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Class and Ethno-Gender Differences in Education and Labour Market Position—An Intersectional Analysis of Ethnic Integration in the UK

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Abstract: This paper analyses the socio-economic disadvantages of women from different ethnic minority heritages in the UK. Using data from the Labour Force Survey (2014–2023), which contains detailed information on parental class and respondents' socio-economic conditions, we examine four domains of life chances which are crucial for ethnic integration: educational attainment at the degree level, risks of unemployment, access to professional-managerial (salariat) position and earning power. We proceeded with the gross differences and then examined the differences by ethno-gender status and parental class combinations, controlling for many confounding factors. We also examined the net ethno-gender differences over the life course and the trends of social fluidity over the period covered and across the ethno-gender groups. We found that women from all ethnic origins were doing well in education but faced multiple disadvantages in the labour market, especially in access to the salariat and in earning power. Women of Pakistani/Bangladeshi heritages faced pronounced unemployment risks, especially at the earlier life stages. There is a significant increase in fluidity over the period covered, but this is marked by considerable ethnic and class differences, with Black Caribbean, Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women from more advantaged class origins being unable to secure advantaged class positions and those from working-class families unable to make long-range upward mobility as effectively as White men. Overall, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African and Black Caribbean women are found to be considerably disadvantaged, but there are also signs of social progress.

Keywords: class; gender; ethnicity; education; labour market position; UK

1. Introduction

Class, gender and ethnic differences are enduring topics in sociological research. They hold centre place not only in academic research but also in policy making. As ascriptive markers, class, gender and ethnicity should have no role to play in liberal democracies that adhere to principles of equality of opportunity and meritocratic ideals. Yet disadvantages along class, gender and ethnic lines abound in the socio-economic life. Although much research has been conducted in each of these areas, little is known about the joint effects. This study seeks to conduct a comprehensive and intersectional analysis to see how women from different ethnic minority backgrounds and different class origins fare in the most important domains of socio-economic life in Britain: degree-level attainment, avoidance of unemployment, access to professional-managerial (salariat) jobs and earning power in the labour market.

This paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we give a brief account of the key literature on class difference, gender inequality, ethnic disadvantage and the need for exploring the multiple disadvantages. Then, we introduce our data and methods, followed by analysis of ethno-gender and class differences in the four domains and over the life course. We also analyse social mobility over the period and across the groups. Finally, we give a summary of the main findings and discuss the implications of the research.

2. Literature Review

The main axes of social division in contemporary British society, termed 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act of 2010, include age, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, religion/belief, disability and class, although the last is called 'socio-economic disadvantage' (Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 237) [1]. This paper tries to unravel the complex interplay of such protected characteristics by investigating the life chances of women in different ethnic minority groups from different class origins over the life course. And, in so doing, we hope to cover most of the legally protected characteristics (96% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, 23% of Black African women and 13% of Indian women in our analysis are Muslims). To avoid excessive complexity, we do not include religion as a main effect or interaction variable. Disability is controlled for in the models along with other covariates. For a fuller account of ethno-religious effects on socio-economic conditions in Britain, see Heath, Li and Woerner-Powell (2018) [2]. Much research has shown that women, people from ethnic minority heritages and those from lower family backgrounds face persistent and pronounced disadvantages in life opportunities such as education, employment, career advancement and earnings (Igansky and Payne, 1996 [3]; Berthoud, 2000 [4]; Li and Heath, 2008 [5]; Platt, 2011 [6]), although there is also research that shows that women are catching up with or have even surpassed men in education (Strand, 2014 [7]; Li, 2021 [8]). As Goldthorpe and McKnight (2006) [9] demonstrate, class is a fundamental organising principle in people's life, affecting employment security, income stability and career advancement. Class position not only affects the social advantages and disadvantages for the position holders but for their family members and future generations. A large body of intergenerational social mobility research attests to the powerful and persisting class effects. Yet it is also the case that most of the mainstream class mobility research has paid insufficient attention to gender and ethnic issues. For example, the data used in the landmark social mobility studies by Goldthorpe (1987) [10] and Heath (1981) [11], the 1972 Social Mobility Inquiry, did not contain women, and there was only a small number of respondents from ethnic minority origins (Heath and Ridge 1983) [12]. This is partly understandable, as only a small portion of the population belonged to ethnic minorities at that time. But the proportion of ethnic minorities has been rapidly increasing, from around 3% in the 1950s to around 20% at the current time, making ethnic integration an imperative social and policy concern.

Research on the labour market situation has found marked disadvantages faced by ethnic minority groups. Quillian et al. (2017) [13], Heath and Di Stasio (2019) [14] and Zwysen et al. (2021) [15] all show a persisting level of racial discrimination in Britain and some other western countries over the last few decades, confirming earlier findings of 'widespread and pervasive' racial discrimination by employers against immigrant workers. But the pervasive discrimination does not necessarily mean the lack of amelioration of ethnic conditions in the labour market. Using the decennial census and the Labour Force Survey data from 1966 to 1991, Iganski and Payne (1996) [3] show that members of ethnic minority groups were making consistent progress in the labour market despite the very low starting points they had and the racial discrimination they were facing. For instance, relative to Whites, the ratios of access to employer, professional and managerial positions fell from 7 to 2.31 for men and from 4.08 to 1.44 for women for the West Indian group from 1966 to 1991, marking substantial social progress, albeit the differences remained at 3.25 for Pakistani/Bangladeshi women (p. 128). This is one of the earliest studies on improving ethnic fortunes in Britain, although the data did not allow the authors to investigate the family origin effects. Therefore, we do not know whether ethnic minorities from disadvantaged family classes faced extra barriers as compared to their White peers.

Another major study was conducted by Berthoud (2000) [4]. He pooled the Labour Force Survey for eleven years (1985–1995) to increase the sample size but focused the analysis on men. He found not only major differences between ethnic minority groups and the majority but also clear and more pronounced differences among the minority groups. Among men aged 20 to 39, Indians were close to the Whites in terms of unemployment

rates and weekly earning power, at 12% and 9%, and £327 and £332, respectively, but Black Africans were over three times as likely to be unemployed, at 29%, and Pakistani and Bangladeshi men had earning power at £182, which was only 55% of that of the Whites. The unemployment rate for the young Black African men (aged 16–17) was at a shocking level of 58%, over three times that of their White peers (at 18%). Even when education and family circumstances were controlled for, Black African, Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean men were 40%, 38% and 24% behind White men in the weekly earning power. This analysis is a powerful reminder of Duncan's (1968) [16] penetrating analysis of African Americans' poverty, which he convincingly shows was due to the problems of race rather than to family poverty. However, unlike Duncan (1968) [16] but like Iganski and Payne (1996) [3], Berthoud (2000) [4] was unable to include parental class in the analysis, as the information was not available in the data used. And as women's experience was not explored in the analysis, it is not possible to know whether the disadvantages encountered by the men from the ethnic minority groups would equally apply to the women from ethnic minority backgrounds or whether female ethnic minorities suffered even more given the prevailing gender differences.

The analyses discussed in the foregoing paragraphs were selected because they were among the earliest and best analyses of ethnic differences in the labour market based on large-scale datasets and they differentiated the ethnic minority groups before the 'official' classification in the 1991 Census of the Population became available. Since the release of the Samples of Anonymised Records (SARs) of the 1991 Census, more data have been collected by the Government and academic communities with ethnicity as a standard variable. As a result, there has been an increasing number of studies in the last few decades on ethnic disadvantages ranging from education, employment, health and earnings to housing (Karn, 1997) [17]. Yet a common feature in most of the studies is that they conduct discrete analyses on specific facets of disadvantages faced by the ethnic groups rather than on multi-disadvantages. This is because most of the data do not contain information on family backgrounds. Even with research where the prerequisite information is available, intersectional analysis is rarely performed. For instance, Li and Heath (2016) [18] pooled all available data at the time of study that contain family class, gender and ethnicity, but as their interest was in intergenerational social mobility in absolute and relative terms, they used sophisticated methods appropriate for mobility research rather than the intersectional approach. As Crenshaw aptly states, 'Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated' (1989: 140) [19]. In the British context, not only Black but also Pakistani-Bangladeshi women may face multiple disadvantages that deserve our attention from an intersectional perspective.

Research in educational stratification has made more progress in adopting the intersectional approach. For instance, Strand (2014) [7] used the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) to study the educational achievement at age 16 and educational progress between ages 11 and 16. Rather than using a single indicator as family class, he used five socio-economic indicators (the eight-category National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification, NSSEC, of the head of the household; parental highest educational qualification, ranging from degree or above to no qualification; entitlement to a free school meal, FSM; home ownership and neighbourhood deprivation) to form a single composite measure of Socio-Economic Status (SES). He then used the ethnic group*SES interactions as an intersectional approach and the quintiles of the SES as class categories. He found that at age 16, the achievement gap between students from the top and the bottom SES quintiles was twice as large as the biggest ethnic gap and six times as large as the gender gap. Social differences run in the order of class, ethnicity and sex. Yet the effects 'do not combine in a simple additive fashion; rather, there are substantial interactions particularly between ethnicity and SES and between ethnicity and gender' (Strand, 2014: 131) [7]. In terms of achievement at age 16 or progress from ages 11 to 16, all ethnic minority groups

from low SES backgrounds achieve similarly to or better than White British students, but at high SES, only Indian students outperform White British students. Low SES White and Black Caribbean boys were most disadvantaged in terms of educational attainment, but high SES White and Indian students were performing very well. In other words, social stratification was more pronounced among White than among ethnic minority students, but ethnic minority groups faced considerable disadvantages in socio-economic conditions. As compared with the 21% of White students situated in the highest quintile of SES, only a tiny proportion of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African and Black Caribbean students came from the top quintile families, at 1%, 5%, 5% and 7%, respectively (Stand, 2014: 141) [7].

Strand (2014) [7] made a notable contribution to the study of educational stratification using the intersectional approach. Another contribution he made was the separation of Bangladeshi from Pakistani groups given the much more pronounced level of poverty of the Bangladeshi students who had a mean standardised SES score of −1.67, almost twice as low as that of the Pakistani students (−0.87). This framework of ethnic classification is a clear improvement over that used in the preceding studies (Iganski and Payne 1996 [3]; Berthoud 2000 [4]). Yet, in hindsight, he could have gained further insight into the ethno-social stratification if he had included Chinese students as a separate category. As Li (2021) [8], using the same data source, shows, although the sample size for the Chinese students is not big (N = 26), it is sufficient for analysis. More substantively, this is a group who seemed to have defied well-known theories like 'immigrant paradigm' (Kao and Thompson 2003) [20], 'ethnic capital' (Modood 2004) [21] or 'relative risk aversion' (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997) [22]. They were from rather disadvantaged origins (31% of them were from working-class families and 56% had low educated parents relative to 23% and 17% for the White students), but they outperformed all other groups ranging from General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) scores, transition to A-Level and to university studies and all the way to admission to Russell Group universities, at 60, 91%, 97% and 29%, well ahead of the White students, at 31%, 60%, 38% and 10%, respectively. Yet, despite the amazing success, they stumbled in career life when they entered the labour market, unable to secure employment and earnings commensurate with their level of educational attainment: they were more likely to face unemployment (at 9%) and had considerably lower weekly earnings (£224) than White students at 6% and £313. Yet, even though this study made a thorough analysis with sophisticated methods ranging from additive to multilevel models, the number of domains under investigation made it difficult to conduct an effective intersectional analysis, a shortcoming which will be amended in the present study.

Leaving aside the methodological issues of the additive versus intersectional approaches to the study of the interwoven complexities of class–gender–ethnic disadvantages, the main substantive concern of ethnic studies is with the gradual socio-economic integration of ethnic minority groups into the mainstream society (or what is termed 'racial assimilation' in the US literature). For decades, scholars have been concerned with the plight of immigrants and their children and the possible improvement in their socio-economic fortunes. Classic accounts such as that of Warner and Srole (1945) [23] demonstrated a pattern of assimilation over time and across generations that subsequently became known as the 'straight line assimilation theory'. They reported that immigrant groups from Europe in Yankee City from the 1850s to the 1930s tended to start on the lower rungs of society and then gradually moved up, although different groups varied in the amount of progress that they made from one generation to another. After three or four generations, most of the groups were well assimilated with the dominant Anglo-American population in both occupational and social status terms, with the ethnic lines becoming rather blurred (Alba, 2005) [24]. Alba and Nee (2003) [25] reformulated the classical 'straight-line assimilation theory' and proposed 'a neo-assimilation theory' in which immigrants from the other parts of the world are also assimilated into the mainstream American society. Many US scholars have documented the gradual assimilation of immigrants, firstly those from European countries, followed by people from Asia, Latin America and elsewhere. Although some

groups were faring worse than others owing to lower starting points and more discriminatory practices from employers, experiencing either 'bumpy-line' (Gans, 1992) [26] or 'segmented' assimilation (Portes and Zhou, 1993) [27], most voluntary immigrants to the US are found to be gradually assimilating into the socio-economic life of the American society, with only African Americans and American Indians being the most persistently disadvantaged groups. Recent research shows that the two groups have income gaps relative to Whites being close to a 'long-term steady-state' (Chetty et al., 2020: 770) [28].

With respect to assimilation, a pertinent question is what kind of assimilation is of key concern? For our present purposes, we follow Gordon (1964) [29] in focusing on structural assimilation as the most important component of ethnic integration. Gordon developed a seven-dimensional paradigm to explain the process of ethnic assimilation: cultural, structural, material, identificational, attitude receptional, behaviour receptional and civic. Although cultural assimilation is likely to occur first, Gordon asserts that structural assimilation, defined as large-scale entrance into institutions of the host society, is the 'keystone of the arch of assimilation' (Gordon, 1964: 81) [29]. This is because, after structural assimilation, all other types of assimilation follow one after another. In addition, structural assimilation also has advantages over the other domains of assimilation on practical, normative and scientific grounds: practically, data on structural integration are more readily available than those on other aspects; normatively, educational attainment and labour market success can be objectively measured rather than subjectively perceived, such as cultural preferences, which are usually set within private domains in liberal societies; and scientifically, structural assimilation can be used to predict the other domains, such as occupational success can determine civic attitudes and behaviours (Li, Pickles and Savage, 2005) [30]. In this paper, we therefore focus on vertical structural assimilation and use educational and labour market success as 'the most important indicator of successful integration' (Casey, 2016: 77) [31].

Another pertinent question in this regard is with whom we should compare the ethnic groups in assessing the extent of structural assimilation. As indicated in the 'neo-assimilation theory' by Alba and Nee (2003) [25], and as nicely summarised by Kasinitz and Waters (2023) [32] and by Alba, Statham and Foner (2024) [33], there have been both an expansion of 'whiteness' and 'mainstream' categories and an incorporation of elements from the newcomers by the mainstream groups in American society so that ethnic groups are no longer being compared with Anglo-Americans as Warner and Srole (1945) [23] did. Nevertheless, it is still the case that White Americans hold the most advantaged socio-economic positions and are being used as the benchmark (Li, 2010) [34]. Similarly, White British men are the most privileged group in British society.

Summarising the foregoing, we focus on degree-level attainment, avoidance of unemployment, access to professional-managerial (salariat) positions and earning power in the labour market as indicators of structural assimilation or ethnic integration for women in different ethnic groups in comparison with White men in Britain. We use the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2014–2023 as the data source and assess both gross and net differences. In the last regard, we use both additive and intersection methods.

3. Data and Methods

The LFS is one of the most authoritative social surveys in the UK. For dozens of years, as indicated in the discussion of research work by Iganski and Payne (1996) [3] and Berthoud (2000) [4], the LFS was a mainstay of research on the labour market positions from employment and class to earnings of different ethnic groups. Yet, the lack of family origin data prevented its use for intergenerational social mobility research. Since 2014, in the July–September quarter, the LFS started to collect data on the class position of the main earners when the respondent was aged 14. This change has resulted in many new opportunities, such as on the glass ceiling of earnings (Laurison and Friedman 2016) [35] and ethnic social mobility (Li and Heath, 2016) [18]. We pooled the data from 2014 to 2023 to increase sample size for detailed ethnic groups. The response rates of the LFS are

generally high although falling in the more recent years (the response rates for the LFS declined from around 75% in 2004 to 60% in 2014 and then to around 50% just before the COVID-19 pandemic). Comparisons between the results from the LFS and those obtained by the census suggest that (after weighting) the extent of response bias is quite small (Weeks et al., n.d.) [36]. The sharpest decline in response rates occurred from 2020, reflecting the COVID-19 effects (see Figure 5.1 in LFS_Userguide_Vol1_Background_2022, available at the data_archive.ac.uk. All the data sources and associated technical information are available at http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/key-data.aspx#/tab-uk-surveys, accessed on 8 March 2024). The total sample size in the surveys is 811,626. We select women from main ethnic groups and White men in the working-age (age 16–65) groups, with a total sample size, as shown in Table 1, of 463,497, which allows us to study the socio-economic situation of women from all main ethnic groups, including Chinese, which is a group usually omitted in UK ethnic research due to sample size issues (Iganski and Payne, 1996 [3], Berthoud, 2000 [4] and Strand, 2014 [7]).

Table 1. Summary statistics of percentage coming from salariat origin, attaining degree-level education, being unemployed, having salariat jobs and earning power (£) by ethno-gender groups.

	% Salariat Origin	% Degree	% Unemployed	% Salariat	Earning Power (£)	Approx. N
White men	36	30	4	41	38,751	211,099
White women	35	33	4	37	26,409	232,077
Black Caribbean women	23	32	8	34	27,434	2468
Black African women	36	39	11	28	24,384	4446
Indian women	36	55	6	42	31,918	6220
Pakistani women	24	31	14	19	19,975	4007
Bangladeshi women	18	30	16	17	21,555	1534
Chinese women	40	63	6	39	36,070	1646
All	35	32	4	38	32,427	463,497

Notes: For respondents aged 16–65 who are residents in the UK at time of survey. Weighted analysis and unweighted Ns. Person weights for 2014–2022 and reweighted data for 2023; income weights for income analysis. The same below for all tables and figures in this paper. Source: pooled data of the July–September quarters of the Labour Force Survey (2014–2023). The same below for all tables and figures in this paper.

To conduct the analysis of the interplay between class, gender and ethnicity, our first task was to code ethnicity, parental class, education and labour market position (employment status, class position and earning power) and other demographic variables in a manner that is consistent over time. We code the main ethno-gender groups. Prior analysis shows that controlling for age, sex, parental class, country of birth and year of survey, White Irish (people from the Republic of Ireland) and White Other (those from Western European countries, North America—Canada and the US—Australia and New Zealand) are doing better than White British in education, access to the salariat and earning power, and there is no significant difference in avoidance of unemployment. We therefore differentiate eight groups: White men, and women from White, Black Caribbean, Black African, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese heritages. We omit the 'Mixed' and 'Other' groups, as they are quite heterogenous.

We code parental and respondent's class into a five-category schema based on the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NSSEC). The five-class schema adopted is as follows: (1) higher salariat (higher-grade professionals and managers including large employers, NSSEC 1), (2) lower salariat (lower-grade professionals and managers, NSSEC 2), (3) intermediate (routine clerical and own account workers of higher grades, NSSEC 3&4), (4) semi-routine (manual supervisors, lower-grade technicians and skilled manual workers, NSSEC 5&6) and (5) routine (semi and unskilled manual workers, agricultural labourers and long-term unemployed, NSSEC 7&8). This is a schema commonly used by Government researchers and academics in mobility research in the UK (see, for example,

Buscha and Sturgis, 2018: 165 [37]; Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2019: 22 [38]; Friedman and Laurison 2019: 45 [1]; In and Breen, 2022: 16 [39]; Li, 2021: 6 [8]).

Our dependent variables refer to (1) degree-level education, measured as first-degree or above; (2) unemployment risks, for people who were economically active but were unemployed at the time of survey; (3) access to salariat, for people in professional-managerial positions and (4) earning power, deflated annual labour market incomes (the variable is standardised using the GDP-deflator available at https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src= https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/659c102bc23a1000128d0cb8/GDP_Deflators_ Qtrly_National_Accounts_December_2023_update.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK, accessed on 8 March 2024). Following Berthoud (2000) [4], we measure earning power as earnings for those in work and zero for those not in paid employment. Finally, as indicated earlier, due to declining response rates, the LFS provided reweighted data for 2023, which were harmonised with the person data from 2014 to 2022. Income analysis was conducted using the income weights provided by the LFS.

We use methods as appropriate for the research questions at hand. Technical details will be kept at a minimum and will be provided as needed. We start at the descriptive analysis to gain a glimpse of overall differences, and then proceed to modelling with both additive and interaction models to see the main effects and multi-disadvantages. We shall also discuss how the net differences unfold over the life course, controlling for a whole range of socio-demographic factors, and we shall illustrate the intersectional effects on access to the salariat and the glass ceiling effects in pay gaps. We shall then analyse the trends of relative mobility over the period covered and across the groups.

4. Analysis

4.1. Gross Differences of the Ethno-Gender Groups

Table 1 shows the four indicators of structural assimilation for the ethno-gender groups. In addition, we also include parental salariat to show the origin difference. As can be expected, White men are still the most advantaged group in British society, with the greatest occupancy in the salariat, highest earning power and lowest risks of unemployment. In contrast, Bangladeshi women are the least advantaged: least likely to have salariat parents (18%), least likely to be in salariat positions (17%), most likely to be unemployed (16%) and having the lowest earning power (with an annual earning of only £21,555) as compared to 36%, 41%, 4% and £38,751 of White men in the respective domains although both groups have the same level of degree attainment (30%). Pakistani women have the lowest earning power, at £19,975, around half of White men. The ethnic women groups are not in the same rank order in the different domains of structural assimilation. Chinese and Indian women have the highest level of educational attainment, almost twice as high as that of White men, but their earning power is lower, although Indian women's occupancy of the salariat is higher than that of White men. White women and the two Black groups of women stand in the middling positions, closer to White men than to Pakistani/Bangladeshi women.

Proceeding from the gross differences, we move onto ethno-gender differences in the four domains by family class. Although considerable intergenerational class mobility research has been conducted in Britain (Goldthorpe, 1987 [10]; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992 [40]; Li and Heath, 2016 [18]; Buscha and Sturgis, 2018 [37]; Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2019 [38]; Heath and Li, 2024 [41]), no research has, to the best of our knowledge, been conducted on origin class effects for ethnic minority women in the UK in the four domains. Yet, given the insights from the mobility research, one would expect that people from higher origin class would have more advantaged educational and occupational positions, but would this be of similar extent for men and women and for people from different ethnic backgrounds?

Table 2 shows the basic contours of ethno-gender fortunes in the four domains of ethnic integration by the five origin classes. The existing research of young people's educational attainment (Strand, 2014 [7]; Li, 2021 [8]) would lead us to expect class-lined educational attainment and, indeed, we find this as true at an overall level, with people from higher

salariat origins being around three times as likely as those from routine working-class origins to have degree-level attainment, at 53% and 17%, respectively, as shown in the last row for all in the first panel.

Table 2. Degree-level education, risks of unemployment, access to salariat and earning power by ethno-gender status and origin class.

	Higher Salariat	Lower Salariat	Intermediate	Semi-Routine	Routine
Panel 1: % degree					
White men	51	42	30	21	15
White women	54	47	33	24	17
Black Caribbean women	56	42	31	33	24
Black African women	56	51	36	32	28
Indian women	74	67	53	45	37
Pakistani women	52	42	29	26	21
Bangladeshi women	52	49	26	32	26
Chinese women	81	78	60	57	47
(All)	53	45	32	23	17
Panel 2: % unemployed					
White men	4	4	4	5	6
White women	3	4	4	4	5
Black Caribbean women	4	6	8	8	7
Black African women	8	11	10	11	15
Indian women	5	6	7	5	7
Pakistani women	11	13	15	18	15
Bangladeshi women	17	2	13	23	20
Chinese women	5	5	4	5	8
(All)	4	4	4	4	6
Panel 3: being in salariat					
White men	57	51	41	35	27
White women	50	47	38	32	25
Black Caribbean women	46	42	34	36	29
Black African women	46	37	24	24	16
Indian women	55	50	38	38	33
Pakistani women	24	22	20	16	17
Bangladeshi women	26	17	17	17	14
Chinese women	47	51	42	38	27
(All)	53	48	39	33	26
Panel 4: earning power (£)					
White men	45,475	41,361	39,216	35,842	32,713
White women	32,822	29,466	26,159	23,364	21,406
Black Caribbean women	41,002	26,379	26,721	27,534	26,691
Black African women	32,030	26,680	22,682	25,582	18,103
Indian women	47,562	30,901	27,152	31,107	27,044
Pakistani women	29,768	20,006	19,059	19,148	18,714
Bangladeshi women	24,388	27,142	19,532	23,176	20,147
Chinese women	41,629	36,428	37,462	32,809	24,362
(All)	39,289	35,347	32,176	29,529	26,896

Looking more closely, we find that with the exception of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women from intermediate origins, where they are slightly behind their White male peers, women from every ethnic background and every class of family origin have higher rates of degree attainment than White men. There are also some other important features in the panel worthy of notice: White women from every class origin are better educated than White men; Chinese women from every class origin are best educated, and even those from routine working-class origins have roughly the same level of educational attainment as that achieved by White men and women from salariat families. Indian women are the second highest educated at all levels of family origin, and Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have the lowest attainment, with women from the other ethnic heritages being in between.

Panels 2 to 4 show data on the labour market positions in terms of unemployment risks, access to the salariat and earning power. One might expect a close correspondence between the patterns in educational attainment in Panel 1 and those in Panels 2–4. Yet, although at the overall level origin class differences are clearly shown in salariat access and earning power with smooth gradients for people from higher salariat to the routine working-class families, there are no origin differences in unemployment risks except for those from routine working-class families. A close scrutiny also reveals that ethno-gender differences prevail over origin class differences in unemployment, with Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African women being two to three times as vulnerable as the overall population regardless of family origins.

Regarding access to the salariat and earning power, as shown in Panels 3 and 4 of Table 2, we find both class and ethno-gender effects, and that in a quite salient manner. With only a few exceptions, White men from all class origins are, despite their modest levels of educational attainment, found to have greater occupancy of salariat position and higher earning power than do women from all ethnic or class backgrounds, attesting to the superior positions enjoyed by White men, as implied by Crenshaw in her criticism of 'racism' and 'sexism'. By contrast, even though Bangladeshi and Pakistani women from all family origins have similar or higher levels of education than do White men, they are just around half as likely to be in the salariat or to enjoy similar levels of earning power. Comparing the two Black groups, we find that even though Black African women are better educated, Black Caribbean women tend to have more advantaged class or earning positions.

4.2. Net Differences of Ethno-Gender Groups

While the preceding analysis has shown important gross differences along the ethno-gender and class lines in the four domains, it might have neglected some other factors. For instance, in our sample, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are much younger (with a mean age of around 27) than White men or women (with a mean age of around 42). As younger people have more opportunities to enjoy higher education but are more vulnerable to unemployment, we need to take age and other confounders into account to see the net effects. With this in mind, we conducted four models for each of the outcome variables, using the average marginal effect (AME) method for the first three binary outcomes (degree attainment, access to the salariat and vulnerability to unemployment) and the log of earning power for the last outcome. This way, the coefficients can all be interpreted as percentage-point differences of each category relative to the reference group. In the first model on degree attainment, we control for the main explanatory variables of ethno-gender and family class, age, age squared (the effects of age squared are 'absorbed' in the AME), nativity and year of survey, as these are factors associated with educational attainment. For models on unemployment risks and access to the salariat, we further control for education as an indicator of human capital. And in the assessment of earning power, we further include factors that have a direct impact on earning power, such as marital status, caring responsibility as entailed in the number of young children under the age of 16 in the household and usual hours of work.

Table 3 shows the net effects. Let us have a look at the socio-demographic variables first. Age is positively associated with employment security (less unemployment risks), occupational advancement (salariat access) and economic renumeration (earning power). As the effects of age squared (the curvilinear functions) are not shown in the table, we shall see in the next subsection how the ethno-gender groups fare in the four domains over the life course. Regarding the nativity effects, we find people who were born overseas tend to have better education, reflecting positive selection and the high threshold for immigrants. Other things being equal, immigrants are more likely to face unemployment, are less likely to have professional-managerial positions and have lower earning power. People with degree-level education are less likely to be unemployed and more likely to have salariat jobs and higher earnings, at around 40 percentage points higher than those with poorer education. We can also see notable social changes over the period covered. From 2014 to

2023, more people gained degree-level education, had salariat jobs and had higher earnings, with an increase of 9, 2 and 7 percentage points respectively. Finally, we notice that married people have greater earnings, reflecting perhaps employers' rewards for commitment (Chun and Lee, 2001) [42]. Caring responsibilities have a small negative effect, and hours of work have a strong positive impact on earning power.

Table 3. Additive models of the average marginal effects (AME) on degree attainment, unemployment risks, access to salariat and log annual earnings.

	Degree Attainment	Unemployment Risks	Access to Salariat	Log of Earnings
Ethno-gender (White men = ref)				
White women	0.026 ***	−0.006 ***	−0.052 ***	−0.139 ***
Black Caribbean women	0.038 **	0.030 ***	−0.054 ***	−0.067 *
Black African women	−0.000	0.060 ***	−0.124 ***	−0.215 ***
Indian women	0.147 ***	0.029 ***	−0.071 ***	−0.160 ***
Pakistani women	−0.022 *	0.071 ***	−0.181 ***	−0.293 ***
Bangladeshi women	−0.012	0.090 ***	−0.195 ***	−0.261 ***
Chinese women	0.224 ***	0.019	−0.096 ***	−0.080
Parental class (high salariat = ref)				
Lower salariat	−0.075 ***	−0.001	−0.016 ***	−0.033 ***
Intermediate	−0.211 ***	0.001	−0.069 ***	−0.077 ***
Semi-routine	−0.283 ***	0.005 ***	−0.091 ***	−0.114 ***
Routine	−0.346 ***	0.020 ***	−0.139 ***	−0.166 ***
Age	−0.000	−0.003 ***	0.003 ***	0.011 ***
Foreign born	0.081 ***	0.008 ***	−0.063 ***	−0.037 ***
Year (2014 = ref)				
2015	0.007 *	−0.008 ***	−0.004	−0.012
2016	0.020 ***	−0.010 ***	−0.001	0.007
2017	0.022 ***	−0.014 ***	0.001	0.001
2018	0.031 ***	−0.015 ***	0.004	0.036 ***
2019	0.043 ***	−0.017 ***	0.009 **	0.040 ***
2020	0.064 ***	−0.002	0.013 ***	0.057 ***
2021	0.072 ***	−0.016 ***	0.010 **	0.032 ***
2022	0.077 ***	−0.020 ***	0.017 ***	0.099 ***
2023	0.090 ***	−0.017 ***	0.017 ***	0.073 ***
Having degree		−0.013 ***	0.403 ***	0.376 ***
Marital status (married = ref)				
Separated/divorce				−0.065 ***
Single				−0.070 ***
No. of dep children under 16				−0.013 ***
Basic usual hour of work				0.042 ***
N	351,460	270,530	351,460	76,595

Note: Age squared is included in the models but the coefficients are absorbed in the average marginal effects. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Net of all other impacts, we still find marked ethno-gender and origin class effects. For instance, as compared with people from higher salariat families, those from routine working-class families are around 35, 14 and 17 percentage points behind in terms of degree attainment, salariat access and earning power. Controlling for all other factors, family origin effects on unemployment are rather weak, but we still find that people from routine working-class families have unemployment rates which are two percentage points higher than those from higher salariat families. Finally, in this regard, we see that having controlled for all other factors in the table, Chinese and Indian women were well qualified, with degree qualification 22.4 and 14.7 percentage points higher than that of White men; we also find that Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African women were much disadvantaged in terms of both career advancement and earning power, by around 20 to 30 percentage points behind White men. All these differences are highly significant and pronounced.

4.3. Intersectional Analysis of Ethno-Gender Differences in Access to the Salariat and Earning Power

Although the data in Table 3 showed marked class and ethno-gender differences, they are, in a strict sense, results from additive rather than intersectional models. To gain an insight into the latter respect, we need to construct interaction models. As we have eight ethno-gender groups and five origin classes, the results will be hard to present in a succinct way, not to mention the number of covariates. Readers may remember that Strand (2014) [7] used SES as a continuous variable in his intersectional effects, but in our case, with eight categories for ethno-gender groups and five categories for origin classes, there will be 28 more degrees of freedom with the ethno-group*class interactions which, together with the covariates, will make the table too big to present and almost unintelligible. Given this, we use the net effects for the ethno-gender groups from higher salariat and routine working-class families as an illustration of the intersectional effects. For brevity, we focus on access to the salariat and on the earning power of the people. In the latter regard, we focus on those who have reached the top of the class hierarchy, namely, in the higher professional-managerial positions. The effects of ethno-gender groups and family origins on degree attainment and unemployment risks are weaker and not presented (available on request). This will allow us to have a panoramic view of both 'ethnic penalty' (Heath and McMahon, 1997) [43] and 'glass ceiling' (Laurison and Friedman 2016) [35] effects simultaneously. The data are shown in Figures 1 and 2, where we included disability in addition to all the covariates already controlled for in Table 3; and for earnings data in Figure 2, we further included respondent's own class and their current region of residence, as people's current class positions are known to have a salient effect on earning (Goldthorpe and Mcknight, 2006 [9]; Li and Heath, 2018 [44]) and there are large income differences over the regions, with people in London and South East also earning more (Friedman and Laurison, 2019) [1].
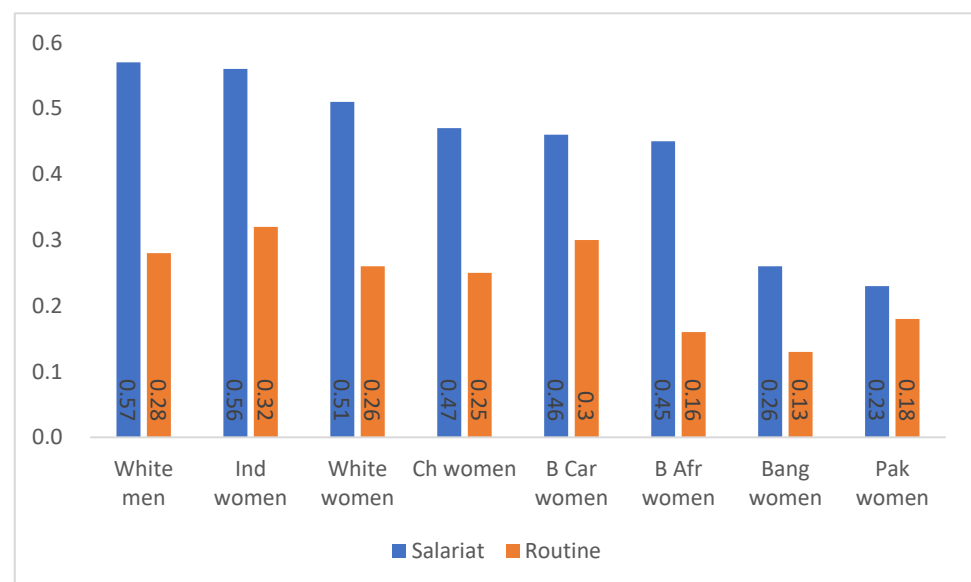

Figure 1. Intersectional analysis of access to salariat by ethno-gender groups from higher salariat and routine origins. Note: controlling for age, age squared, nativity, education, disability and year of survey.
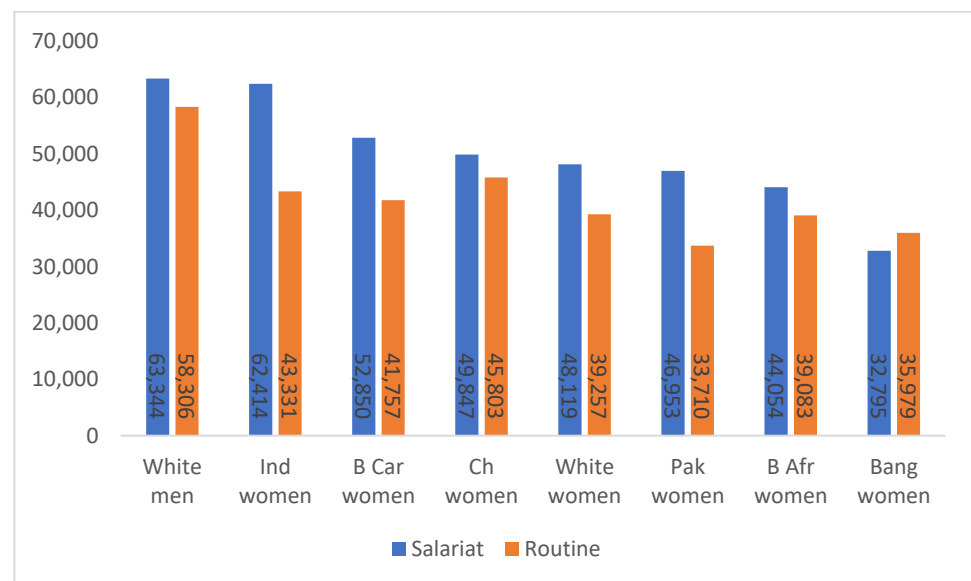
Figure 2. Intersectional analysis of earning power of ethno-gender groups in Class 1 from higher salariat and routine families. Note: controlling for age, age squared, nativity, education, disability, region and year of survey.

The data in Figures 1 and 2 show clear evidence of intersectional ethno-gender and class effects on access to the salariat and on earning power. With regard to the former (Figure 1), we find that those from higher salariat origins are generally around twice as likely to find themselves in the salariat positions as their peers from routine working-class families; and there are also pronounced ethnic differences, especially visible among people from higher salariat backgrounds. A total of 57% of White men from higher salariat but only 23% of Pakistani women from similar origins are found in the salariat. The ranking order from White men to Pakistani women in access to the salariat clearly shows the ethnic hierarchy in the protective power of the higher salariat in preserving class advantages. Combining origin class and ethno-gender effects, we see a huge difference of 44 percentage points, with 57% of White men from higher salariat but only 13% of Bangladeshi women from routine working-class origins being in the salariat, or 4.4 times in terms of disparity ratio holding constant all other factors.

Turning to data on earning power, as shown in Figure 2, we focus on the ethno-class differences among people who have reached the higher-grade professional-managerial positions. Recent research (Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 17) [1] has discussed the 'glass ceiling' effect, namely, 'the invisible and durable barriers' faced by ethnic minority and White women in achieving the same rewards as White men in the same positions. The ethnic glass ceiling effects could be aggravated by the class pay gaps, that is, people from lower origin classes achieve lower rewards than their higher origin peers even when they are doing the same job. The data show that the ethnic differences are in the usual order, with White men and Indian women leading all other groups. The origin class differences are weaker but clearly visible for every group, particularly for Indian women, with a difference of £19,083. The largest ethno-gender gap (intersection effect) is shown between White men and Bangladeshi women from salariat origins, with a staggering difference of £30,549.

4.4. Ethno-Gender Differences over the Life Course

In this part, we present data on the ethno-gender effects over the life course. The data in Figures 3–6 show the net differences in the four domains—degree attainment, unemployment risks, access to the salariat and earning power. We follow Li and Heath (2018) [44] in presenting the net effects. Age is one of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act of 2010, and it is against the law to discriminate against people on the

basis of age. Yet, age is also a marker of experience and human capital and, as such, age difference in education and labour market achievement is something to be expected. The key question for our present purposes is whether there are notable differences for the ethno-gender groups at similar ages in the four domains after we have taken account of all other influential factors and, if there are, to what extent and how to explain them.
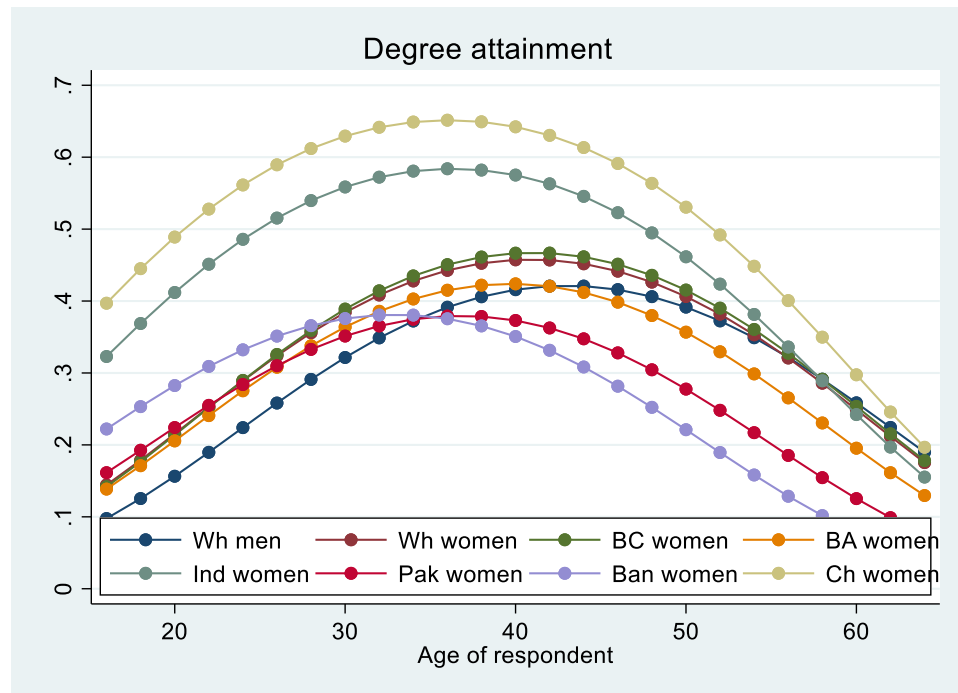

Figure 3. Degree attainment by ethno-gender groups over the life course. Note: controlling for age, age squared, parental class, nativity, education, disability and year of survey.
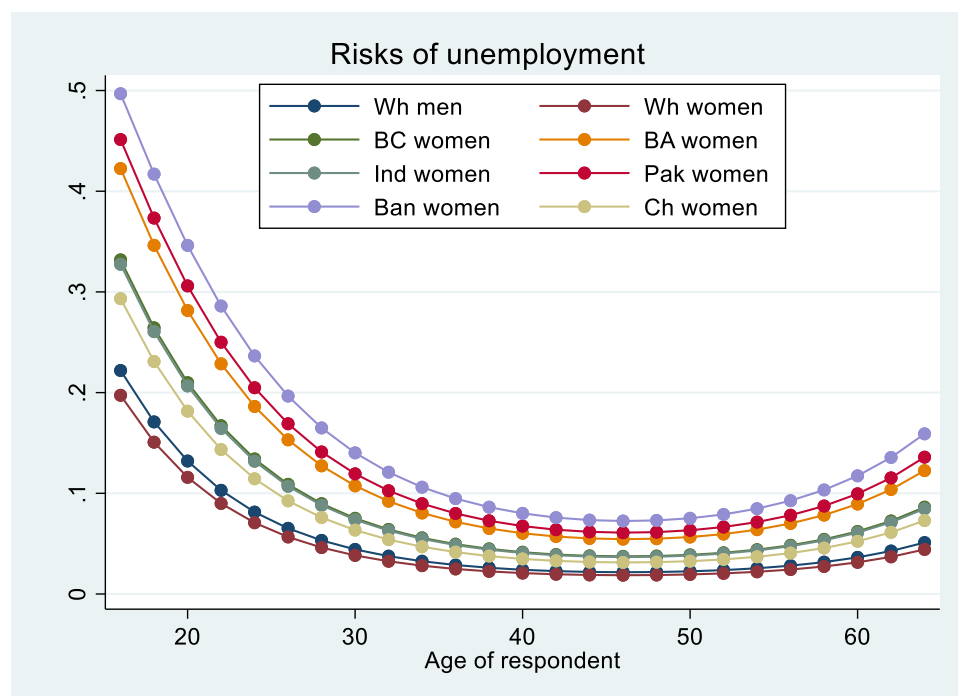

Figure 4. Risks of unemployment by ethno-gender groups over the life course. Note: controlling for age, age squared, parental class, education, nativity, disability and year of survey.
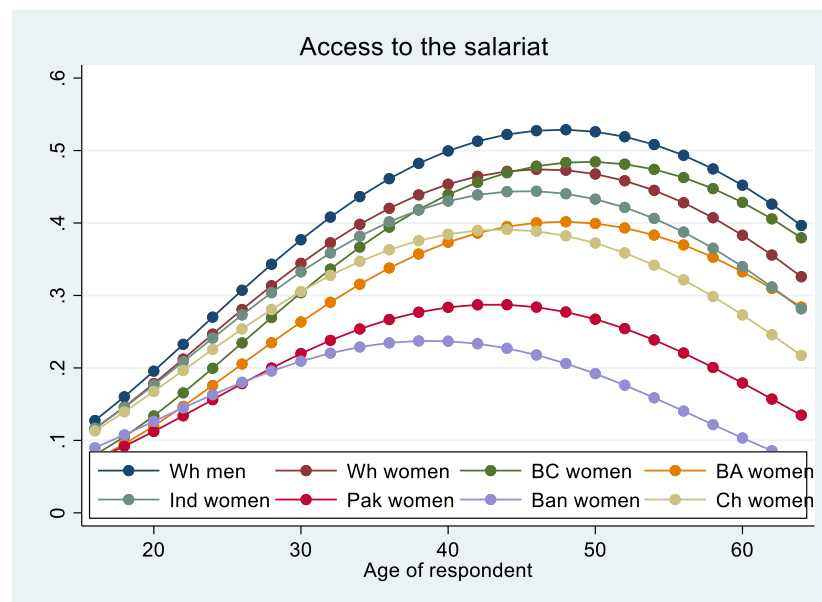
Figure 5. Access to the salariat by ethno-gender groups over the life course. Note: controlling for age, age squared, parental class, nativity, education, disability and year of survey.
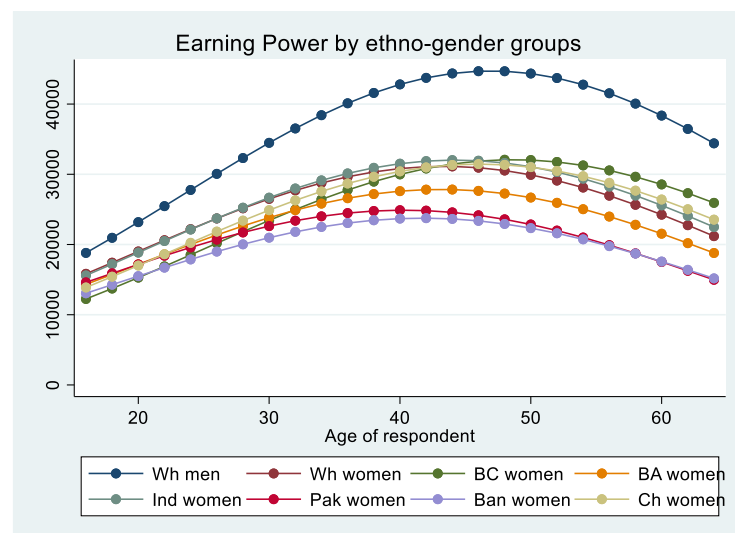

Figure 6. Annual earning by ethno-gender groups over the life course. Note: controlling for age, age squared, parental class, nativity, education, class, region, caring responsibility, marital status, disability, working hours and year of survey.

The data in Figure 3 show the degree attainment associated with the ethno-gender groups over the respondents' ages. As prior analysis shows significant intersections between ethno-gender groups with age and with family class, we included the interactions in addition to the other covariates in the model, with the average marginal effects of the ethno-gender groups over the ages being presented in the graph. The figure shows a remarkable feature which is little noted in the existing literature but which is something that might well be expected, namely, that young women from the four Asian groups—Chinese, Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani—are outperforming the other groups with higher levels of degree attainment until around age 35. For instance, in his analysis of the GCSE results, Strand (2014: 147, Figure 4 for girls) [7] showed that controlling for family SES, the three South Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) groups were overperforming the other groups (he did not include Chinese). Li (2021) [8] showed that the four groups

were doing very well not only at GCSE but also in transitions to A-Level and university studies and even in entering Russell Group universities (see also Crawford and Greeves, 2015 [45], on transition to higher education). The extraordinary performance may reflect an Asian cultural tradition that attaches great importance to learning, coupled with a possible 'immigrant paradigm' (Kao and Thompson, 2003) [20], and/or a desire to pre-empt employer discrimination with superior education (Li, 2021) [8]. At older ages (after 35), Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African women's educational lead quickly declined, and they became the least qualified groups.

How is people's educational attainment reflected in their labour market position? The data in Figure 4 on unemployment risks show almost a mirror image of Figure 3. Young women from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African backgrounds were much more likely to experience unemployment than their age peers from White groups. Women of Chinese and Indian origins were also more likely to face unemployment despite their much higher levels of education. Better education did not effectively protect these women from risks of unemployment, but their vulnerability may have been even greater in the absence of such education.

Being able to set a foothold in the job market is the first step, and gaining career progression is a more difficult task. Figure 5 shows the data on access to professional-managerial (salariat) positions. Here, we again find a familiar pattern, namely, occupational success follows a curvilinear function of age. Goldthorpe (1987: 52) [10] stated that people tend to achieve 'occupational maturity' at age 35, after which decisive long-range down-ward mobility is rare. We can see from the figure that this prediction works very well for White men but is much less accurate for the four Asian women groups. Even at the peak of their careers, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women's likelihood of achieving salariat positions was less than half that of White respondents, holding constant the confounding factors. Even the most educationally qualifed groups (Indian and Chinese) were way behind their White peers. Black Caribbean women tend to work in the NHS as nurses (lower salariat) and hence have a fairly high level of salariat position (Heath and Li, 2008: 279) [46].

With regard to earning power, as shown in Figure 6, we find the shape similar to that in Figure 5, although a two-tier structure is in clear evidence: between White men on the one hand and women from all ehtnic groups on the other. White men have much higher earning power at all ages than women from any ethnic group, with Bangladeshi and Pakistani women being the most disadvantaged, followed by Black African women. Net of other factors, White, Indian, Chinese and Black Caribbean women have rather similar earning profiles over the life course.

4.5. Relative Social Mobility by Generation and Ethnicity

The foregoing analysis concerns the ethno-gender relations in the four domains of crucial importance of ethnic integration. We also had, in passing, a brief discussion (Table 3) on the changes over time as indicated by the coefficients for the survey years. The four domains may serve as crucial indicators of ethnic integration but may be a poor indicator of how the underlying ethnic relations were changing over the decade being explored. For this, we need to address the social advantages and disadvantages associated with relative mobility. Relative mobility measures how 'fluid' or 'open' the social structure is. It refers to the competition between people from different class origins in obtaining advantaged and avoiding disadvantaged destinations. Relative mobility is expressed in odds ratios. The closer the odds ratio is to 1, the weaker is class reproduction (and the greater is fluidity or openness). Our interest is whether the odds ratios were becoming stronger or weaker or stayed unchanged as the time went on, from 2014 to 2023, and how the different ethno-gender groups were faring relative to the White men.

To test this, using standard techniques in social mobility research, we fit three models: the conditional independence model, which serves as the baseline; the constant (or common) social fluidity model (CnSF or CmSF), which allows for an association between origin and destination but not the three-way interactions, a model which postulates that the

origin/destination odds ratios are the same over time or across the ethno-gender groups; and the log-multiplicative layer effects (also called uniform difference, UNIDIFF) model, which provides an assessment of whether there are significant changes over time or across groups. The models can be written as follows.

1: Baseline model (conditional independence)

$$\log F_{ijk} = \mu + \lambda_i^O + \lambda_j^D + \lambda_k^G + \lambda_{ik}^{OG} + \lambda_{jk}^{DG}$$

2: Constant (or Common) social fluidity model (CnSF/CmSF)

$$\log F_{ijk} = \mu + \lambda_i^O + \lambda_j^D + \lambda_k^G + \lambda_{ik}^{OG} + \lambda_{jk}^{DG} + \lambda_{ij}^{OD}$$

3: Log multiplicative or UNIDIFF model

$$\log F_{ijk} = \mu + \lambda_i^O + \lambda_j^D + \lambda_k^G + \lambda_{ik}^{OG} + \lambda_{jk}^{DG} + \beta_k X_{ij}$$

where μ is the grand mean, O stands for class origin, D for class destination and G for later years relative to 2014 or to the different ethno-gender status (White men = 1, White women = 2 and so on); X_{ij} represents the general pattern of the origins–destinations association and β_k is the relative strength of this association relative to the reference group (see also Xie, 1992 [47]; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992 [40]; Breen, 2004 [48]; Goldthorpe and Mills, 2008 [49]; Buckodi and Goldthorpe, 2019 [38]; Li and Devine, 2011 [50]; Li and Heath, 2016 [18]). This third model provides us with a general test of fluidity, namely, whether there is a uniform pattern for the odds ratios to be closer to or further away from 1 (or the log of odds ratios of 0) in a particular layer of the table. The further away the log coefficients (as in Figures 7 and 8) are below 0, the more fluid the origins–destinations association becomes, or the more equal the mobility chances are becoming over time or between groups. We run the models using the five-class schema described earlier. We wish to point out that even though we have very big samples, the modelling exercises for the 5×5 tables would mean that we only have sufficient numbers for White men and women for each of the 11 years and that the sample sizes for women in the ethnic minority groups are too small for each year. Given this, we provide results for tests at an overall level, for changes over time for all groups combined, which is equivalent to a CnSF model, and for comparisons of the different female groups relative to White men, which is equivalent to a CmSF model.
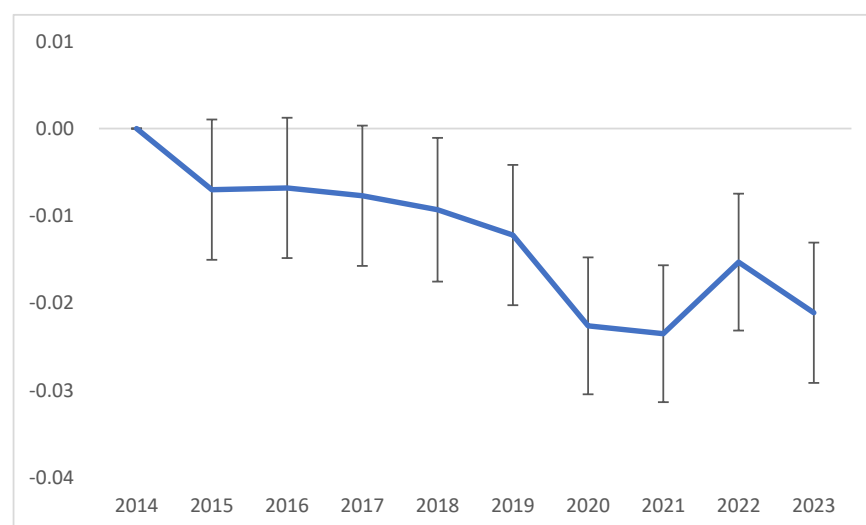

Figure 7. UNIDIFF parameter estimates and 95% confidence intervals of the origins–destinations associations over time (2014–2023).
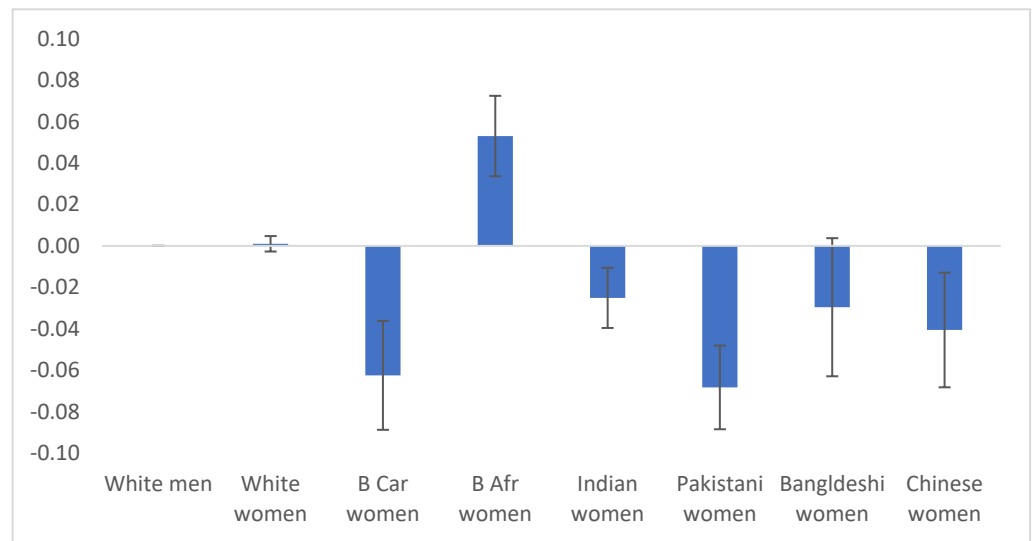
Figure 8. UNIDIFF parameter estimates and 95% confidence intervals of the origins–destinations associations between ethno-gender groups.

The test statistics are shown in Table 4. As regards the goodness of fit statistics, it can be seen that neither the CnSF nor the CmSF model provides a significant fit to the data, although only a very small proportion of the cases are misclassified. However, the UNIDIFF models do provide a significant improvement in fit over the CnSF or the CmSF model. What are of substantive interest for our purposes are the parameters in the UNIDIFF models that show the overtime changes or the fluidity situation of the different female groups relative to White men.

Table 4. Results of fitting the conditional independence (Cond.ind.), constant/common social fluidity (CnSF/CmSF) and uniform difference (UNIDIFF) models to mobility tables (N = 378,696 and 345,682, respectively).

Model	G^2	df	*p*	rG^2	BIC	Δ
CnSF (over time)						
1. Cond. ind.	17,643.8	160	0.00	0.0	15,603.3	8.8
2. CnSF	238.3	144	0.00	98.6	−1598.2	1.0
3. UNIDIFF	169.3	135	0.02	99.0	−1552.4	0.8
2.–3.	69	9	0.00			
CmSF (between groups)						
4. Cond. ind.	18,426.1	128	0.00	0.0	16,793.6	9.0
5. CmSF	677.9	112	0.00	96.3	−750.5	1.3
6. UNIDIFF	558.7	105	0.00	97.0	−780.4	1.3
5.–6.	115.2	7	0.00			

Note: rG^2 = percentage reduction in G^2; Δ = percentage of cases misclassified.

Figure 7 shows the parameter estimates together with the 95% confidence intervals for the changes in the origins–destinations associations from 2014 to 2023. Overall, the line is going down, suggesting an overall improvement over the decade in the mobility structure, or greater social fluidity. This trend was clear but failed to reach statistical significance of 5% in the first few years. Yet, from 2018 onwards, the trend accelerated, and all parameters were significantly different from that of 2014. Taking all 11 years as a whole, the analysis shows clearly a profile of increasing social fluidity in British society. The evidence here reinforces the findings reported in Li and Heath (2016: 189) [18], where the authors showed significantly growing fluidity from the 1980s to 2010s, and we have extended the trend to the 2020s. And our findings here are also in line with the report of growing fluidity

by Goldthorpe and Mills (2008) [49], Li and Devine (2011) [50] and Buscha and Sturgis (2018) [37].

Finally, in this section, we show the UNIDIFF parameters and 95% confidence intervals for the CmSF model in Figure 8. Here, we find that the relative mobility for White women is no different from that of White men. For the ethnic minority groups, we find that with the sole exception of Black African women whose relative mobility is significantly more rigid than that of White men or White women, all other groups have a more fluid pattern than that of White men and women, and significantly so for Black, Indian, Pakistani and Chinese women. Further analysis shows that the mobility pattern of the Black African women is a case of extreme 'ethnic penalty' in class mobility: while for White men, 31% from higher salariat families and 11% from routine working-class families are found in higher salariat positions, the corresponding figures are only 14% and 2% for Black African women. Overall, 56%, 53% and 62% of Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women from routine working-class origins stay in routine working-class positions, as compared with 34% and 22% for White men and White women respectively (see full data in Appendix A Table A1).

How do we understand the generally more fluid patterns of the ethnic minority women? Heath and Li (2024) [41] point out that although social fluidity is a desirable goal for social inclusion on economic, social, scientific and moral grounds, it may mask inequalities if some groups exhibit significantly more fluid patterns than others (see also Platt, 2005) [51]. For instance, if ethnic minority groups show excessive fluidity in social mobility, it could mean that the more advantaged families from these groups cannot protect their children from downward mobility as effectively as do their counterparts from the mainstream group. As a result, ethnic minority children from more advantaged families will experience greater downward mobility than their peers from the mainstream group. This may be aggravated by the lower rates of long-range upward mobility by ethnic minority than by majority children. The combined effects would be greater fluidity by ethnic minority than by the majority group. This is indeed evidenced in our data, as shown in Appendix A Table A1: in terms of intergenerational stability in the higher salariat, the rates are 31%, 15%, 14%, 12% and 18% for White men and Black Caribbean, Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, respectively: Black and Pakistani-Bangladeshi advantaged families are roughly half as successful as the mainstream group in class preservation. This is a clear case of 'perverse openness', as discussed by Hout (1984: 1393) [52]. It is good to have fluidity as a societal goal, but that goal should be equally shared by all social groups.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

We have, in this paper, examined how family class, gender and ethnicity affect people's educational and occupational achievements in contemporary British society. The fundamental aim of this research is on ethnic integration and social inclusion. We used the pooled data from the Labour Force Survey (2014–2023) to conduct the analysis, as this is the most authoritative data source currently available for addressing the complex interplay of class, gender and ethnic differences in the most crucial aspects of life chances. We also addressed age (life course) and disability issues and relative mobility.

Summarising our analyses, we found that, at an overall level, Pakistani/Bangladeshi women were least likely to come from advantaged families and, even though they have managed to have similar educational attainment as White men, were around three to four times as likely to face unemployment, half as likely to find themselves in the salariat positions and had roughly half the earning power of White men. We also found marked origin class effects among the different ethno-gender groups in each of the four domains, with people from higher salariat origins being around three times as likely to have degree-level education, twice as likely to have salariat positions and one and a half times as likely to have earning power as those from routine working-class origins. White men from the higher salariat families were not the most highly educated group but were most advantaged in avoiding unemployment, gaining access to the salariat and having the highest level of earning power, in contrast chiefly to Pakistani and Bangladeshi women.

While the gross analysis shows the overall picture, further analysis controlling for important confounding factors shows net effects of family class and ethno-gender differences. Thus, we found that controlling for class and other factors, women in the different ethnic groups were generally better educated than White men, with up to a 22 percentage point lead in degree-level attainment, but were, other things being equal, up to 9 points more likely to be unemployed and up to 20 points less likely to be in the salariat and had an earning power up to 30 points lower than that of White men.

Although the main effects models showed the net class and ethnic differences, they did not show how the ethnic fortunes change for people from different class origins. To address these issues, we conducted intersectional analysis focusing on access to the salariat and earning power. The analysis showed much greater ethnic differences among people from higher salariat than from routine working-class families in access to the salariat, with the biggest gap being around 4.5 times as high between White men from higher salariat families and Bangladeshi women from routine working-class families, holding constant education and many other factors (57% vs. 13%, respectively), a clear sign of multiple disadvantages. Similarly marked multi-disadvantages were found in the glass ceiling effects of earning power. For example, for people who have reached the top of career life, in the higher-grade professional-managerial positions, the earnings gap between White men and Bangladeshi women is, holding constant education and other factors, astounding, at £63,344 and £32,795, respectively, or a difference of £30,539.

The ethno-gender differences over the life course are equally striking. Our detailed analysis shows that young women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins are doing well in education despite their poorer family resources and were outperforming their age peers from the mainstream community. Yet better education did not protect them from vulnerability to unemployment, nor did it enable them to have equal access to salariat positions or a high earning power. If employment status, career advancement and earning power can be viewed as a close-knit web of life opportunities, White men are in the most advantaged positions in the labour market and Pakistani and Bangladeshi women face multiple barriers, even though the younger members among them have caught up with and even surpassed the mainstream community in education.

Our analysis shows that the period under discussion was a 'good time', with an overall improvement in socio-economic situation in the UK: more people were gaining higher education and having salariat jobs, fewer people were being unemployed and earning power was rising. The period also saw a significant increase in social mobility. Yet the growing fluidity should be viewed with scrutiny. A close inspection reveals marked differences in the relative mobility chances among the ethno-gender groups. Black and Pakistani-Bangladeshi women from higher salariat families were half as likely to stay in the higher salariat as White men, and those from routine working-class families had around one fifth the chance of achieving long-range upward mobility.

We have, in sum, conducted a more systematic analysis than hereto available in the existing literature, yet there are limitations in the analysis. For instance, due to the data constraints, we could not explore why even among respondents situated in the higher salariat, there were such marked ethnic, gender and origin class differences, with multiple interwoven disadvantages. There may be 'chill factor' effects preventing ethnic minority people from lower class origins from trying to reach the very top (McCrudden et al., 2009) [53], or discriminatory practices by employers, or lack of bridging social ties who could give useful clues or a helping hand, or language barriers (Li, Savage and Warde, 2008) [54]. Discrimination, whether of a direct, indirect or statistical nature, is hard to measure, especially in a social survey. The series of field experiments conducted in Britain since the 1960s have shown little change in the chances of Black and Asian applicants being called for an interview relative to hypothetically identical white applicants (Heath and Di Stasio, 2019) [14]. To the best of our knowledge, no experiments of a similar nature have been available on possible discriminatory practices during interviews or in the promotion processes. While objective data are not available, there are data

on subjective perceptions of discrimination. The newly released Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS, 2023, UK Data Archive, SN 9116) contains 153 indicators of discrimination. An analysis shows that ethnic minority people were much more likely than the majority group to feel that they were discriminated against, with a mean score of 0.91, 0.72, 0.61, 0.58 and 0.59 and 0.17 for women from Black Caribbean, Black African, Indian, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Chinese and White origins. These and other sources of disadvantage will be explored in the future if useful data become available. On the whole, our analysis shows substantial and multiple disadvantages faced by women of ethnic minority origins relative to White men, especially those of Black and Pakistani-Bangladeshi heritages. Yet we should also note that younger Pakistani-Bangladeshi and Black women are making good achievements in education and in labour market participation. Further analysis using pooled data from the General Household Survey (1972–2005), the British Household Panel Study (1991–2008), the Understanding Society (2009–2019) and the Labour Force Survey (2014–2023) shows notable progress in the last six decades made by younger women (aged 25–40) of Pakistani/Bangladeshi origins: they have increased their labour market participation from 16% in the 1970s to 50% in the 2020s, and their degree attainment has increased from 6% to 49%. For Black young women, degree-level education increased from 6% in the 1970s to 57% in the 2020s. Slowly and steadily, they are making progress. The Government, employers and the whole society have a duty to do more to help the most disadvantaged groups. A fairer, more inclusive and more equal society will be better to everyone of us.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study as it is based on secondary data analysis.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable as this study does not involve humans.

Data Availability Statement: All the data sources and associated technical information are available at http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/key-data.aspx#/tab-uk-surveys (accessed on 7 October 2024).

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Appendix A

Table A1. Class distribution by ethno-gender groups (percentage by row for each group).

Parental Class	Respondent's Class									
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	White men					White women				
1 Higher salariat	31	26	14	10	20	19	32	20	9	21
2 Lower salariat	24	27	16	13	21	15	32	21	11	21
3 Intermediate	18	22	22	16	22	10	27	24	16	22
4 Semi routine	15	20	18	21	26	8	24	24	20	25
5 Routine	11	16	17	22	34	6	20	22	22	32
	Black Caribbean women					Black African women				
1 Higher salariat	15	31	16	17	21	14	32	15	13	27
2 Lower salariat	9	33	18	14	26	7	30	16	17	31
3 Intermediate	6	28	21	18	26	6	18	15	19	42
4 Semi routine	9	27	20	17	27	6	18	11	18	47
5 Routine	7	22	23	21	27	2	14	12	17	56
	Indian women					Pakistani women				
1 Higher salariat	32	23	13	7	25	12	12	14	10	53
2 Lower salariat	21	29	17	10	23	4	18	11	9	58
3 Intermediate	15	23	18	13	31	7	13	16	10	55
4 Semi routine	14	24	19	14	29	5	11	15	11	58
5 Routine	10	23	22	15	30	4	13	18	11	53

Table A1. *Cont.*

Parental Class	Respondent's Class									
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	Bangladeshi women					Chinese women				
1 Higher salariat	18	9	10	17	46	32	15	16	7	30
2 Lower salariat	6	10	20	13	50	22	29	12	8	29
3 Intermediate	3	15	11	12	60	19	23	17	15	26
4 Semi routine	4	13	15	9	59	17	21	27	9	26
5 Routine	2	12	16	8	62	9	18	19	19	35

Note: weighted analysis. The unweighted sample sizes for the eight groups with non-missing parental and own classes are 162,319, 179,463, 1757, 2985, 4542, 2747, 1032 and 1145, respectively.

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