

**EVALUATING THE PARENTING COMPETENCE OF BLACK AND MINORITY
ETHNIC PARENTS**

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Abstract

Between 1980 and 2015, the population in the United Kingdom grew by 7.8 million. According to the office for national statistics, net migration into the United Kingdom was the main factor for this growth (Office for National Statistics, 2017). As new black and minority ethnic communities emerge, the importance of issues of culture and ethnicity has increased. These demographic changes fuel debates about the reasons behind the over representation of black and minority ethnic children in child welfare and criminal justice statistics (Owen and Statham, 2009; Lammy, 2017). Thus, bringing to the fore questions about how social workers appraise the parenting practices of parents whose cultures vary markedly.

This study combines a phenomenological research philosophy with frame analysis to explore how culture and ethnicity is incorporated in evaluating the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents. The study highlights the complex and rich dimensions of culturally informed parenting scripts by critiquing how social workers and black and minority ethnic parents conceptualise parenting competence. It contributes to knowledge in this area by postulating that culture and ethnicity influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents by framing perceptions about identity. This causes them to socialise their children in ways that seek to affirm cultural and ethnic identity. Conversely, culture and ethnicity interact with other ecological factors in dynamic, non-hierarchical and contextual ways to shape ideas about the competences and values that parents seek to promote.

Eighty participants took part in the study. Analysis of the findings showed that the salience of cultural parenting scripts was dependent on environmental aspects such as acculturation, economic factors and family support networks.

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Acknowledgements

There is a frequently quoted Chinese proverb which has been interpreted into English to mean that even the longest and most difficult ventures have a starting point. Completing this dissertation has indeed been *a long and difficult venture*. Not because the venture was particularly difficult. It had its challenges, but it was mostly enjoyable. I found out, during the PhD, that I enjoy studying and hearing different perspectives on topics. It was the challenges of life that continually interrupted my progress and threatened to derail me that made this *a long and difficult venture*.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of my own work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been submitted for any other award at the University of York or any other institution. All the sources on which I draw are acknowledged as references. The dissertation does not exceed 90,000 words.

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore how social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity when evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. The backdrop to the project is the long reported disproportionate representation of black and minority ethnic children in child welfare statistics in England (Chand, 2000; Hill, 2006; Barn, 2007; Owen and Statham, 2009). In this introductory chapter, I provide an overall summary of the thesis and briefly discuss the two main aspects that the research question seeks to answer: first, the influence that culture and ethnicity have on the way that black and minority ethnic parents socialise their children and secondly, how parents and social workers conceptualise parenting competence.

The chapter is divided into four sections. Section one summarises the parenting, policy and cultural contexts within which black and minority ethnic parents socialise their children. Alongside this, it summarises and the policy and cultural contexts within which social workers conduct parenting competence evaluations. Section two summarises how black and minority ethnic parents and social workers conceptualise parenting competence. The third section gives a brief explanation of why evaluation of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents is an important topic for research. This section goes on to introduce the research question, as well as the aims and objectives for this thesis. The fourth section summarises the structure of the thesis and gives an overview of the content of subsequent chapters.

1.2 Prevalence

Within the literature, there is significant debate about the over representation of black and minority ethnic children in welfare statistics (see Butt and Mirza, 1996; Bhatti-Sinclair, 1999; Chand, 2000; Bernard and Gupta, 2006; Page and Whitting, 2007; Owen and Statham, 2009; Chimba et al, 2012). But, despite research and reporting of persistent disproportionality, the evidence on national statistics does not cohere. In part, this could be associated with studies being focused on demographic or regional explanations (e.g., Modood et al, 1997; Ahmad, 2000; Bebbington and Beecham, 2003; Greenfield et al, 2010). Studies that capture regional statistics generally tend to explain how their regional and demographic figures compare to the national picture (see Greenfield et al, 2010; Chimba et al, 2012), with added caveats about generalisability.

In my review of the literature, I noted a general trend towards scholarships that seek to identify and understand the complexities associated with disproportionality. Much of the discourse generated from the findings of such studies is about the reasons for the disproportional representation of black and minority ethnic children in welfare statistics. There is a degree of consensus that socioeconomic factors as well as professionals' perspectives about black and minority ethnic families are significant contributors to disproportionality (see for example, Page and Whitting, 2007; Chimba et al, 2012). The context of the disproportionality is that although black and minority ethnic people only make-up 14% of the United Kingdom's population (Lammy, 2017), they are overrepresented in child welfare statistics (Owen and Statham, 2009; Bywaters et al, 2016; Dominelli, 2017)

Owen and Statham's (2009) study remains, arguably, the most comprehensive source of national statistics on the disproportional representation of black and minority ethnic children in welfare statistics. But it is the totality of scholarships on the disproportional representation of black and minority ethnic children in welfare statistics that gave this study its impetus. Indeed, this study's focus on issues of culture and ethnicity in parenting competence evaluations is relevant when considered against the trend of increasing diversity in the population of England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

1.2.1 *Defining Black and Minority Ethnic*

There is no official definition for the term 'black and minority ethnic'. However, it is a term commonly used in the United Kingdom to describe people of non-white decent. More recently, the term is interchangeably used with 'black, Asian minority ethnic'. The term does not infer that people of non-white decent are homogenous. Rather, it is used as a concept that enables researchers, policy makers and health and social care professionals to group people who do not define themselves as being White. For this project, I use the term to parents of non-white decent. However, the study also includes parents of Polish decent who are White and define themselves as White-European. They are included in the study because they perceived themselves as being ethnic minority, thus meeting the parameters of this study.

1.3 The contexts of Parenting

At the core of most parenting practices, is the need to ensure that children are protected, nourished, nurtured, educated and socialised competently. The way parents achieve this is influenced by a wide range of conditions which include factors

such as social class; socioeconomic status; culture; poverty; the child's temperament; the parents' own history; the community within which children are being socialised and the era in which the child is born. In the main, parenting is done privately. However, the effects of children being exposed to harm or suffering actual harm often spark public interest in issues of parenting. This is because parenting is seen as the starting point for indicating whether children are at risk of harm or whether there are enough protective factors within families to meet their developmental needs and keep them safe.

In England, the process of identifying whether parents are safely meeting their children's developmental needs involves completing parenting capacity assessments. How social workers go about the task of assessing parenting competence is guided by child welfare legislation including the Children Act (1989; 2004); Childcare Act (2006); Working Together to Safeguard Children (1991; 2004; 2006; 2010; 2013; 2015; 2017); Framework for the Assessment of Children and their Families in Need and their Families (2000); the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); the Human Rights Act (1998); Every Child Matters (2003); Children and Young Persons Act (2008); Children and Adoption Act (2008). This is not an exhaustive list of child safeguarding legislation. Indeed, social work interventions with families are guided by a myriad of laws and guidance that are continually being amended and updated, rather than by a single piece of legislation.

In addition to child safeguarding legislation, identifying parents' strengths in meeting children's developmental needs is heavily dependent on assessors' evaluation skills. Turney et al (2011) reviewed social work focused research published between 1999 and 2010 and concluded that effective social work assessments are predicated on

assessors being skilled in identifying strengths and weaknesses across the six dimensions of parenting espoused by the framework for the assessment of children in need and their families. Namely: basic care; ensuring safety; emotional warmth; stimulation; guidance and boundaries and stability (HM Government, 2013).

The goal of appraising parenting is to establish the extent to which parenting regularly falls below the level that might be considered 'good' enough. This necessarily entails considering the contexts within which parenting is conducted. Kellett and Apps (2009) who interviewed fifty-four practitioners from health, education and social care and found that legislation and training were key components needed practitioners needed to enhance their ability to appraise family strengths and weaknesses effectively.

Studies (e.g., Hill, 2006; Howarth et al, 2008) suggest that the influence of cultural and ethnic conditions on parenting, which is the focus of this study, often transcends other factors within families' environments, including social class differences and economic conditions. This is because culture and ethnicity frame how parents conceptualise issues such as gender; discipline regimes; hierarchy of power within the family and perceptions about when children are deemed to be ready to contribute to family functioning. Parents' conceptualisations of such issues frame ideas about the competences they promote to make their children recognisable members of a culture or social group.

The issue is that the parenting standards that should form the minimum expectations for delivering positive outcomes for black and minority ethnic children continue to be a matter of debate. In part, the debate is complicated by the fact that parenting is a highly contested and continually evolving activity; both within individual families and in the wider community. Furthermore, families generally operate within multiple contexts

that affect the quality of parenting that children receive and, in some instances, restrict the options through which parents socialise their children. For example, financial pressure and social isolation can lead to a single mother expecting her nine-year-old daughter to be responsible for her four-year-old sibling while the mother goes to work. Alongside socioeconomic restrictions parents will also perpetuate practices of previous generations within their birth lineage.

The solutions proposed by modern parenting approaches place great emphasis on parents' abilities to enable children to socialise within multi-faceted ecological frameworks (see Barn, 2002 Shaffer et al., 2009). The limitation of modern approaches is that they tend to be informed by research that proposes a bewildering amount of theories and opinions about the 'best' way to parent. This poses more questions than answers about what constitutes 'good' parenting practice. Indeed, debates about minimum parenting standards are intensified by the fact that most parenting studies have tended to focus on understanding difference rather than the universality of parenting.

The findings of this study affirm the view that the wide range of contexts within which black and minority ethnic parents socialise their children can lead to conflicting analyses and make it challenging to determine universally acceptable parenting practices and policies. At a macro level, recommendations made by researchers inform policies that support parents to overcome social challenges and enhance their parenting skills. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of ecological systems theory is a case in point.

Bronfenbrenner proposed that ecological factors interact within a hierarchy of pathways that influence parenting in four inter-dependent systems: 1. the macro

system, which consists of socio-cultural influences; 2. the exo system, which consists of community influences; 3. the micro system, which consists of family influences and 4. the ontogenic system, which accounts for temperaments. The complexity with which the systems interact sheds some light on how the factors that influence parenting in one level of the system are associated with factors from other levels. This suggests that the overt parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents must be evaluated within the ecological contexts that they occur.

1.4 Defining Culture and Ethnicity

The terms culture and ethnicity are often used interchangeably or used together to mean the same thing. As Coliando and McIlwain (2011) note, culture and ethnicity are aspects of identity that are more salient for some than others. This makes approaches to culture and ethnicity complicated and, in many ways, split between those who view it as long established and those who perceive it as a dynamic social construction. The terms continue to cause controversy because they are also used for social stratification, which some commentators (e.g., Berreman, 1981; Jones, 1997; Fenton, 1999; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Maalouf, 2000; Ellison, 2005) see as perpetuating social inequality along the lines of race, kinship, age, class and gender.

Berreman (1981), for example, explained that culture and ethnicity can be conceptualised as having a dichotic relation with race. He asserted that this dichotomy is based on the difference that racial stratification is rooted in the physical and cultural characteristics defined by outside groups, while culture and ethnicity is based on the cultural characteristics that an ethnic group defines for itself. In his view, both are ascribed at birth.

One way of interpreting Berreman's (1981) point is to reason that contrasting culture and ethnicity with race can be problematic because racial characteristics defined by the outside group often carry inaccuracies, and stereotypes. But, even if in-group classification is normally more accurate, they are not without practice challenges. Cultural and ethnic classifications can still be used by outside groups to stereotype entire communities in ways that are oversimplified and that view ethnicity as being a static cultural process. Consequently, there is a lack of consensus on how to define culture and ethnicity.

Nevertheless, there is some agreement over what the main features that culture and ethnicity should include. These, as highlighted by (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996, 1996; Phoenix and Husain, 2000; Coakley, 2012) are:

1. Shared historical memories including events and commemorations (e.g., independence, heroes, and battles)
2. Elements of a common culture which are not necessarily specific but often include aspects such as religion, language and customs;
3. Common ancestry in terms of notions of origin in time and place that give the group a sense of kinship;
4. Common name to identify and link a community to a common homeland and give a sense of solidarity.

What seems clear from the literature is that the nuances of the variations that exist within and across ethnic groups are difficult to divide. As Hutchinson and Smith (1996) point out this is in part because each ethnicity lives within a broader community and

alongside other ethnicities. The result is continual evolvement. For purposes of this study, the terms culture and ethnicity are conceptualised as referring to the same thing.

1.5 Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

The broad aim of this project is to examine the ways in which social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity when evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. In order to achieve this aim, the research approaches the subject from three main prongs: The first is from the understanding that culture and ethnicity frame the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents; the second is to identify how black and minority ethnic parents and social workers conceptualise parenting competence; and the third is to identify whether there is a link between the way that black and minority ethnic parents and social workers conceptualise parenting competence.

The broad research question was refined following a critique of the literature. The questions that emerged from critiquing the literature led to the original research question being refined from: How do ethnicity considerations influence social workers' decisions when intervening with families from Black and Minority Ethnic (BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC) backgrounds? to: To How are cultural and ethnicity considerations incorporated in evaluations of the parenting competence of Black and Minority Ethnic parents? The reason for refining the original question is that I felt that it was better suited to elicit answers that address the gaps I identified in the literature. Namely:

- Providing better understanding of parenting in black and minority ethnic families within the United Kingdom context;
- Exploring whether the parenting assessment process effectively evaluates the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents;
- Whether there is an identifiable link between social workers' expectations and the competences that the parents seek to promote.

1.6 Structure and Content of the Thesis

Following this introductory chapter, the rest of the thesis is organised into a further seven chapters as summarised below:

Chapter Two: This chapter is the first of the literature reviews chapters. It reviews the literature on parenting to contextualise what is already known about the role that parenting plays in shaping children's outcomes. The discussion within this chapter provide an introductory base upon which later chapters are built. The chapter also gives a detailed description of the term parenting and traces the evolvement of Western parenting practices to conceptualisations initially shaped by religious beliefs. Additionally, the review critically explores how current knowledge relates to the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents.

Chapter Three: This chapter looks more closely at ethnicity and its influences on parenting practices. It provides a definition for the terms culture and ethnicity and critiques the literature to explore the significance of culture and ethnicity in influencing parenting practices. Discussions in this chapter highlight the challenges of identifying

the true effects that culture and ethnicity has on parenting practices and associates this to suggestions that while culture and ethnicity frame passionately held beliefs about parenting approaches, variability across different cultural and ethnic groups complicates evaluation. This is linked to the fact that parenting is a ubiquitous individual characteristic which intersects with other characteristics.

Chapter Four: This is the third of the literature review chapters. It critiques the policy context within which parenting competence evaluations are conducted. The aim is to explore key policy changes and how they address issues of culture and ethnicity in assessments. In confining to the broad aim of this study, the chapter describes the parameters of the policy review and relates policy to the wider social and cultural changes influencing policies. Alongside this, the chapter discusses policy approaches that explicitly encourage cultural and ethnic considerations in evaluations of parenting competence. As the final literature review chapter, it concludes by drawing together a thematic overview of relevant empirical research and highlights the research gaps identified in the literature review as well as how this study aims to address some of these gaps.

Chapter Five: This chapter presents the epistemology, theoretical perspective and methodology adopted for this study. It explains why the approaches taken were selected. Within the discussions, the chapter considers alternative philosophical approaches and explains why frame analysis and phenomenology were adopted and others rejected. The chapter commences with an explanation of why a qualitative approach was chosen for this study and goes on to present the study design and methods used to collect, manage and analyse data. This includes a description of how participants were recruited. The chapter also outlines the data analysis method

used alongside phenomenology and discusses the relevant ethical considerations to this study including how ethical challenges encountered during the study were managed.

Chapter Six: This is the first of the findings chapters and it presents the findings from fifteen qualitative interviews with black and minority ethnic parents. It presents participants' narratives about how they parent and sets out their conceptualisations of parenting competence. Participants' narratives are presented in themes. The purpose of this is to categorise their perspectives to aid analysis.

Chapter Seven: This is the second findings chapter. It presents the findings from fifteen interviews with social workers. The chapter highlights the different dimensions of parenting espoused by social workers and presents them as themes. The purpose of this is to set out what participants consider to be the defining characteristics of 'good' parenting as well as their perspectives of parenting competence. Additionally, the presentation aims to provide the starting point for in-depth analysis in the discussion chapter.

Chapter Eight: This chapter builds on the findings chapters (Chapter 6 and 7) by moving from detailed reporting of participants' narratives to interpreting and discussing what the findings mean. The chapter contextualises the findings from this research with wider research by drawing on the findings from chapters two, three and four to discuss the link between participants' constructions of culturally informed parenting scripts. It explores how parenting competence is construed and negotiated by black and minority ethnic parents and social workers. These constructions are juxtaposed in the context of three overarching themes to explain how culture and ethnicity frames

ideas about parenting. The chapter concludes by identifying a link between conceptualisations held by black and minority ethnic parents and social workers.

Chapter Nine: This chapter reviews and provides a reflective evaluation of the thesis. It commences by presenting an overview of the thesis then summarises the existing evidence base, methodology and findings. The purpose of this is to contextualise the conclusions. Within the summary discussion, the chapter critically reviews the methods and methodology used to allow for the findings to be appraised against the strengths and limitations of these approaches. As a way of concluding the thesis, the chapter evaluates the credibility, originality and usefulness of this research. It also highlights the research's contribution to knowledge and reports the implications of the findings for policy and practice. Additionally, it makes recommendation for further research.

1.7 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has set out the context of this thesis. It has provided an overall summary of the thesis and introduced discussions about the influence that culture and ethnicity have over the way that black and minority ethnic parents socialise their children. It has also briefly introduced discussions about how parents and social workers conceptualise parenting competence.

As well as establish the background to the thesis, this introductory chapter has also summarised the content of subsequent chapters. By pointing to some of the research that will be explored in later chapters, this chapter has also introduced debates such as how multiple perspectives about parenting challenge hitherto taken for granted views about how parents should socialise their children.

Chapter Two – Parenting

2.1 Introduction:

This is the first of the literature review chapters. It provides an introductory base upon which later chapters are built. The chapter reviews the literature on parenting to identify how parenting conceptualisations have evolved in the United Kingdom. Within the discussion in the chapter, I comparatively explore conceptualisations of parenting in general, as well as parenting by black and minority ethnic parents. The purpose of this is to keep within the overall study aim. That is, understanding how culture and ethnicity influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents, as well as whether, and if so, how social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity in their evaluations of parenting competence. The chapter also gives descriptions of the terms: parenting; parenting practices; parenting styles and parenting competence.

2.1.1 Scope and Structure:

The literature that was reviewed for this chapter was purposefully selected to provide a general overview on parenting. The search terms and inclusion criteria are discussed in detail in the methodology chapter. This chapter structures the discussions in a way that separates the literature into three main sections: historic, social and policy contexts. I felt that structuring the discussions in this helped me to critically explore how ideas about parenting have evolved historically, and how social and policy contexts influence conceptualisations of parenting competence. The sequence and layout are intended as a way of contextualising empirical and theoretical knowledge on parenting rather than to suggest hierarchical importance.

It is not within the scope of this study to address the full range of historic, social or policy dimensions that influence parenting practices. The key point I sought to make is that historic, social and policy dimensions are integral facets of the ecological factors that influence parenting. Therefore, evaluating the parenting within these contexts, shed some light on how parenting, in general, evolves to shape the subtle and overt differences in children's outcomes.

In terms of rationale, my interest in how social workers assess the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic families dates to 2004. I had just started an administration role in a children's social care department. The social workers I was supporting at the time often expressed anxiety about assessing black and minority ethnic families. I learnt, from speaking to the social workers, that they found it difficult to obtain a full picture of the care that black and minority parents provide to their children. This was also about the time that Every Child Matters Agenda (2004) had come into effect, following the publication of the findings of the Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, a year earlier (Laming, 2003).

When I embarked on this project in 2010, there had been publication and fresh public discourse over another high-profile death. That of baby Peter Connolly who had been found dead in his cot in August 2007 was growing public interest in issues to do with parenting. I had also been involved in a local serious case review in which there was a death in a family I had worked with in the past. This increased my interest in research and policy formulations aimed at developing methods of evaluating parenting to safeguard children's welfare. I was also interested in how the agenda to safeguard children whilst also reducing the number needlessly entering the care system (see the Care Inquiry, 2013), might be implemented.

2.1.2 Defining Parenting:

Within the literature, there is no consensus about how parenting should be defined. Some writers prefer to place emphasis on the activities that parents perform (e.g., Morrison, 1978; Hoghughi and Long, 2004; Watson and Skinner, 2004; Lee et al, 2014), while others (e.g., Brooks, 1987; Hays, 1996; Smith 2010; Golomobok, 2014) conceptualise the definition of parenting based on the process or state and responsibility of being a parent. As Lee at el (2014) and Bryne et al, (2014) note, parenting means different things to different people and defining it is not quite straight forward. The language varies from describing the activities that parents perform to recent emphasis being place on how parents' behaviour impacts on children's development (see, Smith, 2010).

Feminist writers argue that most definitions approach parenting from a patriarchal ideal that excludes men from the parenting role. This, they argue, creates social imbalance by suggesting that the quality of parenting is associated with the gender that takes responsibility for socialising a child. They point out that parenting is a gender-neutral term and advocate for feminist consciousness when constructing its definition. In their view, this would help deconstruct perceptions that associate sex or gender identity with most parenting definitions (see Chodorow 1978; Zimmerman, 2002).

Although the literature reflects acceptance of diverse definitions of parenting, studies tend to be gender biased. The position I have taken, for purposes of this review, is based on Watson and Skinner's (2004) conceptualisation of parenting. That is, that although parenting roles are usually conducted by biological parents i.e. birth mothers and / or fathers of children, parenting also refers to other contexts, such as: the care and / or guidance provided by extended family members; legal guardians and foster

or adoptive parents. It involves a range of practices or events that encompass how parents socialise children and is influenced by a range of ecological factors, including culture and ethnicity.

2.1.3 Defining Parenting Practices

Parenting literature does not provide or refer to an official definition of the term *parenting practice*. However, the term is espoused in terms of the specific things that parents do to socialise their children. For example, some (e.g., Spera 2005; Roopnarine et al, 2014; Teti et al, 2017) refer to parenting practice as consisting of regular activities that parents perform with their children, such as storytelling or reading a book to improve a child's learning, setting boundaries to guide children and strategies used to discipline and reward children.

According to Roopnarine et al, (2014) parenting practices reflect cultural socialisations in that they are based on how parents balance the multiple dimensions of family life within unique social, physical and cultural circumstances. These circumstances include the influence of factors such as social class; culture; poverty; the child's temperament; the parents' own history; neighbourhood; the community and the era in which the child is born (see for example, Waylen and Stewart-Brown, 2008; Kellett and Apps, 2009).

For this study, I define parenting practice as the regular and varied range of activities that parents adopt to socialise their children. It includes but is not limited to how parents discipline and reward their children, the physical care they give, the messages they reinforce about the world and the behaviour they model.

2.1.4 Defining Parenting Styles:

Definitions of parenting styles, within parenting literature, draw heavily on Diana Baumrind's (1967; 1971; 1991) conceptualisation to describe variations in the way that parents control and socialise their children. Such definitions tend to focus on two main points. The first is that parenting must be understood in terms of issues of nurturing, communication, expectations of maturity and control. Secondly, that Baumrind's typologies describe 'normal' parenting and cannot be used to understand parenting that is abusive or neglectful. Definitions also suggest that there is a causal link between the strategies that parents use to socialise children, and children's behaviour. But, whilst establishing causality is difficult (O'Connor and Scott, 2007; Benson and Marshall, 2009), research indicates that parenting styles can have an impact on children's behaviour that carries on into adulthood.

In their definition of parenting styles, Darling and Steinberg (1993) seek to distinguish styles from practices. They define parenting style in terms of the constellation of the values and attitudes that parents communicate to children, which when taken together create the climate in which parents' behaviour is expressed (Darling and Steinberg, 1993, p. 488). They distinguish styles from practices by suggesting that parenting practices are context specific interactions whilst parenting styles are the dominant strategies that parents use to socialise their children.

Consensus within the literature is that parenting styles are the psychological constructs that represent the standard strategies that parents use to socialise their children (Spera, 2005; Golombok, 2014; Bryne et al, 2014). The parenting styles discussions within this study are based on this definition as it refers to the overall pattern of actions and behaviour of parents, rather than specific tasks.

2.1.5 Defining Parenting Competence:

Definitions of parenting competence are open to debate within the literature. This is partly because there is no universal agreement on a definition of parenting or how children should be socialised. Furthermore, the theoretical and empirical foundations that inform discussions of parenting competence within the literature, are heavily based on Western constructions of parenting. Indeed, much of the debate tends to centre on identifying which components of parenting to consider and what tools to use when evaluating competence (see for example, Teti and Candelania, 2002; Wolfe and Peregoy, 2003; O'Connor and Scott, 2007).

Whilst there is evidence to suggest that some components of parenting (e.g., the goal of ensuring safety) are universally accepted, linking the quality of the parent-child relationship to children's outcomes is neither simple nor direct (O'Connor and Scott, 2007). What emerges from the literature is that the context within which parenting activities are conducted play a crucial role not only in understanding the meaning of parenting practices, but also in understanding their effect on a range of outcomes in children. This suggests that parenting competence is socially constructed and, as Teti and Candelania (2002) propose, can only be defined with reference to the socialisation outcomes desired by a group of people.

For this study, parenting competence is defined as parents' abilities to socialise children towards achieving the expectations and outcomes of a specific social group. It is conceptualised as being determined by the cultural and ethnic factors within the social context. In terms of the discussions contained throughout this study, this definition allows for critical exploration of the varied constructions of parenting competence expressed by black and minority ethnic parents and social workers.

2.1.6 Linking Parenting Practices, Parenting Styles and Parenting Competence

Parenting research suggests that there is at least an association between the way children are socialised and the outcomes they achieve throughout their lifespan. In general, the specific actions that parents perform (practices), and the dominant strategies they employ (styles) when socialising children play an important role in determining children's developmental outcomes. Conversely, research also shows that children's responses to parenting practices and parenting styles varies significantly (see, Darling and Steinburg, 1993; Leug et al, 1998; Darling et al, 2006; Fletcher et al, 2008).

Parenting styles research, especially in relation to children's education attainments suggests that variability in how children respond to the different 'styles' is associated with ethnic and cultural background (Williams et al, 2009; Shaffer et al's 2009; Bornstein, 2013). It is within cultural contexts that parenting competence is determined (Bornstein, 2013). This, in part, is associated with the fact that parents seek to socialise children to develop competences that prepare them to function effectively within their communities and as members of a distinct cultural and ethnic group.

The link between parenting practices, parenting styles and parenting competence, is perhaps best conceptualised as an interrelated context. That is, that parenting practices are moderated by the parents' dominant style and aim to influence children's behaviour so that it is congruent with cultural expectations. The extent to which parents achieve the socialisation goals is measured against cultural expectations, to determine parenting competence.

In their study on the effectiveness of parenting assessment, Kellett and Apps (2009) interviewed fifty-four professionals from health, education and social care. Their findings emphasised the view that understanding parenting and evaluating parenting competence is made complex by the varied range of parenting practices that exist in a multi-cultural community, as well as the fact that professionals are often required to balance *conflicting and sometimes contradictory views of good parenting; good enough parenting and parenting which falls below acceptable standards of care* (Kellett and Apps, 2009, p.6).

2.2 Parenting in a Historical Context:

Early conceptualisations of parenting concluded that the most basic role of parents is to secure the safety and wellbeing of children. This remains relevant today, with modern research confirming that parenting plays a crucial role in shaping children's safety and development across various domains (see Smith and Farrington, 2004; Luthar, 2006; Masten et al, 2006). Parents execute their role by following parenting patterns that tend to be consistent across generations (Quah, 2003; Serbin and Karp, 2004; Belsky and Jafee, 2006; Shaffer et al, 2009). Although each generation of parents will differ from the preceding generation in terms of their approaches to parenting, the nature and pace of change is subtle and heavily moderated by culture. This, according to a study conducted by Shaffer et al (2009) on intergenerational continuity in parenting quality, highlights the mediating role of culture and ethnicity in shaping parenting practices.

But, as Quah's (2003) study showed, intergenerational continuity does not preclude the fact that successful parenting is also influenced by children's temperaments as well as other ecological factors such as social class; acculturation; formal education; changing gender roles and family structures; legislation and policy; financial ability and the geographical neighbourhood in which parenting takes place. What can be inferred from Shafer et al's (2009) study, and other parenting literature, is that views about what constitutes acceptable parenting practices have undergone several paradigm shifts over the years.

In seventh century Britain, for example, children were thought of as property and it was deemed acceptable for parents to treat their children with little or no regard for their vulnerability or welfare (Steinmetz, 1987; DeMause, 1974; Hawes, 1985; Hoghughi and Long, 2004). The parenting practices of the time were largely influenced by religious teachings that human nature, reflected in children, was totally depraved. Therefore, society charged parents with the responsibility of taming what was perceived as children's evil dispositions to control unrestricted passions (DeMause, 1974). Steinmetz (1987) explains this parenting paradigm by citing Aristotle's remark, in response to the wide spread infanticide of the time. He likened the parent-child relationship to that between a master and a slave in that until children became adults, they belonged to their parents, so that parents' actions towards them could not be deemed to be just or unjust (pp.293 – 295).

The perception that the role of parenting was to tame children's unrestricted passions, began to shift following John Locke's (1693) studies. Locke's findings highlighted how childhood experiences impacted on development. Locke defined identity as a continuum of consciousness and postulated that children were born without innate

ideas and that their knowledge was determined by their experiences of the world around them. His studies led him to advocate that the focus of parenting activities needed to shift towards developing children's physical habits in the first instance as this would ensure their overall development. Locke's findings were later modified by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), who took a view consistent with permissive parenting and proposed that early education should be derived from children's interactions with the world.

By postulating that human nature is good, or at least neutral, Locke and Rousseau's studies introduced the notion that children's behaviour could be shaped through parenting activities. They held the view that human nature was not, as hitherto believed, intrinsically evil and that children reflected society's influence on them. This led to a shift from parenting practices that typically instilled fear, shamed children and used physical chastisement (Demouse, 1974; Keniston, 1977) to practices that aimed to ensure that children were socialised with the 'right' competences. This approach continued into the early eighteenth century, as parents were concerned with self-control and orderly developments (Hawes, 1974).

Along with industrialisation, the mid eighteenth century brought in another shift in parenting practices. Historians believe that although industrialisation extended the use of children as a means of cheap labour, their vulnerability meant that they held the same amount of societal attention relative to their times as they do today (Hawes, 1985; Heywood, 2001; Schon and Silven, 2007). Citing Aries (1962), Hawes (1985) postulates that the progress ushered in by industrialisation improved the importance of children within Western societies and acted as the precursor to modern parenting

approaches. This is echoed by Hoghughi and Long (2004) as well as Schon and Sliven (2007) who suggest that public interest in the welfare of children increased as Britain developed, and her structures formalised. They explain that the growing prosperity increased public interest in the welfare of children and the public began to recognise that parental care was deficient for some children.

Public interest in children's welfare led to regional and national campaigns to stop cruelty to children. More notably, the Liverpool society for the prevention of cruelty to children and the London society for the prevention of cruelty to children. Some (e.g., Flegel, 2006; Ferguson, 2011; Rogowski, 2015) suggest that the founding of the London society for the prevention of cruelty to children, which later renamed the National society for the prevention of cruelty to children (NSPCC) in July 1884, was arguably the single most significant factor in influencing the development of legislation to protect children from abuse and neglect, in England. The NSPCC conceptualising cruelty to children as a pathology and focused campaigns on educating the public on the nature of cruelty, thus shaping public discourse.

With the public beginning to view cruelty to children as a crime (Flegel, 2006) child abuse became a subject of social and legal concern. In 1889, campaigns against cruelty to children succeeded in influencing parliament to pass England's first ever legislation to protect children – the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act (1889). Through this Act, cruelty to children became a criminal offence. Chapter four provides a more detailed discussion of the importance of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act (1889), in the development of child safeguarding policy and social work practice.

By the twentieth century, widespread child abuse and deficiencies in biological parents had given rise to public view that the state had a responsibility to intervene and protect children who were experiencing poor parenting (Watson and Skinner, 2004). The political philosophy of the twentieth century was that parents have their children 'in trust' and could not do with them what they chose (Alston et al., 1992). Through legislation and practice policies, the United Kingdom began to recognise that children should be free from abuse and receive culturally assigned minimum levels of care and developmental opportunities (Hoghughy and Long, 2004).

In terms of research, early twentieth century parenting studies considered issues such as childhood abnormalities and poor family histories within the context of poverty, ill health and delinquency. However, it was the emergency of empirical child psychiatry and psychology that gave focus to parenting research (French, 1995; Watson and Skinner, 2004; Shaffer, 2008). As, French, (1995) points out, Freud's emphasis on the central role of early specialisation of children on their adjustments later in life, was arguably the most significant early pointer to the importance of parenting.

Freud's ideas are said to have influenced the work of Erikson (1923), who formulated the psychosocial theory as a framework for understanding lifespan development. Although not as central in providing an understanding of how parenting influences children's outcomes, Erikson's ideas had profound influence among professionals and academics concerned with children's development. He introduced the notion that individuals' ability to change was dependent on how they dealt with the trajectories in their lives. Thus, professionals' intervention strategies were aimed at helping families to negotiate their trajectories better.

In Hoghughi and Long's (2004) review of parenting literature they noted that, after the Second World War, parenting studies gained momentum in the United Kingdom. For example, John Bowlby's (1951) research into the effects of removing children from their parents highlighted the importance of maternal love to the wellbeing of children. His focus on the complexity of the parent/child interaction and the consequent attachment intrigued practitioners' and academics' interest in parenting processes and outcomes for children.

The growing interest in parenting research then resulted in a series of influential contributions that include: Winnicott's (1965) *good enough parenting*, modified by Adcock and White (1985); Skinner (1953)'s *behaviour modification theory*; Piaget (1955)'s *cognitive development*; Bowlby (1951)'s *attachment theory*, later modified by Ainsworth et al (1978)'s *attachment and strange situation*; Maslow (1954)'s *hierarchy of needs*; Bronfenbrenne (1979)'s *ecological systems theory*; Baumrind (1967; 1971)'s *parenting styles*; Chase and Thomas (1999)'s studies on children's temperament and Rutter's (1985; 1999) work on *vulnerability and resilience*.

It is crucial to point out at this stage that the above list is not exhaustive and that it is not within the scope of this review to discuss each contribution in detail. Hoghughi and Long (2004) provide a comprehensive discussion on how the above contributions have illuminated our understanding of parenting and its impact on children's behavioural outcomes and prospects.

More recently, researchers have questioned the belief that parenting is the most important factor in shaping children's development. Harris (1999), for example, famously postulated that children's personalities are shaped by the experiences they have away from the family home and that parents have little or no influence over long-term development. She argued that children, as opposed to parents, socialise children, and any similarities between parents and their children are due to shared genes and culture. Her findings challenge conventional understanding of the role of parenting within the social context. In the context of the focus of this research, Harris's perspective could explain some of the conflicts that some black and minority ethnic parents interviewed for this study said they had with their children.

Whilst Harris does not seek to minimise the role of parenting in determining children's outcomes, she argues that parents' influence on emotional and behavioural development is perhaps less than we imagine it to be and suggests that peers exert more influence than parents. Harris (1999) uses the development of language amongst children of immigrants to illustrate her point. Drawing on the example of her Russian landlords' family, she observed that the children of immigrants learn the language of their home countries with ease but speak the language of the host country with the accent of their peers rather than their parents. This, she argues, is because children identify with their classmates and their playmates rather than their parents, and thus modify their behaviour to fit with the peer group (Harris, 1999).

Studies on risk behaviour in children and adolescents (e.g., Gardner and Steinberg, 2005; Prinstein and Dodge, 2008; Brechwald and Prinstein, 2011) express similar views to Harris by suggesting that the relationships that children have with their peers

exert enormous influence on their lives through friendships that help them to adjust to school or contribute to later-life problems through bullying and/or rejection. While Harris' observations do not deal with children who have experienced social care intervention, her work has some relevance to this study in that it highlights some of the conflicts between black and minority ethnic parents and their children. Some of the parents interviewed for this study, for example, reported that they experienced conflict when socialising their children to conform to the values and behavioural expectations of their home because the children "*want to be like their colleagues*".

2.3 The Social Context of Parenting

In Western communities, society's understanding of parenting and children's development is significantly influenced by research contributions, especially in relation to modern parenting practices. This is often disseminated through books and manuals that offer parenting advice. At a macro level, the recommendations made by researchers inform policies designed to support parents to overcome social challenges and enhance their parenting skills. Conversely, several studies have shown that the social contexts in which families operate affect the quality of parenting that children receive.

Social circumstances such as financial pressures; poor support networks; societal trends and family composition restrict the options through which parents socialise their children and make it difficult for them to focus on the task of parenting (Utting and Pugh, 2004). The Sure Start centres are an example of policy driven support programmes aimed at helping parents navigate through the wide range of parenting approaches. But, for most black and minority ethnic parents, acculturation processes,

family transitions and the impact of racial and ethnic socialisation are added environmental factors that have significant influences on parenting.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of ecological systems theory provides an important framework for understanding how the factors highlighted above affect parenting in general. He proposed that ecological factors interact within a hierarchy that describes pathways of influence in four inter-dependent systems: 1. the macro system, which consists of socio-cultural influences; 2. the exo system, which consists of community influences; 3. the micro system, which consists of family influences and 4. the ontogenic system, which accounts for temperaments. The complexity with which the systems interact with each other makes it necessary for us to understand how factors in one level of the system are associated with other levels. For example, how social and economic factors interact to influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents.

Social challenges tend to be associated with financial challenges. Rodgers and Pryor (1998) describe the inter-connectedness of social and financial implications by highlighting the psychological distress associated with divorce and how it influences children's outcome. Divorce creates difficult social situations that affect parental nurturance by placing considerable pressure on the parent to adopt practices that they believe will help them cope better in their circumstances. Such practices may include imposing strict; age inappropriate and inflexible rules, roles and responsibilities upon their children (see Farrington, 2002). Findings from other studies (e.g. Caldwell and Bradley, 1984; Tripp and Cockett, 1998; Barn, 2002) echo this view, albeit there seems to be more focus on economic rather than social factors. Utting and Pugh's (2004)

review offers a detailed discussion of the role that research has played in shaping the social context of parenting.

Overall, parenting advice often cites research concerned with children's physical, emotional and, in recent years, early brain development. The implicit message, which is one on which my work colleagues and I (I am still a practicing social worker) base our advice, is that parents who understand their children's development are more likely to provide age appropriate parenting, regardless of cultural and ethnic background. My observation, from professional experience, is that parents tend to tailor their practices based on what they have been told is going on at different stages of their children's development. But, from a research point of view, the most helpful way of understanding the social context of parenting is to draw from the interpretation of *parenting styles* and attachment. These frameworks offer insight into how parents 'do parenting' and how parenting influences children's developmental outcomes.

2.3.1 Parenting styles

Diana Baumrind's (1967) *parenting styles* framework is arguably the best known and perhaps most referenced theory on understanding the strategies that parents adopt when socialising their children. She posited that parents fall in one of three parenting categories: 1. the authoritarian parenting - parents whose style is to prioritise strict conformity to rules with little dialogue between the parent and the child; 2. the authoritative parenting - parents whose style is more child centred so that the parents explain rules and guide the children without being demanding and 3. Indulgent parenting - parents whose style is to be heavily involved with their children but allow them to do whatever they want (Baumrind, 1967; 1971). Maccoby and Martin (1983)

expanded Baumrind's theory to include a fourth category; neglectful parenting - parents whose style is emotionally detached as they tend to disregard their children and focus on other interests.

As a framework for understanding parenting practices, *parenting styles* has been tested and validated by various researchers over the years (e.g., Lamborn et al, 1991; Farrington, 2002; Barrera et al, 2002; O'Connor and Scott, 2007). Lamborn et al's (1991) research on patterns of competence and adjustment among adolescents offers a comprehensive illustration of how *parenting styles* impact on children's outcomes. They studied the families of over four-thousand children aged between fourteen to eighteen-year olds to test the impact of parenting styles on adolescent's outcomes. The families were categorised along the four prototypical parenting styles identified by Baumrind (1967; 1971) and Maccoby and Martin (1983). Their categorisation was based on how the children rated their parents in respect to acceptance / involvement and strictness / supervision.

Apart from confirming the *parenting styles* framework, Lamborn et al's (1991) study showed that parenting influences children's outcomes. The findings were that adolescents who rated their parents as authoritative scored highest on measures of psychosocial competence but lowest on measures of psychological and behavioural dysfunction, while adolescents who rated their parents as neglectful scored highest on psychological and behavioural dysfunction and lowest on measures of psychosocial competence. Adolescents who rated their parents as authoritarian scored reasonably well on measures indexing obedience and conformity to the parents' standards but had relatively poor self-conception compared to their counterparts. In contrast,

adolescents from indulgent families evidenced a strong sense of self-confidence but reported a higher frequency of substance abuse and behavioural challenges.

Although Diana Baumrind's *parenting styles* framework had primarily been used to explain how parenting influenced children's outcomes during early and middle childhood, Lamborn and colleagues' study demonstrated that the effects of parenting styles was consistent across different age and ethnic groups. However, the universal applicability of the findings has been called into question with researchers such as Steinberg et al (1992) arguing that the results are mainly consistent with white middle class and, to a lesser degree, ethnic minority middle class families. Garcia Coll et al (1995) add to the parenting styles debate by postulating that the parenting practices and beliefs of middle class American and European parents are part of normative parenting behaviour in those communities (American and European communities) and cannot be used to suggest universal applicability.

Additionally, research that has identified differences in outcomes associated with gender or race (for example, Weiss and Schwarz, 1996; McLoyd et al., 2000; Brody and Flor, 2002) challenge the notion that there is a universal relationship between parenting styles and children's outcomes. Interestingly, Lamborn et al's (1996) study also found some variations associated with ethnicity and culture. In their study, authoritarian parenting did not appear to be associated with good educational outcomes in African American children but was beneficial to achievement orientated Asian American children. Nevertheless, rather than disprove the efficacy of parenting styles, these studies show that, in the main, there is merit and applicability to the

framework. What is perhaps clear is that caution needs to be taken when interpreting and generalising results from parenting research.

Studies on various parenting practices and their effects on children provide consistent evidence that parenting practices are robust indicators of children's outcomes. Knowledge about *parenting styles*, for example, indicates that the way parents interact and become involved in their children's daily lives influences developmental outcomes (see Hill, 1995; Olsen and McNeilly-Choque, 1998; Demo and Cox, 2000; Abell et al., 1996; Dornbusch et al, 1987; Leung et al., 1998; Radziszewska et al., 1996; Aquilino and Supple, 2001; Barrera et al, 2002). Conversely, Shaffer et al's (2009) study on intergenerational continuity highlights the significance that parents' own experience of being parented plays in shaping the *parenting styles* they adopt when socialising their own children. That is, that the repertoire of skills and coping strategies that parents learn from their own childhood experience informs their parenting practice.

Much of the debate around parenting styles has tended to focus on the links between dysfunctional parenting and children's behavioural challenges. However, longitudinal studies highlight the positive ways in which *parenting style*, enables parents in otherwise adverse circumstances to contribute to their children's well-being and achievement (Utting and Pugh, 2004). Nevertheless, it remains the case, as Belsky (1984) observed, that competent parenting is the *parenting style* that socialises a child to develop the competences required to effectively deal with the ecological variables that they will encounter within their community (p. 251).

2.3.2 Attachment theory

Like *parenting styles*, attachment theory illuminates our understanding of the nature and importance of the parent/child relationship. The concept of attachment was pioneered by Bowlby's (1951) observations of children in institutions. Borrowing from ethology, control systems theory, object relations theory and cognitive psychology, Bowlby described four infant behavioural systems: 1. the exploratory system, in which the child explores their world; 2. the affiliate system, in which the child learns to be with others; 3. the fear or wariness system, in which the child learns about danger and how to stay safe and 4. the attachment system, in which the child seeks proximity to their attachment figure in order to feel safe.

Bowlby saw the attachment system as being the most crucial of the four systems in developing a child's personality and interaction with their world. He postulated that through behaviour such as crying, clinging and seeking proximity to their care givers, children expressed separation anxieties designed to get them back to a position of safety. His theory highlights the psychological and developmental significance of secure attachments and gives useful insights into the social context of parenting.

According to Bowlby, attachment is predicated on the child seeking visual or psychological reassurance from their caregiver. It is only when the child is sure that the care giver is nearby, accessible and attentive that he or she will feel loved, secure and confident. Through attachment, cognitive representations of relationships are established and carried forward to influence several areas of an individual's psychosocial functioning (Shaffer et al., 2009, p. 129). Indeed, according to (Shaffer et al., 2009) attachment histories are causally related to intergenerational continuity

and discontinuity in parenting practices. Their study found that the nature of attachment forms the basis upon which parents either seek to replicate or redress their own experiences of being parented.

In the early stages of attachment theory, its theorists recommended the highest levels of maternal devotion as the ideal parenting situation for children's development. Parenting was therefore based on mothers taking on the bulk of childcare responsibilities. We now know that the primary attachment figure doesn't have to be the mother or any specific member of the family but that attachment bonds between children and both or either parent, friends and the wider community can affect children's outcomes (see Rutter, 1985). When the attachment bond is developed from an early age and is secure, then the child is more likely to exhibit social competence in forming and maintaining relationships as well as exercising resilience to adversity in later life (see, Berscheid and Regan, 2005; Masten and Shaffer, 2006; Burt et al, 2008). However, empirical evidence highlights that there are cultural differences in the way that children appraise the accessibility of their attachment figure and regulate their responses to threat.

The differences in how children appraise their parents' accessibility were articulated by Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues who, through a laboratory paradigm for studying child/parent attachments, developed a technique that they referred to as the strange situation. They put parents and their twelve-month-old children in a laboratory and systematically separated and reunited them. Their studies found that 60% of the children behaved in the way that Bowlby described as normative i.e., became distressed when the parents left the room and actively sought parental comfort on the

parents' return – Ainsworth and her colleagues referred to this as secure attachment; 20% were distressed from the onset and were not easily soothed even after the reunification – anxious-resistant attachment; the remaining 20% did not appear too distressed about the separation and on reunification, the children actively avoided seeking contact with their parent – avoidant attachment.

Apart from identifying and naming the different attachment patterns, the Mary Ainsworth and her colleagues demonstrated that children's attachment patterns were correlated to the parent/child interaction during the first year of the child's life. In terms of understanding parenting, the studies provided empirical demonstration of how attachment behaviour is formed within safe and frightening social contexts. Children who appear secure in a strange situation tend to have parents who are sensitive to their needs while anxious-resistant or avoidant children tend to have parents who are insensitive to their needs, neglectful in the care they provide or inconsistent in responding to their children's needs. Ainsworth et al's (1969) work was later modified by Mary Main and her colleagues who added a fourth category of attachment: disorganised or disorientated attachment (Main and Solomon, 1986; 1990).

To illustrate disorganised attachment, Mary Main and her colleagues described a group of children who did not demonstrate a characteristic or predictable response to the strange situation. According to Main and her colleagues, these children typically had a history of being regularly exposed to neglect or abuse. The interpretation was that it is the caregiver's parenting practices and the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the relationship they have with the child then form the hierarchy and base upon which more complex relationships are built. Main's work arguably gives the clearest link

between parenting styles and attachment behaviour. In terms of the context of this research, it highlights the social context of parenting. That is, that human relationships are initially developed with the primary care giver.

It is well documented that a variety of factors can influence the impact of secure attachment on later functioning. Studies that confirm the link between attachment security and early parental sensitivity and responsiveness (e.g. Sroufe et al., 1992; Batholomew and Shaver, 1998; Howe et al., 1999), have added to this knowledge. The consistent themes from research findings are that: attachment transcends cultural boundaries and ethnic parenting practices; fulfils children's instinctual needs; is dependent on the reciprocity of the relationship between a parent and child; it is hierarchical; enduring across the lifespan and, when it is secure, it predicts good psychosocial outcomes in later years (see Belsky and Isabella, 1991; Greenberg et al., 1993; Howe et al., 1999).

The limitation to the cross-cultural applicability of the theory is that attachment behaviour is learned i.e. children learn how to behave in a manner that allows them to successfully adapt to the cultural norms around them. For example, Mary Ainsworth's (1963; 1967) studies of the Baganda tribe in Uganda revealed a difference in observable attachment behaviour between American children and the children in the Ugandan tribe i.e. while the American children hugged and kissed their attachment figure on return, the Ugandan children clapped. These salient differences reflect children's conditioning to parents' expected behaviour rather than intuitive responses. It therefore follows that if the culture specific meaning of the behaviour is not known, the validity of the interpretations is open to debate.

2.3.3 Ethnicity and culture in Parenting

A review of the literature suggests that the influence of culture and ethnicity often transcends social class differences and shape parents' views around issues such as gender roles; discipline regimes; hierarchy of power within the family and perceptions about when children are deemed to be ready to contribute to family functioning (Waylen and Stewart-Brown, 2008; Chuang and Tamis-LeMonda, 2009). It is such views that then influence how parents socialise their children as they seek to promote competences that make them recognisable members of a cultural or social group.

There is consensus within the literature that ethnicity and culture are significant components of the social phenomena that influence parenting practices. As aforementioned, ideals about competent parenting and social competence in children are shaped through exposure to shared identity, lifestyle and ancestry (see Paterson and Hann, 1999, p. 357; Coleman and Karraker, 1998; Barn, 2002; Hughes, 2003; Quah, 2004). This influences the relationships between parents and their children in ways that are more profound than the sharing of common goals. For example, when it comes to areas such as ensuring children's health and language competence, it is not uncommon for parents who share the same culture and ethnicity to parent their children differently (Super and Harkness, 1997; Jambunathan et al, 2000).

Our current understanding of ethnic and culturally informed parenting scripts remains, at best, speculative. Quite often, especially within professional settings, assumptions are made about the parenting practices of ethnic minority parents (see Allen et al., 2008). Some professionals might see certain cultures as being nurturing, egalitarian

and authoritative, while their colleagues might see the same family as being authoritarian and permissive.

Differences in parenting practices, within and across cultures and ethnicities, are defined by the variety of ecological prescriptions that influence biological and social parenting. In Roopnarine and Gielen's (2005) review of parenting literature, they question whether, in the face of increasing globalisation, parents can continue to hold onto practices established from key aspects of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Roopnarine and Gielen postulate that explanations of universal patterns of parenting practices are often grounded in thin databases. This, they say, contributes to some of the misguided and controversial academic criticism about the merit of ethnic and culturally influenced parenting in producing positive outcomes for children (p. 4). Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan (2002) raised the same point and highlighted the need to embrace insight from perspectives that are not necessarily based in empirical research but add to our understanding of parenting.

It cannot be denied that ethnicity and culture are constant attributes of every community, irrespective of their relative size when compared with other communities within the country. Therefore, studies that focus on the socially constructed dichotomy between "white majority" and "ethnic minorities" offer limited perspectives on the dynamics of ethnic and cultural influences on parenting. Today's families may be immersed in global consciousness, but ethnic and cultural variations still set them apart and continue to influence their parenting practices. Understanding how cultural and ethnic attributes influence parenting practices can help improve how the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents is evaluated.

Parenting literature suggests that research on parenting practices has not always been inclusive. Indeed, much of the criticism levelled at modern parenting approaches is that the recommendations are derived from research based in theories arrived at by studying predominantly white middle class families (e.g., Steinberg et al., 1992). That said, it must also be acknowledged that there is an increasing number of studies that focus on the ethnic and cultural aspects of family (e.g., Arnett, 2002; Comunian and Gielen, 2001; Booth, 2002; Alder and Gielin, 2003; Spicer, 2010), to add contextual nuance to parenting and in some instances confirm universal aspects.

We know, for example, that the parenting practices of immigrant minority ethnic families are likely to be influenced by their social environment as well as the complexity of acculturation from (Barn, 2002; Allen et al., 2008; Kriz and Skivenes, 2010). In their study, Kriz and Skivenes (2010) found that as migrants settle into new neighbourhoods, the children often adopt the values of the majority ethnic group quicker than their parents. The ensuing conflicts between parents and children then force parents to adjust their cultural values and parenting practices (Barn, 2002). These adaptations potentially lead to more authoritarian parenting than is used in their countries of origin (Allen et al., 2008).

Quah (2004)'s study of the parenting styles of Singapore families, also makes a welcome contribution to our contextual understanding of parenting in ethnic minority families. Her study highlighted the pervasiveness with which ethnicity and culture shape individuals' identities and their subjective perceptions of the world around them.

She found that parents from different ethnic backgrounds differed significantly in their parenting styles due to the pervasive influence of ethnicity and culture.

Much of what Quah uncovers, such as the benefits of authoritative parenting and how the expectations that parents have for their children influence their parenting practices, confirms what is already known. However, her findings emphasise the point that the values, beliefs and customs associated with parents' ethnic and cultural group identities significantly influence parenting practices. A more detailed discussion of how ethnicity and culture influence parenting will be provided in chapter eight. However, it is pertinent to point out that the implication of Quah's and other filial studies, is that policy makers must address the variety of ecological factors that influence parenting when drawing up national policies.

2.3.4 *Child Development*

It is widely accepted that cultural and ethnic variations can dramatically influence socialisation patterns and thus children's development. This because it is in the context of culture and ethnicity that parents communicate with and understand the world. Indeed, cultural artefacts such as dress, language, behaviour, traditions, beliefs and values influence parents' perceptions of children's development. Citing Whiting and Child (1953), Bornstein (2013) advances the view that cultural and ethnic variation in parenting are an integral reason why individual from different cultures are often so different from one another (p. 3). Bornstein (2013) illustrates the point by positing that culture and ethnicity influence children's development in the same way that they influence the language that children eventually speak.

Bornstein's position appears to address child development from the point of cognitive development. But children's development encompasses physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and language development. Much of the literature on child development is greatly influenced by three main theories: Piaget, Psychoanalysis and Learning theory, which describe child development in terms of linear or sequential stage processes that are similar for all humans.

This study does not seek to explore the different theories of child development. Rather, the reason for including a brief section on child development in this first literature review chapter is twofold: First, is to acknowledge the ubiquity of understanding children's development within parenting literature. Secondly, it is to set the stage for later discussions about the influence that culture and ethnicity have on black and minority ethnic parents' understanding of children's development.

2.4 Parenting in a policy context

Child welfare policy in the United Kingdom continues to see children as being vulnerable, at least until their middle childhood. As a result, parenting (quality and practice) is seen as the starting point for indicating whether a child is at risk or that there are protective factors present when predicting children's development and behavioural outcomes (Collins et al, 2000; Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2006). But, child welfare policies are also based on the idea that children's natural families are the best place for them to grow. Thus, policy and legislation make it clear that the state and other institutions should only intervene in cases of need or crisis.

Historically, feminists' criticism of child welfare policies was that they were rooted in a patriarchy understanding of family. However, demographic changes in family dynamics and structures have resulted in policies being amended to consider the diversity of family forms. For example, social trends such as increased divorce rates and the rise in single parenthood has resulted in an increase in the number of single mother's accessing welfare benefits to help support their children. According to (Davies, 1998) between 1981 and 1988, there was an 86% rise in the number of single parents receiving welfare benefits. This, along with concerns about the welfare of children, culminated in the Children Act (1989), aimed at redefining parental responsibility.

Nevertheless, parenting policies are still based on the notion that parenting is causally related to children's outcomes and that "good" parenting mediates the effects of a family's environment. Policy makers continue to view families as economic agents that also serve important functions in relation to social integration and order. Therefore, rather than have policies that are specifically oriented to parenting, the United Kingdom incorporated policies that support families, intentionally or otherwise, within several pieces of legislation (George and Miller, 1994; Holden et al., 2011). The support is spread across sectors such as: social security, education provision, employment, taxation and health care, with the aim of locating individuals and families closer to the market.

Combining the social and economic aspects of parenting makes policies complex and somewhat unstable. For example, although New Labour's Sure Start schemes offered locally available child and family centred support to parents, it also had overtones of

employment concerns as the employability of parents on benefits became one of its core targets. In some ways, this continued the Conservative's child support system philosophy. Ushered in by the Child Support Act (1991), the child support system sought to place the cost of looking after children squarely on parents' shoulders. Researchers and academics (e.g., Craig et al., 1996; Van Drenth et al., 1999; Bradshaw et al, 1999; Jenkinson, 2001) argue that the benefits of such policies have been sporadic.

Jenkinson (2001) for instance, posits that Child Support maintenance has had a disproportionate effect on the poorest children and often results in acrimonious relationships between parents who have previously had amicable arrangements. According to Van Drenth et al., (1999), the controversy of the Child Support Act (1991) is that it can reduce a father's second family to welfare dependency. A similar view is espoused by Bradshaw et al (1999) following their study of six hundred non-resident fathers in the United Kingdom. They found that absent father felt stigmatised by policies that failed to recognise the entwined nature of fathers' financial obligations with their social and emotional bonds with children.

Additionally, commentators such as (Penn, 2007; Lloyd, 2008) argue that the adversarial nature of family policies fails to achieve the intended benefits for children. Family friendly policies aim to reduce poverty and encourage parents' involvement in their children's lives, (Hayes and Williams, 1999). This purpose is lost when policy initiatives such as Sure Start schemes and the Child Support Agency emphasise the elements of social order and control by targeting poor parents rather than helping parents who need parenting support. The control element is also evident in the judicial

nature of 'Parenting Orders' and 'Parenting Contracts', through which Courts and local authorities, respectively, can require parents to attend parenting classes if their children's behaviour is deemed to be anti-social (Lester, 2006).

That said, it is also important to acknowledge that government legislation has been instrumental in strengthening family relationships and furthering 'good parenting' through policies that focus on improving parenting skills and facilitating parents' presence in children's lives. For example, drawing on research evidence that children benefit from parents being at home, the Employment Act (2002) recognised parents' care-giving responsibilities and enabled them to take time out to raise their children. This improved parents' work-life balance by ushering in options for flexible working and maternity and paternity leave. As a result, parents can combine work commitments and looking after their children without losing out financially.

Furthermore, investment in parenting support services such as conflict resolution, relationship counselling and early years help ensure that parents have access to professional help throughout their children's life spans. In the main, access to professional support equips parents with effective parenting strategies. The down side is that it has the potential of undermining authoritative parenting and shifting the power balance from parents to professionals by questioning parents' abilities to correct their own errors.

The political and public debates that followed the youth riots in the summer of 2011 are an example of how the power balance can quickly shift from parents to professionals. In response to the riots, the government unveiled proposals to get

involved in the way parents bring up their children. The proposed interventions will offer intensive and persistent support to entire families, through Family Intervention Projects (FIPs). These interventions are the key to unlocking positive social change through community wide parenting.

Politicised parenting support is not a new phenomenon in the United Kingdom's policy framework. In fact, according to (Winter, 2011) David Cameron's proposed Family Intervention Projects are largely built on ideas introduced by the Labour government. Family Intervention Project workers will give families practical assistance such as: help to access support that is already crafted along: education; care and well-being of children; financial support to families with children, family functioning; parental employment and the work / family balance. This reflects New Labour's Every Child Matters (2003) agendas which signalled the beginning of policy focus on the interface between parenting and children's outcomes.

Parenting policies have always emphasised the preference for children to remain cared for within their own birth families, except in situations where they are likely to be exposed to severe harm. Indeed, the role that parents play in promoting good outcomes for children is at the heart of legislation such as Children Acts (1989 and 2004), which oblige local authorities to support families in their parenting tasks. The emphasis is that parents should ensure that their children's moral, physical and emotional wellbeing are promoted. However, with increased scientific knowledge about parenting, policy focus has shifted to prevention and early intervention.

Moran et al (2004) attribute the focus on prevention and early intervention to three key developments in policy makers' thinking: 1. Research evidence was showing that the risk factors responsible for children developing poor outcomes were clear and the outcomes could be predicated at an early stage; 2. Addressing the issues early would benefit families as well as the community and 3. Many families who were in need were not being reached by social services (p. 14).

But, as I have already mentioned, despite the prescriptive nature of support and policy guidelines, parenting is influenced by a variety of ecological factors. These factors must be understood within the contexts in which they interact, because some of them are salient and affect families in different ways (Soydan and Williams, 2005; Liabo et al, 2005; Boulshol, 2000; Welbourne, 2002). As Moran et al (2004) put it, "*within any society, parents start off from different places and will encounter different sets of circumstances that will help or hinder them as they progress through the parenting life course*" (p. 21).

Legislation and policies contribute to the way parenting is done by seeking to ensure that children receive a minimum standard of care from their parents. This is done by equipping parents who are deemed to be struggling in their parenting tasks with the skills to function within societal ideals of 'good parenting'. The limitation is that most support initiatives only address the factors that affect parenting at the family and individual level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model yet research shows that the root causes of most parenting challenges are in the macro and exo-systems described in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. These factors include, albeit not

exhaustively: poverty, inadequate education, social exclusion, poor housing and degraded physical environments (Moran et al., 2004).

The likelihood is that beyond ecological factors; parents' temperaments (perhaps best reflected in parenting style) and children's temperaments, black and minority ethnic parents base their parenting practices on cultural constructions. The result is that social workers and policy makers, are constantly presented with recommendations from parenting studies that proposed a bewildering amount of theories and opinions about the 'best' way to parent. Therefore, applying even-handedness to the assessment of parenting competence is a complex task that requires social workers to be reflexive and aware of how factors such as ethnicity and culture (among a variety of other factors) shape parenting practices.

Considering the above, it can be argued that support which concentrates on improving parent/child interactions, enhancing parents' knowledge of child development and bolstering relationships between familial partnerships, fails to provide lasting solutions. Moran et al (2004) note that although there is much discourse about holistic services, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect intervention to be able to offer ecologically comprehensive support. At best, most services will be aware of the ecology of parenting and child development, have a clear idea of the systems level at which their own interventions are targeted and refer parents to other agencies that provide aspects of support that fit families' unmet needs at specific ecological levels.

2.5 Conclusion:

The theme that emerges from the literature reviewed here is that parenting paradigms have shifted over the years. While ensuring the safety of children is still seen as a basic parenting task, it is by no means the only role that parents must perform. Modern parenting approaches place great emphasis on parents' abilities to socialise children within multi-faceted ecological frameworks (see Barn, 2002 Shaffer et al., 2009). But, this also raises questions about what constitutes parenting competence. Feminist writers (e.g., Lloyd et al., 2009 Weisberg, 1996; Nelson, 1997) advanced the argument that because of the diverse contexts in which parenting takes place, we must move away from a traditional understanding of parenting and “embrace the rich and useful set of perspectives that provide critical insights into the nature of nurturance” (Nelson, 1997, p. 178).

The difficulty is that diverse contexts often produce conflicting analyses and make it challenging to determine universally acceptable parenting practices and policies. Furthermore, understanding parenting and how it influences children's outcomes is incredibly complex: the contexts are widely varied; the roles and power differentials change over time, and in some cases reverse and cultural processes hard to define. As family formations and structures have become more diverse and unstable (Muschamp et al, 2007), it is increasingly important for us to understand how culture and ethnicity influence parenting practices.

Additionally, the constellation of practices such as how parents from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds discipline their children, set boundaries or show affection, now famously categorised into identifiable parenting styles (see Baumrind, 1967), requires

social workers to incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity in their decision-making and intervention strategies.

Throughout this review, my attention was drawn to themes highlighting gaps or areas of limited knowledge within parenting literature. Although this list is not exhaustive, the identified themes include: 1. the issue of whether children's outcomes are influenced more by their peers than by parents (Harris, 1999); 2. the link between work-life balance and parenting quality; 3. the quality of parenting within minority ethnic families (Kriz and Skivenes, 2010; Allen et al., 2008) and 4. the efficacy of parenting support programmes (Moran et al., 2004).

Despite the number of studies I have referred to in this review, there are relatively few studies about parenting and ethnicity. Although there is a growing volume of British studies (e.g., Walter, 2001; Dex and Joshi, 2005; Chimba et al, 2012) most studies on parenting and ethnicity have been conducted in America. The limitation of drawing on studies conducted in America is that their history in relation to black and latino children does not map particularly well onto the British situation.

Most studies on parenting focus on difference and few studies involve parents as participants. Therefore, there is a need to develop a collaborative approach that draws on the wisdom of diverse communities to link it with our current knowledge of parenting at different stages of children's development. Coupled with this, the complexities of wider environmental factors make it necessary for researcher to explore the meaning of parenting patterns and practices to unravel and add nuance to our understanding of parenting within its diverse contexts. It is possible that through broad-based

dialogue that engages parents and their immediate support networks, we can develop a better understanding of parents' goals and the ways that their parenting practices may or may not aid the achievement of those goals. This study explores the topic further, and the findings are discussed in chapter eight. In the chapter that follow, I will review the literature to explore how ethnic and culture specific issues are addressed within parenting literature.

Chapter Three – Ethnicity

3.1 Introduction

Having reviewed parenting in general terms, this chapter looks more closely at ethnicity and its influences on parenting practices. In chapter two, I explained that culture and ethnicity is a significant component of the social phenomena that influence parenting practices. This is because culture and ethnicity can frame passionately held beliefs about parenting approaches and, in part, contributes to variability in parenting approaches. Cultural parenting scripts also contribute to the lack of consensus over the activities that constitute parenting, both within individual families and in the wider community. The result is that although there is consensus that at the core of most parenting practices, is the need to ensure that children are protected, nourished, nurtured, educated and socialised competently, the activities that constitute parenting are highly contested and continually evolving. This makes it challenging to identify the true effects that culture and ethnicity have on parenting practices.

Some commentators (e.g., Ogbu, 1981; Garcia-Coll et al, 1995; Strom et al, 2001; Kotchick and Forehand, 2002; Featherstone et al, 2014) have suggested that variability in parenting practices can be associated with the fact that parenting is a ubiquitous individual characteristic which intersects with other ecological factors. In other words, what we see and describe as parenting practice, is the result of how parents have negotiated the intersections and overlaps between culture and other characteristics. However, our current understanding of how culture and ethnicity influence parenting is constrained by a dearth of detailed empirical evidence exploring parenting practices according to ethnic and cultural background.

While there is general information about ethnic groups (see Hewlett et al, 1998; Fenton 1999; Ellison, 2005) it is often not sufficiently detailed or nuanced as to inform decisions about how best to evaluate the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents in Western countries. Furthermore, much of the research on the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents in Western cultures is based on studies in America (e.g., Garcia-Coll et al, 1995; Roopnarine et al, 2005; Berry et al, 2006). Their history, for example in the case of Latino children or Jewish immigrants, does not map particularly well onto the British situation. But what can be inferred from parenting literature is that black and minority ethnic parents have distinct beliefs, values and practices that overlap with, whilst also being unique from those of Western countries. Variation between the parenting of black and minority ethnic parents and White-British parents can be associated with how parents define and conceptualise the role of the family (Garcia-Coll et al, 1995; Kotchick and Forehand, 2002; Le et al, 2008), as well as the beliefs that parents hold about what determines children's development.

Parents' conceptualisations and beliefs about children's development influence the parenting prioritise they choose and how they define competence – both in terms of parenting and in how children are socialised. In this chapter, I discuss the literature reviewed in three main sections: the first introduces the topic of ethnicity by defining the term ethnicity as well as the relationship between ethnicity and its associated terms race, culture and religion. The second part presents and briefly discusses three theories of ethnicity: primordialism; constructionism; and instrumentalism. The third part examines how ethnicity influences parenting.

3.2 Defining Ethnicity

Although seemingly straight forward, the term ethnicity is subject to several interpretations and is often interchangeably used with other terms such as race, tradition and culture. These interpretations are socially constructed and continually redefined or modified over time. According to professor Ignatieff, a historian and academic, it is the plasticity of ethnicity that makes it an essential characteristic of human identity (Ignatieff, 1998). But, whilst it must be recognised that ethnicity overlaps with concepts such as race, culture and tradition, it is important to draw distinctions between them. Clear distinction will help our understanding of ethnicity and its influence on parenting.

3.2.1 Ethnicity

Anthropologists Hutchinson and Smith (1996) trace the origins of the term 'ethnicity' to ancient Greece where the Greek equivalent '*ethnos*' was used to refer to tribe, race, a people or band. The term is said to have first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1953. According to Jenkins (2008), in its most basic form, the English translation has retained the original Greek meaning i.e., a group of human beings living and acting together. Cashmore (2004) conceptualised ethnicity by referring to it as "*coherence and solidarity within a group of people who are, at least latently aware of having common origins*" (p. 142). A similar view is expressed by Caliendo and McIlwain (2011) who explain ethnicity as a concept that helps define individual and collective identities by "*reminding us and telling others of who we are, what we do, how we live and what we value*" (p. xxii).

In his book on the challenge of third world development, Professor Howard Handelman, a political science academic at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, in the United States, draws on the Greek origins of the term, to clarify the concept of ethnicity. He stresses that ethnicity is predicated on social interactions within human communities and goes on to suggest four levels of incorporation: the ethnic category; the ethnic network, the ethnic association and the ethnic community (Handelman, 1996). According to Professor Handelman, the ethnic category is the lowest level of social interactions and only serves to establish perceived differences and boundaries between groups. At the ethnic network level, the community interacts to distribute resources among its members. The ethnic association level is the point at which the members possess common interests and engage in political organisation to express their interests. At the highest level, the ethnic community, the community occupies a permanent territory and operates in a clear political system.

The limitation of Professor Handelman's conceptualisation is in its focus on economic and political ambitions as key drivers to group formation. Consequently, his explanation of the ethnic community level fails to recognise that ethnic groups live within a broader community of other groups rather than as nation states. This is important when seeking to understand how ethnicity influences the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents living in the United Kingdom. Shermerhorn (1996)'s conceptualisation offers some insight. He defines ethnicity as a collective group of individuals within a larger society that derive their identity from real or putative ancestry, a shared history or cultural artefacts.

In terms of seeking to understand parenting practices in black and minority ethnic groups, the key point to be drawn from Shermerhorn's conceptualisation is the shared history. According to Shermerhorn, ethnic groups use their shared history to reinforce what it means to be a member of the group. In the context of understanding parenting, this means that parents from the same ethnic group socialise their children in broadly similar ways that reinforce group identity. For example, as Fontes (2002) points out, what children need to learn and the best ways of teaching them about it are passed down as cultural knowledge from one generation to another. In terms of this study, whilst professor Handleman's conceptualisation of ethnicity might help us understand conflict within nation states, Shermerhorn's conceptualisation offers an, arguably, more relevant explanation of how culture and ethnicity influences parenting practices.

That said, it is also important to recognise that the social-economic environment within which parenting occurs impacts on parents' behaviour (Featherstone, 2014; Gupta et al, 2016). Gupta and colleagues point out that factors such as poverty can limit parents' ability to purchase basic items such as food. Equally, families that experience racial discrimination and disrespect can become wary of 'outsiders' and develop parenting strategies aimed at protecting themselves and their children. In this regard, professor Handleman's conceptualisation is important in helping us understand how economic and political factors contribute to the development of culturally defined parenting scripts. Handleman and Shermerhorn's conceptualisations also point to the need for parenting competence assessment processes that adopt a multidimensional approach to analysing the interaction of black and minority ethnic parents' individual, relational and social factors.

3.2.2 Culture

Geertz (1973), defined culture as the way of life of a group of people, including their material artefacts. This conceptualisation of culture is seen as the traditional view. It sees culture as shaping people's actions by providing the values that influence individuals' actions. In other words, it is everything that one needs to know to fully function as a member of a group. More recent conceptualisations of the term culture define it as consisting of a group's norms and values; its attitudes towards concepts such as family, sexuality, gender roles; and the patterns of behaviour observed within the group (see for example Swindler, 1986; Matters, 2008). What this implies is that even when social contexts vary, there is arguably close correspondence between the socialisation goals of people who share the same cultural heritage.

According to Swindler, culture is best understood as the publicly available symbolic forms through which people experience and express meaning (Swindler, 2008, p. 273). That is, that culture is experienced and expressed through vehicles such as ceremonies, art forms, beliefs, language and dress. She refers to these vehicles as a tool-kit which people use to solve different kinds of problems and argues that culture's causal influence is that it gives people persistent ways of ordering action by providing components that are used to construct strategies of action. In other words, people from the same cultural heritage deem culturally defined ways of doing things or perceiving the world as settled and requiring no further debate. The attributes of cultural scripts are socially constructed, dynamic and, in general terms, shape the behaviour and attitudes of black and minority ethnic parents.

3.2.3 Race

Definitions of race characterise it as being biologically determined. In other words, race is broadly defined in terms of physical feature such as skin colour and geographical origin. Historic categorisations and definitions of the term race raise controversy in modern expressions and understanding of race. For example, nineteenth century attempts to construct a universally accepted definition of the term attached great importance to physical attributes such as skin colour as well as moral and intellectual judgement.

As Walton and Caliendo (2011) note, it became widely accepted that some physical attributes were reflective of fundamental differences between groups and that some groups were inherently superior to others (p. 4). This approach to identifying races continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. For example, basing their study on population genetics, Herrnstein and Murray (1994) conducted a study on intelligence and concluded that genes and environment are associated to race differences. The controversy of defining race along biological attributes is that historically, such classifications have been used to disadvantage some groups by legitimising oppression (Higginbotham, 1996). However, the terms ethnicity and race are still often used interchangeably to refer to a combination of skin colour, geographical origin and behavioural attributes.

3.3 Conceptualisation of Ethnicity

The term ethnicity continues to carry connotations of division with majority populations referring to themselves as “*Us*” and to the ethnic minorities as “*Them*” and vice versa (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996; Caliendo and McIlwain, 2011). Alongside this,

variations of the term have also developed to include terms such as: ethnic origin; ethnic identity; and ethnocentric. Ethnic origin and ethnic identity refer to ancestral heritage while ethnocentric is the belief that one's cultural community or ancestry is superior to all others. According to Hutchinson and Smith, people who are ethnocentric tend to dislike or hate any behaviour, physical characteristics or artefacts that are different from their own.

But, as Coliando and McIlwain (2011) note, ethnicity is an experience which is more salient for some than others. This makes approaches to ethnicity complicated and, in many ways, split between those who view it as long established and those who perceive it as a dynamic social construction. This is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. The key point to make at this stage is that the term still causes controversy because it is also used for social stratification, which some commentators (e.g., Berreman, 1981; Jones, 1997; Fenton, 1999; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Maalouf, 2000; Ellison, 2005) see as perpetuating social inequality along the lines of race, kinship, age, class and gender. Berreman (1981), for example, explains that ethnicity can be perceived as having a dichotomic relation with race. He asserts that this dichotomy is based on the difference that racial stratification is rooted in the physical and cultural characteristics defined by outside groups, while ethnicity is based on the cultural characteristics that an ethnic group defines for itself. Both, he adds, are ascribed at birth.

Berreman's point can be interpreted to suggest that contrasting ethnicity with race can be problematic because racial characteristics defined by the outside group often carry inaccuracies, and stereotypes. But, even if ethnic classification defined by a group

itself are normally more accurate, they are not without practice challenges. Ethnic classifications can still be used by outside groups to stereotype entire communities in ways that are oversimplified and that view ethnicity as being a static cultural process. Consequently, there is a lack of consensus on how to define ethnicity.

Nevertheless, there is some agreement of what the main features should include. These, as highlighted by (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996, 1996; Phoenix and Husain, 2000; Coakley, 2012) are:

1. Shared historical memories including events and commemorations (e.g., independence, heroes, and battles)
2. Elements of a common culture which are not necessarily specific but often include aspects such as religion, language and customs;
3. Common ancestry in terms of notions of origin in time and place that give the group a sense of kinship;
4. Common name to identify and link a community to a common homeland and give a sense of solidarity.

What seems clear from the literature on ethnicity is that the nuances of the variations that exist within and across ethnic groups are difficult to divide. This is partly, as Hutchinson and Smith (1996) point out, because each ethnicity lives within a broader community alongside other ethnicities, thus strengthening the “us” and “them” narratives. Therefore, for purposes of the discussions in this chapter, I adopt Yang (2000)'s definition that refers to ethnicity as being the outcome of subjective perceptions which are derived from culturally constructed group identities but also

based on objective characteristics such as physical attributes, national origin and ancestry.

3.4 Why Culture and Ethnicity Matters

Understanding culture and ethnicity is important because it has a causal influence on parenting practices within black and minority ethnic families. That is, parents from the same ethnic group adopt broadly similar parenting practices in order to socialise their children in ways that reinforce group identity. This is not to suggest that culture and ethnicity is the only determinant of parenting, nor that black and ethnic minority families are a homogenous group. Rather, by understanding similarities within parenting practices, we can focus on identifying commonalities and in the process, contribute to the way that the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents is assessed.

Identifying commonalities is important because the tensions that run through the realities of common experiences among people from the same ethnic background can produce variations and nuances that are hard to divide. For example, individuals from the same ethnic group are likely to experience issues such as poverty or racism differently, based on aspects such as age, gender or level of education. Consequently, there will be broad patterns of difference in the way black and minority ethnic parents approach parenting; not just across different ethnic groups, but also within the same ethnic group.

The challenge, as aforementioned is that black and minority ethnic families are not shaped by one aspect of their identity but by the intersectionality of a combination of

characteristics that include religion; disability; geographical location; education; family set-up; poverty and migration history (see Bond, 2002; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006; Cara, 2013). This intersectionality has the effect of changing the way that black and minority ethnic families perceive themselves, as well as how they are treated by others. The implication for this study, and indeed for research is that the enormous variations make it unrealistic to explore issues in relation to black and minority ethnic groups, as a whole.

Conversely, focusing on differences between minority ethnic groups does not address current trends in social demographics; especially those that are a result of mixed relationships (McLoyd et al, 2000; Owen, 2005; Phoenix and Husain, 2007). As Brubaker (1996) pointed out, ethnicity is not just a historically formed social construct. Rather, it is perhaps best seen as a “*modern transformation of ancient memories and recent mobilisations of authentic and artificial group feelings*” (p. 15).

Given current trends in globalisation and migration, it has become increasingly necessary for social workers assessing parenting competence to be able to consider developmental theories and evidence-based programs with sensitivity to variations in parenting beliefs, and practices. Especially when evaluating how culturally defined parenting practices impact on children’s outcomes. Indeed, one of the key themes highlighted throughout the discussions in this chapter is the role that belief systems associated with ethnic backgrounds shape parenting (Modood et al, 2001; Bond, 2002; Barlow et al, 2004; Barn, 2006; O’Connor and Scott, 2007).

3.5 Theories of Understanding Ethnicity

Theories of ethnicity offer a way of beginning to understand the nature of ethnicity in terms of how it is constructed and how ethnic affiliations or identifications are determined. There are several theories of ethnicity, but they are all grouped into three schools of thought: primordialism; constructionism and instrumentalism. It is not within the scope of this thesis to fully explore the central ideas and arguments of these three paradigms. However, a summary of the theories is provided. A useful point to make from the onset is that these schools of thoughts are ideal types and specific theories do not necessarily sit perfectly within one school of thought. That is, although most theories tend to have an intrinsic view that leans them more closely to a specific school of thought, the ideas may fit in more than one school of thought.

For purposes of this research, the focus is on how theories of ethnicity help us understand the influence that culture and ethnicity have on individuals and how this is reflected in parenting practices. Cashmere (2004)'s conceptualisation of ethnicity is helpful here as he asserts that the distinct characteristics that separate one ethnicity from another are passed on from generation to generation through the way children are parented. These characteristics include aspects such as language, myths, beliefs and traditions. Where the distinctions are hard to see (e.g., in the case of different tribes from the same countries) it is these characteristics that distinguish them. However, this does not address the transactional nature of ethnicity. This transactional nature means that as people migrate, intermarry and assimilate they develop new world views that influence their parenting practices as they adapt to new ways of socialising their children.

3.5.1 Primordial Theory and Parenting

Originally coined by Edward Shils in the 1950s, primordialism was later developed by Clifford Geertz, Joshau Fishman and Pierre Van den Berghe (Smith, 1998). It explains ethnicity as:

1. An ascribed identity inherited from one's ancestry;
2. Because of an inherited ancestry, the members of an ethnic group have the same geographical demarcation;
3. Shared ancestry and geographical demarcation also mean that ethnicity is static, i.e., one cannot change one's ancestry or geographical origin.

Primordialism places emphasis on the view that ethnicity is determined by biological and cultural origins and argues that ethnicity is sustained by primordial bonds (Geertz, 1996; Van den Berghe, 1981) that often mean that people from the same ethnic group hold similar notions about aspects such as gender, sexuality and race.

Within the primordial paradigm there are two perspectives that are relevant for this study: the first is the *culturalist* perspective which places emphasis on the importance of a common culture in determining membership to any given ethnic group. This perspective espouses the view that even in the absence of common ancestry, ethnic identity is determined by common culture i.e., where the group shares a common language, a religion and norms. The implication here is that groups of people from the same country can be categorised as sharing the same ethnic identity even if they do not have the same biological bonds. The common language, cultural norms and beliefs and, quite often, a common religion, often mean that they socialise their children in similar ways. This has been shown to ring true in studies that explore how ethnic

minority groups socialise their children (see for example, Phinney and Chavira, 1995; Stewart and Bond, 2002).

The second perspective of primordialism emphasises the importance of sociobiological factors in determining ethnicity. Proponents of this perspective (e.g., Van den Berghe, 1981; Smith, 1996) argue that ethnic affiliation is rooted in the nuclear family and is an extension of kinship. Consequently, ethnic identity develops and persists because of the ancestral bond that families from the same ethnic background share. The inference to be drawn from this perspective, in terms of parenting, is that parents from the same ethnic group will broadly parent in similar ways because they seek to socialise their children according to the shared ties, memories and identities they hold about their ancestry. Indeed some (e.g., Cornell and Hartmann, 1998; Chandra, 2008; Bayar, 2009) have suggested that primordialism explains ethnic phenomenon better because ethnic identities persist even in societies where the ethnic group is the minority.

Both perspectives of primordialism advance explanations that suggest that ethnicity is based on the sentimental attachment that individuals have to their ancestry. But, while it must be acknowledged that ethnicity requires some form of common origin the theory does not explain why individual perceptions of ethnic identity change or why new ethnic identities are formed. Critics of primordialism assert that this position is untenable because it has limited empirical support (Eller and Coughlan, 1993; Brubaker, 1996). Eller and Coughlan (1993) go on to point out that ethnic groups are not socially passive unchanging entities; they are shaped by economic and scientific changes. Eller and Coughlan's view is reflected in early studies of parenting within

minority ethnic groups which highlight the influence of socioeconomic factors on parenting practices (see for example, Pollak, 1972; Rutter et al, 1975; Pollack 1979; Phoenix, 1987; Coll et al, 1995; McLoyd et al, 2000; Demo and Cox, 2000).

What the above studies suggest is that common ancestry is important insofar as it tells us about families' backgrounds. But this does not imply that common origins are the sole determinants of ethnic affiliation. In terms of understanding parenting within black and minority ethnic families, this goes some way in explaining the differences within ethnic groups. It does not explain how the parenting beliefs and practices of black and minority ethnic parents impact children's outcomes. The constructionist school of thought takes a different focus and explains differences within ethnic groups by advancing the argument that ethnicity is a socially constructed and flexible phenomenon.

3.5.2 Constructionist Theory and Parenting

In addition to the arguments that ethnicity is socially constructed and dynamic, the constructionist theory also asserts that ethnicity is determined by reaction to changing social environments. This view is widely known to have first been advanced by Max Weber who argued that historical and social circumstances coalesce to form a group marker that differentiates communities (Stone, 2003). At the same time, he advanced the point that shared belief in common descent does not of itself constitute a group. Albeit, he does not offer an analysis on why physical and cultural differences are used to mobilise collective action within groups from the same ethnic background. Nevertheless, the constructionist school of thought offers several perspectives.

Yancey et al (1976), for example, proposed what they referred to as an '*emergent ethnicity*' perspective. Their perspective suggests that ethnicity is shaped by structural conditions closely associated with the industrial revolution and can be linked to the positions that different groups within it took. In their conceptualisation, of ethnicity, they propose that as industries developed, groups of individuals with different occupational skills were drawn together along the lines of similarity in lifestyles, work relationships, class interests and transportation needs. This perspective down plays the impact of cultural heritage in favour of structural conditioning as an explanation for similarities in the practices and behaviours of people from the same ethnic backgrounds. In other words, the premise of Yancey and his colleagues' argument is that ethnic groups tend to have more in common with neighbouring ethnicities because of social integration.

In some ways, Yancey et al's (1976) perspective on '*emergent ethnicity*' is a helpful conceptualisation when working with parents from a similar ethnic background. This is because it suggests that culture emerges when information about parenting is transmitted socially through social learning mechanisms. Such a perspective allows child care workers to group multiple ethnicities. The problem with this approach is that ethnic groups are not entirely socially constructed. In the main, they have changeable rules the boundaries of which are recognised by the members of the group. These boundaries differ from one ethnic group to another. For example, in Uganda, my country of origin, cultural and ethnic identity is reflected within geographical regions occupied by several tribes that have subtle differences that distinguish one tribal unit from another.

To the outsider, the tribes are similar and socially integrated. But, within the tribes, there are overt cultural differences that influence how the tribal units sanction and reward different forms of behaviour, including parenting. For example, within the Bakonjo tribe, which is the tribe of my ancestry, the Bamba and Bafumbira share the same language, cultural identity and largely similar practices. However, there are important cultural differences between the Bamba and Bafumbira. Both are patriarchal communities but the Bafumbira see girls as fully mature and ready for marriage at twelve years old while the Bamba see them as part of the family workforce to be held onto for the right bride price. It would, therefore be simplistic to suggest that geographical and social integration are the critical factors in sustaining ethnic diversity. This is because overt institutional forms do not constitute the cultural features that definitively distinguish an ethnic group. Rather, overt forms are determined by aspects of ecological as well as transmitted culture.

A helpful way of reconciling these differences is to approach the influence of ethnicity on parenting by taking Fredrick Barth's argument that ethnicity:

"... entails social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life stories [...] The features which are taken into account are not the sum of the objective differences but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant". (Barth, 1969, pp. 10, 14).

In terms of assessing the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents, this allows child welfare workers to focus on the values that individual parents hold to be important when socialising their children.

Sarna (1978) proposes another constructivist theory, the theory of *ethnicization*. Basing his study in immigrants in America, he contrasted the fragmented nature of immigrant groups arriving in America to the social and cultural unities they formed years later and proposed that ethnicity is created from ascription and adversity. He argued that ethnicity and culture is ascribed to groups by outsiders such as government departments, religious organisations, the media and other immigrants. He advances the view that culture is created through the adversity that members of a group face as they confront prejudice, racism, and discrimination. The adversity forces them to unite and create group identity and solidarity. The limitation of this perspective is that in locating ethnic identity to the larger society, it gives more credence to the effects of outside forces and understates the active role of ethnic groups in shaping their identities.

3.5.3 Instrumentalist Theory and Parenting

Instrumentalism, like constructionist theory gives a significant degree credence to outside forces. At the core of instrumentalist theory is the notion that things that do not manifest in physical form or are not observed cannot reveal anything about what is observable. In other words, instrumentalists argue that it is not possible to make meaningful assertions about things such as ethnicity that cannot be observed. This is because non-observable objects are neither true nor false (Schiffman, 1998| Okasha, 2002) and can only acquire meaning by being associated with what can be observed (Torretti, 1999; Okahsa, 2002). Specific to the current study, instrumentalism advances the idea that culture and ethnicity is neither inherent in human nature nor intrinsically valuable (see Schelling, 1963; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004).

Indeed, basing their ideas on ethnic conflict, instrumentalist commentators such as (Bates, 1983; Fearon and Laitin, 1996; Chandra, 2004) posit that ethnicity simply masks economic or political interests and should be understood as a tool for gaining political power or drawing resources from the state. Fearon and Laitin (1996) for example, suggest that ethnic groups are merely information networks in which group members police each other. They assert that ethnicity is not derived from an intense form of group attachment, rather it is best conceptualised as a communication and information device. The implication is that ethnic groups' reasons for doing things are motivated by the economic or political ambitions of the leaders within the group. The issue with this perspective is that it glosses over the fact that people live in a world of meaning. It is in the context of a world of meaning that parents seek to socialise their children.

For social workers assessing the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents, understanding parents' worlds of meaning implies that any coherent notion of what parents want to achieve for and with their children must be considered within the context of their cultural world. Professor Judith Suissa, an academic in philosophy and education, eloquently discusses the influence of instrumentalism in her article on notions of 'good' parenting. According to Professor Suissa, instrumentalist ideals are implicit in scientific accounts of parenting that see parents as responsible for creating a certain kind of child. But, she argues, the scientific language of measurable outcomes obscures the process of parenting. She explains that instrumentalist approaches to parenting posit 'outcomes' or goals such as 'wellbeing' and 'resilience' as empirically measurable, yet they are neither neutral nor empirically measurable.

Rather, “*they are reactions to the kind of values, beliefs and ethical commitments that form part of parents’ ongoing interactions with their children*” (Suissa, 2014, pg. 121).

As stated earlier, it is not within the scope of the discussions of this chapter to explore the different perspectives of theories of ethnicity in detail. What the summary provided here indicates is that whilst theories of ethnicity help us understand how ethnic identities are formed and sustained, analysis of the different schools of thought leads to the conclusion that ethnicity is an elusive and relative concept. As Henry and Cobat (1996) observe, ethnicity involves passions, emotions, imaginations, memories and ways of perceiving the world that are passed on in ways that “*are so thick with life that they lie beyond the power of consciousness, let alone of verbal and analytic reasoning*” (p. xvii).

But, what the literature also shows is that ethnic and cultural identification has become more important as globalisation and modernisation increase. This, in part, is because modernisation trends, such as media influence, urbanisation, mass education and new occupations create a need for primordial identification. Additionally, ethnic diversity within many cosmopolitan communities makes it necessary to understand why groups of people, with real or putative common ancestry, memories and a cultural focus behave in ways that are different from the wider society in which they live.

Conversely, instrumentalists and constructionists who conceptualise ethnicity as the construct of power, authority, legitimisation and dominion suggest that ethnicity carries an adversarial tone that attracts liberals and radicals but does not disturb the conservatives because it does not raise the crucial problem of money and power.

These different conceptualisations of ethnicity offer a way of beginning to understand how culture and ethnicity influence the behaviour of black and minority ethnic parents.

It is important to add here that there are other, no less valid, theories and models of conceptualising ethnicity that focus on the construction of culture through aggregate behaviour and group members' cognition (e.g., acculturation). The theories I have summarised here are an attempt to highlight the complexity of understanding ethnicity, rather than to deny the value and contribution of other conceptualisations. Indeed, it is acknowledged that ethnic and cultural identity processes unfold simultaneously. The acculturation process, for example, helps us recognise that cultural formation is bidimensional (Berry, 2005). That is, that on the one hand, it is through institutions, rituals, socialisation practices and the modelling of interactions that culture influences individuals' behaviour. Conversely culture is also constructed, perpetuated and modified by the actions of and beliefs of individuals.

3.5.4 *Collectivist and Individualist cultures*

In addition to theories of ethnicity, the literature also suggests that diverse cultural approaches to parenting are perhaps better understood in terms of interconnectedness within communities. The concept suggests that it is the level of interconnectedness within a cultural group that determines how individuals will respond to social situations (Herman and Kempen, 1998; Held et al, 1999). Interconnected is espoused as the extent to which individuals are intricately linked to produce cultural conformity and acceptance (Gilmore, 1990; McPhee et al, 1996; Herman et al, 1998; Tiandis, 2001; Fenton, 2003). Fenton (2003), for example,

asserts that interconnectedness pervades cultures and influences behaviour in ways that define communities.

Within the literature, community interconnectedness is typically divided into two categories: collectivist and individualist. Collectivist cultures, such as those of the participant parents interviewed in this project, are described as closely connected so that cultural values and norms are perpetuated within individual families to form complex group identity. They emphasise interdependence, family and collective group goals above individual needs or achievements. Individualist cultures such as those of Western countries, including the United Kingdom, are described as cultures in which individuals see each other as only loosely linked. They emphasise independence and personal achievements over collective group interests and, in the process foster a strong sense of competition (Triandis, 2001; Huff and Kelley, 2003). This, in part, can be associated with individuals typically assessing the benefits of continuing relationships with others.

3.6 The Link Between Ethnicity and Parenting

The myriad explanations of how ethnicity shapes behaviour, make it necessary to establish a clear understanding of the link between ethnicity and parenting. For example, parenting studies suggest that the variability in parenting practices within and across ethnic groups is associated with the relative importance that parents attach to an independent or interdependent cultural framework (Harwood et al, 2002; Greenfield et al, 2003). Within the independent framework, parenting practices focus on fostering emotional independence while an interdependent cultural framework emphasises the fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other

(Ferguson and Zimmerman, 2005). The reality, as Leyendecker et al (2005) observe, is that both frameworks coexist in all ethnic communities and overlap, albeit with differing emphasis.

Although studies on culture and ethnicity have contributed substantially to our understanding of the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents, they tend to give the impression that parenting practices, especially for infants, vary very little across cultures. Where differences are highlighted (e.g., LeVine, 1994; Hewlett et al, 1998) the findings tend to be based on short studies and therefore preclude evaluations of the ways in which context might influence parent-child interactions with other cultures, as well as within cultures.

For example, Hewlett et al's (1998) study of the parenting practices of the Aka and Ngandu tribes of the Central African Republic found that although the Aka and Ngandu share the same ethnic and cultural belief systems and are regularly exposed to each other, they had distinct parenting approaches. Looking specifically at how the tribes approach the parenting of children aged three to ten-months old, the study observed forty-one Aka and forty Ngandu children. Their results showed that while the Aka responded to children's distress by soothing and the child, the Ngandu left the child to cry. The researchers suggest that the differences in the parenting approach might be explained in terms of the hazards within the community. That is, that there were more hazards within the hunter-gather Aka tribe compared to the farming Ngandu tribe. However, this does not fully explain why parenting behaviour remains relatively unaltered even when hazards no longer exist.

Cross cultural studies of parenting (e.g., Dixon et al, 1981; Super et al, 2007; Carra et al, 2013) suggest that while parenting is linked to distinct cultural goals with most Western cultures seeking to promote independence and autonomy whereas non-Western cultures seek to promote group-oriented tendencies, parenting practices can vary significantly even within cultures. This raises questions about whether parenting practices are influenced by cultural ideology (Super et al, 2007) or practical necessity (LeVine, 1994, Keller et al, 2005). There is some convergence within the literature that because of the relatively high intergenerational and gender egalitarianism within black and minority ethnic cultures, they tend to approach parenting in ways that are similar whilst being distinctly different from Western parenting approaches.

The literature also highlights the empirical complexity of any purported causal link between culture, ethnicity and parenting practices. This has a bearing on this study in that although the study seeks to understand how culture and ethnicity influence the parenting practices of black and ethnic minority parents, consideration must be given to the fact that parenting is influenced by multiple factors including poverty, education, community resources and social policy. As communities integrate, the socialisation contexts change and affect parenting. To understand parenting in the context of integration requires a comparative element to research. This study, therefore, also carries a comparative element.

By comparing conceptualisations about parenting within black and minority ethnic families with the conceptions that White-British parents hold about parenting, we can begin to explore whether evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents needs to take a different approach. But as I have indicated in

chapter two, the dearth of research in this area calls for a cautious approach when making generalisations about findings. Furthermore, the challenge is that parents all over the world hold specific beliefs about how children develop (Richman et al, 1992; Littlechild, 2012; Greenfield and Cooking, 2014) and how they should be socialised to become competent members of the communities within which they live (Steward et al 1999; Harkness et al, 2000; Keller et al, 2005). Thus, it becomes necessary to also consider how black and minority ethnic parents approach parenting practices in their countries of origin.

Keller et al's (2005) study on the conception of parenting in West African Nso and Northern German women offers helpful insights. Drawing from a sample of forty-six Northern German women and thirty-nine West African women, Keller and her colleagues observed ten Nso and ten German women. They found that for both sets of women, ideas about parenting were discussed as related to cultural goals and reflecting the conscious nature of parenting as a shared cultural activity. Similar findings are espoused from studies of parenting in India (Kurtz, 1992; Seraswathi and Pai, 1997; Jambunathan and Counselman, 2002; Garjet et al, 2005; Tuli, 2012; Raj and Raval, 2013); Pakistan (Zaman, 2014; Batool and Mumtaz, 2015); Poland (Dwary and Achoui, 2010; Kmita, 2015) and China (Chao, 2000; Chen et al, 2010). Keller et al (2005) espouse this as *“shared cultural common-sense conceptions that demonstrate that the parenting goals and practices are deliberate moral judgements of a particular society at a particular moment in history”* (p. 179).

In general terms, our understanding of parenting behaviour is perhaps best traced back to the development of contextual and ecological theories such as

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Theory and Developmental Contextualism (Gotlieb, 1998; Lerner, 1998; Thelen and Smith, 1998). These theories explained how internal characteristics such as personality, health status, developmental stage and temperament interact with external influence such as parenting, neighbourhood and other societal factors to shape human behaviour. Based in a systems approach, the ecological theory and developmental contextualism represent our earliest understanding of the influence that culture and ethnicity have on parenting behaviour.

The ecological construction places culture and ethnicity in the outer concentric circles of influence. This suggests that culture and ethnicity only have an indirect influence on parenting practices. However, the dynamic interactions between parents and their social-cultural contexts means that as they experience culture, it becomes a personal construct that has a proximal rather than a distant influence on their parenting practices. As Suissa (2014) asserts, being a parent entails constantly evaluating the extent to which one prepares their child for the social-cultural environment in which they live and should not be reduced to an instrumentalist discourse on outcomes. In her view, parenting comprises a moral aspect that should also be considered when evaluating parenting competence.

In the context of the focus of this thesis, it could be argued that the moral aspect of parenting implies that although social change has significantly altered the social ecology of the United Kingdom, the core concepts sustaining many black and minority ethnic family systems have not changed significantly. Interdependence and collectivist ideals are still the main tenets of many black and minority ethnic family systems (Sarna, 1978; Keller et al, 2005). This is not to suggest that black and minority ethnic

parents do not adjust their parenting approaches. Indeed, studies of the parenting practices of migrant families in Western cultures advance the point that the confrontations and translations between Western and minority ethnic cultural practices produce new parenting strategies that are qualitatively different from those found in the migrants' original communities and the host communities (see Cohen, 1969, 1974; Murry et al, 2001; Leyendecker et al, 2005; Quintana et al, 2006).

3.7 Ethnicity and Parenting Styles

As detailed in the earlier chapter to parenting, Diana Baumrind's parenting styles is arguably one of the most commonly used and most robust approach to studying how parents influence their children's social competence and development. In general, parenting styles have been found to predict child outcomes. However, there is continued debate about their universal applicability. As aforementioned, a common criticism of parenting styles is that the parenting practices of White middle-class parents are actively promoted as normative parenting behaviour. This criticism is reflected in some studies that have been conducted on parenting styles in different ethnicities. For example, authoritative parenting, which is seen as the most successful and ideal style of parenting was found to be most common in White, two-parent middle class families of European decent but did not appear to produce the same outcomes for African and Asian children (Gonzales et al, 1996; Weiss and Schwarz, 1996; Darling, 1999).

Parenting style categories have been used in much of the research on parenting, including parenting in minority ethnic families. This has generated interesting debates. For example, in her study of Chinese American and European American parents,

Chao (1994) argues that parenting styles can be inaccurate and ethnocentric when explaining the values that are important to ethnic minority parents. Lindahl and Malik (1999) draw distinctions between hierarchical and authoritarian parenting styles to express a similar view. They suggest that hierarchical parenting is a more useful concept when studying families where there are strong traditions of collectivist values. Stewart and Bond (2002) also weigh in on Chao's argument and suggest that parenting styles should be organised in dimensions and scales so that component parts such as warmth, responsiveness and regulation can be measured to give a more relevant assessment of parenting within minority ethnic groups. The problem is that while there is general agreement about the component parts that should be included, there is no consensus on how they should be organised.

Phoenix and Husain (2006) build on Stewart and Bond's suggestion further by pointing out that even then, scales can have similar names but be used in different ways and with different meanings. Uniformity is important because, as Whiteside-Mansell et al (2001) point out, unless there is compatibility "*what appears to be group differences could be a result of assessment tools not capturing the same construct across ethnic groups*" (p. 768). This also has implications for research in that the differences in findings may be associated with instruments measuring different constructs in the various groups studied rather than indicating variation based on the same constructs.

Debates about which dimensions of parenting should be considered when studying the parenting styles of parents from minority ethnic groups have also led to researcher drawing distinctions between parenting 'style' and parenting 'practice'. Darling and Steinberg (1993) argue that this is important if we are to begin to minority ethnic groups

socialise their children. They go on to define parenting practices as the specific behaviours that parents use to socialise their children and parenting style as the emotional climate in which parents raise their children. Stewart and Bond (2002) share a similar view and suggest that distinguishing parenting practice from parenting styles makes it easier to research hitherto understudied minority ethnic groups.

In some ways, there are clear advantages to approaching the assessment of black and minority ethnic parenting with this distinction. Not least because, as Kotchick and Forehand (2002) point out, contextual factors play a key part in determining parenting. Additionally, research on parenting in black and minority ethnic groups is sparse and as Phoenix and Husain (2006) observe, not always as methodologically robust as studies of parenting of White ethnic groups. Nevertheless, parenting styles and parenting practices are both necessary when assessing parenting competence because it is through this combination that core belief systems can be identified.

Featherstone et al (2014) caution social workers about the risk of developing stereotypes about the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents. Featherstone and colleagues suggest that social workers who fail to evaluate the social context of parenting perpetuate disadvantage by creating an atmosphere of defensive practice which disempowers families. They advocate for a practice approach that evaluates relational identities within social contexts when appraising parenting competence. Their position reflects the findings of studies that highlight variations about how different belief systems influence parenting styles within and across ethnic groups (see for example Gonzales et al, 1996; Super and Harness, 1997; Darling, 1999).

Researchers attribute differences in parenting styles to the goals, aspirations and values that parents hold for their children (Stevenson et al, 1990; Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Wentzel, 1998; Peterson and Hann, 1999; Quah, 2003; Spera, 2005). For example, for a parent whose belief system prioritises behaviour over education, it will be much more important to them that the child behaves in a manner that they find acceptable, regardless of their educational achievements.

As aforementioned, although belief systems are at the core of parents' motivation when socialising their children, it is also important to bear in mind that parenting and parent-child relationships are constantly evolving. This adds to the complication of assessing parenting practices. Some commentators have suggested that with increased globalisation and migration, families across the world have similar expectations of children i.e., to develop the social competence and skills needed to successfully navigate through life within multicultural communities and to raise successful offspring (Roopnarine and Gielen, 2005). Consequently, parenting tendencies will universally range from autocratic methods of control and assertion of power to relaxed reciprocal parenting.

The impact of globalisation and migration is perhaps undeniable in certain cognitive and behavioural aspects of life such as in language development, but it does not hold true across all aspects of socialisation. Different ethnic groups attach different meanings to the same parenting behaviour. For example, Kotchick and Forehand (2002) explain that parenting practices that may appear to the outsider as being restrictive and lacking in maternal warmth towards children are necessary in dangerous and impoverished neighbourhoods. Similarly, a study by Brody et al (2002)

found that authoritarian parenting style correlated to positive emotional, behavioural, educational and social outcomes in African American children, but these outcomes were not reflected in children from White backgrounds.

For the purposes of this study, the theories and concepts summarised above help conceptualise what makes one group of people different from another. The view adopted in this study is that ethnic identification and categories are socially constructed, vary widely and ethnic group members have little control over of their group membership. As such, there can be no universal or absolute metanarrative to explain how culture and ethnicity influences the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents. This is because concepts and theories of ethnicity have a narrow focus which consequently offers a limited understanding of how ethnic and cultural identity influences parenting.

Therefore, the position taken in this study is that the influence that culture and ethnicity have on the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents is relative to each parents' perception and consideration. In fact, this view influenced the research methodology selected for this study. In other words, from the onset, I was mindful that each participant's narrative would draw on preferred frames of reference and have its own truth, thus offering nuanced understanding of culturally informed parenting scripts. That is, one that is about identifying the characteristics that make black and minority groups' behaviour to be considered as deviation and majority group behaviour as the norm that is typical of a country.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on culture and ethnicity in the context of its influence on the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents. The chapter builds on the discussions in chapter two which highlight culture and ethnicity as one of the significant components of the social phenomenon that influence parenting practices. As a starting point for understanding and evaluating ethnic and cultural behaviour, I have defined the key term ethnicity and its associated terms such as race, culture and religion. Additionally, the discussions in this chapter have explored how ethnicity is constructed and linked ethnicity to parenting practices – both within countries of origin relevant to Africa as well as from parenting studies of black and minority ethnic communities living in Western countries.

Although there is an implicit assumption within theories of ethnicity that culture is a neutral, empirical and descriptive construct aimed at achieving a desired outcome, the overall convergence in the literature is towards a view that culture is both conditioning and conditions. Whilst some aspects of parenting are shown to vary across cultures, there are many similarities. However, the construction of parenting behaviour within minority ethnic groups is far more complex. Empirical evidence suggests that black and minority ethnic groups collectively construct and perpetuate the realities in which they live through socialisation, interaction and language. But there is also a bidimensional aspect to culture formation. As black and minority ethnic parents integrate within host countries, they acquire the beliefs and practices of host nations without necessarily discarding the beliefs of their original cultures.

Studies that have explored parenting practices in Africa suggest that parenting is linked to distinct cultural goals (Super and Harkness, 1981; LeVine, 1994; Hewlett et al, 1998) and that cultural parenting scripts are relatively stable, regardless of the settings. Conversely, studies on the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents in Western cultures (Amato and Fowler, 2002; Super et al, 2007; Carra et al, 2013) suggest that changes in the social contexts can contribute to rifts within families as new environments create situations in which what is taught in the family is incompatible with what is emphasised in the community. This bidimensional aspect to culture formation results in the creation of what Carra et al (2013) refer to as blended solutions in parenting strategies. For example, socialising children to achieve interdependent as well as dependent goals.

The inference that we can draw from the literature on ethnicity and parenting is that differences in cultural expectations for the timing of developmental milestones are the catalyst for the attention that black and minority ethnic parents give to socialisation approaches. In other words, ethnicity and culture provides group strategies for collecting, organising and interpreting the social world so that even if the social context changes, socialisation goals remain relatively unchanged. The challenge for social workers evaluating parenting competence is that in the absence of a universally accepted standard of parenting, evaluations of parenting competence can become focused on children's outcomes. Given the gravity of the decisions for which social workers' assessments of parenting competence is used, there is a need for a social policy position that sets out the potentially relevant areas for determining acceptable standards of parenting.

Chapter 4 – Social Policy

4.1 Introductions

In this chapter, I discuss the policies that shape child safeguarding practice in the United Kingdom and examine their impact on how social workers evaluate the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. The key terms, *parenting*, *parenting capacity* and *ethnicity* have been defined in earlier chapters. Therefore, I begin the discussions in this chapter by providing a brief history of the development of child welfare policies. My aim in starting with the history is to locate child welfare policies and practice in the wider British society and highlight the complexities and tensions that exist when applying child welfare policies to work with black and minority ethnic families. The policy context is also relevant because parenting competence evaluations are conducted within a policy framework that has undergone changes over time. Policy helps define the conditions which constitute ‘poor’ parenting and aids social workers in identifying parenting that causes concern (Lennings, 2002; White, 2005; Choate, 2009; Parton 2010; Crawford, 2011).

The chapter is divided into three parts. Part one provides a summary of the social policy context within which parenting competence evaluations are conducted. Section two then summarises the history of the development of child welfare policies in the United Kingdom. The reason for this, as aforementioned, is to contextualise the development of the policies that inform current practice in social work assessments. Part three discusses how social policy has framed social work practice. This includes discussions about the challenges and direction of child welfare policies with reference to how they affect evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents.

4.2 Overview of the Policy Context of Assessment

In chapter two, I stated that parenting is context driven in that it is influenced by sociological and psychosocial factors within families' environments. This makes it necessary for parenting competence evaluations to take environmental factors, including culture and ethnicity into consideration. However, as I went on to explain in Chapter three, there is a dearth of UK studies that focus on understanding how culture and ethnicity influence parenting. Studies that have explored the influence of culture and ethnicity on parenting generate considerable debate within the literature about the effectiveness of parenting competence evaluations; especially when evaluating black and minority ethnic parents (see for example Dominelli et al, 2001; Choate, 2009; Bhatti-Sinclair, 2011; Chimba et al, 2012).

In their study of the effects of child protection interventions on black and minority ethnic children, Chimba et al (2012), reviewed forty-one case files and interviewed eight families and eight social workers. Their findings suggested that when evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents, social workers are often ambivalent about which aspects of parenting to appraise. This results in significant inconsistencies and in interventions that are not always timely or adequate. Bhatti-Sinclair (2011), herself a social work academic, expresses similar observations and suggests that there is a causal link between social workers' lack of knowledge about how to work with black and minority ethnic families and the diminishing emphasis on learning about race and ethnicity in qualifying social work education and training courses over time. In her view, social work training and education needs to incorporate learning about race and ethnicity to enhance practitioners' confidence about working with diversity.

But, as policy commentators (e.g., Cameron et al, 2007; Parton, 2010, 2014; Nadan et al, 2015) have argued, it is social policy that regulates how social workers respond to social and moral arrangements to protect individual rights, family privacy and children's welfare. In other words, assessing parenting competence and ultimately intervening in family life is framed by how policy defines child maltreatment. For example, child protection-oriented policies tend to conceive maltreatment as an act that requires services to respond to protect children whereas service-oriented policies perceive maltreatment as a problem of family conflict or dysfunction that is triggered by social and psychological difficulties (Parton, 2014).

Social workers who approach assessment from a safeguarding mind-set tend to be more legalistic and adversarial whereas those who take a family service-oriented approach offer a therapeutic response to family need and therefore focus on assessing need. However, it is also important to point out that either approach is largely determined by organisational setting and culture, which is itself often a reflection of the political climate. For example, there is often intense political pressure following high profile child deaths (e.g., Jasmin Beckford; Victoria Climbié; Peter Connelly). Based on my own social worker experience and anecdotal evidence from work colleagues, this can influence decisions about thresholds of concern as well as eligibility for support. The associated constraints on social worker's time as well as poor staff morale coalesce to impact on the quality and effectiveness of assessments.

In terms of research, studies into assessment practice have generally focused on issues of child welfare and taken their lead from the way in which policy constructs

child maltreatment. Consequently, research tends to be divided into two main areas: studies that examine the process of assessment (e.g., Gibbons et al, 1995; Farmer and Owen, 1995; Cleaver and Freeman, 1995; Lennings, 2002; Taylor, 2006) and studies which examine the factors that influence assessment outcomes (e.g., Thoburn et al, 1995; Thomas and Cleaver, 2002; Cleaver and Walker, 2004; Millar and Corby, 2006; Platt, 2006). Whilst there is an increase in research converging around the effectiveness of social work assessments in general, the focus on aspects of culture and ethnicity in relation to assessment is arguably underexplored. What can be drawn from existing empirical evidence is that professionals evaluating parenting competence are still uncertain about how best to work with black and minority ethnic parents (Laming, 2003; Barns et al, 2006; Eades et al, 2007; Stevenson, 2007; Dutt and Phillips, 2010).

4.3 A History of Child Abuse Policy in England

The policy initiatives that shape social work with children and families can be traced back to the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act (1889). This act allowed the state to intervene in family matters for the first time. It also gave the police and inspectors of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) powers to investigate suspected cruelty to children. At this time, the language used in child welfare policy and practice was 'cruelty to children'. Consequently, policy implementation focused on investigating and punishing care givers for 'child cruelty' (Rogowski, 2015). The Act was amended in 1894 to recognise mental cruelty and allow children to give evidence in Court.

Commentators, (e.g., Ferguson, 2011) suggest that the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act (1889), also known as the children's charter, was the precursor of professional social work practice. It marked the beginning of state intervention in the way that children are cared for within the family home. The children's charter and its amendment in 1894 gave courts power to override father's rights over their children and introduced the welfare of the child as a principal determining factor in making decisions about a child's welfare. The legislation that followed the children's charter widened the areas in which the state could get involved in family matters. For example, the Children Act (1908) made sexual abuse within families a matter for the state rather than being an issue that was only dealt with by the clergy. It also introduced juvenile courts and the registration of foster parents.

The Children and Young People Act (1932) broadened the powers of juvenile Courts and introduced supervision orders for children who were deemed to be at risk. A year later, all child protection law was combined into a single piece of legislation. The key feature of safeguarding practice, between 1889 and 1945, was to prevent cruelty to children by prosecuting adults for the ill treatment of children. This focus gradually changed from punishing adults for child maltreatment to practice that was centred on interventions that sought to work with families to improve outcomes for children.

After the Second World War, local authority children's departments were formed and given greater responsibility for providing services to safeguard children's welfare under the auspices of the Children Act (1948). Until then, child welfare support was mainly provided by churches and voluntary organisations. The Children Act (1948) made it incumbent on local authorities to establish children's committees and appoint

children's officers. This brought the concept of the child's wellbeing to the fore of practice and focused interventions on keeping children within their families.

The Children and Young Persons Act (1963) gave local authorities powers and duties to "*make available such advice, assistance and guidance as may promote the welfare of children by diminishing the need for receiving children into or keep them in care*" (Children and Young Persons Act, 1963, S.1). These duties were extended in the Children and Young Persons Act (1969) which bolstered the concepts of care and control by making it possible for Courts to grant local authorities care orders for children who had committed criminal acts. Alongside this, the Act introduced measures for local authorities to share parental responsibility with children's parents.

Between the 1960 and the early 1970s, the language used to describe child maltreatment in policy and practice had moved from 'cruelty to children' to 'battered child syndrome'. The term 'battered child syndrome' was coined by Henry Kemp and his colleagues who described it as "*a clinical condition in young children who have received serious physical abuse*" (Kemp et al, 1962, cited in Krugman and Korbin, 2013 p.23). The term came at a time when children's rights within the family setting were only beginning to be recognised. The work of Kemp and his colleagues was instrumental in increasing awareness of child abuse within the family home. It highlighted that child abuse was a regular and recurring aspect of family life and was not confined to individuals with psychiatric problems as was thought at the time.

In the 1970s, the term 'battered child syndrome' was replaced by non-accidental injury to children. At the same time, sexual and emotional abuse became recognised as

separate forms of abuse to children. Identifying separate categories of abuse also coincided with increasing concern about the 'drift' in planning for children's permanence. This led to the Local Authority Social Services Act (1970). The Act brought together the different areas of social work and consolidated local authority departments into social services departments.

The early 1970s was also a time in which there was a drive to achieve permanence for children in care. This stimulated the introduction of the Children Act (1975) and the Adoption Act (1976). The Children Act (1975) coincided with the implementation of area child protection committees which had been established a year earlier, following the death of Maria Colwell. These committees were designed to coordinate local efforts to safeguard children at risk.

By the 1980s, 'child abuse' had become the generic terms used to describe neglect, physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children. The 1980s was also a period characterised by a series of influential reports which examined the effectiveness of social services' interventions to protect children from harm. The most notable ones followed the child deaths of: Jasmine Beckford (1985); Kimberly Carlile and Tyra Henry (1987). These reports highlighted failures in partnership working between agencies and criticised social services for failing to effectively harmful environments and intervene to protect children from harm. The result was that social workers became wary of leaving children in potentially abusive environments.

In 1987, there was a wave of child sexual abuse diagnosis in Cleveland. This saw one-hundred-and-twenty-one children diagnosed by paediatricians as having been

sexually abused. The children were removed from their family homes and placed in local authority care. The Cleveland report (1988) that came following the children's placement in care, criticised social services and medical professionals for being over-zealous in diagnosing sexual abuse and intervening too hastily in the lives of families. Child welfare professionals were also blamed for failing to communicate amongst themselves and lacking proper understanding of each other's roles.

To address the communication failures highlighted in the Cleveland report, new policies and legislation were framed on the concept of partnership working. For example, new area committees were formed and expected to draw representation from all local agencies that had a role in safeguarding children. Additionally, specific guidance for partnership working was published under the title *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (1991). This guidance set out how professionals should work together to safeguard children in accordance with relevant legislation. The guidance was revised in 2006, 2010, 2013, 2015 and 2018.

The Cleveland report (1988) also argued that by intervening too hastily in family life, professionals were abusing parents' rights. This finding contributed to a shift towards policies that emphasised the importance of children being looked after within their natural families. The focus on partnership working had the broad aim of ensuring that professionals assessing parenting consulted with each other as part of the assessment process. In some ways, this marked the beginning of the concept of holistic assessment as a means of improving the quality and reliability of assessments.

The Children Act (1989) came into effect three years after the Cleveland report. The Act enshrined in law the right for children to be protected from abuse and exploitation and for inquiries to be made to ensure that their welfare is safeguarded. Parental rights were also built into the Act to ensure that only a Court could permanently sever contact between children and their parents, rather than this being the outcome of social work assessment. Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) continued to hold responsibility for investigating whether child protection procedures were correctly followed whenever a child death was suspected to have been caused by abuse.

The death of Victoria Climbié at the hands of her aunt and her aunt's male friend in 2000, led to the publication of the policy document, *Every Child Matters*. This followed an inquiry led by Lord Laming, which made more than one hundred recommendations for change in the way that child safeguarding practice was carried out by local authorities. The Inquiry highlighted the tendency of professionals assessing black and minority ethnic families to make assumptions about cultural parenting scripts that prevent them from conducting full assessments. In terms of highlighting the importance of issues of culture and ethnicity, the Inquiry pointed out that *cultural norms and modes of behaviour can vary considerably between communities and even between families so that it becomes meaningless to make generalisations about behavioural patterns* (Laming, 2003, p. 345).

Although Section 1 (3)(d) of the Children Act (1989) had already provided for issues of culture and ethnicity to be addressed through the welfare checklist, Lord Laming's Inquiry and the subsequent development of the Children Act (2004) was, arguably, the first time that policy explicitly acknowledged and confronted issues of culture and

ethnicity. The Inquiry had made it clear that it was important for professionals assessing parenting capacity to develop knowledge about different cultures to avoid potentially damaging the effectiveness of their assessments. But the main change in policy was that Area Child Protection Committees were then changed to Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) and given mandatory responsibility for child protection in their area. Further changes included incorporating the Child Protection Register into Child Protection Plans that specifies the category of abuse or likely abuse that a child may suffer and how it is to be managed by professionals.

The death of baby Peter Connelly in 2009 led to another Inquiry into child protection practice. This Inquiry was led by Professor Eileen Munro, who published her final report in 2011 (Munroe, 2011). While Professor Munro's Inquiry was still in progress the revised statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010) was released. When Professor Munro's report was finally published, it made fifteen recommendations that concentrated on the need to shift focus from prescriptive social work practice towards assessments that focused on identifying the needs the child. The theme on the importance of assessment continued to be central to child welfare policy and, in 2014, the Children and Families Act (2014) got royal assent to become law – its focus is on giving vulnerable children greater protection by changing the adoption system to allow for assessment of prospective adopters to be fast-tracked.

4.4 Social Policy and Parenting Competence Evaluations

Since 1948, the overarching aim of child welfare policies in England has been to reinforce the paramount interests of the child. Policy developments over the years, have moved the focus back and forth between protecting children from harm and

supporting families to ensure that they achieve their preferred outcomes (Parton, 2014). It could be argued that current policies strike the a balance between the two positions. Whilst I acknowledge that this might be open to debate, my observation as a practicing social worker, is that policies seek to protect children as well as to support families. This is reflected in the national guidance documents that social workers use as assessment tools. For example, the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (Department of Health, 1999) which is used alongside the *Working Together to Safeguard Children* to direct social workers to focus on the needs of vulnerable children to safeguard and promote their wellbeing.

The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families uses an ecological model which helps social workers to focus evaluations of parenting on children's developmental needs and parents' abilities to meet those needs within the family's unique environment and access to community resources. As an assessment tool, the framework is underpinned by research that provides the rationale for it. The research highlights the importance of an inclusive approach to assessing families (see Jack and Jordan, 1999; Department of Health, 2000; Horwarth, 2002; Ward and Rose, 2002; Jack and Gill, 2003; Aldgate et al, 2006). The framework was the main tool for assessment until new guidance was issued in the *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2018) guidance document.

With emphasis on assessing children's needs rather than on processes, the *Working Together to Safeguard children* (2018) guidance streamlined prior guidance and provides clarity about social workers' responsibilities regarding safeguarding children. There is no longer a requirement for local authorities to use the assessment

framework, but they must make clear what assessment tools they use in assessment. The guidance also maintains that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility.

Child safeguarding legislation, such as the Children Act (1989; 2004) direct assessments by defining when and at what level local authorities should intervene in family life. For example, the Children Act (1989) embeds the philosophy that the best place for a child is to be brought up in their natural family (Department of Health, 1991) and therefore directs local authorities to focus their assessments on identifying parents' strengths. The implication for practice is that assessments have to be directed towards evaluating need and risk, whilst also identifying resources that can be accessed to keep the family unit together. Such a focus helps social workers to avoid separating children from their families unless there is no possibility of securing adequate care within the child's natural family.

4.5 Assessment Thresholds

Reviews of the child protection system in the United Kingdom have continually highlighted the importance of early intervention in addressing families' difficulties before they become entrenched (see for example Allen, 2011; Munro, 2011). Research also bears out the importance of timely assessment and early intervention in families whilst also pointing out the challenges of identifying families that need early help (Statham and Smith, 2010).

Focusing on supporting families to remain together, has not meant that issues of abuse and harm no longer form part of parenting competence assessments. Indeed, social workers are still expected to evaluate parenting in terms of whether it is abusive

(s.47, The Children Act, 1989). Policy plays an important role here not only in categorising and defining what constitutes abuse or harm (s.31, Children At, 1989) but also in providing a conceptual framework that helps professionals to analyse families' strengths and weaknesses (HM Government, 2013). The aim of this is to identify whether families need support or the children are in need of protection. As Munro (1999) has previously argued, conceptual frameworks offer the benefit of structuring decision making and moderating reliance on professional judgement alone.

This is not to say that conceptual frameworks, including those derived from policy guidance, are without limitation. Barlow et al (2012) undertook a systematic review of many conceptual frameworks and found that although there were clear benefits, there was a need for most of them to be piloted further and validated within a UK setting. In other words, conceptual tools are not necessarily effective in assessing all family situations and their effective use with one group cannot be generalised to all social groups. Similarly, studies of the Integrated Children's System, suggest that practitioners found it to be too prescriptive and repetitive to the extent that it was incongruent with the practice they aspired to (Bell et al, 2007).

As one evaluates assessment processes, what seems clear is that in seeking to standardise assessment, policies and policy guidance such as the Assessment Framework, Common Assessment Framework, Working Together to Safeguard Children and Integrated Children's System prescribe how social workers should assess families. However, this, as Dalzell and Sawyer (2011) put it, has the potential to undermine practitioners' confidence and their ability to focus on families' individual circumstances. Although no longer relevant, the Integrated Children's System, for

example, drew interesting debate about increased micromanagement (Bell, 2007; White et al, 2010; Wasell, 2011) and the loss of the 'human' aspect from assessments (Hill and Shaw, 2011). The loss of the 'human' aspect that Hill and Shaw refer to contextualises the views expressed by the respondents in Bell and colleague's study. That is, that processes can become prescriptive tick-box exercise that do not reflect families' circumstances.

Initially heralded as a tool to modernise and unify hitherto disjointed processes, the Integrated Children's System drew fierce criticism about its efficacy. Researchers pointed out that in practice, the Integrated Children's System encouraged pre-mature categorisation and dangerously high case closures (Broadhurst et al, 2009; White et al, 2010). Professor Sue White and her colleagues, for example, conducted a study on five local authority in England and concluded that the Integrated Children's System encouraged rigid performance management regimes and centrally prescribed practice models that disrupted the professional task. They explained this to be associated with social work managers focusing on process and thus leading to unhelpfully speedy categorisations and rigidity in recording.

Focusing on process means that assessors are not always able to fully capture the needs of black and minority ethnic families. Social workers who focus on fulfilling process requirements fail to identify the impact of the underlying issues for black and minority ethnic parents (e.g., poverty, language, tradition, acculturation experiences) that influence parenting practices. At a more basic practice level, a focus on process is also likely to mean that social workers miss crucial messages when black and minority ethnic families communicate their views about parenting practices. The

communication aspect is important when assessing risk of harm to a child. This is reflected in the emphasis on effective communication highlighted in child welfare policy guidance and in review recommendations.

Those who criticise the effectiveness of assessment tools advance the argument that tools such as the assessment framework often lead to parents being treated as a homogeneous group (see for example, Laming, 2003; Chimba et al, 2012). This then results in social workers failing to fully engage with the cultural and ethnic issues that influence parenting in black and ethnic minority families (Owen and Farmer, 1996; Dominelli, 2001; Barn, 2006, Stevenson, 2007; Selwyn et al, 2010). Furthermore, the outcomes of assessments go on to recommend welfare and preventative services that are not always forthcoming for black and ethnic minority families or fail to meet their needs. Dominelli (2001), for example, suggests that social workers who fail to recognise that culture and ethnicity is only one dimension of identity, are likely to perpetuate oppressive practice by not engaging appropriately with the racialized nature of social relationships.

Commentators such as Parton (1996, 2014) and Houston (2014) espouse a different view to explain why there is variability in assessment outcomes. They suggest that part of the issue is that policy has moved back and forth between seeing parents as potentially dangerous and viewing them as abusive and therefore potentially treatable (Howe, 1992; Margolin, 1997; Woodcock, 2003; Kellett and Apps, 2009). In other words, policy moved back and forth between intervening to protect children from parents who are likely to cause them harm, to viewing abusive parents as needing

support services to address the issues that cause them to harm children: such as substance misuse, mental ill health, or poor repertoire of parenting skills.

What is noteworthy is that changes in policy focus, coupled with resource constraints and the challenges of analysing vast and often conflicting information gathered for assessment, contribute to assessments becoming increasingly prescribed (Bell et al, 2007; Broadhurst et al, 2009; Helm, 2010; Munro, 2011). However, if assessments of black and minority ethnic parents are to be meaningful, social workers should be aware of the challenges that parents face as they seek to safeguard and promote the welfare of their children. For example, empirical evidence suggests that environmental factors such as poverty and social exclusion disproportionately affect black and minority ethnic families (Barn, 2006; Owen and Statham, 2009; Bywaters, 2011) and can have a negative impact on parents' abilities to keep children safe from harm (Kiernan and Mensah, 2011; Gupta et al, 2016). Social workers' awareness of environmental factors affecting black and minority ethnic families is especially important if they are to achieve the aim of promoting the upbringing of children by their families (s17, The Children Act 1989).

Within the literature, there is debate that social workers face challenges in evaluating parenting because social work practice is itself influenced by a range of policies and guidance that influence their views about how to protect and promote positive outcomes for children. As Woodcock (2003) explains, parenting practices within each family are determined by the family's definition of what is acceptable parenting. The implication for practice is that assessments must be based on a clearly established minimum acceptable level of parenting. But there is no legal definition of what this

standard should be. In the absence of a clear legal definition, research offers what seems to be a generally accepted position. That is, that the minimum expectation should be based on Winnicott's (1973) concept of '*good enough*' parenting.

While the concept of '*good enough*' is itself is not contested, the standard of what '*good enough*' parenting looks like varies widely. Several factors including assessors' personal and professional experience influence how '*good enough*' is defined (Kellett and Apps, 2009). The complexity of determining what is good enough for children's development is made even more acute when parents and the professionals assessing parenting capacity have different views about what is important and why. A key example is the use of physical chastisement. Some black and ethnic minority parents hold strong views about using physical chastisement as a way of disciplining children. While it is still a common parenting practice in the United Kingdom (Heilmann et al, 2015), it is becoming increasingly controversial and less widely accepted.

Section 58 of the Children Act (2004), limits the use of the defence of reasonable punishment so that parents can no longer use it when charged with offences such as actual bodily harm or cruelty to a child. The point to make here is that professionals who hold strong views about physical chastisement being an inappropriate way to discipline children are likely to view parents who use it as being abusive. It is therefore likely that they will approach assessments with pre-conceived ideas about a family's ability to protect a child and thus miss crucial information for drawing balanced conclusions.

Heilmann et al's (2015) study reviewed international longitudinal research on the impact of physical punishment on children and their findings suggest that perceptions about the effectiveness of physical chastisement to discipline children have changed, partly as a result of changes in the law, but also because research continues to show that it can be harmful to children's health and development. Professionals who approach assessments without pre-conceived ideas about the use of physical chastisement are more likely to communicate the message identified by Heilmann and colleagues, as a way of educating families rather than making recommendations that families may find patronising and punitive.

Policy and legislation, therefore, play an important role in helping practitioners to evaluate parenting within the confines of what is acceptable in law. There is evidence to suggest that despite the wide range of parenting practices within communities, the concept of 'good enough' parenting is helpful in identifying aspects of parenting that reflect safe and acceptable care for children within the boundaries of legislation (Kellett and Apps, 2009). According to Kellett and Apps aspects of 'good enough' parenting are namely: parents' being able to meet their children's health and developmental needs; putting their children's needs first; providing routine and consistent care; and acknowledging problems and engaging with support services.

Apart from standardising assessment processes, policy also offers opportunities for transparency. For example, assessments, especially in cases where consideration is being given to removing children from their families, are necessarily conducted within the context of child welfare legislation. This is important because the recommendations that are made in such assessments must be congruent with the

legislative framework (Choate, 2009). The challenge is that reconciling policy with varied parenting practices is complex; often because family circumstances are ambiguous as parents tend to be suspicious of social workers' intentions.

Being able to identify which families need early help would require high volumes of assessments to be conducted. In any event, identifying families that need help early does not mean that they will necessarily receive in-depth assessment or early intervention. This is partly because thresholds for initiating assessment or accessing services vary widely between local authorities (Farmer et al, 2008; Broadhurst et al, 2010). Aside from the fact that it would not be practical to assess every family, research shows that high volumes of assessments result in delays in decisions making and/or poor-quality assessments. This, ultimately, leads to poor outcomes for children (Biehal, 2006; Selwyn et al, 2006; Ward et al, 2006; Beecham and Sinclair, 2007; Farmer et al, 2008). The solution seems to be in setting clearly defined thresholds for assessment.

Setting clearly defined thresholds for assessment is not without its issues. For example, where families have been known to social services for long periods, there is a risk that assessments can be based on 'fixed' ideas about the case rather than on evidence (Brandon et al, 2009; Farmer and Lutman, 2009). In such cases, professionals can easily miss accumulating concerns as thresholds for determining decisive action become difficult to identify (Daniel et al, 2009). But, the thresholds at which to initiate assessment offer a structured way of deciding when it is necessary to assess families.

What studies suggest is that the point at which thresholds are set is dependent on factors such as the information contained in a referral, organisational resources and assessors' skills (Biehal, 2005; Brandon et al, 2008; Sheppard, 2009). The criticism is that to manage limited resources, some local authorities set their thresholds too high, and in the process fail to identify families with significant problems and high levels of need. Research shows this to be especially so with cases involving child neglect and emotional abuse (Farmer et al, 2008, Brandon et al, 2009; Ward et al, 2010), which also tend to reflect the reasons why most black and minority ethnic children become known to welfare agencies (Chimba et al, 2012).

Policy seeks to address the issue of threshold being set too high by placing a duty on local authorities to assess any child in their area who is deemed to be in need or at risk of harm (s.17 Children Act, 1989). In practice, this is implemented through the Single Assessment process, which replaces the Initial and Core Assessment process. As aforementioned, the general idea is to ensure that families' needs are identified before they become entrenched. There is some suggestion from research that black and ethnic minority families may benefit from such timely assessment and early intervention (Barnado's, 2011; Royston and Rodrigues, 2013).

The issues is that recommendations that timely assessment and early intervention would benefit black and minority ethnic families tend to be based on studies that focus mainly on understanding local communities' access to children's centres rather than being specifically about assessment of black and minority ethnic families. In the absence of studies that specifically address how policy affects assessment of black and ethnic minority parents, these issues remain controversial in practice and in

academic circles. Further research is therefore needed to inform our understanding of the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations when appraising the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents.

4.6 Social Policy and Diversity

Child protection policy acknowledges the diverse needs that families have, as well as the diversity within the families that make up the population of England and Wales. As aforementioned, the threshold criteria contained in the Children Act (1989) for example, emphasises the need to consider a family's cultural background and their expressed views and preferences. The issue is that the child welfare policies in England and Wales reflect the overall culture and values of British society and how the society responds to issues of child maltreatment (Beishon et al, 1998; Hetherington, 2006; Cameron et al, 2007; Broadhurst et al, 2009). In an ethnically diverse population such as England, many families of black and minority ethnic origin perceive the values and parenting norms that underpin the way children are raised in Britain as different from those of their own cultures (Hatton et al, 2004; Chimba et al, 2012).

Debates into the success or otherwise of multiculturalism highlight some of the challenges involved in working with diversity. For example, while some commentators (e.g., Huntington, 1993; Beishon et al, 1998) highlight anxieties about the extent to which different ethnic groups follow paths that create strong minority ethnic identities, Parekh (2000) suggests that multiculturalism has succeeded in integrating diverse populations within a common framework. The challenge for social workers assessing parenting capacity is that families that maintain strong ethnic identities tend to

separate and alienate themselves from the wider society, making them hard to reach (Doherty et al, 2004). However, as Nandi and Platt (2013) put it, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that maintaining strong cultural or ethnic distinctiveness necessarily challenges national consensus.

Beishon et al (1998) argue that professionals sometimes see the lack of help-seeking behaviour from black and minority ethnic families as suggesting that they are resistant to the perceived values of UK liberalism. According to Dominelli (2000) such perspectives limit social workers' abilities to appropriately engage with issues of diversity. She argues that social workers whose views are rooted in universalism ignore the influence of race and ethnicity on social relations and the importance of diversity among the clients they work with. This can lead to assessments that do not accurately evaluate the needs of black and ethnic minority families.

But the issues of assessing the parenting capacity of black and minority ethnic parents go beyond a lack of help-seeking behaviour or the maintenance of ethnic distinctiveness. As Verkuyten (2007) puts it, identities are not necessarily binary or oppositional. Retaining some form of positive personal identity whilst also holding multiple identities at different levels of abstraction, is good for individuals' psychological wellbeing (Nandi and Platt, 2013). The challenge, as Broadhurst et al (2009) argue, is that child welfare policy is based on Western constructions of parenting. It is important to point out at this stage that the view that child welfare policies are based on Western constructions of parenting is central to this study. The implications for assessors is that if they seek to evaluate parenting competence

without understanding the cultural and ethnic influences of parenting in black and minority ethnic families, they risk being seen as perpetuating oppression.

As I explained in the section on assessment thresholds, child welfare policy has not fully addressed issues of ethnicity within parenting. This, in part, contributes to some of the controversy with which issues of culture and ethnicity are dealt with in social worker settings (Dominelli, 2011). Professor Lena Dominelli, a social work academic, advances an important point when she states that ethnicity is a contested and troubling category because it forms an aspect of identity which can become the basis of oppression. For example, social workers who base assessments on assumptions about cultural parenting scripts, as was the case when assessing Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003) can uncritically perpetuate stereotypes about cultural differences by viewing ethnicity based on observable characteristics. This can result in assessments that emphasise difference from the mainstream rather than fully evaluate families' needs.

Commentators (e.g., Gelfand and Fandetti, 1998; Dutt and Phillips, 2010) make the pertinent point that much of social work literature on ethnicity assumes a traditional view of cultural influences. That is, one that sees black and ethnic minority parenting as being influenced by cultures that have been brought to a new country. This can lead to reductionism and unhelpful generalisations or unexamined assumptions that the process of migration will either end in assimilation, in which case parents hold similar views as the majority population or culturally pluralist positions in which parents fail to understand professionals' child welfare concerns.

In addition to failing to address issues of ethnicity, child welfare policy does not define what is meant by '*competent*' or '*good enough*' parenting (Reupert et al, 2015). This creates uncertainty in gathering the appropriate information to help formulate evidence-based assessments (Crawford, 2011; Turney et al, 2011). Obtaining the right information is an integral first step in seeking to understand what the information means for the family being assessed and drawing conclusions about parents' abilities (Munro, 2008; Broadhurst et al, 2009; Holland, 2010). However, research suggests that the process of analysing information continues to be problematic in practice (Dalzell and Sawyer, 2007; Helm, 2010; White et al, 2010; Brown et al, 2011; Platt, 2011) and is especially difficult when assessing multifaceted and sometimes contradictory material (Turney et al, 2011).

Policy also attaches great importance to the child's voice being reflected in assessment. However, research indicates that social workers face difficulties in making and maintaining relationships with children. The reasons for this are varied and include children being concerned about the consequences of their disclosures – both to themselves and to their parents. This is not necessarily unique to black and minority ethnic families, but studies suggest that the fear of alienating themselves from their local communities and support networks can mean that children from black and minority ethnic families are reluctant to disclose abuse (Barn, 2006; Chimba et al, 2012). It is therefore important that social workers assessing parenting capacity have the appropriate strategies and resources to respond to the needs of black and minority ethnic children.

Chimba et al's (2012) study, which I have made earlier reference to, found that families from outside the UK had a significant lack of knowledge about the role of social services. In their interviews with parents, they found that black and minority ethnic respondents had no prior knowledge of social services. The implication for practice is that there is a need to build relationships and convey positive images about engaging with social services as such parents are less likely to understand social care's concerns. Chimba and his colleagues site an example in which a family was expected to turn up for a conference without being given prior information about the purpose of the conference. The result can be a presentation that suggests a lack of engagement (Selwyn et al, 2008), yet it could be that in some instances, families are reluctant to engage with services due to strong cultural expectations to care for children without external agency support (Hatton et al, 2004) or simply a desire to keep family life private. As Chimba et al (2012) observe, for some black and minority ethnic families, these positions can be perpetuated by fears arising from their initial contact with the immigration system or an instinctive distrust of the state that is based on the experiences from their countries of origin.

4.7 Conclusion

A review of the literature shows that there have been significant changes in child safeguarding policies in England since the Children Act (1989). Much of the changes have focused on how risk is conceptualised (Parton, 2010, 2014) and the role of professionals in assessing what causes the risk of harm to children, as well as how risk should be addressed (Laming, 2009; Broadhurst et al, 2010; Munroe, 2011). However, whilst there is an expectation for social workers to address issues of culture and ethnicity when evaluating parenting, how this is to be done is not altogether clear. What is clear from the literature reviewed here is that the relationship between culture, ethnicity and parenting is complex. Whilst cultural parenting scripts play a significant role in influencing the parenting practices of many black and minority ethnic parents, not all parents seek to follow cultural scripts to socialise their children.

Culture and ethnicity have been shown to clearly influence parenting practices and informs each ethnic groups' perception of competent parenting. But culture and ethnicity intersect with a range of personal and environmental factors, including poverty (Gupta et al, 2016); acculturation (Chao, 2000; Kriz and Skivenes, 2010; Nadam et al, 2016); and education (Cleaver and Unell, 2011) to influence parenting practices. The literature on parenting competence evaluations largely attributes limitations in the effectiveness of assessments to individual social workers and their practice approach or to failures in social work training rather than to the assessment system (see for example Bhatti-Sinclair, 2011; Chimba et al, 2012; Bernard, 2015).

But, an analysis of the development of child welfare policy suggests that over the years, response to high profile child deaths resulted in gradual moves from broader

assessments of children and their families to increased bureaucratisation of assessment procedures, with the aim of standardising and managing practice (Broadhurst et al, 2010).

For this study, I focused my attention on identifying themes highlighting gaps or areas of limited knowledge within the literature on culturally informed parenting practices. The gaps I have identified include issues to do with: 1. whether children are socialised by their peers or by their parents as Harris (1999) suggests; 2. Whether there are legitimate concerns about the quality of parenting within black and ethnic minority families (Allen et al, 2008; Kriz and Skivenes, 2010)

Chapter 5 – Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The broad aim of this project is to examine the ways in which social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity when evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. In order to achieve this aim, the research approached the subject from three main prongs: The first was to understand how culture and ethnicity frame the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents; the second was to understand how black and minority ethnic and social workers conceptualise parenting competence; and the third was to establish the link between the way that black and minority ethnic parents and social workers conceptualise parenting competence. The methodology was designed with the above process in mind and focused on gathering data that could be used to examine the effects of culture and ethnicity on the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents.

5.2 Literature Search

The literature reviewed for this study was identified through searching social care data bases and identifying publications from child welfare studies known to have included significant number of minority ethnic parents and/or social workers in their research samples. In the main, I used the 'traditional' method of identifying literature through references contained in articles or books I had read (some recommended by my supervisor).

When using the 'traditional' method, I visited the physical library at the University of York and retrieved books, articles and magazines using topical searches on parenting. This process was initially exciting but time consuming. As such, I resorted to electronic

searches which indeed were the main source of the literature used in this study. The electronic searches were conducted through databases. This is because database searching was easy and made it quicker to narrow down the literature to what was most relevant to my study. My searches included the use of Boolean terms, truncation characters, phrase searches, synonyms (e.g., parenting competence and parenting evaluation) and the acronyms 'BME' and 'BAME' to help refine search results

Throughout the literature review process, I frequently modified my search terms and used different permutations of searches containing the terms "parenting"; "black and minority ethnic"; "parenting capacity" and 'parenting competence' to retrieve as much relevant information as possible. Typical search terms and phrases used in my electronic searches included "parenting, culture and ethnicity"; "parenting and black and minority ethnic parents"; "assessing black and minority ethnic parents"; "parenting in England"; "parenting capacity assessments"; parenting capacity assessments in England"; "assessments"; "social work assessments".

In general, when I used the search terms "parenting" or "culture and ethnicity", my studies retrieved a lot of literature. However, most of the returns were not relevant to the focus of this study. As such, returns were filtered by excluding studies from outside Europe, the United States and Australia. Out of the studies conducted in Europe, the United States and Australia, I retained studies that focused on understanding what shapes parenting practices. I then sorted them into three main categories: 1. the history of parenting and parenting studies; 2. frameworks for understanding parenting and 3. policies affecting parenting in the United Kingdom. Although most of the research I refer to was conducted by American researchers,

whenever I came across relevant British studies, I included them in the discussion.

Overall, the databases used included:

- Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA) – ProQuest;
- EBSCO;
- Social Care Online;
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation;
- Yorssearch – University of York’s electronic database;
- Google Scholar

As the study progressed, especially following the data collection stage, I started seeking out studies conducted in participants’ countries of origin. I used a similar process to identify relevant literature. This was done to inform my critique of how culture and ethnicity influenced parents from a country represented within the participant sample. For example, when looking at the parenting practices of Indian, or West African parents, I sought out studies of parenting conducted in India and likewise studies conducted in various regions of Africa.

In this chapter, I explain the rationale for the methods I selected to investigate the research topic. The chapter provides a reflective description and discussion of the sampling design; participants; topic of inquiry; data collection; data analysis; the philosophical perspectives considered; and research trustworthiness. The broad research question was refined following a critique of the literature about how black and minority ethnic parents socialise their children. This was done alongside a critique of literature that addresses child welfare policy in England and Wales. The questions that emerged from this are detailed below, and reflect the gaps in the literature:

- How is parenting in black and minority ethnic families understood in the United Kingdom context?
- Does the parenting assessment process effectively evaluate the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents?
- Is there a link between social workers' expectations of ethnic minority parents and the competences that black and ethnic minority parents seek to promote?

From the time that I started thinking about undertaking this project, I felt that evaluating participants' subjective views would be an important aspect of the study. I envisaged that the narratives of black and minority ethnic parents as well as social workers would have something to contribute to our understanding of the effectiveness with which the parenting competence evaluations appraise the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents.

An important starting point for this study was to acknowledge, that parenting practices are determined by numerous factors (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Belsky, 1984; Belsky and Jaffe, 2006). Additionally, I was also aware that parents tend to perpetuate the parenting practices of previous generations within their birth lineage. This led me to expect that participants' narrative would be a subtle mixture of subjective and objective experience. In other words, I expected that participants would describe their experiences parenting and parenting competence evaluations in ways that inextricably bound feelings with actual experience.

Consequently, rather than reviewing literature that debated the different dimensions that influence parenting practices, I selected literature that explored: 1. how culture and ethnicity influences the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents and., 2. how social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity when evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. This focus inevitably drew discussion about how perceptions of parenting competence are formed. For example, the literature review considered discussions about issues such as whether parents should be firm (e.g., Baumrind, 1968; Maccoby and Martin, 1983) or permissive (e.g., Shumow et al, 1998; Talbot, 2009; Foulk, 2007) or whether they should prioritise personality or character (Shaffer, 2008) as the key competencies to promote in their children.

Drawing on my research training, I began to lean towards the view that a qualitative inquiry will be best suited to providing the answers to the research questions. This is because I was also interested in capturing the language that participants use to describe their experience. Not necessary for coherence of sentence sequences, propositions, speech or turns-to-talk that are mainly the focus of discourse analysis. Rather, I wanted to capture participants' feelings, attitudes, reactions and experience. The qualitative design facilitated this in two key ways: the first was in capturing aspects of cultural influence, as well as the words, emotions, feelings and expectations that both sets of participants used to express their perspectives of parenting and of parenting assessment processes; and the second was in understanding parents and social workers conceptualise parenting competence.

Using a qualitative design enabled me to gather and analyse participants' stories and scenarios and use the information to draw conclusions that contribute to knowledge. For example, by juxtaposing participants' conceptualisation of parenting competence, I was able to identify what I believe to be useful insights (discussed in chapter 8) into how social workers can approach parenting competence evaluations when working with black and minority ethnic families.

I commenced the research with an awareness that narrative accounts are dynamic and can present potential challenges, particularly, when linking participants' language to reality (Creswell and Miller, 2000). As such, I was mindful that participants' narratives, as well as their interpretations would be susceptible to transference and counter transference. Consequently, I deliberated over four philosophical approaches: Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), Ethnography, Frame Analysis and Phenomenology. I chose to use a phenomenological research philosophy because it is congruent with the aims of this study as it allows for subjective interconnection between the participants and the researcher (Creswell, 2009).

Frame analysis was chosen as the theoretic approach for analysing the findings because, as I indicated in chapter three, I was also interested in capturing a comparative aspect to the way that parents and social workers conceptualise parenting competence. A detailed rationale for using phenomenology and a summary of how the alternative philosophies might have benefited this research are provided later in this chapter. The section that follows describes the research design and explains the rationale for the methods selected.

5.3 Research Design

The data for this study were collected between 2011 and 2013 and eighty participants took part. The participants were made up of forty black and minority ethnic parents and forty social workers. The parents were made up of participants whose parenting competence had previously been evaluated by a social worker. They were recruited from five inner-city third sector organisations. The targeted organisations were purposely selected because they provide support to parents who have had social services involvement, including parents whose children had been placed in local authority care. Initially, I identified nine organisations but narrowed them to five based on pragmatic criteria: three accepted because I was known to the managers from previous working relationships and the remaining two were selected based on locality.

At the start of the project, I had hoped to find opportunities to compare the effect of culture and ethnicity within the participant groups. I felt that this would offer the potential of establishing whether parenting practices across the distinct ethnic minority groups can be explained by the same causes. According to Ditch et al (1996), the empirical evidence derived from comparing variables can be used to develop classifications for social phenomena. In this case, I envisaged that I would use the classifications to evaluate the interventions that social workers adopt to deal with culturally informed parenting scripts. However, the differences within the groups were too wide to offer opportunities for comparison. Nevertheless, a consistent variable was that all the parents who took part in the study were first generation immigrants. The similarity of their expressed views offers powerful insight into how parenting competence evaluations impact minority ethnic parents.

The research began with five focus groups, each consisting of eight black and minority ethnic parents. Two of the focus groups were made up of parents from distinct minority ethnic background and three were made up of parents from various black and minority ethnic backgrounds – mostly Africans and Caribbean's. Of the two groups with parents from the similar background, one was made up of predominantly Indian and Pakistani parents and another was of parents predominantly from Poland. This was associated with the fact that the participants were recruited from third sector organisations that provides support to those distinct groups (the structure and nature of the organisations is appended to this thesis).

My thinking in using focus groups was threefold: first, I wanted to use focus groups mainly as a preliminary stage of the study; secondly, I felt that using focus groups would compliment the one-to-one interviews and thirdly, to enable triangulation of findings. As I approached the data collection stage of the study, I felt that it would be helpful to gain some insight into participants' shared understanding of parenting competence evaluations. Morgan and Kreuger (1998) point out that such an approach can present challenges in separating individual views from group views. However, I felt that focus groups would be useful for exploring the degree of consensus within articulated group views.

As Gibbs (1997) asserts, focus groups enable us to draw upon participants' attitudes, reactions and feelings in a way that is not always feasible using methods such as one-to-one interviews or questionnaire surveys. Feminist commentators (e.g., Wilkinson, 1998; Green et al, 1993) express a similar argument and add that using focus groups addresses ethical concerns such as power dynamics and the imposition of meaning.

Given that the study sought to understand how culture and ethnicity influence conceptualisations of parenting, I decided to use focus groups as the first stage to the study. The information gathered from the focus groups helped me to draw up the guidance prompts that I used during the one-to-one interviews as well as the vignette that I used in discussions with social workers.

At the end of each focus groups, I selected three participants to take part in one-to-one interviews. During the focus groups, I had explained the criterion I would use to select three participants for one-to-one interviews. For the parent participants, I explained that this would be based on the plans on which their children were placed following social workers' assessments of the parents' competence, as well as the duration of social care involvement. I explained to participants what the different social care intervention plans meant to ensure that the participants understood the parameters of the study. The criterion I used was to select parents whose children were involved in the care system the longest, followed by the parents whose children were made subject to child protection plans but remained home and, finally, the parents whose children were left at home and supported under child in need plans. This information was provided by the parents and I was not able to verify the information they provided. None of the parents had similar circumstances.

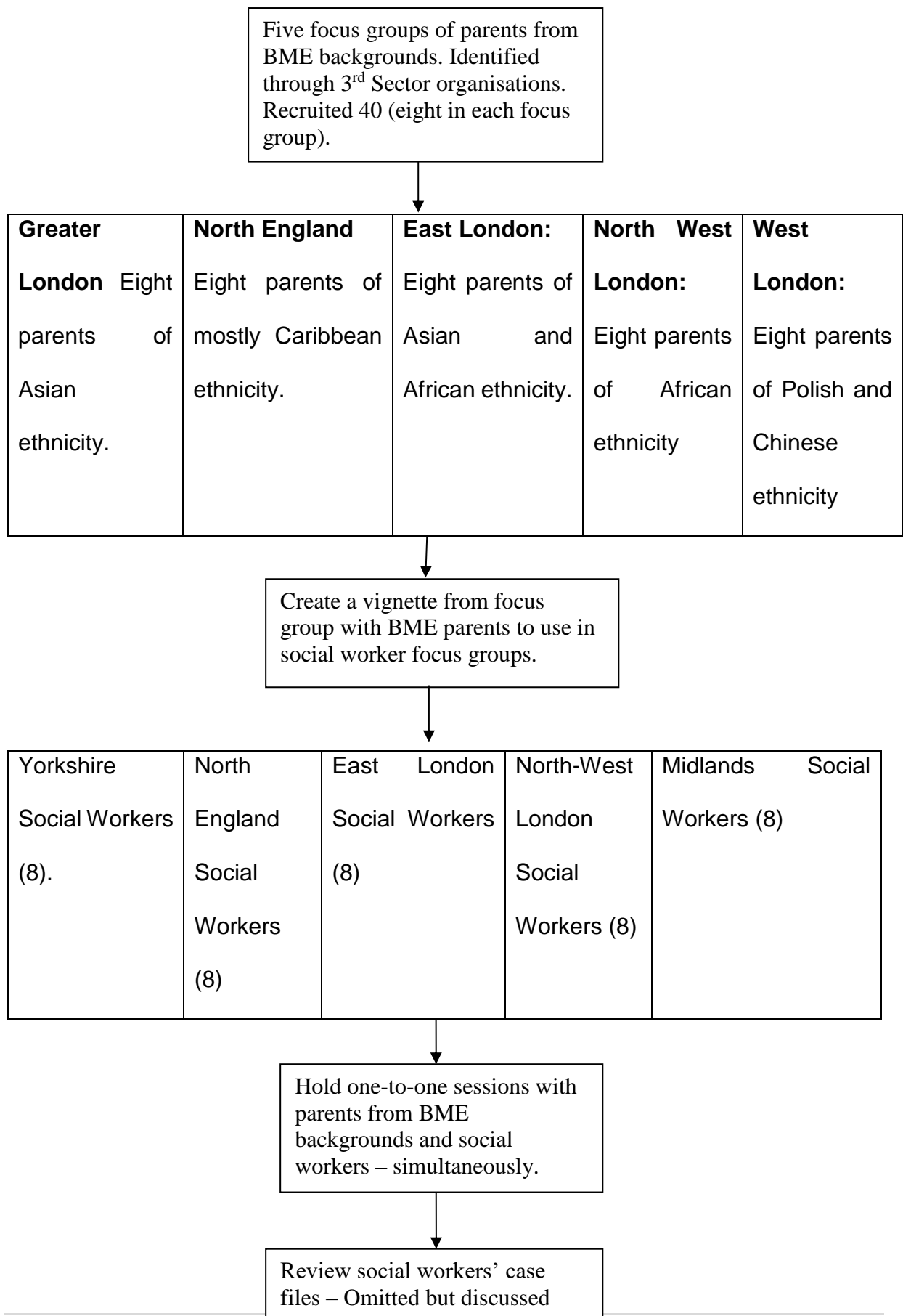
The sample of social workers was made up of participants who had experience of evaluating the parenting competence of ethnic minority parents. They were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball techniques. This is because I had initially sought to recruit all social workers through local authorities but was only successful in securing partial permissions which resulted in very few social workers

agreeing to take part. As a result, I asked those who attended to recommend colleagues that would agree to take part. I also asked my social work friends and colleagues to take part and recommend their colleagues. The vignette that I drew up from my group discussions with the parents from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, was used as a prompt in my group discussions with social workers.

After each focus group with the social workers, I selected three social workers to take part in the in-depth interviews. Selection was based on their direct experience of evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. Using this criterion, I selected the three social workers who had the most experience. This is because I felt that social workers with the most experience would have developed the requisite confidence to confront and navigate the cultural and structure issues associated with evaluating parenting competence. Thus, ensuring that their evaluations of parenting competence objectively explore the multiple factors within parents' environments.

I had also intended to end the primary research process with a review of five social workers' case files, but this was not done because I was unable to secure formal permission to review files. The local authorities that had allowed me to interview social workers made it clear that they were not prepared to pursue the process of securing agreement from other agencies from whom intervention information had been obtained as well as from families. The intension of reviewing case files had been to identify documented evidence of how culture and ethnicity had been incorporated in parenting competence evaluations. The entire process is represented in the diagram on the page that follows:

5.4 Research Design Diagram:



5.5 Preliminary Data Collection Results

The overarching aim of this study was to understand how culture and ethnicity is incorporated in evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. Therefore, the data collection methods sought to capture information about participants' lived experience and perceptions of the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations, in the context of how evaluations addressed issues of culture and ethnicity. Although the participants were not a homogeneous group in terms of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, they shared the experience of having been involved in parenting competence evaluations; either as parents or as assessing social workers.

According to professor Stephen Reicher, a social psychology academic, shared identity is derived from shared experience and is what gives a group of people their social identity (Reicher, 2004). For this study, I made the decision to focus on capturing shared experience rather than both shared experience and identity. This is because it became apparent, in the early stages of the data collection process, that I might not obtain clearly distinguishable data about shared identity. Indeed, both sets of participants (parents and social workers) in this study were an 'eclectic' collection representing several cultures and ethnic identities.

The approach I took to recruiting participants was purposive in that I defined the inclusion criterion that participants were required to have to be able to answer the research questions then approached organisations that work with people who met the pre-defined characteristics. Having identified and approached the organisations, I took a pragmatic approach to refine them from nine to five, based on the locations that

were easier for me to travel to. Apart from highlighting the initial challenges I had in implementing my original data collection methods, the main limitation of the pragmatic approach was that it narrowed the scope of discussion by omitting the narratives of the black and minority ethnic parents in the locations that were not selected.

However, I also felt that this pragmatic approach did not significantly impact on the findings of this study. Proponents of pragmatic approaches to choosing data collection methods (e.g., Tashakkori and Teddie, 2003) argue that researchers should give more credence to research question than to the data collection methods. The other limitation associated with excluding participants from organisations I did not recruit from is that it also impacts on the generalisability of this study.

Data collection was mainly done in two stages: the first was the focus group stage and it is from this stage that participants were selected to for one-to-one interviews. The purpose of the focus group was to begin to engage with the topic under study and generate broad themes that I would explore in detail during the interview stages. The focus group facilitates this by providing a cost and time efficient way of gaining insight into the different aspects of a topic. My interest was to obtain participants' collective perceptions, opinion, beliefs and attitudes towards parenting competence evaluations. From the onset, I had held the view that people who have similar experiences will have, broadly, similar perspectives about their experience. As such, I planned that if the focus group discussions reflected the assumptions I had, I would use information obtained from the parent focus groups to draw-up the vignette that I would use to prompt focus group discussions with social workers.

The focus group session with social workers had a slightly different focus. In addition to seeking to obtain their perceptions, opinion, beliefs and attitudes about assessment processes, I wanted to get a sense of how they approach the task of assessing the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. In the absence of viewing social work files, the vignette offered an alternative way of gaining practice insight. Overall, what I found to be most valuable was observing interactions within the group. In the main, the focus group participants tended to reach consensus about aspects of the topic relatively quickly.

The focus groups with parents were held in meeting rooms that I booked at the organisations from which participants were recruited. The focus groups with social workers were held in meeting rooms that I booked at local children's centres. Because of the varied mix of participants, one-to-one interviews were held either in the community or at participants' homes. Community interviews with black and minority ethnic parents were held at the participants' preferred venue, which was often a local café or community centre. All one-to-one interviews with social workers were held at a café. Care was taken to select a quiet section and ensure maximum privacy from the public. Participants' involvement in selecting the interview venues had the benefit of enhancing relaxation and comfort. This enabled participants to be candid when narrating their lived experiences.

The vignette drawn up following the focus group discussions with parents was only used as the starting point of discussions in the focus groups with social workers. The vignette gave a referral scenario that required social workers to assess a fictitious family depicting characteristics that black and minority parents had said were

important to them. For example, the importance of discipline, religion and cultural artefacts. The purpose of the vignette was to obtain a broad understanding of social workers' perspectives on parenting competence evaluations.

The vignette generated extensive discussions within the focus groups. The topics from the focus group discussions were explored further during the interview stages. The key finding to point out here was that despite the 'eclectic' mix of social workers, they generally gave the same responses in terms of identified themes. The social workers were recruited based on their profession and experience. Initially, I saw them as primarily from the 'culture' of social work but realised that the range of backgrounds they represented was a distinctive, unusual and valuable feature of the study. The mix of social workers was quite varied and included social workers of White-British, African, American, Indian, Scandinavian and Australian cultural backgrounds. Indeed, during the one-to-one interviews, their narratives included some illustrations from their own cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

5.5.1 Missing Voices

As aforementioned, the purpose of the focus group was to begin to engage with the topic under study and generate broad themes that I would explore in detail during the interview stages. Indeed, all the themes generated from the focus group discussions were explored during one-to-one interviews. However, there were two key absences from the focus group stages. The first is that although there were some men in the focus group stages, none of them took part in the one-to-one interviews. The second absence is that in one of the focus groups, there were parents of Chinese heritage, but they were not represented in the one-to-one interviews.

The absence of men from the one-to-one interviews is a limitation in that the voices of black and minority ethnic fathers are missing. Similarly, the voices of Chinese parents are missing from this study. At the focus group stage, I had expected to interview four fathers. My intention had been to interview the fathers along with the mothers, as a single unit. For data keeping purposes, I had counted them as one unit. When the mother's attended on their own, the reasons they gave were as follows: three of the fathers were at work and had not been able to get the time off and one had stayed home to look after the children. In hindsight, it would have perhaps been better to interview couples separately so that father's voices can be separated from the mother's voices. In fact, a focus on father's voices is potentially an area to explore in future research.

The absence of Chinese parents from the one-to-one interviews is a missed opportunity. The Chinese parents who attended the focus group interviews did not meet the selection criteria for the one-to-one interviews. This is because although their parenting competence had been evaluated by a social worker, their children had only been made subject to Child in Need plans for three months. Because they were the only ethnic group from the focus group stages that was not represented in the interview stages, including them would have given a wider sample of perspectives. However, I only realised this missed opportunity after the study was completed. That said, I also recognise that increasing the demographic heterogeneity of the study would not have necessarily enhanced the quality or effectiveness of the study. My assessment of the quality of this study is based in the fact that the inclusion criteria were clearly defined, and participants selected accordingly. This maintained the integrity and authenticity of the study.

The focus of this study was to understand how issues of culture and ethnicity are addressed when evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. As such, the participants were exclusively parents. This means that the voices of children are missed. The voices of black and minority ethnic adult children who were previously removed from their parents' care would add nuance to understanding the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations.

5.6 Rationale for the Methodology

My review of the literature I identified gaps in three main aspects of knowledge about parenting in black and minority ethnic families and the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations. First, while there is consensus that ethnicity and culture are significant components of the social phenomena that influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic families (Barn, 2006; Llod and Rafferty, 2006; Williams and Churchill, 2006; White, 2005; Moon and Ivans, 2004), little has been written on this topic in the United Kingdom. Within the United Kingdom context, studies of minority ethnic parenting tend to focus on the structures, disadvantage and discrimination experienced by black and minority ethnic families (see, Drury, 1991; Barn, 1993; Butt and Mirza, 1996; Dominelli, 2001; Barn, 2002; Chahal and Ullah, 2004; Kober, 2003; Barn, 2006; Bebbington and Beecham, 2003; Greene et al, 2008; Owen and Statham, 2009).

Secondly, there is no literature that has explored, in detail, the effectiveness with which parenting evaluations appraise the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. Studies on the effectiveness of parenting competence assessments tend to focus on evaluating either the processes that professionals use to evaluate parenting

competence (see White, 2005; Cleaver et al, 2007; Daniel et al, 2009) or the skills and competence needed to ensure that professionals are able to consistently identify whether a child's functioning and developmental needs are being met (see Reder et al, 2003; Budd, 2005; Cleaver et al, 2011). Consequently, findings from such studies report on the variability of the quality of assessment reports (e.g. Budd et al, 2001; Conley, 2003).

The third aspect relates to the absence of an assessment tool to guide social workers when they are faced with the challenge of deciding the relative weight to ascribe to the various dimensions of parenting practices within black and minority ethnic families. The literature contains considerable debate about the need for culturally sensitive evaluations of parenting competence, but little is known about how culture and ethnicity affect assessment processes. Some commentators have therefore advocated for a practical guide that helps professionals to be sensitive to the influences that cultural values, beliefs and experiences have on parenting practice, while also retaining a sense of individual uniqueness for each case (see Dutt and Phillips, 2001; Becher and Hussain, 2003; Hussain, 2005).

The above three aspects highlighted the need to increase our understanding of the nature and value of the contributions that culturally informed parenting practices make towards maximising the cognitive, behavioural and emotional development of black and minority ethnic children. This gaps led me to refine my original primary research question from: *How do ethnicity considerations influence social workers' decisions when intervening with families from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds?* to: *How are cultural and ethnicity considerations incorporated in evaluations of the parenting*

competence of Black and Minority Ethnic parents? I then broke down the primary research question into three main categories and split it further into twelve secondary questions as detailed below:

Category A: How do BME families do parenting?

1. How do Black and Minority Ethnic parents define parenting? To answer this, I looked at how ethnic minority parents defined 'good parenting'. Specific attention was given to how black and minority ethnic parents incorporated issues such as cultural norms, religion, assimilation and societal expectations into parenting practices.
2. To what extent does culture and ethnicity influence relationships between parents and children? In answering this I explored how black and minority ethnic parents addressed factors such as children's temperaments, gender, care requirements and developmental needs within their parenting practices.
3. What role does physical environment play in shaping and / or reinforcing certain expressions of parenting? To answer this question, I examined whether the community in which parents were located played a part in reinforcing parenting practices that might be associated with certain ethnic groups and not others.
4. How much diversity is there within each community? This question examined the extent to which parents from the same ethnic background were influenced by practices derived from their racial and ethnic traditions.

Category B: How do social workers assess parenting capacity?

5. How do social workers assess all parenting capacity? Here, I looked at how social workers implemented assessment guidelines, local policies and frameworks in their assessments of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents.

6. Do social workers find parenting assessments problematic: If so, in what ways? This was aimed at drawing comparison between how social workers approached evaluations of black and minority ethnic parents and White-British parents. The question also sought to obtain social workers' views about the challenges, if any, of conducting parenting assessments in general.

7. What, if any, are the differences in the ways that parents from black and minority ethnic groups are assessed in comparison to majority groups?

8. How, in social workers' views, do parents from different races and ethnicities contrast in the competencies they promote in their children? This question looked at how social workers evaluate BME parents' responses to the issues that form 'typical' child welfare concerns: basic care, discipline, boundaries, stimulation, emotional warmth and protection. The aim is to whether there is a divide between social workers' expectations and parents' priorities.

Category C: What is the relationship between BME parents' experiences of being assessed for parenting competence and social workers' experiences of conducting parenting capacity assessments with BME families?

9. How important is the assessor's background (qualification, experience and race)? Within the notion of 'emotional integrity', this question looked at the characteristics minority ethnic parents felt social workers should possess to conduct thorough culturally sensitive assessments of parenting competence.
10. Do parents from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds find parenting assessments problematic? If so, in what ways? This question sought to obtain black and minority parents' views on the effectiveness of the parenting assessment process.
11. How are families included in the assessment process? This question examined the extent of collaboration between social workers and the families they assess. It considered views about inclusion in the assessment process.
12. What aspects of culture are crucial in evaluating parenting capacity? This question considered views about the aspects of their cultural practices that black and minority ethnic parents felt were indicators of 'safe' parenting. Here, I explored whether there was a thread that run across all groups. This was highlighted in the themes that emerged from the study and the information used to explore whether thorough standardised evaluations of parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents is realistic.

As I indicated, and explain later in this chapter, I found equilibrium in the inter-subjective connectedness between myself and the research participants, by adopting a phenomenological research philosophy. I did this by addressing how and to what extent my subjectivity would be reflected in the study. Giorgi (1994) posits that when conducting research from a phenomenological stance, the researcher's subjectivity should be explained rather than eliminated from research. In my case, being a first-generation African parent and a practicing social worker meant that my subjectivity was implicated as I identified and empathised with the participants. Perks and Thomson (2006) suggest that this can result in bias that distorts historical accounts.

Phenomenologist commentators agree that when conducting phenomenological studies, researchers need to be aware of their pre-existing beliefs and to bring them to the foreground to examine and question them in light of new evidence (Giorgi, 1994; Halling et al, 2006). This helps to later separate out what belongs to the researcher rather than the researched and allows researchers *"to bring a critical self-awareness of their own subjectivity, vested interests, predilections and assumptions and to be conscious of how these might impact on the research process and findings"* (Finlay, 2009, p. 12).

Thus, it is important to point out that I began the study from the premise that black and minority ethnic parents influence their children as members of distinct communities. This is because research suggests that the access that they have to resources and networks that reinforce ethnic and culturally approved parenting practices, causes

them to parent their children in, broadly, similar ways (e.g., Dutt and Phillips, 2001; Becher and Hussain, 2003; Hussain, 2005; Akilapa and Simkiss, 2012).

My pre-existing belief was that, in the main, parents from similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds socialised and cared for their children in a broadly similar manner. But, the research methods were selected with the intention of embodying experiential meaning through the provision of fresh, complex and rich descriptions of participants' experiences as they were concretely lived. This provided the basis for a reflective structural analysis of participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Mills, 2005).

The decision to focus on understanding the meaning of complex data through the development of summary themes made it necessary to take an inductive approach. This was because, the inductive approach provided a structure for condensing extensive and varied raw data to establish clear links between the research objectives and summary findings (Creswell, 2009). For example, by allowing findings to emerge from recurring, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, I was able to critique and add nuance to current knowledge about minority ethnic parents and social workers' individual and shared experiences of parenting competence evaluations.

Furthermore, I felt that an inductive approach was useful in enabling me to put forward explanations about how both sets of participants experienced parenting competence evaluations. This is not to suggest that the study sought to identify causality or a comparison of participant groups. While these aspects emerged out of the data, the focus was to learn about how parenting competence evaluations were experienced and draw conclusions that contribute to knowledge.

The alternative would have been to have used a deductive research approach. This would have entailed testing a pre-set hypothesis. But, as aforementioned, my intention was to rely on qualitative data and allow themes to evolve rather than to test pre-existing theory (Miles and Humberman, 1994). Therefore, the deductive approach was not deemed to be appropriate. Additionally, I had envisaged that there would be enough variety within individual narratives to warrant an inductive approach as being a better way of exploring the effectiveness with which parenting competence evaluation processes aided evaluations of parenting competence.

Furthermore, I approached the study with the awareness that the complexities involved in trying to understand the effectiveness of assessment processes would require me to consider the trade-off between detail and generality. This trade-off led me to consider whether to use an inductive or deductive approach. As Shaw (2011) notes, researchers risk losing the subtle secondary meanings derived from narrative contexts and the private codes derived from common past experiences if they subject studies to the restraints imposed by deductive methodologies. Essentially, a deductive approach would have been suitable if my motive was to conduct an explanatory or evaluative study that relied on quantitative data. Although there are some quasi quantitative aspects in this study (e.g., quantifying the frequency with which themes appear within the data set), the dominant approach is qualitative.

5.7 A Qualitative Methods Approach to Phenomenological Analysis

Social research consists of several authoritative paradigms, informed by specific epistemology and ontology. These are then translated into qualitative or quantitative research methods and applied in research designs. Creswell (2009) explains the

distinction between qualitative and quantitative research as being based in the philosophical assumptions that the researcher brings to the study and the type of research strategies used. It is not within the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed discussion on research methodologies. This knowledge can be obtained from Denzin and Lincoln (2005) or Shaw and Gould (2001) who provide extensive reviews and illustrations of the epistemological and ontological distinctions between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For this study, I focused my attention on how a qualitative design would help me contribute to knowledge by providing empirical explanations that were grounded in participants' meaning structures.

My premise, as stated earlier, was that if I was to gain accurate understanding of participants' experiences, I needed to use an approach that foregrounds detail over breadth. This would enable me to obtain insights into narratives that may not be accessible using a quantitative methodology (Shaw, 2003). Marshall (1996) explains a focus on detail as "aiming to provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues" (p. 522). A similar view is eloquently espoused by Hill (2012). In his article about helping children after sexual abuse, Hill advances the argument that by going beyond association, qualitative methods help us to understand the complex dynamics involved in social phenomena and can be used to get to causality. For this study, a qualitative approach enabled me to explore multiple aspects of meaning across a web of interrelated participant narratives. I used a dynamic multi-method approach which involved using words, to build a complex holistic picture that reported on the detailed views of participants as obtained from their natural environment. I then analysed the findings by identifying, coding and categorising the patterns emerging from the data. Throughout this process, there were three unifying

questions that I addressed as I focused on qualitative epistemology and ontology: 1. what was my role; 2. what was reality; and 3. what was knowledge? (Creswell, 2009)

My responses to the questions above highlight the philosophical stance I took; that is, that the nature of reality is one of inter-subjectively constructed meaning. For example, I acknowledged from the onset that my subjectivity would be implicated by the fact that I am a black man and a social worker. This was implicated during focus group and one-to-one discussions, in moments when I identified and empathised with participants as a way of demonstrating that I understood what they were expressing from their frames of reference. In some instances, for example, participants would give a narrative and follow it up with the rhetorical question “*you know what I mean?*” as if to suggest that I should have had similar experiences because I share characteristics of their background. Cottle expresses it thus:

“For a method as fundamental as visiting with people, listening, speaking and allowing conversations to proceed as they will, means that one’s own life is implicated in the life of another person and one’s own feelings are evoked by the language, history and accounts of this other person” (Cottle, 1972, p. xvi).

Proponents of qualitative methods emphasise that the nature of reality is subjective, socially and individually constructed, experienced internally and externally, value laden and meaningful (Reid, 1994; Smith, 2004; Levitt et al, 2006). However, critics have argued that by focusing on meaning, the interpretive nature of qualitative research excludes participants’ actual involvement in the material world (Giddens, 1993). But, it is the ‘plurality of truths’ (Fraser, 2004, p. 118) that makes qualitative

methods useful for offering explanations for causality and association in outcomes studies.

According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009), differences in the conceptualisation of meaning are to be expected because not all populations are homogenous. For example, although this study recruited black and minority ethnic parents and social workers who met specific inclusion criteria, they all had individual conceptualisations of parenting, parenting competence and the evaluation process. Drawing from the different perspectives of participants' lived experiences allowed me to embrace and explore the complexity and richness of culturally informed parenting scripts. Ogbu (1981) suggests that this complexity is determined by the access that black and minority ethnic parents have to resources that facilitate the development of culturally valued competences, as well as customary theories of parenting that foster culturally child behaviour.

Given that there is now greater emphasis on using evidence-based practice in social work, practitioners can rely on qualitative studies such as this study to provide nuanced understanding of complex practice domains (Howard et al, 2003; Jenson, 2005; Adams et al, 2009; Mitchell et al, 2010; Shaw, 2011).

5.8 A Social Constructivist Approach

Having made the decision to prioritise detail over generality, I opted for a research design that was intrinsic to the phenomenological philosophy upon which it drew. As a philosophy that explores human subjectivity systematically, phenomenology represents a social constructivist model of interpreting the meaning of lived experience

(Speigelberg, 1982). I started the study from the constructivist position that each participant had a unique and valid experience of parenting competence evaluations. From this perspective, participants' individual narratives were construed as human experience that can be transformed and projected as reality (Van Manen, 2007).

According to Bateson (1972), the limitation of a social constructivist approach is that it does not prescribe a linear notion of causality for the explanation of social reality. However, my focus in this study was not to prove causality. As Krauss (2005) observes, multiple constructions of reality can coexist and are imbued with knowledge creating power. Therefore, in the process of interpreting and searching for meaning, I shifted back and forth between focusing on individually constructed models of reality (from the one-to-one interviews) and how participants interacted with one another (during focus groups) to construct, modify and maintain what their society holds to be true, real and meaningful (Freedman and Combs, 1996).

Constructivist commentators contend that collating individual and group meaning is necessary because reality is socially constructed, and individuals' perspectives are historically and culturally specific (White and Epston, 1990; Howe, 1992; Burr, 1995; Monk et al, 1997; Morgan, 2000; Rapmund, 2000; Hall, 2001). This debate within social constructivist literature had a significant influence on my thinking in terms of how to interpret participants' narratives. For example, I heeded Rapmund's (2000) caution against allowing the power of singular accounts to further silence and marginalise those whose stories fail to fit. As such, although I took the view that all lived experience has equal validity; I analysed and interpreted individual narratives as instances of the construction of meaning rather than encode each narrative as a

complete construction of reality. It is the inclusion and emphasis on multiple realities and personal stories (Wheeldon and Ahberg, 2012) that makes social constructivist theory relevant to this study. This is not to advance the case that it is better than other theories. My point is that it is appropriate to this study.

Social constructivist theory has been widely used in studies that have sought to understand the lived experiences of parents (e.g. Barn, 2002; Kober, 2003; Barn, 2006; Hill, 2006; Bebbington and Beecham, 2003; Greene et al, 2008; Thoburn et al, 2005; Asmussen and Weizel, 2010; Chimba et al, 212). However, it appears to be scarcely used in evaluative studies. Given that appraising the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations was a fundamental component of this study, I had to set out the contexts and concepts of effectiveness. My approach was to consider efficacy from the perspectives of participants. Using the social constructivist theory represented a dynamic and pragmatic approach this. In part, because it is '*not wedded to the assumption that there is one research method to be preferred for its potential to illuminate and demonstrate social work effectiveness*' (Cheetham et al, 1992, p. 8).

The dynamism of social constructivist theory was used to understand experience and evaluate effectiveness from the variety of participants' perspectives and assumptions, whilst at the same time striking a balance through reference to wider social and policy contexts. This approach enabled me to acknowledge participants' expressed views about how parenting competence evaluations can be improved and the constraints imposed by policy. Parton (2003) advocates for dynamism in research by advancing the argument that in an era where claims to knowledge have become subject to doubt, constructivist perspectives that recognise the importance of fluid and artistic forms of

creating knowledge may prove productive in informing practice. This creativity is illustrated in Barn (2006) who used a social constructivist approach to good effect in drawing our attention to how migration, ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, multiculturalism and racism shape the complex lives and needs of minority ethnic families.

Likewise, the topic of this study meant that I had to be aware that participants' lived experiences would involve the influence of complex intangible issues such as poverty, social networks, diversity, relationships and community. This meant that philosophies that espouse notions of linear causality were not ideal for capturing the complexities of the participants' lives (Schon, 1987). At their worst, as Hall (2007) observes, philosophies of linear causality can be culturally oppressive. Thus, I chose a fluid approach which would allow for the evaluation of effectiveness that was flexible enough to assess whether interventions had been successful in terms of objectives achieved, but also give a view about whether objectives were either trivial, inappropriate or misconceived' (Cheetham et al, p. 10).

5.9 The influence of Theory

While seeking to balance the trade-off between complexity and generality, I selected research methods that were grounded in a phenomenological research philosophy. Phenomenology has a significant influence on qualitative methods (Crabtree and Miller, 1999; Cohen et al, 2000) in that as a research process, it facilitates direct investigation and description of phenomena as they are consciously experienced. This focus is congruent with the purpose of this study, which aims to explore and

understand how black and minority ethnic parents and social workers experience parenting capacity assessments.

A lot has been written about phenomenology but, within the literature, there is much debate and disagreement about what it means or what constitutes phenomenological research (see Moustakas, 1994; Moran, 2000). In the debates that abound, phenomenology is conceptualised as a philosophy, a research method and an overarching perspective from which qualitative research is sourced. This is mainly because there are distinct schools of phenomenological thought which, as Moran (2000) observes, are “*extraordinarily diverse in their interests; their interpretation of the central issues of phenomenology and their application of what they understand to be phenomenological methods*” (p.3). Despite their diversity, phenomenological schools of thought agree that the embodiment of experiential meanings is integral to phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994).

I chose an explicitly Heideggerian approach and therefore consider the methodological underpinnings of this study to be interpretive and hermeneutic, rather than following Husserl’s more descriptive and eidetic methods (Moran and Mooney, 2002). The Heideggerian hermeneutic approach focuses on interpreting lived experience as revealed through participants’ consciousness. Heidegger (2000) was concerned with the question of *Being* and advanced the argument that it is through accessing lived experience that researchers can gain understanding of the meanings and perceptions of participants’ worlds. This is achieved by using the hermeneutic circle to enable the researcher’s understanding of the connection between theory, data and participants’ lived experience (Ezzy, 2002).

Heidegger's analysis of *Being* was influential in guiding my choice of research philosophy. To explain the uniqueness of human beings, Heidegger (2000) posits that although we exist as individuals, we do so within a social context. He argued that it is therefore erroneous to objectify and separate individuals from their experience (Heidegger, 2000, p. 80). Cohn (2002) expounds this by explaining it as the interconnectedness and interdependence of human relationships.

Another key element of Heideggerian phenomenology that influenced me was the concept of temporality. Heidegger also views *Being* as essentially temporal in that individuals are shaped by the past, present and future of their personal and social contexts. This means that when exploring lived experience researchers must consider the historical and temporal nature of social contexts. For example, O'Brien (2004) and Creasy and Trikha (2004) conducted studies which showed that minority ethnic families often encounter cultural conflicts when attempting to reconcile their heritage and traditions with the English traditions and ways of life.

The focus on experiential meaning was congruent with what I sought to achieve through this study. This is because when I was working in a London social work team, between 2008 and 2010; my practice observations led me to question how minority ethnic parents experience the parenting capacity assessment process. I noted then that except in cases where there was extreme domestic violence, cruelty to children or severe parental mental health, social workers often seemed uneasy about making intervention decisions with black and ethnic minority families. The social workers were keen to ensure that their decisions were not seen to be oppressive. But social workers

also found issues of ethnicity and culture particularly challenging to deal with in cases where there were concerns of possible neglect or emotional abuse.

In the absence of accessible research, the tendency was to be guided by anecdotal information from colleagues of similar backgrounds to the families. The challenge for social workers was in undertaking an assessment of parenting capacity that also considered ecological factors in an environment of diverse belief systems. My observations were that social workers often focused practice decisions on narrow interpretations of single issues, for example, physical punishment (Children Act 2004, s.58). This can itself be oppressive.

Following my review of the literature, I identified that the voices of black and minority ethnic parents were underrepresented in parenting literature in the United Kingdom (see parenting chapter). This gap in knowledge strengthened my commitment to the topic and my preference to use participants' narratives, whilst also considering that the narratives of lived experiences may be made up of influences which were not necessarily part of the mainstream society.

At the analysis stage, my expansive reading around phenomenology, as well as my practice and personal experience with the topic of parenting competence evaluations proved beneficial in how I interpreted participants' narratives. For example, social work experience as well as being a first-generation African immigrant, made me aware that parenting practices are often a reflection of broader familial, social, temporal and cultural contexts. Therefore, I tapped into this knowledge during analysis. This is consistent with Heideggerian phenomenology which argues against the notion that

researchers ought to bracket out all prior experiences and emotions by reducing their understanding to an objective opinion. This attention to praxis and reflexivity is congruent with a social constructivist approach (Patton, 2002) and with the qualitative design of this study.

Overall, the phenomenological approach enabled me to engage with participants' experiences through the personal, social and cultural influences that shape their views. This also offered the benefit of ensuring that I did not lose the detail by only valuing generalisation across participant groups. In other words, I was open to the notion that what was unique about a specific participant's experience was potentially all that mattered. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) explain it as follows:

“When we reduce people to statistical aggregates, we lose sight of the subjective nature of human behaviour” (pp. 4 – 5).

5.10 Frame Analysis

My main reason for choosing frame analysis was because of its potential to link behaviour to participants' reception and production processes. In other words, it helps us understand the social construction of reality. Frame analysis is attributed to the work of Erving Goffman (1974) and further developed by Ritchie and Spencer (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994), cited in Bryman and Burgess (1994). It is conceptualised as socially produced structures that individuals use to select, organise, interpret and make sense of complex reality (Schon and Rein, 1994, p. 32). Goffman conceptualised frames as being mental structures through which people make sense of their world. However, he also warns that understanding how people make sense of

their worlds is not a perfect process because individuals can draw from several frames to construct meaning.

Entman (1993), expresses a similar view and suggests that the insights that can be drawn from narratives of complex reality can easily be lost because communication often lacks disciplinary status. He proposes that the use of frame analysis helps us identify how framing influences thinking by "*illuminating the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer of information*" (p. 51). Entman's explanation that perspectives are 'framed' by prior knowledge, resonated with my own view that participants' conceptualisations of parenting would not have developed in a vacuum. Rather, their perspectives would have been shaped through selection and salience, to emphasise specific discourse (Entman, 1993).

As an approach to analysing qualitative data, frame analysis allows for thematic and explanatory themes to be explored. Specific to this research, I saw the use of frame analysis as being an effective way of analysing conceptions of parenting competence by exploring why black and minority ethnic parents say they parent the way they do and juxtaposing how parents and social workers conceptualise parenting competence. Because the focus of the study was on understanding how culture and ethnicity influence parenting practices and how social workers incorporate it in evaluations of parenting competence, using frames represented a helpful way of beginning to draw nuanced understanding of the topic.

According to Entman (1993), the frames (often referred to schemata) through which people make sense of their experience can be identified through what they say and

are captured in the presence or indeed omission of certain key words, stereotyped images, stock phrases, or references made to sources of information. Thus, I analysed transcribed data to identify how black and minority ethnic parents defined parenting and how they said their cultures and ethnicity influenced their parenting practices. Likewise, I used frame analysis to identify how social workers defined culture and ethnicity and how they said they incorporated their understanding of culture and ethnicity in evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents.

The narratives that participants gave of their experience contained clusters of judgements that reflected the frames from which the perception was drawn. For example, the mother who explained that her daughters needed to do more housework compared to her sons because “*it is the girls who will have responsibility for the family; and who wants to marry a woman who can't cook*” was analysed as drawing on a cultural frame about gender roles. Similarly, a social worker who suggests that black and minority ethnic parents use culture and ethnicity “*as smoke screen to hide abuse*” analysed as drawing on the frame that culture and ethnicity are an excuse for poor parenting behaviour.

What became clear from using frame analysis was that the different views and perspectives that parents and social worker held about culturally informed parenting scripts fuelled mistrust and hindered attempts to work more closely together. This was key to understanding the challenges involved in evaluating parenting competence in a multi-ethnic community. From a frame analysis perspective, it could be argued that this is because in the process of selecting, highlighting and using highlighted elements

of lived experience to construct their arguments about parenting and what influences parenting practices, parents and social workers invoke different frames. For most black and minority ethnic parents, their culture and ethnicity is the stock of commonly invoked frames, while social workers generally invoke frames from their individual cultures as well as their professional cultures.

5.11 Alternative Theories

In the preceding section, I provided a detailed discussion about how this study is influenced by a phenomenological philosophy and analysed using frame analysis. However, it is important to acknowledge that not only are there several theoretical orientations from which to conduct qualitative studies, I also considered using either Ethnography or Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) for this study.

Ethnography could have been used for this study if participants' social settings were able to accommodate direct observation, communication and interaction with those being studied and if there were sufficient opportunity for informal and formal interviews (Lofland, 1971). However, the cornerstone of ethnographic research, participant observation, entails extensive fieldwork that requires the researcher to actively form relationships with participants. Van Manen (1982) summarises ethnographic research as follows: *"The result of ethnographic inquiry is cultural description. It is, however, a description that can emerge only from a lengthy period of intimate study and residence in a given social setting"*. (p. 103)

Van Manen adds emphasis to the requirement for the researcher to understand the language spoken in participants' social settings, participate firsthand in some of the

activities that take place and, most critically, do intensive work with a few informants drawn from the setting. This, as Mustakas (1994) observes, makes ethnography better suited for examining phenomena within specific group situations and is largely shaped and constrained by those situations. It can have the advantage of revealing nuances and subtleties within thick cultural and ethnic contexts.

However, the practicalities involved in identifying an ideal study group that is representative of a larger cultural population, as well as the requirement for prolonged contact in the social setting are factors that I was unable to fit around my current professional commitments. Conversely, as I have already mentioned, I was not only interested in understanding shared perspectives, I also want to capture the heterogeneity that exists within participants' experiences.

A Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) would have permitted studying facets of participants' experience which were not directly observable (Wengraf, 2002). This could have provided an intimate view of how black and ethnic minority families experience parenting capacity assessments by allowing us to see parents in the contexts of their entire lives, from birth to the present. Using BNIM provides a cutting edge by which we can examine our most basic common-sense assumptions about the nature of reality. This could have helped the development of a fuller understanding of the stages and critical periods in the construction of participants' parenting practices. For example, using Wengraf (2001)'s conceptualisation of semi-structured interviewing, I could have elicited a fuller understanding of ethnic minority parenting by asking questions about the points at which parents decided that their method of disciplining or setting boundaries was the most appropriate.

Given that narrative expressions tend to represent conscious concerns and unconscious cultural, societal and individual processes and presumptions (Chamberlyane et al, 2003); BNIM would have facilitated my understanding of how participants' historically evolving internal and external worlds interact. This lends itself well to the psycho-dynamic and socio-dynamic approaches used in social work practice. Thus, the findings would have potentially provided a fully psycho-social understanding in which neither the sociological nor psychological dynamics within black and minority ethnic families are neglected or privileged.

Such an approach could have benefited the study in that ethnic and cultural influences on ethnic minority families' parenting practices would have been understood in their historical context, thus laying a basis for comparison of situated practices. In her review of approaches to narrative research, Squire (2008) describes this as the sort of inclusiveness that is particularly beneficial in enabling researchers to extend analyses to multiple levels.

As Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) note, by focusing on eliciting retrospective narratives of experience, BNIM facilitates the expression and detection of suppressed implicit perspectives that could illuminate the intersection of biography, history and society. This makes it better suited for longitudinal process studies which seek to capture incident experiences with a clear sequential order that connects the complexity of historic events in a meaningful way. Critics of BNIM argue that it places greater emphasis on the individual rather than the social context in which life is lived (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Riessman and Quinney, 2005). I chose not to use it because, like ethnography, data collection is time intensive.

5.12 Research Participants

The participants for this study represented several cultural and ethnic identities. This mix of participants provided a rich source of data in that despite their differences, their narratives converged towards a common view about the efficacy of evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. For example, although ethnic characteristics such as parents' countries of origin, religious persuasions and belief systems were different, they all expressed the view that parenting competence evaluations had failed to appraise their parenting practices within the context of the cultural goals they sought to achieve when socialising their children. In this regard, parents saw themselves as being a homogenous group whose cultural approaches to parenting were not accepted in the United Kingdom.

Equally, the social workers were from several ethnic and cultural backgrounds. During the focus group discussions, participants articulated this as being evident in the language that social workers use, which they stated was typical of profoundly ideological views about how groups behave. For example, in using statements such as "I know in your culture physical punishment is acceptable".

5.12.1 Data Collection

The participants for this study were initially selected using purposive sampling techniques. However, the initial numbers were too small. This led me to employ snow ball sampling to recruit participants who met the research criteria whilst maintaining the purposive sampling approach (Polkinghorne, 2005). Participant selection made it necessary to have inclusion criteria in place so that participant characteristics were clear from the onset. Ritchie et al (2003) explains many different forms of purposive

sampling including: heterogeneous; homogeneous; typical; critical and extreme (or deviant) samples. I selected participants for this study based on their ethnicity.

My criteria were simple: participants had to be parents from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, whose parenting had been assessed by social workers. I began the process of identifying potential participants through my connections in the local authorities where I had previously been employed and from friends and colleagues within the social care industry. The recommendations from these connections gave me access to gate keepers and minimised some of the bureaucratic processes that I would have otherwise had to follow to access potential participants.

The pragmatic approach I adopted in selecting the organisations I approached to recruit participants ensured that the sample remained relevant to the aims of the study. In other words, I was still able to recruit participants who met the pre-defined characteristics; that is, black and minority ethnic parents as well as social workers who had experience of being involved in parenting competence evaluations. I felt that this would not adversely impact on the findings because the data collection was still guided by the foundational aims of the study (Creswell, 1994).

That said, some of the debate within research literature questions the use of pragmatic approaches. Mertens (2003) for example, asserts that it is not enough to base methodological choices solely on practicality. She argues that studies that take pragmatic approaches to data collection often fail to clarify whose practicality and benefit is being prioritised, and to what end.

5.12.2 Data Analysis

My approach to the task of data analysis followed the recommendation of Coffee and Atkinson (1996) who postulate that data analysis is better achieved by exploring data from a variety of perspectives. This was congruent with my methodology in which the data will be collected using a variety of methods. According to Van Manen (1990), phenomenological research should not be subjected to rigid rules. Instead, researchers should allow the direction of studies to be informed by continual analysis. This process of simultaneous data collection and analysis is the hallmark for research that relies on participants' narratives to understand phenomena (Lofland and Lofland, 1995).

Given that this study was guided by a phenomenological research philosophy, I relied heavily on frame analysis to analyse the data. Bruner (1986) explains that there are two main approaches to analysing literary accounts: paradigmatic or narrative. In the paradigmatic approach, text and structure are analysed for criteria that might enable a researcher to reinforce hypothesis, while the narrative approach focuses on understanding the meaning of stories by studying them within their contexts (Dautenhahn, 2000; Coffee and Atkinson, 1996).

By using the narrative analysis approach, I focused on participants' lived experiences and, through their narratives, identified themes and patterns associated with their experiences. This was achieved by using data collected from observing and interviewing participants, to draw conclusions about the meaning of narratives (Morris, 2006). Because the research was designed to ensure that participants told their own stories and described their experiences, they had control over their narratives. This

allowed power sharing (Dominelli, 2002) in that I informed participants of their right to terminate sessions at any point.

The challenge, as Van Manen (1990) puts it, is that researchers often know too much about the phenomenon they are studying. Therefore, they must bridle their assumptions and pre-understandings (e.g. personal beliefs and theories) to allow for potentially surprising findings (Dahlberg, 2006). However, as I explained earlier in this chapter, rather than separate myself from the study, I embraced this challenge by allowing my thoughts and experiences to run parallel to those of the participants (Giorgi, 1994; Halling et al, 2006; Finlay, 2009). By doing this, I was in a better position to concentrate on participants' narratives whilst also reflecting on my thoughts and experience.

The data collection methods also helped minimise bias. By using field notes taken during focus groups and one-to-one interviews; audio recording of participant sessions; journal records (which captured my reflections); and from notes about the where, when and of the circumstances surrounding participants' narratives, I became more aware of emerging themes. This also offered the advantage of creating a more meaningful picture by capturing participants' narratives within the contexts of the stories they told (Polkinghorne, 2005; Clandinin, 2006; Reissman, 2008).

As Clandinin (2006) points out, it is through synthesising collective descriptions and storied events that we can discover and understand lived experiences. Therefore, I analysed the experiences that participants considered to be significant as well as how

they reflected on those experiences. This added to the overall identification of the themes and patterns that were analysed.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) making sense of participants' narratives requires researchers to ask questions that point in four directions: "inward, in order to capture internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, moral dispositions and aesthetic reactions; outward in order to capture existential conditions associated with the environment; and backward and forward, in order to capture the temporality of past, present and future" (p. 50). During data collection process, some participants found this to be challenging as they became emotional about expressing their lived experiences. In some ways, participants' emotional expressions elicited the tensions that helped give a better understanding of how they experienced parenting competence evaluations. The qualitative approach adopted for this study, helped in the identification of emerging themes and patterns.

5.13 Ethical Considerations

Researching participants who have experienced social services involvement raises some ethical issues. These include issues of power dynamics, consent, confidentiality, data protection, social justice, partiality, researcher safety, dependency in relationships and cultural differences (Bowling 2002). Moriarty (2011) argues that because questions of ethics are inherent in all studies, no research methodology is ethically privileged.

My approach to addressing ethical issues was to ensure methodological rigour. However, as I had anticipated, the ethical problems I encountered were subtle, as they

were mainly embedded in the construction of the relationship of power between myself and participants. This is because research processes create tensions between aims to make generalisations for the good of others and participants' rights to maintain privacy (Orb et al, 2001; Moriarty, 2011). This was addressed by maintaining the University of York's clear ethical standards. The ethical standards were not only helpful in addressing research process tensions; they were also a crucial indicator of the quality of my research. It was for this reason that I sought ethical approval from research ethics committees and was also guided by relevant social work codes of conduct.

For this study, I submitted applications for ethics approval to York University's Health and Social Care Ethics Committee (HSSEC) and to the Social Care Institute of Excellence (via the Integrated Research Application System – IRAS). The Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE)'s position was that student research proposals that have met the requirements of reputable higher institutions of learning, such as the University of York, did not need separate approval (see appended email). I also applied to the Association of Directors of Children's Services Research Group.

However, although the ethics boards scrutinized my research proposal to ensure that participants were protected, I was ultimately responsible for anticipating and taking steps to address potential harm to my research participants. Therefore, I considered the ethical questions associated with qualitative studies, including issues relating to interactions between myself and the participants (Shaw, 2008). These considerations, as discussed below, are reflected in the appropriateness of the research and

methodological designs and informed the research project from data collection through to the write up and dissemination (Wellington, 2000).

I approached the issue of ethics from my reflection on how biomedical and communitarian research ethics, correspond with the social work codes of ethics put forward by Banks (2006). Biomedical research ethics are based on values of autonomy, none-maleficence, beneficence and justice. These values inform principles of informed consent, honesty, avoidance of harm, respect to privacy, research integrity and confidentiality (Clifford, 2000). Communitarian research ethics on the other hand, are based on feminist philosophy and posit that a community's moral values should guide any research that is conducted within that community's domain (Denzin, 1989). The implication being that research ethics are always contextual and therefore oblige the researcher to be sensitive to community concepts such as kindness, neighbourliness, care, shared governance and moral good.

The relationship between participants and researchers has something to contribute to subjectivity or objectivity (Thompson, 1992). Therefore, I conducted the research with sensitivity to feminist concepts such as empowerment and the participatory nature of research. This is because doing so helped facilitate non-hierarchical dialogue between myself as the researcher and the research participants (Allen and Baber, 1992; Thompson, 1992).

The communitarian perspective on moral good and shared governance corresponds well with social work values on user involvement. According to Banks (2006), social work codes of ethics are categorised as: 1. Respect for individuality; 2. Promotion of

self-determination; 3. promoting the best interest of others; and 4. Promoting social justice. I considered these codes of ethics alongside research principles such as informed consent, avoidance of harm, care and moral good.

Both perspectives are also consistent with the phenomenological philosophy that underlies this study in that they can be applied to engage, interpret and reflect participants' narratives with respect to how personal, social and cultural circumstances influence their experiences. This enabled me to conduct the research and navigate through the tensions between concrete and universal experiences in relation to issues such as gender, politics and social status. That is, I allowed participants to express their views about these issues and how they related to parenting competence evaluations without seeking to add to their narratives.

That said, I remained within the main stream approach and only adopted guiding assumptions from biomedical and communitarian research ethics that were congruent with social work codes of ethics (Shaw and Gould, 2001). Specifically, I ensured that the study was conducted in a manner that reflected commitment to the wellbeing of the research participants. This meant that my paramount consideration was to make sure that the participants understood the purpose of the study, were offered anonymity and that those who consented to participating did so willingly and without coercion (Wiles et al, 2005). This was achieved by informing participants of the general parameters of the study before obtaining their consent. Feminist concerns about ethical issues around consent relate to participants exposing themselves to an undesired extent.

Informed consent was obtained in accordance with the legal frameworks and regulations such as Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Data Protection Act (1998). These had relevance to this research as they specifically relate to issues of respect for private and family life as well as access to the information that organisations hold about their clients (Montgomery, 2003; Masson, 2004).

Consent was also obtained throughout the research as a continual process. This is because of the potential for intrusion and exploitation associated with using participants' narratives as a research method (LaRossa et al, 1981; Alderson, 2004). By obtaining consent at different stages throughout the research process, I was also advancing the case that ethical considerations are not a one-off process and must be negotiated at several stages of the research project.

Initially, the organisations through which participants were recruited approached potential participants and invited them to take part in the study. At that stage, participants were given the project information sheet and asked to attend an information session. During the information session, I explained the research in terms of: my role and identity; the purpose of the research; the scope it will take; the questions I am likely to ask during sessions; the use to which the study will be put; the method of anonymity and the extent to which their narratives will be used in the final report. I also reminded participants about their right to end sessions at any time during the study.

Conversely, questions of confidentiality and anonymity were especially important in ensuring that participants' identities were protected. Anonymity was offered to all

participants and no identifying information is included in the final thesis. I kept all research data locked away and used fictitious names to represent participants' responses.

According to Morris (2006) power differentials and structural inequalities between the researcher and participants need to be addressed to ensure that research participants are not excluded from the analysis process. This study addressed power and structural issues by using a bottom-up approach, which recognises participants as actors and agents whose input into is to be respected.

Additionally, the multi-layered in-depth approach that was used for this study made it necessary for me to consider issues of gender, alongside power and structural inequalities (Lindsey, 1997). This also has advantages for scholarship, as well as ethical and political reasons in that it influences the way we thread individual and / or family narratives.

Aspects of the research design, such as the interview dynamics, prioritised participants' interests over the need to collect data that might have added to validating the conclusions made here. For example, using Thompson's (1992) framework for conducting qualitative research, I asked the all the parents who took part how they felt about being interviewed by a male researcher and whether any arrangements needed to be made to ensure that they were comfortable. This also included obtaining consent for the anonymous use of interview data and omitted parts of their narratives that they did not wish to be included in the data analysis.

Data protection issues were addressed by transcribing all the data that was collected as part of the study and saving it electronically. This was being done on a password protected hard drive that was kept locked in a desk drawer in the researcher's home office. All paper documents including participant identifiers were shredded and audio recording deleted after the information had been converted to electronic versions.

Another area of ethical consideration related to the need to conduct a study on black and minority parenting that bears critical methodological scrutiny. This implied that the data had to be transparent and robust enough to withstand critique and to facilitate nuanced understanding. My research questions addressed this by providing a base from which to draw findings that are resonant with and relevant to participants' lived experiences. The participants were recruited from multiple sites. However, I did not intend to set a control group. Nevertheless, all the parents who took part turned out to be first generation immigrants.

In earlier sections of this chapter, I made it clear that my background and interests were implicated in the study. This informed rather than skewed the research agenda, questions asked and the framework within which data was interpreted. However, I was also keen to ensure that the study did not crossover from scholarship to advocating for black and minority ethnic parents (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006). As Kvale (1996) notes, semi-structured interviews are particularly vulnerable to these pitfalls because they allow the researcher to focus discussions on areas of interest to them. This increases the potential for bias, especially in research encounters where participants are reluctant to express themselves.

While I acknowledge that participants' reluctance to express themselves resulted in me focusing on elements of their narratives that resonated with the research agenda. Nevertheless, I only focused on collecting and analysing information that was important for evaluating and informing social work practice.

5.14 Validity and Credibility

My approach to validity was in the context of establishing the extent to which the findings were a true and certain reflection of participants' experiences. For this, I used methodological triangulation in order to increase internal validity (Patton, 2002). This involved cross checking data from the focus groups and one-to-one interviews to ensure that I had captured participant narratives that related to the research questions and that my descriptions and conclusions were credible. Patton (2002) suggests that this can be achieved by analysing research questions from multiple perspectives. However, he cautions against making the goal of such analyses arriving at consistency across data sources or approaches. In Patton's view, inconsistencies should be welcomed as opportunities to uncover deeper meaning from the data.

Thus, the triangulation process only involved interviewing black and ethnic minority parents and social workers to get their perspectives on the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations and drawing parallels between the two, to determine areas of agreement and divergence. The validity of the conclusions drawn from the research data was then enhanced by presenting direct quotations from the interviews as a way of demonstrating the relationship between themes and participants' narrative.

Morse et al (2002) implore qualitative researchers to reclaim research credibility by implementing verification strategies that are inherent and self-correcting during the research process. Credibility checks for this study included using my supervisor and social work colleagues to audit the data from each research question with focus on the themes created.

5.15 Conclusion

This chapter has described and explained the methods and processes that I used to collect and analyse data for this study. The study recruited eighty participants in total and collected data using focus groups and one-to-one interviews. I have explained that I approached the study from a phenomenological research philosophy and used frame analysis to identify and analyse themes from the data. Within the discussions, I have also explained that my reasons for using frame analysis is because it helps us understand how people build cognitive structures to guide them in their perception of reality. According to Goffman (1974) this does not happen consciously. Rather, people unconsciously adopt and adapt life frames depending on their social circumstances.

I have shown that frame analysis is congruent with a phenomenological research philosophy in that they help us gain greater insight into the structures of experience and consciousness. In other words, they both posit that behaviour reflects individuals' state of mind. As part of the explanation on how I applied frame analysis to this study, I indicated that implicit in all frames are narratives of lived experience. These experiences become the points of references through which individuals interpret their worlds and indeed "*render what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of a phenomenon into something that is meaningful*" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21).

To highlight the robustness of this study, I have described and discussed how thoroughness, reliability, rigour, validity and transparency were achieved. Thus, the chapters that follow will use data elicited from the process described here to address the research questions.

Chapter Six – Findings from Interviews with Parents

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I summarise the findings from the focus group and place greater emphasis on presenting the findings of fifteen qualitative interviews exploring how black and minority ethnic parents say parent, as well as their perspectives on whether social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity when assessing parenting capacity. The chapter attempts to answer three research questions:

1. how black and minority ethnic parents say they parent;
2. how culture and ethnicity influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents;
3. What are participants' perspectives about whether social workers incorporate issues of ethnicity and culture in their assessments of parenting capacity?

I begin the chapter by providing a summary of the findings from the focus groups. This is then followed by introducing the one-to-one participants, in a general sense, to situate their narratives within the context of their experiences. I then provide an explanation of how the findings are presented and illustrated. Following this, I organise and present the findings in the form of themes, with reference to the research questions they answer. My focus throughout the chapter is to present participants' views without interpreting or discussing what their narratives might mean – the discussion is done in chapter eight. Consequently, I use verbatim quotations of participants' words to illustrate how participants conceptualised aspects of their ethnicity and culture and how they linked them to their parenting roles.

6.2 The Focus Groups

The overall aim of the focus groups was to obtain participants' perceptions about and experience of parenting competence evaluations, as well as their perceptions of the influence of culture and ethnicity on their parenting practices. The focus groups were held between April 2012 and June 2013. A total of eight focus groups were conducted. Each group consisted of eight participants and lasted from sixty to one-hundred and six minutes. A total of forty black and minority ethnic parents participated in the focus groups.

Although I sought to recruit participants from the same ethnic groups, the main homogeneous characteristics were that all participants were first generation black and minority ethnic parents whose parenting had been assessed by children's social services. However, not all participants were from the same cultural and ethnic background. For example, a group of mainly Polish participants also contained two Chinese parents. Likewise, focus groups of African parents were made up of parents from different countries in Africa.

I facilitated the group discussions using an open-ended interview protocol. All focus group discussions were recorded on an I-phone with the permission of the participants. The anonymity of participants in the focus groups is protected in this report in that the report only presents the summary of the group discussions. Similarly, the reasons for social care involvement with participant was obtained from self-reports and no attempt was made to clarify the circumstances either through the organisations from which participants were recruited or from the local authorities that had been involved with them.

6.2.1 Focus Group Findings

Focus group interview recordings were transcribed and went through several phases of analysis. The initial analysis was conducted to get a general sense of the data and reflect on its meaning. This was followed with a more detailed analysis and data was divided into units that reflected participants' thoughts, attitudes and experiences. This process culminated in the generation of a list of topics which were then labelled and categorised as the key findings. Data from across all focus groups was analysed and organised into the identified categories to determine the interconnectedness of issues and conditions that may have given rise to the categories. This gave a general picture of participants' perceptions about how parenting competence evaluations incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity.

As part of the process of analysing the findings, each participant group data was also analysed separately to determine whether there were trends unique to each group. However, there were no significant distinguishable differences. Rather, the themes discussed in the findings from the one-to-one interviews are what emerged in all focus groups and were raised in each focus group. Additionally, there were high levels of agreement about the issues raised in focus groups and significant consistency in how they were talked about within the groups. That said, discernible difference was in how an issue was talked about by different groups. For example, restricting children's socialisation was talked about in all focus groups but some groups emphasised religion whilst others emphasised differences in moral values as their main reason for seeking to restrict their children's socialisation.

Overall, twelve themes relating to participants' perceptions about and experience of parenting competence evaluations, as well as their perceptions of the influence of culture and ethnicity on their parenting practices were identified from analysis of focus group discussion transcripts. These findings included: traditions; religion; acculturation, aspiration, protection; children's development; gender roles; identity; social support; building resilience to discrimination and racism; views about professionals' preconceptions; and view about what constitutes competence.

The insight into black and minority ethnic parents' attitudes, feelings and beliefs about the influence of culture and ethnicity was that cultural parenting scripts are partially independent of individual family circumstances or social setting. The consensus expressed in one of the focus groups put it as follows: "*the way we raise our children is how people in our culture have been doing it for centuries. So, it doesn't matter where you go, all Punjab parents anywhere in the world do it the same way*". But, whilst the pervading view was that culture and ethnicity exert significant influence on the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents, some participants stated that their parenting practices were not at all influenced by culture and ethnicity.

Focus group discussions also highlighted that black and minority ethnic parents did not feel that social workers sought to understand why parents approach parenting in the way they do. This, they argued, meant that social workers failed to properly appraise parenting competence and instead limited the use of information about parents' culture and ethnicity to identification purposes.

Another key finding was that religion is intricately interwoven with other aspects of culture and ethnicity. Indeed, within the focus group discussions, participants tended to illustrate points with reference to religion and culture used interchangeably to explain their parenting practices.

All the above themes were also identified from the one-to-one interviews. As such, I chose to focus the presentation and elaboration of findings on illustrations from the one-to-one interviews. This is not to suggest that data from the one-to-one interviews were more important than data from the focus groups. Rather it is; first, to minimise repetition and secondly to focus on gaining nuanced understanding of how black and minority ethnic parents perceive and experience parenting competence evaluations, as well as whether, and if so how culture and ethnicity influenced their individual parenting practices.

6.3 One-to-One Interviews With The Parents

Parents within the interview sample, were originally from four black and minority ethnic backgrounds as defined by their countries of origin. These comprised of Polish, Pakistani, Indian and African. The participants who described themselves as African were originally from Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. This level of diversity within the sample has implications for generalisability. The implications are discussed in chapter eight that discusses what the findings mean.

What is important to point out at this stage is that all the participants also had several characteristics in common, namely: they described themselves as being of black or minority ethnic background; they were first generation immigrants; their parenting

competences had been previously assessed by social workers; they had at least one child who had been previously made subject to either child protection plans, or who had been taken into local authority care.

The reasons for social care involvement with participants' families had been obtained at the initial stages of recruitment. As aforementioned, what I knew of the reasons for social work involvement with participants' families was what the parents told me. The reasons were widely varied, and I was not able to verify the information. However, all participants (focus group and one-to-one interviews) had had social care involvement for more than three months. The participants who went on to take part in the focus group interviews had had their cases escalated and their children either made subject to child protection plans or removed from their care.

As stated in the methodology chapter, the fifteen participants for the one-to-one interviews were drawn from a total sample of forty. Although the majority of the fifteen participants either had long-term partners or were married, it was only the women that attended the one-to-one interviews. The explanations that the mothers attending the interviews gave were that the fathers either had to be at work or were looking after the children to allow the mother to take part in the interview. What was also noteworthy was that most of the participants who took part in the one-to-one interviews were either unemployed or worked part-time (*demographic details of the parents who took part in the interviews are provided in Table 1 below*).

Table 1: Participants (black and minority parents)

| Participant | Age | Ethnicity | Number of Children | Level of Social worker involvement | Length of social work involvement | Employment Status | Parental Relationship Status |
|-------------|-----|-----------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Agnes | 27 | Polish | 3 (two girls and a boy) | CP | 6 Months | Unemployed | Partner |
| Patricia | 32 | Polish | 2 (a boy and a girl) | CP | 3 Months | Part-time cleaner | Single |
| Aria | 26 | Pakistani | 4 (two girls and two boys) | LAC | 6 Months | Unemployed | Married |
| Noreen | 28 | Indian | 4 (four girls) | CP | 6 Months | Unemployed | Married |
| Deborah | 35 | African | 2 (two boys) | CP | 6 Months | Part-time | Single |
| Olivia | 33 | African | 3 (three girls) | CP | 8 Months | Unemployed | Partner |
| Ruth | 37 | Pakistani | 1 child - boy | CP | 6 Months | Unemployed | Single |
| Rachael | 29 | African | 3 (two boys and one girl) | LAC | 6 Months | Part-time cleaner | Single |
| Sarah | 32 | Indian | 4 (four girls) | LAC | 8 Months | Part-time in a school | Married |
| Verona | 36 | African | 2 (one girl and one boy) | CP | 9 Months | Unemployed | Partner |
| Rebecca | 38 | Pakistani | 2 (one girl and one boy) | CP | 6 Months | Unemployed | Married |
| Lillian | 30 | African | 2 (two boys) | CP | 7 Months | Unemployed | Married |
| Susan | 28 | African | 1 child - boy | LAC | 8 Months | Unemployed | Partner |
| Jessica | 34 | Indian | 3 (two girls and one boy) | CP | 6 Months | Unemployed | Single |
| Carolyn | 38 | Polish | 2 (one girl and one boy) | CP | 8 Months | Unemployed | Partner |

Key: CP – Child Protection; LAC – Looked After Child/ren

What was immediately evident from the one-to-one interviews was that in all cases, the children involved were younger than thirteen years old. In fact, there were only two parents who had children who were older than ten years.

What the data from the interviews or focus group does not highlight, is the nature of the organisations from which participants were recruited. The organisations stated that they offered a range of support services aimed at helping their clients. This help was not exclusively about issues to do with parenting. The organisations described their support as being tailored to clients' needs but that it included services such as interpreting, advocacy, signposting and providing social events to connect the organisations' clients with people from similar ethnic backgrounds within the community. What was curious in all cases was that all the organisations had support groups for parents who had been involved with children's social services.

In terms of their policies, the organisations were clear that supporting parents who were or had been involved with social care was not the focus of their work. Rather, where support was being provided to clients who were having interventions from children's social care, it was being provided insofar as it helped safeguard the welfares of clients' children. Typically, the support was offered in the form of client run open drop-in groups that were facilitated by a member of staff.

6.4 Presentation of Findings

When thinking about how I was going to present the findings, I considered whether presenting some of the findings using quantitative data would provide better illustration and lend greater credibility to the research. This was mainly because during the data

collection process, I had obtained significant quantitative data such as the number of participants and their demographic make-up (e.g., age ranges, gender split and ethnic background). I saw the inclusion of quantitative data as offering great benefit not only in drawing meaningful results from large volumes of qualitative data, but also in allowing me to focus on the more nuanced aspects of the data by separating out the quantifiable components.

However, I took the view that presenting the findings using quantitative data would not be in keeping with the inductive theoretical perspective underpinning the research. Throughout this study, experiential meaning was an important aspect of this study. Therefore, I did not want to risk suggesting, through quantitative data that there is an objective reality that can be measured and statistically analysed to understand the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents.

As such, the findings presented here are exclusively based on qualitative data and presented in the form of themes, which are evidenced using verbatim quotes from participants' interviews. The reason for using verbatim quotes is to illustrate participants' perceptions about the links between parenting practices and issues of culture and ethnicity. The quotes give insight into participants' experiences by presenting the words that participants use to describe how they make sense of their word. This helps us understand why each participant believes or parents as they do. Each quotation is labelled with the research participants' pseudonym and their ethnicity. So, for example, (Sara, Pakistani mother), would represent a research participant of Pakistani origin whom I refer to as Sara.

The themes are presented in subheadings and reflect the key issues that emerged during the analysis. They also represent participants' conceptualisations of culture and ethnicity as constituent dimensions of parenting and their perspectives of how issues of culture and ethnicity are incorporated within parenting capacity assessments. The presentation of themes about how parents say they do parenting is followed by themes about parents' views on whether social workers incorporated ethnicity and culture in their assessments of the participants' parenting capacity.

That said, I recognise that some of the phrases I used in presenting the findings, such as 'most', 'some' and 'a few', also carry with them an element of quantifying data. But, every effort was made to ensure that quotations remained as close to the transcribed text as possible. Albeit, conversational prompts, silences between responses and non-verbal utterances such as 'hmmm', 'oh', 'ah', are not included. This is because the focus of the study was to understand content rather than discourse. Therefore, I felt that including conversational prompts or describing participants' 'body language' as they responded to questions would detract from the text.

6.5 How Participants say they Do Parenting

The findings indicate that participants' parenting practices were influenced by a range of factors mostly from their own experiences of being parented but also modified through necessity and exposure to other forms of parenting from social connections and media. Participant's responses suggested that their parenting practices were a result of how they understood messages about being parents from their families, friends, professionals, and the media. One participant expressed it as follows:

Yes, culture comes into it but they don't pull you aside as a child and tell you how to become a parent. You do what you saw your parents doing and what your friends' parents were doing but you also learn as you go...you make mistakes, and you see what your friends are doing with their children, what experts on TV say and you pick-up from there. That's how I do it. I am an international mother. I pick from here and there, (Jessica, Indian mother).

Theme 1: Tradition

Most participants viewed traditions as a key influencing factor in shaping their parenting practices. In other words, they saw their parenting practices as a repertoire of skills that had been passed down through generations. This was expressed in two different ways: first, participants described it in the form of gender expectations and explained that their children had to be socialised to demonstrate certain gender competences because it is this that will prepare them for the different gender roles they will perform as adults.

My daughter has to learn how to keep a home from an early age. Who is going to marry her if she can't cook or clean? So, she must learn. Otherwise what good am I as a mother? (Sarah, Indian mother)

Traditionally, you can't raise boys and girls the same way. A girl cannot be lazy otherwise her family will not eat. But because now we are in England, it is called child abuse when you try to teach your daughter responsibility early (Julia, Pakistani mother).

I remember my mother teaching me these things when I had my first child. She used to say that you have to feed children warm things so that they get some warmth in their body and she would say that it is not good to always carry a child when it cries. Sometimes you have to leave them to cry. The lady from social, she didn't understand this tradition things (Susan, Ugandan mother).

Second, tradition was spoken about in terms of it being an innate characteristic of parenting.

I don't really know where my knowledge comes from. You just know it. It is there. It is tradition. That is how everyone does it where I come from. I don't know. May be if you are raised in a certain culture you just find yourself parenting in the traditional way that you know (Ruth, Pakistani mother)

Some participants spoke of tradition in terms of seeking to maintain a sense of belonging. For some participants maintaining traditional parenting practices was an important marker of identity.

A lot of these traditions did not mean much to me when I was in Ghana. But somehow they have become important since I came to England and I want to make sure that my children don't lose that part of their Ghanaian identity. So for me the language, the behaviour and the dress are important (Lillian, Ghanaian mother)

The need to parent in ways that hold on to tradition was particularly evident in participants who claimed to have traditional rites of passage into adulthood. These participants expressed parenting in practical terms, such as teaching their children the

ancestral language as well as cultural norms concerning behaviour and preparing them for adult life. This also extended to areas of disciplining/sanctioning children for what parents felt was as poor behaviour. Participants reiterated an embedded sense of tradition within their parenting by highlighting the importance of teaching children about their culture from an early age.

Where I come from, it is traditional for children to knell when they greet adults. All my children have been raised like that from a young age so for them it is natural. But when the social worker came, she took it the wrong way. Knelling is a traditional sign of respect and children are taught this from very young (Susan, Ugandan mother)

Children have to start wearing the traditional wear when they are teenagers. At this time, they are traditionally mature and have to learn important cultural behaviour. This is where the problem started with the girls. They wanted to be like their White friends. But we have to keep our traditions. This is who we are, this is how we dress (Rebecca, Pakistani mother).

Theme 2: Religion

Participants were not specifically asked questions about religion, but it became evident during the interviews that religion was very important to most participants. Many of the participants spoke of religion as having a significant influence on the way they parent. Some parents spoke of using religion as a way of socialising their children while others said that their parenting practices were drawn directly from religious teachings. For some participants, religious beliefs and faith were expressed as a

guide for parenting that met the cultural traditions that parents were practicing in their countries of origin and the expectations of parenting in England.

I love my children. Therefore, I have to discipline them. There is nothing wrong in that. Even the bible says that the person who loves their child must chastise them. Of course, you don't just do it for the sake of it. You do it to teach them. That is why they say spare the rod and spoil the child (Olivia, Nigerian mother)

I use the church to teach my children how to behave. It helps with teaching children modesty and about respecting their elders. At least this is the same as African values and no one can say that it is child abuse if it is from the church (Verona, Sera Leonean mother)

Others suggested that their parenting practices were influenced by religion because they had been brought up to be religious in line with family expectations at the time. They, therefore, saw religion and culture as being intertwined.

In Pakistan, religion and culture are the same. A good Muslim child is a good child. It's all the same. This means we must teach them about religion. Then only will they be grow up to be good citizens. This is not just about praying. Praying is good but also, if they are fearing God then also they are doing good things for their self and for they country (Aria, Pakistani mother)

Narratives such as the ones expressed in the quotations above, suggest that for some participants, at least in part, parenting from a religious perspective was established at an early age, through dominant social discourse at an early age. There is also some suggestion of a sort of relinquishing of parental responsibilities. In other words, some

participants used religion to provide guidance and boundaries for their children, without necessarily taking parental responsibility for setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries within the home.

When they get to a certain age, it is easier to use church. For example, who wants to talk about sex and contraception to a thirteen-year-old? That is what the church is there for. I say, no sex until you are married. Therefore, no need to learn about contraception. Not my rules, God's rules (Deborah, Kenyan mother).

Theme 3: Acculturation

Acculturation refers to the process of cultural and psychological change that develops as a result of individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds meet. Participants expressed the effects of acculturation in terms of striving to maintain the parenting practices of their countries of origin whilst also adapting to new ways of parenting. This was particularly apparent in interviews with participants who had faced or were facing difficulties with parenting teenage children. The following participants, for example, talked about the challenges of adapting new parenting practices as a way of making sure that their children did not become socially excluded:

I always knew that smacking doesn't work. I never liked it as a child. So coming to England was a good way to try a new way of disciplining children. The trouble is that somethings are not easy to change. My husband still thinks that the child is the mother's responsibility and he doesn't help at all. This is difficult in a country where we don't have support (Lillian, Ghanaian mother)

It is not easy to adjust but you change your style. What I struggled with was the amount of power that this country gives to children. For me I was shocked when my child threatened to report me to social services. But you learn how to start talking to them differently and accept that what you know is not how things work here (Noreen, Indian mother)

Other participants expressed assimilation with a slightly different emphasis: they spoke about the opportunity to combine the good aspects of their traditional parenting practices with what they saw to be good about parenting practices in England. Parenting, for these participants was a deliberate decision to choose the better of two 'worlds'.

It is hard to say what influences my parenting. I pick what I think will benefit my children from different places. For example, I like the confidence that Western children have. So, I have no issue with my children having sleep-overs unlike many Indian and Pakistani families I know. I think it is a good way for children to grow up together. At the same time, I don't agree with children bringing girlfriends or boyfriends home to stay overnight at thirteen (Ruth, Pakistani mother)

Why does it have to be one or the other? I allow my children to embrace the culture here but I also make sure that they keep their Asian values. You should see some of the clothes that the girls here wear. I can't allow my daughter to leave the house dressed like that. No wonder they become sexually active when they are still very young. I want my daughters to believe that they are as

good as anyone but at the same time I want them to be respectable people in the community (Aria, Pakistani mother)

A few participants spoke of their parenting as being influenced by child welfare policies and described their parenting practices as having changed because they now lived in England. For these parents, child welfare policies constitute an onslaught on traditional parenting and undermine parent autonomy.

It is pure nanny state. The government wants to tell you how to raise your child and they say if you don't we take the child away. Since when does a child decide what goes on in the family? But if you teach them the right way, the state says you are too harsh and they taking them and giving them money and saying 'don't worry, it's okay'. This doesn't help them grow (Patricia, Polish mother).

The government makes it hard for parents. Of course children are children. They will do things which are not good for them and someone has to make sure they don't go astray. For some children that means being harsh. I know my daughter, the naughty step will never work. But they give children so much power and this changes the relationship in the home (Jessica, Indian mother).

As can be seen in the above quotes, participants commonly referred to state intervention when discussing parenting practices that they took on reluctantly. A key example was about how children are sanctioned for behaviour that parents found unacceptable. This suggests that participants held a degree of uneasy about child welfare policies that seemed to spell out how children should be parented. By referring to state intervention, participants seemed to be recognising that their parenting was

transient and that factors such as social policy can thwart the ways in which they prefer to raise their children.

Theme 4: Aspiration

Aspiration refers to the hope or ambition that parents have for their children to achieve something. While some participants spoke of tradition and religion being important aspects of parenting, most participants acknowledged that holding on exclusively to traditional and religious values could limit parent's aspirations for their children. Indeed, many participants felt that the aspirations they had for their children was arguably the single most significant influence on their parenting as all parenting decisions and parenting practices were geared towards ensuring that the children achieved the future that their parents envisioned for them.

At the end of the day, all parenting is about making sure that your children have the best future (Noreen, Indian mother)

Another participant spoke at length about how state intervention in parenting undermines parents' aspirations for their children. Her narrative pointed to the view that the aspirations she had for her children were undermined when her children were taken into care.

My daughter was a very bright girl. Averaging A-stars. But when she went into care she suddenly had a lot of freedom and independence and it all went to her head. I don't think she will achieve what she could. Her behaviour is atrocious. This is not what I wanted for her (Carolyn, Polish mother)

Responses such as the ones quoted above suggest that parents are intentional about developing the skills that their children need for the kinds of lives that the parents would like them to lead. Participants acknowledged that the aspirations they have for their children meant that the parenting practices needed to be fluid rather than being rigidly dictated by tradition or religion. For these participants, parenting must continually be redefined for it to maintain validity. This means that the parenting process is deliberate and overt as opposed to being unplanned and implicit as suggested by other participants.

I have to parent with the times because I want my children to achieve far more than I have been able to. So, for me, it is insane to keep doing the same thing that my parents did with me (Verona, Sera Leonean mother)

Participants were aware that the aspiration they have for their children may change as the children grow (particularly as the children have different ambitions for themselves) and that this may require a re-evaluation of their parenting approaches. In this sense, aspiration highlights that participants understood aspirational parenting as an evolving rather than fixed construct.

Different aspirations were evident: some participants highlighted the need to ensure that their children excelled academically and spoke of their parenting practices as being geared towards making sure that their children had a good education and, ultimately, a good income. Others placed emphasis on socialising their children to be the best behaved and saw this as the gateway to future success.

In both instances, participants seemed to take a range of practical and pragmatic approaches to ensure that their aspirations for their children were realised. One of the approaches commonly mentioned by participants was 'being in it for the long haul'. Many felt that the influence they had as parents was continually being undermined by government policies and they therefore felt that they needed to adjust their parenting to adapt to new expectations:

You have to be prepared to accept that the government will decide on things like when your child will learn about sex, sexual relationships, sexuality and contraception. They even want to tell you how to discipline your child (Ruth, Pakistani mother).

Other participants adopted their parenting in different ways. For example, rather than accept that their children might be socialised in ways that they did not approve of, they adapted by exercising the options available to them within policy:

I read up about the policies and when it came to the sex classes, I opted for my children not to attend. I didn't want them learning things they were too young to understand because it is me who would be picking-up the pieces. This is what politicians don't understand. Real people have to deal with the consequences of their policies (Noreen, Indian mother).

Theme 5: Protection

A significant number of participants saw their parenting practices as being informed by the need to protect their children from what they described as the negative things within the community. One participant explained it as follows:

When your child comes back home and says to you that another child was teasing them because of their accent or because of the colour of their skin, you make sure that your child does not continue to play with those children (Olivia, Nigerian mother).

Participants saw the need to protect their children as being a fundamental factor informing their parenting practices. This was verbalised in a variety of different ways as participants highlighted a range of issues from which they sought to protect their children. The issues were not just about race and ethnicity, but also included the need to protect children from dangers such as encountering paedophiles, people with severe mental health problems and negative peer influences. For example, a number of participants felt that their children were at high risk of being victims of abuse from paedophiles *“because this is a country where this kind of people are allowed to walk around freely and they can harm another victim (Rebecca, Pakistani mother).*

Sentiments about the risk from paedophiles or from people with severe mental health problems were quite common with participants expressing real anxiety that their children are not safe.

One of the first things that you hear over here is the high number of people who interfere with children. I was shocked. My friend told me to be careful about people who want to play with your child on the bus. They can be targeting your child for abuse (Susan, Ugandan mother).

What I fear the most is the number of people with mental health issues on the street. You are always hearing on the news that someone killed innocent

people because the voices in their head told them to do it. I can't take the risk for that to be my child (Carolyn, Polish mother).

In some cases, participants felt that they had perhaps been over zealous in seeking to protect their children and that in doing so they did not allow the children to develop age appropriate socialisation and independence skills. This was expressed in terms of strained parent-child relationships.

When I think about it now, I can understand what the social worker was saying. Maybe my daughter felt that the only way to tell me that I was being too much was to rebel. I wish she had not gone after the wrong relationships. It just broke my heart to discover what she was doing with men older than her parents. On top of it, we had social services looking into our parenting (Jessica, Indian mother).

Participants also stated that they needed to protect their children from what they saw as the harmful aspects of British culture. Again, this was expressed in a variety of ways with some participants pointing to attitudes about sex and sexuality as being issues they were concerned about.

It's hard not to worry when you think about these things. The clothes that some of the children wear leave nothing to the imagination. And you know, some parents even allow their teenage daughters to have a boyfriend. This happened with my own daughter's friend. The mother allowed the girl's boyfriend to stay over and to share a room. This totally sends the wrong message to the child. It can't happen in a Pakistani home (Ruth, Pakistani mother).

6.6 The Influence of Culture and Ethnicity on Parenting

Alongside understanding how black and minority ethnic parents say they do parenting, the study also sought to understand how culture and ethnicity influence parenting practices. Participants were invited to first explain how they defined culture and ethnicity and then to share how they felt their parenting practices had been shaped by culture and/or ethnicity.

6.6.1 Participants' Definition of Culture and Ethnicity

What I had in mind when inviting participants to offer a description or definition of culture and ethnicity was to explore how participants' definitions framed the way in which they understood their parenting roles and thus impacted on their parenting practices. The definitions offered varied significantly but the most common terms used by participants to describe culture and ethnicity were: 'shared values'; 'shared way of life'; 'shared belief systems'; 'shared ancestry'.

Participants also made a distinction between culture and ethnicity in that they saw them as separate concepts. The majority viewed culture as a belief system of shared values and ways of doing things while ethnicity was seen in terms of national and racial identity. Among the participants who viewed ethnicity in terms of national identity, some viewed ethnicity and skin colour as being intertwined. Others viewed culture and ethnicity as being inseparable concepts and spoke of them as the same thing.

But, regardless of how participants defined culture and ethnicity, the majority felt that their parenting practices were influenced by culture and ethnicity. Participants

expressed this in terms of their deliberate efforts to socialise children to develop the skills they needed for the kind of lives they (the parents) expected them to lead.

Everything is about children being able to do certain things by the time they are a certain age. For example, where I come from, by ten-years-old, a girl should be able to cook a meal for the family (Agnes, Polish mother)

For some participants the emphasis was about equipping their children to be ready for post eighteen independence, for others it was about ensuring that their children were equipped to perform gender roles in their own families as adults and for others still, socialising was about ensuring that the children achieved or maintained a certain social and or economic status.

Theme 6: Understanding of Child Development

Participants stated that facets of cultural and ethnicity helped shape their understanding of child development. This was expressed in terms of how they understood developmental milestones. Several participants described it as a rite of passage with the majority giving examples that pointed to the transition from childhood to adulthood. In other words, when they talked of child development, they expressed it in terms of the developmental milestones that children were expected to have reached before they are considered to be adults. For example:

In my culture, by twelve-years old, a child is independent and mature enough to be left to look after their younger siblings. This is normal (Noreen, Indian mother).

There was some suggestion that the communal approach to parenting that is favoured in most participants' countries of origin plays a key role in shaping parents' thinking about child development. This was evident in participants' views about when children should be given greater responsibility of their own decisions. For example, some participants expressed this in terms of parenting decisions around levels of supervision.

For us, when a child reaches seven-years-old we say that he is now fully formed into the person he will be for the rest of his life. He is still a child, but all you can do is give him guidance till he is twelve. After that, he can make his own decisions (Sarah, Indian mother).

There was evidence that participants derived confidence and comfort from knowing that parenting traditions offered clear guidance on parenting. This was expressed by participants who talked about their culture and ethnicity as offering a pragmatic way of understanding what children need at different stages of their development. Participants who expressed this view saw their ethnicity and culture as providing the basis from which to align their parenting practices. They articulated it as a feeling of confidence in the knowledge that the cultural practices they were applying had been proved to work over several generations within their genealogy. For example, several participants discussed how they used traditional parenting practices to inform the diet choices they made for their children at different stages of development, the way they disciplined them and the social skills they sought to promote within their children.

"It helps to be able to do things the way your parents did them because you don't really know what you are doing as a parent. At least the traditional ways

work. They have been tried and tested for generations” (Jessica, Indian mother)

Many participants also voiced that they tended to revert to cultural ways of parenting when they were unsure of how to manage their children’s behavioural challenges. For some, this was the last resort option to ensure that their children achieved their full potential.

“I could not just stand by and see my daughter ruin her life. Talking was not working. Grounding her wasn’t working. And the way she was talking to me; she was beginning to think that me and her were equal. In my culture they say a child that will not listen is managed by the rod. So, I gave her one” (Olivia, Nigerian mother)

Theme 7: Gender Roles within the Family

Participants talked about culture and ethnicity as being fundamental in shaping views about gender roles within a family. This was expressed in two main ways: first in terms of parental gender roles and secondly, as aforementioned, in terms of how they socialise their children. Regarding how culture influences parental gender roles, most participants stated that because they are mothers, their cultures expected them to take a more hands-on role in parenting the children. Participants who expressed this view went on to explain that cultural perspectives about which parent is responsible for the day-to-day care of the children mean that even when fathers are present, they have very little or no direct care responsibilities for the children.

For us this is not an issue. He is responsible for providing for the family and my job is to cook and look after the children (Jessica, Indian mother)

Most participants expressed the influence of culture and ethnicity on gender roles in parenting as a positive aspect and talked about it in terms of efficiency. For example, one participant expressed as follows:

If you think about it, it is actually the best way to survive in England. When you do not have family or the neighbours to help, the best way to get things done is if one of you stays home and looks after the children and the other goes to work
(Deborah, Kenyan mother)

Other participants who shared the view that culture and ethnicity offer positive benefits by separating gender roles in parenting expressed it in terms of parents modelling behaviour for children.

It is definitely a good thing. My sons now know what it means to be a man because they see their dad and my daughters know what it is to be a woman because they see me. I think this is how it should be. Not about what they see on tele (Jessica, Indian mother)

It is simple. Culture and ethnicity help us to teach children what we expect from them. You know, in our culture this means dressing modest. Also you don't allow the girls to play with boys after they have had their first period. You know, she is a woman now (Aria, Pakistani mother)

For some participants culture and ethnicity was seen as exerting a negative influence on parenting. This was expressed in terms of the manner in which culture and ethnicity reinforced notions of patriarchy that excluded women from making key parenting decisions.

My husband he just likes to dictate. He doesn't do anything in the house because he is the man. I see it as a backward way of doing things. Why should it be the man that decides everything? I worry that my son is going to become like that. He is the youngest but he still likes to order his sisters around (Verona, Sera Leonean mother)

Participants who expressed similar views explained that it is by defining gender roles that culture and ethnicity has the greatest influence on parenting. However, they felt that it was not necessarily a good or bad thing. Rather, it was about how each family interprets and applies aspects of their culture to their parenting role and how others view the way that people from a particular culture parent their children.

Of course there are good and there are bad aspects of culture and ethnicity. The problem is that some parents overdo it and spoil it for the rest of us. Then when you have a social worker, they think that everyone from that culture is the same (Susan, Ugandan mother)

It is what you make of it really. I like to think of it as a guide. There are no chores for boys or girls in my house. Just chores (Deborah, Kenyan mother).

Theme 8: Identity

Participants saw the transmission of cultural and ethnic values as an integral to providing children with a sense of identity. Most participants recognised the Influence of culture and ethnicity in shaping how they guided their children on issues of identity. This was articulated in terms of discouraging behavioural choices that participants disapproved of. In other words, participants parented in ways that sought to prevent

the likelihood of their children behaving in ways that did not necessarily fit with their cultural and ethnic values.

It is difficult for any parent. You have to teach your children to take pride in their identity. But there is also pressure from their friends and from the media. But if you don't teach them to have pride in their African identity, then they will go with anything and in the end it is you who loses (Olivia, Nigerian mother)

When my daughter is being lazy, I tell her Polish women are never lazy. We work hard. That is who we are. This helps her (Agnes, Polish mother)

More generally, participants considered that it was important for children to be taught about cultural and ethnic identity from early childhood. Doing so was seen as a way of ensuring that children developed the confidence to resist external pressures on their traditional ways of life and choices.

If the child loses sight of their African-ness, they lose their essence and it is only a matter of time before they become a burden to society (Verona, Sera Leonean mother).

Many participants tended to hold positive views about the role of culture and ethnicity in influencing their parenting practices regarding shaping their children's sense of identity. However, some participants expressed mixed views about whether a sense of identity that was rooted in cultural and ethnic difference was appropriate in the modern world.

My problem with all of this is that a lot of things about our culture and ethnicity no longer apply in today's society. Cultural and ethnic traditions that are

intolerant to difference no longer have a place in society today. I think it would be wrong to say to children that this is what defines you. Let them be who they want to be (Olivia, Nigerian mother).

Theme 9: Social Support

In the main, despite some of the differing views about how much influence culture and ethnicity should have on parenting practices, participants felt that it was important to get support from people who fundamentally prioritised similar values. This was a pragmatic way for parents to ensure that their social support conformed to similar parenting approaches. Many participants expressed strong conviction that it was important for children to see similarities in the way that their peers were being parented.

This whole culture of sleepovers worries me. So, sleepovers are either at my house or at my sister's house. That way I know that we see and do things the same way (Lillian, Ghanaian mother)

A few participants described geographical location as being equally important in ensuring access to social support that reinforced their cultural and ethnic convictions. Participants who expressed this view explained that living in the same geographical location as people from one's ethnic background helped minimise the challenges of determining the right balance between retaining the cultural and ethnic values of their countries of origin and the culture values of Britain.

It is less headache if you stay with your own people. The children have fewer things to complain about because everyone is doing it the same way. Even

simple things like wearing the traditional clothes is easy when you live in an Asian area (Aria, Pakistani mother).

When you live in the same area as other Asians it is easy to make changes possible because you all share the same concerns. My sister lives in an area where there are lots of Asians. Because a lot of parents had children in the same school and some sat on the board of governors, they asked for changes in the school's sex education curriculum (Noreen, Indian mother)

A significant number of participants frequently spoke of how culture and ethnicity reinforced oppressive parenting practices. They continually referred to ways in which either their parents or their partners' parents exerted their influence on them in adult life and felt that this was made possible because they lived in areas where the demographic makeup was predominantly of people from the same background.

It is a sword with two edges. On one hand you have access to support from family and friends who share similar values as yourself but with that you also get some of the things about your culture that you don't want your children to experience (Jessica, Indian mother)

I think it is okay to live in areas where there are many Polish. But only because it is easy to find the food. I don't like to live in these areas because Polish people like too much drinking and fighting. So, I make sure that my children don't see this side of Polish culture (Agnes, Polish mother)

Theme 10: Building Resilience

Participants saw culture and ethnicity as being important in building resilience in children. This was voiced as a way of offering children a belief system that enabled them to retain aspects of their background that reinforced a sense of pride in their identity. Some participants described it as giving children confidence in their identity so that they develop the ineffable ability to retain resolve in times of challenges.

I tell my children that Nigerians might have a bad name in England but at least no one can say we lack confidence. So, I say, if people make fun of you being Nigerian, hold your head up high because what they are really saying is that you are confident (Olivia, Nigerian mother)

When talking about resilience, participants spoke about the stressors they encounter as they settle in the United Kingdom. According to most participants, holding on to aspects of their cultural and ethnic identity that promote a sense of pride helped children to navigate through the challenges of settling into a new environment.

Most participants who talked about resilience as a necessary skill for their children to have reflected on it within the context of settling into a new culture. These participants saw parenting as being context driven and felt that was only by holding onto their cultural and ethnic values that they would promote resilience in their children. One participant articulated it as follows:

People underestimate the challenges that children go through when they move to a new country and a new way of doing things. In Africa, everything is about communal cohesion. So, when you uproot a child from a place where parenting was all about making sure that they get along with everyone around them, it can be difficult for the child to adjust in a country where is individualistic. You

have to help them overcome this by going back to the basics of your culture.

This is how they become resilient (Verona, Sera Leonean mother)

There were also a few participants who talked about the need to build their children's resilience but were not sure whether it was best achieved by reinforcing messages of cultural and ethnic identity or by promoting assimilation. These participants mainly reflected on their thoughts without giving a definitive view. However, they tended to share the view that there was a danger that using culture and ethnicity to promote resilience would raise unrealistic expectations about what culture and ethnicity can achieve in a foreign environment. For these participants, the role that culture and ethnicity plays in influencing parenting practices is only evident within the cultural setting that promotes such practices.

A lot of the things are very different from how people do things in this country.

That is why most of us had social services. May be the best is to forget what you know from your own country and do everything the way it is done here. To be honest, I don't know what works (Noreen, Indian mother)

Participants who shared a similar view to had strong convictions that what culture and ethnicity can achieve in the context of parenting in the United Kingdom is strongly conditioned by what Western society defines as normal. There was also a tendency for such participants to describe resilience as an unplanned and implicit quality that children develop on their own as part of their growth as opposed to a quality that a child can be trained to develop. In general, these participants also expressed a degree of uncertainty about whether socialisation processes within the family and wider community embody or function in ways that reinforce core cultural beliefs and values.

I don't think that culture and ethnicity have anything to do with whether a child is strong or not. They either are or they are not. Who can say whether they are strong because of their cultural beliefs and values? Maybe it is possible; who knows (Susan, Ugandan mother)

Some participants expressed resilience in terms of making children aware of issues such as racial discrimination and teaching them how to deal with it. For these participants, resilience was only seen as a relevant only insofar as it helped children to cope with the effects of racial discrimination.

6.7 Participants' perspectives about Parenting Competence Evaluations

This study also sought to gain an understanding of participants' views about the effectiveness with which social workers incorporated issues of culture and ethnicity when assessing their parenting competence. This had relevance because the research starts from the premise that culture and ethnicity plays an important role in parenting.

Theme 11: Preconceptions

Participants stated that most social workers approached the assessment process with preconceptions about parents. Participants felt that while this was not necessarily a bad thing, it was the failure to adjust their thinking that was a problem. Participants who expressed this view tended to feel that social workers saw culture as being conservative and inflexible in nature. According to these participants, although social workers had considered issues of culture and ethnicity, this was largely superficial. One participant explained it as follows:

Yes, they asked about culture. But it was clear that it was really about ticking boxes. They asked about surface things like whether we are religious, what food we feed the children and if there are cultural activities we like doing (Olivia, Nigerian mother)

Most participants felt that social workers did not show any motivation to understand the extent to which culture and ethnicity influence parenting practices. Participants who expressed this view also saw social workers as only being interested in issues of culture and ethnicity that reinforced their preconceptions. These participants typically felt that social workers were blinded to their own partiality. This was voiced in the form of complaints that social workers were not willing to entertain the possibility that they might hold subjective views which could be implicated in their assessments. The participants stated that, in their view, social workers made no overt attempts to recognise and address their own biases.

I don't think there is any genuine attempt to understand why we parent the way we do. As far as they are concerned the only right way to parent children is the way that it is done in this country. It did not matter what I said to her, I was always going to be wrong (Verona, Sera Leonean mother)

Theme 12: Competence and Confidence

Most participants perceived social workers as professionals who held and used their power as a form of control as opposed to using it to support families. Participants felt that social workers genuinely sought to support families but that they did not have the competence to understand the complexity of family arrangements that were different from their own.

I think she genuinely wanted to help but she made things worse. All she was focused on was that my husband was controlling because he did all the talking. When I tried to explain that this is how it is where we come from, she said I was minimising and that if I cannot see this, I cannot protect my children (Noreen, Indian mother)

In most cases, participants described social worker interventions as being well meaning but often unhelpful. Participants who expressed this view said that social work interventions had done more to alienate some family members and, in the process, exacerbated conflicts within the family. These participants felt that social workers needed to have specific skills to assess the parenting competence of parents whose parenting practices may be heavily influenced by cultural and ethnic beliefs and values

Some participants perceived social workers to have shown confidence in recognising and addressing signs of operation. These participants stated that social workers had demonstrated competence and made it easy for participants to work with them in collaborative partnerships.

Overall, participants stated that they responded to social workers according to what they felt was the overarching stance that the social worker had taken. For example, several participants said that once they had realised that social workers were not prepared to unlearn their preconceptions, they responded by either being overtly uncooperative, or pretended to go along with what social workers were saying.

Participants who felt that social workers were competent tended to be more collaborative.

Like I keep saying in our meetings, some of them are never going to change their views no matter what you say to them. It is better if you just go along with them. After all, this is their country, their rules (Olivia, Nigerian mother)

Theme 13: Feminism

Although participants were not specifically asked questions about feminism, it emerged as a pervasive theme throughout the interviews. Participants felt that feminist ideology permeated most social worker's approach and that this interfered with social workers' ability to fully assess family dynamics within the contexts of patriarchal family structures.

I learnt very quickly that there was no point in trying to explain anything to her. She decided that he was oppressive and I was a victim and that was it. But in our family we had to play good cop bad cop. That's how we got the children to behave. In the end he thought I had given her the impression that he was aggressive. The relationship was difficult after that (Verona, Sera Leonean mother)

A significant number of participants described social workers' approaches as appearing to be led by ideology. Many of the participants who expressed this view felt that social workers had assumed that the family arrangements they found were designed by the husbands and partners to deliberately oppress. According to these participants social workers failed to effectively assess the importance of culture and ethnicity in influencing the parenting practices that were being used within the family.

Like I say, it is not a good or a bad thing. They are probably right that it is not fair. But just because that is not how you would do it doesn't mean it is wrong. If they were being fair, they would ask themselves if our way of doing things makes the children to be damaged. Not who is in the kitchen (Noreen, Indian mother)

Participants stated that social workers whose perspectives on parenting is that there shouldn't be gender role difference within the family imposed their own values rather than sought to understand the value that black and minority ethnic parents attach to their parenting tradition.

6.8 Conclusion

Participants described several ways in which culture and ethnicity shaped their parenting practices and questioned the view that 'good' parenting should only be defined in terms of what they defined as a Western perspective. Participants' responses indicated that issues of culture and ethnicity are not adequately addressed in parenting competence assessments. Their sense was that social workers only dealt with culture and ethnicity as a background issue that informed diet choices, dress codes, language and religion. This, they argued, limited the effectiveness of assessments and resulted in punitive actions from social care departments.

But, while participants were not necessarily happy that some of their parenting practices had been assessed as hindering healthy child development, they had come to terms with these assessments to re-conceptualise their parenting practices. Participants who acknowledged with hindsight that their parenting practices were harsh, explained that the social and economic disadvantages that they faced as black and minority ethnic families had fostered a reliance on authoritarian parenting as they sought to protect their children from the dangers they perceived within their environments.

Overall, participants felt that social workers failed to understand the importance of culture and ethnicity in parenting. They suggested that greater attention to culture and ethnicity would have resulted in less punitive actions from social services and encouraged more support. This is discussed further in chapter eight that attempts to explain what these findings mean.

Chapter Seven – Interviews with Social Workers

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of focus group and one-to-one interviews with social workers. However, the focus group findings are presented in summary form and greater emphasis is placed on presenting the findings of fifteen one-to-one interviews with social workers. This not to suggest that data from the one-to-one interviews is more important than data from the focus groups. Rather, it is to focus on drawing nuanced understanding of the topic whilst also minimising repetition. The interviews explored the social workers' perspectives about the efficacy with which they evaluate the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. Their narratives were in response to questions about whether, and if so, how they incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity in their assessments of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents.

The presentation of the findings aims to reflect how the social workers conceptualise the importance of parents' culture and ethnicity when evaluating parenting competence. This is achieved by attempting to answer the following research questions:

1. *How do social workers assess the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents;*
2. *How much weight, if any, is given to issues of culture and ethnicity when assessing the parenting competence of black and ethnic minority parents?*

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I present a summary of the findings from focus group discussions. This is then followed by introducing the

participants in a general sense. The purpose of this is to situate participants' narratives within the context of their professional experience. Next, I present the findings from one-to-one interviews. The findings are presented in a different format to the previous chapter. That is, in the previous chapter the findings were presented in the form of themes listed under the research questions they sought to answer. In this chapter, the themes are not listed under any specific research question. This is because the narratives that participants gave in response to both questions were closely intertwined and appeared to answer both research question. For example, in answering the question about how she assesses the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents, one participant stated:

"I don't think culture and ethnicity should be ignored but I think everyone should be treated the same. We have standardised processes for a reason".

Additionally, almost all participants gave the same responses to the research questions, albeit in different orders. This is also the reason why the order in which the themes are presented is not intended to reflect any hierarchical importance of the different themes. However, the presentation reflects the order and frequency with which themes were mentioned by participants. For example, the theme about using assessment tools appears first because it was either the first or one of the first three ways that almost all participants said they assessed black and minority ethnic parents.

As I explained in the methodology chapter, the focus groups were used to explore the topic and thus mainly intended to complement one-to-one interviews, as well as for triangulation and validity checking. The semi-structured nature of the interviews

allowed participants to express themselves freely, within the boundaries of the topic of inquiry. This led to the emergence of several unanticipated themes. Although the unanticipated themes do not answer any of the research questions directly, they seemed quite relevant to the main research focus. That is, they gave some insight into participants' unspoken perspectives about assessing the importance of culture and ethnicity in the assessment of parenting competence.

I identified five unanticipated themes from my analysis of the data. The unanticipated themes represent a string of related questions that were frequently asked by a significant number of participants during the interview sessions. The themes were drawn out of the questions that participants asked and the explanations that they gave for asking those questions. They are presented under a separate heading and numbered eight to twelve.

7.2 The Focus Groups

The social worker focus groups were held between August 2013 and February 2014. A total of eight focus groups were conducted. Each group consisted of eight participants and lasted from sixty to one-hundred and twenty minutes. A total of forty social workers participated in the focus groups. Although I was not able to recruit participants from the same local authority, the main homogeneous characteristics were that all participants were qualified social workers with more than four years post qualification experience and had previously assessed the parenting competence of at least three parents of black and minority ethnic background. The social workers were themselves from a range of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and described

themselves as African, Caribbean, White-British, British-Asian and Indian. Other characteristics are described later in this chapter.

I facilitated the group discussions using a vignette created following the focus groups with black and minority ethnic parents. All focus group discussions were recorded on an I-phone with the permission of the participants. The anonymity of participants in the focus groups is protected in this report in that the report only presents the summary of the group discussions.

7.2.1 Focus Group Findings

In a similar way to the process used to analyse data from the focus group interviews with parents, the recordings from group discussions with social workers were transcribed and went through several phases of analysis. The initial analysis was conducted to get a general sense of the data and reflect on its meaning. This was followed with a more detailed analysis and data was divided into units that reflected participants' thoughts, attitudes and experiences. This process culminated in the generation of a list of topics which were then labelled and categorised as the key findings. Data from across all focus groups was analysed and organised into the identified categories to determine the interconnectedness of issues and conditions that may have given rise to the categories. This gave a general picture of social workers' perceptions about how they assess the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents.

As part of the process of analysing the findings, each participant group data was also analysed separately to determine whether there were trends unique to each group.

However, there were no significant distinguishable differences. Rather, the themes from the focus group discussions are the same themes identified from the one-to-one interviews. Overall, there were high levels of agreement about how parenting competence should be assessed and the challenges involved in assessing the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. Indeed, much of the group discussions focused on highlighting the complexities of incorporating culture and ethnicity in evaluations of parenting competence.

However, what was noteworthy across all focus groups, were the impassioned and extensive debates about the value that should be attached to issues of culture and ethnicity when evaluating parenting competence. The consensus was that culture and ethnicity matter and that the parenting practices of most black and minority ethnic parents are significantly influenced by culture and ethnicity. Nevertheless, some social workers felt that the focus of assessment should remain 'squarely' about whether children are suffering harm because of the parenting, rather than seeking to understand why parents take a certain approach to parenting. Indeed, some social workers were suspicious of parents who point to their culture and ethnicity to explain their parenting practices with one of the groups describing reference to culture and ethnicity as "*a smoke screen to hide abuse*".

Another perspective that drew extensive discussions related to where social workers felt the questions of this research should have been directed. Generally, social workers felt that the questions of this research should have been directed towards policy makers rather than at social workers. Within the group discussions, social workers pointed to the practical challenges of seeking to understand cultural parenting

scripts within the context of resource constraints and suggested that it is only through explicit policies that the focus of assessment can change.

Analysis of group discussion transcripts identified eleven themes explaining how social workers said they evaluate the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents, as well as their perspectives about incorporating culture and ethnicity in assessment. These themes included: the use of assessment tools; professionals experience; the role of social workers; time constraints; supervision; the use of colleagues' expertise and knowledge; research; sensitivity to culture and ethnicity in practice situations; the boundaries of culture and ethnicity; oppressive practice and constraints in accessing resources. The way the themes were discussed within the groups raised questions about the extent to which social workers' individual cultures and ethnicities intersect with the social work profession's culture.

The focus group discussions also highlighted that social workers bring aspects of their personal background into the assessment process. This became apparent during discussions in which some social workers pointed out that parenting competence evaluations can be highly subjective. Within these discussions, social workers debated on the need for an assessment tool that minimises and tests subjectivity. There was an attitude among some of the social workers that a focus on ethnicity and culture would make assessment difficult because, for example, expectations around developmental stages vary across cultures.

7.3 The Social Workers

At the start of the project, my intention was to interview social workers from the same local authorities. I had hoped that the fifteen social workers interviewed at this stage would have been made up of three social workers drawn out of five focus groups, each consisting of social workers recruited from the same local authority. However, only two of the ten local authorities approached gave permission for their social workers to be interviewed. Out of the two that gave permission to interview their social workers, I was only able to recruit three participants. The reason for this was that the social workers approached had pressing work commitments and were unable to take part in the research.

The remaining twelve participants for the study were recruited from referrals from the three social workers who agreed to take part as well as from my own connections with social work colleagues that I had worked with in my previous social work roles. The result was that only three of the fifteen social workers were recruited from the same local authority. This has implications for generalisability and these will be discussed in the next chapter. That said, there were several characteristics that were common with all participants (demographic details are given in table 2 below):

1. They all had at least five years post qualification experience;
2. The minimum level of academic qualification was a bachelor's degree;
3. They had all previously assessed the parenting competence of at least three parents from a black and minority ethnic background within twelve months prior to the interview;
4. They all worked within statutory children's social care departments;
5. They had all qualified from a British University.

Table 2: Participants (Social Workers)

| Name | Gender | Age | Ethnic Background | Post qualification Experience | Academic Qualification |
|-------------|---------------|------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Rochelle | Female | 34 | White-British | 6 years | Masters |
| Karen | Female | 36 | White-British | 8 years | Masters |
| Ben | Male | 43 | Black-African | 10 years | Masters |
| Kirsty | Female | 35 | White-British | 5 years | Bachelors |
| Grace | Female | 38 | Caribbean | 7 years | Bachelors |
| Yvonne | Female | 36 | Black-African | 5 years | Bachelors |
| Janet | Female | 29 | Black-African | 5 years | Bachelors |
| Anne | Female | 45 | Caribbean | 11 years | Bachelors |
| Harriet | Female | 33 | Black-African | 6 years | Bachelors |
| Gregory | Male | 47 | White-British | 15 years | Masters |
| Jesse | Male | 38 | Black-African | 7 years | Masters |
| Jaz | Female | 36 | British-Asian | 9 years | Bachelors |
| Pretti | Female | 35 | Indian | 8 years | Masters |
| Monica | Female | 28 | White-British | 5 years | Bachelors |
| Thomas | Male | 37 | Black-African | 9 years | Bachelors |

The themes identified from the focus group discussions were the same as those from the one-to-one interviews. As such, I chose to focus the presentation in this chapter on the findings from the one-to-one interviews. Throughout this chapter, I use verbatim quotations to illustrate how participants conceptualised the role of ethnicity and culture in informing their assessments of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. All participants' names have been changed to keep their anonymity.

In keeping with the phenomenological approach of this research, I present participant's narratives with a focus on describing rather than explaining their experiences. While I acknowledge that there is some form of interpretation involved in deciding what to select and how to express it, my aim in this chapter is to, insofar as is possible, limit my own biases and remain faithful to participants' narratives.

Theme 1: Assessment tools

All participants stated that they evaluate the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents using standardised assessment tools. Most participants expressed this in terms of drawing on a vast body of scientific knowledge to make sense of how families function but that objectivity in assessment was achieved by using the same assessment tool for everyone. Participants who expressed this view also stated that they used the framework for the assessment of children in need and their families as the main tool for evaluating parenting.

“You don't approach assessments differently just because the parent is from a black and minority ethnic group. Everyone is treated equally using the assessment triangle. I think it is the fairest way to assess parenting. Otherwise how can you be sure that the same standard is applied to everyone?” (Karen, White-British Social worker)

“I personally don't think it should make a difference what the parents' background is. Don't get me wrong. I know that culture and ethnicity is important. I just don't think it should influence the outcome of assessment”.
(Monica, White-British Social worker)

The framework for the assessment of children in need and their families was seen by most participants as an effective tool for evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. This was expressed by participants who also held the view that cultural diversity in the United Kingdom meant that need, risk and rights are interpreted differently by the different groups of people whose parenting is likely to be assessed.

“There is no right or wrong way of doing things in our profession. It all boils down to how you balance needs, risks and rights; regardless of the client’s culture or ethnicity. The assessment triangle gives you an objective way of assessing and I think it works just as effectively for black and ethnic minorities”.
(Gregory, White-British Social Worker).

Not all participant who used the framework for the assessment of children in need and their families thought that it was effective in evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority parent. Some participants felt that issues of culture and ethnicity within black and minority ethnic families meant were quite significant and a different assessment tool was needed if their parenting competence is to be assessed effectively.

“The problem is that what we know about parenting is based on Eurocentric views and Western research. It does not necessary apply to people from different backgrounds” (Ben, Black-African Social Worker).

“I think the assessment triangle is a blunt tool at best when it comes to assessing parenting with black and minority parents. Think about it; all parenting takes place within the context of culture. The triangle is suited for

assessing parenting in Western cultures but can only loosely assess parents for whom dimensions such as stimulation, independence, community participation or emotional warmth are interpreted differently” (Thomas, Black-African Social Worker).

There was a commonly held view among participants that assessment tools were important in helping them to focus their work but that they were not always helpful in enabling them to draw conclusive views about parents’ competence.

Some participants felt that this was because organisational policies too often influenced how information was interpreted and presented. Participants who held this view expressed it in the form of criticism that organisational focus on audits and performance indicators meant that they were not able to focus on parenting issues of specific groups of clients.

“In an ideal world, you would like to explore what it is about their culture or ethnicity that makes them parent the way they do. But, when you have eighteen other families to assess within set timescales, you have to have an approach that can treat everyone the same” (Kirsty, White-British Social worker).

“Assessment tools help highlight what the parent is doing or not doing in certain specified aspects of parenting but you ultimately have to make a judgement about whether you think they are a good parent or not. Imagine the challenges if they are from a black or minority ethnic background” (Pretti, Indian Social Worker).

The framework for the assessment of children in need and their families was not the only tool that participants used to evaluate parenting competence. The three most commonly used tools for assessing parenting were: framework for the assessment of children in need and their families; signs of safety and the continuum of need. Participants talked about using a variety of different models to inform their views about parenting competence. However, parenting competence was assessed using tools specified by the organisation in which they worked. Many participants stated that this left them feeling uncomfortable about assessing the parenting competence of black and minority parents.

“You only have a small window in any family’s life to make a judgement about their parenting. It is more difficult when it is a family from a black or minority ethnic group because you know that a lot of what they do may be perfectly acceptable where they come from but obviously it is not in this country. Assessment tools do not capture that” (Gregor, White-British Social Worker).

Participants felt that it was important to have a way of effectively assessing issues of culture and ethnicity within parenting but that this did not have to mean adopting a different assessment tool to evaluate the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents.

“Issues of culture and ethnicity are becoming increasingly common place in assessment of parenting but what is needed is a knowledge base in this area rather than a separate assessment tool for black and minority ethnic families. Perhaps the approach should be similar to the way we assess substance misuse or mental health issues within parenting” (Grace, Caribbean Social Work).

“The issue of black and minority ethnic families being over represented in care statistics is not new. I suspect it is to do with us not understanding the influence of culture and ethnicity on the way they parent. This is what needs to change. Not the way we assess but how we assess these aspects within all parenting” (Rochelle, White-British Social Worker).

Participants who felt that there needed to be a way of evaluating the impact of culture and ethnicity on parenting also stated that effectiveness in incorporating this within assessment was dependent on individual practitioners’ experience rather than organisational focus.

Theme 2: Professional Experience

Most participants stated that it was their experience that gave them the confidence in assessing the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. This was expressed in terms of being able to recognise that a parents’ culture or ethnicity played a significant part in shaping the way they parent.

“The thing is that not every black or Asian parent is doing parenting because they are black or Asian. Understanding this makes a difference when you are assessing parenting. Otherwise you make unhelpful assumptions that could risk leaving a child in a dangerous environment” (Anne, Caribbean Social Worker).

“You build more confidence from working with parents from black and minority ethnic background. This is what helps you to understand how culture and ethnicity influences the way they parent. If you don’t have the experience, I

don't think you can do a good job no matter which assessment tool you use"
(Monica, White-British Social Worker)

Most participants talked about the need to understand issues of culture and ethnicity as they specifically relate to the parents being assessed. However, participants who expressed this view also stated that it was not practical for any social worker to be expected to know about every client's culture. Participants saw experience as the main means through which their gaps in knowledge about assessing the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents was bridged.

"Look, we are not just talking about two or three different cultures or ethnicities. The spectrum is too wide. It is the practitioners' experience, specifically with working with people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds that equips them to effectively incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity when assessing parenting competence" (Thomas, Black-African social Worker).

Experience is massively important in this area. We just need to cast our minds to the issue of female genital mutilation. Until it became a national focus, it was only social workers with experience of working with families for whom that was a common practice that were able to incorporate it in assessment. Most social workers will have stereotyped and dismissed it" (Jesse, Black-African Social Worker).

Participants who viewed experience of working with black and minority ethnic people as an important aspect of assessment talked about in terms of enabling balanced evaluation of parenting. This was expressed in terms of what participants saw as the

benefits of separating risk of harm to children from the need to re-educate parents about their parenting approach.

“We have all panicked about some of the parenting practices we have seen from black and minority ethnic families at some point in our career. But, with experience, you begin to learn that in the majority of cases, it really is a matter of re-educating parents about their approach” (Karen, White-British Social Worker).

Participants also associated experience as being necessary to alleviate ‘fears’ and enable social workers to build relationships with black and minority ethnic parents and improve assessments. This was expressed in terms of enabling social workers to feel less anxious about assessing black and minority ethnic parents.

“I can remember feeling really anxious when I was first asked to assess this Caribbean parents. The husband was so intimidating. I don’t think I did that assessment justice. It was rushed and I only captured how he made me feel. I would certainly do it different now” (Monica, White-British Social Worker).

“You do need a certain level of experience to interpret and break some of the barriers that stand in the way of assessing black and minority ethnic parent. These are more than language. It can be things like the subtle cultural norms around social interactions between adults and children that can, for example be misinterpreted for a lack of emotional warmth” (Ben, Black-African Social worker).

Theme 3: The Role of Social Workers

A significant number of participants saw their social work role as being integral to the way that they assessed the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. This was expressed in terms of ensuring that the focus remained on the child. Participants who held this view stated that all parenting competence was assessed within the context of social justice from the child's point of view. For these participants, it did not matter what the family's cultural or ethnic background was. One participant expressed it as follows:

*“At the end of the day, my responsibility is to the child and the child's welfare”
(Jaz, British-Asian Social Worker).*

Participants also stated that the purpose for which the assessment was required also played a significant part as it decided the stance. Some examples given were that assessments required by Courts were more thorough in comparison to those completed as part of 'normal' local authority assessments. Participants stated that the purpose for which the report was required meant that more time was allocated to completing and that this allowed for more complex issues of culture and ethnicity to be considered fully.

“In the normal run of the mill social work, you don't really have the time to focus on issues of culture and ethnicity. They are far too subtle to draw the attention of managers. But, when you are in the Court arena, you have to be thorough otherwise some wise barrister might ask you whether you considered their client's culture and ethnicity when you made certain conclusions about their parenting” (Ben, Black-African Social Worker).

“I think our roles as children’s social workers has a big influence. I don’t think it is easy to look at issues of culture and ethnicity if your focus is on whether the child has suffered harm. In the vast majority of cases, it is not easy to separate the child’s welfare from the way the parents approach their parenting tasks. Yet, parents’ approach is often determined by their culture and ethnicity” (Pretti, Indian Social Worker).

A significant number of participants stated that there is a need for issues of culture and ethnicity in parenting to be assessed but strongly that this should not be done by the same worker assessing parenting competence. This was mainly expressed in terms of the overwhelming demands on social workers.

“Assessing the impact of culture and ethnicity on the parenting of black and minority ethnic parents should be done by a separate professional from the one doing the parenting capacity assessment. All too often social workers are asked to take more tasks and blamed for weak assessments. You need experts in this area in the same way that we have experts in substance misuse or child sexual abuse” (Kirsty, White-British Social Worker)

Theme 4: Time

Almost all participants stated that the time they were allocated to complete assessments was a crucial factor in determining the extent to which issues of culture and ethnicity were incorporated in parenting competence assessments. Many participants talked about not delving beyond aspects that would be relevant for matching children with prospective carers. Participants who expressed this view felt

that understanding the impact of culture and ethnicity on parenting required them to invest more time in building relationships with black and minority ethnic parents.

Everything is so rushed these days that you can't help but wonder whether your assessment of a family was a fair reflection of what is really going on (Monica, White-British Social Worker).

“Open and honest engagement with parents, of whatever background, takes time to develop. Sometimes, a little more time with a family can reveal a different picture about their parenting practices” (Yvonne, Black-African Social Worker).

For most participants, the need to fit assessments within tightly specified time frames meant that they risked losing sight of the influence that culture and ethnicity have on parenting practices. Participants saw this as disadvantaging parents from black and minority ethnic groups.

“The problem with the tight deadlines is that you have to fit all parenting into the same mould so to speak in order to meet the assessment timescales. Parents who do not conform to that mould can find themselves being assessed as not being good enough. Sadly, that is most black and minority ethnic parents” (Thomas, Black-African Social Worker).

Participants who talked about time as being an issue in the assessment of parenting competence, also often referred to time being associated with the role of social work. This was expressed in terms of social work roles and responsibilities being too wide to be effective within tight assessment deadlines. One participant put it as follows:

“You are expected to do it all: arrange meetings, chair them, write the minutes, arrange contact, supervise it; and not just for one family. Naturally, there is not enough time to be thorough about issues of culture and ethnicity” (Janet, Black-African Social Worker).

A few participants stated that some managers recognised the need to allow more time for issues of ethnicity and culture to be explored in assessments. In most participants' experience, this was only done if cases were in Court proceedings.

“You tend to be given more time if your case is in Court proceedings. But if you have a manager who understands issues of culture and ethnicity, they will allow more time to explore the impact that these issues might have on parenting practices” (Harriet, Caribbean Social Worker).

Most participants did not see culture and ethnicity as the only important factor to consider when assessing the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. Nevertheless, they felt that sufficient time was required in order to assess some root problems affecting parenting competence in black and minority families. Examples given included issues such as poverty, poor housing and racism.

“You need time to produce thorough assessments. Even more so with black and minority ethnic parents. This is mainly because the issues they face are complex and unique to them but it is wrong to assume that it is only about the impact of culture and ethnicity. Other aspects such as poverty, poor housing and access to resources play a far more important role” (Anne, Caribbean Social Worker).

Theme 5: Supervision

Participants stated that supervision made a fundamental contribution to how they assess the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. This view was expressed by participants who also saw assessment of black and minority ethnic parents as being fraught with dangers associated with misinterpreting parents' behaviour, reinforcing practitioners' subconscious stereotypes or causing offence in the process of assessment.

"I have been doing social work for a long-time now, but I still get anxious about assessing black and minority ethnic parent. Not on the clear cut things, like domestic abuse or substance misuse; It is on the more subtle practices associated with their culture and ethnicity. Things like how they enforce the whole idea of respect. It can seem oppressive and you need good supervision if you are to get the balance right" (Rochelle, White-British Social Worker).

Supervision is absolutely key. It is easy to be misunderstood especially when dealing with issues of culture and ethnicity. Supervision comes into its own when you can debate these issues and make sure you are not being biased or stereotyping (Kirsty, White-British Social Worker)

Most participants who viewed supervision as being integral to the effectiveness with which they assessed black and minority ethnic parents' parenting competence explained the benefits in terms of enabling critical analysis of the meaning of parenting practices. This view was typically expressed by participants who saw supervision as a forum for reflecting on their assessments as well as sharing decision making.

It is easy for a parent to lead you down the garden path because they are aware that you can't possibly know about their culture. Supervision allows you to critically evaluate parenting practices that cause concern. For me marriage ranks high among some of the most controversial cultural practices that parents promote as part of how they raise their children (Monica, White-British Social Worker).

Participants who saw supervision as a forum for reflecting on issues of culture and ethnicity talked of supervision as a way of minimising cultural relativism in their approach to assessment. This was expressed in terms of allowing social workers to evaluate whether the cultural and ethnic value bases of black and minority ethnic parents enhance or detract from safe parenting. Participants stated that it was during supervision that they sounded out their reflective awareness of working with client groups from different backgrounds.

The thing to remember is that the different value bases that are reflected in the parenting practices of many black and minority families do not necessarily translate into child welfare concerns. But you need good supervision to help you minimise the likelihood of oppressive practice that looks at Western parenting as the gold standard (Pretti, Indian Social Worker).

A few participants talked of supervision in terms of shaping how much focus was given to issues of culture and ethnicity in assessment. Participants who expressed this view stated that they used supervision to gauge whether issues of culture and ethnicity needed to be considered beyond factual demographic information. Most participants

explained the reasoning for this practice in terms of the pressures to meet assessment timescales.

Obviously issues of culture and ethnicity are important when assessing parenting. But let's be honest; untangling the meaning of cultural parenting practices is a complex matter. You need supervision to guide you on how much time and focus to give it in your assessment (Anne, Caribbean Social Worker).

I don't think culture and ethnicity should necessarily be the focus of all assessments of the parenting capacity of black and minority ethnic parents. Identifying when it is necessary to explore culture and ethnicity in great detail is crucial and it saves time. Most times the presenting issues are to do with child abuse concerns that are a result of environmental factors. If you think about the impact of things like poor mental health, substance misuse or domestic abuse; the effects on parenting are the same regardless of the family's ethnicity and culture (Gregory, White-British Social Worker).

Theme 6: Colleagues

A small but significant number of participants talked about using their colleagues to guide their assessment of black and minority ethnic parents. This was expressed in terms of attempts to understand culturally specific parenting practices. There were two main ways in which participants said they used colleagues: the first was as informal supervisory support and the second was as 'insider' informants of the meaning of cultural and ethnic parenting practices associated with the parents being assessed. Participants who talked about using colleagues as informal supervisory

support talked about drawing on colleagues' professional experience of assessing families from similar backgrounds.

The diversity of the clients we now have to work with is just mind gobbling. Luckily, there is always someone within the team who has dealt with families from the same background; they become the team expert on families from that background (Kirsty, White-British Social Worker)

There is definitely a need for a separate assessment tool. Without it, one has to rely on the expertise of colleagues who have assessed parents from a similar or the same background for guidance (Jesse, Black-African Social Worker).

The reality is that all cultures and ethnicities approaches parenting differently. We risk misinterpreting some parenting practices because we don't understand them or don't have the time to try to understand them. The danger is that you err on the side of caution and in doing so become oppressive in your practice. Having a colleague who has walked the same path before, so to speak, helps make sure that you are, if nothing else, being fair in your assessment and are capturing the right things (Harriet, Black-African Social Worker)

Participants also talked about drawing on the research knowledge that colleagues might have accumulated over the course of their practice.

The diversity is just so wide it is impossible to know the inner workings of every culture. Even within the same ethnicity and culture there are important differences. In my team we have two colleagues that we have dubbed the

encyclopaedias on all issues cultural in assessment. Their research knowledge is astounding (Karen, White-British Social worker)

Participants who talked about using colleagues as insider' informants stated that they used colleagues from the same cultural and ethnic backgrounds as the parents they were assessing to understand and/or verify the meaning associated with specific parenting practices. Participants gave several examples highlighting how their colleagues help give insight into the belief and value bases that had informed the parenting practices of the clients they were assessing. The examples given were typically about trying to understand parents' beliefs and value bases about issues such as respect, tradition, sex, relationships, sexuality, gender and gender roles.

It can get quite complicated when you consider that black and minority ethnic parents approach the task of parenting from distinctively different belief and value systems. Having a colleague from the family's cultural and ethnic background can help explain even practices as simple as why it is important for the children to dress a certain way or why the girl in the family seems to do a lot more chores than the boys (Jaz, British-Asian Social Worker)

From time to time one comes across parental practices within black and minority ethnic families that appear rigid, oppressive and do not make sense from a Western perspective. In such situations, it helps to have a colleague who understands the culture of the parents you are assessing and can explain how to intervene to address the welfare issues without appearing to disrespect the family's beliefs and value systems (Janet, Black-African Social Worker).

Within the responses that participants gave, there was an overall recognition that even colleagues from the same cultural and ethnic backgrounds as the families being assessed didn't always know or understand the parenting approaches that families had adopted. This, according to some participants, heightened anxieties in completing assessment.

I know that some colleagues do not like being used to assess people from their own cultural and ethnic background because they do not want to be seen as the expert in that culture. But, I think it is easy to become more defensive in your practice when a colleague from the same ethnic background says they too do not understand the family you are assessing (Grace, Caribbean Social Worker)

Theme 7: Research

A significant proportion of participants said that they relied on research to inform their judgements about the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. Most participants who expresses this view talked about it in terms of standardising assessments and avoiding practice that might be perceived as being oppressive. One participant expressed it as follows:

The complexity involved in trying to understand the value bases and functioning of black and minority ethnic families means that if you are not careful as a practitioner, you risk making arbitrary decisions which bias the outcome of assessment. What research does is remove the tendency to guess or experiment with families by suggesting helpful ways of assessing parents from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Thomas, Black-African Social Worker)

Participants felt that research evidence was helpful in enabling them to understand the contexts within which black and minority parents socialise their children. This was seen by many participants as a way of providing objectivity in assessment and as evidence of good practice in social work.

Obviously you are going to be less likely to be biased if you base your assessment on research. Basically what you are doing is using best evidence to inform your assessment of the parenting capacity (Monica, White-British Social Worker)

Drawing on research is a crucial way of making sure that assessments are as effective as they can be. It is basic good practice (Ben, Black-African Social Worker)

All participants stated that they generally use research to inform their assessments of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. But, almost all participants also talked about the barriers to using research, with the majority mentioning time as being a key barrier.

We cannot deny that quite often research offers insightful understanding of the clients we work with and that is no different for black and minority ethnic parents. The real issue is whether, as a practitioner you always have the time to dig up research on every client group (Gregory, White-British Social Worker)

Apart from the lack of time, participants stated that research in the area of assessing parenting within black and minority ethnic families was scarce. Some participants also felt that where research was available, it was not always accessible. The main

reasons given for this were that research papers tend to be long and use language that is not always easy to understand. A small number of participants also stated that their use of research was inconsistent because they felt that they did not have the skills to critically evaluate the evidence base of the research they read.

There is actually not a lot of evidence base that is specific to parenting in black and ethnic minority families (Thomas, Black-African Social Worker).

The benefits are clear and undeniable but the reality is that a lot of the research that is available is obviously written by academics for fellow academics. It doesn't always have practical application in the field (Pretti, Indian Social Worker)

A lot of research papers, in my view, live in an ideal world. Besides, trolling through research papers to write an assessment always feels like you are reducing clients' experiences into academic pursuits. People's lives are far more complex and it doesn't help to make them more complicated by requiring them to fit into some academic's philosophical ideal (Anne, Caribbean Social Worker)

A significant number of participants saw research as being helpful in informing assessment, but their narratives focused on the limitations of using research to evaluate parenting competence within the context of culture and ethnicity. Participants such as Anne, quoted above, felt that most research did not have practical application in the lives of the black and minority ethnic parents they saw. Some of the reasons

given for this were that research tended to ignore resource issues or did not address culture issues within the context of United Kingdom's child welfare policy.

The biggest limitation of most research on parenting within black and minority ethnic families is that it is great at explaining cultural influences on parenting but it doesn't tell us anything about what that means within the context of UK legislation and child welfare policy (Rochelle, White-British Social Worker).

7.4 Unanticipated themes

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, I identified five unanticipated themes which are included here because of their relevance to the main research focus. That is; to explore whether, and if so, how social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity in their evaluations of the parenting competence of black and ethnic minority parents. The first seven themes presented above, reflect participants' direct responses to the research questions they were asked. The five themes that follow are drawn from the questions that participants asked about the relevance of the research and their explanations for asking the questions. To remain consistent with the aims of this chapter i.e., to present the findings, I focus on describing rather than explaining participants' narratives.

Theme 8: Ethnic and Cultural Sensitivity in Practice Situations

During the group discussions and in the interviews, participants asked whether the research questions would have yielded better insight if they had been directed at policy makers. Most of the participants who posed this question stated that they asked it because they felt that policy exerts significant influence on the importance that social workers attach to issues such as culture and ethnicity in assessments. Participants

generally explained their stance by pointing out that the assessment guidance on which social workers base their evaluations of parenting competence are informed by policy developments. Most participants suggested that unless policy places more value on the importance of issues of culture and ethnicity, they can only remain relevant as markers of identity that assessing professionals use to inform sensitivity in social care interventions.

National and local policies are notoriously ambiguous on the issue of culture and ethnicity. Take for example the policy developments that followed the death of Victoria Climbié. The changes required social workers to demonstrate greater cultural sensitivity in assessment. But the reality of practice is that culture and ethnicity is often used by parents as a smoke screen to hide abuse. If black and minority ethnic parents are to be assessed differently, it is absolutely crucial for child welfare legislation and policy to be clear about the weight that should be given to culture and ethnicity when assessing parenting capacity (Gregory, White-British Social Worker)

All participants who queried whether the research questions would have been better directed at policy makers stated that it is important for social workers to demonstrate ethnic and cultural sensitivity in their interactions with black and minority ethnic families. A significant proportion of participants felt that ethnic and cultural sensitivity should be limited to understanding the contexts within which parenting occurs rather than inform evaluations of parenting competence. The illustrations that most participants used to emphasise this view focused on explaining that while it was important to understand why cultural parenting practices are important to some black

and minority ethnic parents, their culture and ethnicity should not be used to evaluate their parenting competence.

The thing is, all parenting is culturally defined. What might appear perfectly acceptable in one culture may be seen as abuse in another. It would be chaotic to try and assess parenting capacity based on parents' culture and ethnicity. A good example is the issue of the physical chastisement of children. For some cultures, perhaps due to the influence of religion, physical chastisement is seen as perfectly acceptable way of disciplining children. It is not acceptable in the UK. I think cultural sensitivity should stop at understanding and respecting why the parent might think their form of parenting is okay, but their parenting capacity has to be assessed based on the parenting standards of the UK (Kirsty, White-British Social Worker)

A few participants who shared the view that the research questions might have been best directed at policy makers expressed the view that culture and ethnicity needed to be central in all evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. Participants who expressed this view explained that assessors that mainly use culture and ethnicity to inform how they interact with their clients inevitably oppress black and minority ethnic parents and contribute to the disproportionate over representation of black and minority ethnic children in care statistics.

The context of parenting has to be given central focus when assessing parenting capacity. A parent who falls short of British standards of parenting is not necessarily a bad parent. Therefore, assessments that do not consider ethnicity and culture at a deeper level than for political correctness or identity cannot have been thorough (Thomas, Black African Social Worker)

Theme 9: The Boundaries of Culture and Ethnicity

A significant number of participants queried whether it was necessary for issues of culture and ethnicity to be considered beyond defining identity. Participants expressed this by asking, rather rhetorically, what culture and ethnicity offered black and minority ethnic families besides a sense of identity. The majority of participants who expressed this view stated that culture and ethnicity matters and should be incorporated in assessment, but should be limited to informing support decisions rather than evaluating parenting competence.

Yes, it (culture and ethnicity) matters because it gives people a sense of stability, especially for families who are new to this country. Assessments should therefore consider why parents parent the way they do. But they should not be assessed according to what is acceptable in their culture, which is what the questions seem to be suggesting (Jaz, British-Asian Social Worker)

Participants who shared the view that issues of culture and ethnicity should be limited to informing support decisions tended to give examples relating to children being placed in local authority care. They saw culture and ethnicity as being an important consideration when making decisions about matching children from black and minority families with foster carers.

It is important to be aware of the aspects of culture and ethnicity that are important to families because when you place a child, you want to maintain a degree of normality for them. Things like diet, dress, how they treat their hair and the importance of religion, can seem trivial but are surprisingly important (Rochelle, White Social Worker).

The most common reason that participants gave to explain why the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents should be limited to defining identity is that the expectations are different. Participants expressed this by explaining that parenting within black and minority ethnic families is often based on different conceptualisations of childhood and child development than the ones that inform social workers' evaluations of parenting competence. This explanation was often illustrated with examples about the different interpretations that black and minority ethnic parents tend to have about aspects such as emotional warmth and stimulation, as well as guidance and boundaries.

I can't tell you how many times I have worked with parents from Africa who show no sign of emotional warmth or where the children barely have any toys in the home. To them, these things are not as important as education, respect and children learning to take responsibility from an early age. The intensity that some black and minority ethnic parents enforce these things is often alien to us in this country so we have to hold them accountable to the standards of this country (Monica White Social worker)

When you think about it, parenting assessments are not about pointing a finger of blame. We are not really saying that the parent is bad. All we are saying is that the way they are parenting is not how we would parent and we think it is harmful to the child (Anne, Caribbean Social worker)

Some participants stated that it was important for the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents to be evaluated within the context of the parents' culture and ethnicity. Participants who expressed this view also stated that restricting issues

of culture and ethnicity to defining identity was evidence of the lack of creative thinking within the profession.

I have worked with several colleagues who returned to the office and said there was no emotional warmth with that family. Often what they mean is that the family did not show emotional warmth in the way the social worker expected to see it i.e., there was no hugging and kissing. It is probably true that most African cultures are not tactile. That is not the only way to show emotional warmth
(Benjamin, Black African Social Worker)

Participants also stated that they did not feel that assessment tools or processes needed to change for the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents to be evaluated on

All parenting is culturally defined. Therefore, assessing black and minority ethnic parents with a Western lens immediately disadvantages them. We don't have to reinvent the wheel to take a different approach. The dimensions of the assessment triangle can be considered within the context of culture and ethnicity without compromising children's safety and welfare (Pretti, Indian Social Worker)

Theme 10: The Issue of Oppressive Practice

A significant number of participants asked whether the research was motivated by suggestions that the current assessment processes are oppressive to black and minority ethnic parents. In questioning whether the research was borne out of suggestions that assessment processes were oppressive, participants advanced two main responses: The first was that black and ethnic minority parents either fail or are

reluctant to engage with parenting competence evaluations and this negatively affects the outcome of assessment. The second was that effective practice requires social workers to be reflectively aware of their client groups. This was helpful in aiding investigative social work. However, participants also felt that reflective awareness also carries with it the risk of reinforcing professionals' stereotypes about the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents, thus perpetuating oppressive practice.

Unfortunately, from a Western view point, a lot of culturally defined parenting within black and minority ethnic families can be oppressive and harmful to children. That can be reflected in the views they hold about the importance of women and girls in society or the use of physical chastisement to discipline children. When these issues are being explored and the parents refuse to engage in assessment, you have little choice but to conclude that what your hypothesis is likely to be the children's lived experience within the family
(Monica, White Social Worker)

A few participants stated that evaluations of parenting competence can be oppressive. They explained that this has more to do with the adversarial nature of child protection social work and agency structures which place emphasis on identifying evidence of maltreatment rather than on working to support clients. Participants who expressed this view also pointed out that the system is oppressive to social work clients in general but that black and minority ethnic parents are perhaps at greater disadvantage because they do not always know how or where to access support. Participants who gave this view stated that some of the disadvantage is that evaluations of parenting competence must necessarily be based on British definitions of what constitutes good parenting.

By the time you are assessing parenting capacity, quite often there is already a view that the parenting is short of the minimum expectations. Focus can then easily shift to identifying who is right and what is the best evidence upon which to make a point. Sadly, parents can get lost in this process as we pursue evidence that their parenting has fallen short of the British standards of parenting (Grace, Caribbean Social Worker)

The child protection system is itself oppressive. Thresholds keep shifting. For example, we no longer talk of children experiencing actual harm. It is enough for a social worker to argue that there is a likelihood of harm. It is little wonder therefore that when parents actually have problems, they will minimise them to avoid a negative assessment (Jessica, African Social Worker).

Participants generally held the view that black and minority ethnic children were over represented in welfare statistics because many social workers tend to take what they described as 'defensible' decisions. They stated that many 'defensible' decisions were a result of social workers not having a full understanding of the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents and thus erring on the side of caution to avoid future blame.

Theme 11: The Issue of Resources

A small number of participants queried whether the research would result in funding resources for black and minority ethnic parents. Participants who expressed this view discussed it in terms of positive discrimination. They explained that while having resources such as interpreting services was helpful in reducing disadvantage, more

needed to be done for black and minority ethnic parents. They described black and minority ethnic families as often being vulnerable to structural forms of disadvantage.

They (black and minority ethnic families) face a number of challenges which are not always obvious e.g., racism, poverty, overcrowding, exploitation and social isolation. These issues compromise parenting yet they can be lost in the focus on safeguarding. The extra resources allow for more humane consideration when assessing parenting capacity (Yvonne, Black-African Social Worker)

Participants stated that there was a need for funded support resources with expertise around issues of culture and ethnicity. Several suggestions were mentioned to explain how such a service might work. Typical examples included group specific charitable organisations within the community. Participant stated that the advocacy support that the charitable organisations provided helped social workers understand the inner working of families and thus reach balanced assessments of parenting competence.

Those groups (charitable organisations) help the parent and the social worker. I once worked with an Afghan charity helping a family who were just not willing to engage. It helped me understand the hierarchy within the family which, interestingly was the paternal grandmother. That information changed the focus of assessment and resulted in better outcomes for that family. We need more of such resources if we are to work effectively with people from different backgrounds (Pretti, Indian Social Worker)

When espousing the need for extra funding to support evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents, participants suggested that it needed

to be a specialist resources like substance misuse or domestic abuse support. Distinctions were made between specialist and charitable resources in that participants felt that charitable resource run the risk of being biased and limited to the group they support while professional resources would take a more even handed and inclusive approach.

I suspect that many black and minority ethnic parents are sent to parenting classes because that is what is available rather than because it necessarily addresses any issues raised. A service with ethnicity and culture expertise could work with such families to teach them about aligning their practice to British parenting values. It is a totally different focus (Thomas, Black-African Social Worker).

A funded resource would remove the challenge of trying to know and understand the parenting practices of different cultures. You would simply refer the family and get a report about how they do things in that culture. That way, you avoid making unhelpful assumptions (Yvonne, Black-African Social Worker).

Theme 12: The culture and ethnicity of Social Workers

Although participants did not talk about their own culture and ethnicity having any bearing on the assessments they conducted, their narratives suggested that their personal and professional culture were implicated in assessments. This was evident in statements that contained connotations of value judgements about the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents as well as in narratives that inferred the black and minority ethnic parents use their culture and ethnicity to perpetuate harmful parenting approaches.

“...some cultures openly prefer sons and will channel all their resources to ensure that the sons are treated better than the daughters” (Kirsty, White-British Social worker)

“... obviously where they come from things might be done differently, and it may be okay there. But you have to explain to them that in this country, that is not how we do things. It is not okay to smack your child or threaten them with a stick in the corner (Monica, White Social Worker)

As I explained in the methodology chapter, I initially saw social workers as primarily from the ‘culture’ of social work but realised that the range of backgrounds was a distinctive, unusual and valuable feature of my study. The implications of this are discussed further in chapter eight that attempts to explain what the findings mean.

7.5 Conclusion

In summary, participants described many ways in which they evaluate the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. Participants' responses indicated that issues of culture and ethnicity are incorporated in assessment. However, there were different views about the extent to which parents' culture and ethnicity should influence the outcome of parenting competence evaluations. Many participants talked about the importance of being culturally sensitive when assessing black and minority ethnic parents. But there was little evidence to indicate that cultural sensitivity had translated into evaluations that fully considered the complexities associated with the multiple factors that impact on cultural parenting scripts. In other words, cultural sensitivity was articulated in terms of evaluating how black and minority ethnic parents address issues such as gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion and other characteristics associated with cultural background, as opposed to seeking to understand how parents negotiate cultural parenting scripts in new and evolving environments.

There was an almost 'dichotomous' split in views about how culture and ethnicity should be addressed in assessment. On the one hand, participants stated that the complexities involved in understanding culturally specific parenting practices meant that culture and ethnicity needed to be limited to defining identity rather than evaluate parenting competence. Conversely, some participants felt that the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents necessarily needs to be evaluated within the context of their culture and ethnicity because all parenting can only be understood within the context of culture and ethnicity. In the chapter that follows, I attempt to explain what these findings mean for practice and policy.

Chapter Eight - Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the findings chapters (Chapter 6 and 7) by moving from detailed reporting of participants' narratives to explaining what the findings mean, by interpreting and discussing participants' narratives. The analysis is presented against the backdrop of the two most recurrent themes from this study: first, that social workers and black and minority ethnic parents generally agree that parenting is culturally defined; secondly, that what is accepted as 'good' parenting in any one culture cannot be 'normative'. These findings are consistent with what is already known about culture and parenting (see for example, Belsky, 1984; Hetherington et al, 1997; Corby 2000; Booth, 2002; Barn, 2002; Roopnarine and Gielen, 2005; Bornstein and Cheah, 2006; Simpson and Littlechild, 2006; Lonne et al, 2009; Chase 2010; Spicer, 2010).

The key message espoused by parenting researchers and academics is that black and minority ethnic parents hold value bases which are often at odds with Western values. For example, Corby (2000), as well as Simpson and Littlechild (2006) suggest that in areas such as morality, different value bases between social workers and some black and minority ethnic parents can result in contentions in relation to defining actions that constitute child abuse. This thesis adds to the debate by exploring how social workers evaluate parenting competence in the context of multiple approaches to parenting. Additionally, the findings from this study also highlight the need for social workers to be aware of how their personal and professional values and culture influence their views about what constitutes competent parenting.

Throughout the chapter, I focus on drawing nuanced meaning about how black and minority ethnic parents and social workers construe and negotiate the importance and

impact of culture and ethnicity on parenting practice. This is relevant because the findings in chapters 6 and 7 highlighted tensions in how both sets of participants (social workers and black and minority ethnic parents) use knowledge of culture and ethnicity to inform evaluation of parenting competence. The chapter contains some quotations and themes that do not appear in the findings chapters. The reason for this is to emphasise some of the tensions expressed in the narratives that participants shared when illustrating what they saw as unhelpful ways of interpreting the importance of culture and ethnicity. The quotations also emphasise the importance of frames in influencing perceptions about parenting. For example, one social worker articulated culture as “... *a smoke screen used to hide abuse*” and one parent described social workers as “*not making genuine attempts to understand why we parent the way we do*”.

Although participants articulated their narratives as differences in opinion, what seemed clear was that cultural misunderstandings contribute to some of the negative outcomes of assessments. This has been noted in previous research (e.g., Phoenix and Husain, 2007; Lonne et al, 2009; Simpson and Littlechild, 2009; Chase, 2010) which advances the view that ideas about what constitute ‘good’ parenting are influenced by culture, and that culturally defined parenting scripts challenge hitherto taken for granted assumptions about parenting. As Littlechild (2012) observes, the different dimensions of parenting practiced in multicultural societies such as England have the effect of making parenting competence evaluations more complex.

Indeed, parenting literature indicates that there is still much speculation about what constitutes ‘good’ parenting in different cultures. This too contributes to complexity in

evaluating parenting competence. There is, therefore, a need to understand not only how culturally informed parenting scripts are framed, but also how evaluation of parenting competence, especially within the context of diverse cultures and ethnicities, is framed. Commentators (e.g., Roopnarine and Gielen, 2005; Littlechild, 2012) have argued that a nuanced understanding of how culture influences parenting practices can only be achieved through empirical knowledge guided by research methodologies established in wide ranging disciplines.

For this study, I have drawn nuanced understanding from the findings by using frame analysis to interpret the data. Analysing frames is appropriate because frames contain normative connotations or denotations that contribute to the way people construe and articulate their lived experiences (Goffman, 1974; Art et al, 2009). In other words, frames give meaning to aspects of a phenomenon that would otherwise be meaningless (Goffman, 1974, pg.21). Goffman's insight is relevant within the context of this study because it highlights how issues such as the power dynamics conferred to social workers through child welfare legislation, language and perspective can define the experiences of black and minority ethnic parents. Equally, it helps us understand how both sets of participants frame parenting scripts.

The discussion and analysis that follows is divided into two sections. Section one draws on the literature review (chapter 2, 3 and 4) and the secondary (chapter 6 and 7) data sources to analyse how culture and ethnicity influence black and ethnic minority parents' as well as social workers' views about parenting. This section explores how culture frames participants' expressed ideas about children's development, family organisation patterns, and parents' responsibilities. In section

two, I discuss participants' conceptualisations of parenting competence. This includes consideration of how black and minority ethnic parents engage with issues such as power relations (e.g., between parents; parents and children, as well as between parents and assessing social workers), gender and economic activities as they attempt to maintain key aspects of their cultural traditions. As a way of concluding the chapter, I summarise how participants define 'good' parenting and how participants' conceptualisations fit within the formal evaluations of parenting competence.

Rather than interpret and discuss themes as they are presented in the findings chapters, I focus on analysing the frames from which participants appear to form their perspectives about parenting. By taking this approach to the discussion, I focus on identifying the subtle cognitive artefacts that reinforce participants' views about parenting. As I explained in the methodology chapter, these artefacts, articulated as frames, find expression in participants' narratives. This in turn, can give us greater insight into the beliefs and value bases through which participants select, interpret and make sense of how they parent (in the case of black and minority ethnic parents) and how they evaluate parenting competence (in the case of social workers). A key limitation is that I was not able to verify the reasons why children were made subject to plans. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to conclude that culture and ethnicity play a significant role in the way that black and minority ethnic parents determine what is appropriate when socialising children, as well as in how social workers evaluate parenting competence.

8.2 How Culture Frames Parenting

The way participants articulated their views about parenting indicated that culture influences parenting in ways that are distinct even in the smallest detail so that some parenting decisions are, seemingly, made subconsciously. Goffman's (1974) explanation of 'framing' is used here to help us to begin to draw nuanced understanding of how culture is construed and negotiate within the context of parenting. In general, individuals use frames to organise information and construct a point of view that encourages the facts of any given phenomenon to be interpreted in a particular way. In this context, culture and ethnicity are best understood as consisting of surface and deep frames which contain within them additional information from which black and minority ethnic parents make decisions about how to socialise their children and select the parenting practices to they use to achieve promote cultural competence.

The surface frames are the mental structures associated with how participants describe culture and ethnicity (e.g., practices, beliefs and values). The deep frames define participants' moral world view and influence their responses to the environment around them. According to Goffman, individuals are likely to, often simultaneously, activate several frames as they interact with and interpret their environment. On the one hand, this presents challenges in detecting which frames participants are drawing on to form a view. Indeed, therein lies the limitation of using frame analysis to understand behaviour or make sense of participants' narrative. But, what Goffman (1974), Gitlin (1980) and Entman (1993) espouses quite eloquently is that frames are the 'scaffolds' for any credible stories and therefore indispensable in communication. They are, as Goffman (1974) explains, adopted consciously but most often used

unconsciously. So, for example, parents who give more house chores to their daughters compared to their sons may have drawn on cultural frames about gender roles, family hierarchy and family member responsibilities. Conversely, a social worker may draw on feminist frames to interpret that scenario as evidence of boys being preferred over girls within a culture.

8.2.1 Socialising Children

The influence that culture and ethnicity exert is not always explicit. Rather, it is exhibited in deliberate and overt processes as well as in implicit and unplanned parenting. Throughout the interviews, participants' narratives suggested that they held implicit but strong ideas about what they believed to be the 'right' way to parent. For example, the majority of black and minority ethnic parents stated that they understood why social workers were concerned about their parenting practices, but justified how they parent in terms of what they believed to be appropriate and beneficial to their children within the context of their culture. One participant expressed it as follows:

I know it looks as if we do not value the girls because they do more housework than the boys; but in our culture it is the women who will have responsibility for running the home and they have to start learning early

This can be interpreted to mean that culture and ethnicity frame the way that most black and minority ethnic parents socialise their children. But, it is the subtlety of culturally informed constructions that influence how black and minority ethnic parents construe issues such as gender and the role of a woman in the family. In this regard, responses from most black and minority ethnic parents suggested that they had not considered how their parenting practices perpetuated what they described as the

gender stereotypes and biases they sought to redress. For example, participants whose cultural belief was that modesty in women is reflected in how they dress, attached great importance to the way their daughters presented in public. One participant who expressed this view reflected on how with hindsight, she could see that the way she sought to reinforce modesty was more forceful than it needed to be.

Equally, participant social workers generally acknowledged that they approached parenting competence assessments with culturally constructed preconceptions about gender equity. This was evident in responses which expressed the view that most black and minority ethnic cultures subjugate women. Social workers who expressed this view went on to state that they felt that parents had to adjust their parenting to fit within the constructs of socially acceptable gender equity in England. Most social workers explained this as being a pragmatic approach that would ultimately benefit black and minority ethnic parents, rather than a cultural construct. They reasoned that because parenting competence is evaluated based on Western ideas about socialising children, it was prudent for black and minority ethnic parents to align their parenting to Western ideals.

From a frame analysis point of view, the descriptors that participants used represented the surface frames from which parenting practices were understood. In other words, black and minority ethnic parents saw their parenting practices as being influenced by tradition, beliefs, morals and values. This was perceived to be true for themselves, as well as for the 'other' and can be described as the surface frame. Participants' perceptions about the culture and ethnicity of the 'other', in comparison to their own provides the deep frame from which the quality of parenting or parenting competence

is understood. What is intrinsic within this frame is that black and minority ethnic parents perceive the quality of their parenting to be 'good' but express uncertainty about how social workers view their parenting approaches. This highlights a conflict between how black and minority ethnic parents construe competence compared with how social workers.

The conflict between black and minority ethnic parents' and social workers' constructions of competence is not directly apparent in the surface frames but is reflected in the way that both sets of participants respond to parenting competence evaluations. That is, that when black and minority ethnic parents engage with social workers during the process of parenting competence evaluations, tensions about how children should be socialised arise.

8.2.2 *Stimulating, Guidance and Boundaries*

Participants' narratives also suggested that culture and ethnicity exert significant influence on ideas about how to stimulate and provide behavioural boundaries for children. This includes shaping ideas about what constitutes stability within families' environmental settings. For example, a significant number of black and minority ethnic parents interviewed reported experiencing high levels of conflict with their children over issues such as 'curfew' times, use of make-up, dress styles and lifestyle choices. Parents who expressed this view also stated that conflict with their children often resulted in the use of high levels of overt discipline regimes to guide and manage behaviour, as well as provide safety and stability.

This suggests that black and minority ethnic parents seek to achieve parenting outcomes that are consistent with what empirical evidence lists as the four fundamental components of parenting that are said to transcend cultural contexts: basic care; safety and protection; emotional care and stimulation and providing behavioural boundaries and stability (see Woodcock, 2003; Roopnarine and Gielen, 2005; Johnson et al, 2006; Jones, 2010). The cultural beliefs that black and minority ethnic parents hold about stimulating and guiding their children serve the purpose of creating parenting pathways that ensure that children are prepared for the economic, psychosocial and physical environments in which they will grow and develop.

But, when expressing views about how black and minority ethnic minority parents stimulate and guide their children, most social workers expressed concern. This was mainly articulated in terms of parents lacking basic understanding of children's development. A recurring theme was that social workers were often concerned that black and minority ethnic parents tended to provide inappropriate levels of supervision in relation to their children's ages or levels of development. One social worker expressed being

"...I was suprised that this mother could not see the risk associated with leaving a seven-year-old to cook the family meal on a gas hob. Another mother left a nine-year-old to look after her three and five-year-old siblings overnight, so that she could go to work on a night shift". (Karen, White-British Social worker)

Using frame analysis, we can see that it is from the deep frame that participants organise culture and ethnicity into a context from which to address issues such stimulation, guidance, boundaries and supervision. What this means, in the context

of parenting competence evaluations, is that tensions between black and ethnic minority parents become evident because of the conflict in the expectations and understanding of children's developmental stages. For example, respondent social workers seemed to be approaching parenting competence evaluations with concerns about protecting children from unsafe levels of supervision. This was expressed in terms of the anxieties that social workers voiced as they talked about the challenges of judging safe parenting. Frequent examples given by social workers included narratives about parents giving children responsibilities that social workers did not deem to be age appropriate or using harsh strategies to discipline their children. Consequently, social workers saw culture and ethnicity as a complicating factor that had the potential to perpetuate abuse.

Conversely, black and minority ethnic parents construed parenting competence in the context of preserving cultural identity by promoting their children's social competence and sense of belonging. As such, they articulated social workers' approaches to parenting competence evaluations as having a monoculture focus that undermines the value of black and minority ethnic parents' parenting practices. Such perspectives directly challenge social workers' theories of parenting in that they raise the possibility that issues of risk can be presented as differences in perspective.

The way that participants articulated culture and ethnicity, suggests to us that the deep frames they held defined the general relationship that black and minority ethnic parents and social workers have with parenting competence evaluations. The surface frames reinforce that relationship. For example, social workers who approach parenting competence evaluations from the deep frame that parenting that is culturally

embedded is not 'safe' for children will reinforce that frame with a surface frame that defines the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents as falling short of the minimum standards of 'good' parenting. Consequently, such social workers are more likely to interpret the process of evaluating parenting competence as requiring them to prize parenting that transcends culture over parenting that is culture-dependent. But, as (Buttler and Williamson, 1994; Owen and Farmer, 1996; Littlechild, 2012) observe, social workers' perceptions of parenting are themselves shaped by personal as well as professional cultural ideals.

8.2.3 Modelling Parental Behaviour

Culture frames parenting practices by modelling parental behaviour. This was evident in the narratives of black and minority ethnic parents, which suggested that their childhood experiences of being parented had affected their attitudes and long-term parenting behaviour, including how most parents went on to parent their own children. A significant number explained that their current parenting practices had been borne out of their own experiences of being parented. Participants articulated this in terms of the practices they either wanted to retain or discard from their parenting. This is consistent with parenting literature which asserts that experience of parenting models future parenting (see Madge, 2001; Woodcock, 2003; Madge and Willmont, 2007; Bert et al, 2009). However, this study highlighted interesting differences in the way that black and minority ethnic parents and social workers articulated the impact of parenting experience during childhood.

Social workers tended to suggest that parenting practices that were seen to be punitive or neglectful were a result of the absence of positive parental modelling. They

explained that practices such as regimes used to discipline children (e.g., physical chastisement) were a remodelling of their own childhood experiences. Social workers' interpretations appeared to draw from Bandura's (1962; 1977) social learning theory which asserts that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modelling. Social workers' who expressed this view explained that the parenting practices of many black and minority ethnic parents which tended to cause concern (e.g., punitive punishment, poor supervision) were often enactments of their own experiences of being parented.

Some black and minority ethnic parents shared similar views as those illustrated by social workers. Indeed, most participants' narratives about their parenting practices were expressed as cultural constructions that were modelled during the own childhood. However, a significant number also articulated their parenting practices as endeavours to parent in distinctively different ways compared to the parenting they had received. Parents who expressed this view were keen to point out that culturally constructed values and beliefs did not have a strong influence on their parenting practices. They explained that they were constantly evaluating messages about parenting from their friends, families and professionals.

The views expressed by black and minority ethnic parents indicate that while parenting approaches are often rooted in cultural ideals modelled by their own parents, for most parents, cultural scripts function as flexible systems. This makes it necessary for social work practitioners, policy makers, academics and researchers to consider how motives to evaluate parenting competence within the context of existing knowledge can be balanced with motives to assess parenting within contexts of families' cultures.

Child welfare legislation appears to take this into consideration by requiring assessments to make provision for families' cultural backgrounds as well as their expressed views and preferences (Department of Health, 1991).

The difference in how social workers and black and minority ethnic parents construe the importance of culture in modelling parental behaviour appeared to be influenced on how individual participants framed culture. That is, some social workers appeared to hold a traditional frame of culture i.e., one that black and minority ethnic parents have brought into a new country. Social workers who held this view also seemed to suggest that culture was static. They explained that many black and minority ethnic parents were unable to engage with intervention because they could not break away from their traditions to confront and resolve the damaging effects of their own experiences of being parented.

On the other hand, there were many black and minority ethnic parents who appeared to frame culture as an evolving characteristic. Participants who expressed this view explained their parenting practices in terms of adjustments they had made to cultural parenting scripts, because they were now in a new country. The individual variance in respondents' narratives suggest that culture and ethnicity hold a complex meaning for participants and, as discussed here, is defined from several deep and surface frames. These frames relate and interact in complex and dynamic ways that result in social workers and parents approaching parenting competence evaluations with different notions about what constitutes 'good' or 'safe' parenting or indeed the extent to which experience of being parented is implicated in parenting practices that cause concern.

The implication for practice is that because individual assessors draw on personal and professional frames, there is always the risk of social workers making unhelpful generalisations about the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents. The variance discussed above highlights tensions that mirror wider research on parenting and ethnicity. Specifically, that the absence of universally accepted minimum standards of parenting (Budd and Holdsworth, 1996; Budd, 2001; Page and Whitting, 2007; Phoenix and Husain, 2007) contributes to the challenges and tensions that exist between black and minority ethnic parents and professionals evaluating parenting competence. Additionally, parenting competence evaluations and the resulting recommendations on how to intervene with families could also be guided by unexamined assumptions that the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents will ultimately end in or necessarily needs to culminate in assimilation.

8.2.4 Identity, Meaning and Context

Culture and ethnicity frame parenting by providing the context within which parenting is shaped and becomes meaningful. As illustrated in the findings chapters, black and minority ethnic parents generally articulated culturally informed parenting scripts as the context within which their parenting practices derive meaning. However, they were also keen to emphasise that culture and ethnicity provide more than a context for meaning. Many black and minority ethnic parents also felt that culturally informed parenting practices also identified them as belonging to a particular group. This perspective is consistent with findings from previous studies (e.g., Modood et al, 1997; Super and Harkness, 2002; Weisner, 2002; White 2005; Phoenix and Husain, 2007) that argue for the need for parenting competence to be analysed in the context of the influence of culture and ethnicity.

That said, participants' narratives also suggest that while parents and social workers appear to define culture and ethnicity using similar terms, there were significant differences in their perceptions about how culture and ethnicity should be interpreted when determining parenting competence. For example, a significant number of the black and minority ethnic parents interviewed explained that the contention they had with social workers arose because social workers insisted on limiting the parents' culture and ethnicity to identity whilst evaluating their parenting according to Western ideals and standards. Parents who expressed this view illustrated it with examples that social workers did not appear to consider the dynamic and interactive nature of cultural identity. This was associated with views that the parenting practices exhibited by some parents did not always align with social workers' conceived ideas of what was deemed to be normative.

Researchers and academics (e.g., Gelfand and Fandetti, 1986; Dominelli et al, 2001) share similar observations about social work interventions when working with black and minority ethnic families. Dominelli et al (2001), for example advance the view that social work has not engaged appropriately with issues of diversity and thus perpetuates oppressive practice. They argue that the effectiveness of social work interventions is limited by failure to acknowledge the nature of social relations and the importance of culture and ethnicity among black and ethnic minority families. This results in assessments that focus on observable outward appearances, rather than explore how culture and ethnicity influence perceptions about what is acceptable within a given culture – for example, minimum standards of parenting, gender socialisation, supervision and hierarchy within families.

Without nuanced understanding of why black and minority ethnic parents approach parenting the way they do parenting competence evaluations create a dichotomy of expectations. For example, about how parents should address gender issues. This was evident in the responses from black and minority ethnic parents who felt that when social workers were evaluating their parenting competence, they tended to focus almost exclusively on their own pre-conceptions about gender equity, as expressed in the participant quotation below:

“... she started to look at why the girls were doing more housework than the boys but didn't try to understand. Instead, she said that I was doing this because I was raised in an environment where women are not valued and that is what I know but it is not right.” (Noreen, Indian mother)

Narratives such as the ones illustrated above indicate that culture frames parenting contexts within families and their wider community by not only embodying core beliefs and values but also functioning to communicate and reinforce those beliefs and values. This is congruent with findings from previous studies (e.g., McDaniel and Tepperman, 2000; Quah, 2003) which show that cultural and ethnic affiliations serve to provide group identity and parenting contexts that significantly influence parenting practices.

In her study of parenting styles among Singapore families for example, Quah (2003) found that over time, culture is modified but not eliminated by other variables. The implication is that parents, as well as social workers, filter their perception of parenting in ways that highlight cultural aspects more noticeably than other factors that influence

parenting, such as education, social class, poverty and geographical location (Utting, 2007; Waylen and Stewart-Brown, 2010; Bornstein, 2012). Similarly, studies of parenting within the countries of origin of some of the parents represented in this study (e.g., Keller et al, 2005; Tuli, 2012) highlight similar findings to Quah (2003). For example, Keller et al's (2005) study of Nso and German mothers found that socialisation practices reflected the conscious nature of parenting as a shared cultural activity. This suggests that it is inadequate to use culture and ethnicity only as a descriptor of identity.

What the findings of this study suggest is that parenting competence evaluations fail to fully appraise the dynamic nature of culture and how cultural and ethnic beliefs and values affect parenting practices over time. This finding is consistent with debate within parenting literature that associates the over representation of black and minority ethnic children in welfare statistics, with social workers' failure to fully evaluate the meaning and context of cultural parenting scripts (Lonne et al, 2009; Littlechild, 2012). Only by fully engaging with issues of culture and ethnicity can evaluations move beyond the socially constructed dichotomy of white majority and ethnic minority approaches to parenting.

8.3 Conceptualisation of Parenting Competence

As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, the analysis is presented against the backdrop of the two most recurrent themes from this study: first, that social workers and black and minority ethnic parents generally agree that parenting is culturally defined; secondly, that what is accepted as 'good' parenting in any one culture cannot be 'normative'. Tensions were evident when participants described and shared their

perspectives about the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations. Specifically, in appraising the value of cultural parenting scripts to children's welfare and development. What seemed to emerge from the frames that participants used to define parenting and the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations highlighted a degree of mistrust between black and minority ethnic parents and social workers. The section that follows explores how both sets of participants construed parenting competence.

8.3.1 *Constructions of Child Development*

Child development was one of the dominant frames in the narratives of almost all respondent social workers and some black and minority ethnic parents. Respondent social workers articulated it more in the context of empirical research rather than from a frame of culture and ethnicity. In other words, social workers' perceptions about how children develop were framed by research. As such, they emphasised the importance of parents having knowledge of empirical evidence on child development and felt that parents whose knowledge of child development was not consistent with empirical research were more likely to parent in ways that compromised children's safety and welfare.

On the other hand, respondent parents articulated child development in the context of culture and ethnicity. That is, they used this frame to make sense of their own understanding of how children develop. This was expressed in terms of how children acquire the social skills and competences that they are expected to have within their cultural group. For the respondent parents, the way that children acquire culture was integral to their development. The general metaphor that both sets of participants

used to describe the frame of child development was that there was a knowledge gap on the part of the 'other'. For example, respondent social workers felt that black and minority ethnic parents generally lacked the requisite child development knowledge to provide safe parenting for their children. Equally, respondent parents felt that social workers lacked the skills or desire to effectively appraise child development within the context of culture and ethnicity.

The perspectives that both sets of participants espouse reflect the frames from which they appear to define the same issue i.e., child development. Despite the variance, an analysis of the similarities and differences in the way that participants articulate child development highlights that both positions are reflected in empirical research. For example, a large body of research on ecological systems suggests that children's development is influenced by a range of contextual and immediate environmental factors (including culture and ethnicity) which are different for every family and ethnic group (see for example, McDaniel and Tepperman, 2000; Barn, 2002; Hughes, 2003; Woodcock, 2003; Quah, 2003; Utting and Pugh, 2004; Belsky and Jaffe, 2006; Barn, 2006).

Parenting and, by association, children's development, is a series of connected events across which families participate over time. When participants' descriptions and conceptualisation of parenting competence are brought together under the lens of frame analysis, it becomes clear that for most black and minority ethnic parents, culture and ethnicity embed assumptions about parenting. Through recurrent interactions with their environments, they get drawn into parenting assumptions central to cultural constructions of parenting. Conversely, social workers draw heavily on

scientific knowledge about what is known to work. The issue is that both sets of participants use different frames to inform their knowledge of child development.

Current literature suggests that effective parenting competence evaluations can be achieved when social workers involve parents in parenting competence evaluations (Littell and Garvin, 2006; Buckley et al, 2006; McGhee and Hunter, 2011). This is also recognised within child welfare legislation that emphasises the importance of taking account of families' cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The findings from this study agree with this literature. Black and minority ethnic parents engage more openly with assessing social workers who show respect for their culture. When social workers are critical of culturally informed parenting scripts, it can cause conflict and decrease the likelihood of meaningful engagement.

Given that ideas about child development are framed by different psychosocial, cultural and legislative processes, gaining a better understanding of how frames influence parenting practices helps improve the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations when working with black and minority ethnic parents. Indeed, one of the ways in which this study contributes to this literature is by illuminating the frames from which black and minority ethnic parents and social workers derive their perspectives about how children develop.

8.3.2 Preventing Harm – Tradition Vs Assessment Tools

The overriding concern expressed by social workers was that black and minority ethnic parents often lacked the willingness or capacity to protect children from harm. Indeed, a few social workers suggested that the cultural practices of some black and minority ethnic cultures were more damaging to children than others. Social workers who expressed this view referred to legal guidance as the frame through which they appraised parenting competence. However, their narratives suggested a focus on appraising the presence or absence of abuse rather than parenting competence. This is congruent with Woodcock's (2003) work on social work assessment of parenting. In her study, Woodcock found that rather than evaluate the quality or adequacy of parenting practices, as recommended within parenting literature, social workers construed parenting competence based on whether parents were abusive.

In general, there were many similarities within social workers' narratives about what constitutes 'good' and harmful parenting. Social workers' narratives suggested that their ideas about harmful parenting were framed from training, professionals experience and knowledge, as well as from their personal experiences of parenting (both from being parented as well as from being parents). But, while most social workers stated that they were confident about identifying harmful parenting from black and minority ethnic parents, they expressed feeling less confident about evaluating competence within the context of parents' cultures and ethnicity. One social worker expressed it as follows:

"... it is not as straight forward as that. Harm is harm; you have the law and you have guidance to help you decide when parenting is harmful. The problem with determining whether parenting practices are good enough is that it is all subjective and very difficult to pin down." (Gregory, White-British Social Worker)

Parents felt that in most cases, social workers attributed problems to them that they did not recognise in themselves. The narratives from parents tended to view social workers' approaches to the issue of harm as negative and rigid. Many parents explained that socialisation processes within their cultures meant that their children had attained significant levels of independence at earlier ages than their Western counterparts. Typical explanations related to the ages at which black and minority ethnic parents felt that children were ready to be left in charge of their younger siblings or given responsibilities such as cooking family meals and other house chores.

While some parents reported that social workers had shown understanding of the cultural contexts of their parenting, a significant number of parents felt that during assessment, social workers were often accusatory and unwilling to understand. Parents who expressed this view argued that social workers employ a rigid approach to parenting competence evaluations which alienates families and exacerbates conflict between black and ethnic minority parents and social workers. One parent illustrated it as follows:

"...I was never going to win that argument. As far as the social worker was concerned, if I could not see things her way, I was minimising issues and therefore could not protect my children. What then do you do? You have to accept what they are saying" (Noreen, Indian mother).

What the finding illustrated by the narrative above indicates is that, overall, black and minority ethnic parents view assessment processes as negative. The narratives reflect differences in the way both sets of participants frame parenting competence.

This then causes mistrust between black and minority ethnic parents and social workers and hinders attempts to work more closely together. This finding is consistent with the literature (e.g., Corby et al, 2002; Millar and Corby, 2006; Dumbrill, 2006; Kellett and Apps, 2009) which highlights the presence of enforced compliance in response to assessment. As Kellett and Apps' (2009) study found, the focus on identifying abuse meant that relationships between social workers and parents were strained during assessment. Often to the extent that parents' engagement during and after assessment was either superficial or blatantly aggression towards assessing social workers.

8.3.3 Gender – Identity, Power and Feminism

A key theme to emerge in defining what constituted positive parenting related to how both sets of participants framed the issue of gender – both in terms of gender roles and hierarchies of authorities within families. For most black and ethnic minority parents the goal of parenting was to ensure that their children succeed in what they saw as a new and often hostile environment. Participants' narratives highlighted tensions in the way they interpreted cultural aspects in areas such as respect, hierarchy of authority, sexuality and parental roles. This was evident in participants' expressed views about how culture and ethnicity frame issues of gender.

The parents who took part in the one-to-one interviews were all mothers. During the interviews, they stated that they had actively passed on gender role attitudes to their children by communicating culturally informed gender expectations. This included role modelling as well as encouraging gender specific behaviours and activities. Most black and minority ethnic parents explained that gender identity was a key feature of

culturally informed parenting scripts. This was expressed in terms of the separation of gender roles within the family, as well as differential treatment of daughters and sons. Most black and minority ethnic parents felt that their perspectives of cultural definitions of gender were undergoing shifts, but that social workers' assessments had continued to stereotype them.

The literature on the socialisation of gender asserts that gender relations are culturally and ethnically unique. For example, as aforementioned, individualist and collectivist cultures will have different views regarding earlier maturity around sex or other aspects around gender. That said, there is little detailed research focusing on why black and minority ethnic parents perpetuate gender socialisations practices that they are not always in agreement with. Studies (e.g., Bornstein, 2012; Chimba et al, 2012) tend to focus on the general variations of cultural approaches to parenting. Such as whether cultures prioritise independence or collectivist ideals. This limits our understanding to cultural meanings and practices that explain parenting in general terms rather than on the contrasting interconnections between culture and socialisation aspects such as gender roles and expectations in parenting practice.

Nevertheless, parenting literature also recognises that parental attitudes towards gender issues are adapting to changing socioeconomic realities (see for example Ho et al, 2001). In this study, parents reported they were actively embracing ideas of gender equality in terms of economic aspirations but held on to traditional expectations when it came to parental roles, household chores and family security. The importance of more nuanced understanding of gender socialisation is emphasised by the increase

in mobility and globalisations. As culture boundaries widen, traditional ways of viewing gender issues will become either troublesome or inadequate.

During the interviews, narratives from social workers suggested that they held feminist perspectives about the gendered nature of culture and ethnicity. This was evident in perspectives that disapproved of parenting practices that they viewed as perpetuating disadvantage in the way that girls are socialised. Participants typically illustrated this point by asserting that black and minority ethnic parents tended to socialise their daughters in ways that encouraged dependence, conformity and domestication whereas boys were socialised to be self-reliant, competitive and dominant. According to one social worker:

“...some cultures openly prefer sons and will channel all their resources to ensure that the sons are treated better than the daughters” (Kirsty, White-British Social worker)

Gender socialisation was seen by both sets of participants as an important marker of identity. This was expressed in terms of securing support from within the extended family as well as community networks. For most black and minority ethnic parents who expressed this view, cultural artefacts such as physical presentation (traditional dress) as well as behavioural traits (e.g., perceptions of promiscuity or being able to prepare traditional meals) were also deemed to be important identity markers. These perceptions contrasted with those expressed by social workers who generally saw such gender socialisations as a environments in which relations of oppression were constituted.

8.3.4 Emotional Availability and Sensitivity - Acculturation Vs Assimilation

Most participant social workers stated that black and minority ethnic parents tended to lack insight into their children's emotional needs. Social workers' who expressed this view articulated their perspective as being derived from observations of lack of empathy from parents. This led social workers to conclude that parents were putting their needs (often for financial improvement) over their children's emotional development needs. One social worker expressed it as follows:

"... their perception was that they love their children and were working hard to make sure that the children had everything they needed. But they could not see that the children's behavioural challenges were a result of not spending quality time with their parents" (Thomas, Black-African Social Worker)

On the other hand, most black and minority ethnic parents expressed feeling that social workers expected them to express emotions of affection in a manner that was alien to them:

"We do not express emotions in the same way. Western cultures are heavy on sharing information with others from the onset. Our approach is that people must qualify for what you share" (Olivia, Nigerian mother)

The way that social workers' perceptions about how parents should express emotional availability was, in the main, framed by Western constructions. That is, social workers who suggested that black and minority ethnic parents did not show emotional warmth, expected to observe parents exhibiting overt expressions of receiving and reciprocating affection towards children. They saw black and minority ethnic parents'

failure to align their parenting to Western ideals as a failure to fully assimilate in their new community.

However, black and minority ethnic parents expressed feeling that social workers lacked an understanding of the challenges that parents face in trying to maintain the parenting practices of their countries of origin whilst also adapting to new ways of parenting. Parents associated this with social workers having poor grasp of issues of culture and ethnicity. They argued that social workers lacked the motivation to improve their understanding of cultural parenting scripts beyond a focus on defining identity through aspects such as parents' religious persuasions, type of food families ate and grooming regimes. Most black and minority ethnic parents described these as important but peripheral issues when faced with the prospect of having their children placed in local authority care.

The key point to make about the contrasting parenting expectations between social workers and black and minority ethnic parents is that they are complicated by the frames that both sets of participants draw on to inform their perspectives. For examples, while social workers talk about drawing on research knowledge, legislation and their agencies' policy expectations to inform their perspectives about parenting aspects such as maturity around sex, appropriate levels of supervision and demonstrations of emotional warmth, black and minority ethnic parents say that they draw on their experiences in the community and on their cultures to inform perspectives about the same aspects. The issue is that there is a perceived dichotomy in parenting approaches across the world. I explained this dichotomy as being

associated with the different socialisation priorities within individualist and collectivist cultures.

In terms of evaluating parenting competence, further complexity arises because social workers' perspectives about how ethnicity and cultural issues should be interpreted to address factors such as identity, meaning and context, are significantly influenced by their individual as well as their professional backgrounds. Indeed, many social workers in this study seemed to draw as much from their individual cultural and ethnic backgrounds as from their profession. From a frame analysis point of view, this suggests that social workers' perceptions about parenting are framed by their personal as well as their professional cultures. It could be argued that drawing on these different frames when assessing the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents contributes to variations in assessment outcomes.

8.4 Culture, ethnicity and social work values and codes of practice

As a starting point to avoiding unfair discrimination against culturally different groups, social work values and professionals' codes of conduct make it incumbent on social workers to understand the ethnicity and cultural issues of the clients they work with. But this study suggests that the value bases of black and minority ethnic parents as well as those of individual social workers, vary widely and are often at odds with White-British values. This can limit the effectiveness of the strength-based approaches such as that suggested by Gupta and colleagues. Especially when dealing with issues around morality and ethics, whilst seeking not to exhibit cultural relativity.

The challenge is that most black and minority ethnic parents want social workers to understand their parenting beliefs, values and practices from the parents' own cultures and circumstances rather than from Western value bases. Unfortunately, much of the literature on the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic groups tends to stop at recognising that constructions of parenting and children's developments vary across and within different cultures. Additionally, the literature suggests that when parents are under scrutiny by child welfare agencies, they may choose to respond with resistance (Simpson and Littlechild, 2009; Chase, 2010).

In his article on values and cultural issues in social work, Professor Brian Littlechild provides a helpful summary of social work professional values and codes of conduct and moves on to advocate for greater awareness of the role that ethnicity and cultural factors play in the structures and outcomes of child safeguarding practice (Littlechild, 2012). The findings of this study reflect professor Littlechild's point that social workers' practice and delivery of services can be affected by personal and structural issues surrounding cultural and ethnic differences and reinforce perceptions of 'otherness'. This emphasises the need for social workers to reflect on how they work with black and minority ethnic parents to address parenting practices that are perceived to be harmful to children.

Without greater appreciation of the influence of culture and ethnicity on parenting practices, social workers risk unintentionally reinforcing discrimination and oppression towards black and minority ethnic groups. Previous studies and policy reviews (e.g., Chand, 2000; Graham, 2002; Chimba et al, 2012) have suggested that the over representation of black and minority ethnic children in child welfare and youth justice

statistics in England is associated with systemic approaches that impact on social workers' abilities and creativity to appropriately address issues of culture and ethnicity.

Rather than advance a case for cultural relativism, this study suggests that social workers can achieve greater insight into the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents and work more effectively with them, by understanding the cultural frames from which parents draw their perspectives about family, children's development and socialisation. This should start from social workers recognising and acknowledging with parents that when families move from their countries of origin, they bring with them their own traditions, customs and beliefs about how to bring up their children. Alongside this, social workers should recognise that as black and minority ethnic parents adjust to White-British traditions and child rearing norms, they may encounter difficulties such as discrimination, hostility, poverty and social isolation that re-frame their approaches to parenting.

But, because I was unable to establish the reasons for social care involvement with the families of the parents involved in this study, I cannot definitively say that greater attention to culture and ethnicity might have made a difference to outcomes. This represents a weakness in the study. However, the literature reviewed in preparation for this study as well as the narratives of both sets of participants in this study suggests that greater attention to issues of culture and ethnicity in parenting helps reduce unhelpful stereotypes about the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents.

Chand's (2001) review of social workers' assessments of black and minority ethnic families, for example, found that social workers were prone to accepting stereotypes about the nature of parenting within black and minority ethnic families and tended to view cultural parenting scripts as having 'weaknesses' rather than 'strengths'. In the context of the over representation of black and minority ethnic children in child welfare and youth justice services, it could be argued that greater understanding of how culture and ethnicity frames parenting helps minimise the likelihood of practice that reinforces negative stereotypes and oppressive practice. Furthermore, it enables social workers to focus on re-framing parents' perspectives about how they can achieve the socialisation goals they seek to promote with their children.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how black and minority ethnic parents and social workers construe and negotiate parenting competence. This has been achieved by drawing insights from the frames that participants appear to use to inform their perceptions of parenting competence. The discussions within the chapter have pointed to the need for social workers to develop greater understanding and sensitivity to cultural parenting scripts, as the starting point of formulating efficient strategies of working with families.

In terms of the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents, this study mirrors parenting literature that points to the significant differences in the ways that different ethnic and cultural groups construct childhood and perspectives concerning child abuse (see for example, Corby, 2000; Chand, 2000; Graham, 2002; Simpson and Littlechild, 2009; Gupta et al, 2016). These differences in approaches to parenting require social workers to appreciate the strengths of different cultural parenting scripts, as well as the problems associated with 'cultural relativity' rather than 'cultural sensitivity' (Littlechild, 2012).

The contrasting parenting expectations between social workers and black and minority ethnic parents have been explained in terms of how ideas about the socialisation of children and children's development are framed within individualist and collectivist cultures. As part of the discussion on frames, I have shown that both sets of participants draw on several frames to inform their perspectives and that social workers draw on individual and professional cultural scripts. The chapter that follows summarises this study and highlights its contribution to knowledge.

Chapter Nine – Summary, Recommendations and Contribution

9.1 Introduction

This study set out to explore whether, and if so, how social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity when evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. This has been done by conducting in-depth investigations of the influence that culture and ethnicity has on the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents as well as the policy and practice context within which social workers conduct parenting competence evaluations.

The literature reviewed for this study suggested that social workers were still uncertain about how to work with black and minority ethnic parents (Laming, 2003; Barns et al, 2006; Stevenson, 2007) and that this uncertainty was associated with not understanding the influence that culture and ethnicity has on the parenting practices. This background was one of the central premises of this study i.e., that parenting practices are conducted within specific cultural and ethnic contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Leyendecker et al, 2005), whereas child welfare policy is based on Western constructions of parenting (Broadhurst et al, 2009).

The study was conducted from a phenomenology research philosophy and the findings were analysed using frame analysis. In summary, this study contributes to knowledge by moving the debate away from the universality of parenting concepts (e.g., *good enough, parenting styles, attachment*), to understanding how black and minority ethnic parents, as well as social workers conceptualise the influence of culture and ethnicity on ideas about parenting practices, parenting competence and how parenting competence is evaluated.

My aim in this chapter is to review and draw conclusion to this thesis by providing an overall summary of the evidence base, methodology, methods and findings. The chapter is divided into three sections. Section one contextualises the conclusions arrived at by giving an overview of the thesis and summarising the evidence base, methodology and findings. Section two builds on this by critiquing the methods and methodology to highlight the robustness of the findings. Section three then evaluates the credibility, originality, usefulness and resonance of this study. Section three also highlights the study's contributions to knowledge and reports the implications of the findings on policy and practice, as well as making recommendations for further research.

9.2 Overview of the Thesis

This study has explored how culture and ethnicity influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents. This has been done within the context of how social workers evaluate parenting competence. The findings of the study suggest that it is the cultural attributes associated with identity that have the most significant influence on how black and minority ethnic parents socialise their children. These attributes (e.g., language, moral values, presentation), frame perceptions about gender roles; hierarchy of authority within families and children's readiness to contribute to family functioning. It is these that give meaning and context to parenting practices.

Prior to commencing the primary research, I carried out a scoping review of both parenting and child welfare policy literature. The purpose of reviewing parenting literature was twofold: first, I wanted to explore what was already known about parenting pathways and how they related to the parenting practices of black and

minority ethnic parents; the second aim was to identify research gaps. In the main, the literature affirmed that parenting pathways change over children's developmental lifespans and that cultural variations meant that there was no universal agreement on what constitutes 'good' or competent parenting. This understanding that parenting occurs within specific cultural and environmental contexts formed one of the central premises of this study.

The review of child welfare policy was aimed at exploring and contextualising parenting competence evaluations within the wider policy environment. What was highlighted from the literature review was that child welfare policy issues generate polarised debates about the role of the state in terms of determining what 'good enough' parenting constitutes. Especially in the context of culture and ethnicity.

In summary, the review suggested that evaluations of parenting competence varied widely and lacked validity when appraising black and minority ethnic parents. Alongside this, there was considerable debate about the parenting standards that should form the minimum expectations for black and minority ethnic parents. The issues centred on implicit assumptions that the parenting practices of majority ethnic groups constituted the norm against which other parents were compared (see for example Phoenix and Husain, 2007). The literature also contained intensive debates along suggestions that there is a thin evidence base from which to recommend strategies for working with black and minority ethnic parents. This was associated with much of the research on parenting being focused on difference rather than the universality of parenting.

My review of the literature highlighted gaps in three main aspects of knowledge. First, was that there is a dearth of research on how culture and ethnicity influences the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents; second, there was no literature that had explored, in great detail, the effectiveness with which parenting evaluations appraise the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents and, third, there was an absence of an assessment tool to guide social workers in evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents.

As new black and minority ethnic communities continue to emerge, it is important for social workers to improve their knowledge about how to appraise culturally informed parenting scripts. However, the policy review suggested that while legislative changes to clarify the importance of issues of culture and ethnicity had been introduced (e.g., Every Child Matters Agenda, 2004; Working Together, 2018), organisational cultures continued to contribute to inconsistencies in assessment by introducing excessive procedural requirements which prioritise process over direct work with families (Turney et al, 2011). Nevertheless, the literature review helped focus the research question that was explored and informed the methodology and methods adopted for this study.

Based on the gaps identified in the review, the study design and implementation was aimed at moving away from the deficit-oriented approach that is common to research on black and minority ethnic parenting. Instead, the main aspect of parenting that the study explored was how culture and ethnicity influences parenting practices. This involved establishing the frames through which black and minority ethnic parents construe and negotiate parenting competence and juxtaposing parents' frames with the frames that social workers use to understand and appraise culturally informed

parenting scripts. In this regard, the literature points to culture and ethnicity as both conditioning and condition. In other words, culture and ethnicity provide the guidance and rewards that systematically shape individuals' social cognition through institutions, socialisation practices and patterning of interactions. Conversely, individual parents decide which aspects of cultural they allow to shape their parenting practices.

The design and implementation of this study were mainly influenced by three aspects. The first was that previous studies had mainly recruited parents from one minority ethnic group. This suggested that a gap existed for exploring how culture and ethnicity influences the parenting practices of parents from several black and minority ethnic groups. Second, empirical evidence suggested that black and minority ethnic parents' conceptualisation of competence was dynamic and responsive to changing circumstances. However, this was not explored in detail within the included evidence. Third, existing recommendations for working with black and minority ethnic parents were based on thin evidence bases. This gap was the impetus for the decision to combine a phenomenological research methodology with frame analysis as the theoretical approach to analysing the findings. Thus, qualitative approaches to data collection were chosen as these enable deep and thorough exploration and explanation of participants' views and meanings.

The phenomenology methodology was chosen because its underpinnings, epistemology and theoretical perspectives are appropriate when the aim of research is to understand individuals' perspectives of a phenomenon. The distinctive elements of phenomenology, which are extensively described in chapter five, include using thick description and close analysis of lived experience in order to capture the meaning and

common features of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Groenewald, 2004; Starks and Trinidad, 2007; Vagle, 2014). The focus is on having sustained interaction with participants within their own surroundings (Van Manen, 1990; Creswell, 2013) to determine and describe what experience means to those who have lived it.

Specific to this study, the phenomenological approach enabled me to obtain the thick, rich descriptions of black and minority ethnic parents and social workers' experience of parenting competence evaluations. This was achieved by focusing on the whole experience rather than a single aspect or parts of the aspects of parenting competence evaluations. The methodological principles of Heideggerian phenomenology, which this study adopts, point to the overriding need for the researcher to be personally and methodically reflective through the research process. At the core of this principle is the belief that researcher subjectivity and bias cannot be completely removed from research.

As I explained in chapter five, phenomenology commentators posit that researchers adopting a phenomenology approach to their studies must be aware of and bring their pre-existing beliefs to the foreground in order to examine and question them in light of new evidence (Halling et al, 2006; Dowling, 2007; Giorgi, 2009). This reflexivity adds to the credibility and transparency of the research (Mruck and Mey, 2010) by helping to separate out what belongs to the researcher rather than the researched (Finlay, 2009). Within this thesis, my subjectivity is foregrounded in various sections where I refer to my social work experience or to my insider knowledge as a Ugandan to add emphasis to a finding.

The participants for this study were initially selected using purposive sampling techniques. However, the initial numbers were too small. This led me to employ snowball sampling to recruit participants who met the research criteria whilst maintaining the purposive sampling approach (Polkinghorne, 2005). Participants were selected according to the pre-established inclusion criteria of the sampling frame. That is, there were two groups of participants. One group had to be black and ethnic minority parents whose parenting competence had been evaluated by a social worker. The second group had to be social workers who had experience of evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents.

To adhere to the 'sustained communication' tenet of phenomenological research, a two-phase data collection approach was adopted. The first phase was focus group interviews in which participants were encouraged to talk about their experiences of parenting competence evaluations. Information gathered from the parent focus groups was then used to put together a vignette which guided discussions within the social work focus groups. The topic guide was refined following the focus group interviews and used to guide discussions in the one-to-one interviews.

In keeping with the phenomenological principle that research should not be subjected to rigid rules (Van Manen, 1990), data analysis was iterative. This involved simultaneously collecting and analysing data through coding and memoing. Initially, to allow general themes to emerge and then moving on to more selective and conceptual coding which allowed for higher levels of abstraction from which participant frames could be identified. Throughout the data analysis process, the focus was to

understand participants' perspectives of parenting competence evaluations from their own contexts.

As aforementioned, being an African parent and a practicing social worker, I already knew too much about the phenomenon I was studying and needed to find a way to bridle my pre-conceptions and assumptions (Van Manen, 1990) to allow for potentially surprising findings (Dahlberg, 2006). But, rather than separate myself from the study, I allowed my thoughts and experiences to run parallel to those of my participants (Giorgi, 1994; Halling et al, 2006; Finlay, 2009). This put me in a better position to concentrate on participants' narratives whilst also reflecting on my thoughts and experience.

Analysis of participants' narratives affirm the view that parenting is a cultural construction rooted in identity. The idea of identity was a core category in both sets of participants' conceptualisations of culturally informed parenting scripts. Although identity is presented here separately, it was in fact related to other categories (e.g., autonomy, protection, and support) and existed within a complex system of dynamic interaction in which each category has direct relevance to another and the connection between categories is non-hierarchical, fluid and contextual. Black and minority ethnic parents see their approach to parenting as predicated on socialising their children to belong to and be accepted in a distinct group. Social workers view parenting competence as socialising children in a way that fits in and identifies with Western beliefs and values.

Further analysis suggested that both sets of participants placed great importance to their own conceptualisations of parenting competence and sought to maintain those constructions. For example, although the acculturation process meant that some aspects of culture were abandoned, black and minority ethnic parents generally aspired to socialise their children in ways that identified them with the culture and ethnicity of their birth. Thus, although constructions of parenting were dynamic and shifted between stability and consistency, there were aspects of cultural parenting that black and minority ethnic parents sought to maintain as they picked up new ways of socialising children. Social workers, on the other hand, sought conformity to the constructions of parenting that they use when assessing competence.

The social relationships that participants had with others, especially reciprocal relationships, also contributed to the way that participants construed and negotiated parenting competence. For example, the negative discourses that participants had about each other had the effect of vilifying entire groups represented by the other, leading to perceptions of unfairness. Bradshaw et al (1999) give a vivid example of how perceptions of unfairness can impact on behaviour. Their study surveyed six hundred none-resident fathers in Britain between 1995 and 1999 and found that fathers felt that policy stigmatised them as feckless and this impacted on their behaviour regarding fulfilling financial obligations towards their children.

The overall conclusion is that culture and ethnicity frame conceptualisations of parenting competence but interacts with other ecological factors to influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents. Developing this understanding of the meaning of parenting competence from the perspectives of black

and minority ethnic parents and social workers, would not have been possible without the repetitive approach that is central to phenomenological research.

The section that follows provides a critical review of the methods. The purpose of this is to explore the extent to which this research meets the quality criteria proposed by Charmaz (2006) who recommends a reflective approach that highlights the strength and limitations of the methods and methodology used. As (Silverman, 2001) points out, all research has strengths and weaknesses which the researcher needs to reflect upon. All researchers' interpretations are limited and the open-ended nature of qualitative research means that it is, arguably, the participants that have more control over the content of the data collected. Therefore, acknowledging the possible limitations promotes transparent reflection (Oakley, 2000).

9.3 Critical Review of Methods

One of the key limitations of this research is associated with the sampling frame and the resulting mix of participants. In the methodology chapter (chapter 5) I explained the pragmatic methodological and ethical decisions that informed the sample frame. The implication of the chosen methods and methodology is that the final inclusion criteria also meant that some groups of black and minority ethnic parents and social workers were excluded from taking part in the study. For example, the inclusion criterion that parents had to be from a black and minority ethnic background meant that White-British parents were excluded from taking part. White-British parents would also have something to contribute to the understanding of the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations.

Including White-British parents in the study would have served the purpose of providing a sample that was more representative of the demographic make-up of the United Kingdom. Indeed, their voices would have been beneficial given that their parenting competence will have also been evaluated using similar tools and processes to those applied in evaluating black and minority ethnic parents. However, the resource implications of such a wide sample would have been that I would not have met the financial costs involved.

That said, the focus on black and minority ethnic parents was considered within the context of the over representation of black and minority ethnic children in child welfare statistics (Thoburn et al, 2004; Owen and Statham, 2009). Alongside this, consideration was given to the increasing diversity of the population in the United Kingdom, and suggestions from the literature review that much of the research and policy is based on Western constructions parenting (Broadhurst et al, 2009). Considering the findings of this study, which suggest that parenting competence must be understood in the ecological contexts of individual families, it is possible that White-British parents have different interpretations of the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations, which also need to be explored in greater detail.

Another limitation associated with the sample was that although the research recruited both male and female parents, it was only the female parents that chose to take part in the one-to-one interviews. The possible reasons for this are outlined in chapter 5. The limitation is that gender differences in the way that black and minority ethnic parents construe and negotiate parenting competence could not be explored. However, the dimensions of culture and ethnicity that parents highlighted as key

influencers of their parenting practices were common across all participants. This suggests that male and female parents draw on similar frames in their conceptualisation of parenting competence.

The cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the parents recruited were also too wide for comparisons across different cultures and ethnicities to be effectively considered. Other research has shown cultural variations in the way that black and minority ethnic parents socialise their children (see, Roopnarine and Gielin, 2005; Singh and Clarke, 2006; Katz et al, 2007; Chand, 2008). This is a limitation in terms of generalisability. However, the common factor was that all the parents who took part in this research were first generation immigrants. The fact that they shared similar experiences of parenting competence evaluations and held similar perceptions about the influence of culture and ethnicity on their parenting practices, validates the findings.

Participants from this study were recruited from urban cities in the United Kingdom. This has potential limitations in that the research lacks a rural dimension. This is important in the context of studies that have shown regional variations in social work assessments (Cleaver et al 1999; Jack, 2000; Frost, 2001; Cleaver and Walker, 2004; Howarth and Lees, 2010; Williams et al, 2011; Davidson et al, 2010; Howarth 2010; Parton, 2011; Taulbut and Walsh, 2013). For example, in his review of the availability of resources to support families, Frost (2001) argues that support that is available to parents in rural areas is often characterised by low levels of expectation, poor staff levels and limited availability. This, he adds, reflects policy assumptions that families in need are mainly based in urban settings. This, in effect, suggests that the perspectives of parents whose parenting competence has been evaluated in urban

settings cannot be generalised to those whose parenting has been evaluated in rural settings.

Similarly, in their study of neighbourhood effects, van Ham et al (2011), suggest that regional settings and neighbourhood affect life chances in ways that can undermine individuals' and whole families' characteristics. While their research does not identify causal mechanisms, they point to the implication of factors such as local unemployment rates, levels of crime, demographic make-up and access to support services as dynamics that influence research participants' perspectives. They argue that these factors, which they describe as measures of socially contingent well-being have an impact on how individuals experience phenomena and are strongly associated with regional variations in participants' perspectives about similar process. Similar views were expressed by Shiela et al, (2009).

Including participants from rural settings would have given some insight into whether the findings are significantly impacted by geographical setting. However, because this study focused on gaining an understanding of how issues of culture and ethnicity are incorporated in evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents, it was important to recruit purposively. This, as well as the challenges I faced in the early stages of recruitment influenced the decision to recruit from urban cities where it was relatively easy for me to recruit participants given my previous contacts with the organisations through which they were recruited.

Furthermore, the fact that assessment processes and child welfare procedures in England are standardised (White 2005), left me feeling that it was not necessary to

explore regional variations in the way that social workers incorporate the influence of culture and ethnicity in evaluations of parenting competence. This is not to suggest that there would be no variations (this aspect is covered by Turney et al, 2011); rather, I wanted my control aspect to be that black and minority ethnic parents are exposed to the same evaluation process regardless of their geographical location in the UK.

Despite the above limitations, the participants in this research represented a sufficiently wide sample of black and minority ethnic parents and social workers (eighty in total) to enable useful insights to be drawn from their narratives. The key strength is that the study ensured that black and minority ethnic parents' and social workers' views about the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations were heard. As aforementioned this study highlighted that although there was general agreement that culture and ethnicity significantly influence parenting practices, black and minority ethnic parents and social workers had contrasting views about how culturally informed parenting scripts should be appraised. By juxtaposing participants' perspectives, the study draws useful insights from the frames that appear to shape the contrasting views held by both sets of participants.

This study addresses the gap in the literature that suggests that assessments in England vary widely because of their limited focus on the cultural contexts of parenting (Modood et al, 1997; Super and Harkness, 2002; Weisner, 2002; White, 2005; Phoenix and Hussain, 2007). For example, Phoenix and Husain (2007) advanced the argument that ethnicity and culture need to be given focal consideration in research and in social work practice because they shape children's developmental environments by influencing parents' perceptions about aspects such as protection,

security, nutrition, stimulation and the expression of emotional warmth. The findings of this study confirm and expand the literature by first highlighting that many black and minority ethnic parents place high cultural and ethnic importance on the way that socialise and parent their children.

The findings of this study also suggest that there is a need for social workers to have a general understanding of how the cultural and ethnic histories of black and minority ethnic parents interact with contemporary issues to frame conceptualisations of parenting competence. Equally, social workers need to be aware of how their own cultures and ethnicities intersect with professional values and codes of practice to influence how they evaluate the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents.

The recruitment of social work participants was an ongoing issue throughout the data collection process. This was because although my initial method was to recruit social workers through local authorities, most of the local authorities I approached made it clear that they were unable to let social workers take part due to work demands. The turnout of social workers that agreed to take part, from the local authorities that allowed me to interview their social workers, was too low. As such, I resorted to snowball sampling. This yielded the numbers that are represented in this study. It is difficult to speculate whether there would have been a significant difference if all the participant social workers had been recruited by the initial purposive sampling method. What is clear, however, is that the social workers who took part were from sufficiently wide backgrounds to conclude that it is reasonable to speculate that the findings are representative of the general population of social workers in the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, the overall sample of participants was small enough to allow for detailed exploration of participants' perspectives. This, as well as the use of qualitative methods was especially important given the need to 'unpack' the nuances involved in the relational nature of parenting. The sample size made it possible to probe for underlying values, beliefs and assumption that black and minority ethnic parents and social workers hold, as well as gain a full appreciation of the procedural context within which social workers conduct parenting competence evaluations.

9.4 Applying Quality Criteria

Although there is critical debate, within the literature, about the application of quality criteria to qualitative research, the general agreement is that the quality and credibility of research needs to be appraised (Mays and Pope, 2000; Smith and Deemers, 2000; Thomas and Pring, 2004). According to Thomas and Pring (2004) the distinguishing mark of all 'good' research is the acknowledgement of error. His view is that what flows from acknowledging error is the researcher's attempt to establish procedures which will minimise the effects that identified errors may have on what counts as knowledge. But, as Mays and Pope (2000) note, it is not clear whether consensus can be reached on what constitutes appropriate quality criteria for judging qualitative research from different disciplines or indeed different theoretical backgrounds.

In accordance with the methodological foundations of phenomenological research, this study draws on the evaluation criteria identified by Van Manen (1991) to assess the value of this interpretivist phenomenological research. As Van Manen points out, deciding what to do with information once it has been collected is largely dependent

on the decisions the researcher has already made and the assumptions they bring to interpreting participant observations and narratives. Assessing the quality, therefore, will require the researcher to justify their choices so that the appropriateness of the data, as well as the appropriateness of selection, collection and analytical procedures can be evaluated in the following three areas: scientific credibility, expressing the phenomenon evocatively, and integrating phenomenological concepts.

Scientific Credibility: According to Van Manen, scientific rigour and credibility in phenomenological research requires researchers to capture the complexity and ambiguity contained in participants' description of their lived world. This entails being 'poetically' descriptive so that multiple layers of meaning are laid bare whilst retaining the ambiguity of experience. This study achieves phenomenological credibility by offering examples and quotations from the data to illustrate points. This also serves the purpose of bringing readers into a closer relationship with the phenomenon and makes the evidence base of analytical claims transparent (Halling, 2002). Credibility is further enhanced by a reflexive approach which involved discussions with my supervisor in order to ensure connection between the data and subsequent analysis.

Expressing Phenomenon Evocatively: The quality of phenomenological research can be judged by its relative power to draw the reader into the researcher's discoveries and allow the reader to 'see' participants' worlds in new and deeper ways (Polkinghorne, 1983). This means that phenomenological accounts must be vivid, accurate and emotionally rich. Van Manen (2007) advocates the inclusion of an artistic dimension in order to "stir up the pedagogical, professional sensibilities" (pg. 25). This was achieved in this study, by concentrating illustrations on narratives that were rich

in expressing participants' sentiments and emotion whilst retaining textual understanding. As Todres (2007) states, descriptions of lived experience need to be 'humanised' and made 'habitable' in order to give readers an empathetic sense of being present with the narrator. In his view, embodied understandings can still be facilitated by evoking lived experience in a lively and engaging manner.

Integrating Phenomenological Concepts: This study adopts Heideggerian perspective on the hermeneutic variant of phenomenology and thus takes a relativist position. Consequently, the study advances multiple meanings as they emerge from participants' specific contexts. This was achieved by initially focusing on capturing participants' textual emotion and understanding (chapters six and seven) then moving on to analysing what the findings mean (chapter eight). The integration of phenomenological concepts demonstrated in this is in recognising that when expressing phenomenon, analysis has to remain tentative, emergent and incomplete (Todres, 2007, pg. 19). Additionally, through the comparative, iterative and reflective approach it takes, this research exhibits a strong connection between the data, the findings, and the analysis.

9.5 Originality

Originality in research is said to have been achieved when a research provides an innovative understanding of the studied phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). As I have explained throughout this thesis, the aim of this study was to explore how social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity in their evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. The innovativeness with which the topic was explored was demonstrated in combining a phenomenological research

philosophy with frame analysis to draw nuanced understanding of how conceptualisations of culture and ethnicity shape perceptions of parenting competence. The approach represents a different way of exploring the nature of culturally informed parenting scripts and how they can be appraised.

While there is evidence of phenomenology being used in social work research, there was no evidence of frame analysis being used as a theoretical approach to analysis in any parenting studies in the United Kingdom. The literature I reviewed suggested that frame analysis is widely used in political discourse and has been applied to a parenting support study in Sweden (Ponzoni, 2015) but there was no evidence of its application to UK based studies. Additionally, this study demonstrates originality by moving the debate away from the universality of parenting concepts to a focus on deeper understanding of the aspects of culture and ethnicity that influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents.

9.6 Usefulness

The usefulness of this study is that it provides an in-depth exploration of the influence that culture and ethnicity have; not only on the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents but also on constructions of what constitutes parenting competence. Analysis of the findings shows that parenting competence is a complex concept that contains elements of continuity, change and interdependence between the two. This is useful because insights into how various aspects of culture and ethnicity interact with other ecological factors to reflect black and minority ethnic parents' and social workers' construction of competence can enhance better partnership working. The findings are, arguably timely when considered in light of the increasing demographic

changes in the United Kingdom and the over representation of black and minority ethnic children in child welfare and criminal justice statistics (Owen and Statham, 2009; Lammy, 2017).

9.7 Implications for Policy and Practice

According to the Office of National Statistics, net migration into the United Kingdom was the main factor explaining why the population grew by 7.8 million between 1980 and 2015 (Office for National Statistics, 2015). As the diversity of the population increases culturally informed parenting scripts will continue to present challenges for the evaluation of parenting competence. The insight that this study provides has implications for policy and practice in the following ways:

- In terms of how social workers incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity in their evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents, the study shows a lack of integration between policy guidance and social work practice. Social workers indicated that while legislation and guidance requires them to explore issues of culture and ethnicity in great detail, resource issues (e.g., time, supervision and competing work priorities) within the work environment meant that little attention is given to understanding the cultural contexts of individual parents;
- Black and minority ethnic parents reported, overwhelmingly, that the language that social workers use is often oppressive and does not foster feelings of partnership. Typical examples given related to the use of the words and phrases such as '*minimising*'; '*not in this country*'; '*I know it is a cultural thing but*'. Parents explained that such phrases showed that social workers were not prepared to consider parents' explanations of their lived experiences. This

reportedly led to superficial engagement as parents sought to be seen to cooperate with social workers despite not agreeing with their assessments;

- Within policy and practice, there is a strong emphasis on the likely harm that parenting practices might have on children. Because of this emphasis, parenting competence evaluations may fail to fully appraise any benefits associated with culturally informed parenting scripts. Parents felt that this approach alienated and left them feeling discriminated against, thus less likely to fully cooperate with social worker;
- The findings also show that when black and minority ethnic parents need support to address parenting challenges, their responses are often complex and delicate. For example, parents reported being uncertain about accessing social work support because of the stories they had heard from other parents. Indeed, the findings from this study showed that black and minority ethnic parents' constructs of parenting competence have a much broader scope than the avoidance of harm. In particular, the findings highlighted interdependence of culture and ethnicity with other ecological factors in shaping constructs of parenting competence. This suggests that there is scope for social workers to explore ways of evaluating parenting competence that balance concerns about harm with the relational benefits associated with culturally informed parenting practices;
- The findings show that the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents are not only rooted in cultural constructions but can change as a result of acculturation processes. There is therefore a need for policy and practice to recognise and value (beyond parenting histories) the role of parents' biographies in influencing parenting practices.

- As I reflect on the challenges I faced in recruiting social workers, I note that more needs to be done to encourage local authorities to facilitate empirical studies. Prior to approaching local authorities, I had sought ethical approval from the University of York and from the Association of Directors of Children's Services research group. However, these were not sufficient as many local authorities also asked me to obtain approval from their own research boards, yet this too did not result in agreement. Where research boards had agreed that there was benefit in the study being conducted in their area, they later came back to say that the team managers had been unable to release social workers to take part in the study.

Although the above implications are proposed within the context of this study, it is important to point out that they are relevant for the wider practice and policy context. They point to a need for policies to be consistent with the needs of the people. This then aids effective practice implementation. In other words, when policy fully appreciates the influence that culture and ethnicity can have on parenting practices, then social workers can be better equipped to evaluate their parenting competence.

The participants involved in this study were from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, they gave broadly similar responses. The similarities of responses are powerful and suggest that having similar experiences generates largely similar perspectives on experience. In this regard, this research provides further evidence as to why it is important to advocate for policies that address the issue of the disproportional representation of black and minority ethnic children in child welfare statistics.

9.8 Recommendations for Further Research

A review of the limitations, strengths and usefulness of this study point to several possibilities for further research as detailed below:

- i. This study was conducted in urban cities and may not be representative of experienced of black and minority ethnic parents or social workers in rural cities. A larger study would allow for other aspects such as regional variations to be considered;
- ii. The black and minority ethnic parents who took part in this study were all first-generation immigrants and their experiences might not be representative of the general population of black and minority ethnic parents in the United Kingdom. As such, further exploration of the subject could benefit from a longitudinal research design. This would allow for consideration of aspects such as how cultural constructs of parenting are balanced and rebalanced over time in response to changing family and societal dynamics;
- iii. This study used a phenomenological research philosophy and frame analysis to explore the aspects of culture and ethnicity that influence participants' conceptualisations of parenting competence. Further research could continue to apply frame analysis to test the approach further by interviewing more parents and social workers;
- iv. The social workers who took part in this study highlighted the need for a research-based tool for evaluating the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. This is congruent with the literature. Further research could consider how cultural aspects of parenting can be appraised to inform decisions about parenting competence;

- v. This research has shown that there are times when black and minority ethnic parents want to access social work support to address parenting challenges but that their responses are often complex and delicate. Further research could focus on how support services can best incorporate issues of culture and ethnicity in parenting programmes - as opposed to (or in addition to) current focus on encouraging black and minority ethnic parents to access parenting programmes already being provided.

9.9 Contribution to Knowledge

This research makes both substantive and methodological contribution to the body of knowledge about the efficacy of parenting competence evaluations as detailed below:

1. Substantively, this research has contributed to the body of knowledge by developing a nuanced understanding of parenting competence that is based on the primary findings and analysis whilst also being contextualised within the wider parenting and policy evidence. While the study mainly affirms the findings of the scoping literature review, the primary research showed that culture and ethnicity influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents by framing perceptions about identity. The different aspects of identity are reflected in the way that black and minority ethnic parents socialise and parent their children. These aspects of identity interact in dynamic, non-hierarchical, and contextual ways to shape perceptions of competence. Alongside this, the primary research also showed that social workers conceptualise parenting competence based on parenting practices rooted in Western constructs. Thus, black and minority ethnic parents are seen to be competent when their parenting reflects Western ideals of socialising children. But that social

workers' conceptualisations of parenting competence are also framed by their individual and professional cultures;

2. Methodologically, this research contributes to knowledge by combining a phenomenological research philosophy with frame analysis to explore the complex and rich dimensions of culturally informed parenting scripts. Based on the literature I reviewed, this methodology has not been utilised in UK based studies to elucidate how culture and ethnicity influence the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents or indeed to explore links between parents and social workers' conceptualisations of parenting competence. This study shows that frame analysis is highly relevant in social work research;
3. The research also contributes to knowledge by giving a voice to black and minority ethnic parents and to social workers. This serves to create further social validation by creating an audience for their narratives, which can indeed be empowering (Dominelli, 2008);
4. In addition to giving a voice to parents and to social workers, this study contributes to the body of social work knowledge around the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents by suggesting that parents from different black and minority ethnic backgrounds are affected by experiences of being evaluated for parenting competence. This adds to the need to explore whether consideration should be given to exploring the effects of evaluations on parents.

9.10 Conclusion

This thesis has reviewed parenting and child welfare policy literature to explore the existing evidence base on the extent to which issues of culture and ethnicity are incorporated within social work evaluations of the parenting competence of black and minority ethnic parents. The results of the review then informed the final formulation of the research question and the methods of enquiry. Through the empirical enquiry, the thesis has explored black and minority ethnic parents and social workers' conceptualisation of parenting competence in detail.

Using frame analysis to draw meaning from the findings, the study identifies several primary frames through which participants constructed meaning. This was achieved by concentrating on identifying words and general statements that participants used to communicate their perspective about parenting, parenting competence and their experience of parenting competence evaluations. The result was a nuanced understanding of how culture and ethnicity influences the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents, as well as perceptions of competence between social workers and parents.

The importance of understanding the parenting practices of black and minority ethnic parents is emphasised when considered within the context that demographic and social changes in the United Kingdom have significantly altered the social ecology. The inquiry process, as well as the findings of this study make a unique contribution to the body of knowledge about constructs of parenting competence. This adds to the limited number of empirical studies that provide direct insight into this subject.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Categorised Research Questions:

How do BME families do parenting?

1. How do Black and Minority Ethnic parents define parenting? This question will look at how BME communities define 'good parenting'. Specific attention will be given to how issues such as cultural norms, religion, assimilation and societal expectations are incorporated into parenting.
2. To what extent does culture and ethnicity influence relationships between parents and children? This question will examine how Black and Minority Ethnic parents incorporate factors such as children's temperaments, gender, care requirements and developmental needs within their parenting.
3. What role does physical environment play in shaping and / or reinforcing certain expressions of parenting? This question will examine whether geographical location plays a part in reinforcing parenting practices that might be associated with certain ethnic groups and not others.
4. How much diversity is there within each community? This question will examine the extent to which parents from the same ethnic background are influenced by practices derived from their racial and ethnic traditions.

How do social workers assess parenting capacity?

5. How do social workers assess all parenting capacity? This will look at how social workers implement assessment guidelines and frameworks in their assessments of parenting capacity. Data to answer this question will also be collected from focus group sessions and one-to-one interviews with social workers.
6. Do social workers find parenting assessments problematic: If so, in what ways? This will seek social workers' views on the challenges, if any, of conducting parenting assessments in general.
7. What, if any, are the differences in the ways that parents from Black and Minority Ethnic groups are assessed in comparison to majority groups? This question will seek social workers' views about perceived or real challenges in assessing the parenting capacities of Black and Minority Ethnic parents and how any such challenges are overcome.
8. How do parents from different races and ethnicities contrast in the competencies they promote in their children? This question will look at how BME parents respond to the issues that form 'typical' child welfare concerns: basic care, discipline, boundaries, stimulation, emotional warmth and protection and examine – 1. How they rate them when developing competencies for their children and 2. Whether there is a divide between social workers' expectations and parents' priorities.

What is the relationship between BME parents' experiences of being assessed for parenting competence and social workers' experiences of conducting parenting capacity assessments with BME families?

9. How important is the assessor's background (qualification, experience and race)? Within the notion of 'emotional integrity', this question will look at what characteristics Black and Minority Ethnic parents feel social workers should possess in order to conduct thorough culturally sensitive assessments of parenting capacity.

10. Do parents from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds find parenting assessments problematic? If so, in what ways? This question will gather BME parents' views on the effectiveness of the parenting assessment process.

11. How are families included in the assessment process? This question will examine the extent of collaboration between social workers and the families they assess. It will consider social workers' views as well as 'insider accounts' from friends, relatives etc about inclusion in the assessment process.

12. What aspects of culture are crucial in evaluating parenting capacity? This question will consider views on what aspects of their cultural practices BME families feel are indicators of 'safe' parenting. Here, I will also review BME parents and social workers' views to consider whether there is a thread that runs across all groups and if so how this could be harnessed to enable thorough standardised parenting assessments of BME families.

Department of Social Policy and Social Work

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

DO THEY EVER GET IT RIGHT?

Participants Needed for Research in *Understanding what parents think about parenting capacity assessments*

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study about parenting capacity assessments.

The study seeks to understand the extent to which social workers take into account the influence of culture and ethnicity when assessing the parenting capacities of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) families.

Therefore, we are interested in getting the views of BME parents whose parenting competence has been assessed by social services.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to: *(take part in at least one group discussion; a one-to-one interview and one feedback session)*
Your participation will involve no more than four sessions, each of which is approximately forty-five minutes.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a “goody bag” containing *(a gift voucher, parenting leaflets, product samples and discount offers)*.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

(Davis Kiima)

(The University of York, Department of Social Policy and Social Work)

on

Email: *(dk606@york.ac.uk)*

Appendix 3 – Informed Consent

This study has been reviewed for ethics clearance but the decision to participate is entirely yours.



Informed Consent for Black and Minority Ethnic Parents

This consent form is for parents from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) families whose parenting capacity has been previously assessed by social care services. By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the research titled, “*Assessing Parenting Capacity in Black and Minority Ethnic Families*”.

Name of Principal Investigator: Davis Kiima

Name of Organisation: The University of York

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Hill

Name of Project: Assessing Parenting Capacity in BME Families

There are two parts to this consent form:

1. The information sheet, which gives you information about the study.
2. The certificate of consent, on which you will be required to sign to indicate that you agree to take part in the research.

Once you have read and signed it, you will be given a copy of the full consent form.

Part One: Information Sheet:

My name is Davis Kiima, and I am PhD student at the University of York. I am doing research which I think will shed more light on how culture and ethnicity influence the way Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) families parent their children. My hope is that any new knowledge that I get from carrying out this research will contribute to guiding the way parenting capacity assessments are conducted when working with BME parents.

In this research, I will talk to many parents from Black and Minority Ethnic families and ask them a number of questions about their parenting practices. I will arrange an information session in which I will explain what the research will involve. Once you have heard more about what it involves and agree to participate, I will ask you to sign the certificate of consent before we begin the study.

Participating in research is entirely voluntary and you do not have to decide today. Please talk to anyone with whom you feel comfortable, before deciding. If there are any words in this information sheet that you do not understand, please ask me to explain them.

What is the Research For?

It is possible that the way parenting capacity assessments are done in England does not fully take into account how culture and ethnicity influences the way BME families parent their children. In this research, I will talk to BME parents about how they parent their children and what they think about parenting assessments. I will also talk to social workers about what they look out for when they assess the parenting capacities of BME parents. I will invite BME parents and social workers to share their experiences and knowledge so that I can find out whether the way that parenting capacity assessments are conducted needs to be done differently when assessing BME parents.

What will be involved in the research?

The research will involve three stages: First, I will hold an introductory session in which I will introduce myself and explain all the information in this consent form. Secondly, once you have agreed to participate, I will invite you to a focus group session in which I will ask a group of parents to share their experiences of being assessed for parenting capacity. In the third stage, I will ask some people out of the larger focus group to share their individual experiences with me, in one-to-one interviews.

Who will be selected to take part?

I would like to talk to as many BME parents as possible about the way they parent their children and their experiences of being assessed for parenting competence. The main area of parenting that I want to talk about with them is how much their culture and ethnicity influences the way they parent and whether they felt that assessors understood what the parents were trying to achieve. I would like to ask you to take part because you are a parent from a background that we describe as BME.

Do you have to take part?

You do not have to agree to take part or talk to me and can choose to say no. I am aware that it is not an easy decision to make especially if you will be talking about how you parent your children. The topic is sensitive and, for some people, it can bring back sad memories. You do not have to decide today and if you choose to attend the introductory session, ask as many questions as you like and I will take my time to answer them. You have a few days between now and the introductory session to think about it and to speak to your friends and family about whether to take part. After the introductory session, you can tell me what you have decided.

How will the different stages be conducted?

The three stages that I have already mentioned will be carried out as follows:

Stage One – Introduction: In this stage, I will have as many BME parents as would like to come along to find out more about the research. This will be purely for me to introduce myself, explain the information in this consent form and answer any questions that you might have. The actual research will not have begun.

Stage Two – Focus Groups: You will take part in a group discussion with about seven other BME parents. I will guide those discussions. The meetings will start with me making sure that everyone is comfortable. I will answer any questions you might have and then I will ask questions about what it means to parent within your community. I will encourage you to talk about why you parent the way you do, whether you parent all your children the same way as well as any other topics on parenting that you feel comfortable to share. It is likely that my academic supervisor will attend some sessions. If that should happen, I will let you know in advance. The sessions will be recorded (voice only). This is to make sure that the information and knowledge that you and the other parents share is not missed. This information will remain confidential and will only be accessed by my supervisor, Dr. Andrew Hill and I. When the recordings are typed up and saved electronically, the tapes will be destroyed immediately. None of the typed work will contain any identifying details.

Stage Three – One-to-one Interview: If you agree to go to the next stage, you will take part in a one-to-one interview with me. If during the interview you become uncomfortable and wish to stop, the interview will be stopped immediately. You do not have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. So, if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer, you can say so and I will move on to the next question. You will have the option to either hold the interview at your home or at the same venue as the focus groups were held. The interview sessions will also be recorded (voice only) to make sure that I do not miss anything you share but all information will remain confidential. Other than my supervisor, Dr. Andrew Hill and I, no one else will have access to your information. Once the recording from the session has been typed and saved, the tapes will be destroyed immediately.

How long will the research take?

If you agree to participate in all three stages described above, then you will be involved for a maximum of three hours spread over a two months period. Each stage is expected to last no more than one hour and you do not have to be involved in all three. The sessions will be held at times that are convenient for you.

Are there any risks or discomforts?

The subject of parenting can be quite sensitive. Therefore, there is some risk that you or other parents in the group discussions might share distressing personal experiences. You could also feel uncomfortable talking about answering some of the questions I might ask. It is not my intention for any one to feel uncomfortable or distressed. If a question causes you to feel uneasy, please say so. Prior to the research commencing, I will also provide you with information about other support services to contact if something that is said during the study causes you to be distressed and you feel the need to speak to someone, other than myself, about it.

What is the benefit of taking part in this research?

The benefits of this research might not be immediately apparent or tangible. However, your participation will contribute to helping me find out whether the way that parenting capacity assessments are conducted in England need to be done differently when assessing BME parents. Direct benefits will be that you will gain more insight into your own parenting practices; you will have access to other sources of support; you will get

to meet and socialise with other BME parents within your area and you will get to learn more about parenting.

What are the incentives for taking part in this research?

You will not be paid to take part in the research. However, as a token of appreciation for your participation in the research, I have prepared a 'goody bag' which will contain information leaflets on how to parent, the contact details of parenting support services, recipe books and beauty product samples.

Will information be confidential?

Yes, information will be confidential. I will not be sharing any of the information you give with anyone outside the University of York's social policy and social work department. Your information will be kept confidential and no one, other than my supervisor, Dr. Andrew Hill and I will have access to it. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name. During the group sessions, I will ask everyone not to repeat, outside the group, what has been shared within the group. However, it is important for you to know that I cannot stop or prevent participants who were in the group from sharing things that should be confidential. You should also be aware that it is likely that this research will raise a lot of curiosity within your community and people will ask you about what is involved.

Will the research findings be shared?

After the study, I will share what I have learnt with all the participants and ask them what they think before I share it with the larger community. I will do this by first meeting with the participants and then sharing it with the community. The report that I write after the research will be submitted to the University of York as part of the requirements for completing my PhD but the results will be shared so that other interested people (e.g. social services) can learn from my research.

Do you have the right to refuse or withdraw?

You may choose not to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. If after you have agreed to participate you decide that you no longer wish to continue, you can withdraw at any time. Choosing to participate or not does not affect any of the services or support that you are receiving now or what you will receive in the future.

Where should you direct your questions?

If you have any questions about this research, you can ask them at any stage, including after the research has begun. You can direct your questions to either me: Davis Kiima, at: The University of York, Heslington, York YO10 5DD; email: dk606@york.ac.uk or to my academic supervisor: Dr. Andrew Hill, at: The University of York, Heslington, York YO10 5DD, Tel: 01904 321 268.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by The University of York to make sure that research participants are protected from harm and has also been submitted to a National ethics committee, the Social Care Institute of Excellence, via the Integrated Research Application System (IRAS).

Appendix 4 – Consent Certificate



Part Two: Certificate of Consent

I have been asked to participate in this research study which will involve attending one introductory session, one focus group and, potentially, one interview. I understand that if I should later choose to withdraw from the study, my wishes will be respected. I have been informed that the risks are minimal and may only include feeling distressed or uncomfortable by some of the questions asked or topics discussed. I am also aware that there may not be any tangible benefits to me and that I will not be paid for taking part in the research. I have been provided with the name of the researcher and his academic supervisor who can be contacted using the details I was given.

I have read the information contained in the consent sheet / it has been read to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it. Where I have asked questions, they have been answered to my satisfaction. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time and that doing so will not affect the services I receive. Therefore, I voluntarily consent to participate in this study and understand that I have the right to withdraw from it at any time.

Participant's Name (please print):

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Or

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the information contained in the consent sheet to the potential participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Name of witness (please print):

Signature of witness:

Participant's initials:

Date:

Appendix 5 - Researcher's Declaration:

Researcher's Declaration:

I have accurately read or witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I can confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Researcher's name:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

A copy of this informed consent form has been provided to the participant.

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