**Attainment and identity in the face of dual oppression: Exploring the educational experiences of British females of Caribbean heritage.**

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**Abstract**

The persistent underachievement of Black children of Caribbean descent and their over-representation in Special Educational Needs (SEN) has been highly documented within the UK. However, whilst there is wealth of research exploring the educational experiences of Black males, little has been written about the experiences of Black females of Caribbean heritage. This study explores the relationship between identity and the educational experiences of Black females of Caribbean heritage in the UK. It explores the protective factors and barriers to educational achievement, how their experiences and identities are expressed within group interviews and the impact of intersectionality on educational experience. Constructs of power, oppression and belonging are explored through psychological frameworks of identity formation, psychoanalytic colonial theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (FemCrit).

The participants engaged in two focus group interviews to explore the research questions around their identity and experienced facilitators and barriers to educational success. The second focus group was aimed at expanding upon themes and encouraging participants to reflect on and contribute to the analysis of the first focus group. Narrative analysis, incorporating The Listening Guide (Woodcock, 2016) is utilised to attend to and respect the voices and experiences of participants.

The study illuminated the complexities of identity as participants highlighted the primacy of Blackness as an identifier and the significance of both their Caribbean heritage and British identity. Gender was considered to be an important but perhaps less salient feature of identity. In relation to barriers to success, participants highlighted experiencing social and emotional difficulties in majority White settings and/or in the absence of Black peers, on account of their being the racial anomaly. Additionally, relationships with teachers were presented as depending on participants’ ability to perform as the ideal student which could conflict with cultural /individual identities. Personal ambition and resilience in addition to recognition of family and ancestral ambition, support and sacrifices, were highlighted as facilitators of success. Learning behaviours which supported achievement were also discussed, with some participants professing to practicing silence and enacting personal agency in their approach to knowledge development and others speaking out and seeking support from the community around them.

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1. **Introduction**

**1.a) Definitions**

For the purpose of clarity about intended meanings, it is necessary to define the terms used to describe the heritage and identity of participants. Both the terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ are used to describe physical identifiers such as skin colour, in addition to heritage. Black Caribbean an Afro-Caribbean are used interchangeably to refer to individuals of Caribbean heritage.

‘Black’, ‘White’, ‘Blackness’ and ‘Whiteness’ are terms frequently referred to throughout this paper, with ‘Black people’ and ‘White people’ used to describe both physical characteristics, such as skin colour and cultural characteristics. ‘Whiteness’ and ‘Blackness’, however, refer to racial discourses, with ‘Whiteness’ referring to assumptions, beliefs and values based upon White interests and identification, taken for granted as representing normality, consequently reinforcing power imbalances (Leonardo, 2009, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). ‘Blackness’ refers to the limited constructions of Black people, considered as the degraded, dysfunctional ‘other’, the antithesis to Whiteness.

**1.b) Research Aims**

The current study seeks to explore the relationship between identity and the educational experiences of Afro-Caribbean females in the UK. The study will explore the protective factors and barriers to educational achievement for this group and consider whether institutional racism exists within the educational system and what it looks like within modern Britain. The project seeks to explore these issues from the point of view of those currently experiencing the educational system in relation to their entire educational history. Constructs of power, oppression and belonging will be explored through psychological frameworks of identity formation, psychoanalytic colonial theory, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (FemCrit).

The Black Caribbean community are a long-established racial minority group within the UK, who have consistently experienced significant inequality within the education system with regards to achievement and expulsion (e.g. Gillborn, 2008, 2015; DfE, 2015, 2016). There is a growing body of research in the UK which highlights stereotyped views, low expectations and negative attitudes towards Black males or misinterpretation of behavioural aspects of their interaction with the educational system, as putting them at a disadvantage, limiting their opportunities for academic success in comparison to their White peers. However, Black females appear to be underrepresented in UK literature, despite still underperforming and seemingly experiencing similar barriers to learning. Considering the potential for multiple oppression experience by Black women on account of belonging to a non-dominant ethnic group and gender, I consider it is relevant to explore their intersectionality and the effects within the UK educational system. This study explores these issues with participants considered to be educationally successful through their accessing of further education.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) should seek to explore diversity and difference in order to ensure minority groups are given sufficient support to facilitate their success. I believe that by representing the experiences of Black Caribbean females I will provide an insight into cultural differences and how females from this ethnic minority could be supported to achieve.

**1.c) Content**

Chapter Two provides the reader with the relevant literature and theory pertaining to the research topics, to provide a foundation and justification for the research project. Chapter Three provides an outline of the methodological and procedural aspects of the research. Chapter Four outlines the results which emerged from the narrative analysis utilising the Listening Guide, presented in themes, and explores the themes in relation to literature and theory. Chapter Five provides a discussion of reflections, motivations and key findings; and Chapter Six considers the implications the results have for EP theory and practice. Chapter Seven considers the research strengths and limitations and recommendations for future research.

1. **Literature Review**

**Introduction**

This chapter seeks to explore literature around the construct of race in relation to power and oppression, in order to set the landscape for discussing inequality within educational opportunities, experiences and attainment. It will explore theories of race and identity on an individual and group level. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (FemCrit) will be drawn upon to explore intersectionality and multiple oppression experienced by certain groups, ‘racism’, and its effects on identity and success outcomes. Finally, it will look at the current picture for Black and ethnic minority students within education and the relevance of exploring race within the EP role.

**2.a) Race and Power**

Race is a socially constructed concept which places individuals in prescribed groups and is a dominant, socially accepted aspect of identity, despite contention existing around its validity. Markus (2008) noted that race is historically derived construct which:

“(1) Sorts people into ethnic groups according to perceived physical and behavioural characteristics; (2) associates differential value, power, and privilege with these characteristics and establishes a social status ranking among the different groups...” (p.654)

Rather than focussing solely on physical attributes such e.g. skin colour, Markus highlights the historical relevance and power imbalances which contribute to the meanings given to race. DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2014) note that the area of genetics identifies little or no biological basis for ‘race’ and it is not a scientifically meaningful construct (e.g. Jorde & Wooding, 2004; Lehrman, 2003). This is contended by biomedical researchers who suggest there are differences between racial or ethnic groups with regards to disease related outcomes (e.g. Goldstein & Hischhorn, 2004; LaVeist, 1996). However, these are theorised to emerge from political, social, economic differences existing between races, making certain races more vulnerable to particular diseases. There appears to be more agreement among researchers, however, that perceptions around racial difference have a significant impact on interactions with society and social systems, for example, the educational system. (E.g. Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995)

There has been a historical inequality amongst ethnic minorities in Western society with regards to opportunities for academic, professional and economic success (e.g. Gillborn & Mirza, 2000), and efforts to readdress the balance, such as affirmative action hiring policies, in the US context, (e.g. Wise, 1998; Guy-Sheftall, 1993) which disproportionately benefit White women, continuing to contribute to Whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 1998); and social justice based, ‘colour-blind’ education initiatives in the UK, which have been ineffective in closing the achievement gap (e.g. Wright, 2010; Archer & Francis, 2007). Consequently, the power imbalances between races appears to be maintained and continued from generation to generation, with Whiteness being the continued privileged positioning (e.g. Gillborn, 2005). Leonardo (2002) addresses the difference between Whiteness and white people, describing ‘white people’ as a socially constructed identity based on skin colour, and Whiteness as a racial discourse of reinforced power imbalance, representing the identification and interests of ‘white people’. Gillborn (2005) makes the interesting point that Whiteness is not a stable construct, with groups who were once defined as outside of Whiteness being redefined as being within the privileged group. However, power seems to consistently remain within Whiteness. Gillborn presents some of the defining characteristics of Whiteness as: othering of minority ethnicities and considering white as the norm; unwillingness to acknowledge racial inequity or racism; and seeking to draw a line under historical racist atrocities and diminish its current relevance. He considers the notion of white supremacy, not focussing on extremist neo-national groups, but subtle forms of power which infiltrate political parties, policies and institutions such as the educational system. These systems perpetuate conscious and unconscious beliefs around White superiority and entitlement, and non-White subordination and oppression.

**2.a) i) CRT**

CRT (Critical Race Theory) examines racial disparities such as issues of institutional racism and considers unequal power systems in society which oppress the racial minority. It explores not only explicit forms of racism, a deeper rooted, endemic form of racism by which normative standards of Whiteness are complicit with and reinforced through laws, policies and practices, to the detriment of non-White people (e.g. Hylton, 2012; Gillborn, 2008, 2005). Non-White groups are considered in relation to ‘natural’ Whiteness (e.g. Benard, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and are stigmatised and disadvantaged when they fail to conform to or fit within these ideals, with those who differ from the norm socially constructed as inherently inadequate and disordered. (E.g. Gillborn, 2005; Leonardo 2004) As a consequence, non-Whiteness rather than racism is considered to be an issue, (Annamma et al., 2016). CRT posits that race and racism are implicit in everyday practices and processes and maintain power structures which subjugate non-White people (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 1998). It seeks to explore race across social structures with consideration of the social and historical contexts within which it exists. It also aims to challenge and dominant ideologies which support White principles and social and behavioural norms and notions of equal opportunities and colour-blindness. CRT is also concerned with social justice, voicing the experiences of marginalised and oppressed groups and reducing disparity between White and non-White groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2012). A central aspect of CRT is counter-storytelling which seeks to challenge dominant discourses around ethnic minorities and elicit marginalised voices to provide alternative perspectives of reality. Often this is achieved through personal stories and narratives.

A large volume of CRT research is centred on experiences of Black people within the United States, however, there is a growing body of research in the UK, as explored by Hylton (2012), highlighting similar effects and themes surrounding race and its use to differentiate, disadvantage and disempower groups within society. It is worth noting that whilst there is a structural system of racism and Westernised ideals in the UK and US, both have unique histories and political and cultural influences which result in some differences in experiences and identities. Current research would suggest that CRT is highly applicable outside of its original US context and warrants further exploration of race within the UK. Due to the relative disparity of race-focussed research in the UK, for the purpose of this literature review, studies will be drawn upon from both countries.

**2.a) ii) Intersectionality and Black Feminism**

One of the key tenants of CRT is the interaction between race and other areas of inequality which interact in synergistic ways to shape identities and experiences. However, feminists such as Mirza (1992) purport that CRT has previously failed to explore differences within non-Whiteness, for example how gender interacts with race. Intersectionality strives to examine the effects of multiple phenomena interacting such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality and disability. From a theoretical position, intersectionality considers identities as subject positions of multiple dimensions which are simultaneously influencing our navigation of social systems. Mirza suggests that Black women’s racialized experiences have been subsumed by research of Black men which has historically dominated CRT literature. It may have been assumed that Black women’s gendered experience mirrored that of white and upper-class women, as represented through Feminist research and action.

Crenshaw (1995) felt that this was inadequate, stating that:

 "Because women of colour experience racism in ways not always the same as experienced by men of colour and sexism in ways not always paralleled to experiences of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms."(p.360).

This statement recognises a reality in which we do not engage with social experiences through discrete, singular identities, but through multifaceted identities with complex variable effects (Brah & Pheonix, 2004). Structural oppressions are therefore seen as inter and intra-related, necessitating exploration of the power differentials created as they interact and intersect (Collins, 1990). Critical Race Feminism seeks to expand upon CRT, using intersectionality to explore the multiple forms of oppression experienced by Black women as a result of the intersections of race, class, and gender. Crenshaw (1991) identified three dimensions of intersectionality: structural intersectionality, which is concerned with gender roles, responsibilities and opportunities; political intersectionality, which deals with identity politics and issues of difference; and representational intersectionality which focuses on media images of Black women and their effect of shaping and controlling identity. Evans-Winters and Eposito (2010) note that currently within society, Black women are socially constructed as the antithesis of the dominant norms of whiteness (as maleness) and femininity (as Whiteness). As a result of these constructions of inherent hostile, aggressive, unprincipled and promiscuous characteristics, they represent deviance from all dominant societal standards and ideals within a system of White male patriarchy and racist oppression.

Within education, Evans (1988) highlighted how Black female identities were constructed and performed within the UK school context as they fought against the idealised norms of White femininity, asserting power through their resistance.

“their stubborn refusal to conform to standards of "good behavior," without actually entering the realm of "bad behavior" by breaking any school rules, was exasperating for many teachers. The behavior of the girls could be located in the outer limits of tolerable behavior, and they patrolled this territory with much skill, sending a distinct message of being in and for themselves.” (Evans 1988, p.183)

However, whilst these acts of resistance afforded the Black females a sense of power within the school context, falling into these stereotyped behaviours of ‘loudness’ continued to keep them in a position of subordination as this behaviour is often misinterpreted to maintain the image of the aggressive, loud and confrontational Black female. This can negatively impact recognition of their abilities, development of effective teacher-student relationships, teachers having high academic expectations and consequently their attainments.

Annamma et al. (2016) trace these narrow constructions of the Black woman, which impact upon the development of Black women’s self-identity formation and the behavioural expectations and interpretations of others, back to images presented of them through mainstream media. These are argued to be connected to a history of slavery, subservience and sexualisation of Black women. Popular images of Black women within mainstream media as the sexless, nurturing Mammy; loud, belligerent Sapphire; hypersexualised, temptress Jezebel; and the lazy, conniving Welfare Queen (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000; Webster, 2003; White, 2007; Thomas, 2013), represent historical oppression emerging towards the end of slavery which continue to be reproduced. The prevailing presence of degrading, hypersexualised imagery of Black females in mainstream media, is considered to be an oppressive instrument of symbolic violence, despite being presented as a marketing tool (e.g. Nader, 1997). Benard (2016) explores how current pop culture icons such as Nicki Minaj and Beyonce represent how images of Black female sexuality and eroticism continue to define Black femaleness, a legacy of colonialism (e.g. Story, 2010; Collins, 1995). Whilst reproducing these representations are considered to be potentially damaging by contemporary Black feminism, concerned with structural postcolonial oppression (e.g. hooks, 2016), contemporary Black feminists consider individual’s agency and empowerment through celebration of their Black female sexuality (e.g. Springer, 2002). Crenshaw (1991) noted that Black women adopt, modify and reject these dominant constructions of their identity presented through media in their search to define their identity.

Evans-Winters & Eposito (2010) call for more educational researchers seeking to understand the multiple realities Black girls experience, supporting Crenshaw et al.’s (1995) assertion that Black women's experiences are influenced by both their racial and gendered identities. They recommend the use of curricula, pedagogies and educational policies aimed at intersectionalities in order to develop equality within the educational system. Wing (2003) also noted that seeking to explore experiences of Black girls through a single lens limits exploration and understanding of how race and gender interact.

**2.b) Psychological Theories of Identity Formation**

Erikson’s (1968) theory of identity formation highlights adolescence as the key developmental time for consolidating self-identity which is partially based on ascribed features such as gender and ethnicity as well as chosen elements. However, Howard (2000) notes that it is a fluid, ongoing process which is both consciously and unconsciously influenced by internal and external perspectives. Tajfel and Turner (1986) proposed the social identity theory, which theorises that we conceptualise ourselves on both an individual and group level. Interactions with a shared identity shape collective attitudes and norms, which inform our self-concepts and influence how we perceive and interact with the world. (Turner, 1991). Developing a racial or gender identity is therefore believed to be achieved through interactions with those of the same race and experiences of outsider constructs of race.

According to Moss’ mapping metaphor, we locate other people or ‘objects’ on a map of categories (e.g. gender, sexuality, intelligence etc.), plotted onto axis representing idealised to degraded representations and distance from the subject’s self-identity. Representations close to our own identities may be seen as internal or similar, and those distant from ours, external and dissimilar. These identifications and ‘retaliatory’ disidentifications, through which we make sense of experiences, place us within and against groups. With regards to race and gender, this can easily culminate in racism and sexism. These ‘object maps’ function at both cultural and personal levels, consciously and unconsciously, imposing measurement based on object categories. Race, in particular, is considered to be a highly orienting category, with a historical construction which maps Whiteness as the idealised norm and non-Whiteness as the degraded other, (Moss, 1996).

**2.c) Implications of Racial and gendered identity**

Racial and gender membership are determinative, therefore, regardless of an individual’s personal identifications, their identity will be considered based on constructions of ascribed characteristics such as race. For example, even if a Black woman does not identify as Black or female and its associated social constructions, she is still likely to experience consequences of these identifiers, being considered on these premises by others. As Moss expressed:

“Just as the object in front of us might be constituted, first and foremost, as a “woman,” she will also be constituted, first and foremost, as a “black” woman. Within the subject/object world defined by racial identities, “blood” trumps mind. That is, when racial identity is an operative component, the racial adjective is primary; all others follow.” (p. 276)

Shorter-Gooden and Washington’s (1996) study of Black female’s identity in the US explored the double or triple oppression Black females encounter, facing racism, sexism, and, for a disproportionately high number, low socio-economic status. They identified that despite the racial oppression faced, Blackness was actually seen by participants to be an important, positive element of their identity. Participants either linked this to celebrating their ancestry or to a motivation to work hard in order to overcome the negative connotations or societal views about Blackness. Gender identity was seen as important but less salient than racial identity. This could be due to the fact that racial issues might demand more immediate attention in their everyday lives. Phinney (1993) suggest that it can be difficult for individuals to integrate aspects of their identity which are formed through different group identities, particularly if the associated values and norms are conflicting.

Shorter-Gooden and Washington found that the reported struggle with devalued race and gender identities promoted a sense of strength in Black females, which acted as a buffer and mediating variable, promoting psychological wellbeing. A strong sense of racial identity has also been linked with better mental health outcomes and lower incidences of disorders such as anxiety and depression (e.g. Yip et al, 2006; Schmitt and Branscombe, 2003; Fisher et al, 2014). Cruwys et al. (2014) hypothesise that this could be due to differences with the attribution of difficulties. Those with strong social identities, such as racial identities, are more likely to attribute difficulties or negative experiences to external rather than internal factors. This allows them to have more positive interpretations of stress and failure and therefore, experience less psychological discomfort. Ryan & Deci (2000) identified the nutrients of good emotional well-being to be autonomy, competence and relatedness. Perhaps in an educational context where historically, Black young people have been limited in their power to achieve autonomy and demonstrate competence, developing a sense of relatedness through a strong racial identity which celebrates cultural differences from the White majority, is particularly important. This relates to Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory which expands upon social identity theory in recognition that individuals experience a greater sense of belonging and inclusion within minority groups which celebrate distinctiveness and dissimilarity from the majority group, as well as similarities within the group.

Fordham (1996) explored identity in high achieving Black children and concluded that in order to achieve success, they embodied a race-less persona, rejecting characteristics relating to their Black ascribed identity. It could be suggested that perhaps their racial characteristics were recognised as barriers to achievement and caused cognitive dissonance, so they chose to emulate the dominant White norms and behaviours. However, contrary to this, Amanishakete (2013) expressed Black children who explore their racial/ethnic identity and question who they are and who they can become, considering their identity, are more likely to be high achievers and maintain psychological wellbeing than those who have had this exploration suppressed. High achieving Black children expressed communal responsibilities of advancement and took inspiration from their ancestors’ resilience and perseverance, seeking to continue this legacy and make them proud.

O’Connor’s (1997) study highlighted the importance of a strong, positive, Black female identity in high achieving African-American girls. Findings suggested that development of these identities facilitated resilience against the sexism and racism they faced. Familial or community support in overcoming associated oppression was also found to be a significant protective factor. O’Connor’s results have been replicated by subsequent research suggesting that exploring and affirming Black racial identity is an important identity domain for Black children and young people which links to psychological development, emotional well-being and educational success (e.g. Roberts et al, 1999; Sellers et al, 2003; Amanishakete, 2013; Fisher et al, 2014).

**2.d) Racism, Discrimination and Psychological Processes**

Racism can be described as conflict between racial group identities. One theory of the psychological process underpinning racism is Goffman’s (1963) framework of stigma. Goffman explored how society’s constructions of race can have a negative impact on the construction of self-identity. He notes how stigma is created through othering of perceived racial characteristics and can be carried through lineages, impacting generations, with stigmatised non-dominant groups having to contend with conflicting messages regarding their identity. They are told by society that they are essentially the same as the dominant group and should achieve the same outcomes as them (i.e. they are not disadvantaged by anything external to themselves), whilst being made aware that they are considered as different and therefore inferior to some degree. The dominant group creates an ideology to justify discrimination and animosity towards this difference and so the stigma is maintained.

In his writings “Black people, White masks”, Fanon (1967) considers stigma and oppression of Black people within the historical context of colonialism and its psychological effects on both the colonised and coloniser. He proposes a psychoanalytic theory about the continued struggle for self-determination of Black people within White European society. Post-colonisation, Fanon argues that the White and Black man are trapped in a cycle of reproducing the master/slave relationship of colonialism, where the White man maintains superiority through oppression of the Black man and the Black man seeks recognition and approval from the White man. He highlights the power of the linguistic construction of opposites, where Whiteness is synonymous with superiority and normalcy, the ‘one’, and Blackness is inherent with an uncivilised nature, inferiority and all that is ‘other’ from the norm and associated, positive qualities. It is this imagined difference between the self and identity as ‘other’, which, Fanon argues, facilitates the White man’s domination through psychological enslavement of his mind. Bhabha (1994), a later post-colonial theorist provided an explanation for the emergence of these discourses noting:

‘The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction’ [p.70]

Through discourse, the coloniser creates a version of the colonised as ‘other’ but still recognisable, for example, through stereotyping, which places boundaries around the differences acknowledged, causing the abnormalities to feel familiar, yet increasingly distanced from the norm. Bhabha theorises that this is a contradictory positioning which leaves the colonised individual in constant movement between a position of similarity and difference. Therefore, attempts to minimise or reconcile differences between the colonised and coloniser are met by projections of imagined phobic characteristics by the coloniser, through narratives to reproduce and reiterate the stereotypes based in fear and fantasy. This readdresses the balance of power, maintaining the coloniser in a position of superiority and the colonised in a position of subordination.

Fanon and Bhabha assert that the colonised, or Black man, internalises these ‘abnormalities’ and negative representations of himself presented by the White man, through projective identification and develops a traumatic belief in his own inferiority which serves to reproduce his subjugation and oppression. In response to this trauma, he aspires to emulate the ‘superior’ characteristics, civilisation and culture of the White man, constructing an identity within the Eurocentric image, what Bhabha (1994) refers to as ‘mimicry’. The Black man attempts to wear the White mask of civilisation in order to hide his uncivilised nature, represented through his Black skin. This forces him to abandon his own cultural practices and identities in order to gain acceptance from the idealised White man, whilst recognising that he will never achieve Whiteness or be accepted on equal terms. Rather than being a sign of succumbing to White power, Bhabha asserts that, conversely, mimicry can be a way of asserting power as it forces the White man to challenge his assumptions of ‘otherness’ and difference from the Black man. However, as Fanon expresses, the Black man’s internalisation of his own inferiority and attempts at mimicry manifests as an experience of being stuck between two cultures or dimensions necessitating a process of splitting of the self or ‘self-division’, which has damaging psychological effects of a schizophrenic nature, theorised to include an inherent self-hatred and a desire to be White. Fanon asserts through his work that in order for the effects of colonialism to dissipate, psychological change must occur and challenges must be made to commonly accepted and perpetuated assertions about identity and worth.

In today’s society, it appears that there is contention around whether racial discrimination is still a relevant concept, due to perceived changes not only in anti-discrimination laws and policies, but also in attitudes. According to Bobo (2001) who carried out a review of racial attitudes, principles of racial equality and integration have been increasingly welcomed and embodied, as is increasingly represented through racial studies. However there still exists a picture of clear disparities between racially constructed groups. Perhaps it could be considered that whilst explicit expressions of racism have declined, less conscious or more hidden racist beliefs and attitudes may remain.

It is thought that racism exists in many forms, all in the plight to maintain power structures amongst racial groups, such as Aversive, Symbolic and Institutional racism. Aversive racism was proposed by Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) as describing the inadvertent expression of negative thoughts towards non-White groups, underpinned by normal psychological processes of social categorisation, through which in-groups and out-groups are formed. Whilst aversive racists may endorse equality on a conscious level, they have assimilated discriminatory racial beliefs. This leads to unintentional discriminatory behaviours and their avoidance of ethnic minorities rather than explicit hatred being expressed. (Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) note that aversive racism could also represent pro-in group rather than anti-out group beliefs, but regardless, its effects include decreased opportunities for non-dominant out-groups. In their exploration of historical racial disparities in the US, they concluded from the evidence that discriminatory attitudes continue to be a key factor characterising inequalities such as economic opportunities, a picture which is mirrored in the UK.

Sears (1988) described Symbolic racism as the expression of negative thoughts held about minorities, developed through socialisation in dominant racial biases. Perceived differences between the dominant and minority racial groups are regarded as a threat to dominant values and ideology, causing fear and discomfort. Sears and Henry (2005) note that in more recent society symbolic racism encapsulates the views that racism no longer exists and Black people are given the same opportunities as everyone else or have been given too much advantage. Therefore, failure to achieve or progress are viewed a result of inadequacy, ineptness or laziness. Within an educational setting, these perceptions are likely to prevent the success of strategies aimed at improving the outcomes of persistently underachieving Black students. Evans-Winters and Eposito (2010) discuss attempts to minimise the emphasis placed on race through colour-blind policies and approaches, seeking to treat everyone the same. But if these attempts at neutrality and objectivity exist within a context of White middle-class normativity, non-dominant groups remain at a disadvantage. Delgado and Stefancic (2000) noted that attempts at equal opportunities only address the more extreme forms of racism rather than the everyday forms of racism which account for much of the alienation and subjugation.

Institutional racism refers to the laws, policies and practices, based upon dominant White ideals, which systematically reinforce and reproduce racial inequality within society. According to Jones (1997), evidence can be found of institutional racism within the criminal justice system, employment sector and educational system. Whether the intention of these institutes is to disadvantage ethnic minorities or not is considered irrelevant according to Jones. What is important, is influencing change which facilitates equal opportunities within institutions. Gillborn (2005) also proposed that in order to look at race inequality, within educational policy and practices, outcomes rather than intent should be focussed upon. He argues that policies are not necessarily intended to further subjugate Black pupils and empower White pupils with privilege, but in reality perpetuate White ideals and favour students who can embody these ideals.

**2.e) Ethnic Minorities outcomes in the current Educational Context**

Looking at recent and historic achievement statistics in the UK, it appears that ethnic minority students’ rates of attainment are consistently, disproportionately lower than White students. This is particularly true of Black students who, despite making better progress and therefore matching the achievement of their White peers by the end of primary school (DfE, 2015), persistently under attain during secondary school. Black pupils have the lowest percentage of GCSE achievement (5 A\*-C) of all ethnic groups, at 3.4% below the national average in 2014 (DfE, 2015) and for Black Caribbean pupils, 8.1% below in 2015 (DfE, 2016). Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) has been consistently found to be a predictor of low academic performance across all racial categories and as expressed by DfE (2016),

“Black Caribbean pupils fall further behind when they are eligible for FSM: there is a 24.6 percentage point difference between these pupils and the national average in attainment of 5+ A\*-C.” (p.24)

However, even after controlling for socio-economic deprivation, which disproportionally affects Black children, their attainment is lower, and they overrepresented in relation to speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) (Strand & Lindsay, 2012). Black Caribbean and Mixed White & Black Caribbean are also twice as likely as White students to be identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) (Strand, 2012) and disproportionately more likely to receive fixed term exclusions, even when adjusting for age, gender and SES (Strand and Fletcher, 2014). The DfE (2015) paper also notes that there is a growing divergence between the attainment of Black African students and Black Caribbean/ Mixed White & Black Caribbean students, across gender, with Black African students performing increasingly better (5.2% points difference in 2004 compared to 9.2% points in 2013).

Gillborn (2008) noted how achievement statistics indicate a long term pattern of Black student’s underachievement in the UK, which indicates the persistence of inequality between races and their educational experience and attainment. He asserts that by selectively using statistics indicating improvements in the Black/White achievement gap in mainstream media, the true inequality faced by black and other minority students remains hidden. Consequently, justification for strategies to improve educational experiences and outcomes for ethnic minority children is lessened. Whilst there have been years where the difference in achievement between Black and White students has decreased, Gillborn purports that “Gap Talk” disregards the many years in-between where the gap actually widened, therefore perpetuating the misconception that significant progress towards greater equality have been achieved. Through highlighting the plights of other vulnerable minority groups such as White boys on FSM, against Black African boys, for example (rather than Black Caribbean, whose performance statistics are lower), Gillborn notes that the media paints a picture of ethnic minorities receiving disproportionate resources in accordance with need. This is framed as being at the expense of White children, obscuring a bigger more detailed picture, thus presenting White children as the new underprivileged and powerless.

Whilst it is important to address the significant underachievement of this group in comparison to White non-FSM children, it is more accurately described as a socioeconomic issue rather than a racial one. However, it appears commitments to social justice have been reframed to represent a competitive racial threat. In all ethnicity categories children on FSM generally attain lower than their non-FSM counterparts, but when socioeconomic indicators such as FSM are taken into account, Black Caribbean children are consistently and currently the group who are experiencing the highest rates of underachievement. Gillborn (2005) presents this as evidence of race inequality being a “relatively stable feature of the English education system”, p.237.

**2.f) Educational experiences and barriers to success**

Gillborn (2005) describes the barriers Black children face in their educational journey such as underrepresentation in groups which benefit from additional resources (such as gifted and talented programs) and overrepresentation in groups which are disadvantaged by lower quality teaching with less coverage of the curriculum. This can result in students not being able to access higher grades needed to carry on to further qualifications, when they are entered into lower level papers for GCSE’s. It could be considered that Black children have an educational experience which differs from that of their White counterparts, placing barriers in the way of their potential for educational success. However, some contention exists over the situation of these barriers – within the Black child or within the educational system and practices. A disregard for, or inability to follow authority structures within school has often been a concluding formulation, for why Black students do not achieve in line with their peers, i.e. they simply can’t follow the rules, or are naturally more aggressive and less able to control their behaviour (e.g. Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). A closer look at the issue, however, highlights complexities. Ogbu (2003) suggested that ethnic minorities often experienced academic disengagement due to a lack of belief in the potential for academia to be a route to success for them, due to a lack of personal examples of this occurring for others within their ethnic group. Rollock et al. (2011) expressed that middle class Black families may face fewer barriers to achievement in this respect, due to increased access to Black role models in esteemed careers requiring high levels of educational achievement (e.g. doctors and lawyers), making personal success feel more attainable.

Rahman (2013) explored the notion that ethnic minority students are disadvantaged within the educational system due to the presence of a ‘hidden curriculum’. This consists of unwritten rules, regulations, standards and expectations which reflect the values and behavioural practices considered appropriate by the White dominant culture. Students from ethnic minorities must reconcile any cultural behaviours with those necessary to assimilate into the school culture, participate in mainstream education and achieve academic success. Rahman noted that the hidden curriculum can be regarded as a political process which reinforces and reproduces social class structures and maintains the dominance of Western values over minority cultures. Whilst their White students are well versed in the mainstream culture, experiencing cultural familiarity and comfort in the school setting, giving them an educational advantage, ethnic minority students are required to predict school expectations and adjust their behaviour accordingly to achieve educational success. The alternative, less favourable occurrence is misinterpretation of their cultural behaviours and motivations leading to academic and social marginalisation. Amanishakete (2013) purport that adjustments need to be made to ‘mainstream’ curriculum to include curriculum which support Black children’s self-cultural education, to encourage self-knowledge, self-acceptance and self-determination, in order to improve their achievement.

Vang (2006) posited that students must conform to the ‘correct’ language and culture of the school setting through the abandonment of their preferred style of learning and communication. Gay (2006) also highlighted communicative differences between Black and White people which could cause cultural conflict in the classroom, with Black speech described as ‘animated’ and ‘interpersonal’, and White speech as ‘dispassionate’ and ‘impersonal’. For ethnic minority students, cultural differences may necessitate the adopting of an alternative identity, which is more aligned with mainstream values, and therefore more conducive to academic success. Ulrikson (2009) presents the argument that students vary in their ability to become or perform as the implied ideal student. This assimilation is dependent on factors such as gender, cultural background and associated behavioural norms and values. For example, within the school environment, cultural expectations which emphasise independence in dealing with conflict and determining own boundaries could conflict with Westernised expectations of seeking permission and help from authoritative figures, and alignment to strict, hierarchical behaviour systems. Gay (2006) found that Black, Latino and American Indian cultures favour more communal values which are underappreciated within the school classroom. Disparities between children’s cultural identity and the desired school identity could partially explain the persistent overrepresentation of Black pupils in disciplinary sanction statistics and underrepresentation in high achievement statistics.

Research has also considered that one of the barriers to the educational success of Black children is the attitudes held about them and the assumptions placed upon them, both within society and the educational context. The attitudes and expectations of school staff, teachers in particular, towards pupils can have a significant impact on pupil’s potential growth. For example, Davis and Jordan (1994) found that teacher’s perceptions of accountability for the success or failure of Black students was a strong indicator of achievement. If Black students underachievement is perceived to be due to factors within the child, teachers have low expectations and diminished perceptions of ability to improve their outcomes. Annamma et al.’s (2016) study in the US and found that Black girls were being given higher sanctions than their White peers for exhibiting the same behaviour. It was hypothesised that due to negative expectations of Black girls based upon typecast views, Black girls’ behaviour was often misinterpreted or posed a bigger threat to teachers. This mirrors findings by Blake et al. (2011) who discovered that Black girls were frequently receiving sanctions for unladylike behaviour, with teachers concerns rooted in stereotyped images of Black women. Wright’s (2010) ethnographic study in the UK highlighted the low expectations and negative attitudes Black girls were experiencing from teachers, regarding the way in which they asserted themselves. Wright noted that issues existed around the black girls’ rejection of, or refusal to conform to, the normative dominant view of femininity, a White middle class construct heralding compliancy and docility. Black females’ behaviour by contrast was considered hostile and aggressive. Annamma et al., (2016) note that exclusionary discipline is one way in which Black girls are increasingly denied the right to education, which consequently limits their potential educational and life outcomes.

Research undertaken with successful Black female students (e.g. Henry 1998, Fordham 1993, Amanishakete, 2013) highlight ‘practicing silence’ as an effective strategy for Black girls getting ahead in class and within the educational system. It would appear, disconcertingly, that in order to make progress the Black female pupil must become invisible within the classroom setting. Fordham (1993) explored emerging patterns amongst high-achieving Black females and found shared experiences which included: resistance through assuming a ghostlike existence alongside excellent grades; teaching and parenting which rewarded silence and obedience, and assertive suppression of any sexualised persona. Henry (1998) recognised instances of Black girls asserting themselves in the face of perceived injustice through ‘‘talking back’’ which appeared to be viewed by teachers as an undermining of their authority, warranting further sanctions. However, it was noted that the coexistence of the dual personas – obedient and resistant to injustice - affords Black girls resilience both within and outside of the educational system.

**2.g) BAME education and the role of the EP**

Prilleltensky (1997) highlights the emancipatory role of EPs and their responsibility to support the plight of oppressed and powerless groups. Due to their understanding of the psychological processes contributing to oppression and their power to influence positive change, EPs are in an ideal position to address racism and oppression within educational practice, systems and policies. DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2014) also assert that race is a topic which has developed sociohistorical meaning and hierarchical consequences which need addressing. Due to the disparities caused within the field of education, race should be studied as a phenomenon within the field of educational psychology. Their exploration of recent race-related studies within the top educational journals, including the British Journal of Educational Psychology (BJEP), identified that race-focussed research is highly underrepresented, with relatively few articles around race-imaged concepts. They suggest that race has historically been considered within the field of psychology to explore differences, for example with intelligence, which promoted deficit views of ethnic minorities. By considering race as a sociohistorical construct rather than focussing perceived genetic-based views, they purport that educational psychology can gain greater understanding of the racialised experience. CRT is suggested as a means through which race-focussed and race-imaged issues can be effectively explored to enhance equality within the educational system.

Sewell (2016) maintains that within EPs practice, recognising and critically considering the epistemological underpinnings is important for guiding ethical and methodological decisions. She explains the importance of EPs having an awareness of epistemological oppression and its impact through their practice. Epistemological oppression is defined as a theoretical positioning through which, there is unequal participation in knowledge construction and influencing dominant understandings. This warrants eliciting the voices of marginalised groups and providing the opportunity for counter-storytelling, which challenges dominant understanding. Dotson (2012) asserts that without this, epistemic exclusion occurs, as individuals or groups are restricted from contributing to knowledge construction, causing oppression through power imbalances. Part of the EP role is to promote both anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice, that is, reducing discrimination and addressing the wider subjugation experienced by individuals. It is suggested by Sewell (2006) that whilst anti-discrimination may be a commonly ingrained in EP practice, further consideration of anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice is warranted. Speight and Vera (2009) also propose that educational psychologists should be critical practitioners and critique the cultural values embedded within their practice.

**2. h) Research Questions**

The research questions for the current study have been informed by the literature review carried out into the research topic area and also the pilot interview. They are as follows:

**Research Question 1:** Which aspects of identity are considered to be important as Black females with Caribbean heritage and what is the impact of intersectionality?

**Research Question 2:** What impact does/has identity have/had upon the group’s educational experiences?

**Research Question 3:** What has supported participant’s educational experiences?

These questions were explored through sub-questions, however, these were designed to be used as prompts rather than being a strict interview schedule, with questions arising from participant’s answers.

**Conclusion**

This chapter explored relevant literature and theory relating to the power hierarchy associated with race and gendered identities, with Whiteness and maleness constructed as the idealised norm and Blackness and femininity constructed as the degraded other. It considered how intersectionality and issues of discrimination, racism and Whiteness within the educational policy and practice can impact the educational outcomes for black, female students of Caribbean heritage. Additionally this chapter explored the role for EPs in addressing inequality and oppression for marginalised groups, eliciting voices to gain greater understanding of the racialised experience and challenging limiting racialised constructions.

**3. Methodology**

**Introduction**

This chapter seeks to provide a systematic guide and theoretical analysis of the methods employed for the current study. The design section will cover the rationale for the chosen research methods and how they intended to address the research questions. The procedure section explores how the research was undertaken, including sampling of participants, data collection and phases of analysis.

**3.a) Design**

This section focusses on the following key areas:

i). Theoretical Approach to research*:* *Epistemological and ontological position, social constructionism, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (FemCrit).*

ii). Narrative Enquiry*:* *Narrative analysis, Performative Identity, Focus Groups, Listening Guide, and Alternative Methodologies.*

iii). Validity and Quality*:* *Sensitivity to Context; Commitment, Transparency, Coherence and Reflexivity; and Impact and Importance*.

**3.a) i) Theoretical Approach to Research**

This section explores researcher epistemological and ontological positioning which underpin the research aims and approaches. These set the foundation for the theoretical underpinnings which follow. Whilst some of the theories (e.g. CRT and FemCrit) constitute methodologies in themselves, within the present study they have been utilised to inform thinking and analysis, whilst attending to the narratives presented by participants.

**3.a) i) i) Epistemological and Ontological Positioning**

The theoretical positioning I am conducting the research from is a critical realist social constructionism perspective. Epistemologically, from this perspective, knowledge is considered to be derived from interactions with the social world, shaped by historical and political contexts. Therefore, the research cannot claim to uncover ‘truths’ about human nature as multiple realities are believed to exist. Instead it seeks to provide insight into constructions of reality expressed by a group with shared characteristics, in this case, women of Caribbean descent in relation to their identity and educational experiences. It seeks understanding of the cooperative social meanings groups develop in their cultures, giving the individual experience legitimacy but considering it within social frameworks. According to Gergen (2009), knowledge is relational and originates from communities rather than individual minds, therefore, to study the individual out of context is seen as inept as the actions of the individual in itself has no meaning without its relational understandings. The ontological perspective recognises that these social constructions and influences are experienced as ‘real’ and have implications for individuals and groups. The critical realism perspective purports that multiple interactive causal powers are responsible for all events (Bhaskar, 1975). According to Elder-Vass (2010) whilst individuals can be said to have emergent causal powers of their own which come from their physical bodies, for example, their brains or muscles, the development of these are causally influenced by social contexts.

Causality is understood as potentialities or tendencies, in that the causal powers are dependent on each other to create a particular event, but the absence of some causal powers or presence of other causal powers can prevent the emergence of characteristic outcomes or create different effects entirely. Social events are considered to be influenced by emergent causal powers which originate from social structures, the individuals themselves and material objects Elder-Vass (2012).

Social constructionist critical realism allows for the understanding that despite being influenced by social context, humans have a degree of agency which can allow them to resist social constructions of who they should be and how they should act, making change possible. The extent to which individuals have this power to change is, however, situated within historical conditions which influence the availability of realistic options and opportunities to create change and construct identity.

My positioning as a researcher with a social constructionist, critical realist theoretical approach created tensions in how I felt it was appropriate to engage with the research, which determined how I both interacted with the participants and the data and chose to present the thesis findings. Considering knowledge to be constructed within social settings whilst also considering the participants to have a degree of agency in how they represented themselves, led to a tricky balancing of acknowledging that I was shaping the knowledge to some degree, but recognising that there were thoughts and opinions about the topics which existed prior to this particular group forming, which I wanted to elicit.

Being a Black female of Caribbean descent carrying out a study with other females of the same demographic, my identity and presence within the research was considered to be of benefit, with regards to providing me with shared understandings with the group, based on aspects of shared identity and personal understandings of shared experiences presented through emerging narratives, which helped to shape analysis. However differences in age and power dynamics, as an older, post-graduate researcher leading the study, may have led the (younger, undergraduate) participants to consider me as outside of the group to some degree.

Throughout the study, I sought to privilege and voice participants’ narratives and represent their views as a priority. Consequently, whilst I was aware that I was structuring the research to some degree through my selecting of the topics, questioning and presence within the focus groups, I felt the need to separate myself and my views from the participants’, to a degree, to ensure that participants felt they had the freedom to express views which they were bringing to the group and construct knowledge between themselves as a group. For example, whilst I was using CRT as an underpinning theory which proposes an understanding that race is a relevant concept in modern society, used as a means to create continued power differences, participants were within their rights to dictate that race was not a relevant part of their identity/experiences, if that was their perception. Therefore, I chose to be careful about how and when I expressed my own personal opinions and constructs within the focus groups, for fear of disproportionately influencing the participants’ narratives or making participants feel unable to express opinions which may have conflicted with mine.

Whilst I felt part of the group and focus group conversations at times, relating to experiences discussed, joining the group in responding non-verbally to comments made (e.g. laughing, facial expressions, etc.) and contributing to discussions through my questioning, at other times, I felt very much outside of the group looking in. E.g. when participants engaged in continued dialogues between themselves, without needing further questioning or input from me. They also referred to buildings, groupings and events specific to their university and their shared understandings and experiences within their university which I do not attend, in addition to discussion about the social network ‘Black Twitter’, which I had never heard of, but was familiar to the group. There were also moments when I was very much reminded that I was considered by the group members as external to their group, in my positioning as researcher, when participants articulated a desire to provide information which fitted what I might be expecting. E.g. when I was asked whether I wanted the group to talk about negative or racialised experiences, in response to my open question about educational experiences, and group members apologised for talking about experiences or events which they felt were “off topic”. Whilst I had wanted to encourage what felt like natural conversations about the research topic, the participants maintained an awareness that the purpose of the discussions was to answer particular research questions and consequently, participants did not have free range of topics. However, I felt that the fact that the participants felt comfortable to defer questions asked, in order to follow their interests, demonstrated their feelings of empowerment within the setting to act with agency. E.g. when Amina noted that she would answer the question posed, but first wanted to mention a recent event.

The decision to write the thesis in a formal register, e.g. not referring to myself as the researcher in the first person, other than within the reflective boxes, also reflected my epistemological positioning. I wanted to separate participants’ narratives from my own thoughts to a degree, recognising participants as agentic subjects whose realities and experiences related to mine but were also separate. I did not want the narratives to read as a reflection of my own interests and experiences but those presented by participants. Consequently, I felt it was appropriate to write the study as an academic piece, representing experiences presented, which were experienced as real to participants, in a way which reflected that understanding. I included personal reflections written in the first person to document how my thoughts and actions influenced decisions and actions which will have contributed to shaping the narratives and understandings of them.

**3.a) i) ii) CRT, FemCrit & Social Justice focused Research**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CritFem) are utilised within the research in order to present an alternative perspective and challenge the dominant White ideologies which are often used to explain statistical educational difficulties. The theories allow knowledge to be elicited through frameworks which represent the participants and the social and historical contexts which influence constructions of their identities and experiences. Through CRT the research addresses the impact of race for individuals with Caribbean heritage, on experiences and constructions of these experiences. CritFem provides an understanding of how gender may further impact constructions of identity and interactions with educational systems and contexts. Intersectionality is explored to examine how multiple identities and positioning impact on experiences. The research is social justice focused as it is participatory, encouraging participants to be involved not only in contributing to but also analysing data, ensuring that their voices are represented within the research. It aims to address issues of injustice and inequality experienced by those subject to oppression, whose voices often go unheard. Please refer to Chapter Two for further details on CRT, CritFem and social justice theory.

**3.a) ii) Narrative Enquiry**

The study aims to identify protective factors and barriers to educational success for Black Caribbean students, through analysis of the experiences of the participants, presented through group interviews. I am interested in how participants construct these experiences through their use of language, and how these experiences have influenced their constructions of their identity. Narrative research seeks to represent stories which are told by individuals and groups and explores how personal and group identities are formed and constructed against and with culturally constructed images of the self. The current study also uses narrative analysis to explore whether the language used and identities constructed serve to appropriate power and resist cultural and historical representations or further subjugate power by conforming to and reproducing identities historically used to position groups as powerless.

According to Draus (2004):

“Narrative is a mode of conveying sociological information which allows the sick, poor, and the otherwise excluded to determine at least some of the terms by which they will be known.”p.33

It seeks to present the voices of subjugated groups allowing them to define and construct their identities and experiences in the ways that they want to be seen and understood.

**3.a) ii) i) Identity as Performative**

This research uses theory by Bakhtin (1981) as a basis for understanding the meaning which language holds when expressed to audiences. Rather than being considered solely as a tool to convey information, language is considered by Bakhtin to be inseparable from its historical usage and meanings. Therefore, narratives are understood as being saturated in ideologies, ambiguities and hidden agendas beyond the words spoken. They are not considered to be accurate reflections of events or internal states, but an expression of identity which is performed within a particular context. Considering spoken narratives as a ‘performance’ is not to suggest inauthenticity but instead conveys the understanding that all narratives, whether monological or dialogical, are constructed and presented in negotiation with the intended audience. That is, we use language to shape our self-representations to portray particular meaning, dependant on who is listening, how we want to be perceived and how we think others perceive us and expect us to be. Goffman (1971) also asserts that in conversation we create and project an identity for others, therefore, the presence and response of the listener is implicated in the story which is presented.

Kohler Riessman (2008) highlights how narrative analysis can be effectively utilised to explore performances of identity, as narrative is performative. She stated that language should be interrogated – the particular words and styles selected to recount experience as these provide insight into how language is used and to what effect, recognising that narrative is performative. Attention should also be paid to the historical and cultural context within which the research is taking place, as well as the audiences for the narrative and shifts in the interpreter’s positioning over time. The current research will, therefore, document researcher perspectives on the interactions and present narratives in consideration of contextual elements of performances and historical and cultural influences.

**3.a) ii) ii) Focus Groups**

Two focus group interviews are utilised for the present study, with the initial focus group designed to collect data around the research questions and the subsequent focus group designed to allow participants to reflect on the previous session and for meanings to be further investigated. Viji and Benedict (2014) highlight the potential for focus groups to explore meaning which cannot be explained through statistics. They are an opportunity to encourage dialogue around key issues and have a communities’ opinions and ideas explored. A focus group was therefore considered to be an appropriate approach to use for the current research, as despite the educational differences demonstrated through statistical research, the experiences of Black females of Caribbean heritage which could enhance understanding around why these figures might be consistently emerging, are not being represented.

Bakhtin (1981) considers dialogical approaches to be an effective way to explore human experiences due to the understanding that human experience is embedded in collective activities. Life is dialogical, therefore, research carried out in this way allows negotiation of ideas in the way that all narratives are formed. Through a focus group methodology, these narratives can be explored in a relational way, amongst a group with a personal relationship to the topic but varied ideas and experiences. By facilitating a ‘carnival’ – an open dialogical space which encourages a range of opinions to be expressed and explored, allows for contradictions, inconsistencies and variation of beliefs and experiences, which exist within a particular community or group, to become prevalent. It also facilitates the shifting of power dynamics in favour of participants. (Viji and Benedict, 2014). Unlike with one-to-one interviews, group interviews allow stories to be generated from participants to influence other stories which will subsequently be told by other participants within the group. This encourages self-reflection upon words participants have spoken along with reflection of others’ expressions, both of which will influence consequent identity and group constructions for the storytellers and the listeners. Underpinning this assertion is theory proposed by Mead (1962) which considers that humans hear themselves speak and this causes a response. It is through self-reflection on our speech that change is subsequently instigated in participants’ and researchers’ lives. Therefore, dialogical research carried out, for example, through group interviews, are a form of human intervention. The continual generation of stories is where meaning is held, according to Bakhtin and proponents of narrative research. Within the current research, the researcher does not have the final say on the meaning of the narratives and what they represent, instead the presentation of the research is intended to continue the dialogue in the subsequent group.

The second focus group provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on the meanings they made of the transcribed version of the first focus group they were provided with. Encouraging group to engage with interpretation served as an opportunity to continue the dialogue. It follows traditions of post-colonial research which purport that research participants, particularly from subjugated communities should have the authority on how their voices are represented in research. The follow-up group is also an opportunity to present identity poems developed from the research back to participants, in effect performing their identities back to them, for their consideration and reflection.

**3.a) ii) iii) Listening Guide**

The Listening Guide (Woodcock, 2016), a relational, voice-centred, feminist methodology for analysing transcripts, is used for the present study as a way to attend to and respect the voices and experiences of participants. It proposes a model of analysis which uses four distinct listenings of recorded data to identify distinctive elements of the narratives. The first stage of analysis is aimed at attending to the overall shape of the narratives emerging from the dialogue, including aspects deemed important by participants and those which are pertinent to the researcher. It is also an opportunity to consider the research relationship and positionality which is documented through reflective boxes within the current research. The second listening is aimed at exploring how the participants speak for and about themselves – the construction and performance of their identities. The current research also seeks to explore perceptions of outsider constructions of participant’s identities during the second listening which are expressed partially through “voice poems” elicited from the research data. The third, fourth listenings are aimed at focusing on themes which emerge in through the data and answer the research questions.

**3.a) ii) iv) Alternative Methodologies**

For explanation of alternative methodologies considered for the current research and why they were not used, please see Appendix III.

**3.a) iii) Validity and Quality**

The idiographic approach employed under the qualitative paradigm seeking to reflect, record and comprehend individual events and cases in their entirety to consider the interaction between individuals and their environments and experiences. Rather than seeking an objective truth, qualitative researchers seek to reconstruct experiences and points of view to gain insights into phenomena and better understand the behaviour and culture of humans through individual experiences. The current research is data driven, seeking to develop philosophies as a consequence of interaction with the phenomena rather than prior to investigation. Therefore, the methodology was fluid and organic, with the research questions used as the solid structure around which themes are based. The emphasis of the analysis was consequently driven from the participants’ data with whichever analytical approach enabled the research questions to be answered in the most effective manner. As Yardley (2000) notes:

“the limitations and idiosyncracies inherent in any single perspective on a topic can be both highlighted and partially circumvented by employing a combination of analytic approaches.” (p.221)

Difficulty ascertaining validity of results is a common criticism of qualitative research from quantitative schools of thinking with the assertion that if the underpinning assumptions are that reality and knowledge is subjective to individual consciousness and does not exist outside it, it is impossible to verify the validity of research results and assert credibility. Yardley (2000) notes that due to qualitative methods employing the understanding that truth, knowledge and reality result from social construction and negotiation of meaning, to limit the criteria for establishing truth would limit the possibility for knowledge to emerge. However, it is necessary to ensure quality control of research through criteria which is meaningful to those who the research is intended for. Whilst the positivist notions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are inappropriate for use with qualitative studies, other notions of validity can be employed through alternative reliability criteria. The current research utilises reliability criteria proposed by Yardley (2000) who suggested that qualitative research should be concerned about sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; impact and importance; and reflexivity.

**3.a) iii) i) Sensitivity to Context**

Yardley asserts that honouring sensitivity to context includes providing a sound theoretical context to research, sociocultural setting, participants’ perspectives and ethical issues. The current project demonstrates sensitivity to context through a thorough analysis of previous related research (please see Critical Literature Review for further details) and consideration of relevant theory such as CRT and FemCrit as a contextual background. The group interview method itself was utilised as a platform to allow participants’ perspectives to be expressed and the use of a follow up group interview after providing participants with a transcript intended to address power imbalances by providing a more active role for participants who would have previously been considered subjects of research. This meant that participants had the opportunity to discuss interpretations made and dispute or expand upon ideas. Riessman (1993, 2007) rejects the principle of the researcher as the expert and recommends that analysis and interpretation be brought back to participants as they should have the authority on the authenticity and value of the interpretation. The present study subscribes to this principle, holding the participants as the experts on their experiences and the meaning held within them.

Consideration of the relationship between researcher and participants was also an important aspect of the research due to the theoretical underpinning that language is used to communicate meaning with consideration of audience. As Yardley (2002) noted:

“…the listener contributes to what is said, not only by the moment-by-moment verbal and nonverbal input which prompts and completes the other’s utterances, but also by actively or passively invoking the relative identities and shared understandings which provide the framework for speech.” (p.221)

The inclusion of an analysis of the group dynamics and researcher reflections throughout the process was considered an important element to provide further insight into interpretations made. During the research process, a stronger connection was developed than expected between participants’ and my own educational experiences, contexts and thoughts, which meant that reflecting on this and my reactions to participants was an important part of the context. The details participants provided about their educational history, with regards to the demographics and geographical locations of educational institutions attended, gave further context for the experiences they were discussing.

**3.a) iii) ii) Commitment, Transparency, Coherence and Reflexivity**

In order for qualitative methods to achieve thoroughness and reliability, transparency, coherence and rigour are important elements to consider (Yardley, 2000). Additional elements include clarity and power of argument, transparency of methods and data presentation, fit between theory and method and reflexivity.

The current research project achieves transparency and reflexivity through the insertion of reflective boxes which provide an insight into researcher positioning over time and interaction with data and the research process as it develops. As Yardley (2000) expressed:

“…for researchers who believe that our experience of the world is profoundly influenced by our assumptions, intentions and actions, it is equally important to openly reflect on how such factors may have affected the product of the research investigation.” (p.222)

The nature of the research project dictates that the researcher is very much part of the group interaction being explored and influential to the knowledge elicited, therefore, reflexivity is an important element of the research. By documenting the thought processes which contribute to the analysis, the project seeks to be transparent and coherent to the reader. The research questions are therefore used as a structure around which themes are presented for clarity. I assert that the theory and method are coherent, as explained through this Methodology section and coherence and clarity of argument is supported by the inclusion of participant data to evidence theoretical claims.

**3.a) iii) iii) Impact and Importance**

Yardley notes that impact of research can relate to practical uses, e.g. to influence change for a community, or theoretical importance, e.g. to enrich understanding around an issue. The current research project aims to achieve impact through both criteria, that is, it seeks to enhance understanding around the facilitators and barriers to success experienced by Black females of Caribbean descent and the constructions of their identity in order to support change for the community*.* As noted earlier, group interviews can be viewed as a form of intervention, an instigator of change, therefore, involvement in the study itself is likely to have an impact on participants and can be considered important. EPs have a responsibility to address inequality and promote success for all students, particularly those considered to be vulnerable or oppressed. Therefore, I would purport that seeking to explore the experiences of a group which is persistently underachieving is a relevant and important area of research.

**3.b) Procedure**

This section aims to provide an insight into the procedural aspects of the research project to inform readers of the stages involved in undertaking the study. It is written so that the reader can follow the steps and gain an understanding of how the research was carried out with some explanation as to why certain decisions were made throughout the process. This section focuses on the following:

i). Participants: *Why Participants were Chosen, Participant Selection and Who Participants Are.*

ii). Pilot study: *Purpose, Pilot Study Questions and Extract and Pilot Study Implications.*

iii). Process: *Ethical Considerations, Equipment, Research Diary, Data Collection, Transcription and Phases of Analysis.*

**3.b) i) Participants**

For the purpose of the current research project, five Black women with Caribbean heritage, who were being educated in the UK were chosen to undertake the focus group interview. A sixth participant was selected but unable to attend without notice. Details of why the participants were chosen, how they were selected and key characteristics are detailed below.

**3. b) i) i) Why Participants were Chosen**

There was an initial intention to only include participants who were British, however, it transpired that one of the participants was born and school educated in the Caribbean, in a British Overseas Territory (BOT), Bermuda. She had, however, been receiving college and university education in the UK. Another participant was British born but also carried out the majority of her education in the Caribbean (Grenada).

**Reflective box:**

I was initially concerned that the fact that one of my participants was not British meant that her sense of identity would differ from the others in the group. I also wondered whether I should have made the distinction between participants being partially and fully British educated as there was a potential for those participants to feel that the majority of their experiences were not of relevance which could serve to isolate them from the group/topic and result in data which was not strictly relevant. During the focus group, my fears were partially confirmed as one participants appeared unsure of whether to contribute her experiences of the Caribbean and another spoke at length about the difficulties in her country. However, with encouragement, the former was able to contribute, encouraged by the groups’ response to her. I felt that the expressions of identity and difference of experiences from these participants created the opportunity for comparisons to be made and ultimately added depth to the discussion.

The participants are university students aged between 20-22 years. I wanted the study to reflect recent experiences of the education system, in order to consider recent/current barriers to success and whether racism is a recognised feature of modern Britain and what it looks like/how it is experienced. Whilst younger participants were considered, discussions during supervision highlighted potential difficulties which could arise, such as participants being less able to engage with meaningful self-reflection. It was therefore decided that it would be more appropriate to involve university rather than school students, who were likely to be mature enough to engage in reflection and effectively articulate their current and previous educational experiences. It was important that there were enough participants to demonstrate a variance in circumstances in order to explore how other factors may impact on identity formation and academic experience. However, in order to afford the study the depth of nuanced analysis it requires, and to effectively comprehend and represent the experiences of the participants within a limited time frame, the sample size had to be limited.

**3. b) i) ii) Participant Selection**

Participants were recruited through advertisements sent through university student networks, including groups such as the Afro-Caribbean Society (ACS) and through word of mouth. In order to hold a group interview where all participants were in attendance, it was necessary that the participants were in close geographical proximity to each other. Therefore, all participants chosen are attendees at the same university. This meant that most of the participants knew, or knew of each other, through common interests, such as involvement with the ACS or established friendships. Two of the participants also lived together.

**Reflective box**

I felt during the focus group that the prior relationships between participants were in some way beneficial as once the initial awkwardness dissipated, the conversation fell into a rhythm which resembled a lively conversation between friends. However, I sensed some tension in the room as one of the participants referred to two others as her best friends. By voicing her connection with them it felt almost as if she was establishing herself and those peers as a sub-group, separated from the other two participants. This appeared to cause a change in group dynamics and one participant seemed to further withdraw from the group through her body language. This alerted me to the risks of working with a group with some established friendships amongst those with weaker social links – the potential for members to feel less included and less able to express themselves confidently.

The participants for the study were selected as they had expressed an interest in being involved and were available to attend on the most popular date option. As participants were mainly gathered through word of mouth, it occurred that there was a social connection between myself and some of the participants who expressed an interest. This was the case with the first participant and as there was a close link, I felt that it might be more appropriate to elicit her experiences as part of the pilot study and she agreed that she was comfortable with this. I considered that my prior association with this individual may impact her involvement in the group – she may have been more mindful about how she constructed experiences to others in front of me and this had the potential to impact on the group relations. I was concerned that my social link to participants may have impacted participants’ abilities or willingness to openly engage in the process and the potential for social influence. However, I sought to overcome this through an openness to information sharing, reassurances that there were no wrong or right answers and that responses were confidential.

**3. b) i) iii) Who the Participants Are**

The participants were all students at a university in the East Midlands which was described as ‘multicultural’ and racially mixed by participants, and were in their second or third year of study. The following provides further information on each of the participants, with pseudonyms used to protect their identities.

**Alicia**

Alicia (20) was born and brought up in South East London and was diagnosed with dyslexia during primary school. Her primary and secondary education was carried out in a mixed sex, academy school in the same area which was non-denominational and racially mixed. Alicia attended the school sixth form for the first year, before moving to a college in the area, with similar demographics, to access different subjects. Alicia was attending university in South East England studying American History at the time of the study and was in her second year. She described the university and area as predominantly White, which she felt was a culture shock following her previous experiences.

**Shakira**

Shakira (21) was born and brought up in Manchester, North West England. She attended a public Catholic primary school which was predominantly White and middle class. Shakira initially received secondary education at a non-denominational, mixed sex, grammar school in the North West which was predominantly White with a large percentage of Asian pupils and very few Black pupils. She then moved to a different non-denominational, mixed sex, grammar school in a more affluent area of the North West which had similar race demographics and also attended sixth form there. Shakira was studying Law at university.

**Zara**

Zara (20) received some nursery education in Nigeria and St Lucia, whilst staying with family. She attended a non-denominational, mixed-sex, public primary school in North East London which was racially mixed. She attended a mixed sex, private, Anglican secondary school and sixth form in Essex and noted that it was ‘not very mixed’ with regards to race and she was the only Black girl in her year. Zara was studying Forensic Science at university.

**Amina**

Amina (20) was born and brought up in Solihull, West Midlands. She attended a private, Christian, mixed sex primary school which was predominantly White, with a small proportion of Asian pupils and no other Black pupils. Amina achieved a scholarship and bursary to attend a private, mixed sex secondary school and sixth form with similar demographics. She noted that she was, again, the only Black girl and “drifted a lot from school/sixth form because of it.” She was studying Media at university.

**Samara**

Samara (22) was born and brought up in Bermuda. She attended a mixed-sex public primary school which was non-denominational and predominantly Black. Her secondary school was a private, non-denominational, mixed-sex school in Bermuda which was described as 65% White and 35% Black. Samara moved to England and attended a mixed sex, non-denominational, multi-cultural college in Birmingham, West Midlands, prior to attending university. She was studying Actuary Science at university.

**Lydia**

Lydia was born in London but moved to the Caribbean and attended nursery, primary and secondary school in Grenada, West Indies. She was educated in public Anglican schools which were mixed sex and all pupils were Black (apart from one pupil at secondary school). Lydia attended a public sixth form (mixed sex and race demographics with no religious denomination) in South East London after a few months attending a provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs (due to difficulties with school admissions upon moving to England mid-year, Lydia is not considered to have an SEMH need). Lydia was studying Criminology at university.

**3.b) ii) Pilot Study**

The pilot study was carried out in October 2017 and involved a 1:1 interview lasting approximately 1 hour 30 minutes. The pilot helped to identify themes which were likely to occur in the focus group and was an opportunity to identify whether the questions elicited the right types of responses to answer the research questions. For further information, please see appendices II, III and IV.

**Reflective box**

The pilot study had highlighted a dilemma about whether my questioning would work within a group context, however, I felt that themes would be more likely to emerge organically rather than through direct questioning and that I could allow my questions to be more open and reactive in a group context. I considered how group dynamics would change how the narratives were presented and would interact and develop from each other, unlike within a one-to-one interview, where the dialogue was being created for a single audience. Whilst the pilot study highlighted some interesting themes, I felt that a focus group was a more appropriate method for the study, considering my positioning of identity being co-created in dialogue, in negotiation and consideration of audience and environments. However, I was concerned about how best to represent the multiple voices which would emerge from the approach.

**3.b) iii) Process**

This section outlines the decisions and actions taken in order to complete the research project, including the equipment used, the data collection, transcription and analysis processes.

**3. b) iii) i) Ethical considerations**

Prior to undertaking any data collection, an ethical application for the current project was submitted and approved. Please see Appendix II for further details. British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the research process. Participants were asked to read and sign an information sheet before commencing involvement in the study and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

**3. b) iii) ii) Equipment**

A voice recorder was used during the focus group interviews in order to accurately capture participant’s responses, along with a pen and paper to record observations. Participants were given information sheets to read and refer to, along with consent forms. Participants also completed a sheet to document their school history, to provide further contextual information.

**3.b) iii) iii) Research Diary**

A research diary was kept from the initial stages of conceptualising, researching and planning the research project to undertaking data collection and analysis. This was used in order to document questions, thoughts and reflections relating to the project as it progressed. Some of this information has been provided in reflective boxes placed throughout this document, whilst other elements have been used to develop thinking around aspects of the research and inform decision making.

**3.b) iii) iv) Data Collection**

Following the recruitment of participants, two semi-structured focus group interviews lasting approximately 1 hour 45 minutes and 1 hour, were carried out in the home of two of the research participants. This was deemed to be a suitable location for the focus groups as it was a relaxed environment familiar to some of the participants. There was a concern that those participants who didn’t live in the house may feel less at ease, however, the fact that none of the participants were complete strangers to each other lessened the potential for discomfort.

**Reflective box**

The purpose of two sequential focus groups, rather than just one, was discussed during supervision and I explained that I felt that this would be an opportunity to take the ‘knowledge’ I had created through interpretation and analysis to those who created it, through their dialogue. I intended to represent the voices of the group and individuals within it and therefore felt that it was important that participants had the opportunity to discuss my understandings and whether they were representative of them and their understandings. I did not intend to position myself as the authority on knowledge, but rather present a co-creation of knowledge through continued performance. Therefore I felt that it would be appropriate to present the findings as a dialogue in the second focus group.

The first focus group session was used to elicit experiences, views and stories from participants. Questions were asked in order to stimulate responses relevant to the research topics, however, the aim of the interaction was to facilitate discussion between the group members who were encouraged to lead the agenda within the topics of discussion. Therefore, questions were generally asked once natural discussion had come to a close and there was a pronounced pause. Moffatt et al. (2005) noted that flexibility of schedule was particularly important when working with marginalised groups and carrying out multicultural research, in order to allow space for stories of oppression and resistance. Participants were asked, where possible, to state their names before providing responses, in order to facilitate the documentation of each participant’s responses separately. This did not persist throughout the study which allowed for a more natural flow of conversation. The participants’ voices were easily identifiable after a short period of engaging with the recording.

**Reflective box**

The idea of sending the whole transcript to the group was raised as a way to engage participants in the analysis of their data, as the project sought to involve participants and represent them to the greatest extent possible. By receiving transcripts weeks prior to the second focus group, participants would be able to read through at their own leisure and make notes to bring to the next focus group. I felt that this would provide participants with the opportunity to select what they thought was pertinent from the data, address aspects of the dialogue contributed by themselves, or others in the group, and identify themes. I offered this as a choice, should participants want to engage, as it would give them more agency with regards to the analysis. However, as it would mean more commitment from participants with regards to their participation in the study (e.g. investing more time and effort than they had originally committed to), I recognised that they may choose not to, or may not have the time to engage in this way. In hindsight I realised that by giving participants the whole transcript this was placing a large amount of responsibility on them and was likely to be an overwhelming exercise for them (as it had at times been for me), due to the volume of data which was produced. However, I had wanted to avoid the alternative, reducing the data given to participants.This would have meant privileging parts of the discussions by selecting narratives, asserting what I felt was interesting and/or important, before participants had been given the opportunity to have their say.

As the session came to an end, participants were asked whether they would like to contribute to the analysis of the data collected, by reading a copy of the full transcript or part of it and recording themes and ideas elicited to bring to the following focus group for discussion. All participants elected to receive the transcript and were sent copies of the data approximately 8 weeks prior to the second meeting.

The second focus group was carried out following a process of researcher reflection and analysis. Whilst encouraged, none of the participants elected to bring notes developed through engaging with the transcript. They were given the option to begin the session with their ideas, but collectively professed that they were more comfortable hearing my thoughts first. Identity poems were then presented to the group in order to stimulate a discussion, followed by questions which had been raised through analysis of the first group.

**Reflective box**

I considered presenting the I-poems I had created for individuals during the second group, as this would be a way of presenting a reduced form of raw data participants had produced to them, for them to reflect on. I intended to do this once participants had expressed their own ideas, following engagement with the whole transcript, or parts they had selected. However, I felt that this could be putting individuals in an uncomfortable position – having shared their views and statements within the context of a group dynamic of group dialogue, which is potentially quite different from having their comments collated to form a separate narrative in a monologue form, to be questioned on in front of the group. I then explored the idea of presenting a group I-poem created from the data, representing statements from all members, where possible, as this was a way for me to perform the groups’ identities back to them, giving the group an opportunity to analyse their data (responding to individual voices if they wished), and construct understandings through their response and thoughts on the performance. The aim of this would be to continue the construction and reconstruction of identity and allow the group to reframe my understandings in consideration of identities that resonate or conflict with their own, without being singled out. Consequently, I presented group I-poems within the second session and asked participants if they could hear their own voices within the poems.

**3.b) iii) v) Transcription**

Following each focus group, the recorded data was transcribed. Please see Appendix VIII on the enclosed disc for full transcripts. The transcription was considered to be very much part of the analytic process, and was therefore carried out personally. Listening to the raw data provided an opportunity to be transported back to the experience of the interview, encouraging reflection on participant’s tones, associated expressions and the interaction between group members. The transcription sought to present the groups interaction as a performance narrative by including features Wolfson (1978) identifies:

* Direct speech within narratives
* Repetition, pauses and overlapping utterances
* Asides to the audiences – comments relating to a story being presented between those listening to the story
* Expressive sounds such as audible sighs or laughter

Following the initial transcription, the interview was listened to a further three times for analysis, each whilst engaging with the written transcript. This facilitated checking for accuracy and any further details of note which may not have become initially apparent.

**3.b) iii) vi) Phases of Analysis**

The following stages formed the basic framework for analysis of the focus group data:

* Transcription of taped focus group, with notes made about emerging thoughts.
* Transcribed interview sent to participants for their analysis before the subsequent focus group.
* First listening and analysis of the overall shape of the narratives emerging from the dialogue. Colour coding of narratives to support emerging themes and documenting of reader response.
* Second listening and analysis of constructions of identity. Attention is paid to participant’s voices and identity poems are created from the data to be brought to the second focus group.
* Transcription of second taped focus group with notes made about emerging thoughts, analysis of additional themes presented and clarifications of meaning.
* Third and fourth listening of original data to further explore themes in consideration of data from the second group interview. Themes which are in tension with, or complement each other are also explored. Listenings are carried out separately but analysed together.
* The interpretation is supported through supervision and collaboration to facilitate coherence and validity.
* Researcher reflections on thoughts and perceptions throughout the process are documented.

**Reflective box**

It was intended that participants would have the final authority on how they were represented. However, the process of analysis was continued following the second focus group e.g. identifying contrapuntal and related themes, which provided greater insight and altered some of my perceptions. E.g. Shakira’s rejecting of teacher support was initially considered as representing feelings of disempowerment leading to silencing. However, following analysis of the second focus group, it was later considered as an act of empowerment, due to Shakira’s lack of trust in educators. As another meeting was not deemed possible, the final themes and narratives, and interpretations of them were not checked by the participants. Consequently, evidencing interpretations with raw data, in the analysis and discussion, felt particularly important, to ensure I was authentically representing participants’ voices.

**Conclusion**

This chapter outlines the methodology for the proposed study including the design and procedural aspects involved. It provides a guide to and rationale for the chosen method and the procedures undertaken to collect and analyse date. Reflections provide some insight into thought processes throughout the process.

1. **Results and Discussion**

**Introduction**

This section provides the reader with the results of the analysis by theme, seeking to present the identities and experiences presented by participants in relation to the research questions (RQ’s), (see Table 1). The themes are discussed in consideration of relevant literature and theory. The Listening Guide Methodology was used to elicit themes and attend to participant’s voices, including through the use of identity poems which were presented to the group during the second focus group. Whilst some of these poems are presented in this section, others are presented in Appendix X and XI. Narratives and dialogues taken directly from the transcript are also included to evidence themes, in order to present the reader with an insight into the dynamic interaction between participants and how that helped to shape narratives (see ‘key for transcript excerpts’ below to inform presentation of linguistic features). Please see Appendix IX for reflective notes on the group dynamics perceived during the two focus groups, to provide further context for how the narratives were interpreted. Please see Appendix VIII (Attached on Disc) for the full transcripts.

The first section explores the aspects identity considered important by the participants (RQ1). Two dominant themes – ‘Primacy of Blackness as an Identifier’ and ‘Multiplicity and Tensions in Identity’ are presented and discussed in relation to subthemes. Race was highlighted as a particularly important aspect of identity, as a highly orienting feature, due to others’ misconstructions of Blackness which positioned them as ‘other’. Participants demonstrated pride in their Blackness and ethnicity/heritage, finding that it afforded them belonging to and shared understandings with a group, but also had the potential to minimise focus on other aspects of their identity and individual differences. Femaleness was considered to be an important but perhaps less salient aspect of identity, though it was identified as potentially oppressive, particularly when considered in addition to race.

The second section explores the perceived negative impact participants felt their identity had on their educational experiences, in relation to barriers (RQ2). Dominant themes of ‘Racial identity impacting social and emotional wellbeing’ and ‘Identity impacting relationships with teachers’ are presented as participants articulated experiencing: social and emotional difficulties arising through an absence of feelings of belonging in majority White settings; and discrimination in the form of differential treatment by teachers - being singled out and relationships being dependent on the ability to perform as the ideal student, which had the potential to cause cultural conflict.

The third section explores the facilitators to success presented by participants (RQ3), comprising of the dominant themes: ‘Personal and Family Ambitions for Success’ and ‘Learning Behaviours’. Personal ambition to achieve, arising through empowerment in Black female identity; clear personal goals and aspirations; and inspiration from close family and ancestors who have made sacrifices which had supported their ambitions, constitute the first part. Help-seeking behaviour, supported by positive relationships with teachers and practising silence are then discussed in the second part.

**Table 1: Themes elicited from Research Questions**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Research Question** | **Themes** | **Sub-themes** |
| **4. a)****1. Which aspects of identity are considered to be important as Black females with Caribbean heritage and how do they express these identities?** | **4. a) i)** Primacy of Blackness as an Identifier | **i)** Defining Identity**ii)** Problematic Constructions of Blackness**iii)** Invisibility and Standing Out through Blackness |
| **4. a) ii)** Multiplicity and Tensions in Identity | **i)** Individual Identities**ii)** British vs. Caribbean Identity |
| **4. a) iii)**Intersectionality - Identity as a Black Female with Caribbean Heritage | **i)** Gender Roles**ii)** Gender Representation in Media |
| **4. b)****2. What impact does/has identity have/had upon the group’s educational experiences in relation to barriers?** | **4. b) i)** Identity Impacting Belonging and Social and Emotional well-being | **i)** Isolation as the Racial Anomaly**ii)** Inappropriate Educational Provision |
| **4. b) ii)** Problematic Relationships with Teachers  | **i)** Relationships Dependent on Ability to Perform as the Ideal Student**ii)** Difficulties with Teacher Relationships due to Diverse Cultural Ideals |
| **4. c)****3. What has supported participant’s educational experiences?** | **4. c) i)**Personal and Family Ambition as a Facilitator of Success | **i)** Personal Drive, Ambition and Resiliency**ii)** Family Ambitions |
| **4. c) ii)** Learning Behaviours | **i)** Silencing**ii)** Voicing |

**Key for Transcript Excerpts**

(pause) - pause for more than two seconds

[ ] - an overlap in speech

(( )) - laughter, sighs, nods, contextual information

 underline - emphasis place on words

:: - stretched vowel

utterance=

=utterance - speech immediately followed by a response without a pause

**4.a) Research Question 1: Which aspects of identity are considered to be important as Black females with Caribbean heritage and how do they express these identities?**

With all individuals being Black females with Caribbean heritage, it was predictable that these aspects of identity would be considered important to participants and prioritised within the focus group, with identity being a significant part of the research topic, why participants were chosen, and most likely, agreed to take part. Differences and similarities in Blackness is a theme which characterised much of the groups’ discussion about identity and self-identity was acknowledged to be heavily influenced by the negotiation between others’ constructions of their identity, based on group membership and their self-identifications. Hall (1996a) describes the continuous modification and performance of identities and the:

“…constant agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating the normative rules with which they (Black people) confront and regulate themselves.” p.14

**Reflective box**

Through my facilitation of the focus groups, I noticed how I considered and reconstructed aspects of my identity in negotiation with ideas expressed by the group, feeling a sense of relatedness to different aspects of each participant’s narratives.

This section covers the themes of ‘Primacy of Blackness as an Identifier’ – highlighting the importance of race and constructions and meanings given to Blackness; and ‘Multiplicity and tensions within identity’ – considering the different aspects of identity which are important to participants and the tensions arising through negotiating and performing these different identities.

**4.a) i) Primacy of Blackness as an Identifier**

Being Black was identified as a significant feature of the participants’ identities, as it was how they perceived they are primarily perceived by others and they often spoke as representatives of other Black people in describing differences between themselves and ‘others’ or Black and White people. In the absence of individuals from the Caribbean, the group identify themselves with other Black individuals/groups from other countries and they fluctuated between referring to and making generalisations about Black people and Caribbean people, including themselves within both identifiers.

Blackness was the first factor highlighted as representative of identity, by Amina, who had noted prior to starting the group that she frequently engaged with and enjoyed conversations about race and culture with her family. This view of ‘Blackness’ as a predominant identifier, was supported by the group.

SC: ...which aspects of your identity are important to you?

Amina: Being black.

Group: Mmm (nodding from all group).

Zara: Erm, being Caribbean (pause) [and British

Shakira: [Especially being Caribbean.

Tate (2005) expressed that for individuals with Caribbean heritage, the essentialism of Blackness is disrupted by diasporic connections, for example recognising African heritage which pre-dates Caribbean heritage, eliciting descriptors such as ‘Afro-Caribbean’, highlighting the mixedness within Blackness, representing more than just a Black skin colour. However, Tate expressed that individuals continue to be considered as, and recognise themselves within Blackness, as ‘raced’ and ‘racialising’ subjects, as was noted by participants:

Amina: I find it really awkward when you’re in lessons and then like, for example, I ha- always had it, whenever they touch on something about Black people everyone would always look [at me

Shakira: [Oh that’s so funny=

Amina: =The first thing, it happens, they always [look at me ((nodding from group))

Shakira: [Yeah. (pause) You sort of gotta try and keep your head straight, like act like you don’t care

Group: [Yeah!]

(Line 501-508)

For the participants, diasporic connections were considered important, regardless of the fluctuating emphasis they placed on it, although little reference was made to African roots, instead, connections to Caribbean countries of origin were celebrated within Blackness. The opportunity to perform different aspects of their racial and ethnic identity was considered to be a positive aspect of taking part in the research project for the participants and their discussions highlighted the multifaceted nature of identity – particularly, but not exclusively, in relation to their race.

**4.a) i) i) Defining Identity**

Defining identity to others was a point of debate for the group, due to the relationship between how identity is defined explicitly and conceived by self and others. Zara noted that if relatives are asking her to define her identity, her response to them would be different than it would be to others, as family would be relating the question to her future and who she is going to become, rather than her background. Here she is acknowledging that others’ motives for asking the question, in terms of the information they are asking for, can be different. This highlights the role of the audience for Zara in terms of her expression. In response to this, Lydia interprets the question differently to Zara, asserting that defining identity is an expression of who you are and having pride in your identity. Therefore, regardless of the race, motives or intentions of the individual asking, the audience should not dictate the expression in her opinion. She does, however, consider that for others, race may play a factor, highlighting the power differentials associated with race and ethnic labels and insinuating that other’s may not have the same stability of, or pride in their identity to claim it through naming.

Zara: So yeah it does matter who asks, for me you know.

Lydia: I feel like for me personally, it doesn’t matter who asks me, but I feel like there is some people that would mind. Like they’d have different answers for different people that asked them. Like probably, if it was a different race person who asked them they’d have a different response. But for me=

Shakira: =I don’t think I’d really like change my identity like, to like, depending who asked me. Like I don’t really mind what they think about it.

(pause)

SC: Do you think people may be asking you different questions, depending who’s asking you?

Shakira: I feel like the reason they’re asking you is probably different. As in say like as a Black person, if someone else that was Black asked me, I’d feel like it was more, sort of to relate to me. Whereas anyone else, it would just be a point of interest=

Amina: =Or judgement=

Group: =Yeah

(Line 1514-1527)

Shakira appeared to respond to Lydia’s narrative in a defensive way, perhaps needing to consolidate her image as someone with a strong racial identity and express that she doesn’t change her identity for anyone, and doesn’t mind what anyone might think of it. It appeared to be important to all participants to establish an identity within the group as individuals with strong racial identities.

Shakira felt that the intentions of the person asking may be different depending on their race. As a Black person, if another Black person asked about her identity, she would assume they perhaps attempting to find common ground, otherwise she would presume it was more out of curiosity. Amina quickly notes “or judgement” indicating some discomfort around the intentions of non-Black others who ask for an explanation of her identity, perceiving they could be discriminatory. Butler (1993) expressed that by naming identity, individuals are situating themselves within particular identity boundaries and outside of others, therefore constituting their identity through the amalgamation of the signifiers and attributes encapsulated within the name. Consequently, it could be argued that individuals whose racial identity has the potential to elicit negative connotations and constructions may be cautious about how they present their identity.

Tate (2014) identified Blackness as a race discourse which facilitates certain black identifications and disavows others, highlighting the performativity of race, in professing to Blackness. For the participants this presented a point of contemplation about how identity is expressed and what that meant about the presented image of themselves and their self-concept – who they saw themselves as. Participants recognised that in naming their identity, they were positioning themselves within a particular category, with all its associated signifiers, and that others asking them to name their identity could be seen as others trying to situate them within particular constructions. For Lydia, changing how identity is expressed or named, therefore, is a demonstration of wanting to change identity in order to be seen in a more positive light by others, perhaps not wanting to be associated with the category’s constructions, or for fear that certain aspects of identity would not be understood. She insinuated that this represents a sense of shame about facets of identity.

**4. a) i) ii) Problematic Constructions of Blackness**

Shared experiences of Blackness were considered to be unifying, for example, experienced prejudice/discrimination, being grouped together and given a common identity by White people. The group expressed feeling othering from others due to their skin colour and demonstrated a frustration towards White expressions of Black identity, White people’s fear of being racially offensive, without having an understanding of what causes offence and why (insinuating that Black people are oversensitive), and White people’s discomfort around discussing race when it is part of their Black existence. Participants expressed that Blackness in itself, even the label, was considered as offensive by others, a taboo topic which was best avoided.

Zara: They say like the word Black person then say no offence when they look at you [and you’re like that’s not offensive=

Group: =[Yeah!]

Shakira: =[Yeah like you made it offensive, like directing it at me

((laughter from the group)) (Line 517-521)

The group expressed their belief that, amongst the majority, there is lack of understanding around the multiplicity and intersectionality of Black identities and sub-groups and a tendency to stereotype rather than recognising that these sub-groups exist. An example of this is Shakira’s narrative about learning about Rastafarianism in school. Whilst Shakira expresses an appreciation that the school was seeking to develop understanding of alternative cultures/religions, she felt that this was being attempted without the teacher being fully informed herself, therefore potentially spreading further misunderstandings and prejudice. The group discuss the legitimacy the teacher had to teach this topic as a White woman and Shakira made a judgement about regurgitating texts rather than having personal knowledge. This fact is used to make the point that her knowledge most likely originated from White sources, written by White people, highlighting a concern about the re-writing of Black knowledge and history and censorship by those with limited and/or potentially biased understanding of it. It also highlights inequality in contributions to knowledge favouring Whiteness.

Shakira: I wonder what she’s actually gonna say because=

Amina: =Yeah=

Shakira: =And I wondered, what other people in my class thought, like dreadlocks are dirty and stuff so, ((murmuring from group)) they couldn’t have learnt that much because they still had that sort of idea that like they just smoke weed and have dirty hair and so=

Amina: =Yeah, yeah=

Shakira: =I don’t think she put it across in a good way=

Amina: =Yeah=

Shakira: =Yeah=

Amina: =It’s hard for teachers who don’t even know themselves=

Shakira: =Yeah=

Amina: =Who can’t relate. I dunno I wouldn’t even take her very seriously if she was my teacher, just trying to talk about Rastafarianism, I would just look at her like what do you actually know?=

Shakira: =Mm=

Amina: Like [unless-

Shakira: [She’s reading from a textbook

Lydia: [Exactly (pause) yeah

Amina: [Exactly. And who wrote the textbook probably a White person=

Shakira: =Probably a middle class White person who’s probably never been around Black [people

Lydia: [Yeah who’s probably never been to Jamaica, [you feel like as well.

Amina: [Exactly

(Line 464-488)

Shakira: She sort of like looked to me and the girl for confirmation. ((laughter from the group)) Do you know what I mean? ((laughter from the group)). Like you tell me, I’m from England too!

((laughter from the group))

(Line 496-499)

The group felt that White people used their own constructions of Blackness to form opinions on cultural representation or indiscriminately sought knowledge from Black individuals, regardless of their identification with the particular racialised identity, assuming similarity, that they possess the same knowledge and experience. These stereotyped narratives reflect the racial object mapping proposed by Moss (1996) with is characterised by restricted parochialisms or constructions based on races which facilitate cognitive distancing from self-identity and subsequently, prejudice. The group’s narrative illuminated a limited view/construction through which, Caribbean individuals may be viewed on account of White constructions of Blackness and Black sub-types. These representations are taken as truths by the White majority and projected onto the individuals, a process of dual oppression, according to Fanon (1967) and Bhabha (1994).

As Hall (1996a) expressed, identities are formed through representations:

“…using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation.” (p.4)

The narrative highlighted the power of representations/constructions to influence identities and possibilities for future versions of the self, hence the importance of disrupting harmful narratives which are taken for granted by the majority about Black people and other minorities, which continue to oppress and subjugate (hooks, 1992). Therefore, it set the stage for the argument the participants presented for the importance of generating greater shared understanding of cultural groups in a UK context, in order to reduce discrimination on account of ignorance, which can have a negative real life effect for minority groups and their opportunities for success and progression (e.g. Palmer, 2010).

White ignorance to Black culture was expressed as a consequence of lacking of cultural and historical education in relation to Black people, on a systemic and individual level. The group reported having limited opportunities to express their identity andexperiencing offensive or culturally insensitive actions and expressions of White groups/individuals, on account of their lack of awareness and understanding, regarding the historical mistreatment of Black people and its modern day effects.

A comparative narrative occurs between Lydia and the members of the group educated within the UK, characterised by limited access to information and learning about Black and/or Caribbean history in UK schools, unless at provided at home, in comparison to Black history as the focus in the Caribbean.

Zara: Due to ignorance, to White people, ignorance to our culture. So if they don’t know about it, how are they supposed to understand? So yeah I do think it has an effect on that.

Lydia: I think like from a European point of view, for White people in this country, if they have no education or no information about how racism came about, say, or how Black people were treated before, they have that certain ignorance towards Black people when they do get offended by certain things, or like cos they have no education, they have no information, they don’t know why we’re offended, kinda thing=

Group: =Yeah=

Lydia: =So that’s like something that probably needs to be addressed like in the UK for example. They need to teach this to like, not just Black people, but to White people as well, so they understand like why people get offended or why slavery is a thing, like why, yeah. (Line 527-535).

Please see Appendix X for the I-poem relating to constructions of Blackness and awareness of Black history.

The group expressed shock at the cultural ignorance shown by those with status, power and influence within their university, as it was assumed that their position indicated a certain degree of ‘common’ knowledge, which was expected to include cultural awareness and knowledge about Black history month. This this raised a point about its considered relevance to the majority. It was expressed that, particularly within the majority White educational provisions, Black history was considered unimportant or irrelevant to the degree that it was often unknown and not discussed or explored, even within Black History month and particularly beyond primary education. It could be argued that for those minority students who have less opportunities to have their ethnicity/culture expressed, represented and understood, opportunities to celebrate their history and be recognised could be even more important, significant and beneficial.

The narratives reflected symbolic racism as defined by Sears and Henry (2005), through the minimising of historical atrocities, encapsulating the views that racism no longer exists and that Black people are now given equal or excessive opportunities and advantages compared to the majority and consequently, their racist history should have a line drawn under it. The participants contested this view and emphasised the importance of continuing to raise awareness of Black history, including but not exclusively pertaining to the racist atrocities such as slavery, in order to develop understanding and awareness of the achievements and experiences of Black people, and its continuing importance to Black people, expressing that it should also be of importance to White people. Gillborn (2005) expresses these symbolic racist views as defining characteristics of Whiteness, in addition to othering of ethnicities and considering Whiteness as the norm. These views can result in fewer opportunities being provided for Black students to address inequality as it is perceived that the inequalities no longer exist (e.g. Gillborn, 2008).

**4. a) i) iii) Invisibility and Standing Out through Blackness**

The group discuss experienced frustration and/or anger at being seen as the same as each other, when the only similarity recognised by the White individual is race. Shakira, Zara and Amina recalled experiences where their individual differences were not recognised, overruled by their colour, despite differences seeming obvious to the individuals.

Zara: …‘best look-a-like’ and they put me against this Black teacher in the school and we looked nothing alike, it was just the fact that we were both Black.

Shakira: I don’t think it has to be intentional to be racist but like, it can be, it’s really irritating sometimes when literally the only reason that they’re comparing you to someone else is because you’re Black. Like a teacher, even like a slip-up, so calling you erm your friends name, that’s Black. There’s only like four Black people in the whole year and like they don’t know us enough to call me by the right name. (Line 612-616)

Amina: Yeah that’s bad. Oh actually, no I can relate to that…she was very light complexion though, so I dunno, even if she classed herself as Black to be honest…But people used to get us confused…it’s not like they both begin with A, it’s not like we look alike, so that was just pure ignorance I think.

Lydia: Yeah. Definitely due to the fact that you’re both Black.

((Laughter from the group))

Amina: You know what I mean?

Lydia: Yeah cos that’s the only similarity that you guys have that can cause a confusion with names. (Line 622-628)

Shakira interprets being confused with other Black students as teachers neglecting to take the time to get to know her as individual, instead, considering her as just one of the group of Black students within school. She implies that the teachers should have been more able to identify her, being one of only four Black girls, particularly considering the fact that she was so often singled out by teachers. Her narratives suggest that she feels she was noticed for being Black, first and foremost and for her behaviour, due to teachers’ negative perceptions of her, yet her Blackness also positioned her in a position of invisibility as an individual. Amina responds to Shakira’s narrative by affirming her experience as ‘bad’ but appears to retract this judgement upon recalling similar experiences. It is as though the described occurrence was viewed to her as unacceptable treatment until her own experiences normalised it. She expands on differences identified by Zara which were mainly cosmetic (e.g. wearing glasses and hairstyles) and seeks to evidence her assertions through additional examples of differences from the ‘other Black girl’, particularly the difference in complexion. Lydia summarises and validates their thoughts, perhaps seeing herself as the impartial authority, due to not sharing the experience first-hand.

Amina’s narrative about being compared to another pupil, who had a much lighter complexion than her and celebrated this to the extent that Amina questioned whether she categorised herself as Black, demonstrated the essentialism of Blackness which encompasses all who are considered to have any degree of Black heritage, regardless of self-identification. Tate (2014) notes how light complexions can cause unease in relation to racial dissection and resisting easy categorisation, acknowledging the immutability of race:

“...even when ambiguous, the body must be interpellated through recognisable racial categories so we can become known.”p.189

Despite her peer potentially differentiating herself from Blackness and the apparent differences between Amina and her peer, in particular their skin colour, they were considered as similar in their Blackness/otherness, evidenced by their names being confused, despite no other identifiable similarity.

The participants’ experiences of being confused with or seen as the same as other Black students, based on race alone, relate to Moss’ (1996) theory of racial membership. All members of a racial group are considered to have ‘othered’ similar characteristics, minimising perceived differences within the racialised group and exaggerating differences between the majority group and racial minority groups. Their identities are considered as interchangeable and indistinctive to teachers which is damaging to their self-esteem and their desire to be recognised as individuals. Hall (1996b) speaks of the ‘fetishization, objectification and negative figuration’ which dominate the representation of Black subjects within British culture, simplifying, homogenising and marginalising Blackness and the ‘black experience’. Hall purports that these representations play a constitutive role, manifesting in a lack of recognition of the ‘extraordinary diversity’ within the category of Black.

**4. a) ii) Multiplicity and Tensions in Identity**

The fluidity of the process of identity formation and changing relative importance of different aspects of identity – e.g. heritage, skin colour and regional identity, was communicated through participants’ narratives. They reported changing identities in response to experiencing different social contexts and their changing psychological interpretations of their experiences, which also shifted in negotiation with other participants’ expressions, within the focus group context. As Zara noted – “we are still forming our identities,” identities were not seen as fixed by most, or solely pre-determined based on group memberships, categorisation or others’ constructions. Therefore, the participants all felt that it was important to celebrate and recognise their individual differences in addition to minority group differences from the majority.

**4. a) ii) i) Individual Identities**

In addition to shared experiences of Blackness, the participants highlighted the differences within Blackness which were of great importance to them in developing their individual identities. Amina (who has both Trinidadian and Jamaican heritage) highlighted differences between groups of Caribbean people as well as African people, considering partial aspects of connectedness within a “collective” and reductionist effects of grouping. She emphasised the importance of recognising individual differences (e.g. in educational experiences) rather than using limited cultural understanding or attempting to talk for a whole group when a group comprises of many subgroups. “Being in the same boat” is expressed to describe a shared journey or context, such as educational experience, which she purported strongly impacted potential commonalities and shared understandings between individuals and groups. This assertion is shared and reiterated by Lydia in the follow up focus group when she reflected on sharing a similar outlook and sense of identity to Samara due to them both having had experiences of growing up and being educated within the Caribbean for the majority of their lives.

Amina: =There are a lot of individual cases. So when we say like ‘we’ it’s like, you have to be careful when you say that=

Samara: =Yeah, yeah yeah yeah yeah=

Amina: =Because even like, I could say we for like us in this room, and like you had part education in the Caribbean, you’ve had full education in the Caribbean, that’s like completely different to mine and (Zara)’s experience, so like ‘we’ is actually different. I dunno, in some cases obviously we can relate as a whole, like we are all in the same boat, going through the same experiences as a=

Lydia: =generally a collective=

Amina: =like as a collective=

Zara: =We’re all Black=

Amina: =Very different individual cases=

Group: =Mmmm= (line 1455-1469)

**Reflective box**

Due to the similar context of their schooling, Amina and Zara seemed to have many similarities in experience, which would most likely differ from many others educated in the UK. I was surprised about the degree to which their experiences also resonated with my own, having experienced an educational setting which was similar in description to Amina and Yasmin, with regards to race demographics and socio-economic status of the school population.

Connections and shared similarities to others based on different aspects of identities facilitates the promotion of relatedness through multiple sources, each of which is a valuable social resource. Consequently, acknowledging the multiplicity of self-identity could be considered to support positive social and emotional wellbeing. Cruwys et al. (2014) expressed:

“…each of these social identities has the capacity to provide a person with a sense of purpose, and direction, each can make a unique and potentially additive contribution to mental health.”(p.217)

This celebration of diversity and multiplicity of identity also allows individuals to challenge narrow constructions of who they are. Additionally, within different groups, participants are also celebrating dissimilarity from the majority groups in diverse ways. Having being positioned as ‘other’ by the majority, there is power in the reclaiming of ‘otherness’ and expressing pride in characteristics or signifiers which can be viewed as positively different.

Amina: I feel that once you are cast as an other, it sort of forces you to go even more other, like it’s like you=

Lydia: =You really wanna make the difference=

Amina: =Extreme! Yeah

((Laughter from the group))

Amina: I’m not just gonna be different, I’m gonna be extra different!

((Laughter from the group))

Amina: You’re gonna know!

Zara: It put me in that place like –I’m gonna make it show, you know. ((Laughs))

(Line 1824-1832)

This finding can be understood through reflection on Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory, which expands upon social identity theory, in recognition that individuals experience a greater sense of belonging and inclusion within minority groups which celebrate difference from the majority group, as well as within group similarities. The theory purports that humans need to experience inclusion and assimilation, whilst also desiring to experience differentiation, both of which influence perceptions and evaluations of the self and others and the experiences and social cognitions of intragroup and intergroup relations.

**4. a) ii) ii) British vs. Caribbean Identity**

The complexities of belonging and identity were further explored by the group through their discussions of having a strong British identity and Caribbean identity, despite their changing emphasis of belonging over time, through exposure to different cultural contexts and development of cultural knowledge and history. Negotiation of these identities, however, had the potential to be problematic and uncomfortable for participants. Levitt (2009) expressed the simultaneous embeddedness in dual/multiple contexts and cultures for second generation migrants requiring the navigation of different identities and ideologies, which has the potential to cause psychological conflict.

Lydia professed to identify as Caribbean in nationality, having spent the majority of her life there, despite being born in UK. It appears that time spent away from the UK has weakened her British identity and desire to live in the UK. Interestingly, her accent (which only seemed to have a mild Caribbean inflection) and frequent use of London slang present some incongruence with her strong Caribbean identity, particularly when presented alongside Samara’s expressions which were characterised by a strong Caribbean accent.

Developing regional language was most likely a tool Lydia had utilised in order to minimise her difference from the British majority, since living back in the UK. Bhabha (1994) considered ‘mimicry’, adoption of signifiers of the majority culture, as a tool which can serve to empower individuals, challenging theories of difference and facilitating assimilation. Whilst Lydia felt a strong affiliation with her Caribbean identity, integrating British language into her identity most likely held more currency and value in terms of fitting in with British norms. Considering her perception of her first school placement within the UK, it is unsurprising that she chose to ‘blend in’ in an attempt to go unnoticed. As Fanon expressed, “mastery of language affords remarkable power”:

“To speak means to be in a position to use certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation.”p.8

Adopting the language of the majority is theorised to contribute to a feeling of equality with the majority. For Lydia, this may have been an attempt to reaffirm her British nationality when in Britain, perhaps encouraging others to consider her as equal, and to support her assimilation, preventing feelings of being a tourist. For the other participants, difficulties with assimilation appeared to arise to some degree in both their country of birth and of descent, creating a constant negotiation between the two identities.

Phinney (1993) highlighted potential difficulties which can occur in an attempt to integrate aspects of identity which are formed through different group identities, particularly if the associated values and norms are conflicting. Fanon (1967) and Bhabha (1994) also considered the separation of identities which arises through developing the language of the dominant group and subsequently, losing cultural signifiers from the country of origin, causing an inferiority complex.

In the follow up meeting, the group were asked how they related to Lydia’s statement about feeling more Caribbean than British to develop an understanding of their perceptions of ‘belonging’ to different countries:

 Zara: I think I feel more British. Cos like I haven’t, like I go away to St Lucia some summers then I don’t go for a very long time, so I’ve not really adapted to the culture as much as (Lydia). ((Short laugh))

Shakira: I feel more British. Like if I went there, I wouldn’t feel like ah I’m part of the island=

Zara: =Yeah=

Shakira: Like it’s my country. I’d feel like – so I’m from here, but like, I feel like a tourist

Z & A: =Yeah=

Shakira: =Yeah=

Amina: =Yeah I feel like a tourist as well. I have my roots there and it’s nice to know that my family’s been brought up there and that’s the culture which runs through my veins. But me physically, I think I do identify more with being British.

S & Z: Yeah.

(Line 1551-1562)

**Reflective box**

Shakira’s ‘tourist’ labelling caused me to reflect on my experiences of walking with cousins in the Caribbean and feeling as though I at least looked like I belonged amongst them and was part of a majority group (Caribbean), unlike in the UK. However, I was frequently met by shouts of “Hey English!” and similar comments asking where I was from, from curious locals in the street who had immediately identified me as a foreigner before I had even spoken. I felt a sense of belonging somewhere between two cultures, recognised as ‘other’ in each, regardless of how I identified myself.

Zara and Shakira presented a narrative of partial displacement in the Caribbean which made them gravitate towards their British identity. This contrasted results from Lam and Smith’s (2009) study, which suggested that Caribbean identity was considered to be more salient than British identity for the adolescents involved. However, they suggested that:

“A more British- or English-based Caribbean identity might be fostered as adolescents develop ethnic knowledge and belonging within such contexts.”p1264.

Additionally, it could be considered that having participants within the group with a stronger connection to the Caribbean caused the remaining members to feel closer, by comparison, to their British identity. This highlights the relational nature of identity formed with and against groups. Lam and Smith highlighted the multi-layered nature of the ethnic/national identity, noting:

“individuals may categorize themselves as well as adopt ways of feeling and thinking about themselves to varying degrees in relation to their multiple group membership.” p.1249

Whilst Amina agreed with Zara and Shakira, she presented a narrative of a more harmonious relationship between the different parts of her identity, suggesting through her analogy that she acknowledges and accepts the multi-faceted nature of her identity and recognises the sub-groups and sub-cultures which exist within the Caribbean community, within Britain, affording her a sense of connection to multiple sources in different degrees. Palmer (2011) purported that transnational and diasporic influences weave through ‘Black British’ identities creating intersecting nationalisms which can act as an important resource in identity formation and act as ‘revolutionary interventions’ challenging narrow constructions of Blackness and marginalisation. Amina characterises her Caribbean culture as fundamental to her being, despite being situated in and feeling very much belonging to Britain, supporting this assertion.

The group expressed the sense of pride felt in having Caribbean roots and desire to celebrate them and reclaim and express Caribbean identity, particularly whilst in Britain:

Shakira: But then like, when you’re actually in Britain like, erm, I don’t know, I feel like people like try and like [show they’re Caribbean

Amina: [rep their own country

Shakira: Yeah! You’re like I’m Caribbean, you make sure people know it like=

Group: =Yeah!=

Shakira: =Especially now that we’re older, than when we were younger, like you’re more proud=

Zara: =[You’re more patriotic

Adina: =[It’s important! Because within being British, you have your own, like social groups that you, like even though you’re from the Caribbean, you have your British Caribbeans and you identify as your own kind of group. Because you can relate to each other, like we’re all island girls. And you can relate, yeah=

Lydia: =It even shows that when we go to certain parties, like when we go out to like ‘Viva’ or ‘Rep your flag’, no-ones coming out with a British flag.

((Lots of laughter from group))

Lydia: Everyone’s coming out with their Caribbean country’s flag!

(Line 1563-1577)

It was seen as comedic to the group that anyone would attend these events representing Britain, and all girls laughed in response to Lydia’s rhetoric, designed to make the point that these were rare opportunities to explicitly express pride in cultural belonging which was a significant reason for attending. Interestingly, in this context, ‘patriotic’ is used by Zara to refer to her Caribbean heritage, reclaiming her Caribbean country after previously articulating a sense of detachment. Despite having different countries of origin, within these contexts the girls consider themselves collectively, as Amina refers to them as “island girls”, a sub-group which she considered to have positive associations, and expressed that as British Caribbean they have their own sub-culture with shared understandings. The participants expressed that being able to show pride in their heritage, experience a sense of belonging to their Caribbean roots an relatedness with peers through affirmation of a social identity; was important to their self-identity development within the university context. This sense of ethnic/racial belonging and group identity supported participant’s positive social and emotional well-being, which is consistent with literature (e.g. Rodgers & Summers, 2008; Cruwys et al., 2014; Fisher et al. 2014).

**4. a) iii) Intersectionality - Identity as a Black Female with Caribbean Heritage*.***

Gender identity was considered to be important to the participants and they used the focus group as an opportunity to express and celebrate the positive constructions of Black femininity, as evidenced through their discussions of role models who inspired them to achieve – Black women who were achieving greatness, through their acts of resistance against injustice and inequality and plights for social justice, and/or their intellectual talents, validated through holding high status positions which the participants could aspire to. Samara expressed that she experiences motivation from identification as Black and female, despite the categorisations situating her in a position of dual oppression, in terms of race and gender:

Samara: I always wanted to be the first female to do something… my motivation is driven by being female and Black. (Line 1477-1481)

The other participants also implied sharing this motivation through their expressions of Black female identity and positive representative constructions, woven into their narratives, which mirrors findings by Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996). Strength, in particular, is a construct which was considered to be representative of and celebrated within Black femininity, and subsequently acted a protective factor against negative effects of hardship, supporting resiliency.

Gender appeared to be a less salient feature of the participant’s identities than race and it wasn’t until the second focus group that the impact of intersectionality was considered or expressed in any detail. This replicated Shorter-Gooden and Washington’s findings that gender identity was considered as important, but less significant than racial identity. They theorised that racial issues might demand more immediate attention in their everyday lives than gendered issues, which appeared true for the participants in the present study who articulated that their colour and consequently, race, was often prioritised in others’ perceptions of their identity.

Crenshaw (1991) identified three dimensions of intersectionality, of which the participants’ narratives focussed predominantly on two, in their discussions around the impact of being a Black female of Caribbean heritage: structural intersectionality, concerned with gender roles; and representational intersectionality, concerned with the media representation of Black women and its power to influence and control identity.

**4. a) iii) i) Gender Roles**

Samara presented a narrative about traditional gender role expectations being slow to dissipate in Caribbean families and considered that there are still expectations of a female of Caribbean descent to be a mother and run the household, first and foremost, an assertion mirrored in research (e.g. Mirza, 1992) and representation. Despite potentially contributing financially, their role was and perhaps is still considered to be the support system in two-parent families, rather than the main provider.

Samara: I think it comes from the genera-, it’s a generational thing, like my Nan, she went out and worked, yes, but she had babies, the man was always the income. He went out and worked, and women were supposed to stay home and do the housework and do this and that, while the man went out to work and brought in the income for the whole family. So I think just transitioning through the generations, is not as quick as it has been for other countries. (Line 1164-1169)

Samara’s narratives presented gender expectations of Caribbean women which fail to prioritise further education and aspirations are limited to traditionally accepted ‘female’ jobs- such as nurses – positioning Black women in the subservient role of ‘nurturing mammy’ and limiting their aspirations and expectations of what they can achieve and become. (E.g. Annamma et al., 2016). However, Samara expresses hope that progress is being achieved in modern society, with more options and opportunities being presented than previously existed and less discrimination limiting the potential to perform different roles, for Caribbean women.

Samara: This is the generation where there is less boundaries than there were before. Like before, a lot of nurses or like Caribbean women, there are a lot of Caribbean nurses, and those are the type of jobs that they would get into. (Line 1319-1322)

Ogbu’s (2003) theory of academic disengagement suggests that non-immigrant minorities are often unsure that education will facilitate progression or is the best route success for them, which can negatively impact their academic aspirations. It is theorised that this is due to many having little evidence, through personal and community experience, that education has resulted in success in adult life or upward social mobility among their own people. If Black females feel that their gender limits them to preforming particular roles due to the examples and expectations they are presented with, including careers requiring lower qualifications (e.g. nurse, but not doctor), there is a potential for academic disengagement to occur. Therefore, there is an argument for the importance of promoting positive role models, in other Black females achieving academically and undertaking esteemed positions, through popular media in the absence of the presence of familial and community role models in these positions. Rollock et al. (2011) expressed that whilst middle class Black families have access to role models in Black professionals to support their academic motivation, the disproportionately high number of Black Caribbean families in lower socio-economic groups do not have access to them, further highlighting the impact of intersectionality.

Shakira also alluded to the impact of intersectionality, through her narrative about being disliked by teachers, being disproportionately identified as disruptive, and being punished to a greater degree than her White, particularly male peers. She insinuates that she was treated differently due to both her race and gender, and behavioural expectations from teachers based on those factors, as evidenced by the teacher continuing to enact a positive relationship with her male peer, whilst openly demonstrating the presence of friction in their relationship. Behaviours which were interpreted as humorous when enacted by a White male student, were considered to be problematic when enacted by Shakira, causing her to feel personally disliked and rejected:

Shakira: …there was a guy in high school, he was just so loud and like made the class laugh, but the teacher li:: ked him. So it was sort of like, she told him off but in a bit of a jokey way, like “Oh” like “stop it.” She’d still actually liked (him), whereas me, I’d get in trouble. Like detentions or call my parents or whatever, he like got away with a lot more. (Line 631-637)

This differential treatment could be explained by the fact that her behaviour was considered to be outside of the confines of expected norms of female behaviour, modelled on the majority White feminine ideals of compliance and docility, due to concerns rooted in conflicting stereotyped constructions of Black women as angry and hostile (Blake et al., 2011, Evans-Winters and Eposito 2010; Wright, 2010).

Evans (1988) depicts “those loud Black girls” within a British school demonstrating how the behaviour expressed by Shakira was perhaps perceived by her teachers, due to an image which has constituted the Black female within education for some time. This image is enacted by Black female students as a form of resistance against the ‘good girl’ image of the idealised White female, who is seen as submissive and obedient. It is likely that Shakira’s challenging of her teacher’s expectations was a way of asserting power through her patrolling of the limits of tolerable behaviour, within the context of the school’s expectations of her in her role as a female student.

**Reflective box**

As a child I remember being repeatedly told that I could achieve anything I wanted to, but I needed to be aware that, as a Black female, I would need to work twice as hard as my White peers, in order to get half as far. I was also told that I was already going to stand out as a minority, so it was important that I stood out for the right reasons and due to others’ preconceptions, I would have to do more to stand out in a positive way and should do my best to go unnoticed in between. Whilst it may seem concerning or suspicious to promote these ideas, research validates these opinions as an effective way for a Black woman in modern society to be successful.

**4. a) iii) ii) Gender Representation in Media**

Perceptions of representations of Caribbean females were generally positive, including potentially damaging or negative representations, which were resisted and reconceptualised e.g. their common positioning as ‘sexual’, as noted by Amina in the first group. However, this was contrasted by her later narratives around experienced racism on holiday, in the second group, where her identity was sexualised in a way which made her feel objectified and degraded:

Amina: We had an altercation at the airport where my partner left to go get some money and someone whispered ‘prostitute’ in my ear.

(Line 2073-2074

Amina: I feel like it was a thing where my boyfriend felt uncomfortable as well because a lot of men were staring at me, but like in a sexual way, like they were looking at my bum as we were walking past and like in those type of situations, you can’t fight like every person who’s going to, you know, basically like disrespecting you.

(Line 2111-2114)

Amina makes many references to being stared at which caused her discomfort as there appeared to be negative judgement attached, rather than admiration or curiosity. The unwanted attention she received represented disrespect to her, especially due to the presence of her boyfriend, and their perceived lack of control to change the situation or react to it. The experience of sexually objectified highlighted negative facets of the Black female sexualised identity. Amina also presented narratives in the first focus group about high rates of teenage pregnancies within the Caribbean community, perhaps related to an internalisation of the sexualised identity projected as synonymous with a Black female identity, manifesting as barriers to Black Caribbean females’ academic achievement.

 Amina’s expressions of Black female sexuality represented narrow constructions of Black females presented within mainstream media, connected to a history of slavery and the hypersexualised objectification of Black women. These have the power to influence Black females’ identity formation and outsider perceptions of Black femininity, maintaining Black women in a position of subjugation and powerlessness (e.g. Crenshaw et al., 1995; Collins, 2000; Webster, 2003; White, 2007; Thomas, 2013). However, it could also be considered that Amina’s initial positive interpretation of sexualised representations reflects thinking by contemporary Black feminists who consider individuals’ agency and empowerment through celebration of their Black female sexuality (e.g. Springer, 2002).

The participants discussed empowerment and inspiration from the presence of an increasing presence of modern Black female role models in mainstream media. These figures created new constructions of what a Black female can be and achieve for participants, providing a counter-story to the narratives which subvert and oppress them and inspiration to develop new, empowering constructions of Black femininity.

In the follow up focus group, the participants had further discussions about the empowerment they felt as a Black female in modern society, referring to recent examples in the media:

Zara: Erm, recently Oprah Winfrey did an erm speech, about like standing up to sexual harassment and I really, really like that speech, ‘cause it’s something that’s not really taken as seriously as, in the feminist realm. It really needs to be spoken about more. So I really her speech on that.

Shakira: Yeah that’s really inspiring.

(Pause)

Amina: I really like Michelle Obama as well, I feel like she’s a really good role model, and in terms of Black empowerment as well. She’s spoken a lot about racial issues, concerning women but concerning men as well. I feel like she’s a good role model, figure=

Ezra: =And she’s like really high on like education as well=

 (Line 1607-1616)

Amina: =Even like in terms of like films and television that we watch in the media, recently, like say 10 years ago, we didn’t really see many TV shows or sitcoms with like strong female characters. But now we have like ‘Scandal’, ‘How to get away with murder’ and all these like leading Black females and they’re all doing so well=

(Line 1623-1626)

Shakira: =Yeah like, it’s just like wow! You can actually make it like that=

Lydia: =Yeah like even though it’s movies and TV shows, you know it’s fictional like, but it still has a real impact on your life situation=

Group: Yeah

SC: It sort of says –it’s possible

Group: =Yeah=

Zara: =It sort of gives you hope=

Shakira: =Because everyone looks up to them more as well because they’ve like, sort of where they’ve come from and how they’ve made it.

(Line 1649-1657)

Amina purported that positive representation of Black females achieving and having status in media is encouraging for Black females and the group shared this assertion. Zara expressed a perception of sexual harassment being considered as solely feminist issues, not considered to be important the wider public, even in modern society. Lydia proposed that media representations have a real life impact on those viewing them, in terms of what they feel they are capable of achieving and being, as Amina noted “It gives you hope.” Shakira draws attention to the fact that the Black women in these shows are not only leading characters, but also have professional roles which she and other Black women can aspire to, particularly when the roles relate to personal interests and ambitions. More credit was given to representations which documented or recognised a journey the a character had taken to achieve success, e.g. stories of overcoming hardship, as these were perceived as being realistic, representing achievement through hard work, rather than privilege, a situation Shakira appeared to have a connection to, and many Black women are more likely to relate to. It appears that the participants dismiss dominant ideas of femininity as soft and gentle and instead value qualities such as resilience and tenacity. Their sense of empowerment is heightened through the idea that anyone can achieve success, despite facing disadvantage, powerlessness and other barriers, and that difficulty presented opportunities to learn, develop and progress.

**4.b) Research Question 2: What impact does/has identity have/had upon the group’s educational experiences in relation to barriers?**

The group members expressed a range of barriers to educational success experienced at different stages of education and transitions were highlighted as the most problematic times for Shakira, Lydia and Zara in regards to accessing sufficient, relevant support and adapting to changes. ‘Identity impacting belonging, social and emotional well-being’ explores participants’ voiced experiences of feeling isolation and alienation in their majority White secondary educational settings, being the racial anomaly and one participant who was placed in an educational setting for students with SEMH needs, as an able student without those difficulties. Having an identity considered to be different from those within their school contexts presented difficulties for participants and consequently acted as barriers to their learning. ‘Problematic relationships with teachers’ presents participants narratives about how their identity impacted teachers’ constructions of them and how their behaviour was viewed. It appeared that positive teacher-student relationships were dependent on participants’ ability/willingness to perform as the ideal student and understand and comply with cultural expectations and rules.

**4.b) i) Identity Impacting Belonging and Social and Emotional well-being**

Particularly during adolescence, participants indicated that it was important to have friends who understood their racial identity, as it was the period when they were identifying a sense of what it meant to them, exploring representations through social media, for example, and developing their cultural interests. Erikson (1968) considered the existential identity crisis of adolescence to be the identification of what constitutes the self and potentialities for future selves. That is, questioning who am I? And who can I be? Consequently, having others who could authentically share in the experience of exploring their cultural identity, rather than trying to understand it as an alien culture, was highlighted as important. Having peers with the same or similar racial identity was seen as a protective factor against difficulties with emotional well-being, as it provided opportunities to express shared identities and have them understood by others. In comparison, being the racial anomaly provided limited or no opportunities to positively express racial identity and be understood, causing psychological discomfort.

Throughout both focus groups, the group members, with the exception of Lydia, provided examples of experiencing difficulties in relation to their social and emotional well-being on account of their developing racial identities, in a UK context. Friendships and feelings of belonging were acknowledged by the group as being important aspects of emotional well-being and differences in race elicited conflict for them in relation to their identities and the identities expressed by others.

**4.b) i) i) Isolation as the Racial Anomaly**

Amina, Shakira and Zara, the participants who had been educated within the UK for the majority or all of their schooling, presented narratives which expressed the cognition that their personal recognition of racial difference had a greater impact on their emotional well-being and potential or experienced mental health difficulties, than evidence of others treating them differently on account of their race. Noticing that they looked and perhaps felt and/or acted differently to the majority, due to race, presented personal conflicts for Amina, Zara and Shakira, struggling to identify with their White peers within their school contexts during adolescence. Zara and Amina also both make note of economic differences recognised between themselves and peers, identifying wealth as a factor which differentiated their interests and perspectives, causing them to feel excluded, as expressed, but most likely also inferior to some degree.

Amina and Zara depict an experience of being unable to coherently express their feelings of difference from White peers to others, for fear they would not understand or perhaps due to experiencing uncertainty that these feelings were valid or legitimate. These unarticulated feelings resulted in disengagement with school for Amina and Zara as they had a significant impact on their feelings of comfort and emotional security in their majority White, middle class school environments, feeling that their peers did not understand them and had different priorities and values, causing a disconnect in relatedness. This identity poem explores belonging and identity as experienced by Amina, Zara and Shakira. A further poem on this topic can be found in Appendix XI:

 I You We

Amina: I went through a massive, er, complex, from my schooling experience from like from almost being the only black girl, in an all-white environment, like very rich, erm very wealthy people

 You don’t see any of that as a child

 I felt like I didn’t see race

I didn’t feel like my peers saw race as well

 We all just got on with each other

I felt like as I got older

I started learning more about myself about my identity and my culture

I just started drifting away massively

I wasn’t in school as much

I wasn’t integrating socially out of school

I feel like my education then suffered slightly

I wasn’t keen on school

I didn’t like going there

I couldn’t relate to any of the people there

I didn’t share any similar interests to them.

I couldn’t relate to them just at a basic level so my schooling dropped off.

Zara: I definitely agree

 We had the same environment

 Everybody is so different to you

 You start to realise it now

 You don’t know what to do about it

Shakira: I felt that

 I could relate more to them (Asian people) than I could with the White

 people

 We had the same like family

 backgrounds and like morals

 I still felt like I had some sort of like identity, with *them*

Lydia: I had a completely different experience in secondary, there was no *race*

Amina paints a picture of harmonious relationships with peers and positive experiences of school, until race was personally acknowledged as part of her identity, in addition to her identity as ‘almost the only Black girl’. Her noting of “I didn’t feel like my peers saw race as well”, prior to this recognition, suggests that her peers also later recognised her as different.

Through the development of her racial identity, Amina’s perception of difference between herself and peers was experienced as extreme, as she purports that without exception, she had nothing in common them. As she expressed, “I couldn’t relate to any of the people”, “I didn’t share any similar interests”. This resulted in feelings of alienation and difficulties in continuing to integrate with established friends. She highlights this through repetition of “I couldn’t relate” and the use of definitive language – “I didn’t, “I couldn’t”, “I wasn’t” at the beginning of each statement. This contrasts with her presentation of comments about the timing of her changing perceptions and increasing awareness of race, which she begins with “I felt like” or “I didn’t feel like”, using comparative rather than definitive statements, suggesting some uncertainty about expressing those particular opinions or the validity of her statements. Amina reiterates that the separation from peers prevented her from wanting to attend school as she didn’t feel part of the school community and inevitably this impacted her learning. This is expressed not only in the past tense, as the rest of the narrative is, but also in the present tense to highlight that she still believes this assertion. Zara supported Yasmin’s accounts noting that she was in a similar environment and experienced the same changing identity and recognition of difference, with regards to race, over time. She suggests that she was seeking a way to address this discomfort noting “you don’t know what to do”, inferring a feeling of uncertainty and displacement.

Amina suggests in the follow-up group that she feels that her identity changed whilst her peers seemed to stay the same, potentially implying some resentment towards their capacity to develop their understanding of different cultures to the same degree she perceived that she has, both at previously at school and more recently now her and her peers are attending university. Her previous articulation of disengagement from school could be understood as rebellion against a community she feels has excluded her to some degree, by not developing or growing in the same way she feels that she did at the time.

Cozzarelli & Karafa (1998) identified a correlation between feelings of isolation and rejection as a consequence of cultural estrangement or feelings of culturally not ‘fitting in’ and negative psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and life satisfaction. Cruwys et al. (2014) theorised that a strong social identity, particularly, but not exclusively, racial identity, may support individuals to attribute difficulties to external, rather than internal factors, consequently protecting their self-esteem. Zara and Amina report not having the opportunity to achieve a strong social identity within their educational contexts, therefore, as expressed, they attributed their difficulties to changes or problems within themselves.

Fanon’s (1967) theory suggests that thoughts and ideas of difference and ‘otherness’ experienced by Black peopleare assimilated through projections from White people about their value and normalcy. He purported that it is these stereotyped negative constructions and narratives which make Black and other minority groups feel different, inferior and as if they don’t belong. Fanon proposed that psychological oppression occurs from projective identification, a dual process of experienced socio-economic inferiority and the internalisation or ‘epidermalization’ of this socio-economic inferiority, which serve to create and control the ‘other’ and maintain imbalance.

Clarke & Watson (2014) proposed that institutional racism, a subtle process by which individuals are made to feel anxious and different, can lead to social exclusion for ethnic minority students within the educational context, as noted in their exploration of children’s centres and experienced by Zara and Amina in secondary settings. Clarke & Watson also proposed that projective identification of White norms and values, creates this difference whilst the school environment and stereotypes and constructions of Blackness as ‘other’ strengthen these feelings of difference in the individual.

Individuals who are the ‘only Black person’ or a very small minority are likely to have less opportunities to develop a strong racial identity, considered to be a protective factor against oppression (e.g. Annamma et al., 2016), as Tajfel & Turner (1986) noted, interactions with the same race support the development of racial identity in addition to outsider constructs of race. In the absence of these opportunities to socialise with others of the same race, within the educational context, it is likely that individuals may be influenced by outsider constructs to a greater degree. In addition, the White majority in these contexts are also likely to have little socialisation with non-White others, in order to develop an understanding of the multiplicity within other races, with few real life examples to inform racial constructs. Opportunities to develop cultural understanding within these educational contexts is, therefore, likely to be highly beneficial for both the development of Black pupil’s self-identity and self-worth and White pupils’ understanding and tolerance.

Shakira shared Amina and Zara’s experiences of being the only Black student and struggling to relate to and identify with White peers, due to feelings of difference. However, she suggested that she was protected from potential psychological harm and isolation on account of her differences, due to developing relationships with other ethnic minorities. Together, they were able to find unity in their shared position as ‘other,’ despite having different ethnic backgrounds, providing a strong, protective social identity.

**Reflective box**

Shakira’s reported experiences of developing friendships with other ethnic minorities in lieu of Black peers caused me to reflect on my own friendships within a predominantly White all-female school within a high socioeconomic area, with very few ethnic minorities. Like Shakira, I befriended the few other non-White individuals in my school year, in addition to others who were considered/considered themselves as minorities for other reasons e.g. their sexuality, low socioeconomic background, and/or personalities which didn’t comply the White middle class female norms, e.g. by presenting as loud, eccentric or ‘tomboyish’. Whilst this was not a conscious choice to befriend those who felt they did not fit, I felt a sense of belonging amongst those who felt different, due to my feelings of difference. Therefore, this friendship group acted as a protective factor against potential social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties, as I did not feel I could relate to the majority.

In the follow up focus group, Shakira was asked to expand upon her meanings behind her assertion of having shared values with other ethnic minorities. She depicted a contrasting picture of Black culture being synonymous with collectivist ideals surrounding family and having a greater connection to and respect for family/community as a priority or value, and White culture representing individualist values and ambitions. Zara expressed a similar view of cultural differences as she experienced when transitioning to schooling in the UK. Gay (2006) found that Black and other ethnic minority cultures predominantly favour more communal values which contrast with individualist values often promoted in school and aspired to by the White majority.

Within the context of further education, Lydia, Shakira, who were not placed in majority Black accommodation at university, describe difficulties settling into university life due to lack of friendships and struggling to find others they could identify with. This contrasts greatly with Amina and Samara’s accounts of fitting in straight away when placed in accommodation with other Black peers and ethnic minorities. This seemed to be of particular significance for Amina who had not experienced being part of the majority racial group and the resulting feelings of relatedness and inclusion, previously. These difficulties with assimilation and experiencing comfort which was reported to support academic engagement, resound with Rodger and Summers’ (2008) study, exploring African American students attending predominantly White institutions, in comparison to predominantly Black institutions. They found that the former group reported lower academic achievement and social integration and exhibited lower academic self-concept than the latter group.

**4.b) i) ii) Inappropriate Educational Provision**

Lydia relayed an expressive account of being placed within an inappropriate educational provision upon transitioning to school in the UK. She expressed feelings of fear for her safety due to the normalcy of violence and aggressive behaviour precipitating the need for enhanced security – a reminder of the reality of the threat of violence. It appears that fear and mistrust of associating with peers and being unable to relate to them, lead to social exclusion for Lydia in this context. Her distancing of her identity to those of the students is made clear through her description of peers as “illiterate”, “mad” and “crazy”.

I He (teacher) They (peers)

Lydia: I went there for like what, two months?

I was so uncomfortable there

I didn’t want to be there

I was always on my ones

I wasn’t trying to mix with them

I mean

I would say they were the worst three months of my life

I did not want to be in this country

I had to catch up

I went to the normal sixth form

I was like “Oh! So it is normal then.”

 He disclosed to me

 He would wear a bullet proof vest

 He was so shook off the students

 They were all just mad, crazy kids!

 They used to beat on the table

 They never used to learn

 They can’t handle more

I even saw my school on one of those shows

I would say, the worst and most challenging three months of my life

I wasn’t trying to step to no-one

 They know who I am fam They can They know I’m not inner the drama

 They would definitely come for me

I just stayed by myself.

Lydia stressed her discomfort at being placed within a setting that was so unfamiliar to her, where she struggled to identify with the other students and felt powerless to change her circumstances. She provides further context for her unhappiness, noting that she already resented her change of environment, coming to the UK from the Caribbean, and the associated difficulties of different curricula and missed work which meant she already felt under pressure to catch up. Initially she believes this setting to be typical of British educational provisions, however, upon moving to another setting, she recognised that the issue was with the particular (specialist) setting and pupils within it, as the new (mainstream) school met her expectations of ‘normality’.

Lydia insinuated making a decision to isolate herself due to not wanting to socialise with the other students–using colloquial expression (London slang) “I was just on my ones” and “I wasn’t trying to mix with them”. Peers’ disruptive behaviour, used to gain attention, is highlighted (beating on the tables), perhaps to illustrate their lack of inhibition and focus on self-expression over learning, validating her characterisation of her peers as ‘crazy’ and incapable of learning. Lydia’s expressions provide an insight into her own educational priorities and contrasting identity as a student who takes education seriously.

Lydia corroborated her impression of the specialist setting by reporting the experiences of a former teacher she had met since leaving. She used the word ‘disclosed’ suggesting that the teacher was confessing a secret, adding drama to the narrative and her description of the teacher as “shook off the students”, which highlights his fear of the other pupils, validating Lydia’s reluctance to integrate with them. Lydia also presented the school’s appearance on TV as further evidence of the abnormality of the provision and constant drama within it. She then reiterated her feelings about the setting using repetition of the phrase “worst three months of my life”, adding the word ‘challenging’ for extra emphasis.

Once Lydia has expressed her teacher’s fear, and has set the scene of a dangerous and unstable environment, she admits feeling fearful herself, building on the initial picture she painted, of not wanting to develop friendships due to feeling superior to this ‘othered’ group. “They know who I am” is stressed, suggesting potential vulnerability through associating with peers, insinuating that they would cause her harm if she became involved in their “dramas”. It appears that the presence of fear and absence of peer relationships or being able to relate to peers behaviour and perceived intellectual capacity, was a strong influence on Lydia’s negative opinion of the setting. Whilst lack of opportunity is also highlighted as a barrier to success (she was only able to access a limited number of qualifications in this setting) and reasoning for the inappropriateness of the provision, the other students and her relationships with them was presented as the greatest challenge faced.

Gillborn (2005) describes the potential barriers Black children face in their educational journey as a result of limiting conceptions of their capability and potential, which often relates to the educational provisions they are able to access. For example, Black children are more likely to be considered to have a special educational need / behavioural needs and consequently are disproportionately accessing and disadvantaged by lower quality teaching with less coverage of the curriculum, which reduces their possibilities of accessing further qualifications. Considering that Lydia was not placed within a school for children and young people with SEMH difficulties due to her behavioural presentation, it is concerning that this was considered to be the most appropriate provision for her, particularly due to the negative impact it would have had educationally, had she attended long-term, by limiting her access to qualifications, effective teaching and a learning environment which could encourage her attainment. According to Lydia, it was automatically assumed that she would not be able to keep up with peers in her academic year, following the transition, yet she demonstrated this ability upon moving to another school, reporting even being able to make up for the time lost and learning missed whilst attending the specialist school.

**4.b) ii) Problematic Relationships with Teachers**

Group members discussed how their relationships with teachers developed over time, with primary school considered as a time of positive interactions, in comparison to secondary education. Amina and Zara reported that during secondary school, their experienced social and emotional difficulties, relating their racial identity and feelings of belonging, impacted their relationships with teachers. Shakira, who did not report encountering these difficulties during her secondary education, also reported particularly problematic relationships with teachers during this time. Within the UK statistics, secondary education is also the time when educational differences between Black and White students become apparent, e.g. Gillborn (2008) which could perhaps be partially explained by problematic relationship between Black students and White teachers, particularly as teachers are responsible for imparting the knowledge and support required for students to attain. Positive relationships appeared to be dependent on the participants performing a particular identity as a student and recognising and adhering to cultural expectations.

**4. b) ii) i) Relationships Dependent on Ability to Perform as the Ideal Student**

Relationships with teachers were considered to have a significant impact on the participants’ perceptions of school, self-concept and the degree to which they felt able to engage with their learning and achieve. It was implied by participants that they were required to adopt the persona of the ‘ideal’ student in order to maintain a beneficial relationship and access adequate support from their teachers. This is congruent with theory by Ulrikson (2009) about the construct of an implied ideal student, based on Western values, which is difficult for ethnic minorities to recognise and consequently perform in order to facilitate their achievement. Alternatively, it could be considered that defying this image is an act of resistance and self-empowerment, for students who feel powerless in their educational settings. The ‘Relationship with teachers’ identity poem highlights participant’s narratives during the first focus group:

I You They/He We

Shakira: I was always seen as loud

 I have a loud laugh as well

 I used to get my sent out of lessons a lot

 I would be the one that got in trouble for it

 I’d get sent out and get detentions and stuff

 I suppose it didn’t really stop me

 I was still erm not the best

Amina: I never used to get in trouble

 I was literally like a good student

 I was head girl in my primary school and literally the teachers loved me

Shakira: I never really like actually got along with any of my teachers

 I’d just sort of just get by

 He hated me

 We literally just hated each other

 I would never ask for help

 I didn’t do well

 You sort of had to get by

 I didn’t really like any of my teachers.

Lydia: I feel like all the schools I’ve gone to

 You progress in years

 You get closer with your teachers

 You don’t really get why they do certain things

 You’re younger

 You don’t understand

 You feel like they do things out of spite

 You grow like older

 You kinda understand

 You start to build a relationship

 You kind of understand why they did certain things

 I feel like in my older years

 We had like a good relationship

Shakira: I’d say the same for six form

 I got along with my teachers in sixth form

 You start to realise that they’re literally there to help you

Amina: I felt like when I was in sixth form our relationship changed

 I hadn’t been enjoying school as much

 I wasn’t attending everything

 I would dip as soon as I could go home

 I’d dip for lunch time

 I would never really be that social

 I never got that close teacher-sixth form relationship

 I know that even when I wasn’t attending

 They were still trying to help me

 They were emailing me

 They really pushed me with my coursework

 They didn’t have to.

 I always had a complex

 They need their numbers to look good

 They generally care?

 I didn’t know

 I thought were really good though

 I wasn’t always at school.

Shakira articulates the presence of mutual dislike between herself and teachers and her response to these relationships - demonstrating resistance to conforming to teacher’s behavioural ideals. She reiterated her difficulties in performing the role of the model student in response to Amina, by providing an example of a particular teacher she felt took a strong dislike to her, disempowering her from being included and accepted. Shakira purported that the lack of positive student-teacher relationships, on account of teachers’ negative constructions of her image (e.g. “I was always seen as loud”, “I would be the one who got in trouble”), impacted her school engagement and, subsequently, her attainment. She extended this dislike to all teachers, noting;

“It made me think -why don’t they like me?” (Line 1705-1706)

Her narrative is coherent with research which suggests that Black students are disproportionately punished for exhibiting the same subjective misbehaviour, such as making excessive noise (e.g. Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Annamma et al., 2016). This image of her, constructed by teachers, as one of ‘those loud Black girls’ (e.g. Evans, 1988; Fordham 1993) resulted in Shakira rejecting teachers’ support and disengaging with them in an act of empowerment through agency. Shakira, later agrees with Lydia’s assertion that her relationships with teachers developed over time and with age, due to a developing understanding of teachers’ motivations and the pressures they face. This insinuates that she has now adapted her behaviour to perform the ‘ideal student’ in consideration of her teachers.

Relationships with teachers in primary school are expressed as nurturing and intuitive by Amina and she speaks of them with a fondness. She talks of herself as the model student in primary and the positive feedback she received from teachers as a consequence. However, Amina appears to perceive that her positive relationships with teachers is dependent on this this image, as she considers them to have deteriorated in response to her disengaging with school and extricating herself from social interactions within the school context. Amina takes responsibility for this change to a more detached teacher-student relationship, asserting that the teachers continued to uphold their contractual position and pushed her to succeed although she is sceptical about the genuineness of their motives. Amina expressed that it was her who had changed and disengaged, preventing the relationship from becoming closer and consequently, teachers ‘didn’t have to’ continue to push her, suggesting that she felt no longer worthy of their support. However, it could be considered that her teachers and other school staff had a responsibility to continue to support her in any way they could, despite her attendance, particularly as her absences were related to difficulties with her emotional wellbeing specific to the school context.

Zara also described later experiences of experiencing difficulties with teachers, who were not providing her with the emotional support that she needed following a period of illness and missed schooling. She expressed her perception that the teachers cared more about academic attainment than well-being, reiterating a narrative expressed earlier in the conversation as being characteristic of the school environment.

Zara: School wise I got emails, but yeah like I said they were just focussed on grades so they were just like “You need to be on top” like parents evening, instead of support any of us, we’d have like this chart and they show tell us like how you’re doing in your mock papers is how you’ll do in exams so they would tell us like stats and stuff instead of helping us with revision and stuff, so it was quite stressful. (Line 256-260)

In this setting, effective student-teacher relationships were dependant on a student identity as a high-performing, independent learner. This led Zara to feel as though she was just another statistic, particularly when her individual needs were not recognised. Gillborn (2015) found that whilst Black students are overrepresented in statistics in relation to behavioural difficulties and conduct disorders, other additional needs, those which do not pose a threat to the classroom functioning, appear to be frequently unidentified and unrecognised within Black students and consequently they are less able to access the support they require.

Lydia expressed that her appreciation for the support teachers provided grew over time, due to developing an insight into teachers’ perspectives and recognising shared motivations – learning and attainment. Consequently, she was able to develop respect for them and their authority and perhaps perform more readily as the ideal student. She repeats the word ‘understand’ to stress the importance of being able to relate to the teacher’s experience to develop a fruitful relationship, and iterates that it takes a certain level of maturity to recognise this, as a student. Lydia uses ‘you’ rather than ‘I’, for the majority of her narrative (all but her first and last utterances), perhaps to depersonalise her message or to seek agreement from the group by indicating that it is experienced by others.

**4.b) ii) ii) Difficulties with Teacher Relationships due to Diverse Cultural Ideals**

Zara experienced pre-school in Caribbean and reports difficulties transitioning to a UK school. Education she experienced in the Caribbean consisted of the teaching of cultural and social values e.g. how to respect her elders, which she found did not apply within the UK. Zara described this as causing cultural conflict upon entering the UK educational system, where the expectations and behavioural norms were different for both adults and children.

Zara: I wasn’t adapting as well. I was more like violent with other kids, not in like a bad way, just like not being patient with them and stuff. Then like, because we had learnt to call our elders ‘uncle’ and ‘aunty’, I was calling them uncle and aunty – my teachers, and they kept telling me not to. So I was trying to transition from being brought up in a respectable household, to coming to the UK.

(Line 1687-1691)

Zara’s lack of understanding about cultural rules and expectations and behavioural boundaries within the UK school context, led to feelings of anger and frustration at her failed attempts to enact the school’s cultural conceptions of good behaviour, whilst maintaining cultural values and behaviours indoctrinated as respectful. Zara appears to have internalised others’ constructions of her cultural misunderstandings as ‘behavioural difficulties’, describing herself at this young age as ‘violent’, despite only referring to subjective, desirable behaviours she failed to enact.

Theory by Annamma et al., (2016) suggests that Non-White groups are stigmatised and disadvantaged when they fail to conform to or fit within White ideals, with those who differ from the norm socially constructed as inherently inadequate and disordered. Interestingly, Zara constructs herself as disordered on account of not fitting in with the different school ideals upon transitioning to the UK educational system, suggesting that she perhaps internalised projected constructs of ‘disorder’ (Fanon, 1967). Her experience links to research about existence of a hidden curriculum within the educational system (e.g. Rahman, 2013) which consists of commonly accepted, yet unwritten, rules, regulations and standards, reflecting the White dominant culture, which students are expected to comply with. This places ethnic minorities who are not familiar with the implied expectations at a disadvantage to thrive within the setting. As Zara described, reconciling these cultural differences, with support from her parents who recognised the disparities between cultural rules, was essential in order to assimilate into the school culture, socialise effectively with others and achieve academic success. Failure to do this most likely would have resulted in removal of access to a mainstream school provision and potentially diminished opportunity to achieve in line with her potential.

**4.c) Research Question 3: What has supported participants’ educational experience?**

This section considers the drivers or facilitators of educational success presented by participants. ‘Personal and family ambition as a facilitator of success’ presents participants narratives about their personal ambitions which inspire their hard work and attainment and the importance of family as a support mechanism and inspiration. Participants acknowledged that their personal ambitions and family ambitions are entwined and great individual achievements were considered to be achievements for the family, community and even Black/Caribbean women as a group. ‘Help seeking behaviours supporting success’ examines how some participants professed to practicing silence in educational contexts and engage in self-directed approaches to seeking knowledge, in comparison to other participants who speak out and seek support from those around them. Both behaviours appeared to be effective in affording the participants success in their studies, in addition to resiliency which supported participants to overcome the barriers to success highlighted in Section 4.b.

**4. c) i) Personal and Family Ambition as a Facilitator of Success**

The participants in the study all shared a strong sense of ambition which emerged through their narratives about what they aspire to achieve and the effort they are willing to put in to reach their goals. Participants perceived that education was the route to empowerment, a protective factor against some of the disempowerment and disparity associated with Blackness, noting:

Lydia: I noticed the school where I was from some of the White parents were really lax about education in comparison to the Black parents who really push education because they know the impact it’s going to have for their children, ‘cause a Black individual, you can’t, it’s hard for us to go far anyway, with an education behind us, it makes it a bit easier, because we don’t have that White privilege=

Zara: =Yeah=

Amina: =So education is like a bigger driver in our culture, our community, I feel like in comparison to them, because it’s almost like, they’re already ahead.

Line: 1898-1905

Achievement was not solely viewed as an individualistic effort to achieve for themselves, as all participants expressed a desire to achieve for others who they recognised as having supported their achievements from the beginning until present day, such as immediate family or ancestors. Whilst family provided a supportive network, they also appeared to present an added pressure for participants which they used to motivate them. However, having personal goals was considered an essential factor for academic success. Participants also appeared to find empowerment in their Black female identity, considering it to represent strength, persisting through hardship and community values which encouraged them to aspire to achieve and work towards their goals.

**4.c) i) i) Personal Drive, Ambition and Resiliency**

Personal ambition was clearly articulated by all members of the group, who noted that regardless of outside influences, they wanted to achieve for themselves and were motivated to put in the necessary effort to achieve their goals, and persevere despite difficulties faced, such as lack of support. As Amina noted:

Amina: We all want to do well and achieve but it’s like self-motivation, if you don’t have that then you’re not gonna go far. (Line 812-815)

This group identity poem demonstrates the responsibility the group members feel to achieve their aspirations.

I You She

Shakira : I have like erm, a certain goal

 I want to reach

 I have always wanted to be

 I sort of know what I have to do

 I don’t think they’d really let me, slip

Amina: I can relate to that a lot as well

 I feel like my mum would do anything

 She’d always push us to do the best

 I’m not saying I’m doing it for my mom

 I have my own goals

 I see like how much she wants it for me

 I think yeah

 I can achieve that as well

 I need to be like excelling

Lydia: I can relate to that

 I wanna achieve

 I wanna do

 You just like wanna achieve the best that you can

Shakira: I feel like

 I need to be one of those people as well

 You have to make it onto that wall

Shakira uses definitive terms such as ‘I want’, ‘I have’ to express her clear ambitions, but uses tentative terms such as “I sort of know”, to express the route to reach her ambition, perhaps speaking to a lack of confidence or uncertainty about achieving the necessary steps. She appears to equate achievement with a positive self- identity and becoming an idealised version of herself e.g. “I have always wanted to be” and “I need to be one of those people.” She desires to be acknowledged in her identity as a high-achiever through her graduation picture appearing on her grandparent’s wall which celebrates academic attainment. It appears that this physical representation of achievement is a reminder to Shakira of what has already been achieved by family members and consequently, what is expected of her and aspired to by her. Amina uses assertive, definitive language such as “I can”, “I’m not”, “I have” and “I need”, demonstrating confidence in her ability to achieve highly and asserting that academic excellence as imperative for her. Lydia expresses her ambitions through desires about action – to ‘do’ and ‘achieve’, indicating hope that she can achieve in line with her abilities, in order to reach her own goals and achieve for family.

The group emphasised the importance of having and working towards realistic goals in their academic studies at university – based on their strengths, potential income and career development, and interests – and most professed to have a clear direction with regards to career paths as undergraduates. Shakira suggests that the group members and perhaps others of Caribbean descent who come to university are seeking challenge and academic knowledge and are likely to only undertake courses which are considered to be worth the time, effort and financial input required, in addition to the potential resulting financial output and opportunities. They considered that it was self-indulgent and illogical to go to university without a clear direction, or predominantly for the experience and highly regarded courses which lead to specific jobs. The group demonstrated a perception of educational courses being hierarchical and articulated a desire and ambition to pursue courses and consequently, careers, which are the most highly regarded.

Mirza (2006) found that the second generation Caribbean females in her study possessed an ‘educational urgency,’ driven by resiliency, an aspiration to succeed despite the barriers they faced and determination to not be considered a failure. Educational success was also seen as a vehicle to facilitate professional success and financial freedom as participants in the present study identified. Resilience is presented in a dismissive way by participants, as an afterthought of their negative experiences. Perhaps it is their ability to empower themselves, by successfully navigating these experiences with determination, in order to continue to achieve academically, which is most significant in supporting their success.

**4.c) i) ii) Family Ambitions**

The participants all acknowledged that their personal ambition is inspired by family and community values and all expressed wanting to achieve to make family proud, recognising and appreciating the sacrifices and efforts family have made in their favour, from past generations of family coming to England, in search of better opportunity for self and family, to the emotional and financial support immediate family provided to support them and their education. Achieving in order to inspire siblings, support family financially or even just to elicit pride in parents and grandparents was considered to be a driving force to achievement.

Amina: And like sacrifices that she’s done for us as well, that motivates me even more, being like, OK my mum’s done this and this for me to achieve this, I need to be like excelling like, she’s looking after everyone and all that stuff. (Line 229-232)

Lydia: …and also like making my family proud, for all the sacrifices they made and the money they spent on me, kinda thing, yeah. You just like wanna achieve the best that you can because of everything that you’ve gone through and everything that other people have given up for you, kinda thing, so yeah.

Shakira: Yeah I feel like, especially my grandparents who came to England, from like Jamaica erm and like St. Vincent, erm to work here and like to build a better life for their children. So then, when they get so excited, like when all their grandchildren graduated from uni and stuff, it makes you think like I need to be one of those people as well.

Amina: [Yeah]

Zara: [Yeah]. (Line 234-244)

Lydia: ….I was so mu- like just wanted to do the work, I wanted to catch up and like make my mum proud, cos she fought so: much for me to like go to a mainstream school (line 335-338)

This finding mirrors previous research, such as Amanishakete’s (2013) exploration of high achieving Black students, which revealed that they all implicated family and community in their success. They took pride in the actions and demonstrated strength and resilience of their ancestors, despite oppression faced and used it as a source of motivation for their own achievements. They considered their family and communities in their strivings to attain, valuing the support they provided and benefitting from having successful role models in their image. O’Connor (1997) highlighted the value of family and community support for Black female pupils which can act as a protective factor against oppression. All participants within the study articulated the strong supportive networks they had around them which supported their success through, psychological support through encouragement and motivation, in addition to practical and financial support.

Contrasting stereotyped constructions of Black parents not possessing the values which promote educational success (Fordham, 1996), the participant’s narratives resonated with findings in Rollock et al.’s (2011) study of middle class Black parents and Wright’s (2013) study of young black pupils’ post-compulsory school experiences. Both found that the Black parents studied were heavily involved in supporting their children’s educational development outside of school, largely contributing to educational engagement and success. Support reported by participants included tutoring, extracurricular activities and Black mentoring – including advice on how to overcome and succeed despite racism, all of which the participants outlined as ways their academic motivation and success were encouraged by parents.

Shakira: And obviously your family, my parents, like I don’t think they’d really let me, slip. So I dunno, I know that if I needed a bit of extra support they would find me a tutor or something (line 218-220)

Amina: I can relate to that a lot as well, I feel like my mum would do anything to try and help me get to where I need to go to, even with like my school and me getting the scholarship and bursaries, she would always push us to do the best we need to do… (Line 225-227)

Amina: I remember when I was younger, like erm my dad used to give me my own History lessons kind of, like he’s quite intellectual and he’d literally be like “Right Adina, we’re gonna learn about the industrial revolution today or I’m going to talk to you about your own heritage and about slaves. (Line 454-457)

Learning at school was supplemented by parents, both in terms of supporting learning pertinent to school and to their personal and cultural development and knowledge, including Black history.

Socio-economic disparities between Black Caribbean families and majority groups were highlighted as potentially impacting the educational outcomes for this group, due the resulting lack of capacity to provide their children with additional support outside of school and within further education.

Adina: I know people from back when I was at school, so basically their parents have like a university fund for them. As they were like, so when they were born, they were just putting money [into this account.] Sorry my family weren’t on that, like although they wanted me

Yasmin: [yeah I heard of that]

Amina: to go to university, but they weren’t planning ahead. Because they didn’t know the costs, cos you have to know don’t you?=

(Line 1227-1232)

Amina I feel like a lot of Afro-Caribbean, not saying we’re all struggling. But it’s kinda like get by this year, ok, we’ve done this, ok like its more steps=

Samara: =like living pay cheque to pay cheque=

Amina: =Yeah!

(Line 1234-1243)

Participants’ narratives mirrored findings by Archer and Francis (2007), that social class inequalities are reproduced through the educational system, further disadvantaging ethnic minority groups who are more likely to have lower socio-economic status (e.g. Strand, 2014), as those with social capital can use their resources to access privileges and safeguard against risk and costs. Participants’ economic circumstances meant that, for them and their families, affording further study was not easy, but it was considered manageable.

**4. c) ii) Learning Behaviours**

Seeking out help when needed and making the most of the resources available were seen as facilitators to success, as the participants acknowledged the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning, particularly at university. Samara reported actively seeking out help from tutors and demanding their time and knowledge to support her learning, although this is something other members of the group felt less comfortable with doing, particular Shakira, who notes taking a more self-directed approach to learning. A contrasting narrative of practising silence against speaking out emerges from the group, which appears to be partly dictated by confidence levels but also a respect for others learning and appreciation of learning through listening, as well as speaking.

Shakira: In lectures I’m non-existent. I like to just literally listen=

Amina: =Mm=

Shakira: =write my notes, like I listen to other people’s responses and stuff but I don’t speak at all. But in tutorials, like if I understand it and actually have something to say, I speak out in tutorials. It’s nicer cos it’s like a smaller close-knit group, whereas I feel a bit more=

Amina: =On the spot=

Shakira: =Reluctant to like actually say something

((Group talking at same time, incoherent))

Shakira: ….I don’t have that same understanding that they have so I’m like if I say something everyone’s gonna be like “Ooh.” ((Laugh from Amina)) “What’s she talking about?”

Amina: I speak out a lot of seminars, I have a lot of international students and they really can’t string a sentence together, in English, so they like, they don’t contribute, so it’s just silence. (Line 926-941)

Samara: …I wouldn’t shout out and try and stop the flow of the class, because like I know like maybe the majority of people would already understand what I about to ask, so after the lecture I just went to him and asked him to explain it to me quickly…. (Line 961-963)

Shakira: If I don’t understand something, I take it upon myself to just go home and read up on it, and like I search the internet, I find ways to understand it. So I never leave myself just, confused.= (Line 986-988)

**4. c) ii) i) Silencing**

Shakira’s identity as a student is reported to have changed at university as she professes to taking more responsibility for her learning and the persona of the ‘loud’ student has been replaced by a more ‘ideal’ student who is more likely to practice silence than speak out, even if speaking out could enhance her learning. It could be considered that the silence Shakira professes to as a university student is a further act of resistance, addressing the diminished power she had previously experienced by acquiescing to the teacher’s negative expectations of her as ‘loud’ and disruptive. In wanting to be successful, it could be argued that she was now resisting the image she had previously conformed to, upon becoming aware of how she had been perceived by teachers, how the ‘ideal’ student is treated and how to gain power through silence. However, there is a distinct sense of lacking confidence expressed, as she articulated fear that her knowledge was inferior and speaking out would make that fact apparent to her peers.

**Reflective box**

This caused me to reflect on my experience of having my identity as an ‘able’ and high-achieving student threatened by the school’s cultural ideals of the ‘model student’, which converged with the identity I presented. I perceived teacher’s constructions of my potential to be underestimations (although these doubts about my intelligence were often internalised) and, in the absence of other evidence to support their continued expressions of surprise at my attainments in exams, I considered this to be as a result of my racial identity, and the constructions, representations and consequently, expectations it formed for my teachers. Shakira’s narratives also made me think of my changing identities as a student, evolving from a position of moderate defiance through self-expression and ‘loudness’ to practising silence at university, due to developing a perception that the best way to achieve would be to challenge the stereotypical construction of a Black female and ‘blend in’, or go unnoticed, working hard behind the scenes.

As a university student, Shakira continues to seek empowerment through her independence, demonstrating agency in her learning behaviours and seeking her own access to knowledge. However, interestingly, whilst she professed holding collectivist cultural values which she highlighted as differentiating her from her White peers’ individualist values, in her search for agency she appears to have adopted individualist approaches to learning and success – working alone rather than seeking or accessing help from the community around her. This is reminiscent of Fanon’s (1967) idea of self-division. Shakira suggests that it is her confidence which causes her to practice silence, perhaps on account of previous negative experiences of teachers and their preconceptions and stereotyped constructions which has resulted in an internalisation of her inferiority.

Fordham (1993) discussed ‘silencing’ as a facilitator to success for African-American females, which requires a detachment from Black identities and the performance of White female identities, and questioned the implications of this, asking:

“Is gender diversity something to celebrate? Should we seek its fragmentation? If so, how? Should our goal be to transform "those loud Black girls"? Should success for African-American women be so expensive? Finally, should the African-American female seek to reconstruct her life to become successful, pawning her identity as a "loud Black girl" for an identity in which she is the "doubly-refracted [African-American] Other”?” (p. 24)

However, Samara’s narratives of empowerment through speaking out, in order to ensure she is accessing her learning effectively and developing her understanding, challenges this assertion that a Black female must reconstruct her identity in the White image and practise silence in order to be successful, at least within a university context.

**4. c) ii) ii) Voicing**

Samara incorporates the collectivist ideals which the group identified as synonymous with their Caribbean identity, such as the individuals’ successes being considered as the communities’ successes and valuing the support from others. She enacts her collectivist values by seeking support from the community around her, such as peer support, and 1:1 support from tutors, considering help-seeking and working together with others to achieve success to be a strength rather than a weakness. Perhaps having lived in the Caribbean, enacting cultural values, in addition to valuing them, has been more achievable for Samara. Conversely, being within the British educational system for longer, Shakira has attempted to integrate British or White individualist values and an identity as a student which favours values from White femininity in the search for empowerment, causing conflict with her cultural ideals and identity, impacting her self-esteem. (E.g. Phinney, 1993; Fordham, 1993).

**Reflective box**

I considered whether Samara would have been able to maintain this confident persona as a student, had she experienced secondary education in the UK, where her assertiveness and speaking out may have been less welcomed and accepted by teachers.

Perhaps those who can be strong in their ‘loud Black girl’ persona and use it to demand what they need educationally whilst maintaining cultural values, can achieve success without threatening their identity and self-esteem. However, this requires Black girls to be confident in themselves and their identity as self-expression can invite criticism. As Amina and Shakira note, they are worried about the worth and value of their comments which further encourages them to stay silent, for fear of speaking out and being perceived as unintelligent – perhaps another internalised projection. Despite their different methods of accessing support, the group members, with the exception of Zara who didn’t make a comment in relation to the topic, all reported taking responsibility in some way for ensuring that they were able to access their learning effectively, positively impacting their ability to succeed.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided an outline of the themes elicited from the focus group data in order to answer the research questions and explore the relationship between identity and educational experiences for the participants. The discussion of themes incorporates psychoanalytic theories of power and psychological theories of social identity and colonialism, to consider themes presented from a CRT and FemCrit perspective. These perspectives highlighted the complexity and tensions which can arise in the formation and negotiation of identity as a Black British female with Caribbean heritage and the potential impact that self-constructs, influenced by colonial racialised ideologies, and outsider-constructs of racial and gendered identity, can have on individuals’ educational experiences. For participants, their identity in educational settings impacted social and emotional well-being, relationships with peers and teachers and engagement with the educational context. A strong social identity, in particular, a strong racial/ethnic and gendered identity; family/community support; and personal ambition and resilience to overcome challenges, appeared to act as a protective factor for participants against potential effects of oppression and discrimination; promoting psychological wellbeing and educational success.

**5. Conclusions and Reflections**

**Introduction**

This chapter will provide personal reflections on the research, pertaining to motivations for undertaking the study and knowledge gained through the research process. It will also consider overall conclusions of the research and the key messages to be taken from the results, by research question.

**5.a) Personal Motivations**

The decision to choose the research topic originated from reflections on my own schooling, precipitated by engagement with Educational psychology theory and practice during the doctoral course. I recognised that I had an ambivalent relationship with my educational experience, having benefitted from the education I received in terms of academic attainment, but holding onto residual anger and frustration at the difficulties I had faced during the journey in terms of feelings of difference, particularly during adolescence, leading me to feel that perhaps an alternative educational provision may have been better suited. Being the racial anomaly in the affluent, predominantly White, single sex grammar school, I was immediately identifiable and positioned as ‘other’, an object of curiosity to my peers and of suspicion/invisibility to my educators. “I’ve never met a Black person in real life” was impressed upon me in my first few days, apparently I was not what she had expected - a recurring message I received in relation to my racial and gendered identity. Although I formed good social relationships, often with other ‘outsiders’, I was faced with psychological conflict in my attempts to be a social chameleon and ‘fit in’, navigating two separate worlds - home life and school life - each governed by its own differing cultural values, expectations and constructions of my identity. I internalised these feelings of difference and inferiority which impacted my self-esteem and emotional well-being, often feeling as though I didn’t fully belong or quite measure up anywhere and questioning -is it just me? Fast forwarding to the present doctoral course, I was reminded of my feelings of difference and inferiority on the first day, as I listened to my peers and experienced imposter syndrome, something which was also voiced by the only other ethnic minority in the cohort. Perhaps we were just here to fill the diversity quota, we joked. Or perhaps our shared insecurities spoke to a more complex picture of the impact of race and identity on educational experience.

**5.b) Research Question 1: Which aspects of identity are considered to be important as Black females with Caribbean heritage and how do they express these identities?**

I was interested in how other Black British females identified themselves in negotiation with the identities constructed for them by others and was surprised to find that the study participants expressed familiar feelings of tension and, at times conflict in the amalgamation of different aspects of multi-faceted identities, adopting changing forms and labels. The message from participants was clear – their identity formation was an ongoing process of resisting and internalising other’s stereotyped constructions of what their physical identities represented and a relational experience of connecting to and distancing from different social identities in the pursuit of a coherent self. The Black Caribbean females studied expressed that even in modern society, where there is a commonly held assertion that race is no longer relevant, for them, their Blackness was both an important source of strength and the root of experienced ‘othering’ and difference, which resonated with my experiences. It had the power to enhance our visibility, projecting us into the spotlight whilst simultaneously making us invisible as individuals, with individuality subsumed by Blackness. Caribbean heritage, British identity and femaleness were all key aspects of identity for the participants, which interacted with their Blackness – Black female, Black British and Black Caribbean. The participants wanted their Blackness in its many forms to be embraced and understood, and their identity as individuals to be acknowledged, in the educational context and beyond.

The multi-faceted identities presented by participants were perceived as creating opportunities for multiple sources of belonging to different social groups and opportunities to express different aspects of identity in different contexts. As long as Blackness is considered to be ‘other’, these opportunities for expressing aspects of racial and cultural identity are important to allow individuals to feel recognised and understood by others. More diverse and empowering representations of Blackness, in particular, of Black females were also considered important to create new constructions of Black femininity, representing diversity of identities, and heightened possibilities for who and what Black females can become.

**5. c) Research Question 2: What impact does/has identity have/had upon the group’s educational experiences in relation to barriers?**

The most personally rewarding aspect of the research was the degree to which I identified with participants’ interpretations of their educational experiences and the impact on their identity, previously considering my own to be fairly anomalous without a comparative frame of reference. However, this presented the additional challenge of ensuring I was attending to participants’ voices not my own (utilising the Listening Guide supported this endeavour). Identifying that three of the participants had experiences of difficulties with social and emotional well-being on account of their racial difference, unexpectedly validated my own educational experiences and for participants, theirs. Perhaps it really isn’t just me, or just us. This leads me to consider whether, in fact, this is a more common, conflicting, alienating experience for Black females (and most likely males) educated within majority White contexts. It appears to be characterised by distancing, on recognition of difference, and has the potential to elicit mental health difficulties and disengagement from the educational environment. It appears that once individuals have developed a more coherent/secure sense of self, celebrating difference can be empowering, but in periods of uncertainty of self, emotional security and good emotional well-being reside in belonging, precipitated by a sense of sameness in key aspects of identity such as race. In settings where there are limited opportunities to express these key aspects of identity and be recognised and understood, perhaps more could be done to create supportive connections for individuals to support social and emotional well-being and academic engagement.

The exploration of barriers to educational experiences also revealed the potential for teacher relationships to be problematic on account of identity as a Black female, a less unexpected finding. Those struggling to conform to unwritten values and expectations based upon White British norms experienced fractured teacher-student relationships, which again, resonated with my experience. The process of resisting and encompassing outsider constructions of identity in a struggle for agency and acceptance from teachers and needing to perform as the ideal student, arguably to a greater degree than White (and male) peers, was an experience familiar to all participants in UK schools. That poses the questions – Should Black Caribbean females have to adapt their identities/perform a prescribed identity in order to achieve fair treatment, positive regard and support from teachers? And what will become of those ‘loud’ Black girls refusing/unable to conform?

**5.d) Research Question 3: What has supported participant’s educational experiences?**

The study aimed to explore factors which have supported the participants’ attainment and practical strategies, such as peer mentoring and accessing tutor support, were noted by one participant, with two further participants noting that their parents would have accessed private tutor support, if necessary. However, for most, it appeared that clear goals and direction and determined ambition contributed greatly to their success.Success was considered to be beating the odds, achieving despite difficulty, the result of developed resilience for participants. All participants highlighted the importance of supportive networks of friends and family who nurture their racial/cultural identities and provide greater meaning and purpose to their success. Individual success was seen as family/community success and ambitions were intertwined with parental hopes and expectations, another aspect I identified with. Great value was placed on education as it was seen as the key to improved familial/individual economic circumstances – the reasons their families had originally migrated to the UK. Consequently, all participants professed to feel a responsibility to make their hardship worthwhile by making the most of their education, in order to access esteemed careers and make family proud. Additionally, representations of Black females in professional positions, whether fictitious or real not only supported a positive Black female identity formation, as aforementioned, but also provided inspiration in relation to careers participants could attain. Seeing another Black female performing a role, achieving despite challenges, encouraged their ambition as it made it feel realistic for them to also achieve.

**Conclusion**

I recognised that I had not previously had the opportunity to discuss the issues presented, with others who had had very similar educational experiences to mine, particularly having been the only Black girl in my year and one of very few attending the middle class White grammar school. The experience of engaging in the focus groups, was therefore, a form of intervention for myself as well as participants – an opportunity to reflect on experiences, to express aspects of identity and to be recognised – a process which encouraged reaffirmation and reconstruction of identities in negotiation with others. The results suggest that identity has the potential to greatly impact educational experience which can have negative consequences for the studied demographic, due to negative and limiting constructions and representations of Black Caribbean females. Identity also has the potential to be a source of strength for this group in Britain, which presents a case for promoting social identity development.

**6. Research Strengths, Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.**

**Introduction**

This chapter will explore the strengths and limitations of the research in relation to methodological choices and research aims. Adherence to Yardley’s (2002) criteria for qualitative research is outlined in chapter 3.c). In consideration of these strengths and limitations, areas for future research are highlighted.

**6.a) Methodological strengths, limitations and recommendations for future research**

The focus group design and group dynamics allowed for different identities to be expressed and reflected on by participants, causing co-construction of group identities. The participants were all articulate in their expressions and allowed for a dynamic ‘carnival’ with lively conversation, overlapping speech and laughter, once the group appeared to become comfortable in the discussion. The group dynamics changed throughout the group which was influenced by the extent to which individuals related to topics and each other. This meant that some voices appeared to be silenced at times and some individuals expressed themselves more than others. However, one the research strengths is the agency given to participants to lead the conversation, consequently, it would have contradictory to encourage equal participation at the expense of disrupting the natural flow of conversation and formation of ideas.

Narrative analysis allows the exploration of participants’ constructions of identity and experiences, however, it is limited in the degree to which it can ascertain the barriers and facilitators to success in terms of causality. Josselson (2006) notes that a common criticism of narrative inquiry is its lack of capacity to accumulate knowledge, with the knowledge derived from studies considered to be limited in its scope for advancing theory, perhaps only pertinent to the individual or group being studied. However, she purports that it is possible to accumulate knowledge without losing the richness which constitutes narrative data, asserting that data can be amalgamated, creating a richer understanding of phenomena through cross case analysis exploring commonality and differences. This encourages the development of greater frameworks of understandings beyond the individual study, providing these understandings remain situated within their contexts and knowledge assertions are considered as provisional. Using the definition of causality proposed by Elder-Vass (2012) which refers to ‘tendencies’, the themes elicited from narratives can be understood as providing further insight into factors which have the potential to help or hinder success for this group in society. It is hoped that the present study will contribute to a wider body of narrative research into Black female identity, to accumulate knowledge and facilitate progress.

The Listening Guide was used to attend to voice, which was a thorough and effective method of engaging with participants’ voices and relational expressions of identity. The identity poems developed through the method were also a useful way to perform the groups’ identities back to them within the second focus group, encouraging them to reflect on the selected narratives and facilitating further discussion about the themes. However, for purposes of analysis, the poems seemed to, at times, detract from the richness of the flow of conversation, which supported the statements. Consequently, whilst identity poems are included within the analysis, excerpts from the transcript representing features, as well as content of the interaction, were also used to evidence themes and add context. As this was only a small sample of participants, future research could use narrative analysis and the Listening Guide to represent of a larger number of marginalised voices and their expressions of relational identity and eliciting greater insight into their experiences.

The study sought to present the thoughts, experiences and identities expressed by participants in a way which was representative of them, encouraging them to engage with the research process in order to achieve this. However, due to the volume and richness of the data provided by the participants over the two studies, it was impossible to do this without having some authority on the themes which could be analysed in detail and included within the confines of this thesis. This presented a tension between sufficiently representing the range of views presented and having to censor participants by privileging some narratives over others, in order to present a sufficiently detailed analysis and answer the research questions. Additionally, it was not possible to present the analysis of the research carried out following the second focus group, for participants to critique, which would have afforded the participants further power to shape the research and have the final authority on their narratives and representation. This would be recommended for future research of this nature.

**6.b) Exploring identity and educational experiences – Strengths, Limitations and recommendations for future research.**

One of the strengths of the current research project could be considered to be the exploration and voicing of the experiences of an underrepresented group – Black females of Caribbean heritage, from a racialised perspective. Future research into educational experiences of Black Caribbean students from different backgrounds, utilising CRT and FemCrit frameworks and/or methodologies could perhaps provide a greater insight into the complexities and diversity within Black Caribbean identities and their interaction with educational contexts. Additionally, future research could focus on the experiences of adolescents, rather than young people, to gain insight into more current experiences of earlier education and potential facilitators and barriers to success.

The participants represented a limited range of educational contexts within Britain, with three having attended ‘middle class’ majority White secondary educational settings. This illuminated shared experiences which arose from these contexts, warranting further exploration of the impact of race, identity and belonging, as the racial anomaly in educational settings. Exploration of how identity and educational experiences interact in other educational contexts, e.g. within lower socio-economic areas or ethnically mixed schools, would likely provide a wider insight into facilitators and barriers to success experienced by Black British females of Caribbean heritage. Further exploration of identity and educational experiences of Caribbean individuals who have experienced education in both the UK and the Caribbean, would also further highlight the additional challenges and/or resiliency potentially experienced by this group in their transition. How do these individuals adapt to a disparate social environment, including expectations, norms and values and constructions of their identity?

This study explored intersectionality and highlighted different aspects of identity which dynamically interacted and could impact experience and identity. However, due to the lack of response from potential participants with Special Educational Needs (SEN), it was not possible to explore the further impact educational difficulties may have on identity and experience, apart from within the pilot study. For the pilot study participant, being diagnosed as dyslexic was not presented as a barrier to attainment due to the consistent support she had received and diminished pressure for her to achieve. In addition, it was not presented as an aspect of identity which presented conflict or difficulty in her day to day life and social interactions and consequently, considered to be a less salient feature of her identity than race or gender. Further exploration of the experiences of Black Caribbean females with SEN could provide a greater insight into the interaction between race, gender and disability, further exploring intersectionality and its impact on identity and educational experience.

**Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted some of the strengths and limitations of the present research study, including its participatory method and voicing of an underrepresented group. Recommendations for future research included further exploration of the impact of identity on attainment for Black Caribbean females in different educational contexts, considering the impact of SEN on identity experiences and exploring the use of the narrative analysis using the Listening Guide, as a methodology for eliciting marginalised voices.

**7. Implications for Educational Psychology research and practice**

**Introduction**

This section aims to provide the reader with an outline of how the research findings could be used to develop Educational Psychology (EP) practice and theory. It will consider the themes elicited with regard to standard competencies presented in the EP ‘Standards for Educational Psychology Training’ (BPS, 2015) in relation to ‘diversity and cultural difference,’ as these highlight the responsibilities EPs have for supporting the needs of ethnic minorities. As mentioned in Section Two, there has been a historic achievement gap between Black and White students, becoming apparent from secondary education onwards, which continues to persist (e.g. DfE, 2015, 2016) and suggests a persistent racial inequality in the educational system (Gillborn 2008). In addition, there is growing divergence between the attainment of Black African students and Black Caribbean students, across gender, with Black Caribbean students trailing behind (DfE 2015). Therefore, this study sought to highlight the experiences of Black female Caribbean students to gain an insight into how their racial identity impacted their schooling and how EPs could seek to address inequality and power imbalances for other Black Caribbean students. Further exploration of this issue in future research could provide greater understanding about modern day racialised experiences and effective ways to promote equality of opportunities for Black Caribbean students of both gender in consideration of the particular issues they face on account of their identity.

**7.a) Standard 3.1*: ‘Demonstrate appreciation of diversity in society and the experiences and contributions of different ethnic, socio-cultural and faith groups.’***

The present study highlighted the experiences of an ethnic minority group and the diversity which exists within this group, including in relation to their cultural, national and racial identities. Identity was presented by participants as fluid and complex and highly influenced by social interactions and constructions of Blackness. Participants emphasised the importance of others, including educators and peers, but also wider society, recognising the multiplicity of self-constructs and group within Blackness, in addition to individual differences. This has implications, not only for professionals working with and educating Black Caribbean students and students of other ethnic minorities, but also those who have less personal experience of engaging with ethnic minority students, who are likely to have less awareness and understanding of the potential impact of identity on experience and outcomes. Educators, researchers and policy makers should seek to develop their understanding of the diversity within these groups and the additional challenges that they may be faced with within the educational context, based on their identity. It is important that EP’s and others within educational fields challenge stereotyped, limiting constructions they or other professionals may hold about Black Caribbean students and other ethnic minorities, in order to facilitate anti-oppressive practice and recognition of individual differences and strengths. By further developing understanding of the impact of intersectionality, including racialised and gendered experiences, professionals can enhance their understanding of why particular demographics may encounter difficulty within the educational system, and systemic approaches to address experienced inequality, at an individual, group and policy level. It is hoped that this research can facilitate a dialogue about narrow constructions of Blackness in relation to Whiteness within education and the potential psychological and experienced impact for Black individuals constructing their self-identity in negotiation with these constructions. DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2014) identified race-focussed research, including relating to race-imaged concepts, as highly underrepresented and purported CRT as a useful approach to explore these issues, as the present study did.

The research presents an argument for a role for EPs in exploring and perhaps purporting the importance of and facilitating opportunities within educational contexts, to express and celebrate Black knowledge, history and culture, in order to enhance others’ understanding of the diversity within Black identities and tolerance of these identities; help to develop an understanding about the impact of historic atrocities on Black people in modern society; and highlight positive contributions made by Black people, to redress the ‘victim’ narratives with ones of strength, resistance, achievement and potential.

**7.b) Standard 3.3*: ‘Take appropriate professional action to redress power imbalances and to embed principles of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice in all professional actions.’***

This research aims to promote anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice by encouraging dialogues which challenge limiting constructions, narratives and judgements of Black Caribbean students based on stigmatised constructions based on their identity and concepts of the ‘ideal student’ which may conflict with their cultural identity (Rahman, 2013). As Gay (2006) theorised, disparities between children’s cultural identity and the desired school identity could partially explain the persistent overrepresentation of Black pupils in disciplinary sanction statistics and underrepresentation in high achievement statistics. Participants expressed the impact which narratives can have on experience due to their potential to empower and disempower individuals and groups. By carrying out practice reflectively, EPs and other professionals can seek to enact principles of anti-discriminatory practice through the way that they use language to construct Black Caribbean students and other disempowered groups.

Additionally, the research suggests that there should perhaps be changes to policies which may limit the opportunities for this demographic, such as ‘colour blind’ approaches intended to support ethnic minorities, through ignoring difference. Instead, policies she seek to address the differences which do exist to promote equality within educational institutions. E.g. considering how subjective ‘undesirable’ behaviours are viewed and dealt with, when performed by different groups and the consequence of this. Perhaps greater consideration is needed of what individuals and groups are communicating through their behaviours, are they a reflection of how individuals and groups’ and identities are being constructed, positioned and responded to? Ensuring that Black Caribbean CYP and other ethnic minorities experience a sense of acceptance and belonging within their educational settings, including positive relationships with peers and teachers, regardless of their identity, is of key importance to enhance their educational outcomes. This is the responsibility of educators and professionals such as EPs seeking to promote anti-discriminatory practice and redress power imbalances.

Participants expressed enjoyment and empowerment through having the opportunity to discuss issues of race and identity with others who understood and shared similar experiences, and to negotiate their identity in relation to each other finding connections, similarities and differences. Encouraging participants’ involvement in the analysis of data also presented them with an opportunity to address power imbalances and have their voices heard. It’s theorised that the negotiation of identity can support the development of a strong social/racial identity which can act as a protective factor against the effects of discrimination (e.g. O’Conner, 1997). Perhaps encouraging further conversations about race and identity amongst Black Caribbean Children and Young People (CYP), including focus group and individual research and further use of the Listening Guide to elicit voices, could facilitate identification of ways professionals could support their racial/cultural identity development, particularly during adolescence, when this aspect of identity was considered to be most important by participants, replicating previous theory and literature. It could also provide further opportunities for Black Caribbean CYP to engage in the processing of expressing and negotiating meanings and identities amongst others with similar cultural reference points and shared experiences. This could facilitate their cultural identity and knowledge development in addition to feelings of connectedness and belonging, to potentially support psychological wellbeing and empowerment and seek to redress power imbalances.

**7.c) Standard 3.5*: ‘Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of different cultural, faith and ethnic groups, and how to work with individuals from these backgrounds in professional practice.’***

This research sought to contribute to knowledge about experiences of Black Caribbean females within the UK educational system. Participants identified the impact that educational contexts, including their race demographics had on their experiences and perceptions of their experiences. Further research into the experiences of Black Caribbean pupils in different contexts, including majority White educational contexts, where there is likely to be less opportunity to express cultural identity and have it understood and recognised, could be beneficial for enhancing EP knowledge about potential needs which could arise from these settings. E.g. Social Emotional and Mental Health needs, as expressed by participants educated in majority White settings, on account of cultural isolation and misunderstandings.

Early identification of SEMH needs and the implementation of preventative measures and strategies to support good emotional well-being being, were highlighted within the most recent Green Paper on SEMH (Department of Health, 2017) as influential and important for addressing rising rates of recorded incidences of SEMH difficulties amongst CYP. Whilst the paper reported that there are proportionally lower rates of diagnosed mental health issues amongst black in comparison to white CYP, there may be particular issues which impact Black/Black Caribbean CYP which could be effectively supported as a preventative measure for potential SEMH needs.For example, considering researching, promoting and facilitating opportunities for Black students to access to networks of other Black CYP, (e.g. replicating university ACS’s across a community of schools) or other ethnic minorities, which could be of particular benefit for those who are educated in predominantly White provisions, to encourage feelings of relatedness and connectivity and alleviate potential feelings of isolation and SEMH difficulties. Whilst this may not be needed/wanted/used by all Black CYP, it is likely to be beneficial for some and having the option there could be supportive for those CYP who feel that they are struggling to relate to their peers within their educational settings due to feelings of difference. However, encouraging greater acceptance and understanding of cultural and individual differences amongst ethnic minority CYP is the greatest priority, as this helps to create an environment where individuals do not feel and/or are not made to feel that their differences stop them from belonging, being understood and being accepted for who they are, based on race and/or gender. Seeking greater inclusion of ethnic minority individuals and groups within educational settings, promoted through policy and practice, is likely to support potential SEMH needs which can arise through feelings of isolation or rejection, relating to racialised identities.

**7.d) Standard 3.6*:‘Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of gender and sexuality and the impact of stigmatising beliefs.’***

The research demonstrated how stigmatising beliefs and constructions of Black femininity, as the antithesis to the dominant norms of Femininity, could impact Black Caribbean student’s educational experiences and consequently, their attainment. Participants emphasised the importance of positive Black female role models due to their potential to inspire self-belief, ambition and achievement, through demonstration that great success is possible for Black British Caribbean women. The narratives presented in the research should be considered success stories as they represent experiences of achieving despite shared and individual experienced adversities. Future research could consider how EPs could promote alternative, diverse and empowering constructions of Black femininity within the educational system and continue to represent the marginalised voices and experiences of Black Caribbean females, emphasising success stories in addition to documenting struggle. Sewell (2016) proposed that EPs have a responsibility to promote anti-oppressive practice and are well positioned to elicit the voices of marginalised groups and provide the opportunity for counter-storytelling, which challenges dominant understandings and actions.

**Conclusion**

This section has provided a discussion on the implications of the research project for EP practice and consideration of further research in relation to the research topics. Through consideration of research findings in relation to EP ‘Standards for Educational Psychology Training’ (BPS, 2015), relating to diversity and cultural difference, this section sought to demonstrate that the current research project can be considered as contributing to EP knowledge, theory and practice around racial and gendered identity in education.

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**Appendix I: Original Research proposal**

**Introduction**

This research proposal is intended to provide a clear guide to my Doctoral Research Thesis, from the background and rationale for exploring the topic area, to the practical and theoretical considerations made. It aims to provide an outline of all the relevant features of the study including: the proposed research background and rational for exploring the educational experiences of British Afro-Caribbean females; research questions relating to identity, relationships and oppression; the qualitative research design and methodology utilising focus groups; thematic analysis of data which is Critical Race Theory (CRT) and social justice focused; time management and logistic considerations; and dissemination of results.

**Background and Rationale**

The current study seeks to explore the relationship between identity and the educational experiences of Afro-Caribbean females in the UK. The study will explore the protective factors and barriers to educational achievement for this group and consider whether institutional racism exists within the educational system and what it looks like within modern Britain. The project seeks to explore these issues from the point of view of those who are still experiencing the educational system but will also cover historical experiences of prior stages of education. Constructs of power, oppression and belonging will be explored through psychological frameworks of identity formation, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (FemCrit).

The persistent underachievement of ethnic minority children and their over-representation in Special Educational Needs (SEN), particularly relating to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, in addition to sanction and exclusion statistics, has been highly documented within the United Kingdom (UK) (e.g. DfE, 2015, Strand, 2012, Strand and Fletcher, 2014, DfE 2014). This has led to government initiatives seeking to close the achievement gap and address potential inequalities which may be causing the disparities between them and their White peers. It also warrants research into the educational system to question whether and how the educational experience differs for ethnic minority children, young people and even adults, and how ethnicity can provide barriers to attainment. Dominant discourses have historically revolved around ‘within-child’ factors such as ‘behaviour difficulties’- an inability to control their behaviour and conform to the rules of the school system or perceived low intelligence. However, a growing body of research considers the systemic factors which are more likely to be responsible for the disparities being found.

MacPherson (1999) suggested that institutional racism is a characteristic of the British educational system which is impacting the educational attainment of ethnic minorities. Parekh (2000) identified 10 components of institutional racism which are encountered across educational institutions which included indirect discrimination, a culture where racism is tolerated or promotion of race equality is not a high priority and poor consultation with and understanding of ethnic minority communities. Rahman (2013) explored the notion that ethnic minority students are disadvantaged within the educational system due to the presence of a ‘hidden curriculum’ which consists of unwritten rules, regulations, standards and expectations which reflect the values and behavioural practices considered appropriate by the White dominant culture but which may conflict with non-White cultures. Ulrikson (2009) presents an alternative argument that students vary in their ability to become or perform as the implied ideal student. Assimilation was considered dependent on factors such as cultural background and associated behavioural norms and values. This study seeks to explore the experiences of Black Caribbean females to gain an insight into perceived inequalities and factors affecting their educational success.

The Black Caribbean community are a long-established racial minority group within the UK, who have consistently experienced significant inequality within the education system with regards to achievement and expulsion (e.g. Gillborn, 2008, 2015; Warmington, 2014, DfE, 2015). There is a growing body of research in the UK which highlights stereotyped views, low expectations and negative attitudes towards or misinterpretation of behavioural aspects of Black male’s educational experiences, as putting them at a disadvantage, limiting their opportunities for academic success them in comparison to their White peers. However, Black females appear to be underrepresented in the UK literature, despite still underperforming and experiencing similar barriers to learning. Considering the potential for multiple oppression experience by Black women on account of belonging to a non-dominant ethnic group and gender, I feel it is relevant to explore their intersectionality and the effects within the UK educational system.

Research from the United States suggests that Black females are also negatively affected by stereotyped views and negative attitudes held about them, which impacts on the sanctions they receive, the development of their self-identity and academic self-esteem, and consequently their potential for academic success (e.g. Annamma et al, 2016). Research undertaken with successful Black female students (e.g. Fordham, 1993; O’Connor, 1997; Henry 1998; Aminshakete, 2013) highlight ‘practicing silence’ and developing a strong ethnic identity as effective strategies for Black girls achieving within the US educational system. Whether these strategies and/or others are practised amongst Black girls in the UK is yet to be fully considered and the latter presents potential difficulties for Black females in majority White areas, who may have little opportunity to explore their ethnic identity through school or their local community. This study seeks to explore whether these experiences are mirrored within the UK context and whether there are factors unique to the UK educational system which impact on their identity formation and academic attainment.

Black females face further disadvantage within the education system when they are identified as having an additional need. Gillborn (2015) noted the similarity of the terms ‘race’ and ‘disability’, as both are often assumed to be fixed and obvious and are socially constructed terms which have historically been used to segregate and oppress. Rather than being seen as separate aspects of individual’s identities, a critical perspective considers the multiple oppression faced by Black children and young people labelled as having an additional need. Gillborn’s research in the UK highlighted a tendency for teachers to assume that Black children’s lowest performance was a true indicator of their potential, rather than recognising a potential specific learning need which required support. It appeared that Black students were not afforded the labels which could prove to be advantageous, that is, eliciting additional resources. Schools did however appear to frequently identify and act upon negative disability labels, such as those related to mental health and behaviour. Tomlinson (2014) noted that within both the UK and US there is a history of disproportionate segregation of Black pupils into low-status ‘specialist’ educational provision as a result of these labels. I am interested in the experience of being Black Caribbean, female and having an additional need within the educational context and the impact on self-identity, support or provision experienced and educational attainment.

As a Black female of Caribbean heritage, I believe that my self-identity is strongly shaped by my ethnic identity which is influenced be societal constructions of what it means to be a Black female. I believe that my ethnic identity both impacted upon and was influenced by my educational experiences, particularly having been educated within majority White institutions, and that institutional racism is still a relevant concept within the UK educational context. Whilst I was never considered to have an additional learning need, conversely, I attended a secondary school which required a certain level of academic attainment to attend, I am interested in the impact that this additional form of oppression can have on this demographic. I am seeking further insight into the educational experiences of Black Caribbean females in the UK and the relationship between these and, primarily, their ethnicity, along with other aspects of their identity. I believe this will provide a greater understanding of the experience and personal impact of racism within UK education, possible barriers to attainment and potential facilitators of success for this group.

Educational Psychologist’s (EPs) are in an ideal position to address racism and oppression within educational practice, systems and policies and promote equal opportunities. This is due to their understanding of the contributing psychological processes and their effects, as well as their power to influence positive change within educational institutes for individuals and groups. EPs should seek to explore diversity and difference in order to ensure minority groups are given sufficient support to facilitate their success. I believe that by representing the experiences of Black Caribbean females I will provide an insight into cultural differences and how females from this ethnic minority could be supported to achieve. Whilst my positionality necessitates a heightened awareness of the potential for bias, I believe that it also places me in a potentially advantageous position for undertaking a study with this demographic as it is a topic of personal meaning and identification. Also researchers such as Holloway and Jefferson (2011), Sherman (2002) and Thomson et al (1994) found that by matching researchers and participants based on factors such as race and gender is likely to encourage participants to feel more comfortable, particularly if topics are race and gender related, and are more likely to disclose information more openly and feel happier about the experience.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for the proposed study have been informed by the literature review carried out into the research topic area. At present, they are as follows in bold, with areas of consideration/prompts bullet pointed:

**What impact does being an Afro-Caribbean female have upon individuals’ educational experience?**

Points to consider:

• Has their identity impacted on relationships with teachers or the expectations of educational staff?

• Have they experienced cultural understanding or cultural conflict within their educational environments?

• How has their identity impacted on feelings of belonging and fitting in within educational contexts?

• What are their experiences of racism in the educational context? Were any of these issues addressed and if so how were they dealt with and what was the impact?

• Do participants feel their identity has impacted on their educational attainment? To what extent?

**Which aspects of Afro-Caribbean female’s identities are important to them and how is their identity effected by their educational experiences?**

Points to consider:

• Have they developed a strong racial identity and does this serve as a protective factor?

• Have they developed a strong gender identity and does this serve as a protective factor?

• What has the impact of intersectionality been, i.e. Have they experienced multiple oppression? Has it effected their self-esteem or self-efficacy?

• What other factors have influenced their self-identity?

**How could participant’s educational experience have been better supported?**

**How could other African-Caribbean females be better supported to achieve?**

For the purpose of the study it is necessary that I define the terms used to describe the heritage and identity of participants. I am using both the terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ to describe not only the physical identifiers such as skin colour, but heritage. I am using the terms Afro-Caribbean and Black Caribbean interchangeably to describe individuals who are Black and of Caribbean descent. The term Afro-Caribbean has been used to describe those of either African or Caribbean heritage and has been replaced by African-Caribbean by some for this purpose. However I identify as Afro-Caribbean, and recognise it as a term to relate to those whose ancestors are likely to be primarily indigenous to Africa, but their background is Caribbean. As I seek to feel some identification with this study I will be using this term to describe this particular demographic. I feel that some individuals may identify more with Black Caribbean, perhaps recognising their most recent heritage - Caribbean - as a stronger part of their identity, or equally with both.

Acknowledgement of African heritage for some Caribbean individuals is a contentious issue, with divides between communities which may have migrated through the Caribbean as a result of slavery and those who have not (e.g. Mwakikagile, 2007). Whilst there may be many similarities between the two groups, e.g. ancestral background, some cultural values and practices and skin colour, they do have different social, political and historical backgrounds which have the potential to diversify their experiences and cultural identities. I have referred to studies which have used Black British as a term, but as this also encompasses Black individuals of just African heritage, I have not used it to describe or select participants. Within the UK, Black Caribbean students appear to be making less progress in closing the achievement gap than their Black African counterparts and so this study seeks to explore whether not only being Black (as a phenotype), but being of Caribbean descent impacts on self-identity and educational experience. As an EP I feel it is relevant to carry out research which could support those who experience difficulties achieving educational success. This can be achieved through identifying potential protective factors for underachieving groups, perhaps through success stories or highlighting barriers to success and oppressive factors which need to be addressed.

**Design and Methodology**

**Exploring Experience through Qualitative Research**

The theoretical positioning I am conducting the research from is a critical realist social constructionism perspective. Epistemologically, from this perspective, knowledge is considered to be derived from interactions with their social world, including historical and political contexts. However it is also recognised that these social constructions and influences have ‘real’ implications for individuals and groups. Ontologically, the perspective determines that experiences are very much real to those experiencing them. It considers individuals to be subjects with agency, that is, reflective, embodied beings with the capacity for decision making. Rather than being ‘asocial rational minds’ which do not have connections to, or are impartial to the surrounding environments, individuals are considered to be influenced and moulded by some degree by social contexts (Elder-Vass, 2012). This study therefore seeks to understand the experiences of individuals belonging to a particular ethnic and gendered group, Afro-Caribbean females, in relation to their educational experiences in the UK, in consideration of the aforementioned influential factors. By eliciting the reflections on experiences of the participants, I seek to gain insights into Afro-Caribbean female’s identity, characterised by themselves and society and its impact in relation to their educational journey. I am also interested in their thoughts around how the situation could be improved to facilitate greater racial equality within the education system and their reflections on factors which could currently or could have previously supported them in their educational journey, in their opinion.

Race is considered to be a construct which has little scientific validity, with regards to biological and genetic differences (DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2014). However it is a construct which has been historically derived to create power imbalances and differential value and privilege within the social and political world we live in through racism (prejudice based on race). Consequently, it has psychological and experienced implications. This study seeks to explore these implications which will be real for the individual’s sharing their experiences, in order to enhance understanding of the institutional racism which effects this demographic and to provoke thought about potential changes which could improve racial inequality in education.

**CRT, FemCrit & Social Justice focused research**

Crethar et. al (2008) identify common themes or aspirations which underpin multicultural, feminist and social justice focused paradigms. These are considered to be seeking equity and access, for example, to power and resources, alongside participation and harmony, putting the participants needs first and considering potential benefits and negative consequences of research. Lyons et al. (2013) consider how socially just research can seek to facilitate or achieve these aspirations for individuals and communities through considerations made at each stage of the research process. For example, barriers to access, in relation to power, information and opportunity, could be diminished through research which represents the voices of subjugated groups or individuals and is disseminated to those who could influence change. During the data collection phase, Lyons et al. (2013) state that participation and access can be encouraged through seeking participants perceptions and views around research before, during and after data collection, which is my intention for the current study. It is also important, in order to encourage equity and harmony, that the interviews conducted and observations made are respectful and ethical, representing all views presented. During the analysis phase, they recommend reflection on the researcher’s influence on data analysis and interpretation, that member checks regarding data are carried out and that claims are evidenced with quotations to increase trustworthiness. Holloway and Jefferson (2011) also note the value of two stage interviewing in which the second stage is used to explore issues which provided tension and conflict.

A thematic analysis will be carried out with the focus group interview data within a theoretical framework informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CritFem). This is intended to develop an understanding of how the constructs of racism and oppression are explored by participants. CRT studies lend themselves well to heuristic methodologies encouraging individuals or groups to be active participants in research. Research is intended to be ‘for’ rather than on the subjects in question and CRT proponents seek to achieve this through inclusive, participatory approaches facilitating the elicitation of marginalised voices. Practices such as ‘counter-storytelling’ are popular approaches employed in order to examine the commonly accepted, often dominant premises and myths held about minority racial groups. ‘Counter-storytelling’ challenges the validity of these assumptions, presenting an alternative view and narrative around subordinated groups. (Chakrabarty et al, 2014). Along with ‘voicing’ and ‘storytelling’, which seek to present the narratives of those often excluded from social and political developments in knowledge generation and research, CRT methodologies seek to readdress this unequal influence and power imbalances. It is crucial that the methods employed to explore oppressed groups and their experiences does not further subjugate the group as a result of presenting limited constructions which are analysed and understood within culturally inappropriate frameworks. There is the danger of perpetuating the dominant opinion without understanding groups within the social, political and historical context they came to exist as a group. This research seeks to represent the voices and stories of Black Caribbean women as a minority group and seeks to provide counter-stories which can shed more light on the factors which impact on their academic success and create a more holistic picture which does not hold within child differences as responsible.

One of the key tenets of CRT is that racism exists in everyday contexts through subtle forms of inequality which disadvantage and subjugate racial minorities. It seeks to challenge assumptions of the non-existence of racism and explore experiences and incidences of oppression and subordination on account of ethnicity and race. It is also concerned with identities and intersectionality, exploring multiple oppression which can exist on account of our multi-faceted identities. FemCrit highlights how sexism further compounds the oppression experienced by Black females as they are part of the non-dominant race and gender. They are considered to be further subjugated when they do not conform to the standards of White femininity (e.g. Annamma et al., 2016).

Gillborn (2015) notes:

“If we are to change the racial (and racist) status quo, we must refuse the growing mainstream assertion that racism is irrelevant or even non-existent. A shared analysis of the racism that patterns everyday life can provide a powerful point of coherence for activism and political strategy.” p.284

CRT and FemCrit are activist and social justice focussed, which reflects my intentions for the proposed research. The study aims to identify protective factors and barriers to educational success for Black Caribbean students, through analysis of the experiences of the participants. I am interested in how they construct these experiences through their use of language, and how these experiences have influenced their current identity. I will explore these issues through the sub-questions (as provided earlier), however, these are to be used as prompts rather than being a strict interview schedule. Some of the sub-questions may be answered through participant’s responses to the broad questions, and other interesting and relevant lines of enquiry which may arise will be explored.

**Pilot Study**

In order to further inform and prepare for my research study, I plan to conduct a pilot study. This will consist of a small focus group of participants who would fit the criteria for my main study for the main purpose of refining my interview questions. The group will be presented with potential questions and group discussions of the questions will be encouraged. The focus group could identify concepts relevant to my target demographic that I had not considered, or have previously considered to be less prominent. Additionally, the pilot study could identify whether questions are phrased appropriately to facilitate relevant responses. I feel it would also be a good opportunity to assess how the language I use could impact what and how the participants communicate with me.I therefore aim to amend the interview content in accordance with views and topics presented through the pilot group. In the event that difficulties are encountered with regards to practical issues of holding a focus group, I will conduct a pilot interview. This would restrict the variance in responses and topics raised, however, it would still provide useful information with regards to phrasing of questions.

**Method and Data Collection**

**Sampling and Participant Selection**

For the purpose of the proposed research, I will sample 6-8 Afro-Caribbean women who were born and educated in the UK. I am seeking participants who have had different experiences within the educational system – for example, in relation to the demographics of their academic institutions, their academic attainments and the prevalence of additional educational needs. The study aims to explore at least one account from a participant who has experienced or is still experiencing academic difficulties, in addition to at least one participant who identifies as being academically successful, or feels that they have not encountered difficulties within education. I am also seeking at least one participant who has been educated in a majority White educational setting (as opposed to a more ‘urban’ setting where there is a larger number of ethnic minorities), to explore the impact this can have on identity formation and feelings of belonging to the educational community, both of which can impact on an individual’s educational success.

The participants will be aged between 18-24 years, due to the fact that it I feel it is necessary for the participants to be able to reflect on experiences which are recent enough for them to recall with a good amount of detail. I would also like the study to reflect recent experiences of the education system, in order to consider if racism is a recognised feature of modern Britain and what does it look like/how is it experienced. It is important that there are enough participants to demonstrate a variance in circumstances and explore how other factors may impact on identity formation and academic experience. However, in order to afford the study the depth of nuanced analysis it requires, and to effectively comprehend and represent the experiences of the participants within a limited time frame, the sample size has to be limited. (e.g. Smith, 2004).

Participants will be recruited through advertisements sent out through university student networks. This will result in a particular demographic, indicating a particular level of academic success, educational inclination and value ascribed to education. However, there are university students who have historically experienced or currently experience educational difficulties and/or have additional educational needs and I am also interested in reasons behind decisions to continue with education post 18. Additionally, studying this demographic will allow me to explore recent experiences in education and the continued attainment gap which exists Afro-Caribbean students who attend higher education institutions. I will be able to identify the demographics of the educational institutions participants are currently in, to assess whether participants current educational context is majority White or not. However, identifying the demographics of participants earlier educational contexts will be difficult until speaking to the individuals.

**Conducting Focus Groups**

The first stage of my research study requires the recruitment of participants who are interested in participating in focus groups on the topic area. I plan to conduct two semi-structured focus group interviews lasting approximately 1-1.5 hours, to be carried out in quiet, private settings to facilitate comfort and confidentiality. The first session will be used to gain experiences, views and stories from participants. The second session will be carried out following a process of reflection and analysis and will be used for checking data and themes developed to ensure they represent the views expressed and encouraging participants to expand upon these. The research questions will be asked in order to stimulate responses relevant to the research topics. However, in order to explore experiences and facilitate narratives and themes which are significant and meaningful to the participants, it is important that there is flexibility within the questioning schedule. Moffatt et al. (2005) noted that this was particularly important when working with marginalised groups and carrying out multicultural research, in order to allow space for stories of oppression and resistance. Flexibility will also allow new lines of enquiry too presented and explored. The prompts listed may be used as necessary should participants require additional structuring to facilitate conversation. A voice recorder will be used in order to accurately capture participant’s responses, along with a pen and paper to record observations. I will ask participants, where possible, to state their name before providing responses (a process which should come to feel more natural as the interview progresses) in order to facilitate the documentation of each participant’s responses separately. These names will be anonymised for the purpose of transcribing and analysis. Having carried out studies using focus groups previously, I feel that I am able to navigate topics in this context sensitively and responsively and encourage conversation around specific topics. However I recognise the importance of reflexivity in this process to develop these skills and to ensure I am eliciting meaningful narratives to address the research questions.

**Thematic Analysis**

**Transcription**

In order to analyse the data collected through the focus group interview recording, the data will need to be transcribed into a written transcript in sufficient detail to clearly represent the responses given. This will include syntactic features such as pauses and exclamation. Whilst I have considered the use of a subscribing service to complete this process for me, recognising the time it will take to achieve the detail I require, I feel that transcribing is very much part of the analytic process. Listening to the interview will allow me to be transported back to the experience of the interview, allowing me to reflect on participant’s tone, associated expressions and the interaction between the group. I will then listen back to the interview whilst engaging with the written transcript, in order to check accuracy and any further details of note which may not have become initially apparent whilst accurate recording was the priority.

**Coding, Identifying and Labelling Themes**

Following the transcription of data, in order to carry out an effective analysis, I feel that it is necessary to read and re-read the transcribed text, playing close attention to details as well the text as a whole. Making notes on what I observe whilst immersed in the text, is likely to beneficial, in order to capture thoughts, feelings and reflections that occur throughout the process. I will code the information in accordance with patterns of experiences and discourses and conceptual connections encountered, supported by direct quotes. Following this I will identify data which fits into the patterns before combining and coding related patterns into themes sub-themes. Reflective notes will also be used to consider patterns within the context the narratives were provided. These will most likely include descriptions of predominant features of language used, emphasis placed on certain narratives or words, and anything else deemed to be noteworthy.The intention of this is to bring together fragments of information which could provide greater meaning when brought together and organised in a way which represents the shared and differential views and experiences of participants. Once themes have been developed, it is important that these interpretations are checked with participants to ensure that their intentions and meanings have been correctly portrayed. By holding a follow-up focus group I will be able to both check the themes produced from my meaning making and ask the group to reflect further on the themes to see if any further emerge, or if any are disputed. This feedback will then be included in the further analysis of themes and data. A theoretical framework informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CritFem) will be referred to as part of the analysis and to provide supporting evidence for themes considered significant.

**Time Management and Logistics**

I recognise that good time management is going to be an important factor in ensuring that the research project is completed in the limited time scale. For both the main study and the pilot study, I plan to carry out focus groups, most likely in university premises as these are likely to be convenient for all participants to access and I want it to be relatively easy for participants to travel to the settings for the study. I will ensure that rooms are booked well ahead of time to ensure availability and I am aware that I am likely to need to provide a number of options for suitable times, to ensure a good number of participants are able to attend. However, I also recognise that it is likely that I will need to invite more students than will be needed for the study to allow for participants who may be unable to attend at the last minute. It is possible that I will encounter difficulties getting all participants back to complete a further focus group, however, I feel that this is an important stage of the research. Therefore, I may have to be flexible with participants, perhaps interviewing those unable to re-attend, in order to check the meaning I have made from their responses.

**Dissemination of Results**

Following the completion of the study, I aim to disseminate the results to the participants involved in the study along with the educational institutions involved and local authority EPs. I feel that the study could provide useful information for services and educational institutions who work with ethnic minorities, particularly those who educate Afro-Caribbean children, young people and adults. It could be beneficial to these groups by heightening their awareness of the factors which can impact this demographic and their opportunities for educational success. It could perhaps provide a counter-narrative to within child or adult deficits being responsible for academic under attainment and suggestions and recommendations for how Afro-Caribbean females in different contexts could be better supported to achieve. With tutor support, the intention is to publish the results of this study in a peer-reviewed journal, to further inform research in education.

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**Appendix II: Ethics Application and Approval Letter**

**Aims & Objectives**

The current study seeks to explore the relationship between identity and the educational experiences of Afro-Caribbean females in the UK. The persistent underachievement of ethnic minority children and their over-representation in Special Educational Needs (SEN), sanction and exclusion statistics, has been highly documented within the United Kingdom (e.g. DfE, 2015, Strand, 2012, Strand and Fletcher, 2014, DfE 2014). The study will explore some of the reasons behind these statistics, through thematic analysis of data gathered through focus groups, a forum through which discussions about experiences will be held. The protective factors and barriers to educational achievement for this group will be discussed, considering topics such as institutional racism – whether it exists within the educational system and what it looks like within modern Britain, and how experiences could be better supported. The project seeks to explore these issues from the point of view of those who are still experiencing the educational system but will also cover historical experiences of prior stages of education. Constructs of power, oppression and belonging will be explored through psychological frameworks of identity formation, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (FemCrit). The study seeks to represent the experience of being an Afro-Caribbean female in education, and to uncover possible recommendations and suggestions for how the educational experiences of British Afro-Caribbean females could be effectively supported to increase educational attainment.

**Methodology**

The proposed study will use a qualitative design which will involve two focus groups being held for British Afro-Caribbean female students to discuss their educational experiences. Each session will last for approximately 1-1.5 hours. The groups will be held sequentially with the same participants in each, to allow topics to be explored further following reflection on the initial session, consider new topics of inquiry presented, and for participants’ meanings to be checked. Audio from the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed before a thematic analysis is carried out on the data. The data will be considered within frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (FemCrit) to explore the effects of gender and race on individuals’ experiences and represented in themes. Recommendations

for supporting the educational experiences of Afro-Caribbean females will also be derived from the data.

**Personal Safety**

Raises personal safety issues? No - not entered

**Potential Participants**

The project participants will all be Afro-Caribbean adult females who are currently attending university. As the study is interested in this demographics’ experiences, ethnicity and race will be topics of discussion, including sensitive topics such as racism. There is, therefore, some risk that participants may experience some degree of emotional or psychological distress through recounting negative or difficult experiences or hearing those provided by others. However, participants will be fully informed of the content of study prior to being involved so they understand what they are consenting to, and will be pinpointed to relevant services (such as university counselling services) should they feel the need to seek support following the study. Other groups within university such as the Afro-Caribbean Society (ACS) could also provide informal support for individuals and provide forums to discuss topics of a similar nature further. There is a possibility that participants may have experienced, or may be experiencing educational difficulties or have additional educational needs. However it is likely that these individuals will be known to and possibly supported by university services. Those who are not and feel that they may require additional support will be sign posted to the relevant services. Participants will not have complex or profound needs which will prevent their ability to consent as it is a necessary criterion that they are able to express their experiences effectively within a focus group forum for the purposes of the study. The participants will also have been born and educated in the United Kingdom and should have a good understanding and command of the English language. The study is intended to represent the voices and experiences of participants and therefore, following the initial focus group, another focus group will be held so that meanings can be checked. Participants will be listened to and then interpretations will be represented to the group for further discussion, giving participants a chance to ensure their intended meanings are portrayed and they can address anything they are unhappy about.

**Recruiting Potential Participants**

Participants will be approached through networks such as the Afro-Caribbean Society (ACS) within university. Emails could also be sent out through university networks explaining the key themes of the study with an attached information sheet and an email address to contact for further information. Participants will be informed that the topic of study is the relationship between being a UK born female of Caribbean descent and educational experiences. Ethnicity, race and gender throughout their educational journeys will be topics of discussion within a focus group forum. Therefore participants need to be willing to discuss these experiences in a group. Participants will be informed that they will be required to attend two focus groups to allow for themes to be explored further and participant’s meanings to be checked.

**Advertising methods**

Will the study be advertised using the volunteer lists for staff or students maintained by CiCS? No - not entered

**Consent**

Will informed consent be obtained from the participants? (i.e. the proposed process) Yes

I will seek informed consent, firstly, by providing potential participants with details of the study, its objectives and what will be expected of them. It is important that participants know what their involvement includes, what will be done with the data and its purpose. This information will be provided through the information sheet and participants will be given opportunities to request further information about the study before agreeing to take part. Participants will then be required to sign a consent form prior to the focus group indicating that they understand what the study is about and are happy to be involved and have their anonymised data included. These consent forms will be stored securely to ensure confidentiality.

**Payment**

Will financial/in kind payments be offered to participants? No

**Potential Harm to Participants**

What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants?

The potential participants for this study are not considered to be vulnerable to physical harm as the research design only requires attendance at a focus group which is likely to be held within university premises and verbal contribution to discussions. However, there is the potential for emotional or psychological harm to participants due to the sensitive nature of the study’s themes including gender, race and special educational needs, which is likely to cover incidents of racism and sexism and other types of discrimination. These are likely to be topics of personal identification for the participants and could therefore evoke distress during or following involvement in the study.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

Participants will not be pushed to share information they are not comfortable discussing. As well as negative educational experiences, participants will also be encouraged to share positive experiences, practices and policies alongside protective factors and strategies employed which are likely to be encouraging to other participants. These discussions could provide strategies that other participants could employ to support their own well-being. Students will also be signposted to services they could access should it be deemed necessary following their involvement in the study, including student counselling and disability services or relevant charities. Advice could also be sought through thesis or educational psychology course supervisors who will be involved in research process through reflective supervision sessions. It is important that these sessions are used to discuss any issues which arise through the research process to ensure that participant’s psychological wellbeing is being supported at all stages of their involvement. Participant’s data and personal details will be kept confidential and anonymous. This is important to ensure that their identities are protected and they are not at risk of harm due to damage of their reputation or social standing for example, should they express controversial or negative opinions or experiences. This is particularly relevant considering the sensitive topic of study and the fact that participants are invited to consider current as well as historical experiences.

**Data Confidentiality Measures**

Participant’s personal data, including data generated by the project, will be kept confidential at all stages of the project. Once focus group sessions have been recorded, they will be transcribed with pseudonyms used to keep participants' identities anonymous. It is important that participants are not recognisable from the data transcripts, therefore, other names they may use (of people and educational establishments, for example) will also have to be made anonymous. No others will have access to this data and it will be stored securely. Focus groups will take place in private rooms to ensure that discussions are kept confidential and participants will be instructed that conversations should be kept confidential and not discussed with others outside of the focus group. The voice recorders used to collect data will be encrypted to ensure data is secure. There is an intention to publish the study findings with support from the research supervisor. Participants will be informed of this prior to their involvement so they are aware that whilst their personal details and true identity will be kept confidential, there is a possibility that participant's stories could become public.

**Data Storage**

Personal details collected during initial stages to identify and select participants and record informed consent, will be stored in paper form in a file which will be kept locked away, only accessible to me as the researcher. A digital copy will be stored on an encrypted memory stick. Participants will be informed through the information sheet and verbally before the focus group that an audio recording will be taken from the sessions which will be kept confidentially and stored securely. This is for the purpose of facilitating accurate representation of the participants and thorough analysis of the data, consequently, participants will be required to consent to this in order to take part. An encrypted voice recorder will be used to gather data during the focus groups. For the purposes of identifying participants for analysis, they will be asked to say their first name before making comments. Therefore, it is important that these files are kept secure through encryption and are password protected when stored on a private laptop. No other individuals will require or be granted access to these files. During the data transcription process, pseudonyms will be used to protect participants’ identities. I will be transcribing the audio data myself and data transcription and analysis will take place in private settings such as at home or within booked private university rooms to ensure that personal data is not heard or seen by others. Only the anonymised data will be made available in the analysis, discussion and appendices of the final project and used in discussions about the study, for example, in supervisory sessions. The data will only be used for the purpose of this study and should the data need to be made available for future research projects, it will be necessary to obtain further consent from all participants involved.



Downloaded: 07/05/2018 Approved: 21/09/2017

Sabrina Cummings Registration number: 150107668 School of Education Programme: Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology

Dear Sabrina

PROJECT TITLE: Attainment and identity in the face of dual oppression: Exploring the educational experiences of British Afro-Caribbean females. APPLICATION: Reference Number 013728

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 21/09/2017 the above-named project was approved on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

University research ethics application form 013728 (dated 15/09/2017). Participant information sheet 1033793 version 2 (15/09/2017). Participant information sheet 1029929 version 2 (03/05/2017). Participant consent form 1029930 version 2 (03/05/2017).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt Ethics Administrator School of Education

**Appendix III: Alternative methodologies**

This section aims to explore alternative methodologies considered for the research project. Whilst Narrative Analysis (NA) was the methodological choice for the research project, other methodologies were considered and at the time of the original research proposal, Thematic Analysis (TA) was named as the methodological choice. TA was considered to be an effective approach for identifying themes within the research topics and identifying comparisons between experiences and identities presented by participants. Therefore, it was an appropriate methodology for identifying the barriers and facilitators to success for participants. However, I was concerned that it may not be the best approach through which to explore and represent participants’ identity and how they constructed the relationship between experiences and identity. I was also interested in how stories and identities would be constructed and expressed within the focus group setting (amongst others with shared aspects of identity) and felt that the richness of the interactions could be lost with in an approach solely centred on themes. I wanted participants’ voices to be represented through the research, using as much raw data as possible, however, this did not appear to fit effectively within a TA methodology. Consequently, after discussions in supervision and further research into methodologies, it was considered that NA would be a more effective way to allow stories to emerge rather than broad themes. NA is also an approach which encouraged focus on the way identities and experiences were expressed, including language use and the interaction between participants, ensuring that the participants’ voices were represented.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used throughout the study to inform thinking and analysis but it was also considered as a methodological tool, as a way to explore topics from a racialised perspective. However, upon initially engaging with the theory, I did not have the confidence to utilise a methodology which appeared to have little structure. As I developed knowledge in the theory, I considered that perhaps this may have been an effective methodological approach for the present study, with much of the discussions relating to racialised discourses and experiences. However, using this methodology may have silenced potential narratives relating to identity and experienced which were not perceived to be related to race. In addition, l assert that the added structure of the chosen approach, particularly using the Listening Guide, was beneficial to the research, particularly considering the degree to which I identified with research topic and participants identities and experiences.

**Appendix IV: Participant information sheet**

**Participant Information Sheet**

**Research Project Title:** Attainment and identity in the face of dual oppression: Exploring the educational experiences of British Afro-Caribbean females.

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

**Project Aims**

The underachievement of British Afro-Caribbean students is a persistent pattern within the UK, most prominently in secondary and further education (e.g. DfE, 2015, Broecke and Nicholls, 2007). Additionally, they continue to be over-represented in sanctions and exclusion statistics and Special Educational Needs (SEN), particularly relating to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, (Strand, 2012, Strand & Fletcher, 2014, DfE, 2014). This research project seeks to explore factors affecting the achievement gap and address potential inequalities within the educational system to question whether and how the educational experience differs for female, British Afro-Caribbean students. It will consider how gender and ethnicity can provide barriers to attainment and how, if at all, their educational experiences could be better supported.

**Who is undertaking the study?**

The study is being undertaken by Sabrina Cummings as part of a doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. The project is being supervised by Dr Tom Billington.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen to participate in the study as you are a female of Afro-Caribbean descent aged 18-25 who has been educated within the UK. This study is interested in the experiences and views of people within this demographic to explore ways to explore the impact of their identity on their experiences and ways support the progression of other females of Afro-Caribbean descent in the UK.

**What will your participation involve?**

If you decide to take part in the proposed study you will be asked to attend two focus group sessions lasting approximately 1-1.5 hours with other female students of Afro-Caribbean descent. Questions relating to educational experiences and identity will be posed to the focus group and participants will be asked to discuss the topics in relation to their experiences. The second session will act as a follow-up session used to further explore topics and meanings presented by the group in the previous session.

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You can still withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

**What are the possible disadvantages & advantages of taking part?**

The possible advantages of taking part include having the opportunity to express your views and experiences and illuminate elements of your education which helped or hindered your progression in the education system. This could help to identify ideas and solutions as to how other young people could best be supported and changes which could be beneficial to the education system.

The possible disadvantages of taking part, are the potential to experience emotional reactions to the topics being discussed, including race and gender, as they may be considered to be of a sensitive or personal nature. You will not be pressured to discuss anything you do not feel comfortable with, but reflecting on your own experiences and others’ has the potential to cause upset or distress. If you experience distress during or following involvement in the study, please make myself or Professor Billington aware so we can refer you to a relevant service to access support, such as the university counselling service.

**What will happen if something goes wrong, or the research stops earlier than expected?**

Whilst it is not anticipated that the project will stop earlier than the intended date, should this happen, you will be informed and further advice can be accessed, should you require it. If something goes wrong, or you have any concerns about the project, during or after participation in the research, you can contact Professor Tom Billington who is supervising the project.

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Your personal details will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used in the analysis of the data from the interviews and in the production of any findings based on this research.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of the research project will be written as part of a report that presents a summary of key findings and a set of recommendations aimed at addressing racial and gendered inequality in the educational system. A summary of the findings will be made available to you if you would like. There is also an intention to publish the research findings in a peer-reviewed journal.

This project has been ethically approved by the Education Department at the University of Sheffield.

For further information on the project please feel free to contact either Sabrina Cummings on Slwhight1@sheffield.ac.uk or Professor Tom Billington on T.billington@sheffield.ac.uk or tel no.0114 222 8113

**Appendix V: Pilot study Implications**

A pilot study was completed in order to identify which questions may be useful to use in the group focus group and the types of responses which may be elicited from the questions. I also wanted an opportunity to use the Listening Guide to elicit identity poems and consider whether the methodology could be effective way to explore identity.

Following the pilot study, the following considerations and changes were made:

* The decision was made to not use a list of questions for the focus groups as these appeared to detract from my ability to be responsive to be responsive the participant’s responses. I recognised that even within the pilot interview, I did not stick to a strict schedule, but concern about covering to questions on the list meant that focus was placed on it. It was also considered that with a group rather than individual interview, fewer questions were likely to be needed as it was hoped that participants would respond to each other’s narratives in addition to researcher questions.
* The question – How could other Black Caribbean females be supported to achieve? Was removed as a research question. Whilst this was still an area of interest, I recognised that I was more interested in the participants’ experiences, which might provide an insight into ways to support Black Caribbean females as a group, rather than being a question to be addressed directly by the participants.
* It was decided that more detail would be included in the transcription of the focus group, so that readers could get a feel for the interaction. This included contextual information and lexical features which would capture the emotion and emphasis behind expressions. I recognised that it would also be more necessary in the group interview to provide the reader with an insight into the conversational flow and interaction between partcipants.
* The I poems were considered to be an effective way to attend to relational expressions of identity, consequently, it was decided that using them in the study would be particularly useful, especially as there was an opportunity to perform these back to the group in the follow up session. However, it was also decided that as the poems were reductionist, they should be used alongside other contextual data.

**Appendix VI: Pilot Study Questions and Interview Extract**

**Interview Questions**

How would you describe your identity?

What impact would you say your identity has had on your experiences?

Do you think others have treated you different then, being a female? (follow up from participants mentioning a “patriarchal world” and discussion on being treated differently to brothers)

Within the school context do you think your identity had any impact?

How about in relation to your racial identity?

Is that something you think is important (teaching others about who you are and where you come from)?

Would you say that your identity has impacted on your feelings of belonging or fitting in, in any of your educational settings?(participant mentioned community)

In terms of the demographics of your educational institutions, nursery, school, college, was there much difference between them? Were there many other Afro-Caribbean students?

You noted that you feel that people there have probably never seen other black people before, what makes you say that?

How do these comments and incidents affect you?

Would you say that it has affected your studies at all?

You say that others expect you to (have an opinion) does that impact whether you do respond or how you respond?

Would you say your identity has impacted your relationships with teachers or educational staff?

You said that you were different at home and school, could you elaborate on that?

Did the different demographics of your educational institutions impact relationships with teachers?

Have you ever experienced racism in any educational context? If so, how were these issues addressed?

Has your sense of identity been impacted by your educational experiences?

Why do you think such a high proportion of Afro-Caribbean females are underachieving (relating to statistics)

What do you think supports Afro-Caribbean pupils to achieve?

Do you feel that it is the teachers and educational institutions responsibility to address racism?

Does racism exist in schools?

How did the school act?

Which aspects of your identity are important to you?

Has your identity been impacted in any way as a result of your educational experiences?

Would you say you have a strong racial identity? (Is your race important to your sense of identity?)

What do you think has supported your educational success?

What do you think the media image of Black Caribbean women is?

**Extract from Transcript**

SC: Okay, so first of all, erm, how would you describe your identity?

A: Erm, I would describe myself as a young, Black, Caribbean, you know, woman. I would say I’m not what you would call the normal type of person, I guess of this generation [pause], I’m not as into makeup or as into hair, I’d rather sit down and like read, manga.

SC: Okay, so you mentioned being Black and Caribbean as parts of your identity, and being a woman. What impact would you say your identity has had on your experiences?

Alicia: I think, It’s given me an insight into a world which is mainly patriarchal [pause] like [pause] mainly male dominated. My mom is a single mother and I had two older brothers who were very much hands on, they did all the heavy lifting and whenever I tried to help, I was always told “no (Alicia), you’re a girl, like, you could hurt yourself and kind of thing. In my mind I didn’t see no difference between me and my brothers, being like a girl and then boy, obviously that they were a bit physically stronger [pause] but other than that and stuff.

SC: So, do you think others have treated you different then, being a female?

Alicia: I think, I think yeah, when it comes to family, and maybe some friends, or like, they see like, you as more vulnerable, as like easier to break. Like overall it’s been an overall good experience, but there’s been, but like I don’t particularly like the cat-calls or anything like that, the times when I’ve been in my school uniform and people are cat calling, I mean I’m like me in my school uniform signifies I’m 16 or under, you know, at least have some respect for that [pause] cos you know er [pause] it’s just, yeah

SC: Yeah [pause] within the school context do you think your identity had any impact?

Alicia: Erm I think my school in particular, it was kind of strict in the way of, I guess, like, in like uniform, like we couldn’t change it or add stuff to be unique, so we were like all the same. But I think also, in my secondary we had single sex classes all the way up to GCSE [pause]

SC: Ok.

Alicia: And lunch and everything else was mixed. I think in a way having single sex classes [pause] for me personally I don’t know whether it made too much of a difference, whether it worked, or whether it didn’t, I was quite neutral about it. I think also in the way that we had to dress, they made more limitations for girls and less for guys. But it was also like girls were allowed to wear trousers and boys, and I know in some secondary schools girls have to wear skirts, I think it was more forward in the way that you know you can wear trousers, you know.

SC: How about in relation to your racial identity, as an Afro-Caribbean female?

Alicia: I think, being an Afro-Caribbean female, it’s been very like, I know where I come from and it’s always been there since I was young, like since I was young I’ve always known what country I’m from, where my family comes from, I’ve always like, I’ve never not known who I am in a way. Being part of an Afro-Caribbean, is part of who I am and how I’ve grown up and maybe in a way and I feel more in tune than some people, when you ask where do you come from, because you know they don’t know a lot of things about, you know, where they come from.

SC: Yeah.

Alicia: I think in school, I’ve always like, it feels like, my independence day I always wore earrings or sort of flags and stuff and my school never stopped me because obviously it’s something that, you know, and when it was multi-cultural evening they, they would ask people like, who wants to come up and represent their country and it was quite open like that. A couple of times I was like, we, well for my sake, I think I was, in my whole year I was the only person from my country, and there was one person but he was half but it’s like. My mum worked in my school so she also helped, when it came to multi-cultural evening we’d have our stand, we’d have our food, we’d have our flags, our facts, figures and [pause] I think it taught other people about who we are and where we come from.

SC: Is that something you think is important?

Alicia: I think so as well cos I feel like, if you’re given the opportunity, to show who you are, and who like, you should just like grab it with both hands, its also, it’s also like, you feel, I think you feel closer to people you don’t know who are from the same country, it’s like you can relate to them in certain aspects, if let’s say I’ve got a family member living there and they’re like, “Oh, so do I!”. You know?

SC: Yeah.

Alicia: It just brings you closer to like a bigger community.

SC: Would you say that your identity has impacted on your feelings of belonging or fitting in, in any of your educational settings?

Alicia: Erm I think [pause] when it comes to like education, I think it’s kind of separate. When it’s like I know who I am, I know like, when I tell people, they’re like they don’t know, or they don’t think and some people make jokes and okay that’s not cool, but, they’re ignorant so I’m not going to let that get to me. Cos like I know who I am and I know where I come from and, the great things about my country, so your ignorance is not gonna affect me. In a way. But I think with it school, it’s not, I think that there’s the separation cos it’s not as open, like you’re thinking about your studies more than anything else.

SC: Yeah.

ALICIA: Unless, you know, it comes up in a topic and you’re like, you know what, I can actually do this about who I am, you know I can relate to it, because it, you know, because it involves my country and involves who I am [pause] and I think. Yeah.

SC: In terms of the demographics of your educational institutions, nursery, school, college, was there much difference between them? [pause] Were there many other Afro-Caribbean students?

Alicia: I think it been similar in the fact that, it’s like, mainly like, nobody, I, I’ve not met many, or people, Granadians, from like throughout my whole school life.

SC: Ok.

Alicia: I think it’s like, I’ve known people outside my school life, and stuff like that but, during primary I didn’t know a lot people from my country, in secondary school, the same, same with erm college. I think in college, a few more people knew, but I think that’s because I went to a college which was mainly Black students. It was mainly like, there were lots of Afro-Caribbean students, so like they’d either heard of it, they knew of it, or might have found somebody who was from there, but I think that also depends on the area it was. In South East London it’s like the majority of Afro-Caribbean people, in South London, so you know, you’re gonna get a bigger population of them. But I think that’s dropped a lot since uni, I think cos where I go to uni is a predominantly white area,

where like, Black people are a really small minority, and, it like, for me personally, it’s very overwhelming when you’re in a place like, I’ve had to move from London to Kent. And it’s just, I think it’s just going there and the stark difference, it’s affected like my confidence, like going out and like [pause] in how I dress or how I see myself. Because I feel like when I go there, there’s people who’ve probably never seen Black people in their life, it’s just like. We live in England. It’s 2017. (laughs) You know and it’s just, it’s just a bit mad when you go into your lecture, and you’re the only Black person. Out of 3 separate lecture subjects [pause] it’s a bit, weird.

SC: You noted that you feel that people there have probably never seen other Black people before, what makes you say that?

Alicia: Because I feel like, people like stare [pause] me personally, I know I’m a little bit paranoid, but I can tell when people are staring at me, or like because they have a certain a look of almost bewilderment, or like, “OH! [pause] like I’ve never seen you before!” (exaggerated). Or like, it’s like, you know, or people just openly stare. And after a while it does like piss me off. It’s like there’s nothing to be staring at, you don’t need to stare at me. Or like, being in Canterbury, there’s been like a few incidents where people feel that, well mainly white people, white people feel like, say they can just push in front of you, they can mutter stuff underneath their breath. Or that, they can throw liquids at you, from like on top of bridges, and it’s not cool. In a way.

SC: How do these comments and incidents affect you?

Alicia: It’s like it’s not, like they don’t say racist terms but it’s like if you’re waiting in line, why do you feel the need to comment about me under your breath? Like why do people need to open their mouth, you know, no one gave them permission, I don’t know why they’re speaking. Saying things under their breath. You know, Ooh (in annoyance). [pause] I think for me personally, it’s like [pause] it’s annoying and it’s upsetting. I think it got to the point where it got really upsetting for me personally. There was a lot of other things, as well, that I had to come back to London, from my uni, because I was like, I’m not used to this, I don’t get this and I don’t *like* this. You know I don’t like being in, I understand that I’m a minority anyway, but I didn’t like the fact that I was a smaller minority. I didn’t like, I was the only Black person out of all my flat mates and the only Black person out of all my lectures and I didn’t like how, people would just openly stare at me. For no reason.

SC: Would you say that it has affected your studies at all?

Alicia: I think [pause] I’m, I’m not, I feel like [pause] obviously, I notice it more when I’m at school and in my lectures, sometimes I feel like, there’s something like, if I say, if I say this, you know [pause] like, it may seem like I’m overjudging it. Because, like, I’m doing American History like, American History so there’s gonna be loads of stuff about racism in there. And I feel like, being the only Black person there, I feel like I have like a more connection to what’s happened to the people. Because they are *Black* people. And what’s happening now with the whole situation with Donald Trump becoming president, and all the Black lives matter things, I feel like, I have much more of a personal connection in my lectures than anyone else, like a deeper understanding. Cos, you know. And, I think, with my studies especially when we’re talking about something like that, I feel like, with some people in my lectures some people are just waiting for me to jump up and say something. Or jump up and be like yeah that’s wrong that not it, and be like, all *ghetto* in a way, and like not have reasonable arguments. Which I do. You know. Its like they’re expecting me to say something. Or you know when something is particularly bad and the lecturer says this bit is gonna be really bad so if you want to look away, look away. I don’t think anyone should look away, because this is what happened to people. If this makes you upset and disturbs you, can you think how that must feel for me or how that feels for that person’s family. You know.

SC: You said that you feel that they’re expecting you to say something, does that impact whether you do respond or how you respond?

Alicia: I feel that with the kind of person I am, I feel that for me personally, if I have a point that I think is valid, I say it, and I think, sometimes my stubbornness just gets the best of me and I I’m just like, you know what. There are times that I don’t mind not speaking, but I feel like, if no-one’s going to say anything, I will just to say something to get the lecture going. Or to make a point and make it valid and show that, you know, it’s what it is, kinda thing.

SC: Yeah

SC: Would you say that your identity has impacted upon your relationships with teachers and educational staff?

Alicia: Erm, I think so. I think, I think like who I am, or who knows me like. I never got into trouble at school. Not really, never did. And if I did, when they told the higher ups and their bosses that, in one instance they didn’t believe them. They were like “are you sure you’ve got the right child? Are you sure that this is (Alicia)?” Because of how I was raised I act differently in school to how I did at home, I could be all like crazy when I’m at home but when I’m at school, it’s more like, I need do what I’m doing, I’m not gonna be disrespectful or rude, because you’re a teacher, you’ve earned your position to be there. You know. And I think, like, I think some people expect more like rowdiness, I think or like, then its just [..] most of the time nobody believed them. I’ve done nothing wrong. I’ve been pretty good the whole time. I get decent grades you know. I don’t think there was much expected of me, really, I think I got ok grades, got good grades and I just went through school and did well.

SC: You said that you’re different at school and at home, could you elaborate on that?

Alicia: Erm, I would say I’m more myself at home, more like chatty-back and more like thing, but then I can also say that I’m like that when I’m with my friends at school. I think. And, I act differently depending on the situation, depending who’s involved. Like if I’m with a teacher that I particularly like then yeah I might joke about, I might so and so but I still like, I’m still respectful to them. It’s just like the way I was raised. I feel like when I’m at home, I’m *always* respectful but it’s, it’s always jokey kind of thing. Or like there’s times where my friends are like “you get away with everything” with my mum but I’m like “No I don’t, if I did, I wouldn’t be at school, I’d be at home.” Like I think people used to judge the fact that my mum worked in the school.

**Appendix VII: Pilot I Poems and Themes**

**Defining Identity**

I We You

I would describe myself as a young, black, Caribbean,

You know, woman

I’m not what

You would call the normal type of person

I’m not as into makeup or as into hair

I’d rather sit down and like read, manga

Alicia highlights multiple aspects of self and group membership –othering herself from current societal norms in relation to femininity, using this as a basis to define a ‘normal’ person. Gender highlighted as an important feature of identity and Alicia presents the idea that in order to be a ‘normal’ person, you must fulfil gender expectations. She clearly defined who she is and isn’t through ‘I am’ and ‘I’m not’. Interesting that femaleness is said as an after-thought (or most obvious feature?) but is then used as a particularly definitive aspect of identity for Alicia.

**Femininity**

I You They

I think

I had two older brothers

 they did all the heavy lifting

I tried to help

I was always told

 You’re a girl

 You could hurt yourself

I didn’t see no difference

 they were a bit physically stronger

Alicia expresses others’ constructions of her feminine identity – fighting the ‘difference’ narrative. She presents a depiction of women as weak, but asserts that physical strength did not dictate her ability to contribute or define difference.

**Racialised identity**

I We You They

I know where I come from

I’ve always known what country I’m from

I’ve always

I’ve never not known

who I am and how I’ve grown up

I feel more in tune

 You ask where do you come from

 You know

They don’t know where

they come from

I had to come back to London

I’m not used to this

I don’t get this

I don’t *like* this

I’m a minority anyway

I didn’t like the fact that I was a smaller minority

I didn’t like, I was the only Black person

I didn’t like how, people would just openly stare at me

I know I’m Black

I know Black is beautiful

I can’t change my skin colour

That’s who I am

I’m proud of it, in a way

I’m happy in the skin I’m in

I wouldn’t change

I’m happy

 We know who we are

 We know what we are

 We’re Black and we’re proud

 We come from

 We always represent who we are

 We indulge in that kind of thing

Alicia expresses the importance of understanding of her background and cultural identity, differentiating herself from those who are not aware of their cultural roots using the generalised ‘you’. Expressing pride in her Blackness is presented as important and celebrating and representing cultural identity is considered to be an indulgence. However, Alicia also notes experiencing difficulties as the ‘smaller minority and the attention this drew to her.

**Themes**

**Multiplicity and complexity of racial identity**

The experience of Blackness was considered to be unifying for Alicia and she expresses feeling a connection to other Black people and their experiences, even in past generations. She expresses a view that history should be confronting and that it should not be ignored due to the fact that it causes discomfort as that is what she feels should be felt, when engaging with it.

“I’m doing American History like, American History so there’s gonna be loads of stuff about racism in there. And I feel like, being the only black person there, I feel like I have like a more connection to what’s happened to the people. Because they are black people.

 “…the lecturer says this bit is gonna be really bad so if you want to look away, look away. I one should look away, because this is what happened to people. If it’s upset you can you think how that must feel for me or that person’s family?”

When asked about the demographics of her school, in relation to Afro-Caribbean students, Alicia related to the question in terms of Grenadian students and others’ understanding her Grenadian heritage. It appeared that, within school, this particular aspect of her identity was important to her, although in university, sharing Blackness gained greater importance. This demonstrates the relational nature and changing emphasis of aspects of identities. Alicia highlighted a feeling of being the only one and different to others in secondary school, despite later noting that there was a big difference between pre and post 18 education, with a high number of Afro-Caribbean students in the former, in comparison to university where there were only a few Black people, causing further feelings of difference.

“I understand that I’m a minority anyway, but I didn’t like the fact that I was a smaller minority”

The experience of being a ‘smaller minority’ appears to elicit feelings of vulnerability for Alicia, experiencing safety/comfort in the sameness of other Black people allowing blend in until she wants to be noticed, in relation to the difference she feels standing out and attracting attention as one of a few ‘others’.

“My country” is referred to a number of times through Alicia’s narrative, referring to Grenada despite being a British citizen. Alicia experiences a strong sense of relatedness to her Caribbean heritage, in particular to the island where her grandparents were born, Carriacou, Grenada.

Being known and understood as having Grenadian heritage is seen as important, therefore, cultural representation, through flags, food, facts and figures, and the opportunity to share these with others during cultural events was seen as significant, so that others knew “who we are and where we come from”.

“A few more people knew” **–** relating to other black students but when asked about demographics focused on those from Grenada.

**Racism**

Alicia expressed experiences of racial abuse, in addition to more subtle forms of racism, particularly since attending university in a city which is described as predominantly White.

“White people feel like, say they can just push in front of you, they can mutter stuff underneath their breath. Or that, they can throw liquids at you, from like on top of bridges, and it’s not cool. In a way.”

However, she appears to minimise her statements by describing the behaviours of others towards her as “not cool”, followed by “in a way”, further diminishing the effect of her expression. It is as though she is reluctant to appear to be overreacting, a fear articulated in relation to her peers in her American History class.

**Expectations based on constructions of identity**

“I feel like, with some people in my lectures some people are just waiting for me to jump up and say something. Or jump up and be like yeah that’s wrong that not it, and be like, all *ghetto* in a way, and like not have reasonable arguments. Which I do.”

Alicia perceives that her peers do not expect she has anything of value to say, perhaps demonstrating a lack of confidence in her abilities or a concern about how others will perceive her responses. She has an expectation that her responses will be viewed negatively or will be considered to be an overreaction due to her race (and discussions pertaining to race), which will validate their constructions of her as “ghetto,” based on them potentially holding limited constructions of Blackness.

“If I’ve got a valid point I say it…sometimes my stubbornness just gets the better of me”(perhaps wanting to resist the ‘loud’ stereotype and aiming to practice silence but giving in to it?)

“If no-one’s going to say anything” “to get the lecture going”(seems as though she feels she has to justify speaking out)

As Alicia feels there is an expectation for her to speak out and perhaps be the expert on topics due to its personal relevance, she appears to be cautious about doing what is expected of her and attempts to silence herself.

She appears to be attempting to resist the stereotype of rowdiness and achieve an identity as a ‘good’ student, one who is quiet and conforms at all times – “I’ve done nothing wrong, I’ve been pretty good the whole time.”Conforming to the performance of a good student meantshe stayed out of trouble and senior membership wouldn’t believe teachers if she got in trouble, so she was unlikely to be unjustly punished.

Alicia noted that having a black teacher was a positive experience – as they had an understanding of where she is coming from and stood against ‘colourblind’ policies and those who did not accept that colour/race was relevant in the educational context.

“I don’t think much was expected of me really”

Alicia purported that she did not feel that others had held high expectations for her academic achievements, perhaps as a result of her SEN. However, instead of purporting that this held her back, Alicia suggests that this allowed her to develop self-ambition and try her best to succeed, without fearing disappointment from others should she fail.

**School vs Home Identity**

“Because of how I was raised, I act quite different at school to at home”

“I can be quite crazy…when I’m at home” (at school I have to be respectful and I’m not rude)

“most teachers expect more rowdiness”

“I’m more myself at home...more chatty…but I’m also like that with my friends at school”

“I’m always respectful at home”

Alicia presents the idea of being respectful to teachers and needing to present a certain persona in school, a direct comparison to being more carefree at home and when she is with friends. “The way I was raised” suggests that demonstrating respect for adults is considered to be of importance in all settings, for Alicia, but the performance of this identity is even more necessary at school, perhaps because they expect a certain type of behaviour – “rowdiness”, whereas family have an understanding of shared values and are less likely to misinterpret ‘rowdiness’ as rudeness or misbehaviour.

Alicia suggests that if she presents a certain persona at school – someone who follows the rules then she is less likely to be judged without being asked her side of the story, if teachers believe she has stepped out of line.

**Appendix IX: Group dynamics notes**

It was evident that Shakira and Zara were not as familiar with everyone in the group and their body language initially appeared uncomfortable, prior to the focus group starting. They both sat quietly waiting for the session to start, whilst Adina and Lydia chatted comfortably. Upon starting, the silence amongst the group suggested that they were unsure of how to respond to the first question – how they identified themselves. It felt uncomfortable to me and I found myself wanting to break the silence with a follow up question, but I wanted to give the group the opportunity to reflect/overcome potential nerves about speaking up first. I reflected on my experiences of being asked about my identity in a group context and wondered why I had felt such discomfort in this position and whether the group shared these feelings.

Adina presented as confident, motivated towards the topic of race and identity (noting that she regularly has discussions of this nature at home with family) and appeared at ease discussing her experiences and expressing her opinions. She used energetic, expressive narratives to put her points across, engaging other group members with eye contact and using hand gestures and facial expressions to emphasize points. She frequently supported and followed up comments made by others and her narratives appeared to encourage both Zara and Shakira to contribute to the discussion as it transpired that they had many shared experiences and understandings.

Despite the focus group being held in Lydia’s house, she appeared to take a less dominant position within the group. She demonstrated a lot of nodding and verbal agreement with others’ statements, but was initially less forthcoming with her own. It is possible that she felt her experiences were less relevant, due to being educated in the Caribbean for primary and secondary school. Lydia shared an educational experience of attending a specialist provision, which was quite shocking to the rest of the group (demonstrated by their verbal and non-verbal expressions), in quite a minimalist way, initially. However, with encouragement to provide a more detailed understanding of her experience from the group, she became more detailed and animated in her recounting, raising her intonation, quickening the pace of her speech and pausing for dramatic effect. The rest of the group were particularly engaged in her depiction, due to its content which differed significantly from their experiences, but perhaps also due to the infrequency of her contributions which made her utterances more appreciated.

Samara’s late arrival to the group changed the group dynamics, partially due to the disruption of the conversation flow, but also due to her tendency to dominate the conversation with lengthier, more descriptive accounts of her experiences/opinions than others. This broke down the conversational feel that had been established by the group, leading other members of the group, particularly Yasmin and Shakira, to become quiet. It should be noted, however, that the interview had gone on for some time already, so participants may have been getting tired by the time Samara arrived. As much of Samara’s education was carried out in the Caribbean, and her accounts often related to experiences and issues in her country of origin (Bermuda), the other members of the group, apart from Lydia, may have struggled to relate to her experiences. Unlike with Lydia, where this appeared to elicit curiosity in the other group members, due to the novelty of her experiences and punchiness of her narratives, it appeared to have the opposite effect and the group appeared to be less engaged in her accounts or likely to follow on from or expand upon her topics, possibly due to her thoroughness in explanation. Lydia, however, did appear to relate to Samara’s narratives, due to their shared experience of being educated in the Caribbean, and nodded and verbalised her agreement with Samara’s responses.

For the follow-up focus group, only 4 members of the original group were present as Samara was unable to attend at the last minute. The second group began similarly to the first, with initial long pauses and disjointed responses (answering the question and not elaborating or developing a discussion from it), perhaps due to the participants being encouraged to initiate discussion with their thoughts about the previous session. None of the participants wanted to start which may have reflected their feelings of unpreparedness (none of the participants had brought notes with them as suggested, although all expressed that they had at least read some of the transcript), or perhaps their confidence in attempting to analyse themselves/each other or just speaking first. Reciting the voice poems to the group appeared to give participants a reminder of what had been discussed, encouraging reflection and further comments.

Once a conversational flow was established, group members who had been quieter in the initial session provided longer contributions to the discussion and expressed their experiences more openly, with more detail. Yasmin, in particular, demonstrated more confident body language, sat up in her chair, projecting her voice, whilst giving animated responses. This was a stark contrast from the previous session where she had been slouched in the chair, wringing her hands at times, seeming nervous and timid in her expressions. The group continued to agree with each other and create a lively and supportive dynamic, with laughter and emphasis creating humour and relatedness. This allowed for contradictions and differences in opinion to occur more frequently, without damaging group relations, seeming instead to develop each other’s thinking and understanding. I found that I contributed more to the follow-up focus group, to facilitate conversation and check meanings, but also due to a desire to share my own thoughts/experiences with the group to some degree. I was, however, careful to ensure that my involvement served to encourage further exploration, holding back my personal opinions and contributions until the focus group had come to an end, for fear of having too much influence in shaping participants narratives or potentially silencing participants who may not have felt comfortable challenging or disagreeing with my comments.

**Appendix X: ‘Constructions of Blackness and Awareness of Black History’ I Poem**

**I You We They/She**

E: I learnt quite a lot of that, in history, in secondary school

 You couldn’t dodge it

 We learnt alo:t

 We learnt a lot about it

A: I feel like here, it’s the opposite

We learn about World War1 and World War2

we learn about very British historic things

 You hear snippets like oh Black’s had their own water basin

 We never went deep into it

M: You do the book ‘To kill a mockingbird’

 We sort of like touched on it then

 We didn’t go into too much detail

 I learnt a bit then

 We learnt about like, erm the slave trade

 I found out a lot of stuff about that I didn’t know

A: We never learnt about that

 I wouldn’t learn any of this through school

 I only know this stuff through my parents teaching me

M: I think apart from the few lessons

 I wouldn’t say I learnt much

 We touched on Rastafarianism

I wondered, what other people in my class thought,

they couldn’t have learnt that much

they still had that sort of idea

 I don’t think she put it across in a good way

A: I wouldn’t even take her very seriously

 I would just look at her like what do you actually know?

E: I feel like as well

 I feel like White people don’t necessarily know how to talk on the topic

M: She sort of like looked to me and

 the girl for confirmation

You tell me

 I’m from England too!

A: I find it really awkward

 I ha- always had it

They touch on something about Black people everyone would always look

They always [look at me

 You sort of gotta try and keep your head straight

 (Like) You don’t care

You know when White people have to say like the word ‘nigger

 They don’t know how

E: They try [and say, it’s awkward They don’t know how to say the word ‘Black’

Y: They say like the word Black

 person then say no offence

 They look at you

You’re like that’s not offensive

M: You made it offensive, like directing it at me

A: They don’t know about it, how

are they supposed to understand?

I do think it has an effect on that

E: They have no education or no

information about how racism came about

 They have that certain ignorance towards Black people

 They have no education, they have no information, they don’t know why we’re offended

 They need to teach this

A: I heard that someone didn’t know what Black history month was,

 They didn’t even know

 They thought it was only a week

 They didn’t have a clue

You assume like

E: You would think

 They’d be educated enough

 You don’t know?

 You’re a big educated university

A: I definitely feel that that should be erm like, pushed

M: I remember in primary school

 We used to have like school plays

 I remember like it was big in primary school

E: I saw on Instagram the other day

 they sent a letter home to all the parents telling their kids to dress up as slaves

 They had to send out a public apology to Black people.

A: I believe something came out

 They had a slave auction

You could have a fresher as a slave

 They had like massive uproar

 They thought it was absolutely fine

They probably didn’t even think what they was doing was that bad

They were just like “Oh.”

**Appendix XI: Amina’s Belonging I poem**

**I You We**

I felt like I belonged

I’d been there since I was in Year 7

 You already have your kinda friends

I felt like I did belong

 We had these things

I don’t know how to describe it

 (if)you’re exceptionally well at something

I had one for sports

 You feel proper proud

I’ve really done something

I really felt like part of the school

I felt like I belonged

I was also having this complex between like my class mates

I was feeling like

I’m not really like you

I’m just like not on your wavelength

I did have a few good friends

We had been together since we were twelve

I know their backgrounds

I’ve been round to their houses

I’ve met their parents

We’d all been together for all these years

I’m not really close with you

 We’ve all been

 We used to call it

I was actually organising meeting up

I’m gonna go see them

We weren’t that close towards the end

We still have a mutual respect

We’re just not as close

We still have that respect

Adina talks about her feelings of belonging to the school community through sports as it afforded her a sense of pride in her achievement as she excelled, having her talent and worth validated. It also provided her with a sense relatedness through belonging to a team and community. Initially, Adina’s friendships provided her with a strong sense of belonging. However, once she identifies herself as being different to her peers, this caused tension for her and threatened the feelings of belonging. She reflects on the shared history and previous shared understandings and common ground which has resulted in maintained mutual respect and a desire to continue to maintain the friendships. However she expresses that despite this, the closeness of the relationships could not be maintained due to feelings of emotional distance persisting between them, on account of perceived differences.