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**British African Caribbean graduates:  
Narratives of educational journeys and  
career outcomes**

**by**

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Continuing Education

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# Abstract

The contribution of this thesis is to address a distinct gap in the literature by considering the structural trajectory across the domains of compulsory education, post-compulsory education and careers for British African Caribbean graduates. The research explores the educational and career experiences of a group of ten second generation African Caribbeans, described throughout as British African Caribbean (BAC). Each was born and educated entirely within the United Kingdom (UK), where they graduated from a higher education institution (HEI). The theoretical framework draws upon reproduction theory, critical race theory, black feminist theory and the theory of intersectionality to address three key questions:

- How do BAC graduates experience the structures of race, class and gender in schooling, higher education (HE) and employment?
- What resources do BAC graduates draw upon to navigate these domains and enable their successes?
- In what ways do BAC graduates consider it important to contribute their skills and experiences in order to challenge the structures of race, class and gender in British society?

The qualitative methodology adopted a life history and narrative approach and the primary data collection was predominantly achieved through a series of semi-structured interviews with research participants. This was supported by some quantitative data analysis and an extensive review of the literature on race, class and gender in education and careers.

The findings suggest that whereas school experiences were largely about ‘unfulfilled potential’, in higher education (HE) participants developed new strategies and became adept at ‘learning to achieve’. For most, school experiences were plagued by negative racial stereotyping, which manifested itself in low expectations for girls and conflict between peer groups and teachers for boys.

Most participants’ journeys ‘en route to HE’ involved serendipity and stepping stones and their main motivations were family expectations, social mobility and pleasure gained through studying. ‘Benevolent BMEs’ and anti-racist practitioners acted as catalysts in post-compulsory education, and in teaching roles they enhanced the HE experience. Although problematic teacher-student relationships were detrimental in school, the ability to use ‘emotional withdrawal’ minimised the negative impact of such relationships in HE. On graduation, many progressed into postgraduate study, where a gender dynamic became apparent in the prevalence of women studying for Master’s degrees.

All participants continued into professional careers, predominantly in the public sector. However, careers tended to plateau at an early stage and most felt that their career progress was not commensurate with their education and skills. Consequently, entrepreneurial inclinations emerged as a recurring theme within careers and career aspirations and this was frequently intertwined with a community orientation.

The research suggests that the intersection of race, class and gender oppressions continue to have a negative impact on the educational and career prospects of British African Caribbean men and women. Measures to create a more inclusive education system, in terms of staffing, curriculum and student bodies across the board (rather than in ghettoised locations), would effect change in attitudes and thus challenge the insidious nature of these oppressions. The central role of education in all of our lives bestows it with the potential to act as a vehicle of and for change in British society.

A key area for further investigation is an evaluation of the benefits of supporting BAC graduates in embarking on community oriented entrepreneurial endeavours, in order to utilise their skills more effectively and build stronger BAC communities, which would go some way to fulfilling the government's loudly-trumpeted and laudable objective of greater economic and social inclusion.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### **Introduction**

This thesis takes as its focus the educational experiences of second generation African Caribbean graduates, described throughout as British African Caribbeans (BACs). Within this chapter I explain the rationale for the research project, identifying gaps in the existing literature and indicating the contribution of the thesis. I demarcate the scope of the thesis, clarifying the research aims and research questions. An outline of the thesis provides an overview of the chapters.

One contribution of this thesis is to focus on the success of BACs in education, which is in contrast to the bulk of the literature on race and education. Below average GCSE outcomes at school leaving age (Education Commission, 2004) show that BACs are being failed *en masse* by the British education system. This has a negative impact on their career prospects and the wider socio-economic effect is that

black<sup>1</sup> communities, to a great extent, are marginalised and ghettoised in the United Kingdom (UK).

Another contribution of the thesis is to consider the marked gender differentials amongst BACs in both compulsory and post-compulsory education. These contrasting male and female experiences of education are rarely explored in tandem. Instead, much of the literature on race in HE addresses men's and women's experiences jointly, collapsing the analysis of the two cohorts into one (eg Bird 1996, Leicester and Merrill 1999, etc). Where race and gender is addressed specifically in HE, the focus tends to be on black women's experiences (eg Mirza, 1997). Regarding masculinities in education, schools have constituted the site for the majority of research data and analysis (eg Mac an Ghaill 1988 and 1994, Skelton 1998 and 2001, O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000, Wright et al 1998) and there is a distinct lack of research relating to male BACs in an HE context.

The most significant contribution of the thesis is that in addition to examining the experiences of the BAC participants in light of the existing literature on race, class and gender in compulsory education, post-compulsory education and careers, it also brings together these three domains in order to consider the structural trajectory across them. By using a life trajectory research approach the research spans the

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<sup>1</sup> During the 1990s the term 'Black' or 'black' was used politically as an inclusive term for all non-whites, who faced oppression on the common grounds of race. However, throughout this thesis, except where otherwise stated, the term 'black' is used to refer to people who are physically recognisably of African heritage (eg African, British African Caribbean, African American). Debates around the use of terminology relating to race and ethnicity are discussed in the Literature Review chapter.

entire educational experience and the resultant career outcomes. The discussion covers the factors that male and female participants identify as instrumental in either helping or hindering their progress. The fact that the participants are graduates means that they are, tautologically, educational achievers. On the other hand, many of them did not particularly excel in school. Thus, an assessment of what they consider to be the contributory factors in their initial 'underachievement' and subsequent 'success', opens up particularly useful indicators of BAC experiences. The value of education for BACs is considered by exploring the extent to which participants' believe that their present careers and career prospects are commensurate with their academic achievement.

The main objective of the thesis is to present the viewpoints of the participants and correspondingly, there is no in-depth discussion of the range of amendments to education policy that have occurred. However, it is inevitable that policy innovations inform the analyses within this thesis and therefore, the implications of the findings for policy are drawn out in the concluding chapter.

## **Research aims**

The research had two major aims:

- To gain insight into the educational experiences of British African Caribbean graduates, who were born and educated entirely in the UK.

- To explore, from the participants' perspectives, their experiences and perceptions of the education system from compulsory schooling in childhood through to graduation from UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and the career implications beyond.

The policy context is such that since the early 1990s the government has declared an agenda of widening participation and social inclusion in the education arena. The purpose of this is to encourage a broader cross-section of society to become involved in education and ultimately to up-skill the workforce and increase economic prosperity in the UK.

BAC women are over-represented in continuing education and BAC men are under-represented. There are also significant differences in the performance of BAC boys and girls in school. Nonetheless, there is a constant barrage of media coverage focusing on the 'underachievement' of BACs in education. A culture of blaming the victim prevails and black communities are pathologised, with little attention paid to the structures of oppression that create current trends. Channer suggests that:

If [the] socio-economic factors and the aspirations of black families were as fully examined as negative stereotypes, the education and sociological literature might take account of the extent to which educational aspirations have been suppressed in black children... destroyed and nullified. (*Channer, 1995, 86*)



In order to rectify this stifling scenario, positive measures aimed at improving the educational achievement and career prospects of BACs need to be introduced. These, in turn, necessitate research on the BAC experience of education that is written from a BAC perspective, thus giving due prominence to BAC experiences. hooks argues this point succinctly in the following quotation, where she demonstrates the importance of black perspectives being presented in research about race:

Even if perceived ‘authorities’ writing about a group to which they do not belong and/or over which they wield power, are progressive, caring and right-on in every way, as long as their authority is constituted either by the absence of the voices of the individuals whose experience they seek to address, or the dismissal of those voices as unimportant, the subject/object dichotomy is maintained and domination is reinforced... When we write about experiences of a group to which we do not belong, we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce and perpetuate domination. (*hooks, 1989; 43*)

Therefore the thesis will explore a number of research questions. These include:

- How do BAC graduates experience the structures of race, class and gender in schooling, higher education (HE) and employment?
  
- What resources do BAC graduates draw upon to navigate these domains and enable their successes?

- In what ways do BAC graduates consider it important to contribute their skills and experiences in order to challenge the structures of race, class and gender in British society?

## **Outline of the thesis**

In grappling with these questions, the thesis is organised into eight chapters.

The Literature Review chapter provides a review of the current literature on race, class and gender in education and career. The theoretical framework draws primarily on reproduction theory (Giddens, 1976; Bourdieu, 1977), critical race theory (Solorzano, 1998), black feminism (hooks, 1994; Collins, 2000) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). The chapter is divided into four main sections, the first two of which address, from a BAC perspective, aspects of the educational experience relating to schooling (Mac an Ghail, 1988; Rhamie, 2007) and then post-compulsory education (Mirza, 1992; Modood and Acland, 1998; Reay, 2003; Reynolds, 2006), including positive and negative influences. The next section discusses the career outcomes of the educational experience in light of the literature on black and minority ethnic (BME) graduate careers (Reynolds, 1997; Nelson, 2004), including gender dynamics, career frustration, community orientation and entrepreneurialism. Finally, I draw on the relevant literature to provide a clear outline of the theoretical framework that informs the thesis.

The Methodology chapter outlines the benefits of the qualitative methodological approach that was employed in order to add depth of understanding (McKernan, 1991) through exploratory analysis (Asher, 2002). The design of the study presents an overview of the entire process undertaken and highlights how triangulation enabled me to validate the primarily qualitative methods by combining them with quantitative and secondary data analysis (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Next, sampling is discussed and a breakdown of the research population is provided, along with a rationale for their selection via purposive (Patton, 2002) and snowball (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 1997) sampling techniques. Data collection techniques are detailed, including the structure of questionnaires and interview schedules, as well as the use of diaries. The process of analysing the data is sketched, with reference to coding/ indexing (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), the thematic organisation of data and the writing and re-writing process. Finally, ethical issues and problems arising from the research methods are highlighted alongside solutions.

Chapters 4 to 7 are analysis chapters, which explore the main findings of the research based on the experiences of the ten graduate interviewees. Chapter 4 presents the common themes that emerged regarding school experiences, by first focusing on the experiences of school achievers in light of models of success (Rhamie, 2007). However, the most glaringly obvious trend was that most participants achieved far less than their full potential during their secondary school education and thus, the reasons they identified for this are examined. Most resonate with the existing literature on race and education in the UK, including the problems

of negative racial stereotyping (Mac an Ghail, 1988). For girls this was transmitted predominantly through low expectations from school teachers (Mirza, 1992) and for boys through conflict between peer groups and teachers (Sewell, 1997). Strategies for improving conditions for BACs by increasing diversity in schools are explored (Education Commission, 2004), along with an examination of constructions of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' (Sewell, 1997; Wright, Thompson and Channer, 2007). Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' is utilised to analyse the impact of class on many BAC parents' ability to challenge injustices and secure a good education on behalf of their children.

Chapter 5 examines the motivations and journeys of participants from exiting compulsory schooling until entry into higher education. Most accounts correlate with the literature regarding BME (Modood and Acland, 1998) and BAC (Mirza, 1992) experiences of spending extended periods in post-compulsory education as a means of compensating for a lack of school leaving qualifications. As the adult education literature suggests, participants journeyed through a range of transitions (Knowles, 1998) and their paths were characterised by serendipity and stepping stones. The role of 'benevolent BMEs' and anti-racist practitioners as catalysts, highlights the importance of their presence for BAC achievement. Key motivations to study centred around parental expectations and social mobility (Allen, 1998a). The pleasure of studying (Hughes, Perrier and Kramer, 2007) emerged as an influential factor, particularly for women. The impact of race and class dynamics in the choice of HEIs (Ball, Reay and David, 2002) are also considered.

In sharp contrast to school, most participants felt that HE was, on the whole, both positive and worthwhile. Thus, in Chapter 6, Allen's (1998b) 'black construct of accessibility' provides a theoretical framework for exploring how successful BAC students minimised the negative impact of a lack of diversity in HE. 'Microaggressions' (Solorzano, 1998) have been identified as the main vehicle for racism in HE, a feature that was confirmed in this study. 'Emotional withdrawal' acted as a defence mechanism that was employed to minimise the disruptive potential of poor relationships with predominantly white lecturers. In the absence of a multicultural curriculum, some participants presented a black perspective in their university set work, but there was a degree of risk associated with this. Participants' concerns about fitting in and their ability are examined in light of the literature addressing class (Reay, 2001; 2003) and race (Reynolds, 2006) in HE. The role of black support networks in overcoming these anxieties is explored (Allen, 1998b). A majority of participants progressed into post-graduate study, where a gender dynamic became evident through the prevalence of women studying (McGivney, 2004). However, class-related and gender-related issues tempered female participants' inclinations towards PhD study, highlighting a potential for more BAC women to be encouraged to follow academic careers and thereby tackle the under-representation of BMEs and women in higher education generally. Finally, BAC perspectives on feminism are explored, addressing a hiatus in the literature relating to black perspectives on feminism (Joseph and Lewis, 1986; hooks, 1989).

Analysis of the professional lives of BACs in the UK remains relatively uncharted, so that, of necessity, Chapter 7 drew on the literature relating to the experiences of black women and the broader category of BME professionals (Mirza, 1992; Reynolds, 1997; Nelson 2004). The findings in relation to participants' careers are a bitter sweet combination of success in gaining entry to professions, and frustration at battling against oppressive organisational structures that serve to constrain rather than develop. All of the participants embarked on professional careers in their chosen fields. Their choice of direction tied in with four themes that emerged in the literature and are examined here, namely, public sector careers (Reynolds, 1997), career frustration (Mayor, 2002), entrepreneurialism (LDA, 2005) and community service (Gilkes, 1982). Gender was examined in relation to the impact that a primary responsibility for home and family continues to have on the careers of professional mothers.

The concluding chapter draws together the analyses and summarises the answers to each research question. It thus, outlines how the structuring effects of race, class and gender were typically experienced via the frustrations of unfulfilled potential in school, long journeys through post-compulsory education, microaggressions in HE and a general lack of diversity in staffing and curriculum throughout the education system. In addition, it notes how participants' outsider status frequently created obstacles to career progression. In highlighting the resources that participants were able to draw upon to enable their successes, benevolent BMEs and BAC social capital in the form of black social networks, were key features that enhanced the

experience of post-compulsory education. In careers, entrepreneurialism was identified as an alternative to unfriendly organisations. The ways that participants sought to use their skills and experiences to challenge the structures of race, class and gender suggested a process of conscientization. This was reflected in their career orientations, voluntary work and aspirations to combine entrepreneurial endeavours with community service. Finally, the chapter indicates the key policy implications and directions for future research, which include an examination of the benefits of supporting BAC graduates in developing community oriented enterprises.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the thesis, outlining its purpose and contribution to the field.

I have discussed the rationale for the research, including the political backdrop of recent education policy relating to widening participation and social inclusion and the need for more research from a black perspective that examines the socio-economic conditions that affect BAC experiences of education. Research aims and research questions were outlined, as was the structure of the thesis, thus providing an overview of the chapters contained within.

This introduction to the thesis will be followed, in the next chapter, by a review of the relevant literature.

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of school, HE and work of British African Caribbean (BAC) graduates who have achieved some measures of educational and career success. The thesis offers an analysis of these experiences within a theoretical framework that draws upon reproduction theory, black feminist theory, critical race theory and the theory of intersectionality. The primary purpose of this chapter is to outline the research literature extant in the fields of race, class, gender and education.

Although there is a proliferation of literature that discusses BAC failure in education (eg Coard, 1971; Mac an Ghail, 1988; Sewell, 1997; Gillborn, 1998; Wright et al, 1998), there is relatively little that addresses the conditions of success (eg Rhamie and Hallam, 2002; Mirza, 1992; Channer, 1995) and on the whole the emphasis is on school experiences. The literature on race and higher education (HE) tends to examine the broader black and minority ethnic (BME) experiences (eg Modood and Acland, 1998), as does the literature on graduate destinations and professional



careers (eg Mayor, 2002; Modood et al, 1997). There is a dearth of published research that explores BAC experiences of either HE or professional careers.

This research addresses the lacuna in the literature concerning the education and career experiences of BAC graduates. It thus contributes to our understanding of how BAC men and women become achievers in the educational field and the impact that this has on their subsequent careers. BACs are statistically recognised as one of the cohorts that fare worst within the education system (DfES, 2003) and employment market (Employment Gazette, 1993). However, BAC graduates have, by definition, excelled in the education system and therefore analyses that explore their experiences of education can shed light on the factors that facilitate their success, as well as those that hinder their progress and the strategies they adopt in order to achieve. This research covers the entire journey from compulsory schooling to post-compulsory and higher education and thence into graduate careers.

In the main body of this chapter I firstly explore the research concerned with the experiences of BACs in school, and then examine that which deals with the experiences of BMEs in post-compulsory education. Then, I move to an analysis of the career outcomes of BME graduates. Finally, I discuss the theoretical framework in detail, incorporating a clear outline of the fundamental issues that inform the thesis and underpin reproduction theory, critical race theory, black feminist theory and the theory of intersectionality.

## **Aspects of the education experience relating to schooling**

Research indicates that for many BAC pupils the picture that emerges regarding compulsory schooling is a disturbing combination of negative experiences and unfulfilled potential. A DfES report states that:

The evidence from LEAs and from the Ofsted review of research shows that the academic achievement of African Caribbean pupils is often higher at Key Stage 1 than other groups and then attainment gradually declines relative to other groups and is amongst the lowest at Key Stage 4. (*DfES, 2003; 32*)

Although BAC pupils often outperform their counterparts from other ethnicities when they start school, this situation changes quite dramatically as they progress through the British educational system and their performance tends to diminish rather than improve. The Labour MP, Diane Abbot, opined:

There is a silent catastrophe happening in Britain's schools in the way they continue to fail black British children... (*Diane Abbot, Member of Parliament, 2002*)

Despite the almost total neglect of this issue at a policy level (Archer and Francis, 2007), there is a growing body of literature that explores the impacts of race, class and gender on the attainment of BACs in education (eg Wright, 1988; Channer, 1995; Sewell, 1997; Mirza, 1992).

Traditionally, BAC pupils have been concentrated within inner city, working class communities and in London, where about 40% of the British BME population resides (Commission on Race and Education, 2003). Socio-economic background is generally seen as a very strong indicator of educational success, with working class children generally faring worse than those from middle class backgrounds (Reay, 2001). Under 30% of pupils entitled to free school meals achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C, compared with a 58% national average (BBC News, March 2006), highlighting poverty as a factor in educational attainment. However, 'the correlation between class indicators and attainment is not as strong for Black Caribbean and Black African pupils as for white ethnic groups' (DfES, 2003; 7) and class does not explain why black boys from middle class backgrounds do less well than working class boys from other backgrounds (Education Commission, 2004). On the other hand, when black girls are compared with girls from the same schools and with similar socio-economic backgrounds, they do better than their white counterparts, although not as well as Asian and Chinese girls (Mirza, 2005). Such is the complexity of the issues involved.

'Institutional racism' is a key factor in the longstanding debate over low attainment levels amongst BAC pupils and is defined as:

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

unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (*Macpherson, 1999; paragraph 6.34*)

In the Macpherson Report (1999), the British government was condemned for a systematically ingrained racism that had grown within one of its institutions, namely, the police service. However, the indictment applies to any government service that fails its public and there is a plethora of research that suggests that the British education system is one such example (eg Coard, 1971; Mac an Ghail, 1988; Graham and Robinson, 2004; Richardson, 2005).

The concept of race is somewhat problematic. Its meaning has changed over time and varies according to the socio-historical context (Sharpe, 2005). Although race is perceived as a physical reality (eg skin colour, hair texture, facial features), advances in evolutionary biology show a single human race with a common ancestry and thus discredit the notion that human beings can be sub-divided into distinct 'races' (Salifu, 2007). Nevertheless, Wright, Thompson and Channer (2007) highlight that racist signification ensures that 'whiteness' is constructed as natural and neutral, whilst the liberal ideal of the 'universal individual' is deemed to be white (and male). Non-whites are constructed as having 'racialised identities' (Dabydeen, Gilmore and Jones, 2007) and are cast as 'others'. Hence, despite the fact that race is not a physical reality, its consequences as a political reality are very real (Archer and Francis, 2007). The term 'race', therefore, continues to have relevance for

everyday and scholastic discourses and is frequently referred to in inverted commas in order to acknowledge its ambiguity.

One of the effects of the changing notion of race is a growth in discourses on ethnicity, which shift the focus to cultural identities. Hall (1993) notes that cultural identities are in constant flux, such that hybridity is a defining feature. This is reflected in the changing terminology used to describe ethnic groups. The British African Caribbeans that are central to this thesis, for example, are referred to in other research as West Indians, Afro Caribbeans, African Caribbeans and Black Caribbeans. Such categories sometimes include people of mixed origin and sometimes do not, making it difficult at times to draw comparisons. The term 'Black'/'black' is also questionable and is sometimes used as an umbrella term for all non-whites who face discrimination on the common grounds of race. However, except where otherwise stated, I use 'black' to refer to people of African heritage (eg Africans, British African Caribbeans, African Americans). The persistence of racism suggests that the investigation of the experiences of a more narrowly defined ethnic group, such as BACs, should serve to illuminate, rather than detract from the overall issues of race and racism.

Another key factor affecting the performance of BAC learners is social class. Class is the social stratification that permeates society, dividing the population economically and socially according to their access to power. Despite its absence in

popular, everyday discourses, class persists as a social phenomenon that shapes and often constrains the lives of individuals.

In order to understand the interconnection of race and class for BACs, it is imperative to briefly review the historical context of their positioning in UK society. The colonial relationship between Britain and the Caribbean was based on the capitalist exploitation of (black) Africans by (white) Europeans. Singh (2004) discusses the development of theories of race from their origins in creating a racist ideology designed primarily to justify the slave trade and colonialism. He charts the progression from the 'scriptural phase', where Africans were considered the cursed descendents of Ham; to the 'scientific phase', where biological determinism "proved" the superiority of the white race in terms of intelligence and Darwin's theory of evolution; and then to the current 'sociological phase' where race is seen as a social phenomenon rather than a physical reality. He submits that:

Within the sociological frame, 'race' by and large is understood as a social and ideological construct, designed to serve no other function than to justify racism and domination. (*Singh, 2004; 24*)

However, Singh (2004) also maintains that the widespread reluctance to acknowledge the influence of 'race thinking' belies its persistence.

It is within this social, political and historical context that Caribbean citizens were encouraged by the British Government to migrate to the 'motherland' in order to

help rebuild the post-World War II UK economy. The incentive for the migrants was to enjoy economic prosperity. Coard (1971) argues that the mass immigration of the 1950s and 1960s was devised to provide Britain with access to the cheap labour of its former colonies and in return, offer the least desirable jobs, the least desirable housing and the least desirable schools, thereby positioning BACs firmly on the bottom rungs of the working class irrespective of their education or previous status in the Caribbean. Simultaneously, the constant barrage of negative stereotypes of black people in the media fuelled divisions between black and white working classes who vied for limited resources:

The incitement of racial hatred... has the effect of diverting the workers' energies and attention away from the main cause of their low socio-economic position – the Establishment itself. (Coard, 1971, 34)

As such, race is explicitly and inextricably linked to class for BACs and since their arrival, BAC families have complained of unfair conditions for their children in British schools. Coard (1971) produced one of the earliest pieces of research that substantiated their grievances, demonstrating that education in the UK was racialised and that this led to poor outcomes for many BAC pupils. He refuted the idea that ability lay at the root of their failure *en masse*, demonstrating that IQ tests designed by black psychologists led to greater success for black students in both the UK and the USA. He argued that racism and Eurocentricity lay at the heart of the problem.

Having sketched the wider context, I will now explore the research that deals with the common experiences amongst BAC pupils in school and the ways that racism insidiously affects the school environment.

Teacher-student relationships have come under scrutiny in race and education research, which reveals that covert and often unintentional negative racial stereotyping on the part of teachers can lead them to underestimate the academic abilities of BAC students, even in the face of tangible evidence to the contrary. Research indicates that low teacher expectation manifests in BAC children being systematically placed in lower ability groups (Mac an Ghail, 1988) and their career aspirations being assessed as unrealistically high (Mirza, 1992). As a result, the progress of many BAC students is thwarted when they are directed to lower their sights in terms of career choices and decisions about their continued education (Mirza, 1992; Gillborn, 1998).

hooks (1994) discusses the need for caring and love in the classroom, with teachers having genuine concern for the children in their care. What stands out in BAC experiences of school is the absence of that caring element in classroom interactions with teachers. Instead, negative interpretations of behaviour, based on racial stereotyping, lead to teachers perceiving BAC children as a threat (Mac an Ghail, 1988; Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 1988). A great deal of emphasis is placed on controlling their behaviour, rather than encouraging them academically, and in classroom interactions, black children are more likely to be punished for exhibiting



the same behaviour as their peers from other racial backgrounds. Gillborn illustrates the point:

Black students were disproportionately controlled and criticised, not because they broke clear school rules any more frequently, but because teachers perceived them as a threat. (*Gillborn 1998; 14*)

As Pomeroy (1999) explains, teacher-student relationships play an integral role in exclusions and so it is hardly surprising that disproportionate numbers of black children are excluded from school (Wright et al, 1998). They have also been traditionally channelled into Educationally Sub-Normal classes or 'Special' schools (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 1988) and more recently categorised as having Special Educational Needs (Graham and Robinson, 2004).

This strong emphasis on negative interpretations of behaviour and lack of emphasis on academic ability, combined with low expectations is prevalent within the social organisation of schools responsible for the education of black children and has a detrimental effect.

The fact that BAC children fall behind as they progress through the British education system (DfES, 2003) may indicate that their educational achievements deteriorate with the decline in familial influence on education (Mbandaka, 2004). Parental involvement in the learning process is considered one of the most important elements of school success (Desforages, 2003) and a key problem faced by many

BAC children has been the inability of their parents to successfully challenge unfair treatment and ensure the best outcomes for them (McKenley, 2005).

It is widely accepted that all parents want their children to do well in school and BAC parents are no exception (Stone, 1981; Channer, 1995; McKenley, 2005). Evans (2006) found that working class parents acknowledged the importance of education, but saw it as something that happened only in schools. Similarly, Coard (1971) challenged the misconception that black families did not value education and argued that their inadequacy was not borne of disinterest, but of a strong belief in the meritocracy of the system. Notwithstanding, the Education Commission (2004) identified that BAC children were more likely to feel that they lacked appropriate support for their school work from parents. They also found that schools engaged with BAC parents primarily with the focus on issues of behaviour, rather than academic achievement, leaving parents feeling both unwelcome and unable to work in partnership with schools.

Although the bulk of the relevant literature addresses underachievement, some attention has also been directed at understanding the conditions under which BAC students succeed in schools (eg Arbouin, 1989; Mirza, 1992 and 1997; Rhamie and Hallam, 2002). Here, children's survival strategies and policy innovations were both highlighted as significant.

Amongst those that look at the strategies BAC youngsters utilise to navigate their way through the hurdles they face in school, Chigwada (1987) refers to 'anti-school but pro-education' students and Mac an Ghail (1988) identifies girls who adopt an ethos of 'resistance within accommodation'. Mac an Ghail (1988) found that these students rejected the school ethos because the hidden curriculum undermined their values; for example, the language and books in the library reflected a pride in colonialism, which was naturally offensive to black students with families from former colonies. However, these students valued qualifications as a means to an end and as such found it necessary to regurgitate Eurocentric and racist ideology (Mac an Ghail, 1988).

Gillborn's (1990) achievers kept a low profile, were non-confrontational and suppressed any characteristics of ethnicity which might threaten teachers. However, Channer (1995) believes that conformity is not necessarily sufficient for a black child to achieve success and whereas some have cited low self-esteem as a reason for educational failure, she sees deviance as a rational counter-strategy for maintaining self-belief:

For black pupils who seek academic success in a racially hostile school environment, deviance could be a well-measured stance which permits self-esteem to remain in tact while students aim to secure an educational foundation for their future. (*Channer, 1995; 18*)

Channer (1995) also explores the relationship between religion and education for BAC achievers, including the role of education as a form of social action. She points out that many of her participants viewed 'religion as a source of strength in their quest for academic success' (Channer, 1995; 111). Her reference to the church community as a supportive mechanism in education corresponds to the models of success proposed by Rhamie and Hallam (2002). Their Home-School Based model regards the school, parents and children as central in working in tandem towards educational achievement, utilising and drawing upon a shared language, culture and values. Community activities, such as church and music lessons, provide other valuable experiences that support, but are not fundamental to, academic success. Their model demonstrates that BAC children who attend schools with high expectations generally respond and do well. Although Rhamie and Hallam (2002) do not explicitly address social class in their analysis, this model of success reflects the typical components of middle class school achievement.

However, the concentration of BACs in poorer schools and the common occurrence of negative racial stereotyping amongst teachers, means that high expectations from the school are not the norm for most BAC pupils. As such, the alternative Home-Community Based model suggests that success is most likely to be achieved by BACs when certain other preconditions exist:

Here the community and home together provide the child with a 'sense of belonging', security and acceptance while emphasising the importance of achievement and success.

The community is pivotal in providing the child with opportunities where he or she can experience success. The school is not a part of this circle. (*Rhamie and Hallam, 2002; 164-5*)

According to this model a sense of belonging, love, security, acceptance, achievement and success are integral factors in academic achievement. These are derived from the child's motivation, an education-oriented home environment and positive community involvement where they are able to experience success. These elements combine to provide something akin to a protective barrier for the child. The child, thus, develops a resilience that enables her/him to achieve, regardless of any negative influences from the school, which is distinctly located outside of the main body. Mac an Ghail (1988) concurs with this view, noting that for many successful black students, teacher assessments of their ability is of little importance.

From the perspective of school policies that have raised achievement amongst BME pupils, introducing a multicultural curriculum is considered one of the most effective way to build positive identities amongst BME students and combat negative racial stereotyping (eg Sewell, 1997; Jiwani and Regan, 1998). As such, celebrating diversity has been identified as a key factor in improving achievement levels among BME students (DfES, 2002).

Mullard (1982) outlines the Community in the 1950s in the development of the debate on multiculturalism in UK schools. He identifies the 'assimilationist model', which argued that BME populations should blend into the host culture without

making any changes to that culture; the 'integrationist model' that explored other cultures in a superficial manner; and the 'cultural pluralism model', where anti-racist education took cognisance of the fact that society was not homogeneous, but consisted of a number of groups whose differences should be acknowledged. Although schools began to implement anti-racist policies, the Education Reform Act (1988) brought budgetary restraints and anti-racist education was no longer deemed a priority.

The absence of a multicultural school curriculum and its negative impact on black children has inspired BAC activists to organise Supplementary or Saturday Schools since the 1970s. Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe (1985) record the role of Supplementary Schools as giving added support for the mainstream curriculum and instilling in youngsters a strong sense of pride in their black identity. Mirza (1997), who writes about this activity with particular reference to black women's involvement, expounds:

For black women strategies for everyday survival consist of trying to create spheres of influence that are separate from but engaged with existing structures of oppression.

*(Mirza, 1997; 273)*

She describes black women as using Supplementary Schools as a strategy for transforming the society we live in by 'mapping the hidden histories, subjugated knowledges, the counter memories of black women educators' (Mirza, 1997; 173).

This is achieved by focusing on black images, black history, black role models and creating an environment where things black are the norm.

In the USA, similar community interventions took place in the 1960s when African American women used political consciousness raising in tutoring and found this method worked better than the more formal teacher-student relationships offered by the mainstream schools. They found that the children learned better when treated as peers and experts on their own lives. Teachers learned from students, as students learned from teachers and the children were often present at the group meetings, where childcare and politics meshed by necessity (Baxandall, 2001). This style of education is propounded by Freire (1996) in relation to adult education, when he rejects the cultural reproduction and role allocation of the structural functionalist view (eg Parsons, 1971) and instead proposes a 'critical pedagogy' that serves to empower individuals; social and political transformation are the optimum outcome. For Freire 'conscientization', which in short means 'awakening critical consciousness' (Bravette, 1996; 3), should be education's main objective and education, consequently, would serve to liberate the oppressed masses.

In summary, the DfES (2002; 2003) have identified strong leadership; high expectations; effective teaching and learning, including culturally diverse materials; an ethos of respect with a clearly delineated approach to racism and bad behaviour; and strong parental and community involvement (DfES, 2003). 'Black pupils gained the most improved results of any ethnic group in last year's GCSE' results

(BBC News, 8 March 2006) and the evidence suggests that if initiatives were rolled out nationally the situation might change dramatically. Still, in spite of the overwhelming evidence that black children are being failed by Britain's schools, measures specifically targeting them evoke strong resentment amongst some teachers (TES, 2006) and white working class children (Gillborn and Kirton, 2000). The importance, therefore, of diversity training for educators (Education Commission, 2004) and its reflection in the curriculum, cannot be overestimated.

### **Aspects of the post-compulsory education experience**

Government policy in post-compulsory education in the late 1990s focused upon the imperatives of widening participation and social inclusion. The Dearing Report (1997) was the outcome of an enquiry into HE and the Kennedy Report (1997) related to Further Education (FE). Widening participation in education is about increasing the numbers of learners from a diverse range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds and is defined as:

increasing access to learning and providing opportunities for success and progression to a much wider cross-section of the population...those who are not fulfilling their potential or who have underachieved in the past must be drawn into successful learning. (*Kennedy, 1997; 15*)

Dearing (1997) described the role of HE as the sustenance of a learning society by enabling individuals to fulfil their potential; to increase knowledge and understanding to benefit society; to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable,



knowledge-based economy at local, regional and national levels; and to shape a democratic, civilised, inclusive society. His report concluded:

We recommend to the Government and the funding bodies that, when allocating funds for the expansion of higher education, they give priority to those institutions which can demonstrate a commitment to widening participation and have in place a participation strategy, a mechanism for monitoring progress and provision for review by the governing body of achievement. (*Dearing, 1997*)

Both Dearing (1997) and Kennedy (1997) addressed the need for making adult education more accessible, proposing funding-related policy that rewarded institutions for attracting students from economically deprived areas. Other policy proposals in the adult education arena included building partnerships with industry and between providers, as well as the monitoring of widening access. However, the abolition of maintenance grants and the introduction of tuition fees sent a contradictory message and although the numbers of students attending higher education institutions (HEIs) increased by 53% between 1991-1998, there was little change in their socio-economic backgrounds (Tonks, 1999; On The Record, 2002). Furthermore, policies aimed specifically at attracting black students, excepting on the basis of their living within socio-economically deprived communities, were conspicuously lacking. Issues of race were, thus, subsumed under issues of social class, despite an extensive literature that outlined a range of other, perhaps more pertinent issues for black students (eg Gillborn, 1990; Mirza, 1992; Modood and Shiner, 1997; Sewell, 1997; Paul Michael Allen, 1998; Wright et al, 1998), a factor

that can perhaps be considered as hugely ironic in terms of academia and its own learning rhetoric.

The literature on race and post-compulsory education tends to focus on the broad category of BME students. The evidence suggests that there is enough commonality in their experiences of HE, compared with those of BACs, to justify looking at them as a whole, as well as within more narrowly defined categories (Modood and Acland, 1998). This research was prompted by the 'remarkable' performance of BAC women in adult education (Modood and Acland, 1998), which stood in stark contrast to the under-representation of their male counterparts. The latest HESA statistics (see Chart 2.1) show that BAC enrolments were comprised of 69% women and 31% men. Although women accounted for a larger proportion of HE enrolments generally (60% female, 40% male), the gender differentials are accentuated amongst BACs. Given the paucity of research focusing directly on this student cohort, I was persuaded of the efficacy and value of exploring the similarities and differences in the ways that BAC males and females encountered higher education.

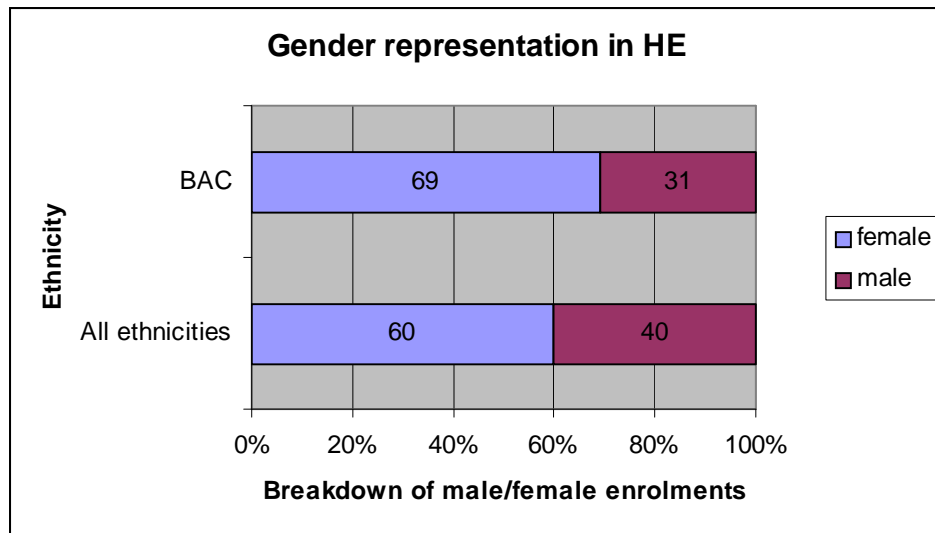
Modood and Acland (1998) found that most minorities were over-represented in HE and Table 2.2, concurs with this. In contrast to all other ethnicities, the white British ethnic group accounts for 92.1% of the UK population, but only 83.6% of HE enrolments in 2006/7, thus revealing an under-representation<sup>2</sup>. However, amongst

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<sup>2</sup> These figures should be viewed with caution as the latest Census figures are for 2001 and ethnic groupings include male and female, which could conceal gender differences in enrolments, such as those amongst BACs.

BME students, progression is often slower and drop out rates are higher, which indicates that issues of race in HE relate not only to access, but also to the differential experiences of BMEs (Modood and Acland, 1998).

Chart 2.1: Gender representation in HE



Source: HESA (2008)

Table 2.2: UK and HE population by ethnicity

Ethnicity	%age of UK population	%age of HE enrolments* 2004/5	%age of HE enrolments* 2005/6	%age of HE enrolments* 2006/7
White	92.1	84.3	84.0	83.6
African Caribbean	1.0	1.5	1.5	1.5
African	0.8	3.1	3.3	3.5
Other African heritage	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.4
Indian	1.8	3.2	3.2	3.2
Pakistani	1.3	1.9	1.8	1.9
Bangladeshi	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.7
Chinese	0.4	0.9	0.9	0.9
Other Asian heritage	0.4	1.3	1.3	1.3
Other (incl Mixed Race)	1.6	2.7	2.9	3.0

\* 1st year undergraduate and postgraduate students

Sources: Census 2001 and HESA statistics 2004/5 to 2006/7

Clearly, many of the influencing factors in the decision to study are universal and apply to black and white students alike. However, the significance of issues can vary considerably and additional issues come into play for large numbers of black students. For instance, the negative experiences of schooling and the trends of underachievement at GCSE level discussed earlier, mean that relatively large numbers of BAC students pursue qualifications through adult education and enter HE via non-traditional routes (Mirza, 1992; Reynolds, 2006). As such, many encounter the range of issues explored in the literature on mature students (eg Reay, 2003) and in spite of high levels of commitment and dedication towards study, they are more likely to struggle with the transition to HE culture. Many black students enter HE with trepidation, expecting their experiences of learning to be as traumatic as that of school (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe (1985) and this acts as a potential barrier. They are also frequently required to juggle more outside commitments, such as family and work. In particular, working class women have been noted for their commitment towards the community (Reay, 2003); they, therefore, experience a higher level of risk in terms of the costs outweighing the benefits of their continued education.

Allen's (1998a) research compares the factors that motivate black and white students in their decisions to study and finds that whilst teachers and friends are important to both groups, parental and family expectations are a more prominent factor amongst black students. Many BME students place a higher emphasis on making their families proud, because education is highly valued within their communities.

Additionally, public achievement is an important issue for some and Allen (1998b) suggests that having been historically labelled as a problem, some black students feel themselves under scrutiny, with an added pressure to do well, as representatives and on behalf of their race. Obtaining qualifications can also be more important to BMEs as a means to acquiring a career and economic success (Allen, 1998a).

In contrast, white students are more inclined to cite the enjoyment of student life, avoiding employment, the desire to learn and their development as motivations (Allen, 1998a). These findings suggest that education, for black students, is seen as instrumental, rather than something embarked upon for intrinsic satisfaction. Although it may seem cynical, such pragmatism is well-founded, as BMEs, including graduates, face higher than average levels of unemployment (Employment Department, 1993; 1995; Blink, 2005) and many black graduates find it necessary to take jobs for which they are over-qualified (Reynolds, 1997).

Linked to this is the debate as to why black students are highly concentrated in 'new' (post-1992) universities, but almost non-existent in 'old' universities. As with all students, grades play a part in the selection of HEI and poor schooling inevitably restricts options. Also, some mature, working class students express an inclination towards 'new' universities on the basis of feeling more welcome (Reay, 2003). Ball, Reay and David (2002) conclude that the influence of social class prevails over ethnicity in BME choices of institution. However, the inclusion of a large Jewish population in their study, who tend to be white and, therefore, an invisible minority,

arguably obscured the issue of race. On the other hand, black students do tend to study closer to home and Taylor (1992) suggests that many are attracted to universities where they expect to find a sizeable black population, as opposed to institutions presenting a largely 'white' image. Allen (1998a) contends that ethnic diversity within the student body is not an important criterion for black students' choice of university; although it does become a factor once they are attending their chosen HEI.

Clearly the combination of race and class deters large numbers of black students from 'old' universities and in terms of widening participation, such institutions have much to learn from 'new' universities in encouraging applications from non-traditional students (Reay, 2003). There are further implications related to the value of the degrees black graduates are able to obtain as a result of attending less prestigious universities.

As the literature probes deeper into the reasons for black students gravitating to institutions with more diverse populations, it reveals the isolation often experienced in university by racial minorities (Bird 1996). Allen (1998b) finds that black students develop informal black support networks, both consciously and unconsciously, in order to insulate themselves against the racism and isolation they encounter in HE. He observes:

It was in the realm of this 'black space' where black realities, identities and strategies were continually being replenished by the informal group. (*Allen, 1998b; 89*)

He also identifies black students as being less likely to enjoy supportive relationships with their lecturers, with many expressing a wish to see more black academic staff, who they feel are better equipped to assist them with issues relating to race. In line with this, black academics find themselves bearing additional, unacknowledged workloads in providing support to black students, who face subtle racism in their HE experience (Mukherjee, 2001). Channer and Franklin (1995) comment:

there is also the specific problem of black pastoral needs which at many universities is ignored. Although some HEIs have begun to recognise that black students have serious grievances about their conditions of learning, nevertheless little is being done which addresses this issue. (*Channer and Franklin, 1995; 35*)

Solorzano (1998) identifies subtle, offensive, put downs aimed at black scholars as one of the main vehicles for the racism and sexism they experience in HE. These 'microaggressions' occur in numerous interactions within the institution and convey the understanding that the black student does not belong and that expectations for them are lower. Because they are often small and unconscious, microaggressions frequently go unchallenged, but their cumulative effect is colossal as they operate in tandem with the macro barriers to HE. By documenting and investigating these incidents, he argues, we can begin to name and then confront racism in HE.

However, the facilitation of a minority-friendly culture in universities appears to be low on the list of priorities for HE managers (Singh, 1998) and statistics (HESA 1996-7; HESA 1998; Mayor of London, 2002) show that black academics and academic-related staff are grossly underrepresented in HEIs. Most of those in pre-1992 universities are from overseas (Carter, Fenton and Modood, 1999) and BMEs tend to be concentrated in the least desirable and less secure posts, such as fixed-term contracts. They are less likely to be promoted than their white counterparts (Hague, 1999) and the level of discrimination in British universities is higher than the national average (Fenton and Modood, 1999). Nonetheless, as Lola Young, one of the handful of black women professors in the UK, remarks:

People in universities like to think of themselves as tolerant, rigorous, demanding intellectuals, so how could they possibly be discriminating on the grounds of race or gender? (*Hague, 1999; 20*)

But can institutions that fail to recruit BME staff provide unbiased education for their BME students?

There is further evidence that cultural bias and discrimination in marking are at least partially linked to the differential learning experiences and achievement patterns of BME students in HE (Allen, 1998b). For example, Esmail and Dewart (1998) found that Asian medical students are more likely to do well in written exams, whilst being more likely to fail in face-to-face assessments with predominantly white consultants.



Other research argues that there is a tendency for BAC students to do worse in written papers as a result of marking that focuses too narrowly on style, rather than content (Modood and Acland, 1998). The fact that they are less likely to conform to a white, middle class style hinders their progress. Channer (1995) and Coard (1971) address the negative impact that language has for BAC children in school. The attention given to English as an Additional Language in education (Education Commission, 2004) contrasts starkly with the lack of attention given to issues of language for BACs. Thus, the impact of Caribbean dialects that are often a combination of English vocabulary and African grammar structures has long been ignored. Conversely, the increasing recruitment of overseas students with English as a Foreign Language is evidence that HEIs can factor language as a consideration when they deem this appropriate. Whilst the lucrative nature of the overseas market has perhaps provided additional incentives for HEIs in raising their awareness of the diverse needs of overseas students, such insights could also be profitably applied to home students from diverse backgrounds where appropriate.

Freire (1972) and hooks (1994) discuss the thought-language issue in adult learning and the role of language in oppression and resistance. Both emphasise the importance of students being able to use their own speech codes and experiences in education in order to express themselves and strengthen links between their learning and their lived realities, thereby serving to reduce the sense of alienation.

Educational policies geared towards widening participation and social inclusion have gone some way towards providing access to HE for more black students and the literature (eg Modood and Acland, 1998) suggests a range of other innovations that could facilitate equality of opportunity for BME students within HE. However, the journey does not end at graduation and the current emphasis on instrumentality and 'marketisation' in HE (Hughes, Perrier and Kramer, 2007) suggests that students expect their graduate status to lead to desirable career prospects. Consequently, I will now consider the career outcomes of educational achievement for BME graduates in a review of the literature exploring the professional careers of BMEs.

### **Career outcomes of the education experience**

The analysis of the professional lives of BACs in the UK is relatively uncharted territory, representing a lacuna in the existing literature that this primary research seeks to redress. Mayor moots that there is 'extremely limited knowledge concerning the black professional class in Britain' (Mayor, 2002; xi) and consequently this section of the literature review will rely heavily on the literature that reflects the current emphasis on black professional women and BMEs.

As the number of BME graduates in the UK swells, BMEs continue to face higher rates of unemployment (Employment Gazette, 1993; Reynolds, 1997), have more difficulty gaining work on graduation (Allen, 1998b) and are concentrated in some sectors of the job market, whilst being all but absent from others. A large proportion of black women are found in the public sector, where the priority given to equal

opportunities in recruitment allows entry for suitably qualified BMEs. However, entry into does not guarantee equality within and statistics from the USA show that there are significant income differentials between men and women and between black and white people of the same education levels (Joseph and Lewis, 1986). Similarly, in the UK there is evidence of differences in the earnings of highly educated male and female workers (Elias et al, 1997), with black professional women tending to earn less than their white male and female colleagues (Reynolds, 1997).

Mirza (1992) explored career aspirations amongst black girls and identified that many selected 'strategic careers', taking into account race and gender stratification within the UK employment market. Accordingly, they aspired to jobs such as nursing, social work and teaching, where there was a visible presence of BMEs and women. With caring still considered the domain of women (Hughes, 2002) and thus remaining relatively low paid, these careers have provided opportunities for women and black people to enter the lower status professions.

Nursing, in particular, has been one of the few professions open to black women since the 1950s (Mayor, 2002), a fact that can in some part be attributed to the stereotyping of black women as carers of others. The proliferation of women in primary schools and the lower levels of the teaching profession is also associated with the caring nature of the career. The popularity of social work, on the other hand, was the result of increasing numbers of Access courses and initiatives that

were geared towards women generally, providing a 'back door' entry for large numbers of black women who seized the opportunity for professional training (Mirza, 2005). Yet, in each of these professions, the number of BMEs and women occupying positions in the higher echelons of the organisational hierarchies is miniscule. The latter remain the almost exclusive preserve of white men.

With the marked increase in women's activity in the employment market (Elias and Bynner, 1996; Purcell, 2000), one might expect to see a corresponding easing of their role as primary carers within the family. However, this is not the case (Hughes, 2002; Omar et al, 2004), and the marked increase in females within teaching, for example, has been fuelled by its commensurability with the possibility for professionally qualified women selecting careers that allow an easy fit with childcare commitments. Holidays that mirror those of their school age children allows mothers who teach to juggle their work with a primary responsibility for the family and household. Teaching is also one of the few careers for which post-graduate training is funded, making it accessible to people from less financially well-off backgrounds.

Hughes (2002) explores the competing pressures experienced by mothers who struggle to achieve a balance between the demands of career and family commitments. She examines the tensions inherent in the popular discourses around 'the good mother' who is caring, selfless and family oriented, and the competitive individualism of a market economy driven by capitalist, self-serving ideals. With

motherhood still considered one of the primary roles of women and people being increasingly defined by their careers, a significant number of graduate and professional women go into part-time employment after having children, which has negative consequences for their earning potential. Working class women who study as mature students, thus run the added risk of failing to gain a return on their investment in adult education (Reay, 2003), because as women returning to work they are unable to compensate for their loss of earnings whilst studying. The combined impact of poor childcare provision in the UK (Crompton, 2000; Hughes, 2002; Prowess Profile, 2005) and a system that does not take account of the family commitments of workers, is that many mothers, including graduates, find themselves in work that is low paid, low status and part-time. As Joseph and Lewis (1986) postulate:

The social reality women have to face is that motherhood and paid employment are objectively incompatible in a world that puts isolated nuclear family (the American dream unit) against the capitalist organisation of work in Western industrial society.  
*(Joseph and Lewis, 1986; 129)*

Women not only endure relative low pay, but also do unpaid work. The 'Campaign for Wages for Housework' in a study by Chase Manhattan Bank estimated that if women in the USA were paid for housework it would cost between \$500 and \$650 billion per annum – the entire government budget! They argue 'This unpaid and underpaid labor of all women, especially Black women, sustains the economy' (Joseph and Lewis, 1986; 34-35).

However, among women of working age in the UK, economic activity rates are highest for those of BAC origin (Employment Department, 1993; Maurey, 2005) and black women have been identified as the most upwardly mobile cohort in British society. As Channer notes there are 'growing numbers of black professionals who are contributing a great deal to society in economic and educational terms' (Channer, 1995; 11).

The term 'glass ceiling' is used to describe the invisible ceiling that exists within organisations, preventing large numbers of women from climbing to the higher levels of the corporate ladder. Nelson (2004) similarly uses the term 'sticky floor syndrome' to describe the situation where BME women remain at the bottom of their professions due to prejudice. When it comes to race, however, it is not only women who face prejudice and experience difficulties progressing in their career. Modood et al (1997) describe the 'ethnic penalty' as 'all sources of disadvantage that may lead an ethnic group to fare less well in the labour market than do similarly qualified white people...' (Modood et al, 1997; 144). Contributory factors that are barriers to progression include lack of fluency in English, longer qualifying periods in education, attendance at lower status education institutions and discrimination in job applications (Mayor, 2002). Ultimately, the value of their degrees is reduced and BME graduates, both male and female, are more likely to gain employment in jobs for which they are overqualified (Employment Gazette, 1993; Reynolds, 1997; Allen, 1998b). Once inside an organisation, they are likely to languish on the

bottom rungs of their career ladder, having to move sideways into a different organisation in order to progress (Reynolds, 1997). Added to this, attempts to tackle racism when disputes arise are frequently met with a lack of union support (Robinson, 2007).

In a racialised context, few black employees manage to secure professional or senior positions, so that consequently those that do can face isolation in their careers and a degree of detachment from their communities (hooks, 1993). Therefore, the literature on bicultural lifestyles (see Bell, 1990; McKenley, 2005; McKenley and Gordon, 2002; Townsend, 1982) explores the ways in which black professionals juggle the demands of predominantly white, middle class, male-oriented organisational cultures with cultural backgrounds that are embedded in the norms of, often disenfranchised, black communities. Gordon (2007) uses DuBois' (1903) 'double consciousness' in her discussion of bicultural competence and is emphatic about the need for BACs to be vigilant in attending to internal conflicts that arise from this duality. She postulates:

Culture is critical to the wellbeing of the human being. At the heart of the idea of bicultural socialisation is understanding that people living in a culture not developed with their interests in mind need to be socialised into two cultures: a culture of origin and the culture of residence. There are points of possible conflict and consciously attending to them protects one's inner well-being. (*Gordon, 2007; 116*)

Alfred (1997) uses Collins' (1991; 2000) 'outsider within' concept to explain the 'creative marginality' that black women academics use to successfully move between the spheres of their professional and personal lives. For these women, the maintenance of a positive black identity and active participation in both worlds was integral to their success. Alfred describes them as 'survivors with the ability to float in and out of different class and ethnic cultures and still emerge with a strong sense of who they are as Black women' (Alfred, 1997; 9).

A similar small scale study of black women academics in the UK identified that they faced challenges including 'exclusionary institutional practices, being subjected to excessive scrutiny and anxieties about evaluation...' (Wright, Thompson and Channer, 2007; 151). Drawing on Foucault (1995) and McLaren (2002) the authors deduced that the heightened surveillance these women endured within HE was eventually internalised, leading to self-monitoring and self-doubt. Despite adopting survival strategies, such as asserting their rights and tapping into their own spirituality, three of the eight participants elected to leave HE or reduce their contractual hours. The research suggests that in spite of policies encouraging diversity, UK HEIs may effectively be driving out the few existing black academic women.

Alfred's (1997) participants' survival strategies included being aware of underhand tactics that others may use against them without emulating that behaviour; having a fulfilling home life outside of the academy that provided a safe place to retreat from



it all; and the insistence on the self-definition of their identity and the rejection of negative stereotypes.

For some, this balancing act may mean sacrificing career progression in order to prioritise the needs of black communities and redefining their perception of success (Gilkes, 1982). For others, the price of not fitting into the organisation's 'old boy network' and the detrimental effect that has on career progression can lead to 'rage'. McKenley (2005) discusses strategies employed in the USA to assuage the anger and frustration that arise from the experience of racism in careers. She contrasts this with the absence of significant steps being made in the UK to deal with similar problems:

The US strategies include: the development of conflict resolution competencies to enable individuals to handle the racism they will inevitably experience as they develop careers, and skill-building programmes which help individuals to manage their 'rage' over the experience of racism... they are organisationally based, suggesting a shared responsibility between the organisation and the individuals of black and minority ethnic heritage. This contrasts markedly with the UK experience where their race experiences seem to be something ethnic minorities are expected to work on individually.

*(McKenley, 2005; 158)*

hooks (1995) also raises the issue of suppressed rage amongst black professionals who, despite their achievements, face continued discrimination in employment and life. In the face of these difficulties, black women in the UK are increasingly

considering either emigration or setting up their own businesses as an alternative (BBC Radio 4, 22 January 2006).

A key feature of recent changes in patterns of employment in the UK economy is the increase of self-employment (Purcell, 2000). The growth of entrepreneurialism amongst black graduates and women who face obstacles in the workforce (Nelson, 2004; Maurey, 2005) is demonstrative of how agency is used to circumvent oppressive structures and transform society. Entrepreneurialism is more common amongst BMEs (Employment Gazette, 1993) and over the past decade increasing numbers of BME women have started their own businesses (LDA, 2005). In London, 29% of black women own businesses, making them the sub-group most likely amongst women to set up their own enterprise (LDA, 2005). In the USA, the percentage of black women who own their own businesses is the highest of any ethnic group, exceeding that even for white men.

Barclays (2005) acknowledged the contribution of BME enterprises to the UK economy and their potential to promote economic inclusion. They identified that BME entrepreneurs were more likely to be graduates or professionally qualified and highlighted the 'desire to be their own boss', 'independence' and 'making money' as key motivators. CI Research (2006) found that the most common reason for starting a business amongst black respondents was making better use of their skills. Similarly, Maurey (2005) suggests that many BME women find it necessary to

create their own job if they wish to obtain work commensurate with their qualifications and experience.

‘Alterpreneurs’ are a new breed of alternative entrepreneurs, who seek to create a more suitable work/life balance by starting up small businesses as an alternative to traditional employment (Critical 2 Limited, 2005). At the same time, increasing numbers of women are turning to self-employment as a viable way of juggling family commitments and childcare with earning potential (LDA, 2005). Omar et al (2004) established that married, BME women entrepreneurs frequently struggled to balance the demands of business and family and depended on informal support networks to succeed. Even so, they found self-employment worthwhile in terms of the flexibility it allowed. The gendered difficulties encountered in the UK contrast with Sweden, where female entrepreneurialism is flourishing and provision of childcare is a government priority. Notably, in Sweden ‘childcare was not once mentioned as a barrier to starting an enterprise, whereas in the UK it is one of the most frequently cited obstacles’ (Prowess Profile, 2005; 16).

Radio 4’s ‘Changing the Rules’ (BBC, 2007) explored the growing numbers of female entrepreneurs who emphasised values, such as flexible working, a good rapport and empathy with customers and staff as crucial. The program argued that women are, thus, changing the face of entrepreneurialism, which in previous generations placed a greater emphasis on traditionally male-oriented characteristics that did not fit with women’s real lives. This new impetus is apparently enabling

women to succeed without a trade off between 'values' and 'value', or 'having a life' and 'making a living'.

There is also evidence of an inclination to community building among BME women (Maurey, 2005) and Gilkes (1982) explores the ways that professional, black women have negotiated careers and community commitment. When Mirza (1992) explored the career aspirations of young BAC women, she also found a strong inclination towards community, with her participants expressing a desire to improve conditions for black communities by working in caring professions. Reay's (2003) findings similarly identified volunteering in the community as a common theme and a strong motivator amongst her mature, working class Access students.

In *The Black Middle Class* (BBC Radio 4, 22 January 06), Mike Phillips reasoned that people who are setting up their own businesses in response to constraints within the mainstream will be central to the development of a more prosperous segment amongst black communities in the UK. But the fact remains that although black Britons are more likely to consider self-employment (Nelson, 2005), on the whole, there are relatively low numbers of BACs recorded in the official statistics for self-employment (Barclays, 2005). One of the key factors in this is poor access to funding (DTI, 2003; Maurey, 2005) on the basis of race, class and gender. For example, BMEs have more difficulty accessing funding, leading to uneven distribution across ethnicities (LDA, 2005); when regeneration funding is available, it is more likely to go to applicants from middle class areas who propose the

development of businesses within deprived areas, rather than to applicants from the regeneration area itself (Dawe, Fielden and Woolnough, 2006); and women are more likely to require loans for business start-ups, compared to men, who tend to have access to savings (Dawe, Fielden and Woolnough, 2006). As such, the multiplier effect of race, class and gender bias takes its toll and available funds are skewed away from BMEs, the working classes and women.

## **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework draws on reproduction theory, critical race theory, black feminist theory and the theory of intersectionality.

### ***Reproduction theory***

Reproduction theorists such as Giddens (1976) and Bourdieu (1977) examine the relationship between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ in a sociological context. Sewell (1992), for example, believes that:

Structures shape people’s practices, but it is also people’s practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures... if enough people or even a few people who are powerful enough act in innovative ways, their action may have the consequence of transforming the very structures that gave them the capacity to act. (*Sewell, 1992; 4*).

The function of education in society and the way it reproduces existing social class structures is explored from a range of perspectives in the sociology of education literature. At a fundamental level:

Educational institutions are specifically created and legally sanctioned to transmit knowledge, skill and values; they also play an important part in determining people's position in society. (*Burgess and Parker, 1999; 180*)

While the functionalist perspective focuses on the transmission of society's values and role allocation (eg Durkheim, 1956; Parsons, 1961), the Marxist viewpoint identifies education as a vehicle of ideological dominance designed to perpetuate inequality within a capitalist society (eg Althusser, 1972). Interactionists explore the relationship between societal structures and individual agency. Bourdieu's landmark work illustrates how the norms of behaviour that set the standards within education are in fact based on middle class values and thus provide children from those backgrounds with a distinct advantage. He elucidates:

when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself "as a fish in water", it does not feel the weight of the world and takes the world about it for granted. (*quoted in Reay, 2002; 223*)

Drawing on Bourdieu, Archer and Francis (2007) note that, historically, occupation was a key component in the conceptualisation of class, but cultural analyses have become more central to contemporary understanding. Among cultural theorists, Bourdieu's work on the interplay between *habitus* and *capital* is particularly influential. *Habitus* is an individual's 'way of being', acquired through socialisation, whilst capital signifies the resources, both real and symbolic, that the

individual can call upon as recognition tools. A middle class habitus aids and abets success in the educational system, inculcating an orientation that promotes the attainment of educational capital. In addition to this, all individuals have access to resources of economic, social, cultural and symbolic *capital*, but the value of these varies according to their proximity to those legitimated by dominant power structures. Therefore, although, for example, working class derision of middle class values occurs in some contexts, at a broad societal level middle class capital tends to carry more status; the former tending to convey value as local currency, with little significance outside the social and economic milieu of its origin. Higher status capital has a wider exchange value (ie it is recognised as culturally valuable by those occupying 'lesser' social and economic positions in the hierarchy) and the cumulative effect of middle class habitus and capital leads to greater privilege because of what the individual has (capital), and who the individual is (values as taste in the everyday, as well as orientations towards ways of being). Bourdieu, thus, provides a useful mechanism for comprehending the ways that inequality is perpetuated and power is maintained amongst certain groups. For Bourdieu, access to power is easiest for those who already share a taste for it, whilst gaining access to it requires an acceptance from those who already have it, which itself necessitates learning a way of life (new values and tastes) that will enable acceptance from those in a position to dispense it. New capital is not acquired easily, nor is it always readily recognised, facing stringent tests in terms of an acceptable *modus vivendi* (habitus) that appear more severe than those adhered to even by the judges themselves.

Whilst Bourdieu's work provides insightful analyses of social class, its weakness is the absence of any discussion of race. Critical race theory, black feminist theory and the theory of intersectionality, therefore, are invaluable resources for exploring race and education, which they understand from similar standpoints, whilst also facilitating a more nuanced comprehension of race and gender. Each has its strengths: the language of critical race theory is useful for deconstructing the experience of racism and its perpetuation (eg Solorzano, 1998), whilst black feminism, which retains the centrality of race, provides illumination through analyses that incorporate the effects of gender and class (eg Collins, 2000; hooks, 1994). Intersectionality is, perhaps, one step closer to an inclusive analysis of the varied and multiple ways that different intersections of social constructions including race, class, gender and sexuality, combine to create different manifestations of oppression.

### ***Critical race theory***

The origins of critical race theory (CRT) lie in legal scholarship (Yosso, 2005). In the 1970s the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) scholarship movement sought to analyse the legal system's role in legitimising oppression. However, it paid scant regard to race and consequently, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman introduced critical race theory in an attempt to improve understanding of how and why racism persists, despite the progress made by the civil rights movement. In the mid-1990s Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate began to apply CRT to the education context



(Dixon and Rousseau, 2006). As such, CRT now provides a way to analyse and critique educational research and practice and make sense of the ongoing racial inequality in educational experiences and outcomes (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

In defining critical race theory, Yosso (2005) draws on Solorzano to outline a number of its underpinning assumptions. Firstly, she notes, race is central to CRT and racist subordination is understood to be inextricably linked to other forms of oppression, such as class and gender. CRT challenges white privilege, arguing that traditional claims of meritocracy, neutrality, objectivity and colour blindness are generally a camouflage for the self-interest, power & privilege of dominant groups. Hence, although education could emancipate and empower, it frequently serves to oppress and marginalise. In CRT the experiential knowledge of BMEs is considered to be not only legitimate, but also essential to understanding how racism operates. Furthermore, CRT suggests that a trans-disciplinary perspective is necessary and accordingly, it draws upon historic and contemporary contexts, across a range of disciplines.

Gillborn (2005) identifies scholarship and social justice as two main objectives of critical race theory and highlights that as a theory it disrupts many of the 'commonsense' assumptions that inform education policy and practice. For example, contrary to many popular discourses, CRT argues that the education system is *not* meritocratic and that racism is dependent upon outcome, as opposed to intent. Thus, the recent government policy to promote streaming in schools as 'best

practice' for all, despite knowing that it disadvantages black pupils, is a clear example of the way white interests are privileged at the expense of black pupils in education. Gillborn further suggests that, according to CRT, racism is the norm, rather than unusual and is most harmful in subtle and institutionalised forms. He asserts:

...the most dangerous form of 'white supremacy' is not the obvious and extreme fascistic posturing of small neo-nazi groups, but the taken-for-granted routine privileging of white interests that goes unremarked in the political mainstream.

*(Gillborn, 2005; 485)*

As a result, institutionalised racism appears normal, because it is embedded in the system. However, we are not born racist; instead we are socialised and educated to be so. Yosso (2005), therefore, contends that many educators are misguided in the belief that the organisation of schooling is basically good and right, and that children, families and communities who fail to achieve are at fault and must change.

By combining critical race theory and Bourdieu's theory of capitals, Yosso (2005) presents an alternative and more positive view of the role of social and cultural capital in BME communities. She argues that Bourdieu's theory centres on the capitals that white, middle class people have in abundance. It, thereby, leads to a discourse of disadvantage in which many educators end up believing that the educational inequality that BMEs experience is a result of BME cultural deficiencies. By centring the black experience, Yosso (2005) decentres the white

experience as the 'norm' or yardstick against which BME experiences are measured. The outcome is a shift from a deficit model of BME social and cultural capital (ie a focus on what they do not have) to acknowledging the cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts that BMEs possess in abundance and utilise in order to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression. Thus, her concept of 'community cultural wealth' identifies a range of capitals that interlink and overlap. These are passed on through BME families and communities and in brief, include:

- **aspirational capital:** a culture of possibility that enables BMEs to hold on to hopes and dreams beyond their current circumstances
- **linguistic capital:** the ability to communicate in more than one language/dialect and in different social/class settings
- **familial capital:** the understanding of family as extended family (rather than nuclear) and the inclusion of community as part of that extended family
- **social capital:** social and community contacts that provide instrumental and emotional support (eg for applications for scholarships/ courses in HE)
- **navigational capital:** the skills and ability to navigate structural barriers, such as hostile education institutions
- **resistant capital:** the self-definition that enables BMEs to develop positive identities that are oppositional to popular, negative racial and gender stereotypes.

This concept of 'community cultural wealth', transforms our knowledge and understanding of how BMEs achieve educationally, and provides an empowering

theorisation that identifies the tools that BMEs equip themselves with in their quest for racial and social justice.

Wright, Standen and Patel (2010) apply CRT, black feminist theory and Yosso's (2005) uses of social capital to explore how black youngsters transform their negative school experiences into 'success' in post-compulsory education. They state:

In the main the book will show how agency, individual response, resistance and challenge are linked to the requisite resources and opportunities made available through social capital facilitated through institutional relationships such as the family, kin and community-based organisations. (*Wright, Standen & Patel, 2010; 11-12*)

They note that despite being failed by the school system, black youth are over-represented in HE and that little is known about how they make this transition. Wright, Standen and Patel (2010) find that black community networks act as a form of social capital that reduces the marginalisation that black youngsters experience and empowers them to develop skills and motivations, which enable them to tap into available resources. They also note that mothers' emotional support for their children's academic success (aspirational and/or resistant capital) transfers to educational and social prestige. Furthermore, their consideration of the role of peer groups in the transformation to 'success', is in contrast to the bulk of past research which focuses on peer group resistance leading to the reproduction of the same inequalities (eg Willis, 1977; Mac an Ghail, 1988; Sewell, 1997).

### ***Black feminist theory***

Historically, race, class and gender have been studied and analysed as separate entities, but it is now increasingly acknowledged that these must be looked at in conjunction with each other in order to gain an understanding of the different forms of oppression. Within the feminist movement there are a variety of perspectives and schools of thought, such as liberal, radical, Marxist and black feminism<sup>3</sup>. Black feminism emerged as a result of the failure of the women's liberation movement to adequately address issues of race; and the failure of the black liberation movement to adequately address issues of gender. With black women being traditionally positioned among the poorer working class, the explicit agenda of struggling 'against exploitative capitalism' (Taylor, 1998; 19) is also central to the black feminist cause.

Rejecting the essentialist notion of a universal 'black experience' (Sharpe, 2005), I argue that black women inhabit a wide range of social class positions in contemporary Britain. If, in the above section on schooling, I discussed the historical location of BACs within the working class, it becomes clear that most BAC women who have moved into middle class professions have their roots in a working class milieu. Their own relocation amongst the middle class does not guarantee the same for their families, or even their offspring, as BAC children from middle class backgrounds will still be subject to bias and discrimination in the

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<sup>3</sup> For definitions of feminisms see Hamer and Neville (1998) and for a '*Map of Feminisms*' see Raddon (2004)

education system (DfES, 2003; Education Commission, 2004), whilst a BAC graduate will still suffer from discrimination in the job market (Employment Gazette, 1993). These and the other issues discussed earlier regarding professional careers, ensure that BAC women's position within the middle class is often isolated and tenuous. Many middle class BAC women, therefore, maintain a vested interest in the elimination of these multiple oppressions and their collective knowledge of the simultaneity of race, class and gender oppression (Brewer, 1993) could provide insight into struggles against the social systems that constrain them.

In defining 'black feminism', 'black' is used politically to describe people of African and Asian heritage who face oppression on the grounds of race; feminism is characterised as follows:

In its broadest sense, feminism constitutes both an ideology and a global political movement that confronts sexism, a social relationship in which males as a group have authority over females as a group. (*Collins, 1996; 12*)

During the 1980s and 1990s, the third wave of feminism arrived and a growing body of black academics, including bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Heidi Mirza began to represent black women's perspectives within the feminist literature, with education featuring as a key topic. Education was also prioritised by organisations such as the Black Feminist Caucus, who emphasised the need for 'the re-education of all groups through scholarship and media sources' (Hamer and Neville, 1998; 3).

Integral to black feminist analyses of education is the role of race and class in perpetuating educational inequalities. Thus, hooks (1994) explores how the prevalence of white, middle class values in education operates to silence black and working class students in the classroom. For example, the middle class norms of using standard English, suppressing emotions and avoiding the discussion of contentious issues such as race, become synonymous with educational success. Black and working class students who find it necessary to suppress their natural behaviour in order to succeed are, thereby, marginalised and cast as 'others'. Reay (2001) infers:

the working-class struggle for academic success is not about finding yourself but rather losing yourself in order to find a new, shiny, acceptable, middle-class persona. (*Reay, 2001; 341*)

Many students, therefore, face the unhappy choice of estrangement from their roots or giving up their courses, which is reflected in higher than average dropout rates amongst BME students. Forms of dominance are, thus, perpetuated. hooks (1994) suggests that instead of acquiescing, students should challenge the status quo by persistently injecting their black and working class perspectives and thereby changing the norms of the institution. A black feminist perspective, thus, encourages teachers to become increasingly aware of these tensions and asserts that their responsiveness to different 'cultural codes' is a necessity for true inclusion and multicultural education (hooks, 1994).

A multicultural, anti-racist, inclusive or diverse curriculum would, by definition, consistently include a diverse range of African and Asian heritage cultures, authors, art, history and scientists in all subject areas. It would, thus, provide a more holistic worldview that acknowledges BME contributions to society. The need for such a curriculum reverberates throughout the literature on race and education and widening participation in HE (eg Bird, 1996; Graham, 2001; Van Dyke, 1998; Sewell 97; Acland and Azmi 1998; Graham and Robinson, 2004). Nonetheless, the presence of a multicultural curriculum in British schools, colleges and universities is sporadic, which perpetuates the underlying problem of tacitly reinforcing racist, Eurocentric epistemology. Fred Powell asserts that ‘cultural domination has challenged economic exploitation as the fundamental social injustice’ (Powell, 1999; 20) and Leicester and Merrill articulate that

omission renders black people and cultures invisible, and, by implication, less worthy of study. There has been little curriculum development in which non-European values and thought patterns are central. (*Leicester and Merrill, 1999; 23*)

To counter the Eurocentric cultural hegemony of the mainstream curriculum, ‘black scepticality’ has emerged amongst many BME students who seek out a knowledge of their own histories and heroes, such as Ghandi and Malcolm X, as an extra-curricular activity (Allen, 1998b). Allen asserts:

It is clear that many black students are rigorously questioning the whole basis of what they are being taught in terms of ‘objective academia’; more and more the issue of



relevance is becoming central to their personal and group constructs of their identities.

*(Allen, 1998b; 89)*

For hooks (1994), the reluctance of the education system to adopt multiculturalism that goes beyond the tokenism of one class at the end of a course is symptomatic of ‘the fear that any de-centering of Western civilizations, of the white male canon, is really an act of cultural genocide’ (hooks, 1994; 32).

Inevitably, gender is a key element of a black feminist perspective on education and there are marked gender differences in attainment amongst BACs. In conceptualising gender there is a basic distinction between ‘sex’, which is a biological difference, and ‘gender’ which is acquired through the process of socialisation (Archer and Francis, 2007). As individuals interact within their social setting they learn to ‘perform’ gender (Butler, 1990), but ‘Not all performances of gender are equal: some carry more weight and power than others’ (Archer and Francis, 2007; 32). Importantly, gendering produces different experiences according to its interconnection with race and class. The theory of intersectionality, thus, explores how combinations of race, class and gender dis/advantage produce different outcomes. Morris (2007) explicates:

...an intersectional approach examines “the ways in which gender is racialized and race is gendered” (Glenn, 2002). Race alters the very meaning and impact of gender and gender alters the very meaning and impact of race. *(Morris, 2007; 491-2)*

### ***Intersectionality***

The term ‘intersectionality’ was first presented by Kimberle Crenshaw (Wright, Standen and Patel, 2010). Crenshaw (1991) convincingly used a range of examples to argue that ignoring the intersections of different elements of our identity, such as race, class, gender and sexuality, leads to BME women falling between the cracks of the feminist and anti-racist movements, thereby creating further marginalisation. She explored arguments for and against identity politics and concluded that identity politics could be an empowering way for marginalised people to join forces in the pursuit of social justice, particularly if they moved away from an essentialist view of group members – for example, ‘women’ means white women, or ‘black’ means black men. She argued that to achieve solidarity, rather than ignoring the differences within these groups their strength lay in acknowledging intra-group differences and understanding how those different combinations of the various elements of identity created different experiences of oppression. For instance, a straight, working class, black woman’s experience of gender oppression would differ from that of a straight, middle class, white woman *and* a gay, working class, black woman. She postulates that groups formed around socially constructed categories of race, gender, sexuality and class should strive for coalition, so that one aspect is not subordinated to another aspect – for instance, race to gender. This would ensure that BME women’s experiences are not marginalised by either group.

Brah and Phoenix (2004) revisited intersectionality and highlighted that the debate had existed long before the term came into use. They define intersectionality as follows:

We regard the concept of 'intersectionality' as signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands.' (*Brah and Phoenix, 2004; 76*)

They describe Sojourner Truth's 'Ain't I a Woman' speech given at a nineteenth century Women's Rights Convention, as deconstructing 'every single major truth-claim about gender in a patriarchal slave social formation' (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; 77). They quote her as follows:

...That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody helps me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm. I have plowed (sic), I have planted and I have gathered into barns. And no man could head me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much, and eat as much as any man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne children and seen most of them sold into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain't I a woman?... (*quoted in Brah and Phoenix, 2004; 77*)

For Brah and Phoenix (2004), the speech epitomises the central argument of the intersectionality debate, which is that any essentialist notion of what it is to be a woman is flawed and must be challenged in order to achieve social justice.

It is apparent that critical race theory, black feminist theory and the theory of intersectionality are closely aligned and each recognise the need to apply reproduction theories that were historically used to explain class inequalities, alongside more nuanced explanations of how race and gender inequalities are perpetuated and can be challenged.

As Yosso (2005) notes, many theories that deal with race or class or gender have blind spots about other forms of oppression and a key issue is, therefore, that we must move away from the mindset of a hierarchy of oppressions. The theory of intersectionality is all encompassing in terms of its inclusive nature and its premise that oppression is neither simple nor experienced in one single way. Instead it is experienced in multiple ways and each and every combination must be theorised and addressed to challenge injustice.

By drawing on the relevant literature, the remainder of this section will explore how the intersections of race, class and gender are experienced by BACs in education.

### *Intersections of race, class and gender for BACs in education*

Concern about the underachievement of boys in relation to girls has been the driving force behind the growing body of literature on masculinities (eg Graham and Robinson, 2004; Odih, 2002; Reay, 2002; Skelton, 2001). Skelton (1998) identifies two main schools of thought amongst male commentators who analyse the problem as being the result of (a) wider social changes in employment, economy and family conflicting with traditional forms of working class masculinity and (b) the curriculum, pedagogy and practices of the school becoming more female oriented. These are linked to the broader influence of women in contemporary society and the 'feminising' of the school environment. She warns of the danger of reactionary analyses leading to measures that swing back towards disadvantaging girls instead of addressing the influence of white, middle class, male power structures.

Wright et al (1998) suggest that middle class masculinities are aligned to the elements required to succeed in education and whereas working class masculinities are less acceptable, black masculinities are unacceptable. They conclude that 'it is race which determines how gender is experienced' (Wright et al, 1998; 79). Similarly, Mac an Ghail's (1988) observations of teacher interactions with boy peer groups revealed that it was the racialised interpretations of behaviour, rather than the behaviour itself, that led to conflict between teachers and BAC boys.

Osborne (2001) indicates that black boys are exposed to a negative racial stereotyping long before their achievement begins to decline. Anxiety levels

associated with academic ability are accentuated and a process of 'academic disidentification' is set in motion. Academic disidentification is the 'detaching of self esteem from academic outcomes' (Osborne, 2001; 49) and is part of a defence mechanism recognised in psychology. In order to maintain self esteem, people are inclined to value activities that their group are expected to excel in and devalue activities in which they are expected to fail. In line with this, Sewell (1997) contends that due to the heightened influence of black music, dress, sports and sexuality in popular youth culture, black boys enjoy increased admiration and respect from their peers and 'adopt teacher stereotypes as part of their own reputation within the peer-group' (Sewell, 1997; 47). The result is that the politics of race and gender make black boys both 'Angels and Devils in British schools' (Sewell, 1997; ix). He continues:

The peer group imposed both positive and negative influences; it was at once a cauldron of new vibrant Black culture, vital to the creation of an African-Caribbean identity in a hostile world, and a trap into a perception of Black boys as a force only of rebellion and never of conformity and creativity. (Sewell, 1997; 219)

This is corroborated by Gillborn's (1998) assertion that black boys find themselves in a position where they must sacrifice cultural identity and peer group for school success.

Contemporary discourses relating to education and black males are firmly focused on their failure. Therefore, when Reynolds (2006) investigates the success of BAC

men in HE, she describes them as an invisible minority in university life. Her participants reject popular ideas that black men see education as 'anti-cool' and that an educational path conflicts with working class values. However, they describe an 'internal struggle' between 'university life' and 'real life' and these sentiments are echoed in McKenley (2005). In spite of seeing their time in HE as a 'second chance' and clearly valuing education, their comments betray feelings of alienation and a continued conflict between their lived experiences outside the institution and the values and norms within.

Reynolds (2006) identifies racism, fear of failure and feelings of isolation as key issues for these men. Past experiences of education had heightened their sensitivity to negative feedback from lecturers, creating a constant need for them to be vigilant in differentiating between critical analysis and adverse criticism. Unlike white peers, they were reluctant to utilise official support services (Rodgers, 2006). Reynolds (2006) concludes that tutors can be instrumental in building up these students' confidence by way of encouragement, coaching and constructive, non-judgemental feedback (ie not personal criticism). She also identifies the development of strong peer networks amongst black and mature students as a constructive way forward.

As cited below, the educational experiences of black girls and women show a combination of commonalities and differences with black boys and men.

Although there is a gender difference in the statistics for African Caribbean pupils, evidence suggests that African Caribbean girls are also subject to a range of stereotypes by their teachers and are more likely to be excluded from school than their white counterparts. (*DfES, 2003; 32*)

Mac an Ghail's (1988) study of boys was complemented by a smaller study of BAC and Asian girls and revealed common experiences of discrimination across both genders in school. However, girls were more likely to adopt survival strategies that enabled them to succeed academically and boys were more inclined to rebel and completely reject school, leaving with minimal qualifications. Both sexes described the whole education system as racist, but the girls fought back by exceeding others' expectations of them. Mac an Ghail (1988) talks of a 'different reality' experienced by black people who live in a racist society and emphasises that the girl group's

insightful distinction between education and schooling enabled them to acquire high-status qualifications while, at the same time perceptively offering an explicit critique of present day schooling. (*Mac an Ghail, 1988; 153*)

He argues that they were more acutely aware of racism than the liberal teachers, who still operated and thought within the racist stereotypes and structures of the school ethos. The girls' 'resistance within accommodation' approach was discussed in the school section of this literature review and is exemplified by his participants' evaluation of the history they were taught. They rejected the teachings that Christopher Columbus had discovered America, recognising the underlying (racist)



implication that non-Europeans' existence in America beforehand was insignificant. However, conscious of the British pride and power dynamics in their relationships with their teachers, they would write what was deemed necessary to pass their courses. Their analysis, nevertheless, articulates a sophisticated understanding of the construction of 'whiteness' as superior<sup>4</sup>. Their strategies were not confrontational and included speaking patois, which teachers considered subversive, but found difficult to punish. The girls also emphasised the importance of informal support networks amongst themselves and within black communities.

These survival strategies have stimulated the growth of black women's activity in continuing education, where they have been deemed the most over-represented group in the UK (Mirza, 1992). Alice Walker (1984) coined the phrase 'womanism' in relation to black feminist thought and hooks used this perspective to build upon Freire's concept of 'education for transformation'. hooks lauds black academic success as a form of 'transgression' (1994) and 'insurgency' (1991) and similarly, Mirza (1997) describes it as an act of rebellion. Casey (1993) also opines:

In a racist society for a black child to become educated is to contradict the whole system of racist signification...to succeed in studying white knowledge is to undo the system itself...to refute its reproduction of black inferiority materially and symbolically.

*(Casey, 1993; 123)*

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<sup>4</sup> For 'whiteness' debate see Sewell (1997); Gillborn and Kirton (2000); Singh (2004); Dabydeen, Gilmore and Jones (2007); Wright, Thompson and Channer (2007); Jones (2006)

Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe (1985) provide an interesting exploration of black women in UK education and contrast their positive experiences of Access courses with the anxiety endured on other courses where they found it necessary to suppress their natural behaviour in order to be accepted as non-threatening. In analysing interpretations of black female learners' behaviour, Morris (2007) found that teacher attempts to impose dominant ideas of appropriate 'feminine' behaviour were potentially detrimental to black girls' academic development. Morris notes that whilst much feminist literature highlights the dominance of boys in mixed sex classrooms, his observations of black girls contrasted markedly with this. He described the girls as competing, questioning and actively drawing the teachers' attention. However, despite being well behaved, their assertiveness was often construed in a negative light by teachers, who attempted to quieten the girls', deeming their behaviour 'unladylike'. He identified that their high levels of interaction regarding the subject concurs with the behaviours of critical thinkers and engaged learners. Thus, behaviours that are generally encouraged amongst white, middle class, male learners were considered problematic when refracted through the lens of gendered, racialised interpretations of acceptable behaviour. Morris (2007) further suggests that the independence and assertiveness of these girls may well be derived from the historical positioning of African American women, who were traditionally compelled to work outside the home and exist without male protection. Their survival, therefore, would have depended on the construction of gendered identities that included self-sufficiency as a crucial element. He comments:

These girls' actions suggested alternative embodiments of femininity that refused to accept passive, deferential position in the gender order. The unique history of Black women perhaps contributed to a standpoint from which Black girls could reject the dominant ideology of gender inequality... (Morris, 2007; 511)

Clearly there are parallels with the experiences of BAC women, who Mirza (2005) describes as 'refusing to be qualified as failures' and 'driven by what I have called 'educational urgency', a desire to succeed against the odds' (Mirza, 2005; 9).

## **Conclusions**

The conceptual framework of this chapter drew on the key concepts of reproduction theory, black feminism, critical race theory and intersectionality, by examining the interplay between societal structures and individual agents, in the educational and career experiences of British African Caribbeans.

BAC school experiences are marked by negative racial stereotyping and poor outcomes. Nonetheless, current trends show a steady improvement in BAC levels of achievement. However, those who succeed have had to adopt strategies to survive in a hostile educational environment.

In pursuit of qualifications, BACs are amongst those most likely to continue into adult education. Their experiences of HE are generally more rewarding than school, but they still face a range of additional obstacles including subtle racism through microaggressions, isolation, the absence of multiculturalism in the curriculum and

the lack of diversity in staffing. As such, issues of identity and conflict run through discourses of race and education and the role of education in reinforcing race, class and gender hierarchies is apparent throughout.

Inequalities in education continue into later careers, where the job market is heavily racialised and gendered. In response to this, growing numbers of BMEs and women are exhibiting a community orientation and an inclination towards entrepreneurialism.

Where BACs are concerned, the literature on race and education leans heavily towards discourses about failure and the emphasis is on school experiences. The literature on higher education and graduate careers tends to look at BMEs as a whole and, therefore, the BAC experience is subsumed under that general category. This chapter has drawn upon the available publications and identified in the literature the marked absence of the educational experiences of BAC male and female graduates. Their journeys to educational achievement and their subsequent career endeavours form the main focus of the primary research and the thesis, thereby, contributes to the field by addressing the hiatus in the literature. The next chapter will detail the methodological approach used to collect and analyse data for the research project.

# Chapter 3

## Methodology

narrative about the most “personal” difficulties, the apparently most strictly subjective tensions and contradictions, frequently articulates the deepest structures of the social world and their contradictions. (*Bourdieu, 1999; 511*)

### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach to the research by describing the research methods employed during the project and providing justification for the selected techniques.

The research methodology was underpinned by a qualitative research approach, which is ideally suited to small scale projects that seek depth of understanding as opposed to measurement and prediction (McKernan, 1991). Thus, the main data collection comprised a series of semi-structured interviews that followed a life history and narrative approach. This methodological approach was selected on the basis that it complements to black oral history traditions and women’s ‘ways of knowing’ (Collins, 2000), as well as its appropriateness as a way of giving voice to those who are frequently unheard (Asher, 2002).

Triangulation can ensure the robustness of the primary data collection (Brannen, 1992; Bell, 1993; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) and thus, in the pursuit of validity and reliability, the primarily qualitative approach was supported by some quantitative methods and secondary data analysis. An extensive review of literature was undertaken and questionnaires were utilised in the early stages of the research to identify trends and salient issues. The three strands of qualitative, quantitative and secondary data analysis were used in an iterative process that revisited and re-evaluated the findings in light of each other and the literature.

The structure of the chapter begins with the design of the study, which presents an overview of the entire process informing the research project, from inception to culmination. Next, sampling is discussed and a breakdown of the research population is provided, along with a rationale for their selection. The next section charts the data collection techniques, detailing the structure of the questionnaires and interview schedules and the process of analysing the data. Finally, the ethical issues and problems arising from the research methods are highlighted. The chapter ends with a summary of the main points that emerge from the methodology.

### **Design of the Study**

The appropriateness of the methodology and research methods utilised in a research project have an enormous impact on the credibility of the findings and each research method has advantages and disadvantages that determine their suitability for the circumstances and data involved in the project. This study sought to investigate the

education and career experiences of a group of British African Caribbean (BAC) graduates, in order to explore the impact of race, class and gender dynamics. In addition, I also saw value in documenting black experiences that are frequently confined to the oral history tradition. Thus, rather than relying on statistical data detailing qualifications of BAC men and women and their career trajectories post-graduation, I wanted to employ a method that would incorporate the advantages of quantitative and qualitative data in an attempt to breathe life into the research through providing real accounts of how racism and sexism affected the BAC community. The overarching research questions were:

- How do BAC graduates experience the structures of race, class and gender in schooling, higher education (HE) and employment?
- What resources do BAC graduates draw upon to navigate these domains and enable their successes?
- In what ways do BAC graduates consider it important to contribute their skills and experiences in order to ameliorate racism in British society?

Numerous authors have written about qualitative and quantitative research methodologies (eg Bryman and Cramer, 1990; Coulon, 1995; Fowler, 1993; Hendrick, Bickman and Rog, 1993; Woolcot, 1995,) exploring the advantages and disadvantages of these two main approaches to research. Their main points are that

quantitative methods are more suitable for (large scale) research involving statistical analysis, where generalisations can be made, while qualitative data is ideally suited to (small scale) projects that seek to provide in-depth findings.

In this research, a life history, narrative approach was adopted for the collection of primary data on the basis that:

Research that listens to others rather than making assumptions about their existence is...  
more plausible. (*Skeggs, 1997; 33*)

This type of qualitative data collection method is ideally suited to ‘understanding’ and ‘description’, rather than ‘measurements’ and ‘prediction’ (McKernan, 1991). The advantage is that it lends itself to a more exploratory analysis, making it an ideal vehicle for under-represented groups to voice themes that they consider important (Asher, 2001). This methodological approach was also attractive, because of its close relationship to black oral history traditions, where knowledge is created through dialogue (Collins, 2000). The use of the term dialogue suggests a two way conversation with more balanced power relations (hooks, 1989) and feminist authors contend that this way of exchanging ideas is closely linked to ‘ways of knowing that are also more likely to be used by women’ (Collins, 2000; 262).

Brannen (1992) in particular discusses the use of a mixed approach combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Triangulation is the term used for this



type of multi-method approach to data collection and Bell (1993) suggests that this can provide a way of cross-checking the data and ensuring that the feedback and conclusions drawn are not biased by the technique. As such, triangulation 'is also often cited as one of the central ways of 'validating' qualitative research evidence' (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; 43).

Triangulation was achieved by collecting qualitative, quantitative and secondary data and then comparing and contrasting what was found to ensure the veracity of my interpretations. In relation to the primary data, a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a group of ten British graduates of African Caribbean origin formed the main qualitative data collection technique. In order to reflect the experiences across both genders five male and five female graduates were selected. All were in their thirties at the start of the research and this not only enabled me to build a picture of their progression through the whole education system, but also to explore the impact of their education on their subsequent career paths. Three series' of interviews were carried out at one year intervals in April 2004, April 2005 and April 2006. This totalled fifty hours of discussion, comprised of five hours with each of the ten participants. Extending the research over a period of three years made it possible to gain on ongoing insight into their lives.

This was supplemented by the use of questionnaires, interviewee diaries, and my own research diary. The questionnaires provided some quantitative data. Interviewee diaries gave a one week snapshot into their work lives. As Alfred (1997)

suggests, my own position as a female, BAC student and a member of academic-related staff in an HEI also enabled me to make my own first hand observations about the impacts of race, class and gender within academic environments, which were recorded in my research diary. This gave me added insight and enhanced my understanding of many of the issues discussed throughout the research. However, I was careful not to allow my views to colour the responses of my respondents and this was effected by paying great attention to listen during discussions, without suggesting 'appropriate' responses, recording interviews and then repeatedly listening and cross checking the contents against interviewees' own responses from other interviews and questionnaires.

Secondary data was obtained via an ongoing review of the literature on race, class, gender and education. Research on black and minority ethnic (BME) graduate career destinations was also utilised to establish the theoretical framework. In addition, institutional policy documents and reports relating to Widening Participation policies were reviewed. Becker warns researchers to 'Use the literature, don't let it use you' (Becker, 1986; 149) and this was an ongoing challenge throughout the research. As participants' stories unfolded, constant reflection on the literature, as a possible illumination of emerging themes, was essential.

## **Sampling**

In order to execute the research it was necessary to identify an appropriate sample population that would be in a position to provide a wealth of relevant data for the topic in question. Sampling in social research is geared to identify a manageable population when it is impractical to survey the entire population to which the research relates. Bell (1993) highlights that generalisations, given the practicalities, are thereby impossible. However, the use of a well selected population that is representative of the group in question can minimise the unavoidable margin of error (Singh, 2004). In order to achieve this, I utilised both purposive and snowball sampling for selection purposes.

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996; 2006) describe purposive sampling as a form of non-probability sampling where the researcher hand picks the cases, because they are considered typical or particularly interesting in relation to the research topic. Purposive sampling design is often used in qualitative research where the number of cases is small and the population is selected on the basis that they can offer a depth of insight and a range of examples of the phenomena being researched (Silverman, 2000). Patton (2002) suggests that this method may be appropriately employed to explore specific communities, cultures or critical incidences. Using a purposive sample can, therefore, be more effective than using a wider population that may have little or no experience of the phenomena in question.

In order to select an appropriate purposive sample, it is essential that the researcher has a good insight into the population they intend to research (Cheng, 2004). As the focus of the research evolved, certain characteristics emerged as key for the sample population. I sought to add depth to an understanding of the experiences of a particular group in society, making it important to access people who belonged to that group – namely British African Caribbeans. As I was investigating experiences of success in education, it was prudent to select people who had achieved a university level of education and who were, thus, by definition, academic achievers. The study aimed to highlight experiences within the British education system, and therefore, so as to avoid confusion, I made the decision to only include BACs who had been educated entirely in the UK.

The fact that BACs represent a small minority of the UK population prompted me to consider the value of using a white, British comparison group to help identify key differences in experiences. However, on reflection I decided that this was not necessary, as there was already a considerable amount of literature in the field relating to white experiences of HE that I could draw on for comparison. These all white studies did not require a black control group to validate them (Solorzano, 1998) and further exploration of the literature on methodology reinforced my original decision (eg Bravette, 1996). In addition to this, I wanted to avoid the risk in social research of pathologizing black experiences and perspectives by measuring them against a white ‘norm’ (Karenga, 1993). Critical race theory suggests that black people have an ability to *know* from their experiences things that white people

do not know or understand, because of their different experience of race (Solorzano, 1998). I therefore resolved to undertake the research purely from a black perspective, acknowledging that the BAC participants were 'knowing subjects' and experts on their own lives, who would be able to offer insights into issues central to their viewpoint.

Having identified the key characteristics of the required population, the next step was to select appropriate participants who were willing to participate in the research. Bell (1993) describes opportunity samples as those where the researcher interviews anybody from the total population who is willing and able to be involved. Similarly, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) state that convenience samples are selected because they are readily available. Although opportunity and convenience played a large part in the selection process with my participants, it was first necessary to pinpoint potential subjects. I initially distributed questionnaires to students at a high ranking university and carried out policy interviews with staff, with the intention of carrying out a subsequent case study. However, it transpired that there were so few BACs studying at that HEI to make it unfeasible to continue solely along that path. This reflected the issue of low BAC participation in the more prestigious HEIs. I therefore resolved to adopt a snowball sampling technique instead.

Researchers typically use snowball sampling when it is difficult to gain access to the population under research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 1997). Once an initial contact is made within the desired population, the researcher obtains other contacts

from them and then further contacts from those contacts. Thus, the snowball effect occurs and continues until the required number of participants for the sample population is reached.

As a member of the BAC community and as a graduate, I was able to use my own contacts as the starting point for expanding access to an appropriate number of participants required for the research, all of whom were graduates. By focussing on participants who had already completed their undergraduate studies, I was able to probe respondents with regard to their career outcomes and whether these reflected their educational achievements. However, as the literature suggests, this was still not without difficulty, as the under-representation of BAC males in HE created the interesting dynamic of having access to many more females than men in the early stages. One of my objectives was to explore the gender dynamics from both male and female perspectives, which meant that it was of paramount importance to include a cross-section of men and women. In accordance with Singleton and Straits' (1999) recommendation, I thus ensured that my two representative sub-groups were selected according to equal numbers of men and women from the target population.

One of the potential difficulties with snowball sampling is that the networking that it involves may concentrate towards, or favour a particular type of person from the desired population, rather than providing a representative cross-section. When certain themes emerged, such as the number of participants in teaching careers and

the orientation to community development, I was concerned that these may have been skewed by the sampling method. I reflected that all interviewees had been informed that one of the motivations for the research was to contribute to improving the educational experiences of BACs. Most were inspired by this purpose and I was mindful that this may have had an impact on the type of participant I attracted, as my research was more likely to galvanise community oriented people. However, the fact that participants were not selected on the basis of community orientation and only one of the people approached declined to participate, suggests that the subject matter neither deterred nor encouraged participation and an interest in community issues is probably common amongst BAC graduates. In terms of the teaching dynamic, only one participant was selected via a link with teaching and many had been in and out of teaching during their graduate careers. Thus, I concluded that these trends were probably unconnected to the sampling method and acknowledged that the potential for bias was an unavoidable aspect of the research method and one of the reasons why the project could signal avenues for further research, rather than act as a generalised last word.

Once the research population had been identified, the next challenge was to design appropriate tools, such as interview schedules, for the collection of the type of data that would enable me to answer the research questions.

## Data collection and analysis

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) raise some important points:

reliability has to do with how well you have carried out your research project. Have you carried it out in such a way that, if another researcher were to look into the same questions in the same setting, they would come up with essentially the same results... Validity has to do with whether your methods, approaches and techniques actually relate to, or measure the issues you have been exploring. (*Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1996; 200*)

According to Brewer and Hunter (1989), the use of a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods can ensure that the weaknesses of any one of the data collection techniques is offset by combining it with others. This section, then, details the combination of questionnaires, interviews and other primary data collection techniques that were used to increase the validity, and the processes of analysis undertaken to ensure a greater reliability for the research methodology.

The Data Collection Flowchart (Figure 3.1) shows the main primary data collection techniques. These commenced with an informal pilot questionnaire that was distributed amongst a convenience sample of black<sup>5</sup> students and graduates, which was followed up by the amendment of the questionnaires according to feedback. Thence, the pilot questionnaire was distributed to HE students to elicit mainly quantitative data for a basic analysis of the demographics and the themes that

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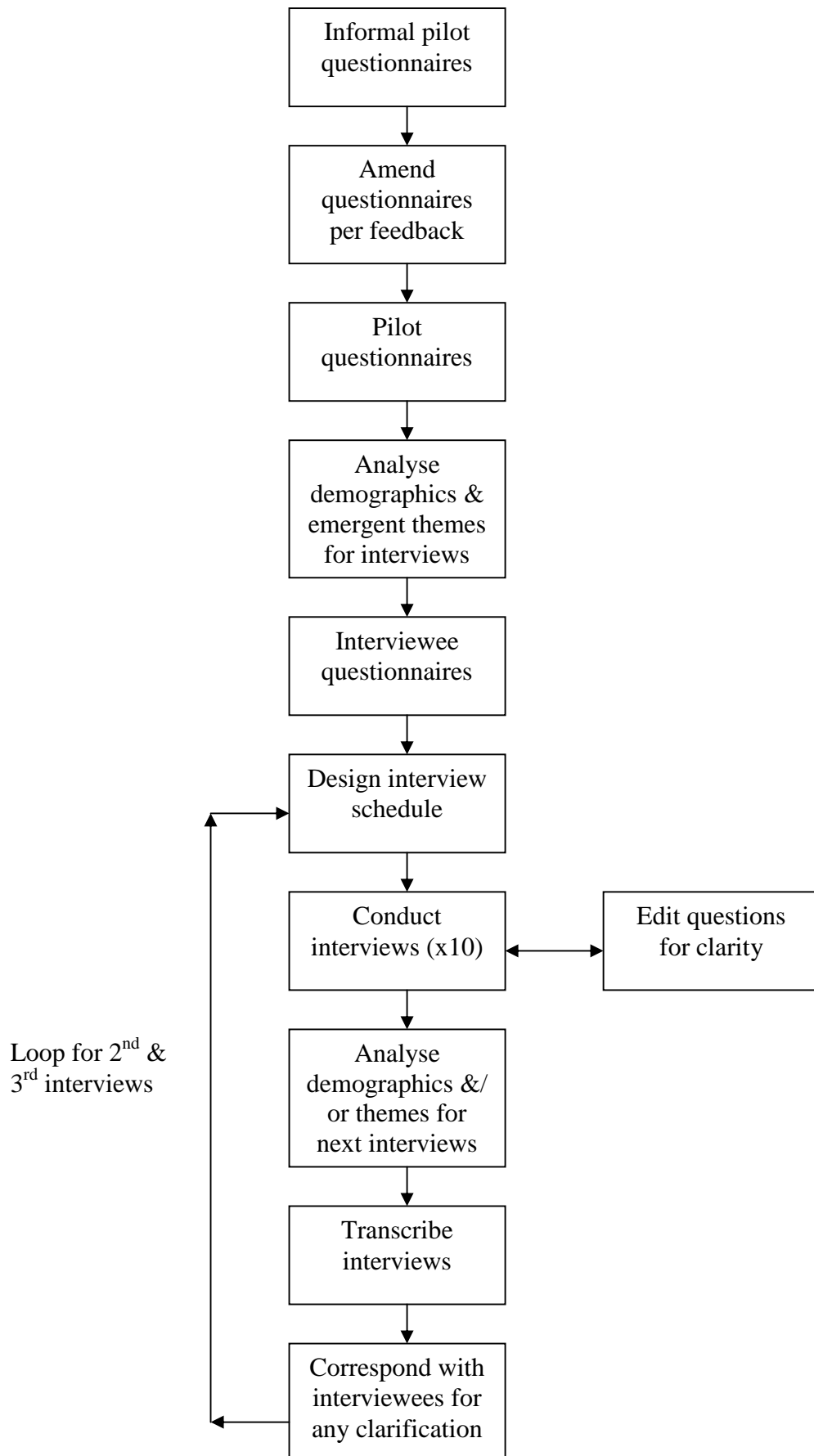
<sup>5</sup> African heritage, eg (British) African Caribbean, African, etc



emerged were assessed. Amended questionnaires were then distributed to interviewees. Due to the relatively small survey population, questionnaire data produced descriptive, rather than inferential, statistics. Next, the interview schedule was designed for the first series of semi-structured interviews, which were subsequently conducted with the ten interviewees. Questions were edited and elucidated, where necessary, for clarity as I progressed through each series of interviews.

From their interviews and questionnaires, the demographics of the interviewees were obtained and themes were pinpointed for further investigation during subsequent interviews. Transcription was undertaken and where there was any ambiguity relating to responses, I contacted interviewees (usually by email) for clarification. The flowchart shows that the process looped back to the 'Design interview schedule' step, where I then designed the second interview schedule and progressed through the same steps as for the first series of interviews. This was then repeated for the third series of interviews, which concluded the main primary data collection.

Figure 3.1: Data Collection Flowchart



### *Questionnaires*

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) outline that piloting allows the researcher to assess whether the data collection tools, such as questionnaires and interview schedules, are effective in eliciting the relevant information and providing an opportunity for respondents to raise other related issues during the research. In this project, the piloting stage included a small informal piloting, followed by the distribution of the questionnaire to a larger pilot group.

The first stage of primary data collection was carried out in January 2003 and involved the distribution of a trial questionnaire to an opportunistic sample of ten graduates and students of African and Caribbean descent. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996; 2006) indicate that informal piloting helps the researcher test a data collection tool without being committed to using that tool or data for the research proper. The purpose of informal piloting in this project was to ensure the validity of the questionnaire design prior to wider distribution, by checking that the data obtained would be relevant to the overarching research questions and lend itself to appropriate analysis. Respondents were asked to give feedback on the format and questions. This feedback, along with their questionnaire responses, was used to evaluate and then amend the questionnaire, providing an opportunity to remove ambiguous questions. The data obtained from this informal pilot was not used for any analysis in the project and merely served to test the questionnaire, in order that the final questionnaire might be enhanced.

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) advise that it is wise to include a pilot stage in social research and when this is not planned, the early stages of the data collection can turn out to be a pilot after all, because of unanticipated outcomes. Despite my initial, informal pilot, I found this to be the case with the next stage of my research. In February 2003, a total of 134 questionnaires were distributed to university students who had described themselves as African, Caribbean or dual heritage, with the intention of making initial contact with potential BAC participants for the main data collection. Twenty-eight completed questionnaires were returned, but it transpired that a significant number of those respondents were overseas students and just six were British African Caribbeans. As the numbers were so small, I decided to treat this as a pilot and analyse the questionnaire data from British African and British African Caribbean, *home* students and discard the data from *overseas* students. This enabled me to identify themes from a black British perspective that could be used during interviews.

Table 3.2: Ethnicity and Gender (Pilot)

	Male	Female	<b>TOTAL</b>
British African	3	4	<b>7</b>
British African Caribbean (including dual heritage)	2	4	<b>6</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>

Table 3.2 outlines the ethnicity and gender of the pilot respondents used in the study. The interview population was then selected using the separate snowball sample discussed in the earlier section.

Questionnaires were forwarded to interviewees for completion before the first series of interviews began. This provided them with some insight into the topic, so that they might have an idea of what to expect during interviews. It also provided them with an opportunity to reflect on some of their opinions beforehand. The data collected from the interviewees' questionnaire responses were later used for demographic data and for identifying themes for further analysis. This data was also used in conjunction with the narrative data to demonstrate common perceptions amongst interviewees.

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) consisted of 17 questions, divided into 4 sections, entitled, 'Personal details', 'Motivations/deterrents to study in Higher Education', 'Other perceptions and influencing factors' and 'Further participation'. The first section obtained demographic information about the research population including their name, ethnicity, gender, family background and studies.

The second section posed multiple choice questions about how a range of influences, such as 'Parental/family expectations', had motivated or deterred participants from studying. Likert scales are ideally suited to measure the extent to which respondents' agree or disagree with a statement (Bell, 1993) and so this section

included a five point Likert scale, where participants could indicate whether each factor was a 'major motivation', 'minor motivation', 'not significant', 'minor deterrent' or 'major deterrent'. This facilitated the assessment, not only of whether factors were significant or not, but also *how* significant they were. The data collected from this section was interpreted and presented in graphs in Chapter 5, which clearly show the number of respondents and the extent to which they were motivated or deterred by each influencing factor.

The third section was designed similarly to the second section, but in this case no middle option was available. Participants were able to indicate the strength of their agreement with a range of statements such as 'Education is a passport to success', by selecting 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. By not including a 'don't know' option, I reduced the likelihood of participants using a non-committal response as an easy alternative. Participants were thereby encouraged to use their judgement as to whether they were in agreement - more or less - or disagreement - on the same scale - with each statement. The data collected from this section of the questionnaire was analysed and presented in Chapter 6. Bell (1993) warns that the use of percentages in small scale research projects can be misleading. Correspondingly, where graphs were used to present data, I was careful to include numbers rather than percentages to reflect the number of responses.

The final section was primarily geared at the pilot population, inviting further participation in the research and requesting contact details for this purpose.

Although the majority of questions were closed to facilitate clear analysis of the data, some were open ended and in particular, question 15 allowed space for respondents to raise issues, which I may not have been aware of, that were important to them. For the purposes of analysis, these responses were typed up as a separate document (see Appendix 2) and reviewed to pinpoint and categorize recurrent themes.

The relatively small survey population meant that the bulk of the data collected via questionnaires delivered descriptive statistics rather than inferential statistics. SPSS software enabled me to produce a wide range of cross-tabulations and frequency tables, in order to identify trends and analyse the data. By importing the most useful data into Excel software, I was then able to produce more aesthetically pleasing and informative charts. Similar responses given in the questionnaire were used to identify themes, which shaped the questions in the interview schedules and stimulated further discussion during interviews.

### ***Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews formed the main data collection technique and a life history and narrative approach was adopted to facilitate in-depth and exploratory analysis. Central to a life history and narrative approach is the stimulation of life stories or biographies that are narrated from the research subject's perspective (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Qualitative research methods such as these recognise the importance of participants' perceptions of their lived realities in developing an

understanding of social phenomena and these methods have become more favoured amongst social science researchers in recent years (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995).

Channer states:

the life history technique is particularly suited to discovering the confusions, ambiguities, and contradictions that are displayed in everyday experience... [It] strives towards locating the individual first of all in his/her overall life experience in the immediate social context, prior to linking it with a broader socio-historical framework.

*(Channer, 1995; 43)*

Asher (2001) lauds the usefulness of biography and storytelling in research that seeks to present the perspectives of women of African and Asian descent and indicates that it is particularly useful for giving voice to the experiences of those that have often gone unheard. She suggests that by documenting these voices, researchers can create alternative discourses that challenge the domination of a 'knowledge' that serves to perpetuate inequalities. Like hooks and West (1991), she emphasises the political role of black academics in using their own agency to create new knowledge, with a focus on anti-oppression, which would inaugurate change.

It was with these objectives in mind that I elected to engage interviewees in discussions about their lived experiences, of education and their careers. Semi-structured interviews provided the ideal vehicle for exploring participants' interactions with their worlds and for understanding how they had navigated their success in these environments (Alfred, 1997). As each interviewee gave freely of



their time and insight, it was important to ensure that interviews caused minimal disruption. Consequently, they were arranged at participants' convenience, usually in their homes or workplaces, to facilitate their maximum ease.

Semi-structured interviews are more likely to be successful when there is a good rapport between interviewer and interviewee (Cheng, 2004) and the importance of trust is accentuated when participants are revealing personal details about their lives and perspectives. Thus, every effort was made to enhance communication and put interviewees at their ease, both before and during the interviews. For instance, prior to meeting interviewees that I didn't already know, I chatted on the phone to them and gave them some personal background information about myself. I explained the purpose of the research and forwarded interview schedules to them in advance, to give them some idea of the issues I wanted to address and to minimise any anxiety about the meetings. There can be occasions when participants feel slightly reluctant to offer their opinions, because they considered the researcher to be an expert on the subject in question (Singh, 2004). On such occasions, I encouraged them to comment by reminding them that it was their opinions and their life stories that mattered and thus, there were no right or wrong answers. This seemed to have the desired effect of stimulating further discussion.

The subjectivity of the researcher and the researched is increasingly acknowledged as an important element of qualitative social research. Whereas in the past

objectivity was held up as the ideal for good research and validity, it is now widely accepted that the researcher is free to research from their own perspective, as:

...objectivity is in fact an impossible claim and fails to acknowledge the subjectivity of the researcher. (*Bravette, 1996; 7*)

If objectivity is an illusion for qualitative research, nevertheless validity remains an issue, and this can only be striven for if the researcher clearly states their position and agenda in relation to the research and ensures maximum transparency in the research methods. To this end, I incorporated a reflexive approach (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), which explicitly locates me as researcher within the research process and acknowledges that my experiences, as well as the processes and activities involved, impact on the research analysis. To define:

Reflexivity is a term used: (a) to describe the ways in which a theory may be turned back upon itself and its practices; and (b) to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, act upon and informs such research. (*Nightingale and Cromby, 1999; 228*)

Thus, adopting a reflexive approach, I recognise that my intent and political position are an integral part of the research process and I will, therefore, explain my motivations for carrying out the research, because these clearly influenced the outcomes. As Asher (2001) reminds us, it is difficult to ignore professionally what you experience personally and in my experience of research, it is also true that the

personal and the political are closely interconnected. As such, the direction of my research was influenced by the fact that I was tired of the common associations between BACs and educational failure in the popular media in the UK. I was driven, therefore, to explore the conditions of success for BACs in the British education system and give voice to an experience that was more in line with my own and others around me. The research might thereby contribute to moving the dialogue, from an onslaught of negativity, to a more positive discourse. This focus on achievement could promote an emancipatory agenda, geared to develop understanding of BAC experiences of education, which would in turn enable us to improve those experiences for future generations and ultimately build stronger BAC communities with the objective of greater economic and social inclusion.

As a BAC graduate myself, I have brought my own insights and experiences to the research process and these undeniably had much influence on my understanding and interpretation of the data. Researchers such as hooks (1989) have commented on the significance of race research being carried out from a black perspective and highlighted the benefit of research in which the researcher shares a similar ethnic background to the researched. Undoubtedly, my 'insider' status as a BAC who had gone through the same educational system as participants, aided communication and enhanced the degree of comfort for both the participants and myself when discussing sensitive issues relating to race and ethnicity in education. This, combined with my existing experience of research and teaching in education, provided me with the valuable perspective of a 'situated knower' (Collins, 2000) or an 'outsider within'

(Collins, 1986). It must be acknowledged that a researcher from a different background may well have drawn different conclusions from the data, but as the research aimed to give voice to the perspectives of the research subjects, I consider my proximity to them an asset in the research process.

Gender was another dynamic that impacted on the research process and whilst I regarded being a woman as advantageous for interviews with other women, because of closer identification, I was aware of the potential barrier it might represent to male respondents discussing their views. Skelton (1998) acknowledges this dilemma in her research into masculinities, noting that male authors have the advantage of being able to tap into issues of masculinity far better than any woman can, because they can identify with the male subjects better. I am certain that this gender bias had some influence on my findings and gave me a better understanding of the gender issues relating to the women (such as conflicts arising between mothering and career progression), than those relating to the men.

Three semi-structured interviews were carried out with each of the ten participants at one year intervals from April 2004 to April 2006, and summative participant biographies have been compiled in Appendix 9. The first interview focused on race and HE, the second on identity and the third focused on learning styles and the relationship between political awareness and education. Open ended questions allowed the respondents to talk in a natural way about the topic and provided opportunities for the interviewees to bring in details that they felt were pertinent to

the topic. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows for discussions to take a number of different directions (Gilbert, 1993). The downside to this is that the data can be more chaotic to organise afterwards. The technique also requires a range of good communication and interpersonal skills, including the ability to relax the interviewee, elicit the appropriate information, take notes and listen effectively. Most interviews lasted between one and a half and two hours. However, others lasted much longer and on occasion it was a fine balancing act to maintain some degree of control over the interview, without stifling discussion. Interviewees consented to having interviews tape recorded, which made it easier to pay attention to the conversation, because of a minimal need to take notes. Although important details, such as tone, can be captured on a tape recording, body language cannot and so it was sometimes necessary to include notes that conveyed added meaning to the recordings, which could be married to transcriptions and analysis.

The interview schedule for each of the three series of interviews (Appendix 3, 4 and 5) contained a handful of open-ended questions for discussion with participants. Under each of these key questions were additional sub-questions or prompts, which were more specific and served to help clarify any misunderstandings. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) refer to this type of tool as a topic guide, which guides and prompts the interviewer throughout the discussion. They suggest that the interviewer is likely to revise this tool as they become more familiar with the topic and things like the sequence of questions or the language used can alter in response to problems encountered. I found that as I progressed through the individual interviews within

each series, I systematically reviewed and edited questions in order to make them clearer where there had been evidence of confusion during discussions. Although questions were never completely changed, they were refined and as I became more familiar with the topics that arose I became more adept at using appropriate language to convey my meaning.

One example of altering the language I used occurred when I used the term 'Walk with a lilt' to describe the rhythmic, bouncy way that some BAC men walk. One participant corrected me, pointing out that I should say 'Walk and skank', which amused us both and aided my communication on the topic in future interviews. Another example occurred when I posed a question related to *conscientization* and participants were asked for their opinions about the relationship between education and political awareness relating to issues of race (see Appendix 5, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview schedule, questions 4 and 5). Some participants were confused and had difficulty relating to the question and at least one participant interpreted this as a question about party politics associated with the Labour and Conservative political parties. Recognising the misunderstanding, I probed further and was able to link the question back to some of the revolutionary political activists in black history that the participant had mentioned during interviews, such as Malcolm X, Bob Marley and Nelson Mandela. I was only then able to elicit the type of information that I required. This prompted me to rephrase the question and add examples for clarity in discussions during later interviews with other participants. This enhanced communication.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) also prompt the researcher to consider whether they are likely to be able to use the data they are collecting and on occasions I felt this was a serious issue. The feeling that I was collecting an enormous amount of data that was interesting, but would be impossible to analyse was sometimes frustrating. However, I realised that the nature of biographical and narrative research is such that it is necessary to talk through many issues that may be related, but not central, in order to add context and get to the core issues. One example of this was the 'Ways of being black' exercise carried out during the second set of interviews, which was geared to explore some of the participants' perspectives on some stereotypical attitudes held amongst or about BAC people. My intention was to look at issues of identity and perhaps illuminate some of the family (or community) discourses that they may have internalised. Although it transpired that most of the data collected during this exercise would not be utilised, the exercise proved to be particularly useful for making interviewees feel at ease and stimulating conversation that was more central to the topic. Our unconventional discussion about 'blackness', stimulated lots of giggles and thought-provoking comments and several participants volunteered that they had thoroughly enjoyed the exercise. That in itself was rewarding for me, as it suggested that participants were actually getting something out of their participation too.

Using a 'grounded theory' approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in the research ensured that the primary data generated the themes that became the main focus of the research analysis. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) moot that:

grounded theory involves the coding of the interview transcript... in terms of key concepts, which are mainly developed during the work itself... Grounded theory also builds upon a cyclical or spiral perception of the research process, with concept development, data collection and data analysis taking place in close conjunction, and feeding into each other. As the research process unfolds, winding on and around itself, a clearer identification and understanding of the concepts of relevance is reached.

*(Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1996; 189)*

As described above, the process of analysis that I followed was essentially cyclical. The first stage involved an initial analysis of the first series of interviews and was carried out immediately after the completion of all ten interviews, whilst the strongest themes were fresh in my mind. A brief document (Appendix 6) was produced outlining the main themes that had emerged and as it transpired, these themes remained at the core throughout the research. A similar document (Appendix 7) was produced at the end of the third interviews.

The next stage involved listening to the tape recordings of interviews to get more of a 'feel' for them. Only then did I transcribe them, which again involved listening to the tapes, a process that facilitated my becoming more familiar with their content. As I transcribed and reflected on the interviews I became increasingly aware of how



important simple things like pauses were in the dialogue and began to include them in the transcriptions. They communicated so much about the speaker's attitude, comfort or discomfort with the subject and at times it was difficult to know what to write in and what to miss out, in order to convey the full meaning.

The next stage of analysis involved coding or indexing, which was undertaken in order to identify and then analyse categories that emerged from the data more closely. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) state:

With textual data, indexing involves reading each phrase, sentence and paragraph in fine detail and deciding 'what is this about?'. the index is usually applied systematically to the whole data set... (*Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; 224*)

For this stage NVivo qualitative analysis software proved to be an extremely useful tool for manipulating the data to maximum effect. It enabled me to organise and code data into broad and then narrower categories and so explore the interconnection of the themes. To give but one example, a broad category of 'motivations to study', suggested sub-themes, such as 'intrinsic satisfaction', 'social mobility' and 'catalysts'.

The initial coding phase was labour intensive and involved importing the text from the word-processing software into NVivo and then going through the transcripts again in order to code or index the most useful comments according to themes. Sometimes comments would encompass several themes and sometimes it was

difficult to decide on the actual meaning or significance of the comment. Once the coding was completed, the subsequent stage of exploring the data from a range of interviews within the context of each theme (or 'node' in the software) was made much easier by the use of the software. I was able to print out and read through the data as it was grouped within a theme and thus, get a clearer picture of what the data was telling me about the theme. In order to ensure that the organisation of the data did not become too complex the themes and sub-themes were structured into a two tier hierarchy. Themes were then reorganised and regrouped when it became apparent that they were more appropriately situated elsewhere within the organisation of the data. At each stage of filtering through the data with the software I was able to attach notes, called *databites*, to chunks of text, which helped to prompt me at a later stage about a train of thought relating to my analysis or understanding of the text. These databites provided a cross-reference to some literature or another narrative and sometimes led to the emergence of new themes or codes.

My intention had been to focus on the HE experiences and the resultant careers of BAC participants. However, during the interviews it became apparent that school experiences constituted a major part of, and were of great significance to, participants' narratives. Consequently, I realised that my exploration of HE experiences would benefit from the inclusion of school dynamics, which would add context and deepen understanding. At this point it became clear that the study

should in fact reflect the *whole journey* throughout the education system and on into graduate careers.

Writing up was also crucial to the analysis, because I was constantly revisiting the literature and narratives to improve my understanding and test the emergent concepts. For example, the concept of ‘benevolent BMEs’ first emerged as a prominent feature of some narratives, which prompted me to check whether it was reinforced by other narratives. As I became more *au fait* with the themes that were surfacing, the logic of the overall structure of the thesis began to take shape. The first drafts of chapters were, therefore, built by grouping data thematically and filling in the analysis between quotations. Gradually, I was able to add more depth to the analysis, reduce the amount of quotations and construct the chapters. A process of distillation occurred as the chapters were re-written and restructured a number of times and the analysis was refined through a feedback, or iterative process.

The utilisation of a range of computer software proved to be greatly advantageous. PowerPoint software was used for the design of the questionnaire and Word for the transcription of interviews. NVivo was invaluable for manipulating qualitative data for analysis and SPSS statistical analysis software proved to be an effective tool for investigating cross tabulations and frequencies derived from the questionnaire data. The use of SPSS in conjunction with Excel spreadsheet software enabled me to create graphical representations of the data, illustrated in charts, tables and graphs, which was a boon for an ease of understanding.

I was fortunate to have experience of using a range of research software from researching in industry and HE as a member of staff and as a student. Nonetheless, I still had to undergo refresher training to up-skill, so that I was equipped to fully utilise the software available through the university. This proved to be a worthwhile investment of my time and was ultimately quite effective.

### *Diaries*

Participants were asked to keep a diary for one week during the third year of the research. They were provided with a list of prompts (Appendix 8) to guide them in the type of data that would be of interest. These diaries contained information about their day-to-day lives, including their work and home life. The descriptions contained in the diaries served to add some contextual background.

Having undertaken teaching and research in HE, FE and schools during the life of the research project, I found it useful to keep my own research diary to record observations and experiences that were particularly relevant and interesting about the research. As a female, BAC member of staff and a student in HEI environments I encountered my own first hand experiences of racism, elitism and sexism. Experiences of university staff making overtly racist comments in staff meetings and then the subsequent silence when they realised there was a black member of staff present (myself), had a direct effect on my ability to work in certain environments, which deepened my understanding when participants described similar situations

and the negative impact they felt on a personal level. In addition to this, I recorded my involvement in relevant conferences and seminars, which brought added insight into the experiences and activities in the field of other black researchers, as well as academics who were researching race, class and/or gender. The act of recording and reflecting on my activities in a research diary was invaluable to the reflexive process and the analysis.

### **Ethical issues and problems with research method**

Ethical issues must be given due consideration throughout any research project and as Simpson and Tuson (1995) assert, researchers should guarantee confidentiality, sound intentions and integrity. Every attempt was made to achieve this during the research. Prior to interviews, permission was sought from interviewees to tape record the discussions and all interviewee names were changed so as to guarantee confidentiality in the transcripts and the analysis. I also ensured that quotations were not used out of context to alter their meaning. Bulmer (1982) suggests consideration should be given to the impact of the research upon subjects and with this in mind, the names of employers and institutions were altered where details of sensitive issues were revealed and could potentially be traced back to participants. Some participants were a little nervous about talking in detail about entrepreneurial ideas, because of the potential for those ideas to be used by others and so I took care not to include such details in the analysis.

Singh (2004) infers that it is important to be honest about the difference between the planned research design and the actual research design, which in some cases can evolve into something quite different. In this project the major problem encountered in the research methods related to gaining access to an appropriate sample population in the early stages of the research.

The initial intention had been to carry out an institutional case study based at a Russell Group University, to which I had access. A case study was selected as the most appropriate approach to provide a holistic view, incorporating student and institutional perspectives within the same environment. The case study would, thus, be divided into two strands. The first strand would involve policy interviews with members of University staff who were key players in relation to widening participation policy. The second strand would include structured questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with BAC students currently studying at the University.

However, two key difficulties emerged. Firstly, having moved to work in the South of the country, the logistics of travelling long distances to visit the university campus and arranging interviews around work commitments, made the data collection extremely cumbersome. The fact that I was not on-site hindered my ability to build a rapport beyond the interviews with members of staff that were involved in the policy interviews. It also made it necessary to depend on third parties for the distribution and collection of some questionnaires, which had a negative impact on

the response rate. Secondly, the low number of BAC home students studying at the HEI made it impossible to access a large enough sample to carry out the research effectively and only six completed questionnaires were returned from BAC students. The low numbers of BAC students at Russell Group Universities is a reflection of the issues of race and education discussed throughout the thesis.

As a result of these problems, it became necessary to abandon the idea of the institutional case study and reconsider the research design. At this point I decided to approach a small group of graduates, rather than students and thereby open up the opportunity to also evaluate the impact of their education on their subsequent careers. As the research design evolved, I was ultimately able to undertake a much more intimate and detailed piece of research, because of the closer links and identification with the snowball sample population.

This closeness was not without problems, however, and it was essential that I remained mindful of the potential to allow over-identification to interfere with my analysis (Singh, 2004). For instance, I was careful to avoid assuming that I understood what interviewees meant and lapsing into shorthand during discussions. I was also vigilant in always seeking clarification so as to double check my understandings by asking for explicit examples and descriptions.

Transcription is very labour intensive, tedious and time consuming, but it proved extremely useful as a means of familiarising myself with the data. I transcribed the

bulk of the interviews, but eventually, due to competing demands on my time, I decided to outsource the transcription. For the same reason, the design of the SPSS database used for analysing the statistical data obtained from the pilot and interviewee questionnaires was outsourced, but the data entry and analysis were carried out by myself. The outsourcing of work, of course, had cost implications and was an additional strain on my financial resources.

Last, but not least, becoming a mother for the first time in the middle of the research project had a considerable impact on my ability to carry out the research in the standard amount of time for a part-time PhD. The enormous amount of time and energy required to fulfil the responsibilities of caring full-time for a baby and then young child, naturally detracted from the amount of time I was able to commit to the research and led to the extension of the project. The very gendered and classed issues of juggling childcare commitments, financial constraints and the resultant time poverty (Reay, 2003) was a constant reminder of my own positioning within the research and reinforced my commitment to the research objective of contributing to improving BAC experiences of education.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter provided a clear explanation of the research methodology and methods employed throughout the project.



An overview of the design of the study outlined the overarching research questions and provided the rationale for the use of triangulation in the research methodology to improve validity (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). A summation of the range of qualitative and quantitative primary data collection techniques was given, including interviews, questionnaires, diaries and participant observation in HE environments. Interviews provided the main source of primary data, and were selected on the basis of their efficacy for the collection of in-depth data for exploratory analysis (Asher, 2001). Sources of secondary data were also outlined, including the literature review and university policy documents. The literature review focused on race, class and gender in education, as well as BME graduate career destinations. The ongoing and constant process of revisiting and reviewing the literature in conjunction with the primary data was explained.

Sampling methods were given some consideration and a purposive sample was utilised on the basis that it was well suited for researching specific communities or incidences (Patton, 2002). The snowball sampling technique was also employed in the research as a means to access a population that was difficult to reach (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 1997). I handpicked the purposive sample to ensure that the participants matched the selection criteria, which was that they were BAC graduates who had been educated entirely within the education system and had progressed into graduate careers. The snowball sampling method was used as the most effective way of accessing a sufficient number of members of the target population, whilst the choice of equal numbers of men and women respondents aimed to provide the most

representative sample (Singleton and Straits, 1999). My 'insider' status as a BAC graduate provided me with some initial contacts, which led on to further contacts until I gathered the required amount of participants.

The methods and techniques used for data collection and analysis were illustrated in a data collection flowchart and then detailed more specifically throughout the text. Informal piloting was used to test the validity of the draft questionnaire from which a revamped questionnaire was designed and utilised for collecting data from the pilot and interviewee populations. Data collected from these questionnaires was analysed using statistical analysis software and the emergent themes were explored in the subsequent interviews. Interview schedules were drawn up as prompts for semi-structured interviews and three interviews were carried out with each of the participants. Each set of interviews revolved around a particular topic. The first interviews focused on experiences of education, the second on identity and the third on learning styles and the relationship between political awareness and education. Detailed discussion provided a wealth of data that formed a picture of the experiences and perspectives of the participants and lent itself to providing answers for the research questions. Every attempt was made to ensure reliability and validity in the data collection and analysis.

Finally, ethical considerations and problems that arose during the research were discussed, alongside the solutions.

Having outlined the research methods utilised during the project, the following chapters will analyse the main findings of the research based on the experiences of the ten graduate participants interviewed.

## Chapter 4

# “Unfulfilled Potential”

## School Experiences

There is a silent catastrophe happening in Britain's schools in the way they continue to fail black British children... (*Diane Abbot, Labour MP, 2002*)

### Introduction

This chapter presents the common themes that emerged from research participants' school experiences. Most participants felt that they achieved far less than their full potential during their secondary school education and the reasons they identified for this echo much of the literature on race, class and gender in education.

Drawing on authors, including Rhamie and Hallam (2002), the chapter begins by examining models of success, in order to identify the social and cultural conditions that facilitated school achievement. Next, I explore the more typical school trajectories and using Reay (2002), demonstrate how social class negatively impacted on access to effective schooling in these cases. Racism compounds the effects of class and most participants experienced negative racial stereotyping from

teachers, instantiated in low expectations and high levels of conflict. Mirza (1992) demonstrated that low teacher expectation was a major hindrance for BAC girls and this concurred with the narratives of female participants. Mac an Ghail (1988), Sewell (1997) and Gillborn (1998) noted that the interactions between BAC boys' peer groups and teachers were fraught with conflict, which resonates with male narratives. With diversity now a prominent feature of the education agenda (Education Commission, 2004), I draw on respondents' views as students and practitioners to discuss the positive influence of BME and anti-racist teachers (Arboun, 1989) and multiculturalism (Sewell, 1997). I also explore Desforges' (2003) suggestion that parental involvement in the school process is instrumental, by examining the attitudes of participants' parents. Finally, I conclude with a summary of the main findings.

### **Models of school success**

The government's current preoccupation with educational achievement is characterised by an emphasis on exam passes (Archer and Francis, 2007). League tables have, thus, created benchmarks of success, based on SATs results during schooling and the acquisition at school leaving age of five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, including English Language and Maths. At the same time, 'diversity', 'widening participation' and 'social inclusion' are high on the agenda of educational institutions looking to address issues of inequality (see Dearing, 1997; Kennedy, 1997; DfES, 2003). With this professed policy agenda, the 'underachievement' in school exams of cohorts of black and minority ethnic (BME) students, including

British African Caribbeans (BACs) (DfES, 2003), has received widespread attention in the educational literature. Drawing on existing models of success (eg Rhamie and Hallam, 2002), I here explore the conditions of educational achievement amongst BACs and begin by exploring the experiences of Elaine and Leroy, the only two graduate interviewees in the research who enjoyed school success within the narrow definition of government policy.

During compulsory schooling, Elaine attained seven O'level<sup>6</sup> passes at grades C and above. She largely attributes her success to a combination of expectations and encouragement from her family, school and wider community. The anticipation of racism in the employment market was an additional motivation and she humorously recalled family and community discourses suggesting 'Because you're black you've got to be ten thousand times better than everybody else!'

Elaine lived in a village on the outskirts of Nottingham, belonging to one of just two black families in the vicinity. She attended the local comprehensive where the grades were generally better than those attained in the inner city schools. This was a prime reason for the family's relocation and is indicative of middle class educational choosing activity (Ball, Reay and David, 2002; James et al, 2006). Her progress was closely monitored, thanks in no small part to the relationship of mutual respect that existed between her mother, who was a teacher, and the teachers in her school.

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<sup>6</sup> O'levels and CSEs preceded GCSEs as the standard school leaving qualifications. Grade A to E O'levels are equivalent to grade A\* to E GCSEs. A grade 1 CSE (the highest grade attainable) is equivalent to a grade C O'level or GCSE, making CSEs a lower level qualification.

Rosenbaum (1991) suggests that black children raised in predominantly white suburbs do better academically and their experience of racism is different to those raised in poor, inner cities. Meera Syal, actress and comedienne, grew up in a village outside Wolverhampton and observed that during her own upbringing, her uniqueness as one of the only Asians in her locality seemed to protect her from the common negative racial stereotypes (Ramesh, 1998). Elaine made similar observations when she described the two identities she cultivated inside and outside of school; one immersed in a white village community, the other in a BAC community in the city.

...we almost religiously went into Nottingham every weekend and went to Saturday School, which was obviously full of black people. Or we'd spend holidays at Grandma's or with other family. So I guess it's like the classic thing that they say about lots of people, which is that you've got two identities. So you've got an identity of what you do when you're not there and then you've got your identity that you put on when you go to school. ...I suppose part of me thought that it must have been really nice to grow up in Nottingham with more black people... And then you speak to people and you think, 'Gosh, well I never experienced that.' ...like when I've spoken to friends of mine that say their teachers said to them, 'You've got to choose whether you want to hang around with the black girls or whether you want to get on and then you just have to drop them.' ...But to me the racism [in the village]... I don't even know whether you would call it racism. It was just complete ignorance of anything outside of what we experience living in this village... I guess it's the difference between when

there's only a handful of people you're not really a threat. You're more of a curiosity...

(Elaine, Consultant)

When Elaine entered HE, she was again one of the few black students at university and in that geographical area. She currently resides in a picturesque village where hers is the lone black family. Success for black people in predominantly white, racialised societies can often necessitate isolation from other black people (hooks, 1993) and many struggle to cope with the inherent contradictions of two (distinct) cultures. Reay (2002) cites Bourdieu's 'duality of the self' in exploring the conflicting values that working class children experience in schools with a middle class ethos. Gordon (2007) explores DuBois' 'double consciousness' and proposes the cultivation of bicultural competence as a mechanism that BACs can utilise to alleviate similar tensions. She explains:

Culture is critical to the wellbeing of the human being. At the heart of the idea of bicultural socialisation is understanding that people living in a culture not developed with their interests in mind need to be socialised into two cultures: a culture of origin and the culture of residence. There are points of possible conflict and consciously attending to them protects one's inner well-being. (*Gordon, 2007; 116*)

Elaine's description of her two identities could be transposed onto this concept. Saturday Schools are community initiatives designed to provide added support for the mainstream curriculum and instil in youngsters a strong sense of pride in their African and Caribbean heritage (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 1988). This is achieved



by focusing on black images, black history, black role models and creating an environment where things black are the norm. Mirza (1992) describes them as a strategy for transforming the society we live in by 'mapping the hidden histories, subjugated knowledges, the counter memories of black women educators' (Mirza, 1997; 173). Elaine's BAC identity was thus nurtured positively in Saturday Schools and amongst her extended family within the black community. Her ability to live comfortably in an all white context was developed in her village life and mainstream schooling, where she was able to adapt to the environment with relative ease. Elaine's perspective on bicultural competence is notably devoid of the tension and conflict described by Reay (2002) and Gordon (2007):

...what happened when you were at home and what happened in your school life was completely different to the existence of people that you went to school with... so probably as a child I was more aware of the two different worlds. But sometimes you hear Asian people describe that there's two different cultures and there's a clash. I never felt that there was a clash, it was just you went from one environment to a different environment. But now I just see it all as an extension... you move from different modes in all parts of your life. Like the way you behave at home is different to how you operate when you go to work is different to how you are when you're on holiday. So maybe it's just like there are two cultures but I don't see it, I just see it as this is how you are in this environment and this is how you are here. (Elaine, Consultant)

Figure 4.1:  
The Home-School Based Model  
(Rhamie & Hallam, 2002; 165)

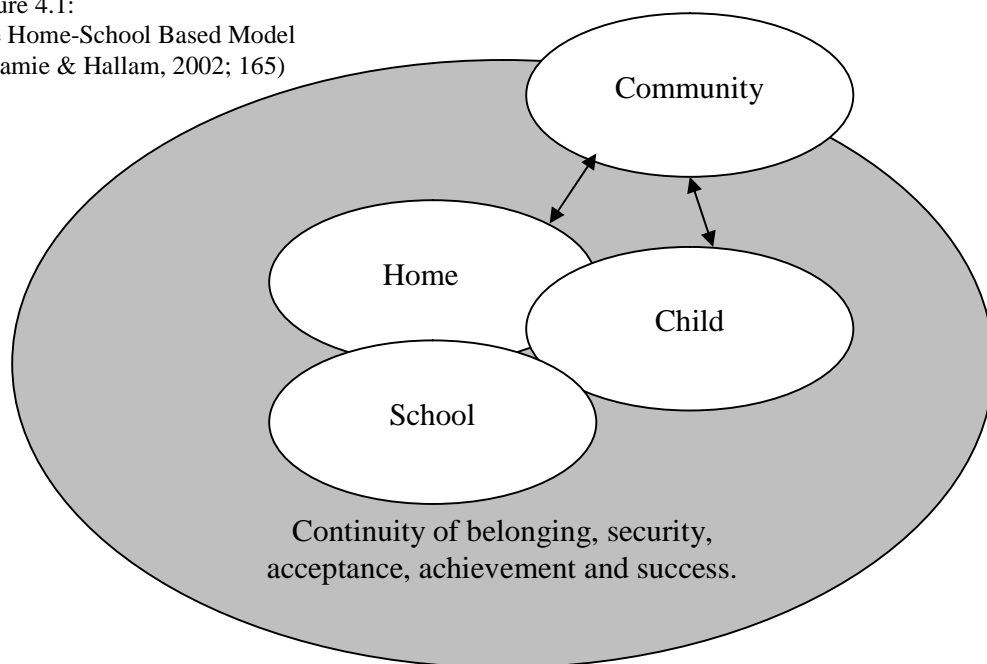


Figure 4.2:  
The Home-Community Based Model  
(Rhamie & Hallam, 2002; 166)

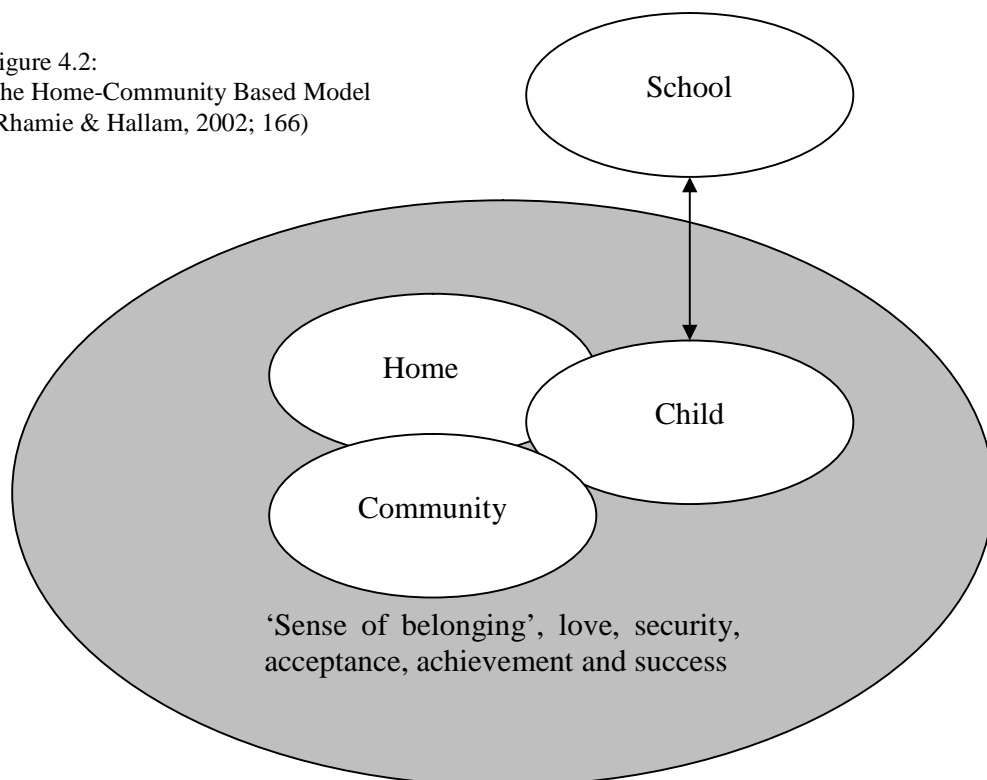
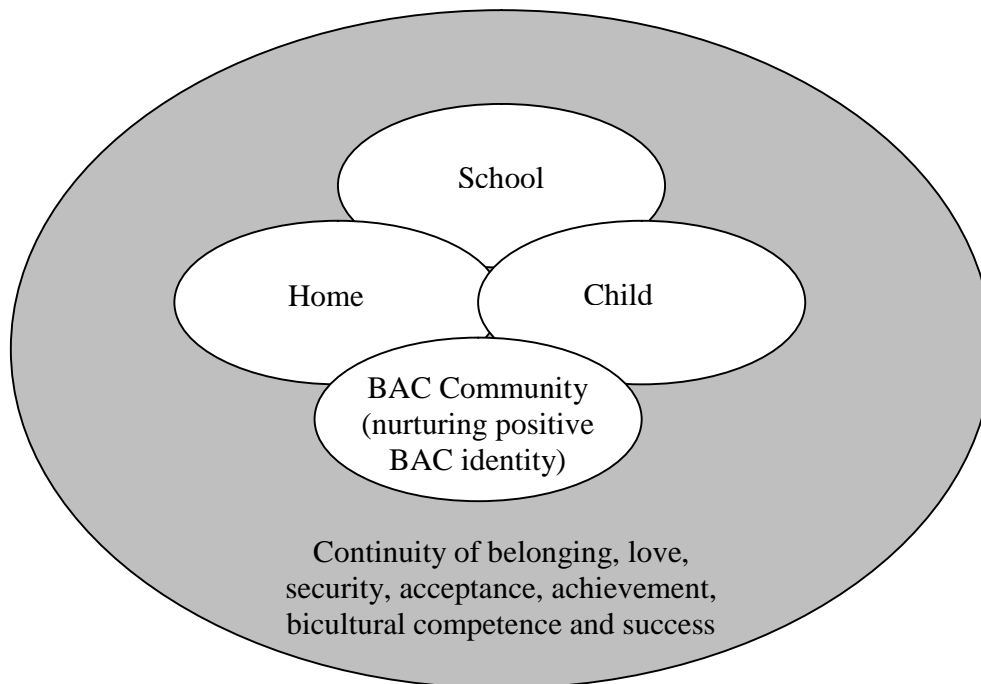


Fig 4.3:

The Home-Community-School Model with Bicultural Competence

(adapted from Rhamie and Hallam, 2002)



Rhamie and Hallam's (2002) Home-School Based Model (see Figure 4.1) identifies high academic expectations in the school, the child's motivation and an education-oriented home environment as critical success factors for BAC children. Positive community involvement plays a supporting role, on the periphery. They identify that BAC children who attend schools with high expectations respond and do well. The model, therefore, reflects the typical components of middle class school achievement.

Their Home-Community Based Model (see Figure 4.2) consists of the same components, but school influences become marginal, whilst community involvement becomes central, with community activities such as church and music lessons providing educational encouragement and experiences of success outside of the school environment. This leads to self discipline and the child's belief in their own ability to achieve, thereby compensating for the low teacher expectations that typically affect BAC experiences of schooling (Mac an Ghail, 1988; Mirza, 1992; Gillborn, 1998).

Elaine's circumstances reflect a combination of the two models, which I have represented in the Home-Community-School Model with Bicultural Competence (see Figure 4.3). In this adaptation, the child, home, community and school all shared high academic expectations and each constituent part was integral to Elaine's success. Parental involvement, including the ability to exercise appropriate choices in the selection of the school and monitor progress via a close relationship with teachers, was crucial. The community activities, including piano lessons and Saturday School, complemented the achievement orientation and provided an all important sense of belonging and acceptance within a BAC community. An additional dimension of the community involvement represented in this adaptation is the positive nurturing of her BAC identity through her attendance at Saturday School. This provided an Africentric perspective on education and culture that counter-balanced the Eurocentric bias of her mainstream education and the white British culture within which she had to function competently. This early

development of bicultural competence facilitated the co-existence of middle class values aligned to the British education system and an appreciation of her BAC culture of origin, thus enabling her self esteem to remain intact.

Leroy gained six O'level passes at grades A to C during compulsory schooling, but does not conform to Rhamie and Hallam's (2002) model of BAC success or the adaptation above. Nor does he conform to Mac an Ghail's 'resistance within accommodation' or Chigwada's 'anti-school but pro-education' models. He describes his parents as strict on discipline, with no emphasis on academic achievement and a hands off approach to education. Nonetheless, he attended a private school for the first three years of his education; his entrance was facilitated by his mother being the school's cook. At his request, he then joined his siblings at a state school, which he describes as 'probably one of the worst schools I could have gone to in the whole borough'. Despite wanting to transfer again, he remained there due to financial constraints.

Archer and Francis (2007) note that Bourdieu's work on the interplay between *habitus* and *capital* is particularly influential among cultural theorists and provides a useful mechanism for comprehending the ways that class dynamics influence educational experiences and perpetuate inequalities. Bourdieu's work demonstrates how limited access to middle class forms of social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital reduces the likelihood of working class children succeeding educationally. Drawing on Bourdieu's capital to understand Leroy's account it seems that class

dynamics impacted negatively on his schooling in two key ways. Firstly, despite his parents having access to some social capital in the form of a social network that facilitated Leroy's entry to the private school, in terms of cultural capital their willingness to transfer him to a less successful school indicates a limited understanding of the education system. This absence of parental *savoir-faire* regarding education is a major hindrance to many working class (Evans, 2006) and BAC children (McKenley, 2006; Coard, 1971). Secondly, this was exacerbated by a lack of sufficient economic capital available to finance a better education when it transpired that his school transfer had been detrimental.

Leroy attended a 'sink' secondary school, where in spite of good grades he felt that teachers had low expectations of him academically. He was, initially, streamed into average groups, from which he gradually worked his way up.

I went from everyone saying in private school that I was bright, intelligent to a state school system where I probably sort of disappeared amongst everyone else... I used to get A's, A's, A's all the way up from the first year until the third year... [Group] 1-1 is the top group [and] I went [into group] 1-3... There were seven streamed classes. So I was in that set for a long while before I actually started to move up in the subjects that mattered... Teachers wouldn't have thought twice about looking at me as anybody with potential until I got my qualifications... (Leroy, FE Lecturer)

Much race and education research reveals that negative racial stereotyping can lead teachers to underestimate the academic abilities of BAC students, even in the face of

clear evidence to the contrary. Low teacher expectation manifests itself in BAC children being systematically placed in lower ability groups (Mac an Ghail, 1988). As a result, the progress of many BAC students is thwarted when they are directed to lower their sights educationally (Mirza, 1992; Gillborn, 1998).

Leroy lived in an inner city London borough with about a 50% BME population, which was reflected in his school's student population. However, his particular neighbourhood, like Elaine's, was predominantly white. Unlike the other male participants, he did not become immersed in a peer group and made no mention of outright conflict with teachers. Neither the absence of the classic success factors, such as attending a 'good' school, high teacher expectations, strong parental involvement and positive community activities (Rhamie and Hallam, 2002), nor the typical hurdles such as peer group pressure and poor teacher-student relationships (Sewell, 1997) prevented him from achieving. He attributes his school achievements solely to self motivation and focusing:

I made sure that I wasn't going to go out and do something that's dead end... I think sometimes the influence of other people de-focuses you; makes you go off and doesn't encourage you. Whereas very often I've been able to motivate and focus myself, myself. And what it comes down to is... it's down to you really. You've got to motivate yourself. And if I really wanted to go off and do something I'd know how to... (Leroy, FE Lecturer)

Leroy's positive experience of a private education in his formative years may well have gained him cultural capital in terms of providing him with an inner confidence in his abilities, which fortified him for the duration of his schooling. Additionally, he was more aligned to Gillborn's (1990) achievers, who survived because they were able to keep a low profile, be non-confrontational and suppress any characteristics of ethnicity which might threaten teachers. He describes himself as someone who '...can get lost in a group of people' and 'I probably sort of disappeared amongst everyone else,' which implies his low profile. His non-confrontational character during his youth is evident in his description of his passive response to a teacher's aggression and his blasé attitude to racism at the time. He commented:

...if someone called me a nigger I'd just laugh. I was able to do that because I never really thought about it. (Leroy, FE Lecturer)

Furthermore, he did not conform to the hegemonic image of black masculinity, including sporting prowess (Sewell, 1997), involvement in a peer group (Sewell, 1997; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Gillborn, 1998), speaking patois (Mac an Ghaill, 1988) and rebelling against injustice (Sewell, 1997; Mac an Ghaill, 1988). He explains:

...black boys are rather categorised. In my second school [where I taught] I went into the staff room and this PE teacher came up to me on the second day and said to me, 'Oh it's good that you're here because you could take the Year 10s for basketball.' And I thought, 'Why?' That's the thing, at school I was the most uncoordinated black



person that walked this earth. [Laughs]. And I mean it was terrible. And I found myself becoming a teacher that black kids would despise in a sense. (Leroy, FE Lecturer)

Leroy, although recognising the stereotyping of him by the teacher, appears to have internalised this stereotype. He also accepts that his nonconformity with this black male typology would not encourage black pupils identifying with him. This and other examples from the cohort illustrate the damaging psychological impact that stereotyping can have on one's psyche. Gillborn (1998) asserts that black boys find themselves in a position where they must sacrifice cultural identity and the peer group for school success. However, it seems that Leroy did not consciously suppress the characteristics of his ethnicity, although their absence may have inadvertently saved him from the fate of many BAC children.

Bourdieu uses *habitus* to describe an individual's 'way of being', acquired primarily through a process of acculturation. He demonstrates how the norms of behaviour that set the standards within education are in fact based on middle class values and thus provide children from those backgrounds with a distinct advantage. He elucidates:

when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself "as a fish in water", it does not feel the weight of the world and takes the world about it for granted. (*quoted in Reay, 2002; 223*)

A working class habitus in a middle class education system increases the likelihood of alienation and conflict for students (hooks, 1994). In developing this concept here, I would suggest that BAC culture is even further removed from white, middle class behavioural norms. A key factor then, is Leroy's non-conformism to BAC behavioural norms. Although he was subjected to the same negative racial stereotyping as other BAC children, such as low expectations, his casual acceptance of this and other injustices, coupled with his ability to blend in, diffused the potential for conflict.

Where Elaine's and Leroy's school experiences converge is in their non-reactive attitude towards racism. Racism is often a trigger for the conflict experienced by BAC children in schools (DfES, 2003) and Leroy's ability to shrug it off would have enabled him to diffuse situations. Elaine put the racism she experienced in her village life down to ignorance and was unperturbed by it. When Rhamie (2007) explored the academic success of BACs she highlighted that the most successful students were more matter of fact about their negative school experiences than others who, even many years later, felt a strong sense of injustice. She identified 'resilience' as the key factor influencing success and defined it as the ability to recover from hardship, because of protective factors built up through the cumulative positive influences from outside school (see model in Fig 4.2). Interestingly, although Elaine's attitude remained much the same over the years, Leroy, on reflection, remarked that he is no longer able to make light of such situations, as he is far more disillusioned about the impact of racism on his life.

Another common feature of Elaine's and Leroy's experiences was that, in very different circumstances, neither became immersed in a black peer group and both were able to adapt or blend in to the school environment. This adaptability may well have been a significant factor for their success.

### **The more typical school trajectory**

Elaine and Leroy's school success is in stark contrast to the more typical school trajectory of the research participants. Negative experiences of compulsory schooling, especially at the secondary level, were quite common and narratives were littered with references to declining grades and unfulfilled potential. This reflects the findings of a DfES report which suggests:

...evidence from LEAs and from the Ofsted review of research shows that the academic achievement of African Caribbean pupils is often higher at Key Stage 1 than other groups and then attainment gradually declines relative to other groups and is amongst the lowest at Key Stage 4. (*DfES, 2003; 3*).

Although BAC pupils often outperform their counterparts from other ethnicities when they start school, the trend changes quite dramatically, and as they progress through schooling, their ability to achieve diminishes rather than improves.

Socio-economic class is widely considered a key indicator of educational success and levels of achievement can vary considerably depending on the types of schools

attended, with working class children who attend poorly resourced, inner city schools faring worst (Reay, 2001). The history of colonialism and post-war mass immigration from the former British colonies positioned most first generation African Caribbean migrants firmly amongst the British working classes in terms of their access to jobs, housing and education (Coard, 1971). As such, BAC children are largely concentrated in inner city schools (Rhamie and Hallam, 2002) and the research participants were no exception. All attended state secondary schools, none of which were selective and when reflecting on the standard of education available at their schools, several felt that generally there was insufficient emphasis on academic achievement:

...I don't know why, but I often think about my schooling. I think it's because the people I socialise with nowadays, a lot of them had a damn good education... And I messed up with school... And I always think that if I'd gone to a better school... I would have done better. (Neil, IT Trainer)

However, the complexity of issues that affect BAC children go beyond class (Education Commission, 2004) and 'the correlation between class indicators and attainment is not as strong for Black Caribbean and Black African pupils as for white ethnic groups' (DfES, 2003; 7). Current trends show that black boys from middle class backgrounds achieve less than working class boys from other backgrounds (Education Commission, 2004) and when black girls are compared with girls from the same schools and circumstances, they perform better than their white counterparts, although not as well as Asian and Chinese girls (Mirza, 2005).

Even in the least successful schools, some children with ability achieve and the participants' subsequent graduation is evidence of their academic ability. However, the most fundamental hindrance to emerge from the narratives was poor teacher-student relationships. Whilst there was significant overlap across the sexes, my main observation is that for girls this manifested itself in low teacher expectations; for boys in conflict between peer groups and teachers.

### *Schooling the girls*

In examining the more typical school trajectory amongst participants, I will first focus on the experiences of the majority of the girls.

Good teacher-student relationships and high teacher expectations are of paramount importance for a child's academic success and hooks (1994) extols the benefits provided by teachers who have a genuine concern for the children in their care. For participants, good teacher-student relationships were characterised as dependent on teachers being caring, supportive and encouraging. Michelle described the profound impact of her teacher's belief in her:

I had Mr S\*. I wish I could hunt him down and find out where he is because he was an excellent teacher. He said to me that you can do anything you want to do. Anything you set your mind to do, you can do it... And I believed him. And I don't think I could have had a more important statement given to me at that time. And when I left primary school I had this in my mind. (Michelle, Teacher)

However, high teacher expectation was rare and there were very few examples of teachers actively encouraging participants. Elaine, the highest school achiever, and Michelle were the only interviewees who perceived an expectation from their teachers that they would go to university. Nora highlights the vast difference between what she achieved in school and the encouragement that fuelled her subsequent achievement a few years later. She rationalises the reasons for her poor school outcomes:

...low expectations. That is just so obvious now, because how could I go through a whole schooling and not really achieve anything in terms of my capability; and then leave school and get three A'levels at A grade? I mean it just shows that at school, what did they do with me? They had no expectations of my capability. So, that was a big barrier... So, when they talk about low expectations that is so real for me. (Nora, Head Teacher)

Low teacher expectation manifests itself in BAC children being systematically placed in lower ability groups (Mac an Ghail, 1988; Mirza, 1992). In this research, a number of participants spoke of instances of unchallenging class work, a lack of encouragement and teachers blatantly trying to lower their expectations despite clear evidence of the students' ability and aspiration. Alison described teachers attempting to lower her expectations by advising her that she didn't 'need' high status qualifications and entering her for lower ones. In the same vein, Michelle provides an account of her teacher trying to demote her to a lower set and strongly

advising her against selecting the sciences, in which she excelled, for her options. She describes herself as a pupil who was always 'well behaved' and worked hard 'because I knew that was where I could achieve'. Nevertheless:

...I had these exams and I think the lowest I got was the fifth highest in the class for sciences... I was in the top for everything. And Science was the easiest [for me]... And I said to [the teacher] that I was going to take three sciences and she said 'Three sciences is almost impossible to pass. You will never do it.' I just ignored her and decided I was going to do three sciences... And out of all the children in my class she came to me and said, 'We're going to put you down a group.' So I was a child on my own and these two teachers came to me and told me that they were going to put me down a group. And I said, 'No! Why would you do that? These are my exam results. How can you basically justify doing that?'... I was so furious that [my mum] went up to the school and spoke to the Head [and after that] they left me in that top group... And then I moved up to my High School and it went on the report that you got, so they put me in the CSE group and my [black] friend was with me as well. And she said, 'We're not supposed to be in this group!' And they said, 'Well you're here now and we've got an exam come Christmas [and if you] do well you can move up.' The work that they gave us was just so easy that it didn't even take us half the time. We spent most of the time talking to the Chemistry teacher and our Physics teacher... Our grades were easily the highest in the class, [but] by the time we moved up the other students stigmatised us, because as far as they were concerned we were really CSE students. And that's how the teachers spoke of us as well... Funnily enough, the O'levels that I got straight away, even though I didn't really revise that much for them, were the science O'levels. And if I had listened to that woman I wouldn't have really got any. (Michelle, Teacher)

This account demonstrates the power that some teachers exert, which ultimately restricts black children's life choices. In her position as a teacher now, Michelle reflects on her unfair treatment and how bold it was for her aged twelve to fight against the decision of her teacher and Head of Science. Their efforts to demote her were partially averted when Michelle's mother successfully challenged it and the Head Teacher agreed that she should remain in the top class. However, the class teacher's report to the next school ensured that Michelle was put into a lower set there instead. Michelle and her friend, who was also black, recognised the injustice and used their power of agency to work hard and thus prove their suitability for the higher set. They were finally moved up, only to find that in addition to the difficulties of adjusting to a different syllabus and class, they faced the stigma amongst their peers of coming up from a lower set. This continuous battle to prove oneself in the face of a constant barrage of negativity would undermine most children's confidence in their academic ability. Michelle's decision to ignore the teacher's advice in terms of subject choice and her success in those particular subjects echoes Mac an Ghail's (1988) finding that for many successful black students, teacher assessments of their ability are of little importance.

Eve's experience was similar to Michelle's. She was channelled into CSE groups and likewise had to prove herself capable of sitting the higher standard O'levels. Similarly, in her class, all of those promoted to higher sets were BME students. Whilst such progress might be considered encouraging, it is an indictment of the school as an institution which systematically denigrates and impedes the academic



potential of BAC pupils, instead of actively encouraging and developing their talents. Teachers, intentionally or unintentionally, racially stereotype BACs as low achievers and students have to be very brave in fighting the system, which places additional and unnecessary burdens on them. As a result of low teacher expectation, participants described time wasted in lessons where the standard of work was well beneath their capabilities and offered absolutely no academic development.

Low teacher expectation and negative racial stereotyping affect not just the present, but also the future, as BAC children have their career aspirations assessed as unrealistically high (Mirza, 1992). Interviewees' general opinion was that careers advice was poor and Alison expressed her frustration at the advice she received in spite of her aspirations to a professional career:

they knew I wanted to get high[ly] paid and everything... but they don't think you will... I did feel with the O'levels and the A'levels it was... battling with the teachers.

(Alison, HE Lecturer)

From the age of eight, Eve wanted to be a hairdresser. She describes her experience of applying for a popular hairdressing course at college.

I had a careers interview with Mr A\* and my mum came with me and it was absolutely dreadful. I told him what I wanted to do and he said, 'Why are you applying for the full-time hairdressing course? Why don't you be an apprentice?' And I said, 'Well I just feel that if I'm going to study this as a career I'd like to learn everything about it

and start from scratch.’ And he said, ‘Well, you won’t get into C\*.’ He didn’t say ‘Well try and apply. It is a difficult college, but go for it.’ He said, ‘You *will not* get into C\* College.’ And as a fifteen year old I remember my mum sitting there and me sitting there and I could feel the tears filling up, because it was like suddenly all my hopes and dreams... and there’s this man in authority telling me that I wouldn’t get a place. So I said, ‘Why?’ And he said, ‘Well, it’s very, very competitive.’ So of course I wouldn’t get in. So I said, ‘Well have you looked at my grades and noted what the teachers are predicting?’ And he said, ‘Oh well yes, they’re fine, but you won’t get in.’ ...I remember even back then being quite strong... My mum said, ‘What would [you] like to do then?’ Because I think my mum felt disappointed for me [and] I said, ‘Well if I don’t get on to do the full-time course I won’t bother. I’ll just do something else.’ And I just said to Mum, ‘Come on. Let’s go.’ And so we went... but my mum was very quiet, because it’s like a mentality of the teachers having the power... So Mum didn’t really ask him anything... (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Eve touched upon the unspoken racial segregation that she experienced from the college to which she applied. When she was turned down it seemed to confirm the Career’s teacher’s low assessment of her abilities. She was crushed. Yet a year later, she was encouraged to re-apply by a particularly good Careers teacher and discovered that there was no apparent reason for the rejection of her first application:

...I applied straight from school to C\* College to do hairdressing and... there were no black people at all that went to C\* College. ...I still applied, but then I didn’t get in the first time; which was like ‘Oh my God, [the Careers teacher] was right, no matter how horrible he was!’ And I was really, really gutted. It threw me completely... So I felt like I was just going aimlessly with the wind to be quite honest... I started to do A level

Chemistry, but my heart was never in it... And then I had another careers interview [and] I decided not to mention hairdressing, because I just felt it was probably a sign that I wasn't meant to go ahead with hairdressing. And so I spent an hour with this Careers Officer who was really nice and she said, 'We've gone through nearly every possible career and everything you've said is fine...' So she was [suggesting] so many [careers] to see if she could see a spark and it was all an even keel. [Laughs] And she said, 'Well, we've just spent an hour and I'm none the wiser really. Where do we go from here?' And then right at the end she said 'Is there something that you've always wanted to do?' She'd never asked that question throughout the interview. And I laughed and I said to her, 'Well, I wasn't going to mention it at all, because I think I'm probably not meant to do it, but I've always wanted to do hairdressing and I applied and didn't get in.' She said, 'Oh my god! Don't be daft... I'm going to have an application form for C\* College. Apply again. Don't be defeated.' She was really positive... I went through the same test. And then they [selected for] an interview. So this is quite intriguing, because I didn't get an interview the first time, but the second time I did. And at this interview I had two teachers... and they said 'We noticed you applied before and you didn't get in. Do you know why?' And *they* were asking *me* why! And I said, 'Well I don't know...' And they said 'We're just shocked that you didn't get in the first time.' And they looked at each other and I've always thought, 'What were they thinking?' Because a week after I was firmly accepted on the course. No hassle at all. So, I don't know what it was about the year before why I wasn't accepted... There were thirty-seven that had made it out of four hundred people [and] me and a guy were the only black people on the course. There weren't any other either mixed raced or Asian... And as soon as I started I loved it and I just knew that 'Yes, I'm happy in this.' And I think because of it I did really well. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Eve went on to be a star student, winning awards, representing the college and having newspaper articles written about her, which demonstrates that she was clearly very able. She also went on to start her own successful hairdressing business at age 21, which she continues to operate on a part-time basis twenty years later. Her experience of the careers interview exemplifies both Mirza's (1992) and Allen's (1998a) findings that black students' expectations are generally lowered by careers advisors. Her story demonstrates the accumulation of obstacles that hinder the academic progress of BAC children, shaping their lives and reproducing inequalities. Her articulation of her emotions conveys the depth of impact that teacher prejudices can have on a child's self-belief and the lost dreams that can readily ensue. Despite her predicted grades, the teacher considered it unrealistic for Eve to apply to the best college course in the region. He, therefore, directed her to the apprenticeship, which offered a more superficial learning experience and a lower status qualification. His low expectation of her ability reflects a patronising attitude, inherent in negative racial stereotyping. Her mother, although disappointed for Eve, was ill-equipped to challenge the teacher's assumptions or act on her daughter's behalf. (Parental involvement is discussed in more detail later.) The mysterious rejection of her application raises unanswered questions about the reference and the college recruitment process. The persistence of the second Careers teacher again demonstrates the importance of the caring professional, whose genuine concern makes a difference. Without it, Eve would have undoubtedly abandoned her goal.

Channer (1995) identifies that successful BACs often encounter a 'benevolent individual' who assists with careers or academic advice and thereby compensates for the shortcomings in the system. She also suggests that for many BAC students '...having the academic ability was not enough' (Channer; 1995; 93). In Eve's case, the influence of a 'benevolent individual' to guide her through the system was a catalyst and key determinant of her success.

Four of the five female graduates left school with only two or three O'level passes. It is apparent that for them the school system did not support, but rather hindered the fulfilment of their potential.

### *Schooling the boys*

I will now turn my attention to the more typical school trajectory of the male participants.

Concern about the 'underachievement' of boys in relation to girls has been the driving force behind the growing body of literature on working class and black masculinities in education (eg Graham and Robinson, 2004; Odih, 2002; Reay, 2002; Skelton, 2001). Wright et al (1998) suggest that middle class masculinities are aligned to the elements required to succeed in education and whereas working class masculinities are less acceptable, black masculinities are unacceptable. They conclude that 'it is race which determines how gender is experienced' (Wright et al, 1998; 79).

Low teacher expectation was the most significant factor amongst the female cohort in this research and male participants recounted similar experiences, although to a lesser degree. Whereas some felt that they were held back, others interpreted the issue as a lack of encouragement. They, therefore, owned part of the responsibility for not seizing educational opportunity:

I was O'level standard from day one, but wasn't given the opportunity to go into that group. And I never asked for it. And I didn't realise that it was that important at the time. The opportunities [weren't] laid on the table, like they should have been; like it should be that teachers want to do that. So, I went through that system. I've got no resentment... it was an excellent learning experience for me... because I know that any child I've got and all my nephews now, they won't be going through that again. It will be completely different, because I'm challenging it... And if I'm not satisfied I'm taking it further... So I try to deal with injustice at school. [I] left with no qualifications. (Dean, Youth Worker)

A prominent theme in the literature is that negative racial stereotyping on the part of teachers leads them to perceive BAC children as a threat (Mac an Ghail, 1988; Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 1988). Because of 'cultural definition' (Stebbins, 1975), black children are subjected to higher levels of control and punishment than others in similar circumstances. Gillborn observed:

Black students were disproportionately controlled and criticised, not because they broke clear school rules any more frequently, but because teachers perceived them as a threat. (*Gillborn 1998; 14*)

As Pomeroy (1999) explains, teacher-student relationships play an integral role in exclusions. Worryingly, black boys are five times more likely to be excluded from school than the average (Wright et al, 1998) and disproportionate numbers of black children are categorised as Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Richardson, 2005).

A number of male and female participants noted that hostilities in teacher-student relationships led to a lack of understanding and the unfair treatment of BAC students. Although being perceived as a threat was not gender specific, it was accentuated for boys. Sewell (1997) notes that black males are stereotypically portrayed in the media and wider society as a threat that needs to be controlled. This shapes the way they are perceived by teachers and the way they see themselves.

Mac an Ghail's (1988) observations of teacher interactions with peer groups of BAC and Asian school boys revealed that the racialised interpretations of behaviour, rather than the behaviour itself, led to conflict between teachers and BAC boys. He noted that due to different types of racial stereotyping, teachers viewed BAC boys in behavioural terms and Asian boys in terms of technical ability. There was no room for academically successful BACs, who were resented and usually put down to lower grades based on negative racial stereotypes of behaviour. By contrast, Asian's

with 'technical problems' were placed in higher sets. Whilst discussing his relationship with teachers Sean deduced:

...some teachers found me and some of my friends quite intimidating. And I don't know if that's a reflection of why black youths don't engage in the education system as much. So I had some bad experiences with some teachers where the teachers were downright unfair, which affected my ability to work within the class... And I think sometimes it's a challenge thing, it's a challenge to your manhood. Even though you're still a boy, you have a sense of pride. And sometimes it's a challenge to that.

(Sean, Housing Advice Manager)

The problem of being 'shamed' by teachers in front of their peers was construed as a very real issue for boys developing their masculine identities and when teachers used public humiliation to control a situation, boys protected their self-respect through confrontation – for example, answering back – rather than submission. Sewell (1997) identified this problem in his research and found that boys simply wanted teachers to treat them with respect, but this was interpreted as subversive. Thus, lack of 'respect' on the teachers part – sometimes including racist comments – and insubordination on the boys' part, were key aspects of the conflicts that arose between black boys and teachers.

The accentuated fear of black boys can also detract attention from aggression that is directed at them and Dean gave an example of an incident of racial abuse where a



teacher chose to ignore the initial act of aggression and focus on punishing the retaliation.

A lot of the teachers need to be getting experience of being out there and getting appropriate training, because they're working with a lot of black men and I think they're scared... Throughout the system I think they're scared; especially at schools... My nephew was verbally, racially assaulted the other day and when he hit this guy, they was quick to say that they were going to put on his file that he assaulted this guy. And his parents challenged that and said, 'Be careful how you use the word assault, because it tends to stay with you throughout your career. So you need to rephrase that.' Fortunately, they did. And [his parents] said, 'You need to be talking about this racial abuse. How are you going to handle that?' They chose not to see the racial abuse part, but they wanted to concentrate on the assault part. I think a lot of them feel threatened and they don't know how to deal with it, so they think the best thing is to exclude. And to exclude is like that downward cycle of destruction. (Dean, Youth Worker)

Whilst fighting in the playground is not condoned, toughness is one of the ways that working class boys maintain their self-respect as well as respect amongst their peers (Reay, 2002). The example above demonstrates how racial abuse can trigger a confrontation and how retaliation can lead to serious consequences for the victim of racism. Gillborn (1998) noted that teachers often respond inappropriately to racist slurs and attacks in school, minimising them and not recognising them as bullying. The DfES (2003) found that a clear approach to racism in school raises BME achievement. It conveys the message that racism will not be tolerated and protects

BME students by providing them with an effective alternative that leaves their dignity intact.

Showing respect is an important element in BAC, male culture and even the youngest boy is often greeted by older men as 'big man' as a mark of respect. Both of the examples above highlight how, in defending their male pride, black boys can use inappropriate responses to challenge injustice and thereby exacerbate situations. Sewell (1997) identified that whilst 'whiteness' is constructed around the concept of privilege, for many black boys, constructions of 'blackness' revolved around rebelliousness towards a hostile system. He thus outlined conflict resolution techniques that can equip black (and white) boys with alternative strategies to diffuse potential conflict. He also suggested that a process of re-education called 'black ego recovery' could enable black boys to reject the negative stereotypes and internalised racism that were reinforced within their peer groups, thus perpetuating their own oppression.

Male participants identified their involvement in peer groups as a source of perpetual conflict with teachers and a root cause of their underachievement in school:

...in my class there were really a lot of mess about children. There were only a few of us who worked and they were mainly girls. So they carried on as girls do, but I just was mixed up in the wrong crowd. I started in the top groups and by the fifth year I was sliding and sliding and I was only doing four O'levels by the time I got to the fourth and fifth year. And that was my fault, my own doing. And I always think that if

I'd gone to a better school, because of peer pressure again, I would have done better.

(Neil, IT Trainer)

Neil's reference to the progression of his female peers, contrasted to his own decline in achievement, the latter partly attributable to his choice of friendship group, highlights how working class and black masculinities are often implacably opposed to school achievement. *Consequently*, male participants blamed their poor school outcomes not only on bad teacher-student relationships, but also on their own lack of interest and motivation to learn. Most also noted that whereas there was very little encouragement in academic subjects, there was plenty of encouragement for sports. This conforms to the popular image of black male sporting prowess and when asked what contributed to his school leaving results, Zac responded:

First thing that comes into my head is to try and blame the teachers... No, I can't really blame them as such, but I wasn't really pushed or encouraged from them at all. The encouragement really was just for sports... I remember our school was one of the best at basketball. And the basketball team was literally 80-90% black. And all my mates, we used to go around thrashing all the other schools. I can remember on several occasions, members being left off detention because there was a game. So, kind of given a bligh<sup>7</sup> through the sports. But if I was to think back at the subjects, there was no major encouragement for those... I think, being fair to them, they probably encouraged us to do the sports, because we were good at it. Obviously, we were skilled in football, basketball... So, at least they were helping us through that. And at the same time, you need all the other things as well, and that push was not there. (Zac, Entrepreneur)

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<sup>7</sup> Let off

Sewell (1997) contends that due to the heightened influence of black music, dress, sports and sexuality in popular youth culture, black boys enjoy increased admiration and respect from their peers and:

The way in which the students adopt teacher stereotypes as part of their own reputation within the peer-group is one example of how racism takes on a life of its own. (*Sewell, 1997; 47*)

He asserts that:

The peer group imposed both positive and negative influences; it was at once a cauldron of new vibrant Black culture, vital to the creation of an African-Caribbean identity in a hostile world, and a trap into a perception of Black boys as a force only of rebellion and never of conformity and creativity (*Sewell, 1997; 219*).

Osborne (2001) indicates that black boys are exposed to negative racial stereotyping long before their achievement begins to decline. Anxiety levels associated with academic ability are accentuated and a process of 'academic disidentification' is set in motion. Academic disidentification is the 'detaching of self esteem from academic outcomes' (Osborne, 2001; 49) and is part of a defence mechanism long recognised in psychology as a withdrawal strategy adopted by the ego to protect itself. In order to maintain self esteem, people are inclined to value activities that their group are expected to excel in and devalue activities in which they are expected

to fail. The individual's aspirations thus conform to the others' expectation. Male participants in this research were also inclined towards sporting prowess; disassociated, both by themselves and others, from academic success and thereby the self fulfilling prophecy of academic 'underachievement' was played out, with four of these five male graduates leaving school without any O'level passes.

### **Diversity in schools**

One of the most effective strategies for tackling negative racial stereotyping and raising achievement for BME pupils is increasing the presence of BME (Education Commission, 2004) and anti-racist teachers in schools (Arbouin, 1989).

Teachers provide the main interface with the school system and thus received a lot of the criticism relating to negative school experiences in the narratives. Their lack of awareness of cultural diversity and a negative racial stereotyping of BACs appeared to be at the root of the problem. Contemporary race research has focused on deconstructing 'whiteness' as a means to understand how racism is perpetuated. A fundamental issue is that due to centuries of racial domination, 'whiteness' is a position of privilege in a system of racial signification. It is construed as natural and normal, whilst non-whites are constructed as 'others' with 'racialised identities' (Dabydeen, Gilmore and Jones, 2007; Wright, Thompson and Channer, 2007; Sewell, 1997).

Sewell (1997) suggests that Hardiman and Jackson's (1996) racial identity development model can be used by teachers to explore their own understanding of race and social justice, without feeling exposed. One of the main obstacles to raising teachers' awareness is their natural reluctance to acknowledge that racism exists within them, because of feelings of guilt. However, the recognition that 'racial domination is a system that positions or constructs everyone who falls within its orbit' (Sewell, 1997; 196) is a crucial step in accepting the reality that both black and white people imbibe racist ideology. Although race is perceived as a physical reality, advances in evolutionary biology show a single human race with a common ancestry and thus discredits the notion that human beings can be sub-divided into distinct 'races' (Salifu, 2007). Singh posits:

Within the sociological frame, 'race' by and large is understood as a social and ideological construct, designed to serve no other function than to justify racism and domination. (Singh, 2004; 24)

'Whiteness' and 'blackness' then, are not about skin colour, but part of a (hierarchical) system of racial signification that can be challenged through raising awareness of the illusion of race and learning respect for other cultures.

Wright, Thompson and Channer (2007) use Fanon's (1986) concept of '*Black Skin, White Mask*' to demonstrate that the presence of black educators in racist institutions does not necessarily equate to diversity, because in order to bypass institutional barriers and gain entry they must adopt white norms of behaviour. Applying this to

the school context, it follows that black skin is no guarantee of an anti-racist teacher. Nonetheless, participants that encountered black teachers were incredibly positive about their influence, providing several examples of their fair treatment of black pupils, as well as the additional guidance and support that they offered.

Michelle recalled her experience of being placed in a set below her ability, where a Caribbean teacher, seeming to be aware of the injustice, took a special interest in ensuring that she and her friends were promoted to the higher set.

So there were thirty children and four black children in that class. And we had a West Indian, Trinidadian teacher and... when I got there I liked her, because she was nice to me. ...what I realise [now is] she was actually coaching us. And I think she knew that we all had the ability to be in the top class and there was something else that must have been going on. Because at the end of that year only three children moved up and they were all black children... me and my other two friends. And she was geeing us along and asking us how we were doing and things like that. So I think she made it her business to get us into that top class, because she clearly thought that there was something else going on. But we wouldn't have known as children. (Michelle, Teacher)

hooks' (1994) deduces that teachers' awareness of different cultural codes in the classroom is essential for true inclusion for BME and working class students. Michelle, in her capacity as a teacher, reiterates this point in relation to the school where she is now employed. She is aware that black teachers' cultural

understandings can neutralise the negative impact on BAC students caused by some teachers' erroneous interpretations of the student's behaviour.

I think the school is more than 50% black...but among the teaching staff I think they've got one permanent black teacher, one teacher on a year contract, and me. So the children, I think, are very happy to see another black teacher. And sometimes its important to be aware of culture... when they're in school, education, I think, still seems to be a very white, middle class environment and those are the rules, those are the standards, and if that's not what you are actually doing, then you are seen somehow to be deviant. And so a lot of the time some of the black children are seen to be deviant. Now to me, I think West Indian culture tends to be a lot louder than European culture, so the children are being loud, but I don't necessarily see that they're doing anything wrong. If they're not working they're doing something wrong, but if they're being loud they're not doing anything wrong. I know I can look up and I can see my middle class section at the top ...they're talking, they're chatting, but they're getting on with their work. [The] black section will be talking more loudly, but they're still getting on with their work. Sometimes when I had my Teaching Assistant in the class he'd be saying 'Oh, look you're making noise, you're talking loudly, get on with your work,' and they'll turn round and say 'Well I've done this and I've done that,' and he'll say 'Show me.' And they'll show him and then he'll say 'Alright then,' but I don't think it connects with him that they are doing work, because he'll say the same thing and respond to them the very same way in the next lesson. Because he is white and middle class that isn't his culture and he feels that if you're making lots of noise and you have been chatting and he can hear you chatting you can't possibly be doing work. But I know that they are, because I'm keeping my eye on them and I've also got something called Ranger where I can see exactly what they're doing on their [computer] screens...

(Michelle, Teacher)



Nora, having excelled in her teaching career became a Head Teacher in her early thirties. She herself left school with few qualifications and has dedicated her career to improving the performance of schools with large numbers of black and working class children. She makes the following observation about the difficulties that black children face, which she attributes as directly contributing to poor school leaving results:

It has a lot to do with school; the teachers not understanding the attitudes of the black boys in particular and with that comes low expectations about what they can do. They're not driven as hard as they could be under the right circumstances. They don't want to work for teachers when they don't feel that the teachers like them. That is a big thing. I've witnessed that myself too often. The curriculum isn't really geared towards the black children. There's not a lot in there that they can relate to. For example, I can take a lesson and I can chip in things like say, 'Yeah, and you know when you have your rice and peas on a Sunday...' The children's ears will prick up. They'll [think]... 'There's something in there for me. She's teaching *me*.' Whereas they don't get that with the white teachers and that hinders them as well. They're not as motivated on that score. (Nora, Head Teacher)

With the benefit of hindsight, there was awareness amongst participants that the mainstream school curriculum had largely served to alienate them as black people through the racism they experienced and the absence of any black perspectives or genuine multiculturalism in the curriculum. A truly multicultural curriculum would consistently include a diverse range of African and Asian heritage cultures, authors,

art, history and scientists in all subject areas. It would, thus, provide a more holistic worldview that acknowledges BME contributions to society. Introducing a multicultural curriculum is an effective way to build positive identities amongst BME students and combat negative racial stereotyping (eg Sewell, 1997; Jiwani and Regan, 1998). However, participants were unified in the opinion that any positive sense of their BAC identity that related to education, had been developed via extra curricular activities. As Zac commented:

[There's] a need for change in how we're educated, because we're in a system that doesn't say anything positive about black people. (Zac, Entrepreneur)

Those who had become teachers, in particular, believed that the situation remained largely unchanged since their childhood and lauded the need for the curriculum to reflect the diversity of the school and UK population. Both Channer (1995) and Mac an Ghaill (1988) talk about the rejection of school as a means of maintaining self-esteem, in, and as, opposition to an environment that denigrates the student's own culture. Interviewees recognised this antagonism and were conscious of a need to inform their own children about black contributions to society, in order to reinforce positive self-esteem and highlight the link between education and their history and culture as BACs.

[My son] had to do a project on the Romans and so he did [Lucius] Septimius Severus, a black Roman emperor. And he just had to do a project on Egypt, which is all about black people, but I made sure that he brought the perspective of not just about the

mummy's and the pyramids; pyramids is fine, but not just about the things that everybody would talk about. I made sure that he covered things like the development of Chemistry and Astronomy and Sciences and Maths. And he had to do a PowerPoint presentation, so he's not only teaching himself and making himself feel good as a black person, but he's also teaching others. And... [laughs] they're going to realise that every project that this boy does is in relation to black people and how good they are. But that's what I do and that helps me, because he has to do the project anyway and they're going to teach him all about the Vikings and the white side of things and the European side of things. So I always make sure that he has the black side of things as well.

(Nora, Head Teacher)

Their concerns, as parents of school age children, bring me to the issue of the parental involvement that they experienced during their compulsory schooling.

### **Parental involvement**

The fact that BAC children are falling behind as they progress through compulsory schooling (DfES, 2003) may indicate that they do better in the early years when familial influence is strongest and fare worse as their parents come to have less influence on their education (Mbandaka, 2004). Parental involvement in the learning process is considered one of the most important elements of school success (Desforges, 2003) and a key problem faced by many BAC children is the inability of their parents to secure a good education and challenge unfair treatment (McKenley, 2005).

This is corroborated by the fact that only one participant had a parent who enjoyed a good relationship with her school and possessed the cultural capital necessary for navigating the school system to her child's advantage. Elaine explains her mother's insight into the system and her ability to exercise parental choice in the selection of her school.

The obvious school for you to go to from where we lived wasn't a very 'good school', so I went further away... But I suppose if I hadn't had a parent who was a teacher, I'm not convinced that I would have been sent to a different school... And then we moved to [the village] and... the major reason was just really to do with schools... (Elaine, Consultant)

It is widely accepted that all parents want their children to do well in school and BAC parents are no exception (Coard, 1971; Stone, 1981; Channer, 1995; McKenley, 2005). However, working class parents tend to see education as something that happens only at school (Evans, 2006) and BAC parents depend on a blind faith in the system (Coard, 1971). The Education Commission (2004) identified that BAC parents fell short in helping their children with their schooling and 'African Caribbean pupils were least likely of all groups to believe that they received good levels of support and encouragement from home most of the time' (Education Commission, 2004; 8).

Contrary to this suggestion, only one participant felt that his parents did not encourage him educationally. Most received considerable encouragement and

family discourses that propounded 'education as a key to success' were commonplace. The fact that education was 'free' in the UK provided a further incentive to capitalise on it.

For many, practical support came to the fore during post-compulsory education in the form of the time and space to study, without the pressure to seek paid employment and contribute to the family income. However, during compulsory schooling in particular, practical support was a weakness and several felt that they would have benefited from far more insight, advice and direction regarding the selection of courses and the resultant career possibilities. The array of comments included:

I do know that when our parents came they did want us to do better than what they had. But I would add that they didn't necessarily know how to help us to do it. They'd just say '*Go and read your book!*' But there wasn't like 'Well, what is it that you're doing?' I don't think that there was that link. But there was, definitely from my parents that drive and motivation to get qualifications in something, but it was down to me to choose... I certainly know that my parents wanted us to succeed educationally, so they supported us through getting A'levels at school and degrees... (Alison, HE Lecturer)

Regarding school selection, Michelle stated:

My mum didn't really do any research, because where she came from in the West Indies the teachers did the best that they could. So as far as she was concerned school

was good. So any school was good enough. I don't think that the school that we went to was really good. It was just a place to go and it depended on the teacher you got as to how good your education was... (Michelle, Teacher)

The narratives concurred with Coard's (1971) analysis of BAC parents having a blind faith in the system. Based on their knowledge of the Caribbean, parents expected teachers to encourage bright children, whatever their social background, as an investment in the community as a whole. However, transposing this expectation to the British context resulted in children being advised to simply do as they were told and '*Go learn you book*', which left them ill-equipped to deal with the challenges of schooling in the UK. This hands-off approach ensured that when injustices occurred, some participants would not involve parents for fear of more reprisals from home. Eve described a harrowing incident where she almost drowned and was then hit by the teacher, who assumed she was playing. She concluded:

...the teachers had ultimate authority. I don't ever remember going home and telling my mum, because... in the Caribbean the teachers had quite a high standing... So if I went home and said that Mr M\* had hit me, then it's likely that my dad or mum would have said, 'Well what did you do? You must have done something.' And so, in that sense they did have all the power. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Thus, BAC parents' belief that the teacher knows best can prove detrimental, leaving their children in a vulnerable position. Eve spoke about her parents' reluctance to challenge teachers' authority in terms of their Caribbean background, but it is also

linked to social class. The cultural capital and habitus of middle class parents ensure that they are more apt to challenge authority effectively and with confidence. Their language and persona are more likely to reflect those of the teacher leading to more mutual respect and greater understanding. They are also more likely to see the school and teacher as providing a service to them and be willing and able to exercise parental choice where schooling is concerned. This can put them in a position of relative power or create a more equally balanced relationship between teacher and parent. On the other hand, many working class and Caribbean parents, who have not excelled in education, can experience feelings of inadequacy in the school environment and in relation to teaching staff. This can lead to frustration, which can exacerbate the situation; or subservience, which can reduce their assertiveness and ability to advocate successfully on their child's behalf.

Sean described his experience of being expelled from a well-resourced school and sent to a 'sink' school. He explains the inability of his parents to fight the school's decision to expel him, in spite of their belief that the deed did not warrant the level of punishment decreed.

Sean: ...my experience at [M\* comprehensive] came to an abrupt end [when] an incident occurred and I was [expelled]... I at the time wanted to move to another school [where] I had friends... Now that's where I'd say my education took a turn for the worse.

Amanda: What did your parents say about it?

Sean: They weren't happy about it... my mum really was involved and she basically said 'Well if they've got that sort of attitude knowing that you haven't done it, it's better that you leave, because they've obviously got a negative view of you...' So we didn't want to appeal the decision or anything. We just thought it's better that we get into another school and that was it.

Amanda: With hindsight, do you think that was a good idea?

Sean: No, I don't in hindsight. I lost out really a lot on my education. Because I was on course to do O'levels at [M\* comprehensive] and I ended up when I came out of [C1\* school] with grade five or six CSEs.

The Education Commission found that communication between schools and BAC parents tended to revolve around issues of behaviour and rarely focussed on academic endeavours. As a result, relationships were frequently strained and 'In general Black parents did not feel welcome at their children's schools and were frustrated at not being able to work in a genuine partnership...' (Education Commission, 2004; 9). This was reflected in the experiences of participants and sometimes the ability of parents to negotiate on behalf of their children played a major role in minimising the damage caused by unfair treatment from teachers. Dean's comments demonstrate this, highlighting the influence of class on his parents' different attitudes to schooling:

My mum's an only child, she comes from quite a well off family and she had very high standards. That's where our motivations to go to university came from. She was very adamant that you need to go through the education system in order to get something.



She had a different attitude from a lot of West Indian parents. Whereas other West Indian parents would listen to what the teacher said at school, my mum would come and question it. You know what I mean? My dad comes from a different background. One of eight children. And he wanted to come to England for a better life. He had a different attitude... But I think both of them together kind of complemented each other... if it was an injustice my mum was at a school like a bullet. (Dean, Youth Worker)

The Education Commission (2004) recommended more collaboration between schools and BAC parents and McKenley (2005) observed that research carried out within the communities and homes of BAC parents could serve to illuminate their viewpoints on parental involvement. Rhamie (2007) identified how outreach initiatives, including parent workshops, were successful in equipping BAC parents to become more actively involved in their children's schooling.

## **Conclusions**

The difficulties that BAC children encounter in school are well documented in the race and education literature (Mac an Ghail, 1988; Mirza, 1992; Sewell, 1997; Wright et al, 1998; Rhamie, 2007) and they include a range of race, class and gender dynamics. The findings of this chapter suggest that social class positioned the majority of participants in inner city schools with poor academic standards. The negative effects of this were compounded by poor teacher-student relationships. Gender altered experience, but left both boys and girls with few useful school leaving qualifications.

Two of the ten participants left school with the desirable five or more O'level passes. My adaptation of Rhamie and Hallam's (2002) models of BAC school success provides the Home-Community-School Model with Bicultural Competence. It suggests that BAC children are most likely to achieve school success when the child, home, community and school share a common orientation towards educational achievement. High expectations and good communication between the parents and the school are key components. A positive involvement in a BAC community can further enhance the child's concept of self through the development of bicultural competence.

This research also suggests that the ability to adapt or blend into the school environment without becoming involved in a BAC peer group may also have been a contributory factor for success at school. If so, it raises an important issue about the extent to which children should be required to integrate into a system of white, middle class norms of behaviour, rather than the system celebrating the diversity of its children within the current teaching ethos of 'every child counts'.

Most participants left school without fulfilling their potential and at the heart of this lay teacher-student relationships that were fraught with difficulties and underpinned by negative racial stereotyping. Concurrent with Mirza's (1992) findings, the girls were most affected by low teacher expectations, characterised by streaming into low ability groups and poor careers advice. Several participants faced a series of obstacles and had to challenge their teachers' authority or ignore their advice in

order to achieve. Ironically, the absence of outright conflict with teachers highlighted their role in hindering the girls' progress. Four of the five girls left school with two or three O'levels.

As Sewell (1997), Gillborn (1998) and Mac an Ghail (1988) suggest, boys were largely affected by peer groups coming into conflict with teachers. They received a significant amount of encouragement for sports, but this was not paralleled by an encouragement for academic school life. Issues related to their masculine identities seemed to accentuate the difficulties they experienced in school and several expressed a lack of interest and motivation to learn. Four of the five boys left school with no O'level passes.

In order to survive in a system that denigrated them, the girls seemed to persist in academic pursuits in the face of adversity, thus fighting from inside the system and achieving some level of academic success; the boys averted their energies to the more rewarding endeavours of peer group culture and sports, thus fighting from outside the system and achieving success and status from non-academic pursuits.

Negative racial stereotyping is insidious, invidious and extremely difficult to challenge. The importance of improving diversity in schools via proactive measures relating to the training of educators (Education Commission, 2004) and curriculum development (Sewell, 1997), cannot be over-emphasised. Increasing the presence of black teachers in schools could go some way to reducing the unfair treatment that

many BAC children receive, mitigating the soul destroying impact of racism in all its forms within the system. In addition, BAC school children would benefit from their parents' increased involvement (Education Commission, 2004) and improved awareness of how best to support them (Rhamie, 2007).

Having discussed participants' school experiences, I will explore their motivations and journeys in post-compulsory education *en route* to HE.

## Chapter 5

# “En Route to HE”

## Motivations and Journeys

They are driven by what I have called ‘educational urgency’, a desire to succeed against the odds. (*Mirza, 2005; 9*)

### Introduction

This chapter examines the journeys of participants; from their exiting compulsory education as far as their entry into higher education (HE). Just one of the ten interviewees followed the traditional route to university. For others the journeys *en route* to HE involved stepping stones and serendipity, with participants falling into two broad categories.

One cohort remained in post-compulsory education on completion of their compulsory schooling, intent on achieving qualifications that would facilitate career progression. Mirza (1992; 2005) highlighted the overrepresentation of British African Caribbean (BAC) women in continuing education and demonstrated that their drive enabled them to achieve educationally, in spite of their ambitions being

assessed as unrealistically high by educators and careers advisors encountered during schooling. One of the consequences of this and other factors is that black and minority ethnic (BME) students, including BACs, tend to spend longer in post-compulsory education (Modood and Acland, 1998). This was the case for the majority of participants in this study, who negotiated the educational stepping stones that eventually led to their graduate status and professional qualifications.

The second cohort returned to education as adults, and although their journeys similarly involved the incremental negotiation of their passage, they also tended to be somewhat serendipitous and involved a catalyst. Most went through a range of transitions, embarking on employment, self-employment and a variety of education and training courses before entry into HE. In the adult education literature, Knowles (1998) identified that some significant change in life circumstances is often the stimulus for adults to return to education and my respondents' experiences reflected this.

I also examine participants' primary motivations to enter HE in light of the existing literature relating to social mobility (Allen, 1998a), pleasure (Hughes, Perrier and Kramer, 2007), expectations (Allen, 1998a; Rhamie and Hallam, 2007) and community activism (Freire, 1996; Reay, 2003). Despite Kennedy's (1997) and Dearing's (1997) emphasis on funding as a mechanism for encouraging widening participation in post-compulsory education, financial hardship still emerged as the main deterrent to continuing education for working class respondents who studied

post-1997 as adult returners. Closely linked to this was the issue of time poverty, which Reay (2003) identified in relation to working class women returners who juggled a range of work and family commitments. My research corroborates her findings, illustrating that time poverty was accentuated for BAC adult returners as a consequence of their social class and mature student status.

In addition to this, I will draw on authors such as Ball, Reay and David (2002) and Allen (1998a) to examine how the dynamics of race, ethnicity and social class influenced participants' choices of HEI, leading to the majority studying in polytechnics or post-1992 universities. I will also apply the concept of Bourdieu's social capital, highlighting how they utilised their own unique BAC social capital, rather than middle class social capital, thus identifying with, and availing themselves of, a resilient protective barrier that Rhamie (2007) identifies as key to BAC academic achievement.

### **Serendipity and stepping stones on the path to HE**

Mirza (1992) identified the over-representation of BAC women in post-compulsory education and demonstrated how their ambition and drive for qualifications enabled them to overcome considerable difficulties relating to race, class and gender in their pursuit of career success (Mirza, 2005). Modood and Acland (1998) noted that, in spite of being over-represented in HE, BME students tend to spend longer periods in adult education in pursuit of professional and graduate qualifications, than their peers. This was the case for most of my research participants, who either remained

in continuing education or took a short break before returning to adult education and achieving their undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Eight of the ten graduated in their twenties and two, having run their own businesses, returned to education later and graduated in their thirties.

Just one interviewee followed the traditional path to HE from O'levels at sixteen, to A'levels at eighteen and then directly on to her degree course. The other nine followed non-traditional routes and these involved a year out, resits, Foundation and Access courses, HNDs, full time employment and running their own businesses. They made gradual progress towards the often nebulous idea of some better, career alternative. About half of the interviewees set their sights on pursuing a HE qualification during compulsory schooling and although their paths to HE were relatively direct, much of the interregnum was spent catching up and compensating for a lack of school leaving qualifications. For others, university was never considered an option at school and in these cases, the decision for HE appeared to signal a change in the direction of their life course, seemingly as a result of serendipity.

Andragogy, as opposed to pedagogy, describes a particular mode of learning and Knowles (1998) is particularly influential in this field of enquiry. He posits that a readiness to learn within adult learners is usually stimulated by some change in circumstances in their life, which creates a 'need to know'. This 'need to know' is gratified through the re-entry into a formal learning environment and the pursuit of



new qualifications and/or skills. This was the case for a number of the participants in my research and several referred to turning points in their lives when the ‘need to know’ became a driving force. Their paths to HE were serendipitous; the unplanned sequence of events that spurred them on often involved a transition of some sort, which resulted in their unanticipated (re-)discovery of an aptitude for academic endeavours and an interest in a subject that would ultimately lead them along a route to qualifications. Frequently, either a change of circumstances or encouragement from one or more significant others was apparent. Zac illustrates the stepping stones in his unmapped journey to HE and the catalysts for him included a yearning for a more fulfilling career and observing his peers progress to university.

I did not want to do one of these Youth Training Programmes... I didn't like the school at all but I thought, 'What the heck, just go and ask [the teacher whether I can stay on at school].' Just to please my mum... I think I did about four O'levels and I really surprised myself that I actually got an O'level. And I thought that's it. That's as far as I'll go... [Then] one of the friends who I'd studied with got accepted onto an A'level course at the local college and so I thought, 'Yeah, that's the kind of course I want to do as well. Let me just try.' And I went for the interview and I surprised myself and got through it ...and I did a few other O'levels as well, during that time. The A'level was in Art and Design. Passed that, surprisingly again and then I thought after that, 'That's as far as I'll go', just as I'd thought with my CSEs and then my O'levels. I thought 'OK look, go to Goodyears or try to find myself a factory job or something.' Because at the time that's all I could really think about. I couldn't think beyond that. Anyway, for some reason I got a job at Goodyears, in the factory, which I did not enjoy at all. That was almost a turning point. That said to me, 'You know what, I'm not cut

out for factory work.’ And then I got a job at the Wolverhampton Afro-Caribbean Cultural Centre... I was the Publicity Officer... And I enjoyed it... I met a lot of good people and a lot of dodgy people and had a very good time there. Then after a year there, I took a step back and thought, ‘...I can do a bit more than this. I know there’s something else for me out there. I don’t know what it is.’ Then I met up with a couple of old friends, who were on these degree courses. I’m like, ‘How can you be on a degree course? I know you’re just as daft as I am.’ And I thought, ‘If they can do it, I can...’ I couldn’t really think beyond that. But I thought, ‘If I do that, it’s got to be better than what I’ve got at the moment.’ So I got onto a Foundation Course; again surprised myself. Got through that. Done my year there. Then I actually got onto a degree course... There were a few friends I had at the time... We’re all the same age, grew up together and everything, but they were two years ahead of me in their course. And just through seeing them and knowing them and seeing them get through it, that gave me more encouragement to say that if they can do it, I can do it too. Because I know I’m just as good or even better. (Zac, Entrepreneur)

Sean, by contrast, went through a more traumatic period of transition, in which his business folded, his relationship broke down and he went through a kind of metamorphosis that led to an epiphany. Again, observing a peer complete a degree played an important role in making HE seem like a viable option. A teacher in post-compulsory education gave him the extra push:

...my brother had just started an Access course... And as he was going through his course we talked on a regular basis and he bounced lots of ideas off me and he talked about a lot of the course work he was doing and as he was going through [his degree], that kind of inspired me, because I’d see him and he was saying ‘Yeah, it’s quite easy’

...I was doing these [short] courses, because I wanted to get back into business. That's why I did the Business Studies course [and] the Computing course... And [my teacher] was the one that directed me really and said 'You should just really go for a degree instead of doing all these bits and bobs of courses. Go for a degree, get yourself a profession and then just move on from there. And then obviously get the resources to get back into starting up your own business again'. (Sean, Housing Estates Manager)

Neil also cites an encouraging teacher in post-compulsory education as a catalyst for his educational progress. He suggests that in spite of high expectations from his family and church community and his own academic ambitions, he felt that he had stumbled along doing poorly in school and college, until he struck up a good relationship with a particularly positive college teacher:

...so I went to college and did my Electronics course and...in the second year there was a really good teacher and I don't know why, but I just got on with him and anytime he was teaching I could understand him... Then I started to apply to universities and polytechnics and he did the reference. I had such a good rapport with him... and it got me into Higher Education and I think without that I wouldn't have done very well... (Neil, IT Trainer)

On leaving school with three O'levels, Nora completed a secretarial course. She describes the changes that occurred when she started working as a secretary in a training department. A senior colleague recognised her ability and she went through a political awakening relating to her racial identity:

...I worked for the Race Issues Officer and he really helped me to understand who I am as a black person and I worked for the Training and Development Officer who was an amazing man. After working for him, in about six months he was like, 'Nora, you're amazing, you're so fantastic. You shouldn't be a secretary. Go and study more. You should go to uni...' and he started to put the idea of university into my head... So he encouraged me to go and do A'levels and he paid for the A'level, paid for my books, gave me time off work, because he really believed in me and that was a turning point for me. So as well as feeling good about myself as a black person, [I] also felt good about myself as an inte[lligent person]...nobody had ever said that I was intelligent.  
(Nora, Head Teacher)

For Eve, it was a gradual process of becoming increasingly immersed in church-related activities, combined with a realisation that she might need to consider a career change from hairdressing for health reasons:

[The minister] saw things in me that he thought could be developed in terms of going on and doing more studying in the church. But I didn't have any ambitions in terms of doing any Religious Studies or Theology work at all... then we had another minister... [and] he was equally as encouraging. He was very, very good... and he was the one that actually first put it to me to go and study Theology really... And [my brother-in-law] was very instrumental in encouraging me to go on an Access course. And he said 'Would you think about going to university?' (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

These narratives indicate that people who acted as catalysts and facilitated the redirection towards HE fell under two categories. Some were peers who had studied in university and thus presented it as an achievable objective; examples include

Zac's friends, Sean's brother and Eve's brother-in-law. Others were people in positions of authority in the participants' lives who believed in their capabilities; these included Nora's manager, Eve's minister and both Sean's and Neil's college teachers. This encouragement contrasted with their school experiences and that of many other BACs, according to the literature (eg Mac an Ghail, 1988; Mirza, 1992), where there was a marked absence of role models and mentors to offer direction. Interviewees alluded to the fact that their peers were not achieving academically in school (Sewell, 1997), that teachers neither recognised nor encouraged the development of their academic abilities (Mac an Ghail, 1988) and that their parents were ill equipped to guide and facilitate their academic success (Coard, 1971; McKenley, 2005).

The adult education literature recognises the key role certain individuals may play in acting as catalysts for many mature students. Channer (1995) identifies that successful BACs often encounter a 'benevolent individual', who assists with careers or academic advice and thereby compensates for the shortcomings in the system. The additional dynamic in this research was that in the vast majority of cases, the 'benevolent individuals' were black or actively involved in the improvement of conditions for black communities. They were, therefore, usually 'benevolent BMEs' or anti-racists. Most participants viewed the benevolent individual's race or connections to BAC communities as incidental and only mentioned these in passing. However, this factor emerged as a recurring theme in the participants' journeys to HE and also during their HE experiences.

In a racist society such as the UK, it would appear that the attitude to race of a key person can be instrumental in enabling them to transcend racial barriers. Exploring the literature that deconstructs 'whiteness' (eg Sewell, 1997) can help shed light on the reasons why this may be. Pearce (2005), for instance, traces the development of her own understanding of race as a white teacher in a multi-ethnic classroom and notes that the privileged position of whiteness in a system of racist signification enables white people to believe that they are the norm and therefore, have no racial identity. This makes it easier to adopt a colour blind approach and thereby avoid dealing with uncomfortable issues relating to race and racism. Pearce (2005), like Sewell (1997), notes that during diversity training white teachers can experience feelings of personal guilt about the history of white oppression and such internal conflict can lead to them rejecting an anti-racist approach. With contemporary understandings recognising race as a social construct, rather than a biological distinction (Singh, 2004), Sewell proposes that systems of racial domination can be most effectively dismantled if whites 'reject whiteness and its privileges' (Sewell, 1997; 198). In contrast, Pearce (2005) suggests that shifting the focus to a change of attitude about race can empower white practitioners to tackle racism. She emphasises:

An approach that targets a particular set of attitudes and assumptions rather than an entire social group offers better potential for change. (Pearce, 2005; 125)

Thus, Pearce (2005) outlines how Frankenberg's (1993) colour cognisant approach can provide an effective mechanism for whites to move away from colour blindness and racism by raising their awareness of racism, reflecting on their own and others' (mis)understandings about race and challenging racism consistently as a matter of duty, rather than as an option. Only then, she argues, can they effectively deal with diversity.

It is much more difficult for BMEs to adopt a colour blind approach, because they occupy a disadvantaged position within the system of racist signification and are constructed as having racial identities (Dabydeen, Gilmore and Jones, 2007). As such, BMEs' life experience of being constantly 'othered' is likely to heighten awareness of their own and others' racial identities and the dynamics of racism. Thus, I would suggest that the fact that most of the benevolent individuals were black or immersed in black communities is significant. Their heightened awareness of issues of race would result in a colour cognisant approach rather than a colour blind approach, one which fostered their ability to transcend racial barriers and negative racial stereotyping.

Another dimension is that participants' closer identification with the key person on the grounds of race, ethnicity or ethnic understanding may have made them more receptive to the influence of that person. Most importantly, it emphasises the utmost necessity to have black and anti-racist people in key positions so as to encourage the achievement of BACs.

Within a few short years of leaving compulsory education, the career aspirations of most of these interviewees crystallised their need for more qualifications. In many cases, the encouragement of significant others (eg peers, teachers, managers) kindled that desire to achieve academically and raised their awareness of their own ability.

### **Primary motivations to study in HE**

Having discussed the journeys to HE, I will explore some of the motivations and deterrents to study that respondents identified during the research. In addition to interviews, participants completed questionnaires (see Appendix 1) and were asked to what extent certain factors acted as motivations or deterrents to study in HE. Chart 5.1 shows that their responses regarding motivations concentrated around social mobility, the pleasure of studying and family expectations. The additional dynamic of community activism came to the fore during interviews.

Many of the factors that motivate entry into HE are universal, but the emphasis can vary considerably in relation to race, class, gender and age. Reay (2003) found that working class women who returned to education as mature students were more likely to be motivated by intrinsic factors, such as an interest in the subject, than were younger students whose motives were more instrumental and goal oriented. She also highlighted a community orientation amongst them and identified that the emphasis on the individualistic motives that Beck (1992) emphasises is more characteristic of middle class students. In relation to gender, men are more inclined



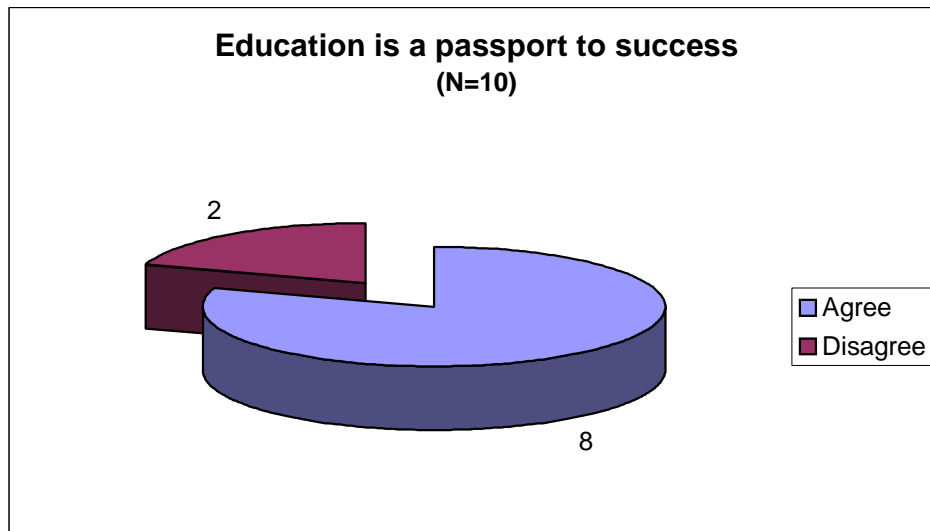
to undergo work-related education and training, whilst women undertake a much wider variety of courses with the desire to learn being central (McGivney, 2004). Allen (1998a) discovered that whereas teachers and friends were more influential for white students, family expectations were more important to BMEs. She also contends that BMEs consider the acquisition of qualifications more of an imperative for pragmatic reasons, such as economic and career success, because of their disadvantaged position in the employment market. These sentiments are echoed to a large extent here.

Although just two interviewees had a graduate parent with first hand experience of the British education system, most had internalised strong family discourses regarding education as a passport to success, which was reflected in questionnaire responses (see Chart 5.2). Comments regarding the value of education frequently referred to the benefits in terms of self-improvement and confidence building.

Knowles explores what motivates adults to learn and indicates that internal motivators, such as quality of life, satisfaction and self-esteem are most important to adult learners. He states:

□ INSERT MOTIVATIONS TO STUDY CHART 5.1

Chart 5.2: Education is a passport to success



Adults tend to be more motivated toward learning that helps them solve problems in their lives or results in internal payoffs. This does not mean that external payoffs (for example, salary increase) have no relevance, but rather that the internal need satisfaction is the more potent motivator. (*Knowles, 1998; 149*)

Hence, personal drives and instrumentality go hand in hand and Sean confirms this with his description of what motivated and sustained his studies:

When I went to university I really wanted to progress and the drive was within me... It was my discipline and my self determination and I really wanted to do it... I didn't want to do it to prove anything to anyone else. I personally wanted to do it, because I thought it was important for my progression... (Sean, Housing Estates Manager)

Chart 5.1 shows clearly that ‘widening life choices’, ‘increasing earning potential’ and ‘improving career prospects’ featured as the most popular motivators for interviewees and the majority described these as major, rather than minor, motivations to study. These factors are closely related to ‘social mobility’, which itself features as a less prominent motivator according to the chart. However, participants may have interpreted the term ‘social mobility’ as an aspiration to a more middle class and less working class habitus, which was of little interest to most of them. Instead, their emphasis was clearly on the practical benefits of career progression in terms of a more comfortable lifestyle, which corresponds with Allen’s (1998a) findings.

When discussing social mobility some participants described their desire to escape the poverty trap that their parents found themselves in and Michelle was crystal clear about the power of this as a motivation:

I think escaping for me from my family background. ...I just remember us being very poor and not having things... I had my first job when I was fifteen, because I was just determined to have some money... and I knew from quite early on that I needed to get out of that house if I didn’t want to be like this. And if I stayed there and didn’t go to university or do something different, then I was going to end up like this. I mean my worst nightmare at that time was to shack up with somebody else [and] be locked in a Council estate somewhere with loads of children. I couldn’t think of anything bleaker than that poverty and that lifestyle. (Michelle, Teacher)

Similarly, Neil explained:

...my parents were a major [motivation], because they came over here and obviously they had no qualifications. My mother was a Dressmaker at home, so she earned money that way. And my father, he started off working in a factory and then he retired as a Bus Driver. And he did so many hours and all that for a pittance. And I thought, 'That's not going to happen to me.' And it was not their fault, because they came over to this country and it's the way it is. But, you know, me being born here, education's given to us and I thought, 'Just take advantage.' So, I always thought I should do well.

(Neil, IT Trainer)

The desire to improve career prospects wasn't necessarily part of a specific career strategy; instead studying in HE was often undertaken with the vague sense that it would lead to better prospects:

I just thought [studying Hispanics] would be interesting. I never thought about it in terms of what would I be at the end of it... I don't even think it's really anything to do with job opportunities. It's just like you assume that going to university would be a better thing to do than not going. (Elaine, Consultant)

Elaine's inference that university would lead to something better was reiterated by others, including Zac, and integrated into their comments were references to enjoyment of their subjects in terms of 'interest' and 'comfort':

...from what I knew the YTS was like factory work, bricklaying, outdoor work. Nothing at all of interest to me... Financially, obviously I'm kind of thinking I've got to [earn a living] and I've got to do something else I'm comfortable with. The creative side of things was definitely it. And as a kid I was always making things and Industrial Design Engineering, which I knew nothing about three years before I was on the course, was absolutely spot on for me. That's what I thought just before I applied for it... (Zac, Entrepreneur)

Allen's (1998a) research findings suggest that factors linked to the pleasure of studying, such as 'delaying employment', 'enjoying student life' and 'personal development', are less of a motivating factor for BME students than for white students. Although this study bore this out, in that 'delaying employment' was of little importance to interviewees, it also emerged that the 'pleasure of studying' was one of the most popular responses to the question of motivation, thus suggesting an oversight in the literature that explores black experiences of HE.

Hughes, Perrier and Kramer (2007) suggest that the relationship between pleasure and learning has received little attention to date, largely because of the current emphasis on utilitarianism within the literature on HE. They warn, however, that an over-emphasis on the extrinsic rewards of education, such as improved earning potential, can lead to an increasingly market driven approach, focused more on measurable outcomes than the development of intellectual enquiry.

Interview narratives demonstrated that for some participants university was an end in itself and embarked upon for intrinsic satisfaction through a sense of achievement. Michelle explains this in terms of the enjoyment and sense of belonging she experiences in a learning environment:

...for me just getting to university and getting a degree - that was my aim... I loved [being in a learning environment]. I loved it. I think it's the place where I always feel myself; the most at ease, the most productive. (Michelle, Teacher)

The word 'love' was evoked repeatedly as respondents recaptured the feelings that drove their desire to study. Nora, for instance spoke of her love of the subject:

Once I did my A'level in Psychology, which is the first A'level I did, I thought, 'I love this subject.' I thought, 'Wow, there's nothing better than this.' (Nora, Head Teacher)

And Eve enthused about her *light bulb* moment when her love of the subject and love of learning were ignited:

...it was actually a Sociology class to do with the church and society and I remember just sitting in and I thought how fantastic it was... I'd found my little niche... And I thought 'Gosh this is really good...' I absolutely loved it... it was the subject that I loved more than anything else. That's what gave me the motivation... I have been a bit of a sponge with my studying and maybe that's why I did well at uni, because I just loved learning and finding more out about things. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Leroy provides a heartfelt description of the satisfaction he derived from his subject and the hopes and dreams he held for the future, which fuelled his desire to study. His comments convey a sense of loss and a yearning to return to that lifestyle, where he was immersed in the pure pleasure of learning his subject:

Terence Conran... He created Habitat. That's who I pictured myself as. But, it was a sort of a glazy dream. In the 1950s they would have photographs taken of him on his Designer chair or something. It was a bit like the equivalent of the 'Rebel Without a Cause'; James Dean sitting on his bike. Do you know what I mean? Now that's what I envisaged for myself. [Laughs]. I mean I pictured myself as successful as him, not a Designer working with loads of other Designers in an office. But as I started to get a grip on reality, I realised that Design isn't just a single person process... All these French and London designers, that's how I pictured myself. And I'm sure Fashion Designers think the same thing. And I'm sure a lot of people do. And it was sort of religious for me to go to Central London every week to either an exhibition, a Design gallery or visit the Design Council to pick up a book on Design. That was my life. I couldn't think of not doing that. And now I rarely do that. I'd like to get back into it. And I used to sit on trains or buses and sketch people. That's what I used to do. I was a bit of a Bohemian. (Leroy, FE Lecturer)

Hughes, Perrier and Kramer's (2007) provide a refreshing exploration of the relationship between pleasure and learning. They explain that discourses about motivations tend to view the student as a mind, whereas discussions about desires tend to view the student as a physical body and they argue that the objective of 'embodied pedagogy' is a synthesis of the two. However, as human beings we are



comprised not only of mind and body but also soul. Pleasure, it seems, is one of the ways that the soul manifests itself, directing us on our journey through life by creating desires or longings within the being. The use of emotive language such as 'love' and 'I couldn't think of not doing that' by these participants, demonstrates to me that the forces propelling and sustaining their HE study went beyond the logic of the mind and even the urges of the physical body, to the more deeply felt realms of the soul.

Drawing on Jung, psychology and theology, Moore (1992) highlights the difficulty of providing a clear definition of the soul. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this thesis, I interpret the soul as the place deep within us from which strong emotions, inner drives and motivations emerge. The soul is the metaphysical essence, spirit and/or life force of a human being that resides within the outer shell of the physical body and is closely associated with matters of the heart. Moore explains:

Tradition teaches that soul lies midway between understanding and unconsciousness, and its instrument is neither the mind nor the body... Fulfilling work, rewarding relationships, personal power, and relief from symptoms are all gifts of the soul.

*(Moore, 1992; xi)*

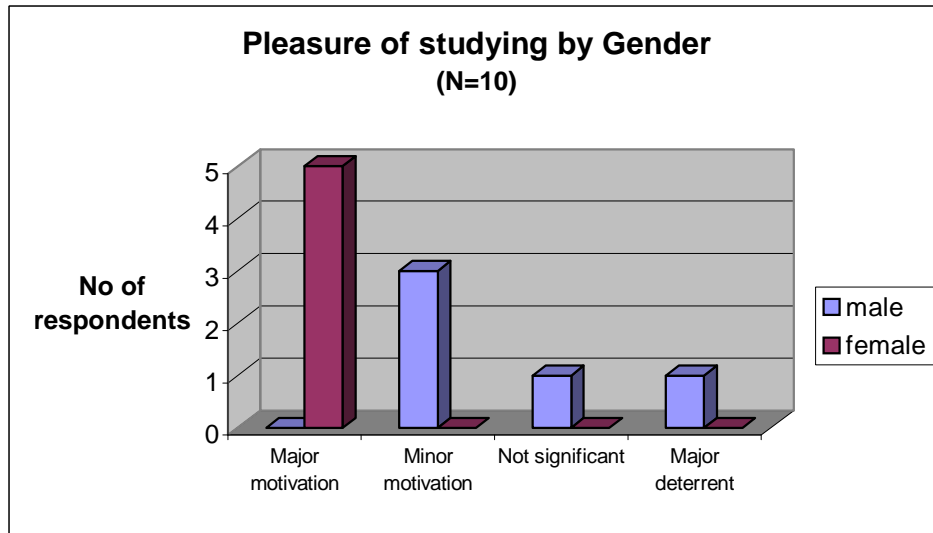
When Moore (1992) discusses power, he distinguishes between the way power operates in the ego and will, with the way power operates within the soul. He states:

When we want to accomplish something egoistically, we gather our strength, develop a strategy, and apply every effort... using brute strength and narrow, rationalistic vision. The power of the soul, in contrast, is more like a great reservoir or, in traditional imagery, like the force of water in a fast-rushing river. It is natural, not manipulated, and stems from an unknown source.' (Moore, 1992; 119)

In my opinion, there are clear parallels between the energy of Moore's (1992) soul power and the role that pleasure played as a stimulus for these participants' learning. This is supported by Leroy's analogy with spirituality in his statement 'it was sort of religious for me'. The stirrings deep within participants appear to have been kindled by the satisfaction they derived from learning and this unleashed a desire to learn more and more. The strength of feeling was such that continuing to learn became the natural flow of events and *not* continuing with their education was hardly even an option.

When hooks (1994) explores the place of emotions in the classroom, she identifies that despite a common perception that 'to be truly intellectual we must be cut off from our emotions' (hooks, 1994; 115), we should, in fact, welcome the body and soul into the classroom. My findings concur with this, suggesting that engaging the soul, along with the mind and body of a student, can indeed enrich the learning process.

Chart 5.3: Pleasure of studying by Gender



In Chart 5.3 a cross-tabulation looking at the ‘pleasure of studying’ by gender shows a marked difference between male and female interviewees. This suggests a gap in the literature (eg Allen, 1998a), which tends to emphasise the pragmatic reasons (eg job opportunities) for education amongst BME students without exploring the gender differentials. My data relating to the pleasure of study shows that all five of the female interviewees and none of the men cited ‘pleasure’ as a *major* motivation in their questionnaires. Similarly, four of the five that spoke about ‘love of learning/subject’ during interviews were women. Whilst extrinsic rewards played a part for all respondents, this additional gender dynamic suggests that for the women, in particular, pleasure was a very important contributory factor for their journey to and through HE.

As the literature suggests (eg Allen, 1998a; Rhamie and Hallam, 2002; Rhamie, 2007), family expectation played an important role in motivating interviewees to embark on continuing education (see Chart 5.1). Discussions revealed that although encouragement from their families stimulated their progression into adult education, it did not usually extend to an expectation that they would progress to HE. Elaine was one of the few subjects whose family did expect her to go on to university and explains her motivation:

I guess the biggest thing would be family expectations. Like your Mom. Like Grandma always used to be saying, '*Learn your books, learn your books.*' ...So I guess that would be a big motivational factor. (Elaine, Consultant)

Most of the female participants perceived this family expectation as support and encouragement for their *own* decision to study. On the other hand, male participants were more inclined to experience family expectation as a pressure and the achievements of older siblings sometimes increased that expectation.

When I reached sixteen now, for some reason my mum thought I was really clever and really good at school and expected me to stop on at school to do my O'levels... I didn't actually get any O'levels or CSEs when I left... [She] thought I could do a lot more. Anyway, [because of] her thinking I'm really good, expecting me to stay on at school... I went back and asked my Form Tutor, [but] I knew the answer he was going to give anyway. And he said 'Are you joking?' It was only really, because of my mum; not that I wanted to stay, [but] because she expected me to stay. (Zac, Entrepreneur)

Zac left compulsory schooling without qualifications and was refused a place in his school's sixth form. Despite this and his lack of enthusiasm about remaining in school, Zac's mother's high expectations and continuing belief in his ability led him to apply to a neighbouring school's sixth form, where he was admitted. Similarly, Dean left school without qualifications, but his mother's expectations ultimately led him to university.

My mum... was very adamant that you need to go through the education system in order to get something... As a younger child I had a lot of pressure on me to achieve, because my sisters were achievers and were 'A' students... But they expected me to be just like my sisters. And I always felt that it was expected of me to achieve. But I was a bit naughty at school. So, that was a pressure in itself. (Dean, Youth Worker)

The pressure of trying to keep up with siblings, as described by Dean, was echoed in Neil's narrative:

[My parents] encouraged me a lot. I mean after Coronation Street finished, I think that was the latest we were allowed to watch telly. They always made sure we did homework. My brother definitely had homework, because he went to grammar school... I went to a comprehensive and they gave us things, but nothing like the grammar school would. And so I tried to make my own homework, just to please my parents... And it didn't help that my older brother went off to a grammar school. I failed the entrance exam, so I couldn't go. And it's always been, 'D\*'s good at this, D\*'s doing that,' and then when he passes nine O'levels, everyone was saying...will you try to get ten to beat him and I couldn't even tell them that I was only doing four at

the time. [Laughs] For me I've always thought it was quite difficult growing up in some respects, because I always had my brother to compete with... I think my brother wanted to be a doctor... and it wasn't until I finished university and I started teaching, which I was really comfortable in, when I actually stopped worrying about being compared to him. (Neil, IT Trainer)

In each case, their school experience did not correspond to their parents' high academic expectations of them and there was a stark difference between their own perceptions of themselves during school and that of their parents. Apparently, the boys did not see themselves as academic achievers and therefore felt pressured by their parents. Nonetheless, their parents' unwavering belief in them acted as a push, which sustained them on their educational paths. The fact that they started school as academic achievers and later became graduates, indicates that they had latent ability, but perhaps not the self-belief or motivation to harness it. In the previous chapter, peer pressure and negative racial stereotyping at school were prominent themes for boys and these must have created considerable conflict with the parental pressure to achieve academically. Osborne (2001) describes 'academic disidentification' as the process that occurs when black boys imbibe negative racial stereotypes and begin to detach their self-esteem from academic achievement and identify more strongly with characteristics such as sporting prowess, which conform to the stereotypical images of black masculinities. In school, most male participants recognised and were encouraged regarding their athletic ability, but not their academic ability. The male experience of feeling pressured by parental expectations, in contrast to the female experience of feeling encouraged, may well have been a by-product of academic

disidentification on the part of the boys and the conflicting values emanating from the two social settings of home and school.

This is not only an issue of race, but also of class and Reay (2002) demonstrates how working class masculinities create a similar conflict for working class boys. In *Shaun's Story*, she uses Bourdieu's 'duality of self' to delve deeply into the contradictions experienced by a working class boy striving for educational achievement, whilst trying to maintain respect from his peers and a sense of belonging. She describes his juggling act of maintaining both his local reputation for being 'tough', with working hard in class, as requiring 'almost superhuman efforts' (Reay, 2002; 226). She notes that 'he has to constantly guard against being reclassified as 'a geek'' (Reay, 2002; 227). Drawing on Butler (1990; 1993), Archer and Francis (2007) suggest that gender is 'performed' and different performances of gender carry different status. Being categorised as a 'geek' would reduce Shaun's status in terms of working class masculinities. Reay demonstrates how middle class boys can belong to their peer group and succeed, but the opposite is the case for working class boys. She encapsulates his predicament:

How can Shaun both set himself apart from and remain part of the wider working-class male collectivity? That is the task he has set himself and the dilemma it raises lies at the very heart of class differentials in attainment within education. (Reay, 2002; 228)

Family expectation went beyond the nuclear family and several participants referred to their communities as an extension of family. Often this community was the

church, which also emerges as a theme in Channer's (1995) and Rhamie and Hallam's (2002) research into BAC academic achievers. Both note that a positive involvement in a supportive community, often the church, acts not only as an encouragement, but as a protective barrier that insulates BAC achievers from the damaging effects of the negative images of black people that are so prevalent in the UK's popular media.

Neil attended a predominantly white church during his childhood and felt that all eyes were upon him and his siblings in relation to their educational achievement. Ironically, when he progressed to HE, he realised how little the congregation actually knew about university life:

When we were growing up we were the only black family in the church. And I think people looked down on us somewhat. But my parents always made sure, you know, Sunday best; typical, dress up smart and all that. And people liked us for it... because we were the only black family in our church everybody wanted to know how we were getting on... But, I think they were really pleased when they started seeing we were achieving... And its really funny, because these people are English and they [should] know the system and yet when we went off to polytechnic and we came down for a weekend or something they used to say, 'Oh, have they given you leave to come or something,' like we were at boarding school or in the army... But they didn't know...  
(Neil, IT Trainer)

Apparently, Neil and his family had to exceed the achievements of others in their church community in order to prove their worth and be acceptable. By contrast,



Michelle, Alison and Denise describe being immersed in black churches, where black academic achievement was not only encouraged but also a norm. Michelle describes:

I remember going to church and my friends were either at university already or going there. And that was more positive obviously, because they would give you their experiences of being at university. And the church I went to was African and Caribbean; mostly Caribbean... so, I was talking to black people that had been to university or were going there. (Michelle, Teacher)

The influence of the church for Eve was more direct in motivating her journey to HE as an adult returner. She received strong encouragement from the ministers to become involved in extra curricular church activities and then eventually mainstream academic religious studies. She ascribes the sense of belonging and achievement orientation she experienced in the church where she grew up as contributory factors in her academic achievement, which is reminiscent of Rhamie and Hallam's (2002) findings.

Channer's subjects cited 'religion as a source of strength in their quest for academic success' (Channer, 1995; 111) and the benefits of their church communities included providing a black support network, encouraging academic development and helping in the fight against the dehumanisation that is racism. She posits:

Some black people have noted the ways in which religion and education have been used to oppress and reinforce systems of domination. However, for many black people... religion and education can be viewed as channels for freedom. Both provide a psychological and social framework within which black people can operate effectively in a racist society. (*Channer, 1995; 190*)

Alison is more sceptical regarding the role of the church. Although she felt that she benefited from the encouragement to excel academically, she questioned the passive acceptance of oppression and dominance within the church. She alludes to the absence of any emphasis on political awareness in her experiences of church life:

...there was a lack of self history, whether that be African or Caribbean and the continual focus on a white God presents as a lie by the whites in the churches and the black people didn't complain about it. So, what's the real education? (Alison, HE Lecturer)

Alison's critical comments concur with and reflect Freire's (1996) and hooks' (1994) belief that education should be a conduit for the liberation of the oppressed masses and that an 'awakening critical consciousness' (Bravette, 1996; 3) should be the ultimate objective. Although Alison's church encouraged her endeavours, her critical consciousness was developed outside of this milieu. Elaine's case was different, as she received her expectations to achieve, not from the church, but from a black activist community in which her mother was active. Political awareness was married to an emphasis on educational attainment and her participation in activities

such as Saturday School exposed her to black achievers, whilst raising her awareness of elements of African heritage cultures. She explains:

maybe it is just like nurturing different parts of you in different ways... I think it was important, because...the vision you would have of black people might have been a lot more negative from what's fed through the media, really... as an outcome of being exposed to things like ALD<sup>8</sup> and Saturday School...you realise that there's things you take for granted that other people [don't know. For instance], how would you know that Haiti was the first black republic? (Elaine, Consultant)

Elaine was unique in her status as an interviewee who experienced a combination of high expectations from her parents, school teachers and community, with an emphasis on political consciousness that resulted in bicultural competence. This is represented in the Home-Community-School adaptation model, which is discussed in more detail in the chapter on schooling. She was also the only interviewee to pursue the traditional route to HE. The other churchgoing participants graduated via a non-traditional route and conformed to Rhamie and Hallam's (2002) Home-Community Based model, where the child, home and community share high academic expectations, but school expectations are not an integral component for success. Their academic success was the result of their persistence over an extended journey to HE.

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<sup>8</sup> Afrikan Liberation Day

Political awareness and community activism also emerged as an additional motivating factor during interviews, which corresponds to some extent with Reay's (2003) findings that a commitment to community was a driving force motivating the mature, working class women in her research. For my research participants, this political awareness tended to revolve around issues relating to race and ethnicity and a desire to improve the living conditions for BACs in the UK. Nora talks about her political awakening and describes the process of *conscientization* (Freire, 1996) that stimulated her love of learning and drive to achieve.

Nora: It wasn't until I started to work for the Race Issues Officer and he started to teach me about what it really meant to be black; pointed me in the direction of books that I should be reading. We started up a group called the Race Ahead. I got some of my other friends involved and we started to talk about black issues and that's when I really started to understand what it meant to be a black person. I mean growing up [during] primary school, I know I wanted to be white and I went through all of the people calling me names and wearing things on my head to try and get to have long hair... But it was when I was like 18 and worked for the Race Issues Officer and he used to do a lot of the Race Equality Training and everything, I really started to open my eyes about...this is who I am...this is the greatness of black people. I read a bit around Egyptology and about Africa and about all the things that black people have contributed. Slavery and all of that, which, I mean I got some of that from watching *Roots*<sup>9</sup> and things. My mom wasn't like pro-

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<sup>9</sup> Popular TV series that charted an African American history by following Alex Haley's family tree from slavery to contemporary times

black, pro-black, but she brought us up in the culture of you're a black, stick to your own, which I suppose, helped to ground me in my ethnicity...

Amanda: Do you think your black consciousness actually motivated you to go to university more or do you think it was just incidental; it wasn't really the issue?

Nora: No, I think it motivated me, because I think I understood at that point that black people were capable of great things, where before I didn't really see that. I don't think there really were any role models for me to say 'OK, well they've been through university, you can do it, can't you' and so I think it was when I was finding out all the fantastic things that black people had done and continued to do. I think that was an additional motivator for me... say, 'Well yeah, you know, I'm capable of this, black people do do this.'

Dean discusses community activism as a motivating factor for his path into HE, one that also helped him to sustain his studies whenever he felt demotivated.

My motivation was a better job, having a say in the community and being able to talk on behalf of young people... to represent some people that aren't... and to be some kind of role model to both service users and other colleagues... I wanted to contribute to a voice in the community... the black community, especially young males, to kind of explain that we need to find different ways of working to our white counterparts. You need to find different ways of working, because there's a missing link here. (Dean, Youth Worker)

Nora and Dean explicitly cited commitment to community development as a motivation to study, but the relationship between education and an awareness of the politics of race was also evident in the narratives of Alison and Elaine. The majority of participants expressed a desire to enhance the opportunities of future generations of BACs, which strongly suggests their *conscientization* (Freire, 1996) and a growing understanding of how the structures of society shape our lives and how they, as individuals, could use their agency to change that.

### **Financial constraints and time poverty as the main deterrents**

The most obvious barrier to HE for most participants was their negative school experiences. However, once they were intent on HE, financial constraints and the ramifications therein became the most prominent hindrance.

In the late 1990s, government education policy was firmly focused on widening participation and social inclusion so as to facilitate access and opportunities for adult education to a wider cross-section of society. Kennedy (1997) addressed further education (FE) and Dearing (1997) focused on the higher education sector. Both identified funding mechanisms as the most appropriate way to encourage inclusion, which would thus undermine the main barrier to continuing and adult education; poverty.

However, the phasing out of maintenance grants and housing benefits for students, along with the introduction of tuition fees and repayable student loans, countered

these initiatives to a large extent, leaving poorer students with the additional burden of potentially large debts at the end of their studies. This, combined with the lower return on investment experienced by certain categories of students, ie, BMEs (Modood et al, 1997) the mature, working class and women (Reay, 2003), has led to discouraging outcomes. Despite the growing number of people attending university, there has been little change in their social backgrounds (Tonks, 1999; On The Record, 2002).

Chart 5.4 shows that the cost of studying was the most significant deterrent for the questionnaire respondents, both for those who graduated before and those who graduated after the publication of the above mentioned policy documents. The financial constraints of studying in post-compulsory education is an issue of social class and Sean, who became a mature student in his thirties, describes the dilemma he faced in relation to the financial cost of studying:

It was just the financial considerations really that made me think that maybe I wasn't going to do it. It's just that after a period of time I'd done the Business Studies course, I'd done the Computing course and then I was enrolling on the Access course and it took me probably a year, year and a half before I did anything, because I was so disillusioned... So during this time I'd not been in full-time employment. And then I had to look at this thing in the distance and say, 'Well you've got another three years before you can actually go back in full-time employment.' So it seemed like a real stretch and I thought, 'I don't know whether I can do this?' ...because I thought 'Well I need the money, I really need to get back on track'. So that was a real deterrent in terms of lack of earning power if you are doing full-time studies. (Sean, Housing Estates Manager)

INSERT DETERRENTS TO STUDY CHART 5.4



His reservation before university was borne out by the accumulation of debts later, a factor that was compounded by the competing demands of working whilst studying, both for him and in countless similar cases.

Well I got a grant for the course and I got a partial grant for survival, but that didn't pay the rent as well as living expenses. So I had to go to do part-time work in Boots. So I'd zoom and go straight to Boots and do 5pm till 9pm... That was one of the biggest strains and the biggest problems I had ... I went into debt. I made my rent go into debt. I went to Court for it; got suspended possession orders for it. That was hanging over me while I was doing the course, which doesn't help, because that's stress. So it was stressful in a lot of ways; stressful in terms of workload, because a lot of the time I had to work. Obviously the stress in terms of the bills that were building up as well, because I still had to pay my water rates and everything else. And you're still liable for it even though you're a student. (Sean, Housing Estates Manager)

Even those with marketable skills were not immune to the financial impact of studying.

Other barriers... financial. Because you know it's a strain going to university. I worked. I was lucky. Because I was a secretary, I could type. Every Christmas, Easter and Summer holiday I typed my fingers off, so that I could sustain my university life. I mean they gave you grants then and I was lucky, because obviously I could get a grant [because] we were on Income Support. So that was a big barrier, because I was working and I had to give up the job - no money. But because I could type I managed to earn... It could have seriously deterred me. And that's why as well in my final year

I lived with my aunt, because I was getting into debt, so I needed to be rent free.

[Laughs] So having the family there was very good for me. (Nora, Head Teacher)

Financial difficulties were accentuated for the mature students who returned to education after a period of employment. Despite appreciating their ability to earn, it was clearly a fine balancing act that required a strict discipline:

But then of course financial difficulties come in ... because going from full-time work I had to really plan. Because I didn't know if I could afford to go to university or to even stop working full-time to do the Access course. So I managed to work out that if I worked two full days or two and a half that would be OK. ... So it was hard going but once I got into the swing of it, all the way through I've not stopped working. So it was really from the Access course where I had to decide how I was going to manage financially to pay the bills at my house and things like that. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

One of the consequences of financial constraints was the knock on effect of time poverty, a condition that was particularly acute for those struggling to balance studies with work and family commitments. In the adult learning literature Reay (2003) highlighted that the mature, working class women in her research were forced to juggle a range of work and family responsibilities in order to return to adult education. Time poverty was identified as a serious hindrance and motherhood compounded this considerably. With women usually performing the role of primary carers for children (Hughes, 2002), the difficulties faced by mature students is often greater in the case of women. Time poverty emerged as an issue for both the women

and men in my research and it is significant that none had primary responsibility for childcare during the period of their undergraduate studies, which may well have been a key factor in their ability to complete.

Arbouin (1989) identified strong 'self-determination' as a key characteristic of successful BAC school children and Mayor (2002) referred to the 'staying power' of BMEs as instrumental in enabling them to overcome racialised barriers and excel in their nursing careers. Similarly, Solorzano (1998) noted that 'strength', 'determination' and 'persistence' are necessities for 'scholars of color' to survive in the academy. These attributes exemplify those of interviewees in their struggle to balance the range of commitments discussed. Extended periods of managing their studies alongside the competing demands of a full or part time occupation, multiple courses and intensive study routes, were common.

A prime example of this is that Eve, whilst running a business, simultaneously studied for a Lay Preachers Training course by distance learning alongside an Access course and then a degree course. For her degree, she attained a first class honours, but describes the struggle to finish her Lay Preachers course during this time:

...sometimes there were six month gaps when I didn't hand any work in. So it just dragged on and on and there were times where I thought 'Gosh I have to finish it,' but I almost felt like packing it in, because it was just so hard. It really, really was. I had to

persevere, because I wanted to complete it... but I just started to get really tired... But I just held out really. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Similarly, Nora described her single-mindedness, when a few years after leaving school, she achieved three A grades at A'level to obtain entry into a prestigious university.

I was determined. I got up at 5 o'clock in the morning and studied before I went to work. And then when everybody had left work I would stay at work and study. I was like, tunnel vision. Friends were like, history. I didn't use to see anybody, because I knew I was going to university. Once I had set my mind on it... I worked my socks off. It was the hardest thing. I was just work, study, work, study and that was it... and that was determination... my personal motivation from university through to MA has helped me more than any other influence. (Nora, Head Teacher)

Reay (2003) noted that 'care of the self' was often a necessary sacrifice for adult returners in the pursuit of qualifications and in these and other cases, participants found themselves exhausted and unable to maintain existing friendships. As such, self-motivation and focus emerged from a number of narratives as a key characteristic that enabled the transcendence of difficulties. A larger than average proportion of BME and working class students drop out of university (hooks, 1994; Modood and Acland, 1998) and Dean's determination manifested itself in his ongoing struggle to resist that fate in the face of the conflicting demands of paid employment.

I left university about fifteen times. I said 'I'm not coming back. I don't like it.' And that was due to me putting myself under pressure, because I had three jobs when I went to university and it [wasn't] easy. (Dean, Youth Worker)

The drive and determination of these respondents demonstrate a tenacity that enabled them to achieve in the face of considerable difficulty.

### **Race and class dynamics in choice of HEI**

BME students tend to be concentrated in 'new' universities and London (Ball, Reay and David, 2002) and their methods for selecting HEIs have come under some scrutiny in the literature. Although there is no consensus over the factors that determine their choice, there is clear evidence of an inclination to study close to home and a preference for institutions with an ethnically diverse population (Taylor, 1992; Allen, 1998a). Ball, Reay and David (2002) addressed the impact of social class and ethnicity on university choices and found that class was the dominant factor. Their research population included a large Jewish cohort, an invisible minority, which might, arguably, obscure the issue of race.

Reay (2003) found that mature working class students were attracted to post-1992 universities on the basis that they felt more comfortable and she observed:

The importance of a sense of being welcomed in must not be underestimated when a majority of these students have shared Mo's experience of 'being made to feel I wasn't

up to it... being looked down on, of being positioned as a supplicant rather than an applicant... (Reay, 2001; 339)

For the BAC interviewees in this project, issues of race as well as class were significant in choosing HEIs. Before embarking on their undergraduate courses, the majority of interviewees confessed to having little by way of expectations of HE and their sole objective was to achieve a worthwhile qualification on completion. About half were the first in their family or immediate social network to attend university and Nora stated:

I didn't know anybody that had ever gone to university. So it was like, none of my friends had ever gone, none of my family had ever been to university, not any of my immediate family who I knew. And so it was like a totally foreign thing for me to be thinking about going to university. (Nora, Head Teacher)

Naturally, subjects and grades were determinants in their choices of HEI, but beyond that the prospect of fitting-in had a significant impact on their selection processes. Table 5.5 below, demonstrates that, concurrent with the literature on race and class in HE, the majority opted for 'new' universities.

Table 5.5: Undergraduate study

Name	Qualification (HEI)	Univ type
Nora	BA (H) Psychology (Nottingham)	Old
Elaine	BA (H) Hispanic Studies (Hull)	Old
Michelle	BSc (H) Export Engineering (UCE <sup>10</sup> )	New
Alison	BA (H) Combined Arts (Linguistics and Psychology) (NTU <sup>11</sup> )	New
Eve	BA (H) Religious Studies (Derby)	New
Neil	HND Computer Technology (Preston <sup>12</sup> ) and Cert Ed in FE	New
Sean	BA (H) Sociology (Leicester)	Old
Dean	BA (H) Combined Community and Youth Studies (Derby)	New
Zac	BA (H) Three Dimensional Design (UCE)	New
Leroy	BA (H) Product and Furniture Design (UCE)	New

They also selected HEIs that offered proximity to black social networks, which some achieved by remaining close to their family.

...I chose Nottingham as well, because I had [my cousins] down the road... [also] Birmingham was just down the road, so I went home very often and plus I went to my family in Nottingham as well. I went to my aunt every Sunday. I used to meet my mum there. That counted for a lot. (Nora, Head Teacher)

<sup>10</sup> University of Central England (now Birmingham City University)

<sup>11</sup> Nottingham Trent University

<sup>12</sup> Preston Polytechnic (now University of Central Lancashire)

Others achieved the same objective by attending institutions that were themselves ethnically diverse or in ethnically diverse locations and Zac's approach combined the two:

How did I choose? That's a good question. It was definitely based on a place that's got black people around; most definitely. If it didn't, it could have been one of the best places in the world, but I wasn't going to go there if I didn't feel comfortable... I didn't really move far away from home... Wolverhampton's just like a stone's throw as opposed to coming up from London or wherever... I didn't really lose touch with my friends, 'cause they were still quite close anyway... (Zac, Entrepreneur)

Nora overtly acknowledges the race and class dynamics that influenced her thought processes. She describes her attraction to the leafy campus at the prestigious university of her choice:

I think Nottingham looked like a place where scholars were...you know the old buildings, the history, you know. [Laughs]. So I quite liked that... I quite fancied myself in that kind of place... (Nora, Head Teacher)

However, her reservations about not fitting-in on the grounds of both race and class raised a dilemma.

Going to university, one of the first things I did notice was the lack of black people and... I was a bit frightened. I was a bit, 'I don't know whether I wanna do this?' ...me knowing that I come from an area where nobody goes to university, I felt that would I



have anything in common with even the black people? Was I gonna have anything in common with anybody? ...So, it wasn't just a black thing, it was a class thing as well.

(Nora, Head Teacher)

Ball, Reay and David (2002) use Bourdieu's concept of social capital to explore the different ways that BMEs from working class and middle class backgrounds select HEIs. Bourdieu suggests that social capital provides the middle classes with a distinct advantage in the educational arena when selecting the 'best' HEIs to attend, as social connections are mobilised to gain insight into which are the most well-resourced and high status universities for maximising career prospects. Ball, Reay and David (2002) subdivide their research subjects into two categories of choosers; 'contingent choosers' and 'embedded choosers'. The former tend to be the first generation in their families to attend university and were working class; the latter tend to be members of families with a history of university attendance and were middle class. Thus, the 'embedded choosers' had access to Bourdieu's middle class social capital.

My participants were predominantly 'contingent choosers' and Ball, Reay and David (2002) suggest that 'Their social capital is of limited relevance here' (Ball, Reay and David, 2002; 338). On the contrary, I would suggest that most tapped into their own unique BAC social capital, which was entirely different to middle class social capital, rather than irrelevant. The logic interviewees applied in selecting HEIs involved utilising black social networks to insulate themselves against the isolation they anticipated in HE. Rhamie (2007) suggests that community networks help to

create a resilience amongst BAC academic achievers, which serves as a protective barrier against their negative experiences in education. Here, BAC social capital takes the form of community networks that participants could tap into in order to create an analogous protective barrier against the anticipated social isolation and 'outsider' feelings that result in high dropout rates amongst BMEs and working class students. Such strategies enabled them to achieve a workable balance between maintaining a rooted-ness in their BAC identity and simultaneously ensuring success in HE. This would ultimately facilitate a degree of social mobility through educational attainment that would otherwise be beyond their reach. (The role of black support networks in HE is discussed in the next chapter).

In the class literature, Reay (2001) identifies the additional risk that working class students face in moving away from their existing identity, which is embedded in working class norms, when they move into the more middle class arena of HE. She poses the question of whether their quest for self-improvement results in *Finding or losing yourself?* and states:

The working-class mature students were trying to negotiate a difficult balance between investing in a new improved identity and holding on to a cohesive self that retained an anchor in what had gone before... (Reay, 2001; 337)

This dilemma was evident in narratives and unlike Nora, others were more reticent in their choice of HEI. Michelle explains her rationale for choosing a polytechnic for her undergraduate degree and only then feeling equipped to go to a more elite

university for her post-graduate studies. She likens the differences between 'new' and 'old' universities to comprehensive and private school educations and touches on the stark difference between the limited resources at the polytechnic and those at the well resourced university.

I was more comfortable going to the polytechnic first... I think I would have had an inferiority complex being among middle class children who had been geared up for that sort of education, so by the time I got to Warwick University I was fine and I was amazed at the discrepancy between [the resources at] Birmingham Poly and Warwick University. (Michelle, Teacher)

However, Michelle's comments also highlight the potential down side of selecting 'new' universities and her comments are a clear example of how BACs can self-select out of the 'best' education, based on race and class dynamics. Reservations about fitting-in can be a strong deterrent to 'old' universities, but this choice can have a limiting effect on future career prospects. Reay (2001) thereby argues that government policy towards improving access for working class students at the tertiary level of education has only served to fail them more by creating 'sink' universities. In seeking remedies to redress the balance, Reay (2003) suggests that 'old' universities could learn a great deal from 'new' universities in terms of welcoming non-traditional students if they truly wish to encourage widening participation and social inclusion.

Michelle’s comments, above, highlight another interesting dynamic that emerged; once they had achieved their undergraduate degrees, the majority of participants that progressed to postgraduate study selected to study at ‘old’ universities, completely reversing the undergraduate trend. (See Table 5.6). Apparently, as a consequence of succeeding in their studies at ‘new’ universities, they developed the confidence to study at ‘old’ universities.

Table 5.6: Postgraduate study

<b>Name</b>	<b>Postgraduate qualification (HEI)</b>	<b>Univ type</b>
Nora	PGCE (London); MA in Education Management (OU)	Old
Michelle	PGCE (London); MSc in IT for Manufacture (Warwick)	Old
Alison	MA in English Language Teaching (Nottingham)	Old
Eve	MA in Religion and Public Life (Leeds); PGCE (Warwick)	Old
	PG Diploma Mgmt Studies (London Metropolitan)	
	MA in Human Resources (Westminster)	
Neil	PG Diploma Project Mgmt (OU)	New and Old
Leroy	PGCE (Wolverhampton)	New

## **Conclusions**

This chapter explored interviewees’ pathways to Higher Education. The vast majority were non-traditional students and their progression to HE was slower than the typical, middle class route and involved a series of stepping stones, including studying a range of courses and embarking on employment and self employment.

Approximately half were intent on HE during compulsory schooling. The others' route to HE was serendipitous with the catalyst often being encouragement from a 'benevolent individual' with insight into the education system. 'Benevolent individuals' were usually same race or actively committed to improving conditions for black communities. They were thus, usually 'benevolent BMEs'. This emphasises the need for black and anti-racist individuals in key positions, so as to positively encourage and promote BAC achievement.

Respondents were united in their belief that education was the key to success in life and that graduate career prospects would facilitate this. The most prominent motivation to study in HE thus appeared to be social mobility, which corroborates the existing literature on race and HE. High family expectation was another key motivating factor, although this was largely experienced as encouragement by the female participants and as pressure by the males. My analysis is that this gender difference is the result of black and working class masculinities conspiring to create low academic expectations, which conflicted with the high academic expectations of their parents. In addition to this, the pleasure of studying emerged as an important contributory factor, particularly for female interviewees. The love of learning described by several of the women and one man, suggested that their desire to study for pleasure was connected not only to mind and body, but also soul. Another emergent theme was the role of political awareness and community activism as motivators.

Once the decision to study in HE had been made, financial constraints emerged as the main deterrent and this clearly constituted a social class issue. Closely associated with this was the resultant time poverty created by the need to juggle work, study and family commitments simultaneously. Determination emerged as a significant characteristic amongst participants, one that enabled them to transcend the substantial difficulties encountered on their educational paths.

In addition to subjects and grades, most interviewees' methods of selecting HEI were informed by a range of race and class dynamics. For undergraduate studies, the majority attended post-1992 universities. There was also evidence of a preference for institutions that were either close to family or in locations with an ethnically diverse population, reflecting the use of a unique BAC social capital in the form of seeking out black social networks to act as a protective barrier and insulate them from the isolation they anticipated in HE. For postgraduate studies the trend reversed and the vast majority attended old universities.

## Chapter 6

# “Learning to Achieve”

## The HE Experience

[Many professors](#) have conveyed to me their feeling that the classroom should be a “safe” place... The experience of professors who educate for critical consciousness indicates that many students, especially students of color, may not feel at all “safe” in what appears to be a neutral setting... the politics of domination are often reproduced in the educational setting... ([Caseyhooks, 1994; 39](#))

### Introduction

This chapter explores the British African Caribbean (BAC) graduates’ experiences of higher education (HE) and shows that whereas school experiences were largely about learning to fail, the emphasis in HE became an orientation towards *learning to achieve*, through the acquisition of valuable academic qualifications. A significant factor that facilitated this change was that participants were better equipped to take control of their own learning.

The literature on race and HE rarely focuses on the specific experiences of BAC students and I thus address this gap in the literature. The commonalities in black and

minority ethnic (BME) student experiences justify examining them both as a whole and within more narrowly defined ethnic groupings (Modood and Acland, 1998). Thus, I will draw upon the literature relating to the broader category of BME experiences to illuminate my analyses. Given the dearth of literature relating to BAC experiences in HE, I have also occasionally been forced to draw upon literature relating to BACs in schools, where such comparisons are appropriate.

Allen's (1998b) 'black construct of accessibility' provided a framework for interrogating BME student responses to a lack of diversity in staffing and the curriculum. Solorzano's (1998) concept of 'microaggressions' suggests that subtle racism is perpetuated via interactions between 'students of color' and academic staff and I examine how participants' employed emotional withdrawal in teacher-student relationships as a strategy for survival and success, and the role of BME academics as 'benevolent BMEs' in the HE context. In relation to the curriculum, I discuss the perceived risk associated with presenting black perspectives in coursework.

I then draw upon the literature relating to class (eg Reay, 2001; 2003) to explore the experiences of participants as non-traditional and mature students, in particular the problem of not fitting in. Again drawing upon Allen (1998b), I incorporate an analysis of the role of informal black support networks in providing a strategy to tackle isolation in HE. Concerns about ability also emerged as a key issue, which was closely related to insecurities about class and race.



The literature on race and HE fails to examine the gendered experiences of BACs. Thus, this thesis, which is concerned with the dynamics of race, class and gender in education within the context of an anti-oppressive agenda, utilises McGivney's (2004) examination of gender differentials in levels of participation in post-compulsory education to explore the gender dynamic of postgraduate study amongst participants. In so doing, I uncover a strong inclination towards academia amongst the women, but a reluctance to embark on academic careers because of perceived barriers linked to social class.

With the exception of Mirza (1997), there are few explorations of feminism from a black British perspective. This chapter addresses this hiatus in the literature by investigating BAC attitudes towards the feminist agenda and analysing respondents' views in the light of the feminist literature that explores black perspectives on feminism in the USA (eg Joseph and Lewis, 1986; hooks, 1989).

### **Race in higher education**

As part of a longitudinal study of the experiences of students of African, Caribbean and Asian descent in British universities, Allen (1998b) examined how issues relating to staffing, curriculum, support networks and employment destinations impacted on BME students. He proposed 'a black construct of accessibility' as a means of dealing with some of the issues that emerged. He deduced that a lack of diversity in staffing rendered BME students prone to racism from staff, whilst largely unsupported by any institutional structures. This, together with a lack of

diversity in the curriculum in HE led to 'black scepticality' amongst BME students, which was defined as a critical standpoint that questioned why their cultures and histories were not validated in the institutional ethos, culture and curriculum. He argued that many BME students engaged in extra-curricular activities to enhance their understanding of their own histories and cultures and in order to reinforce a positive sense of their identities. They also relied upon informal black support networks to minimise the isolation they experienced during HE. Allen (1998b) concluded that the focus of issues regarding race in HE should go beyond the question of access for BME students and extend to the transformation of higher education institutions (HEIs), so that they were better able to reflect BME cultures.

Chart 6.1 represents the questionnaire responses from interviewees regarding issues relating to race and clearly demonstrates their emphases on the need for more black academic staff, a more multi-cultural core curriculum and more multi-cultural activities in HE. Their agreement on the need for more cultural diversity in university life concurs with Allen (1998b) and numerous other commentators on race and education in the UK (eg Mac an Ghail, 1988; Channer, 1995; Sewell, 1997).

- Insert chart Race in HE – Chart 6.1

In relation to teacher-student relationships in universities, Allen (1998b) identified a tendency amongst BME students to experience less supportive relationships with (predominantly white) lecturers than their white peers. Reynolds (2006) echoed this finding amongst BAC male university students, many of whom also grappled with low expectations from lecturers. The gross under representation of black academic staff (HESA 1996-7; HESA 1998; Mayor of London, 2002) compounds this issue, indicating that a commitment to equal opportunities on issues of race is a low priority for HEIs (Allen, 1998b; Singh, 1998) and yet, for many black students, black academic staff are crucial as role models (Allen, 1998b) who provide additional support (Mukherjee, 2001), particularly with regard to dealing with subtle racism. Nonetheless, their role remains largely unacknowledged, so that consequently the needs of black students remain largely unmet, whilst the few black academics fulfilling these multiple roles are placed under additional pressures. Channer and Franklin (1995) comment:

there is also the specific problem of black pastoral needs which at many universities is ignored. Although some HEIs have begun to recognise that black students have serious grievances about their conditions of learning, nevertheless little is being done which addresses this issue. (*Channer and Franklin, 1995; 35*)

The literature on race and education in British schools provides substantial evidence that negative racial stereotyping on the part of teachers leads to low expectations and conflict between teachers and BAC pupils (Mac an Ghail, 1988; Mirza, 1992; Channer, 1995; Wright et al, 1998; Gillborn, 1998;). Correspondingly,

interviewees' narratives in the chapter on schools were littered with references to poor teacher-student relationships and their negative impact on school outcomes. However, when it came to university, there was a marked difference in the way that participants managed their relationships with lecturers. Dean, for instance, highlighted that the willingness of academic staff to be flexible and engage in more personalised inter-communication, enhanced his relationships with teachers in university as compared to those in school. Sean also contrasted his experience of learning in school with that of university and identified the reduced dependence on good teacher-student relationships as a central ingredient that facilitated his success:

[In school] there were some teachers which you got on with and so even though you may not have liked the subject you would actually be productive in that class. But... if you didn't get on with the teacher, if there was some sort of negative feedback from the teacher then you wouldn't necessarily... you'd do the bare minimum. And I found that all the way throughout my experience in the education system, apart from when I got to university and I found that I had total control over the learning process. (Sean, Housing Estates Manager)

However, the overall impression was that relationships with lecturers were not necessarily good, but were generally distant and emotional withdrawal emerged as a survival strategy. This ensured a lesser degree of antagonism, but led to corresponding disadvantages, which reflected the unequal support black students receive. Eve observed that different levels of support were offered to black and white students on her course, which echoes the perceptions of Allen's (1998) and

Reynold's (2006) participants. In the first instance, she discussed the way that requests for support from black students were ignored, despite extensive assistance being offered to white students in a similar position:

[Two black students had] difficulties, but I felt that [the lecturers] were being quite racist, because there were other white students who were struggling and they were seeing them. And one of the [white] girls who was struggling... told me a lot of things about how she used to get really low grades and how the teachers had been helping her and they were really good and blaa, blaa, blaa. And of course that wasn't happening with the [two black students], even though they were asking for help. But I'm pleased that the [black] guy got the help in the end, because he decided not to go through the teachers; he just went to the Support Services at the university, which was good. And I think if [the black] lady had, it would have been better for her. She just had too much pride. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Eve achieved a first class honours degree and reflected on the lack of encouragement she received in comparison to her white counterparts with similar grades. She deduced that the low expectation of black students was the root cause of her lecturers' reluctance to acknowledge her ability, despite their willingness to express their belief in others:

...what I found was right from the first year that the teachers were already predicting who was going to get a first class... [My classmate] said to me 'The lecturers are saying to me that three people are going to get firsts and that's me and Jeff and you.' I said 'Me!' She said 'Oh, haven't they said that to you?' And I realised that they were

saying to the other two people, who were white, but they never, ever once said to me... until the third year... And even though they saw my grades at the end of the first year, they obviously must have been talking about things amongst themselves, but they never once said it to me... I never got that encouragement at all... But it was quite clear that they gave a lot of encouragement to the white students... And I had little snippets of – I wouldn't even say encouragement really – but I think one of our Sikh lecturers probably said a couple of little things... Other than that, there wasn't 'We think you can get a first,' or anything like what was told to the other students... So it's almost like when they can see that you have the ability and you're proving their stereotypes wrong... I don't know maybe they're expecting us black people to drop out. I don't know what their expectations were, but I don't think it was very high. But it was almost like 'Oh right. She's been consistent with her grades, so it seems like she might go on to get a first.' So it was almost like a shock [to them]... That's the impression I seemed to get. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Solorzano (1998) used critical race theory to analyse the ways that racism manifests itself in HE and identified that subtle, offensive, put downs are one of the main vehicles for the racism and sexism that black scholars experience. These 'microaggressions' are often unintentional, but occur in numerous interactions within the institution and convey low expectations and racist attitudes, which taint the HE experiences of black students. Concurrent with this, some interviewees described unsatisfactory relationships with lecturers in which racism was considered an underlying element. Zac spoke of a particularly difficult relationship:

this one teacher, she just couldn't stand me for some reason. I was like 'What is your problem?' And I don't go through life thinking 'It's because I'm black,' and I don't

want to get anything more, get through anything because I'm black. I want to get there because I'm supposed to be there... I've worked to be there. But she was just always knocking me and marking me down. It was like she just wanted me off the course...

(Zac, Entrepreneur)

Although participants observed differences in the ways that they and their black peers were treated, they accepted it as inevitable and perceived that overtly challenging these inequalities would be futile. Life in Britain ensures that BMEs develop an acute awareness of the various forms of racism, which equips them to differentiate between that and other types of friction. Nevertheless, subtlety is an inherent characteristic of microaggressions and one of the main reasons why they are rarely investigated. The difficulty in proving covert racism makes it all too easy for microaggressions to be dismissed as harmless misunderstandings that have been misinterpreted due to hypersensitivity. Zac's comment 'I don't go through life thinking 'It's because I'm black,' demonstrates his understanding of this tendency and the insidious nature of racism.

Nonetheless, Solorzano (1998) implored black students to challenge each and every microaggression, so that by naming and investigating them we can begin to confront racism in HEIs. However, raising complaints can be counterproductive and the absence of effective support mechanisms to tackle covert racism leaves its victims vulnerable to the power dynamics of teacher-student relationships and perpetuates their suffering in silence. The narratives suggest that rather than expending the enormous amounts of energy required to fight these hostilities, students resisted by



adopting coping strategies, which all involved distancing themselves from the academic staff in question. Zac, for instance, went on to explain his conscious decision not to be drawn into a confrontation with his lecturer:

She done something one time [that] really, really riled me up, and I [thought], 'You know what, she wants me riled up, 'cause she wants me to fail... so I'm just gonna take this shit and I want to finish this thing, 'cause I know what I'm good at and I'm good at this and you aint ever gonna stop me from doing it. I don't care what they say...'  
(Zac, Entrepreneur)

And Eve, when she finally received encouragement, was distrustful of her lecturer's motives:

But then [the lecturer] in the third year... started telling me that I could get a first... But she was the only tutor then that had said that. Like she'd been saying to the other girl from the first year. But I was wary of her by then anyway, very wary. And it was almost in my mind 'Why didn't you say that and why didn't I get the same encouragement like the others?' (Eve, Entrepreneur/ Teacher)

In the literature on schools, Mac an Ghail (1988) identified that successful BAC children attach little importance to teacher assessments of their ability and Rhamie and Hallam (2002) suggested that this is achieved by developing a resilience, or protective barrier. Mirza (1992) further suggested that BAC girls resist negativity from teachers by striving to exceed their low expectations. The narratives here indicate that similar survival strategies are employed by black students in HE. For

example, in her earlier comments Eve noted that her black classmates' requests for help were ignored by lecturers. In response to this, the male student tapped into other university Support Services, thereby bypassing the lecturers. In contrast, the female student 'had too much pride' to seek further assistance and appeared to withdraw her expectations of support. Eve's comments below betray her own withdrawal of expectations and show how rebuffs from lecturers can lead black students to internalise a belief that they are not entitled to the support available and that close relationships with lecturers are inappropriate:

But it was quite clear that they gave a lot of encouragement to the white students, because you saw the little things like some of the girls having coffee with them and all pally pally<sup>13</sup> and that kind of stuff. But I was always happy to keep away from that, because I thought 'I'm here to study and I don't need any pals basically from any of the lecturers.' I'd rather keep them there and I'm here. So that's the way I always played it. (Eve, Entrepreneur/ Teacher)

Reynolds' (2006) indicated that her respondents were sensitive to negative feedback from lecturers and, therefore, reluctant to seek out further advice. Additionally, Rodgers' (2006) suggested that black male students in his research were reticent to use official university support services, regarding it as a mark of failure. Whilst my research corroborates the evidence of both Reynolds (2006) and Rodgers (2006), it also identifies that these behaviours are symptomatic of an emotional withdrawal, which is utilised by many black students as a defence mechanism, developed as a

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<sup>13</sup> Very friendly

shrewd response to the onslaught of microaggressions and the unfavourable treatment they encounter in HE. Like uninvited guests or 'outsiders within' (Collins, 2000), they learn to maintain a distance from academic staff and have little expectation of support, thereby increasingly becoming self-reliant.

The independent learning styles in post-compulsory education make it possible for students to distance themselves from teaching staff in a way that is not feasible in school. The disadvantages of this emotional withdrawal are reflected in high drop out rates amongst BMEs in HE (Modood and Acland, 1998) and their silence about the racism they experience is not without cost. When Bravette (1996) discussed her own 'silence' over racism in the workplace, she drew attention its detrimental impact, noting:

though it may be politically expedient to remain silent, the personal cost is high in terms of the self-denial which is involved... [people can] fall, inadvertently, into the trap of perpetuating the status quo through their silence and seeking of acceptance.

*(Bravette, 1996; 8)*

Nevertheless, the strategic use of emotional withdrawal reduced the potential for poor teacher-student relationships to impact upon the individual and enabled respondents to achieve academically in HE, which contrasts markedly with their school experiences.

Another dynamic in teacher-student relationships that appears to have enhanced the experiences of some students, was the presence of BME staff in teaching roles, who acted as ‘benevolent BMEs’. Interviewees were in full agreement that increasing the presence of black staff at various levels within HEIs would enhance the university experience and my analysis above outlines the centrality of the management of effective student-teacher relationships as a strategy for success in HE.

Channer (1995) indicates that successful BAC students often encounter a ‘benevolent individual’ who assists them in navigating their way through the British education system. In the previous chapter, I developed this theme, identifying that where benevolent individuals encouraged interviewees en route to HE, they were usually BMEs or people immersed in BME communities. Their insight into the BME experience was considered a key factor that enabled them to transcend the barriers of race and negative racial stereotyping. This theme of BMEs performing the role of benevolent individuals recurred in the discussions relating to experiences within HE. In the rare instances that participants recollected a particularly supportive relationship with a member of the teaching staff, the latter was invariably a BME; in other words a ‘benevolent BME’. For example, Eve noted the few words of comfort and concern she received from an Asian lecturer, which stood in stark contrast to the absence of encouragement from other academic staff throughout most of her degree course. Zac also referred to the positive influence of a teacher/technician who opened his eyes to the potential of computer technology in his design work: he, again, was a BME:

...there was one guy... he was very good for me... if it wasn't for him I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now... He turned into the Head of Computer Aided Design [CAD], but he was a technician at first, just helping people with all the CAD work and graphics and everything, and up until that point I had no interest in computers, none whatsoever, and I work on computers now – that's my life. ...he actually spent time with me and Dan. We were the only two black people [and] actually the only two in the whole year who took any interest in CAD... I would say it was through Pat and... it was more of a friendship. He didn't kinda like force [it]... It was just the way he came across, he made things seem a lot simpler than you thought it was and help was always there. So really, thinking about it, he was a major turning point... He was a big influence... big time. (Zac, Entrepreneur)

Sean described the added motivation and encouragement he experienced with his black, male tutor in HE:

[My tutor] happened to be a black guy. He was really good. He was excellent... He just gave you that drive [and] extra encouragement saying, 'Come on, I know you can do it.' Say if you were talking on a one to one basis, you could talk through some problems... as a mature student and also as a black student... He'd say, 'You can make it through. It's not a problem...' [Him being black] did make a difference to me. It helped. It was a bonus... [He] actually looked at my unique problems that I had at that time and was prepared to discuss them with me... [It] was a positive thing... But he seemed fair all around. And he was there when times I needed for him to kick my butt. To make sure that all the projects and essays were in on time and stuff. (Sean, Housing Estates Manager)

Neither Eve nor Zac attached much importance to the ethnicity of their benevolent individual, both treating the fact that the encouragement they received was from a BME member of staff, as incidental. Sean, on the other hand, indicated that having a black tutor was 'a bonus'. His regarding of his tutor as someone he 'could have associated with usually', suggests a strong identification. His willingness to discuss personal issues openly with this tutor is further evidence of a trusting relationship that was noticeably absent from the other narratives about relationships with lecturers. Similarly, Zac's statement, 'it was more of a friendship', suggests a sense of camaraderie in his relationship with the CAD technician.

The observations within the literature (eg Allen, 1998b; Reynolds, 2006; Mukherjee, 2002) and from the personal narratives, suggests that white students receive more encouragement and develop closer relationships with white lecturers than their black peers. In this research, where black students received extra support, it tended to come from BME lecturers. This may indicate a greater identification on the grounds of race that is both unconscious and unacknowledged, but it can leave black students at a disadvantage when it comes to teacher-student relationships and access to academic support.

Another element of Allen's (1998b) 'black construct of accessibility' stresses the need for diversity in the HE curriculum through the injection of multicultural and anti-racist content. This theme reverberates through much of the literature on race and education and on widening participation in HE (eg Bird, 1996; Graham, 2001;

Van Dyke, 1998; Sewell 97; Acland and Azmi 1998; Graham and Robinson, 2004). Nonetheless, the presence of black culture, authors, art, history, scientists, etc is sparse in British universities and their exclusion perpetuates the underlying problem of continually reinforcing racist, Eurocentric epistemology. Fred Powell believed that 'cultural domination has challenged economic exploitation as the fundamental social injustice' (Powell, 1999; 20), whilst Leicester and Merrill regarded a lack of cultural content as an

omission [that] renders black people and cultures invisible, and, by implication, less worthy of study. There has been little curriculum development in which non-European values and thought patterns are central. (*Leicester and Merrill, 1999; 23*)

There was overwhelming agreement amongst interviewees that more multi-cultural activities and a multicultural core curriculum would enrich university life and very few respondents felt that their course materials had reflected the racial diversity of either the UK or the world at large.

In particular, teacher training courses were heavily criticised for their inability to prepare future teachers for a multi-cultural school population, thus perpetuating the problem of poor teacher-student relationships and its negative consequences for black children. Respondents highlighted that when race was addressed on their courses it was usually combined with gender and disability in a single session on diversity, which they felt was insufficient for tackling the subject. Eve graduated from her PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) in 2005, but echoed the

same concerns as Nora, who studied more than ten years earlier. Both attended traditional universities to complete their PGCEs and both were alarmed at the low priority given to the subject of race in teacher training courses. Nora stated:

...in Islington, 68% of the pupil population is non-white and then people are coming off courses, but they haven't done anything about anybody else's culture, about how to teach various cultures [or] about how different cultures react and work within the education setting... teachers are walking into a London school... into a class that's got 90% or even more non-white and they haven't been taught anything. They could have come from Cornwall and walked into a school in the inner city and that's just ridiculous... it really is, because that really is going to hinder the progress that the children make in terms of the teacher not being able to understand what's really going on with the children... I mean on the PGCE I think they had a day, Equal Opportunities day or something, where you learned about everything - gender, race, social inclusion, everything. (Nora, Head Teacher)

The concerns of these graduates regarding race corroborated the findings of Rhamie (2007) and Archer and Francis (2007), who highlighted that most newly qualified teachers feel ill-equipped to deal with diversity in schools. Likewise, Gazely and Dunne (2005) found that student teachers were prone to draw on 'deficit models' of working class children and families as explanations for their underachievement, because of inadequate diversity training within teacher training courses.

Allen (1998b) suggested that black students have attempted to counter the Eurocentric bias within the mainstream HE curriculum, through a 'black



scepticality' that pursues the recovery and knowledge of their own histories and heroes, such as Ghandi and Malcolm X, as an extra-curricular activity. He expounded:

It is clear that many black students are rigorously questioning the whole basis of what they are being taught in terms of 'objective academia'; more and more the issue of relevance is becoming central to their personal and group constructs of their identities.

*(Allen, 1998b; 89)*

For hooks (1994), the reluctance of the education system to adopt a multiculturalism that goes beyond the tokenism of a single class tacked on to the end of a course, is symptomatic of

the fear that any de-centering of Western civilizations, of the white male canon, is really an act of cultural genocide. *(hooks, 1994; 32)*

Young (1971) also postulated:

the granting of equal status to sets of cultural choices that reflect variations in terms of the [characteristics of the dominant group], would involve a massive redistribution of the labels 'educational' 'success' and 'failure', and thus also a parallel redistribution of rewards in terms of wealth, prestige and power. *(Young, 1971; 38-39)*

hooks (1994) explored how the prevalence of middle class values in education operates to silence black and working class students in the classroom by casting them as 'others' and Reay (2001) inferred:

the working-class struggle for academic success is not about finding yourself but rather losing yourself in order to find a new, shiny, acceptable, middle-class persona. (Reay, 2001: 341)

Many of these students, therefore, face the unhappy choice of estrangement from their roots or giving up their courses, which is reflected in higher than average dropout rates amongst black students. Forms of dominance are, thus, perpetuated. hooks (1994) suggested that instead of acquiescing, students should challenge this status quo by persistently injecting their black and working class perspectives, thereby changing the norms of the institution. In line with this stance and in the absence of a multicultural curriculum, some interviewees were creative in trying to bring a black perspective to their studies. Nora commented:

...there was nothing to do with black people on the Psychology degree... I did my final year project [on] the education of a black child. So I specifically geared my project and my research towards black children. And similarly when you're given the options to do things on your course... We had to do a module on behaviour and I did behaviour on black children; and we had to do one on parental involvement, I did black parents. And so I brought that in, because I was obviously very black conscious by then... but that was a choice... and I think for some tutors it makes it uncomfortable for them. (Nora, Head Teacher)

Nora's intuition, that some lecturers experienced a degree of discomfort with black perspectives, is echoed by Eve's experience:

I did get into a conflict with one of the guys in the group. It was a piece that we had to read and he couldn't understand why I said it was racist and he was having a hard time with it. And I don't think the teacher dealt with it that well, even though I think she's a good teacher. She kind of drew it to a halt and then left it at that, instead of talking about it and getting us to explain 'Why is that racist?' And 'He's seeing it in that way and why are you reading it in a different way?' And I just don't think in the entire course that they celebrated ethnicity... (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

This discomfort can inadvertently silence black students, such that even though some respondents recognised the value of presenting a black perspective, there was nevertheless a strong sense of risk associated with it. Channer (1995) suggested that black HE students in her research felt that they were marked more harshly when they wrote about black issues and thus highlighted the personal cost of isolation and non-conformism in terms of low grades for essays that dealt with race. Notably, the same issue was raised by some interviewees in my research who tried to present a black perspective in their work when possible and felt that they were sometimes penalised as a result. They were, therefore, apprehensive about the cost of expressing that viewpoint.

I think on one of the papers that I did I got marked down for it and I'd taken the black perspective and I'd taken it quite strong and... even though I knew what the quality of my work was, because I was mostly an A grade student in most of my essays and stuff and if anything I'd get a B. And they'd given me a C and I just thought 'Oh its because you didn't like what I was saying, it isn't anything to do with my style or quality of it'.

(Nora, Head Teacher)

Pertinent to this devaluing of black perspectives is in Freire's (1972) discussion of the type of alienation that occurs through the thought-language dynamic of adult literacy programmes in developing countries. He argued that by putting the words of the ruling class into the mouths of the oppressed, a 'digestive' concept of knowledge' (Freire, 1972; 26) prevents the learner from speaking with their own words about their own lived experiences. This effectively denies that oppressed people can know for themselves, because the only knowledge they can convey legitimately is that of the ruling class ideology. Dean, who is not a student of adult education, expressed his frustration in words that were alarmingly similar to Freire's:

I was trying to overcomplicate it by writing all these essays using all these words that that particular course has caused you to use. And I thought, 'Here I go again, me changing my world to kind of fit in with this... whatever they're asking from me.' And I thought, 'Well, it's only for a time. And then I can practice my way'. It's all interesting actually. (Dean, Youth Worker)

So, although hooks (1994) advocated that black students should inject black perspectives as a means of effecting change in HE, the question of acceptable narratives and its power dynamics, refuses to acquiesce without a fight. Where grades and relationships with lecturers are potentially put at risk, students who are confident in their abilities, often as reinforced through their grades, are in a much stronger position than those who are less confident. This, then, is an issue of cultural capital. In particular, those who have had negative experiences of schooling and enter higher education from a non-traditional route – as is the case with many BAC and working class students – may be at a disadvantage and find it more difficult, in practice, to challenge these norms. The desire to fit in and just survive the experience would appear to be far more pressing.

### **Class and non-traditional students in higher education**

Fitting in is an important issue for most students and is accentuated for non-traditional students such as BME, working class and mature students. Consequently, race and education literature focuses on isolation as a key feature of BME experiences of HE (eg Channer, 1995; Bird, 1996) and its impact is also well documented within the education literature that focuses on adult learners and social class (eg Reay, 2001; 2003). Allen's (1998) 'black construct of accessibility' acknowledges the crucial role that informal black support networks play in providing a safe and supportive environment for BME students who experience racism and a strong sense of isolation in their HEIs. He observed:

It was in the realm of this 'black space' where black realities, identities and strategies were continually being replenished by the informal group. (Allen, 1998b; 89)

When Reynolds (2006) investigated the success of BAC men in HE, her participants clearly valued education and saw their time in HE as a 'second chance'. However, they expressed feelings of alienation and a continued conflict between their own lived experiences outside the institution, and the values and norms within. Reynolds (2006) identified feelings of isolation as a key issue for these men, who described an 'internal struggle' between 'university life' and 'real life'. One of McKenley's (2005) *Seven Black Men* echoed these sentiments when he reflected on his parents' attitudes to his schooling:

There was a tension between wanting you to learn and recognising that education was having a disorienting effect for some children in trying to balance the Whiteworld and the Blackworld. (McKenley 2005; 138)

These issues were addressed in the primary research and Chart 6.2 represents questionnaire responses regarding participants' experiences as non-traditional students. In the questionnaires, most indicated that they were unconcerned about fitting in before they commenced their HE studies, but interviews revealed the opposite, with several expressing concerns about the prospect of feeling isolated on the grounds of age, class and race.

- Insert chart non-trad student - Chart 6.2

In exploring the apparently contradictory evidence of questionnaires and interviews, it transpired that many had anticipated and were resigned to the inevitability of not fitting in and thus prepared for this eventuality by studying close to home, or utilising other black social networks, such as church or family. They also selected HEIs that had ethnically diverse populations, or attended institutions located in ethnically diverse areas. (See Chapter 5 for detailed discussion). Interviewees, therefore, were not concerned about fitting in, as the question was posed, but were resigned to isolation, accepting it as a foregone conclusion.

Despite this expectation of isolation, Chart 6.1 shows that when they were actually at their HEIs, the majority of respondents did not feel isolated as black students and also that most valued black support networks at university. Interview narratives exposed a correlation between these two issues and, as Allen (1998b) suggests, the extensive use of black social networks significantly reduced their sense of isolation. In particular, African Caribbean Societies (ACS) were central for a number of participants. Zac, for instance, was acutely aware of the small number of black students within his HEI and attached great importance to the opportunity to associate with other black students:

There must have been over a thousand people in the Art and Design campus, [but] a very, very, very, very small amount of black students... When I started university it was just a means to an end and then I discovered the Afro-Caribbean Society and it was brilliant to me at the time. I was like, 'Wow, university aint just about university, there's black people with the same type of experiences or going through the same type



of thing.’ So I always took part... [and] I think it was comfortable to go through the university studies with that being around, even though I was quite local anyway. I didn’t really move far away from home... I think if it wasn’t for the societies and being involved in things like ACFest<sup>14</sup>... I would have just kinda... Do you say, ‘lose your blackness’? ...I do think if it wasn’t for the societies I would have lost something...  
(Zac, Entrepreneur)

Closely linked to issues of isolation are issues of identity and Reay (2001) highlighted that many working class students grapple with the fear of being looked down upon when they embark on their HE studies. She also explores the paradox of students having to lose their working class identity in order to find their academically successful self, which, by definition, must be aligned to the middle class values that permeate the education system. She commented:

Their transcripts hint at a delicate balance between realizing potential and maintaining a sense of an authentic self. (Reay, 2001:337)

Eve alludes to this conflict when she contrasts the sense of belonging on her Access course with the sense of isolation she experienced when she commenced later studies:

...on the Access course I realised everyone was in the same boat and that put me at ease... [But,] Warwick was one where I really felt like a fish out of water initially, because I thought there were so many people that were quite snobby... When I first

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<sup>14</sup> Annual festival organised for and by members of African Caribbean Societies from various HEIs

went there we had to introduce ourselves and say which university we came from and I was like Derby [mumbled], because a lot of them had been to St Andrews and Oxford and I know it's wrong to put up these barriers, but I did think 'I'm not going to get on with them.' They were from totally different backgrounds. And being the only black person in the group – yet again – you do have to gain these skills of how you're going to cope with it. But I've tried not to shy away from who I am as a black person, but at the same time you know that the people that are around you don't really understand you. And so [it's] not that you put that bit to one side, but... I know when I started at Warwick University I thought, 'Oh I can't suck my teeth<sup>15</sup> here,' but as I got to know the people more and got on well with them, I thought well, I'm not really ashamed of who I am and I even told some of them that I go home and do my Hairdressing and I didn't care! And it didn't work against me, because I was true to who I was and I thought, 'I'm not trying to be something else...' (Eve, Entrepreneur/ Teacher)

Reay (2001) recognised that class difference is at the root of her students' fear of being looked down upon, but Eve's comments demonstrate how these are compounded for BAC students by race difference. Eve's reluctance to reveal 'characteristics of ethnicity' (Gillborn, 1990) such as sucking her teeth, was trying to minimise her differences and, thereby, fit in. In the same vein, Zac describes his experience of not being 'real' and his discomfort at trying to fit in as a means to an end.

Industrial Design Engineering... was absolutely right for me, spot on. That's what I thought just before I applied for it and during my first year. But that kind of thought started to diminish during the middle of my second year... [I was] thinking 'You know

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<sup>15</sup> Typical Caribbean expression of disdain

what, I'm not really being myself here. I'm just trying to fit in. And it's not real.' ...I knew I didn't fit in. But at the end of the day, I wasn't there to fit in, I was in there to try and get something for me. (Zac, Entrepreneur)

Zac also described the ambiguity of not quite fitting in with his old friends anymore, commenting:

[There] weren't direct barriers, but it was a bit frustrating at the time. Because I remember [my old friends] all had jobs and they were going out and they had money and this and that. And there was me on my student grant and... I couldn't go to things... And they never laughed at me or whatever, but I just kind of felt 'Well, here I am at Polytechnic and not trying to fit in, but knowing that I'm not comfortable there. And that's where I come from and there's my mates doing their things and having a great time, and I just felt that I was missing out. (Zac, Entrepreneur)

Another aspect of not fitting-in is the fear of failure. Identifying feelings of inadequacy amongst mature, working class students, Reay quoted one as expressing anxiety about 'being made to feel I wasn't up to it, that I wasn't welcome in education' (Reay, 2001; 339). Likewise, an alarmingly high number of participants in this research expressed concerns about their own ability. In spite of achieving the level of education required to attend their courses, many were anxious about the prospect of not meeting the standards required and being less able than their peers. Eve described quite graphically her perception of the social stratification relating to university, positioning herself as unworthy despite her inclination and aptitude for studying:

...to be quite honest I've always felt... that university is way up there and I'm way down there! Even though I've done all this study and loved it, I just thought it was way out of my reach... I don't know if I thought as well, 'Will I have the ability or would I just make a mess of it?' I just lacked confidence. (Eve, Entrepreneur/ Teacher)

Michelle conveyed the same sense of trepidation intertwined with inferiority when she explained her rationale for attending a 'new' university for her first degree and only then having the confidence to attend an old university for her Masters. Her understanding of the interconnection between social class and educational achievement are so deep rooted that she, like Eve, doubted the evidence of her own academic achievements.

I was very worried that I wasn't going to be able to make the grade... I suppose I knew I wasn't stupid, I was always confident about my academic capabilities. I think I would have an inferiority complex being among middle class children, who had been geared up for that sort of education... (Michelle, Teacher)

Reay (2001) attributed mature, working class students' concerns about their own ability to negative school experiences and Reynolds (2006) reached the same conclusion regarding the BAC male students in her research. For Reynolds' participants though, self-belief was also predicated upon other people's expectations of their failing, because of the common associations between BACs and poor educational outcomes.

Despite their feelings of inadequacy, interviewees not only attained the requisite standard for their undergraduate studies, but more than half also went on to acquire postgraduate qualifications. At this point, an interesting gender dynamic emerged, with most of the postgraduate students being represented from amongst the female participants.

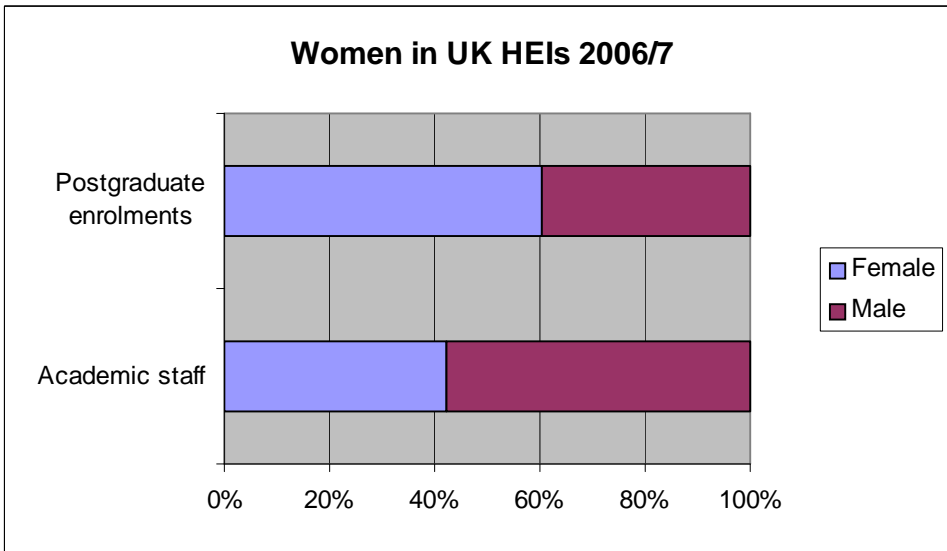
### **The gender dynamic of postgraduate studies**

In *Men Earn, Women Learn*, McGivney (2004) explored gender differentials in levels of participation in post-compulsory education and training. She found that women formed the majority in most subject areas at degree level, whilst men tended to favour work-related education and training. One explanation she gave for this is that, particularly amongst working class men, there is a belief that education is progressive for women, but inappropriate for men over the age of twenty-five. The prevalence of women studying in HE continues at post-graduate level, where they account for 60.5% of enrolments<sup>16</sup> (HESA, 2008). However, despite postgraduate study being a route to an academic career, there is a complete reversal of the trend when it comes to teaching in HE, with men occupying almost 60% of academic posts and women just over 40% (see Chart 6.3).

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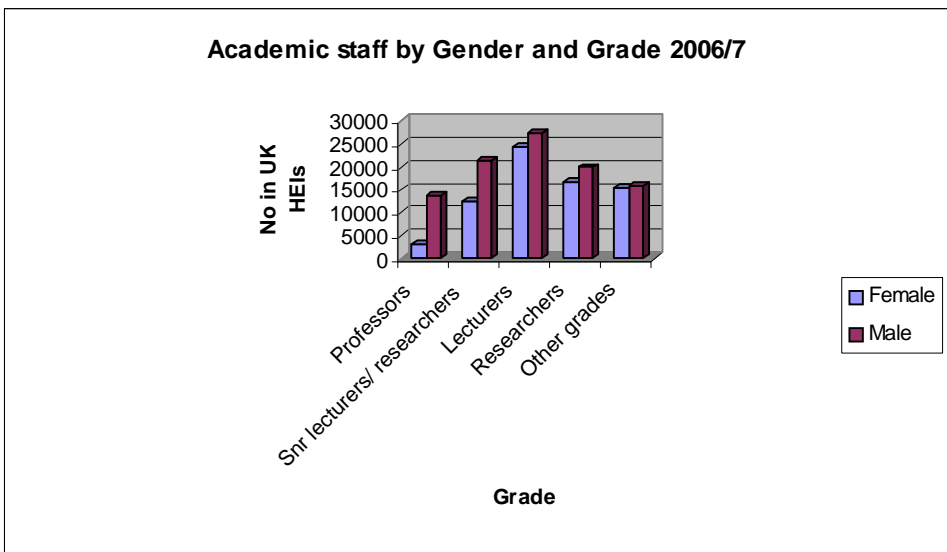
<sup>16</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> year enrolments

Chart 6.3: Women in UK HEIs 2006/7



Source: HESA 2008

Chart 6.4: Academic staff by Gender and Grade 2006/7



Source: HESA 2008

HESA (2008) statistics show that women academics are also concentrated in part-time employment on the lower rungs of the academic career ladder and under-

represented in high level posts (see Chart 6.4). Just 18% of professorships are held by women (HESA, 2008), which tends to bear witness to the concerns of participants regarding the position of women in HE.

The gender bias amongst HE students, as reported in the literature, is borne out by the gender dynamic of postgraduate study in this research. Table 6.5 summarises this.

Table 6.5: Postgraduate Qualifications

<b>Women</b>	<b>PG Certificate/ Diploma</b>	<b>Masters Degrees</b>
Alison	Diploma of English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA)	MA in English Language Teaching
Eve	PGCE	MA in Religion and Public Life
Michelle	PGCE	MSc in IT for Manufacture
Nora	PGCE	MA in Education Management
<b>Men</b>		
Leroy	PGCE	
Neil	PG Diploma Mgmt Studies PG Diploma Project Mgmt	MA in Human Resources

Six of the ten participants obtained postgraduate certificates and diplomas and, as the literature suggested, male postgraduate study favoured professional and work-related education. Four of the five women, and just one of the men, also went on to

complete Master's degrees, which raises questions about what motivated the women to continue when the men did not.

In terms of their motivations for studying, McGivney (2004) found that men and younger students cited job-related reasons more frequently than women and older students, whilst an intrinsic interest was an important factor for all learners. In this study, a major gender difference that emerged in the previous chapter was that the pleasure of studying constituted a *major* motivation for all of the female interviewees and for none of the men. Drawing on Moore (1992), I argued that for most of the male interviewees, studying in HE was an exercise of willpower, undertaken for the extrinsic rewards associated with enhanced career prospects. Whilst this utilitarian approach to the value of university was shared by the women, their motivations for studying additionally stemmed from an intrinsic desire to learn and a deeply felt love of their subjects.

This positive relationship between pleasure and learning amongst the women respondents constituted a stimulus for continued study at postgraduate level and was combined with an expectation that it would improve their career prospects. Alison explained:

The rationale behind doing the MA was because I missed study and I felt that I wasn't being intellectually challenged by the work. The teaching was there, but there wasn't any theory behind it... So the MA came out of my own decision... Work didn't suggest it [or] fund it. I asked for funding; it was refused... I had to forego pay; took less



teaching hours and then had to do it in my own time. But I did feel that once I'd got the MA I could get a position of management and I could get the stable, full-time job in EFL... And I thought, 'Well [you'll have] your Masters and Diploma in EFL, you'll definitely land a job.' (Alison, HE Lecturer)

In addition to this, all of the women interviewees who completed Master's degrees expressed an interest in studying for PhDs. The literature on critical pedagogy originated in Freire's (1996) analyses of the class dynamics in adult learning. Feminist pedagogy builds upon this, drawing attention to gender dynamics that additionally constrain. Mogadime (2003) suggested:

One of the main principles of feminist pedagogy is linking the struggles of equity espoused in the classroom with community struggles... [and] encourag[ing] students to actively engage in changing the structures that control women's lives. (*Mogadime, 2003; 11*)

The common theme amongst these participants in relation to PhD studies was a desire to research issues within black communities, thus addressing race dynamics. Eve's research interest was black women and theology, Michelle's was black women in education and Nora's was the social dynamics underpinning violent crime amongst black youth in Nottingham. However, despite the love of their subjects being their prime motivation, class dynamics, in terms of the opportunity cost of continued studies, particularly the loss of income, ultimately deterred them from further study at this stage.

Reay (2003) identifies that working class women face a high risk of not achieving a good return on their investment in HE, because of their comparatively low earning power as graduates and their career orientation towards the community. Elias et al (1997) highlight that although men who graduate with PhDs in the social sciences go on to be higher earners this is not necessarily the case for women. The investment return for women who graduate with Master's degrees is much clearer than for those who continue to PhD studies. For the women in this research, the opportunity cost became accentuated as they progressed in their graduate studies and became a powerful barrier to an academic career. This is particularly interesting considering that Chart 6.1 and Chart 6.6 show that all interviewees felt there was a need for more female and black academics at various levels within HEIs. Despite their ability and their strong inclination for becoming academics, none pursued PhDs. Eve commented:

Well quite a few people in my class are applying to do PhDs, because they want to be lecturers... And I had a tutorial and I said that I'm going to do a PGCE afterwards. And he said 'Not a PhD?' And I said, 'No way!' He said 'But you finished with a good first, didn't you?' which I had not told anybody. And I said 'Yeeees' and he said 'Soooo'. Then he said 'What were you thinking of doing your PhD on?' So I began to tell him what I was going to do and because I just started rambling on about it he just said 'Well, there's your PhD.' ...I am drawn, but I need some money... I need to work. It's horrible... And I think probably because I've gone back as a mature student and this is my fifth year of study I'm just wearing thin. But I think if I'd done my degree younger [and finished at] twenty-one and [had] a bit more time... Like some of my

friends on this course are quite young as well; they're twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three. So they've still got loads of time... (Eve, Teacher/ Entrepreneur)

Because of the strength of feeling amongst the women regarding their love of learning, exploring attitudes to postgraduate study shed light on other barriers to HE, including age, time and financial pressures. Both Eve and Michelle cited age as a deterrent to PhD studies and there was a sense of them running out of time in their lives. Competing demands on their time ensured that they prioritised what they considered to be more urgent needs, instead of pursuing the desire to study.

I would love to start doing my PhD...[laughs]... but I feel, because of [my] age I have to be sensible now, and doing a PhD isn't being sensible its almost harping back to my student days and not progressing ...my PhD I have to make time for, but I would love to do something... I think when people stay within a job they might do their Performance Arts or sports after they've finished work, but that is what I do in my free time, I like discussing ideas... In my ideal world I would find time to do my job very well, to be running a small business and to do my PhD and obviously to look after my children... Yeah, but now coming back to the real world I know that I can manage the job and I need to be successful at the job, because there is more riding on it than just money and I know my self esteem is linked up with my job... also I know my children need me. So those are the two things that have priority... I'd be willing to borrow the money to go and do a PhD. Its not the money factor anymore, which used to be a key factor; it's the time factor... (Michelle, Teacher)

Clearly, the balancing of childcare with other career related ambitions is an issue for women who are primary carers, and this, combined with the length of time, cost of

study and loss of income involved in PhD study, makes the pursuit of an academic career largely inaccessible to many BAC women.

The female narratives indicate that given the opportunity, women such as these could prove an asset to HEIs, by bringing their added knowledge and experience of BAC culture. In discussing bicultural lifestyles, Bell (1990) described the empowerment and richness that derives from the duality that some professional, black women experience from being immersed in both the white, male dominated culture that pervades most professions and the black culture of their origins. In a similar vein, hooks and West (1991) suggested that black academics can serve a dual purpose of bringing their knowledge of academic culture to black communities, and their understanding of black cultures to the academic community, thereby facilitating anti-racism and social inclusion. Collins (2000) argued:

Black women intellectuals best contribute to a Black women's group standpoint by using their experiences as situated knowers. (*Collins, 2000; 19*)

These findings suggest that an untapped opportunity exists for BAC women graduates to contribute their perspectives to the understanding of race, class and gender in UK HEIs.

### **BAC perspectives on feminism**

Within the anti-oppressive agenda of this research, I explored participants' gendered experiences as students in HEIs and elicited their attitudes to issues of gender in HE.

- insert Gender in HE chart 6.6

Chart 6.6 shows that the gender-related questionnaire responses receiving most agreement were 'We need more female staff at various levels in the university' and 'The core curriculum should include a feminist perspective'. Responses were evenly split across both genders, revealing similar viewpoints for male and female respondents. In view of these two dominant issues, participants' perspectives on the feminist agenda were explored during interviews.

In the black feminist literature, black perspectives on feminism are explored and one of the most common perceptions is that there is a significant reluctance among black women to identify with the feminist movement, despite their activism in fighting for women's rights. hooks (1989) discussed the reasons for black female activists ignoring the battle against sexism in favour of the battle against racism and two key points emerge from her analyses.

The first explanation centres around the historical existence of racism within the feminist movement (Taylor, 1998) where the tendency has been to promote a white, middle class female agenda and ignore the experiences and needs of women of colour (hooks, 1982). This, it is argued, has led to some black women rejecting the term 'feminist' as a white, men-hating ideology that is unrelated to their experiences (Joseph and Lewis, 1986).

The second point is the difficulty of self-criticism inherent in speaking out against black patriarchy and thereby exposing black families to yet more criticism within a

racist society. This is an important point, because black communities and culture often provide a buffer against a racist world outside (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 1985) and many members of black communities remain conservative and insular by way of a defence mechanism (*The Black Middle Class*, BBC Radio 4, 22 January, 2006).

Table 6.7: Perspectives on feminism

	<b>Feminism is important</b>
Elaine	Feminism is important; did not elaborate
Eve	Described herself as pro-feminist, but not a true feminist, because she's not anti-man. Very interested in black British feminist/ women's perspectives on Theology
Michelle	Feminism is very important; it's about women's rights. '...we're over 50% and the issues that females face are usually put into the background'
Dean	Feminism is very important; looking at women's achievements and status should be a constant agenda. Says his attitude is strongly influenced by having three sisters
Neil	Associates feminism with lesbians, who he identifies with positively because of his sexuality; it's anti-oppression. Contrasts his interest in feminism with his lack of interest in anti-racism
Leroy	'Feminism it's for equality, isn't it. Or is it extremism? ...I've always read it as for equality... If I've got to go out and work she's got to go out and work, <i>init!</i> [laughs]

Table 6.7: Perspectives on feminism (continued)

<b>Feminism is not important</b>	
Alison	Feminism used to be important, but is not anymore. It's a European construct and irrelevant to her as a black person
Nora	Feminism is not important. 'I think women have made great strides, there's still a long way to go, but it wouldn't be the highest on my agenda in this day and age'
Sean	Equality for women is important, but feminism is not important, because it's about female dominance (anti-man); 'I see this as the reverse to macho'
Zac	'I'm a man. I don't think [feminism] is important.'

Nevertheless, hooks (1989) suggests that since the role of the black patriarch as caretaker/ provider has never really materialised in post-colonial societies, a feminist, anti-sexist approach could offer a more viable and just alternative for the liberation of black communities and women. It is, therefore, both interesting and worthwhile to explore the views on feminism held by the BAC participants in this research, particularly as the majority indicated that the core curriculum in HE should include a feminist perspective.

The bulk of the relevant literature emanates from the USA and, with the exception of Mirza (1997), there is little research that examines black British perspectives on feminism. Notwithstanding, there are a number of parallels between African



American perspectives and those of the BAC participants. The majority of interviewees believed that feminism was important, with equal numbers of men and women expressing positive and negative viewpoints. Table 6.7 lists the essence of their comments.

Most interviewees considered feminism a worthwhile cause, concerned with seeking equality for women at a macro level in society. They also recognised a need for a feminist agenda that addressed issues affecting real women's lives and shifting gender dynamics at the micro level. Nevertheless, there were certain stereotypes that spanned both the negative and positive responses about feminism, and these were remarkably similar to those resistances noted in the black feminist literature from the USA. For instance, Table 6.7 shows that associations between feminism and 'anti-man' sentiments, rather than anti-oppression, arose in both Sean's and Eve's narratives and likewise, Leroy's playful comment about 'extremism' corresponded with Eve's thinking. Eve's discussion was particularly revealing, because she articulated a number of the conflicting views about feminism that other participants voiced at various stages of the research.

I'm a pro-feminist, but I'm not a true feminist, definitely not, but I could see myself being really strong in terms of women's ideas and things that would support women... Perhaps [a real feminist] would be someone who'd be single, that would be really out there being anti-men and not 'OK, we don't *need* a man,' but totally writing them off for anything... I'm not that extreme, but in a sense of coping and managing on my own and doing stuff like that... I suppose that's history as well and how it's progressed. I

suppose fifty years ago you did need a man and have to stay at home to look after the children, but the funny thing is that I think that's good and there's a value in that for society and the way that children are brought up. But then I've had loads of arguments that I'm not going to be a servant for anybody and I would always say to [my ex-partner], 'Slavery days are over... If I'm going to be working and you're working and you both come home, you share things, don't you? But the expectations that you have is this kind of old attitude where there's certain things that should be done by me, because I'm a woman...' And I said to him, '[I'm not] going to slave and cook and have your dinner ready when you come home and massage you, draw your bath for you like you're [disabled]!.. If you choose to do it, because you love someone and that's your little perks that's your choice, but I'm not going into a relationship or marriage where the person's expecting that of me'. You must be mad! No way! (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Apparently, Eve's description of herself as pro-feminist refers to her independence, self sufficiency and concern with women's issues. At other times during the discussions she also expressed a strong interest in black British feminist perspectives on religion. However, she distanced herself from what she considered the archetypal feminist, who was somebody that would be anti-man and single. Similarly, Sean suggested that feminism was about female domination and women wanting to be in men's shoes for the sake of it, rather than a movement concerned with the pursuit of equality. When Joseph and Lewis (1986) recorded the attitudes of a number of African American women, their perceptions of feminism echoed these sentiments. One respondent is quoted as saying:

These women liberationists just want to get in the same position as men so they can do the same incorrect things like men. (*Joseph and Lewis, 1986; 21*)

Neil chuckled when he explained that he associated feminism with lesbians and that, as a gay man, he identified on the basis of a marginalised sexuality, which was an outsider status that was absent from his comprehension of race. He stated:

I used to think of myself as quite a feminist. I think it's because it's looked upon as a kind of minority and certain things to do with minorities, to a degree, I'll support and defend... I think it's important that people are aware of [feminism] and give it support... I could say the same about black, but I don't know why, but I never see black to be the same as feminism... I feel there's a link between sexuality and feminism... and that's why I always feel strongly about feminism... I don't know how to quite explain it... But you get any feminist on telly and I'm always in agreement with them. (Neil, IT Trainer)

Both Sean and Eve focused on feminism in the micro sense, looking at the balance of power within man/ woman relationships. Both were in favour of the replacement of clearly delineated, traditional gender roles with a more fluid and interchangeable division of domestic labour across the sexes. Zac, who was quite dismissive of feminism, voiced the same opinion, but did so outside of the context of our discussions about feminism. He also expressed admiration for professional black women when he commented specifically that 'there's black women... out there doing constructive things', showing that he had a positive attitude to the career progression opportunities for women – a core feminist principle.

Two female interviewees, Alison and Nora, felt that feminism was unimportant in today's context, because women had progressed and feminism was no longer relevant. Nora experienced a marked degree of success in her career when she became a Head Teacher in her early thirties and was acutely aware that her age, race and gender were all fairly unique to this accomplishment. She was very vocal about the need for race equality and articulated some of the angst she experienced as the lone black member of staff in many work situations. Yet, she was far more accepting of the tensions caused by gender inequality, such as the inherent difficulties of trying to balance responsibility as a primary carer for a young family with demanding work commitments in a society that says we should do both. Ironically, her lifestyle was the epitome of the feminist ideals of women's independence, career progression and family life, despite her dismissal of feminism as of minor importance to her. However, from a different perspective, her situation of working outside the home, being the head of her family and holding primary responsibility for childcare and the household, has historically been the situation for many African Caribbean and African American women. Perhaps the main difference for Nora, as is increasingly the case for professional women (Purcell, 2000), is that her earning capacity and autonomy enable her to buy in help at home and thereby manage the demands of a successful career. Thus, she is in a relatively privileged position, where the difficulties of striking the balance are attenuated somewhat.

Joseph and Lewis (1986) concluded that many of the black women respondents in their research expressly rejected the feminist movement, although they would often voice opinions that supported some of the main tenets of the feminist struggle. I observed the same tensions, even though the majority of interviewees identified feminism as important. Almost all of the narratives demonstrated an underlying belief in the feminist ideology of ‘changing the structures that shape women’s lives’ (Mogadime, 2003; 11) and placed importance on women’s independence and rights, their career opportunities and the realignment or removal of the gender division in family life. However, there was a reluctance to fully identify with the feminist cause and a slight reticence to talk about it in detail. Neil, Leroy and Sean used humour to cloak their embarrassment; Eve said she was not a *proper* feminist; Elaine and Zac declined to discuss feminism and with the exception of Neil, Sean and Eve, most had little to say on the subject. Their discomfort when discussing feminism appeared, for some, to stem from a lack of identification with the subject and for others from their own sense of not being ‘politically correct’ in some of the stereotypical views they held about feminism. Whilst it is tempting to dismiss some of their perspectives on feminism as misinterpretations, the reality is that these interviewees expressed such awareness about inequality and oppression that their rejection of the term ‘feminism’ is concerning.

Many of Joseph and Lewis’ (1986) African American respondents considered feminism to be an intellectual exercise and as such, a far cry from their own concerns about gender, which were firmly focused on the day-to-day struggle for

survival. On the other hand, hooks and West (1991) warned that the interconnections between academic theory and non-academic practice should not be underestimated in black communities and Lenin famously reminded us that, 'Practice without theory is blind... Theory without practice is meaningless' (Hamer and Neville, 1998; 25). Yet, the disparities between theory and practice is a recurring theme within the black feminist literature and Mogadime (2003) provides a particularly insightful analysis of some of the conflicts that arise for black female students when trying to embrace both feminism and anti-racism within the feminist classroom. She does this by contrasting a black graduate student's experience of two women's studies classes. The first class lived up to the ideal of feminist pedagogy, promoting an egalitarian relationship between teacher and students, whereby both parties taught and learnt from each other in a style akin to Freire's ideal. However, in the second class the feminist professor was described as using authoritarian, masculinist teaching methods to silence students who challenged the racism within the feminist movement, thereby treating racism as a non-issue and perpetuating it within her classroom. Ultimately, all the black women dropped the course, feeling unable to reconcile their lived experience of racism within and outside the classroom with the theoretical discussions about anti-oppression. By contrast, all the white women stayed, including those who overtly challenged the racism in the classroom and those who privately acknowledged the injustice.

Apparently, the white women, with their lack of lived experience of racism, felt able to continue, whilst the black women were unable to reconcile the classroom theory

with their own lived experience, thus confirming Hamer and Neville's (1998) view that theory must be linked to practice to be meaningful. Arguably, those who theorise about feminism, whilst refusing to acknowledge and learn about racism, become the antithesis of feminist. Racism is akin to the experience of feminist subjugation in its power dynamic, creating a hierarchy of victimhood.

Similarly, Alison recounted the devaluing of black women's perspectives in the feminist classroom:

...the subject we'd chosen was Women's Studies, Feminism, something like that... But there was me and another black girl and [the lecturer] tended to favour the white women's opinions in the class more than the black women, which felt very strange since we were doing Women's Studies. And I didn't know about black feminist writers at the time, so she was the one that introduced all the bell hooks and the other woman... And she spoke about their work in good light, but the thing that she always used to emphasise was the role of the black women in slavery times. She used to speak about that a lot. So I just thought she was a strange woman, in that here she presents herself as an intellectual, but wasn't that broad, open minded about all types of women and their experiences. (Alison, HE Lecturer)

The two examples above highlight the irony of what happens when the black student's lived experience conflicts with the academic theories and lecturer's perspective. In both cases the dynamics of racial dominance were perpetuated in the feminist classroom with the typical scenario of white lecturer and black student. These black women students experienced a sense of hypocrisy that was too self-

destructive for them to live with and as a result the credibility of feminism was undermined in their eyes. The failure to address race at a practical level, as well as a theoretical level, by hearing the voices of black students, lies at the heart of the ambivalence that many black women and some of the respondents felt towards the feminist agenda. There was a distinct tension between participants' own genuine interest in women's issues and the feeling that academic interest, when it came to issues concerning black women or race, was merely superficial and incongruous.

Mogadime (2003) posited that holding gender above other forms of oppression can lead to blind spots and what she calls 'gender essentialism'; that is the belief that there is a universal gender experience that is common to all women regardless of race, class and sexuality. This tends to promote the middle class, white woman's experience as the single reality for women. The reality for these BAC women is that gender is but one form of the oppression they face and in dealing with race, class and gender oppression, most conveyed that race had the most profoundly negative impact on their lived realities.

Since the onset of the third wave of feminism in the 1980s and 1990s, the representation of black perspectives within feminist literature has become increasingly evident (see hooks, 1982; Collins, 1996; Mirza, 1997). It seems then, that as an anti-racist agenda is integrated more wholeheartedly into feminist discourses and activism and the popular image of feminism reflects more diversity,



BACs will be increasingly likely to embrace feminism as a viable route to anti-oppression.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter investigated participants' experiences of HE, drawing on the literature relating to race, class and gender in education.

Allen's (1998b) 'black construct of accessibility' provided the theoretical framework within which I explored issues relating to staffing, curriculum and support networks. My analysis suggests that the emphasis on independent learning styles in post-compulsory education enabled students to use emotional withdrawal as a strategy to manage difficulties in teacher-student relationships, which enhanced their ability to succeed.

There was a perception that black students received unequal levels of support from white staff. In the rare instances that participants spoke of particularly supportive relationships, the teaching staff were BMEs. Thus 'benevolent BMEs' emerged as a positive feature of teacher student relationships in HE. Respondents voiced a desire to see more black lecturers and this would serve a two-fold purpose in providing support to black students and facilitating improved understanding between black students and white staff. Their presence alone would begin to break down some barriers embedded in difference and would be tangible evidence of a commitment to diversity in HEIs.

In the absence of diversity in the curriculum, Allen (1998b) suggested that BME students seek out their own histories and heroes as an extra curricular activity and hooks (1994) proposed that black and working class students inject their perspectives into the HE environment. When possible, participants presented a black perspective in their work. However there was risk associated with this in terms of the tension it could create in the classroom and the potential for being marked down as a result.

Drawing on Reay (2001; 2003), I explored participants' experiences as non-traditional students in HE, which were often informed by their concerns about fitting in and insecurities about their own academic ability. As Allen (1998b) suggested, for many, black support networks were a crucial element in their strategies to minimise the sense of isolation.

Respondents' perspectives on women in HE revealed a sensitivity to gender inequality that was similar to their concerns over race. Whether or not female experiences of gender oppression within the educational system were what determined the female respondents, even if subconsciously, to prove their 'worth' *against* this doubly oppressive bind cannot be explored here. What is clear is that struggle informed respondents' appreciation of feminism, even despite lecturers who would denigrate female experiences of race for their hierarchical ordering. Thus, ambivalence may well have been generated out of this situation in which theory and

practice were at loggerheads with each other. This became apparent in both the appreciation of feminism as a just cause, as well as in the refusal to acknowledge its priority over race according to the lived experience of these respondents. To be a 'good' feminist may have been linked to bad theory, but nobody could legislate for good practice.

The predominance of women studying in HE (McGivney, 2004; HESA, 2008) was reflected in the fact that most female participants went on to postgraduate study and most men did not. A key difference in their narratives was that women derived great pleasure from learning, which stimulated their desire to complete Master's degrees. Most of them seriously considered studying for PhDs that researched issues pertinent to black communities. However, the opportunity cost deterred them from continuing. This suggests that they represent an untapped resource in academic life. Their strong inclination towards academia could fruitfully be employed to stimulate research that gives voice to black women's standpoints, and simultaneously increase social inclusion by tackling the low presence of black staff and the need for diversity in HEIs.

Finally, BAC perspectives on feminism were discussed in conjunction with black feminist literature (Joseph and Lewis, 1986; hooks, 1989). Despite the bulk of this literature being focussed on the USA, there were many commonalities between African American and BAC perspectives. Participants' narratives showed a belief in the feminist agenda, but some reluctance to identify wholeheartedly with the label

'feminist', because of associations with extremism and anti-man sentiments. Nevertheless, as black and anti-racist perspectives are increasingly incorporated into feminist literature and the popular image of feminism reflects more diversity, BACs are more likely to embrace feminism as a viable route to anti-oppression, as it is the label rather than the philosophy that most are inclined to reject.

Having discussed the issues relating to race, class and gender in HE, the next chapter examines the career destinations of participants.

# Chapter 7

## “Bitter Sweet”

### Graduate Careers

‘Equality in education equals equality in life’ is a widespread accepted principle that is disproved by the underemployment of Black graduates. (*Blink, 2005; 12*)

#### **Introduction**

Analysis of the professional lives of British African Caribbeans (BACs) in the UK is relatively uncharted and within the existing literature, the experiences of the broader category of black and minority ethnic (BME) professionals provides the main focal point, alongside that of black women.

This chapter contributes to the field by exploring the graduate careers of the BAC participants, who experienced a bitter sweet combination of success in gaining entry to professional careers, and frustration at battling against oppressive organisational structures that served to constrain rather than develop them. All of the participants embarked on professional careers in their chosen fields; the most favoured were

public sector careers, entrepreneurialism and community service. Most participants had pursued or aspired to some combination of all three.

Mirza (1992) notes that BAC girls tend to select 'strategic careers', in which women and BMEs have already gained entry. Reynolds (1997) identifies that many black women are attracted to the public sector. In this research, both men and women favoured the public sector and teaching careers, reflecting a pragmatism linked to race, class and gender dynamics in employment and professional training opportunities.

Despite gaining entry into professional posts, there was evidence of an 'ethnic penalty' (Modood et al, 1997) and 'sticky floor syndrome' (Nelson, 2004), with most participants facing difficulties progressing within organisations, as a result of barriers associated with race and gender. The literature identifies that growing numbers of BMEs (Employment Gazette, 1993) and women (Nelson, 2004; LDA, 2005) are embarking on self-employment, and small scale enterprise is increasingly providing an alternative to the 'corporate treadmill' (Critical 2 Limited, 2005). This was reflected in participants' inclinations towards entrepreneurial endeavours, which appealed to them as a way of circumventing the negative effects on career progress that accompanied organisational politics.

Entrepreneurial inclinations were matched by a community orientation and the two were often intertwined. Mirza (1992) highlights a strong community commitment

amongst black women and Gilkes (1982) notes that this is sometimes prioritised over financial rewards and career progress. Amongst participants, an emphasis on community service was evidenced in the seeking of employment in institutions where they felt they could have more of a positive impact on black communities. Furthermore, their voluntary endeavours and entrepreneurial ideas frequently incorporated community development initiatives that demonstrated a desire to improve conditions for BACs in society.

### **Public sector careers**

As the number of BME graduates in the UK grows, BMEs continue to face higher rates of unemployment (Employment Gazette, 1993; Reynolds, 1997) and have more difficulty gaining work on graduation (Allen, 1998b). The government report, *Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market*, states:

all ethnic minority groups... are not doing as well as they should be, given their education and other characteristics... (*Strategy Unit, 2003; 7*)

It further notes that the gap between BMEs and whites is not narrowing. There are pay differentials between highly educated men and women (Elias, 1997) and black professional women tend to earn less than their white male and female colleagues (Reynolds, 1997). Added to these inequalities, BMEs are concentrated in some sectors of the job market and all but absent in others, whilst a large proportion of black women are found in the public sector, where the priority given to equal opportunities in recruitment facilitates entry for suitably qualified BMEs.

Mirza (1992) identified that black girls were astute in selecting 'strategic careers', taking into account race and gender stratification within the UK employment market. They aspired to jobs such as nursing, social work and teaching, where there was a visible presence of BMEs and women. With caring still considered the domain of women (Hughes, 2002) and, thus, remaining relatively low paid, these careers have provided openings for women and black people to enter the lower status and lower paid professions.

Corresponding to the literature, Table 7.1 below shows that nine of the ten participants were in public sector careers at some point during the primary research. Six of these were in the teaching profession and others were employed in social services, housing and local government. Not one interviewee was employed by an organisation in the private sector.

Although pay in the public sector tends to be lower than in the private sector, public sector careers have traditionally offered additional job security and this can be an attractive inducement for those who are qualified, but vulnerable in the job market. The strong emphasis on equality in policy implementation amongst public sector employers ensures that they receive a higher level of scrutiny and are more accountable for demonstrating that they provide equal opportunities and reflect diversity. It is perhaps no surprise then, that BMEs are concentrated in the public sector.



Table 7.1: Employment sector breakdown

<b>Name</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Public/Private Sector</b>
Elaine	Local government consultant/ Self-Employed	Public/Private
Nora	Head Teacher (School)	Public
Michelle	Teacher (School)	Public
Eve	Teacher (School)/ Self-Employed	Public/Private
Alison	Lecturer (HE)	Public
Leroy	Lecturer (FE)	Public
Neil	Lecturer (FE)/ IT Trainer	Public/Public
Dean	Youth Worker	Public
Sean	Housing Advice Manager	Public
Zac	Self-Employed	Private

Much of the literature addressing race and education calls for increased numbers of black teachers (eg Education Commission, 2004; Arbouin, 1989; Blink, 2004), so I was surprised to find so many participants in the teaching profession, as only one participant was selected via any connection with teaching. Nevertheless, as BAC graduates, they are something of a minority and their ability to enter teaching careers may reflect the success of policy drives to increase the presence of black teaching staff. It may also suggest that where opportunities are opened up, black professionals are responsive in taking them up.

Another interesting dynamic is that although most of the participants were in teaching careers, teaching appeared to be a default career for most of them. The PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education) is funded and offers graduates a very structured, direct route into professional employment in a relatively short time (one year postgraduate study), with little further expense or loss of earnings. It therefore represents an attractive and accessible career choice for people from economically disadvantaged (ie working class) backgrounds.

Some interviewees' rationale for entering teaching careers reflected this dynamic, with Michelle, for example, recounting a rude awakening when she approached the end of her degree course and realised that the flood of job offers she had envisioned were not forthcoming. Her pragmatism led her to undertake the PGCE. Eve, on the other hand, had completed a teaching certificate in an FE college many years before attending university and was unimpressed by what she had seen of teaching. Nevertheless, she applied for a PGCE as a kind of security blanket after completing her Bachelors and Masters degrees.

I did the City and Guilds 7307 Teacher Training course. ...It was very trying. I always vowed I'd never go into teaching after... [Then after graduating] I was just hoping to apply for the PGCE, not knowing if teaching was for me - even though I'd hated it the first time. But I just thought even just to get the qualification, so I could actually have a profession... (Eve, Entrepreneur/ Teacher)

Similarly, Leroy completed his PGCE, but didn't enjoy the subsequent school teaching which made him averse to pursuing a teaching career. He considered teaching a 'soft option', but after several years of disappointment with his career, securing a teaching post at an FE college was an improvement. He described his journey back into teaching:

[Last year] I was mainly at home and doing some temping; carpentry and stuff... and then I ended up doing some sales work and I was trying to make ends meet. I was in my mid-thirties and got a bit desperate for some money... it was just convenient... [Then] I was contacted near the end of the summer for the position that I've got now lecturing in a college... I didn't really want to get back into teaching. Not school teaching anyway. I never really thought I'd get the position I've got, which is something that I really wanted to do straight after I finished college. And now I've got it and it's not as great, because I'd have liked to get it when I was twenty-two. So it's come thirteen years too late. ...my idea was to sort of teach part-time and do my own stuff on the side and that's still my ideal. Actually, my ideal is doing my own stuff all the time and not having to worry about money, but it's not realistic, especially in my field... I'm just being realistic. Unless you're really lucky or you've got the right sort of contacts... it's really who you know not what you know in the Arts. (Leroy, FE Lecturer)

Other interviewees were en route to something else when a teaching career became a more attractive alternative. Nora, for instance, entered teaching with the intention of just gaining the two years teaching experience required in order to pursue a career as an Educational Psychologist. However, she developed a love of teaching and

excelled in her teaching career, becoming a Head Teacher in her early thirties. On the other hand, Alison, having struggled with her first choice of degree course, faced a crossroads and decided that teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) would allow her to pursue her love of language and travel the world.

When I knew that I was going to fail [my Speech Therapy degree] I thought, 'What am I going to do?' I still liked languages and linguistics, so then I thought of English as a Foreign Language. I thought I could teach that. I had this inner desire to prove myself linguistically, because I didn't have a qualification that reflected my interest in language or linguistics. So I said, 'Right, if you do a TEFL [Teaching English as a Foreign Language] course, that will show that you can still do linguistics and then you can go away, you can travel the world'. You know, not so stressed out. (Alison, HE Lecturer)

Teaching attracts large numbers of women and their proliferation in primary schools and the lower levels of the profession is associated with the caring nature of the career. In addition, the gravitational pull of teaching is accentuated by a growing need for professionally qualified women to select careers that allow a relatively easy fit with childcare commitments. One might expect women's increasing activity in the employment market over recent years (Elias and Bynner, 1996; Purcell, 2000) to be matched by a corresponding easing of their role as primary carers within the family. However, this is not the case (Hughes, 2002; Omar et al, 2004) and a career with school holidays thus permits mothers of school age children to juggle their work and childcare responsibilities.

Michelle did a Masters degree immediately after finishing her PGCE and whereas her (predominantly white, male) peers tended to be destined for lucrative careers in industry, she had her first child soon after completion and a teaching career became a more viable option to fit in with childcare. For the same reasons, Elaine also considered retraining for a teaching career during the period of the research, but eventually moved into self-employment. This dilemma is one that many women face when making career choices at a time in their lives when childrearing becomes a priority. Michelle explains:

I want to stay in teaching. When my children are off I can be off. And I can manage my time a lot more... I'm sticking with it, because it's family orientated, not necessarily because I'm thinking this is a wonderful career and what I wanted to do.

(Michelle, Teacher)

With motherhood still considered one of the primary roles of women (Hughes, 2002) and people being increasingly defined by their careers, a significant number of graduate and professional women go into part-time employment after having children, which carries negative consequences for their earning potential. Working class women who study as mature students, thus run the added risk of failing to gain a return on their investment in adult education (Reay, 2003), because as women returning to work they are unable to compensate for their loss of earnings whilst studying.

The combined impact of poor childcare provision in the UK (Hughes, 2002; Prowess Profile, 2005) and a system that does not take account of the family commitments of workers, is that many mothers, including graduates, find themselves in work that is relatively low paid, low status and part-time. As Joseph and Lewis (1986) state:

The social reality women have to face is that motherhood and paid employment are objectively incompatible in a world that puts isolated nuclear family (the American dream unit) against the capitalist organisation of work in Western industrial society.  
*(Joseph and Lewis, 1986; 129)*

During the three years of the primary research, Michelle went through a series of part-time teaching posts in an attempt to juggle work and childcare, but was mindful of the loss of earning power. She described her dilemma of working a few hours to fit in with her family commitments, only to discover that she was unable to earn enough to cover her childcare costs. She candidly discusses the need she feels to work, rather than to stay home full-time:

...it was difficult because [the job] wasn't really paying for my childcare, but I wanted to stay at work, actually there was part of me that needed to stay at work... because I'm one of those people that work defines me... I felt like I had given everything up to be in this relationship. I felt almost like I'd become some sort of automaton... and having one foot in the world of work, I just felt like I hadn't totally gone under... so I just needed to stay in work. (Michelle, Teacher)

Despite large numbers of women and growing numbers of BMEs in the teaching profession, their numbers decrease for positions higher up in the organisational hierarchy, which remains dominated by white men. In terms of gender, this is perhaps no surprise when we consider the details of Nora's hectic lifestyle as a Head Teacher and mother. She explains that she now works a much reduced 50 to 60 hour week, sometimes running two schools and also running a part-time course in HE, which develops black teachers for leadership roles. She is the lone parent and primary carer for two school age children and buys in home help to make it possible.

[I used to work] at least 60 [hours a week on a regular basis]. But...I stopped that; the latest I leave here now is 7.30pm... It's a long week, but... this is the lightest its ever been; the [least] I've ever worked, because I hardly ever work on weekends anymore and that's made a lot of difference as well... I feel this is the right balance now. Even in the Easter holidays I only worked one day, which is really unheard of. I usually have to work at least four or five days in any holiday... And nearly every day now from 9pm till 10pm I can watch a program, and that's like luxury. I really kind of feel spoilt that I can watch some TV every night... (Nora, Head Teacher)

In spite of teaching initially providing a safe haven in which participants could utilise their skills in professional employment, all but one of the respondents expressed cynicism regarding their teaching careers. As Neil commented:

I really loved it at first, and then over the years it's just changed. (Neil, IT Trainer)

## **‘Glass ceilings’ and ‘sticky floors’**

The term ‘glass ceiling’ describes the invisible ceiling that exists within organisations that prevents large numbers of women from climbing to the higher levels of the corporate ladder. Nelson (2004) similarly uses the term ‘sticky floor syndrome’ to describe the situation where BME women remain at the bottom of their professions due to prejudice. When it comes to race, however, it is not only women who face prejudice and difficulty making career progression and Modood et al (1997) use the term ‘ethnic penalty’ to encapsulate:

all sources of disadvantage that may lead an ethnic group to fare less well in the labour market than do similarly qualified white people... (*Modood et al, 1997; 144*)

The contributory factors include longer qualifying periods in education, attendance at lower status educational institutions and discrimination in job applications (Mayor, 2002). Ultimately, the value of their degrees is reduced and BME graduates, both male and female, are more likely to gain employment in jobs for which they are overqualified (Employment Gazette, 1993; Reynolds, 1997; Allen, 1998b). Once inside an organisation, they are likely to languish on the bottom rungs of the career ladder, being forced to move sideways into a different organisation in order to progress (Reynolds, 1997).

Considering our female participants’ experiences first, Nora’s career progress was quite linear and she was something of a pioneer and success story, becoming one of



the youngest Head Teachers in her borough (and the UK) in her early thirties. Usually the only black member of staff in Head Teacher meetings, she was also amongst a minority of women to have reached that level in teaching.

Similarly, Elaine experienced little difficulty in progressing, but concurrent with the literature (Reynolds, 1997), she did so by securing new employment within different organisations, rather than gaining promotion internally. These employers tended to be local government or NGOs (non-government organisations). She then moved into self-employment in order to minimise the effects of organisational politics and create a more manageable work/life balance with her family commitments.

Eve's career was in a period of transition and after a number of years of running her own successful hairdressing business, she was about to embark on a new career in teaching. However, having recently completed retraining, she was already expressing reservations about the career move.

Michelle and Alison had insecure teaching contracts and were experiencing a level of career frustration that resonated with the literature. Both clearly indicated that people dynamics had hindered their progress and Michelle was unequivocal in her analysis that racism played a part. Like Elaine, she was also mindful that her career choices had to be balanced against the priority of childcare commitments.

In terms of the men, Zac had been successfully running his own business in multi-media promotions since shortly after graduating. Dean, a Youth Worker, was quite casual about career progression as an employee and instead focused firmly on entrepreneurial endeavours as a way forward. Sean, Neil and Leroy were, to a large extent disappointed with their career progress.

Considering the whole group, male and female, eight of the ten participants were employees within organisations at the end of the primary research and two were self-employed. Of the employees, only one (Nora) had managed to make any significant career progress and maintain a senior position since entering her chosen profession, which suggests that she was the exception rather than the rule. Despite several years in graduate employment in their chosen fields, Alison, Michelle, Sean, Leroy and Neil were all frustrated that their careers seemed to plateau at an early stage. Most of the participants, then, who were employed, rather than self-employed, voiced the problems of career frustration identified in the literature on BME graduates.

In order to tackle her career frustration, after several years in her current post on a series of part-time, temporary contracts, Alison decided to complete a self-funded MA, expecting to reap the rewards in career progression.

So at thirty-two I started the MA and loved it. I just thought, 'All this knowledge,' and 'Gosh there's so much about the language... I just love it... I really liked doing the MA and then the dissertation was in second language acquisition, which is the area that I really like. So I passed all the modules and then was quite happy when I got a

distinction in the dissertation... And so I had this MA now and still in the job, but now I feel I'm not using my MA skills as such in this job. And the way I feel about teaching now is that at first I was very interested in imparting this language knowledge to students and I was quite happy to do the analysis and the lesson preparation behind it, because it was the manipulation of language that I liked to do... but now the teaching side is not a challenge at all anymore ... (Alison, HE Lecturer)

Her enthusiasm about her subject is evident from her comments, but in spite of her many relevant qualifications and her eight years experience of teaching the subject, the desired promotion did not materialise. Sean also expressed concerns about his career path since graduation:

Amanda: How do you feel generally about your career progression since graduation? Are you pleased with it? Are you frustrated with it? Has it gone better than you'd anticipated?

Sean: It's not gone any better... It's got a foot in the door, but it hasn't overcome the same prejudices that were there in the first place. It's allowed me to get in to this position, but even so it hasn't given me that much of a leg up, because there are people in my position who haven't got a degree. All the black people in my position have got degrees, but not all the white people; in fact [it's quite uncommon]. So I don't really see it giving me that big a leg up. Although I needed it in order to gain the trust, otherwise I don't think I would have got the post. But in a sense of being respected any more within the work force, not really. Not really. Whether it's your peers, subordinate or managers, you don't get it. You don't get it at all.

Sean was well aware of the 'ethnic penalty' (Modood et al, 1997) operating in his career and rationalised that as a black man he needed to have more qualifications to gain the 'trust' to get a job that didn't actually require that qualification. He was certain that without his degree he would never have been able to secure his current post. His belief is supported not only by the fact that black graduates are often overqualified for the employment they are able to obtain (Employment Gazette, 1993; Reynolds, 1997), but also by the disparity between the education levels of his black and white colleagues. This issue of trust is raised by Wright et al (2007) when they draw on Foucault (1995) and MacLaren (2002) to examine how power networks operate to exclude black workers and the negative impacts of high levels of surveillance.

Neil, by contrast, was reluctant to cite race as a dynamic that had hindered his career progression. Although he acknowledged the existence of racism and even gave examples of his experiences, he adopted a coping mechanism of refusing to engage with it as an issue, rather than challenging it. He explained his career frustration in his previous employment, where many of his younger, less qualified colleagues in industry had climbed the ladder into management by networking. Networking, however, had not worked for him and he attributed this to chance misfortune and decided to consider a career change.

But I want to get back into Project Management. Because when I left teaching here in 1998 after about nine years, I moved to a software company as a Training Consultant.

And then I got bored of training [and] moved into [IT and Finance] Project Management, because planning and organising etc is something I really like. Then I was made redundant... So since then I've been back in teaching part-time and picking up contracts as and when. But one thing I did find actually... when I worked for the company, a lot of the managers were younger than me and didn't have half as many qualifications as me. A lot of them didn't even have a Bachelor's. They worked on experience. And this is what concerns me with education. Before I used to always tell [my students] that they should get qualifications, but now I'm not so sure. (Neil, IT Trainer)

Although Neil did not identify race as a factor, his experience reflects that of many black professionals, who struggle to climb organisational hierarchies and as a result find it necessary to change jobs in order to progress (Reynolds, 1997). Nevertheless, he described the cyclical nature of his career progression and recounted how years of frustration with his teaching career in FE (and HE) led him to leave the profession.

I don't feel I've gone around in circles, but it's not that straightforward. It certainly hasn't been easy. I do feel I've progressed. I mean, until I was made redundant, that's what sort of knocked me back... It gave me a chance to do contract work, but then that's dried up... I'd been teaching for so long, which is fine and I didn't really get to where I wanted and that doesn't particularly bother me. And I left and I'm happy with that; that I left. I talked about it and I did it. (Neil, IT Trainer)

After a period of not working, he was relieved to secure employment as an IT Trainer in a London local authority that employed large numbers of black staff. He expressed regret at the level of job he had managed to obtain and his hopes for

developing his new role also led to disappointment and a sense of being unable to utilise his existing skills and potential.

In addition to the general sense of being stuck, there were a number of reports of official or unofficial disputes at work, with perhaps the most damaging example leading to Sean's suspension on the basis of a false allegation. Despite the fact that he was vindicated, the union refused to support his request to pursue a grievance, although the allegation was of a bizarre nature and the actions of his managers were inappropriate.

I was suspended because of an allegation from a tenant... [Considering] the lack of evidence, they obviously took their account very, very seriously... before they'd even queried me they'd already made the decision to suspend... they say it's the standard procedure, but apparently it wasn't... but in the end the union said that they wouldn't support me in taking out a grievance against them... (Sean, Housing Advice Manager)

Robinson (2007) raises the issue of the lack of union support that many black workers face when trying to tackle racism or disputes within the workplace. In spite of significant evidence of mismanagement of the situation, Sean felt compelled to give up fighting his grievance, because of the financial and personal cost of pursuing it alone. During his suspension, his managers had attempted to build a bigger case against him by delving into the past and trying to discredit him with more unsubstantiated, unfounded accusations.

They [started] looking at general things relating to my conduct and trying to bring in other things... But they were trying to cover... I think they then were just looking for something for a viable reason to suspend me... (Sean, Housing Advice Manager)

Sean was adamant that race played a part in his case and rationalised that the organisation was going through a privatisation process and had an unspoken strategy to get rid of employees before the changeover. He highlighted the large number of black workers under suspension, which seems to reflect their vulnerability as an easy target within the workforce.

There's always a racial dynamic. It's just how it is. At the time there must have been four or five people of colour that were suspended and it was a time just before the changeover and I don't know whether they were trying to discourage people from coming over to the new [organisation]. I think there was only one, [maybe two] who were subsequently sacked after that. The others were reinstated. I know people who there was no case to answer, so they just came back... But the management team has been criticised by the Audit Commission and Best Value Team... (Sean, Housing Advice Manager)

Alison also described the battle that ensued when, in the absence of promotion, she sought extra responsibility within her current role for career development, having agreed it was appropriate during an appraisal. As was the case with Sean, her manager tried to undermine her by actively seeking evidence to discredit her in order to promote another less experienced and less qualified, white colleague.

I had to fight for [additional responsibility]... the frustration was that, the person that did not want me to do it was in charge of that particular course and she had gone into files and tried to seek out if there were any complaints from students... She wanted to prove incompetence, so that I could not get the position. She wanted her friend to have the position... to deliver the module and this friend had no diploma, less experience than myself, but she wanted to give him that opportunity... So she went to the organizer who is above her to discuss 'I don't want Alison to do this'. And she must have said 'Is there anything else?' because she would not have had access to files on me. So her and the person above her got together, set out an agenda for this meeting, which I was totally unaware that they were going to bring up these two issues. I thought I was just going in to talk about my ideas for module leadership and then went in and found out that they had plotted, colluded together, not to promote staff development, but to keep me down. So I had to fight and battle through that. (Alison, HE Lecturer)

Their search for reasons that might prevent Alison from progressing proved fruitless, and in the absence of ammunition, her manager reluctantly agreed to apportion her new responsibilities that might further her career. However, the emotional cost of being undermined by colleagues was immeasurable and Alison's love of her job was tainted by the negativity she felt about her work environment. She deduced that not being a member of the right clique was at the root of her problem.

Participants rarely related their negative experiences in organisations to overt racism, but were more likely to see it as covert racism or the result of being 'an outsider'. In a racialised context, few black employees manage to secure professional or senior positions and therefore those that do can often face isolation in



their careers and a degree of detachment from their communities (hooks, 1993). The literature on bicultural lifestyles (see Bell, 1990; McKenley, 2005; McKenley and Gordon, 2002; Townsend, 1982) explores the ways in which black professionals juggle the demands of predominantly white, middle class, male-oriented organisational cultures with cultural backgrounds embedded in the norms of often disenfranchised black communities. Gordon (2007) uses DuBois' (1903) 'double consciousness' in her discussion of bicultural competence and is emphatic about the need for BACs to be vigilant in attending to internal conflicts that arise from this duality. Alfred (1997) uses Collins' (1991; 2000) 'outsider within' concept to explain the 'creative marginality' that black women academics use to successfully move between the spheres of their professional and personal lives.

The price of not quite fitting in to the organisation's 'old boy network' can have a detrimental effect on career progression, not only for women, but also for black staff, and the isolation of often being the only black person in a senior position brings with it added pressure to succeed. This combination can have a negative impact on black professionals' emotional health and Allen (1998b) discusses this from the perspective of black women students in HE. He concludes that a history of being treated as a problem in society fuels black students' feelings of being under scrutiny and feeling the need to succeed on behalf of their race when they are in an isolated and esteemed position. Nora raises this in relation to work and explains:

Even now as a Head Teacher...in Islington I'm the only black Head Teacher and I'm the youngest Head Teacher and when I walk into a room when we have Head Teacher's meetings that's the thing that's always with me. I'm the only black person here. And it puts pressure on me, because the African Caribbean children are the worst performing ones in the borough and so anything that's going on, I always feel like '[Nora], all eyes are on you, you're the only African Caribbean person in this, the only black person even in this room. There's not even another African person'. And I'm under constant pressure on that point as well, because all the spotlights are going to be on me. You know, 'She's a black Head Teacher, talking about role models. How are the black children doing in her school then?' [So] I feel like I can't fail, because I'd be failing the whole race. That can be a pressure. (Nora, Head Teacher)

She also confessed a fear that becoming the 'race expert' may detract from her other attributes and lead to further marginalisation:

...sometimes I don't speak out the way that I would want to, because I'm the only black person there and I just think, I don't want to be, 'Oh Nora's on her race card again', because then when you want to say things about other things they won't take you seriously... It's a lonely cry... they do call me about race things [and] I've taken myself off to do this [course], which is about black people, because I love it and I do feel that's within my comfort zone. But I also need to make sure that I stay within things like data and finance... I need to stay in all those key areas, so that I'm not just sidelined to doing black things. (Nora, Head Teacher)

Eve also discusses the impact that being the only black person in educational and work environments can have on a person's way of being and describes the added

comfort she feels in her current post working with another African Caribbean woman. She describes the sense of feeling free to bring her cultural norms to the work environment without the prospect of reprisals or negative judgements being made:

I'm getting fed up of being the only black person in a lot of situations; not only education, but also in certain church committees... And you do have to gain these skills of how you're going to cope with it, but I've tried not to shy away from who I am as a black person, but at the same time the people that are around you, you know that they don't really understand you as a black person. And so you do feel like, not that you put that bit to one side, but like at work at the moment with Sharon I can start bussing out with patios<sup>17</sup>. We both do it with each other, but before I was there she wouldn't have had anyone to do that with. So for both of us it's really great support. And a lot of her friends outside of teaching are saying 'Sharon is really going to miss you'. And I think it's things like that. Because we can have a really good banter and we're sucking our teeth<sup>18</sup> and that kind of stuff, where you know you've still got it, it's still there, you still know about who you are as a black person, but before I came there she wouldn't have had anyone to be like that with. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Here, Eve is touching on the sense of belonging that she feels when she is able to express herself freely and reveal parts of her identity as an African Caribbean by speaking patois. She contrasts it with the sense of having to dumb down that part of her identity when she is in an all white work or education environment, not simply because people do not understand it, but because it is considered unacceptable. Sean

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<sup>17</sup> Speaking Caribbean dialect

<sup>18</sup> Typical Caribbean expression of disdain

gave examples of how BAC behaviour norms were regarded as subversive in his organisation.

Sean: ...there's lots of black people at my office and so we do kind of relax a bit, but it's not in a sinister way, but still some of the people in the office take offence and say 'Oh you shouldn't be talking patois, because we don't understand what you're saying...' And we're saying 'No, don't take it in the wrong way, we're just saying... and this is our... you know what I mean' and they just don't like it at all, because we just seem to be having too much fun... Because that's what they complain about. They say, 'Ooh, people can see you at the counter and you're laughing and joking and whatever' and [we're] saying 'Well what's wrong with laughing and joking?' ... as long as they're getting the service and you don't go over the top...

Amanda: And it looks unprofessional, too many black people laughing in the office. You can't be doing your work, can you? [Laughs]

Sean: Exactly! That's it, exactly...

This resonates with Michelle's observations about the way BAC children's behaviour in her school was sometimes treated with suspicion by teachers, who despite evidence to the contrary, interpreted their joviality as an indication that they were not working. She raised the issue of white, middle class norms dominating and the way that curtailed and labelled BAC norms of behaviour as deviant. In discussing working class experiences of education, Bourdieu eloquently conveys this sentiment:

when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself “as a fish in water”, it does not feel the weight of the world and takes the world about it for granted... (quoted in Reay, 2002; 223)

In order to succeed in education and then in the workplace BACs often find it necessary to curb their behaviour to fit in, but this is not without cost. Bell (1990) discusses African American women’s professional identity and highlights some of the strains of their bicultural existence. She also found that whereas they experienced their black networks as empowering and supportive, they felt much more at risk and cautious within their predominantly white, work-oriented networks and there was a strong sense of them feeling *only just* acceptable. She states:

They are extremely vigilant in their work environments, and they take pain in not revealing parts of their true selves. What becomes evident is that the women don’t feel safe emotionally when interacting with whites, there is a sense of distrust. (Bell, 1990; 474)

Reflecting on the experiences of Alison and Sean, where their managers actively sought out information to discredit them, indicates that this vulnerability is not imagined. Their status is as tenuous as unwanted guests at someone else’s table. Sean observed:

...it is partly to do with the racial dynamic, but it’s un-professionalism because they show favouritism. They’re not impartial, so if it’s a black person they’ll follow that issue, whereas if it’s a white person they won’t necessarily pursue that issue, they’ll

deal with it informally. That's the environment... but you just have to grin and bear it... It's a fairly good wage in Nottingham terms, but in terms of what it does to your soul, it's destroying you... You can't put a price on your soul, can you? (Sean, Housing Advice Manager)

hooks (1995) raises the issue of suppressed rage amongst black professionals who, despite their achievements, face continued discrimination in employment and life. And McKenley (2005) discusses strategies employed in the USA to assuage the anger and frustration that arise from the experience of racism in careers. She contrasts this with the absence of significant steps being made in the UK to deal with similar problems:

The US strategies include: the development of conflict resolution competencies to enable individuals to handle the racism they will inevitably experience as they develop careers, and skill-building programmes which help individuals to manage their 'rage' over the experience of racism... they are organisationally based, suggesting a shared responsibility between the organisation and the individuals of black and minority ethnic heritage. This contrasts markedly with the UK experience where their race experiences seem to be something ethnic minorities are expected to work on individually. (McKenley, 2005; 158)

In the UK there are growing numbers of black support networks, particularly in those professions that have large numbers of black staff, such as Social Services. Also, legislation has evolved so that, for example, the recent amendment to the Race Relations Act acknowledges the subtlety of racism by giving weight to the

complainant's *perception* of discrimination, as well as to the facts. Nonetheless, the evidence from this research suggests that the additional problem of racism in employment persists for black professionals. In the face of these difficulties, black women in the UK are increasingly considering emigration and setting up their own businesses as an alternative to battling through the organisational politics that plague their graduate careers (BBC Radio 4, 22 January 2006). The next section will explore this phenomenon in relation to research participants.

### **Entrepreneurialism**

Entrepreneurialism is providing a new direction for increasing numbers of black graduates and women, who face the type of obstacles in the workforce discussed earlier in this chapter (Nelson, 2004; Maurey, 2005). The changing labour market has brought a general growth in self-employment (Purcell, 2000), but this is more common amongst BMEs (Employment Gazette, 1993) and over the past decade increasing numbers of BME women have started up businesses of their own (LDA, 2005). In London, 29% of black women own businesses making them the most likely amongst women to set up their own enterprise (LDA, 2005) and in the USA the proportion of black women who own businesses is the highest of any racial group, exceeding that of even white men.

Entrepreneurialism surfaced as a strong theme during the interviews that focussed on careers. Five of the interviewees had been fully self-employed at some time during their career and a further three had been partially self-employed, making a total of

eight out of ten who had been entrepreneurs. All of those who no longer worked for themselves expressed a desire to return to self-employment as a career aspiration. Their business ventures, represented in table 7.2, included hairdressing, printing, consultancy, coaching, furniture design, private tutoring, multi-media promotions, alternative therapy and property management.

Table 7.2: Self-employment

<b>Name</b>	<b>Occupation/ industry</b>	<b>Full/Part-Time</b>
Elaine	Management consultant	Full-Time
Eve	Hairdresser; Property management	Full and Part-Time
Michelle	Private tutor	Part-Time
Dean	Alternative therapist; Property management	Part-Time
Leroy	Furniture designer	Full and Part-Time
Neil	Coach	Part-Time
Sean	Printer	Full-Time
Zac	Multimedia promotions	Full-Time

Self motivation, determination and drive are characteristics often associated with entrepreneurs and these attributes were evident amongst participants throughout the research. In addition to these, the literature suggests that male entrepreneurs are likely to be risk takers and that successful networking is a strong characteristic amongst female entrepreneurs (Nelson, 2004). Nelson (2004) argued that women are the single most untapped human resource and that encouraging business start ups amongst them could provide a route out of poverty for large numbers of women.



Barclays (2005), similarly acknowledged the contribution of BME enterprises to the UK economy and the potential for it promoting economic inclusion that would generate social and financial capital. Their research identified that BME entrepreneurs were more likely to be professionally qualified or graduates and highlighted the ‘desire to be their own boss’, ‘independence’ and ‘making money’ as key motivators.

Participants’ routes to self-employment were varied, but a few patterns emerged. The first cluster were young entrepreneurs, who launched their first businesses in their twenties, after just a few years of working in their chosen fields. Neither Sean, Eve nor Zac had any business background or mentors to guide them through the business start-up process, but their drive and motivation stood them in good stead. Sean left school with few qualifications and after a period as a trainee Electrician he moved into the print business. He describes:

I worked for a printers... Did that for maybe four, five years... and then started my own printing business... I found it hard first of all getting finances. I knew very little about what it took to run a business, other than the few bits and bobs that I’d read for myself, but then I just decided to go for it really. Had a bit of advice from a friend that was also in printing... And I got a couple of reasonable contracts. And people came to work for me, but although I could get the contracts in, it’s getting the money and having the leverage to deal with some of the larger clients in terms of getting the money in once you’d done the job... It wasn’t doing fantastic, but it was ticking along. (Sean, Housing Advice Manager)

After a few years, Sean went into partnership with a friend, but within a matter of months the business folded and he went through a 'period of rediscovery' that resulted in his return to education.

Eve's transition to self-employment followed a few years of employment in a popular salon:

When I left Slick Salon I was twenty-one... I just had these great ambitions of working for myself... So at the age of twenty-one, I decided to go into my first business venture, which was to have my salon in town. And it felt absolutely fantastic. I had to work really hard... But even when I look back then the rent was something like four hundred pounds a month and that was in 1988. It was high, but I probably had more money in the bank then than I have now. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

In her thirties, she was still running a successful business as a mobile hairdresser, whilst pursuing a number of part-time and then full-time qualifications. Having recently completed her Teacher Training and her first year of teaching, she is contemplating the idea of continuing in business. Her entrepreneurial spirit is indomitable.

I love working for myself. Not just in hairdressing, but I am a hard worker and I think it gives you that buzz to learn things for yourself and do things for yourself. It makes you more independent... It's brilliant; freedom. (Eve, Entrepreneur/Teacher)

Despite the disapproval of his lecturers, Zac's astute business acumen led him to develop his skills in Computer Aided Design (CAD) whilst studying for his degree. His livelihood is now dependent on those skills.

I met people that had actually done [my] course [and] the majority of them weren't working, even though they were really good... So I said to myself 'I'm going to have to do something that's going to get me a job.' Now at the time I noticed that looking at the ads for industrial designers it all came back to this so called CAD/CAM, which we weren't being taught. We were being taught traditional skills, but not really computer based design. We had a great CAD facility at the place and nobody was using it to do design. I said to myself, 'Right, I'm going to have to learn this thing against what the tutors were saying'. This is why certain tutors turned against me, because they saw that I was still doing my course, but doing this other thing as well. And presenting my work in a non-traditional way. So when it came to my final year, the majority of my work was computer based, using multimedia technology... And when I left polytechnic, I realised that there was this kind of buzz word going on - Multimedia [and I] realised that 'I've done a bit of that...' So [I thought] let me try and pursue seeing what this multimedia thing is about. So, I put my portfolio on a floppy and it was interactive. So you could see my work, there was sound, there was a Curriculum Vitae; basically a presentation on a floppy. That was ten years ago. I sent that around to several agencies and I had phenomenal response really, because it was like 'What is this! A presentation on a floppy!' So I got a lot of work from that. And people coming back saying 'Look, do this for my company...' And I started to do that on a freelance basis... I got some work from some ad agencies, and then working on some large campaigns and stuff. But then I took a step back and thought, 'You know what, your setting up too much people here. I'm doing alright out of it, but there's also an opportunity here to do your own thing.' So, [me and my business partner] set up and then from there it's

just gone on. Multimedia, literally... it's happening, it's here and now. You can't go through a day without seeing some interaction, whether it's video, touch screen information, even using a cash point. (Zac, Entrepreneur)

'Alterpreneurs' have recently been earmarked as a new breed of alternative entrepreneurs, who seek to create a more suitable work/life balance tailored to meet their own specific needs. Rather than aspiring to grow large businesses for the sake of enterprise and vast wealth, they are motivated to start up small businesses as an alternative to the 'corporate treadmill' of traditional employment (Critical 2 Limited, 2005). And increasing numbers of women are turning to self-employment as a viable way of juggling family commitments and childcare whilst harnessing their earning potential (LDA, 2005).

In line with this, the second cluster of entrepreneurs in this research were mothers. Elaine began working for herself in her early forties. She had enjoyed a successful career working for local government and development organisations when she decided to take the plunge and become a freelance consultant. Motivated in part by her disillusionment with her employers, her decision was also largely fuelled by the demands of trying to balance a career with her primary responsibility for childcare. Elaine describes her transition to self-employment positively;

I've given up working full-time. I'm self-employed now [and] the work situation has made quite a big difference in the home life, because now I'm spending much more time with my children than I was before... I was a Principle Consultant [but] for a

number of reasons, including that the work never seemed to be in my area, it just always seemed to be somewhere else that's the back of beyond from here. So I guess that's one of the things that I didn't enjoy about it. But I did enjoy the experience of acting as a consultant. So initially I just planned to hand my notice in and then I spoke to somebody that happened to be my line manager at the time and they said 'Why don't you register with us and go freelance, just do it as your own business. We'd still use you... We've got a good working relationship with you...' And so that's what I did... So, I do more or less the same work - consultancy for local government. I get some work through [my previous employers] and some through word of mouth. I haven't actually done lots of canvassing and marketing, most of the work has just come in through knowing people... And that's working really well. I don't have loads and loads of work, but I have enough work to keep me busy, so that I can still have time with the children and do stuff around the house and that. So it's just a much more leisurely lifestyle. And I suppose the thing I always thought would be difficult would be money and actually I haven't noticed it at all... Probably I've earned [the same] but have only done about four month's work for a year. But I suppose I wouldn't have been able to do it if I didn't have a husband who did have a secure income, because obviously you've got to pay the mortgage every month, you've got to pay your childcare fees every month. Whereas I didn't have any money at all until probably December and then I got £30,000 all at the same time. But it's quite liberating. And now I think why don't [more] people do it... (Elaine, Consultant)

She elaborates on her motivation for self-employment and the additional freedom and flexibility that it has given her, in sharp contrast to her previous lifestyle of never feeling she had enough time for her family:

spending time with the children was a motivation as well. It's just like, why do you have children and then spend all your time sending them to nursery and just rushing them around? Rushing them to get to school, rushing them to have a bath, rushing them to have their tea, rushing them to bed, haven't got time to read a book to them... and I know that in comparison to a lot of people the work style that I had was really flexible anyway. But the difference is just amazing... you can say to people, 'Yeah I can do that contract, but I'm not working that week, because it's half term' and nobody will bat an eyelid... Would they be like that to their own employees? They wouldn't... (Elaine, Consultant)

Despite having lots of work in the first year of business, Elaine and her family relocated to Europe and she experienced a period of much reduced activity for her business. She commented:

I haven't done any work since November, which I'm sure I should feel bad about but I don't... and then part of me thinks well, its just as well that I haven't had any work, because [my husband]'s had work permanently and its just been nice to be able to be with the kids... (Elaine, Consultant)

Although she and her husband both did freelance consultancy, her particular skills commanded a higher rate of pay. Nevertheless, she remained the primary carer for their children and continued undertaking the majority of household chores. Omar et al (2004) establish that married BME women entrepreneurs frequently face difficulties juggling the demands of their business with a main responsibility for childcare and the home, and are generally dependent on informal support networks

for coping (Omar et al, 2004). Even so, they find self-employment worthwhile in terms of the flexibility it allows. These gendered difficulties contrast with Sweden, where female entrepreneurialism is flourishing and provision of childcare is a government priority. Notably:

childcare was not once mentioned as a barrier to starting an enterprise, whereas in the UK it is one of the most frequently cited obstacles. (*Prowess Profile, 2005; 16*)

Elaine goes on to reflect that conforming to traditional gender roles within the home has in many ways proved more rewarding than the exhausting reality of juggling career and family as a professional woman:

At the end of the day, maybe you should just conform to the roles. Maybe it's just a lot less stressful, 'cause now, I guess I do conform to the role. I do the cleaning, the cooking and stuff. I don't do no outside work 'cause that's man's job.... and the house runs a lot nicer. And it's like 'Don't talk to me about finance.' That's another thing, I've stopped being worried about it, it's like [my husband says] 'We haven't got enough money,' [and I say] 'Oh yeah, what do you want for dinner?'... (Elaine, Consultant)

Although her comments were tongue in cheek, it's true that the demands of career and family can prove a heavy burden for professional women to manage comfortably and Amanda Patel presented a thought provoking discussion that explored whether today's women were being sold an unrealistic dream of 'having it all' (*30 Minutes, 3 February 2006*). When a group of teenage girls studying for

A'levels were asked what they had been taught in preparation for juggling career, partner and children, the universal response was 'Nothing'. Yet, this was a key issue that each of the mothers in this research struggled to deal with.

Interestingly, although most participants had entrepreneurial leanings, few of them thought it was important to work for yourself *per se*, and their entrepreneurial endeavours served primarily as a means to an end. Participants' description of freedom, autonomy and financial security as key benefits of working for themselves concurs with the findings of Barclays (2005). However, Barclays (2005) overlooked the dynamics of racism in their research and Maurey (2005) indicates that many BME women are finding it necessary to create their own job if they wish to obtain work commensurate with their qualifications and experience. Additionally, a survey by CI Research (2006) found that, unlike other BME entrepreneurs, the most common reason for starting up their own business for black respondents was to make better use of their skills. This view was corroborated by my research, because self-employed participants felt that their skills, rather than their race, determined their business success. Zac stated:

Working for myself I don't think [race has] had an impact at all. I think if anything people were surprised in the earlier days when I came knocking on the door... when they were expecting somebody to arrive at their door to do this whiz bang presentation. I could see in some of their faces that, 'What, it's you! You're going to do this for us!' ...You can just tell that people were surprised. And I'm a person that kind of says, 'At the end of the day, I'm not here to prove myself to you. I know what I can do. If



you want it, you want it. If you've got a problem, then that's your problem, not mine'.

(Zac, Entrepreneur)

Zac's statement also supports Barclays' (2005) finding that BMEs rarely experienced overt discrimination in business. Rather, as this research illustrates, it is the discrimination in employment that acts as the motivation to set up their own enterprises. The obstacles faced by participants in relation to career progression in organisations were associated with them as a person, rather than with their skills. Self-employment, then, enabled a shift of emphasis, from fitting in with colleagues, to having the ability to fulfil the requirements of the job.

In spite of his qualifications, experience and community endeavours, such as being a Magistrate and School Governor, Neil's desired career progression remained elusive. He has now begun to explore the prospect of self-employment as a Life Coach. He confesses to not being particularly inclined to entrepreneurialism, but his ongoing career frustration has motivated him to consider self-employment.

For Sean, the folding of his first business led to his return to adult education and after graduating, he secured local authority employment. However, his employers have privatised and he faces job insecurity, as well as a less regulated environment of office politics, including racial dynamics, which was discussed earlier. He explains his motivation to return to self-employment:

I could actually be nurturing the potential and trying to progress within the field I'm in, but I don't feel that's the direction for me, because I can see a lot of the barriers that are there. There's still racial barriers that are there and there are still a lot of stereotypes. There's still a lot of favouritism going on within the organisation that I can see. So, yes education helps, but there are still a lot of influences within a particular organisation that put the biases there. So, I don't see it as the way forward. I see the way forward is starting your own business and being fair within your own organisation and having total control really. (Sean, Housing Advice Manager)

In response to these career frustrations and his ongoing desire to work for himself, he is currently incubating two business ventures. The first of his two ideas is intended as a launch pad to generate more capital, which would in turn enable him to start up his second idea, which is more community-oriented and much closer to his heart.

In *The Black Middle Class* (BBC Radio 4, 22 January 2006), Mike Phillips opined that people who are setting up their own businesses in response to constraints within the mainstream will be central to the development of a more prosperous segment amongst black communities in the UK. But the fact remains, that although black Britons are more likely to consider self-employment (Nelson, 2004), there are relatively low numbers of BACs recorded in the official statistics for self-employment (Barclays, 2005).

One of the key factors in this is poor access to funding (DTI, 2003; Maurey, 2005) and the multiplier effect of race, class and gender bias takes its toll. For instance, when regeneration funding is available, it is more likely to go to applicants from middle class areas who propose the development of businesses within deprived areas, rather than to applicants from the regeneration area itself (Dawe, Fielden and Woolnough, 2006). This has implications for BMEs who are often concentrated in these traditionally poor communities and the LDA (2005) identified that uneven distribution across ethnicities leaves BMEs at a disadvantage. Sean, in this research, was not alone in describing this as an issue for his first business and a stumbling block for his subsequent ideas.

Dawe, Fielden and Woolnough (2006) looked at the experiences of men and women in gaining access to finance for business and found that women are more likely to require loans for business start-ups, compared to men who tend to have access to savings. In response to these issues, the Strategic Framework for Women's Enterprise (DTI, 2003) set a target of increasing funding for BME women's business start ups. Subsequently, the LDA proposed:

Regional fund managers could be encouraged to aim for full allocation of percentage distribution to BME-owned businesses. (*LDA, 2005; 9*)

Another factor in this is the need for appropriate business mentors (Nelson, 2004) and each of the young entrepreneurs, Eve, Zac and Sean, highlighted the absence of

business mentors for them when they started up. Increasing access to these would assist them in avoiding some of the common pitfalls in business and develop their business management skills.

Encouraging entrepreneurialism amongst BMEs and women has been identified as a potential opportunity for increasing social and economic inclusion in the UK (Barclays, 2005; Nelson, 2004). Similarly, small businesses can offer flexibility for women who need to juggle caring commitments (LDA, 2005) and an alternative to the 'corporate treadmill' (Critical 2 Limited, 2005). If governments really want to increase business start ups amongst BMEs as a way of promoting economic and social inclusion, these inequalities must be addressed with more initiatives like those mentioned above which target BME communities.

The entrepreneurial spirit of the graduates in this research was often intertwined with a community orientation and it is to this aspect, viz., the influence of community commitment in participants' careers, which I will now consider.

### **Community orientation in BAC careers**

There is evidence of an inclination to community building as a common factor among BME women (Maurey, 2005) and Gilkes (1982) highlights the ways that black women professionals have negotiated careers and community commitment. Mirza (1992) in her research on the career aspirations of young BAC women found a strong inclination to community commitment, with her participants expressing a

desire to improve conditions for black communities by working in caring professions such as teaching, social work and nursing. Reay's (2003) findings concur with this, identifying volunteering in the community as a common theme, as well as a strong motivator amongst her mature, working class Access students.

In this research, the desire to improve conditions for the BAC community by providing services to meet their needs or by 'giving back' in some way, arose as another dimension to career aspirations that was often closely aligned to entrepreneurial ideas. Most of the participants' businesses to-date had not specifically been geared to niche BAC markets, but a number of these graduates sought to combine entrepreneurialism with serving community needs.

Dean, for example, had a number of business ideas related to community development, including the provision of services such as holistic therapy for the elderly and mentoring for young BACs in a community centre style environment:

a venture from me here would be going into schools like a mentor, but I want to get an organisation where teachers are answerable... (Dean, Youth Worker)

He had built up an understanding of how to access government funding for such projects and expressed a strong desire to ensure that ventures were under the control and ownership of the BAC community, rather than a local authority. This, he

argued, would ensure that when funders changed their priorities, as had happened in the past, all would not be lost.

Sean also described a community oriented idea that would utilise his existing skills base and help to improve conditions for BAC communities. He explained:

I'm in the process of developing a website and it's going to be an advice web site for people of Afro Caribbean origin... Because with knowledge you can empower yourself, because you can challenge these systems. (Sean, Housing Advice Manager)

This community spirit was reflected in the career choices of Eve, Nora and Michelle, who saw added value in working in schools with diverse student bodies and large numbers of black and BAC pupils. The additional benefit they were able to bring as black teachers in terms of improving the BAC school experience was matched by a sense of being (more) appreciated within that role. Michelle chose to move from a popular, well resourced, private school to work in a less successful, but more diverse state school, because of the race and class dynamics that impacted on her ability to work in each environment. Regarding the private school she commented:

[Posh High] wasn't working, because... I didn't really suit that environment very well... and although I was one of the most qualified there anyway, so it wasn't that I was out of my league educationally, but culturally I was not welcome there... It was very middle class, very white, the parents were paying. I could tell that quite a few parents weren't very pleased when they turned up to parents evening and I was there with my

locks and my brown face and they didn't want to shake your hands... (Michelle, Teacher)

She drew comparisons with the sense of belonging and feeling appreciated that she experienced in her next school, where although the resources were more stretched, the population was far more diverse and multicultural. She also expresses her satisfaction at having secured a full-time contract.

I'm pleased, because I feel that that is a little bit of a success, because I'm the only [temporary staff] that they've kept. They haven't got the money, but they've still kept me anyway. And I am enjoying the work there, not just the teaching but the interaction with the children and the other staff... its in Lambeth so a lot of the children are black, but because its in Clapham you've also got a lot of middle class white children, so there's a real mixture... and at the moment I'd say the predominant culture in the school is black. (Michelle, Teacher)

For some, this strategy of forfeiting opportunities to work in more prestigious institutions not only served as a way of giving something back to BAC communities, but simultaneously minimised feelings of isolation within their profession. Whereas Reay (2003) notes that this type of community commitment can affect women's financial return on investment in HE, Gilkes' (1982) suggests that for some professional black women

success is defined in terms of community achievements and positive evaluation by colleagues, rather than material rewards. (*Gilkes, 1982; 289*)

Voluntary endeavours provided another example of participants' growing desire to serve black communities and several saw their involvement in the research project as one way to improve conditions for black communities by telling their story and promoting an agenda to deal with the issues they had faced in education and careers. They also wanted the opportunity to encourage black children and Zac, reflecting on his own early days in special school, commented:

I'm getting to a stage where I feel that I've got to give something back. I haven't reached that stage yet, but I do feel I want to give something back. Whether that's mentoring younger black boys or adopting a boy or whatever... whether it's a young sixteen year old, just saying, 'Look, you can do this. These things are there.' Because the kids, especially black boys, they need to see that you can be... you don't have to be a footballer, a pop star, in sport to make money. As a black person you can do all these other things and you can start from being... from going to a special school and getting your sweets and stars and stuff. (Zac, Entrepreneur)

Zac followed this aspiration through by later becoming a business and entrepreneurship mentor and Michelle demonstrated her commitment to community development by embarking on a Supplementary Saturday School project. She explained the purpose and her rationale:

[I run a] Saturday School...I've got ten children that come regularly... I'm having to teach the children Maths and Science and History... It was mainly to help black children, but not just for black children [and] I just wanted them to understand a little



bit about Africa and the Caribbean. And give them a flavour of that, because our schools... the way they teach is Eurocentric. But the damaging thing if your ancestry is not in Europe you begin to feel that your group hasn't contributed to anything and you're almost fortunate to be here in Europe. But that is very much a power and control thing and in order for you to be able to contribute to any society that you're in you need to have a good confidence in your own self and in what your people have done. So you come back with something positive. So that's why I'm teaching them an African language. Not because I expect them to be fluent in it... (Michelle, Teacher)

The community orientation, combined with the entrepreneurial spirit of the graduates in this research, suggests that linking small business and community development initiatives to the increasing numbers of BME and BAC graduates could provide an ideal opportunity for the regeneration of communities in the UK and the promotion of greater economic and social inclusion.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter examined the extent to which participants felt that their present careers and career prospects were commensurate with their academic achievements, in order to consider the extrinsic value of education for BACs. Clearly, graduation enhanced the career prospects of all participants, enabling each to embark upon a professional career, which for a small minority was extremely rewarding. However, for the majority an 'ethnic penalty' (Modood et al, 1997) served to reduce the value of their degrees, curtailing their return on investment in higher education.

Key themes arising from this analysis were respondents' predisposition towards public sector careers, entrepreneurialism and community. Public sector careers, and in particular teaching, emerged as popular choices for careers amongst research participants. A clearly defined career route and funding for training, combined with the emphasis on equal opportunities in recruitment within the public sector, ensured that participants' graduate qualifications secured entry. However, many remained at the lower levels of their chosen professions and their career frustrations were punctuated by official and unofficial disputes and conflict, frequently viewed as arising from covert racism and not fitting in.

There was evidence of a strong entrepreneurial spirit amongst participants and this was in some cases a consequence of them seeing their careers plateau at an early stage. The shift of focus towards entrepreneurial endeavours was seen as a possible way forward that would enable them to bypass organisational constraints and utilise their existing skills base to their own advantage. The vast majority of interviewees had been self-employed at some point during their careers, but for some, poor access to funding was a key barrier to bringing their ideas to fruition.

In addition to the race dynamic, there was also a gender dynamic to both teaching careers and entrepreneurialism. Teaching enabled mothers to work similar hours to their children's school-time and self-employment allowed a degree of flexibility that enabled them to manage the demands of work and family commitments more effectively. Nonetheless, the conflicting demands of paid work and childcare had

negative consequences for the mothers in the research, creating an ongoing challenge in trying to sustain an appropriate balance.

The inclination towards community development was closely aligned to an entrepreneurial spirit and several participants were currently incubating business ideas that contained a community building dimension. Community orientation was also evidenced by voluntary work and career choices that provided an opportunity to 'put back' into BAC communities.

The participants in this research represent part of a growing pool of professionally qualified and skilled BACs in Britain who are achieving in the face of societal structures that serve to limit their options. On the one hand, the inequalities that many have faced in the workplace have led to a waste of their talents and ability. On the other hand, their inclination towards entrepreneurial and community endeavours suggests an opportunity to harness that potential and redirect it towards regenerating BAC communities. It, therefore, seems that investment in BAC graduates such as these could serve to build more vibrant communities and a stronger UK economy.

# Chapter 8

## Conclusions

In a racist society for a black child to become educated is to contradict the whole system of racist signification...to succeed in studying white knowledge is to undo the system itself...to refute its reproduction of black inferiority materially and symbolically.

*(Casey, 1993; 123)*

### **Introduction**

This chapter concludes the thesis by drawing together the main findings of the review of the relevant literature and the analysis of the primary data. Reproduction theory (eg Bourdieu, 1977), critical race theory (eg Solorzano, 1998), black feminism (eg hooks, 1994) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) provided the theoretical framework for the thesis. The existing literature explores the experiences of British African Caribbeans (BACs) during the stages of their education, including schooling (eg Mac an Ghail, 1988; Wright, 1988), post-compulsory education (eg Mirza, 1992; Reynolds, 2006) and higher education (eg Modood and Acland, 1998). The careers of black and minority ethnic (BME) professionals are also explored by authors such as Reynolds (1997) and Nelson (2005).

The contribution of this thesis is to use this body of literature in order to gain an overview of the broader picture. By examining the whole journey of research participants from education to career, the research builds upon understandings of how individual BACs interact with societal structures and institutions to achieve educational success. The extrinsic value of education for BACs was explored by considering the extent to which participants felt that their careers and career prospects were commensurate with their qualifications.

Employing a qualitative research approach, this study sought to gain insight into the educational experiences of ten BAC graduates, who were born in the United Kingdom (UK) of African Caribbean parents and educated entirely within the British educational system. The thesis explored, from their perspectives, the experiences and perceptions of the education system, from compulsory schooling through to higher education institutions (HEIs) and the resultant career outcomes. The overarching research questions were:

- ❑ How do BAC graduates experience the structures of race, class and gender in schooling, higher education (HE) and employment?
  
- ❑ What resources do BAC graduates draw upon to navigate these domains and enable their successes?

- In what ways do BAC graduates consider it important to contribute their skills and experiences in order to challenge the structures of race, class and gender in British society?

The main body of this chapter is divided into four sections which summarise the answers to the three research questions and indicate the policy implications. Thus, the first section examines how the structures of race, class and gender are experienced by BACs in education and employment. The second section highlights the strategies that these participants used to achieve success despite the difficulties they encountered. The third section explores the ways in which these graduates feel that they can use their skills and experiences to challenge the structures of race, class and gender to benefit other BACs at a community level. Policy implications and further research directions are outlined in the fourth section. Finally, I conclude the chapter and thesis with a summary of the research findings.

### **Experiencing the structures of race, class and gender**

The thesis contributes to the literature by confirming and reinforcing to a large extent what is already known about the impacts of race, class and gender on BACs in education (eg Mac an Ghail, 1988; Mirza, 1992; Sewell, 1997) and career (eg Reynolds, 1997; Nelson, 2005). However, it goes beyond this by extending our understanding of the structural trajectory across the domains of compulsory education, post-compulsory education and career for BAC graduates. This section answers the first research question by outlining that trajectory, identifying some of

the common experiences of the structuring effects of race, class and gender amongst participants.

The educational journey begins with the school experiences of research participants and the findings suggested that both race and social class dynamics have a detrimental impact on many BAC children's access to effective schooling. Gender compounds this effect, leading to differences in outcomes along gender lines.

According to the narrow definition of government policy, five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C including English Language and Maths, is the benchmark of school success. Eight of the ten graduate participants failed to achieve this target by the end of their compulsory schooling. The typical school trajectory for participants was, thus, quite disturbing, which concurred with the literature. The DfES (2003) reported that the performance of BAC pupils is often better than their counterparts from other ethnicities when they start school, but declines as they progress through the education system, until they emerge as one of the lowest achieving ethnic groups at school leaving age. This pattern was reflected amongst the research cohort, many of whom started off well, but acquired little by way of school leaving qualifications. Narratives were littered with references to unfulfilled potential and negative experiences, especially in secondary school.

Working class children in poorly resourced, inner city schools are less likely to enjoy educational success than their middle class counterparts and there is a long

history of socio-economic class being closely linked to academic achievement levels (Reay, 2001). The history of colonialism and post-war mass immigration from the former British colonies positioned first generation African Caribbean migrants firmly amongst the British working class in terms of their access to jobs, housing and education (Coard, 1971). The situation for the twenty first century is much the same. BAC children are largely concentrated in inner city schools (Rhamie and Hallam, 2002) and the research participants were no exception. Very few of their parents were educated to graduate level or in professional occupations and all participants attended non-selective, state secondary schools, where several felt that there was generally insufficient emphasis on academic achievement.

However, issues of class are compounded by issues of race for BAC children (Education Commission, 2004) and the relationship between social class and educational attainment is less evident amongst black pupils than white pupils (DfES, 2003). Furthermore, gender dynamics alter the experiences of girls and boys and black boys from middle class backgrounds tend to achieve less than their working class counterparts from other ethnicities (Education Commission, 2004), whereas black girls tend to achieve more than their white counterparts from similar socio-economic circumstances (Mirza, 2005).

The most fundamental issue that emerged in discussions was the impact of poor teacher-student relationships, which were fraught with difficulties and underpinned by negative racial stereotyping. Boys were largely affected by peer groups coming



into conflict with teachers. They received a significant amount of encouragement for sports, but little encouragement to develop their academic potential and the self-fulfilling prophecy of failure was played out, with four of the five boys leaving school without O'levels<sup>19</sup>. The girls were most affected by low teacher expectations, often reflected by streaming into lower ability groups and poor careers advice. Ironically, the role that teachers played in hindering the girls' progress was more glaringly obvious because of the absence of outright conflict. Four of the five girls left school with two or three O'levels.

In addition to this, parental involvement in the learning process is considered one of the most important elements of school success (Desforges, 2003) and a key problem faced by many BAC children is the inability of their parents to secure a good education for them and challenge unfair treatment when it occurs (McKenley, 2005). Working class parents tend to see education as something that happens only at school (Evans, 2006) and many BAC parents retain a blind faith in the system (Coard, 1971). As a result, despite high expectations from parents and family discourses of 'education as the key to success', many participants felt that their parents' hands-off approach to education informed their reluctance to challenge teachers' authority, which, in the most extreme case, resulted in a participant's expulsion. Thus, school experiences were largely about learning to fail, a trend that began to change as they progressed into post-compulsory education.

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<sup>19</sup> GCSE grade A\* to C equivalents

Participants' accounts of their journeys from leaving school to entering HE correlate with much of the literature regarding BME and BAC experiences of adult education (eg Mirza, 1992). Only one interviewee followed the traditional path to HE, completing O'levels at sixteen, A'levels at eighteen and then continuing directly on to her degree course. The other nine followed non-traditional routes and their progression to HE was slower than the typical middle class trajectory.

The main deterrent to HE was financial and particularly the loss of earning potential during study. This is a class-related issue and is accentuated for mature students, who tend to have more responsibilities than the stereotypical young student. The accumulation of debt and the competing demands of working whilst studying impacted on a number of participants. Although financial implications were a major consideration for the participants in this study, in the widening participation policies proposed by Dearing (1997) and Kennedy (1997), funding mechanisms were directed at educational institutions, rather than students. These policies rewarded institutions that were able to attract a more diverse student body, including people from poorer backgrounds. However, if these policies aimed at widening participation, then the removal of grants and the introduction of tuition fees gave a counter-indicative message by placing a greater financial burden on the majority of students.

Nonetheless, participants progressed into HE where they perfected the art of learning how to achieve in an educational setting. As a result they felt that their experiences

of HE were far more worthwhile and positive than those of school. They enjoyed the rewards of broadened horizons and the cultural capital of improved confidence in their own abilities. However, they were mindful of the need for more race and gender equality in HE and highlighted the impacts of a range of class dynamics. Thus, Allen's (1998b) 'black construct of accessibility' provided a theoretical framework for further exploring the impacts that lack of diversity in staffing and curriculum in HEIs had on them as BME students.

Earlier, I discussed some of the problems encountered in relationships between BAC pupils and teachers in school and the detrimental effect these had on their school outcomes. When it came to university, however, there was a marked difference in the relationships participants had with their lecturers and the reduced dependence on good teacher-student relationships was central to their success. Relationships with lecturers were generally distant, which ensured a lesser degree of antagonism, but held disadvantages of its own. For instance, in line with Allen's (1998b) research, some participants perceived that they had less supportive relationships with their lecturers than their white counterparts.

Using critical race theory Solorzano (1998) identifies 'microaggressions' as the main vehicles for racism and sexism in HE. These subtle, offensive put downs are often unintentional, but occur in numerous interactions within the institution and convey low expectations and racist attitudes. Although Solorzano (1998) implores students to challenge microaggressions in order to confront racism in HEIs, participants in

this study who gave examples of their own experiences of microaggressions did not consider complaining a viable option. The power dynamics of teacher-student relationships ensured that they suffered in silence and instead resisted by adopting a coping strategy, which involved distancing themselves from the academic staff in question and withdrawing their expectations of support. Whilst my research corroborates the evidence of both Reynolds (2006) and Rodgers (2006) that black students fail to access the available support, it also identifies this behaviour as an emotional withdrawal. Emotional withdrawal is a defence mechanism developed as a shrewd response to the onslaught of microaggressions and the unfavourable treatment BACs encounter in HE, to which their white peers are not subjected.

Added to this is the under-representation of black academic staff (HESA 1996-7; HESA 1998; Mayor of London, 2002; HESA, 2008), which exacerbates the alienation of BAC students who are starved of support from significant others who might understand the problems they face. Statistics suggest that discrimination in recruitment within HE exceeds the national average (Fenton and Modood, 1999) and this lack of diversity is an issue for many black students who express a desire to see more black academic staff, providing role models and evidence of the institution's commitment to anti-racism (Allen, 1998b). In line with this, there was a high level of consensus amongst respondents that there is a need for more black staff at various levels in HEIs. The present trend is that the few black academics that do exist tend to find themselves bearing additional, unacknowledged workloads in providing

supplementary support to black students (Mukherjee, 2001) and the needs of black students largely continue to go unmet (Channer and Franklin, 1995).

The lack of diversity in staffing is mirrored by a lack of diversity in curriculum. The need for a core curriculum in HE that includes black contributions to society reverberates throughout much of the literature on race and education and on widening participation in HE (eg Bird, 1996; Sewell 97; Acland and Azmi 1998; Van Dyke, 1998; Leicester and Merrill, 1999; Graham, 2001; Graham and Robinson, 2004). Nonetheless, a truly diverse curriculum has never materialised in universities in Britain and the absence, to a large extent, of black culture, authors, art, history and scientists perpetuates and reinforces at a subliminal level a racist, Eurocentric epistemology.

Very few interviewees felt that their course curriculum had reflected the racial diversity of either the UK or the world at large, a fact about which most were critical. In particular, Teacher Training courses received strong criticism for not preparing future teachers for a diverse school population, thus perpetuating the problem of poor teacher-student relationships and its negative consequences for BAC children.

Allen (1998b) states that black students have attempted to counter the Eurocentric bias of the mainstream HE curriculum with a 'black scepticality', which pursues a knowledge of their own histories and heroes, such as Ghandi and Malcolm X, as an

extra-curricular activity. hooks (1994), in line with this, proposes that instead of acquiescing to the white, middle class values that prevail in education, students should challenge the status quo by persistently injecting their black and working class perspectives and thereby changing the norms of the institution. When I explored this idea with interviewees it transpired that although some were creative in trying to bring a black perspective to their studies, they were acutely aware that some lecturers experienced a degree of discomfort with this and as a result there was a strong sense of risk associated with it. Channer (1995) indicates that black students are marked more harshly when they write about race from a black perspective and it was evident that some interviewees who did so, felt that they were penalised as a result. Some were, therefore, understandably apprehensive about the cost of expressing this viewpoint. Where grades and relationships with lecturers are at risk, students who are confident in their abilities are in a much stronger position than others. In particular, those who have had negative experiences of schooling and entered higher education via a non-traditional route may lack this type of cultural capital and such is the case for many BAC students. Consequently, they may be at a disadvantage and find it more difficult, in practice, to challenge these institutional norms.

Many of the interviewees entered HE as mature students and their perceptions reflected some of the common concerns in the literature on working class, mature students and BMEs, primarily regarding anxiety about isolation and not fitting-in (Allen, 1998b; Reay 2001; 2003). It transpired that before going to university, many

interviewees had ascribed to the preconception that university was not for people such as them and therefore fully anticipated not fitting in on the grounds of age, class and race.

Reay (2001) highlighted that many working class students grapple with the fear of being looked down upon when they embark upon studies in HE. She also analysed the paradox of students having to lose their working class identity in order to find an academically successful self, which by definition must be aligned to the middle class values that permeate the British education system. The experience of many research participants exemplifies Reay's (2002) contention that class difference is at the root of working class students' fear. Additionally, for BAC students, ethnicity compounded this. This was evidenced by participants' reluctance to reveal any cultural traits and references to feelings of not being able to be 'real' at university.

Another aspect of not fitting-in is the fear of failure. Reay (2001) identifies feelings of inadequacy as a feature of her mature, working class students' experience and stresses the important role that HEIs can play in either accentuating or reducing this anxiety. She attributed her students' concerns about their own ability to negative school experiences and Reynolds (2006) came to the same conclusion regarding the BAC male students in her research. For Reynolds' participants, this fear was accentuated by their perception that other people expected them to fail, because of common associations between BACs and poor educational outcomes.

In line with this, a high number of my participants said they had been concerned about their own ability before they started university and were anxious about the prospect of not meeting the standards required for their courses. The sense of inferiority that some participants conveyed suggested that their understanding of the interconnection between social class and educational achievement were so deeply rooted that they doubted the evidence of their own academic achievements. The reality of university for interviewees was that they were perfectly capable of meeting the standards and in fact, most went on to study at postgraduate level. Having completed their full-time education, participants pursued graduate careers, to which I will now turn my attention.

Analysis of the professional lives of BACs in the UK is relatively uncharted and the thesis addresses this gap in the literature by exploring the career trajectories of participants. Within the existing literature the experiences of the broader category of BME professionals provides the main focal point, alongside that of black women. By examining the extent to which participants felt that their present careers and career prospects were commensurate with their academic achievements, I considered the extrinsic value of education for BACs. The findings suggested that an 'ethnic penalty' (Modood et al, 1997) served to reduce the value of a degree for most participants, curtailing their return on investment in higher education.

There are growing numbers of BME graduates in the UK, yet BMEs continue to face higher rates of unemployment (Employment Gazette, 1993; Reynolds, 1997) and



have more difficulty gaining work on graduation (Allen, 1998b). Notably, BMEs at all levels of education and training are 'not doing as well as they should be' (Strategy Unit, 2003; 7) and the gap between BMEs and whites is not narrowing. There are disparities between the earnings of highly educated male and female workers (Elias et al, 1997) and black professional women tend to earn less than their white male and female colleagues (Reynolds, 1997).

BMEs are concentrated in some sectors of the job market and rarely found in others and many black women are found in the public sector, where suitably qualified BMEs can gain entry due to the priority given to equal opportunities in recruitment. Mirza (1992) identified that black girls selected 'strategic careers', taking into account race and gender stratification within the UK employment market. I would also suggest that although pay in the public sector tends to be lower than the private sector, public sector careers have traditionally offered additional job security and this can be an attractive inducement for those who are qualified, but vulnerable in the job market.

None of the interviewees were employed by an organisation in the private sector. Instead, all but one had public sector careers and the majority of those were in teaching. Although most participants did not set out with a teaching career in mind, the availability of funding for PGCEs (Post Graduate Certificates of Education) and the structured, direct route into professional employment in a relatively short time, makes it an attractive and accessible career choice for people from economically

working class backgrounds. It thus emerged as a default career. The teaching profession also proved to be an attractive option for mothers in the research, who invariably were primary carers. The changing shape of the UK employment market has witnessed an increased activity from women (Elias and Bynner, 1996; Purcell, 2000), but no corresponding decrease in their roles as primary carers within the family (Hughes, 2002; Omar et al, 2004). Thus, Hughes (2002) discusses the competing pressures placed on mothers who struggle to achieve a balance between family commitments and career. There was evidence of this tension amongst participants and teaching allowed a relatively easy fit with childcare commitments: teaching and childcare, or even the primary carer role writ large, were best served by the rhythm of school time.

The large number of women and growing number of BMEs in the teaching profession are not reflected at the top of organisational hierarchies, which remains the preserve of white men. And in spite of teaching initially providing a safe haven for participants to utilise their skills in professional employment, all but one had become cynical about their teaching career. The 'glass ceiling' hinders the career progression of large numbers of women, who encounter a 'gender penalty'. The 'sticky floor syndrome' (Nelson, 2005) describes the situation where BME women remain at the bottom of their professions due to prejudices of both gender and race. When it comes to race, however, it is not only women who face discrimination in their career paths and Modood et al (1997) describe this phenomena as an 'ethnic penalty'.

The experiences of most participants who were employed, rather than self employed, instantiated the problems identified in the literature on BME graduates and most remained at the lower levels of their profession. Career frustrations were punctuated by official and unofficial disputes and conflict, with participants giving examples of line managers who actively sought information to discredit them. There were also examples of participants being bypassed for career progression by other less qualified and less experienced white colleagues. Thus, at the end of the primary research, of the eight interviewees who were employed within organisations, just one had managed to maintain a senior position. Despite several years in employment, the majority of the group were frustrated that their careers seemed to plateau at an early stage.

Participants' negative experiences in organisations were frequently perceived to be the result of covert racism or being an 'outsider' and in a racialised context where few black employees secure professional or senior positions, many face a combination of isolation in their careers and detachment from their communities (hooks, 1993). As such, the literature on bicultural lifestyles (see Bell, 1990; McKenley, 2005; McKenley and Gordon, 2002; Townsend, 1982) explores the ways in which black professionals juggle the demands of predominantly white, middle class, male-oriented organisational cultures with cultural backgrounds embedded in the norms of often disenfranchised black communities. Gordon (2007) is emphatic about the need for BACs to be vigilant in attending to internal conflicts that arise

from this duality. On the one hand, some found that the price of not fitting in to the organisation's 'old boy network' had a detrimental effect on career progression. On the other hand, the isolation of being the only black person in a senior position brought added pressure to succeed on behalf of the race.

Having discussed the difficulties encountered by these BAC graduates during their education and career paths, we will now consider the resources they were able to draw upon to achieve success.

### **Resources drawn upon to enable success**

A primary contribution of the thesis is to highlight the ways in which BAC graduates use their individual agency to survive and achieve within the educational system and in their subsequent careers, despite structural disadvantages. As such, this section focuses on answering the second research question by exploring the strategies that participants employed in order to navigate success within the domains of school, post-compulsory education and careers.

Two of the ten participants left school with the desirable five or more GCSE passes, or their equivalents, at grades A\* to C. I, therefore, explored their experiences in light of the models of success presented in the literature and two different explanations for their school successes emerged. Rhamie and Hallam (2002) propose two models to explain how school success was achieved by the BAC participants in their research. The factors that facilitated Elaine's success in this

research were a combination of the components of Rhamie and Hallam's (2002) models, which is represented in my Home-Community-School model adaptation (see Chapter 4). In this model the child, home, community and school share a common orientation towards educational achievement. Both the school and parents have high expectations and communications between the two are good. The child is motivated and involved in community activities such as music lessons, which provide educational encouragement and experiences of success outside of the school environment and simultaneously developed the child's self discipline and belief in her own ability to achieve. In addition to this, the development of bicultural competence through positive involvement in a BAC community further enhanced the child's self concept. As Gordon (2007) explains, bicultural competence can ensure that people immersed in a society whose culture is not their culture of origin are mindful of potential conflicts of interest and thus able to protect their own personal well-being.

Leroy's success, on the other hand, seems to have hinged largely upon his ability and self-motivation. He did not enjoy the classic success factors, such as attending a 'good' school, high teacher expectations, strong parental involvement and positive community activities. However, the typical hurdles, such as peer group pressure and poor teacher-student relationships, did not prevent him from achieving. Gillborn (1998) asserts that black boys have to sacrifice cultural identity and the peer group for school success and that achievers survive by keeping a low profile, being non-confrontational and suppressing any characteristics of ethnicity that might threaten

teachers (Gillborn, 1990). Leroy's description of his school experience to a large extent corresponds with this theory and his ability to blend in and shrug off injustices emerge as important factors. He did not conform to the hegemonic image of black masculinity, including sporting prowess (Sewell, 1997), involvement in a peer group (Sewell, 1997; Mac an Ghail, 1988; Gillborn, 1998), speaking patois (Mac an Ghail, 1988) and rebelling against injustice (Sewell, 1997; Mac an Ghail, 1988). Bourdieu's *habitus* shows how middle class norms of behaviour set the standard in educational settings, effectively disadvantaging those from a working class background. I argue that a BAC habitus is perhaps further removed from this white, middle class 'norm', making it even more difficult to achieve success in an educational setting. Thus, although there was no evidence of Leroy consciously suppressing characteristics of ethnicity, his nonconformity to certain BAC norms of behaviour may well have facilitated his success.

Arguably, despite their very different scenarios, a common factor in Leroy and Elaine's experiences during schooling was their nonchalance regarding experiences of racism and their ability to adapt to the school environment, without becoming immersed in a black peer group. This has implications for the potential cost, in terms of alienation from BAC identity, which is often linked to school success in the UK.

During compulsory schooling about half of the interviewees had their sights set on pursuing a higher education qualification. Their paths to HE were more direct than

other participants', but still involved a series of stepping stones, which enabled them to compensate for insufficient school leaving qualifications. For others, university was never even considered an option at school and the path to HE was serendipitous. The sequence of events that spurred them on often involved a transition of some sort, as Knowles (1998) suggests. These transitions tended to include a dramatic change of circumstances and/ or encouragement from one or more significant others. The adult education literature recognises the role of a key person as a catalyst for many mature students. Channer (1995) posits that successful BACs often encounter a 'benevolent individual' who assists with careers or academic advice and thereby compensates for the shortcomings in the system. The narratives from my research participants indicate that people who acted as catalysts and facilitated the redirection towards HE fell into two categories. Some were peers who had studied in university and thus presented it as an achievable objective and others were people in positions of authority in the participants' lives who believed in their capabilities.

An additional dynamic that emerged in this research, was that in all but one case, the 'benevolent individual' encountered en route to HE was black, or actively involved in the improvement of conditions for black communities. This theme recurred in HE where, in the rare instances that participants recollected a particularly supportive relationship with a member of teaching staff, the member of staff was invariably a BME. I thus referred to these individuals as 'benevolent BMEs'. The evidence suggest that the attitude to race of a key person is instrumental in enabling them to transcend racial barriers and that the participants' closer identification with the key

person may have made them more receptive to their influence. Most importantly, this emphasises the utmost necessity of having BME and anti-racist people in key positions, who can support and encourage BAC achievement.

Many of the factors that motivate entry into HE are universal, but the emphasis can vary considerably when you compare BME students as a group to white students as a group. Allen (1998a) contends that BMEs consider the acquisition of qualifications more of an imperative for pragmatic reasons, such as economic and career success, because of their disadvantaged situation in the employment market. These sentiments were echoed to a large extent amongst interviewees, who were united in their belief that education was the key to success and that graduate career prospects would facilitate improvements to their lifestyles. The most dominant motivation to pursue HE was social mobility, expressed as ‘widening life choices’, ‘increasing earning potential’ and ‘improving career prospects’. The emphasis for most was clearly on the financial and security benefits of career progression, rather than any social status implications.

Allen (1998a) also discovered that whereas teachers and friends were more influential for white students, family expectations were more important to BMEs. The majority of respondents indicated that family expectations stimulated their progression into adult education, but in most cases this did not extend to an explicit expectation that they would progress into HE. Whereas female participants tended to perceive family expectations as support and encouragement for their own decision



to study, male participants were more inclined to experience family expectations as a pressure. By contrast, teacher expectations were insignificant as a motivating factor for participants and this ambivalence corresponds with Mac an Ghail's (1988) and Rhamie and Hallam's (2002) findings that school teachers' assessments of BACs ability is of little significance to those that succeed.

According to Allen (1998a), factors linked to the pleasure of studying are less of a motivation for BME students than for white students. However, a contrary view emerged from my research, as the 'pleasure of studying' was one of the most important contributory factors, particularly for female interviewees. In their examination of the relationship between pleasure and learning, Hughes, Perrier and Kramer (2007) argue that discourses have traditionally treated students as either a mind or a body. They propose that the objective of 'embodied pedagogy' is to achieve a synthesis of the two and transcend this duality in the existing literature. In probing this, I discovered that several of my research participants were driven by a deeply felt and powerful desire to learn. The pleasure they derived from learning seemed to go beyond the logic of mind or physical body to the powerful inner realms of the soul. The soul was defined as the central place deep within us that is the core of the being and the very essence of who we are; the place from which the deepest of emotions, inner drives and motivations come forth and where true satisfaction and contentment are experienced (Moore, 1992). Thus, like a compass, the soul can guide us through our lives and the participants who experienced great pleasure in learning tended to be the ones who sustained their studies to Master's

degree level. Consequently, I suggest that pleasure in the learning experience is a key factor to be considered in motivating BAC participation in HE and engaging the whole student, including mind, body and soul in the classroom enhances the learning process.

Returning to Allen's (1998b) 'black construct of accessibility', the role of black support networks emerged as a survival strategy used to navigate success in HE. Allen (1998b) finds that black students are inclined to develop informal black support networks, both consciously and unconsciously, in order to insulate themselves against racism and isolation in HE. Reynolds (2006) identified feelings of isolation as a key issue for the BAC male students in her research, who described an 'internal struggle' between 'university life' and 'real life'. She concludes that the development of strong peer networks amongst other black and mature students is one mechanism that can be used to alleviate this additional pressure. For most of my interviewees the role of African Caribbean Societies (ACS) and/ or other black support networks was central to their university lives. These respondents were acutely aware of the small number of black students within their HEIs and attached great importance to the opportunity to associate with students they identified with and the much needed sense of belonging it provided.

At the same time, the literature that explores BME students' methods for selecting HEIs examines some of the reasons for the concentration of black students in 'new' universities and London. Both Taylor (1992) and Allen (1998a) identify an

inclination to study close to home and a preference for institutions with an ethnically diverse population. However, Ball, Reay and David (2002) suggest that when it comes to choosing criteria, social class has more influence on BME students' choice than ethnicity. My research suggests that in addition to subjects and grades, most interviewees' methods of selecting HEI were informed by a range of race and class dynamics. The majority studied at post-1992 universities and as the literature suggests, there was evidence of a preference for institutions that were either close to family or in locations with an ethnically diverse population (Taylor, 1992; Allen, 1998a). As such, I argue that participants employed their unique BAC social capital, as opposed to middle class social capital, by tapping into black social networks such as family, church and university African Caribbean Societies (ACS), which provided a sense of security and support in HE. On the one hand, their selection techniques effectively minimised the risk of not fitting in on the basis of race and class, thereby reducing the likelihood of them dropping out due to feelings of alienation. On the other hand there was a potential down side that students could self-select out of the 'best' education.

Issues relating to fitting in at university were also evident in narratives about the workplace. The problem of being on the outside of the right social networks for career progression was raised earlier as one of the issues that hindered a number of participants employed within organisations and it transpired that entrepreneurialism was seen as a key strategy to facilitate a more independent career progression. There has been a general expansion in self-employment in the UK (Purcell, 2000)

and entrepreneurialism is providing a new direction for increasing numbers of black graduates and women (BBC Radio 4, 22 January 2006; Maurey, 2005). Nelson (2004) argued that encouraging business start ups amongst women could provide a route out of poverty for large numbers of people. Barclays (2005) similarly acknowledged the contribution of BME enterprises to the UK economy, identifying their potential to promote economic inclusion as a generator of social and financial capital.

During the interviews, entrepreneurialism emerged as a dominant theme in careers and eight of the ten interviewees had been either fully, or partially self-employed at some time during their career. Participants' routes to self employment were varied, but three main patterns emerged. The first cluster were young entrepreneurs, who launched their first businesses in their twenties, after just a few years of working in their chosen fields. The second set of entrepreneurs to emerge were mothers seeking to balance career and family commitments. Finally, there were those who were attracted to entrepreneurialism as a consequence of seeing their careers plateau at an early stage.

'Alterpreneurs' are alternative entrepreneurs, who seek to create a more suitable work/life balance tailored to meet their own specific needs. Rather than aspiring to grow large businesses for the sake of enterprise and vast wealth, they are motivated to start up small businesses as an alternative to the 'corporate treadmill' of traditional employment (Critical 2 Limited, 2005). Increasing numbers of women

are turning to this form of self employment as a viable way of juggling family commitments and childcare with earning potential (LDA, 2005). All of the mothers interviewed were primary carers for their children and two of the three embarked on self employment, largely motivated by the demands of trying to balance a career with their main responsibility for childcare. However, self employment did not erase the problem of managing family and work for these participants, despite the additional freedom and flexibility it offered.

Although most participants had entrepreneurial leanings, few thought it was important to work for themselves *per se*, and their entrepreneurial endeavours served primarily as a means to an end. Participants' description of freedom, autonomy and financial security as the key benefits of working for themselves concurs with the findings of Barclays (2005). However, Barclays (2005) overlooked the dynamics of racism and sexism in their research and Maurey (2004) indicates that many BME women are finding it necessary to create their own job if they wish to obtain work commensurate with their qualifications and experience. In addition to this, a survey by CI Research (2006) found that, unlike other BME entrepreneurs, the most common reason for starting up their own business for black respondents was to make better use of their skills. This view was corroborated by my research, because self-employed participants felt that their skills, rather than their race determined their business success. Notably, the obstacles faced by participants in relation to career progression in organisations were associated with the valuation of them as a person, rather than their lack of skills. By contrast, self-employment shifted the emphasis

from fitting in with colleagues to having the ability to fulfil the requirements of the job.

### **Challenging the structures of race, class and gender**

Another contribution of the thesis is to extend understanding of the relationship between education and community service for BAC graduates. This section, therefore, answers the third research question by exploring the ways participants sought to use their skills and experiences to challenge the structures of race, class and gender at a community level.

Freire (1996) and hooks (1994) argue that education should achieve 'conscientization', which is social and political transformation. The relationship between education and an awareness of the politics of race was evident in a number of the narratives. In some cases, political awareness and community activism were cited as motivators for studying, but this theme emerged most strongly in relation to careers, where participants sought to challenge the structuring effects of race and class by channelling the cultural capital they had gained through education into community service. The majority of participants expressed a desire to enhance the opportunities of future generations of BACs, which suggests their conscientization (Freire, 1996) and a growing understanding of how the structures of society shape our lives and how they, as individuals, could use their own agency to effect change.

Maurey (2005) identified community building endeavours as a common factor among BME women and Gilkes (1982) highlights the ways that black women professionals have negotiated careers and community commitment. Mirza's (1992) research on the career aspirations of young BAC women found that her participants expressed a desire to improve conditions for black communities by working in caring professions such as teaching, social work and nursing. Reay's (2003) findings concur with this, identifying volunteering in the community as a common theme and strong motivator amongst her mature, working class Access students.

In this research, the desire to improve conditions for BAC communities by providing services to meet their needs or by 'giving back' in some way, arose as another dimension of career aspirations that was often closely aligned to entrepreneurial ideas. Most of the participants' businesses thus far had not been specifically geared to niche BAC markets, although a number of these graduates sought to combine entrepreneurialism with serving the community. This community spirit was also reflected in the career choices of some of the teachers, who saw added value in working in schools with diverse student bodies and large numbers of BME and BAC pupils. The additional benefit they were able to bring as black teachers in terms of improving the BAC school experience was matched by a sense of being appreciated within their roles. For some, this strategy of forfeiting opportunities to work in more prestigious institutions allowed them to give back to BAC communities and thereby add meaningfulness to their work, as well as minimising feelings of isolation within their profession. Whereas Reay (2003) notes that this type of community

commitment can affect women's financial return on investment in HE, Gilkes' (1982) suggests that for some professional black women

success is defined in terms of community achievements and positive evaluation by colleagues, rather than material rewards. (*Gilkes, 1982; 289*)

Community orientation was also evidenced by voluntary work and participants expressed a desire to encourage black children to aspire to careers outside the sports and music that the popular media represented as the domain of black professionals. Participants' involvement in supplementary Saturday schools and mentoring corresponded with the literature that discusses BAC community driven initiatives designed to tackle problems faced by black children in education (eg Mirza, 1997; Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 1985; Wavell, 2005).

In terms of challenging gender oppression, I sought respondents' perspectives on gender in HE and their attitudes towards the feminist agenda. Interviewees demonstrated a similar sensitivity to gender inequality in HE to that exhibited about race inequality in HE, indicating a belief that there was a need for more female staff in various levels of academic posts and a feminist perspective in the core curriculum. I, thus, considered the over-representation of women as students in HE (McGivney, 2004), as compared to their under-representation as academic staff, particularly at the top of the academic career ladder (HESA, 2008). Relating this to participants, I noted the prevalence of postgraduate study amongst the women as compared to the



men in the research and linked this to the fact that the love of study was a much stronger motivation for the women than for the men. Four of the five women acquired teaching qualifications and Masters degrees and three of those considered undertaking PhD research into issues pertinent to black communities. However, at this point the class dynamic re-emerged as a barrier to continued studies, with the opportunity cost of a PhD, particularly the financial implications of a loss of earnings, deterring them from continuing. Thus, the pleasure of learning and interest in serving the community via this route was ultimately outweighed by the practical considerations in their cost/benefit analyses.

In exploring participants' attitudes towards feminism as a mechanism to challenge oppressive structures within society, I discovered many commonalities between their BAC perspectives and the African American perspectives that prevail in the existing black feminist literature (eg hooks, 1982; hooks 1989; Taylor, 1998). One of the most common perceptions in the literature is that, in spite of their activism in fighting for women's rights, black women are reluctant to identify with the feminist movement. Nonetheless, most interviewees considered feminism a worthwhile cause, concerned with seeking equality for women at a macro and micro level in society by addressing the issues that affect women's lives. However, certain negative stereotypes prevailed in discussions and as the literature suggests, there was some reluctance to identify with feminism wholeheartedly, because of associations with extremism and anti-man sentiments. This finding resonates with Joseph and Lewis' (1986) conclusion that many black women reject the feminist movement

outright, but simultaneously make statements in support of some of the main tenets of the feminist struggle.

Joseph and Lewis (1986) infer that many African American women consider feminism to be an intellectual exercise and as such, unrelated to their own concerns about gender, which are firmly focused on the day-to-day struggle for survival. Mogadime (2003) also explored the issue of disparities between theory and practice when she analysed the conflicts that arose for black female students when they encountered racism within the feminist classroom. My own research exemplified this, when the devaluing of black women's perspectives on a women's studies course led to black students' rejection of the whole ethos that underpinned that course. The dynamics of racial dominance were perpetuated through the typical scenario of white lecturer and black student, leading to a distinct tension between the student's own genuine interest in gender issues and the feeling that academic interest, when it came to issues concerning oppression, only extended to gender and not race and was therefore merely superficial and incongruous. Mogadime (2003) posits that holding gender above other forms of oppression can lead to blind spots or 'gender essentialism'. I argue that, as anti-sexist and anti-racist perspectives increasingly converge within the feminist literature, BACs will more readily embrace feminism as a viable route to anti-oppression.

## **Policy implications and future research directions**

The research findings have policy implications for equality agendas in schooling, HE and industry. As such, this section outlines the final contribution of the research, which is to highlight the key implications of the findings and suggest future research directions.

In response to the strained relationships between BAC parents and schools identified in their research, the Education Commission recommended more collaboration, suggesting that schools ‘...engage [BAC] parents largely around teaching and learning, rather than on issues of behaviour...’ (Education Commission, 2004; 9) and that BAC parents ‘...identify more clearly the ways in which their children need to be supported and encouraged in their schoolwork’ (Education Commission, 2004; 8). McKenley observed the need for research into parental involvement undertaken from the parents’ viewpoint, stating:

Research has tended to be located in schools and about how schools interact with parents as opposed to how parents interact with schools, with research located in their community and homes. (*McKenley, 2005; 161*)

Research within BAC communities could complement investment in outreach initiatives, such as those outlined by Rhamie (2007), which included workshops and courses that encouraged BAC parents to become involved in their children’s schooling and thereby equipped them to have a more positive impact.

Drawing these points together, I suggest that there is a need for initiatives designed to empower BAC parents, not only to encourage and help their children with schoolwork, but also to challenge injustice within schools in a constructive way. These should be matched by initiatives that encourage schools to be more welcoming and receptive to BAC parents, so that those parents' perceptions of the issues can be heard and addressed, thus enabling parents and schools to work towards the same goal of improving educational experiences of BAC children.

Negative racial stereotyping is the modern day manifestation of scientific racism and the insidious nature of this 'race thinking' makes it extremely difficult but important to challenge in educational settings. One of the most effective strategies for tackling negative racial stereotyping and raising achievement for BME pupils is increasing the presence of BME and anti-racist teachers in our schools (Arbouin, 1989; Education Commission, 2004), which can be facilitated through diversity training that raises practitioners' awareness of racism and empowers them to consistently constructively challenge their own and others' (mis)understandings about race (Sewell, 1997; Pearce, 2005). Those interviewees who later became teachers believed that the situation had remained largely unchanged since their childhoods and endorsed the need for a shift, from the still very Eurocentric curriculum, to one that reflected a worldview and the diversity of the school and UK population. Both Channer (1995) and Mac an Ghail (1988) talk about the rejection of school as a means of maintaining self-esteem in an environment that denigrates the student's

own culture. Interviewees recognised this dilemma and were conscious of a need to inform BAC children about black contributions to society in order to reinforce positive self-esteem. These implications go beyond the school environment and are equally important to address in HE in order to improve BME and BAC experiences of HE.

This research highlighted an apparent predisposition for black students to gravitate to black academic staff for support. I, therefore, propose that in addition to allocating resources for diversity training amongst staff to make all HEI staff more accessible to black students, HEIs could also include appropriate support time in their black staff's workload. Furthermore, increasing the number of black lecturers in HE would serve a dual purpose of providing support to black students and facilitating an improved understanding between black students and white staff. Their presence alone would begin to break down some deeply embedded barriers.

Despite concerns about isolation in HE, my research suggests that the expectation of isolation was far more pronounced than the actual experience. The prospect of not fitting in, therefore, had its greatest impact as a psychological barrier *before* starting university. Policy designed to eliminate these fears will be most effective if universities' promotional literature provides information about the types of support networks that may appeal to BMEs, such as African Caribbean Societies.

In relation to careers it has been suggested that the growing numbers of black people who embark upon self-employment to circumvent organisational politics will contribute to more prosperity within black communities in the UK (BBC Radio 4, 22 January, 2006). But the fact remains that although black Britons are more likely to consider self-employment (Nelson, 2005), there are still relatively low numbers of BACs recorded in the official statistics for self-employment (Barclays, 2005). One of the key hindrances identified in the literature is poor access to funding (DTI, 2003; Maurey, 2005) and this was echoed by participants in this research, who identified financial difficulties relating to set-up costs and cash flow as key stumbling blocks for their ideas. In order to tackle the multiplier effect of race, gender and class bias faced by many BAC would-be entrepreneurs, policies should be implemented to (a) target funding for more even distribution across ethnicities (b) target funding for female entrepreneurs, who tend to have less access to savings than male entrepreneurs and (c) earmark at least a proportion of regeneration funding for applicants residing in the regeneration area.

A need for appropriate business mentors is also raised within the literature (Nelson, 2004) and each of the cohort of young entrepreneurs highlighted the absence of business mentors for their initial fledgling enterprises as problematic. Improving access to mentors via initiatives designed to encourage (highly qualified and skilled) BMEs could facilitate business start ups amongst BAC graduates and help in the development of their business management skills in order to avoid some of the common pitfalls in business.

In terms of future research directions, the evidence from this research suggests that BAC women may represent a greatly untapped resource in academic life. Female participants tended to possess a combination of academic ability, strong inclination towards learning in HE and love of their subjects, which could well be harnessed to stimulate research that gives voice to black women's experiences and perspectives, embracing race, class and gender issues. Their presence in an academic community would simultaneously increase social inclusion by beginning to tackle the under-representation of black and female academic staff and the need for diversity in HEIs.

The participants in this research represent part of a growing pool of professionally qualified and skilled BACs in Britain, who are achieving in the face of societal structures that serve to limit their options. On the one hand, the inequalities that many faced in the workplace have led to a waste of their talents and ability. On the other hand, their inclination towards entrepreneurial and community endeavours suggests an opportunity to harness that potential and put it to good use in regenerating BAC communities. Increasing business ownership amongst BAC graduates would simultaneously provide more role models to encourage future generations of BACs into enterprise and education. It, therefore, seems logical that investment in BAC graduates such as these would be conducive for building more vibrant communities and a stronger UK economy.

In order to achieve this goal, there is a need for further research that investigates the ways that the skills and motivation of these types of BAC graduates could be harnessed to build stronger, healthier communities in the UK and maximise social inclusion in both education and careers. Further research into the relationship between educational success and community activism within BAC communities could also be beneficial, highlighting how the conscientization of BAC graduates can be directed towards the type of political activism that helps to challenge inequalities and build communities.

## **Conclusions**

The contribution of this thesis is to draw upon the existing literature on race, class and gender in education and employment to outline the structural trajectory of BAC graduates across these domains. The theoretical framework drew upon reproduction theory, critical race theory, black feminist theory and the theory of intersectionality to address the research questions. In summary, the response to each of the research questions is as follows.

*How do BAC graduates experience the structures of race, class and gender in schooling, higher education and employment?*

Despite starting well in compulsory schooling, class dynamics ensured that many participants attended poorly resourced, inner city schools with generally low expectations and poor outcomes. Negative racial stereotyping on the part of teachers



often led to low expectations for girls and conflict for boys and ultimately hindered their ability and/ or inclination to achieve their full potential. Thus, although the girls typically stayed school and qualifications oriented they left school with two to three O'levels. Boys typically became immersed in peer groups and excelled in sporting rather than academic endeavours, leaving school with no O'levels.

Progression through post-compulsory education was relatively slow compared to the typical middle class trajectory and the majority of participants pursued a non-traditional path to HE. The financial burden of studying was the main deterrent to continuing education that emerged. Inside HE, a number of participants felt that they received reduced levels of support from lecturers and microaggressions tainted their experiences. However, the power dynamics of teacher-student relationships ensured that they suffered in silence and used emotional withdrawal as a survival strategy. The lack of diversity in staffing and curriculum added to a sense of un-belonging and isolation and many suffered from a fear of not fitting-in and fear of failure.

In employment, participants were concentrated in 'strategic careers'. Most were in public sector employment, where there is emphasis on equal opportunities in recruitment. Teaching also emerged as a default career linked to the class dynamic, as it offered accessible funding and direct entry into professional employment. It was also attractive for mothers as a result of it's relatively easy fit with childcare responsibilities. However, entry did not guarantee progress and participants' careers

seemed to plateau at an early stage in their professions, suggesting an 'ethnic penalty' and/ or 'sticky floor syndrome'. Several careers were punctuated by official and unofficial disputes and these negative experiences of organisational life were rooted in their 'outsider' status.

*What resources do BAC graduates draw upon to navigate these domains and enable their successes?*

School success was achieved in one case by a unique combination of the child, home, school and community working in concert towards the child's educational achievement. The simultaneous development of bicultural competence also encouraged the child's positive self-image regarding their race. In the second case, success was the result of ability and self-motivation combined with a non-conformism to hegemonic black masculinities. In both cases, common factors were nonchalance regarding experiences of racism during their childhood, an ability to adapt well to the school environment and not being immersed in a black peer group in school.

Participants' routes to HE often involved a series of stepping stones to compensate for a lack of school leaving qualifications and/ or a transition of some sort. Catalysts often included encouragement from a 'benevolent individual' who was usually a BME. This theme recurred in HE where 'benevolent BMEs' provided additional support and encouragement in teaching roles. Primary motivations to study in HE

revolved around social mobility, family expectations and pleasure of studying. Pleasure of studying was particularly influential for female interviewees, whose deep love of learning tended to sustain their studies to post-graduate level. Participants used their own unique BAC social capital by tapping into black social networks such as family, church and African Caribbean Societies, in order to minimise isolation in HE.

In the face of obstacles to career progression many interviewees saw entrepreneurialism as an alternative to traditional employment, offering the potential to avoid organisational politics and balance childcare commitments with earning potential. Self-employment was also perceived to shift the emphasis in the workplace from people dynamics to the ability to perform the job.

*In what ways do BAC graduates consider it important to contribute their skills and experiences in order to challenge the structures of race, class and gender in British society?*

Many of these graduate interviewees sought to challenge the structures of race, class and gender via community service and saw this as a way to 'give back' to the BAC community, suggesting a process of conscientization. Community service was often linked to entrepreneurial ideas that aimed to cater to BAC community needs. Career choices reflected a preference to work in schools that served large numbers of BAC and working class children, rather than the most prestigious institutions. Also,

community service was evidenced in voluntary endeavours undertaken by participants, such as Saturday Schools and mentoring. Several women expressed an interest in serving the community via PhD research into issues pertinent to black communities and women. However, the opportunity cost of a PhD deterred them from pursuing this option.

In relation to issues of gender equality, most participants saw the need for proportional representation of women in academic posts and a feminist perspective on the core curriculum in HE. Whilst they tended to sympathise with the feminist agenda, many had reservations about wholeheartedly identifying with the feminist movement, largely due to them associating it with anti-man sentiments and believing that feminist perspectives were yet to fully integrate black perspectives.

The chapter highlighted a number of policy implications, which suggest a need to:

- implement initiatives to improve communications between BAC parents and schools
- increase BME and anti-racist staff in teaching and key roles in school, post-compulsory education and HE in order to improve diversity amongst educators
- increase and improve diversity training for all educators to tackle the effects of negative racial stereotyping at all levels of education
- introduce a truly diverse curriculum at each stage of the education process to reflect a worldview and the diversity of the UK population

- improve support for black staff in HEIs in recognition of the additional workload undertaken in supporting black students
- design university promotional literature that informs potential students about the black social networks they can tap into for support
- increase funding opportunities designed to tackle race, class and gender bias in business start-ups
- improve BME access to mentoring provision by targeting their needs.

The thesis also identified the need for further research to:

- explore initiatives that could encourage community and entrepreneurial endeavours amongst BAC graduates in order to make better use of their skills and build stronger communities for future generations
- explore ways to harness the potential contribution of the untapped resource of black women as researchers in HE
- explore the process of conscientization amongst BAC graduates to continue to challenge inequalities in British society.

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# Appendices



- INSERT PAGE 1 OF QUESTIONNAIRE

INSERT PAGE 2 OF QUESTIONNAIRE

# Questionnaire: Race & Gender in UK Higher Education

This research project explores student perspectives on how race and gender have influenced their educational experiences. Please answer all questions by ticking  where appropriate or printing your answers clearly. **QUESTIONNAIRES ARE CONFIDENTIAL.** Thank you for your participation.

## Section A: Personal details

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: Male  Female
3. What was your age on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2002? \_\_\_\_\_ yrs
4. Ethnic origin: African  African Caribbean  Asian  White   
Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are either of your parents graduates? Yes  No  N/A
6. Are any of your siblings graduates? Yes  No  N/A
7. Are any of your children graduates? Yes  No  N/A
8. Current/most recent HE Institution \_\_\_\_\_
9. Course title \_\_\_\_\_
10. Department \_\_\_\_\_
11. Postgraduate (Research)  Postgraduate (Taught)  Undergraduate
12. What is/was your student status? Home  Overseas

## Section B: Motivations/deterrents to study in Higher Education

13. Please indicate how the following influences motivated or deterred you from studying in HE:
- |  | major<br>motivation      | minor<br>motivation      | not significant          | minor<br>deterrent       | major<br>deterrent       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Parental/family expectations                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Desire to delay employment                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher expectations in school or FE                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prospect of social mobility                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Desire to improve career prospects                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Opportunity to widen life choices                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prospect of increasing earning potential               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pleasure of studying                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Desire to disprove racial stereotypes                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Desire to disprove gender stereotypes                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Influence of Black role models                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Influence of gender role models                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Financial cost of study (eg loss of income, fees, etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Desire to combat racism                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Desire to combat sexism                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



## Section C: Other perceptions and influencing factors

14. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
Education is a passport to success	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A good education will help me to overcome racist attitudes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A good education will help me to overcome sexist attitudes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More multi-cultural activities would enrich university life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Racial stereotyping has made studying harder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender stereotyping has made studying harder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Racial stereotyping has made studying my subject easier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender stereotyping has made studying my subject easier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family commitments make it difficult for me to study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bad previous educational experiences have hindered my progress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The core curriculum should be more multi-cultural	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The core curriculum should include a feminist perspective	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Before I started, I was concerned about fitting in at this university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Before I started, I was concerned about fitting in on this course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informal Black support networks improve the university experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We need more Black staff at various levels in the university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We need more female staff at various levels in the university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a Black student I feel isolated at this university	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel isolated on my course because of my gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. Please add any further comments on how you feel your race, ethnicity and/or gender have impacted upon your educational experiences: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Section D: Further participation

16.	Would you be willing to participate further in this research?	Yes	No
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	If yes, please provide your contact details below:		
	Tel:	_____	
	Mob:	_____	
	Email:	_____	

Please return your completed questionnaire immediately to the person who gave it to you. Alternatively, please return it to Amanda Arbouin, Postgraduate Room (Pigeon Hole), Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL before Friday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2003.

Q15 Please add any further comments on how you feel your race, ethnicity and/or gender have impacted upon your educational experiences:

<b>ID</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	On my undergraduate course I seemed to get the impression that the Black students were not likely to achieve. It was almost a case of having to prove myself. After the <b>teachers</b> realised my potential they began to show a little more respect, but the <b>treatment of other Black students</b> was terrible at times.
4	My family/ ethnic background has impacted on my ability to convey information required at university in a negative way. My <b>speech code</b> at home is at odds with that required for formal studies. It requires more thought on my part to construct sentences as opposed to my natural (learnt) speech pattern.
9	Early education felt that there were no real expectations of me achieving. Felt my <b>personal motivation</b> from university through to MA <b>has helped me more than any other influence</b> . Cannot remember any black lecturers on my course at university. This is significant in terms of role models.
10	Difficult to accurately reflect on events of <b>20 years ago</b> .
11	Educational <b>bias from teachers</b> play a big part [de]pending <sup>1</sup> on who they are and how educated they are about <b>institutional racism</b> and the affects it has on Black/ Asian students in the wider world once leaving HE and looking for work.

14	<p>I am a mature male student who is in a minority of both gender and ethnicity. I do not however fit neatly into the reductionist categories of black and white and object to being defined as 'other'. I feel to combat stereotypes we must acknowledge and celebrate diversity. <b>To polarise society by definition of colour is wrong</b> I feel. Why are Asians geographically referred to yet we use an incorrect definition of colour to refer to Africans and whites? Peace and love! [See emails re his research on mature male students and language and HE drop out. Mentions fear of failure and 'My point was that language change dynamics which accompany the journey of the mature student <b>disenfranchise them from their communities</b> and yet never really places them in the world of academia'. – links to culture and identity]</p>
15	<p>I came from a background where achievement in all walks of life is everything. Parental expectations and peer pressure fuels this desire to better the individuals and his/her family position. Unfortunately I experience a different kind of motivation here in the UK. <b>At school</b> when I expressed my desire to read medicine, there was <b>no active support to encourage</b> or help me achieve the necessary grades that I would require in total contrast to my birth country Nigeria. Again the image constantly portrayed in the media of black people is not of academics but of popular culture such as music and sports and athletics.</p>

17	<p>My <b>white counterparts find it very difficult</b> to strike the balance in terms of <b>relating to me as an individual</b>. Some try too hard in other words you can tell they are not being real. Whereas some don't even know where to start hence don't make an effort. However this is a general overview. Some individuals (a few) are quite themselves. I truly feel they are quite real.</p> <p>Some <b>tutors have preconceived ideas about my race</b> eg they will tend to interpret questions or answers for me as though one is daft and you feel like saying stop putting words into my mouth!</p>
19	<p>Helpful on my course as <b>daily life can be related to my modules</b>. [Ideal!!]</p>
20	<p>As a black student it is easy to <b>feel isolated at university</b> as backgrounds are very different to many at university. Also people can see your educational success as the exception rather than the rule.</p>
25	<p><b>Warwick has</b> very <b>good gender relations</b> between staff and students. More feminist perspective would be beneficial. Warwick has very <b>poor race relations</b> and seems to be indifferent to the needs of black students.</p>
28	<p>I have found educational institutions to be welcoming places for all cultures and genders. There is clearly an axe to grind here and a political agenda. I however completely <b>reject the notion that we need more black/Indian/white or female staff</b>. You simply need the best people for the job. Luckily all of my friends have an open and multi-cultural perspective, which is probably why I have found this survey to be irrelevant if not a little behind the times/ridiculous.</p>

29	Hardly at all.
34	It cannot be denied that race, ethnicity and gender play a part in educational experiences and <b>negative experiences</b> do sadly occur, for whatever reasons.  One must <b>just get on with it</b> .
38	The problem with gender and racial discrimination is <b>not numbers</b> . I don't think that by hiring more black people and/ or white women is going to solve the problem. You need to <b>change people's attitudes</b> , confront racism and problematise white privilege. If this works, then we'll go a long way to redressing race and gender issues. Also imp is acknowledging the position of black women who face inter-sectional discrimination (See Angela Davis, etc).

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<sup>i</sup> Brackets [] indicate my own observations or things not included in the individual's 'Further comments'

## African Caribbean experiences of Higher Education

### Focus of research

Current research suggests that African Caribbean women are over-represented in UK Higher Education, whilst their male counterparts are under-represented. This research explores the dynamics of race and gender from the perspective of first generation British born graduates of African Caribbean ethnicity.

### Research method

The data will be collected through a series of one-to-one interviews.

Participants' opinions and perspectives will be sought regarding various themes relating to the overall subject.

### First interview topics

- Background information
- Motivations and deterrents to studying in HE
- Expectations and experiences of HE
- Career path
- Opinions about African Caribbean participation in HE

## Second Interview Outline: Identity

*Does identifying strongly in terms of race help or hinder educational success?*

1. Update on any changes in work or home life
  
2. Describe your family and their roles in the household (eg you, your partner, others):
  - a. work f-t/p-t?
  - b. main disciplinarian
  - c. main breadwinner
  - d. primary carer
  - e. main home-maker (eg cleaning, choosing interior designs, cooking, etc)
  
3. What class do you identify with and why?
  - a. Now
  - b. Growing up
  
4. In terms of ethnicity, how would you define yourself?
  - a. English, British, Black British, African Caribbean, African (diaspora), Jamaican/St Kitts?
  - b. Are you bi-cultural?
  - c. Is race, colour, culture, national identity most important? Why?
  - d. How does it differ depending on context? (eg in UK, Caribbean, African, Europe, among all blacks/ whites)
  
5. To what extent do you identify with other black/Caribbean people and issues? and why?

- a. Sports (Jamaica vs England at football; WI vs England at cricket; black person vs white person in Olympics)
  - b. Public eye (black person on TV – do you worry they’ll go wrong and reinforce negative stereotypes; feel proud; rooting for them)
  - c. Crime (if black criminal on tv do you feel ashamed; indifferent; sense of ownership of problem; desire to help change it)
  - d. Issues (underachievement in education – do you feel ashamed; indifferent; sense of ownership of problem; desire to help change it)
6. Are there ‘ways of being black’? (eg behaviour, values, black culture, etc)
- a. DO EXERCISE
  - b. Does this work for or against us? (eg acts as a protective cultural barrier around us; box ourselves in and limit our options)
  - c. Does it complement or conflict with the educational path? (eg did you feel free to be yourself in university?)
7. Do you feel positive about being black?
- a. Is it better to be black or white? Does race matter?
  - b. Have you developed a positive sense of yourself as a black person and if so, was it through mainstream activities (eg school, media, etc) or black-led activities (eg supplementary school, extra-curricula reading)?
8. Can racism be overcome by a positive mental attitude?
- a. Does racism exist?
  - b. Is racism most potent in the oppressed person’s mind?
    - i. Their perceptions give it more power to damage



- ii. It keeps them in their place or in a victim mode
  - iii. It creates a negative mindset
- b. Have you at any point felt that you *couldn't* (or shouldn't) do things (maybe as a black person) and then later felt that you *could*? Was it the result of a change of internal mindset or external circumstances?

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Interview schedule**

1. Update on any changes in work, courses or home life
2. Reflections on learning experiences (HE pedagogy):
  - a. teachers (cared for, good/bad, why?, teacher/student relationship)
  - b. subjects (personal relevance, interesting, why?)
  - c. learning environment (interactive, student participation, using own experiences/perspectives, )
  - d. key factors in why succeeded at subject
  - e. enjoyment?
3. What do you think about the way you were taught at university?
  - a. better/worse than school/college? why?
  - b. differences/similarities
4. Awakening political consciousness
  - a. as a motivation to continue your education
  - b. as a result of studies
5. Education as the practice of freedom
  - a. a means to liberation (individual, community, race)

## Initial Analysis of First Interviews

As a result of an initial analysis of the first interviews a number of themes have begun to emerge and some of these may be used as topics for discussion in subsequent interviews. In the first instance, issues coming to the fore include:

### **Identity**

African Caribbean, British, black; the ways that the graduates self-identified varied considerably. For some, race was central, for others it was almost irrelevant to them as students.

### **Self determination**

A dogged self-determination was apparent in the vast majority of cases and this seems to have driven respondents, often against the odds and whilst juggling many commitments.

### **Mature students**

In line with the current literature, many of the graduates entered university via a circuitous route: most were mature students during their undergraduate studies.

### **Entrepreneurialism**

A common theme became apparent, in that many respondents had gone into business or aspired to self-employment.

### **Gender**

There was no overt recognition of gender having played a negative role in their careers to date. It may be useful to explore in more depth the effect of family commitments on career choices, particularly with the mothers.

### **Teaching**

Many of the participants have taught or have considered teaching in their career. This bias may, or may not be linked to the selection process.

### 3rd Interviews – General themes emerging

- Entrepreneurialism – this theme is still coming through very strongly, but when asked most participants do not see working for yourself as important and do not indicate that it is a way to sidestep (perhaps racist or sexist) organisational barriers to career success. Nor do they relate it to facilitating balancing childcare commitments with career, although that's what the **literature on women entrepreneurs** suggests (look up per CH and could relate to black entrepreneurs too) and it may be the case for Elaine
- There is evidence of class consciousness, but only one participant (Neil) seems to acknowledge it overtly as important to him. Most do not feel that they fit neatly into British class definitions
- Carrying the community theme still coming through with Nora (work role in Head teachers meetings) and Neil (churchgoers not knowing anything about Uni – consider Mezirow's perspective transformation).
- Other themes (eg teachers influence in school contrasts with self-motivation in HE – consider Knowles adult learning literature re significant others being important influence as child contrasting with independent autonomous learning skills as an adult) have been reinforced by the third interviews, rather than new themes emerging

## Diary prompts

- daily diary entries providing a snapshot of your life
  - work/ career
  - family/ home life
- reflections on race, gender and education
  - your own experiences
  - general observations (sometimes being involved in a research project makes you notice things that you may have overlooked before)
  - things that may be relevant to the research, but you didn't get chance to talk about in the interview

# Participant biographies<sup>1</sup>

	<b>Alison</b>
<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	St Kitts
<b>Father's occupation<sup>2</sup>:</b>	Minister of religion
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	Seamstress
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	Father
<b>Participant's age<sup>3</sup>:</b>	40
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Female
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; city
<b>School leaving qualifications<sup>4</sup>:</b>	2/3 GCSE equivalents <sup>5</sup>
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	BA (Hons) Combined Arts (NTU <sup>6</sup> ) Cert of English Language Teaching to Adults Dip for English Language Teaching to Adults MA in English Language Teaching (Nottingham)
<b>Occupation:</b>	HE Lecturer
<b>Marital status:</b>	Unmarried <sup>7</sup>
<b>No of children:</b>	None
<b>Location:</b>	Midlands

<sup>1</sup> Details recorded here reflect participants' circumstances and information provided at the time of the primary data collection. Some details may have changed since then.

<sup>2</sup> Parents' main occupation during participants childhood/ education

<sup>3</sup> At end of primary data collection (September 2006)

<sup>4</sup> At end of compulsory schooling

<sup>5</sup> Grades A\* to C

<sup>6</sup> Nottingham Trent University

<sup>7</sup> I have used the term 'unmarried', rather than 'single', as some participants were co-habiting in long-term relationships although they were not married

**Elaine**

<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	Jamaica
<b>Father's occupation:</b>	Taxi driver
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	Teacher
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	Mother
<b>Participant's age:</b>	43
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Female
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; village
<b>School leaving qualifications:</b>	7 GCSE equivalents
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	BA (Hons) Hispanic Studies (Hull)
<b>Occupation:</b>	(Self employed) consultant
<b>Marital status:</b>	Married
<b>No of children:</b>	5
<b>Location:</b>	Midlands/ Spain



	<b>Eve</b>
<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	St Kitts
<b>Father's occupation:</b>	
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	At home mother
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	None
<b>Participant's age:</b>	40
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Female
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; city
<b>School leaving qualifications:</b>	2/3 GCSE equivalents
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	BA (Hons) Religious Studies (Derby) MA in Religion and Public Life (Leeds) PGCE <sup>8</sup> (Warwick)
<b>Occupation:</b>	Self employed hairdresser/ School teacher (secondary)
<b>Marital status:</b>	Unmarried
<b>No of children:</b>	None
<b>Location:</b>	Midlands

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<sup>8</sup> Postgraduate Certificate of Education

**Michelle**

<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	Jamaica
<b>Father's occupation:</b>	
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	None
<b>Participant's age:</b>	38
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Female
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; city
<b>School leaving qualifications:</b>	3 GCSE equivalents
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	BSc (Hons) Export Engineering (UCE <sup>9</sup> ) PGCE (London) MSc in IT for Manufacture (Warwick)
<b>Occupation:</b>	School teacher (secondary)
<b>Marital status:</b>	Unmarried
<b>No of children:</b>	2
<b>Location:</b>	London

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<sup>9</sup> University of Central England (now Birmingham City University)

	<b>Nora</b>
<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	St Kitts
<b>Father's occupation:</b>	
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	At home mother
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	None
<b>Participant's age:</b>	39
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Female
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; city
<b>School leaving qualifications:</b>	2/3 GCSE equivalents
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	BA (Hons) Psychology (Nottingham) PGCE (London) MA in Education Management (OU <sup>10</sup> )
<b>Occupation:</b>	Head teacher (primary)
<b>Marital status:</b>	Unmarried
<b>No of children:</b>	2
<b>Location:</b>	London

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<sup>10</sup> Open University

**Dean**

<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	Jamaica
<b>Father's occupation:</b>	
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	None
<b>Participant's age:</b>	37
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Male
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; city
<b>School leaving qualifications:</b>	No GCSE equivalents
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	BA (Hons) Combined Community and Youth Studies (Derby)
<b>Occupation:</b>	Youth Worker
<b>Marital status:</b>	Unmarried
<b>No of children:</b>	None
<b>Location:</b>	London/ Midlands

	<b>Leroy</b>
<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	Jamaica
<b>Father's occupation:</b>	
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	Dinner lady
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	None
<b>Participant's age:</b>	38
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Male
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; city
<b>School leaving qualifications:</b>	6 GCSE equivalents
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	BA (Hons) Product and Furniture Design (UCE) PGCE (Wolverhampton)
<b>Occupation:</b>	FE Lecturer
<b>Marital status:</b>	Unmarried
<b>No of children:</b>	2
<b>Location:</b>	London

	<b>Neil</b>
<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	Jamaica
<b>Father's occupation:</b>	Bus driver
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	Dressmaker at home
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	None
<b>Participant's age:</b>	42
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Male
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; city
<b>School leaving qualifications:</b>	No GCSE equivalents
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	HND Computer Technology (Preston <sup>11</sup> ) Certificate of Education in FE PG Diploma in Mgmt Studies (London Metropolitan) MA in Human Resources (Westminster) PG Diploma in Project Mgmt (OU)
<b>Occupation:</b>	FE Lecturer/ IT Trainer
<b>Marital status:</b>	Unmarried
<b>No of children:</b>	None
<b>Location:</b>	London

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<sup>11</sup> Preston Polytechnic (now University of Central Lancashire)

**Sean**

<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	Jamaica
<b>Father's occupation:</b>	Unskilled worker
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	Unskilled worker
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	None
<b>Participant's age:</b>	40
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Male
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; city
<b>School leaving qualifications:</b>	No GCSE equivalents
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	BA (Hons) Sociology (Leicester)
<b>Occupation:</b>	Housing Advice Manager
<b>Marital status:</b>	Unmarried
<b>No of children:</b>	3
<b>Location:</b>	Midlands

**Zac**

<b>Parents' island of origin:</b>	Jamaica
<b>Father's occupation:</b>	Factory worker
<b>Mother's occupation:</b>	Nurse
<b>Graduate parent(s):</b>	None
<b>Participant's age:</b>	38
<b>Male/ female:</b>	Male
<b>School type/ location:</b>	State; city
<b>School leaving qualifications:</b>	No GCSE equivalents
<b>Graduate/ professional qualifications:</b>	BA (Hons) Three Dimensional Design (UCE)
<b>Occupation:</b>	Self employed – Multimedia Promotions
<b>Marital status:</b>	Married
<b>No of children:</b>	1
<b>Location:</b>	Midlands