An Examination of the Experiences of BAME Students in the Community and Criminal Justice Division

DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY LEICESTER

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September 2019

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank colleagues in the CCJ Division for their help and support to facilitate the project.

Executive Summary

Freedom to Achieve is De Montfort University's commitment to its students, whatever their ethnicity, to ensure there is an equal playing field. The attainment gap between Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)[1] and white students within UK Higher Education (HE) is well documented and DMU are part of a ground-breaking project to positively address this issue. As part of this multi-faceted programme, the Community and Criminal Justice Division (CCJ) undertook a pilot study to explore our BAME students' experiences at the university. The aim of these results is to help establish preliminary short term and long term strategies to help deliver overall improvements in the BAME attainment gap and aspirations to achieve at DMU.

After undertaking a survey of BAME students within the CCJ, a series of key thematic areas emerged, namely: 1) Assessments, 2) Discrimination, 3) Diversity, 4) Lecture Style, 5) Support, and 6) Universal Design for Learning. We examine and explore these issues in relation to three key theoretical models used to explore BAME attainment in Higher Education. Nigrescence Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Critical Race Theory are all used to help understand the experiences of BAME students. Using the results, we have identified a series of short and long term recommendations that could be utilised to ensure and take steps towards addressing the attainment gap between BAME and White students at DMU.

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[1]Originally called Black and Minority Ethnic "BME" group. The label originated from an ideology of "political blackness"; a concept that was prevalent during the anti-racist movement of the 1970s, when some minorities in British society grouped together as "black" to fight against discrimination (see Sandhu, 2018). This concept is now being used in every aspect of British life including the Higher Education environment.

List of Tables and Figures

1. Introduction

1.1.   Background to the project

The Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) Students underachievement as against their White peers in the United Kingdom Higher Education (HE) sector, is not a new phenomenon for research. A 2007-2008 joint research by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) on 'Ethnicity, gender and degree attainment' (EGDA), identified distinctive features of BAME attainment in HE comparative to White students (Berry & Loke, 2011). These findings aligned with several other individual studies on the BAME attainment gap (see for example, Broecke & Nicholls, 2007; Fielding et al, 2008). Overall, the evidence collated by these studies identified several explanatory factors related to BAME attainment in HE including: socio-economic, educational and institutional factors (Berry & Loke, 2011).

Each UK University faces this attainment gap issue and the perrenial challenges of trying to overcome it. Many, if not all UK Universities have done something palpably obvious to address the issue. Here at De Montfort University (DMU) Leicester, several projects and presentations such as "widening participation, and freedom to achieve" have been streamlined to address the attainment gap vaccum between BAME students' and their White counterparts.

The present study was commissioned by the Community and Criminal Justice Division (CCJ) with the aim of asking two current key questions regarding the BAME students underachievement in HE. Importantly, this is a reflection of the data that identifies existing attainment gaps within our cohorts of students. For example, DMU's Tableau database demonstrates this clear divide in the progression and final results for BAME v White students in the CCJ for two comparable academic years. In the 2016/17 academic year, performance data for level 6 (awards) shows that for a 2:1 award or above the percentage of White students receiving this award was 59.79% compared to BAME students at 47.62%. The percentage of 1st awards between White and BAME students was 16.49% and 6.67% respectively. Similar outcomes appeared in the 2017/18 year with the percentage of White and BAME students achieving a 2:1 or above with 63.36% and 47.62% respectively. Again, the percentage of 1st awards for White and BAME students was 14.85% and 4.76%

respectively. These data reflect a broader trend in the data on clear attainment disparities between BAME and White students.

1.2. Theoretical Models

Across the work exploring BAME students' underachievment in HE, there have been several theoretical frameworks. We address three of the most common theoretical perspectives to help examine the responses of students to the questionnaire. These are nigrescence, social identity and critical race theories. These theoretical models were chosen recognising existing literature that utilises these existing theoretical frameworks to explore BAME inequality within education and society more broadly. We summarise these briefly below.

First, **Nigrescence theory** (NT) is a psychological theory originally formulated by Cross (1971), which suggests there are five different stages of development that describe someone as Black (Constantine et al, 1998). In doing so, it stimulates a process of 'becoming black' in so far as creating a 'black' identity that liberates black individuals from eurocentric and white oppression. In this instance, it creates a black identity in relation to educational and academic study and engagement, distinct to that of their white counterparts. The stages are five namely: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, internalization/commitment (Constantine et al, 1998).

Second, **Social Identity Theory** (SIT) argues that people make great effort to attain positive self attitudes and well being especially in their in-groups where they claim superior over the external groups (Kiecolt & Hughes, 2016). However, this in-group componant will potentially lead to discrimination of the outgroup in a process to enhance that person's sense of identity. Within the HE sector, to help reduce the attainment gap between BAME students and their white counterparts, it is integral to create an inclusive and socially connected environment for more favourable outcomes, i.e. higher attainment levels (Walton and Cohen, 2007).

Third, **Critical Race Theory** (CRT) emerges from social activism, which identifies "race" to be at the core of critical analyses (Rankin-Wright et al, 2018). It employs a practical approach to fundamentally challenge those discriminatory racialized power dynamics that disregard some people and groups to the advantage of others (Rankin-Wright et al, 2018). Within the setting of HE, CRT helps to highlight what

may be the existing institutional structures that have inherent racial biases and maintain White forms of dominance within existing structures (Yosso, 2006). These power structures perpetuate the marginalization of BAME students, and active reflexivity of the institution is required to address some of these existing structures.

2. <u>Methodology</u>

2.1. *Research Instrument*

We used the online survey programme Planet Survey to create a questionaire that would allow us to meet our research objectives. Note, a problem with online survey is the inability to know the real identity of each respondent (in this case BAME or White students). On this occasion, there is no indication to suggest that non-BAME students completed the survey. The questionaire was split into two sections. Section one contained a series of closed questions to garner basic demographic questions of participants. The second section contained a series of two open ended questions to capture the students' responses in full details. These two questions were: 1) *"In your opinion, what factors contribute to BAME students' academic underachievement?"* 2) *"What do you think we can change about your programme to engage BAME students and increase their academic achievement?"* The questions were sent online so that students could easily respond from any location. Questions were developed based on existing commentary and understanding of the differential experiances of HE and educational attainment by BAME students. The questionaire is available in Appendix One.

2.2. *Sample*

While we wanted to have a large response rate, unfortunately we had a low response rate of 65 students. We aimed at conducting the survey on all CCJ students. However, the maximum number of participants was 65. [2] Despite a series of announcement and emails by teaching staff on the significance of the survey, a vast majority of BAME students did not participate. There may be several reasons for this lack of participation: 1) Over participation/bombarded with things to fill in, 2) Reluctance to engage beyond required academic tasks, 3) Lack of engagment and

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[2] Note, there were two open ended questions. 52 participants answered the first open ended question, wheras 65 respondents participated in the second open ended question.

procrastination affecting their ability to complete the survey. Nonetheless, this still provided us with the relevant sample amount to offer some preliminary findings from this pilot study.

Descriptive statistics help illustrate the characteristics of the sample population. (See Appendix one). Besides the small sample size, the participating cohort were drawn from all levels of study: 4, 5, and 6, from a range of different ethnic groups and completed by male and female participants. However, there was an uneven distribution of response rates based on particular demographic characteristics. 89.2% of respondents identified as female, 10.8% identified as male. Therefore, the sample was skewed to female responses. There was also a disproportional number of first year students (55.4%) responding to the survey comparative to second (30.8%) and third (13.8%) year. In respect of course, again there was some disparity where 50.6% of respondents were on the 'Criminology' and or 'Criminology and Criminal Justice' (3rd year equivlant) only course (69.2%). Interestingly, there were no responses from BAME students on the Policing course. This tells a story in itself, acknowledging that there are only 5 BAME students on the policing course across 3 years (between 2016-2018/19 recruitment cycles). This is reflective more broadly of law enforcement and policing stereotypes that exhibit elements of institutional racism (see for example, McPherson, 1999).

While there was some disproportional representation in demographics there was generally an even spread of main ethnic background. Thus, there were some limitations to the sample of participants collected in this pilot study. However, we recognise these weaknesses and will address these in further research expanding the project.

2.3. Data Analysis Process

There were two forms of data analysis. The first was a series of descriptive statistics looking and identifying basic demographic characteristics of the participants. The second method was a thematic analysis of the responses in second section of the questionaire. We used Nvivo 12 to highlight and thematically code the different responses given by participants. We chose an inductive approach, drawing out similar themes/arguments/comments made by students. As a result, we identified eight themes in total which we then used to catergorise the different responses and conduct further data analysis. We then examined if and how these themes could be

interpreted using our theoretical models: nigrescence theory, social identity theory and critical race theory.

3. <u>Analysis and Findings</u>

This section focuses on the second half of the questionnaire. It utilises the results from the two open-ended questions to garner more qualitative, rich data on the experiences of BAME students within the CCJ Division. These two questions were: 1) *"In your opinion, what factors contribute to BAME students' academic underachievement?"* 2) *"What do you think we can change about your programme to engage BAME students and increase their academic achievement?"*

3.1. Overview of Key Themes

Using Nvivo we coded the data and divided this into 9 broad areas of discussion. Table 1 and Figure 1 highlight the list of themes identified in the analysis. The reoccurring themes were *assessment, discrimination, diversity, economic and social life, lecture style, support, universal design for learning (UDL),* and *other.* The theme of support dominates the data with 44 responses and across 12 participants. Diversity arises as the second most common with 27 responses across 17 participants. The other themes emerge sporadically and although less common, still provide some important information and talking points. The following sections explore more in depth each theme.

Table 1. Themes

Theme Name	Number of Occurrences	No of participants
Assessment	1	1[3]
Discrimination	5	1
Diversity	27	17
Economic & Social Life	8	4
Lecture Style	7	3
Support (Academic, Family, Social)	44	12
Universal Design for Learning	23	9
Other	14	6

Figure 1: Distribution of Thematic Areas Pie Chart

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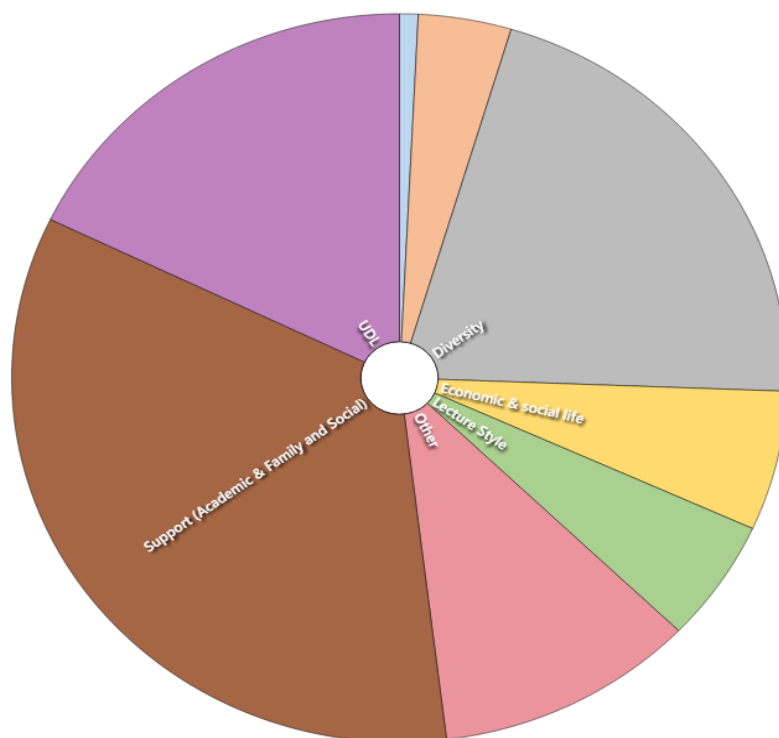
[3] This respondent was a 1st year, female, black Caribbean student and at the time of data collection had not had to complete an assessment. This suggests that the response may not be reflective of the experience at university on the module, rather impacted by previous experiences in school or further education.

3.2. Themes

In this section, we focus on the key areas that emerged within the responses. The themes we target here are *Assessment, Discrimination, Diversity, Economic and Social Life, Lecture Style, Support* and *UDL.*

3.2.1. Assessment

The theme assessment refers to any responses where participants referred in some capacity to an assessment for one or more modules. Overall, only one respondent mentioned assessment as an area of improvement. They argued that we need to "*Have better assessment and essay writing practice. More thorough with the details such as referencing and have to step by step.*" While only one response, this indicates that this student felt more clarification in assessment criteria and guidance is required to meet the needs of BAME students.

While only one response, this could further suggest an interesting interpretation to learning processes at university. The assessment as an end goal is flagged, rather than an understanding that engaging in university life and an academic programme is ongoing. This may reflect a series of perceived outcomes that a student may want to attain when leaving university, and what their initial thoughts were for coming to university. However, this response comes from a year 1 student who at the time of data collection later in 2018, has not had any assessment since starting lectures at DMU. Surprisingly, and despite the importance attached to assessment, no BAME student in years 2 and 3 suggested assessment as an issue for the gap in educational achievement. The reason might be that teaching staff have always updated and improved upon assessment materials to benefit students. This only response seems to have arisen due to prior experience at college and further education, which might have created unfavourable student experience at the time. Thus, further development of this question, focusing specifically on assessments within a case controlled sample of BAME and non-BAME students across years, may provide more insight into whether there are potentially other underlying issues that specifically affect BAME students.

3.2.2. Discrimination

The theme discrimination refers to any responses where a participant disclosed or discussed issues directly related to their ethnicity/race/colour. In post-

modern British society, discrimination has become a daily occurring word used to reveal how unfairly or unjustly someone is treated based on the ten protected characteristics contained in the Equality Act 2010. As one respondent suggests**:**

"Make sure that all the lecturers treat all students with respect no matter their ethnicity. During lecture I believe that I experienced racism from a particular teacher and this made me feel uncomfortable and demotivated me from that lecture and the module".

Some previous events in the wider British society involving BAME people, such as the murders of Stephen Lawrence (see Macpherson, 1999), and Zahid Mubarek (see Keith, 2006) have brought "discrimination" into the spotlight. Moreover, students engage with this literature and these examples within their curriculum. Hence, some BAME students tend to use such theme occasionally to highlight their problems and experiences at university, even when such issues are seemingly unconnected with discrimination. The outcome becomes a misconception of issues; however, such misconception can spark off student resistance (Williams & Conyers, 2016).

Furthermore, according to some of the respondents, discrimination occurs when they feel there is differential treatment between White and BAME students. Students have drawn attention to what they feel is a lack of attention to non-White students, and the idea that they are being 'labelled' which reflects indicators of institutional racism: "*Institutional racism being labelled as a failure not having the same attention as other students". "Favouritism of white students, less BAME teachers". "The inability to listen and include BAME students in activities".*

These preliminary findings suggest that discrimination brings about division and inequality in an academic institution, which may affect the underachievement of BAME students. However, there is legislation to protect victims, but at times, it becomes difficult for the accused to admit that discrimination did occur in the first place. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the university is not a singular unit; rather it is embedded within broader social and cultural experiences and practices. Thus, the experiences and influences on perceptions around race and discrimination outside of university will undoubtedly influence a student's interpretation of events within an institution. Indeed, the internalization/commitment

stage of Nigrescence Theory suggests that black people and other minority groups can challenge and eradicate any form of discrimination (Constantine et al, 1998), if supported by university authorities. A more practical approach is by talking against the scourge of discrimination and reporting it at university. The positive outcome would be an enabling environment for BAME student's achievement, but without prejudice to White student's achievement too.

3.2.3. Diversity

The theme diversity captured far more responses than any other theme, thus signalling obvious significance in the attainment gap for BAME students. Diversity as used by the respondents refers to a mix of students and lecturing staff involving Whites and non-Whites. It suggests a profound inclusivity as opposed to exclusivity of different backgrounds of teaching staff to cater for the overall teaching and learning needs of students, including BAME students. That is, lecturers have the duty to know their student population, understand and engage with those from the White background as well as those from the minorities at their different levels of awareness (Williams & Conyers, 2016). Interestingly there was a consistent pattern in the responses regarding diversity within academic staff and role models within the CCJ itself. According to one BAME student, *"I believe that if there is not mixed ethnicity in a class this can make an individual feel uncomfortable. This may result to them not attending lectures as they feel left out."*

A diverse society or institution brings about multiculturalism and vice versa. Yet cultural specificity is still needed by some to not only address their problems but as a motivating factor (Walton & Cohen, 2007). As another student reveals:

> *"Lack of representation within who is teaching us, it's easier to talk to someone that looks like me / can understand certain aspects of my life because we share cultures, not enough encouragement specified for BAME students even though statistics show we drop out more".*

While this suggestion may provide benefits, it may run the risk of pointing towards what the encounter stage of Nigrescence Theory identified as pro-Black, thus challenging anything White and or Eurosceptic (see Constantine et al, 1998). However, rather than create a sense of belonging, this may lead to a disengagement

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and unintentional exclusion from the student cohort. The intention of respondents in this study is to establish BAME presence whether lecturers or students that may align with creating a sense of social identity within the university environment, rather than an 'out-group' as identified with Social Identity Theory. As another respondent added, they support the idea of pro-Blackness by arguing for increasing the presence of BAME academics or guest speakers. But rather than creating that as a distinct sub-group, the purpose is to provide 1) an integration of staff within the cohort overall and increase presence within the white population of students, while 2) maintaining the opportunity for support and engagement within a specific safe space for BAME individuals:

> *"More BAME lectures, seminar leaders or guest speakers: in doing this more students could [en]in vision a future that has people that look like them as part of the criminal justice future - Use contemporary examples of what happens to BAME people in society as a result of crime - Create a safe space for BAME students to ask questions about criminology which they may feel anxious to think about with white counterparts."*

This suggestion aligns with the Office for Students (OFS) report on BAME and HE which suggests the use of positive action in the recruitment of BAME staff members. Such action has the tendency to defuse anecdotal biases and prejudices against BAME students. It will also help galvanise and reenergise the BAME students' momentum to assert self-confidence, and ambition to narrowing, if not closing the attainment gap between them and their White peers.

Whenever issues of race are discussed, there will always be "clash of racial realities" (see Williams & Conyers, 2016:237). such as Whites, Blacks, Asians, and so on. This study is not exempt from such socially constructed realities because some respondents identified some other diversity difficulties minority ethnic groups face, which directly or indirectly affect their level of academic achievement while studying at university. Whereas some of these issues may look trivial, some others may be more serious and necessary. For example, one student suggested that:

"Some students of ethnic minorities may have a small community of their people at university. This may cause them to feel disengaged and isolated with others as most larger ethnic groups tend to stick together (blacks, asians etc). It can cause lack of friends, as friends are needed to support you mentally and academically while at university. Those of ethnic minorities tend to bond better and build closer relationships with people of the same ethnicity or race as they share similarities of culture. However, when there is a small community of students of an ethnic minority (eg kurdish), this can cause a student to feel left out and isolated while those of black, Asian (for example) minorities are stronger and support each other as a larger community. It can result in isolation by not getting support needed to achieve well academically from peers."

Arguably, when students isolate themselves on campus (the inability to relate or communicate to other people), they might risk academic achievement, and a holistic community spirit and identity. If students of all ethnicities are willing to work together (BAME team up with Whites in group works such as class discussions, workshops, presentations and seminars), then HE teaching and learning can transcend the classroom space into a cohesive virtual environment. This allows the formation and creation of a space to create a new cohesive identity that transcends racial boundaries.

Course representation including student intake also appears a key issue to diversity. More specifically, within the 'BAME' the representation on the course also differs
For example, data reveal the following responses:

"For me this can include the number of other BAME persons in the same course as me because there is a stereotype that Asian people study courses such as Business or Accounting. Also, their representation in society such as a minority group may be associated with crime more than another, leading to them questioning their presence on a course like Criminology or Policing."

> *"Programmes that are targeted and BAME students that actually catches their attention".*

A response here may suggest a broader and more diverse introduction to concepts and ideas on the criminology course as they relate to BAME experiences. However, we note, that as a discipline, criminology's history is aligned with key theorists with western-centric perspectives – although not without critique – does set the foundation of the subject in. However, it is important that we provide greater representation in the courses. In doing so, we can incorporate academic work, literature and examples from a range of perspectives and cultures drawing on for instance, criminologies of the Global South and Pan-African criminology. Moreover, country case studies would be a useful inclusion within subjects that may move beyond a western-centric interpretation of criminology. For example,

> *"Workshops Delve deeper into black british involvement in the CJS - not just about how we are more likely to get locked up or stopped and searched"*

> *"Make individuals feel more included, feel like they are not outside the norm, include more BAME examples and not just depict things from a white or predominately not BAME perspectives."*

This also links with the role of community cultural wealth, embedded within areas of Critical Race Theory (Yosso, 2006) that outlines and draws on the benefits of identifying and using experiences from different communities and cultures, where possible, within the curriculum. This may differ to the staff makeup and traditional academic reading within the discipline, to highlight and respect the value and provide greater diversity within the curriculum. Thus, this aligns then with further reflection on and an understanding of the social and cultural backgrounds and experiences of BAME students. Another interpretation centres on identifying how we do not then eradicate or discount the histories of a 'non-dominant' – 'White' group. Avoiding this form of social oppression prevents the conscious or subconscious denigration of one group (Hardiman and Jackson, 1997) embedded within a social institution that exacerbates inequalities and may affect BAME attainment. These tie in with the Social Identity Theory, making sure that practices within HE learning environment

begin a process of pushing the boundaries of norms within a subject area, recognition of privilege of certain groups that must be articulated within the academic environment, and finally leading towards a redefinition from both White and BAME students of a new identity within the HE that is independent of oppressive social structures embedded within the institution (Torres et al, 2003).

3.2.4. Economic & Social Life

Closely related, and arguably intertwined with the findings focused on diversity, are the specific economic and social life experiences of BAME students. It was highlighted in this study, that these were factors putting in place barriers to academic achievement. Importantly, these experiences recognise the intersections between race, class and gender and its influence on BAME attainment in HE overall. For example, some of the BAME students come from working class families that struggle to meet their compelling needs, hence paying tuition and supporting students at university may become a burden.

> *"coming from a different background could contribute, some individuals don't have the funds to pay for vital books needed for their modules. Living conditions, lecturers not engaging enough with us, I feel like they should make more of an effort to engage with us in studies and sometimes its about not having the ability to achieve well due to not being that educated"*

> *"grants for resources so they are able to afford books and anything else they need to help them achieve the best that they can"*

Moreover, social life at university is seen by some as distraction. Instead of a balancing equilibrium to solve the problem of "all work no play," at times social life is misconstrued such that students forget and neglect the main purpose of being at university. For example, night life point becomes part of a status and aim over academic engagement and achievement.

> *"I have made lots of friends in university that are BAME students. Most of them have said that they haven't picked up a book from when we started this*

semester. They are more interested in going out and party which is needed for social life but there needs to be a balance."

Thus, night life and embracing a university experience – outside of the learning environment – becomes a priority or observed as a form of cultural status and development of an identity within an academic environment, over engagement in academic achievement and activity.

Arguably, the surge of BAME students going to university, as a way of moving up the class ladder and enjoying better quality of life afterwards is partly reflected in this data. Moreover, previous studies (e.g. Mountford-Zimdars et al, 2017) have revealed that most of BAME students are the first in their families to go to university, and this emerged in this study too. Furthermore, the experiences of university may challenge their 'traditional' previous community life and or expectations. Thus, in times of struggling to settle in, students may turn to a non-academic root to engage in *"Social groups, non-supportive family, self- esteem and image."*

Thus, it may be a case of challenging these historical experiences of social and cultural capital, reframing these within a university environment.

"1st generation going off to university Lack of money, hard to concentrate as a result - focus more on immediate gratification Nobody expects us to do good so it's easy to give up Often not given as many chances as our white counterparts"

"Underachievement amongst BAME students has many different factors ranging from ones originate from the community in addition to ways that BAME students are perceived by other non BAME counterparts. As a black Caribbean student, at times i have felt distant from my community because I am not doing things that the black community may not always recognise as being 'what we do'."

This means, that it is integral we move towards creating a social identity within the university community and culture that provides a student with the same type of identity they need to feel included and achieve that differs to their history.

3.2.5. Lecture Style

Respondents highlighted that lecture style is a contributory factor that may affect their achievement at university. Lectures are the major tool for teaching and learning in HE, and each individual lecturer has a unique way of making that available and understandable to students. Given that each individual student learns differently from the other, students then make judgements about whose lecture they understand quickly and easily, while others where they may struggle or do not understand. As some respondents acknowledge,

> *"Understanding different lectures as everyone delivery's differently."* And *"I believe that the way SOME lectures are given are not for everyone. They all have different styles of giving lectures which is not suitable for everyone."*

This point on lecture style, is not something specific to BAME students. Student feedback indicates approaches to lecture style and engagement with students, which cut across both White and BAME students. However, a practical point to note that influences non-native English speakers is a recognition of language barriers where *"language barriers allow a lack of ability to be able to understand certain things in lectures."* This specific barrier is an important point to note. Recognising this then, actions such as summary slides with key points could reach some of these barriers by ensuring the key information is available in writing to allow students to gather a full understanding of the key points of the lecture.

One respondent appreciated the great efforts of their lecturers this year in ensuring better students' experience, irrespective of whether they were taught by BAME teachers or not, yet it is a good practice to have a mix of White and BAME lecturers to meet the needs and demands of both the few and the many.

> *"Professors that we have this year are great, they are there to help. Yet, there may be a majority of white teachers that does not affect learning levels. The colour of teacher's skin doesn't affect the way they teach or help students. For people to say BAME students underachieve because of a minority of BAME teachers is not a true image of what real factors affect levels of achievement."*

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3.2.7. Support

The theme of support featured prominently among the respondents. Support is an essential and overarching concept that touches the entire student life while at university. Support involves student contact with teaching and non-teaching staff to discuss their problems (academic and non-academic) with a view to proffering some solution(s). Also, support can come from student peers. It can be done electronically or one on one. However, respondents have echoed a lack of support or rather the need for adequate support as a great predicament to their attainment gap with their white peers: *"I personally feel the lack of support and not having somebody that understands our way of life."*

Importantly, the ideas of support appear to come from how students from different BAME groups may experience support and/or that sense of community. This concept of community aligns with broader researcher acknowledge that it is important in a student's 'academic life' to establish a community. Without establishing that sense of community in education may become a boundary to attainment. Thus, it is important that mechanism of support is in place to develop feelings of competency and ability which are integral for creating a social identity (Chickering and Reisser, 1993) that allows students to flourish within the HE institution.

Additionally, support specifically for mental health emerged within the responses. Although mental health services are offered by the university, there was a sense that that support was not necessarily easily accessible: *"Mental health - depression (feeling unmotivated) Not knowing where to go for help."* While mental health and positions emerge from both White and BAME students, it seems a particularly poignant point in relation to BAME students. It is important to recognise a very cultural/oriented history where mental health may often be confined with the family and or extended family where a small social network and set of relationships are integral for emotional support (Dressler, 1985). In contrast, it may also be the case that students may not have come from a support network that mental health education, support and awareness are underutilised within certain BAME communities (Simmons, 2019). Encouraging an open and frank debate as well as clear information sources to support BAME students that may suffer some mental

problems is integral for their development and help pass through boundaries to attainment in university life.

Moreover, the concept of support, also appears to emerge from cultural history of the student and home life. As one student noted,

> *"I feel like not a lot of student have parents that have been to uni so they dont get that support at home, or because they have strict parents, so when they get more freedom to go to uni, they forget about their studies and a lot of BAME students are just scared to ask for help, having been failed by academics/ authorities/ government in the past,"*

This was not an uncommon response suggesting that steps need to be taken to offer support and outline staff must meet these challenges. Some students proposed more active encouragement and communication between students and staff on the good work/levels of achievement: *"Being in university is hard enough and if students don't get that push and praise for their good work they may feel down and not try as much."* On the one hand, this can emerge from a historical context from the student's background, the first student from their family to be at a university etc. On the other hand, it speaks to a broader issue around students, including those from lower-economic backgrounds, that staff should actively engage in this encouragement process. Thus, to reframe an inclusive social identity, students and staff need to engage and reflect on the different demographics of the new community and must learn to help create that environment of an in-group that offers a supportive environment and creates the opportunity for a single identity of staff and students irrespective of ethnic background.

From another perspective, several suggestions emerged that *"Allow students to meet people of the same ethnic group as them to share similarities and bond to build relationships with."* Similarly, "*Forums for BAME students to meet up and support each other not only socially but, academically also."* This suggests activities such as social events specific to BAME CCJ Division students' may help grow and expand that support network integral for university life and achievement. When BAME students receive the necessary support, it brings about what the internalization stage of Nigrescence Theory refers to as an achievement of relevant positive Black racial identity (Constantine et al, 1998). It will help them close the

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achievement gap with their White peers. This level of support has been questioned and may be in fact related to personal tutoring and practicalities with staff workloads.

> *"I strongly feel like the university do not take their time to get to know their students. There are lot of students who know supports are there for them however they don't feel like it works for them. Lectures and member of staff needs to give more attentions to student who they believe are under working, because sometime it is not that they are lazy or can't achieve more, however this is not the case. They are desperately crying out for help, but they do not like to come forth."*

When BAME students identify their needs for help and support, they are motivated to evaluate the positive actions of their group (see for example Kiecolt & Hughes, 2017). Thus, it is integral that the university tackle the potential insufficient and inadequate assistance that may be more harmful to BAME students' attainment:

> *"insufficient and inadequate assistance for those who may need it, e.g lack of one to one interactions with tutors, lectures etc Many Bame students come from backgrounds where there is a lack of support, this cycle should be broken at university"*

Indeed, additional activities, learning support from extra workshops, tutorials, language classes, both university level and personal tutorial level are key issues for the BAME responses here. Students won't feel left out, may need more encouragement and more likely to achieve.

3.2.8 Universal Design for learning (UDL)

UDL emerged as one of the themes identified by respondents. It is a learning tool that gives every student irrespective of diversity or background, an opportunity to learn. It showcases different learning styles at the disposal of individual learners. When students are confused in their learning process, it behoves the lecturer to put them in the right path by employing any possible learning style. According to one respondent:

"My opinion I find it a little bit more harder to understand what I am doing at times. Hold small groups and we can help each other. As I think people find it difficult to talk in large groups about the difficulties there having".

"There is enough help I believe the lecture slides are online which is very important"

UDL becomes more effective when tailored around BAME students. For example, small group activities are encouraged by BAME students. Importantly, these need to be structured around a desegregation approach by incorporating and encouraging groups from different background in small group work or assessments. For example:

"mix individuals...instead of telling students to make their own groups put them in groups so they are obligated to talk to other individuals from different ethnic origins."

"For instance when group work is to be done for a presentation, instead of students choosing who they want, having this already chosen by lecturer or automatically being chosen will ensure there is a mix and decrease segregation. Because if students choose for themselves, they are alot more likely to choose someone they are familiar with, which is usually someone of the same colour."

This type of desegregation is integral for creating a holistic, multicultural identity for learners. It aims to remove the barriers that reinforce small communities and isolation by race, rather than actively encouraging communication and working relationships between a diverse group and population.

3.3. Overall Findings

It is important to note that often, the responses from participants combined several of the responses. This preliminary study suggests there are multifaceted and complex factors that influence CCJ Division's students' attitude towards university

life and the ability to achieve and reduce the BAME attainment gap. The three theoretical models provide some insight to help understand these experiences further and broaden our knowledge on potential strategies and mechanism to improve the learning environment that may more specifically meet the needs of BAME students.

Considering the findings, some key points stand out. One, turning to observations related to social identity theory, it appears that we need to ensure the creation and development of a sense of community within the academic environment. This must be inclusive for all students, recognising that this is a separate community to other areas and aspects of their lives. Two, to help do this, it is important that the curriculum, stories, and voices that represent some of the different historical and cultural backgrounds within our student body are incorporated into their study. Three, while the comments and feelings of students are individual, they also identify a consistent pattern. Importantly, these feelings require an understanding of the complex needs and experiences in the diversity of the student cohort. As a result, personal tutoring support as well as university wide support services need to be used, emphasised and resourced sufficiently. Four, important attention should be drawn to prevent and reduce segregation amongst students where possible within classroom activities. Students felt that both experiencing group work with people of the same ethnicity, as well as outside of these ethnic groups should be encouraged. This means, encouraging or arranging different groupings that recognise and explore these different backgrounds.

This is not to say however, that the concerns and issues highlighted by BAME students are only to be tackled by BAME students and the institution. It is important that the institution and lecturers engage in a teaching and learning programme that encourages the reformulation of traditional oppressive institutional structures. In doing so, steps can be taken to forge a cohesive and new social identity embedded within the Division. This new community which aims to 1) recognise cultural and racially historical differences in the body of students within the curriculum and within the classroom. 2) Recognise that support services are needed that allow both a specific environment for BAME students, and one of a desegregated environment, ensuring efforts are made to increase collaboration between BAME students and their White counterparts.

4. Recommendations

There are both short, and long term recommendations that have emerged from this initial pilot research.

Short Term
1) *Guest speakers and lectures from BAME backgrounds*
2) *Integration of BAME issues/ writers non-western criminology into the current curriculum*
3) Emphasise the role of student voice meetings that may help highlight some of the specific needs and issues more quickly. Calls for student reps should actively encourage BAME representation.
4) Help facilitate and support student meetings and bonding activities from people of the same ethnic group and a separate integrative experience with people from different ethnic groups.

Long Term
1) Potential recruitment of more BAME staff (positive action)
2) Module and curriculum development focused on specific modules relating to BAME issues
3) Investment in additional support services
4) Suggested development of a specific study skills module and/or programme targeted specifically at those that have entered university life with (i.e. lower grades, may not have strong skills etc).

5. Conclusions

This was an initial pilot to garner preliminary insights into the experiences of BAME students within the CCJ Division. Moving forward, we will continue to engage and actively develop this research up to faculty and wider university level as part of the DMU Freedom to Achieve Project. First developments will include a longitudinal data analysis of data regarding student achievement to help identify key differences between White and BAME students' achievement, and within BAME student groups.

These may help facilitate a series of focus groups looking more closely at the stories of BAME students as they respond to some of the highlights from the preliminary study and the statistical data analysis. While this report has identified key areas that may help challenge the BAME attainment gap, it is important to acknowledge the praise and achievement of staff by students.

> *"The leader of the BAME program is amazing and absolutely fit for the program."*

> *"Yet there is underachievement in BAME students I have greatly enjoyed my time here. I love my professors and tutor. I like to see that university cares. I would also like to say that I would love to see criminology course for the master's degree. I have been exploring my options after my undergraduate course and realised that if I want to do a master's degree in criminology I can't do it at De Montfort University. There is nothing do to with criminology for a master's degree, that's one thing that worries me."*

These should set the foundations and encouragement for moving forward to create positive change, to finding solutions to the BAME attainment gap.

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7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Pariticpants.

Below are the details of the demographic characteristics of survey participants.

Figure 1:

Results for Question One: Are you a Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) Student?
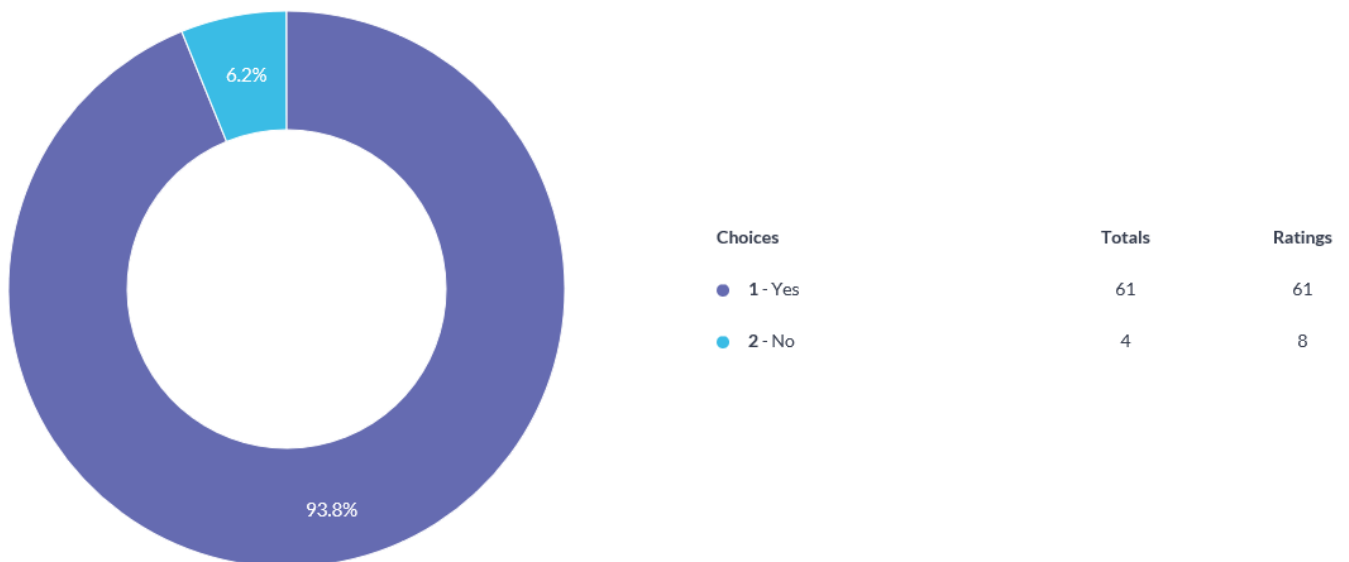

Choices	Totals	Ratings
1 - Yes	61	61
2 - No	4	8

Figure 2:

Results for Question 2: What is your Main Ethnic Background?

Choices	Totals
Asian	4
Asian British	14
Black African	12
Black British	7
Black Carribean	14
Other (Specify)	14
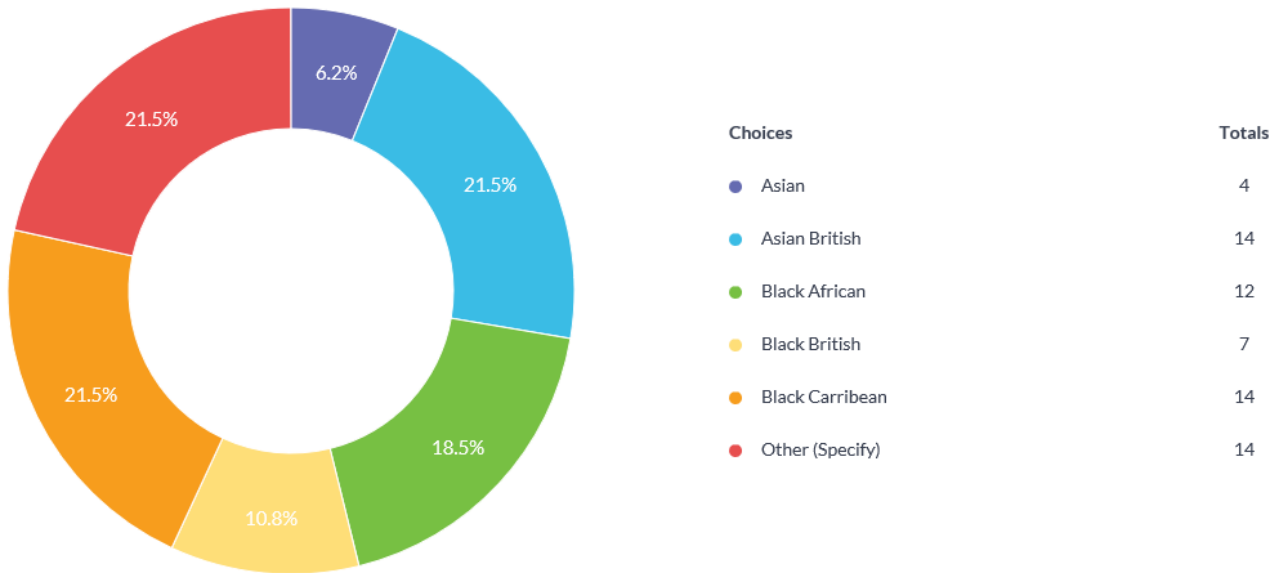
Figure 3

Results for Question Three: What is your current year of Study at DMU?

Choices	Totals	Ratings
1 - 1	36	36
2 - 2	20	40
3 - 3	9	27
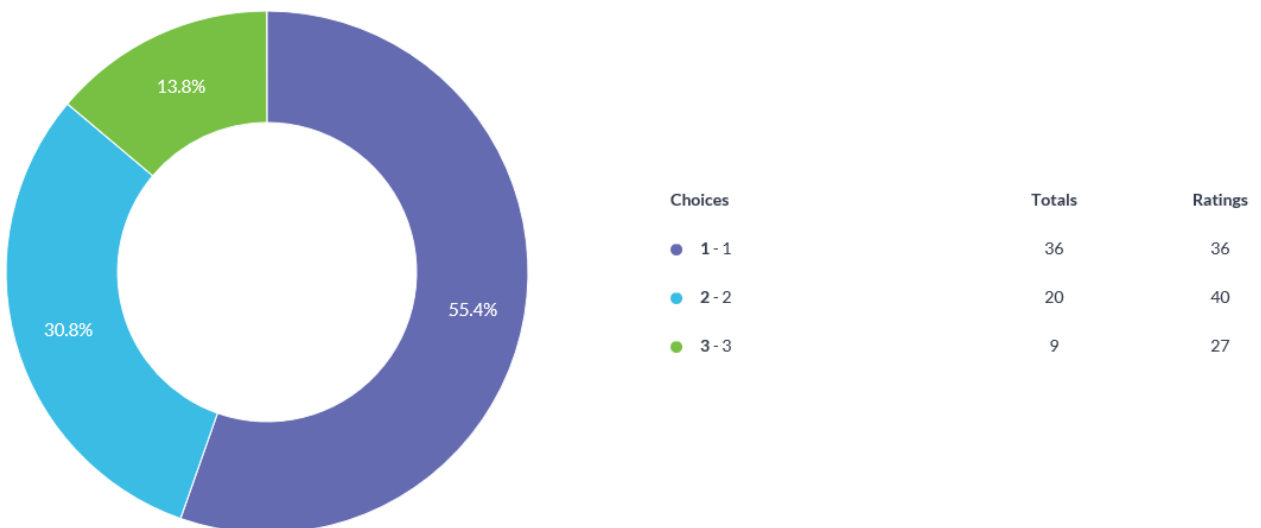
Figure 4

Results for Question Four: What is your gender?

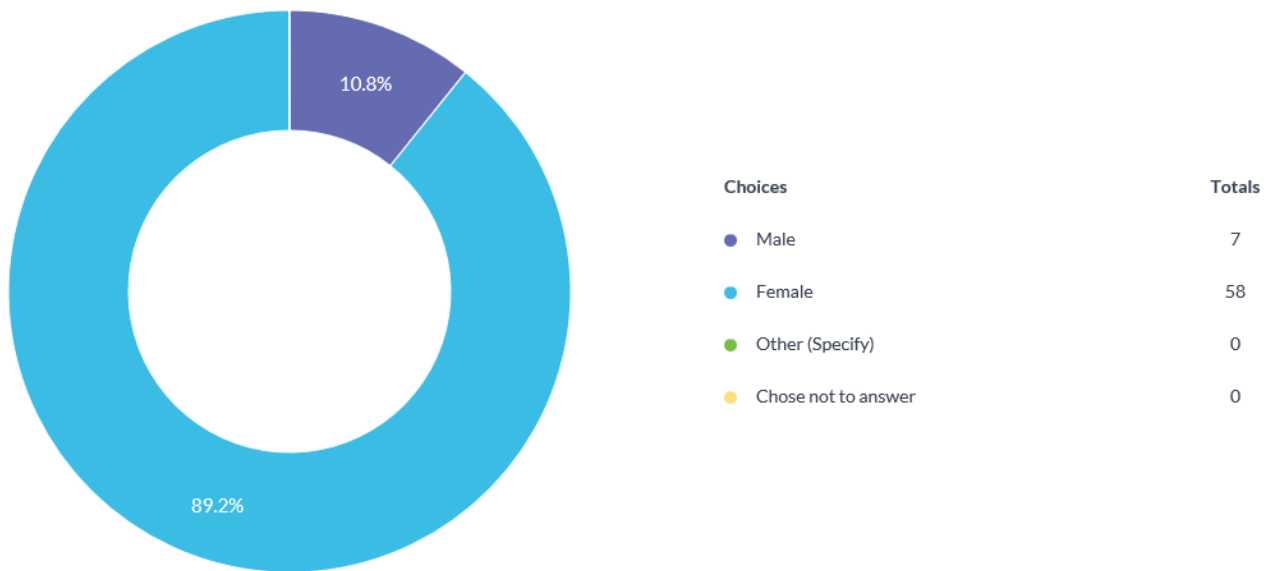| Choices	Totals
Male	7
Female	58
Other (Specify)	0
Chose not to answer	0

Figure 5

Results for Question Five: What is your programme of Study?

Choices	Totals
Criminology	37
Criminal Investigation	5
Criminology with Psychology	14
Criminology and Criminal Justice	8
Policing	0
Other (Specify)	1