

WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN HOW BLACK AMERICAN WOMEN AND  
BLACK BRITISH WOMEN OF AFRICAN DESCENT AND CARIBBEAN DESCENT EXPERIENCE  
RACISM?

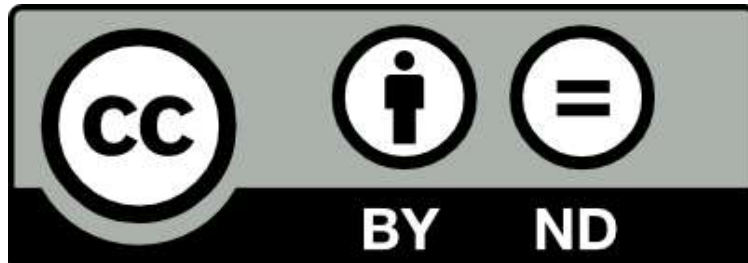
by

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## ABSTRACT

Black women have significant and impactful traumatic experiences of racism that are often ignored (comparable to Black men), and there are almost no comparative studies exploring Black women's experiences of racism in different contexts. This study examines the similarities and differences in how Black women in the United States and England experience racism. The study builds upon the theoretical frameworks of Historical Trauma Theory, Microaggression Theory, and Everyday Racism and interconnects them through the lens of Black women. Mixed methods were used for data collection. A survey was conducted as a recruitment tool to gather participants and collect pertinent demographical data.

Demographical data were collected from 114 Black American women and 80 Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent. Focus group and interview participants were selected from the survey respondents; 30 women gave consent to participate—12 Black American women and 18 Black British women. Thematic analysis was applied to the findings and resulted in five major themes. Major findings discussed in the thesis include historical racial trauma from childhood to adulthood, frequency of experiences of racism and the most common locales of occurrences, and Black women's resilience.

Areas identified for further research include: expanding literature as it relates to Black women's experiences of racism, comparatively, and experiences of racism by Black women with white mothers.

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This thesis is dedicated to my ancestors. Those who survived being ripped from the shores of Africa, survived the Middle passage as human chattel, survived the bonds of enslavement, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement, making it possible for me to achieve this tremendous milestone. I am eternally thankful for their bravery and resilience. I carry their spirit within me with resounding pride and gratitude, and create a new legacy I proudly pass down to my future generations.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAHT – African American Historical Trauma

AAHTQ – African American Historical Trauma Questionnaire

APA – American Psychiatric Association

BA – Black Americans

BAM – Black American Men

BAME – Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic

BAW – Black American Women

BB – Black British.

BBM – Black British Men

BBW – Black British Women

BC – Black Caribbean

BCC – Black Caribbean Canadian

BET – Black Entertainment Television

BI – British Immigrant

BM – British Migrant

BNAB – Black North African British

BR – British Refugee

CCC – Collective Care Centre

CHREBPS – Code of Human Research Ethics of the British Psychological Society

CRMA – Civil Rights Movement in America

CRMBW – Civil Rights Movement Black women

CRT – Critical Race Theory

CT – Central Time

DSM – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual

EBW – Enslaved Black Women

ERT – Everyday Racism Theory

ET – Eastern Time

EVAW – End Violence Against Women

GED – General Education Degree

HTT – Historical Trauma Theory

IA – Inductive Analysis

IT – Intersectionality Theory

MPs – Members of Parliament

MPT – Mountain Pacific Time (Phoenix)

MT – Microaggressions Theory

MT – Mountain Time (Denver)

NABJ – National Association of Black Journalists

NI – Native Indians

NIAN – Native Indians and Alaska Natives

PST – Portland State University

PT – Pacific Time

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSS – Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

PWI – Predominantly White Institution (PWI)



RST – Racial Socialisation Theory

SAA – Slavery Amelioration Act

SAC – Slavery Abolition Act

SBW – Strong Black Woman

SET – Social Ecological Theory

SRT – Social Representations Theory

TEA – The Equality Act

TISM – The International Slavery Museum

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Notes: “Black women” and “women” are used interchangeably and refer to only Black women unless specified otherwise. United States and US are used interchangeably, and USA is used in reference to the country. African American and Black American are used interchangeably.

### Overview and Perspective

The following interdisciplinary study is a bilateral, qualitative, comparative study that explores the similarities and differences in how Black American women and Black British women experience and process racism and racial trauma. My research draws knowledge from several fields, including sociology, psychology, and history, and examines how each discipline provides frameworks to build upon and explore how Black women in the USA and England similarly process their experiences of racism.

Across this study, Black is used according to self-identification by participants rather than the all-encompassing concept of political Blackness. Political Blackness, an umbrella term used more prominently in British history than US history, might include women of non-African descent (from India, for example) and others. During the 1970s in the UK, political Blackness broadly and generally referred to any non-white people who were most likely to be subjected to and experience racial discrimination simply based on the colour of their skin. People from South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and others could be identified as politically Black. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, only participants self-identifying as Black British by race/ethnicity of African descent, Caribbean descent, or mixed-heritage Black descent were invited to participate. Black American participants self-identify

as either Foundational Black Americans (FDA) or Black Americans of mixed-race/ethnic heritage. Foundational Black Americans are descendants of Black slaves who built the United States but do not necessarily relate to or connect with their African heritage because their direct ancestors were born in the USA, not Africa (Dawson, 2022). Therefore, FDAs usually do not prefer to be referred to as African-American.

My work began after I relocated from the United States to England, where I resided throughout the four years until completion. Upon arrival in the UK, I had very little exposure or knowledge and understanding of the history or modern lives of Black people living in the UK. I had “ideas” about what life was like for Black people here, but my PhD journey would prove to be an eye-opening experience that is shared throughout the thesis, from historical context to current and existing experiences of racism. Historical references are drawn to provide context, link commonalities among three Black populations, and present a framework that explores historical trauma. In the patriarchal, supremacist institution of racial hierarchy (Dubois, no date; Ford, 2001; Gilroy, 2001; Hodder-Williams, 2001), Black women are often ranked last, intersectionally, between race and gender; white men, white women, Black men and, finally, Black women, in both The United States and Britain (Song, 2006). As a Black woman, I wanted to hear stories and give voice to other Black women who are often forgotten about or labelled/stereotyped for speaking out against racism, discrimination or social injustice.

The term “Black women” is used intentionally throughout this thesis and should not be substituted nor misunderstood with the term “women of colour.” Mainstream, especially white feminists, have either consciously or subconsciously conjoined non-white women into

one expansive, inclusionary bubble which not only insults us by diminishing, or even negating, our individuality and unique lived experiences, it also stigmatises and demarcates us as being “other” and less than them. Generally, scholarship, academic literature, and feminist and gender studies describe the experiences of white women as normative, while non-white women’s experiences are subsumed in those (Collins, 1989; Gay, 2015; Jonsson, 2016). Since living in the UK and while building and cultivating my professional and academic networks, the term “women of colour” conveys as being trendy when used by women who, most likely, would not have preferred the term just a few years prior. However, amidst global protests for racial equality and equity, it is possible that women feel freer to express themselves as being non-white.

Since the peak of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest movement in the USA, there has been a surge in efforts to systematically bring awareness to historical racism, social injustices, disenfranchisement, and marginalisation of Black people. Multiple news outlets and reporting agencies, including the Associated Press, the Brookings Institution, NBC News, USA Today, and others, have updated their stylebooks to capitalise the word “Black”, even if reluctant to do so initially (Lanham, 2020). Many other popular companies and organisations, such as Nike, Netflix, Amazon, Google, HBO, McDonalds, and many others, have already begun using capital B in their correspondence and ad campaigns (Lanham, 2020). Capitalising Black and leaving white in lowercase symbolises respect and acknowledgement, according to some sources (Brookings Institute, 2021). The National Association of Black Journalists acknowledges that Black scholars have advocated for using capital B for many years (Lanham, 2020); however, I was unable to find seminal sources

regardless of the search convention. Even though the aforementioned editorial changes have been made in industries across the USA, similar or equal changes are not apparent in the UK. For consistency and a willingness not to confuse the reader with the capitalisation or non-capitalisation of Black, throughout this thesis, Black will be capitalised when referencing Black people, and white will be in lowercase when referencing white people.

Black American poet Maya Angelou (1978) wrote about Black women's struggle: *"Out of the huts of history's shame, I rise. Up from a past that's rooted in pain, I rise."*

This quote addresses some key issues presented in this thesis, such as:

- participants' emotive reactions to racism
- participants' resilience despite the many challenges of racism

Resilience is a common thread throughout the thesis that demonstrates the strength of the study's participants and the historical connection between our ancestors and Black women today. Throughout history, Black women have demonstrated resilience through leadership of slave revolts, transporting the enslaved to freedom, and activism for civil justice. As far back as the 19th century, Black women have fought for civil rights. They resisted slavery and, historically, have always spoken out against racism (Leary, 2011).

In the 20th century, Black women formed the backbone of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Black women, sometimes referred to as the "backbone" (Robinson, 1983; Hughett, 2010; Dixon, 2017; Brown and Lemi, 2020), can be formidable forces, not only in the Black community but also society-at-large in the fight against social injustice. From slave revolts to the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement bus boycotts, from the creation of

Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) to the #MeToo (Burke, 2006) and Black Lives Matter (BLM) (Garza *et al.*, 2013) movements, Black women have sacrificed their lives for the betterment of Black people but with little acknowledgement, even from their own community. There has never been a mass movement after the abusive, police brutality or murder of a Black woman (Black Lives Matter - Herstory, no date).

In the United States, since 2015, police have fatally shot nearly 250 Black women (Iati and Jenkins, 2020), and at least 89 were in their homes or where they frequently resided (Iati and Jenkins, 2020). These numbers are overwhelming since Black women make up only 13% of the US population, yet they account for 20% of all women shot and killed and 28% of all unarmed deaths. Sandra Bland and Breonna Taylor are possibly the most high-profile instances of Black women murdered by police. Their deaths prompted the viral social media hashtag #Sayhername to call attention to Black women who are often overlooked compared to Black men and for police reformation and racial justice (Iati and Jenkins, 2020). This thesis study, therefore, deliberately examines Black women's lives to partially address this oversight.

Examining how historical trauma affects all Black populations should be considered an area of future research but is outside the scope of this paper which is specifically examining the residual effects of slavery on Black women. There is a plethora of research available as it relates to Black men; therefore, I prefer to add to the limited research regarding the effects of racism on Black women.

Although it is possible for Black American men and Black British men to have similar, recurring experiences with acts of microaggression, and individual, systemic and/or

institutional racism as Black women, exploring Black American or Black British men's experiences falls outside the scope of this research study. Where there is sufficient research and data that address Black men's issues, this thesis aims to showcase Black women's experiences of racism and amplify their voices which are often ignored. Feminist author bell hooks (1981) describes this erasure of Black women's experiences compared to Black men's when she writes:

No other group in [the United States] has had their identity socialized out of existence as have Black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from Black men, or as a present part of the larger group "women" in this culture. (p. 7)

An exhaustive search through relevant literature yielded only one other bi-lateral comparative study on Black females. Essed (1991) wrote her dissertation about Black women's experiences of racism in California compared to Black women's experiences in the Netherlands. I did not discover Essed's work until near the final stages of this thesis. There were no other comparative studies found about Black women in different countries. Such an omission indicates a dire need for more research about Black women's lives. A further indication of the need for this study is that Essed's thesis was produced in 1991, approximately 30 years before this study. Significant social change has taken place since then, warranting a further comparative study taking account of the current state of play. Therefore, this thesis is my contribution to the literature, seeking to improve awareness about the experiences of racism among Black women and exposure to the effects racism has on our mental and physical health.

## **Slavery as a Historical Experience**

This study uses slavery as the traumatic historical event that may have contributed to the complex, collective trauma experienced by some Black populations who share identity in the USA, the Caribbean, and England (Mohatt *et al.*, 2014). However, even when slavery was not known or documented in a participant's familial history (i.e., African migrants), recent race-related historical trauma, events that occurred within the participant's lifetime still present similarly. Among Black participants who are descendants of enslaved people in the USA, the Caribbean, and England, slavery and all its components of racism could be the social phenomena that create a causal relationship between Black Americans, Black Caribbeans, and Black British. Sociologists describe a causal relationship, or causation, as the existence of "cause and effect" relationships between multiple variables (Theodorson, 1967; Shepard and Green, 2003).

The residual effects of slavery, which will be discussed throughout this thesis, help contextualise a historical theoretical framework that suggests there are similarities in how Black women in the USA and Black women in England experience racism, irrespective of whether they had previous knowledge of or exposure to relatives or ancestors who were previously enslaved. This research provides knowledge that Black women today, across both countries and from diverse education levels, socio-economic statuses, age groups, and various Black ethnic heritages, similarly display the residual effects of racial trauma experienced by their enslaved ancestors without having direct experience or knowledge of the trauma themselves. This knowledge expands the existing Historical Trauma Theory (HTT)



(Braveheart, 2000) beyond the Lakota people by examining how historical trauma from slavery, the primary traumatic event, may effect Black women today.

The discussion of slavery is not exhaustive because I am not an historian, and the history of slavery is not the primary purpose of this thesis. However, slavery, in this context, is the beginning of the journey, the preface of the legacy of the struggle of Black women that is still prevalent today. The paradigms of threat, abuse, sexual mistreatment, mistrust, and emotional trauma linger in contemporary Black women (bell hooks, 1981; Leary, 2005; Gay, 2015). In this study, some participants described these existing paradigms in their overall general perceptions of white people and police, especially. Some participants expressed deep mistrust and hesitancy in forging relationships with non-Black people, particularly with co-workers and colleagues. Participants in intimate relationships with non-Black partners also described nuances of emotional trauma within the relationship when discussing racism.

During a period that spanned over 400 years, an estimated 16 to 25 million Africans (Araujo, 2010; Mintz, no date) were kidnapped from the shores of Africa as human chattel by white European slave traffickers and forcibly transported through the Atlantic Middle Passage in cargo ships. They were bound, chained, beaten, raped, and killed in what scholars consider the “worst migration of people in human history” (Franklin and Moss, 2000). This experience, named the “African Holocaust” (Adbullah *et al.*, 1995), resulted in an estimated two million Africans perishing during the passage from African to the New World (Worth, 2001; Eltis, 2007). Mintz (no date) writes that most enslaved people (60-70%) were deposited in Brazil or the Caribbean. However, by the mid-1800s, approximately two-thirds of all enslaved Africans lived in the southern region of the United States. A comparison of

the conditions in which African enslaved people survived in the United States and the Caribbean will not be discussed at length due to lack of space and because it is not within the scope of research for this thesis. However, the circumstances, conditions and treatment between male and female slaves will be briefly explored.

In his book, *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men*, Foster (2019) describes how enslaved men were often the victims of sexual violence and sexual exploitation at the hands of both white men and women. Black men were physically assaulted, sexually coerced, and subjected to what he described as the most horrifically intimate violations (Foster, 2019, p. 12). Foster (2019) argues how “the conditions of slavery gave rise to a variety of forms of sexual assault and exploitation that touched the lives of many men, their families, and their communities” (p. 19). Hartman (2022) describes the rape and other forms of sexual brutalities, such as castration and forced sexual intercourse with white women, inflicted upon bonded men, demonstrating enslaved men’s vulnerability to their owners’ abuses. The repeated sexual violation and depravity forced upon Black men further victimised Black women (Turner, 2017). As with the power imbalance of white slave owners over the enslaved, Black men also exerted their physical and sexual dominance over Black women through rape and domestic violence (Turner, 2017), perhaps, psychologically, in response to their own oppression. Solidarity and bonding among Black women, as discussed in later chapters, perhaps developed because of these violent occurrences. Black women were subjected to abuse from white people and Black men, and possibly turned toward each other for empathy, safety, and support.

To capture the complexity, harshness and brutality of slavery was not just reserved for men. There is a need for greater contextualization in which Black women's experiences are situated historically. Black women were enslaved and treated as human chattel, equal to the treatment of their male counterparts. Women were not “spared the rod” and were subjugated, beaten, violently raped, and brutally abused. Black women lived under the added and constant threat of having their children stolen from them and sold. The treatment of enslaved African women during the years of the transatlantic slave trade was particularly harsh. It is set apart from other historical accounts of human slavery because enslaved African females served as brooding mares for the purpose of reproducing generations of future slaves (Leary, 2015). In his book, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, Davis (2006, p. 3) discusses the historical comparisons of enslaved peoples to domestic animals and describes how initial enslavement and bestialisation of captured African slaves “may well have been modelled on the successful techniques of taming and domesticating wild animals.”

Throughout slavery, infant mortality was prevalent, and it was common for Black babies not to survive the plethora of childhood diseases or from malnourishment (Leary, 2015).

Therefore, Black women not only endured the tortuous pain of their children dying at birth or shortly after but also from having their children sold into slavery, never to be seen or heard from again. There was also the constant threat of their husbands and sons being captured and lynched or simply disappearing. While managing their heavy labour responsibilities, surviving childbirth, subjugation, oppression, death, and murder of their families and loved ones, Black women also carried the additional burden of fighting off

lascivious, lecherous, and often sexually violent slave owners. Black children, girls and women were relegated to field labour and were expected to work just as long and hard as Black men. Personal accounts claim Black women worked arduously in the fields well into full-term pregnancy and were usually given minimal time, as little as three weeks, to recover from birth and return to the fields—along with their newborn infant (Clinton, 2005, p. 11).

Black women frequently managed the unbearable grief over the loss of family, including parents, spouses (or partners if they were unable to marry), siblings and most importantly, their children. One account describes how a slave woman returned to the fields after birth and placed her newborn infant on the ground nearby, but not close enough for the woman to reach the baby before a snake bit the child and killed it (Clinton, 2005, p. 12). Additionally, Black women were subjected to harsh, cruel, and horrific medical abuse at the hands of sadistic medical practitioners who used them as specimens on which to “practice” barbaric experiments in the name of medical advancement (Washington, 2008). Enslaved Black women did not benefit from the cures and treatments for which they were experimented (Washington, 2008), nor were they compensated monetarily or with services or goods. Medical treatments and benefits were offered exclusively to white women (Washington, 2008). Physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse, fear and anxiety were hallmark features of what life was like for enslaved Black women.

Experiences of isolation, depression and trauma occurred among enslaved Black women throughout the African diaspora, including the United States, the Caribbean and Britain. Despite being isolated from family, beaten by their mistresses and raped by their masters, small slave girls still managed to survive. Black women (in most cases, from a very young

age) shouldered the burden of maintaining a productive work pace – even during pregnancy – short recovery periods after childbirth, unsanitary conditions for feminine and personal hygiene, meeting the needs of their spouses (mates or partners) and children (Paton, 2007). This laid the foundation for Black women’s perception and imagery that has lasted throughout generations. Stereotypical labelling and imagery of the “strong Black woman” has perpetuated a legacy of unwavering, unyielding strength (Donovan and West, 2015).

According to research and participants’ narratives, this phenomenon is detrimental to Black women. Participants expressed frustration with having to uphold a stereotype which, they feel, stifles their ability to express emotions, fatigue, and angst when dealing with racism. Stereotyping will be discussed in-depth in later chapters. I will also discuss how the effects of repeated exposure to those traumatic events have most likely been passed down intergenerationally, making current life conditions for Black women eerily similar even today.

### **Black Women - Slavery in The United States**

Slave traders preferred male slaves, for obvious reasons; they were bigger, stronger and could impregnate female slaves, which would guarantee a steady supply of slaves for generations. Black males fetched a higher price than females; therefore, for every African female slave, two African male slaves were purchased (Paton, 2007). Black women were exploited as slaves for both their productive and reproductive capacities, thereby making the experiences of Black slave women very different from the experiences of Black male slaves. Black women worked nearly as hard in the scorching heat under the same conditions as Black men, and if their productivity fell short, they suffered the same punishments as the

men. In addition to the arduous and back-breaking work of field labour, women were also expected to work in the home of their mistress.

Research shows that some young slave girls started household work as young as five years (Clinton, 2005, p. 17) and were forced to cook, clean, wash and caretaking responsibilities for even younger children. Clinton (2005) describes that:

[Harriet Tubman], at the age of five, was so small, she had to sit on the floor to hold her mistress's baby so that the child would fit in her lap. Young children were not spared from the harsh conditions of field work. (p. 18)

Children were not spared severe beatings even when they worked inside the house. Some children were viciously beaten daily without fail and provocation (Clinton, 2005, pp. 12-18), especially at the hands of jealous and vindictive mistresses while their slave master husbands turned a blind eye to the abuse. Following is an excerpt from Clinton's (2005, p. 18) book that begins on the previous page: "One day, Tubman recalled, she was whipped **five times** before breakfast:

fast — and her neck bore the scars from this incident for the rest of her life. When her wails awoke the mistress's sister, a Miss Emily, she was given a brief reprieve as Emily tried to offer assistance rather than punishment, tutoring rather than harshness. Even though this kind woman interceded on her behalf, Araminta remained unable to please her mistress and was run ragged in the process. The young girl was returned to her family severely debilitated, weak and undernourished.

Rit nursed her daughter back to health, only to have her sent away again as soon as she recovered. This became part of a pattern. During childhood Araminta was hired out year after year, serving a variety of masters as a household worker.

Tubman recalled an episode that provoked her to run away when she was only seven years old:

My mistress got into a great quarrel with her husband; she had an awful temper, and she would scold and storm and call him all kinds of names. Now you know, I never had anything good, no sweet, no sugar; and that sugar, right by me, did look so nice and my mistress' back was turned to me while she was fighting with her husband, so I just put my fingers in the sugar bowl to take one lump and maybe she heard me for she turned and saw me. The next minute she had the rawhide down. I gave one jump out of the door.

**Figure 1: Life as a child slave**

This example demonstrates how enslaved Black children's lives were disrupted by threats and acts of violence. Tubman's historical account links similar emotional responses as described by this study's participants' racist experiences during their early childhood. While no participant described physical acts of violence of this magnitude, the residual and lingering emotive responses from their experiences support the effects of racial trauma, similarly.

## Slavery in Britain and the British Caribbean

In 1636, the trade of imported Africans as slaves became sanctioned (Walvin, 1996) and immediately, English settlers established their dominance by categorizing Africans and indigenous native Indians who worked for them in the New World as heathens and brutes, treating them as human chattel (Walvin, 1996). Africans were sanctioned as slaves for life, and their bondage was handed down to their offspring (Brown *et al.*, 2003). However, slave ownership is virtually invisible in British history (Hall *et al.*, 2014), majorly resultant of omission and by strategies of euphemism and evasion originally adopted by the slave owners. Hall *et al.* (2014) claim hundreds of Britons owned enslaved people themselves or had families who owned slaves yet never identified themselves as slave owners. Referred to as “property” instead of chattel slaves, it undoubtedly included both men and women. According to scholars, British elites who were slave owners were abundant in the early nineteenth century, and that paradigm continued into the twentieth century (Hall *et al.*, 2014)

Between 1655 and 1809, more than 600,000 enslaved Africans were transported across the Atlantic and deposited in the Caribbean at roughly 2,000 Africans per annum initially, then rising to 8,000 per annum in the latter 30 years of the British slave trade (Klein, 1978). The enslaved were doomed to a life of torture, brutality, back-breaking labour and other atrocities in nearly unbearable conditions. Even though not subjected to the harshest conditions of chattel slavery, enslaved Africans in England experienced indentured servitude and were often seen as nothing more than reassuring companions or household employees on display to symbolize a family's wealth and status (Sandhu, 2011). Sandhu (2011) writes



how the English often dressed their household slaves in fancy clothes, including wrapping their heads in bright turbans and how they were often selected based on their looks and the colour of their skin. Wealthy families frequently displayed and showed off their Black servants as proof of their success and social standing. However, Benjamin and Fleming (2010) argue that slaves were still often brutally treated and forced to remain in slavery against their will. Enslaved Black people in Britain were also treated considerably less than humans, and despite the contrast in conditions, institutional racism later took a firm hold in the monarchy and across the British empire (Christian, 1998).

The first major example of British institutionalised racism toward its Black citizenry came in 1837 from Queen Victoria, who strongly and publicly disapproved of the presence of Africans in England (Christian, 1998). Despite disapproval from the queen, Black populations continued to grow throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, and Christian (1998) claims that Black people were viewed as a menace to white British society, which was fast establishing itself as "Great Britain". Racial theories that systematically espoused the notion of white supremacy gained momentum and popularity (Christian, 1998).

The landscape and infrastructure of Britain and its consumerism changed and grew exponentially because of the lucrative trans-Atlantic slave trade. Part of Britain's consumerism became the African slaves themselves (Benjamin and Fleming, 2010). In total, 5000 slave voyages were made from Liverpool, carrying approximately 1.5 million Africans into slavery (Benjamin and Fleming, 2010). London and Bristol boasted the most profits earned from the slave trade in the early 1700s. However, by the 1740s, Liverpool merchants had overtaken them, and eventually, Liverpool's profits from the slave trade turned it into

the wealthiest and most important city in Britain. By 1750 Liverpool was sending more slave ships to Africa and the Americas than London and Bristol combined (Benjamin and Fleming, 2010) and continued to do so until the abolition of slavery in 1807 (The National Archives, 2018).

William Roscoe, a pro-abolitionist, was elected to Parliament in 1806 and spear-headed the campaign to end the act of slave trading in 1807 (Benjamin and Fleming, 2010). Ironically, in the 50 years after slave trading was ended, Britain became the world leader in the lucrative business. The International Slavery Museum in Liverpool states the Royal Navy seized 1,600 slave ships and freed 150,000 Africans on board, and the British government signed anti-slavery treaties with over 50 African rulers. Despite positive actions in 1807, widespread revolts ensued (British Involvement, 2009). However, the British government did not enact the Slavery Abolition Act until 1833. Slave owners were paid a whopping sum of £20 million (roughly £1 billion today) by the British government, whereas the freed slaves received nothing (British Involvement, 2009).

Similarly, in the United States, newly freed slaves, called sharecroppers, were promised 40 acres and a mule when slavery was abolished, but they received nothing as well. Christian (1998) writes: "Time and time again, Black folks have had to struggle for both their livelihood -shrouded in the unhealthy cloak of cultural racism and anti-Black hostility." Racial theories that systematically espoused the notion of white supremacy gained momentum and popularity despite the abolition of slavery (Christian, 1998).

Even though Africans were not enslaved in Britain as they were throughout the Americas and the Caribbean, Britain's role in the slave trade is discussed in this thesis to contextualise

the link between Black Americans and Black British. The study's participants, particularly those of Caribbean descent, described their feelings about what they called England's false projection "to the rest of the world" that racism does not exist in England. Despite England's progressive movement toward the abolition of slavery, which it readily accepts credit for, the involvement of Britain's role in the transatlantic slave trade is often downplayed, for which some participants expressed discontent and anger.

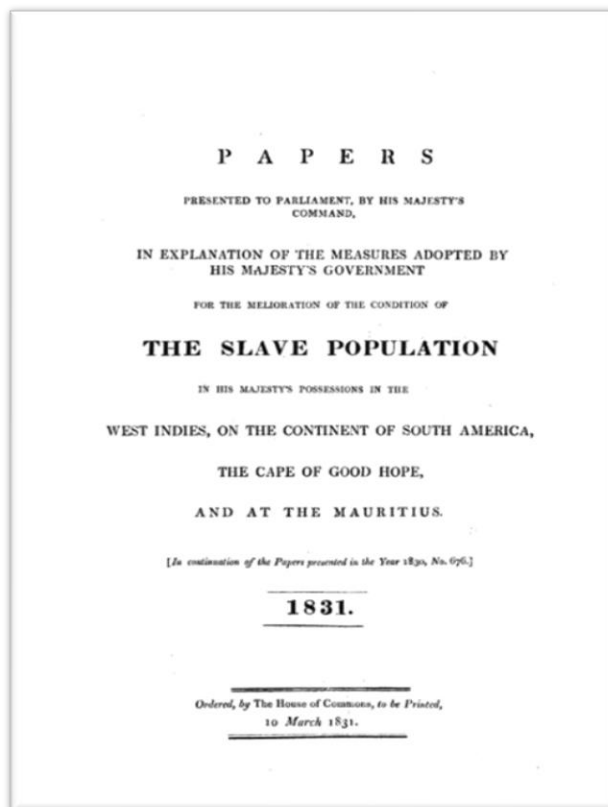
### **Black Women – Slavery in the British Colony of Jamaica**

Similar to the lack of history of enslaved Black women slaves in England, there is also a significantly challenging gap in the literature as it relates to the legacy of slavery for Black women in the Caribbean. The majority of this study's participants of Caribbean descent hail from Jamaica. Therefore, I am providing a brief example of some of the conditions of slavery in Jamaica. However, it should not be assumed that the institution of slavery or the experienced of enslaved peoples presented similarly on other islands throughout the Caribbean.

As previously mentioned, enslaved Black men fetched a higher price because of their strength and, therefore, outnumbered enslaved Black women (Paton, 2007). However, research indicates that between the late 17<sup>th</sup> and late 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were more enslaved women than men in Jamaica (Burnard, 2007), mainly because men seemed to be more vulnerable to death and disease than women (Paton, 2007). Compared to women in the United States, enslaved women in the Caribbean endured the arduous hard labour equally with men and under incredible tropical heat and humidity in a largely agricultural area, growing and harvesting sugarcane. The enslaved were also forced to work and produce

even during the harshest weather due to flooding from hurricanes or periods of intense rain during the summer months, making their conditions even harder and less humane.

Women were often viciously and brutally beaten, usually by men, but were forced to continue working if they survived. The following excerpt is from a document titled ***Parliamentary Papers: Volume 16***. It was produced in January 1831 by the H.M. Stationary Office and presented to: Parliament—House of Commons, Great Britain. The excerpt gives a very vivid and detailed account of an enslaved woman who was beaten savagely by her slave owner, who felt he neglected his duties in beating her; therefore, he enlisted yet another man to beat her.



**Figure 2: House of Commons documenting the beating of a slave woman (Cover)**

## JAMAICA.

Your Lordship will perceive by the documents annexed to Mr. Wildman's letter, that the circumstances of the case are stated as follows: Eleanor James states, that "Butler, a negro man belonging to Mr. M'Donald, bought a hog from her for his master: the payment having been delayed, she dunned the man, and he told her that his master would not pay unless she applied to himself. She accordingly went to North Hall in the evening of the 28th of November, accompanied by another negro woman named Joanna Williams, also belonging to Low Ground, and applied to Mr. M'Donald for payment of the hog: he instantly ordered her to be taken a short distance from his dwelling-house, and there, he himself superintending, to be laid down and flogged. She was flogged by two drivers in succession; the first used a whip, the second used switches: she was afterwards raised and washed with salt pickle. Mrs. M'Donald, the wife of M'Donald, and her sister, were in the dwelling-house, and heard the order given to flog her; the sister interceded: there was also a white young man present, who was walking in or near the piazza when the order was given. The morning after, M'Donald sent her two dollars, and ordered her to leave the property; she did so; and went immediately to Low Ground, and showed herself to Francis Smith, a free black man, who is permitted to reside on the estate."

Joanna Williams, a slave on the same plantation with Eleanor James, states, that "she went with Eleanor James to North Hall and heard M'Donald order Eleanor James to be flogged; she (Joanna Williams) instantly concealed herself among the bushes, and thus escaped notice. Saw Mrs. M'Donald, her sister, and a young man, whose name she thinks is M'Leay; heard Mrs. M'Donald's sister intercede. The flogging took place so near the house that those in it must have heard the screams. She kept a tally of the stripes, and counted 200, that is, she counted ten for each finger on both hands, and went over both hands twice. She saw the salt pickle applied to the wounds. The lash of the whip was dipped in water."

The same person, Joanna Williams, states, in a deposition made on the 3d April 1830, that "he, Mr. M'Donald, observing that Butler did not flog her to his satisfaction, he called a brown man, named Edward, who then flogged her. As Eleanor James was getting the flogging, she asked for water, when he, Mr. M'Donald, told her, the devil a bit of water he would give her, he did not care if she died on the spot, he did not care about her master, for if he was put in the jail-house he would have to maintain him, as he, her master, (meaning Mr. Wildman) had plenty of money. After the flogging had ceased, he ordered her to be washed with a salt mixture, which being done, ordered them to take her and throw her away at the negro houses."

**Figure 3: House of Commons documenting the beating of a slave woman**

The complexities of slavery in the Caribbean, including ill health, miscarriage, infant mortality, harsh weather conditions and the economic difficulty of raising surviving children, ensured that, on average, women had fewer children (Paton, 2007). Some scholars also believe that intense physical stress and strain also contributed to the high number of miscarriages (Paton, 2007). These extreme complexities, especially the miscarriages, also likely contributed to declining numbers among the slave population (Higman, 1995; Thomas,

1997). Dwindling numbers of slaves led to failing profits, and sugar plantation owners became desperate, thereby putting even more pressure on the enslaved (Paton, 2007). The decline of slave labour eventually surpassed the decline in production (Paton, 2007), which ultimately increased the demand for increased production for each enslaved individual (Turner, 1982; Viotti da Costa, 1994). Paton (2007) describes how the infrastructures of systemic and institutional racism operate outside the scope of individual interactions when he writes: “It was the logic of the system of slavery, and not simply the cruelty of individual slave owners that produced the extremes of exploitation and oppression in the Caribbean” (p. 49).

Enslaved women not only faced the pressures of surviving slavery and all that encompassed it, such as beatings, rape, fear of isolation and separation, raising and caring for their surviving children but also the growing pressure of reproducing more children. Paton (2007) notes that some plantation slave owners paid cash to enslaved women after their children had survived for at least one month, along with other payments at Christmas. In the Leeward Islands, Slavery Amelioration Act was passed in 1798, which claimed to improve the living conditions of the enslaved in the British Caribbean colonies. The notion of improving the living conditions of enslaved people instead of granting their freedom seemed ironic. However, the Act included a clause that penalised slave owners for excessive violence and neglect. These actions, superficially, may appear to be acts of kindness. However, research suggests they were merely steps to appease the enslaved to avoid rebellions and violence against slave owners (Miller *et al.*, 2010). While the directive to end violence against the

enslaved may or may not have been adhered to, the following graphic is an example of slaveowner/government resistance to end slavery.

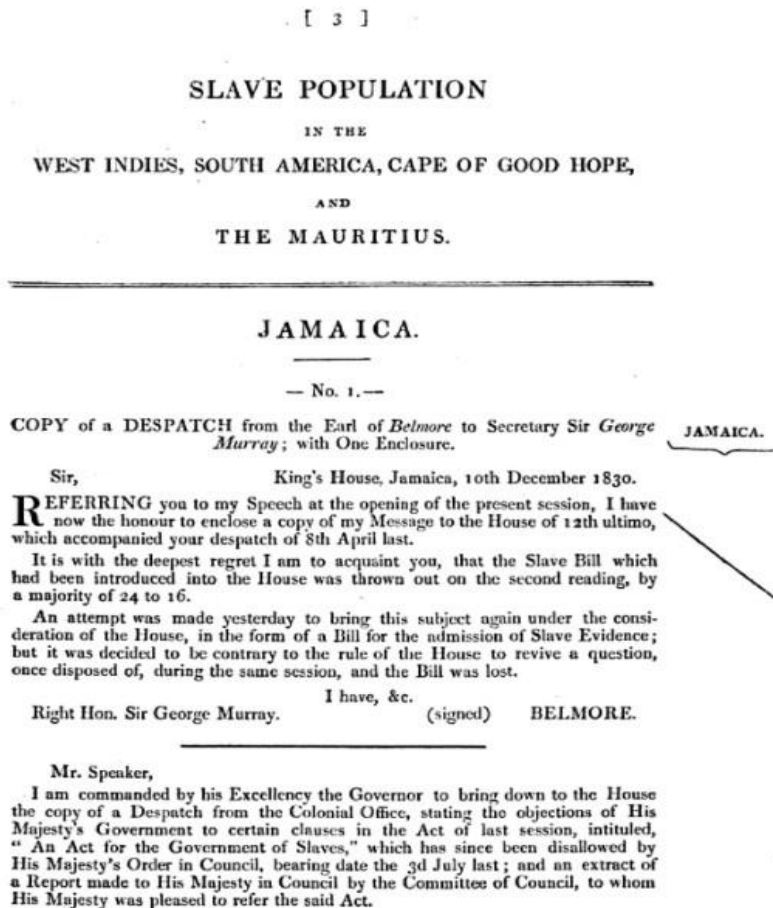


Figure 4: British government's response to slavery

### Historical Trauma: The Aftermath of Slavery

Historical trauma is the "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over a lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group experiences" (Brave Heart, 1998).

Any people whose culture has a history of oppression or genocide may experience the effects of trauma which have been handed down generationally. Historical trauma can be manifested and result in high rates of child and domestic violence, alcoholism, increased

symptoms of mood and trauma-related disorders, various health disparities, and countless other physiological and psychological problems (Williams-Washington and Mills, 2018).

Historical trauma theory is built upon the sentiment that populations exposed to and subjected to long-term occurrences of mass trauma exhibit chronic and morbid diseases several generations after the original occurrences (Sotero, 2006).

Historical trauma theory provides a macro-level, temporal framework (Sotero, 2006) that explores how the psychological and emotional residue from a primary generation's reaction to trauma are transmitted to subsequent generations physiologically, environmentally and socially, establishing intergenerational cycles of trauma response (Carter, 2001; Sotero, 2006; Hossain, 2017). Slavery produced deference, dependence and compliance within most slaves' psyches (Shell, 2001; Mountain, 2004; Hossain, 2014). Shell (2001) further claims that "the psychological implications, social costs and hidden wounds for future generations are incalculable."

Research shows that African Americans have been profoundly affected by slavery and its aftermath (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012). Wilkins *et al.* (2012) defined the residual effects of slavery as the ways in which the racist treatment of African Americans, during and after slavery, has impacted multiple generations of African Americans. However, trauma associated with slavery is unique because it has yet to be accepted as having had profound implications. According to Billingsley (1968), historical trauma resulting from 200 years of bondage still lingers among Black Americans, especially since there have been no reparations for the institution of slavery either economically, socially or psychologically.



The psychology of Black women, as defined by Thomas (2004), is “the systematic study of the motivations, cognitions, attitudes and behaviours of Black women, taking into consideration the contextual and interactive effects of history, culture, race, class, gender and forms of oppression” (p. 290). To better understand certain attitudes and behaviours of Black women today, it may be necessary to reflect upon the historical trauma and abuse inflicted upon Black women from the African diaspora through to the current day. Historical trauma manifests multiple post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)-like symptoms, including anger, frustration, depression, sleeplessness, suicidality, fear and anxiety. However, there is a major relevant difference between PTSD and racial trauma. Primarily, racial trauma is uniquely different from PTSD because it involves “ongoing individual and collective injuries due to exposure and re-exposure to race-based stress” (Comas-Diaz *et al.*, 2019). According to the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-V) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), a diagnosis of PTSD occurs following a single, isolated event. Therefore, there is no clinical diagnosis for racial trauma.

Generationally, African Americans still experience the residual effects of slavery, which can cause feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness both socially and economically (Pinderhughes, 1990). The effects of historical trauma (Sotero, 2007), resulting from slavery and its racist aftermath, lay the foundation for the continued suffering and dehumanisation among African Americans (Billingsley, 1968; Sotero, 2007; Wilkins *et al.*, 2012). Contextually, Black women are virtually intersectionally invisible (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008) in global male-dominated, patriarchal, misogynistic, and chauvinistic societies. Scott (2017) claims a growing number of researchers treat the constructs of race and gender separately,

yet there are limited researchers that take into account the intersectional identities of Black women (p. 4). Intersectionality will be discussed in further detail in later sections.

### **Aims of the Study**

This bilateral, comparative study examines the psychological and emotional effects of racism on Black American women in the United States and Black British women of both African descent and Caribbean descent in England. Specifically, my research explores how all levels of racism affect self-identified Black women in the United States and England. The general objectives of this study are to scrutinise the similarities and differences in how Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent experience racism comparatively.

### **Research Question**

The study seeks to answer the following research question:

What are the similarities and differences in the ways Black American women and Black British women experience racism?

### ***Sub-Questions:***

- Are the physical and emotional effects of long-term exposure to racism similar or different among Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent?
- Does historical trauma play a role in how these Black women experience and react to racism?

- How do Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent experience microaggression, institutional and systemic racism?
- Do Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent cope with race-based trauma similarly or differently?

The impetus for undertaking this study stems from my own personal encounters, experiences and observations as a Black woman born and raised in the United States, where racism is overt and blatant (Nadal *et al.*, 2014). There is a plethora of research that shows racism can cause long-term, possibly permanent damage to the health and mental well-being (Sue *et al.*, 2018) of people of African descent (Comas-Díaz, Hall and Neville, 2019). Feelings of despair, depression, outrage and paranoia (Essed, 1994; Bowleg, 2012; Sue *et al.*, 2018) plague the Black community, where little to no known resources, aside from normal healthcare, are available to specifically service victims of race-based trauma (Sotero, 2006).

There is substantial research on the effects of racism on Black populations, particularly among Black men. However, there is a significant gap in research and literature that explores historical racial trauma and its effects, specifically among Black women (Keys, 2021). The main purpose of this body of work is to initiate a wider scope of understanding of the experiences of racism among Black women in the United States and England from a historical context to the current day and how those experiences have affected them. Doing so also encourages further research in the area of historical racial trauma and the effects of racial trauma on all Black women.

## **Racism – What it is and What it is not**

The term “racism” has devolved over time into what seemingly diminishes the insidiousness of racism, racist intent and racist ideology for the benefit of assuaging white supremacy and privilege (Tate and Page, 2018). To understand the damage of redefining racism, it is necessary to first know what racism is and what it is not. Secondly, racist ideology and terminology must be identified, compartmentalised, and clarified as to their original meaning. Various terms to identify discrimination, bias, prejudice, bigotry, have become stratified and are often confused or misused, as exemplified below. The Oxford Dictionary defines racism too broadly and incorrectly conjoins terminologies. For example, prejudice and discrimination are very different from antagonism, and all have different meanings.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, racism is:

1. Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.

- 1.1. The belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races. (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018)

Terminology in these definitions is used interchangeably and fluidly, either intentionally or unintentionally, perhaps to lessen the meaning or impact of racist ideology and therefore diminish, or even invalidate, the experiences of oppressed and marginalised groups, specifically, Black people. To clarify meanings, Table 1 provides an overview of sociological-

based definitions of racism, prejudice, bigotry, discrimination and power, some of which are used in this study:

Racism	At root, racism is “an ideology of racial domination” in which the presumed biological or cultural superiority of one or more racial groups is used to justify or prescribe the inferior treatment or social position(s) of other racial groups (Clair, Denis and Van Den Berghe, 2015). Racism involves the hierarchical and socially consequential valuation of racial groups (Clair, Denis and Van Den Berghe, 2015).
Prejudice	As the word suggests “pre”judice is a favourable or unfavourable prejudgment of a person, incident, group of people, suggestion, idea or fact. To perform an action based on prejudgement is discrimination and a negative prejudgment without action is a stereotype (Lawrence and Keleher, 2004)
Bigotry	Obstinate intolerance of ideas, thoughts, beliefs or opinions outside of self. Prejudices against others based on their group identity (Macionis, 2012).
Discrimination	Defined as actioned prejudice based on differences and inferior treatment of others based on their race, sexuality or gender, nationality or ethnicity, age, mobility or disability or any other characteristic (Macionis, 2012)
Power	The ability to own, control, manipulate major resources intentionally or unintentionally and the capacity to “make and enforce decisions based on this ownership and control” actionable (Lawrence and Keleher, 2004).

**Table 1: Definitions of racial terms**

Clair *et al.* (2015) offer an even narrower definition of racism:

At root, racism is “an ideology of racial domination” in which the presumed biological or cultural superiority of one or more racial groups is used to justify or prescribe the inferior treatment or social position(s) of other racial groups. Through the process of racialization perceived patterns of physical difference – such as skin color or eye shape – are used to differentiate groups of people, thereby constituting them as ‘races’; racialization becomes racism when it involves the hierarchical and socially consequential valuation of racial groups.

This quote shows that racism is a complex system that operates on micro and macro levels, often simultaneously. Racism and racist terminology supersede the relatively banal

definitions of online dictionaries. Lawrence and Keleher (2016) offer an additional key defining component by claiming that racism lies in the dominance of economic **power** of one group over another group with the ability to prevent the subgroup from obtaining equal wealth and power. Lawrence and Keleher offer the most encompassing definition of racism by defining it formulaically as: race power + discrimination = racism. Some scholars agree with Clair *et al.* (2015) and also claim that racism refers to a variety of practices, beliefs, social relations, and phenomena that work to reproduce a racial hierarchy and social structure that yield superiority, power, and privilege for some, and discrimination and oppression for others (Cole, 2018; Roberts, 2020). Many white people do not include Black people in their ingroups (Feder, 2020), thereby reinforcing segregation as a means to maintain power and control, but segregation alone is only racism when discrimination is actioned. Racism exists when ideas and assumptions about racial categories are used to justify and reproduce a racial hierarchy and racially structured society that unjustly limits access to resources, rights, and privileges based on race (Cole, 2018; Roberts, 2020).

As mentioned above, the first Oxford definition (1. and 1.1) combine the terms “prejudice, discrimination, antagonism and beliefs” collectively, despite each term bearing differing statements of meaning. Combining terms while defining racism minimises the significance, meaning and impact of the word (Roberts, 2020). It is highly possible and even plausible for someone to be prejudiced, bigoted, or discriminatory and not be a racist because if the perpetrator is not the dominate group that has power and control, it is not racism. There must be race power **and** discrimination for there to be racism (Roberts, 2020). Conversely,

without race power, there is only discrimination (or bigotry, prejudice), and where there is race power without discrimination, there is no racism.

In the United States, where only one per cent of the population controls the country's wealth and power, even with a Black population of twelve per cent, Black people make up only 1.7% of the one per cent (Vega, 2016). According to Vega, a CNN Money reporter, for every US dollar a white family holds, a Black family holds only .06 of that dollar in wealth. This phenomenon is known as the Racial Wealth Gap. Sheila Johnson, the Black woman who founded B.E.T. (Black Entertainment Television), worth 2.3 billion (USD) dollars by the time she sold it, says, despite her pedigree, "If you are a person of colour, you can have as much money as you want, you're still who you are, and that was a lesson I really learned. It's about power. If you have the money, through society you gain power. People start to notice you" (Vega, 2016). In other words, money is power, and power is money. Johnson seems to reiterate the sociological definition of racism: race power + discrimination. Wealth is acquired and increases with each following generation.

Scholars offer varied reasons why racist terminology has been "white-washed," which is defined as preventing others from learning the truth about false, misleading, dishonest or immoral "cultural bleaching" of facts and history (Gabriel, 2002). The Black-white divide on racial matters is one of the most profound and enduring in society. For decades, public opinion polls have shown that Blacks and whites differ fundamentally in what constitutes the race problem, how severe it is, and what to do about it. Sigelman and Welch (1991, p. 65) write: "It is hardly an overstatement to say that Blacks and whites inhabit two different perceptual worlds." DiAngelo (2021) and Bosisis (1997) summarise a "white reality" versus a

"Black reality" in the findings of the Joint Centre for Political and Economic Studies 1997 National Opinion Poll.

Whitaker (2017) argues that dictionary definitions are generally too simplistic and are written and edited by white men; therefore, dictionary definitions of racial terms are systemic, weak and biased. For many white people, the "definition of racism" offers them a safeguard so that they no longer feel the need to check their privilege. It acts as a last resort when backed into a corner by logic and reason. It is their final safety measure to ensure that they still win the conversation. Whitaker (2017) further stated:

Many of us were taught when we were little that racism is simply disliking someone based on the colour of their skin. We were taught that it is a two-way street and that it can happen to anyone. We were taught that racism is simply prejudice toward any race.

However, Brown *et al.* (2003) argue that white-washing of racist ideology is partially because white people believe that racial discrimination is a "thing of the past" and that "racial inequalities that undeniably persist" exist only because of short-comings, failures, ineptness or inabilities inherently attributed to Black people's cultural and individual failures.

In 1994, psychologist Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray published *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* and posited that genetics and environment influence human intelligence and can predict personal and professional outcomes (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994). This negates the possibility that a person's sex, gender, race, sexual preference, or disability influence those outcomes. Irrespective of the narratives of Black people's lived experiences, white people often refute testimonies and



accounts by offering alternative reasons or explanations to make racism and racist activity more palatable or in some cases, non-existent at all.

Racism is not perceived; it is a core value of the United States (Macionis, 2012; Roberts, 2020). The USA, as a country that Britain colonised, was built on the foundation of the genocide of its indigenous inhabitants (Native Indians) and cultivated by imported enslaved Africans. Racism is a deep-seeded ideology that permeates global societies in the form of covert microaggression (subtleties) to blatant, overt acts of violence (shooting and killing unarmed Black citizens); and systemically (police forces, court systems and prison systems), racism continues to plague and destroy Black communities.

British participants' accounts of racism echo the same. Issues involving racism are more nuanced in England, according to some of the study's participants; however, racial abuse and violence occur in England similarly. England is comparatively smaller than the United States. However, per capita, the number of Black populations is similar in the severity of systemic and institutional racism within law enforcement and academia. According to the British Social Attitudes Survey in the UK, there has been a revival of racist sentiments since 2001 and claimed levels of prejudice rose to nearly 40% in 2011, up from 25% in 2001 (Flemmen and Savage, 2017). Even though overt prejudice declined among professionals and managers between 1991-2013, it doubled in extent among unskilled manual workers during the same period (Flemmen and Savage, 2017).

The commonality of racism that links the USA and the UK is whiteness, and whiteness underpins racism (Tinsley, 2022). Tinsley (2022) writes, "racism is the active work of white institutions to maintain white supremacy, and whiteness is a way of categorising people,

humanising some by dehumanising others.” Some scholars in the UK believe that the white supremacist sentiment that fuelled Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign has reverberated in the UK too. Scholars also note the similarities between the rhetoric of Trumpism and the Leave campaign (Brexit) and the simultaneous presence of dehumanising rhetoric to describe migrants and refugees (Schofield, 2020). As though acting in unison, Trumpism emboldened Brexiters in the UK, and Brexit emboldened nativist supports in the USA, providing a sense of security where they see themselves as part of a global movement toward conservatism (Schofield, 2020). The following section expands the definition and explanation of various types of racism described throughout the thesis.

### **Overview of Types of Racism**

According to some scholars (Jones and Carter, 1996; Sue *et al.*, 2017), there are seven forms of racism. Racism typically operates as a combination of at least two forms working simultaneously. Independently and together, these seven forms of racism work to reproduce racist ideas, racist interactions and behaviour, racist practices and policies, and an overall racist social structure (Cole, 2018):

- representational
- ideological
- interactional
- discursive
- institutional
- structural and systemic

For the purposes of this thesis, institutional, structural and systemic, and other forms of racism, such as microaggressions, will also be considered and discussed as complex systems

of racism that work together fluidly and simultaneously in the theoretical frameworks section.

### **Perceived Racism**

Loosely defined, perception derives from the ability to understand and interpret situations and sensations received from stimuli. Regarding the perception of reality and the disavowal of meaning, Freud explains the differences between perception and reality and how the brain processes each: "Once registered in memory, capable of directly seeking expression by exciting the system conscious, external perceptions are part of conscious experience" (Basch 1983). Further, once threatened with displeasure, access to secondary-process thought can be blocked by repression. Perceived racism is often linked with irrational fear, imaginations, and even pathology (Whaley, 2002; Salter, 2008). A recent study shows how clinical misdiagnoses such as schizophrenia, paranoia, and bipolar mental disorders frequently occur when Black patients express cultural mistrust and fear of white society (Whaley, 2006) even though similar psychological and physiological symptoms and reactions are "normative and adaptive responses to systems of racism and oppression," (Salter, 2008). A study showed that where the continuum of paranoia included measures reflecting cultural, nonclinical, and clinical paranoia, perceived racism predicted cultural mistrust and nonclinical paranoia (lower end of the paranoia continuum) but not clinical paranoia (Combs *et al.*, 2006).

As mentioned, the majority of Black people report encountering incidents of racism throughout their lifespan. Additionally, there is a plethora of research that suggests Black people are more likely than white people to believe racism plays a major role (Salter, 2008) in current events, systemically and institutionally, in White societies. Associating racism with

perception erroneously absolves perpetrators of racism from responsibility for and ownership of racism and racist activity. Such terminology also reinforces long-standing, prevailing beliefs that racism is solely linked to Black identity concerns (Salter, 2008). Microaggressions are subtle, daily forms of racism manifest intentionally or unintentionally by the perpetrator. The frequent use of “perceived racism” as a sociological term enforces racism as being primarily unintentional and can diminish the severity of both micro and macro levels of racism. This is another example of “white-washing” terminology and invalidating the lived experiences of Black people.

Throughout history, Black women have suffered stereotypical and harmful imagery and depiction that still impact how society at large views us. The following section explores how slavery, efforts for resistance, and resilience contextualise a legacy of historical racial trauma suffered by Black women and how residual effects of that trauma possibly underpin Black women’s resilience to racial abuse today.

### **Outline of thesis**

Chapter One gives a detailed background about the study’s topic on racism, specifically as it affects Black American women and Black British women. Chapter two critically examines the relevant literature, which shows the impact of slavery on Black individuals’ lives across the generations and its residual effects still being felt today. Chapter Three explores the possible theories that one could reasonably assume might be used in this study and describes the theoretical framework applied here, including three primary theories; Historical Trauma Theory, Microaggression Theory and Everyday Racism Theory. Several relevant secondary theories were also discussed. Chapter Four explains the methodology and ethical

considerations for recruiting participants, followed by demographical information and the thematic analysis process. Major themes and findings are explored in Chapter Five, followed by an interpretation and discussion of the findings in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven concludes with the thesis by discussing the original contributions, limitations and a call for further research.

### **My Positionality**

As a Black woman, I have always honoured my ancestors and other Black women who withstood, rebelled, and survived subjugation and enslavement. There is someone in my direct lineage who survived capture from slave catchers, was transported through the Middle Passage, and suffered unbearable heat and harsh conditions of hard labour, rape, and physical and mental abuse. That person, whom I will most likely never identify because they are perhaps just a number on a piece of old paper, is the reason why I sit here writing this thesis. From childhood, I have been fascinated by the historical account of Harriet Tubman, and mentally, I secretly adopted her into my family. In my thoughts and written conversations with Mrs Tubman, I gain strength, wisdom, and fortitude. At times during this research project, frustration, exhaustion, fear, anger, demotivation, and exasperation often made me stop and call upon my ancestors for clarity, strength and guidance. I also frequently asked myself, “What would Harriet do?” Reimagining her life or rereading her story never fails to refocus, ground and centre me.

As a researcher closely related to the work in this thesis, I share many of the lived experiences of the participants of this study. I have spent much time in the company and kinship of other Black women, personally and professionally, advocating for racial equality. I

have frequently confronted and spoken against racial oppression and abuse on behalf of myself or for others, sometimes at great personal risk and sacrifice. Therefore, I felt humbled and empowered by the participants' openness in sharing their narratives, many of whose stories were not unfamiliar to me. Resultantly, I have expanded my personal posse to include several more kindred sister-spirits.

Writing about the historical racist context of Black women's imagery was especially difficult and draining, more than any other subject throughout the thesis. Therefore, I feel it pertinent to disclose to the reader that there may be a possibility of triggering in the section: **Historical Overview of Black Women's Imagery**, found on page 57. Discussion and images in that section may be difficult for some readers. However, writing it was of great importance. I decided to emphasise the indelible fact that through our resilience, Blacks have survived the atrocities of slavery, racialised stereotyping and abuse, and racial trauma. Despite all of that, as a group of women, we still manage to *thrive* today. Slavery is not the sole legacy of Black people, in general, and specifically, Black women.

## **Summary**

This chapter provides a brief overview that contextualises the atrocities of slavery with historical trauma, identifies the effects slavery may present even if slavery was not part of a familial legacy, and my positionality within the study. The research question and sub-questions were presented, and the definitions of racism within the context of this thesis were explored and discussed. The study's outline was presented, and my positionality within the thesis was stated. As previously mentioned, the next chapter sets out the essential literature as a basis for this study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The literature review in this thesis is discussed in two chapters and is organised and synthesised around previous research and key themes. This chapter presents a general overview of racism and microaggression, and historical trauma, followed by a discussion of the research methods used to measure historical trauma. The chapter closes with a broad, comparative historical overview of the similarities in the lived experiences of Black people in the USA and England. The following chapter begins with a presentation of the three primary theoretical frameworks: Historical Trauma Theory (HTT), Microaggression Theory (MT) and Everyday Racism Theory, along with a review of the relevant theories and theoretical framework utilised in the study.

Empirical and seminal literature is ever-expanding in this particular field of research, especially as it relates to Black women. Presenting well-known, relevant literature throughout this thesis was challenging because of the mandated guidelines for academic writing regarding empirical, seminal literature, which in many cases is significantly outdated in this field. Additionally, pertinent empirical and seminal literature is most often written by white male scholars, even in the social sciences related to racism and race studies.

Contemporary literature, grounded within the research paradigms of this study, has been contributed to and published by relatively “new” scholars and academics. However, contemporary research and findings should not be discounted nor devalued, especially as it relates to Black women and Black feminist scholars, writers, and academics. Interdisciplinary research and studies are rapidly providing new theoretical frameworks and research

paradigms in the exploration and examination of decolonisation, anti-racism, and Black studies, including misogynoir. An unprecedented number of grants and funding are being provided for further research (Ghosh, 2021), as are the numbers of scholars engaging in this work. Therefore, the guidelines mandated for academic writing are possibly outdated, and newer scholars and research should be considered as providing significant value in a field that is rapidly changing. The reviewed literature in the next two chapters is a combination of outstanding and contemporary research.

Although some research findings outline the effects of racism and racial trauma on Black people, in general, there are comparatively fewer studies that demonstrate how Black women react to racism, their emotive responses to racism, and the lingering effects upon them. There are even fewer studies that comparatively examine the effects of racism on Black women. Fluidly contextualising Black people's experiences of racism from the past to the present, and possibly the future, is the unique contribution of this thesis as it is nearly impossible to write about contemporary experiences of racism without providing a historical context or without minor repetitiveness.

### **Historical Trauma**

Historical Trauma Theory (HTT) explores how the embodiment of trauma is manifested and transmitted to subsequent generations after a historical traumatic event is experienced by a subjugated primary generation. Contextualisation of slavery as a historical traumatic event, how the embodiment of the tenets of HTT is passed down to subsequent generations of Black women in the United States and England, and applying HTT interchangeably with the past and present, all contribute to the originality of this study. The lingering effects of racial



trauma from previous generations and the lingering effects of childhood racial trauma are referred to as historical trauma (HT) in this thesis.

Historical Trauma Theory (HTT) is defined as the 'life course of a population exposed to trauma at the particular point in time compared with that of unexposed populations' (Sotero, 2006; Walkerdine, Olsvold and Rudberg, 2013), thereby durable enough to withstand the complexities of the residual effects of slavery and racial trauma, relatable to Black women. Ortega-Williams *et al.* (2021) support my position when they write:

Models of HT expand dominant narratives of health disparities and notions of polyvictimisation among people who experience trauma and subjugation. The focus moves beyond individual characteristics and group behaviours to encompass purposeful targeting by dominant groups that have resulted in disruptions to biological, psychological, social, and spiritual cohesion among targeted groups across space and time.

Participants of this study discussed how recollections of traumatic experiences of racism throughout their lives still linger in their psyche, continuing to influence how they respond to and maintain relationships with non-Black people, particularly white people. A more in-depth discussion about this can be found in Chapters 4 and 5.

The idea of the existence of distinct biological "races" was used from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to explain the appearance and behaviour of the (supposedly) "uncivilized" and "immoral" people "discovered" by early European explorers (Kohn, 2014). The historical account of the enslavement of African people and the development of the Transatlantic slave trade is outside the scope of this thesis. However, it underpins the historical origins of shared commonality between some Black Americans and Black British.

African American historical trauma has been described as the collective, spiritual, psychological, emotional, and cognitive distress perpetuated intergenerationally, deriving from multiple denigrating experiences originating with slavery (Raboteau, 2004). It continues with pattern forms of racism and discrimination to the present day (Williams-Walker and Mills, 2017, p. 247). Black Americans experience microaggressions and systemic (institutional) racism regularly in daily life (Pierce, 1970; Sue *et al.*, 2007), but Williams-Walker and Mills (2017) argue there is little recognition or accommodation for Americans of African descent to mourn their traumatic sufferings throughout history. Generations later, African Americans continue to carry the mental and social scars of their history, including feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, and problems with self-identity (Du Bois, 1935).

Storytelling became an integral folkway that can lead to self-awareness, ancestral pride, and cultural confidence among Black people of African descent (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Stolen identities, culture and heritage were preserved through song, dance and stories, which has helped create a strong bond and powerful connection between generations (Raboteau, 2004), allowing descendants to forge a kindred relationship with their ancestors (Clinton, 2004). Interestingly, it is possible that trauma and PTSD were also passed down intergenerationally through storytelling (Olusoga, 2017). There are no longer Atlantic slave trade survivors still alive today to confirm, but based on modern qualifications, scholars hypothesise that enslaved Africans possibly suffered symptoms of PTSD resulting from the atrocities, violence, brutality and subjugation they suffered themselves and what they also witnessed (Degruy, 2005 p.97-98). In her dissertation, Acuna (2014) writes, “the number of lifetime stressful events and problem family communication was positively associated to

PTSD symptom severity, and family storytelling style was negatively associated to avoidance symptoms.” Research findings found an association between exposure to stressful life events and poor family communication, resulting in increased risk for PTSD symptoms (Acuna and Kataoka, 2017).

The following section explores how HT is measured among Black people even though there is no diagnosis for racial trauma in the current fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). Therefore, racial trauma does not necessarily lead to a diagnosis of PTSD (Williams *et al.*, 2018; Beckerman and Sarracco, 2019) because mental health practitioners and providers may be unaware of the impact of racial discrimination. They may incorrectly associate symptoms of racial trauma with other causes (Carter, 2007) or may feel anxious or uncomfortable initiating the topic of racism (Williams *et al.*, 2018). However, further detailed exploration or discussion of the mental health of sufferers of racial trauma is beyond my ability and outside the scope of research for this thesis. However, I decided to include brief descriptions of trauma measurements as a contribution to shortening the gap in the literature, as well as a call for further research.

### **Measurements for Historical Trauma**

Multiple studies have shown that Black people have disproportionately higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other health disparities (LeClere *et al.*, 1997; Landrine *et al.*, 2006; Carter, 2010) resulting from racial discrimination than other groups (Carter, 2007; Olusoga, 2017; Williams *et al.*, 2018). Yet, few tools for measurement exist (Williams *et al.*, 2018). Racial trauma often manifests physiologically with symptoms similar to PTSD (Braveheart, 2008; Carter, 2010; Sotero, 2011; Kniffley, 2018). The following section provides

an overview of the measurement tools that assess (historical) racial trauma among Black people.

### ***Race-Based Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale***

Race-Based Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale (RBTSSS) (Carter *et al.*, 2013) assesses trauma by focusing on sequelae resulting from a single incident. The scale is designed to assess the psychological and emotional stress reactions to racism and racial discrimination by focusing on sequelae resulting from a single incident (Williams *et al.*, 2018). The RBTSSS utilizes open-ended questions related to three experiences of racism each individual has encountered. If used ethnographically, recording three experiences in each evaluation over a designated period, this assessment scale could broaden the understanding of the physiological, psychological, and emotional impact of racism. RBTSSS could possibly contribute significantly toward a clinical diagnosis of racial trauma and subsequent treatment.

### ***Racial Microaggressions Scale***

Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS) (Torres-Harding *et al.*, 2012) assesses the frequency in occurrence of subtle forms of racism in people of colour.<sup>1</sup> However, it does not capture any symptoms in relation to the experiences. Assessing the frequency of occurrences without context limits opportunities to diagnose racial trauma as it directly relates to the impact of microaggressive events. This scale could be expanded to capture and record symptoms related to racially motivated microaggressive experiences, which could possibly have a

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<sup>1</sup> Torres-Harding *et al.*, refer to RMAS as a measurement of trauma among people of colour, not Black people, specifically.

profound impact on influencing acceptance and practice of diagnosing racial trauma as DSM-V classification.

### ***African American Historical Trauma Questionnaire (AAHTQ)***

The African American Historical Trauma Questionnaire (Williams-Washington and Mills, 2018) was ground-breaking, as the first of its kind. It is a quantitative data collection questionnaire used to explore the effects of historical trauma among Black people, published in 2018, just prior to the data collection phase of this study. Williams-Washington and Mills (2018) acknowledge the limitations of their survey when they write, "..this study offers preliminary evidence that the AAHT questionnaire exhibits desirable levels of internal consistency and factorial validity, much work remains to be done to further establish its reliability and validity.." (p. 258).

### ***Racial Trauma Assessment***

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, racial trauma is often a missed diagnosis. Kniffley (2017) coordinates the Collective Care Centre, one of the few racial trauma clinics in the United States. Kniffley developed a treatment protocol for patients experiencing racial trauma (Kniffley, 2019) and pioneered a training programme for clinicians, as racial trauma assessors, in the implementation of the protocol. Trauma clinics could not be found in England, which seemingly validates the lack of infrastructure and resources for Black people who experience racial trauma in the UK, especially regarding mental health. An exhaustive search showed a plethora of anti-racism initiatives across multiple sectors in the UK;

however, I could not find any resource dedicated to assisting or treating those who have suffered from racial abuse or trauma.

The following section provides a comparative, generalised overview of literature grounded in Black history in the USA and England. Firstly, an historical context is given to provide a better understanding of the similarities and experiences of Black people across both countries, and secondly, an historical context specifically related to Black women.

### **An Across-Country Historical Overview of the Black Experience**

#### ***Black Americans in the USA***

Historical trauma is the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over a lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group experiences” (Brave Heart, 1998). The psychological outcomes of historical trauma distinguish it from other forms of trauma (Sotero, 2006). Any people whose culture has a history of oppression or genocide, irrespective of race or ethnicity, may experience the residual effects of a historical traumatic event (i.e, the Holocaust), which have been handed down generationally. However, this thesis focuses solely on the historical racial trauma of Black women. Historical trauma can be manifested and result in high rates of child and domestic violence, alcoholism, increased symptoms of mood and trauma-related disorders, a variety of health disparities, and countless other physiological and psychological problems (Williams-Washington and Mills, 2018).

To define historical trauma among African Americans, Williams-Washington and Mills (2018 p. 47) write:

A specific definition for African American historical trauma is the collective spiritual, psychological, emotional, and cognitive distress perpetuated intergenerationally deriving from multiple denigrating experiences originating with slavery and continuing with pattern forms of racism and discrimination to the present day.

This supports newly emerged research which used HTT as a theoretical framework to explore Black populations specifically. However, there were no assessment scales to measure HTT among Black people until Williams-Washington and Mills (2017) created the AAHT questionnaire to fill a gap where no data collection or analysis of the effects of historical trauma resulting from slavery and its impact on African Americans had previously existed. The AAHT questionnaire is the first and only measure that exists to narrow the gap and increase our knowledge and understanding of the prevalence and impact of historical trauma on the lives of Black people (Williams-Washington and Mills, 2017).

### ***Black British People in England***

In 2017, the Race Disparity Audit (2017) was commissioned by the English prime minister. The following year, in 2018, the Audit reported that about 13.8% of the UK population was from a minority ethnic background, with London having 40% of its population from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. Further, according to the 2011 Census (*Ethnicity facts and figures, 2017*), the total population of England and Wales<sup>2</sup> comprises:

- 86.0% white
- 7.5% of Asian ethnic groups
- 3.3% of Black ethnic groups

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<sup>2</sup> There is no independent census solely for England

- 2.2% of Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups
- 1.0% of other ethnic groups

The Black ethnic group population of 1,864,890 (3.3%) comprises the following:

- Black African - 989,628 (1.8%)
- Black Caribbean - 594,825 (1.1%)
- Black other - 280,437 (0.5%)

Black women account for approximately half of the population of their overall demographical group and sub-groups. Additional breakdown of demographic details can be found throughout this chapter.

There is significant dearth of qualitative or quantitative data, as it relates to racism or the effects of racism, that is readily available in the UK. Within the past few years, there have been a significant amount of studies conducted about the theory of racism but very little beyond the regurgitation of already-known information. Discussions of racism are often discouraged or dismissed because “the British would much rather prefer the rest of the world believe racism does not exist in Britain” (Brown, 2020). The British government presents ethnic-minority groups collectively, not as individual populations or communities. The collective group is known as BAME - Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic. The conglomeration and labelling of various ethnic groups is problematic because it invalidates the lived experiences and cultures of each group, which can be starkly different (Bunglawala, 2019; Luxon, 2020; BAME acronym: UK broadcasters commit to avoiding catch-all term, 2021); especially because members in the minority ethnic portion of the acronym are not necessarily Black or Asian (sometimes referred to as Brown) people. For example, Irish



Travellers, Romanies, Egyptians, Greeks, and many others are sometimes identified as people of colour as well which may or may not be accurate. There is more discussion regarding statistical challenges in recording BAME later in the chapter.

Holloway (2021) claims that racism in the UK is more covert than racism in the United States. An independent audit by Full Colour (2022) for the charitable organisation, UNICEF UK, found that covert racism is a part of life for some and that people who experience racism often have their experience denied. The report also states that no examples were shared of overt racism, but “covert and everyday racism is a regular experience at UNICEF UK for some colleagues of colour.” Jamilia, a Black woman in the UK, claims that racism in the UK has “moved from overt and changed into covert racism” (Buford, 2021, pp. 12-14). She adds, “Even though we may not be like America, and we may not have guns in our faces, we still face difficulties that effect our lives, and sometimes cost us our lives” (Buford, 2021, pp. 12-26).

Hutchinson, a Black activist in the UK, agrees with Jamilia when he states:

Things [used to be] really, really overtly racist. And you heard the N-word and the P-word against Asian people almost every single day. So the overt racism has really, really died down, although it still exists in pockets. But it's the covert racism now that we're having to deal with, the stuff that's embedded and systemic and that's embedded in our society. That's what we're fighting now. (Snuggs, 2020)

However, UK participants of this study seemingly support Holloway's (2021) claim and describe how acts of racism are not always easily identifiable. Subtle acts of racism, either intentional or unintentional, called microaggressions, can cause the recipient of those microaggressions to be confused or gaslighted following the encounter. USA participants described racism as more overt and more easily identifiable in the US. Additionally, Holloway,

a British journalist and editor at Britain's only Black national newspaper (Ayodele, 2021), claims that Britain is actually in a regression in recognising inequality (Mohdin, 2021). British culture is often self-identified as an onward and upward or stiff upper lip (Brown, 2020) society in which problems are not openly discussed, and emotions are kept internally. Cabral and Adams describe racism with British characteristics as a complex system of structural and institutional racism that portrays Black people as aggressive, threatening, combative and problematic who are frequently profiled and targeted by police, excluded from schools at disproportionate rates to whites and other ethnic minority groups, and the healthcare system (Brown, 2020).

### **Contemporary Context - England**

To recap from the previous section, the total Black British ethnic population is roughly 3.3% (*Ethnicity facts and figures*, 2017). Resources or statistical data that relate specifically to Black British women are rare or extremely difficult to find. Extrapolating data for Black British, particularly Black British women, is exceptionally challenging.

A common theme among contemporary British race relations is the impact of the legacy of colonialism (Solomos, 2003), not racism, per se. Historians claim colonialism has shaped ideas and values in Britain (Harris, 1988; Said, 2003; Solomos, 2003); however, Solomos warns of generalising and compartmentalising macro-level societal paradigms to integral notions or assumptions about the role of colonialism. In Britain, there is evidence that racism is often not regarded as a societal problem; rather, the underpinnings of discord lie within immigration policies instead. The growing number of arrivals of immigrant ethnic minorities

to Britain has caused an increase in hostility, racism and racist activity (Eatwell, 1998; Kushner and Knox, 1999; Solomos, 2003).

This trend in both Britain and the United States can possibly explicate the resurgence of racist political movements and overt acts of racism (Solomos, 2003). Despite racism being an important issue in local communities throughout the country, it does not draw as much social, or economic attention on political platforms. According to Solomos (2003), issues such as religious differences, refugee and asylum policy, and migration dominate the politics of race and racism. The arrival of newcomers, both legal and illegal, have created concerns among politicians and government, generating uncertainty and confusion about the paradigm shift of economic and political orientation of Britain's national identity (Solomos, 2003). This shift has also created a rift between Nationals and ethnic and racialised minorities already living in Britain.

Conservatism and far-right wing parties and movements were in the forefront of British history during the 1960s and 1970s with the creation of The National Front, when three far-right groups merged; the British National Party, League of Empire Loyalists, and the Racial Preservation Society (Ashcroft, 1939-1999). The party recruited members using immigration as its conservatist political platform throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Conservatism is on the rise again globally over the past two decades, and politicians in the UK once again used immigration as a platform to encourage the UK's departure from the European Union (Brexit), seemingly, renewing their ideology that racialised minorities are outsiders, foreigners or domestic enemies (Solomos, 2003). In the UK, according to Solomos, this has led to the renewed "racialisation of issues such as employment, housing, education and law

and order and the resurgence of racial attacks and violence in some areas of the country” (Solomos, 2003, p. 7).

The British government identifies its population, primarily, as: white British, Black British (African or Caribbean), mix-raced, Asian, Black other and white other. The UK government website on ethnic figures, states “government data about the UK’s different ethnic groups. 87% of people in the UK are white, and 13% belong to a Black, Asian, Mixed or Other ethnic group” (*Ethnicity facts and figures*, 2019). The use of the acronym BAME simplifies and over-generalises ethnic minorities by placing them conveniently into one category. This microaggression desensitises and devalues each individual group’s experiences and maintains the flow of institutional racism by neglecting to gather critical information regarding minority populations.

The available published statistical data regarding employment in the UK is listed as “All, White, Other than White,” making it impossible to collect data about specific minority and ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are then divided as “All, Asian, Indian, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Asian Other, Black, Mixed, (other)White, White British.” The broad, sweeping clusters of groupings make it near impossible to analyse any of the data on the official government website. For example, the site claims the following: “The highest employment rate was in the Other White ethnic group, at 82%” without any identifying markers for who the Other White ethnic group represents. There is even less identification for Black populations. Another example of the gross generalisations on the site include statements like this: “the highest employment rates for most ethnic groups were generally found in the South and East of England and the lowest were generally found in the North of England and Scotland.”

Studies show, overall, that the Black British general population lags far behind and below the standards of the white British population in education, health and mental health services, housing, employment and earnings. According to Public Health England, The Mental Health Act, Gov.uk, all nationalities of Black British earn less money, live in substandard housing and poverty, have chronic obesity and chronic morbid diseases, are more likely to be victims of crime, are 10 times more likely to be stopped and searched by police and have almost three times detention rates than all white people in the UK (Stop and search.gov, 2021)

Black Caribbean British women make up 53% of their ethnic population group which is .58% of the general population and Black British “other” women make up 50% of their population group, equalling .25% of the British population. Even though women are the majority in each of their ethnic groups, Black British women still only represent 1.77% of the total British population. Summarily, among the 3.3% Black British population in England, 1.77% are Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent.

According to Kohn, colonialism is similarly defined like racism, as the practice of domination and subjugation of one group by another, including political and economic control (Sotero, 2006; Carter, 2012; Hossain, 2014; Kohn, 2014). Colonialism resulted in a long history of violence and trauma among Black people and has had profound impact on the descents of former slaves (Hossain, 2014). Slavery required enslaved parents to teach their children how to survive amid dangerous conditions (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012) thereby, either subliminally or overtly instilling in them socialisation skills that helped them navigate through white spaces as safely as possible. The next section of this chapter introduces misogynoir and bridges the gap in literature where gendered racism and historical trauma connect.

## Contextualising Intersectionality with Historical Trauma

This section provides a broader understanding of the origins of intersectionality, generally, followed by how intersectionality theory is used in this study as it relates specifically to Black women. The primary focus throughout the thesis is how participants are affected by experiences based on their gendered race. The term *misogynoir* is discussed in this section to further explicate the effects of gendered racism experienced solely by Black women.

Bryan *et al.* (1985) published the book, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*, that took a socio-historical approach and contextualised the lives of Black women in Britain.

Bryan, a British Black Panther, was a member of the Brixton Black Women's Group when she co-authored the seminal book, which provided an in-depth account of the struggles and triumphs of Black women in Britain (Thomas, 2021).

A few years later, in 1989, the term *intersectionality* was first used by Black American law professor and social theorist Kimberly Crenshaw when Black American feminists began vocalising their thoughts and speaking out about the middle-class nature of the white feminist movement. Intersectionality theory, at its core, asserts that Black women are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression and that identity markers, such as "Black" and "female," do not exist independently of each other. Intersectionality is a framework that conceptualizes Black women and the discriminations and disadvantages they experience because of their race and gender (YWBoston, 2017). It is a theory that helps better understand the multi-dimensional and complex prejudices Black women face regularly (YWBoston, 2017).

Many Black women, who often distance themselves from white feminism, feel that the challenges that face white women pale in comparison to those experienced by Black women.

The umbrella of white feminism also does not exclude racism; therefore, Black women often feel excluded, alienated or discriminated against by white feminists despite the shared gender.

Intersectionality posits that race, ethnicity and gender intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (racism and sexism) at the macro, social-structural level (Bowleg, 2012). Racial discrimination is recognised as a key social determinant of health and a driver of racial/ethnic health inequities (Stanley *et al.*, 2019). Research enhances insight into issues of social injustice and inequality in organizations and other institutions and their effects on mental and physical outcomes in Black women (Atewologun, 2018).

A substantive amount of well-established literature correlates the effects of racism with poor mental and physical health outcomes in Black women (Lewis *et al.*, 2017). However, research that ties poor health outcomes in Black women as it relates to racism, is sparse inequities (Stanley *et al.*, 2019). Higher frequencies of racism and racial microaggressions negatively affect mental health, and racial microaggressions are significantly correlated with depressive symptoms and negative affect (Nadal *et al.*, 2014). Persons with intersecting identities of disadvantage are subjected to multiple systems of inequality working simultaneously (Andersen and Collins, 2004). Self-image plays an important role in how these persons define themselves (Trahan, 2010).

Intersectionality tends to be associated with qualitative research methods (Atewologun, 2018) due to the central role of giving voice elicited through focus groups, narrative interviews, action research, and observations. Intersectionality is also utilized as a

methodological tool for conducting qualitative research, such as by researchers adopting an intersectional reflexivity mindset. Researchers have used various approaches to study racism as experienced by Black women, such as single-axis (race or gender only), comparative (comparing Black women against white women), additive (measuring racism and sexism separately, then adding them together), and interactional/multiplicative (creating a statistical interaction measurement such as racism x sexism) (Lewis *et al.*, 2017). However, the intersectional approach is the only approach that theorises and explores racism and sexism simultaneously instead of separately.

Black women's simultaneous experience of racism and sexism is referred to as misogynoir. Queer Black feminist, Moya Bailey (2010) coined the term by combining "misogyny" and the French word, "noir", meaning black. Misogynoir describes misogynistic discrimination that specifically targets Black women (Bailey, 2010). Misogynoir is related to poor mental health outcomes, including psychological distress. It explores the origins of intersecting oppressions for Black women as rooted in the historical stereotypes of enslaved Black women who were subjugated against white, Eurocentric standards of beauty and womanhood and deemed as inferior based on their race and gender (Williams and Lewis, 2019). There is very little research that has focused on the influence of misogynoir on health outcomes in Black women. However, Lewis and Neville (2015) developed an intersectional measure to assess gendered racial microaggressions (i.e., subtle forms of misogynoir). Their findings indicated that greater experiences of gendered racial microaggressions were positively related to racial microaggressions, perceived sexist events, and psychological distress in a sample of adult Black women.



A recent study by Lewis *et al.* (2017), a team of researchers who first extended the literature by specifically exploring the association between misogynoir and physical health, found that gendered microaggressions significantly predicted health outcomes, showing that the greater the frequency of gendered racial microaggression, the greater the likelihood for increased negative mental health. Additionally, their study found a greater frequency of misogynoir to be significantly and positively related to psychological distress for Black women. Medical apartheid (Washington, 2008) inflicted upon Black women has existed since the era of slavery. Today, studies and research have linked medical racism and misogynoir. A very prominent example of this occurred in 2020 during the peak of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Black American medical doctor, Susan Moore, MD, took to social media in a desperate attempt to alert the public after being refused medication and experiencing the horrific mismanagement of her medical case and negligent care. Despite demonstrating a command of complicated medical terminology and having an intricate knowledge of treatment protocols, being a medical doctor herself, the white male doctor who treated Dr Moore downplayed her complaints of pain, refused to give her medication and told her she was lying about her symptoms. Dr Moore died on December 12, 2020, after her last video on social media claimed, "He made me feel like a drug addict."

Misogynoir and medical racism frequently intersect regarding the mental and physical health of Black women in the USA and the UK. The Office for National Statistics 2021 census in England and Wales reports:

The Black ethnic group has had the highest infant mortality rate each year with a rate of 6.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019 [...] compared to the white ethnic group with the lowest infant mortality rate at three deaths per 1,000 live births in 2019.

While rates have been declining since 2007, babies from the Black ethnic group have the highest rates of stillbirths and infant deaths of all groups. (Maddox, 2021)

Similarly, in the United States, infant mortality rates show Black women are also disproportionately more likely to give birth to stillborn babies. The charitable organisation, March of Dimes (1938), reports that babies born to Black women are over twice as likely to die at 10.4 per 1,000 than those born to white women at 4.4 per 1,000 (March of Dimes, 2020).

This chapter closes with a historical contextualising harmful past and present negative imagery of Black women. The reader should be aware of the sensitive content and imagery in the following section and use necessary discretion in reading and viewing.

## **Historical Overview of Black Women's Imagery**

### ***Introduction***

Contemporary scholars, academics and researchers are making a concerted effort to expand the common, general, and monolithic perception of the Black experience. Therefore, it is important for me to contribute to this effort and present a more robust image of Black peoples beyond slavery. I have previously discussed the debilitating effects of racism and racial trauma, but I believe the ways in which Black women have overcome these challenges in positive and powerful ways should also be highlighted and showcased. A historical account of Black women as leaders of slave revolts begins the section, followed by a discussion of contemporary Black women activists and scholars. The section ends by exploring the positive and negative aspects of the "strong Black woman" archetype versus stereotype.

This chapter conceptualises resilience as an embodied historical character trait of Black women, from slavery to the present day, adding to the originality of this thesis. As mentioned throughout the thesis, the effects of historical trauma are what link commonalities among Black women in the United States and England, including their shared coping mechanisms when facing racism and microaggressive events. Participants of the study described aspects of racial discrimination or microaggressive events that both traumatised and empowered them, though not necessarily simultaneously. In interviews, some participants discussed the continuous evolution of their socio-political development and activism, even minimally, thereby emboldening them when confronting racists, either directly or passively.

This section is also an acknowledgement of Black women researchers, authors and writers who have worked tirelessly to raise better awareness and understanding of the bravery of our enslaved Black women ancestors in the New World (United States) and throughout the Caribbean. Throughout history, Black women and their tremendous development in racial sociocultural processes, including racial identity and racial socialisation, were an integral part of catapulting them toward freedom and independence. Finally, this section is a testimony to my own positionality within the sociological/sociocultural/sociopolitical evolutionary processes that helped empower me to finish this body of work despite many personal and professional challenges. This paper is a homage to my familial ancestors and the dynamic Black women who encouraged me along this PhD journey.

## **Black Women-led Revolts, Rebellions and Resistance to Slavery**

A typical and racially motivated misnomer in United States History is that enslaved Black populations were passive or acquiescent with their conditions and meekly accepted their bondage. However, it should be noted that many enslaved Africans resisted and rebelled against slavery using various methods and varying intensity. A slave revolt is defined as an action involving 10 or more slaves whose goal is the “uprising, plot, insurrection, or the equivalent of these” (Apthekar, 1937) toward the aim of freedom, and at least one in 10 voyages was disrupted by revolt.

Most search results typically provide details about revolts that were led by men, especially the famous Nat Turner rebellion in the United States. However, Black women, as early as while aboard slave ships crossing the Middle Passage during the transatlantic slave trade, were leaders of rebellions against slavery (Hall and Martinez, 2021). Hall and Martinez (2021) write, “the more women on board a slave ship, the more likely a revolt.” Enslavers separated male slaves below decks, and women and girls were placed near the weapons cache. Women used the underestimation of their will and strength to their advantage to seize weapons and use them against their enslavers (Hall and Martinez, 2021).

The conditions of slavery could possibly account for the drive and determination that laid the foundation for the liberation of enslaved Black women (Ladner, 1995). Enslaved Black women’s resistance and call to violent reaction was usually in response to violent and brutal events (*Hidden voices: enslaved women in the Lowcountry and US South*, 2014), particularly rape. In this study, some participants echoed this demonstration of willingness to fight back, especially participants who used physical violence against overt racist perpetrators when the

word 'nigger' was used. Historians are increasingly expanding research that credits Black women for playing key roles in the resistance to slavery but not being credited for their participation in revolts, including Turner's rebellion (Colby, 2021).

In her book *Wake*, Hall (2021), a historian, discusses her difficulties in researching Black women revolters. Her PhD research on the subject drove her to various states in the US, and to England, in search of documentation, including slave records, to learn the identities of four Black women. In 1712 in New York City, there was a documented trial that describes an attempted slavery revolt that was led by four unidentifiable Black women who secretly organised and were prepared to evoke violence to gain freedom (Hall, 2021, p. 35). Despite multiple challenges and setbacks, Hall discovered that of the four women tried, two were found guilty, and the other two were also found guilty but sentenced to death. Treatment of Black women in the aftermath of their efforts of resistance was no less severe in violence and brutality, even death, than enslaved men, including beatings or hanging to death. Therefore, Black women often used subtle tactics to rebel against their enslavers which included: poisoning, threats of evoking "root work" upon slaveowners, feigning illness, and slowing production as ways to fight their oppressors instead of violence. As mentioned, enslaved women sought ways to remain deeply involved in the work of everyday resistance to slavery (Holden, 2021), and that resistance could take forms that ranged from work stoppages or slow-downs to sheltering, feeding runaways and serving as crucial conduits for information (Holden, 2021).

After conducting an exhaustive search, finding literature that describes Black women as slave revolters barely exists, confirming Hall's and Holden's claims. The minimal

documentation available to the public typically only exists where a government trial occurred and was documented. However, in the majority of cases, there is no written record and no way to know how many revolts were led by enslaved Black women and who they were. Therefore, this section expands beyond the British colonies in discussing instances where Black women played key roles in fights and resistance against slavery but provides a snapshot of Black women's resistance, generally. It is also reasonable to consider, then, that enslaved Black women possibly resisted and revolted against slavery, irrespective of their geographical location. For example, in 1733, Breffu of St. Jan (the island of St. John in the Danish West Indies), was the leader of a slave rebellion that lasted a year (Kesse, 2019). She killed her owner and his family, along with other wealthy slaveowners. Breffu committed suicide a year later to evade capture. It was not until much later government officials realised the rebellion had been led by a woman (Kesse, 2019).

Maroon societies and communities were comprised of escaped slaves and became formidable forces against Spanish colonisers. In Matudere, a maroon community in the mountains, swamps, and rural and remote locations of Cartagena, Colombia, La Virreina Juana, an African woman, was a leader (Landers, 2013). In retaliation, the Spanish destroyed Matudere, and Juana was captured, interrogated, given two hundred lashes by the whip, and returned to slavery at 60 years old (Landers, 2013).

Attention to Black women's contributions toward human and civil rights activism lags far behind the notoriety of Black men's contributions. As mentioned previously, Black women were deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in the United States and can be credited for organising marches, boycotts, sit-ins and protests. History remembers

prominent Black men, such as the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who fought for civil rights, but Black women helped enable many of the victories (Dastagir, 2018), including his wife, activist Coretta Scott King and Dr. Dorothy Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW, 1935). Angela L. Davis and Ericka Huggins are prominent leaders of the Black Panther Party in the United States, an organisation that embraced Black pride and segregation from white people but on equal terms. The following section discusses a few examples of Black women's negative imagery and the persistence of racial stereotypes today.

### **Black Women's Legacy of Negative Stereotypes and Imagery**

During slavery and its aftermath, Black women have been portrayed by harmful, over-exaggerated images that depict us in a plethora of dehumanising, overly sexualised, and exploitative stereotypes. Black women were harmfully portrayed in the United States and England. In the United States, Black women were often characterised by two extremes:

- Jezebels—Black women with an insatiable appetite for sex
- Mammies—Desexualised, sassy, exaggerated antithesis of the jezebel (Pilgrim, 2012) whose main duties included cooking, cleaning, and caring for white women and children.

According to Pilgrim (2012), curator of the Jim Crow Museum located in the US, the Sapphire image (Jewell, 1993) was mostly portrayed in US Black television shows that caricatured Black women as being “rude, loud, malicious, stubborn, and overbearing”, the very epitome of the negative labelling of the Angry Black Woman (ABW) (Pilgrim, 2012). In England, the

golliwog, sometimes represented as female (1895), depicted harmful racially-charged, negative, and dehumanising images of Black people.

Present-day derogatory racist imagery depicts Black women as being welfare queens, cantankerous, boisterous, attitudinal and combative (Daniel, 2000). In the book, *Psychotherapy with African American Women: Innovations in Psychodynamic Perspectives and Practice* (Jackson and Greene, (2000) (cited in Daniel, 2000) describe Black women who were constantly bombarded with oppressive and stereotypical imagery of themselves within Eurocentric cultures as suffering from the following traumas: image distortion as trauma, traumatic racial memories, law enforcement and judicial trauma, medical trauma, and trauma in educational settings (pp. 126-144). Daniel (2000) argues that extended exposure to these depictions can result in tremendous pressure and have subsequent adverse negative mental and physical health consequences for Black women. Following are pictured examples of mammies and golliwogs. Even though golliwogs were typically depicted by Black men, below are examples of female golliwogs. The following section discusses Black women's futility in the constant fight against racism.



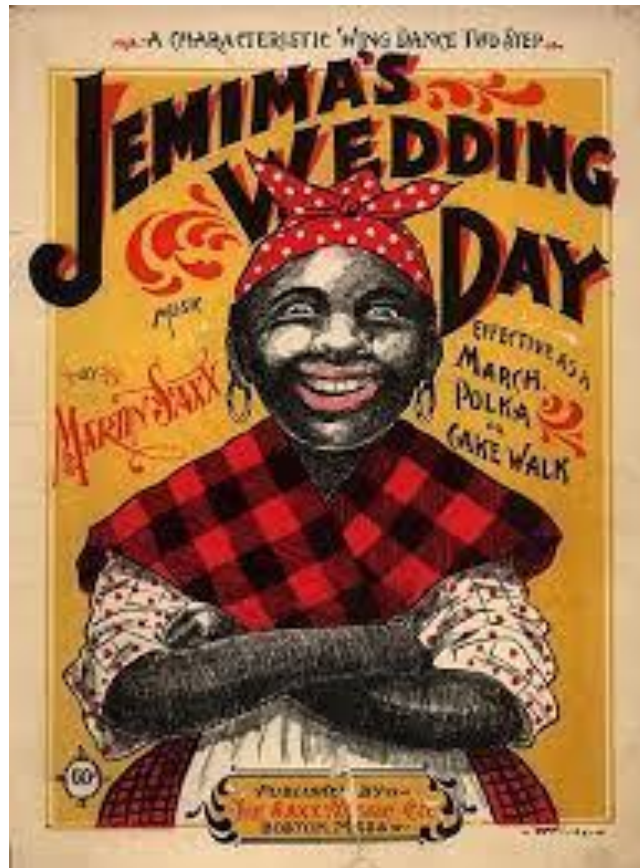


Figure 5: “Aunt Jemima” is a renowned stereotypical image of “mammy”

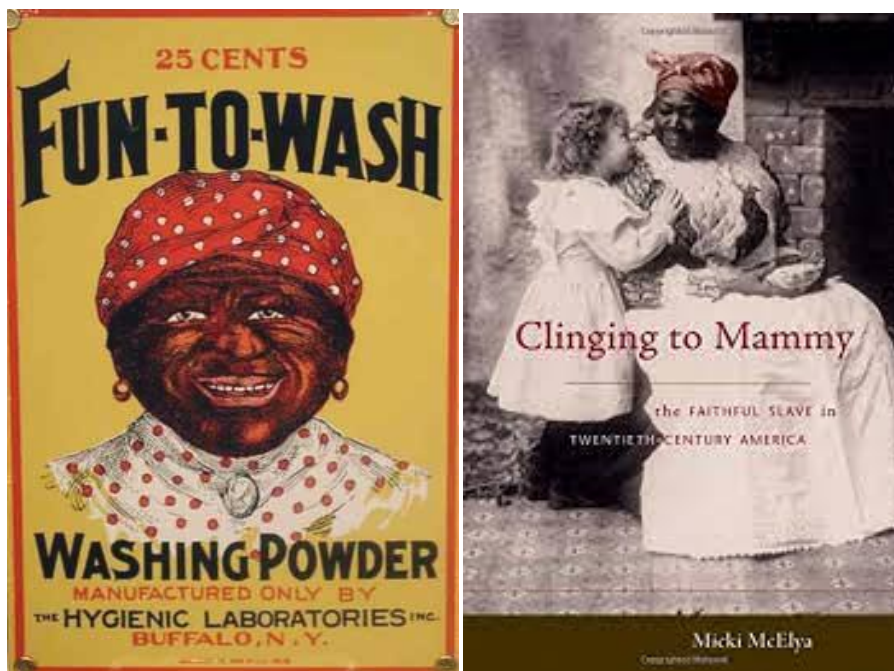


Figure 6: Harmful stereotype images of Black American women

Source: Pilgrim (2012)



**Figure 7: The “golliwog” is a harmful, racist depiction of Black (men and) women**

*Source: Pilgrim (2012)*



**Figure 8: Traumatic imagery on book, cover of renowned English writer, Agatha Christie**

## How Strong is The Strong Black Woman?

Participants described resilience as a double entendre, a word relative to Black women, that has a double meaning. The Strong Black Woman archetype portrays Black women as being psychologically and emotionally strong and promotes a belief that Black women can and are always able to withstand and endure misfortune, trauma, and abuse, totally independent and without help, nurturing or support during crisis (Donovan and Williams, 2002). In some instances, this stereotype is uplifting and empowering. Participants expressed feelings of pride when describing themselves as strong Black women, and women with daughters described raising their offspring in the same fashion. However, when contextualised within the paradigms of racism and racial abuse, some participants expressed having a variety of emotive responses, such as disgust, anger, and animosity toward the terminology.

Daniel (2000) claims extended exposure to such stereotypical labelling can result in tremendous pressure that can cause adverse mental and physical health consequences for Black women. A recent tweet posted on Twitter by a Black woman echoes Daniel:

I dream of never being called resilient again in my life. I am exhausted by strength. I want support. I want softness. I want ease. I want to be amongst kin. Not patted on the back for how well I take a hit. Or for how many. Instead of hearing “You are one of the most resilient people I know,” I want to hear “You are so loved. You are so cared for. You are genuinely covered. (Brown, 2021)

Many other profiles on Twitter who seemingly appeared to be Black women responded to Brown’s tweet with comments of solidarity and understanding, expressing having similar feelings of racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2003). Several study participants described feeling “tired of being strong” and attributed the term, Strong Black Woman, as being a form of racialised abuse and an excuse used by white people to persist in microaggressive behaviour,

cruelty, insensitivity, and ambivalence toward the mental wellbeing of Black women.

Historically, there has been a systemic silencing of Black women and their racial trauma generationally (Broussard, 2013) in three main ways:

- residual effects of slavery and the demands for social order
- social injustice and abuse within law enforcement
- the omission or disappearance of Black women's narratives throughout history to the present day (Broussard, 2013; Scott, 2017).

Broussard (2013) argues that such complex systems systematically nurture a culture of oppression and silencing of Black women, making a long-lasting impact on their mental and emotional well-being.

### **Black Women's Post-Traumatic Growth**

Post-traumatic Growth (PTG) research expands HTT by focusing on healing and recovery from historical trauma (HT) (Ortega-Williams *et al.*, 2021). PTG examines how groups suffering from HT not only survive, but also thrive. Despite HT being linked to poor or negative health outcomes (Sotero, 2007; Yehuda, 2011), there are factors that can possibly counteract stressors through cultural practices, kinship, and social interactions (Ortega-Williams *et al.*, 2021). Participants in all three sub-groups described bonds they maintained with other Black women and the nurturing support they received. Even without familial ties to each other, Black women found more comfort talking about the stressors involved with racism and the effects of racial trauma with other Black women than any other racial/ethnic group. Shared experiences linked participants' narratives, and they described feeling rejuvenated and empowered in the safe spaces they had created for themselves. Following

is a discussion of how psychological and emotional strength demonstrated by Black women is often exploited and facilitates racialised microaggression and abuse.

This study's participants described having "double jeopardy" feelings when reflecting upon their Blackness. Some women discussed feeling fetishised by both white men and women while also being hated, often simultaneously. Participants described having discontent and anger over white people's misappropriation of Black culture and felt white people capitalise on it without giving public recognition or financial reward to Black women.

Despite the dehumanising challenges of stereotyping and labelling, Black women's presence in the media (especially social media platforms) continues to rise and help promote positive Black women images for healthy mental wellbeing. British researcher, Sobande (2017) writes: "Online content, created by and for Black women, can offer them self-affirming and knowledge-sharing experiences." A US study discovered emerging themes that showed a connection between Black participants with niche communities that valued social media tools as an opportunity to connect with communities with which they shared identities and their voices are relevant (Correa and Ho Jeong, 2010). The next section discusses ways study participants described growth from past trauma, resilience and empowerment with the assistance of other Black women.

Historically, Black women have been dehumanised, ostracised, and fetishised through stereotyping and over-exaggerated negative imagery. Participants described having a dichotomous relationship with harmful stereotypes, from which they also derived some sense of pride and empowerment. Black women in this study expressed contentment about their natural Black features but were equally angry over the exaggerated stereotypes

motivated by racism. Several participants did not ascribe to the colloquialism “what doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger.” Contrarily, they expressed feeling mentally and emotionally fatigued, angry, and disappointed.

## **Summary**

This chapter explored the current gaps in the literature as they relate to recording, documenting and evaluating the racial experiences of Black women, generally, and in the United States and England, specifically. This chapter also serves as a conduit that connects Black women’s past with the present and how previous historical racism abuse is still ever-present today. The reader should not assume that my omission of details was conscious or subconscious. In most instances where gaps exist, no details or further discussion could be found. The apparent gaps in this literature review are also clear indications of where there are gaps in scholarly literature and empirical research. The chapter closes, firstly, with descriptions and depictions of negative stereotypical images of Black women from a historical lens. Secondly, the chapter explored the potentially damaging labelling of being “strong” as a form of gaslighting or obstruction to expressing normal emotive reactions and responses. The following chapter discusses the three major theoretical frameworks utilised in the study and several secondary theories that are also relevant to provide further clarity, understanding, and historical significance of the racial experiences of Black women and the resultant racial trauma.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

### Introduction

This chapter contextualises three primary theories around microaggressions (MT), historical trauma (HTT), and everyday racism (ERT) that were applied in this study. Several secondary theories from sociological disciplines were broadly examined to support the main theories and enhance the robustness of the study's theoretical framework. The theories are conceptualised in this thesis to explore and understand the framework and underpinnings of historical racism and how the emotive responses to racial trauma affect Black women in this study in the United States and England. The previous chapters provided relevant literature that closely relates to Black women's experiences of racism. However, where there is a wealth of literature about racism (including microaggressions), HT, and race trauma as they relate to Black people in general and Black men, specifically. Conversely, there is abysmal literature and theories that associate themselves specifically with the collective experiences of racism among Black women that are linked to HT. This study seeks to address that gap. Recommendations for further research are in later chapters.

The chapter starts with a discussion of the interdisciplinary aspects of the literature that frame the thesis, followed by an examination of the HT Theory (HTT) and how it is situated in this study, comparatively to slavery and the racial experiences of Black women. HT is used to link the atrocities of slavery endured by primary generations to the experiences of racism and racial trauma among contemporary generations of Black women. Secondly, Microaggression Theory (MT) provides a framework of how racism is contextualised in the thesis and illustrates better how both overt and more subtle forms of racism and racist

activity affect Black women. HTT was not conceptualised with regard to Black women and MT provides a generalisation of racism perpetrated upon any non-majority group; neither Black people nor Black women, specifically. Everyday Racism Theory (ERT) complements MT in its relationship and relevancy to the effects of racism, specifically on Black women. It is the only study that intersects race, gender, and HT that specifically relates to Black women that could be found. Finally, the chapter ends with brief overviews of several secondary theories that have relevant elements that can be applied throughout the study:

- Critical Race Theory (CRT)
- Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)
- Social Conflict Theory (SCT)

### **Interdisciplinary Study**

This study explores the intergeneration of historical trauma and its impact on Black women in the United States and in England as the primary theoretical framework. However, Historical Trauma Theory presents a myopic view or interpretation of the very complex systems in which Black women in both countries navigate their lives in the face of racism. Therefore, utilizing various academic disciplines provides broader knowledge and understanding about the complexities of the racialised experiences that participants describe throughout their narratives. Integrating multiple disciplines into the theoretical framework, a more robust connection emerged between theory and participant narratives. The disciplines explored and examined include: the study of complex systems, history, psychology, physiology, and phenomenological embodiment. Following is an overview of the disciplines that were explored.



## ***History***

History is used fluidly throughout the study and is applied as a common thread that connects past ancestral traumatic history to present-day historical events that have occurred across participants' lifespan. Participants also use history as a metaphoric map or timeline that guides them toward their futures. The Marley Hypothesis (Nelson, 2013) is a psychological theory that posits that racial groups' perceptions of racism vary based on the extent of knowledge and awareness of racial history. Scholars claim that historical knowledge of past racism is more prevalent among Black people than white people who showed little historical knowledge of racism in both isolated incidents and systemic manifestations of racism (Nelson et al., 2013). The lack of knowledge and understanding of racism from the past strongly suggests a lack of knowledge and understanding of racism in present-day and provides a foundation for denial and inaction about injustice from the dominant group (Nelson et al., 2013). Examples of the Marley Hypothesis are similarly described in-depth throughout participant narratives. Later in this chapter, Historical Trauma Theory, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, and Racial Socialisation Theory are discussed as primary and secondary historical theories that were considered and applied to this body of research.

## ***Complex System of Racism***

This study explores the intergeneration of historical trauma and its impact on Black women in the United States and in England as the primary theoretical framework. However, Historical Trauma Theory presents a myopic view or interpretation of the very complex systems in which Black women in both countries navigate their lives in the face of racism through their resilience. Racism is a complex system (Macionis, 2012) that operates on both

the micro (interpersonal) level and macro (systemic and institutional) levels of society, often simultaneously, and attacks the mind, body and spirit of study participants. Exploration of the literature required a wide berth that crossed multiple disciplines. According to Center for the Study of Complex Systems, the field investigates populations of diverse, adaptive entities connected in networks, and seeks to identify and understand phenomena that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries (LSA, 2020) Newell (2001) argues that the nature of complex systems provides a rationale for interdisciplinary study. The term race is used to describe the Black women of this study who self-identify as such. It does not aim to argue whether race is a social construct. Scholars debate whether “race” actually exists or is a socially constructed or socially adaptive force (Bobo, 2019). Bobo (2019) argues that race can only have consequence if it is a fixed construct; something rooted either in biology and nature, or instead reflecting the force of inflexibly held prejudices about those perceived as members of particular racial categories. The field of complex systems investigates populations of diverse, adaptive entities connected in networks, including people or nations (Read, 2022).

### ***Psychology***

Racism entails a set of practices that are embedded in bodily and habitual registers (Ngo, 2017). The psychological effects of racism are thoroughly described and discussed throughout the thesis. The effects of racism can be described as racial abuse, racial trauma (Carter, 2017), and racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2003), and can manifest intergenerationally for many generations (Leary, 2015; Williams, 2022). Scholars argue whether racial trauma should be classified as a mental health disorder or within the context of PTSD despite the

similarities in symptoms of both (Carter, 2004). According to various studies, what sets racial trauma apart from PTSD is the constant and cumulative impact of microaggressions and other forms of racial discrimination that Black women are exposed to (Cénat, 2023). Currently, racial trauma does not meet the mental health diagnostic criteria of PTSD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and therefore some scholars believe claims of racial trauma are invalidated (Carter, 2004). Scholars also argue that a mental health diagnosis carries stigma which may further exacerbate a victim's experiences of racism which could lead to internalised emotions which could lead to self-inflicted harm, including death. The psychological effects of racism are described and discussed in-depth throughout the thesis.

### ***Physiology***

Complex trauma is caused by traumatic experiences that involve multiple threats or events that have occurred across the lifespan (Cénat, 2023). These traumas can severely affect the mental and physical wellbeing of those who experience them (Dolezsar et al., 2014). Similarly, racial trauma, internalized racism reoccurs across the lifespan and manifests as maladies in mental health, behaviours, cognition, relationships with others, self-concept, and social and economic life (Cénat, 2023; Comas-Díaz, 2016). Additionally, studies show that racial trauma affects ability to study and work. The physiological effects of racial trauma can lead to severe mental health outcomes including death (Lewis et al., 2021). Experiences of racism affects the body biologically through the central nervous system, endocrine, metabolic, immune, and cardiovascular systems (Metzger et al., 2018; Carter, 2021); cognitively by internalizing problems caused by feelings of isolation, rejection, depression,

fear, and withdrawal; economically by poverty due to the inability to maintain employment (Williams and Mohammed, 2013).

The following section discusses the primary theoretical frameworks utilised in the thesis, followed by an overview of secondary theories that were considered, and provides additional knowledge, clarity and understanding for later chapters.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### ***Historical Trauma Theory (HTT)***

Historical Trauma Theory (HTT) is a theory that describes how trauma experienced by ancestors is passed down intergenerationally and experienced as pain by current members of that group. HTT provides a macro-level, temporal framework (Sotero, 2006) that explores how the psychological and emotional residue from a primary generation's reaction to trauma are transmitted to subsequent generations physiologically, environmentally and socially, establishing intergenerational cycles of trauma response (Carter, 2001; Sotero, 2006; Hossain, 2017). Historical trauma (HT) is the "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over a lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group experiences" (Brave Heart, 1998).

Any people whose culture has a history of oppression or genocide may experience the effects of trauma which have been handed down generationally. In the past two decades, the term has been applied to numerous colonised indigenous groups throughout the world, as well as African Americans, Armenian refugees, and Japanese American survivors of internment camps. The term also applied to Swedish immigrant children whose parents

were torture victims, Palestinian youths, the people of Cyprus, Belgians, Cambodians, Israelis, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Russians, and many other cultural groups and communities that share a history of oppression, victimization, or massive group trauma exposure (Mohatt *et al.*, 2014). HT can be manifested and result in high rates of child and domestic violence, alcoholism, increased symptoms of mood and trauma-related disorders, a variety of health disparities, and countless other physiological and psychological problems (Williams-Washington and Mills, 2018). Historical trauma theory is built upon the sentiment that populations exposed and subjected to long-term occurrences of mass trauma exhibit a higher level of chronic and morbid diseases several generations after the original occurrences (Sotero, 2006).

Braveheart and Debruyn (1998) expanded the literature on Jewish Holocaust survivors and their decedents (Brown-Rice, 2013) to contextualise the psychological and emotional stress that children of the Lakota community were experiencing while attending North American Indian boarding schools. Braveheart coined the term “historical trauma” in the 1980s to describe the traumatic effects of children who were struggling to assimilate and adapt to the boarding school’s environment (Braveheart, 1998). In the 1990s, Braveheart theorised Indigenous Historical Trauma (IHT) (Braveheart, 1998) and applied her research to indigenous communities, then referred to as the Native Indians and Alaskan Natives (NIAN). These communities provide a model for addressing health disparities in other minority populations (Sotero, 2008). Few studies have applied HTT to Black populations, and no studies could be found where HTT was applied to Black women specifically.

Mohatt *et al.* (2014) describe HT as “a public narrative for particular groups or communities that connects present-day experiences and circumstances to the trauma so as to influence health.” They argue that by treating historical trauma as a public narrative, research discourse shifts from exclusively searching for “past causal variables” that may have previously influenced health to identifying how present-day experiences and their health impacts are connected to HT for a particular group or community, transgenerationally, intergenerationally, multi-generationally, or cross-generationally (Mohatt *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, as a narrative representation, HT bridges primary traumatic events that were collectively experienced within groups and communities, and present-day experiences, including the contemporary health of those groups and communities. Therefore, the theoretical framework of Braveheart and Sotero’s HTT was applied to this study to provide a foundation conjoining HT to participants’ present-day experiences of racism.

The following section describes how the HTT framework in this study relies on two levels of narrative (Mohatt *et al.*, 2014); 1) an internal logic describing a cause-effect relationship between a past event and present symptoms, and 2) memory as a constructed representation of a traumatic event (Young, 2004). It is helpful to note here that the terms history, historical, and the past often represent recent history in a participant’s lifetime, not necessarily the distant historical past.

### ***Applying Historical Trauma to Black Women***

Similar to Brave Heart’s expansion of the literature based on Jewish Holocaust survivors, it is thereby reasonable to apply the same theoretical framework to contextualise the traumatic effects of slavery on enslaved African people, similarly. Ortega-Williams *et al.* (2021) argue

that “a lack of research integrates personal and mass group-level growth in the context of HT” (p. 221). Slavery produced deference, dependence and compliance within most slave psyches (Mountain, 2004; Shell, 2001; Hossain, 2014). Shell further claims “the psychological implications, social costs and hidden wounds for future generations are incalculable” (Shell, 2001). Research shows that African Americans have been profoundly affected by slavery and its aftermath, and the residual effects of slavery are defined as the ways in which the racist treatment of African Americans, during and after slavery, has impacted multiple generations of African Americans (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012). However, a main critique of HTT is that trauma associated with slavery is unique because it has yet to be accepted as having had profound implications ((Wilkins *et al.*, 2012; Ortega-Williams *et al.*, 2021). According to Billingsley (1968), historical trauma resulting from 200 years of bondage still lingers among Black Americans, especially since there have been no reparations for the institution of slavery either economically, socially or psychologically.

Similar to the residual and ongoing traumatic effects from experiences of colonisation, segregation and genocide of the NIAN peoples, Sotero (2007) and Comas-Diaz (2019) argue that feelings of hopelessness often manifest as chronic and co-morbid diseases and even suicidality or death. Some scholars agree that historical traumatic events often result in adverse health outcomes (Brave Heart and DeBruyn, 1998; Brave Heart and Sotero, 2007; Williams-Washington and Mills, 2018). This will be discussed in further detail in later chapters. This thesis conceptualises historical trauma and abuse inflicted upon enslaved Black women through the current day and applies the theory to Black women in the US and Black British women, which has not been done previously.

The effects of historical trauma (Sotero, 2007), resultant from slavery and its racist aftermath, lay the foundation for the continued suffering and dehumanization among African Americans (Billingsley, 1968; Wilkins *et al.*, 2012; Sotero, 2007). Contextually, Black women are virtually intersectionally invisible (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008) in global male-dominated, patriarchal, misogynistic, and chauvinistic societies, making race and gender-based racism even more profound. Scott (2017) claims a growing number of researchers treat the constructs of race and gender separately, yet there are limited researchers that take into account the intersectional identities of Black women (p. 4). Applying HTT to the racial experiences of Black women across two countries contributes to the originality of this thesis and fills a significant gap in the theoretical literature.

Ancestral pain is transmitted and memorialised internally and can manifest as unresolved grief, persecution and mistrust of others (Sotero, 2006). Racial trauma carries psychological and physiological effects such as hypervigilance to threats; flashbacks; nightmares; avoidance; suspiciousness; headaches; and heart palpitations, among others, which are similar to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Comas-Díaz *et al.*, 2019). These PTSD-like symptoms were similarly described by participants of this study. Microaggression Theory is discussed in the following section.

### ***Microaggression Theory (MT)***

Microaggressions are the primary forms of racism that are described and discussed throughout the thesis. Racism that occurs on the macro-levels of society are described as: institutional, structural, and systemic racism (Sue *et al.*, 2015) are also described and discussed within this study, however, the importance of racism among interpersonal



relationships (micro-level racism) is discussed more in-depth. Primarily, I analysed the effects of racism and its impact on participants while they were performing their normal, day-to-day interactions and activities with white people.

Pierce (1970), a Harvard University psychiatrist, first coined the term *microaggressions* to describe the racial insults and dismissals he regularly witnessed being inflicted upon Black people by non-Black people. Pierce (1970) contextualised the less obvious, more subtle forms of racism in opposition to his previous references to macroaggressions and coined the term *microaggressions* in the 1970s (Pierce, 1970, 1974; Spencer, 2017). Pierce used the term to describe ways that Black people, specifically, were racially abused by white people (Spencer, 2017) in “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal daily exchanges which are ‘put downs’ and send denigrating messages to Black people” (Pierce *et al.*, 1978; Sue, 2008; Hudson and Hunter, 2019). Sue *et al.* (2015), theorised Pierce’s terminology to describe microaggressions as behaviours or statements that do not necessarily reflect malicious intent, but which nevertheless can inflict insult or injury (Steele, 2010; Runyowa, 2015). They referred to these incidents as “microassaults” (Sue *et al.*, 2015). However, this is in contrast to what Pierce (1970) (cited in Williams, 2019) called “macroaggressions,” which include severe acts of racism (e.g., lynchings, beatings, cross burnings). Additionally, current definitions of microaggressions, have expanded far outside the parameter of the original conceptualisation of the term, which previously solely applied to anti-Black racism.

Microaggressions point out cultural differences, often causing anxiety and crises of belonging on the part of minorities (Runyowa, 2015), and can be just as damaging as blatant, overt racism. Microaggressions can cause psychological breakdowns in self-esteem and self-

worth (Carter, 2011) as oppressed victims repeatedly strive to prove their position in society beyond race and ethnicity.

According to Sue et al. (2018) the definition of microaggressions now includes other marginalised and disenfranchised races and ethnic groups (Spencer, 2017; Sue et al., 2018). Daily, common manifestations of aggression leave many people feeling vulnerable, targeted, angry, and afraid (Sue *et al.*, 2018). However, Showunmi and Tomlin (2022) argue that anti-Black racism supersedes other forms of racial, ethnic, nationality, and religious discrimination, and exists on a global scale (Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022). They claim that anti-Blackness is the most predominant feature of racism including when racism intersects with class and gender. Tomlin argues that racism should be pluralised to *racisms* to appropriately describe the various types of racism that can occur concurrently.

According to Sue *et al.* (2015), there are three types of microaggressions:

**Microassaults:** blatant, overt acts of racism, including physical violence, verbal threats and racial epithets or racist symbolism such as the Nazi flag, a noose, confederate or colonialism statues, and stereotypical imagery.

**Microinsults:** racism, usually in the form of stereotypes and racist dogma, that targets others based on their ethnic heritage, such as believing all Black people excel in sports, that all Chinese people are good at maths or asking a non-white British person where they are “really from.”

**Microinvalidation:** often the most insidious form of racism because it frequently does not come from ill intent. Comments such as “I don’t see colour” originates from a perspective of

privilege that purveys superiority over those who live in non-white skin and can \*only\* see colour in a society where skin colour is used against them. Microinvalidations minimise the lived experiences of racially marginalised people.

Some participants in this study described responding to racial abuse with physical violence. Sue et al., would most likely claim that the interaction is a microassault, because the incident occurred within an interpersonal relationship involving only two people. In this aspect “micro” refers to the scale of the event, not the severity of it. Therefore, for clarity and the purposes of this paper, Sue et al.’s definitions of microaggressions (2007) will be used to describe both subtle and overt forms of racism, including microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations against Black women in the United States and England.

The next section discusses Everyday Racism Theory, a theory that explores how Black women, specifically and comparatively, experience racism.

### ***Everyday Racism Theory (ERT)***

The term ‘everyday racism’ was conceptualised in 1984 by Philomena Essed, a Dutch PhD researcher who pioneered a study in which she attempted to shift the micro-interactional perspective on racism to a macro-structural perspective (Bourabain and Verhaeghe, 2021). However, there is a significant gap in the literature that relates to ERT. Therefore, I relied heavily upon the only peer-reviewed article found for clarity and a better understanding of the theory. ERT is an important theoretical framework for this thesis; it complements the other aforementioned theories by expanding the understanding of how and why racism is experienced every day.

Essed (1990) argues that ERT distinguishes and separates itself from other forms of racism because Black people encounter racism every day, meaning, repetitively and with intimate familiarity (Bourabain and Verhaeghe, 2021). Scholars and critics disagree whether theorising 'every day' is even possible. However, Essed uses every day to starkly contrast non-everydayness (Essed, 1990; Bourabain and Verhaeghe, 2021). Zimmerman and Pollner (1970) describe everyday life as general societal commonalities and social norms (Bourabain and Verhaeghe, 2021). Essed's primary position argues that Black people experience racism every day compared to white people's non-everydayness, non-existent experiences of racism. ERT can therefore be explained or interpreted as being the pioneer study for microaggressions, as experienced by Black women, specifically. Additionally, given the significant paucity of work by Black women about Black women, I would be remiss in not positioning Essed's work within the theoretical framework of this current study. A further discussion about the interconnection of these three primary theories can be found later in this chapter on page 86.

Showunmi expands on Essed's theory by conceptualising and coining the phrase "sophisticated everyday racism" (Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022) which identifies how systemic structures are designed to promote racism which disingenuously appears to promote anti-racism on equitable policies (Showunmi and Tomlin, 2022). Essed's theory is contextualised in this study to add broader understanding of how racism regularly and consistently affects Black women specifically, and nuanced by Showunmi's explanation of sophisticated every day racism, as it relates to racism on macro-levels of systemic, structural, and institutional. Historical Trauma Theory, Microaggression Theory, and Every Day Racism

Theory offer a complementary theoretical triad that offers unique insight into how Black women in the United States and in England experience racism.

### **Secondary Theoretical Frameworks**

As mentioned in the previous section, secondary theories were closely examined to provide historical context and deeper understanding, supporting the three primary theories.

Elements of some of these theories may explicate and provide broader knowledge about the overall impact and effects of racism on the lives of Black women, especially as they relate to Black women's mental health, self-esteem and self-respect, and how certain characteristics may be passed on intergenerationally. The following theories by well-known philosophers and sociologists were included in this section to provide a thorough and robust sociological perspective to this study. Some are non-specific to Black women but generally provide a broader view of the detriments of racism and race trauma.

#### ***Critical Race Theory (CRT)***

The Critical race theory is a critical analysis of race and racism from a legal point of view that evolved from the ideas of legal realism scholars of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Benjamin N. Cardozo (Simba, 2021). The theory highlights that race, instead of being biologically based, is a socially constructed identity for the purpose of maintaining the superiority and privilege of the white population (Crenshaw et al., 1996). The CRT claims that race functions as a means to maintain the interests of the white population that constructed it, and that individuals are limited in their free agency because of their social class. It asserts that racial inequality emerges from the social, economic, and

legal differences that white people create between “races” to maintain elite white interests in labour markets and politics, thereby creating circumstances that give rise to poverty and criminality in many minority communities (Curry, 2016). In 1881, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver W. Holmes wrote *The Common Law*, in which he described how law is not logical, but experiential; meaning judges’ prejudices are what determine laws, not logic or common sense (Simba, 2021). CRT holds that the laws and policies in the United States are biased against people of colour, and legal institutions support that bias (Curry, 2016) and started to appear in scholarly writing in the 1970s (Simba, 2021). The earliest scholars of CRT were Bell (1976) and Freeman (1978), who published “*Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation*”, and “*Legitimizing Racial Discrimination through Antidiscrimination Law*”, respectively. In their writings, they argue that the law has never been colour-blind, and that the Supreme Court has explicitly upheld the use of racial classification (Crenshaw et al., 1996).

The disproportionate number of ethnic minority inmates compared to white prison inmates and the harsh sentencing of ethnic minority prisoners to that of white inmates supports the implication that racism operates at the highest structural and functional level (judicial systems) and trickles downward.

CRT was not drawn from psychoanalytical or Eurocentric social conflict theoretical frameworks. Instead, CRT was born from the experiences and writings of Black scholars and has advanced theoretical understandings of the law, politics, and US sociology that focused on the efforts of white people to maintain their historical advantages over people of colour (Curry, 2016).

### ***Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)***

Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary (2001) introduced the concept of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). PTSS is an explanatory theory that explores and examines generational trauma (Leary, 2005). The theory posits that there is a clear connection between survival behaviour learned during slavery and the contemporary Black American experience. PTSS provides a theoretical foundation for conceptualising adaptive and survival behaviours that have been passed down generationally to the offspring of former slaves. Degruy posits that the pain and suffrage of past traumas are embodied in subsequent generations and until those injustices are effectively acknowledged, understood and treated, healing cannot begin.

Historical trauma lays the foundation upon which PTSS is built (Degruy, 2005). Trauma can be transmitted to the descendants of those who have endured traumatic experiences (Hicks, 2015). DeGruy explains that the systematic dehumanization of African slaves was the initial trauma, and generations of their descendants have borne the scars (Talvi, 2006). Both overt and subtle forms of racism (microaggression) have damaged the collective African people's psyche (Carson, 2013, Carter, 2016) and has harmfully manifested through poor mental and physical health, family and relationship dysfunction (Brave Heart, 2003; Sotero, 2006), and self-destructive impulses (Talvi, 2006). Societies have been inculcated and immersed in a fabricated (but effective) system of race "hierarchy," where white privilege still dramatically affects the likelihood of succeeding in that society (Talvi, 2006).

The general concept of PTSS posits that as a coping mechanism, Blacks can demonstrate avoidance symptoms similar to detachment symptoms in PTSD (Portland State University, 2006). They may join in minimising, ignoring, devaluing, denying or even sympathising with

racist oppressors (Degruy, 2006) (often referred to as ‘Uncle Tom’ or ‘Sambo’) as a coping strategy and as a means to escape the painful emotions that are associated with race-based stress and race-based trauma (Degruy, 2005). Appropriate adaptation, a qualifier for identifying PTSS, occurs when a Black person uses tactics of denigration, disavowal and denial for self-preservation (Hicks, 2015) when living in a hostile environment (racist society). DeGruy (2006) theorises that descendants of African people, traumatized by slavery, continue to be injured by power and privilege differentials (Carson, 2013; Hicks, 2015; Carter, 2016), stigma, and prejudice that remain a part of the US society. Therefore, Degruy recommends that the effects of racism must be studied in the historical context of slavery and continued present-day oppression (Portland State University, 2006) that individual, familial, community and societal aspects of transmission be addressed and that racism be viewed as a part of a cumulative transgenerational trauma (Carson, 2016).

Cultural mistrust has also been attributed to the residual effects of slavery (RES) and may be the framework for distrust, avoidance and apprehension regarding Caucasians among Blacks (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012). Pouissant and Alexander (2000) describe Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome as: “the persistent presence of racism, despite the significant legal, social, and political progress made during the last half of the twentieth century, has created a physiological risk for Black people that is virtually unknown to white Americans” (p. 15). Historical oppression and its resultant trauma have led some Blacks to develop feelings of powerlessness (Pinderhughes, 1990). According to Wilkins *et al.* (2012), historical oppression has led to assimilation, crime, delinquency, or protest. Elements of PTSS theory frequently



emerged throughout the narratives, especially when participants spoke of their parents and their parents' reactions to their own experiences of racism.

### ***Social Conflict Theory (SCT)***

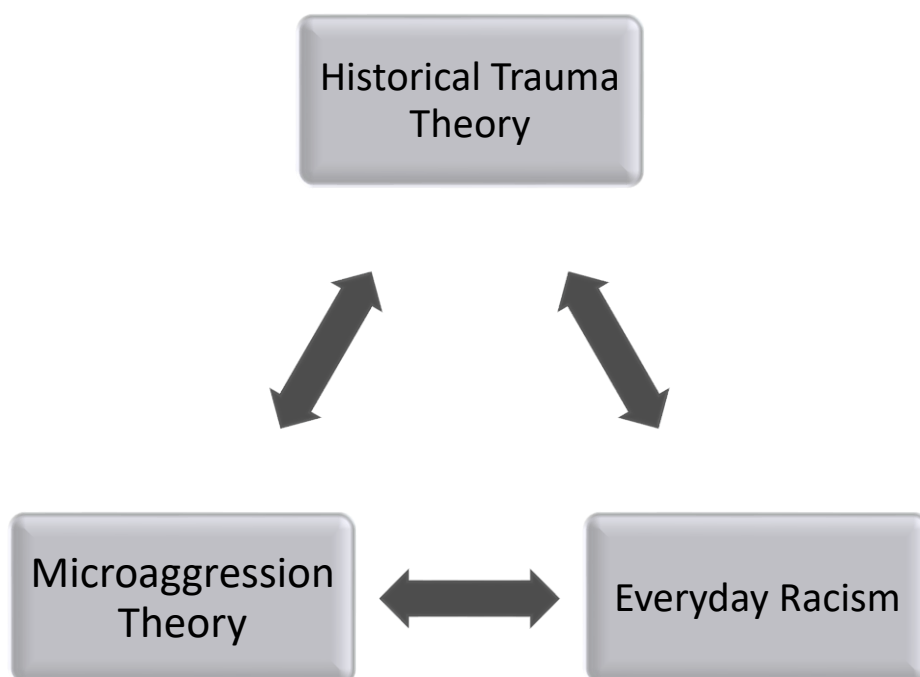
SCT is a Marxist theory that operates on the macro level of the sociological perspective. It is a theory that views social inequalities as being linked to race, sex, class and age. Marx stated that societies, particularly capitalist societies, are structured to favor the wealthy - a small, dominant group over the majority group who are the socially oppressed. Social conflict theory sees social life as a competition and focuses on the distribution of resources, power, and inequality (Moffit, 2015).

Karl Marx's theory claims that industrial societies are divided into two distinct populations: the "haves" and the "have nots"; the rich and the working poor; people who own businesses and people who work for those businesses. Business owners are capitalists, and those who sell their labor for wages are proletariats. Marx argued that capitalism would eventually lead to class conflict as a result of inequality, alienation and the working class awakening from false consciousness. He believed that feelings of powerlessness and oppression would inevitably cause the working poor to rise up and rebel against the social elite. However, wealthy groups use their economic power to maintain their dominance and social position to exploit groups with less power, thereby keeping the lesser group from ever having the opportunity or capability to advance their station.

Black Marxism (Robinson, 2021) is grounded in the ideology of revolt, similar to what Karl Marx writes about explicitly in his manifesto. However, Robinson admonishes Marx's

negligence and insufficiency and calls it “damning” (Kelley, 2021) for underestimating racial ideology, and inaccurately identifying and explaining cultural and social forces when describing social conflict. In his book, “Black Marxism” (Robinson, 2021) describes Black Radical Tradition and the significance of protestation, rebellion, and revolt in the rest of the world, beyond Western Europe. At its core, Black Radical Tradition promotes and encourages action-oriented resistance with the goal of “disrupting social, political, economic, and cultural norms originating in anti-colonial and antislavery efforts.” The relevancy of SCT and how it relates to Black Marxism is a unique common thread that weaves itself throughout the thesis, especially as it relates to past and present history, and rebellion. Though Marxism itself is not mentioned across the narratives, elements of Black Marxism emerged throughout participant narratives. When discussing even the smallest engagement with activism, participants described their individual forms of rebellion against racism and racist attitudes and behaviours. The willingness to support and participate in this study which took place during the Black Lives Matter global movement could be described as a form of activism, or “Black radical tradition in motion” (Kelley, 2021).

As mentioned previously, this study seeks to balance contextualised history related to Black women’s experiences of racism. The key importance of this chapter is the inter-relationship of primary theories, and elements of complementary secondary theories that are used in the framework of this study in their application to Black women’s experiences of racism.



**Figure 9: Inter-relationship of theories**

### **Summary**

This chapter identifies and examines key elements of the three primary theories, HTT, MT and ERT, utilised in this study, and interconnects various complementary elements of each, and other theories, as they relate to the experiences of Black women in the United States and England. The originality of this chapter emerges through the unique combination of theories that are applied, providing a broader explanation to participants' reactions to racist events and the lingering effects of the incidents (HTT). MT and ERT provide further understanding of the complexities of racism, the frequency in which racist/microaggressive events occur, and their impact on Black women in the United States and England. Secondary theories were discussed to broaden and further explicate through a wider lens the issues

and impact of residual effects of racism and trauma that directly impact Black women's lives.

The following chapters discuss the ethical and methodological protocols and processes

undertaken for this study's data collection and analysis.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This study used a qualitative approach to compare experiences of Black American women (this thesis uses the acronym AB1 to refer to this group of participants, where the number refers to the country, 1=USA) and Black British women of Caribbean descent (BC2) and African descent (BA2) in their experiences of racism. This study also examined whether Black American women and Black British women experience racism and race-based trauma similarly. This chapter will first present a justification for using a qualitative research design, along with details of the research instruments and data collection methods. A survey was used to collect a sample group and to gather demographic data, however data collection was gathered utilising one-to-one interviews, and focus groups. Secondly, the philosophical foundation is presented, followed by the epistemological and ontological worldviews undertaken.

Thirdly, a discussion of the research design and the demands to remain flexible during data collection phases in adherence to government-mandated restrictions during a global pandemic. Fourth, ethical considerations are discussed, followed by an in-depth explanation that provides an understanding of how the quantitative data collection process, via an online survey, was utilised as a participant recruitment tool. Some participants from the pool of survey respondents were later recruited as interviewees and focus group attendees. An interpretation of the findings following a thematic analysis closes the chapter. In the next section, the main research question and sub-questions are presented, followed by an

explanation of the philosophical, epistemological and ontological foundations used in the study.

## **Research Questions**

To achieve the aims, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the similarities and differences in how Black American women (AB1) and Black British women (BC2 and BA2) experience racism?
- How has historical racial trauma affected AB1, BC2 and BA2?

With these sub-questions:

- Are the physical and psychological effects of long-term exposure to racism the same among Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent?
- Does historical trauma play a role in how these Black women experience and react to racism?
- How do Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent experience microaggression, institutional and systemic racism?
- Do Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent cope with race-based trauma similarly or differently?

## **Philosophy, Epistemology and Ontology**

### ***Philosophical Foundations***

Sociological research designs make certain assumptions about how knowledge is created and generated throughout the social world. Positivism, interpretivism and realism are three different philosophical worldviews that address whether the nature of scientific knowledge

applies to societies (Ibrahim, 2014). Scholars suggest that elements of these three theoretical frameworks can be found in a great deal of sociological research (Hibberd, 2010; Ibrahim, 2014), claiming that the underpinnings of quantitative research methods are grounded in positivist and realist paradigms (Ibrahim, 2014) and qualitative methods are grounded in interpretivism, constructivism and naturalism (Punch, 2009; Hanzel, 2010; Thomas, 2017).

Contemporary scholars argue that combined methods accommodate margins and strengths (Ibrahim, 2014) and can compensate for mutual weaknesses (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003) and the limitations of quantitative and qualitative mono-method research in the rapidly developing “new era” (Ibrahim, 2014) in the field of social science methodology (Ibrahim, 2014; Kriukow, 2017). This study assumes the worldview that is referred to as social constructivism. It is rooted in interpretive theoretical frameworks that attempt to explicate multiple and various emergent realities that can provide better and clearer understanding of how people attach meaning to those realities (Thomas, 2009; Kriukow, 2017).

Creswell (2013) argues that in research, constructivists are concerned with participants’ perspectives and beliefs and, therefore, investigate how and why these specific beliefs are formed (Bryant, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Kriukow, 2017). Reflective on the subjective nature of the constructivist worldview, this study seeks to answer the research questions by comparing the similarities and differences of racial experiences of Black women and how those experiences have affected them through qualitative data collection methods.

### ***Positivism***

Positivism epistemologically assumes that empirical knowledge is grounded in objectivity, verifiability, and reproducibility of all authentic knowledge (Bryman, 2001; Punch, 2009; Ibrahim, 2014). Ibrahim (2014) writes: "In the positivist view, sociology involves the search for causal relationships between observable phenomena and theories that are tested against observations" (p. 29). Therefore, positivism posits that the natural sciences are applicable to the study of societies (Hibberd, 2009; Ibrahim, 2014). Positivist researchers may use quantitative methods, such as surveys, to identify viewpoints or to seek answers that explain people's behaviour that is not scientifically observable.

### ***Interpretivism***

Interpretivism purports the worldview that the way people view reality is not straightforward because each individual constructs and interprets 'their world' in a different way, with words and events carrying different meanings (Thomas, 2017, p. 110).

Interpretivism usually employs qualitative methods to understand people, not to measure them and does not necessarily exclude quantitative methods (Ibrahim, 2014). This ontology is the framework for narrative research and lays the foundation for researchers to question what is going on rather than go by what is being shown while collecting data (Koch, 1998).

Interpretivism is a critical component of narrative research design because there is no expectation that the researcher needs to be objective (Thomas, 2017, p. 111). However, researchers should remain critically reflective and systematic because validity is the key criterion in interpretivism epistemology (Ibrahim, 2014).



Even though shared experiences appear similar and feelings, emotions and reactions can feel the same, it remains my task to critically reflect upon the reality that worldviews are constructed differently, through different lenses and experiences with “words and events carrying different meanings in every case,” (Thomas, 2017). The main point about interpretivism is studying the way in which people interrelate, how they form ideas about the world and how their worlds are constructed (Thomas, 2017). Therefore, using interpretivism as the primary research paradigm for this project, the study aims to explore the experiences of racism among BAw and BBw comparatively.

### ***Pragmatist Approach***

Utilising a pragmatic approach, I conducted this study on the universal knowledge or truth that racism does exist within the Black experience, as documented and recorded by an infinite number of studies and research. The pragmatic lens also allowed me to approach the study with a reasonable understanding that it is likely that most Black women have experienced some form of racism within their lifetime. Therefore, in this thesis, I am not arguing whether racism exists. I am providing research and discussion within a historical context that expands the current knowledge and understanding of the similarities and differences in Black women’s experiences of racism, past and present.

In this study, a pragmatic approach was used to juxtapose the positivist research method of utilising quantitative methods (survey) while also exploring qualitative data-gathering techniques (interviews and surveys). Pragmatism embraces plurality and is frequently used in mixed-method studies because it can flexibly work for what is best for the research being investigated (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). It accepts that one or several realities are open to

empirical enquiry (Creswell and Clark, 2011; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Pragmatists also suggest that certain human objective realities are resultant of environmental influences and can only be contextualised through human experience (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019).

Kaushik and Walsh (2019) write: “a major underpinning of pragmatist philosophy is that knowledge and reality are based on beliefs and habits that are socially constructed.”

However, pragmatism allows researchers to explore how some social constructions often match individuals’ experiences more than others, making reality nearly impossible to be determined by and for everyone (Pansiri, 2005). Therefore, pragmatist researchers choose which version of reality will result in the most anticipated and favourable outcomes (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019).

Pragmatism was adopted in this study as a compatible philosophy to social constructivism (Mead, 1932) that offers an even more flexible approach (Kriukow, 2017). Pragmatic researchers believe that the research question should determine the most appropriate methods and employ either qualitative or quantitative, depending on the nature of the phenomenon and research question(s) (Kriukow, 2021). There is a broad agreement among scholars that using multiple methods is more robust than mono-methods research (Creswell *et al.*, 2003; Ibrahim, 2014).

This study used quantitative methods first via a survey, followed by qualitative methods via interviews and focus groups. The quantitative-qualitative approach, outlined in a later section, complemented the structure of the study because the survey was used to recruit participants and to collect demographic data, allowing for descriptive statistical findings. The survey was used to identify criteria for the targeted audience and provide a sampling frame

(Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). The survey and interview questions were created pragmatically on the basis that Black women had previous knowledge and experiences of racism and that they understood those experiences to be racially motivated.

The value of the researcher taking the time to reflect upon their own philosophical assumptions of knowledge and placing themselves somewhere within the spectrum of paradigms is vital (Shusterman, 2016). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), paradigms “are human constructions” that “define the worldview of the researcher” (p. 183). In attempting to understand my own research paradigm, there are four key considerations (Thomas, 2011) to explore: Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology.

### **Ontology – Positivism and Quantitative Research Methods**

Ontology is a concept that identifies the overall nature of existence (Edirisingha, 2012) and the nature of reality (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988) of a particular phenomenon (Edirisingha, 2012). This study engaged with positivist ontology in the form of multiple-choice questions on a survey to identify and qualify participants for the study. A survey was used as a recruitment tool to gather participants for qualitative data collection through interviews and focus groups. Some scholars question whether surveys are epistemology or method (Marsh, 1979); however, for the purposes of this study, the survey was used as a method to qualify (or disqualify) participants based on their responses to self-identifying and demographical questions. Surveys are grounded in positivism, which is described as “what we see and hear is straightforwardly perceived and recordable without complications and that things of the social and psychological world can be observed, measured and studied scientifically”

(Thomas, 2017). Therefore, how the women perceived themselves and their experiences of racism determined their progression in the study.

Certain questions were designed to gather demographical information while others required reflection upon the particular individual's experiences of racism and racist activities. They were also asked to describe their feelings and emotions about those experiences, an interpretive epistemology which will be discussed in the section below.

As shown in Chapter 3, there is only some research or data available that gauges or measures the historical traumatic effects of racism as it relates to African Americans' experiences in the US. There is even less available data as it relates to Black people (of African or Caribbean descent) in Britain. However, research studies show that the majority of Black people believe they have experienced some form of overt or covert racism within their life span in the United States (Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 1998; Palosky, 2020) and in England (Marchant, 2020). Therefore, it is plausible to assume that an experience of racism is interpreted as a reality that is shared by most Black individuals.

Racism is ambiguously defined, especially among scholars and the population, as to what it is and what it is not. The terms bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination are often mislabelled as racism. For the purposes of this research, the definition: "racial discrimination + economic and social power=racism" (Lawrence and Keleher, 2004; Clair and Denis, 2015; Nittle, 2018) is applied. Therefore, the participants' interpretation of their personal experiences of racism that create or comprise their reality, individually or as a group, was formulated around this definition.

In this section, the terms: Black, Blacks, African Americans and Black Americans will be used interchangeably unless noted otherwise to respect the choices and preferences of the participants involved in the study. Black British refers to those of both African descent and Caribbean descent.

### **Epistemology - Interpretivism and Qualitative Research Methods**

Epistemology describes our inherent knowledge of things and gives plausible explanations to ponderings about why things are the way that they are (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

Epistemological stances affect methodological choices to generate knowledge from a study (Rosenberg, 2012). Interpretivism Interpretivism allows the researcher to interview and study people's reactions through verbal and non-verbal communication while in their natural settings as opposed to a constructed or simulated environment (i.e., laboratory or interview room), thereby possibly allowing interviewees to feel less inhibited in their responses to the researcher's questions. Using this method was particularly helpful during the Covid-19 pandemic, which will be discussed in later chapters.

Qualitative data collection methods allow the researcher to collect data as an insider through face-to-face intimate processes (Punch, 2009). Narrative inquiry, as a methodology, is a way of thinking about experience (Clandinin, 2006). It is a process in which researchers use storytelling as a portal to collect data and gain insight (through analysis) into how people enter the world and how their experiences are interpreted and made personally meaningful (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47). Similar descriptions of experiences, often with the exact verbiage, frequently emerged between women on different continents who had never met, affirming their interpretation of the reality of the experiences of racism or racist activity.

## Research Design

A flexible research design was employed with both quantitative-qualitative research methods to answer the research questions, including a survey, interviews and focus groups as tools of data collection. The narrative research design was used as a main framework in which I utilised my own personal understanding, knowledge and personal experiences of racism to create the survey, interview and focus group questions. Questions that could provide deep insight into thoughts and feelings as they relate to the research objectives were presented. According to Thomas (2017), the researcher's task is to provide and combine personal knowledge and experiences to create a framework in which the characters, through their motives and involvements, directly impact the plot (Thomas, 2017). In return, participants use the raw materials (their narrative) and provide the fabric that connects the story, fitting all the pieces together (Thomas, 2017). This process coincides with the underpinnings of interpretivism.

Openness to competing interpretations is a deterrent in physical science and quantitative research methods; however, interpretivism is a virtue in narrative research (Czarniawska, 2004). Thomas (2017, p. 111) argues that “researchers should share the experience of the study by becoming active participants and insiders.” Narrative inquiry, as a methodology, is a way of thinking about experiences (Clandinin, 2006). It is a process in which researchers use storytelling as a portal to collect data and gain insight (through analysis) into how people enter the world and how their experiences are interpreted and made personally meaningful (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47). According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 20), narrative inquiry

is a “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus.”

Oral tradition, a form of narrative enquiry, was, and still is, a fundamental part of African-American way of life (Clandinin, 2006). According to the Pew Research Center (2022), roughly three-quarters (76%) of Black Americans say they have spoken with their relatives to learn about their family history. Black adults who were born in the United States (77%) are more likely to say they have done this than those born outside the US (67%). Storytelling through oral tradition is the practice of handing down stories, including folklore, by word of mouth, from one generation to another. Stories link common characteristics of a culture that can be passed on to future generations by recording family histories and cultural norms by and about people who experienced the events first-hand. Oral tradition can be used as an enlistment tool to build better lives and stronger communities for Black people (Clandinin, 2006). Narrative enquiry supports pragmatist philosophy with allowances for each storyteller’s experiences, therefore their reality, to be told and shared through their personal, socially constructed lens. Therefore, this study deliberately engages with the narrative tradition of oral storytelling as a way to commonality and kinship with participants, to establish trust and to demonstrate compassion and understanding of their experiences toward their narratives.

Given the identities of both parties, it is inevitable that participants of the study and I share some similar experiences regarding racism and microaggression, thereby making the researcher’s “self” one of the primary tools for collecting data (Lipson, 1990, p. 72). I bring a plethora of knowledge and experience to the study, which participants can possibly relate to

and engage with, including; Black history, Black culture and Black dialect and lingo, and shared reactions to the effects caused by acts of racism, racist activities and race-based trauma.

In addition to the survey data, the study used semi-structured interviews and focus groups to gather the experiences of 31 women located in the United States and England. Due to covid-19 pandemic restrictions, all interviews and focus groups were conducted online via Zoom meeting software, and each interview/focus group lasted approximately one hour. Pre-set questions had been created; however, the researcher allowed the discussions to progress and flow organically. Interviewees and focus group members were given the option to provide additional consent to be contacted for future phases of the study. Following phase two, data were transcribed and coded. Thematic analysis was used to discover themes. The following section will discuss various theories used during the analysis. How the theoretical frameworks relate to the findings will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The University of Birmingham requires postgraduate researchers to adhere to the strict guidelines of conducting quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, as mandated by the British Psychological Society. This study's proposed qualitative methodology design withstood a robust and rigorous application process that was approved by the University of Birmingham's Ethics Committee.

Due to the in-depth nature of the qualitative research process, a key consideration is the protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles



(Arifin, 2018). As a researcher, I have the ethical responsibility of ensuring and protecting participants' confidentiality and anonymity throughout the recruitment and dissemination process. Such measures include protecting participants' demographical and cultural, personal, educational, employment, and other identifying information. All considerations were adhered to throughout the study. Following is an overview of the general and specific ethical considerations for conducting qualitative research in the UK and how they were applied in this study. An in-depth discussion of these considerations follows throughout the chapter.

### ***General Ethical Considerations***

Scientific integrity is a key aspect of ethical research since inaccurate research in minority groups can lead to incorrect conclusions, which can trigger negative social consequences for this group (Christians, 2008). For example, regarding concern about scrutiny by white academics, some participants required reassurance that no other researchers, nor my supervisors, would have access to their transcripts or other information. Ensuring the safety and confidence of Black women to share their stories openly and freely was of paramount concern for me, and I took necessary measures of reassurance to develop nurture and trust among participants. A strategy to obtain participant consent was utilised to provide participants with a clear and deep understanding of their role in this study and my responsibility as a researcher to keep their identities and narratives safeguarded and protected.

The online survey was designed for participants to provide consent before progressing to the survey questions. Participants were also required to provide further consent to participate

further in the study by providing their email address. No other contact information was requested or provided. Participants who were contacted for interviews and focus groups were asked to sign a consent form and return it via email. They were also forwarded a description of the study, their voluntary role in the study, my contact information, and my lead supervisor's contact information; any further pertinent study details were included in the Participant Information Sheet. At the onset of every interview, the participants were reminded of their voluntary consent and were reminded that they could withdraw consent at any time. In accordance with The British Psychological Society's guidelines (BPS, 2014), there are five mandatory ethical considerations in qualitative research. They are as follows:

- Voluntary participation – Participants were advised during the quantitative data collection via online survey that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw their consent at any time before, during or after the commencement of their participation.
- Informed consent – Participants were required to provide initial consent and further consent during various stages of the study. Participants were not able to progress in the study without providing consent.
- Anonymity and confidentiality – Participant identification was anonymised by utilising acronyms. Any other identifying information, such as location (beyond the country of residence), place of school or employment, or any other divulences that may be identifiable, was also anonymised. Confidentiality was maintained by not identifying participants by name during focus groups. Participants were provided a

choice of whether to engage their cameras. However, they were required to show a single hand on camera to confirm eligibility to participate.

- Potential for harm - The nature of the questions posed during the interview process may evoke emotional responses such as deep feelings of overwhelming emotion, depression, anxiety, anger, or others, including frustration and feelings of withdrawal. Participants with pre-disposition to regular episodes of chronic depression and/or anxiety may manifest symptoms before, during, or following the interview. Government-enforced lockdown restricted prohibited in-person interviews; therefore, interviews were conducted online, a deviation from the original methodology plan. Topping *et al.* (2021) explain how the remote nature of online interviewing can risk inducing more distress than face-to-face interviews. During in-person interviews, the interviewer may have the advantage of interpreting body language and posture and facial expressions that may not convey prominently during online interviews (Topping *et al.*, 2021). They further suggest encouraging participants to enlist a nominated support person to be contacted should the need arise. Additionally, my supervisor's contact details were provided to every participant in the participant information sheet, which will be described later in the chapter.
- Results communication – A focus group to discuss key findings with the participants was in the original research design. However, due to time constraints and covid-19 social distancing restrictions, organising and facilitating the final session became nearly impossible. A findings report will be forwarded to participants via email following this thesis submission, or another attempt to organise an online focus group may be considered.

To account for potential problems, I incorporated a variety of measures which included but were not limited to the following:

- Briefing prior to commencement of the interview, reminding of voluntary consent.
- Mental health support referrals were immediately made available after each session.
- Debriefing after interviews included: allotted time for questions or to state concerns and confirm my email address.

This thesis study used several tools to collect data about Black women's experiences of racism. An online survey was used as a recruitment tool to gather and qualify self-identified Black women for the study and collect pertinent demographical information through a series of closed-ended questions, with additional options for further comment. Following the survey and by providing further consent, some participants were emailed and later selected from the pool of survey respondents to participate further in interviews and focus groups. The following sections provide in-depth discussions about the survey, interviews and focus groups.

## **Survey**

A quantitative online survey was created to collect demographical data from a sample group of Black women from the United States and England. It consisted of fifteen multiple-choice questions related to demographics, experiences of racism and the effects of racism. The survey launched on 02 June 2020, directly in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder and at the height of global protests. The Black Lives Matter global activism protests were triggered as a proactive response against police brutality and racism that began in Minneapolis on 26

May 2020 and largely took place during 2020. Conducting this study during the BLM movements was, perhaps, an ideal time because participants expressed feelings of openness, willingness, and readiness to tell their stories, which some conveyed as their own type of activism. The following section describes the purpose of using a survey in this study as a recruitment tool, sampling methods, and the survey design.

### ***Survey Design***

The survey questions were designed to collect information about participants' age, ethnicity, race, nationality, employment status, education level and relationship status as a method of gathering a diverse and more robust sample of Black women to participate further in the subsequent focus groups and interviews. Demographic data is a critical step for this study to determine whether respondents accurately represent the target population for generalisation purposes (Salkind, 2010). Demographic data serve as the independent variables in research because the data cannot be manipulated (Salkind, 2010). Research suggests there is an interrelationship between population phenomena and social, economic and health conditions (Treiman *et al.*, 2012).

### ***Survey Recruitment***

Recruitment for this cross-cultural qualitative research study was originally designed to gather a demographically and geographically heterogeneous sample. Such research selects individuals from different cultures to compare them and search for similarities and differences (Robinson, 2013). A key strategic aim of recruitment efforts was to sample women from various education, economic, employment and age statuses as well as racial

experiences throughout the life span as comparative paradigms. According to research, diverse sampling is beneficial because despite respondents sharing race and/or ethnic similarities, they may respond to questions differently (Alkerwi *et al.*, 2019). Respondents may have similar experiences but will interpret or describe them differently, feel more or less passionately about some experiences, or feel differently about the importance (impact) of similar experiences on their lives (*Ensuring racial and cultural diversity in research*, 2020). Diversity in research sampling can also effectively impact the audiences and populations the study is intended for (McAdams, 2018).

The survey in this study used purposive sampling as a recruitment tool, designed to specifically target Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent. Purposive sampling is a non-probability, non-random technique that does not rely on underlying theories or a set number of participants. It occurs when a researcher makes deliberate choices during participant selection based on the qualities the participant possesses (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). This technique was used for the intentional selection of participants within various Black women's networks, organisations, and social media platforms to participate in the survey based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to choose within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest (Tongco, 2007).

Purposive sampling is most useful when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within (Tongco, 2007). I also used snowball sampling (Sedgewick, 2013) by asking women to post, share, and retweet the survey information. Critics of

snowball sampling argue misrepresentation within the sample group can occur (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981) and that true representation of the targeted group or demographic is not guaranteed. Additionally, critics argue that researchers have no control over the sampling and, therefore, have no idea of the true distribution of the population and sample (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981).

Chain referral occurred only during the survey recruitment process and at no other time during the study. Black women assisted in the recruitment of other Black women within their professional or social networks, familial circles or other social media specific to Black women. This study managed the effects of these challenges for snowball sampling by targeting groups, platforms and organisation with membership bases comprised solely of Black women. Additionally, the survey contained mandatory qualifying demographic questions that served as gatekeepers. The researcher included exclusionary criteria, a feature of the survey software, that prohibited further progression of non-qualifying selections.

Two identical digital flyers were designed and created, with the exception of location requirements, as a call-to-action for Black women to partake in a survey about experiences of racism. One flyer was a recruitment tool to attract Black American women throughout the United States. The other was a recruitment tool to attract Black British women of African descent and of Caribbean descent in London and in Birmingham. During the Covid-19 global pandemic, recruitment efforts were later expanded to include Black British women in all of England and Black women who were born, raised and had lived most of their lives in England but were temporarily living abroad with the intent to return to England. The decision to

expand the survey location criteria was realised when the focus groups and interviews required facilitation online instead of in-person due to the Covid-19 lockdown. Restrictions, including loss of the freedom of movement and travel, made it prohibitive for the researcher to leave her base or travel. The effects of the pandemic on this study will be discussed in more detail throughout this paper.

Recruitment efforts were made on several social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp, where a brief description of the study was given along with a hyperlink to the survey website. Social media was utilised as a recruitment tool because the internet provides space where Black people, especially Black women, can explore, discuss, negotiate, and share their sense of self, including racial and sexual identity (Sobande, 2017). According to UK researcher Francesca Sobande (2020), an expert in digital media studies, Black women use social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to find solidarity, without geographical boundaries, with other Black women around the world (Sobande, 2017). Additionally, "Blogging while Black", a common Americanism that explains the inter-relationship between Black women and online public journaling, provides a space and opportunity for Black women to actively participate in feminism discussion and other political agendas where white feminism and other mainstream activism marginalise the voices and experiences of Black women.

Emails were sent to several individuals and organisations, including Black student guilds, and Black academics, staff and faculty located in the US and in England. Emails were also sent to Black sororities in the United States. Initiation into these prominent and historical women's affiliations are often a rite of passage for many young Black women. These individuals and



organisations were specifically and strategically targeted due to their large databases and access to Black women. Today, there are now over a quarter of a million women belonging to Black sororities with numbers increasing yearly, continuing the legacy of public service and activism (Johnson, no date).

Contrary to the responses received from social media campaigns, individual contact made by the researcher and snowballing, email enquires received no responses from any of the aforementioned. The emails also included a brief description of the study and a link to the survey. Announcements on Facebook and Twitter asked members to forward the link to their own networks of Black women members and participants. Additionally, several Black women blog writers were emailed via their website or directly. The flyers were posted on each social media platform along with promotional hashtags appropriate to the topic, and a link to the survey. A request to share, forward and retweet the survey information as also included.

On Facebook, the flyer and request to participate were posted on the researcher's personal and professional pages and on group pages that target and cater to Black women. On Twitter, the researcher tweeted from her page and frequently tagged (a form of targeting) Black women or organisations for Black women along with a request for retweeting. On LinkedIn, the flyers were posted, and an article was written to request participation in the survey. Organisations for Black women were tagged, as well as Black women academics and Black women working in corporate environments. The flyers were also posted in "stories" on the researcher's Instagram account and Whatsapp with a link to the survey. Blog writers

were emailed via their website contact form or, where available, directly to their email address.

### ***Demographic Questions***

In order to collect the specifics of the sample, participants were asked ten demographic questions: age, ethnicity, race, nationality, employment status, education level and relationship status. The demographic questions were designed to provide the researcher with sufficient data to identify and invite a diverse and more robust sampling to participate further in the subsequent focus groups and interviews.

The following demographic questions were used solely as a recruitment tool to qualify respondents from each of the targeted groups of women:

- Country of residence
- Ethnicity
- Generation
- Employment status
- Highest level of education completed
- Current relationship status

The ethnicity question included the option to choose “other” and a text box to type their answer. All questions had the options of “don’t know” or “prefer not to answer”.

### ***Qualitative Survey Questions***

Following the demographic questions, the survey included six multiple-choice questions about participants’ experiences of racism. A glossary of terms was provided at the beginning of the survey to help respondents understand the definition of racism, particularly

microaggression, for the purposes of this study, prior to giving consent to participate. In addition to several options/choices provided by the researcher, appropriate questions allowed respondents to add their own answers in a box marked “other”. Six questions were devised pragmatically from the literature but also drawn from my knowledge about racism and personal experiences of racism as a Black woman. I asked respondents: if they believed racism exists; if they have had experiences of racism; if so, where the experiences occurred; their feelings after an incident of racism or racist activity; if they told anyone and if they had been negatively affected.

The questions about racism determined whether women believed they had experienced racism. Every respondent claimed to have had experiences with racism and had certain residual, long-lasting feelings about the experience, which will be discussed later in the analysis. When the women were asked where they had experienced racism, they were provided ten choices and “other”, which included space for a free text response. Among the choices, several women provided “other” information that the researcher had not previously considered, providing even more data on where Black women experience racism. Insight into the data provided will be discussed later in the thesis.

Survey questions directly referring to experiences of racism were designed using a causation approach. Causation is generally considered a positivist (quantitative, scientific) approach; however, it can also be justified for qualitative research (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Punch, 2009, p. 83). Causation can be defined as “the act of giving rise to a phenomenon or a state of affairs (Thomas, 2011). Miles and Huberman (1994) claim that qualitative studies are well suited to finding causal relationships (Punch,

2009). A report released by the National Research Council (2002) argues that previous conceptions of causality are not only “narrow and philosophically outdated” but that there is legitimacy to use qualitative research for causal investigation (Maxwell, 2004).

In a nomothetic causal relationship, a pragmatic approach to causality assumes that the value of an interdependent variable is the reason for the value of a dependent variable (Maxwell, 2004, 2012, 2021). Maxwell (2004) argues that causality pays attention to the causal mechanism and the process involved in particular events (p. 79) This research study is about the causal relationship between repeated exposure to racism (the mechanism) among Black women in the United States and England, comparatively, and how the effects racial trauma have impacted their lives (the process involved in particular events). During interviews, participants were asked to describe their personal experiences of racism, not those they have witnessed occurred to others. Their personal accounts describe a causal relationship when they recall memories of racial incidents during childhood that have remained throughout their lifespan and how those incidents provide a substantial framework for how they view and respond to white people and racism today. Some participants’ narratives reveal how residual feelings from racist incidents from the past are often the impetus for re-triggering emotional responses and their opinions about white people.

The following are multiple-choice questions that were concerned about the women’s experiences of racism:

1. Do you believe racism exists?
2. Have you experienced any forms of racism and/or racist activities (including racist language and microaggression)?

3. Where have you experienced racism? (check all that apply)
4. Do you feel any of the following after a racist experience? (check all that apply)
5. Did you tell anyone about your experience?
6. Do you feel negatively affected by racism?

Each question offered the option(s) of “don’t know” and “prefer not to answer” and no pre-set exclusionary criteria. Some questions were applicable and included the option “check all that apply”. Where the option “other” was applicable, a text box was placed for the respondent to type in their answer.

A request for further consent was placed at the end of the survey for respondents to voluntarily submit their email addresses if they were interested in continued participation in the study. Respondents who provided consent were later contacted via email and sent additional consent forms and participant information sheets.

I tested the survey functionality several times to reduce software glitches, misdirection of the pre-set exclusion criteria responses and overall aesthetics of the site. On average, the survey took approximately six minutes to complete. The interrelationship of online journaling and Black women provides a space and opportunity for Black women to actively participate in feminism discussion and other political agendas where white feminism and other mainstream activism marginalise the voices and experiences of Black women.

### ***Survey Launch***

The survey was hosted on secure servers on qualtrics.com. The University of Birmingham holds a software licensing agreement with Qualtrics, and it is the preferred hosting site

according to university and ethics guidelines. An account was created using the researcher's university login credentials. A description of the research study was placed on the landing page along with a consent to participate button. If the respondent failed to provide consent, a generic message appeared, and they would not be able to progress. They were also advised via a statement on the survey's home page that they were not obligated to participate.

When the survey initially closed, one hundred and sixty-six self-identifying Black women in the United States and England had responded; 110 Black American women residing in the USA and 56 Black British women residing in England. Among the remaining 5 participants; 3 are British women living abroad and unable to return home due to covid, and 2 women are American currently living in England. Preliminary data analysis showed that of the number of Black British women respondents, only 14 identified as Black African British while 32 identified as Black Caribbean British and 15 as "other". A second launch of the survey was necessary to recruit additional Black African British women for a more robust sample of their sub-group. A recruitment poster was placed on a private Facebook group page that hosts a Black British women membership base. The recruitment poster called for Black British women, specifically African women, to be interviewed. The Facebook post yielded positive results. In total, over thirty women responded. The survey was relaunched on 15 December 2020, and active recruitment continued until 05 January 2021. The additional recruitment effort was beneficial and resulted in a total of 233 responses, an overall increase of 28 women. The survey was finally closed on 19 January 2021.

After providing initial consent, respondents were required to answer specific qualifying information based on self-identity and sex. The survey was designed with pre-set questions that were used as part of the survey design functionality on Qualtrics. The researcher programmed exclusion criteria that would prohibit respondents from advancing to further questions. Only women who completed the qualifying questions were successfully able to advance to questions about their experiences of racism. Selecting any of the pre-set exclusion criteria automatically took respondents to a generic landing page if they matched any of the following:

- Under 18 years old
- Men
- Asylum-seekers and refugees who have been resident for less than 6 months in the United States/England
- Transgender women

Initially, the sampling frame excluded mixed-race women and women who do not self-identify as Black American or Black British. However, during early qualitative data collection, I modified the inclusion criteria to allow for mixed-race women and British women residing outside England. Black British women who were born and/or raised in England but were living abroad during the survey period as legal residents or had been forced to remain due to non-travel restrictions because of the Covid-19 pandemic wanted to participate in the study. Some of the women of Caribbean or African descent preferred not to self-identify as British though they were born or had lived in England for a significant part of their life, a minimum of 15 years. Even though, publicly, these women identify as British where necessary, privately, they told me they preferred not to be called British because of the empire's ties to

slavery and colonisation. However, for the purposes of this study, they agreed to be called British. This explains the researcher's decision to allow these modifications to the exclusion criteria.

Note: The terms mixed-race<sup>3</sup>, mixed-heritage, culturally mixed, and multi-ethnic heritage are used interchangeably.

Respondents did not pass through the pre-set exclusion criteria for the following reasons:

- Identifying as male
- Selecting “prefer not to answer” for self-identity
- Not identifying as Black (later revised to include mixed-race women)
- Non-British or Non-USA
- Not answering the question and timing out

#### Exclusionary criteria

Managing the size and scope of this study within the mandated timeline to complete the thesis, especially during the pandemic, required considerable deliberation about the qualifying criteria for participants, which proved to be challenging. To answer the research question, any person who identified as male or did not answer the self-identity question was excluded. Initially, women who identified as mixed-race were excluded, however I later opted to change that decision. Following are explanations for decisions made about exclusionary criteria on critical points.

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<sup>3</sup> There are broad discussions among scholars, academics, researchers, media sources, and personal perspectives about the terminology used to describe persons of more than one race and/or ethnicities. For assurance I was using the correct terminology, participants of the study were polled for clarity. All participants were comfortable with the term mix-raced, therefore it has been used in this thesis.

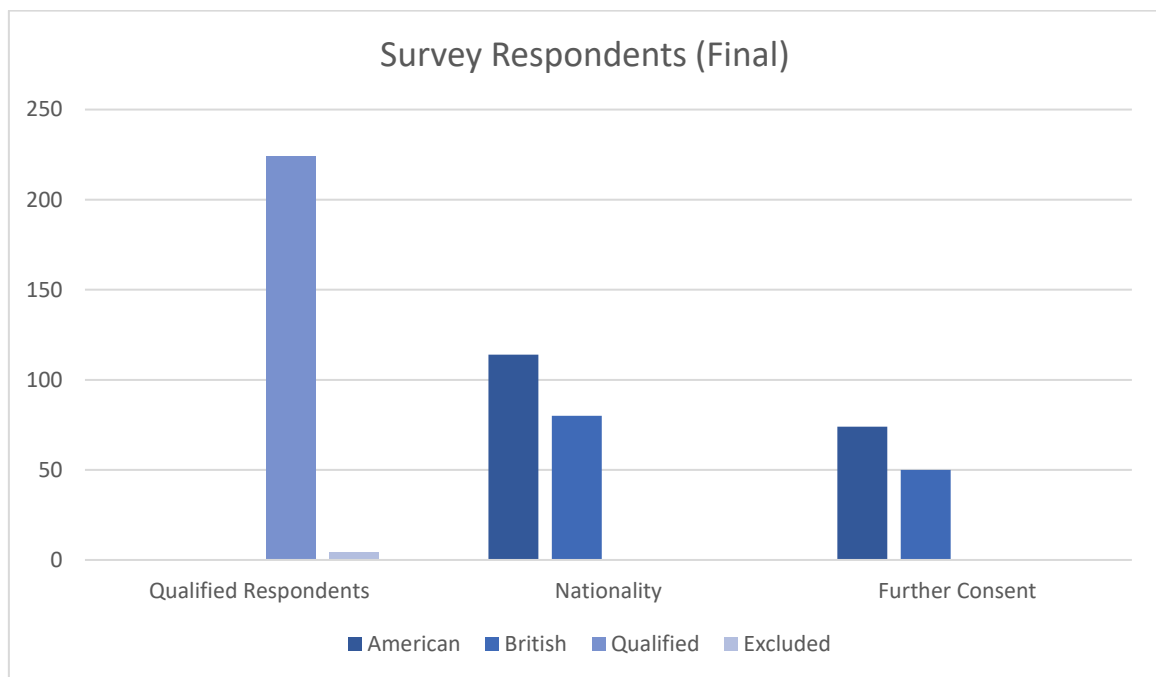


Mixed-race/heritage women often experience racism in the same ways that Black women born to two Black parents experience racism. However, there are additional nuances that mixed-race/heritage women encounter simply from having a non-Black parent. Mixed-Race Theory (Brunsma and Strmic-Pawl, 2020) is a non-binary approach that considers racial demographics (Brunsma and Strmic-Pawl, 2020), and showcases identity as the primary focus of the psychological and sociological research on race and multiraciality (Brunsma and Strmic-Pawl, 2020). Multiraciality adds social, cultural, and political dimensions (Brunsma and Strmic-Pawl, 2020) that are not necessarily experienced by women with two Black parents. Consideration of the extra dimensions mentioned broadened the study, perhaps beyond the research question. However early data collection revealed that mixed-race/heritage is not as compartmentalised in the UK as it is in the USA. Participant narratives revealed women of mixed-race/heritage self-identifying as Black while still acknowledging their other heritage backgrounds, therefore the criteria was changed.

Transwomen were excluded from the study because the study was designed to explore Black women's experiences across their lifespan, and transwomen may not have always identified as women, especially during childhood. Participant narratives confirm that most women experienced their first incident of racism around the age of 6, an age where a young boy may not have transitioned yet. Internalised sexism is defined as the practice of women being misogynistic towards themselves and other women (Phutela, 2022) and there is active debate whether sexist beliefs and values remain intact despite transitioning (Thomas, 2021). There is a severe dearth of research and literature that explores embedded misogyny in transwomen where embedded misogyny in cis-women is robust. Therefore, I made the decision to exclude transwomen from the study.

Several demographic markers do not appear in the study, but not because of exclusionary criteria. For example, there is no data collected about class or religion. Although no specific class or economic status group was intentionally targeted for the study, women from a specific class group or economic group may have been more likely to respond based on where the calls to participate were marketed. Religious status was not considered for exclusionary criteria, nor was it asked on the survey. Religious practices or beliefs were also not mentioned across participant narratives.

Figure 11 shows there were 233 valid survey responses; 229 women identified as Black or mixed-race, and more than half of those women gave consent to be contacted for further participation in the study. Further, 124 women provided their email addresses: 74 were from the USA and 50 from England (residents of England)



**Figure 10: Total number of respondents by nationality**

On 06 November 2020, an email was distributed to all those who had provided an email address, thanking them for their participation and explaining the next phase of the study. A document with additional information about the study and instructions on how to register for a focus group was also attached to the email. Separate emails were sent to women in the United States and those in England. Women in the United States had the option to choose a date and time from one of the US time zones (7) where they reside. They responded from five US time zones:

- Eastern (ET)
- Central (CT)
- Mountain (MT) (Denver)
- Mountain Pacific (MPT)(Phoenix)
- Pacific (PT)

There are no time zone differences in England; therefore, for their convenience, women in England were given a choice of dates to select from.

Among the 114 women that agreed to further participation and were contacted, eleven women from the USA and two British women responded. After coordinating dates and times among the US women, the first focus group was scheduled on Zoom secure meeting software for 19 November 2020 and the second on 30 November 2020. Zoom meeting software is approved by the University of Birmingham's Ethics Committee for providing security for the purposes of qualitative data collection.

On 19 November 2020, the researcher initiated a Zoom meeting room to accommodate four US women across four time zones and the researcher's location in England (GMT). The

meeting was to start at 11pmGMT/6pmET/5pm(CT)/4pm(MT)/3pm(PT), respectively. The meeting room was held open until 12am (GMT), with no participants joining the meeting. The meeting room was closed on 20 November 2020 at 12:01am (GMT).

On 30 November 2020, the researcher initiated a Zoom meeting room to accommodate seven US women across two time zones. Among the seven women, two participants joined the focus group and were interviewed. The focus group lasted approximately one hour and fifteen minutes.

The challenges of organising online focus groups across multiple time zones were exacerbated during the global pandemic. Therefore, after consulting with my lead supervisor, I decided to conduct interviews first and organise follow-up focus groups after preliminary analysis. The decision to delay focus groups was practical for several reasons, including:

- Women would already be familiar with the study, the researcher and the interview style and would more likely agree to return to the study.
- Women could provide a more robust discussion in a group setting about emerging themes.
- All women who participated were very amenable to discuss their experiences with racism in further detail.
- All women who participated were interested in the research outcomes (analysis).

Against the backdrop of a global pandemic, civil and social justice unrest sparked the Black Lives Matter global movement, which made data collection simultaneously timely and challenging in organising and employing qualitative research methods. I was personally affected by Covid-19-related personal tragedies and deeply connected to the political and

social justice unrest in the United States. International travel was prohibited; therefore, the research design was slightly altered to accommodate the demands and pressures of the restrictions of global, regional and local freedom of movement by placing all data collection online. The decision to conduct focus groups and interviews online was beneficial as it widened the recruitment efforts for the survey resulting in a more diverse and robust sample size without the inconvenience or expense of travel. Limitations will be discussed later in the thesis in Chapter 7.

### **Covid-19 and Changing the Research Design**

The original research design of this study included conducting qualitative research methods in two focus groups in the United States and four focus groups in England to be equally divided between Black British Caribbean women and Black African British women. However, in-person interviews and focus groups in both the United States and England did not hold; the global spread of the Covid-19 pandemic caused the US government and the UK government<sup>4</sup> to impose restrictions on global movement and implement lockdown measures. Further, according to the study's original research design, interviewees were to be purposively sampled from the focus groups. However, the imposed restrictions made organising and scheduling focus groups difficult. Many recruits preferred to be interviewed individually rather than in focus groups. Multiple time zones across both countries exacerbated the problems with scheduling. The original research design had to be modified

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<sup>4</sup> There is no separate English government. The UK government oversees England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

to accommodate a strict thesis timeline and further stages of the study. Therefore, upon my supervisors' approval, I decided to conduct interviews prior to scheduling focus groups.

Four focus groups in England would have been conducted the as follows:

- Black African British women (London)
- Black Caribbean British women (London)
- Black African British women (Birmingham)
- Black Caribbean British women (Birmingham)

In the United States, two focus groups would have been conducted among Black American women as follows.

- Washington, D.C.
- Atlanta, Georgia

Conducting focus groups or interviews in different or additional cities would have made the US sampling far too large for a useful comparison to the Black British population. Black Americans in the US make up thirteen per cent of the overall US population of approximately 326 million (US Census Bureau, 2020) people. Black women are approximately half of the total Black American population, currently 7.4%. Black British people of any ethnicity make up approximately three and a half per cent of the overall English population of approximately 61 million (Gov.uk, 2011).

Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, Georgia were selected because of the relevant sample sizes to comparative regions and populations in England and the geographical locations (distances) as they relate to London and Birmingham. The following information was retrieved from Google Maps (2020) and is an approximation:

Comparatively, Washington D.C. and Atlanta are approximately 542 miles apart, whereas Birmingham and London are only approximately 125 miles apart. However, the land mass of England is significantly smaller than the United States. England and the state of Alabama are approximately the same size. England has an area of 50,337 square miles. Alabama is only slightly larger, with a land size of 50,645 square miles. Additionally, Washington D.C. and Atlanta have similar demographical information on Black populations regarding education, employment status, social status, social-economic status, relationship status and gay/straight ratios. It should also be noted that several British participants were interviewed outside of England because of travel restrictions. Many of them had travelled for the 2020 Christmas holidays and had not been able to return to the UK.

### **Black Lives Matter (BLM)**

The murder of George Floyd sparked what would become possibly the biggest protest against racism and social injustice of all time (Buchanan *et al.*, 2020; Johnson, 2020; Wright, 2020). The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement spanned the globe, on every continent, and white, Black, and Asian, along with many other races and ethnicities, united in a common cause despite putting themselves in potential grave danger. Running rampant simultaneously, Covid-19 and BLM united people, face-to-face and virtually, in the form of peaceful protests (Chenoweth and Pressman, 2020) around the world.

Data collection for this study began during an increasing number of BLM protests. Anxiety, anger and frustration about the Covid pandemic restrictions and social injustices in Black and other ethnic minority communities helped fuel the rapid progression of the movement.

During interviews, some participants felt empowered by the movement to express thoughts

and emotions that had been previously suppressed and eagerly expressed desire to have their voices heard in this thesis. Some participants felt that speaking about their experiences of racism and racial trauma was timely during the movement, and they felt empowered by doing so.

Conversely, some women also shared their feelings of simultaneous discontent with the movement because it was triggered by the murder of a Black man. In the US, unarmed Black and Hispanic men are disproportionately murdered by police (Edwards *et al.*, 2019), compared to all white people and Black women (National Trends—Mapping Police Violence, 2021). Since 2015, 48 Black women in the US have also been murdered by white police, resulting in only two legal charges (Gupta, 2020; Stinson, 2021). Frustration that more media attention is not directed toward the suffering of Black women was expressed in several interviews, which may not have been discussed outside the context of the movement.

### **Focus Group Questions**

Life histories are narrative biographies (Hoosain, 2017) used to understand the life experiences of oppressed people (Ssali and Theobald, 2016). Life histories are beneficial qualitative data collection tools because they empower participants in decisions of what to talk about within their own levels of comfort in a protective environment. In phase one of data collection, two focus groups were conducted, each with two participants. My role during focus groups was to facilitate and moderate discussions between the participants (p. 213). Focus groups comprised participants with shared commonalities, “brought together in an informal setting to discuss the topic in question” (Thomas, 2011, p. 213).



To keep the discussions on track while still allowing participants to speak spontaneously and freely, a discussion guide was created with the main topics/questions that pertained to the research questions. The discussion guide outlined the objectives of the focus group, a breakdown of major topics, and probing questions (Escalada and Heong, no date).

Participants were reminded of their voluntary participation, that they did not have to answer any question they did not want to without reason or explanation and that they were free to leave the session at will.

- Interview and Focus Group Questions Design; This study used a 3-stage design for interviewing participants. The process allows participants a slower immersion into the subject matter and lays a foundation to build a rapport between the participants and my role as the researcher. Interviews and focus groups were conducted according to the following stages:
  - Introductions
  - Broad questions and answers
  - The conclusion

### ***Introduction and Warm-Up Questions***

I introduced myself and gave a brief background of my professional credentials. Participants were reminded of their voluntary participation and asked if they had any questions before proceeding. After introductions and information generalities, interviewees were asked three closed warm-up questions to introduce them to the research topic as less intrusively as possible and to encourage memories and thought processes to emerge in their reflections about the subject of racism and their experiences and reactions to it. Participants were asked the following:

1. In a single word, describe your feelings when you hear the word “racism”.
2. In a single word, describe your experiences of racism.
3. In a single word, describe how your experiences of racism make or made you feel.

### ***Broad Questions and Answers***

After the warm-up questions, open questions were asked about participants’ personal experiences of racism. Participants were asked the following:

1. Describe your earliest memory of an experience with racism?
2. What are examples of your experiences of racism?
3. Describe if and how the impact of racism has affected you.
4. How have you responded to direct interaction/contact with racists?
5. How have you responded to experiences of racism?
6. Describe any discussions about racism in your family household (growing up and presently)

After providing details about their experiences of racism, I concluded the interviews with questions that could refocus and recentre the participants by discussing their positive experiences of resilience and empowerment. During the closing section of the focus group session, the women were asked the final three questions:

1. Describe any coping mechanisms you have created for the aftermath of experiences of racism.
2. Describe your “tribe” or “posse” with whom you can discuss matters of racism.
3. If applicable, describe how you feel empowered as a Black woman.

Note: Due to Covid-related delays and time restraints, only one focus group session was conducted. However, the session was managed entirely as described above. Following are the interview design and methodology, and interview questions.

### **Interview Design**

Interview sessions were conducted in similar stages as the focus group, but participants were asked more detailed and in-depth interview questions about their personal experiences. Interviews were conducted online using Zoom meeting software. A meeting room was created in advance with appropriate security measures that prohibited anyone except the scheduled participants from entering without the researcher's approval. Participants were advised of the recording and the audio backup and gave consent. Interview questions remained the same for participants from the United States and England, and other countries where British women were residing at the time of data collection.

### **Interview Questions**

This study's interview questions were piloted by my supervisors and approved by the university's Ethics Committee. Participants were asked three exploratory warm-up questions (May, 1991) purposed to encourage them to reflect upon past experiences of racism, their reactions and emotive responses and to prepare them for the remaining questions. However, the researcher allowed the discussion to progress organically, not forced, giving the women the opportunity to speak freely. The researcher only guided the conversation or proceeded to the next question. Participants were reminded they were participating voluntarily and did not have to answer any question they did not want to without reason or

explanation and that they were free to leave the session at will. Interview questions in this section were more condensed than the questions for the focus group to reduce repetition and preserve space in the thesis. The session began with the researcher asking three “warm-up” questions (Hannabuss, 1996) listed below:

1. In a single word, describe your feelings when you hear the word “racism”.
2. In a single word, describe your experiences of racism.
3. In a single word, describe how your experiences of racism make or made you feel.

During the main section of the interview, the women were asked the following questions:

1. Describe your earliest memory of an experience of racism, when you recognised it as racism, your age and where it took place.
2. Did you recognise the racist activity immediately after it happened or later? If immediately, what did you do?
3. Can you remember how you felt after that experience?
4. Did you tell anyone about the experience? If so, what was their reaction?
5. Did you receive support?
6. Describe any discussions about racism in your family household.
7. At your discretion, please describe any other profound subsequent experiences of racism that have affected you.
8. Have you had more experiences of overt racism (irrefutable, blatant) or covert racism (microaggressions, subtleties, confusing or doubtful)?
9. Where would you say you have had the most experiences of racism? (i.e., work, school, home etc...)

10. Did the experience affect your:

- Self-esteem?
- Make you less trusting of others outside your identity group?
- Make you feel isolated, alone or afraid as a result of the experience?
- Depressed?
- Angry?
- Powerless?
- Insecure?
- Frustrated?

11. If you experienced any of the above, did you seek support or counselling?

12. If you sought counselling, was it helpful? If not, how? If so, how?

During the closing section of the session, the women were asked to:

1. Describe any coping mechanisms you have created for the aftermath of experiences of racism.
2. Describe your “tribe” or “posse” with whom you can discuss matters of racism.
3. If applicable, describe how you feel empowered as a Black woman.

The next section provides overall demographical details about the survey respondents according to their country of origin.

### **Survey Respondents**

Note: the terms mixed-race, mixed-heritage, mixed-ethnicity, culturally mixed, and multi-ethnic heritage are used interchangeably.

Most survey respondents are married, employed women between the ages of 35-44 with a college education. The majority of respondents were from the United States; however,

comparatively speaking, per capita, demographic information for British women was similar. During the first launch of the survey, 49 British women and 110 US women responded. Following the second recruitment effort for more British women, the number of British women nearly doubled, with an increase of 31 and 4 additional US women responding. The researcher determined the second recruitment effort was successful and that the final numbers more accurately reflected both geographical populations.

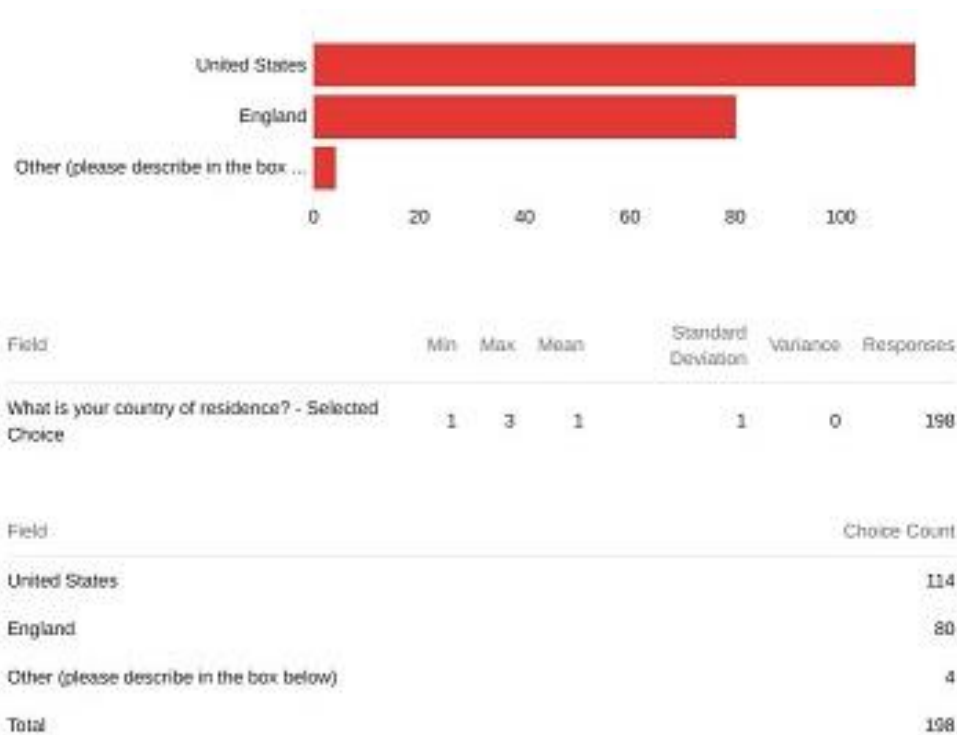
### ***Black American Women in the USA***

More Black American women responded to the survey than Black British women. This may be considered logical and appropriate because there are more Black women in the United States than in England (Census, 2019). The US Census (2019) reports Black Americans make up 13.4% of the US population. In 2018, according to the American Community Survey from the US Census Bureau (*Black women statistics, 2020*), Black women represented 52% of the total US Black population. Specifically, there are approximately **21.7 million** Black women currently living in the United States (*Black women statistics, 2020*). Therefore, survey respondents loosely reflect respective demographic numbers in each country.

### ***Black British Women***

According to the 2011 UK Census, the total overall population of England and Wales was 56.1 million, including a total Black ethnic population of roughly 3.3% (Statistics, 2019). Among the Black ethnic population, 1.8% identify as Black African, 1.1% identify as Black Caribbean, and 0.5% identify as Black “other” (Statistics, 2019). Black African British women account for 52% of their ethnic group, which is equal to .94% of the overall British

population. Black Caribbean British women make up 53% of their ethnic population group, which is .58% of the general population, and Black British “other” women make up 50% of their population group, equalling .25% of the British population. Even though women are the majority in each of their ethnic groups, Black British women still only represent 1.77% of the total British population. Summarily, among the 3.3% Black British population in England, 1.77% are Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent.



**Figure 11: Respondents by country (totals)**

## Residency

### *United States*

The United States is divided into regions and divisions. The following figures illustrate how the USA is divided:

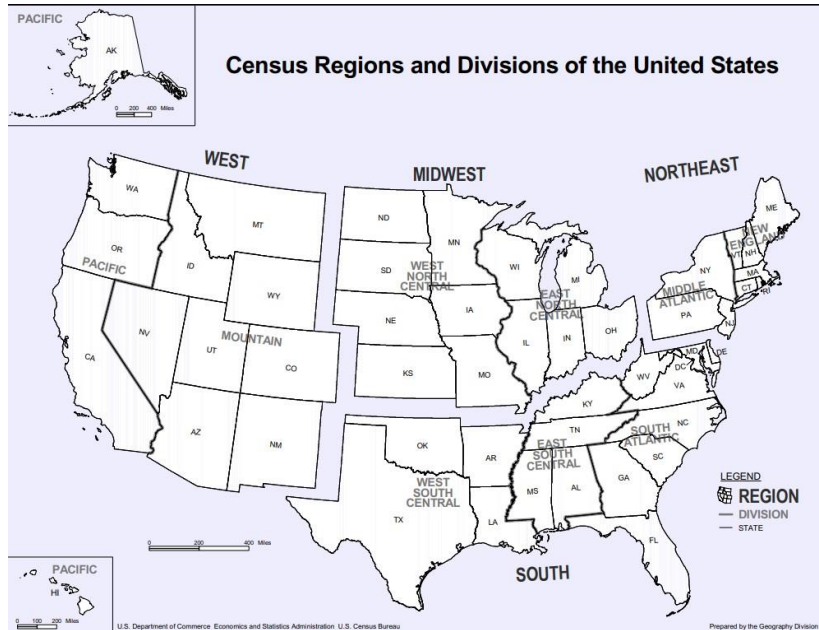


Figure 12: United States of America by Regions

U.S. Census Bureau		
Census Bureau Regions and Divisions with State FIPS Codes		
<b>Region 1: Northeast</b>		
<b>Division 1: New England</b>	<b>Division 2: Middle Atlantic</b>	
Connecticut (09) Maine (23) Massachusetts (25) New Hampshire (33) Rhode Island (44) Vermont (50)	New Jersey (34) New York (36) Pennsylvania (42)	
<b>Region 2: Midwest*</b>		
<b>Division 3: East North Central</b>	<b>Division 4: West North Central</b>	
Indiana (18) Illinois (17) Michigan (26) Ohio (39) Wisconsin (55)	Iowa (19) Kansas (20) Minnesota (27) Missouri (29) Nebraska (31) North Dakota (38) South Dakota (46)	
<b>Region 3: South</b>		
<b>Division 5: South Atlantic</b>	<b>Division 6: East South Central</b>	<b>Division 7: West South Central</b>
Delaware (10) District of Columbia (11) Florida (12) Georgia (13) Maryland (24) North Carolina (37) South Carolina (45) Virginia (51) West Virginia (54)	Alabama (01) Kentucky (21) Mississippi (28) Tennessee (47)	Arkansas (05) Louisiana (22) Oklahoma (40) Texas (48)
<b>Region 4: West</b>		
<b>Division 8: Mountain</b>	<b>Division 9: Pacific</b>	
Arizona (04) Colorado (08) Idaho (16) New Mexico (35)	Montana (30) Utah (49) Nevada (32) Wyoming (58)	Alaska (02) California (06) Hawaii (15) Oregon (41) Washington (53)
<small>*Prior to June 1984, the Midwest Region was designated as the North Central Region.</small>		

Figure 13: United States of America by Regions and Divisions



The 114 Black American women hailed from all seven regions in the United States, with the majority of women living in the South, with the West and Midwest represented equally.

Table 2 is a breakdown by US region and state.

Northeast	South	West	Midwest
Massachusetts (3)	Texas (13)	Utah (1)	Michigan (1)
Connecticut (1)	Arkansas (1)	Nevada (1)	Illinois (11)
New York (7)	Louisiana (2)	Colorado (9)	Indiana (1)
Pennsylvania (1)	N. Carolina (4)	California (10)	Ohio (2)
New Jersey (3)	Georgia (13)		Wisconsin (1)
	Florida (3)		Missouri (5)
	Kentucky (2)		
	Tennessee (1)		
	Alabama (1)		
	Virginia (3)		
	Maryland (3)		
	Wash., D.C. (11)		
Totals 114 15	57	21	21

Table 2: US respondents by region (totals)

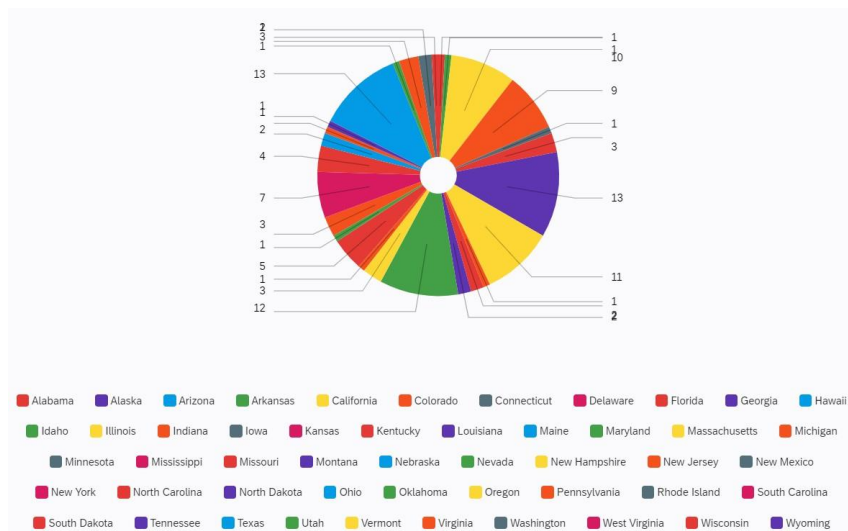
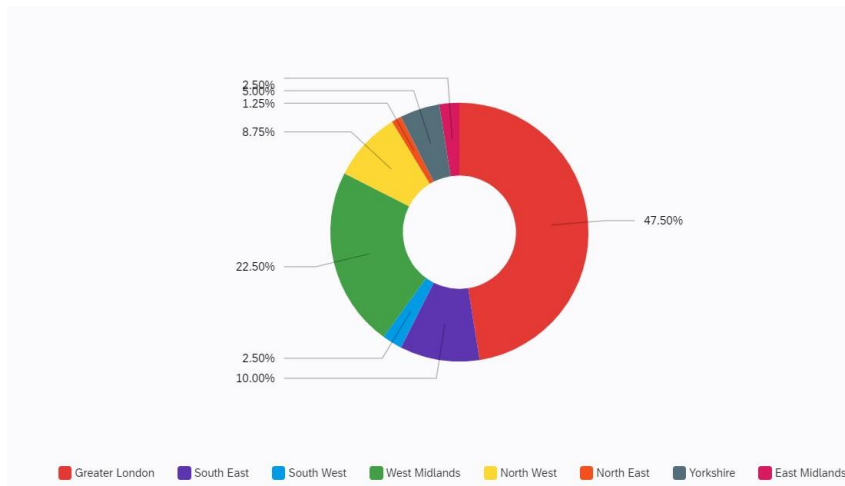


Figure 14: US respondents by state (totals)

## England

The majority of British respondents were Black women living in London. This is not surprising because 54% of the Black British population lives in London. Birmingham has the second largest Black British population, with 9.8%. These demographics include women who may be temporarily living abroad due to the pandemic. Among 80 Black British women respondents, eight regions of England were represented:



**Figure 15: British respondents by region (percentages)**

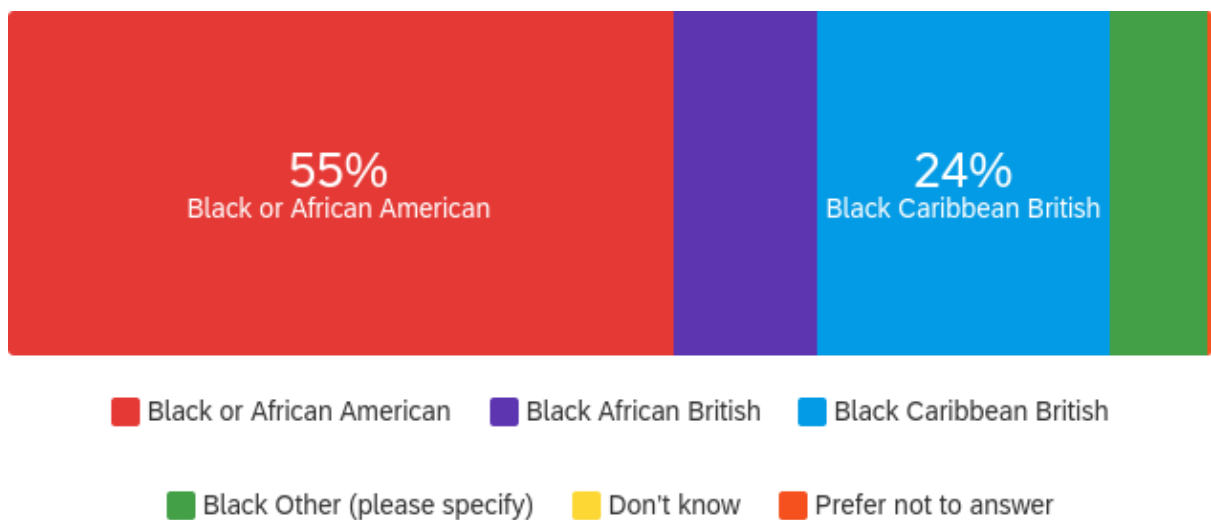
Greater London	Southeast	Southwest	West Midlands	Northwest	Northeast	Yorkshire	East Midlands
38	8	2	18	7	1	4	2
Total British							80

**Table 3: British respondents by region (totals)**

## Ethnicity and Generation Status

### *Ethnicity*

A mandatory participation criterion for this study was that all women must self-identify as Black. Among respondents identifying as Black, some answered the “what is your ethnicity question” with various responses. The majority responded, seemingly, to coincide with their nationality. However, some women, even though born and raised in England, preferred not to claim British heritage, nationality or ethnicity even in the cases of multi-cultural/multi-racial race/ethnicity. They preferred to identify as “Black other” and claim the nationality/heritage of their parents.



**Figure 16: Respondents by ethnicity (percentages)**

United States		England	
Black or African American	104	Black or African American	3
Black African British	0	Black African British	22
Black Caribbean British	2	Black Caribbean British	45
Black Other (please specify)	7	Black Other (please specify)	9
Don't know	0	Don't know	0
Prefer not to answer	0	Prefer not to answer	1

**Figure 17: Respondents by ethnicity (numbers)**

Only some women answering with “Black other” provided additional, insightful information about their response. In some cases, “other” represents: Black Caribbean, Haitian, Jamaican, Afro-Latina, Black Caribbean Canadian, African, Black North African British, Ghanaian and Jamaican, African and Caribbean and British Black African and Caribbean.

### ***Generation Status***

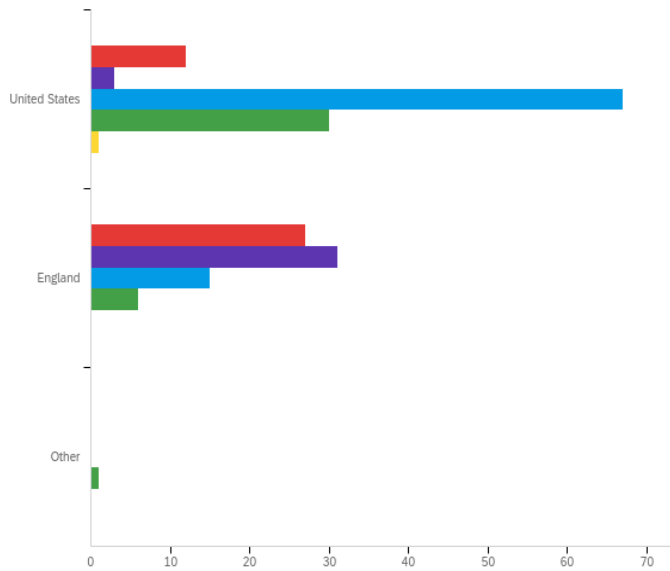
According to the Pew Research Center (2022), many Black Americans are often challenged when attempting to trace their ancestry before the 1870 census. Generally, this is because records of enslaved people were usually handwritten on pieces of paper or parchment and have been poorly maintained, lost, or destroyed (Cox and Tamir, 2022). As previously mentioned in an earlier section, Black Americans are more likely to learn about their ethnic heritage from surviving elders within their families (Cox and Tamir, 2022). Pew’s study also showed that 82% of Black women respondents claimed they were more likely than Black men (69%) to speak with their families about their ancestors and their ancestral history in general (Cox and Tamir, 2022).

Additionally, Pew’s study also showed that more than double US-born Black adults (55%) were descendants of, or at least knew about, enslaved ancestors compared to Black immigrants (21%) (Cox and Tamir, 2022). Ellis (2021) claims Americans descended from enslaved Africans eventually hit a genealogical brick wall, meaning their family trees go “dark” after five or six generations (Ellis, 2021). A large number of participants in this study are Black American Baby-Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and early Gen X generationers (born between 1965 and 1980), which may explain their lack of ancestral knowledge. Foner (2011) describes Black immigrants within the United States as being an

exception because they are often viewed as a special case since their African ancestry “appears to be an uncrossable boundary and because they and their descendants are unable to avoid being viewed through the prism of race” (Foner, 2011, p. 251).

In Britain, mass immigration brought hundreds of thousands from the colonial Caribbean (Foner, 2011). Approximately two-thirds of the 27,000 Caribbean population were migrants in the early 1950s. However, by the UK 2011 census, following a steady decline, there were still over 560,000 migrants living in the country (Foner, 2011). Since the early 1970s, in the aftermath of the primary immigration cycle, only a little more than half the British African Caribbean population has been born in the Caribbean, while the same population has increased among the British-born (Foner, 2011).

A significant number of women in the USA responded with “don’t know” when asked about their generation status, compared to the low number of British women who responded the same. In this study, roughly 27% of the USA participants did not know their generation status compared to 7.6% of British women who did not know their generation status. These data suggest that immigrants have better knowledge of who they are, where they came from and their familial history. Graphs on the following pages illustrate the women’s responses in greater detail.



**Figure 18: Respondents generational status by country**

***Black American women***

Among women that responded to the question related to their generation status, the majority of women in the United States indicated they were third generation.

**United States**

First	12
Second	3
Third+	67
Don't know	30
Prefer not to answer	1

**Figure 19: US respondents' generational status**

### **Black British Women**

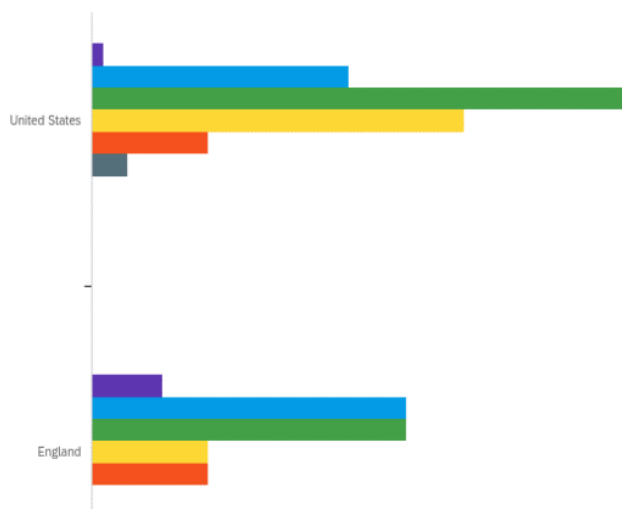
British women responded, with the majority being second generation and first generation closely following.

England	
First	27
Second	31
Third+	15
Don't know	6
Prefer not to answer	0

**Figure 20: British respondents by generational status**

### **Ages**

The majority of overall respondents were between the ages of 25 and 54.



**Figure 21: Respondents age by country**

### ***Black American women***

The majority of women in the United States were between the ages of 35-44, closely followed by ages 45-54 and 25-34, respectively.

United States	
Under 18	0
18-24	1
25-34	22
35-44	46
45-54	32
55-64	10
65+	3
Don't know	0
Prefer not to answer	0

**Figure 22: US respondents by age**

### ***Black British women***

The majority of women were between the ages of 35-44. However, in contrast to Black American women, the age range gap between British women and those between the ages 25-34 was much less and the age group of 45-54 was far below both of the other age groups. There were no British respondents over the age of 65.

England	
Under 18	0
18-24	6
25-34	27
35-44	27
45-54	10
55-64	10
65+	0
Don't know	0
Prefer not to answer	0

**Figure 23: Respondents participants by age**

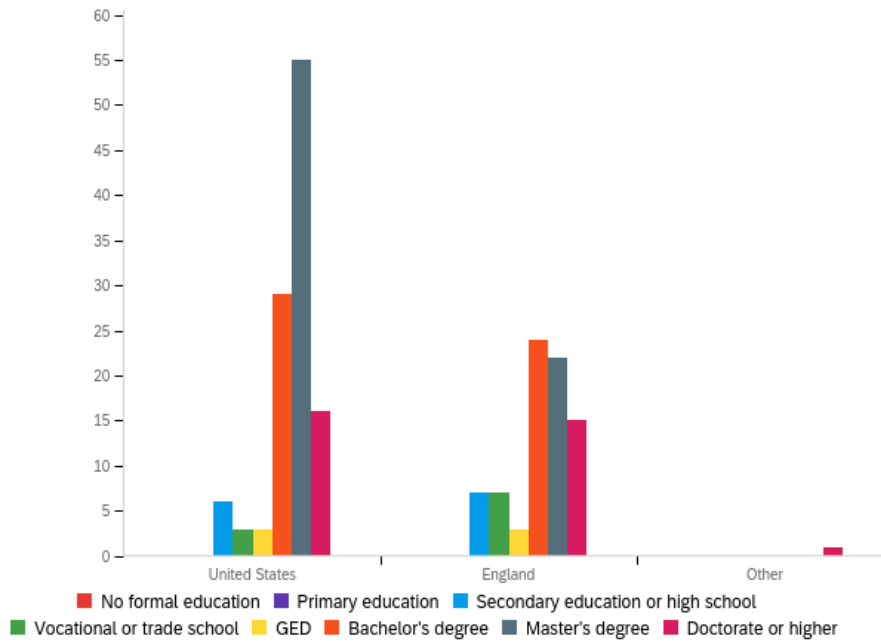


## **Education**

The education demographic revealed that the sample groups may have been unintentionally skewed because there were no respondents who lacked any level of formal education.

Recruitment for this study occurred solely online and for two reasons: 1) Covid-19 significantly impacted freedom of movement, thereby restricting recruitment efforts to solely online platforms, and 2) snowball sampling from professional and academic networks was a major recruitment method, meaning participants referred others within their own demographical networks and resources. Hamilton and Bowers (2006) argue the pros and cons of using the Internet for research recruitment. They found that the benefits of online recruitment is the wide accessibility to varied and diverse populations. However, disadvantages include a sample that is likely skewed toward higher income and education levels, which may have occurred in the study.

Overall, 19 women had received, at minimum, a secondary education or high school or a GED (General Education Degree earned in the US, equivalent to a high school diploma). Ten women had attended a vocational or trade school, and 53 women had received a bachelor's degree. Graduate students (32) were the majority regarding the women's highest level of education, and 32 respondents claimed a doctorate degree or higher.



**Figure 24: Respondents education level by country**

### Marital Status

Nearly an equal amount of married women and single, never married women responded (70 and 66, respectively). Coincidentally, divorced women compared to those cohabiting with a significant other (17 and 20, respectively) and separated women compared with those in a domestic partnership or civil union (5 and 7, respectively). Where categories may appear redundant, I wanted to get a clear understanding of participants' living arrangements, particularly where lingo, jargon, or colloquialisms may account for different responses.

*'Single, cohabitating with a significant other'* is meant to separate single women with same-sex or opposite-sex platonic roommate(s) from women who are single and never married.

*'Single, never married'* also refers to women not cohabiting with a significant other.

*'Domestic partnership or civil union'* are legal classifications that allow partners certain legal rights or benefits where simple cohabitation does not allow. This classification is particularly

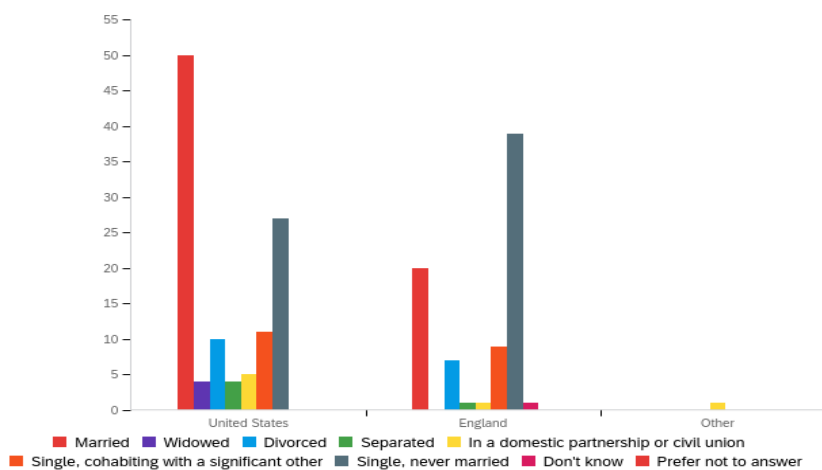
important as it relates to visa applications for fiancé(es) and spouse application. These classifications apply to relationships in both the USA and the UK. According to Pearce Legal Solicitors in the UK:

Civil partnership is a legal union that can be entered into by two people who aren't related, the partnership has the same responsibilities as in marriage but the difference is that a civil partnership is entered into by signing a civil partnership document while marriage is entered by vows. (Pearce, 2021)

Prebeck (2022), a US attorney, writes:

States that have civil unions generally extend to couples all of the same rights and responsibilities as married couples. A civil union was created to allow same-sex couples a way to publicly commit to each other without quite granting them permission to marry. Some states, such as Vermont, converted all civil unions to marriages after legalizing same-sex marriage. Often and with some exceptions, civil unions can provide couples the same kinds of benefits and protections that marriages do.

The distinction between civil unions and cohabitation with a significant other also helped clarify other interview questions for participants.



**Figure 25: Respondents marital status by country**

## Employment

The majority of women residing in both the United States and England are either employed full-time or are students full-time. Among women in both countries, 19 chose “other” for their response. Even though the survey offered choices of full or part-time employment, some women considered self-employment or entrepreneurship as separate or different choices, thereby accounting for the choice “other”.

### *Black American Women in the USA*

Overall, most of the US women work either full-time or part-time or are full or part-time students. Occupations were listed in “other” such as self-employed, work at home, homemaker or stay-at-home mother. There could be examples of intersectionality in this category with women being employed full or part-time as well as being full or part-time students.

United States	
Employed, working full-time	85
Employed, working part-time	8
Not employed, looking for work	3
Not employed, NOT looking for work	1
Retired	2
Disabled, not able to work	0
Full-time student	9
Part-time student	3
Other (please specify)	12
Don't know	0
Prefer not to answer	1

**Figure 26: US respondents employment status**

### **Black British Women**

Similarly, the majority of British women are employed full or part-time or are full or part-time students. There could be examples of intersectionality in this category with women being employed full or part-time as well as being full or part-time students.

England	
Employed, working full-time	44
Employed, working part-time	14
Not employed, looking for work	0
Not employed, NOT looking for work	1
Retired	0
Disabled, not able to work	2
Full-time student	10
Part-time student	7
Other (please specify)	8
Don't know	0
Prefer not to answer	0

**Figure 27: British respondents employment level by country**

### **Interview and Focus Group Participants**

#### ***Interviewees***

Interviewees were purposively sampled from the survey respondent pool if they provided prior consent. The diverse sample of Black women from various ethnicities, ages, educational levels, marital and generational statuses included the USA, British women of Caribbean descent, African descent, and mixed-race and mixed ethnicities, but who self-identified as Black. At the onset of each interview, demographic information was recollected and recorded. It should be noted that more than half the women whose highest level of education is a Master's degree are also currently post-graduates working toward a PhD. Following is the colour-coded participant roster, listed by age, country, nationality,

education or career, and marital status (see Table 4). They include 12 Black Americans and 18 British (3 African descent; 2 Caribbean/African descent; 9 Caribbean descent; 4 multi-ethnic).

	AGE	LOCATION	Nationality	EDUCATION/WORK	MARITAL
1	36	Georgia	B Amer	Masters/Self FT	Separated
2	36	Bham	Car/Jam	PhD/FT	Married
3	45	Liverpool	Multi	PhD/FT	Single
4	48	B'more MD	B Amer	Masters/FT	Divorced
5	48	Alabama	B Amer	Masters/FT	Married
6	52	Gloucester	Multi	Masters/PT	Married
7	47	Brum	Car/Jam	Student/FT	Single
8	60	Mich/Vegas	B Amer	Masters/Self FT	Single
9	32	Darbyshire	Car	PhD/FT	Married
10	18	Gloucester	Multi	Student/FT	Single
11	44	London	Car	Masters/FT	Single
12	38	Cardiff	Car	PhD/FT	Single
13	35	London	Africa	Masters/FT	Partnership
14	29	Belgium	Car/Af	PhD/Stud/FT	Partnership
15	53	Wash D.C.	B Amer	2 yrs of college /FT	Married
16	60	Bedfordshire	Car/Jam	PhD/PT	Single
17	45	Chicago	B Amer	Bachelor of Arts/FT	Partnership
18	21	Brum	African	Some college/ FT stud	Single
19	44	Cheshire	African	PhD/FT	Dom Part.
20	29	Brum	Car	Bachelor of Arts/FT stud	Single
21	44	London	Car/Jam	Bachelor of Arts/FT	Separated
22	39	Texas	B Amer	Masters/FT	Single
23	28	London	Car/Jam	Masters/FT Stud/PT	Single
24	49	Missouri	B Amer	Associate/FT	Single
25	55	Bham	Afr/Car	PhD/FT	Married
26	33	Vegas	Af Latina	PhD/FT	Dom Part.
27	40	New Castle	B Amer	Master/FT	Married
28	57	Bham	B Amer	PhD/FT	Separated
29	43	Heresford	Multi	Master/FT	Married
30	44	Wash D.C.	B Amer	Bachelor of Arts/FT	Divorced

**Table 4: Participant roster**

Note: Red = USA, Blue = African and African/Caribbean mix, Green = Caribbean descent, Purple = Multi-race/ethnicity

## **Data Analysis**

In this study, I used a constructivist-interpretive approach to analyse, understand and compare Black American and Black British women's lived experiences of racism (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221). Schwandt (1998) argues that constructivists or interpretivists understand the meanings of worldviews by interpretation, which is a construction of those meanings, and through interactions between a researcher and the research subject (p. 221).

The size of the sample and type of data allowed for descriptive quantitative data analysis. This allowed for some trends to appear in the proportion and presentation of different sub-groups within the respondent pool. In addition, the free-text questions were analysed using a thematic analysis framework (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

### ***Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research Data***

Qualitative elements of the study were analysed using a version of thematic analysis (REF). Thematic analysis is a way of making sense of the identifiable commonalities found across a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2012). It is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns, which are themes, within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 77-101) and "reduces it in a flexible way" that can address a wide variety of research questions and topics (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018 p. 807-815). Castleberry and Nolen (2018) write:

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses from surveys or transcribed interviews can explore the context of teaching and learning at a level of depth that quantitative analysis lacks while allowing flexibility and interpretation when analysing the data, but it should be undertaken with special care and attention to transparency of the method in order to ensure confidence in the findings. (pp. 807-815)

Researchers (Yin, 2011; Braun and Clark, 2012; Castleberry and Nolen, 2018 p.807-815) claim there is a general framework in which to analyse qualitative data: “compiling (transcription), disassembling (coding), reassembling (thematic analysis), interpreting and concluding findings.” Braun and Clark (2019) updated their definition of thematic analysis to reflexive thematic analysis, which broadens the flexibility of the original thematic analysis process.

There is insufficient literature (Aronson, 1995; Onwuegbuzie, 2005) about the pragmatic approach to conducting trustworthy thematic analysis (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). However, with in-depth clarity of description and a rigorous approach, justification of the researcher’s choices and decisions may fill in parts of the literature gap (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Lincoln and Guba (1985) (cited in Nowell *et al.*, 2017) claim trustworthiness is a form of validation of research findings. They later reconceptualised the term to include additional criteria of “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” in comparison to the rigorous assessments of validity and reliability in quantitative data analysis. Contrary to Braun and Clark’s (2006) approach to qualitative analysis, Nowell *et al.* (2017) contend that thematic analysis is a constant ebb and flow between phases and that data collection and data analysis can occur simultaneously.

Pragmatism, as mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, is when researchers “take time to reflect upon their own philosophical assumptions of knowledges and placing themselves within the spectrum of paradigms” seemingly supports a pragmatic approach to analysis. Although the results of the final analysis will be discussed in later chapters that are devoted to the discussion of the results, the following paragraphs describe each step of my



analysis methodology to serve as clarification and explanation for the decisions and choices I made regarding my approaches to the raw data.

### **Inductive Analysis Process**

This study required the foregrounding of interpreting the participant's qualitative experiences. As a result, I selected a more refined version of the thematic analysis that included inductive processes, called *Inductive Thematic Analysis* (Bradley *et al.*, 2007).

Inductive Analysis is a qualitative method that conceptualises or develops data into theory by identifying themes collected from documents, audio or video recordings and surveys. It entails going through data, line by line thoroughly and assigning codes to paragraphs or segments of texts as concepts unfold (Bradley *et al.*, 2007; Curry *et al.*, 2009; Azungah, 2018) that are relevant to the research questions (Thomas, 2006). The inductive approach was a pragmatic choice for this comparative study. My research purpose is to discover and explore any similarities or differences in which Black American women and Black British women experience racism. Therefore, inductive thematic analysis provided a solid framework for this process, to draw conclusions from both populations, comparatively.

Inductive analysis (IA) allows detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher as a systematic procedure for analysing qualitative data in which the analysis is likely to be guided by specific evaluation objectives (Thomas, 2006). It is a recursive process that involves moving back and forth between data analysis and the literature to make meaning of emerging concepts (Neeley and Dumas, 2016; Azungah, 2018) and capture "the most empirically grounded and theoretically interesting factors" (Schüssler *et al.*, 2014, p. 147).

The flexible nature of IA was important because there is a dearth in the literature, particularly from the British perspective. I frequently had to refer to literature during the analysis phase because new and relevant literature was published almost daily during the thesis period.

For example, the African American Historical Trauma Questionnaire (AAHT), a pioneer study, was published after this study commenced. As a result of this addition, AAHT was added to the review of literature and discussed in the Chapter 2. Additionally, to maintain originality of work, I explored more relatively contemporary theoretical frameworks from recent scholars, particularly Black women scholars, rather than research by white scholars to maintain and preserve a relevant and contextualised perspective.

The outcome of an inductive analysis is the development of categories into a framework or report (coding) that summarizes the raw data and conveys key themes. Generally, the following procedures are used for inductive analysis: preparation of raw data files (data cleaning), close reading of the text, creation of categories, overlapping coding and uncoded text, and continuing revision and refinement of the category system (Punch, 1998; Thomas 2006; Creswell, 1998). In the IA process, “although findings are influenced by the evaluation objectives or questions outlined by the researcher, the findings arise directly from the analysis of the raw data, not from *a priori* expectations or models” (Thomas, 2006, p. 239; Azungah, 2018).

### ***Compiling - Transcription***

Data was initially transcribed by hand, then later uploaded to transcription software at Otter Voice Meeting Notes software on [www.otter.ai](http://www.otter.ai). Otter software was used as a method of verification for manual transcriptions and to ensure accurate transcribing. I made notes during the transcription process to be used during analysis and to identify possible emerging themes. Transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo 12 software for analysis.

### ***Disassembling - Coding***

Inductive coding began with close readings of the raw data to discover meanings in the text, to begin the process of making the data “make sense” (Azungah, 2018) and discover “what’s going on” (Morse, 1999, p. 404; Azungah, 2018). A label is created for each new category, and text is assigned accordingly.

According to Thomas (2006), coding usually has five key features: category label, category description, text or data associated with the category, links, and the type of model in which the category is embedded. Categories with similar text or implications can also be linked in the inductive coding process. I identified summary categories that captured the key aspects of emerging important themes (Thomas, 1998) I had identified in the raw data. I manually coded the data initially, then a secondary coding process was done with Nvivo 12 software for validation. The overall coding process resulted in more than eight categories (themes), which means, according to some researchers, coding could be considered incomplete (Thomas, 2006). After further evaluation of categories, some codes were combined while others were eliminated based on my decision of which categories or themes were most

important (Thomas, 2006). Compiling (transcription) and disassembling (coding) were discussed in the previous section. Following are the reassembling, interpreting and concluding processes:

### ***Reassembling - Themes***

The reassembling process began once the coding was complete. Data was conceptualised into hierarchies of broad categories and themes. Similar codes were clustered, evaluated and restructured at multiple levels (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p. 807-815), providing a wider canvas upon which to analyse the data. To elevate themes, I used Nvivo 12 software to construct detailed codes, eliminated those I deemed unnecessary or irrelevant, and produced and printed a codebook. Utilising the codebook, I handwrote each of the codes on Post-it notes™ and placed them, in clusters, on easel paper. Visualisation aided in the process of translating the voices of the women. Codes were shuffled, sorted and combined, then examined for commonality, relationship value, appropriateness and relevance. Analysis included prioritisation of codes, grouped by importance and relevance in how they related to the research questions. Irrelevant or lesser important codes were eliminated. This process was repeated during the analysis process until broad themes emerged. The physical actions of moving the papers around assisted with “putting me in the data” and stimulated analytical thinking, allowing the “big picture” to emerge (Ziebland and McPherson, 2006). Broad themes were examined and analysed through a reflective lens of participant narratives until five major themes emerged.

Potential themes were reviewed and particular consideration was given to avoiding researcher bias. Re-evaluation served as a quality control measure. Braun and Clarke (2019) describe this reflexive process as allowing the coding process to bend back on itself and continuously questioning the assumptions that are made whilst interpreting and coding the data (p. 592). Codes reflect the considerable analytic work that is “actively created by the researcher at the intersection of data, analytic process and subjectivity” (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 592). Particular care was given to not evoking my thoughts, emotions and personal experiences or overreaching the data (Anderson, 2010; Creswell, 2007). I accomplished this by remaining immersed in the data and relying upon my research diary, and being reflexive about my own personal experiences of racial abuse. Analysis, combined with reflection on the research questions and their relationship to the codes, helped modulate researcher bias.

Validation of coding was monitored by my lead supervisor, and an independent PhD consultant. To address the concerns of participants who explicitly expressed they did not want their data shared with my supervisors, only X number of transcripts were selected and anonymised, removing any identifying participant information before the validation process. The transcripts were then forwarded to my supervisor via the university’s email system and reviewed by the independent PhD consultant via my shared screen on Zoom. The consultant never received the actual transcripts. The goal of this exercise was to gather a sense as to whether there were any significant gaps in the coding and analysis by seeking a corroborating opinion (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017; Roberts, 2019). The consultant described their coding as broadly in-line with mine and without significant gaps to warrant concern.

## Interpreting the Findings

Interpretation of the data should not begin in the final stages of analysis. A researcher should be “in tune” with the data throughout the analysis process, including during the aforementioned stages (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p. 807-815) of compiling, disassembling, and reassembling (Yin, 2011). According to Yin (2011), qualitative interpretations should maintain five distinguishable qualities:

- Completion including a clearly defined beginning, middle and clear interpretation of the conclusions.
- Other researchers should derive the same conclusions.
- A clear, accurate representation of the raw data.
- Relevant and consistent; in context of current literature, adding value to and understanding to current offerings on the topic.
- Methodology, including interpretation should be credible. (Yin, 2011)

One of the key elements that is most important in interpreting raw data was for me not to reflect upon the number of times a word or phrase was repeated among the participants, but instead, deeply analyse the meaning of the words when combined and discover how those words related to the research question(s). An example is the experience of the majority of the women having their hair touched without permission. This experience was mentioned in almost every interview, and in one 1-hour interview, the word “hair” was mentioned a total of 78 times. Of course, I realise “hair” is a serious contention among Black women who have experienced strangers putting their (possibly unsanitary) hands in our hair because I have also experienced this. The excessive number of times “hair” was referenced throughout data collection confirmed that similar acts of overt racism and racially-motivated

physical assault were shared by participants, irrespective of their country of residence. My responsibility as the researcher was to discover a broader theme(s) that conceptualises their experiences and answers the research question(s).

Another example of the frequency of terms and interpretation of the findings is the emotional reaction of the women following an experience of racism. I coded 73 reactions and emotions from the raw data. There were several emotions mentioned, such as anger, frustration, anxiety, and fear, that were repeated often. In an effort to condense the codes, I attempted to understand the deeper meanings of the emotions and explore how their emotional responses manifested into physical manifestations, illnesses or maladies. To do so, I had to explore past the actual words (i.e. anger) and conceptualise what the word meant. This example and the previous will be discussed in the findings section of the thesis, where an analysis of each theme will be provided.

## **Conclusions**

Conclusions are made when analysis of the raw data answers the research question(s). According to some scholars, qualitative researchers must yield results that are robust and that justify the researcher's decision-making processes throughout the analysis stages. A detailed description of coding procedures, how the codes led to themes and how the themes were interpreted (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018) will explicate the methodology of this study. Managing this thesis during a global pandemic was not without challenges and flexibility, which will be discussed in appropriate spaces throughout the paper.

## **Summary**

This chapter is a detailed description of the ethically approved methodological process undertaken in this study. An online survey launched the study and was utilised to recruit Black women study participants in the United States and England and to collect pertinent demographical data. Upon consent, some survey respondents participated in an online focus group or in individual interviews. The focus group and interviews were designed with three stages, beginning with three closed questions to warm-up interviewees, followed by several open-ended questions which explored the participants' historical and current experiences of racism comparatively. An inductive thematic analysis process was applied to explore and analyse broad themes. The following chapter discusses the emergence of the five major themes of this study.



## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

### Introduction

A robust thematic analysis revealed a substantial historical framework upon which a richer and deeper understanding of participants' experiences of racism was formed during childhood and insight into how participants were affected by racial trauma throughout their lives. Participant narratives provide provocative insight into their experiences and answer the research questions. A key (and surprising) finding of this study is that participants from the United States and Britain share more similarities than differences in how they experience racism and racial trauma. For example, women in both countries recalled racist experiences from early childhood being prominent and central in forming their understanding of how racism impacted their lives then and now. The findings show they recollected similar events during childhood irrespective of relevant demographical factors such as socio-economics, marital status, or education. Locations where racial incidents occurred were also similarly listed in order of frequency, i.e., school, work, and in shops. Women in both countries discussed having similar emotive responses following a racial incident, from anger to humiliation. Further similarities will also be discussed throughout this chapter.

The analysis showed that despite differences in demographical information, age, education, socio-economic status, marital status or location, experiences of racism and the participant's reactions to it, their experiences of racism varied very little. Participants often similarly described their experiences, emotions, reactions, reflexions, and lessons learned, despite their geographical location or racial or ethnic background.

The majority of women had eerily similar experiences. Generally, participants often described similar racial incidents and comparable reactions to them. The similarities resonated and were especially compelling because the women didn't know each, had never met, and lived in the United States and England, respectively. There were several instances of *déjà vu* when narratives from different participants were markedly similar, often using the same words or phrases.

The study found that women in both countries had many similarities in how they experienced racism and very few differences. Participants recalled experiencing racism for the first time around the same age and in the same places. They had similar experiences at school and work, generally under similar circumstances. Participants also received similar feedback and responses when they confronted those who had committed overt and covert racial discrimination or microaggressions. Participants' emotive responses ranged from anger and physical assault to confusion, exasperation, and anxiety, irrespective of country of origin or residence; however, all participants expressed some sort of reaction or emotive response to the event. The majority of participants turned to other Black women for comfort, support and solidarity in navigating through white spaces and in contexts where racism and gender intersected. Generally, the majority of participants expressed sentiments of high distrust, discomfort and dislike for white women, with the exception of two participants, whose mothers are white.

Some differences in participants' experiences did emerge, although less frequently than similarities, irrespective of demographics and participant location. Two of the participants

(Antoinette and Bridget<sup>5</sup>, British) who have white mothers, but self-identify as Black, described explicit differences in their experiences of racism, and the effects of racism and racial trauma, as compared to the experiences noted by those women who were born to two Black parents. For example, both participants with white mothers explained their experiences of racism being more prevalent among white men and not white women, yet the remaining participants described white women as being the biggest purveyors of racism, racial abuse and racial hate. Antoinette and Bridget also described differences in their reactions to racist experiences, coping mechanisms in the aftermath of a racial experiences, support networks (or lack of) and how their worldview was or was not affected by the experience compared to the other participants. Interestingly, there were significant similarities in Antoinette and Bridget's narratives.

The narratives of refugee and immigrant participants shared several commonalities within themselves that are dissimilar from those who are born in England, or are first, second or third-generation immigrants. For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'refugee' is used because that is how the women self-identified on the survey and during interviews. For simplicity of understanding, in this study, the terms 'immigrant' and 'migrant'<sup>6</sup> are used to

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<sup>5</sup> Participant's real names are not used throughout, and have been substituted with pseudonyms.

<sup>6</sup> There is debate among scholars on how the terms 'immigrant', 'migrant' and 'foreigner' should be used (Anderson and Blinder, 2019). Immigrants are typically people who are settled or intend to be settled in their new country and migrants are those who are temporary residents (Anderson and Blinder, 2019). However, the terms are used interchangeably despite the public debate, even among research scholars (Anderson and Blinder, 2019). For clarity, the terms 'immigrant' and 'migrant' will be used interchangeably in this paper. I prefer not to use the term 'foreigner' because, in my opinion, the term is a microaggression, an identity label that denotes superiority by native-born residents while projecting an oddness, even dehumanisation, of others, based on one's geographical birthplace/birthright. Outsiders are labelled, identified and sometimes treated less than equal (Imperial College of London, no date; DeAngelis, 2009; Sue *et al.*, 2011).

describe women who were born outside of England or the United States but currently legally reside (or resided) in either country and migrated to England as refugees or as children of refugees. In most instances, women in the USA or England either did not know or did not elaborate on their status. Findings regarding their statuses reflect the data collected. Other differences will be discussed later in the chapter, but include:

- How they react to racism and racist incidents.
- How racism has affected them over their lifespan.

The type of support they received from family members and how they navigate discussions differently with their own children.

To recap, this study examines the following research question and sub-questions:

**Research question:** What are the similarities and differences in how Black American women and Black British women experience racism?

**Sub questions:**

- Are the physical and psychological effects of long-term exposure to racism the same among Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent?
- Does historical trauma play a role in how these Black women experience and react to racism?
- How do Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent experience microaggression, institutional and systemic racism?
- Do Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent cope with race-based trauma similarly or differently?

Participants are identified by location to compare responses from US women and British women of African descent, Caribbean descent and “other”, and to help illuminate similarities and differences between participants (Thomas, 2017). Acronyms are used to identify country location and pseudonyms replace actual names. When words are removed from a direct quote, they are replaced with ellipses within brackets [...]. Empty brackets are used [ ] where words have been inserted, and where there are pauses in the speech, they are shown with ellipses (...).

**Note: The use of racial epithets has not been altered, renamed or changed, and appear exactly how they were mentioned in participant narratives. I decided not to code the words “nigger”, “golliwog” and other harmful words to better contextualise participants’ emotive responses and reactions to the events.**

Following is the anonymisation key.

- AB1 = Black Americans
- BC2 = British Caribbean
- BA2 = British African
- BAM1 = Black-identifying American mixed-raced women
- BM2 = British Black-identifying, mixed-raced or multi-ethnic women

**Anonymisation Key**

American	British Caribbean	British African	American – Mix	British - Mix
AB1*	BC2**	BA2	BAM1	BM2

\* Number 1 denotes participants in the United States

\*\*Number 2 denotes participants in England or whom are British residents currently living abroad

## Major Themes

Participants shared stories about their experiences of racism, and openly discussed the residual effects and impact of those experiences. Most, if not all, had been waiting with anticipation for the interview, and to share experiences that they had rarely, if ever, shared before. From childhood thru adulthood, women discussed regular and consistent forms of racial abuse they had experienced in what they frequently described as a safe space with me. An immediate rapport emerged between the participants and myself which allowed participants to convey deeply personal information, because as they described, they felt comfortable in doing so. These in-depth personal conversations facilitated a robust data collection for broad analysis.

Five major themes emerged from a rigorous analysis process in which the data answers the research questions. Findings will be presented that answer the primary research question and the sub-questions. Below is a list of the major themes, followed by a brief overview:

<b>Themes</b>
Personal and collective histories of racial trauma.
Responses to verbal and physical racism.
Locations of frequent occurrences of racism, racial abuse and racial trauma
Individual, systemic, and institutional racism perpetrated by those in power and/or authority
Coping mechanisms and Black women's resilience

### **Theme 1: Personal and collective histories of racial trauma**

The women of this study recalled their experiences of racism as being “baptised by fire” which, in some cases, significantly altered their worldview even at a young age. Participants in both countries recounted similar early-childhood racial experiences that occurred between ages six and eight and were, generally, perpetrated by another child they knew. These incidents were vividly recalled, and participants were able to provide intricate details about location, perpetrators' names, what was said/done, who it was reported to or who responded to the incident, and what the outcome was following the incident. Participants spoke with clarity and deliberation, not having to stop and reflect about events that occurred decades ago. According to participants, their total recall is indicative of the residual raw feelings and emotions that still linger resultant of the incident. As though transporting back in time, while recounting their stories, some women paused to reflect deeply and, in some instances, became tearful. In most interviews, participants described how these early racist incidents had been their introduction to racism. Further, they explained how that experience sometimes influenced their attitudes, actions and behaviours toward racists and racism later in life. Some of the participants also described never fully recovering from the initial event and how a cumulation of events over their lifespan has deeply affected them. Reasonably, participants in both countries, irrespective of demographic details, similarly carried painful memories and residual effects of their first encounters of racism, from childhood to adulthood, and recognise the experience as being integral in formulating their opinions of racism and white people, in general.

## **Theme 2: Responses to verbal and physical racism.**

Participants, irrespective of country of residency, varied in their personalities and the ways in which they responded to incidents of racism. However, every participant reacted either passively or aggressively toward their perpetrator. Findings did not indicate similarities or differences in physical or emotive responses based on demographical data such as age, education level or marital status which suggests most women responded about the same or very similarly across their diversity. Although participants often reacted similarly to a racist incident, data analysis did not suggest that there was a relationship in which a certain act of racism caused a particular action. There was no apparent methodology or differentiation between passive or aggressive responses to covert or overt acts of racism. Also, the participant was not usually met with overt racism in the form of physical violence (it was usually a racial epithet) however, she would often respond with physical violence toward the perpetrator. Overt reactions to racism were described as expressed anger (profanity) and physical violence toward the purveyor of racial abuse even if the abuse was passive. Some covert reactions to racism were described as confusion and disbelief. Despite having varied responses to acts of covert or overt racism, each participant reacted in some manner. When violence was used against the purveyor of racism, participant reaction was usually a calculated response. Participants were fully aware of their chosen response, either passive or aggressive, without consideration of the consequences. Even those who responded with physical violence, did so with calculated aggression and not simply blind rage. Calculated rage is a 'skill' they have learned to develop across their lifespan.



### **Theme 3: Locations of frequent occurrences of racism, racial abuse and racial trauma**

Participants described similar locations for racist experiences, with school and work being the most prominent in their narratives. This finding seems likely for a couple of reasons; children spend most of their waking hours in school for most of the calendar year, so it is likely a participant's first racist experience occurred on school grounds or with a classmate. Comparatively, working adults spend most of their waking hours engaged in work-related activities, thereby making it likely for them to experience racism and racist activity at work. Where participants experienced racism outside of school or work, their responses were consistent in both countries. Participants in both countries identically listed locations where racist incidents occurred in the same order of frequency. When considering locations where participants experience racism, it might be reasonably concluded that Black women experience racism in most places they frequent even outside of work and school. While performing normal day-to-day activities, even when engaged in social activities and during escapism or self-care practices, Black women are likely to have a racist encounter in most places. These daily and frequent experiences of racism and racist behaviour contextualise the development of racial trauma, or racial battle fatigue, and 'death by a thousand cuts' microaggressions.

### **Theme 4: Individual, systemic, and institutional racism perpetrated by those in power and/or authority**

Participants in both countries described experiences of racism and racist activity on micro and macro levels. Racism in the form of microaggressions occurred in normal, everyday activities (outside school and work) such as grocery shopping, retail shopping, waiting for the

bus, or simply walking down the street. Women also described racist experiences systemically within the school or medical/healthcare systems. Participants' narratives included discussions about negative, racist encounters with teachers, receptionists and other gatekeepers who prevented access to services or escalated complaints. However, the most insidious form of educational systemic racism participants from both countries described was the "*Classroom to Prison Pipeline*" (Hemez *et al.*, 2019; Novak, 2019). Hemez *et al.* write: "the school-to-prison pipeline refers to a process by which youth who experience punitive punishment in schools are increasingly enmeshed within the criminal justice system".

Unsurprisingly, higher education (academia) was described as the institutional system where Black women in England, particularly, felt the most discriminated against and racially harmed, both as students and as faculty and staff. Every interviewee described having experienced individual, systemic, and institutional racism, representing all three societal levels. Feelings of frustration, futility, and oppression permeated participant narratives when discussing microaggressive events, and racist practices and behaviours within higher education. Where the participant was the only Black departmental member of staff or faculty, they had no support from line managers, supervisors or bosses. They found it difficult or impossible to discuss incidents of racism with a white person whom, in most examples, displayed microaggressive behaviour in response, often victim-blaming, dismissing or diminishing the event, or gaslighting. Reactions to this type of imbalance of power can result in feelings of isolation, depression, loneliness, self-doubt, and fear, which can then lead to suicidality, alcohol or other substance abuse, domestic abuse and violence, and chronic fatigue. Without proper support and care, it is reasonably to conclude that these

chronic symptoms may then be passed on to the people in close relation to the participant, and handed down intergenerationally (HTT).

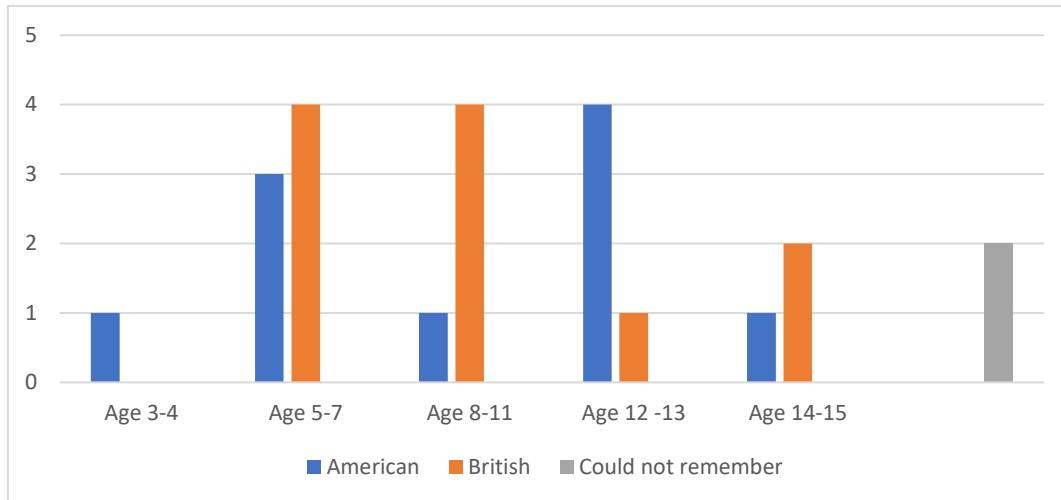
### **Theme 5: Coping mechanisms and Black women's resilience**

Despite the frequency or ferocity of racist encounters, participants described having successfully found various coping mechanisms, kinships, or practices through which to process their emotions, strategies, recover from and persevere after the incident. No longer wanting to be burdened by the implications of being labelled as “strong Black wom(e)n” or “Black Superwom(e)n”, participants, while reflecting upon their experiences, provided insightful discourse about their vulnerabilities, including their pain, confusion, and feelings of low self-esteem and low self-worth resultant of prolonged racial abuse. Referencing notably famous Black women who initiated and orchestrated slave revolts, escape plans, and activism, interviewees said they called on their ancestors and spirits of their ancestors and their religious practices to sustain themselves through challenging periods of their lives.

Findings related to each theme are listed below, along with a discussion about its relationship to this study's research question(s).

### **Theme 1: Historical racial trauma from childhood through adulthood**

In this study, the majority of participants in both the United States and England, recalled their first experiences or incidents of racism or racist behaviour occurring between the ages of six and eight years. The following graph shows how participants recalled the earliest memories of their first racist experiences, between the ages of five and thirteen.



**Figure 28: Earliest memories of racist experiences by country and age**

A recent study claims our memories might go back as far as age two-and-a-half years (Petersen, 2021). However, psychologists and sociologists largely agree that long-term memories usually begin between ages five and six. Conway (2018) claims that our memories prior to age five or six are usually not accurate recollections of one incident but are, most likely, fragments of several passed incidents combined into one memory. Historical Trauma Theory (HTT) research was conceptualised and has been mostly applied to the historical racial traumatic experiences of the NIAN people. Comparatively, there has been an unequal number of studies that examine HTT as it relates to historical racial trauma experienced by Black people. Therefore, for the purposes of this study and to better contextualise how HTT might relate specifically to Black women, I asked participants about their early experiences of racism and racial incidents by recalling their earliest memory of when they recognised they were being treated unfairly ***because of their ethnicity or skin colour.***

The vast majority of women not only remembered when and where their first experience of racism occurred, even at such a young age, they were able to also internalise and

understand that they were experiencing racism at the time. Winters' (2020) recollection demonstrates how she was able to process her racist experience at a young age and how that experience remained within her psyche through her life. Listening to these narratives made me aware of my first experience of racism at age six also. Much like Winters and the other Black women in this study, I also remember how I felt from the disconcerting revelation that I had been treated differently than the white child because I was "different".

Most study participants recalled vivid details about the incident, including location, time of day, what they were wearing, and their responses to the incident. Many recalled very specific details about the perpetrator, including physical description, smell, attitude (especially the perpetrator's personality), and reputation. More than half of the participants were able to recite exact dialogue used between them and the perpetrator during the racial incident. Most participants also remembered how that initial incident evoked thoughts and emotions about racism that appear to be long-lasting, remaining with them decades later, as evidenced by the following quotes taken from across the two study locations.

BM2 – Frances, age 29, describes her first memory, "The earliest I can remember was being in primary school. So I must, I don't know, must have been about six or something."

BM2 – Phyllis, age 18, "It happened around four or five, six, around that age and I realized, um, so like that kind of translated to me like if someone called you that name, apparently that's a bad thing."

AB1 – Kathleen, age 48, was slightly older, about age seven or eight, when she recalled her first experience:

So the first time I remember an experience, I was probably in the third grade<sup>7</sup>. [...] and when I beat her [little white girl] in a foot race, she told me the only reason why I beat her was because I was a nigger. Third grade. I punched her in her nose. And we've we fought on the playground. And we got in trouble for fighting on the playground. And it took me years later to make the connection to what happened when we were waiting for the principal to come get us because we were in trouble. With a bloody nose and a swollen eye, she told me I was still a nigger. [Kathleen]

From about the age of six, participants described being able to connect the incidents to racial discrimination without necessarily being able to identify or even understand the meanings of words such as racism, racist, or degrading racial epithets. Participants were able to identify acts of racism inflicted upon them because of their skin colour and not as just “normal” acts of child aggression or non-racial bullying. They provided in-depth details about covert incidents – microaggressions – not just those when and where they were attacked with racial epithets or other derogatory name-calling. Most participants expressed reflecting on that incident frequently throughout their lifetime, often unbidden and at unexpected times. They expressed how those reflections and reactions possibly contributed to the development of mistrust and negative perceptions of non-Black people, thereby supporting the historical effects of racial trauma (Braveheart and Sotero, 2015) as exemplified in the following:

BM2, Daria - age 45, from Northwest England, described how she reflects upon her first experience of racism and how, throughout her life, those feelings developed into a mistrust of non-Black people. She discussed her first memory of an (overt) act of racism and how being called a nigger made her feel at age ten.

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<sup>7</sup> Third grade in the United States is equivalent to Year 4 in the UK (Comparative ages, grades and exams - US vs UK | The Good Schools Guide, no date)

[...]it's like a really distinct memory for me, I was literally maybe nine or 10 years old. [telling a relative] 'I'm gonna go and play in that playground'. I went over to the playground, and I was on the swings. This boy and his father came over, and they were like, a white boy and his white dad. And they're like, 'get off the swing'. So I'm like, 'no, I won't'. So I remember it, he called me the N word. But he, you know, he called me down and pulled me off the swing, and got on the swing. And, um, me, being from [redacted]. Um, you know, I literally, I turned around, and I right-hooked him. [Daria]

BC2 - Marlene, age 24, living in Greater London, remembers a game she played as a child on the school playground at the age of 10. The game did not have a name, but she describes the participants and how it was played:

I don't even know if it had a name [...]. We had been learning about Black history, I believe, and it just became almost a game. But some of the kids decided to chase some of the other kids, and kind of weirdly have this kind of slave game and I remember a few of us were kind of tied up. It was part of a game so I think we were all kind of consenting to doing this but it was just odd. (Marlene)

Carlette: 'Do you mean like slaves and masters sort of thing?'

'Exactly and I remember it happening and being like, this is so weird. I knew that it wasn't right' (Marlene)

BC2 - Sherry, age 44, from London, describes a family trip that resulted in ruining the holiday when she was called a racial epithet:

And we went on a trip I think to Cornwall and I was called all kinds of odd names. Some might have been endearing to those people that called it but some were just outright offensive, [like] chocolate drop and, you know, those kinds of crazy little things. But there were some other very hurtful words too like little nigga. I went back and I asked my mom obviously what does that mean and why [I was called those names] and she had to explain racism to me. [Sherry]

BA2 - Nancy, age 21, from Birmingham, UK says:

'[He was] a white boy. And like, he was just kept calling me names and stuff like that because I was Black.'

Carlette: “Why do you say he called you names because you are Black?

‘I know it was because I was Black because of the names he called me.’ [Nancy]

AB1 - Kathleen, age 48 (previously mentioned), lives in the Northeast region of the United States, and described a childhood memory (age 7) of being called a racial epithet while at a department store, ‘And the lady that worked behind the counter, called me a little nigger and told me to get away.’

AB1 - Jilly, age 49, from the Midwest region of the United States, was 11 years old when she was called a racial epithet. She had previously attended a predominately Black school in a predominately Black middle to upper-class neighbourhood. Her father’s job made it necessary for her to transfer to a predominately white school in a predominately white neighbourhood. Jilly recollects her first racist encounter at her new school, ‘I get to the school, and I think it's on my second day somebody walked past and just said, ‘nigger’ for no reason at all.’

Most Black American women and British women shared similar experiences of racism as children, and no one recalled their first experience occurring in early, middle or late adulthood. Two participants could not recall their age at the time of their first racist encounter; however, both said they were in their early to middle childhood years. The majority of participants experienced racist experiences during childhood at school, regardless of a teacher’s presence. In some cases, a teacher was the perpetrator.

Participants described the incidents with teachers were particularly harmful because most of the women (and their parents) considered school to be a “safe place.” However, Black



children discover that it was not always the case, as evidenced by this experience described by Adina, AB1, age 60, from the Western region of the United States:

Most of the school system consisted of all white teachers that had no experience with Black. So going into the all-white school being the only Black girl there, there was always a constant, 'you were different'. Your hair was kinky, your hair, you know, is ugly. A lot of times we had in physical education, square dancing, and that kind of thing. So, you partner off the boys with the girls and things like that. Of course, nobody wanted to be with the nigger. So, I mean, from a very, very early age, and it was very clear that you were thought of as nothing. [Adina]

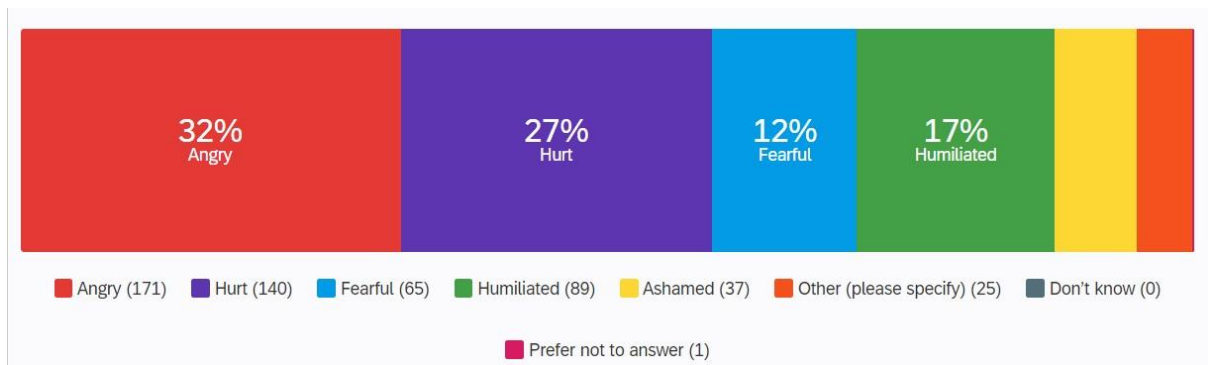
Following the earliest memory of racist experiences, theme #2 explores participants' responses to racism and racial incidents and any effects on interviewees' mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. Emotional reactions to those experiences ranged from confusion, anger and fear, while physical reactions included punching or kicking the perpetrator. Reactions, emotive and physical, to these racist incidents will be discussed in Theme #3 later in this chapter.

**Theme 2:** Responses to various incidents of verbal and physical racism.

The following section outlines the emotional responses of participants to racism and racial incidents from childhood through adulthood, using responses to interview questions, as well as survey responses. Overall, the analysis found 53 descriptors (codes) in which participants described their negative reactions to experiences of racism and racial incidents. Physical, verbal, emotional and psychological responses following past and present experiences of racism were recorded. For brevity, responses from the survey and interviews are combined because of duplications and because responses on the survey are anonymous, making it impossible to match comments on the survey to specific interviewees. Descriptors reflect responses from childhood through adulthood because reactionary and emotional

descriptors were also often duplicated. Reactions ranged from punching the perpetrator in the face to crying, lowered self-esteem, humiliation and the development of mistrust of white people in general. The descriptor most frequently presented to describe emotive response was **anger**. Nearly 100% of women in both countries identified “anger” as a negative (emotive) traumatic response to racism and racial incidents that have occurred during their lifespan from childhood through adulthood.

A notable similarity between both national participant groups is that the most common descriptors appear in the same prioritisation. Irrespective of the actual group sizes, anger, hurt, fearful, humiliated, and ashamed, are weighted equally, in order, for women in the United States and England.



**Figure 29: Emotional responses of participants to racism**

Field	Angry	Hurt	Fearful	Humiliated	Ashamed	Other (please specify)	Don't know	Prefer not to answer
United States	104	78	33	45	12	15	0	1
England	66	62	32	44	25	10	0	0
Other	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	171	140	65	89	37	25	0	1

**Figure 30: Emotional responses of participants to racism (by country)**

Fifteen women in the United States and ten women in England described their emotive responses to racism as being ‘other’ than the options already listed on the survey. The below word cloud presents the terms mentioned most frequently by US participants in relation to how they emotively respond to racism the most:



**Figure 31: US participants’ “other” emotive responses**

The above chart and word cloud provide a understanding of the negative reactions to racism as it experienced by participants, irrespective of country of residence. There is no deviation of terms, with exception to the descriptive term by one participant expressed feeling, ‘indifferent.’

‘I’ve grown so used to it, now all I feel is **indifference.**’

Indifference can be described as: lack of interest, concern, or sympathy. However, indifference can also be a coping mechanism. Scholarly research describes indifference occurring when life’s problems, in this case racism, seem so overwhelming that people feel powerless to do anything about them (Buckle, 2021). Repeated exposure and experiences of

racism can be traumatic and cause the recipient to shut down emotionally and mentally as a coping mechanism (Buckle, 2021). Indifference or apathy happens as a response to traumatic or stressful circumstances, and possibly describes the participant's feelings of futility, and symptoms of racial trauma. The word cloud also refers to feelings of confusion and bafflement, which are often resultant of a microaggressive event. Experiences of microaggressions, described as subtle, everyday occurrences of racism, often leave feelings of confusion among recipients. The subtleties of microaggressions can leave the recipient feeling unsure of what they experienced, doubtful, bewildered, and mistaken about what had occurred. However these feelings of confusion, bewilderment, or bafflement do not negate the experience or its severity. Surprisingly, in the survey, a participant described 'deserved' as an emotive response to racism.

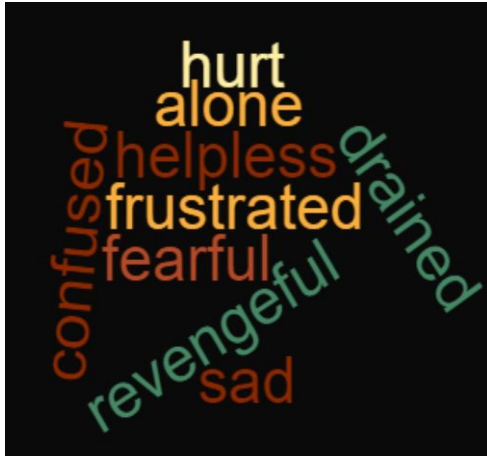
Participants' comments that offered more than single-word descriptors for "other" are worth mentioning and provide a broader and more meaningful, compassionate understanding of their experiences. Following are comments from anonymous US survey respondents:

'I get so **angry**, it makes me want to expose the experience on social media and close friends. But then I will be the one to get attacked and called out'

'In the past I may have felt hurt. Now I feel **frustrated** by the ignorance.'

'This may sound stupid, but sometimes I actually feel **guilty**. Like if I did something to deserve it.'

The word cloud below presents the terms mentioned most frequently by British participants in relation to where they emotively respond to racism the most:



**Figure 32: British participants' "other" emotive responses**

Interestingly, comments from British women were strikingly similar to US participants.

Following are comments from anonymous British survey respondents that show the similarities:

'**Sad**, when you be minding your own business but people feel they have the right to say racist things'

'**Alone** - bystanders who have witnessed events and do nothing'

'I can never tell if what I'm experiencing is racism or me misunderstanding. I usually feel **angry** and at times, **hurt**.'

'Most of the time, I just feel **dismayed** by it all.'

Feelings of dismay can be described as being upset, worried, or agitated by something that is usually unwelcomed or unexpected. The use of the word is interesting because it accurately describes a microaggressive event. It also something that happens without consent, therefore can leave one feeling helpless and loss of control. Across narratives, participants described having feelings of helplessness, loss of control, and the inability to act upon their

anger toward racism and racist activity. As mentioned in previous chapters, the effects of racism can result in racial trauma, which can manifest as PTSD-like symptoms such as depression, anxiety, irritability, sleeplessness, and poor mental and physical health outcomes. Emotive responses were similarly expressed between American respondents and British respondents. This finding suggests that not only are racist incidents experienced similarly, but participant emotive reactions to the incidents, by women in both countries, are similar also.

The following section explores participants' narratives about the aftermath effects of their experiences and addresses the research sub-question:

- Do Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent cope with racial trauma similarly or differently?

I interviewed two young women who are recent secondary school graduates in a dual-participant interview. One interviewee resides in the United States and is Black American; the other resides in the Midlands region of England and is British, Caribbean/African/White mixed-race/ethnicity who self-identifies as Black. The young women had never met each other prior to the interview, but they shared similarities in their narratives about their experiences while attending predominately white high schools. Both frequently described their suffering and frustration from enduring microaggressions from not only students but from teachers and staff as well.

Recall that microaggressions are every day, subtle – intentional or unintentional - acts of racism that outwardly may seem harmless. However, microaggressions have been described

as a death by a thousand cuts (Nadal, 2011; Sue, 2021 ). **One may not feel prolonged effects of a single papercut; however, after the effects of several thousand cuts can eventually impact one’s thoughts, actions, and overall lifestyle.** Microaggressions happen daily and frequently, yet they are no less harmful than overt acts of racism (micro-assaults) which most likely occur far less frequently, on average (Sue *et al.*, 2011). Interviewees described often feeling alone, isolated, depressed, and angry. Following are excerpts from our interview:

ABW – Vesta, age 18, speaks of her years in high school at an all-white school and how she was bullied but was afraid to speak out for fear of reprisal. Vesta was only one of three Black students at her high school. The other two students were two years behind her, meaning she was the only Black student in her cohort.

I think because I felt like my back was against the wall [...] because I mean, you confront one and then it's a whole herd against you. It would turn into me trying to bite my tongue a lot. And then it having to come out in like angry outbursts, because I'm not an angry person. But I seem like it, because the minute that you say something, I mean, you get attacked. And it's one against 10. So it made me feel extremely angry, because I hated [my hair] being touched. And I hated having stuff thrown at my head. And I hated being told to shut up all the time and all that. And it did form I guess, mostly in the form of anger with violent thoughts, but no violent actions, due to self-control, that had to be learned. Because when you're Black, if you couldn't, if you speak your mind, if you confront someone about racism, they will attack you in herds, in groups, and you can't defend yourself [against a group].  
(Vesta)

Carlette: 'That must have been incredibly difficult. Besides being angry, can you tell, as best you can or as comfortable as you feel, what you were thinking or feeling when those things were happening to you?'

Outraged. It's just like don't, like I'm not a zoo animal for you to pet. Don't touch me. You feel so many emotions at one time when it happens. And then when you're done being angry, you start looking at yourself in the mirror like "Oh my gosh, what's wrong with me, and then you get insecure and the insecurities are long lasting.  
[Vesta]

BM2 – Daisha, age 18, also spoke viscerally of her years whilst in high school at an all-white school.

[...]the angry Black woman complex as well, as you know, anytime I spoke up about it, the school the teachers, the staff, that students would all consider me to just be the angry Black woman, and no one would take me seriously. So by year 11, I learned to bite my tongue, and let it go in that moment, and be angry about it later. vent about it to my mom. [Daisha]

Carlette: 'How did having to bite your tongue and not respond to them make you feel?'

I think it leads to a lot of a lot of mental health problems like depression and anxiety. Because I remember going through periods of depression when kids at school would be giving me a hard time because of my hair. And it actually, I mean, I tried cutting my hair, I tried straightening my hair, I would try, I'd have to tie up my hair every morning and like these tight buns and stuff, just so that they wouldn't touch my hair. And that's kind of how it formed for me is it formed, it came in the form of a hair insecurity. It made me insecure. And then it made me depressed because I knew I couldn't speak up about it. So I was just kind of left there to try and fend it out during a school day, and then wait till I get home before I can release it. And it led to me holding in a lot of emotions that I'm still working through, still working past that holding in stuff. [Daisha]

Research in this study has shown that participants experience racism primarily at school and at work and this interview may suggest that the severity of racism is not diminished by location. Despite being in a younger age group than most of the other participants, these younger women describe events at school that are equally racially abusive or violent as those described by older women who experience racism at work. These two participant narratives may suggest that younger white people are equally racially abusive toward Black people, as older white people or maybe worse because of their lack of regard for personal space and inappropriate touching without permission. Further research may clarify this interpretation of the data. Additionally, the lack of support or enforcement of anti-racist policies are described similarly between the younger participants at school, and the older



participants at work. Despite the age differences, participants described emotive responses and their feelings in the aftermath of such overt racism, similarly as well. It is reasonable to conclude that irrespective of age group or country of residence, Black women experience and react racism similarly in school or at work.

Patty and Adina (Black Americans) and Clair and Edna (British; African and Caribbean, respectively) are between the ages of 55-60, and all hold a PhD. Patty resides in the Mid-Atlantic region of the US, and Adina resides in the Western area of the US. Clair resides in the Midlands of England, and Edna resides in the Southwest of England. All four interviewees have experienced various forms of racism throughout their lifespans and are the eldest participants of the study. I asked them to describe if racism has/has not had long-term effects on their physical, emotional or mental health.

I have had so many experiences of racism over my life. From being told by a white girl that she wasn't going to sit next to no Black girl on the bus to having a white girl change rooms in college when she found out I am Black. To white boys wanting to have sex with me just know what it feels like to fuck a Black girl. I have been thrown under the bus by white women on the job, mistreated and abused by white male bosses. Just years and years of going through racist bull[expletive]. When I was younger, I would fight, physically, or cuss them out, or quit or whatever. Now, I just roll my eyes and beat them back with my intelligence. I politely and articulately break them by belittling them with big words and making them feel stupid (laughing).  
[Patty]

Racism still exists in our society, and it's still systemic, and it's still actively working against Black people and people of other ethnic minority groups. I've got a lot less time for white people, a lot less time than I used to. I used to really try to like make people understand and have conversations and be like, Listen, and be very cordial. And I'm not very cordial now. I'm just like, shut down. I really tried before I really (...) I really tried. I don't like conflict. I like to try and find resolutions. I'm quite actually quite diplomatic. I really tried to be, but now can't be diplomatic. That's nonsense. And I had to learn that the hard way. [Adina]

I mean, to be Black in Britain is just madness actually. Like, it's not like I think Britain for so many reasons is such a mad country but I think being Black is so difficult. Um, it affected me initially in a really bad way. I see Black women and Black men for that matter, as being targets all the time, and, and, you know, still being seen, as you know, not worthy, not still being seen as inferior, still being seen as criminals, for the most part, you know, and that kind of thing, and being a target for oppression and abuse and everything else. So that hasn't changed to me. So you have to constantly be watching yourself or watching how you say things around well don't say it like this, because you don't want that to overshadow and no, you know, they're not listening at all you find yourself, you know, in a corner by yourself, or what have you. And that in itself is frustrating. [Claira]

We are the victims of racism, but yet we are the ones who have to modulate our reaction to racism all the time. That is ridiculous. (...) we always have to be the ones to make to make the changes. We always have to be on our guard. You know, you have high blood pressure [...] and it's like you cannot allow this society, this group of people to force that upon me, or, or allow myself to be so taken, that they're able to win by even killing me because of the underlying health condition or all these things that happened to Black people because of the spiritual and healthcare disparagement and everything. So you pay for being Black, you have to do everything on pins and needles and on eggshells. [Edna]

On several occasions, interviewees became emotional in telling their stories. One woman, Dora, broke down into tears during the interview. I stopped the interview and offered to provide her with links to support services. She wanted to continue, so we took a break while she went to get a drink. I remained silent until she had gathered her thoughts and was ready to speak again. Dora, PhD, is age 38 and resides in the UK with her white partner, whom she says is very supportive of her. Dora says she had never experienced racism, never thought about it, and never considered it while living on her native island in the Caribbean. She explained that she never had to consider or experience racial trauma until she arrived in the UK in her 20s. When Dora was ready to continue, she further discussed how the effects of racism burden her today. When working with a more senior, white female colleague on an intersectionality module, the senior faculty member listed many white male and female scholars in the field but failed to mention Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), the Black woman

scholar who coined the phrase 'intersectionality', or any other Black scholars. When Dora brought attention to the oversight, she was told to provide links and other sources to the senior colleague, who was not interested in researching the information for herself.

I wanted to say 'no, go do the work yourself' but I laughed instead, thinking 'you are a senior academic I am an early career researcher. If you're doing a lecture on feminism, do the research'. It's not overt racism, but it's problematic, you know? And, yeah, and I found that, yeah, it upset me. [...] [on the slide presentation] every single face was white. Every single face was like, there were maybe 12, at least 12 pictures, every single face was white. And I just, you know, I sat there and, you know, and I just felt myself welling up. I was so upset, and I just left I left the meeting, I just couldn't take it because I couldn't control my emotions. I was too upset. Later, she said, that she'd noticed that I'd left and she knew that something had happened to upset me. But, you know, sort of instead, it became about her, and about how hard she tried to ensure that everything was done well. And, how she didn't want to do this anyway. And, she really just became about her experience of this thing. And I yeah, it's just exhausting. Exhausting. [Dora]

The above narratives provide deeper knowledge about the reactions, thought processes and emotive responses participants have experienced when they are faced with acts of overt and covert racism. They openly expressed feeling helpless, frustrated, and fatigued in the aftermath of racist incidents at school and work, which ranked highest in relation to where racism most frequently occurs.

### **Refugees and Immigrants**

The data show significant differences in the ways refugees and children of newly arrived immigrants understand, process and react to racism and racist activity. While women who migrated to the United States or England, either as immigrants or refugees, appear to experience racism similarly to women born in either country, their reactions to racism and racists often differed. Immigrants seemed confused by racism when it occurred since they

did not recall experiencing it in their homeland. Therefore, they were sometimes stunned by the incident and left unsure of what to do or lacked the confidence to do anything about it. The refugees of the study did not seem afraid to confront racists or racism because as Josephina states: "I had already seen the brutality of war, so racism isn't nearly as hard to face even though it, too, is war." Migrating to a predominantly white-populated country and experiencing racism, simultaneously, for the first time seemed to affect women differently however, as mentioned previously, the inferred indifference, and denial, may be coping mechanisms, especially by women from countries that are devastated by war. Survival mode, adrenal fatigue, denial, and shock are often symptoms related to ongoing exposure to trauma. The urge to fight, flight, or freeze during times of crisis or traumatic experiences can linger, causing physical, psychological, and physiological manifestations even if the recipient is unaware they are experiencing trauma (CGRC, 2020). Refugee or migrant participants who did not have parental or familial support seemed to suffer a great deal because the parents did not know how to navigate through the new environment of white supremacy either. The lack of familial support exacerbated feelings of isolation, aloneness, depression and suicidality. Unlike women who were born in their perspective countries and had experienced racism at a young age, refugee and migrant participants were generally much older when newly arrived. This means they had more lifetime experience without racism, therefore exposure to racism later in life may have impacted them differently. The following section examines if racism is experienced similarly or differently based generational status.

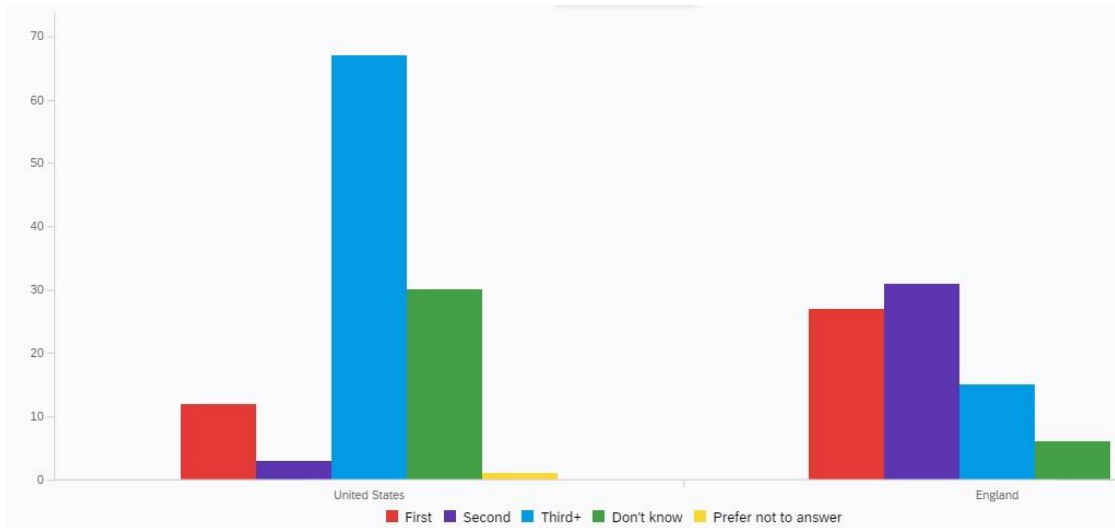
## **Generational Status**

Survey respondents were asked to answer their generational status in their country of birth. The question was asked to explore any generational similarities or differences in how they reacted to racism. In this way, a goal of the research was to explore if native-born respondents experienced racism or were recipients more or less frequently than migrant women, children of relatively newly-arrived immigrant parents, or recently naturalised citizens. Surprisingly, most women struggled to answer the question. Notably, as a Black American, the question was a bit tricky for me to navigate as well.

Literature suggests that most Black people, especially Black Americans, cannot trace their family heritage beyond their great-grandparents because of slavery. Enslaved people were not allowed to keep their original names and did not have birth certificates. In many instances where records can be found, families were listed on bills of lading by numbers, nicknames or racial epithets. Also, only within the last decade or so are existing records being digitised and made accessible online. Many records have been lost or destroyed, making it nearly impossible for some families to trace their roots.

As mentioned previously, a possible explanation for the large number of Black Americans over the age of 35 who do not know their generation status could be because of slavery. Black families were sold and transported to different plantations, sometimes close by, but more often to another county, city or state (Clinton, 2004, p. 16). The sheer size of the USA compared to smaller islands in the Caribbean, where names/people might have been more easily remembered and passed down through oral tradition, may not have been possible in the United States. These combined explanations are likely reasons why US participants who

do not know their generational status. The following charts show the generation statuses of respondents and the number of women who responded to each selection per country. The graphs and tables outline the above:



**Figure 33: Generation statuses by country**

United States		England	
First	12	First	27
Second	3	Second	31
Third+	67	Third+	15
Don't know	30	Don't know	6
Prefer not to answer	1	Prefer not to answer	0

**Figure 34: Generation status totals by country**



**Figure 35: Combined generation statuses totals**

Among survey respondents and interviewees who qualified for the study:

### ***British Women***

- Two British women identify as refugees (BR – British refugee).
- One British woman as an immigrant (BI – British immigrant).
- One British-born woman has migrated to another European city (BM – British migrant)

### ***Black American Women***

- Two women identify as immigrants (AI – American immigrant) in the United States
- Three US women identify as migrants (AMB) who left the United States and are currently living in England.
- To better understand the experiences of racism among refugees and immigrants, in this section, a brief overview follows below.

Both groups of participants' reactions and emotive responses are similar to others within their sample group. These findings suggest that, as mentioned before, Black women, even when placed into sub-groups, might share more similarities than differences in their experiences of racism, irrespective of their place of birth or residence. Narratives about their earliest memories of racism appear in this section.

BA2- Josephina, age 35, lives in London, arrived in a European city outside the UK as a refugee at the age of 8 years old, from a war-torn African country. She grew up in that city and has lived in England for the past seven years. Josephina says she encountered racism directly after arriving in Europe while living in a detention centre with her family. As a gifted and talented child, a case worker suggested Josephina be sent to a "regular" European

primary school instead of being held back and stigmatised by remaining with the other refugees who were widely poorly educated and had poor literacy.

I think that was my first the first time that I experienced racism in the sense that I could see that I was being rejected for who I was and what my background was. [...] I was eight years old [...]. [Josephina]

Carlette: 'So even at eight, you could understand what was going on?'

Yes, and it made me feel very angry and very sad and very unworthy of having access to regular education like anyone else, it also made me feel like, I would never get out of that situation, at the time, you made me feel like education was something that was impossible for me to have access to public education. [Josephina]

BA2- Nancy, age 21, currently resides in the Midlands of England. She migrated from Africa at the age of two with her parents. Her earliest remembrance of an act of racism occurred when she was just three or four years old.

Yeah, so I was three or four. And I remember an incident where I was like, pushed over by an older boy. And like a white boy. And like, he was just calling me names, and stuff like that, because I was Black. I can't remember the names exactly. All I can remember is like, the being pushed over and like my knee, bleeding and stuff like that. But that's my first ever memory. [Nancy]

Carlette: 'Can you remember how that experience made you feel?'

It was a very like traumatic experience, to be honest. And so I got bullied throughout my whole childhood. So from the young age of like, three four, but it just kind of continued into the further years and it was like the exclusion from being in groups but also just feeling like I wasn't good enough or the ideas of like bleaching my skin so that I could be white. [Nancy]

Nancy's testimony was the most emotionally challenging interview for me. She is a very bright, intelligent and articulate young woman. However, at only 21 years old, Nancy seems tired and weary, almost beaten down. She appears to be surviving rather than living and, according to her, receives minimal support from her family. Nancy has limited access to mental health care. Nancy described her mental and emotional wellbeing as:



So I thought I was like, all of the negative words that come with being Black like you know, negative, and like a there will be people that called me like poo and stuff like that. And it would just affect my mental health and it is a big contribution to the fact that I have a **mental illness and depression and anxiety. But that's like all that trauma.** I actually went through quite a lot of difficult moments. [...] But when we look down to the interactions that you have with these people in power, or they might be your teachers, or it might just be a stranger on the street. Essentially, there's a **value placed on you based on your skin.** And it's so complex where people can look at you and place value on you. [Nancy]

How Nancy connected her experience of trauma with her current depressive state and anxiety is resonant with descriptions of racial trauma and racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2007; Braveheart, 2015; Kniffley, 2017; Sotero, 2017).

BAM1 – Florence, age 33, lives in the Western region of the United States and is a Phd/Dr mental health provider. Florence identifies as Afro-Latina, originally from the Dominican Republic, and is currently an immigrant residing in the US

When I saw your research, I'm like 'yeah, does she want me or doesn't she, because Afro-Latinos are often forgotten.' So culturally, like what I feel in my soul is that my culture is Black and indigenous. [Florence]

Florence's earliest memory of racism – which was a blatant, overt micro-assault – occurred when she was age 13 or 14. She described the incident as being 'right in your face.'

I was in [US city omitted] waiting for the bus to go home from school, and the bus wasn't coming. And there was this older white lady there. And I'm like, man, the bus is really late. Like, [I'm thinking that maybe I] should like go upstairs and catch a subway instead? So I can go to another stop? So I asked her 'excuse me, ma'am. What's the time?' And she said, 'I don't give time to niggers [Florence]

Carlette: 'How did that make you feel and ...wow ... did you respond?'

I felt like I wanted to punch her right in the face. I was so angry. [...], not just because of being called a nigger, but because [after she called me that, she] just gave her back to me. I was just in shock. It is painful. [Florence]

Carlette: Okay, so if you feel comfortable, let's talk about that. So after the old lady at the bus stop, is it safe to assume then that from that experience to where we are right now, in this moment, you have had more racial experiences?

Yes, even deeper. So that's exactly what I was going to say, there we are because we live racial experiences every day, but there are some that have really affected us. Even me, and this is what I do. [Florence]

Comparatively, in the United States, in a 2015 Pew Research Center study, 17% of all newlyweds were married to someone of a different race or ethnicity (Livingston and Brown, 2017). In the United States, Black men were reported twice as likely to marry outside their race compared to Black women; 24% and 12%, respectively (Livingston and Brown, 2017). According to the Office for National Statistics (2014), the 2011 UK, those living as part of a couple totalled census reported 1 in 10 (9% or 2.3 million) people). were in an inter-ethnic relationship (Potter-Collins, 2014). Of that group, people were most likely to contain people in an inter-ethnic relationship were:

- White and Black Caribbean (88%)
- White and Black African (79%)

These figures may suggest that Black British women may be more likely to have a white partner than Black American women. Irrespective of likelihood, participants in both countries described challenges they face in their personal relationships with their non-Black partners regarding racism.

AB1 - Roberta, AB1 Patty and AB1 (Vesta) are Black American women who have been living in England for 11, 8 and 6 years, respectively. Roberta married a British citizen and is currently seeking UK citizenship. Patty is single but has a British, long-term, non-domestic

partner. Vesta is single. The three women discussed how racism in the United States had played a major role in helping them make their decisions to migrate to the UK. However, they described racism in England as being equally bad, or perhaps worse, than racism they experienced in the USA. The interviewees believe that racism in the US is far more detectable, discernible, or identifiable than in England and that they better know, 'where we stand with white people (...) as in where we can go and where we can't.' [Roberta].

Roberta, Patty, and Dora's experiences of the additional challenges of racism they face as Black women with non-Black partners were discussed during interviews, and it should be noted that interviewees discussed experiences that had occurred when their partners were present and witnessed the occurrence, and also when their partners were not present. Additionally, these participants described racist experiences **because** of their partners' presence.

Black women in the United States and England share similar experiences with racism as early as four years old, seemingly irrespective of geographical location. The following section further explores the commonality of where interviewees most frequently experienced acts of racism, the third emergent theme.

**Theme 3:** Locations where racially motivated events occur most frequently.

Participants mentioned a wide range of places where they experienced racism, with work, on the street, and school being the most frequent locations where incidents occurred. Racist incidents occurring on the street are surprisingly more frequent than incidents that occurred in school, even though they are closely ranked. One explanation for this could be that some

respondents did not (or are not able to) identify a childhood incident as being an act of racism and may consider it an act of normal childhood bullying. All interviewees, however, were able to identify their first childhood experiences of racist behaviour. Another possible explanation is that relatively more working women answered the survey. Another explanation may be that college students experience less incidents of racism than primary school students; however, that exploration falls outside the scope of this body of work.

Women in the U.S. experienced racism in a grocery store or other shop, and a restaurant or pub with equal frequency. British women experienced racism more often in a grocery store or other shop than they experienced it in a restaurant or pub. Other shops could include clothing or other retail stores, where Black people are often racially profiled by security and shop workers.

Women in the U.S. experienced a lower number of incidents of racism while on public transportation (37) compared with British women (43). One plausible explanation may be because, geographically, the United States is much larger than England, and public transport is not as accessible or affordable, making it more likely that women drive their cars more frequently. Another explanation could be that, as mentioned previously, the sample groups for this study are mostly college-educated women; therefore, the issue of transportation may be skewed toward class-based accessibility. Participants' financial abilities, such as private transportation, possibly negate the chances of encountering racist experiences on public transportation because they aren't on public transportation as often. Twenty women identified 'other' locations where they experienced incidents of racism. While some 'other' could be categorised in locations already previously provided, there are some that warrant

mentioning. Survey data in the tables below show that participants in the US and England experienced racism the most at work and on the street, followed by shops, restaurants, online, public transport, and others.

	United States	US %	England	England %	Total
Total responses	114		80		198
Work	94	82%	65	81%	159
On the street	75	66%	60	75%	135
School	74	65%	50	62%	124
Grocery store or other shop	73	64%	41	51%	114
Restaurant or pub	73	64%	33	41%	106
Online	59	52%	28	35%	88
On the bus	22	19%	7	9%	49
On the subway (tube)	15	13%	16	20%	31
Home	17	15%	7	9%	25
Other	13	11%	7	9%	20
At church	6	5%	7	9%	13
Don't know	1	1%	1	1%	2
Prefer not to answer					

**Table 5: Location of event; by country and frequency**

Comparing the two national groups, startlingly, the locations for the most frequent events ranked identically. Respondents were given the option to provide additional answers to the question under 'other'. Twenty respondents (13 in the United States and 7 in England) provided other locations where events occurred. Five of the 20 'other' locations listed were the healthcare system, doctor's office or hospital where respondents experienced racism. Participants provided additional "other" free-text responses to indicate where they had experience racism:

- Everywhere (United States)
- In all areas of my life (England)
- Racism is ingrained against Black worldwide (United States)

The above responses seemingly express feelings about the futility of avoiding acts of racism.

The responses might also indicate participants' feelings of despair that racism might be inevitable, unavoidable, commonplace, and inescapable. These feelings are shared among women in the United States and England, increasing the instances of commonality among both sample groups.

Among interviewees in the US and England, initial childhood experiences of racism occurred at school 100% of the time. The second most frequent location, throughout the life span, occurred at work; also 100%. Based on data collected, it would be reasonable to conclude that wherever Black women exist, they may experience racial abuse, and therefore could experience racial trauma similarly. Microaggressions, subtle forms of racism that occur daily, are described as death by a thousand cuts. Death is defined as; the cause or occasion of loss of life. For the purposes of this study, *loss of life* adequately describes the emotional and physical responses of participants, subsequent racial trauma due to daily exposure to racism. Loss of appetite, sleeplessness, fear, frustration, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, substance abuse (lack of control), and prolonged anger may possibly relate to feelings like loss of life. Teachers and co-workers (colleagues) were named as frequent perpetrators of racism and microaggression and will be discussed further in Theme #4. In the following section, I will discuss the most common locations: work, on the street, and at

school. There is also a discussion about the relevant findings regarding number six on the list: online.

### **At work**

Survey data shows that experiences of racism occurred in the exact same ranking order for participants from the United States and England. Experiences of racism in the workplace ranked first place in both the United States and England. Most experiences of racism occur in the workplace likely because, generally, adults spend most of their waking hours at work and commuting between home and work. Interviewees negatively described their work environments as being 'toxic', 'hostile', and 'racist'. Their narratives included discussions about racist bosses, colleagues and co-workers, making their work experiences nearly unbearable. Roberta, an interviewee mentioned previously, provided an example of how she felt devalued on her job when she was overlooked for a promotion:

The supervisor asked for someone to volunteer to do what was basically the team lead position. And so I volunteered and I did it for probably five months before they posted the team lead position. They gave it to someone else [even] though I had been doing the job and gave it to someone with blond hair and blue eyes because I'm the supervisor was told that I intimidate people and that I don't know how to talk to people. [Roberta]

I asked Roberta to describe her office demeanour compared to the woman they hired because Black women are often negatively mislabelled as being aggressive, with an "attitude", or difficult to work with simply because of inflexion or tone of voice, facial expression or pattern of speech (Ritchie, 2019). She gave examples of her experience compared to other white women in her office. She described their behaviour and

demeanour as rude and unprofessional without reprisal. All names of employees have been changed, and these are not their actual names.

So Maggie, the one who got the job, can be in a staff meeting in front of everyone and say to the same supervisor who I was talking to, she can say to you, 'well, I don't know why we're gonna do it that way. That just seems dumb'. She can say that to the supervisor. Diana can slap the table and look at someone and say, Who are you talking to? And neither Maggie nor Diana are not Black and didn't get written up. And Francine who also is not Black can say in a staff meeting 'I got as much education as all y'all bitches', in a staff meeting, and she didn't even get written up. But [emphasis] **I** don't know how to talk to people. Right. So that's how I got all of these examples of white women behaving badly in staff meeting, but they promote one of them. But because I'm direct, and I talked to you, and I asked questions, and I challenged her, I challenged her authority by saying, 'Are you sure you want to do it that way'? [Roberta]

Conversely, women who were self-employed or owned their own businesses described feeling safe at work. AB1- Monique, age 48, is a mental health counsellor who owns a private practice and recruits and hires her own staff. She discussed feeling safe at work not only around her employees and staff but also among her client base because she has, as she described, a "zero-tolerance policy" for racism, meaning racist behaviour is not tolerated:

'You know, it's interesting for me, because my work environment is a safe place. I mean, it really is a safe place. Because first of all, I'm the boss. And so nobody can fire me.' [Monique]

Regarding a client she had to fire because of racist comments he had made toward her, Monique told me:

I didn't even care if he never showed up to my office again, because I don't I don't have to talk him, I don't have to and I certainly don't have to and won't tolerate his racial abuse in [emphasis] **my** business. That's empowering.

There is often an invisible line of power dynamic between boss/supervisor and employee that is generally unspoken and understood in a typical working environment. In some



instances, employees may be intimidated by that dynamic and may naturally navigate around it diplomatically. At times it may be difficult or stressful to do so. In situations where an employee is aware of the power dynamic but is also attempting to navigate through white spaces where the intersection of racial and gendered discrimination is apparent, Black women experience double consciousness which contributes to and exacerbates racial trauma. Hypervigilance may occur, resultant of uncertainty of when or where the racist threat might appear, leading to feelings of paranoia or being gaslighted. Compounded by experiences of microaggressive events from clients, participants experience feelings of anger and futility. They are also likely to feel difficulty and unwillingness to return to an abusive environment, having to make the choice between mental health and earning a living extremely traumatising.

### **On the street**

Experiences of racism that occurred more frequently on the street ranked second.

Experiences that occurred in school ranked third. In retrospect, one of the limitations of the survey questionnaire in the present study was that a text space was not provided for respondents to provide more details about their experiences “on the street” and give better insight into the circumstances of their racist experiences in that context.

BC2 - Edna, age 60, describes an incident that occurred whilst on a walk with her pregnant friend when they encountered a white man, followed by her thoughts of the incident:

She was walking down the street, and this white man was walking towards her. And as he approached, he spotted her feet. And he said, ‘fucking pregnant monkey’.

So basically we call it patriarchy chicken, where you are walking on the streets, and if sort of men don't move, they expect you to give way, you know, [...] So when I walk

down the streets, I don't move for men and now I don't move for white woman. I will move out of the way I will give weight to people who are visibly disabled, to children and to women of colour. And I found that white women are the ones who are most annoyed when I don't get out of that way. [Edna]

BC2- Marlene, age 28, originally from London, currently a Post-Graduate Researcher in Southwest England, recounted a traumatic experience while walking along the street with some of her white friends. Marlene described how her life at college was particularly isolating, and she often felt alone in her experiences, being one of the few Black people on campus and the only Black woman in her circle of colleagues. The experience happened on Halloween and caused her significant racial trauma. She had no opportunities or resources to share her frustrations, stress and anxiety, and she received no support during or after the incident. I allowed Marlene to speak freely about what had happened:

I was walking home, my usual group of friends, I just felt alone. And we were walking down one of the main streets and a car swung kind of really quickly into the road. Tanya [not her real name] was driving and her boyfriend was in the passenger seat and [I could see that he] was in head-to-toe Blackface. And I had just never seen that before. I had never, ever in my life in London seen anyone dress up for Halloween in Blackface ever. And it just it took me by surprise, I kind of physically held my chest and jolted back because I felt like I had just seen almost a ghost like I didn't really see it. So I turned to my friends to verify. Did I just see that because they were speeding past. And they were like, 'what was that? What was that?' And so I just was kind of stunned, and he had on kind of gold chains and his hat was so I was guessing he was dressed as a rapper. Or a pimp or something stereotypical and I (...) and I just felt so ashamed and so embarrassed. [Marlene]

Carlette: 'Why do you think you felt ashamed or embarrassed by what he did?'

I just felt (...) I've never felt so embarrassed, I think in my life for someone else's actions. And I just felt embarrassed and all my friends on my course because I was the only Black woman on a course. It was a female heavy course anyway, but they were all white and so I just didn't feel like I could even turn to them and really talk to them about it because I don't know if they really knew. I think they knew for sure that that shouldn't happen but I don't know if they kind of knew enough to understand why that was so offensive. [later when I saw Tanya, she said] 'oh, I saw

you guys walking home yesterday. I bet you must have been shocked that he was dressed as Dizze Rascal [...] 'Oh, it's just a bit of fun. It's just a bit of fun for Halloween.' And sort of my friends were all just like nothing's wrong, not even a little bit. [Marlene]

Carlette: I'm sorry that happened to you.

I think it is to trivialise our lived experiences. It feels very intentional, very deliberate, very dehumanising. She could have said something, anything. She clearly saw me and saw that I saw him. She wanted to make sure I saw it. [Marlene]

According to a recent study by End Violence Against Women (EVAW) (2021), 32% of women in Britain and 59% of women in America do not feel safe walking alone at night (EVAW, 2023). Only one in two women felt unsafe walking alone after dark in a busy public place (EVAW, 2021). There were over 15,000 white respondents to the study but fewer than 1,000 Black and minoritized respondents (EVAW, 2021). The study does not disaggregate by race and ethnicity (EVAW, 2021), thereby does not broadly present a full analysis of Black women's experiences of safety in public (EVAW, 2021). Additionally, "the omission of lived experiences of Black women shows a significant data gap" in the study when other studies show that there is sufficient data to support how Black women are disproportionately affected by "sexual harassment and abuse, and how they are often combined with racism" (EVAW, 2021). Participants' experiences of racism while walking in public places support the acknowledgement that there is a dire need for more research as it relates to Black women specifically. Unlike white women, Black women have to consider their safety as women, but also as Black women.

## **At School**

The majority of women in both the United States and England described primary school (childhood) or the workplace (adulthood) equally when recollecting where they experienced incidents of racism. As children, most incidents occurred at school, perpetrated by other children or students. The occurrences took place, usually on the playground, rather than the classroom, possibly where there was minimal supervision. Some experiences occurred in a classroom that was monitored by a teacher or, in some cases, were actually perpetuated by the teacher. Racial incidents occurring at school were presented in the previous section relating to the earliest memory of racism.

Most of the interviewees shared intersectional responsibilities between university and either full or part-time work. When discussing incidents of racism where intersections occurred, interviewees automatically defaulted to speaking about experiences at work as a priority. This is not to imply that there were no experiences at school, nor to minimise those incidents, but to highlight that incidents at work were prioritised in the women's narratives. Manifestation of racial battle fatigue could occur when attempting to prioritise *where* racism most frequently occurs since it often occurs daily but also, how does one "prioritise" racist encounters. The mental strain and psychological impact of racial experiences, both at home and at work, can result in hypervigilance and racial trauma.

## **Online**

As mentioned previously, participants described online as a location where they experience incidents of racist abuse. According to Amnesty International UK (2020), there is an

onslaught of online racial abuse specifically targeting Black women. Their research report claims that online abuse targeted at Black women Members of Parliament (MPs) in England is so prevalent and horrific that Black women are 84% more likely than white women to “be mentioned in abusive or problematic tweets” (pp. 4-6) on Twitter. The report also claims that the content of racially abusive tweets can also include death and rape threats (*Online abuse against Black women MPs 'chilling'*, 2020).

**I've had death threats, I've had people tweeting that I should be hung if 'they could find a tree big enough to take the fat bitch's weight' ... I've had rape threats...and n\*gger, over and over and over again. (Diane Abbott, UK MP and Shadow Home Secretary, July 2017)**

AB1 – Lana, age 53, is an internationally well-known political commentator and social-justice activist in a major US city. Lana says that despite all the activism she has participated in, she is still emotionally scarred by some of her experiences of racism, especially online. She hosts a podcast and is a member of several online groups where she is regularly assaulted by misogynists, racists, neoliberals, conservatives, and far alt-right trolls of all genders and sexes.

I am still very scarred by it. Very scarred, and the continued racism that I experienced, even as a political commentator, like the all the racist shit we went through a few years ago, you know, online. Well, that stuff is just knowing that there is at least more than half of the so called progressive space, that discredits you because you're Black. And as soon as you mention racism as a problem, they don't want to hear what you have to say. But you let a bunch of white people get online and talk about how 'racism isn't the issue it's classism [that's the real problem] and all we need to do is pass some economic reforms'. Everybody loves those people. [...] Because we were still living in a white supremacist society and people will use in this online environment, people will quickly use what you put out there against you. So we do have to be careful. [Lana]

While I was writing up the thesis, Elon Musk, according to Bloomberg (2023) the wealthiest person in the world, purchased the social media website Twitter, in 2022. Shortly after the acquisition, Musk began to dismantle and dissolve moderation against hate speech, hate advocacy, and hateful content. According to a recent report, an influx of hateful content flooded Twitter immediately after Musk's takeover (Sato, 2022). An average of 1,282 tweets with slurs against Black people, specifically, appeared daily before Musk took over. Following the acquisition, the number increased to 3,876 (Sato, 2022). According to research by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2022), after Musk tweeted that hate speech impressions had significantly dropped, slurs increased to **4,650 tweets a day on average** (Sato, 2022). Even though the data does not disaggregate by gender, participant narratives support the data and Sobanda's argument that Black women are disproportionately targeted by online racists.

Theme #4 helps identify the insidiousness of racism from the micro-level perspectives of personal interactions to the macro-level perspectives of systemic and institutionally racist systems and organisations that continue to perpetuate legacies of racially motivated harassment, discrimination, and microaggression.

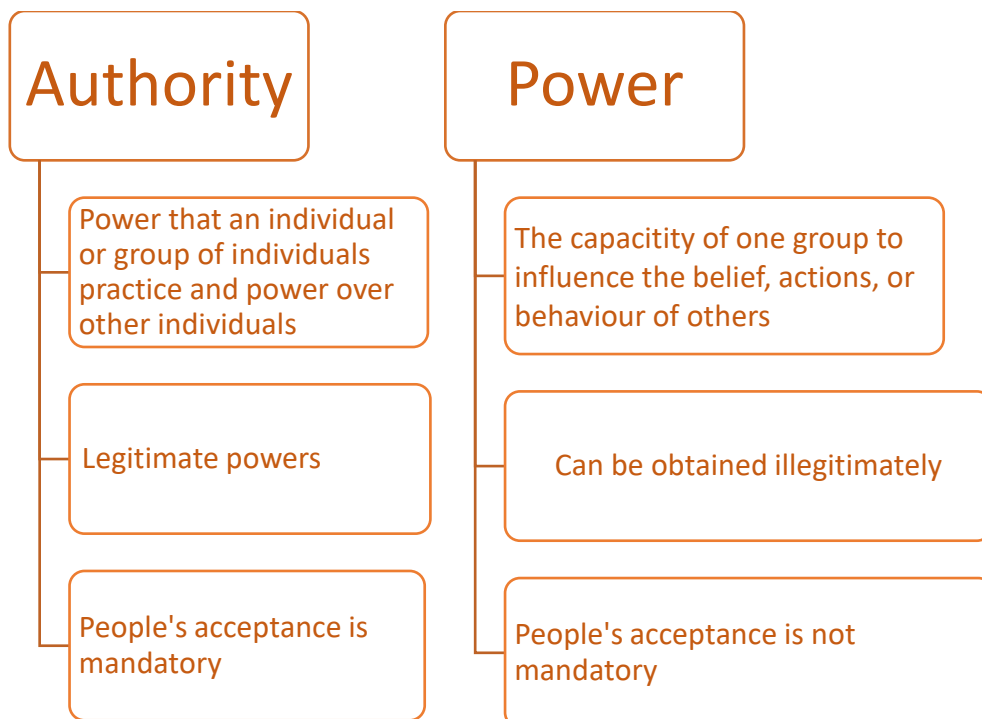
**Theme 4:** Power and authority as a form of racism in interpersonal relationships

In situations where Black children were victims of racial abuse in school, they were often met with racists wielding both power and authority, sometimes simultaneously leaving them feeling powerless, hopeless, angry and depressed. This section explores power and authority in interpersonal relationships, whether intentional or unintentional. In instances of romantic relationships, power dynamics are not obvious. However, where one partner has social,

economic, racial and financial privilege, it might be reasonable to consider how power plays a part in the infrastructure of the relationship.

In this study, data shows that racism occurs on micro and macro levels. Survey respondents and interviewees described experiences of racism in one-on-one interactions, small groups or teams, and in large public spaces. Incidents included racial encounters with those of equal status, those in power, and those in authority. As discussed in the previous section, experiences of racism occurred in most instances of daily life for Black women. Whether situated in a personal or professional environment, survey respondents and interviewees experienced racism, irrespective of circumstance.

The following chart explores the differences between power and authority:



**Figure 36: The differences between power and authority**

Source: Hasa (2021)

Power dynamics emerged in racist experiences that occurred in school, where perpetrators were students, teachers, and staff, who seemingly felt empowered to inflict verbal or physical acts of microaggression without fear of reprisal from teachers, staff or school administrators. The complex system of racism that Black women are forced to navigate in everyday life, in every situation, and how learning to intuitively “read the room” can be exhausting and emotionally draining (Rollack, 2012; Sian, 2019). Black women are often burdened with manoeuvring through racism and racial trauma in the following relationships:

- Romantic relationships
- Friendships, peers, colleagues
- Colleagues, supervisors, administrators
- Legal systems and justice departments

To recap, microaggressions can occur even when the offender has good intentions. The following are narratives about relationships in which power, or the perception of power, can influence and empower those who inflict racism and racist practices while simultaneously leaving the victims of racism and racist activity feeling powerless and traumatised. Micro-level relationships frequently involve a power dynamic between certain parties within that relationship. However, macro-level relationships often demonstrate fluidity between power and authority, or both, simultaneously. Micro-level, interpersonal relationships will be discussed first. Following, macro-level relationships are contextualised by their effectiveness and impact on Black women’s experiences and reactions to racism.



## Micro-Level Relationships

### *Romantic relationships*

Only a few participants contextualised, with details, discussions of racism within their romantic partnerships. Those who shared are married, cohabitating or in a romantic relationship with a **non-Black** partner, specifically, white. Interestingly, According to participants' responses, in cases of interracial marriage, there is often racial tension between the merged families, particularly from non-Black members toward Black members. There was no mention of racial hostility from Black family members toward non-Black family members. Across the narratives, interracially married participants equally credited and discredited their non-Black partners for either being understanding, compassionate, and empathetic or having a lack of insight into the emotional toll racism has on their Black partner.

Microinvalidation, as mentioned previously on p. 77, is grounded in intentions of support and solidarity. However, because intended support often does not come from lived experiences, those comments can have a reverse effect and trigger even more racial injury. Participants described feeling happy in their relationships but that interfamilial relationships were often challenging, at best. According to participants' accounts, the non-Black partner sometimes feels put in the middle, or having to choose sides between birth family and partner. Not all women, however, are comfortable with speaking about racism with their non-Black partner, and they feel the inability to talk about racism adds pressure to the relationship.

BA2 - Britney, age 44, in Northwest England, is married to a white man. The issue of discussing racism came up during our interview. I had relayed a personal experience, and she responded:

I don't have people I, (...) I talk about racism with my partner who is white, British. We don't talk about [race]. I mean we do talk about racism and we talk about race but after I **educate** him. That's not a support system. That's me educating him. We can have conversations of race, we have conversations about racism. Because I don't think we've ever had conversations where I don't know, it becomes very academic because he's a philosopher. Yeah, it becomes very academic, rather than me talking about how I feel in all these issues. And yeah, it just becomes an academic exercise. [Britney]

Similar to Britney's feelings of not being able to discuss with her partner how racism affects her, Dora explains feeling frustrated by her partner's microinvalidations. She says her partner had never seen or encountered a Black person in real life until the age of 15. Her attempts to discuss race are often overshadowed or downplayed by his opinions of classism.

He's one of those who thinks that, you know, we need to be talking about how class affects a lot of what's happening in the world and blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, Yeah, absolutely. We do need to talk about that we comprehend that racism is a big factor that deals with this as well. So we often have loads of back and forth conversations sort of about racism, particularly in the UK. And it's just, yeah, it can be it can be a bit frustrating sometimes. [Dora]

Several participants frequently mentioned throughout their interviews that they often had feelings about racism but had not allowed themselves to really dwell on their deeply rooted thoughts and emotions, noting that they have been suppressing these as a means of coping and survival. Britney became very thoughtful after her statement, and I allowed her several seconds of silence before we continued. She did not share her thoughts with me, so it is unclear whether she was reflecting upon her emotions, her coping mechanisms, or how her voice had been silenced in the relationship by both her partner and herself. The next section

examines how experiences with racism among certain sub-groups affected participants. Discussions of mistrust, anger and frustrations demonstrated how some participants felt deeply betrayed by people they had felt comfortable, safe and entrusted with.

### ***Friendships and Peers***

Study participants described experiencing anti-Black racism from white people on both micro and macro levels, in both power and authority, in school, at work, on the street, online, and other places. Black children are likely to be physically safe from outside offenders while in school; however, they often have to navigate through racism from an early age, usually from preschool (US) or nursery (US, UK). This study shows that students, regardless of their level of study, experience racism and racist activity in school (or university).

Theoretically, parents should feel relatively confident in sending their children to school, believing their offspring will be safe within the confines of school grounds. However, this is not always the case, especially for Black children who, historically, have suffered horrific racial abuse within the school environment, both in the US (Berthold, 2022) and the UK (Firth, 2005; Garcia, 2020; Novak, 2023). A study by the University of California San Francisco reported that Black girls are especially impacted, resulting in alcohol abuse and behaviour problems (Berthold, 2022).

Interviewees described how, from a young age, white children felt empowered to racially harass Black children and how those children were not always reported, reprimanded or disciplined afterwards. Without repercussion or disciplinary action taken against them, it is understandable how white children may have interpreted non-action from those in higher power or authority as signalling that racial abuse receives little to no reprisal and is,

therefore, acceptable. Several interviewees shared memories of racist experiences whilst among people whom they considered close friends.

In a previous section, Marlene described how she was already feeling alone, even among other people, and how she often felt isolated at university because she was one of only a few Black students at the school. Following an experience of racism that occurred whilst she was walking with 'friends' from university, Marlene discussed a range of emotions she felt and, importantly, stated that it was her peers whom she felt had disappointed her the most. Marlene experienced two forms of racism: microinsult from the situation itself and microinvalidations from those who also witnessed the incident when it happened and afterwards.

AB1- Moira, age 36, from the southern region of the United States, described a racial incident that occurred during her first semester at university. Moira was assigned a dormitory residence to share with one roommate for the term and had arrived at the accommodation before her roommate.

So, like I'm unpacking and setting up my section of the room when someone knocks on the door. I go open it, and there's a blond-haired, blue-eyed white girl standing there. She doesn't even come into the room. She says 'this is your room?', I go 'yeah' and she turns up her nose and says 'I'm not rooming with no Black girl' and she walked away. I was so shocked; I couldn't believe it. I stood there in the doorway with my mouth open, just watching her walk away. I finally yelled after her, 'well, fuck you then. [Moira]

Josephina has not forged friendships with white people because of cultural mistrust. She describes why she decided not to include white people in her inner circle.

I have to be very honest, I have no, in my current in my current stage, at my age, etc. I don't have any active, white friendships. It's something that I've chosen consciously,

I think as well, even though the action towards it has been subconsciously. It is something that I chose constantly, because I knew that there, even with the white friendships that I had, let's say, in high school or in undergrad, etc, I could look back and see that there was very little that I had in common with these friendships right with these friends. I never wanted to have that conversation with them because I knew there would never be able to relate with that experience or with that reality of my life. So, yes, even now in spaces as an academic as someone that teaches as well. [Josephina]

Making a conscious effort to avoid substantive relationships with white people and feeling anxious at the prospect of having a white female boss or co-worker could indicate racial battle fatigue and racial trauma (Smith, 2007; Leary, 2015; Sue *et al.*, 2020). Racial trauma and racial battle fatigue can cause feelings of isolation, mistrust, (mental) fatigue, anxiety and anger, even if the trauma victim is unaware of what they are experiencing (Smith, 2007).

I never really had white male friends or interacted with white males in that in that space. [...] I have no relationship with my males supervisor whatsoever, because I don't know how to have that relationship with a white man. It just seems so non-authentic to me, doesn't feel like a relationship that I can have with a white man. [Josephina]

Carlette: So part of your coping mechanism, then is to completely detach yourself from white people. Is that right?

Yes. Unless I'm in spaces where I can't avoid it, like academia or my work, etc. But in my personal life, I have no active white friendships. [Josephina]

In this rare and unique example, Josephina has maintained her own personal power over those who would normally have power and authority over her. The manner in which Josephina demonstrates confidence, control and discipline was impressive. She and her family arrived in Europe as civil war refugees from an African country. Josephina is now a senior academic where her perseverance is a testimony to her strength and courage.

BC2, Casey, age 29, resides in the West Midlands of England. She describes an experience of racism that occurred when a handyman arrived at her home to measure a space for a new bed.

So I was ordering a bed for my daughter's room about two and a half years ago. [...] a man came to my house [...] and he was being really nice and friendly [...] and I just thought, you know, 'nice person'. Then he left the house and then I received a text on my phone that was mistakenly sent to me and it says, 'Hi, babe, has the nignog sent the deposit yet?' And I was literally in shock. I sat there for a while. And I was just in shock because I was like, 'nignog'. I'd heard this terminology but [it had] never been used towards me. I think it's more of a, an older terminology that's using a racist term. I couldn't believe I was really hurt because he'd been talking to my children. Not on his own, of course, 'cause I'd never leave my children on their own. But he was very friendly. And I was thinking that whole time. He was in my home, getting ready to accept my money and he was just thinking 'this nigga'. And it really hurt me. And I can't remember how I replied. [Casey]

Carlette: How horrible. How did that make you feel?

It was horrible. He tried to use 'excuse me, it's predictive text'. And I explained to him that it's not even possible. Because, you know, I even tried, because I'm that type of person like to see the best in people. So I even went on my predictive text and typed a number of things to see if it would even turn into that. And then I realized no, no that's not a word. [Casey]

Experiencing an act of racism in her own home was quite traumatic for Casey, and she decided to refuse services with that company and obtain someone else.

I couldn't believe the person was in my home and was getting ready to accept my cash. And if he didn't send that to me, mistakenly I would have still paid them like nearly 600 pounds for this bed. It would have come back fitted. That bastard smiled at me and my kids. And it just made me feel really just, yeah, sick. [Casey]

The next section examines participants' narratives about racial encounters with white people in power and authority in the workplace.

### ***Colleagues, Supervisors, Administrators***

Anti-Black racism runs systemically and institutionally throughout the hierarchal structures of companies, corporations, schools, colleges and universities. In England, there are efforts being made to decolonise the school curriculum and make learning more diverse and inclusive. Generally, histories have been white-washed to amplify and glorify white people, mostly of European descent. Cultural competency and diversity are lacking in history-telling and textbooks (Harrison and Turner, 2011 p. 342; Hardy, 2018). Some universities, in both the USA and England, were built from profits earned from the transatlantic slave trade, and anti-Black racism runs rampant on some campuses, where Black students are tormented, harassed and even brutalised or killed. There is lack of space in this thesis to explore institutional racism in academia in-depth; therefore, this section examines participants' experiences with racism in a broader context while attending university.

In childhood, participants described experiences of racism perpetrated by other children. They discussed how racism, racist language and attitudes had been developed and practised by children as young as 4-6 years old. Participants also described racial experiences, with similar frequency, with teachers and school administrators. Encounters with school administrators often resulted in stricter disciplinary actions against the victims rather than the perpetrators. In instances where victims' parents became involved to defend their children, parents were sometimes confronted with racist behaviour from teachers and administrators.

AB1- Lana, age 53, is from the southern region of the United States and remembered an experience she had while in school when she refused to do a homework assignment that

asked her to describe what she thought her life would have been like in the years around the Civil War (1861-1865). In the history textbook, the section about slavery was only “two pages” and had been extremely “watered down and white-washed.” Lana described her teacher as a “southern white lady” who was “mean, devilishly mean.” The teacher confronted Lana in class and, in front of everyone, asked her why she had not completed the homework assignment.

[because] I would have been a slave if I lived during this time. And I don't think I'd be as happy as this book is trying to make it out to be because this is not. This is not the way my parents and my grandparents told me, the slavery was like for us. And this woman got up from behind her desk, and she said, you know, your grandparents and your parents may not have had enough education, to understand this history. And that's when I kind of realized I didn't know what it was, but I knew that there was something really, really wrong and awful and hateful with this woman telling me that my people were stupid, that they didn't know what they were talking about, in regard to a history that by that point, I knew we were descendants from. [Lana]

Lana was 11 years old when she had that experience. She described the teacher's reaction to her well-articulated response and how it made her feel, and how it developed a lasting impression of mistrust within her.

She looked at me like it was a mixture of pity and contempt. And like, 'Oh, you poor idiot thing, you don't know any better.' And that's basically what she said about my parents that all those poor idiot people, they don't know any better. **They don't know that slavery wasn't so bad for them.** And I think that's the moment when I realized that at least, that particular white lady didn't like me and didn't like, couldn't like Black people for her to say something like that about my people who, as far as I knew, she didn't know. And then like the constant like, harassment that I got from some of the white kids in the class after that day let me know that there was this thing between white people and Black people that I wasn't aware of before. I was, from that moment on, hesitant to ever speak out in class. Like, when the teacher would call on me, I would pretend like I didn't know the answer. [Lana]

I didn't trust a whole lot of other white teachers. All of my teachers in that particular school were white and I began to look at them all with (...) look at them differently to see if they were treating me differently. Some of them did, and some of them didn't.



But I went throughout the rest of that school year, like, having a real mistrust of everybody white in that school (...) and it was, yeah, it definitely affected how comfortable I felt as a kid. [Lana]

AB1- Monique, age 48, from the southern region of the United States, describes a physical education teacher, a softball coach, who displayed racist behaviour.

I played softball, and on the bus coming home from school, my softball coach's son called me a nigger because I wouldn't get out of the seat on the bus. He told me I had to get out of that his seat. And I was old enough to know who Rosa Parks was and I wouldn't give up my seat. And he called me a nigger, and I punched him in the mouth [because] that's what you're supposed to do, apparently, because it worked last time [when I punched a kid in the mouth] I don't know. And so we got into a fight on the bus and we both got put off the bus for like a week. Neither one of us could ride the bus. But it wasn't until years later that I like looked back on that and thought he was my softball coach's son. He was in the fifth grade just like I was in the fifth grade. Where'd he get that? Right? Like it wasn't until later that i thought you know what? My softball coach was probably quite a closet racist because her son thought it was okay to talk to me that. [Monique]

It is important to note that even childhood memories of experiences of racism described by participants usually involved white women more than white men. White women were so prevalent as purveyors of racial hate across the participants' accounts that there is a section exploring this in further detail in the Discussion chapter.

In adulthood, participants recounted experiences of racism perpetrated by co-workers, colleagues, supervisors, managers and administrators. Experiences ranged from blatant to covert. Participants described incidents of racism perpetrated by white women to be the most painful and which evoked the most feelings of betrayal. Participants described racial mistrust for white feminists especially, whom they feel create a false sense of security for Black women, forging a fake kinship or "sisterhood", and then, subsequently, betraying them. Among 30 interviewees, 28 claimed white women in positions of power, real or

imaginary, motivated by racism, especially in the workplace, were more prevalent purveyors of racism and racist activity.

AB1 - Olive, age 45, from the midwestern region of the United States, says:

So my issue of Karens<sup>8</sup> is you call yourself a feminist. But as soon as I tell you that what you're doing is wrong, call the police on me. So you're not a feminist because you're only here for white women (...) not all women. [Olive]

Monique spoke about a former white woman boss who betrayed her:

Um, my [white woman] supervisor failed me in my internship. She was going to fill out the form and give it to me and when I went to pick it up, she said, 'Oh, I didn't get a chance to get it. Do you mind if I just fax it over to the chair?' And I said, 'No, no problem', because I wasn't expecting what that bitch was going to do. She failed me and said that I had not completed the necessary requirements, and that I was a lazy intern. And I didn't do anything that she asked me. And I was always on my phone. And I was never available for students when they came to talk to me. And none of this is true. But she put all this in my evaluation. Now, four weeks prior, she'd given me glowing reviews. And the only thing that happened in that four weeks was I started calling them out for not having fair representation for their Black students. So she fails me. And at the very bottom of my review, she wrote, 'everything is not about race,' I was furious [...] so I actually passed, he passed me anyway, he overrode her decision to fail me and pass me. But yeah, she was trying to keep me from graduating because I was talking about racism.

It is worth mentioning that the note left by the supervisor ('everything is not about race') is a microinvalidation itself. Many Black people who face racism daily, do feel that everything actually **is** about race. The point here is that the supervisor proved and reinforced her position of power over Monique, if not intentionally in the review process, most certainly in

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<sup>8</sup> In pop culture, the name 'Karen' has been used as a generic and stereotypical description of an archetypal white woman who has an overall unpleasant and trouble-making nature for causing serious problems for non-white people, such as verbal and physical harassment and bullying, phoning police and filing false complaints, erroneous reports to management regarding Black employees and more.

the condescending comment. Incredulously, the supervisor's statement that everything is not about race is a microaggressive racist comment.

Jilly worked for a white-owned company in the United States and was assigned to work with a problematic white colleague that management allowed to work undisciplined. Previously warned by her Black mentor to "watch her back and document everything," Jilly described the hypocrisy in the ways upper management took disciplinary action against her compared to her troublesome white colleague.

She was an HR nightmare. [I] dealt with her for, whew, seven years, six years, to the point where I had to stop wearing contact [lenses] because I got a twitch and I the contact [lens] would pop out. It was so stressful with the things that she was doing, saying and getting away with. I work for a conservative company. One day I was wearing a dress with a big jacket. I got hot while sitting at my desk, not in front of any customers, I was just sitting there. But my tattoo was showing. Just the day before, that white girl literally had somebody clock her in when she came back from lunch and I proved it. I saw somebody coming back, go to the back and clock her in and I even took a picture of her timecard and send it to the manager and said listen [...] No, they didn't do anything but I get a sound talking to and it actually showed up on my review! They put it in my review that my tattoo is showing even though it was at my desk. Wow. Yeah. [Jilly]

Several participants discussed the preferential treatment of white employees over Black or other non-white staff. The following are snippets of conversations where interviewees shared their experiences at work when they had felt white employees had been treated more favourably and where they believe racial discrimination likely occurred:

AB1- Doris, age 39, resides in the southern region of the United States. She is a mental health professional with her own private practice. Doris's real name usually immediately suggests that she is a Black woman as there are likely no white women who would bear her

name. Before establishing her counselling services, Doris worked at another agency where her name caused a racial incident with a potential client.

A woman had called looking for a counsellor in my fulltime job of work at [company]. [...] I was sitting up at the front, and the receptionist answered the phone, and I heard her say, 'Oh, well, we have some counsellors that are available.' And then she mentioned my name. And I heard her kind of pause. And she goes, 'Oh, yes, yes, she's African American.' And then something else happened on the other end, and she was like, 'okay, sorry, you feel that way, whatever.' And she just hung up, and I was like, 'What was that?' And she let me know that the lady wanted counselling services, and when she heard my name, she immediately was 'Wait, that sounds like a Black person. Is that person Black?' and [the receptionist] was Like, 'Yes, she's African American' so I was like, Okay, I guess that's who what she wanted, right? but [the caller] was like, 'No, no, thank you. I don't want her. I don't want her to be my counsellor. [Doris]

Black academic participants of the study, specifically post-graduate researchers (PGRs), described the difficult and tumultuous relationships they have with faculty and staff in the university, especially working with white supervisors who can be insensitive and often cruel toward PGRs and their work. Academic participants explained how supervisors, faculty and staff often repeatedly call upon (the same) Black students to participate in discussions of equity, diversity and inclusion EDI, racism and decolonisation, because of the lack of Black faculty and very few Black students within departments. Black academics say they are frequently asked to participate, usually without remuneration, in what they perceive to be "performances," without regard to cultural or emotional sensitivity. It was also without reflection of the emotional labour that comes with participating, which can also be potentially triggering, at best, and racially traumatic at the worst outcome. They voiced concerns about the lack of diversity within departments, which sometimes left them feeling isolated and alone, personally, and without guidance or mentorship, professionally. The lack of Black academics and faculty within departments left some participants to feel like they

were floundering to stay afloat while white students and colleagues were able to find support, guidance and mentors in the same scenarios.

Marlene, whose body of work involves racism and decolonisation, discussed feeling frustrated and the futility of working with a supervisor whom she considered to be a racist. She described an incident that had occurred with one of her supervisors, a white woman. Their relationship was not a good one and Marlene left supervision feeling belittled, humiliated and angry. She and the supervisor eventually conflicted when Marlene was asked to voluntarily sit on the EDI committee as the only Black member in a predominantly white institution (PWI).

[the supervisor] was saying, 'you know, you have an enlightened background, it'd be great if you sat on the EDI Committee' and I said 'I'm absolutely not going to do that. I'm not sitting on no committees. I'm attending no meetings when it comes to that. If you guys have a committee and a subgroup for students, good, but I'm not going to meet anywhere near that as the only Black person here. I'm not going to come up with your solutions. I'm not going to keep talking to you about traumatic experiences. I'm not going to do it. I'm just not. I'm so sorry but I can't. So I've tried in this PhD programme to just be as assertive as I could be, to tell them, in a nice way, to fuck off. [Marlene]

Marlene had just described earlier the incident of walking with her friends and seeing the boy in Blackface. After talking about her supervisor, she had become visibly upset, so I paused the interview to give her time to recover or to resign. Marlene decided to continue.

Carlette: I'm sorry, I realise this is a lot. Let's take a deep breath. Yeah, because I can see it has triggered you so let's just take a deep breath for a second and come back into this moment because (...) you have used (...) we've been talking now for 15 minutes, my goodness. Um, you've said the word 'isolated'. I haven't been actually counting but you've used that word about 10 times in just 15 minutes. Are you okay to continue or we can stop here if you would like to.

I felt alone on the course, (...) I was the only Black person on this course. And their reactions were 'Oh, are you? I hadn't noticed' which was total bullshit. I thought, 'Oh,

I see 80 people in the room and only I look like me, of course you've noticed maybe you've been taught to not to not say you think that that's the best way to do it. But you've noticed for sure. And so I think I just felt very alone in coming to terms with that experience in the first place and my supervisor just exacerbated those feelings because I felt like I had absolutely no one to go to and there was no one who looked like me. And to be raised conscious, I felt very alone in that and I also think I was the only person from London. And so I felt alone in where I came from my upbringing, my experience of diversity being I think I felt alone on many different levels. Really. And that was just a difficult, difficult thing at the time.' [Marlene]

Participants described, in detail, their feelings of isolation at work and at school, where most people spend most of their time. The women described the lack of support and not feeling safe in spaces that white people take for granted; never having to think of race or racism, and how, because white people have never had lived experiences, their seeming lack of concern or regard for racial harassment or abuse, negates the urgency for finding solutions. This section explored interpersonal relationships as they relate the participants' experiences with navigating around racism and racist activity while at work, on the street and at school, the primary places they spend most of their time. Following are narratives which reflect how macro-level racism within systems and institutions has affected the participants of this study.

## **Macro Level Relationships**

### ***Legal Systems and Justice Departments***

Some study participants were eager to discuss their thoughts and feelings regarding their or their loved ones' encounters with the police. To contextualise participants' experiences with historical trauma, one needs to understand the underpinning and historical context of distrust, violence, and fear between Black people and police that originated during slavery in

the United States when the police were known as Slave Patrols. The “police” were originally created from a body of slaveowners, overseers and members of the Ku Klux Klan to catch and punish runaway slaves. The purpose of the police, called Slave Patrols (Hadden, 2003, p. 2; Turner *et al.*, 2006; Durr, 2015), during that time, was to cause harm, pain and/or death to Black people who were seeking freedom from slavery. Reichel (1988) writes, “Southern cities had developed elaborate police patrol systems in an effort to control the slave population, [...] these Slave Patrols were precursors to the police.”

In the UK, Home Secretary, Robert Peel, sponsored the first successful bill to create a professional police force in England. The Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 established the London Metropolitan Police Department as the “New Police.” Uniformed, unarmed and with little authority, the constables, known as Bobbies, named after Peel, were “instructed to treat all citizens with respect, and to maintain close ties with, and to draw support from, the people it policed” (*The development of professional policing in England*, no date). However, according to annual figures released by the Home Office, Black people accounted for 14 percent of all “use of force” incidents between April 2021 and March 2023, almost four times their proportion of the country’s population (Bradley, 2022).

England has a long history of police violence, abuse, discrimination, racial profiling during “stop and search” operations, and police misconduct toward its Black citizens, dating back as far as 1919. Known as the race riot of 1919, it was considered one of the most severe incidents of unrest in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Britain (1919 Race Riots, 2022). Following is a non-exhaustive chronological list of other race riots in England:

- 1958 Notting Hill (London)
- 1980 St Pauls (London)
- 1981 Chapeltown (Leeds)
- 1981 Brixton (London) Toxeth (Liverpool) Handsworth (Birmingham)
- 1981 Moss Side (Manchester)
- 1989 Dewsbury (Yorkshire)
- 2001 Oldham (Manchester)

Between January 1969 and July 1970, police had raided the Mangrove Restaurant in the Black community of Notting Hill, London, twelve times, despite a lack of evidence regarding any illegal activity. Referred to as a den of iniquity frequented by pimps, prostitutes and criminals, there was no evidence that substantiated those claims and references. In 1970, during a protest march by the community, violence broke out between the police and protestors. Nine men and women, eventually known as the Mangrove Nine, were charged and eventually acquitted, which is considered a victorious moment in the history of Britain's Black Power Movement (Mangrove Nine protest, 2022).

Racial abuse against Black people by the police, in the United States and England, is historical, and so is the resultant trauma. Anti-Black racism is complex and is spread systemically and institutionally within the criminal justice system. Many researchers and scholars agree that the pattern of police brutality exists today (Hadden, 2003).

The historical context is possibly an important insight into participants' narratives, and therefore relevantly fitting within the scope of the findings because police encounters can trigger PTSD symptoms and exacerbate racial trauma (Motley and Joe, 2018). Some of the women in this study have been victims of police brutality or have witnessed police violence, mistreatment, verbal threats, and intimidation inflicted upon their loved ones. Police



violence is a component of the complexity of systemic racism, which filters through legal services, judicial systems and finally, the prison system (Rivera and Ward, 2017; Sewell, 2020; DeAngelis, 2021).

The police are higher authority citizens that carry and practice legitimate power over citizens in the community. The community is mandated to accept police authority as it is and have no role in the recruitment, hiring and firing processes of police officers, administrators or staff. Police also have the power to influence an individual's actions or behaviours, legally through laws, or illegally, through corruption or coercion. Some white people commonly use police law enforcement officers as weapons of race-power and authority over Black people (Kelling, 1987, p. 209).

Recalling The Young and Black Report (2020) conducted by the YMCA, the following reflects police mistrust among young Black people in the UK:

- 64% worry about being treated unfairly by police
- 54% do not trust the police to act without prejudice and discrimination
- 55% worry about being falsely accused of a crime

Claira (BA2, age 55) mistrusts police and has frequent panic attacks when she even sees an Dofficer. Casey (BC2, age 29) has had several encounters with the police and has witnessed her disabled mother be treated unfairly and roughly handled by the police.

AB1 – Moira, age 36, explained,

In the United States, white children are taught that police officers are friendly, helpful and kind, and they're supposed to serve and protect the community. White

people have no problem calling the police. When we were kids, ‘Officer Friendly’<sup>9</sup> used to come to our school and give a talk about how he was our friend. But Black people don’t have that privilege. We fear calling the police because we, or someone we love, may end up dead. We can’t teach our kids the cops are our friends. We have to teach them to fear the police because they can be more dangerous because they’re nothing but a gang too. [Moirra]

It is often customary for Black parents to teach their children how to behave in the presence of the police (Dyson, 2017). In his book *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*, Dyson (2017) explains how Black parents prepare and roll-play with their children as preparation drills (p. 97) should they have an encounter with the police. Police encounters can contribute to the stress and anxiety Black people already experience in their daily lives (Dyson, 2017), but even when individuals are careful to act in ways described as ‘non-threatening’ when encountering law enforcement officers, Black people are still often subjected to verbal and physical harassment and abuse by police. For example, from this study, AB1 – Kathleen, age 48, described conversations she has had with her 17-year-old son, instructing him on how to conduct himself in the company of police officers. She fears her instructions still may not be enough to save his life.

In the United States and England, Black children are susceptible to police violence outside the home and school (Raymond, 2010). The United States employs police officers (called resource officers) that set up police stations within the school buildings. Thus, Black children are then also susceptible to police violence in school too (Raymond, 2010). Participants who are mothers discussed the additional burden of trying to explain racism to their children and

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<sup>9</sup> The Officer Friendly program was created in 1966 and the program was quickly adapted in most school jurisdictions throughout the United States. Amid marches and demonstrations, it was designed to address anti-police sentiment and offer children a kinder, gentler face of law enforcement.

expressed deep fears and concerns for them, which often resulted in sleepless nights, nightmares, depression, feelings of futility and rage.

The complex and violent interrelationship between Black women and police was created through the establishment of slavery in the colonial world and the legacy of systemic racism, police brutality, and disproportionate arrests and incarceration rates, and still continues today (Jacobs, 2017). Instances of police brutality inflicted upon Black women in the US may be more familiar at present among the overall general population because of extensive news and media coverage. However, Black women in England have also been murdered by police, even though literature was difficult to find. Following are three high-profile cases where Black women were killed or severely injured by police in England:

- ➔ Dorothy “Cherry” Groce, was mistakenly shot by police officers in the shoulder, leaving her paralysed and bound to a wheelchair for the rest of her life (BBC News, 2020). Resultant of the Groce non-fatal shooting, civil unrest ensued during the Brixton Riots of 1985 (BBC News, 2014).
- ➔ Cynthia Jarrett, an Afro-Caribbean woman died in 1985 due to heart failure after “four policemen burst into her home during a raid on 5 October 1985” (BBC News, 2014) a week after Groce’s shooting. Police were allegedly searching for stolen property (by her son), but none was found (BBC News, 2014). Jarrett’s death sparked the Broadwater Farm riot.
- ➔ Joy Gardner died in 1993 after being detained during a police immigration raid on her home in Crouch End, London, when she was restrained with handcuffs and leather straps and gagged with a 13-foot length of adhesive tape wrapped around her head. Unable to breathe, she collapsed and suffered brain damage due to asphyxia (Athwal, 2013).

Similar to Black American participants, Black British women also described being fearful of police. BC2 – Edna, age 60, described her frustration over the racial abuse her grandson faces in school. Subjected to horrific, overt acts of microaggressive behaviour, Edna went to the police, who did not file charges for a hate crime against the white boys, who admitted to

abusing Edna's grandson. Even with the admission, Edna says the police did not act. "How can I protect my grandson when the police won't even do it?" she asked.

Not all Black women have had or will have encounters with aggressive police officers. However, statistically, in the US (Jacob, 2021) and England (Hasan, 2021), it is more likely to happen, or to have happened to another Black woman who is known to be the first woman. Additionally, witnessing racial violence or abuse inflicted upon a Black woman or girl by a law enforcement officer, whether live, in the media or on a social media platform, is highly probable. Multiple participants described being triggered emotionally when images of police violence toward Black women appeared in newsfeeds, posting, or comments. They also expressed frustration, feeling there is "no one out here protecting us!" A few participants in the United States disclosed they had legally purchased a firearm and were taking lessons in an effort to protect themselves and not rely on the police.

BC2 - Casey, age 29, lives in the West Midlands of England. Across 90 minutes, Casey mentioned the word "police" 57 times. According to Casey, her brother has had numerous encounters with police, sometimes including verbal and physical threats and violence, battery, illegal detainment, false reports, false arrests and failure to initiate or continue a criminal investigation. Casey says her mother, who is wheelchair-bound, has also been physically assaulted by the police. She feels the family's stress and anxiety are unsurmountable within the family, particularly trying to manage the traumatic racial injury inflicted upon her brother and after witnessing countless incidents of brutality, depression, suicidality, PTSD, terror and trauma that plague her and her family.

I think I do need to [blog about police brutality] because it will help people because a lot of people do (...) you know how, like, all of the crime that's in America, like with the police, like police brutality thing. People believe that doesn't happen in the UK. Yeah. And what they'll argue is, we don't have guns here, if they only knew. And a lot of people also have that attitude that it's just criminals. While I've had, you know, negative experiences with the police myself, I've had to see, it's actually in England, and it's actually (...) people won't believe it. [Casey]

It is quite possible that Casey suffers from racial trauma as indicated by the mental and physical health concerns that manifested after several encounters with law enforcement.

Casey claims to have had good health prior to the years she and her family were entangled with legal actions and litigation.

Carlette: Are they [the health issues] resultant of your experiences with racism? Did they cause health disparities with you? Or exacerbate them?

The first thing was I think I started getting like pains and stuff like neuropathic pains. And now I have the longest list of health conditions I've been diagnosed with a mental health condition and autoimmune conditions, which result in a lot of body pain, a lot of issues with my tummy, and like I've been diagnosed with all these conditions that I just never had [before], and I was never even ill. And there was no indication. [Casey]

The previous themes have explored how racism has affected Black women in The United States and Black women in England. For the majority of survey respondents and interviewees, encounters with racism have been emotionally provocative and have resulted in feelings of depression, anxiety, anger and futility. Despite the emotional burden of racism and the residual effects some of the women still carry, there is a palpable underlying strength among the participants. While they conveyed, in some cases, painful narratives, they did so, formidably. It was apparent from the interviews that some women were either affected differently or they relayed their experiences differently.

One of the last questions I asked each study participant was to identify their “tribe or posse.” I asked them to identify people in their lives whom they turn to for support, guidance and empowerment during emotionally challenging aftermaths of racist experiences. The participant’s moods, spirits and attitudes seemed to immediately uplift when they concentrated on their own forms of empowerment. The final questions were meant to end the interviews positively and upliftingly.

### **Coping Mechanisms and Black Women’s Resilience**

One of the most prolific revelations during the analysis occurred when participants described how that which has debilitated and humiliated them has also empowered them. Participants mentioned their hair being a target of microaggression and overt racism. They described feelings of anger, resentment, dehumanisation and helplessness when they are asked deeply personal questions about their hair or when White people touch their hair, especially without permission. Questions such as “do you wash it?”, “what do you do with it?” and “it’s just so BIG, it’s weird!” enraged participants. However, in many situations, they felt helpless, powerless or even fearful to respond naturally. The anger and humiliation of having to endure such personal assaults and emotional injury were exacerbated by fear of reprisal for speaking out. However, despite the negative reactions toward the Black-hair microaggressions, the majority of participants who identified “hair” as a source of contention, ironically, claimed their hair has also been a source of empowerment, pride, and self-valuation.

Versatility and ethnic pride were the most recorded reasons for feelings of empowerment, followed by (referencing white women) “we have something ‘they’ will never, ever have

despite all ‘their’ misappropriation of our culture.” During a focus group interview with two participants, Daisha and Vesta, the word ‘hair’ was mentioned 71 times between the two women. It was used 54 times to describe negative experiences, but surprisingly, ‘hair’ was later mentioned 17 times when they described empowerment. Black people, in general, are often penalised for the way our hair grows naturally out of our heads. Discussing Black hair caused the most self-reported emotional and psychological pain for Black women in this study, even more so than skin colour or name-calling. There will be further discussion about Black hair in a later chapter. The following narratives demonstrate how participants coped with the emotional rejection and pain related to their natural hair but also how they often felt empowered by their Black hair and other methods in which they practice self-care, self-love, Black-identity, and “sista-hood”.

### ***Coping Mechanisms***

*“White women can find support from people of any race but Black women will only ever find support from other Black women” [Vesta, ABW]*

As discussed previously in other sections, participants responded to racism and racist incidents in a variety of ways; from physical and verbal responses to suffering in silent humiliation. This paper does not focus on the psychology behind their responses outside the framework of racial trauma and PTSD-like symptoms that accompany racial trauma. However, how participants reacted and responded to racism and racially motivated microaggressions may provide some insight into how their future responses manifested, developed throughout adulthood and were embodied through their lifespan to-date, especially in cases where the first experience occurred during childhood. A recurring topic among the participants occurred when they reflected upon how experiences of racism

forced them to read the white room, navigate white spaces, navigate and control their emotions, control their reactions and responses to racism, ignore racists and bigots, and suffer in silence and isolation. The most frequently expressed coping mechanism identified by the respondents is spending quality time with other Black women, where they feel safe discussing issues of race, racism and white supremacy. This section explores coping mechanisms, followed by resilience and empowerment.

BC2 - Raquel, age 36, resides in The Midlands of England and had her first experience in primary school, around age 6-7, about her hair. She describes the incident and then explains that it was so painful that she took measures to prevent another such occurrence:

I think I must have been about six or seven. The girls with the straight hair, whether it their Asian girls or white girls, at play time would go into the toilets, and use water and do their hair, do each other's hair, you know, the way that they can do use water to slick their hair, and I went into the toilets wanting to play whatever game it was, they were playing in there. And I remember this because I usually would have my hair braided. So it came wild. But this time, I think I just must have had two puffs or something I don't know. And I see the girl sort of putting water through their hair. So I decided I'm going to put water through my hair and you know, our hair and water just does not mix at all. So very quickly, I realized I shouldn't have done this. Because my hair doesn't look slick. Like theirs. My hair's, now a problem. And I remember um one of the white girls turned to me, I remember her saying, 'Oh, your hair's really ugly. But it looks worse now it's wet. And they all giggled at me. [Raquel]

Carlette: That must have really hurt. How did you cope with it afterwards?

No one had ever told me that I was ugly before or anything about me was horrible. You know. So I think to be told in a way that they were laughing at me because they were laughing at my hair to be told that I was ugly and that it was funny to them, really, really quite hurt. I remember it really deeply because I've never heard that before. And yeah, I don't think I don't think I mentioned it to my mom or anything. I don't think I mentioned it to anybody, I just sort of carried on. But I do remember that I would always ask my mom to braid my hair after that. I always had canerows (cornrows). I never had my puffs out for a long time after that. Because I just (...) I don't know, I just didn't (...) didn't want to go through that again. [Raquel]



AB1 - Nancy, age 21, is a first-generation immigrant from a country in Africa. A university student in middle England, Nancy is struggling with her experiences of racism. She has been a victim of horrific racial abuse and has experienced her hair being pulled at the root, verbal and physical assault, and harassment. Nancy disclosed that, at times, she felt suicidal after her experiences and that she had little or no support from her parents. Migrating from Africa, a continent whose majority of its inhabitants are brown and dark brown-skinned, Nancy had not experienced racism before arriving in the UK, and neither had her parents.

She says they were completely unaware of racism and racist behaviour and therefore had no ideas on how to help her – nor did they seem to try, in her opinion. This detachment was a major cause of feelings of isolation, and depression and anxiety for Nancy.

Following is a rather lengthy excerpt from our interview, her narrative is so critically important. To understand Nancy's journey and experience, I decided to utilise space in the thesis to perhaps provide a clear example of the torment that victims of racism can suffer. With what can feel like the weight of the world on her shoulders, somehow, Nancy is still persevering and pursuing her education despite and in addition to suffering from racial trauma. While white students bear the burden of routine university experience, Black students bear that burden but with the added burden of surviving in an anti-Black and racist environment. The lack of Black representation in university administration has a trickle-down effect through colleges, departments, faculty and staff. This failure in academia also places undue added stress, duress, responsibilities, and emotional labour upon other Black students, lecturers and staff on whom white academia call at will for "help". Nancy's narrative reveals the insidious underpinnings of what victims of racial trauma might endure

because there is no real escape, no real solution, and in some cases, no support or help provided from all-white departments with all-white staff to help navigate through the physical, psychological and emotional damage inflicted on the Black person's psyche.

The whole first year of my university broke me, and it left me in a place where I'm literally just tired. I don't know if I have the energy to continue. And that's something that I can't really say out loud because people expect me to continue. People expect me to be the voice for everyone and to always be talking about this stuff, but it's actually, it's triggering for me, because all of these times when I do talk about racism, it is triggering, because it's not something that's ever left me. I become very withdrawn when I have experienced racism. And I have to like, kind of put in (...) and then I can't get emotional. And a lot of the times, that just means I have to distract myself, like my coping mechanism is distraction. It's throwing myself into the world of media, like watching TV shows, dissecting what's going on, you know, character development, all that type of stuff, escapism, or reading fantasy books, that's been my escape. Since I've been a young child, it's going so far away from my reality where I feel I'm finally safe. And I can control that. A lot of my issues come from the fact that I have no control. [Nancy]

The women in this study expressed various coping mechanisms while often simultaneously describing how they recovered, retaliated or moved beyond the experience of racism fairly quickly because of the help support of their posse or from their own natural resilience.

As previously mentioned, Daisha described how debilitating microaggressions can be regarding her hair. However, near the end of the interview, she stated:

I mean, I guess it's almost the very thing that I've experienced racism against the most is my hair, but like when I go out and when it's cooperating with [me, and] whatever I decided to do with it that day (...) It makes me feel proud to be not normal. Like, I actually like my hair. I like my Afro. So, yeah. [Daisha]

Vesta also described how her hair empowers her and causes her to reflect upon the struggles of other Black women:

When I finally learned how to take care of my hair I become really, like proud of it. And I think a lot of it is I'm proud of the women in my family who dealt with their

racial experiences. And by the women, I just really mean my mom. But you know, I think back to her, and I'm like, she can get through it. You know, I'll be fine. [...]And I just think about all the amazing things that Black people have done. And I'm like we're pretty awesome. We are pretty, pretty awesome. [Vesta]

Lana described gardening as a means of coping.

To get out my frustration, well, the first thing is actually gardening. Because see, you can take the hand spade thing, and you can stab the earth and you can pretend that you're stabbing a person and not go to jail. It's something! It is amazing therapy, you can get a rock, I'm serious. I've done this. You can get a rock and paint a little face on it, and then just, oh, and just scream out and just be being out in nature, and releasing all of that frustration and anger and hurt into nature. Nature is amazingly receiving of, of negative energy that we carry around, and then it envelops us with all of this beauty. And it just it just, I have found that being able to garden and grow flowers and plants and in that process of angrily turning the earth and, you know, getting dirty and pouring all of my frustration into you know, tilling rough ground, it ends up sprouting some really beautiful and sometimes delicious things when I can grow some, some vegetables. So that's one way. And another way it really is through my activism. [Lana]

Much like our female ancestors, as described in Chapter One, Black women's resilience still prevails, even during some of the most challenging experiences. Seemingly, there is a bond among Black women, either spoken or unspoken, a shared lived experience of racism, outside any other shared experience, intersectional or not. The following section, and the last portion of the research findings, explore the kinship, fellowship and bonding with other Black women, whom they describe as their resilience, posses, and enforcers of positive mental health.

### ***Resilience and Empowerment***

Most participants claim other Black women as their main sources of support. Their networks and "posses" are other Black women, including their mothers, who, for most of them, are their main source of support during both childhood and adulthood throughout their

mother's lifespan. Other prevalent all-Black posse members included teachers, relatives, friends, supervisors/bosses and co-workers. Kinship with other Black women outweighed activities that are often promoted as mental and physical health boosters, such as running, exercising, meditation or yoga, hobbies and other creative activities, and even professional counselling.

The final two questions of the interviews asked participants to describe their "tribe or posse" and what empowers them. Although typically defined as a group of men, the terms tribe and posse were meant to encourage the women to describe their safe place with people they trust and with whom they can share the pain of racism and racist experiences. Participants were not prompted to describe the race or ethnicity of their posse. This section is divided into the three groups of women who were targeted for the researcher to provide insight into the similarities across three demographics of Black women residing in two countries. Every study participant responded that their posse included Black women, even if not exclusively.

Every posse included women, even if non-Black, with whom they felt safest. Interestingly, most posses did not include family members, or at least, they were not mentioned. One posse included at least one man, non-family. A few posses included family members who were men, usually a father or brother. Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned their spouse/domestic partner/partner as a member of their posse. Perhaps the omissions could be interpreted as what they thought might be an obvious assumption on my part. A future area of exploration to expand this body of work might include racial trauma within Black women's intimate relationships.

The following narratives emphasize the similarities across each sub-group in how participants seek to disengage from the stress and pressure of racism. Generally, and irrespective of demographical similarities or differences, the common thread among the participants is that they gather strength, empowerment and resilience through kinships and bonding with other Black women. To emphasize cross-sectional similarities among the subgroups, narratives from each are listed below.

### ***British Women (Caribbean)***

BC2 – Marlene, age 28

I have many kinds of group chats of Black women, who are my go to. I often want to talk about it with Black women, because I think Black men have a different form of microaggression and that type of thing that they don't always understand is what I think. So they're strong Black women who I think have shown that they are good listeners are empathetic, understand it whilst not trying to fix it. [Marlene]

BC2 – Diane, age 32

I get with a group of, you know, Black women, we share it, and they help me process and work through it. And that, for me, really works. Because when I see the strength in other Black women as well, and you know, they've experienced similarities to me, I could easily just kind of contain it and make process it myself. My tribe, or my posse, my girls, I love, who I surround myself with at the moment, which is positive. [Diane]

### ***British Women - African***

BA2 – Josephina, age 35

I do have a tribe of all Black women. A tribe, I think, is not only a support system, but it's also that reflection, that mirror of yourself trying to see whether you shape up to be the person that you think you are. So my tribe gives me that opportunity. I actually think I draw my power from being a Black woman; that's literally where I draw my power from, because I really become so much more. I'm certain and confident in myself as a Black woman. [Josephina]

BA2 – Antoinette, age 52

‘So I have some very thoughtful and reflective women friends that I can talk to. she's a safe space [...] and she gives the sense of calm and understanding.’ [Antoinette]

### ***Black American Women***

AB1 – Moira, age 36

The advent of social media has been really good. Because you know, being that I like to be alone, it's easier to interact with Black women on social media. So I have women, older women, women from across the pond, women from different regions in the United States. I talk to doctors and lawyers and even witch doctors and Voodoo priestesses and things of that nature. Those are those are the kind of women that are part of my tribe, other authors, actresses, things of that nature. I have a very diverse group of Black women. [Moira]

AB1 – Lana, age 53

I have a special Black female friend and we're connected in several ways. You know, and we've experienced the same kind of racial trauma from an experience we went through together. But then we also have the same experience from growing up in the same city. [Lana]

### **Summary**

Five major themes emerged from the data that provide some insight into how the participants of this study experience racism and manage racial trauma. Similarities in experiences among participants in each country were overt and plentiful. However, differences in their experiences were less obvious and more nuanced, particularly among the British women. The commonality in the similarities and differences of their experiences occurs irrespective of their socio-economic position or demographic intersection (per country). Interestingly, women across the sample group experienced racism and carried racial trauma similarly. The prominent difference in their experiences lies within their

geographical location, not their nationality; meaning, Black American women continued to have similar experiences of racism while living in England as they did while living in the US. They did not describe any differences in the actual experience, only where it occurred. Unfortunately, there is no comparison to a Black British woman living in the US, but this could be a topic to explore in future research.

Overall, the majority of study participants recalled their first experience of racism occurring between the ages of four and seven and most realised they were victims of a racist act at the time. Upon reflection later in life, others were able to describe the incident occurring at that same age, which is a possible exposition of why women described school as one of the prominent locations of frequent racial abuse. The majority of participants, because of the median age of 40 and their level of education, have spent time in school and the workforce in almost equal measures. This may explain why work was another prominent location for the most frequent experiences of racism and racist activity. Examining the data, it seems exceedingly difficult to describe a location where Black women have not had a racist experience, been racially abused or harassed, racially profiled or been victims of any of the three forms of microaggression.

Responses to racism, racist activity and racial abuse ranged from being confused by the assault or insult, ignoring it, reflecting upon it, or responding to it with physical violence. Interestingly, women acted outside their own fear, or the result of it, for personal safety and unabashedly inflicted physical harm upon male perpetrators. Several participants described punching the racist in the face after being called a racial epithet or other racially motivated slurs. In other narratives, some participants described being shocked, hurt, or angry after a

racially charged experience. No participants described feeling “nothing” at all or being able to block all of their feelings or emotions resulting from the experience, even when they chose to ignore it.

Experiences of racism across the sample occurred on micro and macro levels. Participants described experiences of racism, racist incidents and activity, and racial abuse among interpersonal relationships with perfunctory friendships with white people, interactions with white co-workers and colleagues and encounters with the police, politicians or others in power and/or authority. Microaggressions on the micro level of interpersonal relationships seemingly inflicted the most racial trauma because the racist incident was usually unexpected and occurred, sometimes, among people the participant trusted, even minimally, therefore making the racial abuse more insidious and harmful. This topic will be explored in-depth in the Discussion section of the thesis.

As children, most participants found comfort and support from their mother, father, parents, grandparents, aunts, or siblings after experiencing racism. However, there were several women who did not disclose their experiences to their parents. Non-disclosure was not made because of fear but because of confusion, shame or humiliation. A refugee participant, originally from an African country, described not telling her parents because they had no idea how to handle the situation. She expressed frustration at navigating through her trauma alone and without support. Refugee participants shared similar incidents of racist activity, comparable to non-refugee participants. However, there were significant differences in the overall **experience**, including understanding and processing, long-term



effects, level of support and the severity and lingering of PTSD-like symptoms caused by racial trauma.

Most participants forged kinships with other Black women, non-spousal familial relationships, and close friendships to navigate and, literally, survive the PTSD-like symptoms of racial trauma and racial battle fatigue. Where support networks included men, those men were usually a father, sibling, or a close, non-sexual male friend the women trusted. Coping mechanisms varied throughout the sample but included self-care regimens and routines such as cooking, baking, reading, or outdoor activities. Interestingly, none of the participants described crying as a coping mechanism. In a future study, I would explore why, out of 30 interviewees and 41 coded emotions, crying was not mentioned as a reaction to racism. Although one participant cried during the interview and three women had to pause to collect their emotions before moving forward, none of the women actually talked about crying, not as an emotive response or a form of self-care. Research studies show that the inability to cry, that is, repressed emotion, is a symptom of major depression with melancholia (Holguín-Lew and Bell, 2013, Hammen and Padesky, 1977). The next chapter reviews the findings and applies literature to clarify and expand current knowledge.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This chapter examines the findings from the data presented earlier in Chapter 4 and relates these findings to the knowledge presented in Chapters 2 and 3. In particular, these findings will be considered in relation to theoretical frameworks, including Microaggression Theory, Historical Trauma Theory and Everyday Racism Theory, to understand and interpret the similarities and differences in participants' experiences of racism and the impact of racial trauma. The discussion of implications of the findings will explore the relevance of the study towards better understanding the impact of racism upon Black women's mental health and wellbeing in the United States and England by examining how historical and ongoing racism has affected and continues to affect Black women today. Findings of this study suggest:

- Black women in the United States and in England experience racism, irrespective of country of their country of residence.
- There are more similarities than differences in racist experiences.
- Participants across both countries shared similar emotive responses, irrespective of the intensity of the response, from passive to aggressive.
- Participants have historical trauma effects from intergenerational and present-day trauma from racist experiences.
- Despite experiencing racial abuse, Black women demonstrate resilience.
- Black women seek other Black women to formulate bonds and to commensurate about racist experiences.
- There was a strong appreciation for this study and the focus on racist experiences of Black women.

The final section includes call-to-action plans and recommendations for further scientific studies.

By examining the findings of this study, this chapter seeks to answer the original research question:

*What are the similarities and differences in the ways in which Black American women and Black British women experience racism and process the effects of racial trauma?*

To fully answer the primary research question, the following sub-questions were used to provide a clear, robust, and comprehensive historical account of participants' experiences of racism, as well as longer-term PTSD-like signs of racial trauma as they relate to those experiences:

- *Are the physical and psychological effects of long-term exposure to racism the same for Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent?*
- *Does historical trauma play a role in how these Black women experience and react to racism?*
- *How do Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent experience microaggression, institutional and systemic racism?*
- *Do Black American women and Black British women of African descent and Caribbean descent cope with race-based trauma similarly or differently?*

Throughout this thesis, history has been used fluidly to provide context to how trauma from the past still afflicts Black people today (Daniel, 2000). It is necessary for me to move backwards to explain the present and speculate about the future. This fluid motion from past to present is the underpinning of Historical Trauma Theory and can be used as an accurate depiction of historical traumatic experiences in present-day Black lives also.

As previously noted in Chapter 4, significant similarities emerged regarding how Black American women and Black British women experience racism. Analysis of interview data suggests, within five major themes, that Black women in the US and England share more

similarities than differences in their experiences of racism and that their experiences have also affected them similarly, irrespective of geographical location. The data indicate that women residing in both countries experienced individual, systemic and institutional acts of racism and microaggression similarly. Notably, although Black women from both countries experienced similar acts of racism and were similarly affected by these experiences, their *reactions* to similar incidents were not always the same.

The few primary differences in how Black American women and Black British women experience racism appear to be influenced by two experiential elements:

- Whether she was born in the country of residency (as opposed to naturalized) or a citizen (of either the USA or Britain)
- Whether she was born in a Black-majority society and then migrated to a white-majority society.

As a reminder from Chapter 4, women born into Black-majority societies who later migrated to England were found to have similar experiences of racism as their counterparts; however, their experiences occurred later in life than those of women born into white-majority societies. Notably, immigrant women appeared to be the least emotional during interviews, compared to the women who were born in their country of residence, even though their experiences with racism were comparable. Their diminished responses could indicate their coping mechanisms and the prolonged PTSD-related psychological effects resulting from previous historical traumatic events related to war or civil unrest in their home countries; however, it is not clear.

Given the emotional impact of these variables on how Black women interviewees react to similar experiences of racism, the results are suggestive of cultural, nationalistic, and patriotic differences among the women but not within the racist experiences themselves.

Where participants had similar experiences of racism, analysis suggests that their interpretation of the incident and their reaction to it is affected by whether they were natural-born residents or immigrants. This study proposes that the relative availability of resources dedicated to fighting racism and racial discrimination within a country are driven in part by:

- population size
- a country's acknowledged history with racism
- Black women's earliest exposure to racism, racist trope and ideology

These suggestions might also help explain why cultural and societal differences exist surrounding how similar experiences of racism are confronted by Black women from different countries. Macionis (2012) referred to racism as a "core value" of the United States. In this respect, two important factors, the "southern experience" and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, may explain how participants from the USA and England react to racism differently.

The Civil Rights Movement was a revolutionary effort to secure equal rights for Black people in the US. Resultant of both historic and current political activism and legislative reform, anti-racism events and activities are a constant presence in US society and culture. There has not been a comparable civil rights movement in England as it relates to the same length of history of continuous struggle and resistance over generations. Additionally, historically, Black people were not enslaved as human chattel in England despite heavy British

involvement in the slave trade. While enslaved Africans were not treated as human chattel on British soil, they most certainly were treated as such throughout the British colonies. However, there has been notable resistance to racism and protests in the pursuit of racial justice. For example, in 1970, a massive protest<sup>10</sup> movement ensued after British police targeted The Mangrove Caribbean restaurant in the Notting Hill section of West London. Black film writer and director Steve McQueen's documentary, "Mangrove", depicts how nine people were arrested. Later, five were completely acquitted in a landmark case that resulted in a major milestone victory in the fight for civil rights within Great Britain (Mangrove, 2020; *Notting Hill Carnival Ends in Riots*, no date).

The massive anti-racism infrastructure in the United States consists of societies, committees, organisations, legal aid, and others dedicated to fighting inequality, discrimination and racism. Another consideration is that the United States population size is significantly larger than that of England. Currently, according to the US Census Bureau (2020), Black people comprise 13.4% of the US population, of which, Black women account for 12.9% of the overall population of women in the US (Catalyst, 2021; Census, 2020). The huge number of resources, many of them free, including legal services, dedicated to fighting racism and racial discrimination, might explain why cultural and societal differences in how racism is confronted in the birth country may play a part in how the women in each country respond to racist activity, despite sharing the same experience. Women born into Black-majority

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<sup>10</sup> Historically, the uprising in Notting Hill is coined, The Mangrove riots. However, I have called them protests here. The term 'riots' is often used in racist language with the intent to demonise civil rights protests in order to instil fear and hate. Attention is detracted from the **cause** of the protest and purposely redirected toward to **resistance to the action** that led to the protest. As mentioned in the previous chapter, resistance and rebellion, is a historical reaction by Black people, in response to historical racism.

societies and later migrated to the UK have similar experiences of racism as their counterparts. However, overall, their experiences occurred later than women born into white-majority societies but were similar to the other women. As mentioned previously, a comparative level of services in the UK, as they relate specifically to Black women, could not be found. To recap from the previous page of this chapter, services are usually provided by a country's acknowledged history of racism. It can be argued that the structuring and classification of the UK census is problematic, thereby making data gathering amongst specific races and ethnicities almost futile.

Finally, recapping from Chapter 4, British women frequently expressed frustration when trying to determine whether they had been a victim of racism or whether they had misinterpreted the event. They explained that racism in England could be so subtle, so insidious in nature, that it could leave them feeling sure but unsure about what had occurred. Additionally, throughout their narratives, British participants drew similar conclusions about white British as rejecting the existence of racism in England. They added, however, that simultaneously, white British are often perceived as content in accusing other countries, especially and foremost, the United States, of being racist and that they are not. Participants described a disconnect among white British who fail to understand that racism is embedded within the principles of colonialism. Every day (Essed, 1990), white Americans and white British practice racist concepts and beliefs that are firmly embedded in both cultures, though they themselves may be ignorant of how such practices, myths, opinions, and beliefs are connected to racism and white supremacy concepts (Feagin, 2013; Barber *et al.*, 2020; Evans *et al.*, 2020). Following are further in-depth explanations of the findings.

## Interpreting the Findings

This chapter applies three main theories: Historical Trauma Theory, Microaggression Theory, and Everyday Racism Theory, as frameworks for interpreting the findings derived from analysing study participant interviews. To recap the literature:

- Historical Trauma Theory (HTT) contextualises how trauma is transferred intergenerationally.
- Microaggression Theory offers a comprehensive framework of the various forms of racism and helps illuminate specific incidents and experiences of the participants.
- Everyday Racism Theory connects the structural forces of racism with routine situations in everyday life.

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), while not one of the main core theories used to conceptualise the results of this study, is mentioned as it complements HTT.

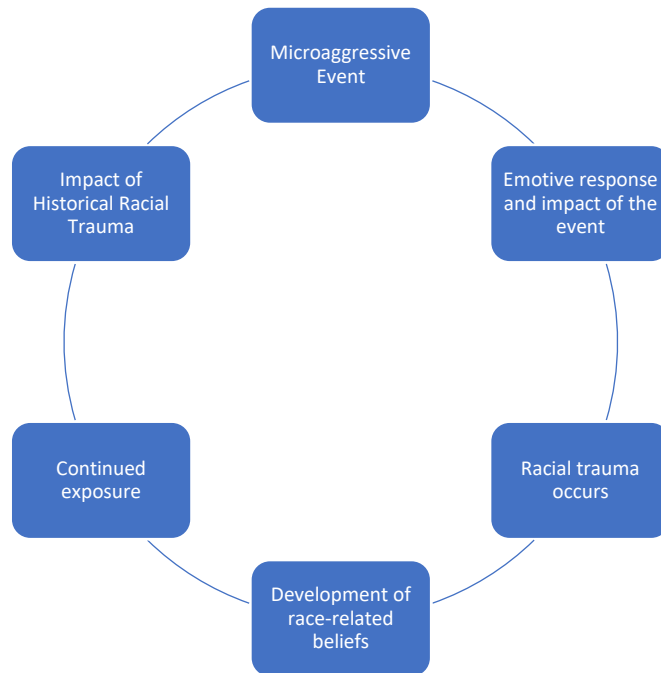
## Historical Racial Trauma from Childhood to Adulthood

Participants in both countries recalled racist events occurring from an early age. They were able to comprehend that the incident was directly related to their Blackness. Participants also accurately described their emotional and physical responses to the event. To recap from a previous chapter, Chester Pierce (1970) contextualised the less obvious and more subtle forms of racism and coined the term *microaggressions* in the 1970s (Pierce, 1970, 1974; Spencer, 2017). Sue *et al.* (.2007) expanded the definition beyond the original parameters to include other marginalised and disenfranchised races and ethnic groups (Spencer, 2017) and conceptualised Microaggression Theory. The theory suggests that even from a young age, children are socialised to view members of the dominant group, those whom are historically



privileged, as normalised (Sue *et al.*, 2019) because interactions with those within that group are often reflective of their power and systemic oppression (Sue *et al.*, 2019). Participant narratives seem to support the theory when they discuss how the racist activity from their childhood affected their self-esteem and made them question why they were being treated differently. Several participants described feeling “less than” white children while also developing deep feelings of mistrust of white people. Many reflected that racial abuse from childhood is a likely reason for their mistrust of white people today.

Microaggressive experiences (Sue *et al.*, 2019), especially at a young age, can become internalised, resulting in poor mental and physical health outcomes related to stress, fatigue, nervousness, anxiety, and depression. Previous studies have demonstrated that when students are confronted with microaggressive experiences, PTSD-like symptoms, and school avoidance (Solorzano *et al.*, 2000; McCabe, 2009) are outcomes that can negatively impact their mental health and their academic performance (Powell, 2021). Following is a chart demonstrating a conceptualisation of internalised racism among African Americans. The omission of directional arrows is intentional because of the fluidity and flexibility of the outcomes following a microaggressive event:



**Figure 37: The differences between power and authority**

Women across both countries described how childhood experiences of racial abuse sometimes resulted in being distracted in class, developing mistrust of teachers and administrators, loss of concentration, disinterest in school subjects and lack of wanting to interact with white children because of microaggressive incidents (Ricks, 2014). There was frequent discussion describing teachers as the perpetrators of racism, leaving the participant feeling isolated and alone, with no one within the school with whom to share the racist incident, or worse, no one who would take action. Black girls and women often experience marginalisation, yet research has largely failed to focus on this intersectional group (Boston and Baxley, 2007; Pinder, 2008; Mirza, 2009; Ricks, 2014). According to Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010), the focus of research is almost exclusively on Black males and white females and is rarely centred upon the unique experiences and needs of Black women (Ricks, 2014). Participants also described how flashbacks and reflections upon past experiences of racial

abuse that occurred during childhood still trigger emotive responses such as anger, discontent, depression, hopelessness and sadness.

In some instances during data collection, I had to stop the interview to allow the participant(s) an opportunity to pause or to take a brief break to regain their thoughts or composure. These residual emotive responses from historical events may indicate the underpinnings of historical racial trauma (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012). Even though slavery is the major historical event upon which descendants of enslaved Black people are still profoundly affected (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012), the racist experiences, events and incidents occurring within the current lifespan and the residual effects must also be considered. As mentioned in Chapter 1, historically negative racial and sexually-charged imagery has had a long and profound effect on Black women that still exists today. Marlene (BC2, age 28), Florence (BAM1, age 33), and Britney (BA2, age 44) described how having fuller lips, curvy and voluptuous shapes has been the subject of ridicule, mockery, dehumanisation, and envy. These encounters, they say, have resulted, in some instances, in their embarrassment and humiliation, the same emotional responses that have plagued Black women intergenerationally (Degruy, 2015).

Women in the United States and England, similarly, described their first childhood experiences of racism as being “rude awakenings”, “theft of their innocence” and “acts of cruelty,” because, in some cases, those incidents were their first encounters with racists and microaggressive events. Some participants expressed having residual traumatic effects of the microaggressive incidents and, upon reflection, found it difficult to accept that, in some aspects, their childhood “had been robbed.” Some participants described feeling scarred by

their encounters with racists because, in some instances, the racist activity was perpetuated by adults, not other peer-aged children. Many participants felt that adults, especially those in power and/or authority should have provided safety, support and assurance to young Black children. But those adults, including teachers and administrators, instead frequently exacerbated participants' feelings of anxiety, anger, helplessness and hopelessness—all of which are indicators of racial trauma.

Recent literature suggests that racism is a social determinant of health that adversely impacts early childhood socioemotional, and behavioural development (Berry *et al.*, 2021). Anxiety, sleeplessness and depression affected many of the participants, resulting from a racist encounter that had occurred at school or in the office with a colleague. Some women described not being able to sleep the night before returning to work or school to inevitably face the perpetrator of the microaggressive event.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, symptoms of racial trauma present similarly to symptoms of PTSD (Braveheart and Sotero, 2011). Trauma is defined as an injury caused by an outside, usually violent force, event or experience (Degruy, 2005). Context of trauma, as it relates to racism, is significant when considering how participants' experiences of racism often triggered PTSD symptoms such as flashbacks to the incident, depression, anxiety, self-doubt, wavering self-esteem, and mistrust of white people. Recent studies show that racial microaggressions can negatively predict lower self-esteem and that microaggressions occurring in educational and workplace environments can be particularly harmful to self-esteem (Nadal *et al.*, 2018). Participants recounted a range of experiences suggesting their personal introduction to acts of racism at such a young age has remained in their psyche,

often causing them to develop negative perceptions and mistrust of non-Black people. Longitudinal studies seemingly support these narratives by providing empirical evidence that very young children are highly influenced (Berry *et al.*, 2021) by experiences of racism. Additionally, these experiences can be severely damaging to young children's socioemotional development (Berry *et al.*, 2021), which can have long-term and lasting effects throughout their lifetime. Participant narrative accounts and recollections seem to support these studies' findings when some women described difficulties forming and developing interpersonal relationships and an unwillingness to date outside their race.

Participants described having feelings of inadequacy or inferiority following a racial microaggression, especially when their Black hair was assaulted either physically or verbally. According to some participants, such assaults sometimes led to PTSD-like symptoms (Suliman *et al.*, 2009), such as depression, anxiety, and prolonged anger. For example, assaults upon participants' hair during childhood seemed to have lasting traumatic effects and flashbacks which, upon recollection, continue to evoke emotions from some women. Studies warn that childhood exposure to racism can impact adolescent and adult mental health with lasting sequelae (Berry *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, the harmful sequelae of racial microaggressions can significantly impede or impact psychological and physiological development (Spanierman *et al.*, 2021). The psychological impact of racial microaggressive experiences from childhood was a recurring theme throughout participants' narratives and historical trauma from the experiences still lingers. Although it is important to note that I am not a clinician nor offering a diagnosis, the severity of trauma appeared to vary among

participants from prevalent to minimum, and it remains clear that the experiences were impactful and relevant life events.

### **Black Women Experience Racism, Irrespective of Country of Residence or Location of the Occurrence**

Survey respondents and study participants in both countries listed several localities where they have experienced microaggressive activity while engaging in normal, routine, daily activities and events; including those that occurred at school and at work. The study's findings indicated that the location of a racist incident had very little relevance to the commonality among the participants' demographical differences such as age, education, economic or marital status, frequency of incidents, or similarities in the participants' shared experiences and racist incidents. These findings seem to support similar research conducted by a Black Dutch woman, Dr. Philomena Essed, of the Netherlands who wrote the book, *Understanding Racism*, in 1991, as an edited version of her PhD dissertation. Figure 10 on page 115 in Chapter 5 of this thesis contextualises Everyday Racism Theory as exemplified when respondents listed locations where they had experienced racism. According to their responses, racism occurs during normal, routine, and common activities that most people engage in, irrespective of any demographical specifications to race, sex, or ethnicity. This finding supports Essed's (1991) assertion that Black people can and do share similar experiences of racism because racism occurs daily, meaning during normal, routine, daily activities and at frequently attended locations such as school, work, shops, grocery stores and retail outlets – "everywhere" (Essed, 1991).

A reasonable conclusion might be drawn that Black women inescapably experience racism so frequently and while doing normal, everyday activities, it is so ubiquitous that white people do not, and in some cases cannot, objectively view themselves as racist. This, in turn, leads to their committing racist acts and demonstrating microaggressive behaviour consciously or subconsciously (Essed, 1991), routinely and inevitably. This finding explicates why survey respondents listed additional locations where racist events had occurred beyond those included on the original survey list. Racial biases often operate implicitly and can influence people's judgments even if, outwardly, they reject or refute racial stereotypes and prejudices (Machery *et al.*, 2010). This is possibly why participants described feeling accepted by white colleagues and peers initially but later feeling as though those same colleagues and peers had suddenly changed their attitudes and behaviours towards the participants. In her book *White Fragility*, DiAngelo (2019, p. 14) writes, "Nice, white people who really aren't doing anything other than being nice people are racist. We are complicit with that system. There is no neutral place." Further, research studies have revealed that people can harbour implicit racial bias despite their attitudes about race and racism (Machery *et al.*, 2010), which offers insight into why Black women experience regularly and consistently while performing normal duties and tasks. Making additions to the study's location list emphasises respondents' commonality and draws a natural assumption that racism occurs everywhere and is experienced by most, if not all, Black women in white-majority countries. The following sections discuss how systemic and institutional racism affects Black women.

## Historical Systemic and Institutional Racial Abuse Against Black Women

As mentioned in previous chapters, a common thread throughout this paper is contextualising history and the lingering effects of racial trauma from slavery to the present. To explain the present, reflecting on past or recent-past historical events can offer better understanding and explanation of the emotional and psychological impacts of racism that manifest intergenerationally. The enslavement of peoples throughout the African diaspora, and colonisation of the United States and the Caribbean, involve a long and difficult history of subjugation, violence, and oppression that continue to persist today through complex systems that work in parallel, conjointly and simultaneously. Systemic racism refers to the whole societal structure that maintains a racially oppressive system that privileges and oppresses different racial groups in society (*Elizondo-Urrestarazu, 2020*). Manifestations of systemic racism are, for instance, structural and institutional racism (*Elizondo-Urrestarazu, 2020*).

Participants of this study listed educational systems, including academia, law enforcement, and criminal justice departments, as institutions that consistently and repeatedly perpetuate racial oppression, abuse and violence. The scope of these systems is too broad to contain within this thesis. There is a clear history of violence against racial and ethnic minorities, in the United States and England that contextualises the traumatic experience of police violence (*Bryant-Davis et al., 2017*). Therefore, in this discussion, focus is given to law enforcement officers (the police) and a general overview of empirical data collected on racist encounters with Black people.



Repeated exposure to racism, racial harassment, racial abuse and violence can have devastating and long-term effects, including PTSD-like symptoms such as depression, stress and anxiety. According to Carter (2021), “Research in the area of racial harassment and racial discrimination demonstrates that harm can result in debilitating stress for people who have racial encounters that are memorable, out of their control, sudden, and are deeply emotionally painful.” Encounters with police can exacerbate the symptoms among Black people, who can generally live in fear or harbour feelings of mistrust of police. Examples of police mistrust among study participants were discussed during interviews. Participants did not feel safer or more protected than their Black male counterparts. Possibly because the police do not restrict the use of excessive and aggressive force to adult Black women (Powers, 2016; Jacobs, 2017). Law enforcement personnel also arrest and brutalise young Black girls (Jacobs, 2017) equally. These events can be psychologically marked as a historical traumatic event that embodies itself and can manifest as various and multiple symptoms of racial trauma long after the event.

The 1964 U.S. Civil Rights Movement, a coordinated fight for racial equality, was highlighted through freedom marches, bus boycotts, sit-ins, violent protests, riots, and dangerous confrontations with law enforcement officers and personnel which often resulted in pain, injury, maiming, or death and martyrdom. It was a landmark social justice achievement. As mentioned previously, the Mangrove Nine were at the pinnacle of the British Black Power Movement during the 1970s (Ball *et al.*, 2009). As part of that movement, the British Black Panthers organisation was created by Black and the politically Black, South Asian community and operated between 1967 and 1972 (Ball *et al.*, 2009).

England has not experienced a social justice movement comparable to the Civil Rights Movement that has evoked relative, relevant or significant progress toward racial, gender and ethnic equality. In England, The Equality Act was not enforced until 01 October 2010, a mere 11 years ago. It is the largest piece of British legislation that directly provides “the basic framework of protection against direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation in services and public functions, work, education, associations and transport” (The Equality Act). A description of The Equality Act was found on the UK government website:

[The Equality Act] replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. It sets out the different ways in which it’s unlawful to treat someone. (The Equality Act)

The Equality Act is certainly worthy of acknowledgment; however, the delayed response from the British government over a centuries-old social and political cultural stain seems lacking amidst an ever-increasing and hostile racial climate. Since Brexit (2016) and England’s departure from the European Union (EU), instances of racist hate crimes and the rise of populist nationalism have surged sharply (Savage, 2021). Home Office reports hate crimes and race hate in England and Wales have more than doubled since the EU referendum (Brexit) (BBC, 2019; Savage, 2021). *The Guardian*, a British news publication, reports 71% of people from ethnic minorities face racial discrimination, post-Brexit, compare with 58% in January 2016, before the EU vote (Booth, 2019). While progress has been made, study participants in England indicated that they do not believe their government is doing enough to fight racism and that the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, as well as Home Secretary, Priti Patel, do more to incite racial hatred and abuse than their attempts to address and eliminate

it. Participants also expressed strong disapproval of and dissatisfaction with Cressida Dick, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, whom they feel demonstrates racist ideology and tolerates racial abuse within her departments and those under her command.

Fighting racism or having to endure daily microaggressive events is draining. It can make Black people feel overwhelmed, depressed, fatigued, and angry. Efforts to fight and resist racism and racist activity can seem daunting and futile, especially among activists, advocates, and race scholars and academics. PTSD-like symptoms caused by racial trauma can impact the Black mind, body and spirit in damaging and destructive ways. However, throughout history, Black people, Black women especially, are and have been prone to resistance, revolt with the will to persevere, overcome, and survive. Despite the historical and ongoing violent and volatile interrelationship between Black women and the police, there exists a paradigm that reflects the underpinnings of Black women's revolutionary vision, strength and resilience, while also providing historical context. To better illustrate Black women's resilience, a landscape of the challenges of brutality Black women face is presented in the next section.

Harriet Tubman is considered one of the most well-known resilient Black women and a prolific freedom fighter throughout the history of slavery.

*"..and I prayed to God to make me strong and able to fight, and that's what I've always prayed for ever since."*

Harriet Tubman to Ednah Dow Cheney, SC, 1865  
(Quotes: Harriet Tubman, 2021)

The following section explores how Black women have found ways to thrive and live their best lives while navigating through white spaces, racism and racists. In particular, it will

consider how the participants in this study found ways to do this by predominantly bonding with other Black women and practising self-care.

### **Black Women's Resilience**

Chapter 1 provided a historical account of the systematic dehumanisation of the Black woman's image. White supremacy and racism have attempted to break Black women's spirit and psyche through rape, brutality, fetishism and dehumanising, negative stereotypical imagery (Degruy, 2005). The Black woman's body has been used as a depository by white slaveowners and overseers and as a whipping post for their wives and children (Clinton, 2017). Her body has been used to bear children she did not want and to harvest crops weighing more than four times her own body weight (Clinton, 2017). She has been experimented on by sadistic medicine practitioners (Washington, 2008).

Despite white-washed historical accounts that provide false narratives and imagery that Black people were complacent as human chattel and put up little resistance, conflicting documentation illustrates how enslaved Africans' repeatedly attempted to escape, despite knowing the dangers, and threats of abuse including torture, dismemberment or death (Clinton, 2017; Hall, 2021). Slaves frequently chose to die fighting rather than remain enslaved (Hall, 2021). White-washed history often favours "one" in recounting Black people's positionality throughout history. There is "one" Black woman who refused to give up her seat (Rosa Parks), "one" Black woman who navigated the Underground Railroad etc., when in fact, there are countless other Black women activists and revolters and revolutionaries (Essed, 1991; Degruy, 2005; Clinton, 2017; Hall, 2021). Slave rebellions in the

US and the British-Caribbean reflect the resistance to slavery and what could have been the willingness to die for freedom.

Historical trauma is embedded in Black women's DNA (Carter, 2011; Kniffley, 2019), resulting from the brutality of slavery and subsequent racist events previously mentioned. However, we successfully, albeit sometimes painfully, navigate and manoeuvre through racism and predominately white spaces. The final two questions of the interviews were asked so participants could navigate away from speaking about negative experiences and focus on how, despite the pain of the effects of racism, they managed to detach, digest or refuel. Participants called upon other Black women when they needed support and named Black women exclusively as dominant members of their innermost circles. Many organised support groups, such as domestic abuse survivors, recovering alcohol and drug addiction groups, and weight reduction groups, function in a similar manner. These groups are inclusive and intersected by race, sex, gender and ethnicity. However, the "posses" that interviewees described are uniquely different because they are exclusively formed by Black women, for Black women and about Black women. This is not to imply that interviewees do not have more diverse kinships. But, in response to the general research question, *will you please describe your posse?*, participants were clear to specify, whether consciously or subconsciously, they ascribed Black women as their closest confidants.

'I can count on my sistas to back me up.' - Rashida

'Black women comfort me.' - Lana

'I know I can say anything about racism and not be tone-policed or made to feel bad.

'I also don't have to explain anything, because they already know.' – Jilly

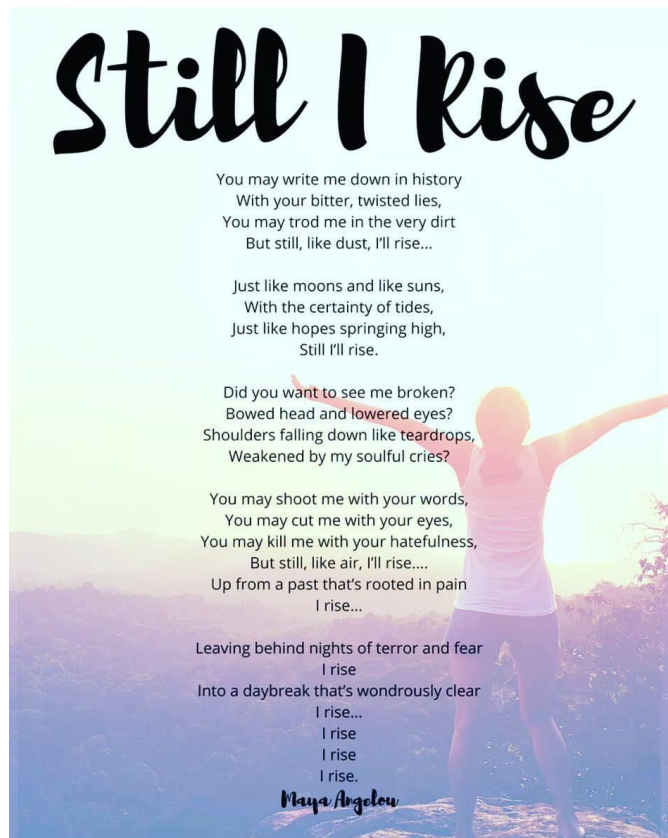
'I trust my girls implicitly and can tell them anything.' – Clairra

‘Nobody gets it like another Black woman.’ – Frances

‘I would never tell a white person my true feelings because, friend or not, they would find a way to manipulate what I’ve said and use it against me.’ – Casey

‘I love Black women. Only Black women could have survived this shit. That’s why they hate us so much. They thought they could break us, but they can’t.’ – Patty

During interviews, on some occasions, women became pensive, soft-spoken, slowed their speech, or cried. In contrast to these responses, when I asked about resilience, they appeared markedly uplifted. They strongly disavowed racist tropes such as the ‘strong Black woman’ and ‘angry Black woman’ but rather want to be acknowledged for their resilience.



**Figure 38: ‘Still I Rise’ [Instagram] 22 October 2018**

Source: Lynne (2018)

They expressed wanting to be seen as risers which, to them, means resilience, making a way out of no way. As mentioned previously, Black women and girls are often masculinised and

denied the ability to be soft, feminine, or vulnerable similar to white women. Some participants admonished the 'strong Black woman' image because they feel the term does not allow Black women to express emotions that other non-Black women are able to express freely. The words of Poet Laureate Maya Angelou's famous poem, *Still I Rise* (1978) seem to adequately express their sentiments because although Black women have a long history of racial abuse and trauma, whenever we have been knocked down by the force of racism, we have risen through the power of resilience.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises and concludes this thesis. It begins with a contextualised overview of the purpose of the study, a re-capping of the primary research questions, a brief overview of what is already known about the racial experiences of Black women in the United States and in England, and how this study contributes to research and literature. It also summarises the participants' narratives about their experiences and conceptualises them through the theoretical frameworks described in Chapters 3 and 4. The chapter concludes with limitations within the study and recommendations for further research.

This study explored the comparative experiences of racism of Black women in the United States and Black women in England of Caribbean descent and African descent. It investigated if there were any similarities or differences across those experiences. The following section summarises the main original contributions of this thesis, what has been learned, and how this study might provide better insight and understanding of Black women's experiences of racism. The aim of the study was to answer the following research question:

*What are the similarities and differences in which Black American women and Black British women experience racism?*

To answer the research question, relevant literature was reviewed, and an interpretivist, qualitative study was conducted.

I designed a study grounded in the hypothesis that the residual effects of slavery linger in the psyche of Black Americans and Black British irrespective of familial history linked directly to slavery. At the inception of this study, I recognised the importance of how history and its underpinnings were necessary paradigms to explicate how the past still impacts the present.



From the onset, I discovered a wide dearth of research and significant gaps in the literature that contextualise the impact of racist experiences and the effects of historical racial trauma on Black women in the United States, but especially on Black women in England, where data is minimal, at best. To understand the study, I began with empirical literature about historical trauma. HTT research primarily relates to the NIAN peoples and Holocaust victims. However, the underpinnings of the theory and the conceptualisation of historical trauma seemed flexible enough to withstand its application to the historical racial atrocities experienced by enslaved Black people and to test my hypothesis.

HTT literature was applied to compare the Black experience of chattel slavery and to examine how the traumatic effects from slavery might also be passed down intergenerationally. Analysis suggests that Black women in the study experienced some of the same emotional and physical outcomes as described in HTT research and literature. Where trauma could not be linked to intergenerational transmission, some participants described trauma resultant from a childhood incident(s) that had stayed in memory through to adulthood. Therefore, while the traumatic effects of participants' racial experiences might not be a traceable connection directly to their ancestors, the lingering effects of early incidences of racism have lingered. Additionally, in narratives where participants' parents and grandparents discussed racist events and activities, memories of the discussions and parental advice about racism and racial abuse were still very lucid across participants in both countries.

Overall, the recollection of historical events varied across the sample groups occurred for various reasons, including the lack of knowledge about ancestral history, the participant's

migration from a Black-majority society where racism had not been experienced before, or lack of discussions about racism within their nuclear and extended families. The significant positionality of HTT within the study as the primary framework is crucially necessary to provide an evidentiary trail that connects the effects of trauma from the past to the present. However, HTT is not inclusive enough beyond the NIAN populations to independently provide in-depth understanding of the research question and sub-questions as they relate to Black people. Expanding upon the general knowledge that historical racial trauma is transmittable intergenerationally, this study considers “historical” to be also across the lifespan.

Racism has been defined in a plethora of ways, and some researchers argue the current definition is far too ambiguous and white-washed to better assuage white guilt (DeGruy, 2015). Wachtel (1999) writes, “Looking [racism] up in the dictionary is utterly beside the point when a central issue is who gets to write the dictionary, who defines the terms of the debate” (p. 541). Therefore, for the purposes of clarity, empirical research and seminal literature provide definitions and explanations of what racism is and what it is not and how those definitions were used in the study. Pierce (1970) coined the term ‘microaggressions’; however, researchers such as Sue *et al.* (2007) helped expand and amplify the theory contextually and more inclusively. Microaggression Theory (Sue *et al.*, 2007) was used as an empirical baseline in the study for defining racism and microaggressive behaviour and to provide consistency among racial terminology, definitions, examples, concepts and context throughout the thesis. Participants described their experiences as having occurred across the

three major microaggressive forms of racism; assault, insult, and invalidation (Sue *et al.*, 2007).

Experiences only varied significantly across the sample groups when a participant described being unaware or unsure whether they had experienced a racist incident or imagined it.

Research suggests that if a racist act is not overt, whether intentional or unintentional, the recipient may be confused when a racist event occurs or whether it occurred at all because the subtleties of microaggressions often leave the recipient confused. However, this dissociation does not negate the action or its impact. I argue that the realisation and impact of the event is confirmation that the act or action was racist. Recalling the effects of racism and racial trauma as mentioned throughout this thesis, I posit that whether the recipient is consciously aware they have encountered a racist or experience a racist/microaggressive event does not mean the act was not racially motivated.

Participants described experiencing racism while attending school, at work, and other places where they attempted to perform normal, routine tasks and activities so frequently that they felt the incidents were daily occurrences. As mentioned previously, microaggressions have been described as death by a thousand cuts because of the frequency and consistency of the experiences. As a result of the frequency of receiving microaggressive activity, it is logical to conclude that Black women experience one form of racism everyday whether at school, at work, in the shops, online or other places. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the key limitations of this study is the dearth of research and bias toward the visibility of search results across internet search engines; this will be discussed later in this chapter. Therefore, it was not until the later stages of writing this thesis that I discovered Essed's

(1991) Everyday Racism Theory (ERT), which seemingly complements the aforementioned theories and substantiates and supports the participants' narratives of experiencing racism daily. Sue *et al.* (2007) describe microaggressions as "commonplace and daily", thereby supporting Essed's theory and the participants' narratives.

As the thesis shifted to more specific knowledge, it moved from considering Black women's experiences generally to comparing racial experiences between Black American women and Black British women. There is a profound difference in how demographical data about the Black population by their respective governments across both countries is gathered.

However, both systems are similarly systemically racist (Goodey, 2007; Ratcliffe, 2008; Monk, 2021). In the United States, "Black" people are generally categorised as a monolithic population, irrespective of ethnic background or heritage. Monk (2020) argues that racial census data lacks nuance and does not account for self-identified origins of race or ethnicity for Black people (Rojas, 2021).

For the purposes of this study, the cumulative grouping of self-identified Black women is regardless of ethnic background or heritage. Unlike the US, Black women in the UK are able to self-identify according to their ethnic group and/or heritage. Meaning there is no collective or all-inclusive category of Black women in the UK like there is in the United States. Black women in the UK generally can self-identify as Black African, Black Caribbean, or Black Other. The two largest categories to consider for this study were women of African descent and Caribbean descent. The 'other' self-identifications were too minuscule and diverse to be considered.

Thirty Black women were interviewed across the two countries and multiple time zones. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, where the three aforementioned theories were applied to elucidate participants' narrative accounts and to answer the research questions. This analysis revealed that racism, racist events and their impact affected participants more similarly than differently. Every woman in the study had experienced a microaggressive event, and most participants recalled the event from childhood memory and occurring at school. Other participants were slightly older in their recollection; however, even with the age difference, all participants' recalled their first experience occurring at school. As they grew older, all participants experienced racism at their place of employment, including those who were self-employed.

All participants responded to microaggressive events. Some women responded passively, emotionally or non-verbally, and others responded with physical violence. The majority of participants described physical reactions such as punching, yelling, or screaming at the perpetrator of the racial slur or verbal abuse. Few women were physically assaulted by the perpetrator, however, those who were, responded with equal or more physical violence. Several women described the event as involving non-verbal communication but that they were very aware of the racist intent behind the perpetrator's behaviour and mannerisms. In those instances, women responded passively or non-confrontationally. They removed themselves from the situation or endured the discomfort until they could. Few women reacted emotively by crying to a partner or other close confidant after the event had occurred. No participant cried in the presence of the perpetrator.

Participants described 'white people touching their hair' as one of the most offensive and inflammatory microaggressive events. One participant described suffering PTSD symptoms for a time, resulting from strangers approaching her and touching her afro-style hair without permission. She referred to the action as physical assault and described how traumatising it had been when approached because she feared they might touch her hair. She had already suffered frequent bouts of stress and anxiety pondering where strangers' hands might have been, but the symptoms have heightened during Covid-19.

Although there was no question specifically regarding white women, 27 participants identified white women as the most frequent perpetrators of:

- racial bullying and harassment
- racial hate and betrayal
- racial discrimination
- racially charged language and verbal assault
- racial deflection and gaslighting
- racial misappropriation of Black women's culture, including physical and cosmetic appearance

Participants described having a general and palpable disdain for and mistrust of white women over white men. Feelings of betrayal and exclusion from white feminism and its social progression and accomplishments echoed across participant narratives. Some described feeling manipulated by white women gaining access to Black culture, absorbing it, and then excluding Black women from any acknowledgement, recognition or financial gain. Participants related these experiences occurred at work, school, and especially online on social media platforms. Others discussed their feelings of betrayal upon befriending white

women within social circles and then being abruptly excluded, often in favour of other white women or without explanation.

Analysis revealed that participants most frequently confided in other Black women to discuss issues of race and racism. They also sought other Black women with whom to strategise racial problems at work and at school. With the exception of one participant, all others described having Black women as confidantes and not white women. The sole participant, who self-identified as Black British African/White mix, claimed to have more white women as confidantes and had not experienced any discomfort or mistrust among her white friends. Interestingly, this participant's mother is white. Investigation of whether Black women born to white mothers experience or react to racism differently than Black women born to two Black parents is outside the scope of this study but should be considered for future research.

Even when interviews appeared to be difficult for some participants, no one opted to end the interview. Their ability to pause a moment, take a breath and continue is a testament to the resilience of Black women. When asked how they overcame experiences of racism, many participants became animated and their moods lightened. Merely talking about how they indulge in self-care, their relationships with other Black women, and how they support other Black women illuminated the narratives. When asked what empowers them, several participants responded with their natural hair. Ironically, the source of such tremendous and abject pain from microaggression and racial trauma is also the source of pride, respect and empowerment for Black women.

## **Original Contributions**

This study provides several original contributions to the field of study. Firstly, there are very few comparative studies about Black women (Essed, 1990), and this study updates this with a current experience by developing knowledge about the similarities and differences in how Black American women and Black British women experience racism. Secondly, this study foregrounds and amplifies Black women's voices, thereby highlighting a significantly overlooked population's experiences.

As a third contribution, this study is grounded in two theories, Microaggression Theory and HTT, and it integrates Everyday Racism theory with a population and situation not previously studied and proved to be a fruitful compilation and application of theory. My original contributions to the field include expanding current knowledge and understanding of Black American women's and Black British women's past and present experiences of racism comparatively. It accomplishes this by examining their experiences through the HTT theoretical framework – an innovative approach that has not been previously used.

Fourthly, this thesis study uniquely positions Black women's experiences of today within the intergenerational trauma that is passed down from their ancestors in a number of novel and original elements. Historical context is important for all three sub-groups of Black women, in the following senses:

- Expand knowledge and understanding of the atrocities of slavery endured by Black women, specifically and independent of Black men.
- Showcase and highlight the omission of Black women's roles of leadership during rebellions and resistance.



- Contextualise culturally embedded historical trauma from slavery and from colonial oppression, as it relates solely to Black women.
- Explore personal/biographical histories starting in childhood through adulthood—except for women brought up in Black majority African countries.
- Contextualise that Black women’s experiences of racism occur in similar locales, irrespective of country or demographical information. Pervasiveness of locations where they experienced racism, including work and school, ranked particularly high across all three sub-groups.

A fifth original contribution is identifying the early age of Black women’s initial racist experience. Participants’ first experiences of racialised microaggressions occurred at very similar ages for Black women in white-majority societies in the United States and England. The effects of microaggressive events that occurred during childhood were held in memory for some participants and continue to impact their sense of self and interactions with white people in ways that are indicative of trauma. Interestingly, Black American women more readily identified personal experiences of racism compared to their British counterparts. Participants from the US described overt and blatant forms of racism, racist language, and microaggressive nuances. British women, however, indicated confusion about identifying racism at times, resulting in less explicit and more insidious experiences of racial microaggressions and gaslighting. Additionally, British participants more likely felt racism in England is embedded within a culture of indirectness and apparent politeness.

A surprising and unique finding (the sixth) is the particular impact of racism and microaggressive events that occurred when the acts were perpetuated by white women and support evaporated at key moments when allyship may have been expected or hoped for. Participants born to white mothers tended to bond with white women as friends, colleagues

and peers more than women born to two Black parents. Additionally, participants born to white mothers were seemingly more ambiguous about identifying racist acts and activities.

Lastly, the thesis identified an original mechanism of resilience transmission. In response to the embedment of historical racial trauma, resilience is equally embedded and passed down inter-generationally. This response to racial trauma suggests an extension of HTT to include two simultaneous dimensions of (a) victimisation and trauma and (b) resistance and sisterhood/posses.

### **Summary**

This study developed knowledge about the similarities and differences in how Black American women and Black British women experience racism and amplified Black women's voices. I would be remiss if I did not include the expression of gratitude the majority of participants gave and their thanks to me for conducting this study. Many of the women told me they were excited to participate because "something like this is long overdue."

Participants' accounts in this study show that Black women share more similarities in their experiences of racism, irrespective of country, age, education, marital status, or location.

### **Limitations**

There were certain limitations and challenges regarding this study which included a lack of subject knowledge by my supervisors and no mentorship due to a lack of representation within the college and department. This study also brings awareness to the dire need for Black supervisors, faculty, and mentorship within the British academy to provide academic support, pastoral care, and subject knowledge to Black PhD Researchers in the study of

racism and racial trauma. There is a dire need for cultural awareness and sensitivity training within the social sciences among white scholars, academics, supervisors, faculty and staff, when Black PhD Researchers are often writing about and experiencing racism and racial trauma simultaneously. Black PhD Researchers often experience double consciousness from the challenges of writing a thesis which are exacerbated when navigating through institutional racism. Results suggest predominantly white environments are prime contexts for producing racial battle fatigue among Black women (Smith, 2014).

From the onset of the study, new literature and studies were being published regularly that were more relevant to contemporary and current sociological perspectives about racism. Therefore, engagement with the literature continued throughout this study. Reports show that even library and field-specific databases and search engines often show bias and manipulate results to first default to white male scholars (Gilbert, 2019). I struggled throughout the write-up stage with citing sources and scholarly references. In the final days, I was still discovering relevant, pertinent scholarly articles that had only been published within a few months of my submission date. Additionally, Black women often lack citations or have very few, which affects their positionality when searching for literature.

The timing of this study proved to be challenging because data collection occurred between two very simultaneous and historical events: The Black Lives Matter Protests and Covid-19 global pandemic. The original design was shifted from in-person interviews and focus groups to interviews conducted solely online. Coordinating focus groups across the two countries and multiple time zones became impractical and the decision was made to eliminate them.

This study was conducted, written and completed, despite lockdown measures, feelings of isolation and fear, and tragic, personal, familial losses.

### **Further Research**

This study updates and builds upon Essed's work. It raises awareness of how Black women experience racism in the United States and England and adds to the knowledge that Black women experience racism similarly and in similar locales. Our understanding of how Black women experience racism and the effects of racism on their mental well-being can lead to better mental health initiatives exclusively for Black women. More awareness must be brought to Black women where racism intersects with sex and gender, and more attention given to Black women's narratives of their experiences. There is a need for further research, study, and documentation concerning the resilience of Black women, as a legacy, from slavery to the present day. Participants of the study, and myself, frequently discussed "pulling on the strength of ancestors" and calling upon them to provide assistance and guidance during critical times and crises that come with experiences of racism and the aftermath.

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