

ESTUDIOS

IN PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: CAREERS GUIDANCE PROVISION FOR MUSLIM GIRLS IN ENGLAND

LA ORIENTACIÓN PARA LA CARRERA Y LAS JÓVENES MUSULMANAS EN INGLATERRA: UNA REFLEXIÓN SOBRE LA JUSTICIA SOCIAL

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RESUMEN

En este artículo, se reflexiona sobre la atención a la diversidad cultural en los Servicios de Orientación para la Carrera en Inglaterra, y cómo, a pesar del discurso vigente sobre igualdad de oportunidades, se está excluyendo de forma sistemática a ciertos grupos. Las intervenciones parten de un sistema de valores occidental, orientado al individuo frente a la colectividad, lo que entra en conflicto con la forma de actuar de ciertos grupos. Se ejemplifica dicha situación con el caso de las jóvenes musulmanas, un grupo muy numeroso en Inglaterra.

En la primera sección se exponen las limitaciones del actual discurso liberal referido a la «igualdad de oportunidades», en la sociedad inglesa. Los autores argumentan que este discurso es demasiado individualista y no tiene en cuenta las dimensiones sociales presentes en una sociedad culturalmente di-

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versa. Proponen cambiar este concepto por el de *justicia social*, crítica detrás para que no se quede en un mero concepto de corte paternalista. Consideran que para sentar las bases de una sociedad más dinámica y justa que busque dar respuesta a las necesidades de todos sus ciudadanos, de forma individual y colectiva, es preciso adoptar un enfoque más amplio y crítico como es el de la *justicia social*, postura que defienden a lo largo de todo el artículo.

En la segunda parte, se menciona brevemente la transformación sufrida por los Servicios de Orientación en Inglaterra a partir de 1993 (de ser públicos a entrar en un «mercado de libre competición»), y las distintas prioridades con respecto a los destinatarios según los gobiernos sucesivos. En cualquier caso, y a pesar de que el de centro-izquierda pusiera el énfasis en la atención a grupos en desventaja social, se sigue ignorando el contexto social como variable moduladora de los procesos vocacionales y de elección ocupacional, y se sigue aplicando un modelo de orientación basado sólo en premisas occidentales.

Se hace referencia además a los resultados de una investigación llevada a cabo por los autores, para averiguar cómo los servicios de orientación estaban atendiendo las necesidades de orientación para la carrera de las jóvenes musulmanas en los últimos años de la escolaridad obligatoria, y si se tenía en cuenta la influencia que ejerce la cultura (y en concreto la religión) en sus decisiones. Mediante una encuesta a los servicios de orientación, y entrevistas a algunos, se les preguntó sobre su interpretación del concepto de «igualdad de oportunidades», qué medidas estaban adoptando para atender a la diversidad étnica en general, y si realizaban actividades concretas dirigidas a jóvenes musulmanas.

Por último, en la tercera sección, proporcionan un marco de referencia para reflexionar sobre la atención a las necesidades vocacionales de los diversos grupos culturales, y concretamente de las jóvenes musulmanas. Parten de tres dimensiones que afectan el desarrollo de la carrera y la elección ocupacional: la existencia de *influencias comunes que afectan a todas las personas que viven en una sociedad Occidental*, independientemente de su cultura o religión de origen; que la forma de interpretar estas influencias es *singular a su propio contexto cultural, y las características individuales*, que también entran en juego, según la importancia relativa que se les conceda en relación a la afiliación cultural. Se centran sólo en la segunda, puesto que los Servicios de Orientación atienden a la primera y tercera, y consideran que es fundamental tener en cuenta la dimensión social. Identifican así cuatro ejes de influencia que afectan tanto el nivel de autonomía de las jóvenes musulmanas como su acceso a distintos recursos: los padres y la familia, la comunidad, los centros escolares y las instituciones de educación superior, los empresarios y formadores (en el trabajo).

Concluyen sugiriendo que se debe revisar el actual discurso sobre la igualdad de oportunidades, que no está dando lugar a una verdadera igualdad de resultados proponiendo el enfoque crítico de justicia social como alternativa que facilite una mayor conciencia y comprensión sobre los diversos grupos culturales, y un cambio de actitud con respecto a la «diferencia» «diversidad» como rasgos permanentes y deseables de nuestra sociedad. El reto consistirá en asegurar que personas pertenecientes a comunidades diversas que pueden diferir en función de su raza/etnicidad, género o clase social, obtengan el apoyo y los recursos necesarios que respondan a sus distintas necesidades.

Palabras clave: Justicia Social, jóvenes Musulmanas, igualdad de oportunidades, orientación para la carrera, educación, diversidad cultural, multiculturalismo crítico, acción.

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ABSTRACT

For many years, a liberal discourse of «equal opportunities» has continued to dominate challenges to racist, sexist and inequitable practices. The desire to treat «everyone the same» is a common strand in which the universal needs of the «many» are set against the differentiated needs of the «few». The authors suggest that this discourse is too individualistic and inward looking, failing to acknowledge and adequately accommodate the social dimensions which exist within a culturally diverse society. It is argued that a broader social justice philosophy should be adopted which is critically located, politically informed and sensitive to cultural diversity and differentiated needs. This article considers how the «equal opportunities» discourse has influenced much careers guidance practice amongst English Careers Services in relation to the career guidance needs of Muslim girls. Finally it draws upon recent research, to highlight the possibilities presented by the adoption of a critical social justice approach.

Key Words: Social justice, Muslim girls, equal opportunity, Career guidance, education, cultural diversity, critical multiculturalism, action.

Introduction

This article reflects upon the limitations of the current equal opportunities discourse which has been so influential in shaping English civil society. Consideration is given to the way in which the adoption of a broader concept of social justice will serve to contribute to the foundation of a dynamic and socially just society that accordingly seeks to meet the needs of all of its citizens, individually *and* collectively. It is argued that, if careers guidance⁵ is to move towards a more inclusive agenda, the implementation of a critical social justice philosophy will be paramount. By accommodating and valuing cultural diversity, and acknowledging gender differences within a multi-ethnic context, Careers Services themselves will be in a position to advocate on behalf of all clients, as the imposition of Western models of careers guidance practice are replaced (Leong & Hartung, 2000). Recent research by the authors into the career guidance needs of Muslim girls is used to illustrate current approaches to careers guidance practice within England. The findings highlight the issues to be addressed, and seek to provide a clearer understanding and insight into how practice may be adjusted, and strategies developed, to accommodate Muslim girls» career guidance needs.

Towards a social justice agenda

Emerging in the 1970s, a liberal *equal opportunities* discourse has tended to exert significant influence on discussions about «race» equality and notions of justice and fairness within British society. In many respects it has been focused primarily upon the individual, and applied as a means of trying to establish a *level playing field for all*, thereby enabling *fair competition* in relation to available opportunities, particularly with regards to employment. Racism has commonly been regarded as a product of individual ignorance, leading to prejudice and hence intolerance. Legislative attempts therefore have been used to

5. The term «guidance» is used synonymously with the activity generally referred to as «careers counselling» within many European contexts.

enforce change by outlawing individual racist behaviours and recruitment practices, whilst educative approaches have focused upon the raising of (the «white» majority's) awareness about the (non-white minority) «cultures of others». Until recently, the institutionalised nature of racism has been underestimated, with cultural diversity viewed through a Western lens.

Yet, as Riley (1994) points out, the notion of equal opportunities is not only based upon differing assumptions and values, there is also a lack of agreement as to what «equality of opportunity» actually is (Arnot et al, 1996), leading to its uneven, and at times ambiguous, application. Further to this, the equal opportunities agenda has tended to operate within a depoliticised discourse in which the nature and construction of racist and inequitable practice has remained largely uncovered (Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, 2000).

When contrasted with the equal opportunities discourse, the concept of *social justice* is more holistic in nature, allowing for a much broader understanding and interpretation as to what constitutes «fairness». Recognition is given to the nature of «difference», the right to self-respect and personal autonomy (Commission on Social Justice, 1998:48), whilst cultural diversity is regarded as a feature of British life to be valued. By locating a social justice philosophy within a social world, in which economic concerns are regarded as only one aspect, the benefits which accrue can be observed more closely. A re-distributive understanding is reinforced, supported by an acceptance that an uneven distribution of goods and services *should* occur, reflecting individual needs and socio-cultural positioning. This moves us beyond the rather simplistic equation that places an economic value upon the individual on the basis of their «productive» potential.

Unlike the concept of «equal opportunities», the conceptual aim of social justice is movement towards a fairer and less oppressive society in which the distribution of economic and social benefits are more evenly shared. Yet without a clarity of purpose, there is a risk that the concept of social justice could itself lead to a re-introduction of patronising policy models or fragmented responses, which fail to acknowledge and/or address wider structural inequalities. If a model of social justice is to overcome the deficiencies associated with a sanitised, depoliticised and, in the case of Muslim girls, a neutralised perspective of social relations, it will have to be explicit about the sites of oppression (s) (Dei, 1999) and their interlocking nature, engaging with a critical review of social and political relations. As Brah (1992) notes so succinctly:

«The social reality of Asian women's lives in Britain is constituted around a complex articulation of the economic, political and ideological structures that underpin the relationship between race, class and gender» (p. 64).

If we accept that racism is more than simply an individual act (Geddes, 1993) born out of prejudice and based upon a combination of psychological factors (Rizvi, 1993), it is then possible to move beyond the «moral relativism» that is associated with pluralist multicultural practice (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). As the more deeply rooted institutionalised nature of racism is revealed, which is reflected in the ethnocentric organisation and practices of British society, it also becomes possible to identify the spaces which will enable enlightened action to occur. Rather than reinforce the fundamental differences which may be seen to exist between the dominant «white» and exoticised «non

white» cultures, a re-examination of *all* cultures will be beneficial, as this «sharing» of lives may in effect lead to greater understanding and a sense of well-being amongst all. Careers educators, including those who deliver guidance, have a major role to contribute here as the provision of a critical learning environment that enables both «white» and «non white» students to review the world:

«through an alternative and more plausible lens is likely to provoke changes in the racist construction of the way things are» (Troyna, 1993:128).

The implications of this for careers guidance practice with Muslim girls is significant as, notes Watts (1996): «Guidance can be a form of social reform: it can also be a form of social control» (p.352). There is an evident need for those engaged in careers guidance activity to be cognisant of this when considering their practice (Irving, 2000a). Professionals therefore will be required to reflect upon, and review, their own beliefs and attitudes about the values that are to be found in the cultures of «others». Adaptive approaches which seek to impose Western constructs of «freedom» and «equality of opportunity», premised upon liberal notions of the autonomous individual, are clearly at risk of marginalising cultural differences and failing to «acknowledg (e) a plurality of diverse goals of equal value» (Reid, 1999). This is particularly the case for many young Muslim girls who place a high regard upon the views of family, community and religion (Ramdin, 1999), when considering their future options. Further to this, the failure to recognise that Muslim girls may also occupy complex and contradictory personal and social existence's could result in inappropriate actions and covert or unintentional stereotyping by teachers and careers staff (Mirza, 1992; Bhatti, 1999; Malik, 2000).

Background to Careers Guidance provision within England

Within England, the provision of careers guidance is primarily the responsibility of Careers Services that function at the transitional interface between compulsory schooling and post-compulsory education, training and employment opportunities. Underlying Careers Service practice it is possible to identify an implicit philosophy of individual empowerment. This operates alongside a liberal interpretation of equality of opportunity, as discussed earlier, which seeks to enable all young people to compete fairly for available opportunities. Within careers education and guidance the emphasis is placed upon activities that focus upon the individual, seeking to raise their self-awareness, decision making skills, awareness of opportunities, and development of the skills required to manage the transition from school. Careers guidance is employed to assist *individuals* to identify aspirations, consider the «reality» of these, and then to take action towards achieving agreed goals.

The modern day Careers Service⁶ in England was formed in 1993 as part of the «New Right's» drive to reduce the power of public services and open them up to «free market competition» (Willcocks & Harrow, 1992). Following a competitive tendering process, contracts were awarded by central government to quasi-autonomous private companies who have demonstrated that they can meet the outline specifications on the basis of price and

6. The Careers Service is currently undergoing further change and it is possible that a fundamental reform will occur within the near future.

quality. Following the success of the British labour party in the 1997 general elections, a centre-left government was formed which fundamentally sought to change the direction of Careers Service activity. In line with the «new» inclusion agenda, Careers Services were advised to refocus their activities towards the needs of the disadvantaged and those at risk of social exclusion. However, the impact of the social context tends to be neglected (Watts, 1996) and overlooked, often regarded as having a relational effect upon individual choice and opportunity, rather than exerting significant influence upon decisions taken by many young people (Roberts, 1977). This highlights one of the dilemmas faced when Careers Services attempt to apply Western models of careers guidance universally to young people from *all* cultures, when the concept of individual autonomy, underpinned by a belief in equal opportunity, is placed at the centre.

Race, Gender and Islam: English careers guidance in practice

Muslims comprise the largest ethnic minority group within the UK, (Sarwar, 1994; Anwar, 1993), about one third of the children are of compulsory school age and the vast majority live in England. Although Muslims are often presented as an homogenous and unified mass (Solomos, 1993) they are differentiated by history, cultural practices, linguistic background and «race» (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996). Moreover, these factors can also be seen to interact with those associated with gender and socio-economic class. The presentation of such «difference» is at risk of presenting diversity as a problem however, resulting in those from «alien» cultures being regarded as deficient in some way (Lago & Thompson, 1996). With specific reference to British Muslims, this is made more complex as the importance attached to religion adds to the risk of stereotyping and misrepresentation. Parker-Jenkins et al; (1998a) expand upon the impact of religious belief, noting that:

«Muslims often face prejudice and discrimination due to their religious rather than their cultural positioning, for Islam has been portrayed negatively, with «fundamentalism» seen as representative of all Muslim communities» (p. 36).

Given the complexity associated with Western perceptions of Islam and the position of Muslim women, it was felt that there was a gap in knowledge about the ways in which Careers Services in England sought to accommodate the career guidance needs of Muslim girls who were in the final years of compulsory schooling.

In 1999 the authors of this article reported on their study⁷ which sought to identify the extent to which current Careers Service practice had been influenced and informed by an understanding of the influence of religion and culture upon the scope of decision making by Muslim girls. For the purposes of this article the focus is on the findings of this study, as these provide a useful overview of current practice, and link into the debate concerning whether there is a need to move away from an equal opportunities approach towards a critical social justice agenda.

7. A copy of the full report «The Careers Service and Young Muslim Women» is available from the authors or DFEE Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham, England NG15 0DJ. Quote ref: CID/RD/99/01.

Earlier work by Cross et al (1990), into the relationship between Careers Services and ethnic minorities, resulted in a series of recommendations for good practice which included, amongst others, the need for a written equal opportunities policy; monitoring of career destinations by gender and ethnicity; and the importance of training in issues of «race» for careers staff. By adapting this framework for our own study, it has been possible to identify how much change has been achieved.

Key Findings

Through a large scale survey of the Careers Services in England (with an 82% response rate), we sought to find out how they were interpreting the concept of «equal opportunities», what they were doing to accommodate ethnic diversity, and to elicit whether they were engaged in activities specifically targeted at Muslim girls. The majority of the respondents in the survey identified that they have a generic equal opportunities policy, which is applicable to all. Approximately 36% of these policies make specific reference to religious cultural difference. The quantitative survey was enhanced by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews held with staff across those 5 Careers Services which had indicated that they were undertaking activities specifically targeted at Muslims in general. All had developed written equal opportunities policies, which had been informed by good practice guidelines, produced by the Department for education and Employment (DfEE). These policies were generally overarching and sought to encompass all potential areas of discrimination. It was felt that such an approach would overcome artificial divisions on the basis of «race» and gender, and for some would enable the application of a liberal notion of «equality for all», without being seen to give primacy to any one group. To add to the complexity, a number of these Careers Services indicated that *some* ethnic minority community leaders also opposed differentiated provision, seeking to secure an «equal share» of the available resources for their own community members. The importance attached to «fairness and equality» tended to be translated as ensuring that all received an «equal share». However, such generic «equal opportunities» perspectives and policies may also serve to «hide» or dissipate «difference», leading to a bland universalistic and individualistic application in practice. Moreover, the concept of an «equal share» is at risk of failing to acknowledge that some groups within society have suffered long-standing and serial disadvantage which has become institutionalised over time. Further, the imposition of a Western model of «equality» may marginalise cultural difference by failing to recognise that there may be «a plurality of diverse goals (which should be accorded) equal value» (Reid, 1999:5).

Concerning the advice from Cross et al (1990) that Careers Services should implement a policy of ethnic monitoring, it was clear from the research that nationally agreed codes are applied which enable clients to be categorised on the basis of their ethnicity and gender. This raises a significant problem for those communities who organise around religion, such as Muslims, as the place of origin and ethnic identification can indeed be diverse. The defining characteristic of their social formation is their religion (even though this may be subject to differing cultural interpretation), a statistic that is not gathered. For those Careers Services who recognised that this may be an omission, it was not felt to be overly problematic as, for example, the information was gathered informally through the careers

guidance interview. Yet there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding the significance of monitoring and usage of the data collected. Discrimination on the basis of religion is not currently covered by any English legislation, therefore its collection is not a formal requirement, and the scope for action is restricted. Generally, the value of gathering information about clients' cultural/religious affiliations was felt to be helpful as it provided an insight into «what an individual faces», yet this is not elaborated on by the respondents and is subject to multiple interpretations.

Overall, our research found a very mixed picture in relation to both the attitudes and actions of Careers Services, with regards to their understanding of the career needs of ethnic minorities, and more specifically Muslim girls, in relation to their social milieu. The general concern that Careers Services should seek to act impartially, and provide *a service for all* is echoed by the majority of the respondents. Where action was taken to promote «race» equality, this tended to focus upon the opening up of access to opportunities through the raising of aspiration and the removal of barriers that restrict *individual* progression. There was little evidence of Careers Services targeting activities towards Muslim girls, and where this did occur it was usually an initiative taken at an individual level. Whilst the existence of cultural difference was generally acknowledged, the underlying philosophy rested within a liberal conception of «equality of opportunity» as discussed earlier. Yet, as Young (1992) observes:

«The politics of difference... aims for an understanding of group difference... as entailing neither amorphous unity nor pure individuality» (p. 171).

The need therefore to be cognisant of cultural attachment, informed about its scope of influence, and have an understanding of its *potential* impact upon individual autonomy can be seen to be of key importance when considering the careers guidance needs of Muslim girls. For this to be effective, a move away from the notion of equal opportunities to a more dynamic conception of critical social justice is now required.

Social Justice, Careers Guidance and Muslim Girls

Drawing on the literature and findings, we were able to develop a framework for practice that could be applied not only to Muslim girls, but all culturally diverse groups. Our primary concern however was to establish the ways in which Careers Services accommodate the career guidance needs of Muslim girls, and their underpinning rationale for doing so. As a means of facilitating this, a framework was constructed which assists in providing a conceptual understanding for the analysis of current provision. The framework is premised upon three dimensions that can be summarised as follows:

1. that there are *common influences which affect all clients* living in a Western society, whatever their cultural or religious backgrounds. Therefore the influences of parents, family, educational attainment, and community are likely to impact in some way upon choice, career development and occupational direction.
2. that how clients are affected by, and interpret, these common influences is *unique to their own cultural setting and, in some cases, religion*. For example, to be a Muslim identifies the uniqueness of being part of a «shared» culture and common faith

which is mediated and communicated through parents, school, community and the labour market.

3. that *for each client, individual characteristics*, including the perceived relative importance of personal characteristics as against cultural/religious affiliation, also acts to influence them⁸. This is concerned with the extent to which individual autonomy may over-ride social and cultural influences by locating the *individual* on a continuum of ethnocultural identity. For instance, whilst all Muslim girls in England have a degree of autonomy and choice, for many greater importance is attached to socio-cultural factors.

Our research found that, at the present time, Careers Companies concentrate upon the first and third of the above premises. We felt therefore that it was important to focus our own considerations upon the second statement as this highlights the way in which culture and, in the case of Muslim girls, religion acts to mediate decisions made about future career pathways. The social dimension, which encompasses a complex set of internal and external relations is considered to be of paramount importance, as it is here that «sense» is made of the world, and the uniqueness of what it means to be a Muslim is grounded. From our deliberations, we identified four key sites of influence that impact directly both upon the level of autonomy exercised by Muslim girls, and their access to opportunities: parents and family; community; schools and colleges; employers and training providers.

Parents and family

Parents and family are able to exert significant influence in situations where adherence to traditional Muslim ideologies are present. This is particularly apparent in the parent's desire to ensure that their daughters receive a complete education in Islamic principles, behaviours, morals and values. For many Muslim parents, education, and the acquisition of advanced qualifications, is highly valued, however this is generally conceived within the context of culture and religion. There may be concerns about their daughters studying away from home; at an Institution where there are no students of similar backgrounds; or within a social/cultural environment that is alien to their traditional beliefs, which may include mixed sex settings. For some families, economic considerations may mediate cultural considerations (Brah & Shaw, 1992) yet the concerns outlined in relation to education could also have an affect upon those who are seeking to enter training or employment.

As mentioned earlier, to be a «Muslim» does not reflect membership of an homogenous mass, as Islam and its cultural interpretation *within* families can also be mediated through a wider range of factors. Shah (1998) notes that Islam does not set in opposition the notion of career and domestic life for women, which amplifies the potential nature of the internal differences and debates that may occur. The cultural «gap» between traditional Muslim perspectives and the experiences girls (and families) have of Western expectations are continually in a state of flux and subject to movement (Ramdin, 1999). Basit (1996) provides a useful insight into the complexities within Muslim families concerning whether daughters should be allowed to go out to work. She observes that:

8. For a fuller discussion see, for example, Marsella and Leong (1995), Bimrose (1996), Sue et al (1996).

«the spouse favouring the employment of women is usually able to convince her/his husband/wife regarding the merits of a career. This points to the important function of negotiation and persuasion within these families» (p. 231).

There is much evidence however to suggest that parents are interested in their daughters education (Meijers & Piggott, 1995), and this highlights the need for Careers Services to engage Muslim parents in the careers guidance process. The development of strategies that reach out to parents (and the extended family), and facilitate full and active participation, can be seen to be of paramount importance (Irving, 2000b). There were few examples of this within our study, however those that are worthy of note include the initiative taken by a Muslim Careers Adviser who is relating issues of careers education and guidance to the teachings of the Qurʾān, and using this at school-based parents meetings. In a different area, another Muslim Careers Adviser is making home visits to discuss options at 16; and a Careers Service arranges visits to a local college for Muslim parents to enable them to become familiar with the study environment.

Muslim communities

Muslim communities are diverse in their cultural origins, and members have differentiated views on the meaning and impact of Islam upon their lives (Parker-Jenkins, 1995), and Muslim girls perceive the older generation to be greatly influenced by the views and values progressed by community and Islamic leaders. The importance of honour (izzat) as it affects both individuals and families is of significance importance for most Muslims. How daughters behave therefore may be judged by the extended kinship group, and reflect upon the family's standing within the community. Ashfar (1994) suggests that as the position of women within the Muslim community is changing, therefore Muslim males will be required to reassess traditional patriarchal values, and allow greater freedoms with regard to choice and identity, if family cohesion is to be retained.

If Careers Advisers are to become an organic part of the local community, it will be necessary for them to have a clear understanding about current issues as a wider understanding of the socio-cultural milieu may allow them to retain a critical edge to their work. Perceived inequalities will still be presented and require sensitive and appropriate challenge, yet this will require an understanding of the context within which they are located. A useful example of this was found in one Careers Service which reported that they had run a «lifelong learning» event for mothers and daughters on a Saturday morning. This was attended by a range of organisations, such as ESOL (English as a second language) representatives, college access staff, some local employers, youth and community workers, training providers and staff from the Health Education Resource Centre, thereby providing Muslim women and girls with the space to explore and discuss opportunities in learning and work, alongside access to information, advice and resources, and presenting «positive» female role models, in an all female environment.

Schools and colleges

A good education is seen as the key element in achieving aspirations, and as such is generally highly regarded by many Muslims. Entering educational courses that ultimately

lead to highly valued careers is regarded as both a sign of respect for parents, and for those of Pakistani origin, evidence for the *bradari* (members of the extended family «back home») that the family has succeeded in Britain. There are concerns within the Muslim community about the aims of a secular (and in many respects a «Christian») educational process as it is regarded to be at odds with the teaching of Islam. For Muslims, the Qur'an, as the holy text, provides a basis for knowledge, a framework for cultural organisation and perpetuates a strong sense of family and community. The issue of single sex schooling is seen by some parents as a way of protecting their daughters from the corrupting influence of Western society.

However, as Haw (1998) found, whilst some Muslim girls may not be allowed to continue their education beyond compulsory schooling, others continue after marriage when it is considered «safe» for them to study in a mixed-sex Institution. For Muslim girls who are likely to enter into arranged marriages, the prospective husband, and his family, may also be influential in determining her future. Our research identified a limited response to this in a few Careers Services, for example one careers adviser has established links between a Muslim girls school and the local further education college resulting in the college providing single-sex courses within the school.

A further concern relates to research findings undertaken elsewhere which suggest an apparent lack of support for Muslim girls from careers staff in relation to their aspirations, being able to relate to their needs, or being left to «fend for themselves» (Parker-Jenkins et al, 1997; Bhatti, 1999). This further reinforces the need for all staff engaged in careers guidance *and* education activities to clearly establish a framework within the school-based setting that accommodates, and responds positively to, cultural diversity.

Employers and training providers

Although school-industry links are evident in the majority of English schools, the extent to which these adequately prepare students from ethnic minorities for the transition from school to post-16 opportunities, and to widen access, is open to question (Heath, 1997). If those employers who participate in work based programmes fail to recognise the diverse needs of Muslim girls, which may encompass issues of food, dress code, travel restrictions, working environment, hours of work and prayer facilities (Parker-Jenkins et al, 1998b) this may impose further limitations.

The above issues are also of paramount importance with regards to training and employment opportunities. Noon and Ogbonna (1998) found that the «failure» of those from ethnic minority backgrounds to be as successful as their white counterparts was attributed, by some training providers, to their reluctance to assimilate British cultural values (p.32). The importance attached to the challenging of inequitable practice by raising awareness of «difference», seeking to change attitudes, promoting positive action, and highlighting both the ethical and economic aspects (Welsh et al, 1994) should be foremost in the work of Careers Services, yet our survey revealed little demonstrable activity in this area.

Conclusion

Clearly if Careers Services, and careers guidance, is to respond positively to the «new» era of cultural diversity, the need for a critical review of the dominant «equal opportunities» discourse will be required if Western forms of oppression and exploitation are to be challenged. Acknowledging that power and privilege are unevenly distributed, and accepting that the shifting cultural landscape positions «difference» and «diversity» as a permanent feature of the «new» nation state, may lead to an internal examination of the modern day complexities that encompass the desire to institute a fair and just society. Seeking to ensure that the career guidance needs of Muslim girls are met is more than just a symbolic action; it signifies a belief in the value of change and the importance of responding positively within a diverse world. The adoption of a «critical social justice» approach therefore will help to facilitate a wider awareness of the issues, legitimate the place of political understanding, and empower Muslim girls and their communities in their pursuit of rights and opportunities. To finish with a quote from the conclusion to our 1999 study:

«Strategies that promote equity and social justice... are essential. The challenge therefore is to ensure that clients with a complex range of needs, who are members of diverse communities, and who may be differentiated on the basis of their race/ethnicity, gender and class, receive the level of support and resourcing they require» (Parker-Jenkins et al, 1999:27).

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