gender equality, people produce the truth of child marriage as soon as an opportunity arises that helps the society to maintain the subordination of girls/women and operate as it always has. This confirms that the power balance of discourses is ever-changing, always trying to overcome each other (Foucault, 1978).

Girls/women and Religious Hypocrisy

Foucault (1978) suggests that some bodies of knowledge are most powerful in society at a particular time and place and, therefore, highly influential. This

knowledge is considered legitimate, right, and worthy (see Chapter 2). Religion is such a body of knowledge that prescribes one's demarcated area of movement, ideal behaviour, and possible pursuit. Nonetheless, the influence of religious discourses differs based on gender and specific religion. Even within the discourses of a particular religion, women's experiences in terms of spatial restrictions tend to be stricter than men's. Women's experiences are also intensified based on which religious discourse they are situated in (see Chapter 3). These restrictions also result in limited economic opportunities and income, leading to the intensification of poverty.

In the Introduction chapter (Chapter 1), I discussed the vital role played by the discourses of religion in the construction of Bangladeshi identity and politics in Bangladesh (Nahar, 2010). They form a body of knowledge that strengthens and perpetuates patriarchal ideas within the Bangladeshi society (Patoari, 2019). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority[18] country, with only 7.95% of the population identifying themselves as Hindu and less than 1% of the population as Christian, Buddhist, and other. However, due to the geographical location of Bangladesh, which is surrounded by India (a Hindu majority nation) on three sides, a specific 'regimes of truth' is produced through the complex intermixing between social, religious, and political discourses. This is also reflected in the analysed interview narratives.

Discussing the influence of religion Dipto shares,

> "One thing can be noticed. In our area, I have observed that Muslim families marry off their daughters early. They marry off their daughters at 10, 12, or even 14. There are a few who marry off their daughter at 17/18. In our [Hindu] neighbourhood, the child marriage rate is a bit low" (Dipto, 15, male, Hindu).

Farhan discusses how religion impacts girls/women in their village. Similar to Dipto, he also identifies that the religious discourses impact Muslim girls more than others. Farhan shares,

> "It is seen mainly in Muslim families, the child marriage. The Hindu families, even if they have to struggle [economically], they try to educate their children.

[18] According to Census 2022, 90.39% population of Bangladesh identify them as Muslim.

> They […] even the mothers work. In Muslim families, women do not work. In Hindu families' women work and want to educate their children".

When asked why he thinks it is that way, Farhan explains,

> "Due to '*Purdah*' norms. In Islam, there is no rule for women to take care of the family by working when they grow up. They do not get an education. Where will they work? Then, they cannot work in the fields or will not work in the hospitals. Hindu people do all these things. They do not think of them as inferior to do such work. They do not believe they will become small if they do such work […] most Hindu mothers work in hospitals. Then they cut mud for construction...they even work in the crop fields. Muslim women do not do such work as they stay at home" (Farhan, 15, male, Muslim).

Even though Islam does not set boundaries for women having a profession as long as they maintain the *'Purdah' norms*, Muslim women in Bangladesh experience being confined by the visible and invisible discourses of *'Purdah'* (see chapter 3) set by socio-cultural discourses restricting their space within their home boundary. Socially, they are prohibited from speaking or touching men outside their immediate family (that is, father, brother, son), which restricts them from performing duties, for example, as a medical professional caring for patients. The only exception is the Gynaecology specialisation (see Chapter 3), which involves female patients and helps maintain the dominant '*Purdah*' norms (Story et al. 2012). They also face restrictions from working in the fields or selling crops in the market, where they are visible to the public eye. As a result, Muslim families, especially Muslim women, tend to be poorer in terms of economic assets (Kabeer, 2005; Hossain, 2013).

This links to the discourse of religious hypocrisy discussed by scholars like Patoary (2019), Ayoub et al. (2022) and Hashmi et al. (2022) (see Chapter 3), who argue that religion is misinterpreted, manipulated, and used to forward socio-cultural and patriarchal discourses. Exploring women's rights in Islam, they also point out girls'/women's right to acquire knowledge, have a profession, and do business. Nonetheless, the interview conversations confirm previous findings on how religious ideals are twisted to legitimise social and patriarchal discourses of discriminating against girls/women and isolating them from the outer world. I argue that the favourable conditions for men in almost all contexts in Bangladesh utilising Islamic teachings suggest a discourse of religious hypocrisy

where society manipulates religious and cultural discourses to maintain girls'/women's subordinate position in society.

Regulating Desire

The analysed findings show how the desires of young participants are disciplined in numerous ways. As discussed in earlier sections, a stringent demarcation of space has been in place since childhood to instigate self-regulation among young people, especially girls. The social discourses of patriarchy influence the young minds that girls belong to the private sphere, within the boundaries of home, and boys belong to the public sphere, the outside world. Violating that space and becoming close to each other is strictly prohibited, as dominant discourses characterise it as immoral, shameful, and unacceptable. Therefore, in a society where incest is considered absolutely intolerable (Salam et al., 2004), the public discourses of family, culture and school forward the notion that male and female young people are like brothers and sisters. The young people internalise this knowledge and maintain self-regulation. Moreover, they see failure to do so as their own fault and feel responsible for rejecting those involved in such a despicable act (Duncan, 1994).

Discussing about classmates Piyal shares,

> “Here [in school], we all mix like brothers and sisters. We are not involved in anything wrong. We are like brothers and sisters [stressing]. Yes, there are one or two people who have dirty minds, who are involved in such things [having romantic feelings for someone]. We do not even consider them. Because it is a personal matter. We do not interfere in these matters. It is not my place to say anything about it [showing detest]. Well, at this age, they are doing such a thing. It is definitely a bad thing. When they will understand, maybe they will feel bad” (Piyal, 15, male, Hindu).

Piyal mentions how boys and girls in his class are like brothers and sisters. He insists on this conception by repeating himself. He also points out that looking at girls in any way other than as a sister is bad. He shares his antipathy against the 'deviants' who break the social rules and get involved with girls in a romantic manner. He also stresses that he does not get involved in any such event, suggesting he is a good boy. Piyal's conversations shed light on the social construction of an 'ideal boy' and an 'ideal girl' and their socially accepted

relationships. Male and female people use their gender correctly by maintaining their relational boundaries (Davies, 1991). Following the conversation, Piyal can be identified as a well-disciplined boy who maintains Bangladeshi ideal masculinity from Butler's (1990; 2005) perspective.

The young people are not only disciplined through self-discipline, but they also monitor each other like inmates in jail to maintain the social and patriarchal norms. Discussing classroom conversatons Hasan shares,

> “Girls usually sit together. They talk about studies. They discuss their actions and consequences. They give good advice to those who have lost their way to the wrong path, i.e., having a boyfriend. They try to advise them not to do anything wrong. Suppose, while coming [to school] she talks with men. If a classmate sees that, they will say why are you talking with stranger men in school uniform. They try to say that the guy is her friend, but we cannot trust that” (Hasan, 15, male, Muslim).

In the previous sections, I discussed the continuous surveillance of social bodies of knowledge such as family, school, and neighbours experienced by the girls. Since they can never know who is watching them, they internalise the gaze and self-regulate. Nonetheless, interview narratives of Hasan suggest the reach of disciplinary power, highlighting that young female people also keep each other in check, perpetuating the patriarchal forces to persist, as discussed by Foucault in his works (1975, 1980).

Regulating Career Aspirations

Pursuit of Validation

The interview narratives show that validation of family and society is fundamental to the female young people but this is not observed among the male participants. The 'ideal feminine' attribute of being obedient and listening to elders also translates into female participants' career aspirations (Salam et al. 2021). In some instances, the female participants appeared indecisive, confused, and hesitant. In contrast, the male participants were confident, sure, and vocal about their career aspirations without seeking their parents' permission and/or validation. This again confirms the argument that female bodies are discursively influenced to be more docile than male bodies (Bartky, 1988; McNay, 1992).

Mohua (15, female, Hindu), who wants to be a police officer, a job considered masculine within the Bangladeshi social discourses, shares, "I do not know how they [people] will react to it. There are many people who do not take it in a good way that women are wearing police uniforms like men". The conversation implies Mohua's indecisiveness and hesitance in terms of choosing her future career aspiration due to the need for validation by her disciplined mind. When asked about her parents' approval, Rahima answered, "I will listen to my family. They will only want well for me". Rahima is another example of a disciplined female who is self-regulated to follow her parents' instructions and stresses her parent's good intentions, ruling out all other possibilities (Duncan, 1994).

By contrast, when I asked a male participant about their future career aspirations, Farhan (15, male, Muslim) asserted straight-away, "I want to be a banker in future", and Belal (15, male, Muslim) confidently claimed, "My parents will be happy with whatever I want to do." In a way, it can be argued that the male young people are also docile as they do not transgress from the expected ideal male behaviour of being confident and sure. They do not seek validation from society and family like female young people, confirming previous research findings (Hasan et al., 2020; Nipu, 2020; Islam and Jirattikorn, 2023).

Nonetheless, few participant female young people were found to exercise agency. When asked if Runa had any role models, she replied, "I do not have anyone in mind whom I want to follow. I either want to join the Air Force or become a doctor. I want to be like myself." Runa is confident about what she wants and does not seek anyone's validation. This reflects that even within the restricting dominant social and patriarchal discourses, there are cleavages where alternative discourses may take place.

Becoming a Doctor: Discourse of Prestige

Even within such a patriarchal mandate, it can be seen that few parents continue their daughter's education. Discussing about parent’s motivation Jamal shares,

“The female friends are like, I have taken a science major, then I will be a doctor, nothing else. They [parents] only want their daughters to be doctors. If

she wants to be a doctor, then it is fine with them, but if she wants to be something else, they will not allow it".

When asked why you think they want to be doctors, Jamal explains,

"Being a doctor is a respected profession. Parents will then be able to brag about their daughters, that their daughter is a doctor. They will proudly tell everyone that my daughter is a doctor. But when their daughter shared their desire to study, they did not support her. Later if the girl becomes a doctor, engineer, or takes a good job or joins an educational institution with her own initiative and struggles without family support, then the family feels proud of their achievements. There is a girl in our area who is working now. But initially, she did not receive any support or encouragement [from her parents]" (Jamal, 15, male, Muslim).

As discussed in Chapter 3, in Bangladeshi society, medical doctor and engineering are two highly respectable professions associated with social prestige to the individual and their family. Since engineering is mainly considered a masculine profession, it is observed that female people who continue their education are primarily encouraged to be doctors (especially Gynaecologists). This can be argued to make the most economic and prestigious outcome of their parent's investment. Moreover, this finding confirms previous literature that found similar results with a significant preference for being a doctor. As Story et al. (2012) highlight, girls are encouraged to be gynaecologists as they are agents of accommodating the religious and cultural discourses of maintaining '*Purdah*' for patients and doctors rather than challenging it.

I Earn, I Decide: Discourse of Earning

Foucault (1978) looked at power as something dynamic and ever-shifting, something that resides within different discourses (see Chapter 2). Even though any one person may not be entitled to power per se, domination can exist within power relations, which may make the possibility of liberty extremely confined and limited (Foucault, 1984). The interview narratives show that within the household, men are positioned in a place of domination over female members by maintaining authority, for example, earning and providing for the family, taking all decisions within the household and allowing female members of the household to work outside or continue studies.

During the interview, Nisha (15, female, Hindu) explains, "There are many people in the society who do not let women work outside. They only allow women to work at home. Their husbands do not want their wives to work outside." Tonni (15, female, Hindu) also discusses, "In our family, women are not allowed to work outside. My father [household head] does not like women working outside. He says we men are working outside, why do you need to work outside." Tonni adds, "If men, after coming home, do not find the food ready or everything they need, they get angry and scream at their wives" Thus, men do their gender by conforming to the dominant social and patriarchal ideas of providing for their family and maintaining the power relations within the family where he enjoys a dominant position among the female members. This way, men maintain the enclosure of female household members within their private realm, which is fundamental to discipline. Islamic religious discourses are further used through manipulation to validate these social and patriarchal discourses (Patowary, 2019).

Furthermore, male earnings are an element that strengthens and perpetuates their dominance within the household. Feminist economists have identified the 'public' versus 'private' realms of women from the perspective of their paid (i.e., formal job) and unpaid (i.e., household work, children rearing) work as a source of exploitation and domination (Chant, 2010). Women's work is devalued due to male-centric discourses of the division of labour. Women's work is also invisible to the public, depriving them of the possibility to demand equal worth. Discussing invisibility of women's work Tonni discusses,

"Men work outside. Everyone can see them working. Women work within the house but is there anyone to see it? No, no one can see that. That is why men receive more respect" (Tonni, 15, female, Hindu).

Tonni's interview narratives show how girls/women's labour becomes insignificant because of being invisible and unquantifiable. This is another way society maintains the dominant discourses by keeping women in the private sphere.

Another way girls/women are disciplined is by regulating their education. Since education creates pathways to earn and disrupt the domination of men within

the household, men maintain their domination by regulating girls'/women's education.

Discussing spending on girl's education Mohua shares,

> "Most families discriminate between boys and girls. For example, if a boy wants money for college admission, parents would happily give it to them, but they do not give it much to girls. They ask the girls to do tuition or anything else to earn the money to pay the admission fee. They do not do this with boys. If a boy asks for money, then parents arrange the money even if they do not have it. There are many such discriminations" (Mohua, 15, female, Hindu).

Moreover, Faria shares,

> "Parents differentiate between boys and girls in terms of giving private tuition fees. They do not mind if they spend more on boys' tuition fees, but they will taunt girls that because of you, we have to spend so much money. We will marry you off […] they say things like that" (Faria, 15, female, Muslim).

Even though Foucault (1975,1981) was quite pessimistic regarding the margin of liberty for individuals and/or social groups under domination (for example, women), earning can create opportunities to expand these margins. Feminist economists evidence how earning has the potential to generate some liberty of decision-making within the household and agency (Kabeer, 2005, 2017); (Agarwal, 2020); (Jacobsen, 2020)). Describing a female neighbour with a formal job, Tonni (15, female, Hindu) shares,

> "The woman works outside and earns money. Our mothers do not work outside or earn money. So, they [women who work] have some power, right? That they are working outside and bringing money home".

The interview narrative suggests that bringing money home is associated with authority that strengthens and maintains the domination of an individual within the household. Men exercise this domination, arguing that they are the ones who bring money home and provide food, clothes, education, entertainment, and the cost of all basic and desired needs of the household members. They keep women within the private sphere of household boundaries to make their contribution to the household invisible to the public world and maintain their domination. What is invisible cannot be measured or quantified and thus can be under-valued.

However, when women earn and bring money home, the balance of power shifts, expanding the margins of women's liberty (Kabeer, 2012).

"Boys are Talented, and Girls are Hard-working"

During the interviews, it was apparent that, among the participants, girls were better-performing students in terms of academic grades. Most of the top five students in classes were female. This matches the national SSC and HSC (O-level and A-level equivalent) results, where girls outperform boys in passing rates and achieving the highest possible grade, GPA-5 (The Business Standard, 2022). However, most girls underestimated their self-worth, whereas boys were found to be confident and overestimated their self-worth regarding results.

Sima holds second place in her class based on academic performance. When asked how she would rate herself as a student, Sima answered,

> “How can I tell whether I am a good student or not [with a shy smile]. My teachers will be able to judge that. I used to be the first girl at the primary level. After moving to high school, I have become second” (Sima, 15, female, Hindu).

Sima's lack of confidence, even after holding second place in her class, is evident. Instead, she reflects on her failure, highlighting that her results have deteriorated and that she has underappreciated her talent and effort. This is another example of young female people internalising the public knowledge of female inferiority as their private quality. While Sima's stance may also be suggested as humbleness, this humbleness is not observed among the male participants.

Schools and teachers, who are, according to Foucault (1975), agents of the body of knowledge, play a vital role in maintaining the notion that female pupils are inferior to male pupils. Naima (15, female, Muslim) says, "I have heard boys have sharper brains than girls. They have a very good memory, but they do not utilise it." She further shares that her Maths and English teacher encourages male pupils, saying, "You boys have even sharper brains than girls, but still you do not want to study. If you study even a little bit more, you will do way better than girls”.

This construction of male pupils as inherently talented by default of being male is also observed to be internalised among the male pupils. Farhan shares,

> “Boys are always busy being naughty. They do not study. Girls study all the time. So, they do better. Boys do well if they study. But they do not want to study, that's the problem. They are more inclined to play sports. Wherever there are sports, boys are there. They do not like to study” (Farhan, 15, male, Muslim).

When asked how he thinks he would do if he were a girl, Farhan answers, “I would have been a lot better in my studies, If I had to stay at home all day. I would have just eaten and studied” (Farhan, 15, male, Muslim).

The typical notion that 'boys are talented, and girls are hardworking' is imprinted all over the conversations by male and female participants. Boys believe girls do better than them only because boys play and do not study, which holds the underlying suggestion that they would have obviously done better if they had studied. After all, their teachers confirmed they were the talented ones. Farhan's speech also sheds light on his ignorance of the additional burden girls experience of doing household chores and rearing younger siblings, which boys/men rarely engage in Bangladesh. This confirms the previous findings by Akter et al. (2021), who found persistent socio-cultural discourses forwarding the idea that boys are better at maths, a prestigious subject than girls because they are naturally talented.

When asked Belal, who holds second place in his class, how he sees himself as a student in terms of attainment, he answers,

> “What can I say.. I think I am better than the girls in my class. I am better than them. How far better, that I do not know. But I believe if I continue to study, I will be able to do something in life. I have that belief in myself”

When asked why he thinks that way even though a girl holds the first position in his class, he answers,

> “Yes, well you can say it was an accident. There is a tendency of teachers, if the student goes to them for private tuition, they give those students more marks”(Belal, 15, male, Muslim).

Belal's narrative is a classic reflection of the instilled idea that male pupils are better than girls. Boys grow up absorbing and internalising this knowledge, leading to doing their gender well by being confident and optimistic about future possibilities (Kalia and Sentance, 2018; Francis, 2013). Even though Belal was not asked about his position in terms of the girls, he responded by undermining the girls struggling to accept his second position since it hurts his male superiority (Hasan et al., 2018). Here, Belal exhibits the behaviour endorsed by discourses of hegemonic masculinities within Bangladeshi society discussed in literature exploring gender issues in Bangladesh (Anwary, 2015; Fattah and Camellia, 2020) (see Chapter 3). The interview narrative also shows how some male pupils play the blame game to justify their failure to be superior, as boys'/men's inferiority is impossible within the patriarchal discourses in Bangladesh.

Regulating Career Choices

Similar to regulating female pupils' education and career aspirations, their career choices are also regulated. The interview narratives show that very few girls get to study subjects and/or choose a profession they love. The career choices for female pupils are restrained by family, religion, culture, and patriarchal discourses within Bangladeshi society (Islam et al., 2021).

Discussing girl's career struggles Jamal shares,

> "It is harder for girls. It is the tradition. No one person can change it. Girls suffer for this. A rule, I am a girl, so I must follow it- this is how it has become. Yes, this is why girls are behind in all aspects. I agree with that. There are girls in our class who are very good in studies, brilliant, but may be their families do not want them to continue their studies […] saying they would marry them off. What would you do studying? You are a girl. They say what would you do working. Not many people allow them to aspire, neither at their own home nor at their in-laws. That's why many girls lose interest in aspiring for a career. It is very unfair. If you do not let them work, where will girls find motivation to study?"(Jamal, 15, male, Muslim).

Jamal's narrative and discussion in the previous section underscore how female young people's desire for a career and career aspirations are disciplined in different stages. First, since birth, they are taught they are inferior in terms of talent and competency (see previous section). Then, they are constantly

reminded that education is pointless for them as their ultimate purpose is to get married and raise children; therefore, spending money on their education is only a waste. Moreover, even if their parents are generous enough to bear the cost of their education and provide them with an education, there is no guarantee that their spouse or in-laws will let them work in the future. Even if she survives all these stages, her career must be one considered suitable for a woman as her primary duty is to take care of the household and rear children (see previous section). Therefore, very few parents embark on this journey fraught with the peril of having a career for their daughters.

When asked why do you think parents act that way with their daughters, Jamal explains,

> "For some reason, they [parents] cannot have faith in their daughters. What if she cannot do well or get a job? There is a risk factor. Many girls cannot attain their aspirations because of this initial lack of support during this time. Their parents say no, and they do not even try. If parents provided some support during this stage, girls would have been able to achieve their aspirations" (Jamal, 15, male, Muslim).

The interview narrative highlights how parents struggle to have the faith and patience to allow their daughters a chance to aspire and make a career. It is also striking as Jamal underscores how many girls give up and do not even try to make alternative discourses of having a career possible due to the dominant patriarchal discourses.

Discipline through Deceit?

Discipline can also be deceitful. When asked about Tonni's future career aspirations, she mentions, "Previously, my dream was to become a police officer. Now, I am a commerce major. Commerce major students cannot become a Police officer". When asked, 'who said that?', Tonni mentions that her neighbours and village people say that. She further adds,

> "My brother says police officers have to work very hard. You will not be able to tolerate it. So, you do not need to become a police officer[…] My brother says, you do not need to work. You are our only sister. You stay at home" (Tonni, 15, female, Hindu).

Here, Tonni's brother internalises the social discourse of male dominance over the female body in maintaining her private boundaries, disguising it in the discourse of brotherly love for the younger and only sister. After doing a little research, I found out that commerce major students can indeed join the Police force in Bangladesh. Nonetheless, socio-cultural discourses of Bangladesh identify it as a male job, and very few families encourage their daughters to join the police force. While it can simply be access to lack of information among the village people, it is also possible that Tonni is being misinformed about commerce major students not being able to join the Police force as a strategy to demotivate her to join a male job. Her family being against her choice adds further weight to the argument. It may be another example of family and neighbours endorsing the dominant social discourses believing that they are doing the right thing by keeping her away from a masculine profession.

"What Would People Say?": Disciplining through Constant Surveillance

The analysed findings show that 'What would people say?' is a dominant discourse in shaping young people's conceptions and actions. The constant reminder of what people may say/think may work as a panopticon to keep young people's minds and actions in check (Foucault, 1975). The perpetual possibility of being seen by people and they might spread bad rumours about them makes them self-regulate.

Discussing Faria's experience, she shares,

> "Many girls give up playing, thinking people can make comments. They keep sitting at home. If friends request a lot, they come out and chat with them together. There are many such examples" (Faria, 15, female, Muslim).

The interview narratives show how the participant girls constantly think about what would people think, which influences their conceptions and actions, for example, playing outside or being visible in public spaces. It also shows how girls self-regulate their desires to play and stop going outside due to such constant surveillance, trying to make themselves invisible from the public sphere.

When I asked Mohua about it, she replied,

“Everyone thinks about it. Because girls go through a lot of physical changes at this age [during puberty], some get bulkier. So, if they play and family or people in society notice that [their body], it does not look good. Not everyone takes sports or playing as a good thing. And it mainly impacts the girls. Boys do not need to bother” (Mohua, 15, female, Hindu).

The constant surveillance of people maintaining the dominant socio-cultural knowledge of female boundaries goes deeper than apparent. With age, the boundaries of female movement start to shrink. Discourses of religion and culture intensify these boundaries. As discussed in an earlier section, the institution of '*Purdah*' limits Muslim girls/women's boundaries even further than girls/women of other religions. While talking to Rahima (15, female, Muslim) about sports, she mentioned, "I used to love playing when I was younger. I do not play anymore." When asked why, she said, "The study pressure grew with class and getting older, so, I stopped playing." I asked her about her age when she stopped playing outside. She said, "[I was] probably ten years old." She also stressed that she faced no pressure from family or neighbours to stop playing outside. From an understanding of the education system in Bangladesh, at the age of ten, one can hardly have so much study pressure that may require one to stop playing. Instead, Rahima's interview conversation reflects an internalisation of the responsibility to maintain the socially prescribed rule to stop playing sports as they reach a certain age (Duncan, 1994).

Social and patriarchal discourses work in subtle ways. Such discourses make it the private goal of the female young people. However, if coercing does not work, and the female young people try to subvert the dominant ideas of giving up playing sports, they are inflicted with direct intervention by neighbours and/or family members. Mohua (15, female, Hindu) shares if they play outside, neighbours say, "You are such a big girl now. How can you play? [...] You guys have played plenty all these years. Now stop this nonsense."

Discussing about neighbour’s reaction Raima also shares,

“When I progressed to class 8 [age 13], people [female neighbours] used to say, you have grown up now. You are not a young girl anymore. You could have done anything earlier, but not anymore. Now you have to be attentive to [household] work and studies. You will not be able to play like before, and cannot talk with boys. You have to change everything” (Raima, 15, female, Muslim).

The interview narratives show how 'what would people think' constantly works as a surveillance, disciplining their conceptions, behaviour, and actions among both girls and boys. It is apparent that the young people are under constant surveillance in several stages by a variety of actors. They are under constant surveillance at home by their families, primarily female members, as they stay at home. Neighbours further this chain of surveillance and then it is maintained by the school. Most often, for female young people, this surveillance is exerted by other female members (i.e., peers and neighbours), which is also confirmed in the research by Fattah and Camellia (2020), Ali (2012), and Hussein (2017) discussed in Chapter 3. Therefore, some women play a significant role in maintaining and perpetuating the dominant social discourses.

Farhan, who is a male, shares another example of constant surveillance that discipline young people.

> “We.. see girls like our sisters. We used to go to school together with girls, but we never talked. We used to go in one group and they another. If we talked with the girls on our way to school people would think otherwise. That is why we never talked. After reaching school, if I had anything to ask regarding studies, I used to ask them. Otherwise, I would not talk with girls that much. But we used to go to school and return together” (Farhan, 15, male, Muslim).

He further shares,

> “They [people] tell their [girls'] parents, I saw your daughter talking with a boy today. She was walking with a boy I saw. However, they do not realise that we are walking with the girls to guide and protect them. If other unruly boys disturb who do not study at the school, we are there for the girls. We restrain the boys as the girl's guardians that they do not understand. They only mind and take it in a bad way”(Farhan, 15, male, Muslim).

The conversation with Farhan reflects a few things. First, society instils the idea from an early age that boys and girls are different. Moreover, it teaches the idea of classmates as brothers and sisters (Kamruzzaman et al., 2021) to restrict them from becoming romantically inclined toward each other. They grow up with the idea that it is a sin, a bad thing to mix. Moreover, from an early age, the children are taught that boys are the protector of girls/women and girls/women need to be protected as they are weak and inferior, which forwards the discourse of feminine vulnerability discussed in Chapter 3.

Nonetheless, even within such constant surveillance and limited resources, girls may still be found to exercise agency sometimes by resisting the dominant discourses, which I discuss in the next chapter. Nonetheless, this comes at the cost of other women's (i.e., their mothers) failure to maintain the dominant discourses that lead to the mothers being criticised and disgraced in society.

Agent of Empowerment or Patriarchy?

Women working as active actors in perpetuating patriarchal discourses has been well documented by scholars exploring feminist issues (see Fattah and Camellia, (2020); Hossain (2022); Hoq (2019)). Even though some girls and women are found to subvert and/or negotiate dominant social and religious discourses, this is not observed widely in Bangladesh. In my research, through the interview conversations, I found conflicting views shared by a female participant that reflect multiple subjectivities (see Chapter 2) where girls negotiate their positions and opportunities; however, they perpetuate patriarchal norms for older generation women.

Tonni is an example of such disciplinary manifestation where she has successfully subverted some levels of disciplinary influence but has not been able to overcome it entirely, highlighting the persistent nature of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1975). When I asked Tonni (15, female, Hindu).about her future career aspirations, she responded, "I feel, I want to be a police officer. I want to go to different countries. I will make new friends there. That is it". She further shares how her mother encourages her to become independent and have a career, saying,

“When anyone is sick at home, we go to the hospital. My mother sees female doctors […] female police officers on the road. She says, "Didn't you see the doctor [female] at the hospital? Be like her or become like the female police officer we saw on our way home” (Tonni, 15, female, Hindu).

Sima also discusses how the female young people help each other learn lessons so they can all do better, showing solidarity among female young people.

“We talk about studies, especially when someone does not understand a topic.

> We discuss it with each other and try to explain the topic. This way we help each other with studies. We also discuss what we aspire to be in future. Some want to be a doctor, others may be a police officer. We have many different aspirations" (Sima, 14, female, Hindu).

However, when Tonni was asked about women in her family working outside, she affirms, "In our family, our mothers are not allowed to work. This does not happen in our family". When asked why not, Tonni explains,

> "It is not that it is bad. But why would our mothers work outside? They would take care of the home. For women, working at home is more than enough […] do they need to work outside? In our family, we have grown up. Now, if our mother works outside, would it look good? That is what our father says that. But we are studying. So, we will work"(Tonni, 15, female, Hindu).

The conversation reflects the complex hierarchical dynamics between different generations of women. Tonni wants to finish her education and become a police officer. Nonetheless, she perpetuates patriarchal discourses like her father (and men in her family), stressing that her mother and aunts do not need to work, as taking care of the household is their primary duty. Moreover, she asserts that it is all right for her sisters, female cousins, and herself to work because they are getting a formal education, suggesting, to some extent, a position of superiority over their mothers due to having the advantage of acquiring formal education. It legitimises working outside for them and making a career, but not for their mothers.

From the conversation, it can be argued that becoming educated does not necessarily ensure one woman supports another to exercise their agency. This confirms the feminist notion that all girls/women are not a homogenous group with the same collective interests and goals (Zucker, 2004). It also confirms individuals' multiple subjectivities across different discourses (see Chapter 2). A girl/woman may resist the dominant patriarchal discourses to exercise her own agency to meet her desire but at the same time perpetuate the same patriarchal discourses subverted by her through exercising them on other women. This further confirms that within the same discourses, some girls/women may have more power to negotiate and/or subvert dominant discourses, and others less (Foucault, 1980). In this instance, the net-like power suggested by Foucault (1980) that constantly moves through discourses comes with a condition of formal education that gives Tonni the leverage to negotiate her position better.

Tonni negotiates the power relations within the discourses she is located for her own career aspirations. However, it remains unchanged for other women who fail to negotiate their position within the same discourses.

The Spectacle of Child Marriage: The Ultimate Punishment

Foucault (1975) discussed the spectacle of the scaffold as a ceremonial display of sovereign power and a way of establishing legitimacy. He suggested that such a display of power is archaic and that power has taken a more efficient approach in the form of discipline in modern times. However, I argue that such display of punishment in case of disobedience is still observed in the form of forced child marriage in Bangladeshi society. In Bangladesh, minor girls are married off for not being the "ideal Bangladeshi woman" as a punishment and a spectacle is created to remind other girls to self-regulate and conform to societal norms.

I pointed out earlier how Foucault sees schools as a body of knowledge that forwards powerful knowledge in society that is considered correct and acceptable (Foucault, 1975). Teachers are the agents of schools that instil that knowledge in their pupils.

Hasan shares about 'girls who are different',

> "There are many girls who are different [suggesting who talk with boys]. Parents marry off those girls early. Teachers worry that a life would be wasted [due to early marriage]. So, they ask us to be careful [not to engage in romantic relationships]" (Hasan, 15, male, Muslim).

Nisha mentions,

> "There are a few girls who are a bit different in attitude. Their parents marry them off early so that they cannot do anything to hurt the honour of their family. So, teachers ask girls to be careful and not do any such things that parents may marry them off" (Nisha, 15, female, Hindu).

The interview narratives reflect teachers' significant roles in maintaining the social order. They instil powerful social knowledge and continuously remind them of the horrible consequences for the 'deviants' to protect them from transgression. They only forward the public notion of 'ideal femininity and masculinity' (see chapter 3) wrapped in the cover as young people's interest.

Different disciplinary techniques are imposed on girls/women who fail to conform to the dominant social and patriarchal discourses of 'ideal femininity'. Moreover, they are punished in several stages. Firstly, they are labelled as a 'loose girl/woman' by the society. Then, they are marked as a bad influence and blamed for ruining their family's honour. The society also endorses that other girls who want to maintain their reputation of being ideal girls/women must avoid them. This way, society punishes the 'loose girls/women' through isolation. Nisha (15, female, Hindu) mentions, "Those girls [who were married off early] were a bit different in nature. I did not know them personally", stressing that she does not mix with them. Female participants were uncomfortable and cautious throughout the interviews while talking about these 'different girls'. Once labelled by society, these girls are punished by their families through early marriage with a spectacle to alert other girls. Tonni (15, female, Hindu) mentions, "In our class, girls who are a bit naughty, their parents marry them off." When asked what they mean by 'naughty', Nisha explains [with a shy smile as she thinks she is talking about something inappropriate],

> “They used to talk with boys [indicating a flirtatious relationship], and boys also used to mix with them. They talk with boys or try to get involved romantically, that's why. So, parents were bound to marry them off to protect their honour in the society” (Nisha, 15, female, Hindu).

Here, Tonni and Nisha exhibit another example of girls/women internalising the socially accepted feminine ideals and being responsibilised for maintaining them through self-regulation (Rottenberg, 2014). They stress the fault of 'those girls' for not maintaining proper behaviour prescribed by society. The interview narratives also highlight the construction of 'bad girls' and/or 'girls that are different' as the ones who talk with boys and mix with them. Nisha also suggests that the punishment was just and necessary, and the parents were 'forced' to take this action to maintain their honour in society.

This scenario exhibits how society disciplines female behaviour and conducts it at different stages, from an early age through its institutions. Moreover, punish them if they fail to conform to the dominant social norms, which confirms findings in previous literature (Streathfield, 2015; Asadullah, 2021; Psaki et al., 2021). The spectacle of child marriage is a significant way of disciplining and punishing female young people. It achieves a dual goal, first, it punishes the

transgressed girls who failed to maintain their 'ideal femininity', and second, it exhibits an example to other girls of the potential consequences in case of transgression from the attributes of being an obedient 'good girl' leading them to self-regulate. Family, school, and teachers play a significant role in enforcing these regulations.

Conclusion

In this first empirical chapter, I argued that to understand how the discourses of gender and career aspirations are shaped, it is essential to understand the ways socio-patriarchal discourses control, dominate, and subjugate both female and male young people through discipline. With that objective in mind, I have utilised poststructuralist feminist theories inspired by the work of Foucault (discussed in Chapter 2) in combination with feminist public versus private ideas to analyse and discuss the findings. Building on research evidence, in the first part of the chapter, I discussed how female and male young people are disciplined through techniques of enclosure, regulating body, mind, and desire; moreover, regulation of career aspirations and career choices through constant surveillance. Moreover, I discuss how, through the spectacle of child marriage, society achieves a dual goal of punishing the transgressed 'girls' and disciplining the spectator girls to maintain their 'ideal femininity'. However, Foucault (1978, p.95) suggests, "Where there is power, there is resistance". In the next chapter, I highlight how young people resist their subjugated positions and make space for alternative discourses of gender and career aspirations.

Chapter- 7

Power, Strategy, and Resistance: Creating Space for Alternative Discourses

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the different ways in which female and male young people are disciplined through socio-patriarchal and religious discourses. As a result of such apparent discriminatory discourses, girls/women in developing countries like Bangladesh are often seen as powerless in some international discourses, and their perspectives are ignored (UNICEF, 2016; IRC, 2023; Hamilton et al., 2021) (See chapter 3). However, in this second theoretically informed data analysis chapter, wearing a Foucauldian hat with a feminist lens, I contend that female young people may be powerless in certain discourses but they may exercise power in others.

Analysing the interview data, I find that the young people draw knowledge of gender equality and girls'/women's equal rights from sources available to them. They utilise these knowledge to exercise agency through resistance, negotiations, and sometimes even subversion to create alternative discourses. Even though discourses are continuously constructed and re-constructed, I highlight through the findings that not all alternative discourses enhance the agency of girls/women. Finally, I discuss the intra-generational sisterhood and solidarity between girls and boys, which strongly emerges from the findings.

Where there is Power, there is Resistance

It is fundamental to Foucault's (1980) arguments that there is no power that is total. Instead, it is everywhere, always moving and shifting. Therefore, wherever there is normalisation of ideas such as girls/women being inferior and domination to perpetuate that idea, there is resistance. The resistance may be fragmented but numerous (Foucault, 1998). In the following sections, I discuss

how the participant female young people resist dominant discourses and negotiate their positions, drawing knowledge from available sources to make alternative discourses possible across three themes.

Theme 1: Exercising Agency

Knowledge is Power

Foucault (1975) states, "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (Interview, Prison Talk, pp. 51-52). Arguably, access to knowledge may create pockets of resistance. However, some feminist scholars argue that girls'/women's access to knowledge is restricted, and it is kept exclusive to boys/men to maintain girls/women's subordination (Spain 1992, 2014). As the participants of my research engaged in a gender-sensitive programme provided by CMMS (see chapter 5), the interview findings suggest that the knowledge of equal rights and gender equality endorsed by the programme worked as a significant source of legitimate knowledge for these young people. The programme was supported by the school authorities and facilitated by the teachers, which also afforded the proposed knowledge a certain level of legitimacy. The interview narratives strongly reflect how enhanced knowledge of female young people of available resources through the gender-sensitive programme may create possibilities of resistance. The female participants consistently shared ways in which the gender-sensitive programme increased their knowledge of rights and gender equality.

Talking about the gender-sensitive programme Faria, says the following.

> “When we started doing the diary [Diary of the Brave] at first, I used to think, where? I do not see any such difference between boys and girls. But when we started doing the exercises [in the diary], I realised that in most families, things like favouring boys over girls, then seeing girls as inferior to boys exist. Many of my friends argue, so what if he [her brother] is a boy, I am more inclined toward studies than him. He does not even want to continue his education; plays outside all day. Still, I am the one who is not allowed to continue school. My friends talk like this” (Faria, 15, female, Muslim).

Moreover, Raima said,

> "During the programme, I tried to think about our rights. What are our rights, what do we need to do in our daily life? For example, we need to follow a routine and help our parents. We need to eat nutritional food. Now at home if anyone says boys have more rights, then I tell my mother, why they would have more rights. Boys and girls are all equal. We can do everything like boys. But Mother says it cannot be that way in our society. Girls cannot do what boys do" (Raima, 15, female, Muslim).

The discriminatory effects of gender inequality are plainly visible in the narratives of Raima and Faria. Nonetheless, these also exhibit the power of the knowledge provided by the gender-sensitive programme to make the female young people aware of the day-to-day discrimination they experience. As feminist scholars argue, sometimes girls/women are so submerged in discriminatory discourses that they fail to identify it (Kabeer, 2005). The knowledge gives the female young people the voice to protest against inequality and exercise agency. However, women perpetuating patriarchy discussed in the previous chapter is also visible here. As Raima's mother stresses, "girls cannot do what boys do". Nonetheless, the findings underscore the power of knowledge coming from educational institutions and teachers that allows girls to resist inequality. Similar findings of the positive effects of educating girls and making them aware of their rights are shared by Somani (2017) based on research in Mombasa, Kenya.

Safia also shares gaining knowledge on child marriage and its harmful effects,

> "I did not know about child marriage that well. That getting married before the age of 18 is child marriage. Many girls were married off during the [COVID-19] lockdown. We learned about the bad effects caused by child marriage, for example, it can harm the girl, put the newborn at risk, and risk the life of both young mother and child from Brave Men Campaign. I also learned about our rights" (Safia, 15, female, Muslim).

The interview narratives also show how access to knowledge related to gender-equality in health and safety can make girls more aware of their rights to protect their body and health. It allows them to negotiate their right to health safety and to protect themselves from the harms of child marriage.

Resistance through Disapproval: Changing the Narrative of Self-worth

The analysed findings show an uncompromising assertion of equal worth among all female participants. During the interview, when I asked the participants about opportunities and treatment toward girls and boys, all female participants maintained that girls and boys are equal and shared a strong stance against discrimination based on sex/gender. When asked about female and male students' behaviour and attitude, Rahima (15, female, Muslim) stressed, "Some are louder than others. A difference between boys and girls is not seen. Everyone is equal."

Even though the question was not about equality *per se*, by repeating the equal worth of girls again and again, it was as if the girls were trying to change the narrative and establish a new 'regimes of truth'. While discussing the experiences of being a student and any difference in experience between female and male students, rather than giving an answer, Sima (15, female, Hindu) expressed her protest by throwing back a question, "Why should there be any difference? As male students want to learn, female students want to learn as well. Both should have the same opportunity to learn. Boys should get it, so do girls." She established again that girls and boys deserve the same opportunities and rights. Nonetheless, when asked, "But in reality, do all students get the same opportunity to learn or get an education?" Sima (15, female, Hindu) then came back to reality and answered, "That all do not get. Many students do not get the same opportunity". Explaining further, she added,

> "At the primary level, education is free, so they [parents] do not have to pay anything. But at a higher level a time comes when the fees increase. Then, many parents wonder why should I pay so much to send daughters to school. For example, many girls have been married off in my class. Many girls were married off in class 6 or class 8 [secondary school]. They have to move to their husband's homes after marriage. Will they get the opportunity to study there? They will not" (Sima, 15, female, Hindu).

A strong assertion of the equal worth of girls is starkly visible across the interview narratives. Some critical scholars have argued such behaviour by girls/women is a form of denial, arguing that continuous living within the dominant socio-patriarchal discourses is so naturalised that it makes

girls/women unable to identify the unequal and discriminatory treatment (Kabeer, 2005). Moreover, Napiar et al. (2020), testing the denial versus acknowledgement of gender discrimination hypothesis, argue that gender discrimination is predominantly denied as it reflects the social system as fair. They contend that denial is a coping mechanism for women to reap the benefits of working with men and make their space within a male-dominated society.

However, I argue that the female participants in my research do not deny but rather resist the unequal worth bestowed upon them by the discriminatory social and patriarchal system through constant disapproval. Throughout the interviews, the female young participants disapproved of the differences between girls and boys in terms of educational opportunities and career aspirations. Through examples, they consistently underscored the unequal share of household work, freedom of movement, and access to opportunities for education and career aspirations. They shared their protest against discrimination and questioned the social system. Instead of denying the unequal share of responsibility and opportunities to support boys to get their approval, as suggested in Derks et al., (2016), they disapprove of the unequal standing of girls and boys. Nonetheless, as I pointed out in the methodology chapter (see chapter 4), my research participants engaged in a gender-sensitive programme. Therefore, they may have had more agency in genera by drawing ideas from the programme than those without access to that programme.

Creating Hidden Spaces: Negotiating Space through Sports

In the previous chapter, I discussed how space is strictly demarcated for girls/women as a discipline mechanism. The public/private divide is well documented in feminist scholarship (Massey, 1996; Gavison, 2017; Adapa and Sheridan, 2017). The public/private divide suggests that women's space within the household sphere and men's space in the public domain are also visible in sports (Scraton and Flintoff, 2002; Tolvhed, 2013). Much speculation and discussion around the 'body' of sportswomen is also observed as Butler (1998) identifies sport as one of the most dramatic ways in which contradictory gender ideals are placed and negotiated in the public sphere. Sports are also a powerful discourse that influences how individuals express their gender (Messner, 2011).

When asked about sports, boys primarily mentioned playing football, cricket, *'Kabadi'*[19], and other culturally considered masculine sports (Kidd, 2013). Moreover, most male participants played in the public realm, such as nearby fields. Jamal (15, male) shares, "We [boys] play cricket and football. Maybe we used to play many things in childhood, but now we stick to cricket or football." Through these masculine sports, the male young people do their gender and perform masculinity. By playing the sports that are considered 'male sports', they perform their gender correctly, which provides them with social validation of being boys/men (Francis, 2002). However, when asked, most of the female participants mentioned giving up playing as they are now "grownups", and people may say bad things if they are seen playing. I discussed this mechanism of disciplining young girls in the previous chapter (see Chapter 6). Faria (15, female, Muslim) said, "We sing, recite poems [..] things like that. Then we sit together and chat […] then play together while sitting". When asked Sima (14, female, Hindu), about girls stopping to play after a certain age, she mentions, "Oh no! Why would they stop! Don't they feel like playing? As young children love to play these games, older children like to play them as well." However, when asked if she knows any girl who plays at her age, she confusingly says, "I do not really know. I have never seen any girl playing after they started High School". Jamal (15, male, Muslim), who is a male participant, mentions, "Girls are not allowed to play in the fields. When asked why to another participant, Samiul said,

> "They play in front of their house [yard] because boys play there [in the field]. If girls play there as well, they may bump into boys. I mean boys usually play in the field […] so why would they [girls] go there to play? [showing surprised]" (Samiul,15, male, Muslim).

The participants clearly and frequently refer to the strictly divided space between male and female young people based on their sex/gender (Nanayakkara, 2012). Samiul even underscores the fact that the fields in the public domain belong to them, the boys/men. He even became surprised for being asked such an obvious question. Faria and Sima's narratives also highlight how the sphere of spatial movement becomes more restricted with age for girls. Nonetheless, my research findings confirm the feminist argument about the

[19] Kabadi is a team sport, played between two teams. It is the national sport of Bangladesh.

continuous construction and reconstruction of space through negotiation (Butler, 1990; Massey, 1996; Adapa and Sheridan, 2017). Even within Bangladesh's social and patriarchal discourses, negotiation and resistance can be observed.

When asked about playing sports, Tonni said, "We play at home. I play cricket. Then I play '*Cork'* [Badminton] and '*Ha Du Du'*[20]. There are many girls in our neighbourhood around us. We play together in our '*আঙ্গিনা*' (yard)." She continues,

> "Now we have grown up. There are people around who can see us. That is why my mother asks me not to play. I understand that. I tell mother that we are playing within the boundary, and no one can see us" (Tonni, 15, female, Hindu).

'*আঙ্গিনা*' is the front yard of a house, usually with a boundary of trees, making it hidden from the passers-by. Tonni shares how she and her female friends love to play *'Ha Du Du'* and cricket. These sports require a lot of physical stamina and are considered male sports within Bangladeshi social discourses. She also shares how their innocent desire to play is constrained by what people may say, a constant surveillance restricting their space within the premise. Nonetheless, they also discuss how they negotiate their space by creating "hidden spaces" even after existing within these dominant discourses of gendered restrictions. Shamsuddin (2015) discusses similar findings, arguing a hierarchal public space for women in sports in Bangladesh, calling it a 'gendered apartheid' of public space restricting gender equality. Some scholars argue in favour of such segregation by seeing it as a compromise for expanding women's opportunities in sports without being objectified and hurting the dominant socio-religious discourses. Others mark such segregation itself as a form of sexualisation and objectification of women's bodies (Afzali and Hoodfar, 2015).

[20] A native Bangladeshi sports considered suitable for boys/men.

Theme 2: Alternative Discourses

Prestige and the 'Educated Bride'

The disciplining techniques I discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 6 may seem pervasive, and they are. Nonetheless, the interview conversations also indicate that alternative discourses are slowly emerging in girls'/women's higher education. But, I argue that all emerging alternative discourses may not be empowering for girls'/women's agency. In Bangladesh, the drop-out rate at the secondary school level is 40.29%. Even among the remaining students who continue to higher education (i.e., university college and university level), only 36.30% are female (BANBEIS, 2021). This reflects the absence of thousands of girls who do not get the chance to graduate.

When asked about people's perspectives toward female education, Jamal shares,

> "There are many girls who have completed graduation, but they are sitting at home. This has two implications. One is that the next generations raised by these girls will be educated as well. The bride will raise the children of their [in-laws] sons, so [now] they want the bride to be educated [at least a university graduate]. Another is that they [girls' family] would be able to tell the groom that the potential bride is a graduate" (Jamal,15, male, Muslim).

The interview narrative shows how the motivation of educating girls is to prepare them as potential brides, as 'being a graduate' brings prestige for both the bride's and groom's family. It also creates value for the in-law's family by supporting the education of the next generation of children. Nonetheless, it can hardly be identified as enhancing any agency for the girls/women.

Discussing the choice of profession, Jamal states,

> "They [in-laws' family] may say you are educated, you studied in school, you can probably give private tuition at home. Some people do not want their daughter-in-law to go outside and work in an organisation. Some may want to be a teacher [..]in that case, they [in-laws' family] allow her to be a teacher. However, they do not let her work in a hotel or an NGO [that involves mixing with all kinds of people]. That is not seen well" (Jamal,15, male, Muslim).

Jamal's narratives highlight how taking up a profession and choosing a profession strongly depend on the social values endorsed by the in-laws family.

The opportunities related to choosing a profession are a lot more influenced by society's perception of it rather than what the girls aspire to.

When asked about his sister's education, Jamal shares that they are a poor family, and, after the COVID-19 pandemic, his family can only send one of them to school. So, he may drop- out of school and work to support his family. He stresses that it is essential for his sister to complete her education as it is now crucial for girls to get a certain level of education to get a suitable (i.e., qualified, well-off) husband. This is a change which was not observed in earlier studies (Shahidul, 2013; Shahidul and Karim, 2015; Sarker et al., 2019)

Jamal further shares his views regarding the expected qualification of potential brides,

> “It depends on the groom's qualifications. The groom looks for qualities in the potential bride according to his own credentials. The groom must first think about his qualities to judge the potential bride. Still, they want an educated girl as a bride. Usually now families want brides to be at least educated to a certain extent. At least, HSC passed or is a university graduate. Nowadays, most people look for somewhat educated girls for marriage” (Jamal,15, male, Muslim).

Jamal's interview narrative, which is related to the expected qualifications of a bride, shows how a potential bride's desired level of education is not fixed. Instead, it is dependent on the groom's qualifications as socially it is expected to be lower than the groom's. The interview narratives confirm how the meaning of an "educated bride" is fluid and contingent to a particular historical time and space (Foucault, 1978; Butler, 1990). With the influence of international discourses, an educated bride (as pointed out by Jamal) in Bangladesh now refers to a girl with an HSC (equivalent to A-level) or a university graduate. This is also heavily motivated by the discourse of prestige that I discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The interview narratives also indirectly suggest the significance of qualification hierarchy between the bride and groom as a mechanism to maintain male superiority. According to the socio-cultural discourses in Bangladesh, it is vital that the bride, even though educated, is less educated and earns less salary than the groom. As Ackerson et al., (2008) found in their research, women with higher

qualifications than their husbands are more prone to violence against women. The girl's family, her in-law's family, and society all are led by different motives to encourage female education. However, neither the girl's family nor her in-law's family or the society wants girls to be educated and have a career to ensure their happiness and empowerment (Nazmunnesa, 2007).

The girl's family wants her to complete her education so that they can present her as an eligible potential bride who can educate the future generations of the groom. This is significant because families in Bangladesh are primarily patrilineal, meaning men continue the family lineage. By contrast, women leave their families to become a part of their husband's lineage by forwarding it further (Shahidul, 2012). The groom's family, motivated by the discourse of prestige, wants the bride to be educated so that they can brag about their daughter-in-law's qualifications to everyone as she can take care of the household and raise educated children (Hossain, 2016). There exists an economic factor as well. With the increasing cost of living, modernisation, and neoliberalism, grooms realise that marrying a homemaker only increases a mouth to feed and brings no economic benefit. It is only efficient to marry an educated bride, who is educated but less educated than the groom. This way it ensures girls'/women's inferior position set against their husbands within the family along with making a monetary contribution to the family (Yasmin, 2007; Banks, 2013) that Banerji (2016) calls 'patriarchal neoliberalism'.

Efficient Use of Resources

A neoliberal self, utilising available resources calculatedly to achieve their desired education outcome and career aspirations, is observed among the female participants of this study. When asked what will happen if their parents do not allow them to pursue higher education and/or their aspired career, Safia argued,

> "Then I will explain to my family members, then I will do what I want to do. I will explain to everyone that I want to be a doctor; I want to help poor people in need. I want to take care of them. If they still do not agree I will request my teachers to explain it to my parents" (Safia,15, female, Muslim).

Runa (15, female, Hindu) was also found asking her classmate, who was married off before becoming an adult, why she did not inform the teachers or call the government hotline number to seek help and stop the wedding.

The neoliberal entrepreneurial self meticulously sorts the available resources at their disposal and makes efficient use of them to achieve their desired educational and career aspirational outcome, which creates neoliberal subjectivity that is quite evident among the participant female young people. They not only use their resources calculatedly but also make their peers aware of the available resources (that is, support from teachers, government hotline to stop child marriage) and encourage them to use them efficiently.

While discussing unequal share of household work and allocated time for studies among male and female young people, another example of making efficient use of resources came up by a male participant. Hasan says,

> “Suppose [...] there is a gap between classes, sometimes few girls play and get mischievous with friends. But the girls who are good students, they keep studying their books, do maths practice or research. Suppose how an English sentence has been formed, discuss with other good students. Boys do not do these things. Most often they play around” (Hasan, 15, male, Muslim).

Literature findings within the international development discourses show that women are more efficient and responsible in using resources to improve their family's well-being and financial condition sometimes suggested as 'smarter economics' (Chant, 2016). Girls' education leading to women's empowerment is contended to be the rational pathway to economic growth and poverty reduction, which is fundamental to the neoliberal goal (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Traces of such neoliberal subjectivity are visible among the female participants of this study. Nonetheless, the responsibilising of girls/women has unceasingly been criticised by critical scholars, underscoring the perpetuity of inequality remaining unchallenged (Chant, 2016). Exploring a girls' empowerment programme in South India, Maithreyi et al. (2022) highlight the prevalence of individualised self and responsibilisation, highlighting an ethical need going beyond an empowerment model focused on individualisation, rescue, and responsibilisation. Moreover, Banarji (2016) argues that such alienation of girls/women by the state and disregard for their well-being perpetuates and

amplifies patriarchal discourses. Thus, a reconceptualisation and re-evaluation of the concept of empowered neoliberal feminist self has become necessary.

Idealising self- reliance

In my study, the data analysis suggests a strong idealisation of self-reliance among this study's female participants, fueling their neoliberal subjectivity. When asked if they have a role model they want to follow, most female young people asserted that they want to be themselves rather than be like someone else. Sima shares,

> "No. I want to be like myself. If I become like someone else, will they take my place? They won't. I am Sima, that is what they will say. So, I want to remain who I am, do not wish to be like anyone else" (Sima, 14, female, Hindu).

Sima believes in her individual reality and journey which cannot be successfully embarked on by trying to be someone else. Moreover, the neoliberal entrepreneurial feminist subjectivity that takes responsibility for her own future is also prominent when she challenges that no one can take her place, live her reality, and overcome her struggles as a girl within a patriarchal society like rural Bangladesh. She suggests that it is her lot and that she is responsible for changing it. Similar results are also found by Akinbobola (2019), reflecting on neoliberal feminism in Nigeria, who identifies individualised selves among Nigerian women and argues high levels of poverty and unemployment to create a favourable condition for neoliberal feminism to thrive. Extreme poverty and a high unemployment rate are also prevalent in Bangladesh (Shahidul and Karim, 2015). Such findings underscore the all-encompassing spread of neoliberalism-informed feminism in different parts of the world.

Theme 3: Sisterhood and Beyond

Intra-generational Solidarity: A New Kind of Sisterhood

While a critical analysis of neoliberal feminism claims individualised feminist selves and the death of sisterhood (Rottenberg, 2014), analysed findings of my study reveal a new kind of intra-generational sisterhood. In the previous section,

I discussed finding traces of neoliberal subjectivity among the female participants. Moreover, in the previous chapter (see chapter 6, p.132), I discussed, in light of a conversation with Tonni (15, female), how young people might also endorse dominant socio-patriarchal discourses for the older generation of women (i.e., mother, aunt, sister-in-law) by supporting their isolation within the home sphere. Nonetheless, the interview narratives show a strong connection and solidarity among the female participants who experienced similar struggles and unequal opportunities for education and career aspirations. This is not to claim that they represent a homogenous group, as they all come from different classes, economic backgrounds, and religions and do their gender differently. However, their experience of patriarchal inequalities has similarities.

It was evident in the interview narratives that the female participants supported each other with studies, rescuing them from child marriage and raising awareness among themselves of available resources to achieve their aspirations. When asked about what they discuss during break time at school, Faria discussed,

> "We chat about educational topics quite often. We ask each other what they want to do in life. They also ask the same to each other. Then which teacher's lesson they liked today. How do they feel about classes? We chat about all these things" (Faria, 15, female, Muslim).

Faria and her female friend's conversation reflects a sisterhood in which they support each other in attaining their desired level of education and career aspirations. Similar results of girls helping other girls in lower-secondary level schools in Norway were also found by Schøne et al., (2016) who argue that girls help girls and may increase the choice of STEM subjects among girls. Scholarly work exposing inter-generational women, especially mothers perpetuating patriarchy within the family, is well documented (Kandiyoti, 1988; Kabeer, 1988), and some scholars have identified this as 'Neopatriarchy' (Habiba et al, 2016). This trend has also been observed among working women who conform to patriarchal norms and deny discrimination in the workplace (Becker, 1999; Chowdhury, 2009; Hossen, 2020). The intra-generational solidarity observed in my findings is less observed.

Solidarity between Girls and Boys

The analysed findings of my research show that both female and male participants drew from the knowledge of gender equality learned through the gender-sensitive programme provided by CMMS. Nonetheless, they utilise this knowledge and exercise agency differently. As discussed in the previous section, girls indirectly resisted dominant discourses of inequality through drawing knowledge, negotiation, and creating hidden spaces. On the other hand, boys were found to exercise agency by directly resisting gender inequality and being vocal about it. The male participants were more proactive in identifying social discourses of inequality and protesting against them. It arguably reflects the male privilege of talking about the subjugated discourses of equal rights of girls/women more easily than girls themselves (Schwiter et al., 2021). Throughout the analysed findings the solidarity between girls and boys strongly came across. While women and men working together for equality are well-documented with positive outcomes (Kabeer, 2012; Sweetman, 2013), solidarity between girls and boys encouraged through gender-sensitive intervention is an addition to new knowledge through this study.

Talking about the unequal share of household work between female and male students, Hasan says,

> "For girls/women […] the workload is heavier. They do household chores, then they study. That is why they get less time. [In school] if they cannot answer questions at school, they will feel ashamed. So, they make sure they finish the lessons even after doing all the household chores. Boys have to do some household chores but that is very negligible. Boys do not have to do much work at home, especially those who are students. They get more time to study. If they study well, they get better jobs. In Bangladesh, men have higher percentage of jobs. Girls get to study less that is why boys are a little ahead of girls" (Hasan, 15, male, Muslim).

In the 'Idealising self-reliance' section, I discussed how the analysed findings suggest that the participant female young people are aware of the discrimination but see it as their self-responsibility to ensure their well-being, happiness, and success embodying the feminist neoliberal subjectivity (Rottenberg, 2014). On the contrary, Hasan's narratives show that the male respondents recognise the competencies of their female classmates and

sympathise against the discrimination faced by them. Almost all the male participants endorsed equal opportunity for both girls and boys. Sharing his views against discriminatory opportunities for girls/women Jamal shares,

"I ask my classmates (female) how you guys manage to study so much? In my house even if I say my sister does not do anything, still she ends up doing few chores and loses time in that. How do you guys manage studies like this? I do not do anything at home, I go home, study complete my assignments. so I get plenty of time to study. They even have to work waking up in the morning. How do they manage I ask them? […] I do not have any pressure that is why I can study" (Jamal, 15, male, Muslim).

Jamal's narrative shows how he recognises the existing gendered unequal social discourses in the day-to-day life between girls and boys, and he finds it unfair. He also shows his support to his female classmates and friends.

"If I were a girl, once I reach class 10, people would have started saying [to my parents] you should marry off your daughter. Every girl has to hear it. My sister, she is 3-4 year younger than me, believe me potential grooms come to see her. For example, Israt, our first girl, she has been receiving marriage proposals. Even her family is ready to marry her off. She has been crying so much. I do not think if I were a girl, I would have been able to study like these girls" (Jamal, 15, male, Muslim).

Through the interview narratives, Jamal underscores the barriers and constant fear young girls have to experience as they grow older. The young girls face continuous pressure from their families to get married and Jamal identifies the mental struggles of studying under such fear.

A majority of male participants also shared about learning a new way to view discourses of inequality between girls/ boys and challenge it. Sharing his experience after the gender-sensitive programme Hasan discussed,

I also started noticing the differences within my house. Why would things be different for my sister? If I get something by asking, why my sister should not get that? We are brother and sister. We were born from the same mother. When I read the stories [in Diary of the Brave], they matched with real life. For example, if I was given something good, I would question why I got the better thing than my sister. When I read the book, I started to notice discriminatory things we do but never realise doing it or that it is unfair. I started asking myself, yes, does this situation happen with my mother or my sister? Previously it was going on naturally and I never thought about it. And I realise that I need to change these things" (Hasan,15, male, Muslim).

Hasan's narrative shows how the gender-sensitive programme and the diary provided him access to an alternative discourse of gender equality where girls and boys are equal. This knowledge also influenced how he looked at things in his everyday life. He started noticing the subtle and obvious unfair discriminations between girls and boys that he never realised existed. He also highlights how he has started a small effort to change things within his home by raising his voice to ensure his sister's equal rights within the family. It shows the power of such knowledge. Discussing a change in this behaviour and actions Hasan also shares,

"I tried to explain to my male friends that they should not raise their hands to their sisters or if their family did not support sending girls to school, I would encourage my friends to help their sisters. If there is any discrimination between brothers and sisters, I would try to explain that these things are unfair" (Hasan,15, male, Muslim).

The interview narratives show how Hasan did not limit his changed ideas to himself, instead started to encourage his friends to protect their sister's rights and refrain from the socially accepted practice of raising a hand to the female members of the family (see Chapter 3).

In the previous chapter, I discussed the gendered economic discourses affecting girls and boys differently. Sharing the experience of receiving tuition fees, Jamal says,

"My sister and I both take private tuition. My mother used to give my tuition fees first, but she did not used to do that with my sister. So that I do not have any issues with my private tuition. I never even bothered to know about this. But now I make sure that my sister gets the tuition fees first and then I take it. If my sister does not have a pen or a guidebook, even if I do not have my own book, I try to make sure that she gets what she needs for her studies. The way I make myself understand if I do not get something she will not be able to make herself understand that way. That is why I try to ensure her needs first"(Jamal, 15, male, Muslim).

Jamal's interview narratives suggest how it can be difficult to recognise discrimination between girls and boys as dominant social discourses naturalise it. However, alternative discourses from legitimate sources (i.e., schools and teachers) may help individuals notice, question, and even resist such discriminations to make alternative discourses possible.

When asked if any questions come to their minds after participating in the gender-sensitive programme, Dipto mentioned,

> “It comes to my mind[…] why parents marry them [girls] off so early. They could have married off their daughters after 18 years of age or after completing education. Why do they marry them off so early? Now I will not let my younger brothers or sisters or let relatives marry off their children at an early age” (Dipto, 15, male, Hindu).

Analysing Jamal's, Akash's, and Dipto's conversation mirrors the apparent continuous gendered discriminations forwarded by socio-patriarchal discourses that exist in Bangladeshi society. However, it also suggests an opportunity to encourage gender-equal perspectives among boys/men, creating solidarity between girls/women and boys/men. Discussing the solidarity between girls and boys, Safia says,

> “There was a boy who had a Hindu girl from our school as his neighbour. He informed us about the child marriage. Then our teachers and students went to their home and stopped the wedding. Our Head sir explained it to the girl's father and we [students] explained to the girl's mother and stopped the wedding. Now she comes to school” (Safia, 15, female, Muslim).

Safia's narratives show how solidarity between girls and boys can strengthen a girl's position within society and help create space for alternative discourses. Based on my findings, I argue that female and male solidarity is the way forward to break the sticky patriarchal discourses and make alternative discourses possible.

Perpetuator or Opposer: Dual Nature of School Authority and Teachers

In the previous chapter (see Chapter 6), I discussed how teachers and school authorities discipline young people using different mechanisms. Nonetheless, actions taken by different actors (i.e., family, school authority, teachers) are not linear. Even with Foucault's utmost pessimism, resistance can also be observed from the agents of dominant discourses, such as school authority and teachers. For example, Naima shares how their schoolteachers together protested and stopped the child marriage of one of the female students from their school.

> “Once a senior student, a girl who was a very good science major student was married off by her parents right before her SSC exam due to financial

constraints. Then our teachers stopped the marriage. Teachers said she is so good at studies, if she studies, she will do really well in future. Then she sat for the SSC [O-level equivalent] exam" (Naima, 15, female, Muslim).

This suggests that agents who support the dominant socio-patriarchal discourses may also resist them, again confirming multiple subjectivities (Davies, 2003; Blaise, 2005). It shows the possibilities of resistance and a way to make subjugated discourses possible, generating hope. It is also confirmed by numerous NGO interventions implemented in Bangladesh through capacity building and livelihood skills interventions that helped reduce child marriage to some extent (Lee-Rife et al., 2012; Amin et al., 2016). Exploring 30 studies involving child marriage prevention programmes, Malhotra and Elnakib (2021) argue that intervention programmes involving the enhancement of girls' human capital (i.e., life skills, livelihoods, and gender rights training) and opportunities are the most successful in delaying marriage.

A Growing Frustration Against Girls/Women-centric Interventions

While the majority of male participants of the study supported equal rights and opportunities among girls and boys, two male participants (out of twenty participants in total) shared a certain level of frustration against girls/women-centric support and a feeling of being excluded. During the interview, Piyal said,

"Our respected prime minister, Sheikh Hasina gives more priority to girls' education. So, it is seen that girls are doing a lot better than boys. They get a lot of benefits for studying in school from UNESCO and NGOs. There is nothing for boys. Then NGOs provide free books, copies, pens, and other stationaries to girls, but they do not provide these to boys" (Piyal, 15, male, Hindu).

In Bangladesh, in line with the international development discourses, the government has taken several steps to improve participation in female education and reduce female drop-out rates at the secondary level. Some supports are free education for girls, stipends, financial support, and food for school schemes (GED, 2022). A girl/women-centric approach is also strongly visible in projects undertaken by local NGOs and international organisations whose targeted beneficiaries are girls/women (World Bank, 2019). The interview narratives show that this may create dissatisfaction and feelings of neglect among some male young people. Since discourses and knowledge are constantly constructed and

re-constructed through negotiation and resistance, Piyal's dissatisfaction reflects a resistance against the alternative discourses to maintain the dominant discourse of male privilege (Schwiter et al., 2021).

Feminist scholars underscore a growing notion of entering a post-feminist era where gender equality is considered somewhat achieved and further intervention is unnecessary (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). A UK study[21] (Ipsos UK and GIWL, 2023) shows a doubling rate of people in Britain being scared to advocate for women's equal rights. This trend has also been observed among the twenty-two other countries in this survey. Moreover, this increasing fear is more prominent among the younger generation in Britain, i.e., Gen Z, even though the younger generation is more likely to define themselves as feminists. Thus, my findings from data based in Bangladesh confirm the contemporary research on boys feeling discriminated against or left out in other parts of the world to an extent.

Conclusion

In this second empirical chapter, I attempted to shed light on the untold stories of resistance and negotiation of the female and male young people who participated in my research. Divided into three themes, first, I discussed how the young participants drew from the knowledge of gender equality and equal rights forwarded by the gender-sensitive programme offered by CMMS. I highlighted how such knowledge from legitimate sources like schools and teachers creates pockets of resistance and enhances the agency of young people. I discussed the gendered nature of utilising knowledge and the different ways the female and male participants use it to negotiate their positions. Secondly, I discussed the emergence of alternative discourses, such as the new meaning of 'educated bride' and the discourse of prestige. I also highlighted the traces of neoliberal subjectivity among the female participants, arguing that alternative discourses do not necessarily enhance the agency of girls/women. Finally, I discussed strong evidence of intra-generational sisterhood where the female and young people support each other closely. This contradicts the

[21] A UK study shows recent study by Ipsos UK and the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at the King's College London shows the rate has increased from 17% in 2017 to 29% in 2023 in Britain. And from 24% in 2017 to 33% in 2023 among the 22 countries within the sample.

neoliberal subjectivity addressed in Chapter 2 and found under the second theme. Moreover, I discussed the strong solidarity observed between the girls and boys as a way forward to make education more inclusive. In the next concluding chapter, I summarise the main findings and contribution of my research, offering future recommendations.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

In this final and concluding chapter, I present the summary of research findings, implications, future research pathways, and some final thoughts. First, I summarise the main findings of my research to address the four supporting research questions. Next, I outline the study's main contributions which are divided into knowledge creation, pedagogical scholarship and insights, and policy implications. The section follows to highlight the potential future research directions in the area of education, gender, and international discourses. Finally, I conclude by sharing my reflection on my personal learning journey during the period of the study.

Research Questions and Main Findings

The overarching goal of this study was to investigate:

Main Question:

- What are the conceptions of gender and career aspirations among secondary-level young people in Bangladesh, in the context of moves toward inclusive education?

I attempted to answer this overarching question with four supporting research questions given below. Together they provide an overview of the conceptions of gender and career aspirations of the participant young people in Bangladesh. In this section, I summarise my findings for each supporting question. However, I must acknowledge that there may be overlaps among findings for the supporting questions.

Supporting Questions:

SRQ1: What are the conceptions of 14–15-year-old young people, following a gender-sensitive curriculum, on gender and career aspirations in Bangladesh?

SRQ2: What kinds of barriers are experienced by these 14-15-year-old young people in relation to gender and career aspirations?

SRQ3: How do these 14-15-year-old young people negotiate space for their views on gender and career aspirations?

SRQ4: What are the implications of the findings for developing equitable and inclusive education in Bangladesh?

In this study, I used a feminist poststructuralist perspective with a special focus on Foucault's theories to explore the conceptions of gender and career aspirations of 14-15-year-old young people following a gender-sensitive curriculum in Bangladesh. In this research, with detailed discussion in the first findings chapter (see chapter 6), I have highlighted ways young people, especially female young people, are disciplined in Bangladeshi society. I have argued, with detailed discussion in my second findings chapter (see chapter 7), that even though the young people are disciplined and may seem powerless in some discourses, they do exercise agency through negotiation, resistance, and even subversion to make alternative discourses possible.

Supporting RQ1: What are the conceptions of 14–15-year-old young people, following a gender-sensitive curriculum, on gender and career aspirations in Bangladesh?

In my thesis, I explored the conceptions of gender among the participant young people, which exhibited a clear demarcation of tasks, space, and opportunities between female and male participants. Under this question, I attempted to show how gender is constructed, re-constructed, performed, and perpetuated in Bangladeshi society creating a notion of different gendered cultures. Within these cultures, girls and boys are assigned separate tasks. Household chores and care-

responsibility are assigned for girls/women and work with economic gain for boys/men.

It also separates space, denoting its gendered nature by assigning the home sphere for girls/women and the outside world for boys/men. These conceptions were heavily influenced by socio-cultural and religious discourses. Both participant girls and boys were found to be strongly influenced by these ideas, utilising this knowledge to perform their gender correctly. Boys were found to construct their masculinity by seizing the public space and playing masculine sports like cricket, football, and *'Ha Du Du'*[22] in the fields. On the other hand, girls constructed their ideal femininity by maintaining their space, limited between home, school, and tuition classes. While girls were devoted to following rules to perform ideal femininity by showing obedience, boys felt more entitled to break the rules and get away with it. It was evident in the interview narratives that some boys regularly bunked school even after being aware of the punishment, whereas girls would never do that. The interview narratives also highlight that the participant girls' motivation behind following school rules was to avoid a bad reputation instead of the school punishment, which was not a factor for boys. The participant young people perform their gender appropriately by doing household chores, maintaining modest clothing, and playing within the home boundaries.

Even though the female participants showed strong solidarity for their female classmates, they also participated in perpetuating patriarchal discourses for older women within the family, demonstrating that girls/women cannot be considered to have homogenous outlooks. These multiple subjectivities may also reflect maintaining the interests of their gender as a whole. As my research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, two things were evident, first, the long perpetuated patriarchal discourses became more dominant during emergency situations; second, the effects of poverty and the pandemic are gendered, affecting girls more intensely than boys.

Future Careers Aspirations

[22] Ha du du is a team sprots popular in Bangladesh, played between two teams.

The findings of this research suggest very few girls get to study subjects and/or a profession they love. The career choices for female participants are restrained by family, religion, culture, and patriarchal discourses within Bangladeshi society. They are disciplined to conform to the dominant gendered notions in stages. Since birth, they are taught that they are inferior in terms of talent and competency. Then they are constantly reminded that education is pointless for them as their ultimate purpose in life is to get married and raise children. Therefore, spending any money on their education is only a wastage. Moreover, even if their parents are kind enough to bear the cost of their education and provide them with an education, there is no guarantee that their spouse or in-laws will let them work in future. Even if they survive all these stages, their career must be one considered 'suitable for a woman' as their primary duty is to take care of the household and rear children. Therefore, very few parents embark on this journey fraught with the peril of supporting their daughters to make a career.

Supporting RQ2: What kinds of barriers are experienced by these 14-15-year-old young people in relation to gender and career aspirations?

Through the analysed research findings, I argued that society utilises visible and invisible discourses in layers to regulate and discipline the conceptions of gender and career aspirations of young people in Bangladesh. Disciplining young girls starts through isolation, regulated time, and space. The young female participants mentioned having a strictly demarcated area where their movement is allowed (i.e. home, classroom, tuition) that is bound by strict time regulations. If a girl fails to maintain such time regulations (i.e., staying outside late), then they are punished through stigmatisation of being a 'bad girl'. The docility of female young people is further enforced through the visible discourses of violence against girls/women in the form of prevalent rape, abuse, harassment, murder, eve teasing. Society also plays its part by normalising such acts and behaviour by boys/men that regulate female behaviour and actions. This way, the discourses of VAW restrict girls/women within the home sphere, making the public space dangerous for them. This encourages girls/women to internalise the idea of protecting their bodies by being invisible from the public

sphere or by taking up a *'Hijab'* to hide their bodies. Along with the religious discourses, fear was a significant factor observed in the interview narratives of female participants that influenced the practice of *'Purdah'*.

I argued that Bangladesh being a Muslim-majority country, co-existing beside a Hindu-majority country, results in constant construction and reconstruction of cultural and religious discourses. Through the analysed findings, I showed how the religious discourses of Islam are sometimes manipulated creating a discourse of religious hypocrisy to maintain the dominant social and patriarchal discourses that restrict girls/women's right to acquire knowledge, have a profession and/or own a business (Patoary, 2019; Ayoub et al., 2022; Hashmi et al., 2022). I also highlighted how it put the Muslim girls/women in a disadvantageous position even though girls/women from other religions are somewhat affected by the invisible discourses of *"Purdah"* as well. Even within these spaces, the young girls experience constant surveillance by family members, neighbours, classmates, and teachers to ensure that they are doing their gender correctly. Failing to do so results in a bad reputation and the ultimate punishment of child marriage, which commonly leads to the end of their education.

The power of the invisible discourses of "what would people say" is a significant factor in regulating young people's doing gender and career aspirations. It was reflected clearly through the interview narratives that the constant surveillance of "what would people say" regulated the young people's gendered behaviour, career aspirations, and choices. Moreover, I discussed that the socio-patriarchal discourses forwarding the idea that boys are naturally talented and better in maths than girls immensely influenced female participants' confidence and assessment of their own competence, leading to regulation and underestimation of their competence. Through the interview narratives, I highlighted how validation of family members and society was so crucial for participant female young people in terms of career aspirations and choices that were absent among the male participants. Moreover, the analysed findings also exhibited practices of potential deceit and manipulation on the part of family members and neighbours, by supposedly misinforming female young people when aspiring for professions considered 'masculine'. This may also reflect the infludence of the internalised dominant discouses where the family member and neighbours think they are doing

something good by maintaining the gendered ideas. This way dominant gender discourses are maintained. The only exception was observed toward the profession as a 'Gynaecologist' for girls. Nonetheless, it is an example of maintaining the discourse of prestige for the family without challenging the dominant social and religious discourses. Instead, it maintains and legitimises the dominant discourses of *'Purdah'* for women. Even though elements of resistance were present in the findings, the stickiness of the dominant discourses was also evident, where young female participants were found to resist and perpetuate the dominant patriarchal discourses while confirming their multiple subjectivities.

Supporting RQ3: How do *these 14-15-year-old* young people negotiate space for their views on gender expectations and career aspirations?

One of the primary goals of my research was to bring the spotlight to the agency of female young people, exercised through pockets of resistance, challenging the discourses of *'অবলা নারী* (Obola Nari[1]) that represent girls/women as weak and vulnerable. Guided by supporting RQ1 and RQ2, I reflected on the various ways female young people are regulated and disciplined through visible and invisible socio-patriarchal and religious discourses. Through the supporting RQ3, I explored ways these female young people exercise agency through pockets of resistance.

As discussed in the methodology chapter (see Chapter 4), my research participants are female and male young people who participated in a gender-sensitive programme provided by an NGO named CMMS. The analysis of the research findings shows that the gender-sensitive programme was arguably a powerful source of knowledge on equal rights to these young people, especially the young girls. The knowledge coming from schools and teachers, who are dominant agents in forwarding social discourses, legitimised the knowledge to create a new 'regimes of truth'. This legitimised knowledge in relation to subjugated discourses of gender equality extended agency to the female young people to negotiate their positions. The participants exercised agency through direct resistance utilising continuous disapproval of inequality and discrimination that was striking throughout the interview narratives, especially among the female participants. I suggest that this strong disapproval is, to some extent, influenced by the gender-

sensitive discourses endorsed by CMMS, which provided them with the knowledge/power to resist and negotiate discriminatory gender discourses. I should highlight that the research participants were from rural areas. If the participants were from urban areas, they may have had access to more gender-equal knowledge and agency as a result of better access to the internet and more liberal discourses.

The research findings also shed light on how, even when situated within the discourses of gender inequality and discrimination, young female people constantly negotiate their spaces. An example of such resistance is their utilising *'আঙ্গিনা'*, which is an enclosed courtyard within the boundary of the house, to play different sports that the girls are not allowed to play once they are considered 'grown-ups'. The female participants negotiated with their mothers that they could play because they were not 'seen' or, in other words ', invisible' to the social eyes.

While evidence of exercising agency through resistance and subversion was observed in the research findings, the research also brought forward evidence of alternative discourses taking place, which I argued was counter-productive and not necessarily empowering for girls/women. Some influence of the international development discourses and neoliberal discourses were observed among the female young people who focused on the efficient use of available resources and internalised self-responsibility to fulfil their career aspirations. They ignore/deny any inequality and/or do not hold society responsible for making changes. I argued that such a shift of responsibility on young girls is rather responsibilising than empowering (Larner, 2000; Rottenberg, 2014; Ghadery, 2019). Moreover, the interview findings show alternative discourses like a shift in the meaning of 'ideal bride' motivated by the discourse of prestige of having an educated bride. It may help the groom's family to gain symbolic capital, as suggested by Bourdieu (1986,1989), but fails to extend girls'/women's agency. Most often, the girl brides end up being a showcased object or a 'trophy wife' within their in-law's family unable to achieve their aspirations.

Even though a strong influence of the knowledge forwarded by the gender-sensitive programme was observed among the female and male young participants, they were influenced differently. Boys were more vocal and direct

about their resistance toward gender inequality, whereas girls were rather indirect. Girls utilised the knowledge to resist dominant discourses of inequality through disapproval, creating hidden spaces, and repeated indirect resistance along with internalising self-responsibility and efficient use of resources. On the other hand, boys utilised the knowledge to directly resist the discourses of inequality against girls by helping their sisters/ female classmates, protesting unequal treatment regarding tuition fees, and resisting child marriage. They showed a commitment to end child marriage by ensuring that they or their sisters do not engage in child marriage. While the female participants idealised self-responsibility, relieving the society and state from making any change to the existing inequality against them, male participants quite comfortably identified these inequalities and underscored a need for change. This highlights the male privilege of being able to identify and speak against such inequality and discrimination from a superior male position than a subjugated female position.

Finally, the analysed findings exhibited a clear and strong solidarity between the participant female and male young people. While sisterhood was evident among the young girls who supported each other by sharing knowledge, helping each other to do well in studies, and through positive advice, solidarity was not only limited to female young people. All the male participants shared a strong stance against inequality based on sex/gender and defended their female classmates. They showed a strong commitment to supporting female education and fighting child marriage. A strong influence of the knowledge provided through the gender-sensitive programme was observed among boys. I argue that such gender-sensitive programmes may forward powerful knowledge, allowing both girls and boys to resist the dominant patriarchal discourses of inequality and discrimination against girls/women. Moreover, it makes alternative discourses possible to expand agency.

Supporting RQ4: What are the implications of the findings for developing equitable and inclusive education in Bangladesh?

The supporting RQ4 is answered through the main contributions discussed below.

Main Contributions

In my research, based on a systematic literature review of education and gender scholarship, I argued that an inclusive and equitable quality education requires a gender-sensitive education (i.e., curriculum, textbook, pedagogy) and policy initiatives. It requires exploring the intricate discourses that scaffold the conceptions of young people around their competency, possibility, aspirations, and achievements. With a national move toward equitable quality education and empowerment of all girls/women in line with international discourses of SDGs, it has become crucial to understand these intricate discourses, which I have attempted to explore in my research. Below I highlight the contribution of my research to creating new knowledge.

Knowledge Creation

I aimed to conduct a research study that offers a unique understanding of young people's conceptions of gender and career aspirations in Bangladesh that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in Bangladesh can draw from. Exploring the conceptions of gender and career aspirations among young people is a timely and significant study in Bangladesh due to its commitment to SDGs. The study can help understand the construction of girls/women, their conceptions, and negotiation strategies to develop inclusive education in South Asian contexts. From a theoretical lens, the study contributes by employing a feminist poststructuralist analysis of power/knowledge and discourses in educational research with a focus on gender in a South Asian context. It is a rich example of a Foucauldian study with a feminist stance exploring patriarchy, gender violence, and gender inequality – issues that are considered marginal in Foucault's discussion and identified as limitations of his theories by feminist scholars (McNay, 1992; 1994; Ramazanouglu, 1993; Yates, 2015; Tiisala, 2017). Thus, the study furthers the Foucauldian debate in relation to gender.

The research also contributes by highlighting how discourses influence female and male young people in demonstrably gendered ways. It underscores how power/knowledge is continuously constructed and reconstructed, making space for alternative discourses. The study can help understand how young people do

their gender, what their possible conceptions of gender and career aspirations are, and how their career aspirations are influenced which can be useful in making schools, classrooms, and playgrounds more gender inclusive. The findings may also support schools and teachers to become more aware of gendered teaching practices and raise their awareness against gender- stereotypes. The scholarship can support schools to provide helpful career guidance to young people to meet their full potential by understanding their gendered experiences and struggles.

Future Research Pathways

While my research creates a base for exploring the conceptions of gender and career aspirations among young people, my participants were from rural parts of Bangladesh. My research opens the door to study aspects and contexts that need further investigation. Research studies exploring conceptions, negotiation strategies, and resistance of young people situated in urban settings may be interesting research that I hope to undertake in the future. Moreover, the analysed research findings showed dual characteristics of the teachers where the teachers and school authority seemed to work (from the accounts of my participants) as both the perpetuator and opposer of discriminatory patriarchal discourses against girls. Due to limitations of time and resources, I could only explore the conceptions of young people. In Bangladesh, academic literature related to teachers' perceptions and performance is rare. Thus, exploring the perspectives and subjectivities of teachers and the student-teacher power dynamics can create further new knowledge in this less-explored area.

PhD Journey and Some Personal Reflection

A PhD is a journey that may bring permanent change both personally and professionally in a person. I can say that I am not the same person I was when I started my PhD. Being a PhD student during the COVID-19 global pandemic and becoming a first-time mother in lockdown surely made this journey difficult meant dealing with an extraordinary amount of stress, responsibilities, and, at the same time, overwhelming emotions that I experienced for the first time. Even as I am making final edits to my thesis, my country is in peril and I am disconnected from

my family and people. But it also allowed me to grow as an individual and an academic in a way I did not imagine.

My data collection journey was very different from how I imagined due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I had to collect the data virtually. However, reflecting on my PhD journey, if I had the opportunity, there are a few things I would have done differently. I would try to be more organised in keeping a record of field notes and excerpts. Even though I documented everything, I could have done it in a more organised way if I had time. I would spend more time planning the steps. I would set more precise expectations and daily goals as a researcher. I had to make many adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was unique to that particular time. The heightened stress level and constant uncertainty, given the huge geographical distance between me as the researcher and the participants, escalated my awareness that participating in the study could feel burdensome for the participants. I was also immensely concerned about their safety. As discussed in Chapter 4, I was mindful of this and repeatedly checked that the young people were willing to participate and tried not to take any additional time than needed.

In my PhD, I tried to understand the experiences of the young people in their own words and language, which needed creating a relationship of trust. Not being able to sit face to face and build a relationship with the participant due to virtual data collection impacted the data quality to some extent. Even though the participants were willing to talk, I believe I would have received more rich data from face-to-face interviews. Moreover, it would have given me a sense of their everyday surroundings within which they are located. Following a reflexive thematic analysis, I spent a long time transcribing, translating, and coding interview data in NViVo. A positive outcome of this strenuous process was knowing my data like the back of my hand. However, I realised I did not need such detailed coding and could have saved writing time. But that is something I have learned from experience. In the future, I may review the emerging themes by analysing three or four transcripts rather than completing most of the transcripts.

Undertaking a deeply theoretical work and adopting a feminist poststructuralist lens trained me to explore and understand power relations not only in the experiences of my participants but, in fact, everywhere. It is a permanent skill I

have developed as a researcher. Most importantly, my research journey allowed me to contradict the popular view of seeing girls/women in developing countries like Bangladesh as vulnerable and weak, something I experienced closely as a development worker. My research enabled me to explore the negotiation and negotiating strategies to make space for the views undertaken by the young girls, even within difficult situations, which allows me to look at things differently. My research journey allowed me to understand, to some extent, why people may act in certain ways. This understanding helped me make peace with my own experiences of growing up within dominant patriarchal discourses as a girl/woman.

Along with being a PhD student at the University of Glasgow, I believe a turning point for me was when I started working as a master's dissertation supervisor as an associate tutor at the University of Glasgow and got involved in teaching university students at the University of Manchester. As an international student, I initially struggled to achieve international standard academic writing, learn criticality, and make arguments, which is an essential part of being a researcher. Even though I mastered these skills as a PhD student over time, the opportunity to assess other students' work as a teacher/supervisor was a significant leap for me in developing my research skills. It allowed me to evaluate my writing from an evaluator's perspective.

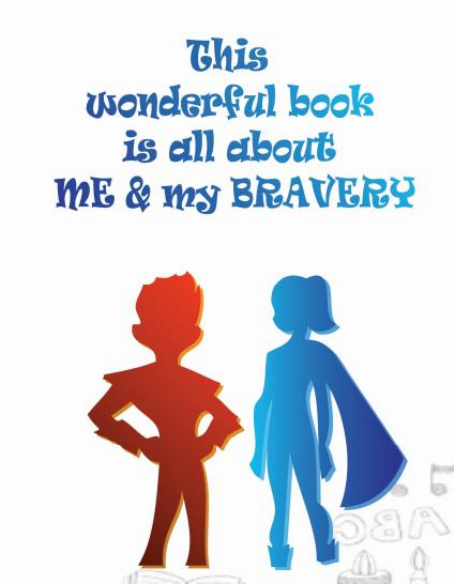
The important thing I learned the hard way was that our journeys, may it be personal or professional, are not linear. There is a lot of back and forth, just like in research. Previously, I only knew to set a goal and strive for it. But my PhD journey taught me to fail, accept, and start all over again, which will stay with me forever. It has immensely helped me to grow as a researcher, a teacher, and as an individual. Now that I look back, I realise how I look at things differently and feel proud of my journey.

I hope this is only the beginning of my journey as a researcher to explore the gendered journeys of young girls and women in different parts of the world and tell their stories.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Contents from ‘The Diary of the Brave’

1. Young girls and boys depicted as superheroes



2. Foreword of the book

মুখবন্ধ

মানবাধিকার শব্দটির শুরু ‘‘মা’’ কে দিয়ে। অথচ প্রতিনিয়ত আমাদের এ সমাজে মায়ের অধিকার থাকছে উপেক্ষিত। যে মানুষটি নিজের শরীরের সবটুকু নিংড়ে আমাদের জন্ম দেন তার অধিকার তো দূরে থাকুক, কাজের স্বীকৃতিটুকুও আমাদের সমাজ দেয় না। এই ডায়েরিটি সাজানো হয়েছে এমন ভাবে যেন কোমলমতি ছাত্রছাত্রীরা ব্রেভম্যান ক্যাম্পেইনের মধ্য দিয়ে ‘‘মা’’ এর অধিকার, মর্যাদা, প্রাপ্যগুলো কীভাবে উপেক্ষিত হয় তা জানে, কেন সমাজে এমনটা হয় এ প্রশ্নগুলো করে। আমরা মনে করি মায়ের অধিকার নিশ্চিত করার জন্য বদ্ধ পরিকর হলেই ছেলে মেয়েরা সমাজের সবার অধিকার নিয়ে সচেতন হবে। এগিয়ে আসবে সমঅধিকার রক্ষায়। সমাজ থেকে নির্মূল হবে নারীর বিরুদ্ধে সকল প্রকার সহিংসতা।

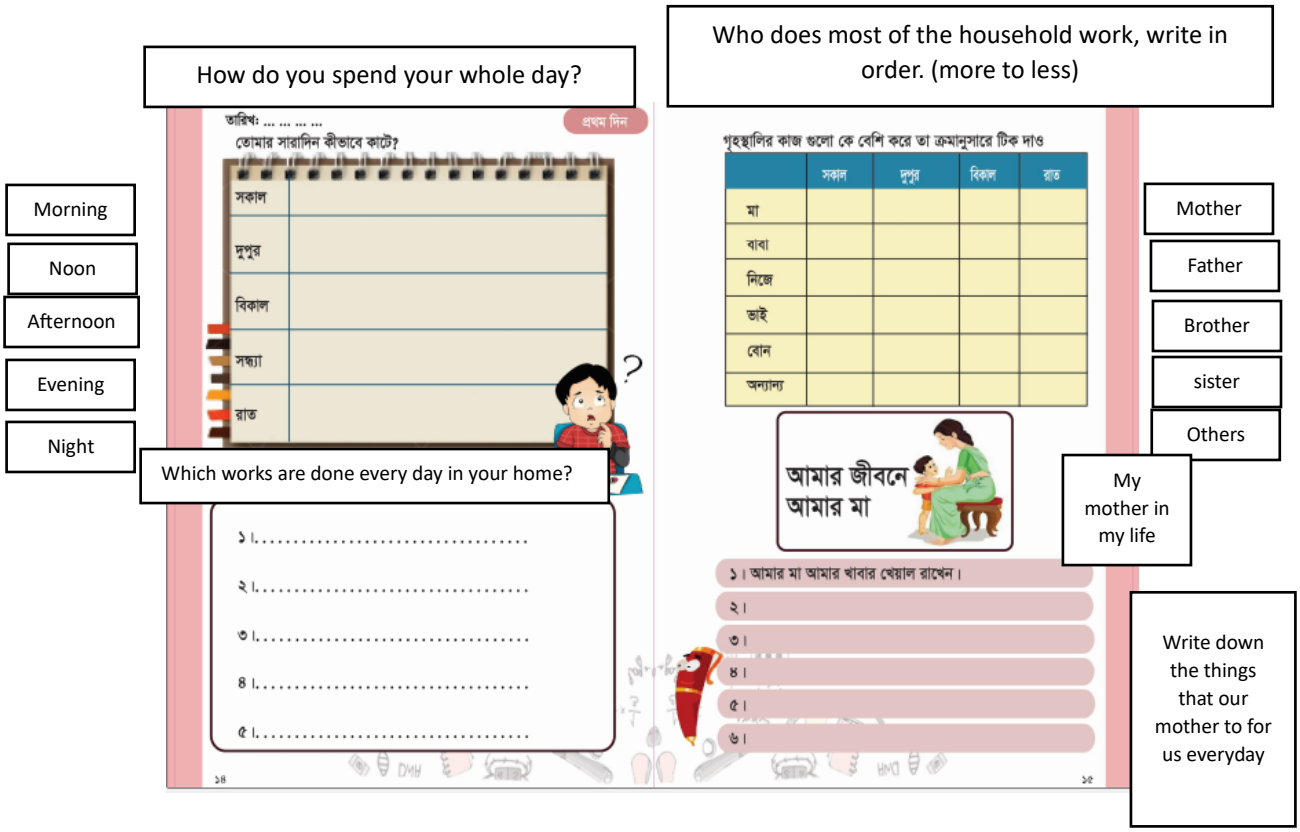
আমার ব্যক্তিগত প্রত্যাশা ‘‘মা’’র অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠার মধ্য দিয়েই শুরু হোক সবার মানবাধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠায় আমাদের শিশুদের বেড়ে ওঠার, মানুষ হয়ে ওঠার যাত্রা।

Foreword

মানবাধিকার (Human Rights) starts with মা (mother). However, everyday mother’s rights are ignored in our society. The person who extracts every bit of their body to give birth to us, ensuring their rights are far from it, our society do not even give them the recognition for their work. This diary has been organised in a way so that the through the Bravemen Campaign the tender students can learn how mothers’ rights and honour are ignored and questions ‘why that happens in our society’. We believe, if young people are determined to ensure mother’s rights they will be aware about everyone’s rights in the society. They will come forward to protect equal rights. All kinds of violence against women will be eliminated.

My personal expectation is that the journey of protecting human rights in children’s growing up and becoming a good human being, may start by protecting the rights of “mothers”.

3. Instructive images and exercises to provoke questions



4. Story of Maria Mitchell

১ আগস্ট ১৮১৮
মারিয়া মিচেলের জন্মদিন

মারিয়া মিচেল ছিলেন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের প্রথম নারী জ্যোতির্বিজ্ঞানী। তিনি ১৮৪৭ সালে একটি ধূমকেতু আবিষ্কার করেন যা তার নাম অনুসারে মিস মিচেলের ধূমকেতু নামে পরিচিত হয়। তার আবিষ্কারের জন্য তিনি ডেনমার্কের রাজা ষষ্ঠ ফ্রেডরিখের কাছ থেকে স্বর্ণপদক পুরস্কার পান। মিচেল প্রথম নারী হিসেবে আমেরিকান একাডেমি অফ আর্টস এন্ড সাইন্স এবং আমেরিকান অ্যাসোসিয়েশন ফর দ্যা অ্যাডভান্সমেন্ট অফ সাইন্স এর সদস্যপদ লাভ করেন।মারিয়া মিচেল কর্মক্ষেত্রে নারী পুরুষের বেতন বৈষম্যের বিরুদ্ধে কাজ করার পথিকৃৎ হিসেবেও গণ্য। তিনি দেখেন কেবল নারী হবার কারণে কর্মক্ষেত্রে তিনি বেশি কাজ করেও তার অধীনস্থদের থেকেও কম বেতন পাচ্ছেন। তিনি এর বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিবাদ করেন এবং পুরুষদের সমপরিমান বেতন দাবী করেন। পরবর্তীতে তার দাবী মেনে নেওয়া হয় এবং তার কর্মক্ষেত্রে নারী পুরুষ নির্বিশেষে সমান কাজের জন্য সমান বেতন ব্যবস্থা চালু হয়।

1 August 1818

Maria Mitchell's Birthday

Maria Mitchell was United State's first female astronomer. She discovered a comet in 1847 that was named 'Miss Mitchell's Comet' after her name. She received a Gold Medal as a prize for her discovery by Denmark's King, King Frederick VI (Sic). Mitchell was the first women to become the member of American Academy of Arts and Science and American Association for the Advancement of science. Maria is also considered a precursor in working against inequal pay at the workplace between female and male employees. She realized even after working more, she was paid even less than people working under her because of being a woman. She protested against it and demanded equal pay as male employees. Later her demand was agreed and equal pay for equal work rule was established in her organization.

5. Story of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza

এসো আমাদের প্রিয় খেলোয়াড় মাশরাফির জীবনের গল্প জানি, কিভাবে আত্মবিশ্বাস তাকে একাধিক ইনজুরির পরেও সাফল্যের চূড়ায় পৌঁছে দিয়েছে।

মাশরাফি-বিন-মর্তুজা বাংলাদেশ ক্রিকেটের অহংকার। তিনি একজন হাসিখুশি ও উদারচেতা মানুষ। কিন্তু এই মানুষটির ক্রিকেট জীবন সুগম নয়। অনেক চড়াই উতরাই পার হয়ে তিনি আজ খ্যাতিমান অবস্থানে পৌঁছেছেন। ইংল্যান্ডের বিপক্ষে ব্যক্তিগত তৃতীয় টেস্ট খেলার সময় তিনি হাঁটুতে আঘাত পান, যার ফলে তিনি প্রায় দুবছর ক্রিকেটের বাইরে থাকতে বাধ্য হন। ১৬ বছরের ক্যারিয়ারে ১১ বার এ ধরণের চোটের কারণে দলের বাইরে যেতে হয়েছে মাশরাফিকে। তবে তিনি ডাক্তারদের সাবধান বানী আর শারীরিক যন্ত্রণাকে তুচ্ছ করে বার বার উঠে দাঁড়িয়েছেন আত্মবিশ্বাসের সাথে এবং দেশকে নতুন নতুন জয়ের আনন্দ দিয়েছেন। আত্মবিশ্বাসী এই মানুষটি আজ বাংলাদেশের ইতিহাসের সর্বকালের সেরা অধিনায়ক।

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is Bangladesh cricket's pride. He is a cheerful and kind person. But his life in Cricket was not easy. He has reached today's fame going through many ups and downs. He hurt his knee during playing the third test against England that kept him away from playing cricket for two years. In his 16-year cricket career he had to go out of the team 11 times due to injury. But he ignored doctor's safety advice and physical pain and stood up with self-confidence again and again and brought joy for his country by winning matches. This self- confident person is now considered the best captain in Bangladesh Cricket history.

6. Story of Marie Curie

নভেম্বর ৭, ১৮৬৭
মেরি কুরির জন্মদিন

মেরি কুরি বিজ্ঞানী হিসেবে অত্যধিক পরিচিত। নারীদের বিজ্ঞানচর্চায় তিনি পথিকৃৎ হয়ে আছেন। তিনিই প্রথম (একমাত্র নারী) দুই বার নোবেল পুরস্কার লাভ করেন। তিনি বিজ্ঞানী পিয়েরে কুরিকে বিয়ে করেন এবং দুজন মিলে তেজস্ক্রিয়তা এবং তেজস্ক্রিয় পদার্থ নিয়ে গবেষণা করেন। যৌথভাবে তারা ১৯০৩ সালে পদার্থবিজ্ঞানে নোবেল পুরস্কার পান। ১৯০৬ সালে তার স্বামী পিয়েরে কুরি মারা যান। এরপর তিনি নিজেই গবেষণা কার্যক্রম চালাতে থাকেন। পরবর্তীতে ১৯১১ সালে তিনি রেডিয়াম ও পলোনিয়ামের উপর গবেষণা কাজের জন্য রসায়নে নোবেল পুরস্কার পান। তেজস্ক্রিয় পদার্থ নিয়ে গবেষণা করতে করতে তিনি তেজস্ক্রিয়তা দূষণের শিকার হন। আর শেষ জীবনে তিনি অসুস্থ হয়ে পড়েন। ৪ জুলাই, ১৯৩৪ সালে মেরি কুরি মৃত্যুবরণ করেন।

November 7, 1867

Marie Curie Birthday

Marie Curie is very well-recognized as a scientist. She is the first (only woman) who won the Nobel prize twice. She married scientist Pierre Curie and together they researched radiation and radioactive particles. Together they won Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903. In 1906 her husband Pierre Currie passed away. Then she continued her research. Later in 1911 she received Nobel prize in Physics for her research on Radium and Polonium. She became affected by radiation due to her research with radioactive particles. 4 July 1934 Marie Curie passed away.

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet (Bengali)

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

"জেন্ডার এবং ক্যারিয়ার সংক্রান্ত ধারণা: বাংলাদেশের জেন্ডার-সেন্সিটিভ মাধ্যমিক পাঠ্যক্রম অনুসারী শিক্ষার্থীদের উপর একটি অনুসন্ধান।"

আপনাকে "জেন্ডার এবং ক্যারিয়ার সংক্রান্ত ধারণা: বাংলাদেশের জেন্ডার-সেন্সিটিভ মাধ্যমিক পাঠ্যক্রম অনুসারী শিক্ষার্থীদের উপর একটি অনুসন্ধান" শীর্ষক এই গবেষণায় অংশ নিতে আমন্ত্রণ জানানো হচ্ছে। অংশগ্রহণের সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে, কেন এই গবেষণাটি পরিচালিত হচ্ছে এবং এতে কী কী বিষয় জড়িত তা জানা আপনার জন্য গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।

দয়া করে নীচের তথ্যগুলি মনোযোগ সহকারে পড়ুন এবং আপনি চাইলে অন্যের সাথে আলোচনা করুন। যেকোনো তথ্য ও অস্পষ্ট বিষয়ের জন্য গবেষককে জিজ্ঞাসা করুন। আপনি অংশ নিতে চান কিনা তা স্থির করতে কিছু সময় নিন। এটি পড়ার জন্য আপনাকে ধন্যবাদ।

প্রকল্প সম্পর্কেঃ

আমি তাহসিনা আকবর, যুক্তরাজ্যের গ্লাসগো বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের একজন স্নাতকোত্তর গবেষক । আমি আমার ডক্টরেট (পিএইচডি) ডিগ্রি অর্জনের জন্য এই গবেষণাটি পরিচালনা করছি। গবেষণাটির অর্থায়ন করেছে কলেজ অফ সোস্যাল সায়েন্স এবং প্রজেক্টটি "কলেজ গবেষণা নীতি কমিটি, গ্লাসগো বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়" কর্তৃক অনুমোদিত হয়েছে।

"জেন্ডার এবং ক্যারিয়ার সংক্রান্ত ধারণা: বাংলাদেশের জেন্ডার-সেন্সিটিভ মাধ্যমিক পাঠ্যক্রম অনুসারী শিক্ষার্থীদের উপর একটি অনুসন্ধান" শীর্ষক প্রকল্পটি সেন্টার ফর মেন অ্যান্ড মাস্কুলিনিটিস স্টাডিজ (সিএমএমএস) প্রবর্তিত জেন্ডার-সেন্সিটিভ প্রোগ্রামে অংশগ্রহণকারী মাধ্যমিক স্তরের শিক্ষার্থীদের জেন্ডার, জেন্ডার রোল এবং ক্যারিয়ার সংক্রান্ত ধারণাদির নিয়ে কাজ করবে। এই গবেষণার সময়, শিক্ষার্থীদের জেন্ডার সম্পর্কিত ধারণা, মতামত এবং অভিজ্ঞতা, তাদের কাছে প্রত্যাশিত এবং সঠিক জেন্ডার রোল কোনটি, এই সংক্রান্ত কয়েকটি ওপেন-এন্ডেড প্রশ্ন জিজ্ঞাসা করা হবে (যেমন, আপনার জেন্ডারের জন্য মানুষ আপনার কাছে কীরকম ব্যবহার, পোশাক ও বাচনভঙ্গি আশা করে) এবং শিক্ষার্থীদের ভবিষ্যত পরিকল্পনা কী, সে সম্পর্কে জানতে চাওয়া হবে (যেমন, পড়াশুনা শেষ করার পরে আপনি কী করতে চান)। আপনার জাতীয় পাঠ্যক্রমের পাঠ্যপুস্তক এবং সিএমএমএস উপকরণগুলির চিত্র এবং স্লাইড সম্পর্কে আপনার মতামত জানতে এগুলো সাক্ষাৎকারের সময় প্রদর্শিত করা হবে। আপনার সম্মতিক্রমে সাক্ষাৎকারটি অডিও এবং ভিডিও হিসেবে জুমে (অ্যাপ) রেকর্ড করা হবে যাতে কোনও ডেটা হারিয়ে না যায়।

দয়া করে মনে রাখুন, গবেষণায় আপনার অংশগ্রহণ সম্পূর্ন স্বেচ্ছাকৃত, এবং কোনও কারণ ছাড়াই আপনি যে কোন সময় গবেষণা হতে নিজেকে প্রত্যাহার করে নিতে পারবেন। আপনি নিজেকে প্রত্যাহার করে নিলে আপনার পূর্ব-প্রদত্ত ডেটা আর ব্যবহার করা হবে না এবং সেগুলো ধ্বংস করে ফেলা হবে। এই গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণ কোনও আর্থিক বা অন্য কোনও ধরণের সুবিধা প্রদান করে না এবং আমি আপনার মূল্যবান সময় এবং সহায়তার জন্য অত্যন্ত কৃতজ্ঞ। প্রযুক্তিগত প্রতিবন্ধকতা (যেমন, ইন্টারনেটের গতি, সংযোগ বিচ্ছিন্নকরণ ইত্যাদি) বিবেচনা করে সাক্ষাৎকারে ৬০ মিনিটের বেশি সময় নেওয়া হবে না।

প্রত্যেক অংশগ্রহণকারীকে তাদের পরিচয় রক্ষার জন্য একটি আইডি নম্বর এবং ছদ্মনাম (কাল্পনিক নাম) দেওয়া হবে। দয়া করে মনে রাখবেন যে গোপনীয়তার বিষয়ক নিশ্চয়তাগুলি কঠোরভাবে মেনে চলা হবে যদি আমাদের কথোপকথনের সময় আমি এমন কিছু শুনি যাতে আমার মনে হয় শিক্ষার্থীর কোনো ক্ষতির আশঙ্কা থাকতে পারে, সেক্ষেত্রে আমাকে এ বিষয়ে দায়িত্বশীল সংস্থাগুলিকে অবহিত করতে হতে পারে (যেমন, পুলিশ, শিশু অধিকার সংস্থা)। অধিকন্তু, গোপনীয়তার গ্যারান্টি দেওয়া অসম্ভব হতে পারে, উদাহরণস্বরূপ, নমুনার আকারের কারণে, নির্দিষ্ট অবস্থানের কারণে ইত্যাদি।

সংগ্রহ করা ডেটা প্রাথমিকভাবে আমার ডক্টরাল ডিগ্রির প্রয়োজন হিসাবে ডক্টরাল থিসিসের জন্য ব্যবহৃত হবে। এই ডেটা বিভিন্ন কনফারেন্স পেপার, পোস্টার প্রেজেন্টেশন, জার্নাল আর্টিকেল এবং থিসিস প্রেজেন্টেশনেও ব্যবহৃত হতে পারে যদি আমি পরে আমার গবেষণা কাজ প্রকাশ করি। ডেটা সংগ্রহ এবং বিশ্লেষণের সময়ে ডেটা গ্লাসগো বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় এর ক্লাউড স্টোরেজ এ সংরক্ষিত করা হবে। এই সমস্ত সতর্কতা আপনার পরিচয় এবং ডেটা গোপনীয়তা রক্ষার জন্য নেওয়া হবে।

গবেষণার সময়কালে আপনার ব্যক্তিগত ডেটা (যেমন, আপনার নাম, ইমেল আইডি) ভবিষ্যত সাক্ষাৎকার এবং ফলোআপের জন্য যোগাযোগ করার জন্য ব্যবহৃত হবে। গোপনীয়তা বজায় রাখার জন্য গবেষণা শেষ হয়ে গেলে আপনার সমস্ত ব্যক্তিগত ডেটা (যেমন, অংশগ্রহনকারীর নাম, যোগাযোগের বিবরণ, বা অন্য কোনও ব্যক্তিগত তথ্য সম্বলিত ডেটা) নষ্ট করে ফেলা হবে। সমস্ত গবেষণা তথ্য (যেমন, ছদ্মনামে সাক্ষাতকারের সময় সংগৃহীত তথ্য যা ব্যক্তিগত তথ্য ধারণ করে না) গ্লাসগো বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের বিধিমালা অনুযায়ী ১০ বছর পর্যন্ত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের আর্কাইভে রাখা হবে। এই সময়কালের পরে তথ্যগুলো নষ্ট করে ফেলা হবে।

প্রিন্সিপাল সুপারভাইজারের সাথে যোগাযোগের তথ্যঃ

গবেষক সম্পর্কিত যে কোনও তথ্যের জন্য দয়া করে যোগাযোগ করুন,
ডাঃ বারবারা রিড (Barbara.Read@glasgow.ac.uk)

ব্যক্তিগত তথ্য প্রক্রিয়াকরণ সম্পর্কে কীভাবে জানা যাবেঃ

যদি ডেটা সংগ্রহের সময়কালে প্রদত্ত তথ্য সম্পর্কিত আপনার কোনও অভিযোগ থাকে তবে GDPR প্রদত্ত গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণকারীর অধিকার অনুযায়ী (যার মধ্যে রয়েছে: ব্যক্তিগত তথ্যের কপি, সংশোধন বা মুছে ফেলার জন্য অনুরোধ করা এবং ব্যবহারে আপত্তি জানানো। এছাড়াও, আপনার ব্যক্তিগত ডেটা প্রসেসিং এবং ডেটা পোর্ট্যাবিলিটি সীমাবদ্ধ করার অধিকার আছে। আপনি আপনার সম্পর্কিত যেকোনও তথ্য যা ব্যবহার করা হচ্ছে তাতে অ্যাকসেস পাওয়ার জন্য অনুরোধ করতে পারেন।

যেকোনও সময়ে, যদি আপনার মনে হয় আমরা আপনার সম্পর্কে যে তথ্য ব্যবহার করছি সেটি ভুল, আপনি এই তথ্যটি দেখার জন্য অনুরোধ করতে পারেন এবং কোনও কোনও ক্ষেত্রে এটির রেস্ট্রিকশন, সংশোধন বা মুছে ফেলার অনুরোধ করতে পারেন। আপনি ডেটা প্রসেসে এবং ডেটা পোর্টাবিলিটির ক্ষেত্রে আপত্তি করতে পারেন।

দ্রষ্টব্যঃ আমরা গবেষণার উদ্দেশ্যে আপনার ব্যক্তিগত ডেটা প্রসেস করছি। জিডিপিআর এবং ডেটা সুরক্ষা আইন-২০১৮ এর আওতায় এই অধিকারগুলি প্রয়োগের ভিন্নতা থাকতে পারে। এ সংক্রান্ত আরও তথ্যের জন্য UofG Research with personal and special categories of data. অধ্যায়টি দেখুন।

আপনি যদি উপরোক্ত কোনো অধিকার প্রয়োগ করতে চান তবে দয়া করে ওয়েব ফর্ম (webform) পূরণ করুন এবং dp@gla.ac.uk এর মাধ্যমে আপনার আবেদনটি জমা দিন।

অভিযোগ দায়ের পদ্ধতিঃ
গবেষণা পরিচালনার বিষয়ে যে কোনও অভিযোগ জানানোর জন্য: কলেজ অফ সোস্যাল সায়েন্সেস এথিক্স অফিসার, ডাঃ মুর হিউস্টনের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন, ইমেইল: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

"Conceptions of gender and career aspirations: A study of young students utilising a gender-sensitive curriculum in Bangladesh".

(will be translated in Bengali)

You are being invited to take part in this research study titled "Conceptions of gender and career aspirations: A study of young students utilising a gender-sensitive curriculum in Bangladesh". Before you decide to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve.

Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take some time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

About the project

I am Tahsina Akbar, a post-graduate researcher in University of Glasgow, UK. I am conducting this research as a requirement of my doctorate (PhD) degree. The research is **funded by College of Social Science** and has been **approved by the College Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.**

The project titled "Conceptions of gender and career aspirations: A study of young students utilising a gender-sensitive curriculum in Bangladesh" explores the perceptions of gender, gender roles and career aspirations of secondary level school students who were a part of the gender-sensitive programme provided by Centre for Men & Masculinities Studies (CMMS). For this research during interview, you will be asked few open-ended questions to share your view on popular ideas of feminism and women's empowerment that represent girls/women as agents of change. Moreover, how these ideas may impact the young people in Bangladesh from a critical perspective. Provided given consent, the interview would be recorded during virtual (audio and video) and/or face to face (audio) interview so that no data is lost.

Please note, your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. In the event of withdrawal during or after the interview the already provided data will be destroyed. The participation in this research does not involve any monetary or other form of benefit and I am truly grateful for your time and support. The interview will take no more than 60 minutes considering technical impediments (i.e., internet speed, disconnection). Each participant will be assigned an ID number and a pseudonym (imaginary name) to protect your identity. Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm. In such a case I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

Primarily the collected data will be used for the doctoral thesis as a requirement of my doctoral degree. The data may further be used in conference paper, poster presentation, journal article and thesis presentation if I later publish my research work. During the data collection and study period the data will be kept in password protected folders in the computer. The computer will be password protected as well to ensure double- protection. Once the study in completed as a requirement of doctorate degree in University of Glasgow, the data will be submitted to the University. All these cautions are taken to protect your identity and data confidentiality.

During the research period, your **personal data (i.e., your name, email id)** will be used to arrange interviews and contact for any follow up. Your personal data will be retained by the University only for as long as is necessary for processing and no longer than the period of ethical approval. However, the **research data** (interview data) will be retained for a period of ten years in line with the University of Glasgow Guidelines.

Contact Details of Principal Supervisor

Please contact for any details regarding the researcher,

Dr. Barbara Read (Barbara.Read@glasgow.ac.uk.

How to make queries about personal information processing

If you have any complaint regarding the information provided during the data collection period, GDPR provides that individuals have certain rights including: to request access to, copies of and rectification or erasure of personal data and to object to processing. In addition, data subjects may also have the right to restrict the processing of the personal data

and to data portability. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

If at any point, you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected, or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see UofG Research with personal and special categories of data.

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the webform or contact dp@gla.ac.uk

How to file a complaint

To pursue any complaint about the conduct of the research: contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Lead, Dr Susan Batchelor , email: socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix 4: Sample of Interview Guide

(This is a guide only as the open-ended semi-structured interviews questions were guided by participant answers making each interview unique)

Interview Guide

Participant no:

Date:

Duration:

Participant Profile:

Name:

School Name:

Age:

Class:

Religion:

Parent's occupation:

Family members:

Assalamu Alaikum A. How are you? I am Tahsina, a student like you but at a university level. I am doing this research for my thesis where I would like to talk with you about your daily life, school life, about your friends, studies, and future plans. My field coordinator has already shared the project information with you and your parents for consent. Do you have any question or concern?

I want to emphasise that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you can let me know at any time if you do not want to participate any longer, or do not feel comfortable to answer any question. I also want to stress, there is no right or wrong answer, I just want to hear your thoughts and views. Do you have any question?

Ok then lets start….

Theme 1: Introduction/ views

- Can you please tell me about a typical day of your life from dawn to dusk?

Theme 2: Family, friends, and surroundings

- Can you please tell me about your family and the family members?
- How is the household work is divided among the family members?

Theme 3: School life

- Let's talk about your school life. Can you please tell me about a typical day at school?
- How do you go to school? Can you please tell me about your experience.
- Can you please tell me what do you talk about with your friends during the tiffin break?

Theme 4: Choosing future profession/career

- Do you talk about your studies, future aspirations?
- What do you aspire to be and why?
- How do you feel about going to school?
- How do you all sit in your class and why?
- What do you think? Is there any difference in the experience of being a student as a girl or as a boy?
- Have you ever faced any barriers within your family to study or work in future? Can you please share.

Behaviour

- Is there any difference in behaviour, conducts, nature between boys and girls?
- Suppose the person in the image were a male, how do you think his day would have been?

Theme 5: Self-worth/ self-perception of educational ability

- Let's talk about your class a little. Who are the top 5 students in your class?
- How do you see yourself as a student?
- What is your favourite subject? why?
- Is there any subject that you do not like? Why?

Theme 6: Teacher's behaviour/actions

- How do your teachers encourage the students?

Theme 7: social barrier

- **(**showing image) Can you imagine going to places without your family?
- (showing image) Can you imagine going to capital or big city to study? How does your family feel about it?
- (showing Ms. Shahana's story) what would you do if your family does not allow you to study what you want?
- Can you please share about child marriage in your school or neighbourhood.

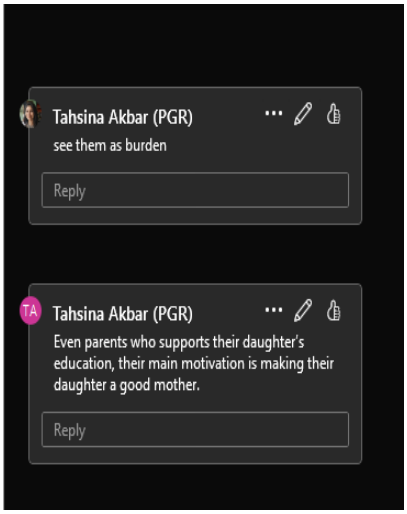
Theme 8: Brave men campaign

- (showing image from BCP) Milli and Rony story- How do you feel about the fact that everyone blamed only Milli for not helping her mother but not Rony.
- When you all did the lessons on the diary about rights, did any questions come to your mind while doing these lessons?
- Has doing the BCP programme impacted your way of thinking in any way?

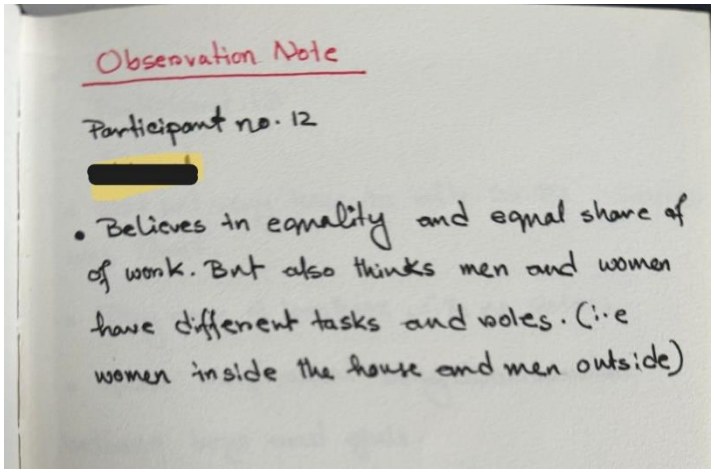
Appendix 6: An example of familiarising with data

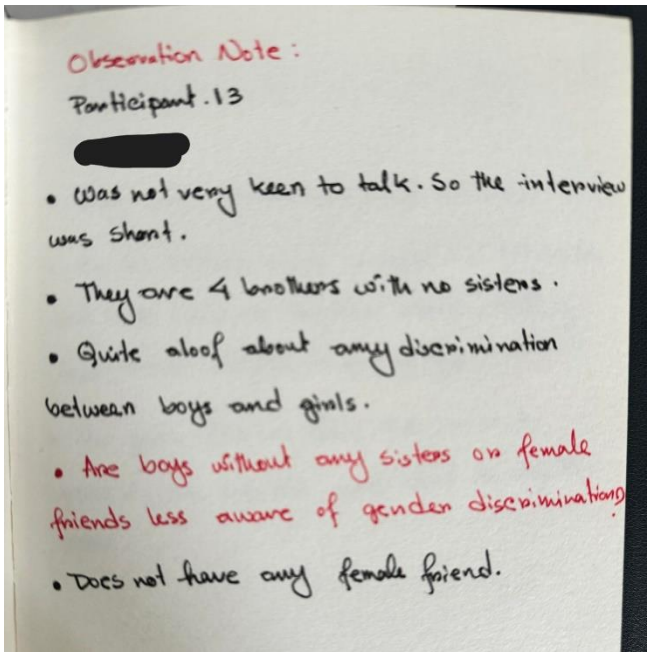
Interviewer: Do you know why they were married off?

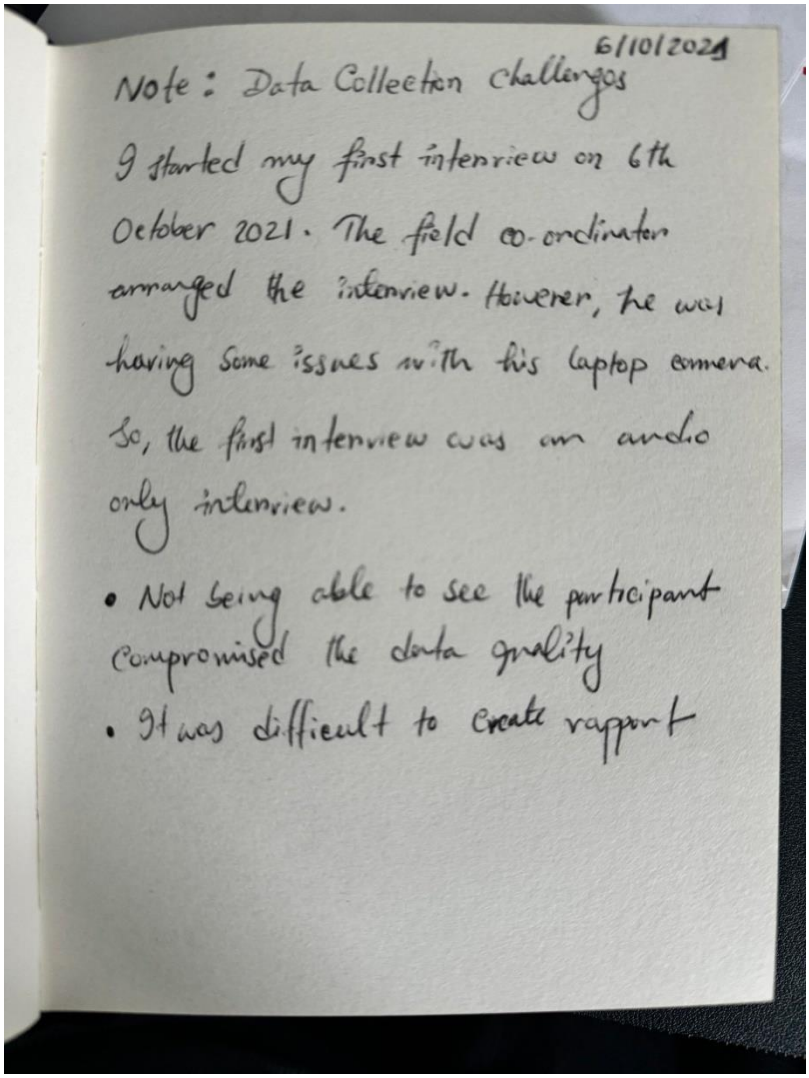
[redacted] why..if **I have to answer, suppose they have been isolated from the school** (School was closed), and they were sitting at home. In our village area there is a tendency, they (parents) don't like their daughter sitting at home. They believe daughters cannot be kept at home, they marry them off. Sometimes we hear that the girl was studying, still her parents found a proper groom and married her off. Our village people have a mentality that why do girls have to study! Now things have changed a bit. Many families are not like that. Many families want their daughters to go to school, learn things, learn about how life operates, that may help to raise good children. But how many people understand these things. Not many parents understand these things in village area. They only want to marry off their daughters. They see daughters as 'trouble'. Eve teasing exists. they always remain scared of it. So, they just marry their daughters off.



Appendix 5: Extracts from my Research Diary







6/10/2021

Note: Data Collection challenges

I started my first interview on 6th October 2021. The field co-ordinator arranged the interview. However, he was having some issues with his laptop camera. So, the first interview was an audio only interview.

- Not being able to see the participant compromised the data quality
- It was difficult to create rapport

Appendix 3: Sample of Consent Form

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Consent Form

(the form will be translated in Bengali)

Title of Project: Conceptions of gender and career aspirations: A study of young students utilising a gender-sensitive curriculum in Bangladesh

Name of Researcher: Tahsina Akbar

Name of Supervisors: Dr. Barbara Read, Professor. Nicki Hedge

Please tick as appropriate

Yes ☐ No ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to interviews being audio and video recorded for research purpose.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym or a fictitious name by the researcher to protect participant's identity.

I agree that:

Yes ☐ No ☐ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete by the researcher.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be retained in secure storage for archiving up to ten years by the University of Glasgow.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

Yes ☐ No ☐ Other authenticated researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

Name of Participant …… Signature ……

Date ……

Name of Researcher ……Signature ……

Date ……

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