AN EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK CARIBBEAN GIRLS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND IN THE TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports a study on the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls in England. It focuses on the everyday interactions of Black Caribbean girls in school and identifies the strategies they employ in pursuing academic success. Drawing from Critical Race Theory and intersectionality perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixteen school aged participants exploring nuanced accounts of their everyday experiences and the strategies they employ, as they attend secondary schools in England. The narratives reinforce earlier findings from Fuller (1980), Mirza (1992) and Rollock (2007) and confirm that, even in a presumed ‘post-racial' society, Black Caribbean girls perceive that they are working harder than their peers. Findings are critically examined with reference to notions of agency, neoliberal policies and meritocratic values. The thesis argues that Black Caribbean girls continue to be ignored from educational policymaking resulting in negative educational outcomes. Recommendations include that policymakers and educators should focus on the underachievement of Black Caribbean girls and consider the effects of neoliberal meritocracy, and post-racial ideologies, on their psychological well-being.

DEDICATION

For my late parents, Ralph (Sidney) Henry Blake and Carmen Blake.

I am incredibly indebted to my dear mother

who always encouraged me to reach greater heights and deeper depths.

Your confidence in my abilities was profound and still motivates me today.

This is for you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rationale

In this thesis, I will critically examine the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls in secondary education in England and the factors which contribute to their success. The aim is for this thesis to build on the empirical studies by Mary Fuller in 1980, Heidi Mirza in 1992 titled 'Young, Female and Black', which are among the few studies examining the school experiences of Black females in the English secondary education system. The objective of this research is to represent the needs of this marginalised group and appeal to policymakers and educators alike, to open up the debate on raising the attainment and aspirations of Black Caribbean girls.

Section one, part one is where I provide an autobiographical account of my childhood, lived school experience and life experiences which are instrumental in motivating me to choose this area to study. In part two, I will describe the educational policies which have shaped the school experiences of children attending secondary schools in England, which leads to my research questions.

In section two, I provide the background to my personal and professional motivations within this research and my observations from my role as a teacher in secondary education. I will build on this reflection, to discuss the methodological implications of my positionality in the context of my study.

SECTION ONE

Part One

To establish my positionality, I begin this study by reflecting on my own educational experiences, by outlining my autobiography. Exposing my life history signals, as a researcher, I should also be prepared to unmask my reality in the same way that I expect my participants to do so (Maylor, 1995). It is only in our willingness to expose our experiences, that real change can happen. I concur with Bryan et al., who argue, 'we must take stock of our experiences, assess our responses – and learn from them' (Bryan et al., 2018: 12). A huge influence on my educational trajectory is my mother.

A Mother's Love

'Education, education, education' was the slogan coined by Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour government, in 1997 (Blair and Adonis, 2021), however, I would argue, this was a mantra first instilled in me by my mother many years earlier. As the eighth and youngest child of parents of Jamaican heritage, who were ambitious and positive about life, despite its challenges, I was very happy. Always embroiled in some conversation with my older siblings, words were currency in my household; the funnier, the better. Unfortunately, I didn't always get a chance to intervene in what was often described as 'big people's conversations', so instead, I would take myself off to read my Ladybird books from school such as the adventures of Peter and Jane, or tales of the Black boy named 'Sean'. When I wasn't at home, I led an active lifestyle which was not only shaped by my Caribbean culture, but I was reaping the advantages of living in a diverse, close-knit community in Yorkshire which could be described as having a *village mentality*, meaning, everyone looked out for each

other. Adults were not timid in reprimanding children in the community if they noticed any level of naughty behaviour, whilst being equally keen to share all their skills, time and resources to support families to raise their children. During hot long summer days, I would be *playing out* with neighbours in the back street, attending the local community centre or hanging onto the pulley at the nearby adventure playground. An important instilment to my upbringing was my mother's faith. As a fervent Christian, she ensured all her children attended the Pentecostal church. Church was where we had lessons in Sunday school, we learnt new skills in clubs such as Brownies and Girl Guides, as well as going on outings and participating in special events, some of which included recitations. Memorising and reciting readings in front of large congregations were part of everyday life. Although nerve racking at times, the educational advantage my participation provided was serendipitous and naively mistaken for having fun. Accordingly, Rhamie argues, 'home and the community are crucial to the development of resilience and high achievement' (Rhamie, 2007:125).

The product of a bustling network of siblings, very close in age, set me up as an outstanding pupil in my first experience of school. Beginning in a large comprehensive school in class one was short-lived when I was moved up to class three, as my abilities matched children older than myself. I loved to read and write but numeracy was not my favourite. At home, my mother would engage all her children in home learning, which sometimes ended in frustration from both parties. My mother, my first teacher, would persist, being driven by the importance of her children having a well-rounded education and, I always wanted to please her – but sometimes, I just didn't have the answer.

There was more to my mother's drive for her children to be well educated, than I knew at that time. My own school lived experience took place in the decades, 1970 and 1980. Referring to this period, Gillborn argues, 'Equality of opportunity was the dominant educational issue of the 1960s and 1970s' (Gillborn, 1990: 98), coupled with the way in which education was managed and organised to prepare youth for employment, in the absence of a national curriculum (Tomlinson, 2005). The problem with education in the 1970's, according to Tomlinson, was the lack of 'coherent plans for the education of working class children to higher levels, or for dealing with a private sector which sustained division and privilege' (Tomlinson, 2005: 27) The emergence of youth training schemes was evident, which failed to result in employment. Further turbulence was felt from the educational agenda in the 1980s, emanating in the main, from the government's strategy to predicate education in economic or industrial terms. Despite the roll out of free education for all, as a direct result of the 1944 Education Act, disparities existed between children from ethnic minority backgrounds in relation to their achievement. It was the Rampton report in 1981 and similarly, the Swann report in 1985, which concluded that Afro Caribbean children 'as a group are underachieving in our education system' (Rampton, 1981:10). The historical background of educational policy is discussed in chapter 2.

I spent my school days in a state of oblivion of the political climate, notwithstanding the stereotype of underachievement which all 'West Indian' children were educated in. Instead, I was cushioned by my mother's efforts to change my trajectory by acquiring social capital for social mobility. In 1988, I was among the first ever cohort to achieve the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications, the year in which the Education Reform Act was established. Against the political

climate of racial ideology, I successfully achieved the necessary grades to pursue my further education goals before moving to the West Midlands to gain my first degree at university. My early introduction and passion for education has remained with me until this day.

The realisation of the state of education for Black Caribbean girls came as a blow when I became a mother. I moved to the leafy suburbs of a large city in the West Midlands, where my daughter began reception at the nearby primary school, at the age of three. Being one of a few Black children in the mainly White school, I was unaware of what this move signalled for her identity, her positionality, and her safety. In the first year of her school life and mine as a mother of a school child, my time was absorbed in numerous conversations about my daughter's *difference* from the other children, which was a bone of contention for her teacher. Every day there was another issue which led to her being hauled to the Headteacher's office, often in tears. I couldn't understand why playing with other children and developing social skills in a learning environment always resulted in my daughter being singled out and disciplined. The written daily diary accounts of her controversial misdemeanours mounted up. The final straw was parents' evening, when her teacher concluded that the issue with my daughter is that 'she has a strong mind'. My response was simply 'this mind is her strength, and it will carry her through life'. My decision to remove my daughter from this school came as no surprise to her teacher and the Headteacher, who showed no willingness to improve her school experience. My daughter has now graduated with a first degree, however, as I reflect, I wonder what her academic outcome would have been if she remained in this primary school until the age of 11 years old.

Having a passion for education throughout my life, led me to work in secondary education in many roles, including a teacher. It was my role as an Ethnic Minority Achievement Project Assistant which consolidated my own lived school experience, my role as a mother and now an educator. I began to relate with the students on a personal level as I understood where they were coming from. As a mentor, I became a professional friend and sometimes, it was their tears that moved me rather than the student's words. My first role within a school, focused on raising achievement for Black boys, which followed the national agenda after the release of the Macpherson report in 1999. However, it was in 2018, when I was privileged to mentor Black girls in a mainly White comprehensive school, located in the suburbs of a city in the West Midlands, that I began to reflect on what I was observing. As I dissected the girls daily lived experiences and all the negative connotations that attributed to it, including my daughter's early experience, I concluded that Black girls' school experience is being thwart by a system that stifles her academic achievement and instead, diverts energy and attention to her race, gender, and class. It is these experiences of Black girls in school, which provided me with the impetus to share their story with policymakers and educators to create opportunities to improve their lived school experience and their educational outcomes.

Part Two

English Schools

Schooling in England is compulsory for all young people from the age of 5 -16 years (Connelly, et al, 2013). There are several factors which contribute to educational

attainment and progress, determining the trajectory of the young person and the career which they go on to pursue. These include but are not limited to parenting practices and involvement with school, the home learning environment, the young person's educational aspirations, the school context and neighbourhood deprivation (Strand, 2012). Success is measured by the qualifications and grades that a young person achieves, which provide them with a better chance of employability.

English schools use the GCSE as the standard qualification. It is the norm for institutions or employers to request young people to obtain, as a minimum, a grade C or a level 5 in English and Mathematics, to pursue advanced additional courses or to secure a professional career or an apprenticeship (Connelly, et al, 2013). A young person's school experience, together with their GCSE attainment, are strong determinants of their future success and participation in post-compulsory education, university and employment (Babb, 2005; Connelly, et al., 2013).

Meritocracy

Meritocracy is used by the United Kingdom (UK) government and globally, as a strategy which represents social justice and legitimises social class differences (Jin and Ball, 2019). In his 1958 satire titled, 'The Rise of the Meritocracy', Young introduced the British ideal, '*may the best person win'* (Reay, 2020: 405), when he defined meritocracy as the formula, merit = intelligence + effort (Jin and Ball, 2019: 65). The notion of meritocracy can be described as the ideological essence of a society in which all subjects are open to social justice and equality of opportunities to compete for social resources on the base of merit (Jin and Ball, 2019; Reay, 2020).

The idea that all young people have the same opportunities open to them, fails to take into consideration that social equity is not available to every young person and disparities such as race, class and gender exist. Therefore, in the pursuit and acquisition of GCSE qualifications in the school discourse, a young person experiences meritocratic practices including; 'testing, hyper-competition and setting' (Reay, 2020: 405). Meritocratic practices in English schools serve to exacerbate social divisions and stimulate 'distrust, prejudice, envy, resentment, and contempt between different social groups' (Reay, 2020: 405). Accordingly, Reay contends with meritocratic ideology when she argues;

> *'Despite Young's pessimistic account of the dangers of meritocracy, it has become widely accepted as an ideal in liberal democratic societies. A meritocratic system is a competition in which there are clear winners and losers, but in which the resulting inequalities are justified on the basis that participants have an equal opportunity to prove themselves'*
>
> (Reay, 2020: 405).

Young people are confronted with the juxtaposition of unlevelled playing fields. The fact is inequalities are often discriminated against by the policies and structures within educational institutions (Reay, 2020; Jin and Ball, 2019).

Social inequalities are interchangeably propelled to the forefront of government policies to coincide with societal needs or political agendas. However, irrespective of the varying waves of initiatives, some groups have been misrepresented and are invisible from policies or educational resources such as Black Caribbean girls.

The Moral Panic

In 2001, when schools in England and Wales were required to provide information on individual pupil characteristics for the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils came to the attention of policymakers. The lowest performing group were Black Caribbean students who were consistently performing below the national average in core subjects, English, Mathematics and Science (Smith, 2007). Policymakers directed much attention to raising the achievement of Black pupils to close the achievement gap between their White and Asian counterparts. However, the legacy of the 'moral panic' (Smith, 2007) surrounding the academic achievement of boys in the 1990's prevailed, therefore, initiatives aimed at raising Black Caribbean pupil attainment, largely focused on the failing boys discourse rather than Black Caribbean girls.

Black Caribbean girls have become invisible in education and obscure from the view of policymakers and researchers alike, yet they face similar trajectories as their male counterparts (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The successful girls discourse (Rollock, 2007; Skelton and Francis, 2011) has highlighted that the performance of girls, especially at GCSE, has overtaken that of boys (Smith, 2007). It is the comparison of Black girls with Black boys which is often the focus of researchers as noted by Rollock, who argues:

> *'comparing the educational attainment of Black girls solely with Black boys over-emphasizes Black girls' achievements as successful when this, in fact, is merely relative in comparison with the already well-established low attainment of their predominantly failing male counterparts'* (Rollock, 2007:197).

Whilst Black boys' underachievement is a fact, Black girls are experiencing multiple challenges in the education system and beyond. Ladson-Billings and Tate argue, 'although [Black girls] receive better grades than their male counterparts, their grades do not translate into advantages in college admission and/or the work place' (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995:51). Nonetheless, whilst Black girls overtake their male counterparts, recent data reveals they are historically and consistently falling behind their White and Asian female counterparts in GCSE attainment (GCSE English and maths results, 2021). (For achievement data, see appendix 2 and 3).

Research Questions

This study will explore the lived experiences of Black Caribbean girls in secondary education in England, and answer the following questions: -

1. What are the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls?
2. What strategies do Black Caribbean girls employ to navigate their school experience?

SECTION TWO

Something has to change

In 2002, I was employed as an Ethnic Minority Achievement Project Co-ordinator at a secondary school in West Yorkshire. The role was created as part of the Aiming High: Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils programme, which was rolled out across thirty secondary schools in England, to raise the attainment of Black and Pakistani students, who were attaining GCSE grades below national average and were underachieving compared to their White and Asian counterparts (DfES - Aiming High Consultation, 2003). The schools were provided with extra resources including funding and training support.

Neoliberalism

From my recollection of working in schools, the era of 2002 – 2008 was a monumental time for education, when the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, brought education to the forefront. There was of a stream of initiatives for schools, such as Excellence in Cities, Every Child Matters, Aim Higher and Widening Participation, the focus of which was primarily to close gaps in attainment for the disadvantaged, promote access to education and universities and to remove barriers to learning - which were all part of New Labour (Ball, 2013). Education was capital and this rhetoric became a global phenomenon. Not only education, but there was a clear movement of economic focus from an industrial to an informational and service economy (Ball, 2013). Ball argues of this time, ‘education policy [was] increasingly thought about and made within the context of the pressures and requirements of

globalisation' (Ball, 2013:1). Schools were the machine that would churn out young people who were qualified and aspiring to utilise their education capital to grow the economy. New Labour demonstrated that young people were worth the investment. Funding was reserved for the prospect of a bustling economy and young people who would be sought after on a competitive, global level. School children were the education entrepreneurs and the sought-after capital of the English education system, who were spearheaded to rival countries such as China. Comments from the Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP (Secretary of State) in 2007 highlight signature neoliberalism values, when he states in his foreword within the Departmental Report, 'the Education and Inspections Act 2006 introduced new measures to raise standards, promote choice and diversity and give teachers new powers to discipline pupils' (DfES, 2007).

Ball comments, 'whatever else one could say about Labour's education policies, there was certainly no shortage of them' (Ball, 2013: 95), which was a stark contrast to the former two decades and public spending cuts under the Conservative government. Britain encapsulated neoliberalism, which was a belief in markets, individualism, responsibility, and viewing the private sector as the engine of national economic competitiveness (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Eagle, 2003; Ball, 2013; Bhopal, 2018). It could be argued that all young people were set to gain from an educational infrastructure that gave them freedom to succeed - to be enterprising and to make a positive contribution in skills and knowledge to the British economy (Ball, 2013). However, Bhopal criticises this notion when arguing that the neoliberals' quest to promote self-interests, disguised in the promotion of offering individuals increased

choice and control over their lives, performs in a parallel manner for ethnic groups and instead, exemplifies race inequalities by diluting the importance of inequalities in society (Bhopal, 2018). Furthermore, Gillborn and Youdell reinforce this notion, noting that New Labour's efforts in promoting social justice and equality were in fact, increasing inequality and social exclusion (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Instead, neoliberalism exposed the most disadvantaged citizens in society and prevented them access to policies which promote equality of opportunities.

Raising achievement

The paradoxically situated school in the suburbs of a West Yorkshire town had a growing population of Black and Mixed heritage pupils, who were bussed in from areas with a high prevalence of disadvantage, and who were identified by their school attainment data as being at risk of underachieving. The Aiming High programme focused on encouraging schools to develop strong leadership and to raise teacher expectations of pupils through monitoring data and tackling underperformance, teaching lessons that reflected the language and cultures represented in the classroom, involving parents, developing pupil voice and tackling racism (DfES - Aiming High Consultation, 2003).

Much of my role involved mentoring students, observing their behaviour and their approach to learning in lessons, developing their self-confidence and widening their horizons through university visits and career workshops as well as involving community groups from within the local area, who would engage the students in empowerment events and conferences. I focused my attention on boys and girls at

this time, however, it was boys who I would often save from the perils of exclusion. Reducing exclusions was another factor which the strategy hoped to reduce for this group of students (DfES - Aiming High Consultation, 2003). ‘Permanent exclusions are a key feature of the school experience for Black pupils’ (Rollock, 2007:198). Furthermore, Black males are disproportionately excluded from school along with an increasing concern for Black girls (Maylor, 2009; Crenshaw, et al., 2015; Demi and McLean, 2017a; Demi and McLean, 2017b).

Having a dedicated Black mentor who was focused on the needs of Black and Mixed-heritage young people, sent positive shockwaves throughout the school. Teachers would approach me for advice on how to work with mentees or recite both good and unfavourable behaviour reports, which I would follow up with the young person to encourage self-reflection. I could not credit the successful rapport that I built with staff, students, parents and the wider community, together with the improved pupil outcomes, on my race alone. There were other nuances which played an important role. These were: my upbringing and the strong values on education which were instilled since a young age from my mother, my role as a single-parent, raising my daughter, coupled with transferable skills acquired from my previous employment. Maylor asserts that it is not merely their race which qualifies Black teachers to be a credible mentor to Black pupils; rather it is their ability to be effective in this role which gains them the recognition (Maylor, 2009). The school improved the way in which they worked with the Black and Mixed-heritage students, which consequently raised pupils’ self-esteem and increased their ability to want to work harder and succeed.

Prior to embarking on a career move to develop another project, the school was heralded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as a case study for good

practice in the *Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils* publication. The DfES reported that 'early indicators are that the integrated approach to tackling barriers to achievement is making a real difference to students' learning and behaviour' (DfES - Aiming High Consultation, 2003: 22). Reporting would serve the purpose of supporting similar funded schools to also develop strategies which would improve their potential for achieving the project's outcomes. In the case study, the DfES summarised what they described as 'key ingredients' which the school had utilised that were contributing factors to its success. These were:

- use of data to identify and target pupils
- effective partnerships with learning mentors, teachers and senior managers
- parental involvement and participation
- a focus on both pastoral and academic support
- use of specialist expertise
- enrichment and extension activities
- high quality training and support.

(DfES - Aiming High Consultation, 2003:22).

My new role took me to a secondary school in a deprived area of the West Midlands, where the challenges of racism and socio-economic deprivation were not hidden from view, as they were in the leafy suburbs of the secondary school in West Yorkshire. There was a climate of disharmony between Black and White students and an outcry for Black History lessons from the Black pupils who had organised a demonstration in protest. The school data revealed Black pupils did not achieve 5 or

more GCSE's passes at grade C or above. Exclusions were also at their height, primarily, for Black boys. The school was selected for the Aiming High programme and the leadership's strategy for intervention would focus solely on Black Caribbean and Mixed heritage boys. The absence of girls on this project did not mean Black Caribbean girls were not experiencing their own challenges. As the Black boys grew in stature from boys to young men, the threat to the staff seemed to grow too (Sewell, 1997; Maylor, 2009). Daily battles with teachers over trivia seemed to spill out of the classroom into my mentoring room. The boys refused to receive intervention from anyone but myself. Having an advocate whose remit was the Black boy seemed to alleviate the oppression that Black boys and their parents faced against the school's policies and practices.

During this time, there were also several agencies and organisations in the West Midlands community that were set up primarily to tackle the failing boys' discourse and to reduce exclusions. The role was both rewarding and demanding and the outcomes on Black boy's attainment were proving successful as those securing GCSE passes were on the increase.

During my preoccupation raising the attainment of Black boys, I would often have Black girls ask me, 'Miss, when will you mentor me.' I didn't have an answer except for referring them to ask leadership, who might agree to me diverting my attention from the boys. Of course, during the years of the 'moral panic' (Smith, 2007) over boys' education, their time did not come and Black girls were least likely to be included in the programme or other community initiatives on a local and national level.

Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils (Dfes:2003) was one of the pilot projects which informed the '*Black Pupils Achievement' Programme' (BPAP) (Ensuring the Attainment of Black Pupils, 2007)*. This was part of the New Labour government's Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners (DfES, 2007). The BPAP was launched in 2007 with a remit to close the gaps for exclusions and the attainment for Black pupils. A report by REACH, titled, '*An independent report to Government on raising the aspirations and attainment of Black boys and young men'* was at the centre of the BPAP's principles. REACH was one of many project groups established in 2006 by the successors of the Stephen Lawrence Steering Group and the Race Equality Advisory Panel. It had a clear focus on raising the aspirations and achievement among Black boys and young Black men (REACH report, 2007).

The following statements were published in the BPAP's guidance for schools;

> *'According to the REACH Report, among the majority of pupils not in receipt of free school meals, the race inequalities of attainment are pronounced: Black Caribbean boys are 18.5% points behind White boys'.*
>
> *'The high exclusion rate for Black Caribbean and mixed White/Black Caribbean pupils (particularly boys) need to be investigated and challenged in order that every pupil has the opportunity to fulfil their true potential'.*
>
> (Ensuring the Attainment of Black Pupils, 2007)

What the guidance did not highlight was the race inequalities for Black Caribbean girls, which were also apparent in the data published in the REACH report. It was reported that Black Caribbean girls were behind White girls by 12.6% points and also the lowest achievers amongst their female counterparts (Ensuring the Attainment of Black Pupils, 2007), yet, this data did not make the headlines.

As REACH was exclusively focused on Black boys and men, it is unclear whether this influenced the government's collaboration or whether it was as a consequence of REACH's project values why Black Caribbean girls were overshadowed in the creation of the BPAP. However, what is clear, is that the discourse of failing *Black Caribbean* boys was at the forefront of the programme's agenda at the expense and the misfortune of Black Caribbean girls.

With a framework that favoured Black boys, Black girls were not of primary concern. It could be argued that the government's ideology of Black pupils was influenced by the rhetoric of the 'moral panic' (Smith, 2007) concerning boys' underachievement and when mentioning Black pupils, this could be interpreted to mean Black boys. Therefore, it could be assumed that any involvement of Black Caribbean girls in the BPAP served only as a tokenistic gesture. However, the inclusion alone can be seen as a positive gain for Black Caribbean girls whose attainment was improved as a result of the programme. Concurrently, hooks denotes, when the Black experience is often talked about, it is Black males who are referenced (hooks, 2004). This signals that Black Caribbean girls are strategically positioned at the back of the advantage queue and as a result, receive miserly leftovers of support to meet their educational needs.

My role in the BPAP involved consulting for local authorities on a national level and providing training on the guidance, to assist middle-management colleagues to meet the programme outcomes of raising attainment.

After the raft of government measures that sought to improve Black pupil's attainment diminished, I qualified as a secondary school teacher with both pastoral

and teaching and learning responsibilities, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I became adept at supporting young people transition throughout the challenges of school life. It was during a role as a Supply Teacher when I was approached by a Headteacher who asked me to set up a mentoring programme and work with Black girls who were deemed to be 'raising their heads'. She described their behaviours as being rude to staff, disrupting lessons, being loud on the corridor and having a poor attitude to learning. The Black girls were not conforming to the school's ideology and this was proving to be a nuisance for leadership and teaching staff at the school. Rollock argues that dominant school discourses situate the female body as 'academically predisposed' (Rollock, 2007:199). Therefore, it would appear that the school staff were less focused on the achievement of the Black girls as they were with controlling Black girls' resistance to conforming to the racialized and gendered behaviour patterns which teachers had come to expect from them. Instead, it could be argued that the girls had transgressed the boundaries of feminine behaviour, through challenging teachers and resisting various forms of subordination (Wright et al., 2000). Resistance, in relation to schooling, can refer to, how specific groups of pupils negotiate and respond to their marginal positions in schools (Wright et al., 2000). The juxtaposition highlighted that the girls were referred to me because of their race and not because of their underachievement or success in school. Furthermore, the action of the Headteacher to exonerate me, a Black teacher, from my teaching schedule to mentor Black girls, could mean that there were wider gendered processes at work.

I set about the challenge, not to fix the girls but to devise a personalised strategy of support. What I did not expect was the huge amount of empathy I felt when hearing their stories and how they were misunderstood. The Black girls were harassed on a

daily basis and seemed oppressed by the dominant structures of the school discourse that prevailed. As a result, the girls had no breathing space. Every corridor and classroom had a teacher ready to raise their voice and tell the girls about their attitude and why they could not enter their classroom. The mentoring room became a passage for openness and a space to vent and shed tears. For every challenge the girls experienced, they would struggle to remain silent and instead, respond at the level in which the teacher spoke to them. Some Black girls spent more days of the school week in the scruffy internal isolation room than they did, being taught in the classroom.

What I was witnessing was a Black girl's struggle to achieve in an education system that has forgotten she exists. Notwithstanding the fact that despite the years which had passed since the government initiatives to raise attainment for Black pupils, the racial climate within the school did not represent progress. Strand states, most of the improvement for Black pupils occurred during 2003 and 2006 (Strand, 2015). The year was 2018. I recognised the shift in the government's strategies which demonstrated a political diversion in school resources that support an agenda which aimed to improve the life chances of Black pupils in secondary education.

Although Black girls are outperforming their male counterparts at GCSE level (GCSE English and maths results, 2021), this is not without its challenges. The girls were struggling to survive their school experience in a 'zero-tolerance' environment (Crenshaw, et al., 2015: 5). I recalled those previous requests for support from Black girls, who were side lined by the failing boys' discourse, and it was then that I realised Black girls have been invisible from the view of policymakers and educators for decades and something has to change.

This experience, coupled with my role as a parent who has raised a daughter through the secondary school system, led me to explore the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls and the effect this phenomenon has on their educational outcomes.

In this thesis, I will critically examine how Black Caribbean girls experience the secondary education system in England and the significance of varying intersectional nuances including their gender, race and ethnicity.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Introduction

In part one of this chapter, I will highlight the historical and present issues and challenges which face Black girls attending a secondary school in England together with a discussion of educational policies. In part two, I will also draw on my findings from existing data and literature including empirical studies, which will form the basis of my research.

SECTION ONE: THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

In this section I will provide a historical overview of the policy and practice which informs this study. It is divided into two parts. Firstly, in part one, I will discuss race and ethnicity in education to present day, to contextualise the framework in which the school experience of Black Caribbean girls can be situated within. In part 2, I will discuss the intersectional experiences of Black Caribbean girls in education, to locate this within the policy framework.

Part One: A historical view of race and ethnicity in education in England

Race and ethnicity are usually addressed under the guise of underachievement (Archer and Francis, 2007). Underachievement for Caribbean students is a legacy of the English educational system and is historic. Whilst this phenomenon is known, the underachievement of Black Caribbean girls is less well-known.

Underachievement has been described as the predominant discourse (Weiner et al., 1997). It is usually categorised by gender, a social group, an ethnic group and a national school system (Smith, 2007). Troyna suggests, the term superficially shifts responsibility away from the education system to students, assuming widespread failure among young Black people (Troyna, 1984). I will refer to Gorard and Smith's definition, 'low or differential achievement' (Gorard and Smith, 2004: 204), as it averts any suggestion of responsibility for its occurrence.

To contextualise this issue, in this section, I will discuss the changing picture of education policy for Black Caribbean girls' educational achievement in England.

1945 – 1969: The welfare state and the arrival of the Windrush generation

Before the launch of the Education Act in 1944, 88 percent of young people left school by the age of 14. The post-war period of 1945, where there was free education for all, could be described as an optimistic period (Tomlinson, 2005: 3). There was also an emergence of the 'Welfare State'. During this era, social policy focused on state intervention to tackle social problems and eradicate the negative effects of poverty through a series of practical policies (Williams, 1989:4). Themes of 'Family' and 'Nation' were harvested to explicate the true meaning of a British way of life (Williams, 1989:5). It was during this era, in 1948, when the SS Empire Windrush ship arrived on British shores. On this ship, there were several families from the Caribbean islands, seeking a new life in England following the UK government's invitation for a reserve army of labour from the Caribbean, at a time of economic growth and labour shortages (Troyna and Williams, 1986). As a result of the mass

migration, there was an increasing presence of Black children of Caribbean decent, attending secondary schools in England. Williams argues, the welfare state inhibited the recognition of the welfare needs of women and Black people (Williams, 1989; 4). This stemmed from the welfare state's associated themes of family and nation. Williams argues, the government's politicians and officials held the views that imperial strength could only be gained through 'the promotion of the imperial race' and 'the cooperation of fit and healthy mothers' (Williams, 1989; 5). The government's racialised ideology gained momentum as the number of West Indian families migrating to the UK increased, and in 1968, Enoch Powell, a Conservative MP, delivered the 'Rivers of Blood' speech. Referring to the number of West Indian migrants to the UK, Powell declared 'Like the Roman, I seem to see the river Tiber foaming with much blood' (Sandbrook, 2023). This speech was *the tip of the iceberg* as Black families who were faced with racial disharmony on their arrival to Britain, which inevitably spilled out into the way in which Black boys and girls were treated in schools. In order to subvert the political agenda, in 1971, Coard, wrote a book titled, '*How the West Indian Child Is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System'* (Coard, 1971). His book highlighted the plight of Black boys and girls who were referred in large numbers, by their teachers, to attend schools described as Educationally Subnormal Schools or E.S.N. In an interview, Coard made 5 observations:

> '*1. There are very large numbers of our West Indian children in schools for the Educationally Subnormal—which is what ESN means.*
>
> *2. Those children have been wrongly placed there.*

3. *Once placed in these schools, the vast majority never get out and return to normal schools.*

4. *They suffer academically and in their job prospects for life because of being put in these schools.*

5. *The authorities are doing very little to stop this scandal'.*

(Coard, 1971: 49)

Post-war immigration continued until the early 1970's.

1970's – Youth unemployment and Black parents

In the 1970's, the influx of more families with Black children caused a disruption that bore heavily on state education in England. This was evident in the succession of policies and measures that were created to bring about social cohesion, due to the shift in the cultural landscape. There was now a diverse population of Black Caribbean pupils in English classrooms and the wider community (Rampton, 1981; Gillborn, 1990; Ball,1990; Phillips and Phillips, 1998; Tomlinson, 2008).

During their school experience, Black girls and boys were at risk of losing their identity within the dominant structures of Whiteness, and instead, they were being labelled as underachievers. The learning environment was treacherous as the future of Black pupils lie with teachers who were incapable of acknowledging the intersectional disadvantages of race, gender, and class. In a school system which was situated within a racialised and gendered political climate, Black girls were

marginalised as policies in education which focused on the female gender had not yet ensued.

There was also growing concern from Black parents (Demi and McLean, 2017a), who had high hopes for their children to progress in the English education system. Instead, Black pupils were leaving school with little or no qualifications or employment skills (Tomlinson, 2008).

Consequently, Black Caribbean parents were outraged and sought to promote their needs through community activism, where they established groups such as *The Black Parents Movement* (Booker et al., 1989). Black parents were faced with incomprehension and sometimes naked hostility (Warmington, 2014), which provided fuel for their campaign against the lack of resources and prejudices towards Black children's education in schools. This resulted in a backlash that would not recede until the government intervened. Black education movements also joined together to form, what Warmington describes as, 'one of the most significant products of the 1960's and 70's', Supplementary schools, which he argues, have retained a presence in the educational landscape ever since (Warmington, 2014: 52).

Supplementary schools

Growing up in the 1970's, I recall attending a Supplementary school, otherwise known as a Saturday school, which was located in a large Victorian house in the heart of the community. Others were held across the country in community centres, church halls, empty classrooms or in the front room of houses (Reay and Mirza, 2001). The supplementary school I attended, operated on a Saturday, outside of

normal school hours and was run by a Black female activist whose passion was to educate Black Caribbean children in the local community. Additional lessons of Mathematics and English would supplement the meagre rationings of education that was presumably being served to Black children in schools. A critique of the Supplementary school ethos can be understood from Warmington, who asks the following questions; -

> *i) Should the aim of supplementary schools be to improve black pupils' attainment in mainstream education, by offering additional tuition in Maths and English, or should they specialise in black history and culture, or provide both?*
>
> *ii) Was the work of supplementary schools to feed into state schooling or to remain apart from it?*
>
> (Warmington, 2014: 52)

As a child who attended a supplementary school and as an adult and parent, who has taught and sent my daughter to attend one; I argue that early supplementary schools served a point of need and positioned Black parents and activists as ambassadors of Black children's education, during an act of desperation and at a time when state education fell short. The teaching of Black history and culture was serendipitous and a hidden curriculum, as children were taught by role models who continuously affirmed a can-do attitude and the sentiment that *as a Black child, you will need to work twice as hard to achieve that of your White peers*.

The supplementary school presented a safe space for Black children to learn; and a freedom from the oppressive school discourses that permeated one of the most valued treasures at the heart of the Black community; *Education*.

In response to the questions posed by Warmington, I concur with Reay and Mirza who argue, Black supplementary schools may superficially appear as sites for conformist inscriptions of dominant discourses, in particular, meritocracy and traditional pedagogy. Instead, they are parallel spaces of contestation where goals of enabling Black children to achieve, are combined with a discursive opposition to the system (Reay and Mirza, 2001).

Supplementary schools also became a space where Black boys and girls were encouraged to establish their identity and gain a sense of belonging, away from their disparate school experience. Accordingly, Mirza posits, 'These schools are places where Whiteness is displaced and Blackness becomes the norm, creating a sanctuary for the Black child in which he or she is celebrated and recentred' (Mirza, 2006: 143).

Black children were being labelled, banded in lower streams and their teachers had low expectations of them (Wright et al., 2010). Historically, it was the African-Caribbean communities who tended to be first to take a militant position on their children's educational futures (Warmington, 2014) to combat the educational crisis. Militance in this instance, refers to the strategic methods in which a parent seeks to defend their child's education against oppressive realties. Similarly, my mother valued education, and whilst she never outwardly demonstrated militancy, she wholly supported any attempts to increase the prospects of a good education for her eight children; especially in an education system which was proving to be unsatisfactory for Black children. Exemplifying Bourdieu's theory of habitus, my mother had created her own cultural capital to provide for her family (Mirza, 1997; Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus can be defined as 'a system of durable, transposable dispositions which

function as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices' (Bourdieu; 1974: vii). The success of my mother's efforts was realised when, as a new starter to school at the age of five years, I was transferred from class one to class three to learn with older peers, as my level of understanding had surpassed peers of my own age. Coupled with my mother's teaching and my early socialisation, being the youngest of eight children, I can also credit my early achievement to the success of the supplementary school, which provided me with a head start and positioned me to achieve.

1980's: Black girls as successful

During the 1980's, government policies and initiatives to solve the disillusionment that Black parents and their children faced in schools only served to extricate the problem.

Although, the problems of so-called disadvantage were presumed to be intractable, and solutions were ineffective (Tomlinson, 2008), Black girls were deemed as successful as early as the 1980's, when compared with Black Boys. This phenomenon was identified in the Rampton Report in 1981.

The Rampton Report 1981

The Rampton Report brought about the first official recognition of the need to monitor achievement (Nehaul,1996). The report sought to investigate the educational needs and attainment of West Indian pupils and make recommendations (Rampton,1981). Within the Rampton Report, an article by Driver claimed, 'West Indian girls achieved

better than West Indian boys at school and in some cases better…than their white classmates' (Driver, 1980 cited in Rampton,1981). An important point to note in this study is, when comparing 'West Indian' girls with 'West Indian' boys, this assumes West Indian girls are successful on the backdrop of the failing boys' discourse. Black Caribbean girls' underachievement is often dismissed on this basis. The discourse of underachieving Black girls becomes evident when comparing girls with other girls by ethnicity. However, as the recommendations from the Rampton report were not differentiated by gender, Driver's comments did not hinder the holistic focus of tackling racism and its effects on the schooling of all West Indian pupils. Since Driver's findings in 1980, there has been little progress in the way in which Black Caribbean girls' attainment has been compared with Black Caribbean boys. However, one of the Rampton report's most successful outcomes was the mandate for local authorities and school leaders to collect school data that records the ethnicity of the student population.

Black learners

Furthermore, the Rampton report's findings identified 'West Indian' pupils as underachievers in relation to their peers and also cited racism; the appropriateness of the curriculum; the examination system and teachers' low expectations, as factors that contributed to 'West Indian' students underachievement (Rampton,1981). The report also highlighted the failure of schools to work inclusively with Black pupils to enable them to progress into a career.

Rhamie argues, ‘Schools have responsibility for educating Black pupils, like all pupils, to achieve their full potential’ (Rhamie, 2007: 23). In her book, *Eagles who soar*, Rhamie discusses findings from her study of 78 Black learners whose ages ranged from sixteen to forty years (Rhamie, 2007). Rhamie highlights an important question asked by the Black learners, that is, ‘why [do] certain teachers relate to Black pupils differently from White’ (Rhamie, 2007: 23). The effects of racism in schools, although subtle, can leave children and young people perplexed concerning the differential treatment and negative experiences. Rhamie argues that these experiences may rise from interactions with teachers and staff which leave them feeling that they have been treated unfairly compared to other children (Rhamie, 2007). The saying ‘still waters run deep’ typifies the pain of unanswered questions that Black children may have regarding racial inequalities, even after they have left school. This can also have repercussions on their role as parents and the relationship they develop with their child’s school, when they become an adult.

Furthermore, Black parents whose children have poor educational experiences in school, based on the grounds of race, consequently, begin to lose trust in the education system (Rhamie, 2007). Also, in Rhamie’s account of findings from her study, parents of ‘High Fliers’ (learners with positive educational experiences) closely checked the progress of their children (Rhamie, 2007: 8). Rhamie explained, the Black parents originally believed that the school would do the best for their children, but various experiences turned trust to distrust (Rhamie, 2007).

The political and economic crisis that followed the Rampton Report saw race riots and social disorder on the streets of major cities in England, as a result of high unemployment among Black youth with few employment skills (Troyna,1984). Troyna

comments on this period, highlighting that ‘demands for ameliorative policies and practices to reverse the educational underachievement of black pupils have gained a fresh impetus’ (Troyna, 1984:155).

The Swann Report 1985

As a reaction to the prevailing climate, the government commissioned the Swann Report in 1985 (Troyna, 1984).

Concerning Black Caribbean girls, Swann identified gender differences as an indicator that statistical averages were ineffective in identifying highs and low scores within ethnic groups, describing West Indian girls as ‘unexpected differences’ (Swann, 1985: 39). Additionally, reaffirming the sentiment from the Rampton report (1981), Swann concurs with the findings from some studies that suggests West Indian girls were performing at a higher level than West Indian boys’ (Swann, 1985). Black Caribbean girls are rarely identified as underachievers in British schools, mainly because they achieve higher than Black Caribbean boys. However, when comparing Black Caribbean girls by gender and ethnicity, they are the lowest achieving group when compared with other girls.

Similar to that of the Rampton Report, findings from the Swann report identified that racism exists by teachers of ‘West Indian’ children in schools (Rampton, 1981; Swann,1985). Swann stated that the racism resulted from teacher’s expectations and negative stereotypes which had the potential to directly affect the achievement or behaviour of ‘West Indian’ and Asian pupils (Swann,1985). In highlighting the racial disparity experienced by ‘West Indian’ pupils, Swann identified the term ‘Colour

Blindness', referring to teachers he interviewed who suggested that they made no distinction between 'West Indian' pupils and others, arguing they were in fact 'colour-blind' (Swann,1985). Teachers during this time did not accept responsibility for the low attainment of Black students in their classes, neither were they held to account. This was combined with policies and procedures which sought to undermine the progress of 'West Indian' students. Concurrently, Swann used the term 'institutional racism' to describe the practice taking place in schools, towards the West Indian children. He defined institutional racism as;-

> *'the way in which a range of long-established systems, practices and procedures, both within education and the wider society, which were originally conceived or devised to meet the needs and aspirations of a relatively homogenous society, can now be seen not only to fail to take account of the multi-racial nature of Britain today but may also ignore or even actively work against the interests of ethnic minority communities'.*
>
> (Swann, 1985:28)

Swann concluded that institutional racism deprives ethnic minority children of equality of access of opportunities and denies their right to have a say in the future of the society of which they are an integral part (Swann, 1985). As well as providing recommendations for tackling racism in schools, the Swann report focused on identity, recommending schools to accept West Indian pupils as British (Swann, 1985). This is one of the earliest attempts in educational policy to be inclusive and welcoming of ethnic diversity. What is evident is the persistence of racism that is endemic in the lives of Black children attending schools in England. Hall describes this as a 'stubborn persistence of racial thinking [that is] part of the deep,

unconscious structure of British common sense, often crystalized in institutional cultures' (Hall, 1999: 3).

There lies at the heart of the Swann Report (1985), a missed opportunity to critically investigate those 'unexpected differences' (Swann, 1985) which were evident in the statistical data when Swann compared West Indian girls with West Indian boys. Although gender differences were highlighted, Black girls' underachievement in school was not investigated by policymakers and remains invisible.

1990's: Institutional Racism

The Macpherson Report 1999

In the 1980's both the Rampton Report (1981) and Swann Report (1985) described racial inequality in schools and highlighted how Black students are treated in schools in comparison to their White counterparts. However, it was the racist murder of a Black teenager in 1993, Stephen Lawrence, that prompted the government to commission a report by Sir Macpherson (Troyna, 1984; Hall, 1999; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Gillborn, 2007). The Macpherson report identified the Metropolitan police as 'institutionally racist' and recommended changes to the education system to address the problem of racism in schools (Macpherson,1999). Additionally, Macpherson defined institutional racism as:

> '*The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance,*

> *thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people*'
>
> (Macpherson, 1999: 6.34).

It could be argued that Macpherson deemed racism in the community to be a symptom of the racial disparities and negative stereotyping in the school system, resulting in a divided society. This demonstrates the effects of racism in schools to have a far-reaching impact on the holistic life of the Black child. Macpherson's findings also signalled a recognition that racism extends far wider and is ingrained within the structures, policies and practices of other public bodies that Black people come to rely on, such as the police. Although, the Macpherson report sought to address the problem of racism in schools, the whole child was not considered, beyond the school gates where racism is part of their everyday life. This represents a missed opportunity. It could be argued that it was incumbent of the Macpherson Report to develop emergent holistic joined up policy thinking on combatting institutional racism in the UK, at large.

2000's - The Race Relations Amendment Act

However, as a result of changes implemented by the government, as a consequence of the Macpherson Report, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000) was published, which placed statutory duties on public bodies, including schools, to monitor, evaluate and improve their service and eliminate all acts of discrimination. This is a significant event, which should not be under-estimated. Schools were now

accountable to local and central government in recognising the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils on a local level, in their schools.

Gillborn and Mirza (2000) argue that the findings of The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry generated a widespread public commitment to the goal of racial equality, which included a response from the Office for School Standards in Education (OFSTED) titled ‘Raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils – school and LEA responses’ (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). The project I have referred to in my introduction titled Aiming High: Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils (DfES - Aiming High Consultation, 2003) can be situated within this context.

During this decade, although several initiatives were initiated to raise the achievement of Black pupils, the main focus was mostly on the underachievement of Black boys. The death of the Black male teenager, Stephen Lawrence, who was also the focus of the Macpherson report, diverted the UK government and schools’ attention, to focus on Black boys rather than Black girls. Whilst the school discourse identifies Black Children on the grounds of their race (Mirza, 2000), I argue that racialisation under a telescope, has several nuances, which include gender and class. This suggests, different genders experience racialisation differently. For Black girls, their intersectional disadvantages of gender, race and class can serve to immobilise their educational outcomes. Whilst the array of initiatives during this decade, were centred on Black boys, Black girls were hidden from the political horizon and obscured from the view of policymakers, educators and, in some instances, their community, who, in previous decades, had homogenised Black children as one cause. Due to the unfortunate murder of Stephen Lawrence, the underachievement of Black boys gained exposure. However, the weight of policies to

tackle the underachievement of Black boys inadvertently concealed the poor school experiences and educational outcomes of Black girls. Concurrently, when Mirza recounts findings from her study, she describes Black girls' presence in the classroom as minimised, when she posits,

> *'On the surface they wanted to climb the career ladder and were seeking academic success through getting more and more qualifications. But as I dug deeper I found their motivation was not simply driven by a desire for educational credentials. They were engaged in a strategic rationalization of their schooling. The schools they were in were poorly resourced and teaching was stretched. The young women sat in the back of the classroom and got on with their work. They often pretended to not be working, but did their homework. Most of all they had to stay on longer and go to college to achieve academic success'*
>
> (Mirza, 2006: 144).

2010 – present: Decades of slow progress

The notion of Black Caribbean pupil's underachievement in British schools is in danger of becoming accepted as an irrefutable fact (Demie, 2017b). The turbulent period of underachievement for Black boys and girls, culminating from the 1960's, is still prevalent today (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Blair, 2001; Demie, 2001; OFSTED, 2002; Connolly 2005: Demi and McLean, 2017a) and has operated like a fixture on the landscape of the English education system, rooted in racism and policies that work against Black pupils rather than provide support.

Black Caribbean boys and girls in Britain are still regularly framed within education discourse as an underachieving group (Wallace & Joseph-Salisbury, 2021). Since the 1970's when Coard criticised the English education system for labelling and referring to Black children as educationally subnormal; who were removed from state schools and transferred to special schools (Coard, 1971) (see above), insufficient improvement in the educational experiences and outcomes of Black Caribbean young people at the secondary and tertiary levels has been made (Gillborn, 2014; Bhopal, 2018; Alexander and Shankley, 2020; Wallace and Joseph-Salisbury, 2021). Any progress has been slow and inhibited by the changing agendas of governments, coupled with a legacy of institutional racism. The problem reaches far wider than the scope of the school, as Black Caribbean children are also awarded low A-level grades, they are overrepresented in special needs programme and allocated lower-ranked schools (Wallace and Joseph Salisbury, 2021). Furthermore, young women also anticipate a life of workplace sexual harassment, which has a huge bearing on many women's lives (Cloke, 2021), yet the UK government has not initiated any preventative measures of education in schools that promotes positive behaviour towards women in society.

The lack of progress has occurred despite the recommendations from the earlier Rampton, Swann and Macpherson reports in the 1980's and 1990's and those programmes and initiatives discussed earlier, where schools were provided with additional resources and support whilst local authorities and schools were made accountable for reporting achievement data by ethnicity. Although the Department of Education collate, publish and frequently update attainment results by ethnicity, the integral drive to create real change has not accelerated.

Black Caribbean girls, once again, are demoralised and occupy the lower percentiles for attainment, which is having a normative effect. Although there have been fluctuations and even some improvement at times, the attainment gap between Black Caribbean girls and their female peers by ethnicity has remained the same.

The transparency of school data is under the watchful gaze of policymakers and educators who I argue, are entertained by the stagnant graphic display, which year on year, portrays the demise of Black Caribbean boys and girls. Much to the dismay of researchers and Black parents, who have reverberated narratives, casting hopes and aspirations of a better educational experience.

This can be said of the presiding Conservative government, who have launched a £4.8 billion 'Levelling-Up Fund' in their Budget in 2021. The government fund aims to tackle 'entrenched inequalities' across England (GOV.UK, 2021c). In a press statement, they state that the fund will make 'bold new policy interventions to improve livelihoods and opportunities in all parts of the UK' in key areas such as; health, education and policing (The Levelling Up agenda, House of Commons, 15 June 2021, 2021). Before the policy was launched in February 2022 (Levelling Up the United Kingdom, 2022), a taskforce was created to produce a White paper detailing how it plans to distribute funds, including compensatory measures following the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the government issued schools with a contingency framework in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The framework stated;

> '*The impacts of having missed face-to-face education during the pandemic are severe for children, young people and adults. In all cases, any benefits in*

> *managing transmission should be weighed against any educational drawbacks.*
>
> *(Contingency framework: education and childcare settings, 2022)*

As a result, schools in England were closed temporarily and children were educated remotely using laptops and electronic devices, from home. There is growing evidence that this unpredicted turn of events disrupted the lives and education of British children and impacted the most disadvantaged (Sharp et al., 2020). The Prime Minister's speech and the press release indicate that the Levelling Up Fund will seek to address social inequalities'.

On 15 June 2021, The British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced his intentions of the Fund concerning education;

> *'what is the key question that young families ask themselves about a neighbourhood- not just whether it is safe – but whether the schools are good and we need to give all our children the guarantee of a great education with safe and well disciplined classes and fantastic teachers so we are literally levelling up funding for primary and secondary education, with a higher level of funding per pupil and so that every teacher starts on a salary of £30,000 and we must face the reality that in loss of learning, and loss of life chances, some children have been hit harder by this pandemic than others and so we have put in place the biggest tutoring programme anywhere in the world to help them catch up, a catch up programme that is already worth £3 billion that was invested as soon as this government came in'.*
>
> (GOV.UK, 2021c)

Ball argues 'Policy is about progress, it is about moving from the inadequacies of the present to some future state of perfection where everything works well and works, as it should' (Ball, 2013: 9). Boris Johnson's speech fails to focus on race or ethnicity

and therefore, suggests, yet again, Black Caribbean girls underachievement will not be a priority to invest funds. Furthermore, there is no strategy suggested as to how the £3m investment in the catch-up programme will be distributed and to whom. The absence of policies in recent years which seek to address the needs of Black Caribbean girls attainment has been discouraging. Accordingly, Demi and McLean argue, 'it is now rare to find nationally…a project relevant to the needs of pupils of Black Caribbean heritage' (Demi and McLean, 2017a:138). In turn, they urge the Department for Education to develop targeted initiatives to identify and address the needs of pupils of Black Caribbean heritage (Demi and McLean, 2017a).

The Commission for Race and Ethnic Disparity (CRED)

In 2021, the UK government launched the CRED. The aim of the CRED was to collate data on race and equality in one place and to understand the impact of ethnicity and other factors of the outcomes of success among minority groups in the community (The report for CRED, 2021).

The report comprises of a focus on education and training including data relating to young people on free school meals (a key signifying factor of who is working-class). If one or both parents are in receipt of state benefits, it is assumed they are unemployed or working for less than sixteen hours. Therefore, it is assumed that a child growing up in a home where adults are unwaged or low-waged, will be disadvantaged, and free school meals are therefore, provided by the government.

Within the datasets mentioned in this report, Professor Strand provided an outline of findings for secondary school pupils by socio-economic status and ethnicity. Strand

denotes, socio-economic factors are considered so as not to explain away any ethnic achievement gaps, but to better understand the root causes and therefore identify relevant policy interventions and action (The report for CRED, 2021).

In the report, Strand compares the mean Best [attainment 8] scores for all combinations of ethnic groups, socio-economic status, and sex. The findings state:

> *'the 2 lowest achieving groups were Black Caribbean and White British boys of low socio-economic status, and girls from these 2 groups were also the lowest achieving groups of girls. Pakistani boys and White Other boys from low socio-economic backgrounds also had below average scores'*
>
> (The report for CRED, 2021).

Notedly, the data included in the report excludes Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller groups as a separate ethnicity group, suggesting this is due to their small sample size. Instead, these groups are referred to as 'frequent outliers in attainment' (Strand 2021 in the report for CRED, 2021). Removing two of the lowest performing ethnicities gives the effect that White-working class boys and girls are now on par with the educational disadvantages experienced by Black Caribbean boys and girls and other minority ethnic groups. Furthermore, the removing of the Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller groups is also a cause for concern which requires further debate for policymakers to consider the disadvantages experienced by these groups. Notedly, as Black Caribbean boys and girls remain one of the lowest performing groups in England's educational system – evidently, nothing has changed. Crawford argues, 'children in particular minoritised ethnic groups continue to bear the brunt of racialised systems of oppression – especially those with family origins in the Black Caribbean (Crawford, 2018: 425). Crawford critiques the government's art of

adaptation of school data to push agendas, when she argues, ‘government collected and generated assessment data…must be treated with caution when presented as evidence to lend support to racially loaded and classist logics within political agendas’ (Crawford, 2018: 430). The failings of the CRED report and its findings are reviewed in chapter 3).

Analysing the data

In the early 1990’s, the significance of data by gender, justified the actions of policymakers to focus on Black Caribbean boys, who are persistently positioned amongst the lowest achievers when compared with their White and Asian male and female peers and Black Caribbean girls. In addition, Connolly argues, underachievement is a strongly classed and racialised discourse (Connolly, 2006). A sentiment of which, is demonstrated in recent data by the Department of Education for England.

Referring to Figure 1 in appendix. 2, the data shows Black Caribbean boys were one of the lowest ethnic groups (30.9%) to achieve a grade 5 or above in English and Mathematics GCSE in 2021, compared with 47.2% of White boys. Black Caribbean girls are more successful than their male counterparts with 41% achieving a grade 5 or above in English and Mathematics, however, when comparing Black Caribbean girls with their female Chinese counterparts, there is an attainment gap of 45.2%.

The figures reveal a bleak picture for Black Caribbean girls when compared to their peers (Chinese in particular). Not only does the data expose the need for the government’s Levelling-up Fund agenda to specifically focus on the urgent need to

close the attainment gap for Black boys and girls but it also highlights the invisibility of Black Caribbean girls to policymakers.

Where the greatest inequalities were once between White and Black Caribbean students (Tomlin et al., 2014), the data shows the largest inequalities exist between Chinese and Black Caribbean students.

Whilst Black Caribbean boys' underachievement is of the most concern, there are issues of gender which differentiates Black girls from Black boys. One concern relates to employability, where women are less likely to receive a higher paid salary than a Black male, when doing the same job (Crenshaw et al, 2015). Furthermore, Ball stipulates, females are more likely to acquire positions where they fulfil routine tasks than men (Ball, 2013). Therefore, the need to close the prominent attainment gaps for Black Caribbean girls is equally as urgent, to improve their career potential.

A similar pattern is observed when looking closer at the average attainment 8 score, by ethnicity. Attainment 8 measures a pupil's achievement across eight qualifications. Figure 2 in appendix 3 shows a detailed breakdown of different ethnic groups, which reveals an attainment gap of 25.2% between the highest achievers, Chinese pupils, when compared with Black Caribbean pupils.

The lowest achievers

Black Caribbean pupils are amongst the lowest attainment 8 achievers with a score of 44% compared with White British pupils score of 50.2% and Chinese pupils score of 69.2%.

Although Black Caribbean boys are widely disadvantaged in the British education, which has historically attracted funding, resources and media attention, Black Caribbean girls are one of the lowest attaining ethnic groups by gender, besides Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller pupils (GCSE English and maths results, 2022).

The significant underachievers are Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller pupils with 22.7% and 30.7% attainment, respectively. The gap between these two groups with their White counterparts also highlights a need to relook at the positioning of the Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveller groups who do not identify as White and have cultural differences to their White counterparts. Further research is also required for these groups which is supported by Bhopal who posits, the attainment of Gypsy Roma and Traveller pupils remain a cause for concern (Bhopal, 2011).

Black Pupil's still underachieving

Black Caribbean girls underachievement can result from stereotyping; teachers' low expectations; exclusions and Headteachers poor leadership on equality issues (Demie and Mclean, 2017a: 243), all of which have hallmarks of findings from earlier government reports, suggesting the legacy of institutional racism remains ever present in schools throughout England.

Knowing the efforts of colleagues including my own experience of raising Black pupils' attainment in secondary education, the current state of Black pupil's underachievement is a festering open wound. Crenshaw, et al. argues, 'For girls, as with boys, the failure to receive a high school diploma often places individuals on a

pathway to low-wage work, unemployment, and incarceration' (Crenshaw, et al., 2015: 8). If Black Caribbean girls' underachievement is neglected by educators and policymakers alike, it has the potential to leave a permanent legacy of failure for Black children and their families, for generations to come; when Black Caribbean girls today, become the mothers of Black Caribbean children in the future.

Part Two: The implications of policy on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls

My first role within secondary education was primarily to raise attainment for Black pupils. Although, this was two decades ago, the problem of Black pupils' underachievement still exists. It has been systemic since the late 1950's (Gillborn, 1990; Tomlin et al., 2014). Black children from Caribbean and British backgrounds have been leaving school with little or no qualifications routinely (Tomlinson, 2008) and the crisis is ignored. This was not the case with New Labour, who, in 1998, produced a series of initiatives to raise the academic achievement of Black boys (Ball, 2013), rather than Black girls.

On face value, as a teacher working in secondary schools, gender and race inequality is not pronounced, however, data in appendix 2 and 3, shows a clear disparity in underachievement by ethnicity. One reason for this is the subtleness of a 'new racism' (Phillips, 2010). Phillips describes this as 'egalitarian ideals [which] coexist with an anti-Black affect that cause anxiety, distrust, fear and hostility' (Phillips, 2010:176). All of which, plays out in policies, systems and practices that cause disadvantage to Black Caribbean girls, resulting in poor school experiences.

Evidently, Black Caribbean girls have been invisible in education policy over the decades. It is pertinent therefore, to refer to the historical prevalence of racial inequalities within educational policy and how it impacted their school experiences.

i) Educational policy and practice: de/racialised

Bhopal denotes, education policy has focused more on gender in recent years rather than race, largely to push forward an agenda which reinforces White privilege and the 'hierarchy of oppression' in society (Bhopal, 2020; Gillborn, 2007). The issue of deracialised policies was evident in the early 1960's and 1970's, which coincided with increased numbers of 'West Indian' children arriving in English schools. Although educational policies featured aspects of race, Troyna and Williams argue, they were 'unable to satisfy the demands of the black communities precisely because they were deracialised and did not engage with the issue of racism' (Troyna and Williams, 1986: 10). This resulted in a backlash from Black parents and activists within the Caribbean community who set up Supplementary schools (see above).

Black children: ill-treatment

Reflecting on my own experience, as a Black Caribbean girl starting school in the 1970's, I recall my older siblings returning from school and sharing stories of their peers and at times, their harsh discipline which they'd experienced during the school day, including being struck with a cane or having clashes with teachers. Corporal punishment was embedded within the tradition of UK schools and Black children received more punishment than their White peers (McFadden et al.,1992). The ill-

treatment of Black boys and girls aggravated the poor relations between Black parents and schools.

Schools

For Black Caribbean girls, school was like a battle ground with adults from the Black community feeling helpless. Although Caribbean parents highly respected the role of teachers, their admiration did not deter them from craving the best educational outcomes for their children, which was not being provided. This could be accredited to the fact that 'racial and ethnic minorities were regarded as a problem by many schools' (Tomlinson, 2005: 37). The type of schools they attended had inadequate resources and were situated in urban areas. The low standard of teaching increased Black parents' anxieties, leading to a report in 1977 on *The West Indian Community*. The report recommended actions to inquire into the underachievement of West Indian Children in school (Tomlinson, 2005). During the 1970's, Black Caribbean girls were educated in under resourced schools that delivered a poor education.

Family

Reflecting on my school experience, the issue of race was seldom discussed in my household, rather, home was a space for perspective and hope. Accordingly, Williams suggests, unlike White feminists designating the home as a 'site of oppression', for the Black family, home is a 'site for resistance in contemporary struggles' (Williams, 1989: 71). Poor educational provision served as a catalyst to

motivate Black children to excel. Black Caribbean girls were in the grips of an educational crisis, and home provided the necessary tools to help them to aspire.

Social class

Comprehensive schools in the 1970's were demonised for their low academic standards and there were increasing debates regarding the poor educational performance of working-class children (Tomlinson, 2005). Plummer suggests, the failure of Black middle and working-class children has been attributed to causes such as 'parent education, occupation and work condition, unemployment, one-parent family status, health and diet, infant mortality, death rates, poverty, poor housing, family size and cultural factors – in particular, language and socialisation' (Plummer, 2000: 27). All of which, negatively affects their educational performance.

Whilst working-class parents' ability to provide a 'stimulating background' for their children was heavily criticised in the 1960's, during the late 1970's, the Labour government supported initiatives to promote the inclusion of parents in their child's schooling (Tomlinson, 2005: 86). This was alongside an egalitarian agenda where the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the third Race Relations Act 1976 was passed. Historically, when looking through an intersectional lens, gender was of more concern than class in how school was experienced by Black Caribbean girls. This is due to policies focusing on gender rather than that of race. One reason for this is that, 'gender permeates all social classes and ethnicities, so that it can be seen to affect all citizens (Archer and Francis, 2007: 21).

It could be assumed that Black Caribbean girls are less affected by class differences than their White counterparts, a sentiment that is supported by Gaine and George who argue, ethnic minority groups and middle class girls 'achieve better school results in spite of certain negative aspects of their time in school' (Gaine and George,1999: 96). However, the intersectional disadvantages of a Black Caribbean girl can add factors of oppression during school which affect their educational performance. Concurrently, Gaine and George posit 'ethnic minority' working-class girls will have a qualitatively worse school experience and fewer benefits, including language challenges and a curriculum which they are unable to identify with (Gaine and George, 1999: 96).

Additionally, under the Conservative government in the 1970's, working-class children had their educational opportunities rationed through various strategies laid out by Margaret Thatcher, which Tomlinson, argues, 'led to a reassertion of social class as the major determinant of opportunity' (Tomlinson, 2005: 33). Working-class Black Caribbean girls were worse off in the educational environment than their peers.

Oppression

During the 1980's, it was the outcry from the race riots that put race and ethnicity on the education agenda. Following Lord Scarman's recommendations within the Scarman Committee report in 1982, improving the educational provision for Black children was made a key area of focus (Tomlinson, 2005). Black Caribbean girls experienced oppression within the school environment and a lack of employment opportunities on leaving school. It was also during the 1980's that working-class girls

attended mixed schools, having the same basic lessons as boys, however, it was only girls who had sewing and cookery lessons. The domestic ideology in schools prevailed, focusing girls' aspirations to become good wives and mothers, irrespective of class (Plummer, 2000). Additionally, Williams argues, within the 'ideology of familism' during the welfare state, to be *Black* and a *mother* was 'doubly negative' as it constituted the reproduction of more Blacks (Williams, 1989: 69). Black Caribbean girls were studying a racialised curriculum which did not prioritise the contribution they would make to British society.

Contrastingly, whilst the 1980's witnessed a time of racial disharmony and Black people faced discrimination, Black women were joining forces and empowering each other. These women were likely to be children of *militant* parents discussed above. Bryan et al. argues, the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) 'succeeded in bringing a new women's dimension to the Black struggles of the 1980's' (Bryan et al., 1997: 42-43). Central to OWAAD's aims was a mission to combat the 'struggle against women's oppression' (Bryan et.al., 1997: 44). Bryan et al. posits, many women were inspired to go home and set about the task of forming local Black women's' groups (Bryan et al., 1997). This movement suggests, in the 1980's, Black Caribbean girls were raised by mothers who exemplified strength by overcoming the oppressive factors they experienced within society. It is apparent that women who participated in this movement or started their own in the 1980's, are now the mothers and grandmothers of Black Caribbean girls who are attending secondary school presently. It is also likely that they will be admired by their daughters and granddaughters' as role models, for their legacy of strength and resilience through struggle.

Individualism

‘Since the early 1980’s, Britain has been subject to policy drives and discourses emerging from the movement which we now call neoliberalism’ (Archer and Francis, 2007:18). However, it was in the 1990’s under New Labour where education was developing as a ‘market commodity’, which Tomlinson, suggests, was ‘driven by consumer demands’ and ‘demonstrated by the retention of market competition between schools’ (Tomlinson, 2005: 90). Education policy sought to raise standards. Humans were capital within a competitive, global marketplace, resulting in ‘policy obsession with educational achievement’ (Archer and Francis, 2007:18). Within the neoliberal model, the focus on self is paramount, where the onus is on the individual to achieve if they want to be successful, irrespective of intersectional disadvantages. Accordingly, Archer and Francis argue, ‘It is the duty of the individual to be sufficiently flexible to maximise the opportunities available to her or him – any failure resides in the individual rather than in socio-economic structures such as those which privilege/discriminate on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, social class and so on’ (Archer and Francis, 2007:19). The politics hidden within neoliberalism is one of division, as it is the privileged who will achieve success. Black Caribbean girls are disadvantaged by oppressive factors including their race, which their White counterparts will not experience. Concurrently, Lorde 1984 (cited in Williams 1989: 71) argues, ‘white women can assume to have some recourse to a white power structure… in a way that Black women cannot’. Therefore, the introduction of educational policies and practices in the last thirty years, including Excellence in Cities; Aim Higher; Aim High; BPAP and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), which served to tackle the achievement gap between Black pupils and their

White peers, made little impact and appeared ‘tokenistic’ by ‘disregarding race equity in achievement’ (Archer and Francis: 2007:16). Notwithstanding my observations whilst working on some of the above-mentioned projects which highlighted that it was Black Caribbean boys who were prioritised for support in schools, whilst Black Caribbean girls were ignored. Concurrently, Mirza noted in her study in 1992, ‘young Black women collectively identified with the notion of credentialism. They subscribed to the meritocratic ideal, which, within the parametres of their circumstances meant ‘getting on’ (Mirza, 1997: 270). Evidently, Black girls were embracing ‘neoliberal meritocracy’ (Littler, 2018; Mirza 2006), which appeared outwardly to shape their identity. It could also be argued that Black girls became accountable for their own educational outcomes.

Today, there are few government reports which prioritise race, which suggests it has fallen off the political agenda. Whilst the policy approaches to race have evolved over the years, Archer and Francis argue, the pathologisation of minority ethnic pupils within education policy remains an issue today’ (Archer and Francis, 2007:1). It appears that the UK government has rendered current educational policy to initiatives which seek to reinstate the British race and stifle the social mobility of Black Caribbean girls. Furthermore, opportunities to tackle racism are missed within policies that promote neoliberalism and meritocracy. ‘The hegemony of individualism in current educational policy has gradually erased specific allusion and concern with particular factors of social identity, including very notably the absence of race from policy documents’ (Archer and Francis, 2007: 20).

Black Caribbean girls have recognised the legacy of educational policy and practice which has failed to focus on their educational needs and outcomes, however, their

aspirations to succeed have not been diminished. Educational policy has maintained its colourblind approach to inequalities in education according to race, affecting the trajectories and life chances of Black Caribbean girls. However, recognition of this fact creates a positive momentum for change. Consequently, I concur with Troyna, who posits:

> *The distinction between discoursive deracialisation and benign racialisation allows us to tease out the continuities and discontinuities within and between the changing racial forms of education in Britain. In addition, it provides a more sensitive lens through which to identify and interpret the muddled and contradictory ways in which key concepts such as race, ethnicity, culture, identity and deprivation have been presented and related'*
>
> (Troyna, 1993: 29).

Proposing a solution to the racism which persists within educational policy and practice, Troyna calls for 'the re-education of whites for the sake of harmony and for the demonstrating cultural justice to black people' (Troyna,1993: 41).

ii) Educational policy and practice: Racialised and Gendered

Black Caribbean girls have been racialised, gendered and classed in the school discourse for decades, leading to an inadequate school experience. Furthermore, education policy has failed to provide legitimate resources or targeted initiatives because, whenever race is considered by policymakers, it is Black boys who they target. Therefore, racialisation is gendered and intersectionality is bypassed, so that the outlook for Black Caribbean girls is bleak, moreover, those who are working-class. These nuances impress deeply upon the educational experiences of Black

Caribbean girls who forfeit an inclusive school experience to one in which they are deemed invisible or forgotten, leaving them to fend for themselves.

Gender also plays a prominent role in the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls, which begins with early socialisation (see definition in chapter 3). Gaine and George argue, 'schools through their organisational structures both formally and informally reinforce gender stereotypes' (Gaine and George,1999: 82). As such, teachers' interaction with Black Caribbean girls will be different when compared with their male counterparts, therefore, school is experienced differently for boys and girls.

Early studies by a body of researchers, identify that teacher interaction favoured boys more than girls with boys receiving more praise and attention, however, whilst boys received more criticism, girls received less instruction. In addition, boys were also more likely to be referred to by name, reducing girls positionality to one on the margins within the classroom, which girls were aware of (Acker, 1994; Brophy and Good, 1969; Clarricoates, 1978; Darling and Glendinning, 1996; Delamont, 1984; Douglas, 1964; Kelly, 1986; MacIntosh,1990; Merret and Wheldall, 1992; Sexton, 1969; Spender, 1982; Stanworth, 1981). A reason for the increased attention from teachers is attributed to the failing boys' discourse, where boys presented with difficulties in learning to read (Douglas, 1964; Sexton, 1969) were less hardworking, unable to concentrate and less submissive to discipline than girls (Acker, 1994). These findings reveal a similar school experience by Black girls in studies by Fuller 1980, Mirza, 1992 and Rollock 2007, who describe Black girls as conforming to the school discourse and in some instances, deemed invisible. In Fuller's study, Black girls were described as resenting boys as they noticed the discrepancy in the demands on girls, which resorted to the participants awarding boys labels such as

childish and lazy. Resentment which Fuller suggests, was likened to envy due to the boys having ‘greater freedom’ (Fuller, 1980: 56).

During the era of unemployment in the 1980’s, feminist teachers analysed classroom practices to identify gendered experiences and to understand the extent in which these experiences ‘disadvantaged girls’ in relation to their participation in school and their occupational choices made (Gaine and George, 1999). According to Fuller, Black girls are aware of their racialised and gendered positions in school and society, and the ‘double implications’ this had on their employment opportunities (Fuller, 1980: 56). Finding strength from their identity, Fuller states, that the girls embraced a strategic stance to take control over their educational and career outcomes, rather than resorting to despair (Fuller, 1980). Gender inequality is an oppressive factor which contributes to alienating Black Caribbean girls from selecting certain subjects. As a result of gender stereotypes, girls and boys choose gendered subject choices within the National Curriculum which ultimately affects their career trajectories (Gaine and George, 1999).

Intersectionality and identity

The intersections of a Black Caribbean girl in the school discourse can include but is not limited to her race, gender, class, ability, religion, background, etc. All of which, can weigh heavily upon Black Caribbean girls as they experience oppression from within the school environment as well as the prevailing political climate. For example, a Black Caribbean girl who is working-class, may experience more oppressive factors

in their school, resulting in lower academic achievement than their peers and lower skilled professions.

In contrast to their White counterparts, Black women's' experiences are structured by race as well as gender (Williams, 1989). Interestingly, Fuller observed Black girls embracing a positive identity as Black, female and British, despite having a Caribbean background (Fuller, 1980). Although their postcolonial status added another layer of oppression due to racial discrimination which they were exposed to in Britain, this served to motivate the girls to action, as they had high hopes of success. Similarly, findings from Mirza's study provides an image of Black girls establishing their position of resistance, when she denotes, '[Black girls] were no longer in the Caribbean they were in the UK, and their experience was deeply racialized in a particular way. I found they were forging new identities. Identities that were grounded in a refusal to be quantified as failures' (Mirza, 2006: 145). Although their intersectional disadvantages are ignored, Black Caribbean girls refusal to accept the stereotype as underachievers is evidently clear. It can be argued that the effects of educational policy and practice since the Windrush era has created a generation of postcolonial feminists whose identity has inspired a revolution of positive activists, against the dominant powers that bombard their everyday struggle. Although they are afflicted, Black women and Black Caribbean girls are not down. Mirza questions the prevalence of this phenomena today when she asks, 'Can we, as women of colour, claim that black and postcolonial feminism - a conscious, meaningful act of political self-identification- still binds us in our different locations and seemingly fragmented struggles in the globalised 21st century?' (Mirza, 2009:3).

It is assumed that Black girls have redefined the parameters of what we have come to learn of identity (for the definition of identity, see chapter 3), by removing the safety net from the ideology of nation and replaced it with activism (Fuller, 1980; Mirza, 1992; Mirza,1997; Mirza, 2009; Persram,1997). Black Caribbean girls today face similar challenges to first and second generation Caribbean migrants, however, it can be argued, they are redefining their presence within postcolonial Britain by creating their own opportunities, even in the absence of policies and practices that seek to improve their educational outcomes and life chances.

In Summary: Meritocracy prevails

Despite increasing educational provision in the UK in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conservatives and capitalists revoked their opportunity to increase equality for all. Instead, they focused on creating a niche pool of talented individuals into the capitalist class, further emphasising their meritocratic ideology (Littler, 2018; Todd, 2015). Meritocracy has debilitating consequences for Black Caribbean girls who have intersectional layers which prevent them from getting ahead in society and in school.

Meritocracy centres around the thought that ‘whatever your social position at birth, society ought to offer enough opportunity and mobility for ‘talent’ to combine with ‘effort’ in order to ‘rise to the top’ (Littler, 2018: 2). In a school context, the talent being referred to, is that of the achievement of national qualifications such as GCSE’s. Although the learning of life and employability skills are a key component of what is learnt in school, Gillborn argues, ‘Qualifications alone are not sufficient to

gain access to education or employment, but they are frequently a necessary condition: without them access may not even be a possibility' (Gillborn, 1990:107). Black Caribbean girls are underachieving in a society that declares the playing fields are level and providing a child puts in the effort, they will succeed. From a neoliberal perspective, the challenge becomes more nuanced as the acquisition of talent lies with the individual (Littler, 2018). Black Caribbean girls have more than their fair share of disadvantage and in a meritocratic and neoliberal society, the chances of achievement become scarce. Littler describes this notion as 'neoliberal meritocracy' (Littler, 2018: 8).

Both the historical background of Black Caribbean girls' achievement in Britain and the achievement data fail to provide a view of equity. Concurrently, Littler argues,

> '[*Black Caribbean girls'] have been encouraged to believe that if [they] try hard enough [they] can make it: that race or class or gender are not, on a fundamental level, significant barriers to success. To release [their] inner talent, [they] need to work hard and market [them]selves in the right way to achieve success*
>
> (Littler, 2018: 2).

Another caveat stated by Littler, is the promise of rising, is not attributed to everyone. This is because, 'meritocracy is a competitive, linear, hierarchical system in which by definition certain people must be left behind. The top cannot exist without the bottom' (Littler, 2018: 3). This highlights the detriments of Black Caribbean girls' educational trajectories when they encounter poor school experiences and occupy marginalised positions in racialised and gendered learning environments, instead of schools which enhance their academic potential.

In the twenty-first century, policymakers fail to recognise the educational needs of Black Caribbean girls, despite the emergence of global feminist movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo (Williams, 2021). Accordingly, Williams denotes, the 'transformative power of feminist, anti-racist and post/decolonial and ecological thinking is still relatively marginal to core social policy theory', although other critical approaches have gained recognition (Williams, 2021: 4). For any progress in social policy to be effective for Black Caribbean girls, the intersectional disadvantages of race, class and gender need to 'interconnected' and 'central' to its analysis (Williams, 2021:2). Meritocracy is about one group governing over another (Littler, 2018) and due to their marginalised position, Black Caribbean girls remain on the lower tiers of society and they are still deemed invisible. Williams draws attention to a sense of intensified continuities, which she describes as the 'unfinished business of everyday institutional racism' affecting Black Caribbean girls educational outcomes, which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Williams, 2021:4).

Reflecting on the historical legacy of educational policy and practice, I hereby question, to what extent has educational policy and practice failed Black Caribbean girls? The answer lies within the findings from Rollock's study, when she argues,

> *'while prevalent discourses on femininity serve to increase Black girls' legitimacy in the context of dominant discourses on academic success, those on ethnicity serve simultaneously to downgrade their legitimacy, both minimising their opportunities for high status academic success and rendering them invisible in the debates on Black attainment'* (Rollock, 2007:197).

PART TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A semi-systematic literature search was performed using databases Web of Science, Jstor and Google scholar to identify relevant articles and studies to answer my research questions. I employed a methodical approach to search existing literature and followed a process of screening by excluding those articles which were not relevant to my topic (Pahlevan-Sharif, et al, 2019).

In addition, I carried out a Boolean search using the key terms; Black OR Afro* OR Caribbean OR BME OR BAME OR Ethnic AND Minorit*) AND (Girl) AND (Education OR School) AND (2011 – 2021) and limited to the United Kingdom. This was the second literature search I carried out as the first search reviewed literature in two journals; Gender and Education and Race, Ethnicity and Education, which returned few results using the key terms; 'boys underachievement', 'failing boys', 'black girls', and 'black girls underachievement'. Using a thematic structure, I will discuss the findings from my search.

I have explored the recent debates widely discussed in the field of education, spanning the last decade. In the decade between 2001- 2010, 57% of the articles published in the Gender and Education journal were from researchers in the UK. Contrastingly, during the period 2011 - 2021, articles in my related search were, in the main, published in America and were therefore, discounted as my research is focused on secondary schools in England.

In this chapter, I will discuss recent themes pertaining to Black girls which will enable me to establish an answer to my research questions.

Hegemonic Masculinity v Successful Girls

An article by Skelton and Francis titled, ‘Successful boys and literacy’ argues, that research shows the gender gap is more evident in writing, and identifies girls as being twice as likely to score more than boys (Skelton and Francis, 2011). The article asserts, in English lessons, teachers assume boys would be less able than girls, and therefore, they do not develop the skills which contribute to achieving in that subject, as well as suggesting that schools fail to cater for boy’s needs (Skelton and Francis, 2011).

Skelton and Francis’s article contrasts with earlier papers on the successful girls’ discourse and appears to defend the plight of boys’ failure in literacy subjects, on account of their gender. Contrastingly, feminist researcher, Ringrose posits, in her paper ‘Successful girls? Complicating post-feminist, neoliberal discourse of educational achievement and gender equality’, ever since the Equal Opportunities policies and the formation of the National Curriculum in 1988, girls have outperformed boys (Ringrose, 2007).

The rhetoric of presenting girls as successful is counterproductive for Black Caribbean girls as it suggests that they are mastering the key markers of neoliberalism and the meritocratic discourse, whilst boys are being left behind.

Successful boys

What could be described as a response to the demise of the failing boys’ agenda, is an emergence of literature reporting on the successful Black boy who exudes resilience against educational challenges and achieves educational success (Yosso,

2005; Wright, 2018; Wint et al, 2021; Wright et.al, 2021). In their book titled, '*Young British African and Caribbean Men Achieving Educational Success: disrupting deficit discourses about Black male achievement*', Wright et al. argue 'Black people, particularly those of Caribbean heritage, place an urgency and are willing to go above and beyond to ensure immediate and future generations of young Black people achieve academic success and go on to lead successful lives' (Wright et al., 2021: 93). Additionally, families expect Black men to achieve academic success (Wright et al., 2021). Similarly, Skelton and Francis assert, hegemonic masculinity, which was once to blame for boys being unsuccessful at gendered subjects, has been replaced by a new type of emerging masculinity, which they label as renaissance masculinity. They argue that renaissance masculinity is reworked by academically successful boys who are high achieving pupils (Skelton and Francis, 2011).

Whilst society maintains its patriarchal view of gender inequality and there are significantly fewer female managers in the highest paid jobs (White, 2022), including those in science, engineering, technology and mathematics (STEM), the successful boys' discourse has the ability to divert resources to their male counterparts which could have otherwise been targeted for Black Caribbean girls.

The gender gap

The gender gap has been deemed as both a national and international crisis, formed by the beginnings of a global moral panic over failing boys (Ringrose, 2007). In a research report in 2015, Stokes et al. argue, 'As ethnic gaps in attainment are

already evident on entry to school, efforts to raise attainment of White working-class pupils need to consider what works for even the youngest pupils' (Stokes et al., 2015: 8). Stokes et al. calls for policy to also focus on White working-class girls as they also show low attainment levels (Stokes et al., 2015).

Race, class and gender have dominated the political landscape when focusing on underachievement, but there has been a shift in focus. Interestingly, where socio-economic status is a category under scrutiny, only White working-class pupils are highlighted. This illuminates the priority set by the UK government to focus on White working-class groups as a race rather than those groups performing below national standards, such as Black Caribbean girls.

Contrastingly, Strand identified Black Caribbean boys and girls as the lowest achieving group at age 16, in attaining 5 GCSE passes at A*- C including English and Mathematics in 2011, according to national data (Strand, 2014:132). Figure 2 (see appendix 3) reveals, whilst White working-class boys are underachieving in comparison to their Asian peers, Black Caribbean boys and girls remain the lowest performing group by ethnicity with the lowest average attainment 8 score of 44%, which is 6.2% below that of their White British counterparts, who have an average attainment score of 50.2% (GCSE results (Attainment 8), 2022).

The debates around the urgency to raise achievement for White working-class boys has also gained momentum in the media, however, policies where Black Caribbean girls are identified by their class are yet to be created.

This demonstrates that the conversation on underachievement is highly contentious and the position for who is most at risk is not straightforward. Concurrently, Gillborn

and Youdell argue that Blackness appears to act as a totalising signifier, and it is only in the case of White pupils that social class emerges as a key axis of differentiation (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000).

Not only does this lack of clarity and integrity affect those Black Caribbean girls who require intervention to succeed, but it presents a crisis in the English education system where race is invisible, and the 'neoliberal meritocracy' (Littler, 2018) within British classrooms continues to present a divide between the winners and losers. Furthermore, a focus on White working-class male students suggests the intersectional disadvantages of Black Caribbean girls are non-existent on the government's agenda although the impact of race, gender and class weigh heavily on the quality of their educational outcomes.

Gender bias is already prominent within inequitable schooling. Accordingly, Ladson-Billings and Tate argue, 'Females receive less attention from teachers, [and] are counselled away from or out of advanced mathematics and science courses' (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995: 49).

Tiering

In addition, the second point I draw attention to from the paper by Skelton and Francis is, the sample for their study consisted of 71 high achieving pupils in nine secondary schools in England that were selected by the teachers (Skelton and Francis, 2011). Skelton and Francis denote, out of the 71 students selected, only nine were from minority ethnic groups, which they argue, 'did not reflect the diverse nature of the population of some of the schools and raises questions about how

children are recognised as ‘achieving’ by teachers’ (Skelton and Francis, 2011: 462). This evidences the debate on teachers’ perception and stereotyping of Black Caribbean pupils (Rampton 1981; Swann 1985; Macpherson 1999; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Wright, Weeks and McGlaughin 2000; Rollock 2007). In an analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, Strand concluded that Black Caribbean students are ‘systematically under-represented in entry to the higher tiers relative to their White peers’, which he argues, ‘provides a window on teacher expectation effects which may contribute to the achievement gap (Strand, 2012: 75).

A point I have made earlier in the thesis is the power a teacher has to influence the trajectory of a young person’s life beyond school. Black Caribbean girls are positioned in a less than favourable situation as they are discriminated against on the grounds of race, gender and class. They are least likely to be selected for higher tiers and the contrast of a low tier can mean they miss out on opportunities beyond school if they do not attain the desired grade (Strand, 2012). Fuller supports this notion in her study when she asserts, the girls were ‘weighing up’ the ‘potential relevance and importance of teachers’ and were sophisticated in judging who did and did not matter in their pursuit for academic qualifications (Fuller,1980: 61). Additionally, Strand argues, boys were 12.1 times more likely to be entered for the higher tiers than girls (Strand, 2012: 86).

Tiering can implicate the careers the types of careers which Black girls can pursue. Accordingly, Mirza argues,

> *‘young black women choose realistic careers that they know are accessible and historically available to them such as social work, caring and office work.*

> *Jobs that require training which is a way of expressing their meritocratic values within the limits imposed on them'* (Mirza,1997: 271).

Tiering is usually required for subjects such as Mathematics, English and Science, which are all requirements for professional jobs or further and higher education courses, which lead to professional careers. It is, therefore, important in the school experience of the Black Caribbean girl, to be recognised as worthy of selection to a higher tier when the teacher is making the selection. This may account for the reason why both Fuller (1980) and Mirza (1997) observe the Black girl appearing to conform to the school discourse.

Factors which contribute to the selection of higher tiers, as noted by Strand are, high parental aspirations, greater parental supervision, the provision of a home computer and private tuition (Strand, 2012: 86). Such factors highlight nuances of disadvantage, and it can be argued that these may not be available to working-class children. As race and class operate differently and black and white children occupy different societal positions (Phoenix,1997), a teacher will utilise racialized and gendered assumptions when selecting tiers, which could hinder the career prospects for the Black Caribbean girl.

Empirical studies

Black Caribbean Girls

Black Caribbean girls are often described as outperforming their male counterparts, which disguises their route to success (Rollock, 2007). It appears that Black girls are seamlessly entering the secondary education without experiencing the inequalities

usually associated with race or gender in education. However, this reflection of success is not without its challenges. Black girls are navigating their own routes to success amidst the same disadvantages of their male counterparts and female peers.

There are several factors that impact a Black Caribbean girl's experiences in school and the wider society, which can have an influence on the strategies they employ, to navigate their school experience. Furthermore, these factors can also have implications on the characteristics they need to be equipped with to ascertain the grades she gains, in order to achieve her career goals. In this section I will discuss some of the key issues affecting Black girls following a review of empirical studies.

Black Caribbean Girls: Racialized

Black Caribbean girls are racialised in schools and the wider society (Mirza, 1997). Within the confines of a school environment, the differences in identity are often used to characterise or identify pupils. Whilst race is an identifying factor, it should not be the defining factor (Mirza,1997) for Black Caribbean girls including the labels which are attached by others, according to the colour of an individual's skin. Concurrently, Sandoval 1991 (cited in Mirza 1997: 3), describes racialisation as a 'self-consciously constructed space where identity is not inscribed by a natural identification but a political kinship'.

The social structure of race has a significant bearing on how Black Caribbean girls will be defined by others, before they begin their school experience. It is, therefore, the determination of the Black Caribbean girls to make a concerted effort in which, to

counter any negative labelling or stereotyping they experiences as a result. Mirza argues, being successful in institutions that have traditionally not allowed Black women real power, enables them to indirectly subvert oppressive structures by changing them (Mirza,1997). If Black Caribbean girls are unsuccessful at counteracting the racialisation from teachers and peers, their experience within the school can become oppressive. Concurrently, Crenshaw et al. argues, Black girls experience 'inhospitable, educational environments' (Crenshaw et al., 2015: 9). The effect of which, can be detrimental to their achievement and aspirations.

The negative consequences of racialisation were evident by Lord Swann, who noted that racism towards West Indian and Asian children, which resulted from teacher's low expectations and negative stereotypes, had the potential to directly affect the pupil's achievement or behaviour' (Swann,1985).

Black Caribbean Girls: Gendered

Black Caribbean girls are gendered. Structural expectations are placed on them, depicting their attitude to learning and to school, how they should work and behave towards their peers and teachers. In her study, Rollock posits, staff described female students to be motivated, focused, and organised (Rollock, 2007). This is also in comparison to Black boys, who are more likely to be stereotyped by White teachers as deviants and trouble-makers than black girls (Coultas,1989; Rollock, 2007). Black girls in Rollock's study received less surveillance than their male counterparts, rendering the girls invisible (Rollock, 2007). Additionally, Rollock argues, Black girls can become viewed in direct relation to concerns similar to Black boys, resulting in a

minimised presence in the classroom, whilst sharing the negative visibility associated with Blackness (Rollock, 2007).

Black Caribbean Girls: School Discipline

From my experience, when mentoring Black girls in a secondary school (discussed in chapter one), it was the expectations of the school discourse which waned on them, as they were forced to conform to the school's ideals. Consequently, their behaviour was challenged on a daily basis as they were moved out of top sets, refused access to school during break and lunch times when other girls were allowed to attend enrichment, as well as being excluded both internally and externally. A strategy that was often exercised by the Headteacher was a Managed Move. A Managed Move is where a pupil takes part in a carefully planned supported transfer from one school to another to try to avoid the risk of permanent exclusion (Birmingham.gov.uk, 2021). A neighbouring schools negotiated either a swap or agreed to place a Black girl in their school, who might otherwise have been permanently excluded. The Headteacher would managed move a Black girl when it was presumed that they had exhausted the full extent of the school's behavioural management strategies.

In a report titled: '*Black Girls Matter: Pushed out: Overpoliced and Underprotected'*, Crenshaw et al. provides examples (in America) of harsher punishments which they argue, are awarded to Black girls in school (Crenshaw et.al., 2015). One example is of a sixteen-year-old student, who was arrested in a California school for dropping cake on the floor and failing to pick it up to a school officer's satisfaction. Similarly, in a London school, a case in which a Black girl was overpoliced and underprotected

has been reported widely in the media, causing reactions within the Black community and also amongst leaders and parliament (Chant, 2022). In December 2020, a Black girl (referred to as Child Q) was denigrated by two female police officers who subjected the girl to a strip search when teachers suspected her of carrying cannabis. This strip search was not only conducted with no other adult present, but the girl was menstruating and according to The Local Child Safeguarding Practice review initiated by Hackney council, 'her intimate body parts were exposed and she was asked to take off her sanitary towel'. Reports cite racism as factor (Gamble & McCallum, 2022; Crew 2022; Quinn 2022). In addition, other factors which put Child Q at risk include, 'adultification bias' coupled with Child Q's ethnicity and background as a child growing up on an estate (Gamble and McCallum, 2022:34; Crew 2022). Adultification can be defined as the circumstance 'where adults perceive black children as being older than they are' (Crew, 2022). This incident significantly highlights the racialised, gendered and class disparities that a Black Caribbean girl experiences in comparison to her White peers. A question posed in the Safeguarding review for Child Q, asks 'whether the child was treated differently because she was black' (Quinn, 2022). Furthermore, Child Q was due to sit an examination prior to this incident and after being searched, Child Q's mother argued, that her daughter 'was asked to go back into an exam without any teacher asking her about how she felt' (Gamble and McCallum, 2022; Quinn, 2022). The reaction from the school supports the notion that more attention is being placed on disciplining Black Caribbean girls rather than providing a safe school environment which empowers them to achieve.

Such racialised school incidents are not widely reported in the UK, however, evidence is emerging in the media. One example is a newspaper article in 2020, that

reports, the Campaign group ‘No More Exclusions’ argue, ‘black girls are frequently being sent home for having braids in their hair and other students have been suspended for kissing teeth’ (Busby, 2020). Identity and cultural differences are often used to punish Black Caribbean girls’ because of their difference. It is this unequal treatment to their White peers which can have a negative impact on Black Caribbean girls’ school experience and affect their ability to achieve and overcome the oppressive school structures, especially if they don’t feel safe. Experiences of racial inequality is another burden they encounter which their White peers don’t. Concurrently, recent statistics show that 25% of Black Caribbean pupils (boys and girls) were permanently excluded in the school year 2018-2019, compared with 10% of White British pupils. (Permanent Exclusions: 2022).

Researchers consistently report the fate of Black Caribbean boys’ as being at risk of school exclusion, however, following a recent review of Black Caribbean underachievement, Demi and McLean state, both Caribbean boys and girls were over twice as likely to have fixed term exclusions as pupils overall (Demi and McLean 2017b).

Black Caribbean Girls: Race, Class and Gender

All girls are gendered but gender development is different for different groups of people. Furthermore, when you consider race, gender is differently experienced by Black people and White people, by working-class people and middle-class people (Phoenix,1997). Traditionally, data is compared on academic attainment by ethnicity from government statistics, however, it is impossible to compare the educational

experiences in this way. This is evident whether comparing Black Caribbean girls with Black Caribbean boys or Black Caribbean girls with White British girls and other ethnicities. By their very experience, it is difficult not to polarize Black girls as a homogenous group, separate to that of their peers. Distinct differences are identified by their physicality, yet Black Caribbean girls are categorised in a homogenous group and are expected to perform in an identical fashion as all girls. Daily experiences of racism alone can polarize the Black Caribbean girls from their female counterparts.

Phoenix posits, when social class is taken into consideration, Black girls are marginalised and denigrated to the lowest position of power below their White peers and Black boys (Phoenix, 1997). Whilst working class children share a common experience, the dominant structural position of the White girl is more widely accepted than the Black girl, as they occupy different societal positions (Phoenix,1997). The outlook for an underachieving Black Caribbean girl is one of invisibility. School presents an oppressive image and a daily struggle. Concurrently, Maylor argues, research is limited on the psychological impact and long-term consequences on Black children's self-esteem and self-worth due to differential treatment, calling for school policies which focus on caring and relationship strategies (Maylor, 2009).

Black Caribbean Girls: Self-Worth and Strategy

In the absence of school policies that recognise the effects of racism which is intertwined in relationships with teachers and the school structure, there is a phenomenon of Black girls *doing it for themselves*. In Fuller's study of eight Black girls in a London school in 1980, she describes them as 'coming to their own worth',

which meant, they learnt to rely on their own rather than others' opinion of them (Fuller,1980, 61). Black girls' show a sophisticated understanding of Whites and White authority (Coultas,1989: 289). Furthermore, Fuller asserts, the girls adopted a 'strategic political stand', which was in response to Whites generally and Whites in authority in the school (Fuller,1980: 61). In addition, Fuller argues, the self-worth which the Black girls displayed, was derived from 'their existing knowledge and understanding of their own worth' (related to qualifications and career), coupled with their understanding that this was often denied (Fuller,1980: 8).

Similarly, findings from Mirza's study of Black girls, provoked the question;-

> *How can, what appears on the surface as compliance and willingness to conform to systems and structures of educational meritocracy, be redefined both as strategic and as evidence of a covert social movement for change?*
>
> *(Mirza,1997: 270)*

As with Fuller's study, Black girls' in Mirza's study showed a desire to achieve albeit discretely positioned from the view of teachers, which eventually lead to success. Mirza affirms, 'They do relatively well at school, relative that is to their male and female working-class peers' (Mirza,1997).

This suggests, Black Caribbean girls resist the pressures of sexism, racism, marginalization and disadvantage, and develop strategies to navigate their school experience, whilst leaning on qualities, hidden from the view of teachers in school.

Black Caribbean Girls: Positionality in schools

Black Caribbean girls have an awareness of their position within the school structures and the low expectations from teachers. Mirza refers to this position as 'the 'third space' because it overlaps the margins of the race, gender and class discourse and occupies the empty spaces in between (Mirza,1997: 4). The third space draws parallels with the discourse of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), whilst highlighting the multidimensional disadvantages that can stand in the way of a Black Caribbean girls attainment. Black Caribbean girls position within education has, for decades, been reported by feminists who tackle injustices of gender in education, from the perspective of White girls (Hill-Collins, 2009). Coupled with government policies that focus largely on Black Caribbean boys. This calls for Black feminists and policymakers to acknowledge the educational needs of Black Caribbean girls whose marginalised position has been neglected for years.

Black Caribbean Girls: Self-Esteem and Self-Concept

In her paper titled, '*Black Girls and Self Esteem*', Valerie Coultas explores the history of past research carried out in the twentieth century, which were some of the first to explore the self-concept of Black children in school (Coultas,1989). The availability of the type of studies discussed by Coultas are not available in current literature, however, these studies were conducted during significant political moments concerning Black people and their integration into their Western culture (see chapter 2). Although over three decades, findings from Coultas's paper will contribute to answering my research questions as similar research is not widely available today.

The studies in America and the UK focused on the self- esteem of Black children. Low self-esteem can be defined as ‘feeling ineffectual, powerless, impotent, as regards goal achievement and having a tendency to externalise the responsibility for actions’ (Louden 1978 cited in Coultas, 1989). Western researchers hypothesised that ‘Black pupils would internalise society’s views’ and ‘hold a negative view of themselves’ (Coultas, 1989: 284), concerning their low status. The tests were based on the assumption that Black children would want to be White because there was nothing to pull them in the opposite direction (Coultas,1989: 284-287). The doll test was one of the first studies. Early studies indicated that 33% of Black children identified incorrectly by saying that the White doll looked like them, however, when a light brown doll was used, there was a significant reduction in the number of Black children mis-identifying. Dolls were replaced with celluloid sheets and researchers asked the children to build a picture of themselves. The study found the children were less likely to mis-identify. They also recognised the children used ‘socially desired responses (Coultas,1989: 287).

Self–concept can be defined as ‘how someone thinks about, evaluates or perceives themselves’ (Mcleod, 2022). Early studies found positive self-concept highest among Black children in non-integrated schools and argued that attitude depended on context or significant others. It was suggested that, if Black parents, siblings, friends and teachers held children in high esteem, this would counteract the influence of the wider society (Coultas,1989). Later studies added to the body of work by comparing the self-esteem among the most and least disadvantaged girls in a secondary school. Findings revealed that Black pupils, who were the most disadvantaged girls among the group, had higher self-concept than the less disadvantaged girls. The school’s

dominant philosophy, ethos and the *pupil-centred approach,* which gave great rewards to pupils who were unpopular with teachers were said to contribute to the results (Coultas,1989:283-4).

The studies discussed by Coultas, reveal the characteristics Black pupils utilise to position themselves in marginalised spaces. Results showed, having self-esteem empowers Black pupils to feel good about themselves and to embrace their identity. The doll tests suggests Black pupils are aware of negative stereotypes and labelling in which, they wish to detach themselves from. The only other option in the first dolls tests was a white doll which when selected, was described as mis-identifying. The brown doll presented a neutral option that was neither black nor white. Additionally, by choosing the 'socially desired responses' (Coultas,1989:287), it can be assumed that the participants had an awareness of the expectations and consequences of their actions, from those conducting the tests, who represented social structural powers. However, despite the oppressive factors experienced by Black Caribbean girls for their race, class and gender, they have high self-esteem.

Within a school context, it is teachers who have a large stake in the educational and occupational futures of young people, which can determine their success. Leath et al. describes teachers as 'significant gatekeepers' (Leath et al., 2021a: 1). The prospect is seemingly bleak for Black Caribbean girls, who are marginalised by race, gender and socio-economic status (hooks, 1994; Hill Collins, 2009; Mirza, 1997; Leath et al., 2021a) and whose trajectories are in the hands of institutions which have been historically declared as institutionally racist (Swann,1985; Macpherson, 1999) and has failed them for decades (Gillborn, 1990; Mirza, 1997; Demi and McLean 2017a). However, in amidst these challenges, results from these studies reveal that

disadvantaged Black Caribbean girls are choosing to empower themselves to achieve, impressing on their social capital.

Black Caribbean Girls: Misogyny

Leath et al. denotes, many Black girl's school related challenges with teachers and school leaders involve discriminatory practices at the intersection of racism and sexism, such as 'misogynoir' (Leath et al., 2021a: 2). Misogynoir is defined as 'the ways in which racism and sexism intersect to produce racialized gendered violence and harm against Black women and girls' (Leath et al., 2021a: 2). Schools in the UK have seen a rise in the number of girls speaking out about sexual harassment and violence, as part of their lived school experience. The #Metoo movement was founded by Tarana Burke to direct attention on the plight of Black women and girls from underprivileged communities who are the victims of sexual assault or rape in America. The hashtag was recently co-opted by White women worldwide, including Hollywood celebrities, sharing similar experiences (Brinkman et al., 2021). In 2021, an article in the Guardian newspaper, titled '*#MeToo changed Hollywood – but what about our schools, workplaces and homes?'* stated:-

> *'The movement has certainly made a difference in Hollywood, leading to the arrest and conviction of powerful men such as Harvey Weinstein. However, sexism and sexual harassment are not only found in Hollywood but also closer to home, in our schools, our workplaces and our everyday lives*' (Cloke, 2021).

A YouGov poll carried out in March 2021 for UN women, found that nearly nine out of ten younger women had experienced some form of sexual harassment in public. In addition, the discourse has recently revealed a large number of sexual assault cases

in schools. An investigation by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) stated, thirteen thousand sex offences involving under-18s have been reported annually to police between 2018-2020 in England and Wales (Cloke, 2021). Furthermore, concerns raised by Ofsted, suggests, ‘sexual harassment has become normalised among school-age children’ (Cloke, 2021).

This adds to the oppressive and unsafe climate which Black Caribbean girls exists within school. Although acts of sexism exist for all women, Brinkman et al. argue, ’the move for White women using the hashtag on social media has resulted in Black girls’ experiences being left in the shadows, silencing their experiences’ (Brinkman et al., 2021: 252). However, the weight of public awareness of sexual harassment that has co-existed alongside schools structures and practices, has been shifted onto girls for not speaking out. Accordingly, Ofsted’s chief inspector, Amanda Spielman, stated ‘Whether it’s happening at school or in their social life, they simply don’t feel it’s worth reporting’ (Cloke, 2021). Author of the guardian article, Cloke, suggests, girls fail to report incidents due to the ‘lack of education about what is considered assault, or from a history of schools failing to take cases brought to them seriously’ (Cloke, 2021).

I argue that girls are educated in a culture that normalises sexual harassment, fails to support them adequately and implicates the culprits, who have not been addressed in the article. The conversations steer away from the oppressor and instead, rebuke the girl for her lack of knowledge or awareness, whereby, the oppressor remains vindicated. For similar incidents in America, Crenshaw et al. recommends schools to ‘Devise programmes that identify the signs of sexual victimisation in order to support girls who have been traumatised by violence’ (Crenshaw et al., 2015: 42). However,

progress is slow and ineffective in the UK, as echoed by Cloke, who argues, ‘an anonymous system, whereby pupils can submit their cases to a trusted teacher or member of staff without having to go to them in person, has been shown to be effective [but] this has not yet been widely implemented in British schools’ (Cloke, 2021).

This point correlates with early and recent literature which suggests, Black girls do not position themselves as victims, instead they develop a strategy of conformity which masks their disapproval of the school discourse. (Fuller,1980; Coultas 1989; Rollock, 2006). Referencing findings from early studies, Louden, 1978 (cited in Coultas, 1989: 284) argues, ‘People do not passively and inertly accept and internalise threatening communications about themselves. They react’.

Black Caribbean Girls: School experience

Drawing from the empirical studies, I have sought to illustrate the educational journey navigated by Black Caribbean girls in secondary school in England. This is categorised in three stages (see appendix 1 for illustration).

Denying: This stage signifies the moment in Black Caribbean girl’s school experience when they react, by choosing not to accept the oppression of racial disparity and outward defeat (Louden 1978 cited in Coultas,1989).

Internalising: Black Caribbean girls’ internalise their plight and crafts their own trajectory, which I describe as the *Getting Out* strategy. Mirza posits, doing well can be a radical strategy and an act of social transformation (Mirza,1997: 274).

Resisting: This momentum is when Black Caribbean girls' set on their path to become the women they dream to be, by avoiding the negativity, sexism and racial stereotypes, which can be disguised as conforming (Fuller, 1980; Mirza, 1997). During the resisting stage, it may appear that Black Caribbean girls' are conforming (Fuller,1980; Mirza, 1997). Similarly, Collins renders an image of a nonchalant Black women when she states, 'In their search for self-definition and the power of a free mind, Black heroines may remain motionless on the outside, but inside? (Collins, 2000: 99)

Social system of support: This is the network of support from 'significant others' or a 'counter-culture from the dominant discourse', which can include parents, siblings, family and friends, who hold Black Caribbean girls' in high esteem. This, in turn, promotes their ability to counteract the influence of the wider society which is culminated together with their self-reliance (Coultas,1989).

These three stages highlight Black Caribbean girls' strategy to resist racist expectations and beliefs to transform their opportunities in school and beyond (Fuller, 1980; Coultas, 1989; Mirza, 1997).

Black Caribbean Girls: Self-Reliance and Resilience

What is notable is the self-reliance that Black Caribbean girls have on themselves and the role model of the strong Black mother, which can contribute to the labelling of the 'superwoman' (Wright et al., 2000) who embodies strength to get her through tough times. This can be both inner and outer strength. However, Lamont et al. argue, stigmatized members of society often interpret their oppressive lived reality by

social resilience, which is offset by ‘contradictory contextual forces’ or ‘cultural repertoires that enable social inclusion’ (Lamont et al., 2013: 3). In the UK, this repertoire can symbolise national ideologies such as neoliberalism, discussed earlier. The effects of which, shifts the focus on social resilience, which Lamont et al. argues, is conceived as a feature of groups rather that a feature of individuals. as well as exposes the neglected conditions for recognition and social inclusion, all of which typify a successful society Lamont et al., 2013). Black girls’ in earlier studies exert a culturally specific coping mechanism that is imperative for the survival of women of African descent’ (Collins, 2009; Nelson et al., 2016). Recurrent within the history of enslavement and the American Civil Rights movement, strong Black women as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Rosa Parks, are presented as role models of strength during adversity, a sentiment that has been passed down to generations of Black females. Black Caribbean girls may have arrived at the conclusion that they can’t rely on the educational system, but they can rely on themselves. This crisis of social inclusion inflates the need for self-resilience for marginalised groups and it is a common feature of stigmatized societies, which affects their trajectories and shapes the opportunities and resources available to them (Lamont et al, 2013). Black Caribbean girls rely on themselves and their social system of support (see appendix 1) to forge their opportunities, which Lamont et al. argues, influences the repertoires made available to them in successive generations (Lamont et al., 2013).

Coultas drew the following conclusion from her own and the reflections of teachers in her study, by highlighting the strong Black female in the context of the school sub-culture, when she denotes;-

> *'Black female pupils reproduce their own ideology in the face of racism and that they have high self-esteem because they have the support of family, friends and community as a counter-culture to the dominant culture. This leads them to resist, negotiate and sometimes overcome the obstacles to their intellectual development in the British School system. It proves that many black females in schools are highly motivated to learn, despite outward manifestations of disinterest'*
>
> *(Coultas,1989: 292).*

This review highlights the need for researchers to analyse the triple oppression - racism, sexism and class status of Black Caribbean girls in education; to identify how they process their experiences after leaving the classrooms as well as exploring the extent to which this oppression informs their motivation and sense of career readiness (Coultas, 1989; Leath et al., 2021a; Wright et al., 2000).

What is missing from the literature search?

The review of literature has highlighted a decline in UK research on Black Caribbean girls in the last decade. The discourse on failing boys focused on White working-class boys which shows a substantial decline in studies that focus on raising the achievement of West Indian children in the1980's, and Black Caribbean boys in 1990 – 2000's. The research critics are feminists and not Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars. This change can be described as no progress in favour of raising Black pupil attainment, more specifically, Black Caribbean girls. The search for Black girls underachievement returned no literature, which exposes a gap in research on the attainment or school experience of Black girls in secondary education in the UK.

Since the study by Fuller (1980) and Mirza (1992), there has been few studies highlighting the gender inequality for Black girls in secondary education and one which investigates the agency used by Black girls in the light of racism or the failing boys' discourse, in the last decade. Since the 1990's, where data was present, there were no studies which focused on comparing girls with other girls, instead, girls have been continuously compared with boys. This has come at a cost for Black Caribbean girls, in that, they are deemed as being successful, when in fact, they are failing in comparison to girls in other ethnic groups – which has seemingly, gone unnoticed.

How my research will add to the literature

My research will investigate the discourse of Black Caribbean girls' lived experiences in secondary schools in England, focusing on the strategies they use to navigate the educational system. It aims to build on earlier research by Mary Fuller (1980) and Heidi Mirza (1992), which are more than three decades ago. Although Fuller and Mirza's studies signified a turning point in research, to focus on Black girls and their career aspirations and positionality within the school discourse; my study will explore how a new generation of Black Caribbean girls experience secondary school in an era of neoliberalism and meritocracy and investigate those strategies they employ to succeed. This study will also establish new knowledge and create awareness for researchers and policymakers alike, to open up the debate on how to raise the achievement and aspirations of Black Caribbean girls.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

In section one of this chapter, I will begin by discussing the term Black, along with other key theoretical constructs including ethnicity, Black Caribbean, race and racism, along with gender, British values and identity, which feature within the discussions of this study.

In section two, I will explain the theoretical concepts of CRT and intersectionality which I have chosen to answer my research questions, which are,

1. What are the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls?
2. What strategies do Black Caribbean girls employ to navigate their school experience?

SECTION ONE

Ethnicity and Race

The terms ‘ethnicity’ and ‘race’ are often conflated, and research scholars have frequently attempted to distinguish between the two (Kiwan, 2016). Kiwan argues, a search to understanding these concepts, often involves an acknowledgement of societal structures of power together with implications for social justice (Kiwan, 2016). In recent times, ethnicity and race can be described as ‘salient organisational categories’ which defines a state’s approach to social justice and confers the political

and economic interests of a nation (Kiwan, 2016; 6). Both concepts are closely related, which I will define in this section.

Ethnicity and Black Caribbean

'It is common practice for schools [and the UK government] to group students into standardised ethnic categories when measuring the differences in academic achievement' (Archer et.al, 2010: 39). Archer et al. argue,

> *'While useful up to a point, these standardised ethnic categories do not really capture the richness and complexity of contemporary urban young people's ethnic identities and the way in which they construct and live out multifaceted, racialised identities in their daily lives'*
>
> *(Archer, et al., 2010: 39).*

Ethnic categories used for measuring student data serves only to provide a broad perspective of the student population in secondary schools in England.

Over two decades, ethnicity became a crucial factor in monitoring pupil attainment in schools and since this time, Black Caribbean students have consistently been underachieving when compared to their White and Asian peers. This is somewhat different to their Black African counterparts, who are the largest Black group and have seen improvements in attainment at GCSE level, surpassing their Caribbean counterparts (Strand, 2015). It is for this reason that I will focus on Black Caribbean girls.

Ethnic Minority can be defined as 'implying minority status not only in numerical terms, but also in power terms' (Gillborn,1990: 5). It is not only in the population

figures alone where Black groups are minoritised, however, as this definition suggests, the term Ethnic Minority can also refer to the dominant structures of power that exists within society.

The UK Black Caribbean population are referred to as being an ethnic minority or more recently referred to as Black Minority Ethnic (BME) or Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic (BAME). These acronyms have been at the forefront of recent debates and have been widely refuted by Black and Asian groups. As a response, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) recommended these acronyms are no longer used. The recommendation stated 'Stop using aggregated and unhelpful terms such as BAME, to better focus on understanding disparities and outcomes for specific ethnic groups' (Summary of Recommendations, 2021). As a result, the UK government has readdressed their use of the terms and published this information on their website:-

> *'We do not use the terms BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) and BME (black and minority ethnic) because they emphasise certain ethnic minority groups (Asian and black) and exclude others (mixed, other and white ethnic minority groups). The terms can also mask disparities between different ethnic groups and create misleading interpretations of data'*
>
> (Writing about Ethnicity, 2021).

Similar to schools, the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2021), categorises the UK population into 18 ethnic categories. As argued by Archer et al., this also provides a narrow picture of the full scope of the ethnic population in the UK. The largest category is White British with 80.49% compared with 1.06% of the UK population identifying as Black Caribbean.

Over recent times, the terms ‘West Indian, African Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean, Black, Caribbean, African or Black, have been used to describe groups of Black pupils in the UK, (African-American in USA), but this does not make it easy to differentiate between individuals from Caribbean or African origins (Demi and McLean, 2017a).

In this thesis, I will refer to the term Black Caribbean and will therefore be referring to people of Caribbean heritage, more specifically Jamaican parentage.

Use of term ‘Black’

The socially constructed term ‘Black’ has been used to refer to ‘people of different national, ethnic and religious backgrounds who are believed to share a common experience of white racism’ (Gillborn, 1990: 36).

To define the term *Black* can be complex and has been highly contested by scholars. The term has evolved throughout different time periods and has taken on new meanings. Aspinall suggests the use of the term Black represents the period of the 1970s and 1980s when the term was employed by politicians to ‘strategically mobilise under a common identity all minority ethnic groups who shared a common experience of discrimination and disadvantage’ (Aspinall, 2011:34). A notion in which all individuals who are non-white are deemed as homogenous.

Black has therefore become widely used among persons from Caribbean, African, Asian and mixed White and Black backgrounds. This in itself can become quite problematic, as situating individuals of different ethnic groups together suggests a collective homogeneity and discounts their individual experiences (Gilroy, 1987).

However, according to the ONS, there are only two ethnicities which are referred to as Black. These are Black African and Black Caribbean (ONS, 2021). The ONS categories highlight the dilemma that the social constructs of ethnicity and race are confused and conflated in practice. The two categories of Black groups does not suggest that only Black African and Black Caribbean groups experience racism or discrimination, nor does it mean Black people from the Caribbean or Africa are a homogenous group. Within Caribbean and African Black communities, there are cultural differences, traditions, languages and experiences which set them apart from the other. Whilst both groups are racialized and can be described as Black by skin colour; African's and Caribbean's are not synonymous, and differences are evident in how they view their ethnicity. One factor is that 'Africanness avoids the use of colour' (Aspinall, 2011:34) as an identity marker as to avoid utilising the language of colour which, they argue, can be used as a tool to signify white privilege over black disadvantage (Aspinall, 2011).

More recently, the term *Black British* is widely used to describe individuals who were born in Britain and therefore, describe their heritage as British rather than originating from Africa or the Caribbean islands. Whilst Black British is not listed as an ethnicity in the 2011 Census, many official forms and documentation lists Black British as an ethnic category from which an individual can be identified. The availability of the category on official documentation can signal an acceptance by government and official departments, to those second-generation individuals whose connection with the Caribbean and Africa is only through their parents' birthplace. Whichever category is made available to describe one's ethnicity, an individual can choose how they wish to identify themselves, however, Agyemang et al. criticise this option

suggesting, the potential drawback to self-definition is that people change their self-assessment over time (Agyemang et al., 2005).

Black as a term has many connotations and has been widely misrepresented. Use of the Black term can be seen as an opportunity to racialize individuals and create opportunities for negative racial stereotyping. CRT scholars argue, the intention of the terms White and Black are signalled at the 'particular political and legal structure that is rooted in the ideology of White European supremacy and the global impact of colonialism' (Taylor, 2016: 71), rather than classifying individuals or identifying groups. Use of the term Non-White, can be substituted for Black (Taylor, 2016).

Due to the issues described above, it can also be argued today, that the term Black is one which causes offence among the African and Caribbean origin population and has become outdated (Aspinall, 2011), however, bodies set up to combat the effects of racism and oppressive factors which hinder the lives of Black people still use the term as a means of identifying their cause, such as the Black Lives Matter movement.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will define the term Black to describe 'a person with African ancestral origins' (Agyemang et al., 2005: 1016), which includes individuals whose heritage is Caribbean.

Race and Racism

'Race is a social construct with no biological basis' (Gilroy, 1987; Gillborn, 2008; Kiwan, 2016). By definition, race in itself is largely politicised and controversial (Gillborn, 2000) For the purpose of this thesis, I will define race as 'a system of

socially constructed and enforced categories that are constantly re-created and modified through human interaction' (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000: 4).

The term race has been widely debated since its beginnings in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when white missionaries, traders and booty adventurers travelled the world and identified non-white populations according to their skin colour, facial features, naturalised cultural characteristics and traits (Ratcliffe, 1987). This 'Black-white dualism' introduced a link between hierarchy and skin colour which was reinforced by early writers, historians and physical Anthropologists. They associated black with connation's such as 'paganism, savagery, barbarism and evil' whereas white was associated with 'purity and goodness' (Césaire, 1972 cited in Ratcliffe, 1987:12). The focus on race graduated to a scientific concept in the eighteenth century, which saw the introduction of Carl Von Linné's published volumes of the *opus systema Naturae*, which was a study of the animal kingdom. What followed was a succession of scientists who sought to describe, categorise and classify the world's population to that of three races; white, yellow and black. The most influential being de Gobineau, who is referred to as the 'father of modern racism' (Kiwan, 2016: 6), together with the writings by Georges Cuvier (Ratcliffe, 1987) in the nineteenth century.

Race and racialisation have gained a new momentum in the twenty-first century, which is evident in classificatory systems that underpin policies globally (Kiwan, 2016). It is the perception of difference linked with skin colour that has far reaching consequences and it can be argued, has been the root cause of a magnitude of tensions, prejudices and discrimination across hierarchical, political and economic premises, globally. The effects of which can be ascribed to racism. Concurrently,

Gillborn and Youdell posit, racism is best identified by its effects (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Although, the definition of racism is highly contested, I will refer to Gillborn's view, which is 'the belief in the existence of discrete human races and the idea that those races are hierarchically ordered' (Gillborn, 2008:3).

The construction of race and racism can be perceived as racist in itself as it disadvantages and marginalises Black groups. Hence, UK education policymakers subscribe to language such as disadvantage [and ethnicity] to avoid use of the terms (Tomlinson, 2008). Therefore, it can be argued that the construct of race serves only to promote the dominant discourse of Whiteness and create oppression within societal structures for minorities. Accordingly, Crenshaw posits, race is a 'vestige of bias or domination in which social power works to exclude or marginalise those who are different' (Crenshaw, 1995: 357).

Gender

For the purpose of monitoring performance and gathering data on young people, schools' in England also categorise young people by gender. As the focus for my research is on Black Caribbean girls, an understanding of the term *gender* will be important to distinguish.

There are many debates around the meaning of gender which has grown in complexity in more recent times. When reviewing a definition, there are several researchers who define gender with sex, however, Butler disagrees with this synonymous partnership by suggesting this presumes gender is binary, whereby, there is no reason to assume that genders should remain as two (Butler, 1990). In

contrast with Butler, McGeown and Warhurst have notably aimed to distinguish this phenomenon by suggesting sex reflects the biological differences while 'gender is socially constructed and reflects characteristics associated with being male or female' (McGeown and Warhurst, 2019: 103).

Gender is usually linked to the inequalities between male and female which, when added to disadvantages such as race and socio-economic status, can easily become conflated with structural power relationships. Halanger suggests there are three ways to define gender categories; -

> *i) 'How one is socially positioned i.e., how one's life is structured socially, legally and economically*
>
> *ii) Hierarchically within a broader complex of oppressive relations i.e. subordinate to the other*
>
> *iii) Sexual difference function as the physical marker to distinguish the two groups [male and female]'.*
>
> (Halanger, 2000: 38)

Furthermore, debates have arisen around how gender is constructed. McGeown & Warhurst (2019) suggest, children's idea of gender is a product of their socialisation, role modelling and made sense of from the feedback they receive regarding gendered behaviours. The term 'gendered' will be used to refer to behaviours which are deemed to be stereotypical of a particular sex. It can be argued that the innateness of the construction of gender does not only start at birth but is continuously shaped throughout one's life (Yelland and Grieshaber, 1998). Perceptions of which can have consequences on the life choices and trajectories of boys and girls and what society expects of them.

The evolution of gender gives rise to the complexity of defining the term, which could be argued, has traditionally been referred to as an *either*-or phenomenon, such as male or female. In my opinion, the twenty-first century is in the realms of a gender revolution and by way of definition, can be both convoluting and controversial. As a result, I sought to establish a definition that is holistic, inclusive and concurs with the category definitions above by Halanger. Therefore, in this thesis, gender will be defined as, a socially, politically, economically and hierarchically construct which identifies the difference between male and female.

British Values and Identity

Identity is multi-layered and due to its complexity, it can present a conundrum of conflict in which young people from all ethnicities are required to uphold British values. Accordingly, Hesse argues,

> *'young people's ethnic identities can be conceptualised as complex cultural entanglements: common-place forms of creolization, hybridity, syncretism that represent a profound challenge to the idea that national and social forms are logically coherent, unitary or tidy'*
>
> (Hesse 2000 cited in Archer et.al., 2010: 39).

As part of the government's drive to reform the British identity, all maintained schools are required to meet the standards set out in section 78 of the Education Act 2002 and promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of their pupils. It is through SMSC development in which schools should demonstrate that they are actively promoting fundamental British values (Assets.publishing.service.gov.uk, 2014b). The five 'British values' are defined as

democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths' (Assets.publishing.service.gov.uk, 2014a). The Department for Education's guidance stipulates to schools that 'Actively promoting the values means challenging opinions or behaviours in school that are contrary to fundamental British values' (Assets.publishing.service.gov.uk, 2014b). Accordingly, Wiborg suggests, schools play an important part in 'nation building' (Wiborg, 2000: 241).

Black Caribbean girls are provided with a curriculum that arbitrates Britishness which is broadly seen as being White (Richardson and Wood, 2000; Winter et al., 2022). Concurrently, Abdi describes Whiteness and racialised thinking which dominate the classroom culture in English schools, as the 'default setting' (Abdi, 2015: 60).

Identity has an effect on how Black Caribbean girls' come to understand themselves, their loyalties, their allegiances and their sense of belonging (Richardson and Wood, 2000). Therefore, the inflating of what Britishness is in the curriculum could come at a cost in solidifying a young person's ethnic identity, including Black Caribbean girls.

SECTION TWO:

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT – What is it?

CRT comes from a long tradition of resistance to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines in America and across the globe (Taylor, 2016:1).

CRT is thought to emerged in the context of protests of the Civil Rights movement in America, in the 1960's, and seen as a way of addressing discrimination. It was scholars who challenged the racial discourse and sought to formulate strategies for change to avoid any regress (Taylor, 2016). The tenets of CRT will be explained later in this chapter. Using CRT will serve to 'unmask and expose racism' in its 'various permutations' (Ladson-Billings, 2016), in Black Caribbean girls' lived school experiences. Bell argues, CRT is characterised by 'frequent use of the first person, storytelling' and 'narrative' (Bell, 1995: 899). It is in the narratives, where I can gain insights into the daily operational life of the school and the impact this has on the education, wellbeing and trajectory of the Black Caribbean girl.

Employing CRT as an effective theoretical framework in centralising race to frame my discussion as it will enable me to;

- expose inadequacies and differential treatment on the grounds of race, for Black Caribbean girls, who are marginalised,

- provide a voice against discriminatory practices, systems and policies which are part of the daily experiences for Black Caribbean girls, and

- provide a platform for implementing anti-racist work in the school context.

In this study, I will be drawing from CRT as a theoretical concept, however, I will not be relying on it strictly as a template. I am however, inspired by CRT, as my thesis involves empirical research about Black Caribbean girls. CRT will be employed to illuminate the racial context, as it is race which differentiates the experiences of Black Caribbean girls with other girls from different ethnicities and their male counterparts. Accordingly, Howard-Hamilton argue, 'When black women do not see themselves represented within the institutional structure or classroom environment and all students seem to be treated from a one size fits all frame of reference, there is a loss of individualism as well as gender and cultural constructs' (Howard-Hamilton, 2003: 20).

Education

Although CRT has its roots in the legal sector, it became widely used within the field of education and is pioneered by scholars such as Edward Taylor, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic and Derrick Bell. One of the few UK scholars include David Gillborn. Delgado and Stefancic argue, in the field of education, CRT theorists use CRT as a means to 'understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, affirmative action, high stakes testing, controversies over curriculum and history, and alternative and [state] schools' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012: 6). Accordingly, Solórzano interprets the tenets of CRT specifically for education as:- '(a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice,

(d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective' (Solórzano 1998 cited in Fernandéz, 2002: 47).

CRT will enable and underpin my critical analysis of the experiences of Black Caribbean girls in secondary schools, which have historically been found to be institutionally racist (Swann 1985; Macpherson 1999) since Caribbean people immigrated to England in the 1950's – 1970's. Accordingly, Taylor argues 'All too often, we avoid discussing the historic reasons that Whites and people of colour have had separate and unequal educations' (Taylor, 2016:6). This includes inequalities such as persistent underachievement.

CRT will also present a framework in which to highlight key areas of concern and a dialogue to answer my research questions. On reflection, Taylor posits, CRT was a lifeline for legal scholars, which provided them with sources of an explanatory model and a wellspring of tools for action (Taylor, 2016). Whilst CRT has found a space in education research, though widely used and establishing its place in UK education research, it is worthy to note that CRT is not without criticism. Critiques have argued, in education policies and practice, CRT has been found to be 'lacking a coherent theory of race or the necessary tools to overcome racial equalities in academic achievement', suggesting, scholars found themselves 'without an adequate vocabulary or theoretical framework (Taylor, 2016:8). Concurrently, Bell argues, CRT work is 'often disruptive because its commitment to anti-racism goes well beyond civil rights, integration, affirmative action and liberal measures'. Furthermore, he denotes, critiques are 'highly suspicious of the liberal agenda' and 'distrust its method' (Bell, 1995: 899). In my research, I will reflect on how to utilise CRT effectively, to overcome race inequalities for Black Caribbean girls in education.

Race and Racism

Gillborn (2008) argues, 'The starting point for CRT is a focus on racism, in particular, its central importance in society and its routine (often unrecognised) character' (Gillborn, 2008:27). My research questions which are focused on gathering data on race and racism experiences in the school context, will be most effectively derived from the interaction of participants in their social world. Qualitative research methods are therefore, the best fit for my study. Concurrently, Gillborn suggests, there is no fixed framework due to the changing, complex and controversial nature of race/racism. However, Delgado and Stefancic argue, CRT is founded on the following key epistemological themes or tenets:-

i) '*Racism is ordinary…the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of colour.*

ii) Interest convergence or material determinism…because racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it.

iii) The social construction thesis; race and races are products of social thought and relations.

iv) Differential racism - dominant society racializes different minority `groups at different times, in response to shifting needs such as the labour market.

v) The notion of intersectionality and anti-essentialism - the idea that each race has its own origins and ever evolving history.

vi) Narrative storytelling: The storytelling movement holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, people of

colour may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know'.

(Delgado and Stefancic, 2001: 6-9)

Gillborn contributes another perspective on CRT tenets:

vii) *CRT reinterprets civil rights law in light of its limitations, illustrating that laws to remedy racial inequality are often undermined before they can be fully implemented.*

viii) *CRT portrays dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy as camouflages for the self-interest of powerful entities of society.*

ix) *Critique of liberalism which springs from its understanding of racism (as wide ranging, often hidden and commonplace.*

x) *The call to context - the importance of experiential knowledge is an insistence on the importance of context and the detail of the lived experience of minoritized people as a defence against the colour-blind and sanitized analyses generated by universalistic discourses.*

xi) *Focus on Whiteness: the shared power and dominance of White interests.*

(Gillborn 2008: 28-29)

How the tenets will be applied to this study

The dynamic tenets of CRT can often be misconstrued or interchanged, however, similar themes exist, as listed above. As a result, scholars may lean towards a small number of tenets during their study rather than subscribing to all. Concurrently, in the

book, ‘Critical Race Theory: An introduction’, Delgado and Stefancic posit ask ‘What do critical race theorists believe? Probably not every member would subscribe to every tenet set out in this book’ (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001: 6). Gillborn argues, CRT is ‘by no means a fixed picture’ and ‘As more writers add to the tradition, and priorities alter, it is likely that certain features may change in status, or disappear, while new aspects might be added’ (Gillborn, 2008: 27). Furthermore, in studies by CRT scholars such as Gillborn (2005; 2008) and Bhopal and Pitkin, CRT tenets are selected according to the topic being researched and its relevance rather than applying all tenets. I have taken this view when applying the tenets of CRT as a tool in my study.

CRT recognises the normality of racism. Bell 1992 (cited in Ladson-Billings, 2016:18) argues, ‘racism is a permanent fixture of American life’. This can be translated (as alluded to in my previous chapters) that racism also exists as a normality in UK life. Gillborn suggests, ‘racism is an ingrained feature of the landscape [which] looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture’ (Gillborn, 2008:27). In my study, this tenet will be used to analyse Black Caribbean girls’ experiences by shining a light on racialised systems and structures within the life of the school. Accordingly, Delgado and Stefancic encourage CRT researchers to ‘investigate evidence of racism through gaining an understanding of issues around school discipline and hierarchy’ and to ‘review tracking and records of sanctions, refer to records on testing and seek to identify controversies over curriculum and history’ (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012: 6).

Applying the Interest convergence tenet to this study will support my analysis of policies and systems in the school system that serve to promote the interests of Whiteness whilst disadvantaging Black Caribbean girls.

The social construction of race is described in chapter 3. In my study, I will use this tenet to analyse the effects of racialisation on the lives of Black Caribbean girls and how it operates within the school discourse.

The call to context will be applied to my study by collecting data from the interviews with Black Caribbean girls, where they will share their experiential knowledge of their lived experiences within the school discourse. It is this experience which is pivotal to exploring how their intersectional disadvantages of race, gender and class, create opportunities or promote challenges in their daily experiences in secondary schools.

A focus on Whiteness will be applied to analyse the effects of White privilege on Black Caribbean girls, who have historically marginalised and government policies have recently focused on White working-class boys rather than Black girls or boys.

In this study, I will refer to the notion of intersectionality will be discussed later in this chapter.

Resistance

As CRT beginnings are in law and not education, Taylor argues that the theory ‘holds promise to inform educational strategies and renew efforts of resistance’ (Taylor, 2016: 7). CRT scholars describe the act of resistance as ‘triumph’ because, they suggest, the small decisions to resist can multiply to create significant momentum

(Taylor, 2016: 9). Also, because of its 'oppositional character' (which can appear to look weak as if nothing is done at all; 'it is the refusal to remain silent, in and of itself, that gives strength and empowerment' to the repression (Taylor, 2016: 9). From my experience working with Black pupils, resistance is a strategy which is often used against power and hierarchy as it is experienced in school policies and practices and in opposition to Black pupil's cultural practices. Gillborn refers to this as the 'business-as-usual forms of racism that people of colour confront every day and accounts for much misery, alienation and despair' (Gillborn, 2008: 27). In my study, this CRT tenet will enable me to identify resistance as it is described within the participants stories.

Narrative Storytelling

CRT draws on the 'unapologetic use of creativity' (Bell, 1995: 899) in which to understand the ways in which racism is experienced. Taylor argues, storytelling, autobiography, parables and narratives are 'ways to expose and challenge social constructions of race and relies on the experiences of people [who are] negatively affected by racism' (Taylor, 2016: 7). Listening to stories is imperative as racism can be otherwise difficult to highlight through social research and may pose several challenges. Although, CRT has a strong emphasis on the narrative (Taylor, 2016), I have used semi-structured interviews in this study which are also effective in understanding the lived experiences of people in their social world.

The Post-racial Society

CRT critiques neoliberal philosophies and meritocratic ideals as they only seek to work against non-White groups and further advance White groups, as the dominant structural power. In English schools and within school and government data, the presence of racism exists, yet there is a sentiment of Britain moving towards that of a post-racial society. A post-racial society was claimed by American political observers upon celebrating the election win of the mixed-heritage president, Barack Obama, suggesting this signified America becoming a post-racial society (Dawson and Bobo, 2009). The two terms which followed, led by President Donald Trump resulted in restlessness among the Black community for acts of racism during his time in office. In the UK, the sentiment in schools can also allude to the fact that the term 'racist' has lost its meaning as little or no action is taken when claims of racism are made by Black children, evidence of which, led to a Black school boy losing his finger (BBC News, 2022).

The post-racial society rhetoric works in opposition to CRT and has accumulated with the concept of colour blindness. Colour blindness was a finding from the Swann report in 1985, however, amidst the rhetoric of a post-racial society, it can be said, society at large professes colour blindness, not just teachers. It is played out in politics and in the neoliberal discourse, which has mapped the course of UK politics and the New Labour era of educational policies (Bhopal, 2018; Gillborn, 2008); and is hidden within the ideology of meritocracy and the promotion of enterprising individuals, without considering for social equity.

Colourblindness

Colourblindness operates inconspicuously in society and through a discourse of culture, difference and multiculturalism, rather than race (Gillborn, 2008; Gillborn, 2000; Bhopal 2018). As this subtle, new form of racism goes largely undetected, CRT will need to be robust, in order to prove what constitutes as racism in education. One of the tools of defence is narratives, which Schofield argues, serves the purpose to 'refute notions of merit and colourblindness', which have an 'insidious effect' and has been 'difficult to counter with traditional forms of research, statistics and legal procedures' (Schofield 1986 cited in Taylor 2016: 7).

Having a disregard to race, Schofield 1986 (cited in Taylor 2016) suggests that Colourblindness has the effect of rendering White privilege invisible, and therefore reinforcing its preeminence' (Taylor, 2016:7). As such, government policies can serve their own agendas which exclude ethnic minorities and those young people who are marginalised because of their race, such as Black Caribbean girls.

It was the sentiments of the CRED report (alluded to in chapter 2) in which a debate over the status of race in Britain gained momentum. In a BBC News article titled 'Race report: 'UK not deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities', the main findings of the report were published and highlighted in the article:

- '*Children from ethnic-minority communities did as well or better than white pupils in compulsory education, with black Caribbean pupils the only group to perform less well*
- *This success in education has transformed British society over the last 50 years into one offering far greater opportunities for all*

- *But some communities continue to be "haunted" by historic racism, which is creating "deep mistrust" and could be a barrier to success'*

(BBC News, 2021).

Although the report's central focus is race, it fails to tackle the real issues of institutional racism within society and instead, promotes optimism in Britain as a successful multicultural society. There is a deliberate avoidance to accept the negative effects of racism. This disappointing fate is recognised by the media who share the sentiments of the Chair of the CRED, Tony Sewell, who argues, 'While the impediments and disparities do exist…they were varied and ironically very few of them are directly to do with racism' (BBC News, 2021). The publication of the report by the BBC, was accompanied by the voices of several critiques (BBC News, 2021).

The report should have served as a reminder to policymakers to tackle the underachievement of Black Caribbean girls, but instead, it neglects the marginalised in society. In a newspaper article, a UN spokesman condemns the report for, 'ignoring racial disparities' and for 'shifting the blame for the impacts of racism to the people most impacted by it' (Independent, 2021), which is evident in the opening statement by the Chair who reports, 'For some groups historic experience of racism still haunts the present and there was a reluctance to acknowledge that the UK had become open and fairer' (The report for CRED, 2021). The CRED report signifies a backwards move by the UK government as it fails to build on the explicit findings of the Swann Report 1985 and the Macpherson Report 1999, which cited institutional racism as a key marker of Black children's poor educational and employment outcomes. However, the facts and figures (see chapter 2) suggests that racism still

exists in England and there is room for improvement to enhance the school experiences and life chances of Black Caribbean girls.

Criticisms of CRT

Due to its radical nature and focus of race and racism, CRT has come under much criticism from scholars, as discussed in this chapter. Accordingly, Warmington, in his analysis of critics of CRT, suggests this is due to CRT's 'lack of genuflection', which he describes as 'an irritant' (Warmington, 2020: 22). Critics of CRT are individuals in society who may also include staff in schools. This notion has encouraged me to consider sensitivity to critics of CRT within my research design which will be discussed in the methodology (see chapter 4).

Intersectionality

Black Caribbean girls experience multi-faceted disadvantages which are intertwined with other nuances that are unique to this group. Therefore, when conducting an empirical investigation, the discourse of intersectionality should be considered. Intersectionality can be defined as 'a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences' (Hill-Collins and Bilge, 2020: 2). The dissections of any individual can include several segments; each of which, belong to a homogenous group. These include but are not limited to race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity and age. Black Caribbean girls who are working class, also experience a triple oppression of disadvantage. Intersectionality will enable me to include all facets without giving due priority to one oppressive factor over the other.

What is it?

Intersectionality is grounded within feminist theory and anti-racist theories; and has become the most referred way to 'conceptualise oppressive systems that construct' the multiple identities of women and the 'social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege' (Carastathis, 2014: 304). The term was first phrased in a paper, '*Mapping the Margins*', by the CRT and Black feminist scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991. It was seen as a theoretical concept that was effective at interlocking' identity expressions, such as race, class and gender, which in the past, were dealt with as single entities. The paper describes three categories of intersectionality. These are;

i) '*Structural intersectionality;* the ways in which women of colour at the intersection of race and gender, makes discriminatory experiences, qualitatively different from that of white women.

ii) *Political intersectionality;* instead of helping the marginalised, both feminist and antiracist policies have paradoxically marginalised women of colour.

iii) *Representational intersectionality*; which refers to the cultural construction of women of colour that leads to controversial issues concerning their representation in popular culture'.

(Crenshaw, 1991:1245)

Black Caribbean Girls

The type of intersectionality which I will use is structural intersectionality as this lends itself to that experience in the educational arena. This is because, Black Caribbean girls in school suffers matters of race, gender, and class simultaneously. . In this study, my focus is primarily on the discriminatory factors of race and gender. Whilst I

attend to the intersectionality of gender, race and class, the disadvantages of race and gender were forefront to a greater extent in my data. Intersectionality highlights 'ideological blind spots' (Mirza, 1997:4). Furthermore, due to the structural positioning of race, Black Caribbean girls occupy a different position to their White female counterparts. This is because Black Caribbean girls have the additional issue of race which means they inhabit additional oppressive, discriminatory factors. As a result, a Black Caribbean girls experience school differently to their White female peers, due to racism, which is expressed in their narratives. Intersectionality, therefore, serves the purpose of interlocking oppressions evenly, rather than selecting one over the other, whereby, no factor is excluded.

The School Discourse

As government data fails to consider the intersectional impacts of race, gender and class, as well as group differences, Black Caribbean girls are compared with peers who experience White Privilege (Bhopal, 2018). Black Caribbean girls continue to be positioned at the margins of society (Crawford, 2019; Bhopal, 2018; Gillborn 2008). Accordingly, Bhopal argues that White people benefit from their own identity of Whiteness (Bhopal, 2018), which results from their socially constructed, structural positioning in society, which affords them to experience more advantages over Black and other ethnic groups.

Black Feminist thinker, Heidi Mirza, in her article 'Race, gender and educational desire', calls for readers to consider a 'Black Feminist utopia', where 'Women educators…, the supplementary schoolteachers, and the young Black women in

schools and universities [are] seen as more than fragmented players' (Mirza, 2006; 153). Mirza's vision stems from her observations of Black women who struggle amidst social exclusion, racial beliefs and low expectations in education, as they strive for social transformation and better opportunities (Mirza, 2006; 153).

Whiteness

Whiteness, in an institutional context, can be demonstrated through the 'maintenance of power, resources, accolades' and support systems, which can be interwoven within formal structures and procedures' (Bhopal and Chapman, 2019:102). In addition, at a national level, Whiteness politics is reinforced within the agendas of central government (Crawford, 2019), which serve to exclude the needs of Black Caribbean girls

In 2014, the Education Select Committee charged schools, local authorities and Ofsted to prioritise White working-class boys (Crawford, 2019). In a speech by prime minister Theresa May, in 2016, White working-class boys were positioned alongside disadvantaged ethnic groups. Raising their profile on the political agenda, May stated, 'White working-class boys were less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university' (Crawford, 2019: 423). More recently in 2021, The House of Commons Education Committee produced a report titled, '*The forgotten: how White working-class pupils have been let down, and how to change it*' (House of Commons Education Committee, 2021). Crawford refers to this move as 'racialized politics', where White students are presented as a 'distinctly disadvantaged racial group under siege' (Crawford, 2019: 424). Additionally, Gillborn asserts:-

> *'While global capitalism reeled on the edge of financial melt-down, the values of neo-liberalism were reasserted as natural, moral and efficient through two apparently contrasting discourses. First, a victim discourse presented White working people, and their children in particular, as suffering educationally because of minoritized racial groups and their advocates. Second a discourse of degeneracy presented an immoral and barbaric underclass as a threat to social and economic order'*
>
> *(Gillborn, 2010: 2).*

As the UK propels the needs of White working-class pupils to the forefront, yet again, marginalised groups such as Black Caribbean girls are ultimately relegated even further below the threshold of receiving any attention or political intervention. Gillborn argues that 'contradictory discourses maintain White middle-class interests, silence and demonize minoritized groups, and reinforce traditional racialized, gendered and notions of respectability and belonging' (Gillborn, 2010:3). Racialised politics presents an ever-present threat to intersectionality and reaffirms the urgency for researchers to call to attention equality and social action, from UK policymakers.

The Achievement Gap

Intersectionality exposes inequalities and disparities where the political rhetoric or overriding concepts are to the contrary. One example is argued by Strand who, in his paper titled '*The White-British Black Caribbean Achievement Gap*', explains, despite the use of controls used in a longitudinal study of young people, the researchers were unable to provide a valid reason for the low achievement of the Black Caribbean group (Strand, 2012). In his analysis, Strand argues, that this leads to a consideration of other factors such as indirect or institutional racism, which may

explain the observed gap (Strand, 2012: 77). Where the presiding factors are uncertain or conflated, intersectionality will provide an inclusive theory to underpin the narratives of Black Caribbean girls which supports both CRT and Black feminist theories.

Black Feminist Thought

An alternative nuanced concept interlinked with intersectionality is 'Black Feminist Thought'. As a critical social theory, Black Feminist Thought aims to 'empower [Black] women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions' (Collins, 2000: 22). Whilst Crenshaw coined the phrase 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1991), Black women have shared their lived experiences of disadvantage several decades before. Its popularity gained momentum since the anti-slavery and women's rights activist Sojourner Truth through to contemporary Anglo-Black feminists' in the nineteenth century (Alexander-Floyd, 2012). A key scholar in Black Feminism is Patricia Hill-Collins, who focuses her attention on elucidating the Black feminine voice, which she describes as being 'silenced by dominant groups' (Hill-Collins, 2009: viii). Like many other Black feminists, Hill-Collins highlights the intersectional disadvantages which are collectively experienced by Black women which she describes as 'occupy[ing] societally denigrated categories' in everyday life (Hill-Collins, 2009; viii). Additionally, feminist and writer, bell hooks, in her book titled, 'Teaching to Transgress', provides the catalyst for women to discern a Black woman's positionality in the classroom while she explains how the social constructs of race, gender and class, seek to reinscribe systems of domination such as racism and sexism (hooks, 2014:10). It is in

the sharing of experiences that Black feminism can be used as a tool to describe the systems of oppression which serve to dominate Black women, who are marginalised due to the intersections of disadvantage which they experience in everyday life.

Feminist methodologies centre around forming relationships where female participants are made to feel at ease with the researcher. Employing a feminist methodology which suggests an approach as a friend rather than a researcher, serves to eliminate the power imbalance in the research relationship (Bryman, 2012: 40). Black Caribbean girls in my study have different life experiences, however, they will all experience the social construct of being racialised and gendered within the wider society, which I can identify with. Therefore, researching young women, positions me, a Black female, as a competent member of the culture that I am writing about (Mirza,1992 :8).

Resistance

Audrey Lorde, an intersectionality activist, campaigned for the visibility of marginalised women and in doing so, posited to the marginalised, ‘Your silence will not protect you’, and to the oppressor, ‘When will the Ignorance End?’ (Lorde 1979 cited in Hancock, 2016: 78). It is on the connection of these questions to both action and knowledge that provides insight into the epistemological stance of intersectionality (Hancock, 2016).

Like CRT, intersectionality operates on a doctrine of resistance to structural powers and a belief in the power of self. Similar to findings from studies by Fuller and Mirza, Black girls operate on a strategy of resistance from oppressive forces in the school

discourse (see appendix 1). Intersectionality will enable me to identify the strategies which are employed to overcome oppression and illuminate the voice of the Black Caribbean girls.

Hancock expands on the sentiment of Lorde when she denotes ‘The ignorance will end when one of us begins to seek out and trust the knowledge deep inside of us, when we dare to go into the chaos which exists before understanding and come back with new tools for action and change’ (Hancock, 2016:78). Intersectionality’s inclusive arm is what seeks to expose the hidden and persistently obscured. Intersectionality has a multi-pronged approach to the triple oppression, that is, race, class and gender.

As Black Caribbean girls encompass their structural position as Black, young women, they are confronted by both a race and gender problem. Where socio-economic status deems them to be disadvantaged, this also positions Black Caribbean girls on the margins of society, when compared with their Black male and White female counterparts. Crenshaw suggests that this invisibility has ramifications for Black women in that their oppressor is complicated to identify (Crenshaw, 2019). Therefore, intersectionality interlocks categories of difference (Hancock, 2016). Hancock argues, the break between mainstream feminist standpoint theorists and intersectionality theorists has produced a distinctive shift in the analytical framework of categories, from one of centres and margins to a conceptualization of interlocking categories of difference (Hancock, 2016). I concur with Rice et al. who argue, ‘intersectionality is not definitive as a methodology, instead, it calls scholars to promote social change and engage with social justice’ (Rice et al., 2019: 7).

How intersectionality works as a research tool

Intersectionality is used to explore the narratives of lived experiences including race, class and gender to gain a holistic view of discrimination. Accordingly, Crenshaw denotes, ‘the problem with identity politics, is not that it fails to transcend difference’, rather, it ‘frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. Furthermore, she argues, the consequences of ignoring difference results in, ‘tension among groups’ (Crenshaw, 1991:1242).

Intersectionality, however, is not without its critics. Rice et al. suggests, it does not always offer a clear set of tools for conducting social research. Instead, it offers varied strands of thought, pointing to different methodologies and methods for doing intersectional research (Rice et al., 2019).

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study focuses on the lived school experiences of Black Caribbean girls and the strategies they use to achieve academic success. In this chapter, I will present my research questions and epistemological stance and how these relate. I will then discuss sampling, including introducing my participants stories and how they were recruited for my study. I will also explain my research design, discuss why I chose the research methods I employed to collect data and, how I conducted my data analysis. Finally, whilst exploring my positionality I will also discuss the procedure I enlisted to ensure research ethics guidelines were followed.

Study Title

Dunleavy denotes, ‘your title should introduce the central analytical concepts used or the major argument themes developed (Dunleavy, 2003: 200). During the process of my study, it became apparent that, whilst the failing boys’ discourse is a background policy context, it was not my major argument theme. On reflection, it was felt that the original study title, ‘An exploration of the failing boys’ discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in secondary education in England’ did not convey the content of my study. Furthermore, the original title could suggest that there is a causal link to the school experiences and educational outcomes of Black Caribbean girls. All of which, would deflect attention away from Black Caribbean girls. I chose, therefore, to adjust my title to ‘An exploration of the lived experiences of Black Caribbean girls in secondary schools in England in the 21st century’, to reflect

how the research centres on the lived experiences of Black Caribbean girls', whilst acknowledging the failing boys' discourse as a policy context. As such, the data collection and literature review were not affected.

Research Questions

It is the research questions that directly influence the choice of research strategy employed (Bryman, 2012). The two research questions which are explored in this thesis are:-

1. What are the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls?
2. What strategies do Black Caribbean girls employ to navigate their school experience?

Research Paradigms and Epistemology

My study of the social world has an interpretivist epistemological position as it seeks understanding by the examination of the interpretation of the world by its participants (Bryman, 2012). The qualitative researcher stands at the centre of the research process as a requirement of interpreting social life (May, 2001). This contrasts with the scientific model of quantitative researchers who, May argues, utilise positivism, which presumes to take an objective stance in data collection and analysis (May, 2001:15).

Interpretivism

Phenomenology is a methodological stance that explores how knowledge is known rather than what knowledge is known (Macquarrie and Robinson, 1990). An interpretivist paradigm sits within the phenomenological tradition (Bryman, 2012). It views the way in which people interrelate with their social world, what they think and how they form ideas about their world and how their world is constructed (Thomas, 2013). This approach underpins my research questions enabling me to explore how Black Caribbean girls view their lived experiences in secondary schools and, thus granting me opportunities to gain new knowledge. Accordingly, Thomas argues, an interpretivist immerses themselves, as an insider, into the research context, to gain understanding (Thomas, 2013:108). This is in contrast to positivism, which seeks to quantify findings objectively, whereas interpretivists acknowledge their positioning in the study and instead, use a subjective approach. In my study, I situate myself within the world of Black Caribbean girls to acquire an in depth understanding of their experiences.

Research Ontology and Epistemological Stance

As my research aim is to investigate the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls, in the light of being racialized and gendered, my research ontological stance needs to ensure that I achieve an understanding of Black Caribbean girls' lived experiences and how they position themselves for achievement within the school environment. I have considered the optimum way to resource rich, authentic views and perceptions of young women reflecting on their experiences and inclusive of their relationships

with adults and peers within the context of the school environment. These are both emotive and subjective responses which require integrity and reflection. Therefore, the research design which I employ will enable me to engage with the participants and support the collection of new data (see Table 1 and Table 2 below).

Ontology refers to the philosophy of what we assume exists in the world and how these things should be viewed and studied (Thomas, 2013). Qualitative researchers have an ontological position such as constructivism. 'Constructivists [are relativist who] view social properties as outcomes of interactions between individuals which are separate to those involved in its construction' (Bryman, 2012: 380). My study supports this as I will reflect on the social reality of Black Caribbean girls in their social world of the secondary school, which is unique to their experience than that of mine. As knowledge, in this instance, is not prescribed or assumed, constructivism implies 'the social order is in a constant state of revision (Bryman, 2012: 33).

Epistemology refers to how researchers gather knowledge of the social world (Blaikie, 2000). My understanding of the phenomena of Black Caribbean girls in educational settings has developed from my experience as a Black Caribbean girl in school, together with my role as a teacher, mentor and parent of a Black Caribbean girl. These contribute to my ontological and epistemological stance. As social actors, the participants will conceptualise their own lived experience that are separate to my own views, as a social constructionist. Concurrently, Blaikie argues, 'data can be obtained both from the researcher's observations and experience, as well as from the social participants' knowledge, perceptions and experience' (Blaikie, 2000:196). However, by employing an inductive approach throughout the interviewing process, I

will use reflexivity to facilitate an openness to new ideas and constructs emerging from the data.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research design was employed informed by quantitative government data sources on Black Caribbean pupil's attainment in GCSE qualifications. The statistics provided in the ethnicity data (see in chapter 2 and appendix 2 and 3), have provided the evidence of gaps in achievement for Black Caribbean girls' when compared with other girls by ethnicity, and as such, has informed my research aims. However, where quantitative research requires a strategy which emphasises quantification in the collection of data using a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, qualitative research will enable me to generate new theories from my data collection, as it employs an inductive approach (Bryman, 2012).

Inductive Paradigm

Both inductive and deductive paradigms are forms of reasoning (Thomas, 2013). An inductive view is the relationship between theory and research, which is a feature of qualitative research. For this study, I will be employing both inductive and deductive paradigms. This process begins when collecting and analysing data and producing generalisations, such as inductive logic (Blaikie, 2000). It is after the collection of data, constructed from the Black Caribbean girls' experiences, that new insights and knowledge will emerge to create theories (Thomas, 2013). This will serve the

purpose of achieving my research aims and answering my research questions. Furthermore, the theoretical frames of CRT with a focus on intersectionality, also inform my deductive positionings.

Sampling and Recruitment

Fink defines a sample as 'a portion or a subset of a larger group called a population' (Fink 1995 cited in May, 2001). For my study, I required a sample of Black Caribbean girls who attend a secondary school in England. I employed purposive sampling because it ensures particular settings, persons and activities that are relevant to my research questions and aims, are selected over any other choice (Maxwell, 2013). Respondents were recruited based on the following: must be born or have parents who originate from the Caribbean; to be registered as attending a secondary school in England and aged between 13 – 16 years old. Being specific, enabled me to ensure I had the optimum representation of the population of Black Caribbean girls. Accordingly, Saunders and Townsend denote:

> *'Heterogeneous or maximum variation, purposive sampling relies on the researcher's judgement to first identify relevant diversity characteristics as criteria and then choose participants that meet these criteria to provide maximum variation in the data collected.'*
>
> (Saunders and Townsend, 2018: 485)

Following an exploration of literature, I reviewed the findings of Frances et al. from a health study on interview saturation. Frances et al. revealed fourteen interviews reached saturation but 'two more interviews without shared beliefs emerging would have been necessary to meet the proposed criterion for saturation' (Frances et al.,

2010:14). Although this is not prescriptive to all studies, I chose to interview sixteen participants as this was considered to be a manageable sample size and one that would not limit the quality of the data as it reached saturation of the data. Selecting for a sample size of sixteen allowed for the story to be told.

As schools were closed due to the summer vacation, participants were recruited from my social network of family and friends, as well as churches and youth groups, where I sent emails and forwarded a recruitment advert providing information about my study, along with contact details. Word of mouth was an effective method, which introduced snowballing to the recruitment process.

In recruiting young people of school age, the process involved gaining access via gatekeepers. Maxwell notes that gatekeepers can facilitate or interfere with the study (Maxwell, 2013), therefore, consideration needs to be made on how one initiates and negotiates these relationships. I established a relationship with parents/carers initially, to acquire consent prior to gaining access to the young person.

Sixteen participants were recruited from five regions across England and interviewed online, using the platform, Zoom, over a four-week period. During data collection, the focus of recruiting participants from schools within the West Midlands region only, was expanded to include other regions. This was an advantage of snowballing from family and friends who live outside of the West Midlands region, coupled with the flexibility of conducting online interviews. Pseudonyms of have been used to ensure anonymity and maintain participant confidentiality.

The participants ranged in age, from 13 years to 16 years. This selection includes students in years 8 – 11, excluding year 7, which is the transition year from primary

school. As such, only participants who had completed their first year of secondary school were considered, excluding pupils aged 11-12 years who were in the first year of secondary. Participants attended a variety of school types including faith schools, single-sex, grammar, and mixed schools, within the West Midlands, Hertfordshire, West Yorkshire, and Greater Manchester regions. The variety within this cohort provided an additional feature to the research results (See chapters 5 – 7).

Table 1 below summarises key information about the sixteen participating Black Caribbean girls selected for my study. All girls self-defined as Black Caribbean, although, some chose other references to describe their ethnicity/cultural background.

Table 2 provides a short biographical insert which derived from opening questions at the start of the interviews, where participants were asked questions about their background and career aspirations. Providing an insight into the participants lives serves the purpose of developing a nuanced understanding of the different life stories and intersectional disadvantages which each participant brought, together with creating the understanding of the varying stages of life, family background and their academic achievement. This caveat enabled me to provide a more detailed analysis which has enhanced the study's capacity to share a diverse range of school experiences.

Table 1: A table showing participant school information

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Year group	School information	School type	Region
Nia	13	8	Type of school: All-through School category: Community Number of pupils on the school roll: 1782 Ofsted Overall effectiveness: Outstanding	Mixed	West Yorkshire
*Jasmine	13	8	Type of school: Secondary Comprehensive School category: Academy sponsor-led Number of pupils on the school roll 969 Ofsted Overall effectiveness: Good	Mixed	West Midlands
Chanel	13	8	Type of school: Secondary School category: Academy converter Number of pupils: on the school roll 1,196 Ofsted Overall effectiveness: Outstanding	Mixed	Greater Manchester
*Imani	14	9	Type of school: Secondary Comprehensive School category: Academy sponsor-led Number of pupils on the school roll: 969 Ofsted Overall effectiveness: Good	Mixed	West Midlands
Raven	14	9	Type of school: Secondary School category: Academy converter Number of pupils on the school roll: 790 Ofsted Overall effectiveness: Outstanding	Single sex	West Midlands
Kayla	14	9	Type of school: All-through School category: Academy-free school Number of pupils on the school roll: 706 Ofsted Overall effectiveness: Outstanding	Mixed	West Yorkshire
Navaeh	15	10	Type of school: Secondary comprehensive School category: Academy converter Number of pupils on the school roll: 1043 Ofsted overall effectiveness: Requires improvement	Mixed	West Midlands
**Cemone	15	10	Type of school: Secondary School category: Academy converter Number of pupils on the school roll: 1316 Ofsted overall effectiveness: Good	Mixed	West Midlands
Asia	15	10	Type of school: Secondary comprehensive School category: Academy sponsor-led	Mixed	West Midlands

			Number of pupils on the school roll: 1270 Ofsted Overall effectiveness: Good		
Alyssa	15	10	Type of school: Secondary School category: Foundation Number of pupils on the school roll: 1762 Ofsted overall effectiveness: Requires improvement	Mixed	West Midlands
**Taylor	15	10	Type of school: Secondary School category: Academy converter Number of pupils on the school roll: 1316 Ofsted overall effectiveness: Good	Mixed	West Midlands
Savannah	16	11	Type of school: Grammar (selective) School category: Foundation Number on roll School: 753 Ofsted overall effectiveness: Outstanding	Single sex	West Midlands
Tiara	16	11	Type of school: Secondary School category: Academy converter Number of pupils on the school roll: 1269 Ofsted overall effectiveness: Good	Mixed	Hertfordshire
Alexis	16	11	Type of school: Secondary comprehensive School category: Academy sponsor-led Number of pupils on the school roll: 637 Ofsted overall effectiveness: Good	Mixed	West Midlands
Aliya	16	11	Type of school: Secondary comprehensive School category: Academy converter Number of pupils on the school roll: 1,205 Ofsted overall effectiveness: Requires improvement	Mixed	North Yorkshire
Destiny	16	11	Type of school: Secondary School category: Academy free school Number of pupils on the school roll: 365 Ofsted overall effectiveness: Good	Mixed	West Midlands

Key: Participants attending the same secondary school are marked with * or **

Table 2. A table showing short biographical accounts from the sixteen participants

Year 8
Nia lives with her mother and brother in West Yorkshire. Her mother is a Social Worker, and her father is a Barber. Nia has ambitions to become a Lawyer. Her inspiration for choosing this career choice is her aunty, who is a Criminal Lawyer.
Jasmine lives in the West Midlands with her parents and two brothers. Her mother works in administration and her father works in warehouses. Jasmine would like a career in acting because, she describes herself as 'dramatic'.
Chanel lives in Greater Manchester with her parents and sister. Her brother is attending university. Her mother is a Personal Assistant at the local church, and her father works in car sales. Chanel aspires to be a Forensic Scientist because she enjoys science, and she would like a job in Criminology.
Year 9
Imani lives with her single mother in the West Midlands. Her mother is a Tutor, and her father works in security. Imani's ambition is to become a Lawyer because she "likes proving people wrong".
Raven lives in West Yorkshire with her parents. Her mother is a Progress Mentor, and her father is a Social Worker. Raven has ambitions to become a Prosecutor. Her interest in this career choice has been inspired by watching tv dramas.
Kayla lives in West Yorkshire. She resides with her mother and father separately. Her mother is employed as a nurse and her father is a carpenter. Kayla would like to have a career in Physics or Humanities. Her biggest aspiration she explained is "to change the world, and then I can get a Nobel prize."
Year 10
Navaeh lives in the West Midlands with her parents and sister. Her mother is a nurse, and her father works in car manufacturing. She would like to become a pediatrician or pharmacist, although she describes her career choices as being 'out of her range'.
Cemone lives in the West Midlands with her parents and brother. Cemone's father is a Pastor, and her mother is a Teaching Assistant. Cemone aspires to become a Business Advisor. Her inspiration is her brother who owns a small business. When explaining challenges in acquiring her career, Cemone explained, "I'd say it will be a bit more difficult because of like where I come from, like, because I'm Black and you have to work harder to be what you want to be. It's 10 times harder than for other people."
Asia lives in the West Midlands with her single mother, brother and sister. Her mother is a full-time carer for her brother, and her father is a plumber. Her ambition is to become a social worker because she likes to make sure that everyone is in a safe environment. Her inspirations are her older cousins and aunt because they have done well.
Alyssa lives in the West Midlands with her mother and stepfather. Her mother is a teacher, and her stepfather is an engineer. She aspires to become a Criminologist, which has been influenced by crime documentaries which she finds interesting.
Taylor lives in the West Midlands with her single mother and siblings. Her mother is a nurse, and her father is unemployed. Taylor would like to work in healthcare as a nurse or pediatrician. She is fond of helping others, especially younger people.

Year 11
Savannah lives with both parents in the West Midlands. Her brother is attending university. Her father is a pharmacist, and her mother is a teacher. Savannah has ambitions to work in the business and finance sector. She has chosen to stay on in the school sixth form to study Mathematics, Economic and Geography at A Level. When talking about any foreseeable challenges to achieving her career goals, Savannah explained "Again I feel like it's just like gender and race, if you get what I mean like. Sometimes people see like another person that may not work as hard, they may see them as fitting more for the job so may offer it to someone else. Well, I know in Finance in particular, I know that's more of a male dominated role, and I guess kind of, as time goes on, more females do it as well and business again it's quite mixed, so I know I may not always be preferred for it, but obviously working hard, if it's on paper, I mean they can't not pick me. Like I said…we know, deep down, that we will have to work harder, and so I know.
Tiara lives in Hertfordshire with her parents and sister. Her mother is a Lawyer, and her father is a Project Manager. Her career aspiration is to become a Human Rights Lawyer, which she states, is largely influenced by her mother and her personal research on the role. Tiara likes the idea of 'fighting for justice'. She explains, 'I definitely think it'll be a challenge because it's not the easiest career to go into but I'm ready to take up that challenge, and I think that I'm a very hardworking person so I can do it.'
Aliya lives with her single mother in West Yorkshire and attends school in North Yorkshire. Aliya's mother and father are both unemployed. Her aspirations are to become a Social Worker because she likes to help others, whether they be children or adults that have a similar lifestyle to her or people who she can relate with. When explaining her career aspirations, Aliya explained, "I do believe there will be a lot of challenges and I'll have to climb a very heavy ladder to get there, and, in general, I think that if I could put my mind to it, I should be able to get there, and not let other things hold me back. When you look at them statistics, Black people like myself don't tend to get as far as other people…for example, White people tend to get a lot further by just being [White] and me being Black, or we [are] stereotype[d] that I might not be the perfect person for the job without actually looking at what I can do."
Alexis lives in the West Midlands with her parents and sister. Her father is a Pastor, and her mother is a Teaching Assistant. She has ambitions to become an obstetrician because she has a passion for health care, especially childcare. Her career choice was influenced by a documentary she watched when she was younger which explained that 'Black women were five times more likely to die or have complications during pregnancy'. Alexis explained 'I just wanted to be a catalyst to change that statistic'.
Destiny lives in the West Midlands with her single mother. Both her parents work in retail. Destiny aspires to be a doctor. The motivation for her career choice, she describes is due to having many family members in hospital for different reasons. Destiny explained 'I wanted to be in a position where I could help people in the medical field as well."

Research methods and CRT

In my literature review, I have framed my study around CRT, which explores narratives from storytelling as a research methodology. I chose to use the traditional method of qualitative research as it is widely used and is also supported by CRT scholars. From a CRT perspective, the notion of using traditional interviewing methods to collect data about race, offers me a way to look at discrimination in secondary education which centres the student at the core of the school and thus contributes to debates on addressing educational diversity and social change (Parker, 1998).

The Interview Process

Cohen et al. argues, the purpose of interviews includes: ‘a means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives’ as well as ‘an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships’ (Cohen et al., 2007: 351). I have chosen interviews to understand the lived school experiences of Black Caribbean girls, as a vehicle for participants to tell their story in their own words. Atkinson argues, ‘Most people are eager to tell of their experience, to tell the stories they have lived, because they are what they know best and are also what are of most interest to them’ (Atkinson,1998: 22). Utilising semi-structured interviews will afford me flexibility in data collection whilst providing me with the opportunity to connect personably with the girls, who are the best at authoring their own stories and realities.

Having my research aims and questions in mind throughout the planning and interview process, it enables me to keep my participants' responses aligned with my research goals.

A narrative interview approach was originally considered, to work alongside storytelling. Narrative interviews or biographical research can facilitate accounts of the perspectives and the interpretations of people in a variety of educational settings, providing valuable insights (Cohen et al. 2007: 198). However, according to Cohen et al., the researcher and participant must be willing to establish and maintain a close, intimate relationship which requires time (Cohen et al., 2007: 198 -199). Furthermore, the researcher should demonstrate skills associated with non-directive counselling approaches. The unstructured approach of narrative interviewing was considered to be more onerous on my time than semi-structured interviews, which, as a data collection method, could also be an effective tool in which to gain stories of educational journeys, in a more structured manner (Robson, 2002; Cohen et al., 2007). See Table 2 for a short biographical account of each participant.

Semi-structured interviews

I chose to use semi-structured interviews, which have a set of pre-determined questions, but that retain flexibility with wording, order, or follow up questions as appropriate to each participant; responses are mainly open-response questions (Robson, 2002: 270). Semi-structured interviews are the most preferred interview type for my study as they are widely used in flexible, qualitative designs as they allow me to take the lead in the discussion, ensuring the research aims and objectives are

being met' (Robson, 2007:270). In using this type of interview, I was able to remain focused on ensuring the research questions are being addressed. Robson describes this level of control for the researcher as the 'interviewers rule' (Robson, 2002, 271). The interviewer's rule, coupled with the structured format, presents me with the advantage to ensure planned themes are covered, in a flexible way. For my participants, the semi-structured interview can also appear less restrictive (Robson, 2002). Similar to storytelling, which is commonly used in CRT, Bryman argues, 'rambling' or 'going off at tangents is often encouraged' (Bryman, 2012: 470), which is advantageous, as it will allow for deeper reflection where the participant can express her school experience openly.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the opportunity and flexibility to explore answers other than those on the interview guide, gaining a deeper understanding when necessary (Bryman, 2012). I carefully constructed the interview questions to achieve the desired results (Cohen et al., 2007) Firstly, I formulated questions on the participants' backgrounds, and school context before asking questions focused on their experience, behaviour, contrasts and feelings (Cohen et al., 2007). Questions covered 10 themes, all of which followed a process. Accordingly, Kvale suggests:

> *'process questions are those which: introduce a topic or interview; follow-up on a topic or idea; probe for further information or response; ask respondents to specify and provide examples; directly ask for information; indirectly ask for information and interpret respondents' replies'*
>
> (Kvale 1996 cited in Cohen et al, 2007: 359)

I chose to ask open-ended questions to encourage an in-depth narrative, although, a series of closed questions were used to start the interview. Use of in-depth, semi-structured questions would provide the girls with the opportunity to tell their story within the parameters of the theme. Closed questions that require short, factual responses were employed in the introduction, as a means of welcoming the participants into the research space and teasing out any technical difficulties at the outset (see appendix 4 and table 2). Considerations were also made regarding how I framed the questions. Allowing for further prompting and probing of narratives, would enable the participant time and encouragement to articulate their story in a desired and relaxed way whilst also reassuring them of my interest in their story and of my active listening. Accordingly, Cohen et al. denotes, 'Prompts enable the interviewer to clarify topics or questions, while probes enable the interviewer to ask respondents to extend, elaborate, add to, provide detail for, clarify or qualify their response, comprehensiveness and honesty' (Cohen et al., 2007: 361).

Interview questions and language

My approach to planning a set of questions, considered the language and the age of the participants. Accordingly, Bryman denotes, 'knowing how frequent terms are used and the meanings of specific terms in the local vernacular is frequently viewed as crucial to an appreciation of how the social world is being studied and viewed by its members' (Bryman, 2012: 522) Whilst not meaning to appear informal, I deemed it imperative to use terminology suited to the age range and generation of the Black Caribbean girls, whilst being mindful that I should appreciate entering into a youthful space with which, they would share new vocabulary, language or generational

linguistics with me, which could differ from school to school and region to region, across England. Concurrently, Labov denotes, 'In each school, adolescents [talk] about everyday experiences with each other in ways that are special to them and a little cloudy to the adults surrounding them'(Labov, 1992: 339). Additionally, he denotes 'in each school adolescent slang appears' (Labov, 1992: 339). As in my early school experience, everyday informal youth words or slang, appeared amongst certain groups, however, the presence of global online social media platforms, such as TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook, has exposed my participants to an even wider range of cultural and youth terms than my generation. Therefore, I thought it was beneficial for me to be familiar with youth slang. Concurrently, Labov posits, for the researcher, 'knowledge of a slang term shows the acquaintance of the listener with its speakers' (Labov, 1992: 339). Consequently, as I immersed myself into the social world of Black Caribbean girls, my questions were written in such a way that I could form linguistic connections and demonstrate an understanding of their reality and sub-culture. My ten themes included: - career aspirations, motivation, the learning environment, school experience, STEM subjects, race, ethnicity, identity, gender and strategies (see Appendix 4 for a full list of interview questions).

Piloting

One pilot interview was carried out with a Black Caribbean girl in the age range and similar category to those I would be interviewing. I chose to pilot the interview for the following reasons: to check the language and vocabulary I used was accessible; to check my pitch and tone; to gain an understanding as to whether the questions allowed for an in-depth narrative response; and also, to gauge the duration which the

interview would take. This enabled me to correct any errors beforehand and to build my confidence in my ability as an interviewer. Having confidence that my question schedule was succinct, enabled me to ask my participants questions in the appropriate manner, knowing, their responses will provide answers to my research questions. Accordingly, Bryman advises researchers to ‘pilot if at all possible’ which ‘helps to throw up the inevitable problems of converting [the] design into reality’ (Bryman, 2012: 382).

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Birmingham Ethics Approval Committee and in line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) . Cohen et al. emphasises the discourse of power when arguing ‘Respondents cannot be coerced’…they have the ‘right to withdraw from research at any time’ (Cohen et al., 2015: 317). In recruiting and interviewing participants, I adhered to the ethical code for researchers by seeking written consent from participants and their guardians before commencing data collection, giving them opportunities to ask questions to clarify what was required of them and, to check their knowledge of their right to withdraw from the interview up to four weeks after the interview had taken place. Furthermore, privacy and the protection of personal data was managed securely. Interviews were recorded to ensure that I captured the participants responses whilst conducting the interview, once consent was provided. Responses were transcribed during the data analysis stage. All participant’s real names were replaced with pseudonyms where information will be made available in a public domain. The data collection is only for the purpose of this study, and it will be used

and stored in line with The Data Protection Act. (see Appendices 6-11 for ethical documents).

Data collection

Covid-19 pandemic

Ethical consent was granted to interview participants within the school environment. This was thought to be more effective for me as a researcher so that I could conduct face-to-face interviews; observe participants in their environment as well as the possibility of gathering achievement data on individual participants from their teachers. However, during the period of data collection, the Covid-19 pandemic inhibited schools from permitting visitors within the school grounds. As a result, I received nil responses from letters and emails sent to schools. Semi-structured interviews took place online instead, using the platform, Zoom. Accordingly, Lobe et al. denotes, many researchers currently working on projects that are un-related to the pandemic are being forced to transition from face-to-face data collection to some other form of data collection that is by phone or internet-based (Lobe et al., 2020: 1). The impact of online interviews did not afford me with the opportunity to gain empirical observations of the school environment or acquire data other than the stories from the participants. Although this issue restricted the breadth of data collection, it did not hinder the building of relationships with the participants during the online interviews. Online interviews also presented me with opportunities that a school-based interview did not. The positive caveats for online data collection, as discussed by Lobe et al. include, ‘greater flexibility in time and location of data

collection, together with, a highly socialized form of interaction which informs health and safety restrictions (Lobe et al., 2020). Contrastingly, using Zoom online platform also presented me with concerns such as; lack of security of the platform and, the potential lack of confidential and privacy in the environment where the interview is conducted (Lobe et al., 2020). However, due to the flexibility of online platforms, I had the advantage of recruiting participants from different regions in England. Issues of privacy was overcome as the participants used their mobile phones and as such, were not limited to holding the interview in full view of family members who could potentially, influence their stories.

Data analysis

Data analysis is the management, analysis and interpretation of data (Bryman, 2012: 14). As the transcript of recorded interviews were available from Zoom platform, I employed the use of NVivo qualitative computer software to upload and store both the recorded interviews and transcripts, for each of the sixteen participants. This process was carried out soon after the last interview was conducted in order to remain familiar with the data as I recalled the interactions to memory.

Data Analytical Process

I checked the transcripts for any flaws and spent time correcting errors within the raw data (Bryman, 2012). The next stage was the thematic analysis where I examined the data to extract core themes which recurred from the transcripts of the girls' interviews (Bryman, 2012). Tesch suggests four basic groupings of qualitative

analysis These are; the characteristics of language; the discoveries of regularities, the comprehension of the meaning of text or action, and reflection (Tesch 1990 cited in Robson, 2002: 457). For my study, I was interested in the discovery of regularities in the girls' school experiences, which related to my research questions, as they stemmed from the narratives as the girls verbalised their social realities. The tools of CRT and intersectionality provided me with an opportunity to engage fully with the data.

Coding

Once I became familiar with the meanings of the data, I proceeded to code each theme. Bryman describes coding as a 'process whereby the data are broken down into their component parts and those parts are then given labels' (Bryman, 2012 :13). I employed an interpretive analysis as codes began to look similar by grouping together similar themes. This process reduced the wealth of data without losing its meaning. I assigned codes to categorise topics and themes as they related to CRT and Intersectionality. The codes were pertinent to the recurrent themes race and gender, rather than class, as they emerged from my literature review. The participants narratives together with the historical school experiences of Black Caribbean girls in England, formed part of the social realities of their school experiences, as the data began to form.

Reflexivity

A significant aspect to my study was reflexivity. This can be defined as being reflective about the implications of ‘methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world [that social researchers] generate’ (Bryman, 2012: 393). Throughout the process of planning, interviewing and analysing my findings, I have maintained sensitivity to my social space and have been prepared to be flexible in adapting methods to suit the research environment, participants and outcomes. Throughout the process of data collection and interviewing, I developed an awareness of my involvement and interpretation of what was taking place (Fox and Allan, 2013). To be aware of my positionality, I maintained my focus for the justification of my study and the opportunities it presented for Black Caribbean girls, as well as recording my thoughts after each interview and poignant moments in the data collection and data analysis, in a research journal. The journal provided me with an insight to my point of view and an interpretation of the school experiences shared by the participants, which I was careful not to project in the data collection or analysis.

Positionality

My positionality was considered as an opportunity to understand participants rather than instilling any bias in the formulating of questions, body language and engaging with the participants. Festinger and Katz argue, a researcher ‘positions themselves as allies of individuals or groups who have a special interest to exploit’ (Festinger and Katz 1996 cited in Cohen et al., 2007:57). When considering my positionality in my

research, I reflected on the role of self by critically questioning my own role and scope within the study (Agyemang, 2008). Race was therefore, of most importance to the participants and their parents, before any other theme in my research topic, which created an instant connection to participants and high expectations of the purpose behind the research topic. As a woman of Black Caribbean heritage, my identity and positionality in relation to this study made this study personal. Not only do I identify with the school experiences as a school attender, teacher and parent of a daughter who is also of Black Caribbean heritage, but I too, sit on the margins of society as a Black, female, originating from a working-class background. A closeness to the researched subjects avails me the responsibility as a researcher to interpret their (and not, my) stories in a non-biased way, Concurrently, Delgado et al. argues, 'Race-based methodology thus shifts the locus of power in the research process by situating subjects as knowers' (Delgado et al. 2002 cited in Chapman, 2018: 98). This unique position afforded me an advantage in establishing rapport with the girls, almost instantly; especially as the subject alluded to our shared heritage.

My positionality requires me to understand the power I have in collecting and thus analysing the data from my participants, who put their trust in me. Being reflexive, ensures my positionality is used, not to exploit my participants but to provide me with gains as an insider who works with integrity and ethically with my participants (Bilgen et al., 2022).

Furthermore, as a researcher who employs CRT as an analytical tool, I concur with Chapman et al, who posit, 'An often forgotten or purposefully omitted tenet to CRT is the call for researchers of colour to research their own racially marginalised communities' (Chapman et al., 2018: 98). Interviewing participants of the same racial

background provided me with a sense of purpose and intent, which I describe as *giving something back to my community*. Reflecting on my mother and the village of supportive adults who afforded their skills, time and resources so that I could have a better education, (see chapter 1), I desire for this study to have a similar effect on the participants and Black Caribbean girls who will attend English secondary schools in the future. However, I was motivated by the urgency to make even a small increment of change in the landscape of educational knowledge surrounding the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls. Accordingly, Chapman et al. state, 'In CRT, these epistemological connections to one's community affiliations are valued and cultivated, not hidden or demonized (Chapman, 2018: 98).

Research Integrity

Having research integrity is a key component to ensuring research outcomes are both transparent and sensitive to the political, cultural and social context. Accordingly, Yardley suggests four criteria, which I have adhered to. These are, 'Sensitivity to context; Commitment and rigour; Transparency and coherence', and 'Impact and importance', all of which, are crucial in evaluating and reporting my research findings (Yardley 2000 cited in Bryman, 2012: 393).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

RQ 1: What are the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls?

Introduction

This chapter explores intersectional themes within the context of Black Caribbean girls' school experiences, which I will conceptually situate within the literature review and theoretical framework chapters. Each theme culminates from the interviews of sixteen Black Caribbean girls of 13 - 16 years of age and draws on the review of literature and is interpreted within CRT and intersectionality frameworks.

I will critically analyse the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls as described in the semi-structured interviews, using the themes which emerged during the data analysis.

Using an intersectional perspective, I have focused on the multi-faceted experiences of Black Caribbean girls. Hence, the themes I discuss, seek to address the multiple forms of inequality and disadvantage, experienced by Black Caribbean girls in secondary school.

The aim of this chapter is to build upon existing literature and to extend knowledge, by highlighting Black Caribbean girls' educational needs during her experience in an English secondary school.

The sixteen participants

The profile of each participant is listed in Table 1. which provides information of the school year, school type and location of the secondary school which they attend. Pseudonyms have been used to replace the name of each participant. To gain a wider picture of the participants backgrounds and stories, please refer to Table 2. Each participant brings with them a diverse set of abilities, age range, school type, background and location. Within my findings, there is little fluctuation in the school experiences despite these nuances.

During the interview process I collected a wealth of data from the participant's narratives. A phenomenon occurred that although the participants differed in age, location, abilities, background, and school type, as they were asked the same questions, the variation in experiences was limited. In my discussion of findings in this chapter and chapter 6, I have selected quotes from all participants, giving each participant an opportunity for each voice to be heard. I also selected quotes which represented the common themes of everyday experiences as they were narrated by the girls, across the different types of schools, abilities and year groups. Each quote articulates the lived school experiences of Black Caribbean girls both clearly and concisely. Participants spoke not only for themselves but represented the voices of the sixteen participants in this study, and where one incident is highlighted, this was not exhaustive of the wealth of experiences shared.

British Values: Identity Crisis

As discussed in chapter 3, Black Caribbean girls' ethnicity is not recognised or revered in school as they are confronted with learning a curriculum which promotes Whiteness and ignores their identity. This is a consequence of the post-racial society where multiculturalism is the norm and given precedence over issues related to race and ethnicity. This has paradoxically deemed Black Caribbean girls as British and having no safe space in school to understand their identity or their ethnicity. Rather, they are instilled with British values which only seeks to promote ideals of how to be a good British citizen. Kapoor critiques this political move by suggesting, British values mutes the terms of race whilst escalating the use of biopolitical technologies to govern certain segments of the population, which it legitimates under the threat of terror (Kapoor, 2013). This phenomenon leaves Black Caribbean girls with few options but to embrace the rhetoric at the expense of compromising their own identity and ethnicity. This is evident from the responses provided by all participants, irrespective of age, when asked to describe their ethnicity. Although ethnicity can be conflated, as described in chapter three, participants used a variation of terms to describe themselves, including; 'Black Jamaican', 'Caribbean Jamaican African', 'Black English Jamaican' and 'Black British Caribbean'. Kayla's response highlights the misunderstandings that Black Caribbean girls have regarding their ethnic identity:

"*I'm right, wait, I don't know. I guess my mums from the Caribbean. I guess, wait. Can you tell me what ethnicity means again?"* (**Kayla, year 9**)

I use CRT to critique positions which state colour-blind, or formal conceptions of equality, expressed in rules that insist only on treatment that is the same across the board, to remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination (Delgado and

Stefancic, 2012: 8). A colour-blind approach in the government's focus on national values homogenises all students in a classroom as British subjects, leaving the Black Caribbean girl with an identity crisis.

The UK government's drive to promote British Values within the curriculum, needs to also consider the identity of Black Caribbean girls and other ethnicities within their classrooms too. Failure to do so, serves only to promote the dominant structural power of Whiteness (Gallagher, 2003), and fails to understand the identities and expectations of the diversity of students within the school. This leaves Black Caribbean girls with an identity crisis. This phenomenon also calls for parents and guardians of Black Caribbean girls to be proactive in providing guidance on their ethnicity rather than leaving it to the school alone. Failure to do so may result in a generation of Black Caribbean girls who are blind-sided by Britishness. The colour-blind/white as default ideology also importantly responsibilises Black students for their failure rather than making the system and structures responsible.

Structural Stereotyping

Teachers stereotyping of Black pupils has been discussed earlier in chapter two, which was a finding of the reports by Rampton (1981); Swann (1985) and Macpherson (1999). Black Caribbean girls experience racialised structural stereotyping by teachers, in dominant school discourses. The participants discussed labels they were prone to be identified as, irrespective of school type or year group, including 'Loud Black Girl' (**Taylor, year 10**), 'Angry Black Girl' (**Alexis, year 11**) and 'Bad Black Girl' (**Nia, year 8**). Whilst this is not a new concept, Black Caribbean girls

are experiencing stereotyping on a daily basis, which can have a bearing on their self-esteem and their job opportunities. Accordingly, Motro et al., argues,

> *"The angry Black woman stereotype…not only characterizes Black women as more hostile, aggressive, overbearing, illogical, ill-tempered and bitter, but it may also be holding them back from realizing their full potential in the workplace — and shaping their work experiences overall"*
>
> (Motro et al., 2022:143).

Within a school context, if teachers ascribe negative labels to Black Caribbean girls, this not only emphasises their racialised and gendered status but it has the ability to lower their self-esteem. In addition, this can also affect their behaviour by influencing them to act according to the labels ascribed (Mirza, 1992), or negatively impact their achievements and aspirations (Swann, 1985; Crenshaw et al., 2015).

In the extract from Nia, she explains the negative effects of structural stereotyping:

*"The teachers know me as the Bad Black Girl – not very good...I can't go anywhere without the teachers knowing me, even the new teachers, even the supply teachers, like just everyone just knows me. It makes me feel quite down." "If teachers just know me as the Bad Black Girl, then I don't know what else to think. They always pick on me…." (**Nia, year 8**)*

Black Caribbean girls are confronted on a daily basis by the structural domain of Whiteness, which encompasses how social institutions are organised to reproduce her subordination over time. This racial injustice within schools, seeks to socially exclude Black Caribbean girls from the opportunities that education presents her with (Hill-Collins, 2000). Black Caribbean girls face identity politics (Crenshaw, 1991) on a daily basis in school, however, Mirza argues, that Black girls seek to counteract any negative labelling or stereotyping, in her desire to achieve educational success

(Mirza, 1997). However, a critique to this notion is that there is an absence of adults in the form of mentors, with whom the Black Caribbean girl can go to for support. For example, in Nia's case, she states 'it makes me feel quite down'. When she asked if she could change anything about school, what would she do? Asia described a safe space:

"*I feel like it's more to do with, like, making everyone feel comfortable and like, making like you know, like you have someone there to speak to, or like, knowing that you're like in a safe place. Like, there is always someone there to go to, like, with anything and you don't have to feel worried*" (**Asia, year 10**).

There is a need for change in how Black Caribbean girls are labelled by teachers in school as experiences of gendered and racialised stereotyping contributes to their underachievement (Rampton, 1981; Swann, 1985; Macpherson, 1999; Demi and McLean, 2017a), notwithstanding the affect it has on self-esteem as well as having the potential to hinder their educational and career trajectories.

Micro Aggressions

'Racial microaggressions are 'brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of colour' (Sue et al., 2007: 271). A plethora of studies have found that black students experience 'demeaning and stereotypical comments made about them in academic and social interactions', including 'academic inferiority, assumptions of aggression, stereotypic misperceptions, subtle putdowns and racial jokes from their White teachers and peers' (Solórzano et al., 2000; Lewis et al., 2019, Nadal et al., 2014;

Sue et al, 2007; Watkins et al., 2010 and Keels et al, 2017; Gadson and Lewis, 2022).

Intersectionality provides a focus for investigating micro aggressions by gender, which can be referred to as gendered micro-aggressions. Lewis et al. defines gendered micro-aggressions as 'subtle and everyday verbal, behavioural, and environmental expressions of oppression based on the intersection of one's race and gender' (Lewis et al., 2016: 766). Black Caribbean girls experience daily gendered micro-aggressions in school which are subtle comments which can have can affect her self-esteem. One focus of attention was the hair. Several participants described their experience of receiving daily comments throughout the school day about their hair and how it was styled, which sometimes led to threats. This phenomenon was unique to Black Caribbean girls with afro-hair. Reports in the media, as discussed in chapter two, show the experiences of participants to mirror those of other Black girls in English schools. Tiara narrative describes her daily experience:

"*It is really frustrating because it's like, if I have a hair band in my hair and a white girl has a hairband in her hair, why am I the only one getting picked up? You kind of think, well, why me? and it does kind of lead back to that race question. So, it's frustrating having to deal with that constantly but I think it's become very normalized, and I think I'm used to it*" (**Tiara, year 11**).

Tiara alludes to the 'race question' as she asks, "why me?" The race question enquires, 'Is it because I am Black?'. Accordingly, Gadson and Lewis argue 'Gendered racial microaggressions capture the unique and intersecting forms of covert racism and sexism experienced by Black women and other women of colour' Gadson and Lewis, 2022: 16). The subtly of gendered micro aggressions experienced by Black Caribbean girls is an oppressive factor of the school discourse.

Furthermore, there is a growing body of research which suggests this can 'lead to psychological distress, depressive symptoms, traumatic stress, anxiety and poorer self-reported mental and physical health' (Lewis and Neville, 2015; Moody and Lewis, 2019; Wright and Lewis, 2019; Wright and Lewis 2020).

From a CRT perspective, micro-aggressions are assimilated as the colour-blind ideology (Leonard, 2004; Burdsey, 2011; Carter and Davila, 2017) of a post-racial society. This is due to the inconspicuousness of micro-aggressions (Gillborn, 2000; Gillborn, 2008; Carter et al., 2017; Bhopal, 2018), which renders the Black Caribbean girls silent and unable to highlight the oppressive nature and psychological impact of micro-aggressions that form part of their everyday school experiences.

However, whilst experiencing this oppression in school, Black Caribbean girls would be reprimanded for retaliating, so instead, they find ways to accept the gendered micro aggression as a normal part of their school day. This is evident from Tiara's extract, where she describes experiencing gendered micro aggressions as being 'very normalized' and states, 'I think I'm used to it'. The feeling of micro aggressions being normalised can be the result of Tiara's five years of experience from year 7 – 11, in secondary school. Because Black Caribbean girls are racialised and gendered as part of their everyday school experience, over time, their experiences become the norm. From the interviews, the participants suggest it is incumbent for Black Caribbean girls to accept gendered micro aggressions as an organic part of her school day, which can affect their mood, as described by Asia:

"*I can wake up like in a good mood and like want to go into school and actually want to do well. And it's like, as soon as like, you walk through the gate like, you're getting*

looks from teachers or like they give sarcastic comments, like 'are you going to be good today?' or 'hello trouble'. Like, I don't find it funny" (**Asia, year 10**).

Gendered micro-aggressions serve as a reminder to Black Caribbean girls that they occupy a different societal position to that of their White counterparts (Phoenix, 1997). As discussed in chapter 2, although distinct differences are recognised by a Black Caribbean girl's physical traits, they are homogenised into the same gender category where achievement is a factor, and they receive no differentiation according to their ethnicity to close the achievement gap. Racialisation serves only to remind Black Caribbean girls of her positionality, but it is not beneficial when focusing on achievement factors. Maylor highlights the limited research on the psychological impact and long-term consequences which gendered micro-aggressions can have on the self-worth and self-esteem of a Black Caribbean girl (Maylor, 2009). The daily onslaught of micro-aggressions impacts Black Caribbean girl's ability to achieve and can have lasting consequences.

The Curriculum: Tokenistic or Inclusive?

The Education Reform Act 1988 introduced the National Curriculum introduced, which provided a mandate of what should be taught in schools on a subject by subject basis (Mattei, 2012). During the interviews, participants reported the GCSE qualifications which they were studying towards, which included; English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, a Modern Foreign Language (MFL), Computing and an array of optional subjects. All participants attended schools which were diverse, although some schools were more diverse than others. When asked whether they felt the school recognised their race, participants alluded to topics

discussed in assemblies or tutorials, which take place during the month of October as part of Black History Month or History lessons. A quarter of participants also referred to one-off sessions delivered in school that focused on Black Lives Matter, which were delivered after the murder of George Floyd, in May 2020. Although some form of Black History content was taught in schools, Black Caribbean girls found the experience both awkward and uncomfortable. As a teacher, I inherently believe the opportunities to teach a diverse curriculum are vast within the school context and within the plethora of subjects taught, whilst taking into consideration the demands of the national curriculum. Therefore, I concur with Richardson and Wood who argue: 'In every curriculum subject there are opportunities to engage pupils by showing respect for their cultural and personal identities' Richardson and Wood, 2000: 40).

However, it is the quality of provision which has the ability for the delivery to appear tokenistic and insulting rather than achieve the engagement of the students in the classroom. This can be derived from the narratives of the participants who highlighted their dissatisfaction. One of the concerns, described by half of the participants was the racial background of the teacher delivering the content. It was felt that White teachers did not suitably qualify for the task of delivering lessons focused on Black history as Cemone explains in the extract:

"*It's kind of awkward sometimes cause it's like, teachers that aren't, like, Black; they don't really know anything about our race, and it's a very negative subject really and we hear about it all the time*" (**Cemone, year 10**).

Several participants also referred to the way in which their White peers reacted during lessons on slavery or the mistreatment of Black people, including the Black Lives Matters campaign, which served only to illuminate racial inequalities in history

and the present day. The negative impact this had in the classroom environment for Black Caribbean girl's and in relationships with their White peers can be understood from Taylor's extract:

"*It's always the same people we learn about in Black History Month. If we're in History, the only thing about Black people we learn about is slavery and we don't really learn about slavery like that. Even then, when we do talk about slavery, everyone like turns and looks at the Black people in school. I had one girl who made a comment and she was like talking about slavery and then she was like, I think she meant it in a light-hearted way but she was like, 'when I'm older, I'm going to have a big house and you're going to be my slave'. I didn't like it at all because I was like, that's not right to say. I don't remember her ever getting into any trouble for it. because she said, 'I meant it in a nice way' and school's like, 'yes, we understand'. I'm not friends with her anymore*" (**Taylor, year 10**)

Taylor and Cemone attend the same secondary school, however, the tokenistic sentiment concerning the curriculum was evident in most schools.

Additionally, Asia explained that she felt Black students should be prepared for the lessons in advance through prior warning by the teacher when sensitive topics like slavery would be delivered. This could be deemed as a counteractive measure to prepare for the oppressive learning environment that would enfold.

"*Like, some people are probably not mentally prepared for all of that, like they don't know like what's coming up. I feel like they should be, like, making people more aware'* (**Asia, year 10**)

During interviews, some participants suggested that schools should explore other topics rather than slavery. This can be derived from Cemone's response:

"*You should do more about, like, Black excellence, not just slavery*" (**Cemone, year 10**).

The narratives from the participants reveal there is much room for improvement for secondary schools to provide a diverse curriculum to engage Black Caribbean girls. Throughout my career in education, Black pupils have voiced disapproval with the lack of diversity in the curriculum. As mentioned in chapter 1, Black children at a school where I mentored, demonstrated in protest for Black History lessons. The participants highlight, nearly two decades later, that the discontent of a curriculum which is not inclusive, is being voiced by another generation of Black Caribbean girls. During interviews, instead of a rich, diverse curriculum, the participants have described meagre rationings of lessons which reflects their cultural history or which seeks to celebrate the contributions of Black people to the curriculum. It was felt that tokenistic gestures for Black History Month were short-lived and seemed 'forced' and sessions on Black Lives Matter were a knee-jerk reaction to political events in the media.

Not only does the curriculum fail to meet their needs, but participants have also alluded to how and where lessons are delivered and by whom. From the narratives, Black Caribbean girls require a safe learning environment to learn the curriculum from a cultural perspective; one in which they can feel respected and valued as a member of the school community by their teachers and peers, rather than being stared at or receive derogatory comments from peers, that go unchallenged by teachers. As suggested by Asia, Black Caribbean girls would like to be informed, prior to the lesson or assembly, when the topic will be delivered. This will assist those girls who require it, to be psychologically and emotionally prepared to deal with sensitive topics like slavery. Having a variety of topics to deliver, which does not emphasise the negatives of British colonial history but rather the benefits of a diverse

British nation, can also encourage engagement and enable the school to make positive strides towards inclusivity. From the interviews with Black Caribbean girls, secondary schools need to be aware that the History curriculum and its focus on slavery, can cause embarrassment, discontent and leave them feeling disturbed by the nonchalance of the teacher's delivery and the ignorant response from their peers. During the interview, Cemone posed a suggestion:

"*You could either, like, get someone in to talk about it, like. They could be [a person] of color or wherever. A person that knows what they're talking…and, like, make us think about, like, the topic as a whole and get us to understand it better as well: because, if you don't address the situation, then you're just going to be stuck in the same place and no one will learn from that*" (**Cemone, year 10**).

Having a diverse pool of teachers, including those of Black Caribbean heritage, can encourage approval from Black Caribbean girls, that the school is taking measures to deliver a curriculum and provide a safe environment for her to learn about her history and the curriculum from a cultural perspective.

This comes at a time when there is much debate regarding the decolonising of the British curriculum which accentuates the rise of the British global superpower as a result of the transatlantic enslavement of African people and the colonization of two thirds of the planet (Ackah, 2021). The sentiments of British colonization are prevalent today within the British curriculum and classrooms within England. One which teaches of the supremacy of the British way of life and fails to acknowledge those citizens whose ancestral past has been impacted by the colonies which Britain invaded and controlled (Ackah, 2021). The teaching of slavery, therefore, re-enacts the power of the British upon Black people and reinforces the dominance of Whiteness in the classroom which serves only to remind Black Caribbean girls of

their marginalised position and those of their ancestors, at the hands of Britain leaders. At the same time, her White peers are reminded and empowered by the structural discourse of Whiteness as it plays out in the topic being delivered. I would argue, this paradox which Black Caribbean girls are faced with, has been dismissed by the government, who, in the CRED report stated,

> '*It is widely accepted that the school curriculum and the way it presents the historic past can be central to creating a sense of belonging amongst pupils and a belief they can contribute in the future. When those from different ethnic and social class backgrounds can see, hear and read about their heritage, and the contribution their forefathers and mothers have made to this country through the ages, they can identify themselves as a part of British history. This is not about teaching the personal history of each individual but rather linking the story of different ethnic groups to a unifying sense of Britishness'*.
>
> (Report of the CRED, 2021)

This statement does not only encompass sentiments of meritocracy and multiculturalism, but it suggests that Black Caribbean girl's histories are rooted within Britain and does not emanate from the Caribbean. It also ignores any opportunities to develop an inclusive and diverse curriculum to engage children from all communities and backgrounds to understand the rich heritage and traditions which each child brings into the classroom.

Viewing this dilemma with a CRT lens, the absence of a diverse curriculum in secondary schools in which Black Caribbean girls attend, can be associated with interest convergence, as 'it seeks only to promote the self-interest of elite whites than from a desire to help blacks' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012: 8).

In recognition of the curriculum as a device of power, the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn and his Shadow Equalities leader, Dawn Butler, promoted the party's plans to provide a diverse curriculum in 2018, prior to launching their manifesto. Corbyn promised a national curriculum which taught Black History and the legacy of the empire, whilst Butler suggested it would be beneficial by reducing exclusions, build pride and empower Black pupils (Evening Standard, 2018).

Contrastingly, in a recent move, the UK government launched a guidance in February 2022, titled, 'Political Partiality in Schools'. Under the Education and Skills Act, 2008, the UK government forbids any school leaders, staff and teachers in schools, to promote partisan (one-sided) political views. This includes; campaign groups, lobbyists and charitable organisations (GOV.UK, 2022a). Media and Teaching unions have interpreted the move to silence schools from discussing political issues around race such as the Black Lives Matter campaign (Harding, 2022; Harding 2022a). Accordingly, a Guardian newspaper article purported that the guidance states, 'contentious and disputed' issues around the British Empire should be 'taught in a balanced manner', which, they suggest, is in response to the large number of schools teaching the topic as part of a 'decolonised curriculum; arising from pressure from campaigners, and those schools delivering Black Lives Matter sessions which can be seen as advocating support for political groups (Harding, 2021, Harding 2022; Harding, 2022a).

In response to the guidance, the National Education Union (NEU) for teachers, critiqued the government guidance, stating, it was 'not possible to present a balanced view of imperialism, colonialism and racism in the classroom, as well as calling for black perspectives to be embedded in every subject, not just History. This action will

support its drive to decolonise the curriculum and to prevent sexist and racist treatment of Black girls (Harding, 2022a).

The advantages of an inclusive curriculum that recognises and respects the cultural heritage of Black Caribbean girls, can increase her sense of belonging in the learning environment and have a positive effect on her ability to achieve.

Institutional Racism

When asked about a typical school day, most participants explained incidents of racism which formed part of their everyday secondary school experience. Although participants attended different types of schools, across different geographical regions across England (see appendix 5), this did not have a bearing on the level of racism experienced. Incidents of institutional racism included: refusal to permit Black children to leave the classroom to attend the bathroom, being ignored when needing support and being singled out or constantly reminded of negative behaviour.

Institutional racism was evident in the findings of the reports by Rampton (1981); Swann (1985) and Macpherson (1999). Refer to definitions in chapter 2. Gillborn states, institutional racism ‘originates in the operation of established and respected forces in society and, thus receives far less public condemnation’ (Gillborn, 2008:27) Within the systems and policies, which form the school ethos, secondary schools in England all have a Behavioural policy that outlines the procedures in which a member of staff will following as a consequence of a student’s misbehaviour.

Accordingly, CRT recognises that ‘racism is ordinary’; ‘the usual way society does business’ and the ‘common everyday experience of most people of colour’ (Delgado

and Stefancic, 2012: 7). Racism forms part of the daily school experience of Black Caribbean girls and was highlighted in the Swann report 1985, as discussed in chapter two.

Cooper et al., argue, 'Black adolescents are often embedded in racialized school contexts, which devalue their existence and undermine their well-being' (Cooper et al., 2022: 170). A body of research suggests, these school experiences can adversely affect their self-perceptions, identity development, psychological adjustment and academic outcomes, including; attainment, academic motivation, their persistence and goal orientation (Cooper et al., 2022; Leath et al., 2021a; Mims and Williams, 2020; Morris et al., 2020; Banerjee et al., 2018; Butler-Barnes et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2010).

Intersectionality highlights the reality that Black girls are marginalised within the context of the school discourse on the basis of their race, class and gender. This recognises the differential treatment they are exposed to, from their White peers. In a school environment, where Black Caribbean girls set themselves goals to attain in order to achieve, they are presented with a daily reminder of their racialised and gendered positions which can impact negatively on her desire to achieve.

Teachers are responsible for the safety and well-being of Black Caribbean girls, during the school day. Schools need to consider the harmful and psychological impact on Black Caribbean girls who experience their teachers using racist slurs and conferring racist oppression within a classroom setting. Savannah describes her experience of being present in a classroom where the teacher uses racist language:

"My Biology teacher…in that particular lesson they had like two girls who are Black

*girls who were very loud. And then somehow in a conversation that the teacher was having with those students, the N word was said by that teacher…. The two girls were very upset and, obviously, like a few people, even the ones that she didn't say it to, had like, ran out crying" (**Savannah, year 11**).*

Although this incident was not directed at Savannah, the use of the 'N word' is a derogatory racial term rather than personal. This experience was, therefore, distressing and the classroom environment became virulent. It was no longer a safe place for Black Caribbean girls to learn for Savannah to feel at ease, as she describes, some girls 'ran out crying'. Notwithstanding, that this incident took place in an outstanding, single-sex grammar school, where school reputation is key. Black pupils who experience adult-perpetrated racial discrimination at school may experience long-term psychological effects that persist years after the initial experience (Cooper et al., 2022; Keels et al., 2017; Brittian and Gray, 2014). This could have a negative impact on Black Caribbean girls self-worth, thus, impacting their chances of achieving academically or achieving career success. Feelings of despair and fear for the future can invade the girls' hopes as Aliya describes, following an incident which occurred in year 9:

*"There was a food fight in the hall and my mom got emails saying I'd been throwing food and there was CCTV evidence of me doing so. I told my mom that I didn't. My mom obviously knows when her own child is lying or not, so she told a different member of staff that they needed to look at it properly and then it came up that I wasn't nowhere near them throwing food… They were trying to ban me from having dinner in that hall and it generally wasn't me...There was no apology. That was left on my file, as bad behavior and it generally wasn't me" (**Aliya, year 11**).*

When asked, how this situation made her feel? Aliya provided the following response:

*“Well, I think it's a bit like betrayal but the same time you do feel for myself and others because, obviously, I know, being Black, that I will have to go through similar things and I'm thinking, I'm only young and I've experienced this and in the major world where people have to have to work every day, this is what they experience, just trying to get money for their families” (**Aliya, year 11**).*

During interview, Aliya described her school as mainly White. This incident highlights the lack of concern which her teachers had to rectify their mistakes made in singling out Aliya or reproofing her school records. This incident could have detrimental effects to Aliya’s college application for the next academic year, thereby, reaping negative repercussions for Aliya’s career choices.

Whilst not compulsory, all schools are encouraged to report incidents of racism to their local authority. In 2021, over sixty thousand incidents were reported between 2016 - 2021 (Batty and Parveen, 2021). In this context, a racist incident is deemed to be, ‘any situation perceived to be racist by the alleged victim or any other person, including unintentional racism. Although, this figure is alarming, as there is no legal duty for schools to report racist incidents, so it is likely that incidents of a racism in schools in the UK are actually higher, taking into consideration those schools which fail to produce a report (Batty and Parveen, 2021). This means, Black Caribbean girls are learning in an environment where they are experiencing racialised slurs and comments, which are detrimental to their well-being and which can also have a bearing on how they develop relationships in school and with whom.

A common response to racist incidents as described by the participants is that it goes unchallenged. This phenomenon was highlighted earlier, in chapter three. Participants explained that the school’s behavioural policies were not followed when they reported incidents of racism. This sentiment was explained by Cemone:

"*I think it was year nine. The topic of racism will come up and, like, people would be saying words that they're not supposed to say, and I would say, the teachers didn't know how to handle the situation and they didn't really do anything about it. We would go to them, tell them what they've been saying and they'll say they'd sort it out but nothing really happened to the person. I don't think they were even, like, talking to them about the situation, telling them it was wrong; neither would there be any consequences, or anything*" (**Cemone, year 10**).

If incidents of racism in school are left unresolved, this reinforces the dominant structural position of race, in the school discourse, this undermines Black Caribbean girls' sense of being valued, affecting their self-worth. In a study on how school discrimination and disciplinary inequities shape Black adolescent boys' and girls' adjustment, among their findings, Cooper et al. argue that 'systemic discrimination may contribute to fleeting motivation and decreased engagement among Black students and declining school satisfaction may be linked to the awareness of inequality and personal experiences of school discrimination' (Cooper et al., 2022:184).

Strategies to combat institutional racism are rarely discussed in the school discourse, which can be submerged under the rhetoric of the post-racial society. In chapter three, I argued that the post-racial society and its ideology of neoliberalism and meritocracy, work against CRT. However, what has emerged is a new racism. Speaking of neoliberalism, in an article in the Guardian in 2011, Stuart Hall argued 'Today, just as it heralds the end of public services, the end of the welfare state and the end of state-led 'social engineering', it proclaims 'the end of race' as well' (Hall, 2011 in Redclift, 2014: 577). In her article, '*New Racisms, New Racial Subjects*? Redclift refers to a 'neo-liberal fantasy that sanitizes the formative and continued role of racism in shaping unequal access to social and material goods', one which,

‘uncover[s] attempts to airbrush race from existence while re-inscribing its borders and legislating its pathologizing effects’ (Redclift, 2014: 588). Race and racism have been displaced within politics for several years, in the UK and globally (Redclift, 2014; Bhopal, 2018). The remnants of which, leaves few opportunities to proclaim whether racism has occurred, for the society has censored any such talk, with the post-racial momentum and meritocratic values. For Black Caribbean girls, the opportunities to challenge institutional racism are few and far between. Like their equals twenty years ago in the schools I worked in during the New Labour era, they are silenced. The UK racial and ethnic landscape in UK is remains historically unsettled, however, it is now more coded, more nuanced and more oblique (Redclift, 2014).

In the review of literature, of the few studies on Black girls in schools, Fuller noted that Black girls showed a ‘sophisticated understanding of Whites and their authority’ (Fuller, 1980: 62). In an attempt to overcome the oppressive school structures, Fuller argues, the Black girls adopted a ‘strategic political stand’ in response to White authority (Fuller, 1980), which is also illustrated in appendix 1. This phenomenon can also be understood from the extract by Savannah, who explains how she and other Black girls chose to deal with the racist incidents in her selective girls’ school:

“*All of us… I think, after like a few Black issues have been happening, we like, formed a group, kind of like talking about it closely. It makes us all feel better when we talk about the issues that we face and obviously, we all know, like between us, it’s a common issue, so we'll just have to work harder in general, and so I guess, in that sense, we're all on the same page about that*” (**Savannah, year 11**).

There is a suggestion by Cooper et al., that ‘as students become increasingly aware of their social position within the school setting, their school satisfaction may be

influenced by their racialized experiences within the classroom and in their interactions with school staff' (Cooper et al., 2022: 184). However, Savannah and the action of her peers to form a support group to discuss their feelings, emphasises the determination in which Black Caribbean girls have, to overcome racism which she experiences, within the school discourse. Within this extract, Savannah alludes to, 'working harder'. This was repeated by many of the participants who shared that it was commonly understood, that as a Black Caribbean female, they have to work harder than their White peers if they want to achieve academic success.

Institutional racism can also have a profound effect on the discipline outcomes for Black Caribbean girls. These include, but are not limited to, the social environment, student autonomy, teacher involvement and the structural climate (Griffin, 2020). In chapter two, empirical studies showed that Black girls suffer harsher punishments than their White peers. Examples of which, featured in media reports, such as Child Q, suggesting links with racism. Furthermore, recent statistics show that Black boys and girls are twice as likely to be excluded from schools, when compared with their White counterparts (Permanent Exclusions: 2022).

During the interviews, all participants shared their experiences of harsher school discipline, either as an observer or one who has been punished. Black Caribbean girls are experiencing harsher punishments in secondary schools in England, as can be derived from Taylor's extract:

"*I'd say, the Black girls, they're more like curvier than like the rest of the other girls at our school, and [White girls] like, get away with their skirts that's really high, and like, they get away with a lot more stuff than Black girls. I've seen like' White students, they mouth off at the teachers and they'll just get a warning, but then, like, if I was to*

like express how I felt, they'd be like, it's either you pull it down or you just go in isolation…I feel like [teachers] jump to punishment a lot more when it comes to like me. I just don't understand why it's different, because we're all the same really. Like, in my school, there's like, five Black girls in my year and we all have to be careful what we say, whereas, White people, they can just say whatever they want" (**Taylor, year 10**).

Cooper et al., suggests, Black children recognise their experiences of school discipline are unique to them (Cooper et al., 2022). Evidently, in Taylor's narrative, she draws contrasts with her White peers. Intersectionality recognises that Black girls are marginalised because of their race, class and gender, which leads to discriminatory practices. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 2, Phoenix asserts, that Black and White children occupy different societal positions (Phoenix, 1997). It is the positionality of the triple oppression which situates Black Caribbean girls in the lowest rung of society and within the school context. Unconsciously, Black Caribbean girl develops an awareness of the unjust punishments when compared with White female peers.

Black students regard school discipline as a control mechanism that represents larger, structural and ideological practices, which have their foundations in anti-Blackness (Bell, 2020). Taylor's extract also suggests that Black Caribbean girls are silenced by the structural racial discourse so as to not receive harsher punishments. This can be understood when Taylor refers to Black girls as 'hav[ing] to be careful what we say'. A Black Caribbean girl's marginalised position leaves her vulnerable to oppressive attacks, which are heavy handed repercussions for minor misdemeanour's, during the school day.

Black Caribbean girls are discontent with these social and racial injustices. Participants' narratives support the notion that teachers are less likely to punish their White peers who inflict negative behaviours on Black students. Asia describes this in her narrative

"*Like, even any situation that we're in, if it was like someone else [who] was in the wrong and we [Black students] wasn't in the wrong, it will be like, 'I can't promise you anything, like, with their punishment'; but, if it was the other way around, we [Black pupils] was in the wrong, it will be quick for us to get a punishment. That's what I mean, not treating situations fair like. It's very clear, and, like, when we speak up to it, we get put as aggressive or very forward, and like, have no manners, but it's not that. We can see what's going on. We're not little kids, so we have an opinion on it. We should have the right to say*" (**Asia, year 10**).

Asia expresses frustration with the racial injustices and the way in which teacher's urgency to award punishments to White peers is not prioritised as it is for Black students. What is also apparent is Asia's awareness of discriminatory behaviour, which she describes as 'not treating situations fair' and stating that 'We can see what's going on'. Asia warrants that she 'should have the right to speak say', which is, to detest the injustices, however, similar to the sentiments with Taylor's extract, yet again, the safer option is silence.

Harsher punishments experienced by Black Caribbean girls have social, emotional and academic consequences, which can affect their future trajectory, long after leaving school (Crenshaw, et al, 2015). Black Caribbean girls' daily occurrences of racial injustices and harsher punishments can be associated with poor student behaviour, decreased academic performance, decreased school engagement and is detrimental to their mental health. Furthermore, Black youths' perceptions about

disproportionate disciplinary practices and school-based discrimination experiences have crucial implications to their academic and psychological outcomes which give rise to educational disparities and negatively impact the achievement gap (Morris and Perry, 2016; Cooper et al., 2022).

During their school experience Black Caribbean girls are silenced and incidents of racism have a numbing effect. As Black Caribbean girls mature through the year groups, the narratives illuminate the phenomenon that they become more and more silent in order to withstand further consequences. This is evident when comparing Nia's response to incidents in school, who is in year 8, with that of Aliya's response, who is in year 11. Both participants are educated in schools in Yorkshire:

(Nia, year 8)

"Let's say, if the Asians or Blacks were being really rude to the teacher. The teacher would put on call and get a member of the SLT (Senior Leadership Team), and they will take us out the lesson but if it was a white person they wouldn't give them no negatives, no code, they would just say okay, just chill out."

"They'll just pick every little thing that you're doing, and they'll start shouting at you or something and let's say it a white person does every little thing that you're doing, they will literally, completely act like they're blind".

(Aliya, year 11).

"Nine out of ten, I'd just agree to keep the peace without being confrontational or make a problem where it didn't exactly need to be"

Whilst several participants shared their dissatisfaction with the presence of racial inequality, in regard to the distribution of punishments, two participants alluded to the response of the school to silence the matter quickly, in an attempt to manage the

school's reputation. Alexis noted her school's urgency to handle a racist matter which happened on social media by students at her school, at a time when the school was preparing to apply for an anti-racism award.

"…*that's why the anti-racist award was a slap in the face for me, because I was a bit like, you're trying to do all this now, but you're still not tackling the real issue*" (**Alexis, year 11**).

Using the lens of interest convergence, a tenet of CRT, according to Alexis's narrative, the school's attempt to silence the racist issue, was not the purpose of resolving the conflict on behalf of Black students in their school, but instead, served the purpose only to promote the self-interest of the school leaders rather than from an inert desire to help Black students (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012).

Black Caribbean girls are always reminded of their positionality, even at the most vulnerable moments in their school experiences. They are victimised by peers and demoralised by the neglectful response of teachers. Where teachers appear nonchalant concerning punishments for White peers, this stance is soon retracted to a hasty course of action if Black Caribbean girls should fail to comply with school rules. This phenomenon leaves Black Caribbean girls with no room for error. Even their childhood is compromised as they are under the surveillance of teachers who are ready to 'jump to punishments', as denoted by Taylor. I argue that Black Caribbean girls have to grow up quickly in the school discourse as childish behaviour is quickly disapproved and punished. The media report of Child Q, discussed in chapter two, suggests that Black girls are adultified (Gamble and McCallum, 2022:34; Crew 2022), which puts them at risk of harsher punishments. The intersectional position of a Black Caribbean girl needs careful consideration to prevent further

instances of harsh punishment and risk, at the hands of adults who are responsible for keeping her safe.

Peer Relationships

Participants described their relationships with their peers in school. These are the students who they spend most of their free time with during school, such as break and lunch. All participants shared a commonality that their friendship groups comprised of students who were other Black girls. Leath et al., argues, 'young [Black] women's ongoing negotiation of racialized and gendered school norms influenced their sense of closeness with same-race and interracial peers' (Leath et al., 2021b: 35). Black Caribbean girls in secondary schools reach a period within their development when they become more aware of their social and racial identity, and that of their teachers and peers. This impacts their choice of whom they choose to interact with. Black Caribbean girl's friendships are, therefore, influenced by their beliefs, values and common expectations around race (Leath et.al., 2021b; Hoffman et al., 2019; Neal-Jackson, 2018; Tatum, 2017; Byrd, 2015; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2010). Black Caribbean girls form peer groups and friendships with individuals who they perceive to be in a similar race, gender and class as themselves. Cemone explains this in her narrative:

"My friendship group is like many people of colour…I only like, hang around with like people of color and that's most of the girls of colour in my whole year group, so it's like everyone else who is not either White or Asian… there's a limited amount of people of color and most of them are in my friendship group. I say like, we like stick together and that they do their own thing. We do different things; we are not the

same in a way because we don't do things that they would do. Like, we are our own people. I mean that we sort of separate ourselves from other people. They don't really understand us. Like, they asked where we come from and that's because, like, school is in a predominantly White area. It's like …we've come along and then, like, we've been sort of introduced to them and, like, they don't know what to do with us. So, I feel like we all sort of gravitated towards each other. Like, we are different from other people basically" (**Cemone, year 10***).*

Cemone's narrative demonstrates a connectedness on the grounds of race, which she defines as different to other peers from White backgrounds in her school. Furthermore, Cemone recognises feelings of racial disharmony from her White peers who have enquired as to where the Black students in their school have come from. Black Caribbean girls experience social isolation and ostracization in when they attempt to form friendships with White peers in predominantly White schools (Clark, 1989; Leath et al., 2021b). Similarly, Fuller reported findings from her study of a sub-culture which she suggested was as a result of the girl's 'positive acceptance of being both Black and female and stemmed from their critical rejection' of how their race and gender is perceived in the school discourse (Fuller,1980: 57). It was these 'understandings' that Fuller suggests, 'gave particular meaning to their achievement of educational qualifications (Fuller, 1980: 57). Black Caribbean girls use friendships as a system of support as their presence in the school environment is an encouragement and a defence from the oppressive, discriminatory practices that prevail and confront her on an everyday basis, because of her race and gender. Yip et al. argue, same-race relationships experienced by Black girls also promotes positive self-regard (Yip et al., 2010). The saying of 'strength in numbers' is actualised in a literal sense by Black Caribbean girls. This comes at a cost, as

participants explained the discontent from teachers when socialising in a friendship group with other Black peers. Several participants alluded to teachers' responding negatively to their friendship group during their free time, including raised voices and being intimidated. Alyssa explains how teachers at her school respond:

"W*hen there is a big group of Black people in the corridors and we're loud but we're not doing anything, the teachers come running, like, what's going on? what's going on? But, like, because the school is mainly White and the kids are all shouting, the teachers are used to them and they don't really say nothing"* (***Alyssa, year 10***).

Alyssa draws comparisons with her teachers' reaction to Black pupils in comparison to her White peers. Black Caribbean girls are confronted with oppressive experiences in the classroom and during their down-time, within the school day. Forming friendships with other peers of the same race and gender add another nuance to receiving unwanted attention from teachers who become aggravated by their friendship connection. Concurrently, Leath et al. argue, 'Black students often receive discriminatory school-based messages about their racial group membership that can undermine their sense of school belonging and social connectedness' (Leath et al., 2021b: 35).

Secondary schools in England should strive to build a positive ethos of diversity amongst peers so that Black Caribbean girls can build friendships with peers of all backgrounds. However, where a Black Caribbean girl favours same-race friendships, rather than being perceived as a threat, teachers should award Black Caribbean girls the space within a safe and welcoming environment to be themselves.

Girls are ‘Weak’

Chaudhury et al. defines misogyny as ‘hatred towards women’, which can present itself in several ways, such as, male privilege, patriarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, belittling of women, violence against women, and sexual objectification (Chaudhury et al., 2077: 111). Women and girls of all backgrounds can become victim to misogynistic behaviours in all environments, including the workplace, home and in school (Cloke, 2021). As discussed in chapter 2, Black Caribbean girls experience misogynistic behaviour, which is described as Misogynoir, when directed at Black girls and women (Leath et al.,2021).

During the interviews, a quarter of the participants shared their experiences of misogynistic behaviour during the school day, such as that described by Alexis:

“*I know that many just saw the girls as objects, basically, like the boys. They saw the girls as objects…or as weak…Like, what I mean by object is like, so, an instance would happen in the school where [the boys] will be like...’look at that girl over there, look at her skirt and I would get her to do this’…I remember one of the boys in our youth group and he basically sexually assaulted one of the girls and he was like, touching her up in the middle of PE and they brought it to the teacher. Obviously, he went to isolation and nothing else. The issue wasn't tackled properly or effectively…, In actual fact, he should have been excluded for sexually harassing the girls*” (**Alexis, year 11**).

Alexis draws attention to the issue not being addressed effectively by teachers, and inappropriate punishments given to the perpetrator. What is not known, is whether the victim received any support from the school, for her ordeal. The school has a responsibility to deal with incidents of sexual harassment swiftly and appropriately, in order to make the school environment a safe space for Black Caribbean girls to learn.

Teachers can also be at the centre of the misogynistic behaviour. This is illustrated in Taylor's extract earlier in this chapter, where she refers to Black girls receiving harsher punishments for uniform irregularities, when compared to their White peers, due to their curvier bodies. Black Caribbean girls are sexualised during their school experience, which adds to the oppressive, discriminatory environment of their secondary school (Crenshaw et.al., 2015).

As discussed in chapter two, the echoes of the #MeToo movement and the recent media attention on the Black school girl named Child Q, has highlighted that misogynoir is a menace for young girls which is becoming associated with the school discourse. This suggests the learning environment to be toxic, intimidating and unsafe and actions to deal with such incidents are deemed ineffective. When Black Caribbean girls experience the lack of support from teachers for misogynistic assaults, they may be dissuaded from reporting these incidents in future.

This comes at a time, when the UK government are debating the move to make misogyny a hate crime. Hate crimes include offences against an individual such as 'assault, harassment or criminal damage and, if it is proven that it was because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender identity, it is considered a hate crime. A hate crime which falls into these categories provides judges with 'enhanced powers' to award tougher sentences (Scott, 2021). Women in the UK, including campaigners and politicians, are voicing their concerns over the need for tougher sentences and increased punishments of misogynistic offences and in a BBC News article, they are lobbying politicians for sex and gender to be added to the list of Hate crimes, arguing misogyny is one of the "root causes" of violence against women (Scott, 2021).

From an intersectional lens, misogynoir discriminates against the dissections of sex and gender of Black Caribbean girls in school. Acts of misogyny are not prioritised in school behavioural policies, neither does it feature as a topic for discussion in the programme of study for the national curriculum's Citizenship core subject (GOV.UK, 2022b). Discriminatory practices on the grounds of race, sex and gender, promote oppressive environments for Black Caribbean girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Crenshaw, 1991; Leath et al.' 2021). Notwithstanding, the emotional distress this can cause, long after the girl has left school (Leath, et al., 2021). As Black Caribbean girls are polarised and the participants narratives suggests their concerns in the school day are given very little attention, it is imperative that experiences of misogyny are tackled to avoid the long term effects this can inflict, whether this is acted on or not, leaving the girl disengaged from her pursuit of educational and achievement goals.

The extract from Alexis exposes that misogyny is affecting the school experience of Black Caribbean girls in school. Her narrative suggests more care needs to be taken by secondary school leaders to safeguard girls appropriately and measures put in place to prevent this behaviour. It appears that boys are not appropriately punished for their misogynistic behaviours in the secondary school. Concurrently, in a Misogyny Hate Crime Evaluation Report, published by the University of Nottingham in 2018 following the launch of Nottinghamshire Police's Misogyny Hate Crime policy in 2016, findings suggest that, of the 174 women who reported Misogyny Hate Crimes from April 2016 - March 2018, the total number of perpetrators who were actually convicted was one (Mullany and Trickett, 2018). The lack of attention given to misogyny is more than a school issue, it is a national and societal issue which demands the urgent attention of policymakers and researchers alike.

There is a critical onus placed on secondary schools in England, to ensure school is a safe place for girls to learn, as well as Black Caribbean girls' future employers, to ensure the workplace which she secures her career, is free from misogynistic practices. The current lobbying of politicians and campaigners provide miserly droplets of hope that perpetrators will be punished accordingly in schools and within the wider society, making school a safe space for all females. Additionally, schools have a responsibility to guide boys to become responsible young men, who evade such behaviours and to receive appropriate punishments if they treat all females, including Black Caribbean girls, in a misogynistic way, including restorative programmes. Scholars also appeal for teachers to 'play a key role in transforming schools into supportive spaces by dismantling the types of educational practices that harm Black girls' learning and development' (Leath et al, 2021b; Annamma, 2015; Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010).

Gendered Academic Support: Boys Favoured Over Girls

In chapter two, literature revealed that the gender gap was more evident in writing, with girls being twice as likely to score more than boys in literature-based subjects (Skelton and Francis, 2011). I argued that this phenomenon presents Black Caribbean girls as successful when comparing them to failing boys, especially where class is a factor. It is only when you compare Black Caribbean girls with other girls by ethnicity, that the true picture of underachievement is exposed. As Black Caribbean girls are one of the lowest achievers of English and Maths at grade 5 or above, when compared with other girls by ethnicity (see appendix 2), it would be pertinent to assume that the attainment of core subjects, such as English and Mathematics, were

made a primary focus for underachieving groups, such as Black Caribbean girls, in all English secondary schools. This was the case in my early career during the era of New Labour, as alluded to in chapter two, when Black children were offered additional academic support and several interventions were created, to increase the opportunity for their success. However, all participants explained that Black Caribbean girls were not given adequate support to achieve core subjects, including single sex schools. Instead, some participants described that boys were favoured over girls for extra support. Tiara describes the attention that boys received in her school when compared to girls:

"*I think that they give boys special attention, and they do kind of more for the boys. When you asked me, 'Is there anything they do for only girls?', I said no, there is things they do for only boys. So, they took a group of boys out like, to a swimming event and they [attend] Power of Literature for Lads, on a Friday, where they like, help them with their English literature…So, I definitely think that they…shine the light on the boys, in our school" (**Tiara, year 11**).*

Intersectionality highlights discrimination where race, class and gender are the oppressive factors (Crenshaw, 1991). The prioritising of one gender over the other, signals discriminatory practices in the school environment, especially when there is evidently, data pertaining to the fact that Black Caribbean girls, historically lag behind their female counterparts (see appendix 2 – 3). The participants show an awareness of their positionality in relation to gender inequality in school, which has rendered some of them to take action. In her narrative, Kayla explained the action she took, when she recognised the disparity in academic interventions, between boys and girls at her school:

“Like I'm not saying that we don't get any opportunities, but I'm saying that [boys] get more; just, based on the fact, because they’re boys and it's just always been like that. That's not fair to me because I’ve had to go up to the teacher and say, hey, can I do this, too? I just see like, in life, just in general…the entire patriarchy thing. I just see them been given more respect and women just kind of pushed away and not like, getting the respect that they deserve” (**Kayla, year 9**).

Kayla’s response, like all the participants interviewed, highlight that as they transfer through the year groups, Black Caribbean girls develop an awareness of gender inequality in their school experience, which they also observe in the wider society. Kayla acts on her frustration when she approaches a teacher to ask whether she can participate in a boys’ club too, stating ‘That’s not fair’.

Although gender inequality is not limited to core subjects, such as English and Maths, Black Caribbean girls all described their determination to succeed in English, which proved popular when asked which subject was their favourite. This can be understood from Chanel’s extract:

“*I like English, and I feel like I'm good at it and my scores are good as well. I don't think I'm perfect at English at all because I still make mistakes every now and then, but I feel like I'm on my way to be really good*” (**Chanel, year 8**).

Despite its popularity among Black Caribbean girls, when asked how the school could help them to improve academically, among some of the responses, participants suggested being given; ‘extra time’, ‘more interventions’, ‘after school clubs’, ‘one-to-one learning’, ‘booster’ and ‘revision sessions’, ‘smaller groups’ and ‘online work’. From these narratives, it is implicit that there is still a deficit in what curricular and educational support is being offered to Black Caribbean girls compared to their male counterparts. Evidently, Black Caribbean girls are dissatisfied with the current state

of the support and intervention they receive in school, which is even more discriminatory when compared to that offered to boys, Participants describe the way in which they are required to work independently whilst the teachers' attention is directed at the other needs which arise in the school discourse.

"They could create a better environment in terms of, I feel that at times, they don't really give us the help that we need. It can almost feel very independent at times that we have to go and search the answers and find it for ourselves. It's sometimes good to be able to go to a teacher and have that extra information from them, or they put in the extra effort to put on…revision sessions or things like that to help" (**Tiara, year 11**).

Black Caribbean girls are left to work out their educational journey, independently, including those subjects that they find difficult to understand. The level of support in school is unequally balanced in the direction of boys, who are presented as victims, and girls, successful, when the narratives provide a different view. In chapter one, my experience in relation to mentoring Black girls was a consequence of their resistance to how the female body is predisposed to being motivated, focused and organised within the school discourse (Rollock, 2007). I am building on the study by Rollock who suggests that the Black girls' presence in a classroom is minimised, and their ethnicity has the negative visibility associated with Blackness (Rollock, 2007). Additionally, I argue, Black Caribbean girls' presence within school is gendered, racialised and concealed from academic support to support them to achieve educational success.

As a result, strategies of resistance emerge in order to make any gains of achieving academic qualifications. (Resistance will be discussed in the following chapter). Tiara's response, reveals her maturity in her school experience and highlights an

awakening of resistance, and describes the adjustment she has made mentally to overcome the discriminatory practices of gender inequality, which she is experiencing in secondary school:

"I think it actually motivates me to be better than the boys and to show the teachers that no, I can do this…I can be better than some of the boys, in fact" (**Tiara, year 11**).

The vehicle at the heart of the discontentment experienced by Black Caribbean girls is neoliberalism and meritocracy, which creates a society of winners and losers. Within the school discourse, gender plays a pivotal role in deciding who will factor at the top of the leader board. CRT critiques liberalism, suggesting it acts as a camouflage of neutrality, objectivity, colour-blindness and meritocracy (Gillborn, 2008), when, what Black Caribbean girls need is directed support to cater for her marginalised position in school and society at large. As alluded to in chapter 2, in both studies by Fuller (1980) and Mirza (1992), Black girls accept their positioning and develop a resistance to oppressive forces present within their everyday school experience. This phenomenon is also illustrated in appendix 1.

Gender inequality in the school discourse, is not limited to the classroom alone. Cemone describes that, uniform irregularities are less of an issue with boys, than they are with girls.

"The boys can basically wear things that they want. I say like they pick up on what the girls are looking like than what the boys are looking like. They care more about the appearance of the girls" (**Cemone, year 10**).

Similar to the programmes of intervention for Black pupils, alluded to in chapter 1, following the PLASC in 2001, schools should make the achievement of underachieving groups, a priority, including Black Caribbean girls, who are one of the

lowest achieving groups when compared by gender and ethnicity (see appendix 2 and 3). The government's focus on groups such as White working-class boys as stated in the CRED report (2021), the absence of clear definitive ethnicities to target as part of the £4Billion Levelling-Up Fund, and focus on boys' interventions over girls within schools, have all contributed to Black Caribbean girls embarking on their own independent educational path of success of resilience. (Resilience will be discussed in the following chapter). This is a journey without the necessary input of a specialist teacher to enable them to make sense of what they have learnt in the classroom. Furthermore, the focus on girls' misdemeanours rather than boys, sends a message that Black Caribbean girls' position in school is impeded with hypersensitive surveillance, which can affect her psychological state and affect her behaviour and social interaction with teachers.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

RQ2: What strategies do Black Caribbean girls employ to navigate their school experience?

In this chapter, I critically analyse the themes derived from the narratives of the sixteen participants from the semi-structured interviews, following data analysis (see Table 1 for participant information). I discuss the themes exploring the strategies which Black Caribbean girls employ during their educational experiences in secondary school, whilst referring to the literature review and the theoretical perspectives in earlier chapters.

Building on the studies of Fuller and Mirza, I discuss firstly, discuss the strategic drivers which are intrinsic enablers to executing Black Caribbean girls' strategies. Secondly, I will discuss the strategies which are employed by Black Caribbean girls in their school experience, whilst they occupy the marginal spaces within secondary schools, in England. This phenomenon was first highlighted by Fuller who observed a group of Black girls who refused to accept the facts of subordination, but instead, created their own strategy of 'going it alone' (Fuller, 1980, 64).

Strategic Drivers

It became evident from the participants narratives, that Black Caribbean girls gain inspiration from *Strategic drivers*. These are significant resources of support in which they gain momentum to grow their potential, which ultimately impacts their strategic direction. These strategic drivers are also enablers that provide support for Black Caribbean girls to deal with contextual disadvantages which neoliberal and

educational policy seeks to stigmatize and discredit. These include but are not limited to, lone parent families, the Strong Black Woman ideology and role models.

Lone Parent Families

At the beginning of each interview, the participants were asked a series of questions about their background, their role models and their career aspirations. From the responses, several participants lived in a single-parent home, headed by their mother (see Table 2). Notedly, the CRED report suggested there is high family breakdown amongst Black Caribbean young people. They reported that, in 2020, of the 2.9 million children growing up in lone parent families in the UK, 63% were Black Caribbean children. The CRED argue, reasons for lone families stems from 'cultural change relating to male responsibility, the welfare state and growing affluence making it possible to bring up children alone' (The report for CRED, 2021: 42). Following a discussion in the report on the negative outcomes of family breakdown, such as, children's worse educational performance, emotional development and adult mental health; the CRED made the following statement:

> '*To repeat: this is not about allocating blame, but simply pointing out that children require both time and resources, and that is more likely to be available when both parents play active roles in their upbringing. Governments cannot remain neutral here. We would urge the government to investigate this issue further and look at initiatives that prevent family breakdown*'.
>
> (The report for CRED, 2021: 41-42).

Steeped in meritocracy and the post-racial society rhetoric, the statement presents a picture of the UK government as a nanny state, which is accusing families of the problems they impute on society rather than seeking to support their needs. Although

mentioning ‘children’s worse educational performance’, the CRED presents no solutions including funding of additional the time and resources required for the high number of lone parent families, with the highest proportion being Black Caribbean. Instead, the CRED, confirming their stance not to remain neutral, suggest a focus of prevention of family breakdown, rather than to deal with the negative outcomes for children in society, thereby, putting the onus once again on the individual to fix the problems themselves. This reinforces individualism and the neoliberal deficit model (Loke, 2015; Bhopal, 2018), which means Black Caribbean girls will need to resolve any issues that arise from their structural differences, themselves. Black Caribbean girls who are from lone parent families are deemed as being in deficit. Educational and neoliberal policies present Black youth and those of other ethnicities, as broken and need saving (Lipman, 2011). Socially constructed deficit may award Black youth with labels describing their societal challenges as ‘culturally deprived’, ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘at risk’ (Baldridge, 201: 441). Instead of meeting their educational needs, the educational discourse and neoliberal political rhetoric fails to focus on the intersectional needs of Black Caribbean boys and girls, but seeks to fill the deficit with a ‘support for families review’ (The report for CRED, 2021). This can be translated through the stereotype that, Black Caribbean girls’ in lone parent families are deemed in education policies to be *broken* and have been denied the additional support, time and resources from the UK government, who have failed to recognise them in educational policies. Policymakers have failed Black Caribbean girls from lone parent families by ignoring their social challenges.

Despite the negative stereotype, Black Caribbean girls from lone parent families have high aspirations and draw strength from their single parents and other adults within

their social network. Taylor, who lived in a home headed by a single mother, evidences this phenomenon in her narrative, as she describes her ambition:

> *"I want to be anything to do with healthcare like a Child Nurse or Paediatrician, something along those lines. I want to work with kids."*

When asked, what or who has influenced her choice. Taylor replied:

> *"My mom and grandma. They both work for the NHS…" (**Taylor, year 10**).*

The Strong Black Woman

During interviews, the narratives from the participants were synonymous with a 'can do' attitude which they credited to the inspiration of a Black female role model in their life. The traits of which, symbolised the ideology of the Strong Black Woman. Black women and Black mothers are often described as a Strong Black Woman. This is often conceptualised through five characteristics; 'independent; taking care of family and others, hardworking, high achieving, overcoming adversity and emotionally contained' (Ayee et al., 2019). The participants explained in their narratives, how they sought empowerment and inner strength from the familial examples of Black women in their families and wider community. When asked about their role models, two participants said Former First Lady, Michelle Obama, while several of the participants mentioned female family members including their mother, grandmother, sister and aunty. This can be seen in Taylor and Kayla's extracts:

"*My mum, because she's really strong like she does everything by herself and I want to be like that. I want to be able to just get it done*" (**Taylor, year 10**).

"*My sister, I would say, is my biggest role model. She's just always been the person who's like…that's what my standard is, so I need to go above and beyond that:*

number one. She has always been my role model because she is hard working, she's determined, she got what she wanted, she strives to be her best at all times and she works so hard in everything she does, which is like amazing to me" (**Kayla, year 9**).

Kayla's narrative describes a hard working female who embodies all the elements of a 'Strong Black Woman' (Watson and Hunter, 2015; Walker-Barnes, 2015). The characteristics listed by Kayla, suggests her sister works hard to achieve her goals in life, which has not gone unnoticed by her younger sibling, and who has been influenced by her actions. Kayla has internalised that if she works as hard as her sister does, then she will achieve her 'goals in life'. Additionally, Taylor uses the word strong to describe her mother.

Taylor and Kayla's enthusiasm to emulate their role models were echoed by several participants who desired to reproduce the same focus and strategy which they have seen demonstrated by 'Strong Black Women' in their lives. This is explained by Jasmine and Alyssa.

Jasmine explains, why her mother is her role model:

"*Because I want to carry on in her steps"* (***Jasmine, year 8***).

Alyssa describes how her mother and aunty inspires her:

"*Because if I look up to them it will make me want to push myself to be like them*" (**Alyssa, year 10**)

Those participants who described Michelle Obama as their influential role model were also selecting a woman who was globally renowned for her hard work. Ayee et al. argue, 'Perceptions of [former First Lady], Michelle Obama were deeply steeped within the context of the four dominant and oppressive stereotypes of black women in the United States: mammy, matriarch, welfare queen, and sexual siren (Ayee et al.,

2019). Stereotypes of which, are described as products of ‘white supremacy and its connection to the patriarchal oppression of black womanhood since slavery’ (Ayee, et al., 2019: 461). The essence of intersectionality along with and Black Feminist Thought, have sought to control negative images of Black women through exposing the multi-facets of a Black female and the various ways in which she is discriminated against and oppressed. In response, Ayee et al. posit, Michelle Obama countered the ‘oppressive and controlling images’ by her ‘presentation of self’ and her ‘unrelenting work’ (Ayee, et al., 2019: 461). This suggests that strength is used as a mechanism to overcome oppression forces from societal dominant structures.

Black women are often referred to as strong, which is a notion which emanated from the civil rights era when Black female slaves were perceived exude strength is handling manual tasks (Walker-Barnes, 2015). From an intersectional lens, strong Black women are created by the systems of oppression which permeates from racialised and gendered performances by societal dominant structures. Black women and girls are working harder than their White counterparts, in the workplace and in their home (Crenshaw, 2000). Concurrently, Crenshaw argues, ‘Black women have traditionally worked outside the home in numbers far exceeding the labour participation rate of White women’ (Crenshaw, 2000: 222). This is exacerbated by neoliberal policymaking that forces those Black women who are in positions of patriarchy, heading a household, to work their way out of the disadvantages which a marginalised position enfolds. CRT recognises the unfairness of neoliberalism and the myth of equality of opportunities that a Black female is presented with. This leads to the new forms of racism, alluded to in chapter two, hidden in the rhetoric of the post-racial society.

The bearing this has on Black Caribbean girls is that the Strong Black Woman in their family or community, is merely demonstrating the struggle that Black women are subjected to in order to achieve their goals. This 'emotional resilience' (Walker-Barnes, 2015) is interpreted by the participants, as the necessary approach they need to take in order to achieve.

The Strategy of Resistance

CRT embellishes a strategy of resistance against racial oppression, which is discussed in chapter three. Accordingly, Bell renders the following reassurance to people of colour 'We must realize, as our slave forebears did, that the struggle for freedom is, at bottom, a manifestation of our humanity which survives and grows stronger through resistance to oppression, even if that oppression is never overcome (Bell 1990 cited in Taylor, 2016: 9). CRT utilises resistance, not as a cure for oppression, but as a tactic of warfare against racism, which informs the enemy of being fearless. Furthermore, Taylor describes resistance as 'the refusal to remain silent, in and of itself, that gives strength and empowerment in a society determined to cling established habits of repression' (Taylor, 2016: 9).

'Black Girl Voice'

When interviewing the sixteen participants, it became evident that Black Caribbean girls demonstrate resistance. This was a prominent feature of all participants across different years groups, however, the younger the participants were, the more likelihood that they would be disciplined by teachers for exclaiming an injustice had occurred. As the participants matured in their school year groups, the action of using

their voice became more equated with having conversations with leadership or being proactive. In their narratives, nearly all participants described how they use their voice to challenge injustices within the school discourse; a phenomenon of which, I have termed, 'Black Girl Voice'. This can be understood from Chanel's extract, where she explains how important using your voice is in school.

"*Teachers know I like to challenge them, and they understand it's like, in an educated way, so there's nothing wrong with it*. *I find that very important for a lot of people, especially during these days, because if you don't challenge something that you're not happy with, you can just go through life not being happy…The voice is not being heard and I find it important for people's voices to be heard. I always have. I used to do that in primary school. I used to be an Ambassador for things because I find it important for voices to be heard*" (**Chanel, year 8**).

Chanel equates using her voice as a solution to happiness. For Black Caribbean girls, the voice presents a way to alleviate the burden of oppression and acts as a form of resistance to challenge the status quo. As alluded to, CRT, does not suggest resistance will alleviate the oppression but it will counter some of the oppressive instances that a person of colour experiences. Chanel's experience as an Ambassador in her primary school provided her with an opportunity to use her voice to challenge injustices. This sentiment was echoed by other participants, including Destiny, who strategically secured a position as Head Girl in her school, as she explains:

"*I think, because I was in a position where I had like, a say with things that happened in my group, I think [teachers] knew they had to…involve me, for the sake of it…I was Head Girl"* (**Destiny, year 11**).

Destiny explained that she strategically positioned herself for the role of Head Girl from year 7, although the role would not be advertised until she came to the end of year 10.

"W*hen I got to school in year seven, I was always like talking about how much I like sharing my opinions and how things could be changed, like helping other people…so they knew from then, [that] I…was passionate about*" (**Destiny, year 11**).

Black Caribbean girls position themselves as activists against the oppressive structures and systems that exist in school. They use the system which seeks to work against them, to triumph over oppression. Taylor suggests, acts of resistance may 'give voice to otherwise unspoken realities' (Taylor, 2016: 9). This is evident in the narratives from the participants who described being strategic, in looking for opportunities to use their voice to challenge injustices, such as Destiny and Chanel's leadership roles (although Chanel did not find a similar opportunity in her secondary school). In addition, Destiny alludes to teachers having to involve her 'for the sake of it', as she understood the rights of resistance, that the Head Girl role would afford her, in her final year at school. Taylor suggests, from a CRT perspective, for those engaged in overcoming injustice, they will gain momentum from the source of affirmation which the sense of futility brings (Taylor, 2016: 9). However, there are those participants who remained sceptical about using utilising their voice as an act of resistance, having endured negative experiences as a consequence. This can be seen in Asia's narrative:

"It just depends on like, the teacher, because some people can cope with it. Like, some people can just sit back and like, not say anything at all, and just get on with the day but it just depends [on] who you are around and what teacher you're having. Like, even…like, the way how I speak like. I hate when people say like, I'm trying to

*pick up an argument with them. Like, it's just how I speak and it's just how I am. Like,… I have this one teacher that tries to manipulate you like, and change it around, or try and say this, or put words in your mouth and he just makes it worse. Like, I'm not gonna sit there and just see something in front of my eyes and just sit with it because that's not me, yea*h" (**Asia, year 10**).

Asia's narrative signals that she is not deterred by the teacher's reaction, but she is aware that her voice is not always well received. She refers to other girls as being able to 'cope with it', whereas her voice is used as a defence mechanism. Asia's experience mirrors the girls whom I mentored in school, as discussed in chapter two. When Black Caribbean girls are outspoken, they can be deemed as 'raising their heads' and find themselves being subject to punishment, as a result. Black Caribbean girls are more than twice as likely to be excluded from school or susceptible to receive harsher punishment from their school, when compared with their White peers (Permanent exclusions, 2022). Therefore, Black Caribbean girls are aware that the decision to use their voice to challenge injustices can result in receiving adverse disciplinary measures. This instilled some precaution in some participants, such as in Kayla's, which is evident in her extract:

"*Sometimes, I think I'm not even gonna try and like argue with the teachers…because I already know I'm going to get into trouble. I mean…if I see something wrong like, if it was an injustice happening like, I'm going to say something like, in the most respectful manner possible because I don't want to get a correction. That's like the entire thing, I don't want to get a detention*" (**Kayla, year 9**).

The fear of punishment lies heavily on some participants. Having a detention or worse, could affect the Black Caribbean girl's reputation in class or in the wider school, and comes with a notification to parents to alert them of their child's date and time of detainment, which is usually after school hours. If school alerts parents for

disciplinary matters, this may trigger a sense of failure for Black Caribbean girls. This can be understood from Alexis's extract:

"*Our parents always tell us from a young age like, don't mess around when it comes to school. 'So, when you go to school, you know what I send you to school for, so I don't want to hear of, Alexis been doing this, Alexis doing that, Alexis has been involved in this'; they just want to hear good things. So, [it's] because they know that if we don't like, basically succeed in our academic career, then life gets even more harder for us on the outside"* (**Alexis, year 11**).

The Role of Parents

Black Caribbean girls care deeply about and value education, as it is a powerful tool for liberation (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1994) and a vehicle which steers them towards social mobility. Encouragement from parents to do well also signals the need to steer away from disciplinary action from teachers. This is difficult for Black Caribbean girls to avoid, as they are susceptible to responding to the injustices of oppression which they experience in school on a daily basis. Using 'Black Girl Voice' which is a tool of resistance used to confront teachers, in an attempt to defend a marginalised position.

Alexis recalls her parents' advice, that without education, life will be tough on the outside. Similarly, in Mirza's study, Black girls derived much of their determination, which Mirza describes as 'getting on', from their parental orientation (Mirza, 1992: 178). Similar to Alexis's narrative, the participants describe their parents support as disciplinarians, who are integral to their beliefs and value systems. The voice as a strategy is utilised to ward off injustices which Black Caribbean girls experience in school. However, they must avoid, at all costs, the school contacting their parents to

discuss negative issues. Part of their resistance strategy suggests there should be no rebound to the family unit, which presents as a safe space for Black Caribbean girls. Sondre O'Neal 1986 cited in Collins (2000) denotes,

> '*Beyond the mask, in the ghetto of the black woman's community, in her family, and most importantly, in her psyche, is and has always been another world, a world in which she functions – sometimes in sorrow but more often in genuine joy…-by doing the things that normal black women do'*
>
> (Collins, 2000: 101).

Therefore, Black Caribbean girls will consider the consequences of negative behavioural reports to parents which informs how they exercise their strategies of resistance .

As illustrated in appendix 1, resistance forms part of the Black Caribbean girl's journey in school. Black Girl Voice is one of the ways in which Black Caribbean girls exercise their strategy of resistance, but it is a necessary step towards liberating oneself and the fight against racism. A sentiment that is reinforced by CRT scholar, Taylor, who deters activists 'not to remain silent' (Taylor, 2016: 9).

The Role of Mentors

Mentors can provide a supportive role for Black Caribbean girls, as in my role as a mentor, discussed in chapter one. In her narrative, Destiny explains how the role of a Black behavioural mentor was employed as a support mechanism for her friendship group of Black girls, to resist the recurrent racial issues which occurred during the school day:

"We had a new behaviour teacher…a Black teacher, and we would bring it up to him and he'd be like, 'you do realize like this is going to happen, so you just need to either deal with it and just wait, so you can get out', because he knew that he wasn't in a position where he could change it, and he said, 'rather than us trying to speak to someone else and then getting pushed down, just like not deal with it" (**Destiny, year 11**).

Destiny explained how the behaviour teacher's advice was received by the Black girls in her friendship group:

*"Like they would get really frustrated…crying in the room with the teacher, because when they get sent out of lesson, there was a room that he would be in and they would go to him and talk about it with him, and he could see how frustrated they were" (***Destiny, year 11***)*.

Destiny's narrative highlights the messages that a Black Caribbean girl is given, within the school day. When she expresses her frustration outwardly, she was deemed as poorly behaved and receive harsh punishments, as described in chapters two and five. The behaviour teacher presented the Black girls with a safe space to vent their frustration and cry. However, the teacher's approach in telling the girls that 'this is going to happen, so you just need to either deal with it and just wait until you get out', reinforces the position of a Strong Black Woman, who is able to cope under pressure without signalling any vulnerability. In this sense, Black Caribbean girls are adultified, by being expected to handle discriminatory practices in a mature manner, almost as an adult, to avoid harsher punishment or direct any unnecessary attention to themselves.

Schools need to identify an approach to working sensitively with Black Caribbean girls and show enthusiasm in attending to her concerns, whether they are of a racial or gendered nature. Although Destiny's school had recruited a Black member of staff

to handle behavioural issues, the Black girls saw his presence as a pillar of support and his office as safe space to cry and vent their frustrations. This was a strategic notion, which provided a source of respite from the oppressive school discourse. However, there was no action to resolve the concerns of the Black girls. Their position as year 11 students, who had only a few months in which, to attend the school, was emphasised as a solution to the racial incidents.

There are several schools which do not provide safe spaces or opportunities for Black Caribbean girls to express their concerns, which they experience on a daily basis. Schools need to take the emotional needs of Black Caribbean girls seriously. As failure to do so, can result in burn out or irreparable damage to her mental health and well-being, which she will carry throughout her educational and career trajectory. Alexis's narrative reveals that Black Caribbean girls are already encountering the effects of the Strong Black Woman ideology, as part of their school experience.

"I was like overworking myself basically and stressing out so much, I just became burned out and like, you could tell that I was just stressed, because I wasn't thinking about my mental state. All I was thinking about was academics, and then like, year 11. I was like, you can't do the same thing that you did [before] because you'll be burned out and you won't perform as you'd like. So, I just had to take that step back, relax and get on with it, but not to the point where I'm overworking myself" (**Alexis, year 11**).

When asked what factors had put pressure on her, Alexis provided the following response:

"I think it was myself and…the school, like. I think it was certain grades that they were predicting me, knowing full well, I was not going to get that. I had known for a while I could get above that. It was kind of like, they were trying to put a barrier in front of me

and I was like, right that's more pressure for you to exceed their expectation" (**Alexis, year 11**).

CRT posits that racism is hidden within the everyday structures of society and crafted within policies and systems of institutions and schools alike (Gillborn, 2008; Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Alexis felt the oppressive factors of low teacher expectations which was highlighted along with institutional racism in the, Rampton (1981), Swann (1985) and Macpherson (1999) reports. Teacher's low expectations were a factor of oppression for Alexis, which she described, led to 'becoming burned out', 'stressed' and not 'thinking about [her] mental state'. The low expectations presented as a 'barrier' to Alexis, which she admittedly stated that it contributed to 'more pressure'. Alexis's narrative provides more insight into the everyday struggle that Black Caribbean girls have in school which results in developing a strategy of strength and power, but reeling from the consequences that additional unwelcomed pressure brings.

The Strategy of Resilience

In chapters 2 and chapter 5, I have discussed both empirical evidence and findings detailing the educational dilemma's which face Black Caribbean girls on a daily basis, during their school experience. Experiences of which can contribute negatively to their academic attainment, which is a crucial aspect of legitimising the years they have spent in school. Referring to the statistical evidence on attainment (see appendix 2 and 3), Black Caribbean girls are in a fight for survival to keep up with their female counterparts. The question to be raised at this juncture is, how do Black Caribbean Girls still manage to achieve in the light of the adversities they face on the

grounds of race, gender and class? The answer lies in their strategy of resilience. Resilience in this context can be defined as, ‘the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity’ (Herman et al., 2011: 259). There are multiple sources and pathways to resilience, which often interact. These include ‘biological, psychological and dispositional attributes; social support and other attributes of social systems i.e., family, school, friends, and community’ (Herman et al., 2011: 259). Whilst resilience is presented as a strength of character, in the context of neoliberalism, resilience reinforces structural discrimination through individualism. This dilemma will be discussed throughout this chapter.

Individualism

Black Caribbean girls are carving out their own educational trajectory. From the interviews, a theme of individualism was apparent, where the participants described the agency that they inhabit in order to achieve their academic goals. Much of which takes place through the encouragement of their own network of support, which is usually separate from the school. Concurrently, Cochran-Smith and Fries posits, Black girls are fending for themselves in classrooms where they are mostly taught by White female middle class teachers, from family and economic backgrounds different from their own (Cochran-Smith and Fries, 2005). This phenomenon suggests, Black Caribbean girls are operating in an era of individualism, where the onus is on themselves to achieve. This comes as a result of educational policies that serve only to exclude ethnic minorities and suggest that if they fail, it is because they

themselves did not put the effort in. This is evident in Tiara's response when she discussed the support teachers could provide to help her to perform better:

"*[Teachers] could create a better environment… I feel that at times, they don't really give us the help that we need. It can almost feel very independent at times… we have to go and search the answers and find it for ourselves…Sometimes it's good to be able to go to a teacher and have that extra information from them, or they're putting in the extra effort to put on…revision sessions or things like that, to help us more*" (**Tiara, year 11**).

Tiara's response reveals her pursuit of self-learning to achieve. Her experience suggests that to do well in school, it is up to her, as an individual. Individualism is a symptom of neoliberalism and meritocracy, which was discussed in chapters one and three.

Neoliberalism and meritocratic policies do not consider Black Caribbean girls with an intersectional lens, and the triple axes of oppression that they face. Instead, both neoliberalism and meritocratic values advocate the deficit model (Bhopal, 2018). The deficit model approach infers these issues are ingrained within the individual students rather than within institutional culture (Loke, 2015; Bhopal, 2018). Therefore, when referring to the underachievement of Black Caribbean girls, English schools function within this paradigm, removing the responsibility for closing the achievement gaps (See appendix 2 and 3), with the student rather than as an institution at large or local authority. The deficit model approach is based on the assumption that it is more cost and time effective to change individuals rather than across an entire institution (Loke, 2015; Bhopal, 2018). This begs the question as to the level of responsibility in which the school and UK government place on educating Black Caribbean girls. The depth of input, be it financial, political or physical resources, that they have in her

educational trajectory is whittled down to miserly, bland, policies that seek to exclude, rather than include her with all her intersectional complexities. Furthermore, those policies, which, from a CRT perspective, provide limited equality of opportunity, thereby, placing the burden of social mobility on Black Caribbean girls to do this for themselves.

Working Twice as Hard

Black Caribbean girls in school are metaphorically, scavenging in the elite jungle of educational policies that provide no substance in which she can build her cultural capital. If Black Caribbean girls chose to accept the status quo and *chew off the bones* from left over educational policies that are entwined within the post-racial society rhetoric (discussed in chapter three), they would settle for a life in low waged jobs, in poor housing and struggling to make ends meet. The message this sends to Black Caribbean girls is, they will have to work twice as hard to achieve the equivalent of their White counterparts, which is evident in Savannah's extract:

"I feel like, obviously certain aspects of myself compared to other people, obviously in society; they kind of compare things more, so, I feel, like, I have to work a little bit harder than others to kind of achieve… I guess. Like the school that I go to and that environment, they definitely push us hard, so I know A levels will be stressful, but I definitely think I can do it. It's just like gender and race, if you get what I mean like. Sometimes people see like another person that may not work as hard. They may see them [to] fit more for the job so may offer [it to them]. Well, I know in finance, in particular. I know that's more of a male dominated role, and I guess…as time goes on, more females do it as well, and Business, again it's quite mixed, so I know I may not always be preferred for it, but obviously working hard, if it's on paper, I mean they

*can't not pick me…We know deep down, that we will have to work harder" (***Savannah, year 11***).*

Savannah's shows an awareness of intersectional discrimination on the grounds of oppressive, discriminatory practices which she has experience within the school discourse. Black Caribbean girls are aware of their positionality in a society that is dominated by the structural power of Whiteness. CRT suggests Whiteness provides a system of opportunities and benefits for White people, because they are White (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016) and it is that accumulation of opportunities that presents as privilege over minority groups. As Black Caribbean girls move through the school system, and graduate in age and year group, they develop a greater sense of awareness of White privilege and begin to chart their educational trajectory accordingly. Furthermore, the type of school can promote a sense of competitiveness to achieve. As can be read in Savannah's narrative when she states, '*if it's on paper, they can't not pick me*', she perceives that '*working hard*' and the acquisition of qualifications, will stand her in good stead, not to be refused for job roles in the future. Savannah attends a selective girl's school which she alludes to in her extract. The careful crafting of a successful trajectory can begin even before a Black Caribbean girl commences her secondary school experience. The type of school she attended, was often included in Savannah's responses, and she deemed it to form part of her success story, but this was not without its challenges, which Savannah describes below:

"*The pressures of going to a Grammar school is definitely…sometimes that competitiveness can be too much for girls at my school and mental health is like, one of the biggest problems at my school, by far. I mean, I could talk about that for a long time, but definitely mental health has been a struggle for girls. I think that's why*

*…their subjects drop because deep down, mental health is the problem, and they act out…as a coping mechanism…It's a shame to see …girls struggling with mental health and then letting their grades slip" (***Savannah, year 11***).*

Savannah's observations reveal her consciousness to avoid the pitfalls that the rhetoric of individualism can bring to Black Caribbean girls, instead, she uses her support system of family, friends and her community, to provide her with the spiritual, physical and emotional support and guidance that she needs to overcome.

Working Independently

Participants narratives explain that they are engaged in independent, additional home learning, to position themselves for success, which is explained in Savannah's narrative:

"Extra home learning…and…independent study and a lot of self-motivation, like pushing yourself but not getting overly stressed, but a little bit of pressure is good. Also, just like taking upon yourself…like, research things, so again, it really just comes down to you and kind of where you want to see yourself. And like I said, I have plans hopefully to do really well job wise, so having that at the back of my mind pushes me" (**Savannah, year 11**).

Savannah's extract exemplifies the emotional resilience and battling through oppression, which has typified the Strong Black Woman persona. Also evident is the level of independence she feels is important to ensue if she wants to achieve her plans of achieving her job prospects. When teachers and society reinforce the necessity for Black Caribbean girls to reiterate the power of the Strong Black Woman, they are confirming the struggle that she must demonstrate in order to overcome the triple oppression of race, class and gender which intersectionality exposes. Whilst

this strategy of strength is not all negative, Black Caribbean Girls can develop their self-worth through achieving their goals from their daily oppressive struggle within the school discourse. However, embarking on a mission of strength which plays out at home, and is reinforced in school and in the media, does come at a cost. Watson and Hunter (2015) argue that the Strong Black Woman can suffer from increased distress, emotion dysregulation and obesity (Watson and Hunter, 2015: 425). Black Caribbean girls who maintain this power and strength throughout her school and career trajectory can fall foul of poor mental health and well-being, as lifestyle factors are compromised in the pursuit of social mobility.

The implication of this phenomenon provokes the need for policymakers to rethink their current course of action in promoting neoliberalism and meritocracy by considering the affect this has on Black Caribbean girls. The unlevel playing fields seek only to illuminate social injustice and inequity, in favour of the dominant structures which prevail. The message what Black Caribbean girls receive from the emissions of the post-racial society is, to get by, they need to be independent, strong and rely on themselves. This was also a finding in Fuller's study when she describes the girl's adopting a programme of 'going it alone' (Fuller, 1980: 64) in order to create a better future for themselves and survive. Whilst Black Caribbean girls are developing the skills as a Strong Black Woman, their White female counterparts do not identify with this racialised struggle. This, in turn, presents their White female peers with a head start as they can utilise the distractions of oppression, which the Black Caribbean is presented with and her drive to be a Strong Black Woman, as an opportunity to extend more agency to get on and achieve.

Black Caribbean girls are one of the lowest achievers when comparing achievement by ethnicity and gender. As discussed in chapter 2, the data in appendix.2 and 3 reveals sizeable gaps when comparing achievement with her Chinese and White peers. In her educational pursuit as a Strong Black Woman, a Black Caribbean girl exerts strength and independence to battle against the tide of oppression and discriminatory factors, that weigh heavily on her, she forfeits the ability to focus on reaching her academic goals.

Schools should also provide additional support for Black Caribbean girls to compensate for the addition survival skills that her educational strategy entails when compared with her male and female peers of other ethnicities. Teachers should also be aware of the responsibility they have in reiterating the negative messages which society has of female patriarchy and strength. This racialised and gendered phenomenon puts Black Caribbean girls in a vulnerable position, which she tries her hardest to disguise. Tiara describes her observation of Black girls in her school who appear not to care about their educational path:

"*I think generally Black girls can seem [like] they don't care about school or their grades, but I don't think that's necessarily true. I think that's just the picture that's being painted by a mix actually; because the teachers can have a view already, before they even meet these girls, but the girls also kind of project this kind of facade that they don't care or they're bad girl*" (**Tiara, year 11**).

When asked, her thoughts on why Black girls appear this way, in her opinion, Tiara responded:

"*I guess trying to keep up with appearances like, keeping up with what's happening in this day and age, and not wanting to be called a Keeno. If you like school, it seems*

like a bad thing to [this] generation…I think that's what is in the back of their minds" (**Tiara, year 11**).

Tiara's observation highlights those findings from Fuller (1980) and Mirza (1992), in their studies. Fuller described the Black girls in her study adopting a stance that 'appearing to take school too seriously, risked the discovery of their academic and job ambitions and consequently invited ridicule' (Fuller, 1980: 60). This coincides with the avoidance of being called a 'Keeno', which describes 'an individual who expresses an unusual eagerness or enthusiasm to perform an action or task, usually considered undesirable' (Urban Dictionary, 2022). Thompson highlights how Strong Black women strive to maintain a façade of 'having it all together', which involves, exuding a calm and composed persona and depicts being in control irrespective of any level of suffering they might be experiencing (Thompson, 2000: 114). This is done, so as to avoid declaring signs of emotional vulnerability. Instead, this is masked with strength, control and coping under pressure (Thompson, 2000: 114).

This conundrum of masked vulnerabilities means that Black Caribbean girls exerting the Strong Black Woman ideology, will be inconspicuous in the classroom and wider school environment as her efforts will not be plain to see. Black Caribbean girls can exude a range of behaviours or even embrace invisibility, so that their inner-drive could be mistaken for nonchalance. Schools will need to prioritise the emotional needs of Black Caribbean girls and find innovative ways of deciphering her academic and emotional needs.

Support System

O'Connor argues that 'academically resilient Black girls are socialized to have a strong sense of racial identification and commitment to fighting against race, class and gender injustices at school, in the community, and in society overall' (O'Connor cited in Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010:13). This support system provides Black Caribbean girls with the foundation they need to be resilient and provides the battle talks and daily conversational briefings which prepare them for the oppression, they will face in the school discourse, and beyond (Evans-Winters & Esposito 2010; O'Connor, 1997; Nunn, 2016). Accordingly, Nunn posits, 'These characteristics serve as major tools for developing protective coping factors and transformative action against the ways in which racism, sexism, and classism manifest in school classrooms (Nunn, 2016). Parents form part of a Black girl's arsenal in her fight for justice. This can be understood from Alexis's extract, when she responded to a question on tiering:

"We didn't have sets in our school, they made it mixed learning. [We had] foundation [students] in higher [classes]. I was in higher for everything but there were certain times where I was having to question and think to myself, you need to ask the teacher if you can move seats, because if you don't move seats, you're not going to get any work done because you're wasting your time trying to help this person next to you that probably should be in a lower set because they're not grasping the work. Yeah, and I made sure that happened and obviously I spoke with my parents, because if they didn't listen to me, then they would have to listen to my parents. So, yeah, it was a case of me just doing what's best for me because, obviously, when people need help, course I'm going to help them if it's little things, but if you're constantly not knowing what to do and it's now affecting me then I'm going to have to make changes" (**Alexis, year 11**).

Alexis informed her parents of the school policy which was affecting her learning and on addressing it with the teacher. Alexis's extract demonstrates her willingness to have her parents confront the school if she was unsuccessful in resolving her issue. As illustrated in appendix 1, Black Caribbean girls rely on a support system, one that influences her beliefs and values throughout her educational journey, including her peers, which was discussed in chapter five, and her role models, including Michelle Obama.

In an online discussion with Black girls in a UK school in 2021, Michelle Obama provided the following description of resilience:

> *'Resilience is a muscle that we don't fully understand, which comes from practice, from pushing. Getting yourself into places that force you to grow and sticking with it. Every time you succeed, survive it, you earn another chip of resilience. Those chips build on each other, the more you do, the more able you are to survive it – the stronger you get, the more you understand the feeling of going through something difficult and instead of moving away from it, you relax into it and understand that this is the process of growth'*.
>
> (YouTube, 2021)

Black Caribbean girls are encouraged by these messages of strength and resilience from people in their lives who inspire them to believe in themselves and to survive tough times.

Faith and Community

Resilience is a mantra for many families and organisations in the Black community, including Black-led churches, which some participants attended. Along with family

and friends, faith and religion was a source of resilience for some Black Caribbean girls, which was evident Alexis's narrative, when asked what or who motivates her to achieve:

"*I'd say myself my parents, my friends and God. It helps me to stay motivated and determined and encourage[d], that I…have so much potential and those people around me allow me to realize that and strive for i*t" (**Alexis, year 11**).

When asked to describe how God helps to motivate her, Alexis responded:

"*Just having conversations with Him out loud and praying to him. And it just allows me to put my faith and trust in him*" (**Alexis, year 11**).

The participants social support systems which they described in the semi-structured interviews, are similar to the academic lives of the High Fliers, noted in Rhamie's study (Rhamie, 2007). Rhamie suggests, 'Within the community, the Black church provides opportunities for positive, confidence building interactions and experiences' (Rhamie, 2007:16).

Class

Individualism drives Black Caribbean girls to regard work ethic, ability and perseverance as the ingredients for social mobility. This is particularly difficult for Black Caribbean girls, where class is a factor of disadvantage. Intersectionality recognises the multi-faceted dimensions of a Black Caribbean girl, and encourages policymakers not to think of an individual in only one way, but to consider the challenges a Black girl may experience on the grounds of race, class, gender, religion, disability, sexuality, etc. In the literature review in chapter 2, I alluded to the inequalities in which a working-class Black Caribbean girl experiences when

compared with her White male and female peers. Educational policies which deal with social inequity as a result of class, are combined within the Pupil Premium Strategy (GOV.UK, 2022c). Pupil premium seeks to support children whose families are on low incomes. The paradox is, that for Black Caribbean girls, this offers little support as the annual funding of £985 is provided from the UK government to the school leader, for each eligible child. However, referring to the literature review, the education policy discourse in England is focused on highlighting White working-class boys as victims (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Gillborn et al., 2012; Stoke et al., 2015; Crawford, 2018) and the most important group of concern. Therefore, in a line where funds are being distributed to provide academic resources that will enhance the educational outcomes of students in English schools, it is at the school leaders' discretion as to how much of the funding will be used towards the plight of the underachieving Black Caribbean girls who are working-class. Gillborn et al., argue, placing White people at the centre of the debate operates to remove race inequity from the agenda and formulates the basis for an analysis which transfers the blame for educational failure onto those students and communities that experience the injustice (Gillborn et al., 2012). Using the CRT's tenet of interest convergence, such policies seek to preserve the structural dominant power of Whiteness at the expense of minority groups, such as Black Caribbean girls, who are, once again, left behind and her race and gender is ignored.

Where there are class differences, participants narrated an awareness of the negative stigma associated with deprivation and poverty, especially in comparison with their White working-class male and female peers. As in government data (GCSE English and maths results, 2022; GCSE results (Attainment 8), 2022), achievement

figures (see appendix 2 and 3), internal school data fails to consider, the race and gender of Black Caribbean girls in school, whose families also receive a low income. This paradox, means, that race and gender is only recognised in the physical appearance of Black Caribbean girls and not in the negative experiences they endure as part of the school day. School leaders and local authorities turn a blind eye and dismiss those added markers of discrimination, which increase Black Caribbean girls likelihood of suffering psychologically from their position of disadvantage. Although resilient, being looked down on, due to intersectional disadvantages does affect how Black Caribbean girls feel about their under-privileged position within their school community, which Aliya explains in her extract:

"*I do think disabilities can hold people back as well if you're Black and disabled people, probably going to say you've got no chance of doing anything and just stuff like that, and also your background if are you working class, or if you're middle class. People never really will see Black people as being upper class in the nice places, so you already label yourself probably lower class*" (**Aliya, year 11**).

When asked whether she felt she was in a lower class than the students that lived in the area in where she attended school, Aliya provided the following response:

"*Yeah. Well, you do get them kind of kids that brag and will try and be a certain way, because they do feel that they're entitled, so that the people in my class whose dads are like the CEO of [football club]. They had these big top jobs, big houses, so they automatically think that their one above people. Even though I don't really see that as being rich, I do think that people's qualities, what they have inside, is where you get the richness from. So, I do think that children obviously think that they are a lot higher than people that don't have this car or this house or multiple houses here and that kind of stuff".*

When asked, whether this affected her performance in school, Aliya provided the following response:

"*Yes, because it kind of makes you feel like you want to give up and when it gets to that point, you think, well what's the point because teachers are never going to recognize you for what you're doing and are always going to praise the other children"* (**Aliya, year 11**).

Aliya's narrative suggests working-class Black Caribbean girls experience despondency during their school experience and amidst their strategy of resilience. Black Caribbean girls experience gendered, racialised and class disadvantages on a daily basis, within their school experience, but at the same time, they exercise their strategy of resilience by remaining steadfast in their path to academic success. This can be derived from Aliya's narrative later in her interview:

'*[Teachers are] probably thinking another Black student [has] come to this school, probably not going to do very well, but when they do see the work that I can produce, they'll probably end up being shocked*' (**Aliya, year 11**).

Self-Image

Several participants discussed other ways of minimising the attention to their class status, which was carefully crafted through their self-image. Black Caribbean girls use their image to avert attention from their socio-economic status, which could lead to further negative labelling and stereotyping, if detected by their teachers and peers. This is evident in Jasmine's extract:

"*[Image is] very important because you have to like, make a statement that you have money to like buy school clothes and to relax your hair, make sure your hair looks*

neat, and if not, then there is going to be comments of how you look" (**Jasmine, year 8**).

The fate of working-class Black Caribbean girls can serve to discredit her positioning within school but there is evidence from participants narratives that she uses her resilience to overcome the obstacles that her socio-economic status presents. This is in the absence of support from policymakers to close the gap between working-class Black Caribbean girls who experience a triple-oppression of disadvantage in a system of social inequity.

The Role of Teachers

Within the school climate, some participants narratives explained that they are labelled by teachers as exemplifying behaviours similar to that of a 'Strong Black Women' (discussed above). The sentiment seemed to motivate Black Caribbean girls as recognition of this title signalled, they were achieving the identity of Strong Black Women in their lives whom they admire. This is expressed in Alexis's narrative:

"*I've seen a change in my work ethic and my grades over the years. My teachers like, know me and were kind of rooting for me…would always tell me like, 'you've got so much potential. You're a strong independent Black woman'. I remember one of my teachers saying that to me, yeah, a White male*" (**Alexis, year 11**).

When asked, how did that make you feel coming from your teacher? Alexis provided the following response:

"*Really good you know, because I just didn't feel like it. Well, obviously I knew I had a lot to prove but I wasn't putting that kind of pressure upon myself, so it was nice for them…recognizing the change. I was like, it's about time*" (**Alexis, year 11**).

Alexis's narrative shows a positive reaction as a result of her teacher's recognition of her resemblance of a Strong Black Woman. Black Caribbean girls are surrounded by messages in and out of the school discourse that encourages them to work hard and to cope under pressure. Although the teacher's labelling signified acknowledgement of Alexis's resilience, when a teacher further endorses the labelling of Black Caribbean girls as a Strong Black Woman, this can impact them negatively without Black Caribbean girls realising the pressure the ideology provokes on their psychological and emotional well-being. When teachers label Black Caribbean girls as Strong Black Women, they are projecting the individualism that is synonymous with the incredulous strength which is required to maintain this title, well into adulthood. It also places the onus on Black Caribbean girls to manage their own educational trajectories and key decision making, which is not imposed on their female counterparts of other ethnicities. This presents Black Caribbean girls with a double-edged sword, which suggests acquiring the title of the 'Strong Black Woman' in the short-term means educational success but in the long-term, maintaining this persona can contribute to mental burn out and a lifestyle of hard work and struggle.

Goal Setting

As part of their strategy of resilience participants demonstrated foresight and goal setting, very early on in their school experience, where they created their own success story, coupled with the additional ingredient of self-belief (as discussed in chapter two). This can be understood from, Kayla,

"I've made a set plan, all the way up to university and getting my PhD, of what schools I want to get into…[and] how I would get into them, for example, I want to go

*to Oxford University because its…amazing. So, I've already done extensive research; already I have figured out what I would need to put into my personal statement; I figured out how the interviewing process works and I looked up on the website [to see] what I would need to get and the grades I need to get, so that, basically, I look [at] my sixth form options which I want to do to Oxford International University, as I'm going to Oxford ultimately. It's known as the best sixth form in the UK so that's what I'm set on and that's where I'm going to go. I was thinking I'm getting grades, all nines in my GCSE's. That's number one because I feel like it's the top grade. I'm going to get all of them. That's going to give me a good setup to get into one of the sixth forms colleges that I want to get into… I've starting, planning and doing everything, all the experiences, the volunteering that I would need, since I've been in year eight. That's when I really got into like, Oxford University; where I'm going to go; what I'm going to need to pay for it. I've already figured out a way to get expenses to cover it, if I don't get a scholarship to cover it… if other people can, I can do it. I just need to spend the time, effort and dedication. So, yes, it will be hard but I know I can do it because I know I'm very strong willed for some reason and I can persevere through most things so yeah" (***Kayla, year 9***).*

Kayla was the most outspoken participant who spoke candidly about her educational trajectory, and what she was planning to do to overcome some of the obstacles, such as finances, work experience, achieving the right grades, etc. In her discussion, there was no emphasis on receiving support from anyone else but herself. Black Caribbean girls thrive on self-belief and self-concept. This has been discussed in chapter two. They are driven and strategic in mapping out their own trajectory, even beyond the secondary school experience. This independence takes the onus off the teachers, the school, the community and parents. The driver of their decisions stems from their 'Getting Out' strategy, as illustrated in appendix 1. Furthermore, the study by Coultas, discussed in chapter 2, also describes Black girls as being self-reliant (Coultas, 1989). This forms part of their strategy of resistance and their refusal to

accept the marginalised status which they are assigned by society (Hill-Collins, 1986). Accordingly, Patricia Hill-Collins posits, 'if Black women refuse to accept their assigned status as the quintessential "other," then the entire rationale for such domination is challenged' (Hill-Collins, 1986: S18).

Conforming

In the school setting, Black Caribbean girls may disguise their determination, a phenomenon which was evident in both studies by Fuller (1980) and Mirza (1992). Accordingly, Mirza posits 'How can what appears on the surface to be compliance and willingness to conform to systems and structures of educational meritocracy, be redefined as strategic…' (Mirza,1997: 269). For Black Caribbean girls, their educational trajectory is translated into a covert operation. Some participants highlighted the strategic stance they take in lessons. In the extracts below, both Aliya and Cemone describe their actions in the classroom during their school day. Whilst Aliya's extract shows caution to her peers, Cemone's attention is on the teacher:

"*I do just try and be that good student to try and get along with them, but very soon in class I'll probably notice little things and then know that I need to avoid them or just try and keep contact minimum"* (**Aliya, year 10**).

"*I'd say, I'm…calm like, in lessons but I don't really want to get into trouble so I just do my work and make sure that the teacher can't really say anything to me because, I've done my work*" (**Cemone, year 10**).

It could be argued, that both participants' actions in the school classroom equate to conforming. This is, to the predisposed gendered and racialised labels awarded to Black Caribbean girls, which they utilise, so as not to draw attention to themselves in

the learning environment, be it for behaviour or disruption from other students. Mirza argues, Black women conform in order to transform and change (Mirza, 1997).

Evans et al., argues, 'In addition to grades, resisting distractions and maintaining a clean school record [is] also a priority for Black adolescent girls. Belief in education as economic survival' means the girls view 'school performance as being high-stakes' which contributes to daily stress (Evans et al., 2020: 365).

Furthermore, Black Caribbean girls choose not to disclose their dreams or goals with others. I would define *others* as, those individuals who are not within their social system of support, and who represent the dominant structural powers, those who consider Black Caribbean girls to still maintain their marginalised position. Conforming provides Black Caribbean girls with a positive space to achieve their academic goals within the dominant construct of Whiteness, which is the default setting (Abdi, 2015) within the school discourse, whilst also affording Black Caribbean girls time to work on improving themselves and developing their skills. For Black Caribbean girls to share their dreams with *others* would be futile, and doing so, could mean that they allow the negative labelling to enter into their psyche, and affect their self-belief. This is evident in Alexis's extract:

"*I think, if there was doubt from other people and they were voicing it to me, I think it wouldn't like, make me fall off completely but I'd be stumbling, if you get one mean."*

"Like if they were constantly trying to put me down and kind of like underestimating my potential and not realizing my worth, it would be a bit of a knock" (**Alexis, year 11**).

Alexis provided the example of how this felt when she was predicted low grades:

"*I did feel like they're trying to hold me back in a sense, and trying to count me as an underachiever, when in my head like, I know what I can do because I've done it…I just felt like they were trying to count me at lower grades deliberately when they know how much I've worked and the standard that I can work to, basically*" (**Alexis, year 11**).

For Black Caribbean girls, the 'other' including, teachers, peers or adults in positions of authority over them, have the ability to knock them off course and derail their academic goals. Conforming, therefore, provides an inconspicuous classroom presence which does not present any clues towards their 'Getting on' strategy (see appendix 1) and their enterprising mindset. Any knocks from *others* are counteracted with their strategy of resilience, which Alexis alluded to in her extract – suggesting that '*it wouldn't like, make me fall off completely but I'd be stumbling*'.

Indicators of resilience

From the narratives, Black Caribbean girls use resilience to overcome racism and the dominant structural power of Whiteness, during their everyday school experience. Indicators of resilience in children includes, functioning comparable to the population average in academic performance, emotional regulation and social competence (Herman et al., 2011). Black Caribbean girls use resilience to close the attainment gaps between themselves and their male and female peers. However, they are still susceptible to internalised failure and ideas of insufficiency if *others* perceive them to be 'Getting on'. It would appear from the extracts that there are systemic acts of racism that can lead to Black Caribbean girl's receiving knocks, however, they are

encouraged by their social system of support and self-belief, not to stay down, but to keep aiming for her academic goals.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the conclusions and recommendations which have emerged from my study, to answer my research questions. I include how the theoretical perspectives have helped to shape the outcome for Black Caribbean girls and build on earlier studies. Secondly, I will outline the limitations of my study. Finally, I will discuss my future research directions which will involve partnering with educators and policymakers on developing anti-racist policies and improving the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls.

RQ1: What are the school experiences of Black Caribbean girls?

The methodology was effective in providing deep narratives from the sixteen participants from the semi-structured interviews. From the data collection and data analysis process, I identified emerging themes which provided a rich level of discussion from the qualitative approach.

Participants shared their experiences of their school day and shared the events as they recalled them, articulating the emotional, physical and mental implications of actions taken by themselves or others.

Their narratives described how Black Caribbean girls are marginalised throughout their everyday school experience. In chapter one, I discussed my role of raising achievement for Black pupils several years ago, together with mentoring Black girls more recently. In the literature review in chapter two, I discussed a plethora of discriminatory practices that befalls Black Caribbean girls, which are racialised and

gendered, and have lasting consequences through to her adult life. These experiences were even more challenging than those mentioned in earlier studies, such as Fuller (1980) and Mirza (1992). Today, the school experience of Black Caribbean girls is far more nuanced and hidden in the post-racial society rhetoric. The intersectional layers of disadvantages experienced by Black Caribbean girls are far more nuanced and diverse, impacting her identity, what she is taught, how she is perceived, and also treated by teachers and peers alike, when compared to her counterparts.

The sixteen participants in this study ranged in background, school type, year groups, region and academic ability, however, from my findings it is evident that this did not hinder the shared secondary school experiences. Although there was a change in approach to dealing with the everyday issues which occurred during their school experience, the evidence still presents that, Black Caribbean girls are gradually silenced and unfavourably positioned within the school discourse. All of which can have a negative effect on their mental health and motivation to aspire.

Additionally, Black Caribbean girls are invisible in the school discourse. During the New Labour era (alluded to in chapters 1 and 2), the focus was on the failing boys' discourse, and Black boys were targeted for interventions, following the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Today, the government's agenda focuses on White working-class boys. Black Caribbean girls' invisibility to policymakers has detrimental effects on their ability to achieve in school, as they are sidelined and left to work independently, whilst their male counterparts receive attention from educators and policymakers.

I argue that educational policy has not learnt from the past. Black pupils who I supported in schools two decades ago, could now be parents of Black Caribbean girls, similar to the participants interviewed in this study. *Has history repeated itself?* Instead of progress, the neoliberal rhetoric and meritocratic values have driven an even greater gap between Black Caribbean girls and her female peers and created a gender gap which is not only prevalent in schools, but in the wider society.

Intersectionality provides a new lens in which to view the multi-faceted challenges which are facing Black Caribbean girls. This has broadened the scope wider so that, whilst educational policy fails to see Black Caribbean girls only one way, intersectionality exposes areas of need and sends a message to policymakers to develop an awareness of her marginalised position and the support she needs to compete in a society that fails to recognise her disadvantages.

Furthermore, CRT shines a spotlight on racism which the Black Caribbean girl experiences in school, within her learning environment, in the teachers greeting at the school gates, in the curriculum in the relationships she has with peers and teachers; and within the power it deploys, to silence her.

RQ2: What strategies do Black Caribbean girls employ to navigate their school experience?

Evidently, in chapter two, Black Caribbean girls have both high aspirations and high self-dependency. Furthermore, early studies suggested, Black girls have high self-concept, high self-belief and were self-reliant (Coultas,1989). They also create a

counter-culture and develop a network of support, to help them to achieve their goals. Also, both studies by Fuller (1980) and Mirza (1992), present Black girls as conforming and strategic.

Similarly, the narratives from the participants in this study, reinforced these ideals but also suggests that Black Caribbean girls are super-strategic. Within the school day, they form a sub-culture of same-raced peers, who they can rely on and whom they find strength from the everyday oppression that they experience in school. Additionally, Black Caribbean girls look up to role models who can be defined as Strong Black Women, with whom, they emulate and gain guidance, as they chart their own career trajectory, including Michelle Obama, family and friends. They develop a growing awareness of their racialised and gendered positions as they mature through the school system. As a result, Black Caribbean girls are careful not to divulge their strategy to 'others', except those within their support system. Instead, within the school environment, she appears to conform to the school discourse. It is her strategy of resistance which provides Black Caribbean girls with the premise to explore the 'Black Girl Voice', which is employed to signal injustices during her time at school. Resilience is at the core of everything a Black Caribbean girl embarks on, which nourishes her psyche and composes her mindset. It is a tonic to steers her to rise after experiencing knocks of oppression, on her way to achieving her goals.

Self-reliant and strategic Black Caribbean girls, whilst strong, shows signs of unconsciously bowing to the rhetoric of neoliberalism as she performs individualistically. The neoliberalism discourse projects agency on young people and awards blame to those whose social factors highlights deficit (Bhopal, 2018; Loke, 2015). Black Caribbean girls who are working class and who live in lone parent

families are revered to as ‘broken’ (Lipman, 2011) because they have extra layers of challenge. Educational policies fail to deal with Black Caribbean girls who face daily oppressive factors on the grounds of their race, gender and class. Theme 3 under recommendations in the CRED report is to ‘Create agency’, by empowering individuals to exercise greater control over their lives and make informed choices that lead to better outcomes for themselves (The report for CRED, 2021). Consequently, *Black Caribbean girls are the ideal neoliberal subjects*. This phenomenon leaves Black Caribbean girls fending for themselves whilst alleviating the government of the responsibility to recognise her social differences. Instead, Black Caribbean girls are working twice as hard to achieve the employability goals and the educational trajectory that she desires, leaving her prone to emotional and physical dysfunctions.

Intersectionality has propelled me to identify the various nuances that are being ignored by educational policies, whilst CRT points the finger at neoliberal policies which are damaging to social justice discourses and in a presumed post-racial society, where one size fits all.

‘Strong Black Women’ have been part of the historical landscape even since my early childhood as described in chapter one, concerning supplementary schools. Visionary activists and militant mothers etc. are prevalent in the lives of Black Caribbean girls. Educational policy has failed to take heed, since the early findings of Mirza in 1992. Thirty years later, UK policymakers have not addressed the multi-faceted disadvantages of Black Caribbean girls who are burdened but not down. Their struggle for education and justice needs to provide them with support and respite, so they can concentrate on being a child rather than running a mature uphill race for social capital. Whilst Black Caribbean girls spend time fighting the daily oppression

from the dominant structures of Whiteness, they are overtaken by female peers from other ethnicities, who carry a lighter load. This can be seen in the achievement gap which I urge policymakers not to ignore.

Original contribution to knowledge

This study brings an original contribution of rich empirical evidence to a gap within the literature and policy on the lived experiences of Black Caribbean girls in secondary school education in England, which establishes a new focus for UK researchers on the invisibility of Black Caribbean girls.

The study also illustrates the stages of a Black Caribbean girl's trajectory in the secondary school system in England (see appendix 1).

I have used CRT and intersectionality to expose the gendered and racialised daily lived experiences of Black Caribbean girls. In addition, the study identifies the 'strategic drivers' which essentially feeds into those strategies which Black Caribbean girls employ to navigate a society that declares itself post-racial. This includes the strategy of resistance, which is where I coined the term 'Black Girl Voice' which refers to a tool of resistance which Black Caribbean girls use to confront injustices in school, to defend their marginalised position.

Furthermore, the study highlights the way in which Black Caribbean girls are often compared with Black Caribbean boys, which makes them appear successful but when they are compared with other girls by ethnicity, this study reveals that Black Caribbean girls are one of the lowest underachieving groups when compared by gender and ethnicity.

Additionally, the study offers an in-depth analysis of how Black Caribbean girls are positioned and how school experiences affect the psychological and emotional well-being of their daily lives.

Recommendations

This study argues that Black Caribbean girls are under no illusion of the racialised and gendered oppressions they are experiencing in school, which is evident in Asia's extract:

'We can see what's going on. We're not little kids, so we have an opinion on it. We should have the right to say" (**Asia, year 10**).

The recommendations that I will discuss, have originated from the research findings:

Revise School Policies on Race and Gender

Schools should create policies on race and gender which describe their responsibility to students from all backgrounds. Staff should be made accountable for incidents of racism and gendered practices by updating Teaching Standards.

Mentoring: Safe spaces

Schools should provide Black Caribbean girls with mentors of the same racial background, in schools. From the narrative discussed by Destiny and in my experience (see chapter one), a mentor provides a safe space for Black girls to cry and to vent their frustrations. The mentor in Destiny's school explained that he had no authority to change anything. Mentors should be listened to and be given the authority to act on behalf of their mentees.

Educational Policies to Close the Attainment Gap

My experience of working in schools on initiatives that sought to raise achievement for Black pupils proved successful, but was short lived. Black Caribbean girls have been ignored from educational policies which is to her detriment, they are underachieving compared to their white? female counterparts. Policymakers need to identify solutions of how to close the attainment gaps between Black Caribbean girls and their female counterparts, and when publishing data, more opportunities need to be taken to compare girls with other girls from different ethnicities rather than comparing girls with boys.

Cultural Values in the National Curriculum

The national curriculum needs to encompass the cultural values of diverse populations rather than solely British values. Furthermore, the current topics of slavery and Black History need to be addressed and be more inclusive. Schools should focus on Black empowerment and positive role models throughout the school year rather than one-off tokenistic gestures.

Teacher Training on the Needs of Black Caribbean Girls

All teaching staff should attend mandatory training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, which includes self-reflection on their unconscious biases and their consequences. The training should include information on anti-racist and inclusive strategies to work with Black Caribbean girls.

Mandatory reporting of racist and sexualised incidents

Schools should provide mandatory reporting on racial and sexualised incidents that take place in schools. A policy for schools should be provided from central government which provides schools with written procedures to deal with sexualised incidents. Schools should also support victims of sexualised incidents and measures should be in place to deal with all perpetrators.

Black Caribbean Girls Leadership Programme

A national leadership programme should be created which seeks to empower Black Caribbean girls. Within the programme, there should be opportunities to develop personal skills, to receive educational support, enrichment and mentoring.

Limitations of study

A limitation of this study is the exclusion of views from secondary school teachers of Black Caribbean girls. As alluded to in this study, teachers are referred to as 'significant gatekeepers' (Leath et al., 2021a: 1). Giving voice to teachers would contribute to the study by providing a different perspective from their observations and interactions with Black Caribbean girls during their school experience. It would also provide evidence of teachers' understanding of racialised and gendered practices within secondary schools in England. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, access to schools in England and teaching staff was limited.

Secondly, academic data from the participants would enhance this study by exploring a correlation between the strategies employed by Black Caribbean girls to navigate

their school experience, with their educational outcomes. This data would also demonstrate the effectiveness of these strategies on improving Black Caribbean girl's attainment and closing the achievement gap. During the academic year in which the study was conducted, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, participants in this study received teacher assessed predicted grades in place of GCSE examinations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Impact and engagement work could include collaboration with leadership and teachers in secondary schools, to create continuous profession development resources to present to teachers within secondary schools, that comprises of intersectional and anti-racist strategies to support teachers to work effectively with Black Caribbean girls to improve their school experience.

At present, there is no educational policy directing support for Black Caribbean girls from lone parent families. More research is required which explores the disadvantages and implications that being from a lone parent can have on Black Caribbean girls or providing strategies which support Black Caribbean girls to acquire academic success and employability.

Black working-class pupils experience racialised oppression during their school experience. Educational policies fail to focus on race or gender when considering those young people who are awarded extra funding as a result of being from a low-income family. Critical research should consider the effects of the 'one size fits all', for the Pupil Premium policy and the effects of ignoring the race and gender implications that contribute to educational outcomes for Black pupils.

Further research on how educational data is collated by the UK government on ethnicity should be considered. I argued, there are opportunities that exist when policymakers and schools can distinguish between pupils' attainment by gender and ethnicity. This enables targeted investigations, to assess progress made by individual groups, which enables policymakers to present solutions to close gaps in attainment. Furthermore, where there are emergent societal needs such as loss of schooling due to the pandemic, the transparency of data can provide justification to policymaking and allocating resources, where data highlights evidence of underachievement in a particular group. This will provide more scope to close the ethnicity gap between the lowest scoring groups, including Black Caribbean girls.

Also, as a follow-on from my study, evidently, there are psychological effects which are experienced by Black pupils who experience racism in schools. Very little is known as to the long-term effects on the educational trajectories of Black pupils and more research is recommended.

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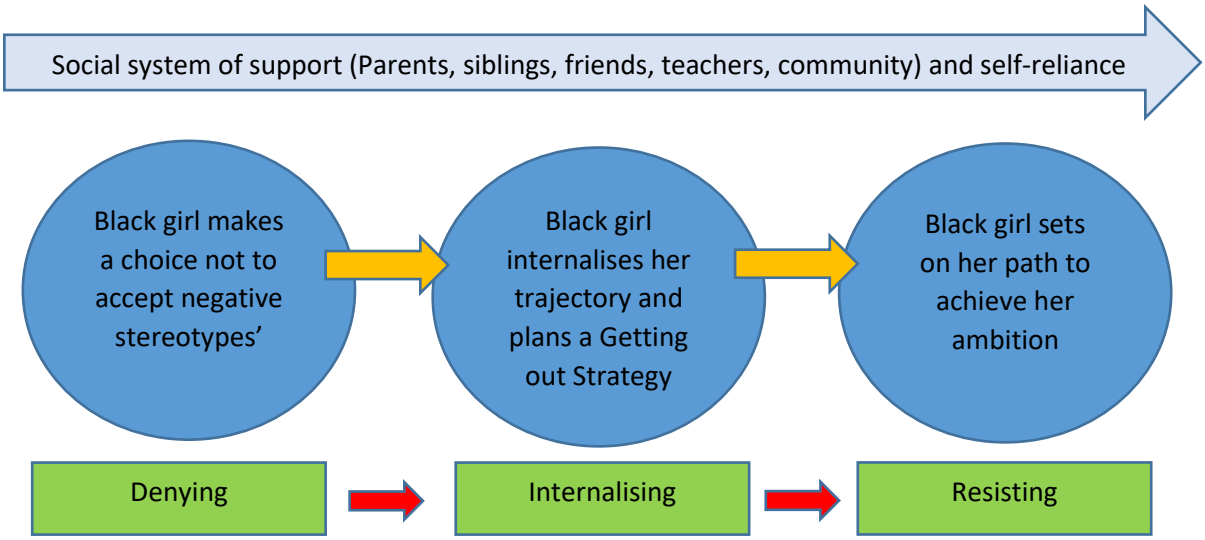
Appendices

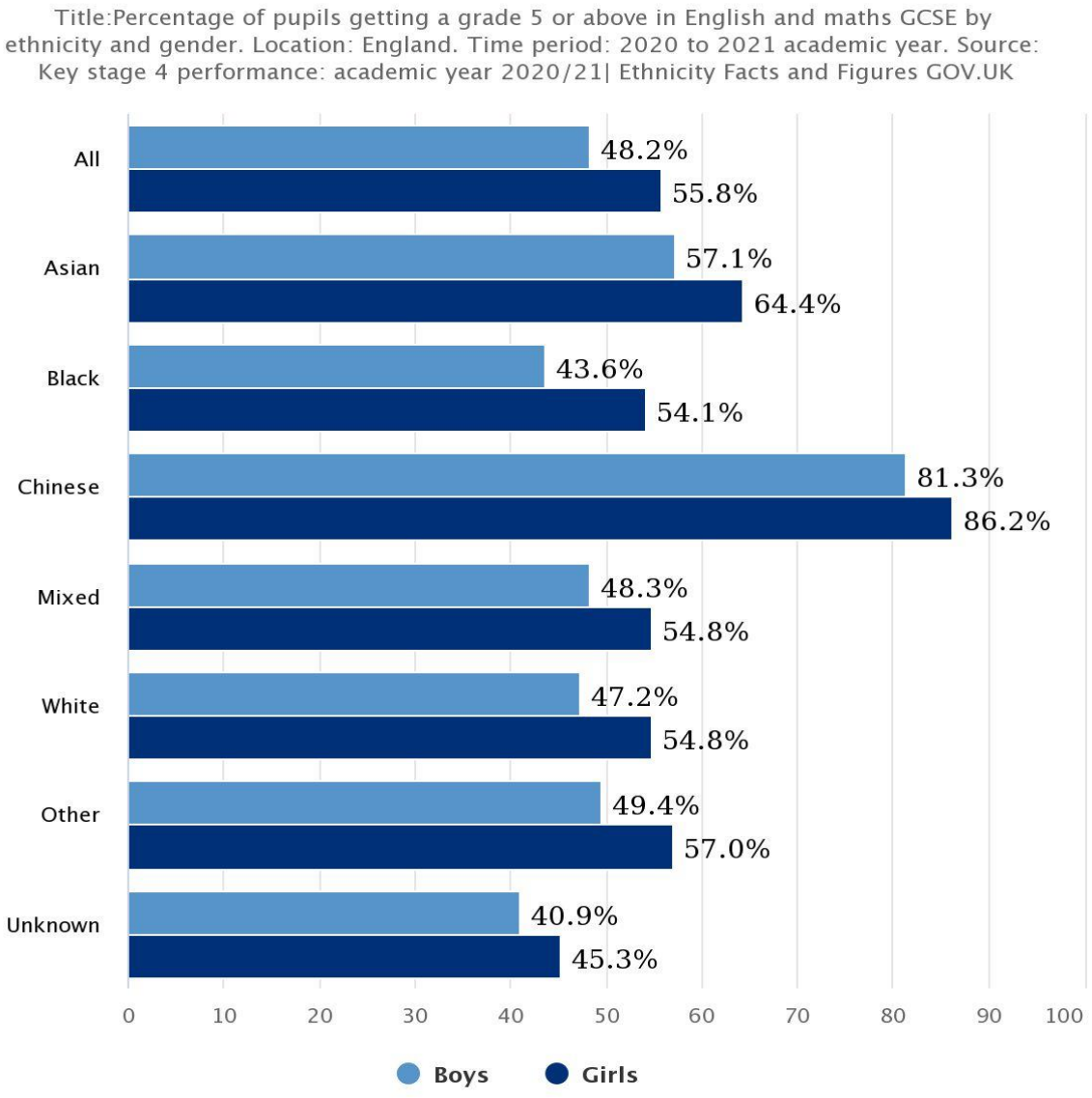
Appendix 1.

An illustration showing the stages of a Black Girl's trajectory in the secondary school system in England



Appendix 2.

Figure 1: Percentage of pupils getting a grade 5 or above in English and Mathematics GCSE by ethnicity and gender

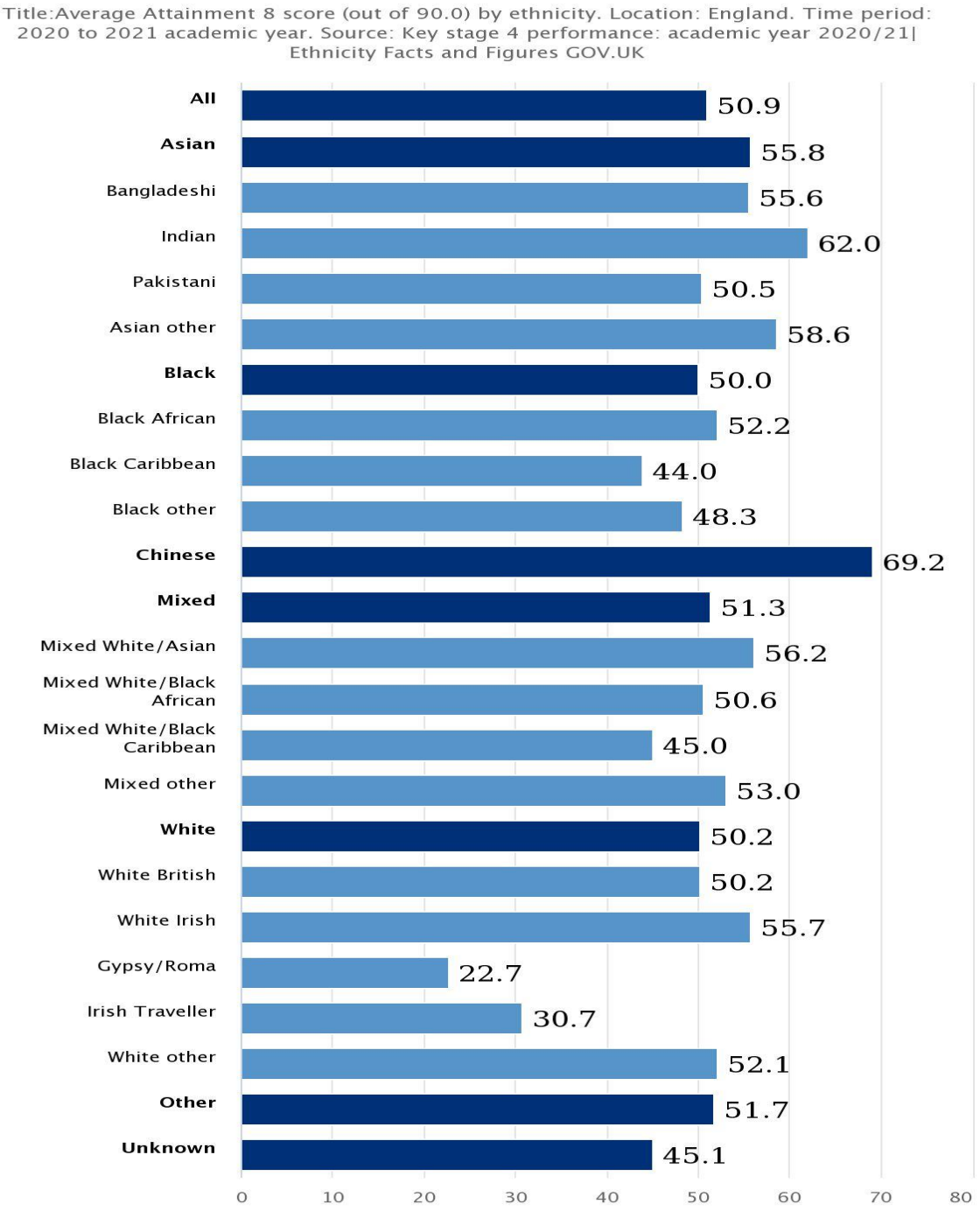


	Boys		Girls	
Ethnicity	%	Pupils	%	Pupils
All	48.2	293,649	55.8	282,214
Asian	57.1	32,822	64.4	30,882
Bangladeshi	58.1	5,148	63.1	5,099
Indian	68.4	8,711	76.7	8,190
Pakistani	46.8	13,246	54	12,505
Asian other	62.8	5,717	71.8	5,088
Black	43.6	17,473	54.1	17,438
Black African	48.2	11,552	58.9	11,688
Black Caribbean	30.9	3,604	41	3,538
Black other	40.6	2,317	49.8	2,212
Chinese	81.3	1,025	86.2	1,076
Mixed	48.3	15,997	54.8	15,775
Mixed White/Asian	58.7	3,910	65.7	3,621
Mixed White/Black African	47	2,083	53.1	2,010
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	35.3	4,135	42.9	4,261
Mixed other	51	5,869	57.4	5,883
White	47.2	215,374	54.8	206,621
White British	47.2	197,283	54.8	189,286
White Irish	58.4	873	63.4	848
Gypsy/Roma	9	720	9.2	705
Irish Traveller	22.2	99	19.4	72
White other	48.6	16,399	56.5	15,710
Other	49.4	5,818	57	5,447
Unknown	40.9	5,140	45.3	4,975

(Source: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk /GCSE English and maths results, 2022)

Appendix 3

Figure 2. Average Attainment 8 score (out of 90.0) by ethnicity



Ethnicity	Score	Pupils
All	50.9	575,863
Asian	55.8	63,704
Bangladeshi	55.6	10,247
Indian	62	16,901
Pakistani	50.5	25,751
Asian other	58.6	10,805
Black	50	34,911
Black African	52.2	23,240
Black Caribbean	44	7,142
Black other	48.3	4,529
Chinese	69.2	2,101
Mixed	51.3	31,772
Mixed White/Asian	56.2	7,531
Mixed White/Black African	50.6	4,093
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	45	8,396
Mixed other	53	11,752
White	50.2	421,995
White British	50.2	386,569
White Irish	55.7	1,721
Gypsy/Roma	22.7	1,425
Irish Traveller	30.7	171
White other	52.1	32,109
Other	51.7	11,265
Unknown	45.1	10,115

(Source: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk /GCSE results (Attainment 8), 2022)

Appendix 4. Semi-structured interview guide and script

Confirm;

- Confidentiality – names will be changed/data won't be shared with anyone else but for the purposes of the research
- What will happen to the data they provide?
- What is they need support?
- They have the right to withdraw 4 weeks after the date of this interview
- Any questions

The first questions will be focused on getting to know the interviewee.

Introduction

Name

Age

How would you describe your gender?

How would you describe your Ethnicity/ethnic background?

Parents ethnicity; Mother? Your Father?

Parents careers; What career does your Mother do? Your father?

Who do you live with?

What school do you attend?

What year group are you in?

What subjects are you studying?

Family – who do you live with?

1. Career aspirations
   What career would you like to do?
   What or who has influenced this choice?
   How difficult do you think it will be for you to achieve this career?

2. Motivation
   What/who motivates you to learn?
   Do you have a role model – who is this?
   How does they help with your learning?

3. Learning environment
   What happens in a classroom?
   Do you have lessons with girls only?
   Do you have mixed lessons with boys?
   Is your performance or ability to learn the same in single or mixed sex lessons? Explain

Do you think you are performing at your best?
What can the school do to improve this?
What can you do to achieve this?

4. School experience

   Favourite/least favourite subject – why?

   What do you like about school?

   How would you describe your relationship with girls in your classes?

   How would you describe your relationship with boys in your classes?

   How would you describe your relation with teachers?

5. STEM subjects (Science/Technology/Engineering/Technology): How would you describe your current performance in each of these subjects?
   Do you receive any additional support in these subjects?
   Which set are you in for each of these subjects?
   Are you on target to meet your predicted grade? What steps are you taking to improve your performance?
   What skills do you apply to learning these subjects?
   Why do you think your performance differs in some of these subjects than others?

6. Race
   How would you describe your school day?
   Is this experience the same for girls from all ethnicities? Explain
   Is this experience the same for all boys from all ethnicities? Explain
   Why do you think this is the same/different?

7. Ethnicity
   What, if any characteristics, differ in a black girl's attitude to school than other girls? i.e. completing homework, behaviour, attendance, taking responsibility for learning, punctuality and participation in class and wider school activities.
   Describe, if any, the differences in how black girls are addressed in class when they are on task, compared with other girls? i.e. Praise
   Describe, if any, the differences in how black girls are addressed in class when they are off task compared with other girls? i.e., Sanctions
   What strategies, if needed, do you think the school should put in place in improve the achievement of black girls in English and Maths?

8. Identity
   How is your identity recognized in school?
   Describe extra-curricular or events that the school provides for girls?
   Does the school recognize your gender?
   Does the school recognize your race?
   What could be done differently?

9. Gender
   In your opinion, are girls and boys treated equally school?
   If any, describe any differences you have observed?
   Describe the effect this has on your performance?
   Who are the highest achievers in the school – boys or girls?
   What help is available to you to increase your grades?

10. Strategies

    What action have you taken to increase your grades?
    What grades would you like to achieve?
    Do you take opportunities to discuss your goals with teachers?
    How would your teachers describe you? Why is this?
    How would you describe your approach to learning?
    If you could put 3 characteristics in your rucksack, which ones would you take to school to succeed?

Appendix 5.

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Application for Ethics Review Form

Guidance Notes:

What is the purpose of this form?

This form should be completed to seek ethics review for research projects to be undertaken by University of Birmingham staff, PGR students or visiting/emeritus researchers who will be carrying out research which will be attributed to the University.

Who should complete it?

For a staff project – the lead researcher/Principal Investigator on the project.
For a PGR student project – the student's academic supervisor, in discussion with the student.

Students undertaking undergraduate projects and taught postgraduate (PGT) students should refer to their Department/School for advice

When should it be completed?

After you have completed the University's online ethics self-assessment form (SAF), **IF** the SAF indicates that ethics review is required. You should apply in good time to ensure that you receive a favourable ethics opinion prior to the commencement of the project and it is recommended that you allow at least 60 working days for the ethics process to be completed.

How should it be submitted?

An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

What should be included with it?

Copies of any relevant supporting information and participant documentation, research tools (e.g. interview topic guides, questionnaires, etc) and where appropriate a health & safety risk assessment for the project (see section 10 of this form for further information about risk assessments).

What should applicants read before submitting this form?

Before submitting, you should ensure that you have read and understood the following information and guidance and that you have taken it into account when completing your application:

- The information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-of-Research.aspx)

- The University's Code of Practice for Research (https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf)

- The guidance on Data Protection for researchers provided by the University's Legal Services team at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/legal-services/What-we-do/Data-Protection/resources.aspx.

Section 1: Basic Project Details

Project Title: An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in Secondary education in England

Is this project a:

University of Birmingham Staff Research project ☐
University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project ☒
Other (Please specify below) ☐
Click or tap here to enter text.

Details of the Principal Investigator or Lead Supervisor (for PGR student projects):

Title: Professor
First name: Dina
Last name: Kiwan

Position held: Professor in Comparative Education
School/Department College of Education and Social Justice, School of Education

Telephone: Click or tap here to enter text.
Email address:

Details of any Co-Investigators or Co-Supervisors (for PGR student projects):

Title: Professor
First name: Kalwant
Last name: Bhopal

Position held: Director, Centre for Research in Race and Education
School/Department College of Education and Social Justice, School of Education

Telephone: Click or tap here to enter text.
Email address:

Details of the student for PGR student projects:

Title: Miss
First name: Julie
Last name: Blake

Course of study: Education Doctorate
Email address:

Project start and end dates:

Estimated start date of project: 01/06/2021
Estimated end date of project: 06/06/2022

Funding:

Sources of funding Self-funded:

Section 2: Summary of Project

Describe the purpose, background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and expected outcomes. This description should be in everyday language that is free from jargon - please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases. Please do not provide extensive academic background material or references.

This research is a study of the current experiences of girls of African Caribbean descent in secondary schools in England and an exploration of whether the prevalent failing boys' discourse has any implications on their educational outcomes. It employs a qualitative methodology which comprises of a semi-structured interview to seek answers to questions about their achievement, their daily experiences and teacher expectations. The discourses highlighted in this study include feminism, Critical Race Theory (CRT), intersectionality and class. In 1992 Heidi Mirza's study on girls of African Caribbean descent focused on 'women's strategies to succeed at school and into further and higher education' Mirza (1997:267). Since Mirza's research, there has been few studies on the school experience of girls of African Caribbean descent in the last 30 years, which presents a gap in the literature.

Mirza(1997:4) describes Black British women as 'inhabiting a third space, which overlaps the margins of the race, gender and class discourse' and one which 'occupies the empty spaces in between'. Women of African Caribbean descent are often 'racialised' and 'gendered' (Mirza: 271: 1997). My aim is to explore how girls of African Caribbean descent navigate the school system in the light of the failing boys' discourse and to investigate current challenges and the strategies they employ to overcome disadvantage to achieve.

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. *How does a girl of African Caribbean descent navigate her school experience?*

2. *How does the failing boys discourse affect this experience?*

3. *What are the present challenges faced by a girl of African Caribbean descent, in school?*

4. *What strategies does a girl of African Caribbean descent use to achieve her educational goals?*

Mirza, H.S., 1992. Young, female and black, London: Routledge.

Section 3: Conduct and location of Project

Conduct of project

Please give a description of the research methodology that will be used. If more than one methodology or phase will be involved, please separate these out clearly and refer to them consistently throughout the rest of this form.

Parker and Lynn (2002) argue 'CRT has important implications for qualitative research, particularly in education and youth culture.' Based on the theoretical foundations of CRT, gaining the participant's

perspective is most effective through storytelling. By employing qualitative research methods, I can analyse the narratives of the interviewees as they tell their stories. I will conduct a detailed semi-structured interview with sixteen young girls of African Caribbean descent and of secondary school age, to gain an understanding of their secondary school experiences. I will conduct one semi-structured interview with each young girl. The interview will be one hour long. The interview will consist of ten themes which are derived from the findings of Heidi Mirza's 1992 study as well as themes highlighted from the review of literature. (refer to Appendix 1) Tuckman (1972)argues 'the interviewer should inform the participant of the nature or purpose of the interview…The conduct of the interview should be explained…[including] how responses may be recorded…, and these procedures should be observed throughout.' Based on Tuckman's format, the interview will be held with the interviewer and one interviewee only. I will check the consent has been correctly completed prior to commencing the interview (refer to appendix 2). After which, I will explain the purpose of the interview and confirm it will be recorded with the interviewee's consent. I will explain the structure of the interview and ask the interviewee if they have any questions to ask before the interview commences. The interview will start with demographic information such as age, year group, interests, etc. to establish rapport with the interviewee, leading on to the themes (refer to appendix 1). A semi-structured interview format will present the interviewer with flexibility to prompt or probe the responses of the interviewee further, where necessary. The interviewer will hold one interview with each participant. Lobe, Morgan & Hoffman (2020) argue 'many of us currently working on research projects unrelated to the pandemic are being forced to transition from face-to-face data collection to some other form of data collection such as phone or internet-based'. As a result of Covid-19, I will use an online platform, conducted virtually using software such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, unless suggested otherwise by the school or parent/carer. Where interviews are held face-to-face in schools, a church or youth centre, they will be conducted by following current local, national and University guidelines as well as that requested by the hosting organisation. For confidentiality and anonymity purposes, pseudonyms will replace the names of the interviewees and the name of the school, church or youth group will not be published in the research. The interview audio/video will be recorded and a transcript written with the consent of the interviewee and their parent/carer. All data will be collected and stored in password protected laptops and hard-drive and the data will only be accessible to myself and my supervisors only. Participants will be advised on the consent form that they have the right to withdraw at any point during the study and up to four weeks after the interview, after which, they no longer have the right to withdraw their data. Where a participant or parent/carer chooses to withdraw, their data will be destroyed including any recordings. The data will be collected for the purpose of my doctoral thesis which will be made available online by the university only and stored as a hard copy on a password protected laptop.

Geographic location of project

State the geographic locations where the project and all associated fieldwork will be carried out. If the project will involve travel to areas which may be considered unsafe, either in the UK or overseas, please ensure that the risks of this (or any other non-trivial health and safety risks associated with the research) are addressed by a documented health and safety risk assessment, as described in section 10 of this form.

Interviews will be on a virtual platform such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. There will be no requirement to travel to areas which are unfamiliar. However, if by request of the Headteacher or parent/carer, the interview could be held in a school, church or youth centre during school hours of those operating hours or the church or youth centre as this may be during the summer holidays. In all circumstances, where the interview will be held face-to-face, the interview will be conducted by following all local, national and University guidelines in relation to Covid-19.

Section 4: Research Participants and Recruitment

Does the project involve human participants?

Note: 'Participation' includes both active participation (such as when participants take part in an interview) and cases where participants take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (for example, in crowd behaviour research).

Yes ☒
No ☐

If you have answered NO please go on to Section 8 of this form. If you have answered YES please complete the rest of this section and then continue on to section 5.

Who will the participants be?

Describe the number of participants and important characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc.). Specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used.

The focus of this research is to identify the school experiences of girls of African Caribbean descent. Following the review of literature and methodologies, I will interview sixteen participants who will be female and of African Caribbean descent. In order to capture achievement data, students in their GCSE years will be selected who are between 13 years and 16 years of age. They will vary in background, ability and age. It is not anticipated there will be any girls with special educational needs disabilities. The interview will be conducted with the interviewer and the participant only. No other persons will be present.

How will the participants be recruited?

Please state clearly how the participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Include any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student). Please ensure that you attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.

Participants will be recruited from within the local community of [redacted]. The researcher will contact the Headteacher of local secondary schools via email (see appendix 3), inviting girls of African Caribbean descent to volunteer to participate in the research. It is at the Headteacher's discretion as to which students are selected within the scope of the gender and ethnicity requested, however, participation is voluntary, and girls will not be coerced or made to feel they have to participate. Each girl will be provided with a letter with my contact details together with a consent form (see appendix 2a and 4) in which will be forwarded to the parent/carer. Other community groups such as Black-led churches and youth centres will be contacted by email (see appendix 5) in which an advert will be sent as an attachment, to forward to all prospective participants. The advert will contain details of the research project and how to contact me (see appendix 6). The Headteacher, Church and Youth Leaders will be given the opportunity to contact me for further information.

The initial emails to the school, youth group and church (see appendix 3,5 and 7) will have information of how to support the young girl who participates in the study and similarly, the letter to parents/carers. This will advise the adults of potential emotional responses from the young girl,

following the interview, and how they can offer or refer them for further support. The contact details of my supervisors will also be made available for further information or any concerns regarding the conduct of the interview.

The consent form will include information on how their data will be collected and request their written consent to the terms of the interview and the right to withdraw from the research project within four weeks of the interview (see appendix 2).

Section 5: Consent

What process will be used to obtain consent?

Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain valid consent. If consent is not to be obtained explain why. If the participants are under the age of 16 it would usually be necessary to obtain parental consent and the process for this should be described in full, including whether parental consent will be opt-in or opt-out.

Potential participants will be issued with a letter via email which requires both the young person's and their parent's/guardian's written consent to be interviewed. Parents/guardians will be advised to discuss the decision with the participants to ensure they fully understand the interview process and what will be expected of them, before returning the completed form. This is in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. My university email address will be given to participants/parents/guardians. Parents/guardian's will be required to sign the letter to agree to permit their child's to participate in the interview process and agree to the collection of data for the purpose of the research project, taking into consideration, data and privacy laws. Consent will also be required by Headteacher's to agree to students in their school participating in the research project. (see appendix 2)

Please be aware that if the project involves over 16s who lack capacity to consent, separate approval will be required from the Health Research Authority (HRA) in line with the Mental Capacity Act.

Please attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (if applicable), the Consent Form (if applicable), the content of any telephone script (if applicable) and any other material that will be used in the consent process. (Refer to appendix 1 – 7)

Note: Guidance from Legal Services on wording relating to the Data Protection Act 2018 can be accessed at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/legal-services/What-we-do/Data-Protection/resources.aspx.

Use of deception?

Will the participants be deceived in any way about the purpose of the study?

Yes ☐
No ☒

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Include how and when the deception will be revealed, and the nature of any explanation/debrief will be provided to the participants after the study has taken place.

Section 6: Participant compensation, withdrawal and feedback to participants

What, if any, feedback will be provided to participants?

Explain any feedback/ information that will be provided to the participants after participation in the research (e.g. a more complete description of the purpose of the research, or access to the results of the research).

A statement will be added to the consent form where parents/carers and/or the participants can state whether they would like to be contacted after the study to be advised of the research outcomes. If they agree, participants and/or their parents/carers will be provided with the main research findings. Participants and/or parents/carers will also be provided with the option for this feedback to be given in writing or via a brief online meeting where both participant and their parent/carer can be present together. For written requests, the participant and/or their parent/carer will be sent a brief statement of the main research findings via email (see appendix 2a).

What arrangements will be in place for participant withdrawal?

Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project, explain any consequences for the participant of withdrawing from the study and indicate what will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw.

In the letter of invitation and consent form (see appendix 4 and 2a), the participants and their parents/guardians, will be advised of their right to withdraw at any time, with no need to provide an explanation, and with no negative repercussions. Interviewees will also be reminded of their right to withdraw before the interview commences. Once the interview has been completed, the interviewer will check the interviewee still would like their answers to be considered for the benefit of the research project. It is at that point, the researcher will assume they consent and would like to continue in the process, unless expressed otherwise. My email address and supervisor's contacts will be provided to participants on the information sheet for any questions during the research process and will be reminded of the opportunity they can withdraw from the research project up to four weeks after the interview date.

Please confirm the specific date/timescale to be used as the deadline for participant withdrawal and ensure that this is consistently stated across all participant documentation. This is considered preferable to allowing participants to 'withdraw at any time' as presumably there will be a point beyond which it will not be possible to remove their data from the study (e.g. because analysis has started, the findings have been published, etc).

Participants and/or their parents/carers will be advised they can withdraw up to four weeks after the interview has taken place, at which point, their data will be destroyed. This information will be added to the consent form (see appendix 2a). Interviewees will be reminded at the start and end of the interview. If after the interview has taken place; a participant or their parent/carer requests to withdraw their data from the project, their data will be deleted if this is within the four-week

deadline. This participant will be replaced by another, using the same recruitment process as described earlier.

What arrangements will be in place for participant compensation?

Will participants receive compensation for participation?

Yes ☐
No ☒

If yes, please provide further information about the nature and value of any compensation and clarify whether it will be financial or non-financial.

Click or tap here to enter text.

If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 7: Confidentiality/anonymity

Will the identity of the participants be known to the researcher?

Will participants be truly anonymous (i.e. their identity will not be known to the researcher)?

Yes ☒
No ☐

In what format will data be stored?

Will participants' data be stored in identifiable format, or will it be anonymised or pseudo-anonymised (i.e. an assigned ID code or number will be used instead of the participant's name and a key will kept allowing the researcher to identify a participant's data)?

Data will be stored using pseudonyms in place of real names in order to provide anonymity for all participants. This is in line with the ethical guidelines detailed by the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2011) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2015). Data will be kept on a secure computer which only the researcher can access.

Will participants' data be treated as confidential?

Will participants' data be treated as confidential (i.e. they will not be identified in any outputs from the study and their identity will not be disclosed to any third party)?

Yes ☒
No ☐

If you have answered no to the question above, meaning that participants' data will not be treated as confidential (i.e. their data and/or identities may be revealed in the research outputs or otherwise to third parties), please provide further information and justification for this:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 8: Storage, access and disposal of data

How and where will the data (both paper and electronic) be stored, what arrangements will be in place to keep it secure and who will have access to it?

Please note that for long-term storage, data should usually be held on a secure University of Birmingham IT system, for example BEAR (see https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/it/teams/infrastructure/research/bear/index.aspx).

Data will be held for 10 years following the researchers viva.

Data retention and disposal

The University usually requires data to be held for a minimum of 10 years to allow for verification. Will you retain your data for at least 10 years?

Yes ☒
No ☐

If data will be held for less than 10 years, please provide further justification:

Click or tap here to enter text.

What arrangements will be in place for the secure disposal of data?

The data from this study will be kept on a secure, encrypted memory stick. Due to the requirements at
the University of Birmingham, data will also be stored in the 'Research Data Store (RDS)' which allows restricted and secure access to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants for a minimum of 10 years after the research has been completed (research-data@contacts.bham.ac.uk). Data within 10 years of the study will only be disposed of if advised by the University of Birmingham or following a consultation with my Supervisor/Course Leader.

Section 9: Other approvals required

Are you aware of any other national or local approvals required to carry out this research?

E.g. clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), Local Authority approval for work involving Social Care, local ethics/governance approvals if the work will be carried out overseas, or approval from NOMS or HMPPS for work involving police or prisons? If so, please provide further details:

Working with young people under the age of 18 years, requires clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). The researcher is subscribed to and has a valid Extended DBS for work in children in schools and churches. It is envisaged that interviews will be conducted virtually where a DBS will not be required. However, in circumstances where the researcher visits school premises to conduct an interview, she will bring a valid certificate with her DBS credentials, enabling the school

to access the researchers records to check the approval is valid. In the event the school requires their own documentation, I will provide all the necessary documentation to fulfil this request or be escorted by a member of staff for the duration of the visit instead.

For projects involving NHS staff, is approval from the Health Research Authority (HRA) needed in addition to University ethics approval?

If your project will involve NHS staff, please go to the HRA decision tool at http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/ to establish whether the NHS would consider your project to be research, thus requiring HRA approval in addition to University ethics approval. Is HRA approval required?

Yes ☐
No ☒

Please include a print out of the HRA decision tool outcome with your application.

Section 10: Risks and benefits/significance

Benefits/significance of the research

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research

The research will provide new information and evidence about the experiences of female students of African Caribbean descent in secondary education in the UK who have been invisible over recent years; whilst the failing boys discourse has been prevalent. This is in the light of media perceptions that girls of African Caribbean descent are achieving, when in fact, they are underperforming and there is a lack of initiatives to support their learning.

I will provide additional knowledge to Heidi Mirza's study in 1992 on the school experiences of girls of African Caribbean descent in secondary schools in England. There is currently a gap in literature on this topic. It is hoped, this research will provide new guidance to educators and parents, as well as training and development for school-based staff on strategies to engage girls of African Caribbean descent in education.

Risks of the research

Outline any potential risks (including risks to research staff, research participants, other individuals not involved in the research, the environment and/or society and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap.) ***Please ensure that you include any risks relating to overseas travel and working in overseas locations as part of the study, particularly if the work will involve travel to/working in areas considered unsafe and/or subject to travel warnings from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (see*** https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)***. Please also be aware that the University insurer, UMAL, offers access to RiskMonitor Traveller, a service which provides 24/7/365 security advice for all travellers and you are advised to make use of this service (see https://umal.co.uk/travel/pre-travel-advice/).***

The outlining of the risks in this section does not circumvent the need to carry out and document a detailed Health and Safety risk assessment where appropriate – see below.

Location - It is envisaged that interviews will take place in a virtual setting. However, where circumstances do not permit, whilst visiting the school/church/youth centre, the researcher and the participants will adhere to local, national and University guidelines regarding Covid-19 as well as the policies of the hosting organisation.

Participants – The focus of the research on educational attainment, gender and ethnicity and the themes explored during interview where the interviewee shares their experiences, may arouse emotions of a sensitive nature with the interviewee before, during or after the interview has taken place. Interviewees will be given the opportunity to reschedule the interview if they wish. Also, parents/carers and Headteachers will be advised of the support services young people can access or be referred to for additional support, regardless of any visible distress post-interview. (see appendix 2 and 7).

University Health & Safety (H&S) risk assessment

For projects of more than minimal H&S risk it is essential that a H&S risk assessment is carried out and signed off in accordance with the process in place within your School/College and you must provide a copy of this with your application. The risk may be non-trivial because of travel to, or working in, a potentially unsafe location, or because of the nature of research that will carried out there. It could also involve (irrespective of location) H&S risks to research participants, or other individuals not involved directly in the research. Further information about the risk assessment process for research can be found at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/worksafe/policy/Research-Risk-Assessment-and-Mitigation-Plans-RAMPs.aspx.

Please note that travel to (or through) 'FCO Red zones' requires approval by the University's Research Travel Approval Panel, and will only be approved in exceptional circumstances where sufficient mitigation of risk can be demonstrated.

Section 11: Any other issues

Does the research raise any ethical issues not dealt with elsewhere in this form?

If yes, please provide further information:

The researcher is aware that selecting young people based on their gender and race and asking them to reflect on their school experience might be stressful, distressing and uncomfortable for some participants, etc. Furthermore, discussing themes associated with ethnicity and gender, may also trigger sensitive emotions. In this regard, all participants will be made aware through the consent forms (see Appendix 2) provided to all participants/parents/carers, prior to the interviews, that they have the right to withdraw from the study, at any time, without having to explain their reasons for doing so. Accordingly, the European Commission's 'Ethics in Social Science and Humanities' document (6._h2020_ethics-soc-science-humanities_en.pdf (europa.eu), suggests research that involves members of ethnic minority groups and researching the topic of race, is considered a sensitive topic that has the potential to cause psychological and emotional stress. As the interviewer, I am in control of the interview and the ability to minimise these risks. I will do this by observing the interviewees body language and responses, being aware of any cues or signals that indicate the young person may be distressed. I will allow for pauses and give the interviewee an opportunity to stop and recollect themselves. If the situation necessitates, I will indicate acceptance of the young person's response and remind them of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, including pausing or stopping the interview. This has been indicated by The Qualitative Research Forum in their published document - Undertaking Sensitive Research: Issues and Strategies for Meeting the Safety Needs of All Participants (https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/983/2143). I will also provide an information leaflet (electronic or paper format) with a list of support services available for the young person and their parent/guardian to contact if they require it (see appendix 7).

Do you wish to provide any other information about this research not already provided, or to seek the opinion of the Ethics Committee on any particular issue?

If yes, please provide further information:
The researcher has had previous experience carrying out research which focuses on ethnicity with adults in Higher Education and will use this experience to inform professionalism, sensitivity, tact and confidentiality.

Section 12: Peer review

Has your project received scientific peer review?

Yes ☐
No ☒

If yes, please provide further details about the source of the review (e.g. independent peer review as part of the funding process or peer review from supervisors for PGR student projects):

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 13: Nominate an expert reviewer

For certain types of project, including those of an interventional nature or those involving significant risks, it may be helpful (and you may be asked) to nominate an expert reviewer for your project. If you anticipate that this may apply to your work and you would like to nominate an expert reviewer at this stage, please provide details below.

Title: Click or tap here to enter text.
First name: Click or tap here to enter text.
Last name: Click or tap here to enter text.
Email address: Click or tap here to enter text.
Phone number: Click or tap here to enter text.

Brief explanation of reasons for nominating and/or nominee's suitability:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 14: Document checklist

Please check that the following documents, where applicable, are attached to your application:

Recruitment advertisement ☒
Participant information sheet ☒
Consent form ☒
Questionnaire ☐
Interview/focus group topic guide ☒

Please proof-read study documentation and ensure that it is appropriate for the intended audience before submission.

Section 15: Applicant declaration

Please read the statements below and tick the boxes to indicate your agreement:

I submit this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent. ☒

The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it. ☒

I undertake to abide by University Code of Practice for Research (https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines. ☒

I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer. ☒

I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee via the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer. ☒

Please now save your completed form and email a copy to the Research Ethics Officer, at aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. As noted above, please do not submit a paper copy.

Appendix 6. Letters of invitation

School

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Dear

<u>An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in Secondary education in England: Invitation to participate in a research project.</u>

My name is Julie Blake. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Birmingham, studying an Education Doctorate. I am inviting students from [school name] to participate in my research project.

The topic of the research is: An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of girls of African Caribbean descent in secondary education in England.

The aim of this study is to explore the current school experiences of sixteen girls of African Caribbean descent to explore the strategies they use to achieve. This study recognizes the media's focus is largely on the underperformance of boys of African Caribbean descent whilst there is little said about girls. However, statistics from the Department for Education reveals that in 2019, 'Black Caribbean' girls were the lowest achieving group by ethnicity and gender and 'Black Caribbean' pupils to be the amongst the lowest performing ethnicity to attain Mathematics and English at A*- C.

The outcome of the study will be used to develop new guidance for educators and understanding how to close the ethnicity and gender gaps.

I would like to offer the opportunity for girls of African Caribbean descent in years 9 – 11, to volunteer to participate in the study.

All data will be collected and stored confidentially and anonymous. It will be kept securely and will be made available to the University only. All participants and their parents/carers can get feedback on the research outcomes as their request.

Interviews will be one hour long and can take place during or after-school hours, using an online platform i.e. MS Teams, Zoom or Skype. However, if your preference is for face-to-face interviews on the school premises, this can be arranged at your request. Please note: all participants have the right to withdraw from the study up to four weeks after the date of the interview, in which, the data will be destroyed.

I strongly recommend girls to be given the option whether they would like to participate in the study. All girls who volunteer should be issued with the attached letter for their parents/carers to read, together with a consent form, which should be emailed before the interview.

This benefits to your school include the opportunity to shape the future for themselves and other girls in their school, as well as providing new information for educators. If you agree to your school taking part in this study, please can you sign and email the consent form to the address below.

I recognize that the sharing of personal experiences may present the girls with emotional needs following the interview. Please refer to the information attached for a list of agencies in which you can refer them for support following the interview.

Cont…d

I would appreciate it if you could sign and return the consent form by [Date] to confirm you agree to your school taking part in the study.

For further information, please contact me at [redacted] or [mobile number].

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

J. Blake

Julie Blake

Parent/Carer

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Dear Parent/Carer

An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in Secondary education in England: Invitation for your daughter to participate in a research project.

My name is Julie Blake. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Birmingham, studying an Education Doctorate. I am inviting girls to participate in my research project.

The aim of this study is to explore the current school experiences of sixteen girls of African Caribbean descent to explore the strategies they use to achieve. This study recognizes the media's focus is largely on the underperformance of boys of African Caribbean descent whilst there is little said about girls. However, statistics from the Department for Education reveals that in 2019, 'Black Caribbean' girls were the lowest achieving group by ethnicity and gender and 'Black Caribbean' pupils to be the amongst the lowest performing ethnicity to attain Mathematics and English at A*- C.

The outcome of the study will be used to develop new guidance for educators and understanding how to close the ethnicity and gender gaps.

I would like to offer the opportunity for your daughter to volunteer to participate in the study. The study presents your daughter with the opportunity to shape the future for themselves and other girls in their school, as well as providing new information for educators.

All data will be collected and stored confidentially and anonymous. It will be kept securely and will be made available to the University only. All participants and their parents/carers can get feedback on the research outcomes as their request.

Interviews will be one hour long and can take place during school hours, using an online platform i.e. MS Teams, Zoom or Skype. However, if your preference is for face-to-face interviews on the school premises, this can be arranged at your request. Please note: all participants have the right to withdraw from the up to four weeks after the date of the interview, in which, the data will be destroyed. Only the interviewer and your daughter will be present in the interview.

All girls who volunteer to participate have been issued with a consent form and information sheet (attached) for you to read and sign. If your daughter chooses to be interviewed, please ensure both you and your daughter signs the consent form by [Date] and email it to the address below.

I recognize that the sharing of personal experiences may present your daughter with emotional needs following the interview. Please refer to the information sheet attached for a list of agencies in which you can refer her to seek additional support or to discuss the topics raised.

For further information, please contact me at [redacted] or [mobile number].

Yours faithfully

J. Blake

Julie Blake

Youth groups

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

FAO: The Youth Centre Manager

Dear Sir/Madam,

<u>An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in Secondary education in England: Invitation to participate in a research project.</u>

My name is Julie Blake. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Birmingham, studying an Education Doctorate. I am inviting students from [school name] to participate in my research project.

The topic of the research is: *An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of girls of African Caribbean descent in secondary education in England*. This study will explore the current school experiences of sixteen girls of African Caribbean descent, to investigate what challenges they may face at school and the strategies they employ, to achieve. This study recognizes the media's focus is largely on failing boys and there is little said about African Caribbean girls. However, statistics reveal girls of African Caribbean descent were the lowest achieving group by ethnicity and gender in 2019 and Black Caribbean pupils are amongst the lowest performing ethnicity to attain Mathematics and English at A*- C.

The outcome of the study will be used to develop new guidance for educators and an understanding how to close the ethnicity and gender gaps.

I would like to offer the opportunity for girls of African Caribbean aged 13 – 16 years, to volunteer to participate in the study.

All data will be collected and stored confidentially and anonymous. It will be kept securely and will be made available to the University only. All participants and their parents/carers can get feedback on the research outcomes as their request.

Interviews will be held with the interviewer and the participant only and will be for a duration of one hour. It will be arranged to take place after school hours, using an online platform i.e. MS Teams, Zoom or Skype. However, if your preference is for face-to-face interviews on the youth centre premises, this can be arranged at your request, in which I will adhere to current Covid-19 guidelines. Please note: all participants have the right to withdraw from the up to four weeks after the date of the interview, in which, the data will be deleted. All girls who volunteer to participate can be issued with the attached letter for parents/carers to read and should also sign and email the consent form to the email address below, before the interview. Interviews will be attended by the interviewer and the interviewee only.

I recognize that the sharing of personal experiences may present the girls with emotional needs following the interview. Please refer to the information attached for a list of agencies in which you can refer them to for support.

I would hope you will take up the opportunity, the benefits of which include providing young people with the opportunity to shape the future for themselves and other girls as well as providing new information for educators. Cont….d

I would appreciate it if you could sign and return the consent form by [Date] to confirm you agree to your centre taking part in the study.

For further information, please contact me at [redacted] or [mobile number].

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

J. Blake

Julie Blake

Appendix 7

Email to churches/youth groups

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Dear xxx

<u>An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in Secondary education in England: Invitation to participate in a research project.</u>

My name is Julie Blake. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Birmingham, studying an Education Doctorate. I am inviting students from [school name] to participate in my research project.

The topic of the research is: *An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of girls of African Caribbean descent in secondary education in England*. This study will explore the current school experiences of sixteen girls of African Caribbean descent, to investigate what challenges they may face at school and the strategies they employ, to achieve. This study recognizes the media's focus is largely on failing boys and there is little said about African Caribbean girls. However, statistics reveal girls of African Caribbean descent were the lowest achieving group by ethnicity and gender in 2019 and Black Caribbean pupils are amongst the lowest performing ethnicity to attain Mathematics and English at A*- C.

The outcome of the study will be used to develop new guidance for educators and an understanding how to close the ethnicity and gender gaps.

I would like to offer the opportunity for girls of African Caribbean aged 13 – 16 years, to volunteer to participate in the study.

All data will be collected and stored confidentially and anonymous. It will be kept securely and will be made available to the University only. All participants and their parents/carers can get feedback on the research outcomes as their request.

Interviews will be held with the interviewer and the participant only and will be for a duration of one hour. It will be arranged to take place after school hours, using an online platform i.e. MS Teams, Zoom or Skype. However, if your preference is for face-to-face interviews on the [church/youth centre] premises, this can be arranged at your request, in which I will adhere to current Covid-19 guidelines. Please note: all participants have the right to withdraw from the up to four weeks after the date of the interview, in which, the data will be deleted. All girls who volunteer to participate can be issued with the attached letter for parents/carers to read and should also sign and email the consent form to the email address below, before the interview. Interviews will be attended by the interviewer and the interviewee only.

I recognize that the sharing of personal experiences may present the girls with emotional needs following the interview. Please refer to the information attached for a list of agencies in which you can refer them to for support.

I would hope you will take up the opportunity, the benefits of which include providing young people with the opportunity to shape the future for themselves and other girls as well as providing new information for educators.

Cont…d

I would appreciate it if you could sign and return the consent form by [Date] to confirm you agree to your [centre/church] taking part in the study.

For further information, please contact me at [redacted] or[mobile number].

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Julie Blake

Appendix 8

Consent forms

Headteacher

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in Secondary education in England.

Consent Form

Interviews will be conducted for one hour with the interviewer and the interviewee. Please read the following statements. If you agree with each statement, sign and email the form to Julie Blake at: [redacted]

- I have received a letter explaining the research project.
- I have received a copy of the information sheet.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the responses.
- I understand students or their parents/carers can withdraw at any time during the project and after the project up until 4 weeks after my interview date.
- I understand that the participant's data will be destroyed if they or their parent/carer choose to withdraw within the permitted time.
- I understand the data collected will be anonymised and will be placed in an online data archive for future research.
- I understand the data will be shared with the university for the purposes of the study.
- I consent to my girls in my school taking part in the research project.

Signed:_____ Date: _____

Name in block capitals _____Position: _____

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in Secondary education in England.

Consent Form

Interviews will be conducted for one hour. Only the interviewer and the participant will be present throughout the duration of the interview. Please read the following statements. If you agree with each statement, sign and email the form to **Julie Blake** at: [redacted]

This section to be completed by participants.

- I have read the letter for participants and parents/carers.
- I have received a copy of the information sheet.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the responses.
- I understand I can withdraw at any time during the project and after the project up until 4 weeks after my interview date.
- I understand that my data will be destroyed if I choose to withdraw within the permitted time.
- I consent to be audio/video recorded and a written transcript of the interview created.
- I consent to my anonymised data being placed in an online data archive for future research.
- I consent to my data being shared with the university for the purposes of the study.
- I consent to be contacted for future research projects.
- I consent to take part in the research.

Signed:_____ Date: _____

Name in block capitals

_____

The email address to send the meeting invitation is: _____

This section to be completed by Parents/Carers.

- I have read and discussed the letter with my child.
- I have received a copy of the information sheet.
- I understand only the interviewer and my daughter will be present during the interview.
- I understand I can withdraw my child at any time during the project and after the project up until 4 weeks after the interview date.
- I consent to my child participating in the University of Birmingham research project.

Please tick the box if you would like to receive feedback on the research outcomes. ☐

If you ticked the box, please select whether you would like this information sent to you via email or in an online meeting. (Please provide an email address) Email ☐ Online meeting ☐

Signed:_____ Date: _____

Name in block capitals _____

Relationship to child: _____

Consent form

Youth Centre Manager

An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in Secondary education in England.

Consent Form

Interviews will be conducted for one hour with the interviewer and the interviewee. Please read the following statements. If you agree with each statement, sign and email the form to Julie Blake at: [redacted]

- I have received a letter explaining the research project.
- I have received a copy of the information sheet.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the responses.
- I understand that girls or their parents/carers can withdraw at any time during the project and after the project up until 4 weeks after my interview date.
- I understand that the participant's data will be destroyed if they or their parent/carer choose to withdraw within the permitted time.
- I understand the data collected will be anonymised and will be placed in an online data archive for future research.
- I understand the data will be shared with the university for the purposes of the study.
- I consent to girls attending this centre can take part in the research project.

Signed:_____ Date: _____

Name in block capitals _____Position:_____

Appendix 9.

Information sheet

The research will be carried out by **Julie Blake,** a Postgraduate student at the University of Birmingham. To contact Julie, please email: [redacted] or phone: [mobile number].

For further questions on the research, you can contact staff at the University of Birmingham using the details below;-

Professor Dina Jane Kiwan, Professor in Comparative Education, College of Education and Social Justice, School of Education. Email address: [redacted]

Professor Kalwant Bhopal, Director, Center for Research in Race & Education, College of Education and Social Justice, School of Education. Email address: [redacted]

Counselling and Support: If you need to talk to someone about the topics raised in this research, you can contact any of the following agencies for support.

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (https://www.nspcc.org.uk/) Help for adults concerned about a child Call 0808 800 5000	**SAMARITANS** You can access confidential emotional support at any time from Samaritans either by emailing or by calling 116 123.
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) **(**https://www.nspcc.org.uk/) Help for adults concerned about a child Call 0808 800 5000	**MIND** For help with mental health(https://www.mind.org.uk) Infoline: 0300 123 3393 Email: info@mind.org.uk Text: 86463 Post: Mind Infoline, PO Box 75225, London, E15 9FS
Childline offers help for children and young people. It is a free, private and confidential service that you can access online and on the phone. Call Childline on 0800 1111	**SHOUT** Shout is a 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need immediate help. Text 85258 for immediate help.
PAUSE is run by Forward Thinking Birmingham, the city's mental health partnership for 0-25 year olds. https://www.forwardthinkingbirmingham.org.uk/contact-us) Crisis Team open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week Postal Address: 5th Floor, 1 Printing House Street, Birmingham, B4 6DF Access Centre Number 0300 300 0099	**The Children's Society** (https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/see-hear-respond)
NHS: To get urgent medical help, use the NHS 111 online service, or call 111 if you're unable to get help online**.**	

Appendix 10.

Advert

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

My name is Julie Blake. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Birmingham, studying an Education Doctorate. I am inviting you to participate in my research project.

The topic of the research is: An exploration of the failing boys' discourse on the educational experience of Black Caribbean girls in secondary education in England.

This aim of the study is to explore the current school experiences of girls of African Caribbean descent to investigate what challenges they may face at school and the strategies they use to achieve. This study recognizes the media's focus is largely on African Caribbean boys underperforming and there is little said about girls of African Caribbean descent. However, statistics on the performance of African Caribbean girls in 2019 shows Black girls were the lowest achieving group by ethnicity and gender and Black Caribbean pupils to be the amongst the lowest performing ethnicity to attain Mathematics and English at A*- C.

The outcome of the study will be used to develop new guidance for educators and understanding how to close the ethnicity and gender gaps.

Interviews will be held online for one hour with an interviewer at a time convenient to you.

If you are a parent/carer or a girl aged 13-16 years of African Caribbean descent and you are interested in participating in this study or you would like further information, please contact Julie at [redacted] or [mobile number].