The University of Sheffield

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Navigating Disaffection: A Qualitative Study of Second-Generation Black Caribbean Males' Experiences in English Schools

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the

Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education (EdD)

December 2023

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Acknowledgements

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr Themesa Neckles for her unwavering patience and invaluable guidance throughout this journey to completion. My appreciation also goes to Dr China Mills, who offered crucial support during the first half of the EdD programme's taught component. Special thanks are due to those who I was able to have conversation with over the years as fellow travellers on this doctoral path, all provided insightful conversations that significantly bolstered my progress. I am grateful to all my professional work colleagues, young people and parents in Sheffield and Kirklees who I worked with over the past decade, with whom I shared my thoughts and from whom I often received indirect but vital information, support and advice.

I owe a debt of gratitude to all the participants in my research, including the professionals who constituted the seminal voice of this study and the high-achieving Black Caribbean males who generously shared their experiences. Most importantly, my deepest thanks go to the formerly disaffected participants who courageously opened up and revisited their personal narratives for the benefit of this research.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents. To my late father, Henry Williams, who passed away in November 2014, the same year I embarked on the EdD programme, and to my mother, Cordel Williams, for their unwavering belief in me and for setting an exemplary standard of perseverance and dedication. Their hard work and sacrifices have granted me the opportunity to pursue this academic journey.

Additionally, a special dedication goes to my wife, Lisa, and my son, Zakariyya. They have been companions throughout this process, sharing and shouldering the burdens that come with it. Their support and patience have been invaluable, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

Abstract

This study explores the experiences of formerly disaffected second-generation Black Caribbean males who have previously faced school exclusion and academic underperformance, a demographic significantly overrepresented in national statistics for school exclusions and educational achievement gaps. Through a qualitative interpretive approach, using narrative interviews, this research aims to give voice to these often underrepresented individuals and uncover insights to aid schools in effectively addressing disaffection among this group.

The research is framed within critical race theory and ecological systems theory, providing a comprehensive perspective on the interplay of race, power, institutional dynamics, and social environments within the education system. The analysis employs a thematic approach to evaluate the participants' experiences, focusing on their interaction with the educational system.

Key findings reveal a pervasive pattern of racial stigmatisation and alienation. Notable concerns include the experiences of being labelled and stereotyped in academic and disciplinary contexts, a notable lack of cultural and racial representation in the curriculum and educational workforce, and a resulting sense of disconnection contributing to a feeling of a lack of belonging within the school environment. Additionally, the study highlights a shift in the education system towards a market-driven model, characterised by an emphasis on quantitative assessments and practices that often exclude the most disadvantaged Black Caribbean boys. These findings suggest that such reforms may be intensifying disaffection among this group.

Essential recommendations include a holistic approach that acknowledges Black Caribbean boys' unique experiences and needs. This approach should aim to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. The insights from this research can support and contribute to existing educational practices and guide policy development, with implications extending beyond the English educational system and school environments to wider communities.

Jonathan Williams

Glossary of Terms

The following terms and abbreviations have been used throughout this thesis:

Term	Definition
ADHD	Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
Black Caribbean Males/boys	People of black Caribbean heritage who have at least one parent from the Caribbean
BLM	Black Lives Matter: A global movement for racial justice
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ESN	Educationally Subnormal
EST	Ecological Systems Theory
FE	Further education
FSM	free school meals
LAC	Looked after children
LA	Local Authority
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PRU	Pupil referral unit
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
Racial Minoritised Ethnic	People from a non-white racial background
SEN	Special Educational Need

Supplementary schools	Informal schools set up by the Black communities, parents, community activists to support Black children due inequalities within the mainstream education system
SCR	Serious Case Review
Windrush generation	Post-war migration, mainly those arriving from the Caribbean from 1948 following the docking of the SS Empire Windrush

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CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Between 2017 and 2020, the United Kingdom witnessed a series of tragic incidents involving the deaths of minors in public spaces, raising significant concerns about systemic failures in safeguarding and child protection. Among these cases, the Child C Serious Case Review (2018) documented the fatal stabbing of a 15-year-old Black male in London (City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership, 2019; The Commission on Young Lives, 2022; Marsh & Davis, 2020). This case was emblematic of a broader pattern, as other Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) revealed similar tragedies. For instance, the London Newham Local Safeguarding Board's Serious Case Review – Chris (2018) detailed the fatal shooting of a 14-year-old boy, while a 2020 review chronicled the stabbing death of 15-year-old Archie in Sheffield. Another report, also titled Child C, highlighted the fatal stabbing of a 15-year-old boy in London. Although these cases were geographically and circumstantially distinct, they shared critical commonalities, pointing to systemic failures, issues around care, community safeguarding, and the increasing vulnerability of young people to gang involvement and criminal exploitation.

A striking and deeply concerning pattern across these cases is that all the victims were Black children who had been disengaged from mainstream education prior to their deaths. This disengagement often stemmed from institutional challenges, such as permanent exclusion or parents opting for elective home education due to their child's difficulties within the school system. The SCRs identified this detachment from mainstream education as a significant factor contributing to the victims' growing disaffection, which in turn heightened their exposure to risks and vulnerabilities. Crucially, the reviews highlighted multiple missed opportunities for timely and appropriate interventions by professionals. These failures, had they been addressed, could have potentially averted the tragic outcomes, underscoring the urgent need for systemic reforms in policy and practice.

A closer examination of individual cases further elucidates the interplay between systemic failures and individual trajectories. For example, the case of Chris, a 14-year-old boy from London, illustrates the detrimental impact of inadequate support during critical educational transitions. Diagnosed with ADHD, Chris maintained a 99% attendance record in primary

school, where his behavioural needs were effectively managed through supportive strategies (Hill, 2018). However, upon transitioning to secondary school, this support was replaced by punitive disciplinary measures, including detentions and fixed-term exclusions, culminating in his permanent exclusion and placement in a pupil referral unit (PRU). PRUs, which cater exclusively to children excluded from mainstream education, often lack the resources and capacity to address complex needs. As Chris grew older, his vulnerability to gang exploitation became increasingly evident, leading to multiple arrests and the discovery of him carrying class-A drugs and a Rambo knife shortly before his fatal shooting at the age of 14 (Hill, 2018).

Similarly, the case of Archie, a 15-year-old from Sheffield, underscores the profound consequences of school exclusions and poor attendance on vulnerable young people. Following a breakdown in the relationship between Archie's mother and his school, she opted for elective home education (Cane, 2020). However, this decision coincided with Archie's escalating involvement in criminal activities and violent interactions with older peers, culminating in his fatal stabbing in 2018. Both Chris's and Archie's cases highlight the critical role of educational transitions and institutional responses to challenging behaviours in shaping the trajectories of at-risk youth. These cases also reveal the consequences of inadequate support systems for disaffected pupils, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds.

The findings from these SCRs are further contextualised by national homicide data, which reveals alarming disparities in the age and ethnicity of victims. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2019), nearly half of all Black homicide victims in the UK were aged between 16 and 24, a stark contrast to the more uniform age distribution observed among White and Asian victims. This disproportionate clustering of Black victims within this age bracket raises critical questions about the intersection of structural inequalities, educational disengagement, and vulnerability to violence. The juxtaposition of national data with individual case reviews suggests that the vulnerabilities faced by Black boys within the English educational and societal systems may contribute to their heightened risk of becoming homicide victims during late adolescence and early adulthood.

This convergence of evidence underscores the urgent need for systemic introspection and

reform. The patterns observed in both individual case reviews and national data highlight the necessity of addressing structural inequalities and improving safeguarding mechanisms to protect vulnerable children. Transitioning from an analysis of these issues to the exploration of solutions, it is imperative to evaluate how educational and social interventions can mitigate these risks. By addressing the systemic failures identified in these cases, policymakers and practitioners can work towards creating a more equitable and protective environment for at-risk youth, ensuring they receive the support and opportunities necessary to thrive.

This analysis not only highlights the tragic consequences of systemic failures but also calls for a reimagining of policies and practices to prevent future tragedies and promote the well-being of all young people, particularly those from marginalised communities.

Central Voice

This thesis examines the nexus between disaffection in Black males of Caribbean descent and their experiences within the English education system. The primary objective is to discern elements that could enhance the education system's efficacy in addressing disaffection among this demographic. This exploration is rooted in the narratives of second-generation Black Caribbean males who, despite encountering social disaffection during their tenure in English secondary schools and post-school, have successfully re-engaged with society as reformed individuals, acting in this study as a central voice.

In addition, two distinct cohorts' yet interconnected voices lend depth and breadth to the study's narrative. The first cohort participants are Black males of Caribbean heritage who, in contrast to the group mentioned above, have journeyed through the educational system as mid to high achievers without succumbing to disaffection. Their narratives offer a divergent perspective, providing a foil against which the experiences of their disaffected counterparts can be juxtaposed and better understood. The second cohort brings insights from a selected group of current and retired professionals who have served across various echelons of the educational and voluntary community sector in Sheffield. This group encompasses individuals with roles in strategic leadership and operational capacities spanning schools, colleges, local authorities, and community-based organisations.

By integrating their professional insight and experiential knowledge, this study aims to enrich the research with a multidimensional understanding of the educational landscape and the experiences of Black Caribbean males in English schools. By amalgamating insights from both the micro-level interactions among these social actors and the macro-level structural dynamics of the education system, to construct a comprehensive understanding of the issue, thereby contextualising it within a broader spectrum. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the modern education system to intricately connect and compare the current educational environment with the historical experiences shared by the participants.

This comparative analysis of past experiences with the contemporary education system aims to contextualise and explore the potential implications and realities for Black Caribbean pupils in the current educational landscape. By doing so, we support the research in providing a clearer picture of what this means for Black Caribbean boys in English secondary schools. In essence, this study aims to contribute to a greater understanding of the educational experiences, with the ultimate goal of supporting schools by providing recommendations that could help combat disaffection and promote re-engagement.

The introductory chapter of this thesis encompasses the following components:

- **Research Rationale:** This section elucidates the societal imperatives that underscore the significance of this research endeavour.
- **Research Objectives and Questions:** A delineation of the primary aims and investigative queries to guide this study.
- **Research Design, Methodology:** An outline of the methodological approach and theoretical constructs that underpin this research.
- **Research Literature:** A critical review of existing research relevant to the topic, providing a foundational context for this study.
- **Conclusion:** A summary of the chapter and a preview of the subsequent structure of the overall dissertation.

1.2 Research Rationale

1.2.1 Motivation Underpinning Choice of Research Topic

While composing this thesis, I have a professional role as a senior learning mentor within Sheffield City Council's Attendance and Inclusion Service. My remit is to assist schools in enhancing pupil attendance, reducing suspensions and exclusions, and facilitating the reintegration of permanently excluded pupils back into mainstream education. This position has afforded me a direct window into the realities of disaffection among young people. However, my journey in this field did not commence with my current role but dates back to the late 1990s. Then, I began working for the Black Palm Mentoring Project, a community-based organisation in Sheffield, where I mentored Black pupils facing school and social challenges. Over the following two decades, my professional path has traversed various sectors, always focusing on support roles for identified at-risk young people aged 13 to 19.

A pivotal juncture in my career was a consultancy with Sheffield College in 2010. This three-month assignment involved working with eight further education (FE) students from diverse minoritised ethnic backgrounds who were at risk of receiving a permanent exclusion due to various incidents. My intervention overall was successful; suspensions ceased, and risks of exclusion dropped, culminating in all eight students completing their courses that academic year—a testament to the efficacy of targeted support. Fast forward a decade, and the paths of some of these eight students have diverged significantly. Four did not continue beyond the next year of college, and among these, two lost their lives to gang-related violence, one is incarcerated for a violent crime, and another battles mental health issues exacerbated by substance abuse. The other four students have navigated their way into stable adulthood.

Reflecting on the long-term outcomes, I pondered on the true impact of my intervention. In the short term, it achieved its goals—suspensions stopped, and college retention rates improved. However, the subsequent years revealed that a three-month programme was insufficient. Some of these students needed sustained, multi-year support that should have been initiated much earlier in their educational journey. Prior to joining the college, three of the four students who later faced the most negative outcomes had attended the Sheffield Inclusion Centre, (PRU), a provision for those pupils permanently excluded from

mainstream school, signalling a need for intervention well before they reached FE. This experience taught me a crucial lesson about the trajectories of those most at risk and has significantly informed my professional practice, reinforcing the notion that systemic, long-term support structures are vital for truly impacting the lives of at-risk young people. While schools have the potential to be life-saving for vulnerable young people, current patterns indicate that such institutions are often where these young individuals are most likely to be marginalised and excluded (Timpson, 2019).

1.2.2 School Exclusions Nationally

Within the vast tapestry of the educational system, school exclusions, while universally applicable, do not afflict every student segment equally. While every student operates under the canopy of school regulations and resultant punitive measures, a consistent pattern emerges from both contemporary and historical literature. Certain groups, moulded by distinct social characteristics, appear disproportionately vulnerable to the axe of school exclusions (Panayiopoulos & Kerfoot, 2007; Timpson, 2019; Vulliamy & Webb, 2001).

Professor Graham Vulliamy shed light on an unsettling reality: through the 1990s, pupils predominantly at risk of permanent exclusion encompassed:

- Predominantly males;
- Those of Afro-Caribbean descent;
- Individuals with special educational needs (SEN); and
- Children in the guardianship of local authority care (LAC).

(Vulliamy & Webb, 2001)

A comparative lens with contemporary research, notably the Timpson Review (2019)—a report on school exclusions in England—reveals an eerily familiar list:

- Predominantly males;
- Children reliant on free school meals (FSM);
- Specific ethnic cohorts, notably Black Caribbean and Gypsy Roma;
- Individuals with SEN; and
- Children under local authority care (LAC).

(Timpson, 2019)

This comparative exploration underscores a disconcerting continuity: the vulnerability landscape, especially concerning Caribbean heritage students, remains relatively unchanged. Each distinct social determinant amplifies a student's vulnerability quotient within the academic system, escalating their susceptibility to exclusion. At secondary school age in England—11 to 16—Black pupils only make up 6% of the overall pupil population, but are reflected as a larger percentage in much of the negative school stats (Wright et al., 2021). Literature posits that this vulnerability often culminates in students feeling estranged and disenchanted with the educational infrastructure, their educators, and the overarching curriculum. Such alienation often snowballs into truancy, behavioural infractions, and inevitably, suspensions or exclusions potentially leading on to further youth disaffection (Blyth & Milner, 1996; Cullingford, 1999; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005).

1.2.3 The Links between Educational Experiences and Youth Disaffection

The discourse surrounding youth disaffection frequently draws a parallel to school exclusions, suggesting an intertwined relationship. This connection was highlighted in the summer of 2011, when Britain was engulfed in some of the most intense riots it had witnessed in decades. These riots were sparked by the police shooting of Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old Black man suspected of firearm possession. The aftermath highlighted the demographic profiles of those involved in the unrest across various cities. Government reports, notably the Communities and Victims Panel (2013) and the Home Office's (2011) Overview of Recorded Crimes and Arrests Resulting from Disorder Events in August 2011, provide a statistical snapshot of the riots:

- Approximately 4,000 individuals were apprehended.
- 2,138 were convicted.
- A total of 1,405 were sentenced to immediate custody.
- Notably, 40% of those involved had a history of fixed-term school exclusions or demonstrated poor school attendance.

Additional findings from these reports paint a more detailed picture:

- 90% of the rioters were male.

- Over 70% were under 25, with some as young as 10.
- Around 60% hailed from Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnic backgrounds, with individuals recorded as Black constituting 39%.
- Among those prosecuted aged between 18 and 24, 71% had prior convictions, and 26% had previously served prison sentences.
- At least 1 in 5 were identified as having gang affiliations.

These statistics reveal a glaring disproportionality, especially when considering the UK's demographic composition: while 87% of the population is White, individuals from Black, Asian, and other minoritised ethnic backgrounds only comprise 13%. The overwhelming majority (90%) of those involved in the riots were male, underscoring a significant gender disparity (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013). In response to these tumultuous events, then-Prime Minister David Cameron labelled sections of society as part of a 'broken Britain', promising sweeping reforms targeting the fractures within British society. Among the proposed educational reforms were:

- Incorporating PSHE (Personal, Social, Health, and Economic education) lessons to equip young people with the decision-making skills needed beyond school.
- Empowering headteachers and educators with greater authority to manage behaviour.
- Enhanced school performance measures, particularly in numeracy and literacy.
- Expanding the number of academies.
- Implemented targeted support to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

The 2011 riots, coupled with additional empirical studies, suggests that disaffection can propel young people towards risky behaviours, with school exclusion acting as both a harbinger and an accelerator of disaffection (Lupton, 1999; Perera, 2020; Windle et al., 2020). The unfortunate reality is that children who are permanently excluded from schools and placed in PRUs often find themselves exposed to the underbelly of society, including organised crime and gangs. Martin Hewitt, chair of the Police Chiefs and Council, ominously referred to some PRUs as 'recruitment centres for criminals', highlighting the vulnerability of these excluded children to criminal influences (The Commission on Young Lives, 2022).

1.3 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

The primary aim of this research is to explore the connection between school experiences and youth disaffection among Black Caribbean boys by examining the lived experiences of formerly disaffected second-generation Black males of Caribbean descent, specifically focusing on their educational journeys during secondary school in Sheffield, England. This investigation seeks to capture and analyse the personal narratives of individuals who, despite their formerly disaffected status during and post their secondary education in Sheffield, have successfully navigated their lives to become working professionals. These individuals' accounts will be the cornerstone for examining the educational experiences that shaped their journey from adolescence to adulthood. As mentioned earlier, the study incorporates a diverse array of professional voices to augment these narratives.

The ambition is to construct a robust dataset that bolsters the research findings and facilitates a nuanced comparison and contrast of the emergent narratives. A comprehensive dataset is instrumental in achieving the research's overarching goals: thoroughly understanding the lived experiences on the ground and the broader systemic elements that shape these realities. This, in turn, aims to provide an interpretation of the dynamics within the schooling environment to see whether or not there are contributing factors to the underlying reasons for the observed phenomena. This inquiry will hopefully yield insightful answers to the central research queries guided by three research questions:

- *How can the English education system leverage the experiences of formerly disaffected, second-generation Black Caribbean males in England to help address youth disaffection within this socio-demographic?*

This study also includes a macro lens to analyse the potential influence of wider structural factors on individual experiences within the education system, with a question asking:

- *What impact do the broader mechanisms operating within the education system have on the educational experiences of social actors on the ground, and how does this impact Black Caribbean pupils?*

Plus, a third final sub-question asks:

- *Is there evidence from the results of the two previous questions to suggest that the education system contributes to disaffection amongst Black Caribbean males in England?*

1.4 Established Literature

Studies on the topic of Black Caribbean pupils within the English education system is a well-established and extensively researched field. The scholarly journey into this domain dates back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, with seminal works uncovering the racial inequalities that pervaded the system during that era (Coard, 2021 Rose et al., 1969). Among these, Bernard Coard's (2021) *How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Sub-normal in the British Education System* stands out as an early critical examination of the experiences of Black Caribbean families within education during the post-war period. Coard brought to light the troubling trend of disproportionately assigning Black children to schools for the educationally subnormal (ESN), which were intended for students with significant learning, mental, and physical disabilities. The primary objective of ESN schools was to provide minimal education, equipping pupils for low-skilled manual jobs, thereby preventing them from becoming a societal burden in adulthood. Coard's investigation revealed the erroneous placement of many Black Caribbean children in these institutions.

Advancing into the 1980s, the British Government commissioned the Rampton Report (Education UK, 1981) and the Swann Report (1985), both of which scrutinised the experiences of Black Caribbean children in the English school system. These reports acknowledged the pervasive racism within the education system as a formidable barrier to the academic achievements of Black children, recognising a necessity for a more inclusive educational landscape (Gundara et al., 1986; Education UK, n.d.). In the wake of the Stephen Lawrence murder, the Macpherson Report (1999) identified institutional racism as a significant factor in the justice system's failings. Macpherson defined institutional racism as: *'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin'* (Macpherson, 1999). The Macpherson Report also contained recommendations regarding the educational system's role in combating racism, echoing sentiments previously expressed in the Swann Report (1985).

Subsequent research post-2000 ignited debates concerning race and class inequalities. Scholars questioned whether class represents the primary inequality experienced by minoritised groups, overshadowing racial disparities, or whether discussions of class inequalities serve to muffle conversations around racial inequities in education (Bhopal and Preston, 2012; Gillborn, 2007; Rocque, 2010; Rollock, et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2002). Additionally, there is an extensive body of literature focusing on race, racism, and their intersection with various aspects of education, such as discipline and school punishments, including exclusions, pupil attainment, special educational needs (SEN), and the impact of a market-driven education system (Demie, 2018, 2021; Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2006; Gillborn, 2007; Hamilton, 2018; King, 1991; Rhamie, 2012; Rhamie & Hallam, 2010; Richardson, 2007; Rollock et al., 2015; Strand, 2011; Wright, 2010).

1.5 Research Gap

Upon examining the existing literature, a noticeable gap becomes apparent. Not enough research captures the stories of formerly disaffected Black males of Caribbean descent in England. Specifically those who have been through the English education system and experienced social disaffection during the secondary or post-secondary school transition period, experiencing periods of incarceration, but have ultimately reformed and carved out successful trajectories, this represents a significant lacuna within the discourse. Including these voices could offer a multifaceted perspective that could enrich the discourse in this academic space. Previous qualitative research has effectively highlighted the voices of Black Caribbean boys who are disaffected or at risk of educational underachievement. However, exploring the experiences of earlier generations who faced similar challenges but went on to achieve success as adults could offer valuable insights. These individuals, with the benefit of hindsight, can illuminate the critical transitional phases from school to adulthood and the education system's role during this period. Their reflections could enrich the discourse, challenge specific political narratives, and provide educators and policymakers with meaningful strategies to better support at-risk youth.

1.6 Research Design

The research design employed for this study is rooted in a qualitative interpretive approach, utilising phenomenological and narrative methodologies. The study focuses on capturing the voices and experiences of second-generation participants who have bounced back from their

experiences of youth disaffection, supplemented by other participant cohorts including education and community sector professionals. This study employs a theoretical framework that integrates Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Ecological Systems Theory (EST), both of which are examined in greater detail later in this chapter. Also, this research is geographically situated in Sheffield, England, providing a contextual foundation for exploring disaffection within this specific locale. This study focuses on the education sector, but the scope concentrates on secondary school education in England, focusing on Sheffield. The period covers those who attended secondary school during the 80s, 90s and early 2000s and is concerned with Black males of Caribbean heritage.

1.7 Theoretical Perspective

1.7.1 Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) provides a framework for analysing the interconnections of race, racism, and power within society. This approach delves into a wide range of discourses, including constitutional law, social and political equality, and the underlying structures of liberal societies (Bhopal & Preston, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). By examining these areas, CRT provides a comprehensive perspective that reveals how racial dynamics are intricately woven into the fabric of societal structures. This theoretical lens is particularly effective in dissecting the complexities of race-related issues across various contexts, including the field of education.

In the context of education in England, CRT is crucial in uncovering how systemic racism and power dynamics shape educational outcomes. This framework facilitates a critical examination of the ways in which racial inequalities are embedded and perpetuated through educational policies, practices, and institutional norms. By utilising CRT, researchers gain deeper insights into the specific challenges that marginalised groups encounter within the educational system. This makes CRT an indispensable tool for addressing and mitigating these disparities, as it highlights the structural factors that contribute to unequal educational experiences.

Applying CRT to the research group in question is essential for understanding the systemic structures that influence educational experiences. Through the lens of CRT, researchers can identify and confront the power dynamics that underlie racial inequities in education. This

approach not only brings attention to the race-related dimensions of the educational system but also offers a strategic framework for developing interventions aimed at dismantling these inequities. By bridging the theoretical underpinnings of CRT with its practical applications, this methodology provides valuable insights into creating more equitable and inclusive educational environments.

1.7.2 Ecological Systems Theory

The ecological systems theory (EST), also known as the bio-ecological system theory, originated from the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner. This theory explores human development through the lens of experiences in different social settings (microsystems), including the home, school, and broader community. It also takes into account the influence of larger societal structures (macrosystems), such as government policies and legislation, on these environments (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). My rationale for analysing this topic also incorporate the theoretical lens of EST is to gain a deeper understanding of Black pupils' experiences within the school environment and to examine the perspectives of professionals working across various institutions within the education system.

EST serves as an expansive framework for analysing the various school environmental elements that converge to form these educational experiences. Incorporating EST as a theoretical lens to explore in school microsystems and the macrosystems of the education system encompassing cultural norms and institutional policies, provides an added dimension to understanding the relationship with the experiences of the social actors to fully grasp their combined impact on the educational paths of Black Caribbean males. The theoretical framework is analysed in greater detail in chapter three.

1.8 Portrait of Sheffield City

Sheffield City is located in South Yorkshire, England, a city and metropolitan borough that includes the towns of Stocksbridge and Chapeltown, and part of the Peak District. With a population of 556,500 (ONS, 2020). Sheffield is one of the largest cities in England by population, following cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, and London. During the Industrial Revolution, Sheffield became pivotal due to numerous important inventions and technological advancements originating there. The 19th century saw significant growth in the city's traditional cutlery industry, driven by the local development of stainless steel,

which led to an increase in the city's population. Sheffield became known as the City of Steel in 1893, however, in the 1970s and 1980s, international competition in the iron and steel industries, along with the decline of local coal mining, led to a downturn in these sectors.

1.8.1 Historical Timeline of the Black African and Caribbean Community in Sheffield

The history of Black people in Sheffield is closely linked to the city's social and cultural development. One notable figure is Arthur Wharton, the world's first Black professional footballer, who moved from the Gold Coast (now Ghana) to play for Sheffield United in the late 19th century, marking the beginnings of a small but significant Black community in the city (Sheffield Libraries Archives and Information, 2018).

Following World War II, Britain faced severe labour shortages, prompting the recruitment of workers from the Caribbean during the Windrush era (1948–1973). Arriving from Jamaica, Barbados, and other Caribbean nations, these individuals filled critical roles in Sheffield's NHS, steel and coal mining industries, and transport sectors (Johnson, 2021; Sheffield Libraries Archives and Information, 2018). By the early 1950s, the city's Black population grew significantly, documented at 534 residents in a 1952 survey by the Colonial Office. During this period, community organisations such as the Sheffield Coloured People's Association (1953) and the Sheffield Caribbean Cricket Club provided vital social support and helped foster a sense of belonging (Sheffield Libraries Archives and Information, 2018).

Integration into Sheffield's social and economic fabric continued with milestones like the establishment of the West Indian Association (1955/6) and the employment of Caribbean tram conductors by Sheffield Transport in 1956. Civic engagement increased during the 1960s and 1970s, with events like the 1961 Conference for West Indians in Sheffield and the 1970 Black Liberation Weekend Conference addressing citizenship and racial equality. By 1981, the Afro-Caribbean population in Sheffield had reached 6,300. The Sheffield and District African Caribbean Community Association (SADACCA), which evolved from the West Indies Association, became a central hub for the community's social and cultural activities after its formal establishment in 1986 (Sheffield Libraries Archives and Information, 2018; SADACCA, 2023).

The community achieved further milestones in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Sheffield African Caribbean Mental Health Association (SACMHA) was established in 1988 to address specific mental health needs, and in 1989, Sheffield appointed its first Afro-Caribbean headteacher. By 1991, the Afro-Caribbean population had grown to 7,080, and the ACE Centre opened as a hub for cultural and social-economic activities. By 2014, Sheffield's Black population had grown to 11,543 Black African and 5,506 Black Caribbean residents, reflecting the ongoing growth and influence of the community (Sheffield Libraries Archives and Information, 2018).

1.8.2 Growth Trends and Social Implications of Sheffield's Black Population

Sheffield ranks 28th nationally and 6th among core UK cities for its Black Caribbean population, concentrated in wards like Burngreave, Manor Castle, and Nether Edge (Sheffield City Council, 2022). Census data reveals a rise in the Black population, increasing from 3.6% in 2011 to 4.6% in 2021, indicating growing diversity (ONS, 2021).This demographic shift suggests a broader trend, including migration, birth rate changes, and mixed Caribbean heritage, enhancing the community's visibility in schools and other sectors.

Currently, pupils from minoritised ethnic backgrounds make up 39% of primary and 37% of secondary school populations, but they face significant educational disparities (Hylton, 2022). In 2023/24, Sheffield schools enrolled 436 Black Caribbean and 2,307 White/Black Caribbean pupils (DfE, 2024). Despite an 11% improvement in GCSE attainment for Black Caribbean pupils over the past decade, their performance remains below the city average, compounded by persistent absenteeism and fixed-term exclusions (Sheffield City Council, 2022). A high proportion of Black Caribbean post-16 youth are NEET, reflecting systemic barriers to progression.

Transitioning to the employment landscape, unemployment rates among Black Caribbean males (12%) and females (7%) are significantly higher than citywide averages (7% for males and 4% for females). Although many Black Caribbean residents work in education, health and social work, wholesale and retail trade, and construction, economic inactivity remains a major issue, affecting 32% of males and 37% of females (Sheffield City Council, 2022).

Demographic patterns highlight concentrated Black populations in wards like Burngreave, where 14.4% of residents identify as Black, followed by Darnall, Nether Edge and Sharrow (6.4% each). In contrast, wards such as Stocksbridge and Ecclesfield have minimal Black residents (0.5%–0.9%), reflecting significant residential segregation linked to socio-economic disparities (Hylton, 2022). Sheffield's socio-economic landscape shows stark inequalities tied to geography and race. Over 30% of the population lives in areas among the most deprived nationally, predominantly in the north and east. Life expectancy varies dramatically between affluent areas like Ecclesall (83.7 years) and deprived areas like Firth Park (75.6 years). These disparities, compounded by poor housing and limited healthcare access, disproportionately affect minoritised ethnic groups concentrated in deprived areas, such as Burngreave and Darnall (Hylton, 2022).

Efforts to address these challenges include initiatives like the Best Value Report (BVR) of 2001**,** which identified gaps in data and service delivery across sectors like employment, education, and healthcare (Hylton, 2022). Despite its recommendations, systemic issues persisted. The Sheffield Race Equality Commission (2022) proposed creating a 'legacy body' to ensure long-term implementation of its recommendations. This body would include representatives from public, private, and voluntary sectors, with over 50% from minoritised ethnic groups, aiming to foster trust and drive meaningful change.

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into the following chapters, each focusing on a distinct aspect of the research:

- Historical Context: Illuminates the intricate tapestry of wider Black history, which underpins the history of the Black Caribbean Community and their presence in Britain, elucidating its evolving dynamics with British society and the educational system. By weaving together historical events, societal shifts, and policy transformations, the aim is to provide a backdrop against which the subsequent investigations of this thesis can be comprehended.
- Literature Review: Offers a meticulous exploration of both seminal and contemporary literature. The objective is to navigate the labyrinth of arguments and counterarguments presented by scholars within the discourse, identifying

convergences and divergences. Moreover, this clarifies the rationale behind selecting specific texts, emphasising their relevance and significance in the grand narrative of this research journey.

- Research Methods and Methodology: This section articulates the methodological blueprint adhered to during the research process. Not only does it delineate the research techniques employed, but it also provides a justification for the selection of these particular methodologies, highlighting how they align with the research objectives and questions at hand.
- Research Results and Findings: Apart from presenting the raw data, this section spotlights emergent patterns, anomalies, and overarching themes.
- Research Discussion: This chapter delves deep into the exegesis of the research findings. The latent significances embedded within the primary data are extrapolated through the data analysis process. Furthermore, an intricate weave is constructed, intertwining the revelations from my primary investigation with the tapestry of extant literature, discerning alignments and dissonances.
- Overall Conclusion and Recommendations: Culminating the thesis, this chapter echoes the primordial research inquiries, revisiting the overarching ambitions and directives of the study. Reflective introspection gauges the extent to which the research questions have been addressed and the foundational aims realised. This chapter celebrates the contributions this study has bestowed upon the academic realm and casts a visionary gaze forward, contemplating prospective avenues of further research Grounded in the insights unearthed from the research, this chapter proffers a set of pragmatic recommendations. Lastly, grounded in the insights unearthed from the research, this chapter offers a set of pragmatic recommendations.

1.10 Chapter Conclusion

This research is driven by a commitment to enhancing professional awareness and contributing to educational practice. A key motivation is deepening my understanding as a frontline practitioner, where theory and action intersect daily. This intersection is often overlooked, making it essential to bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world application. By integrating theoretical insights with hands-on experience, my goal is to

develop a more comprehensive understanding that directly informs my work with young people and strengthens professional practice in education.

Another driving force behind this research is the aspiration to share insights with fellow practitioners, helping them refine their approach and improve engagement with Black students. Beyond personal growth, this work is intended to contribute to a broader improvement in educational practice. By disseminating findings in practical ways, I aim to empower educators with knowledge that enhances their ability to support young people effectively, and integrate frontline experience with a strategic policy perspective. By synthesising hands-on work with broader educational frameworks, it aims to inform school leaders and local authorities, strengthening interconnected systems that support Black students. Ultimately, this study is guided by a commitment to improving educational outcomes and ensuring that young people receive the support they need to succeed.

The next chapter delves into the historical context, examining Black history, the journey of the Black Caribbean community in Britain and the dynamics between its educational experiences within the English educational system. This foundational exploration will provide the necessary context for a deeper understanding as the study moves forward.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the historical experiences of the Black Caribbean community in Britain, focusing on their contributions, systemic racial discrimination, and social exclusion. I begin by exploring how colonial legacies, pseudo-scientific racism, and moral panics have shaped public perceptions and policies. The chapter also discusses migration, labour, and race relations, particularly post-Windrush, highlighting structural barriers, and how political rhetoric and media narratives fuelled moral panics, influencing education, policing, and public policy, shaping contemporary racial inequalities and ongoing struggles for justice.

The second half of this chapter explores the historical development of the Black Caribbean communities experience with the English education system, it critically examines key policies, national education reports, and practices from the 1970s to recent educational reforms to assess policies to understand the current educational landscape in England. The analysis remains focused on educational issues relevant to the thesis, particularly to understanding the lived experiences of Black Caribbean males within the English education system, while situating these within the broader historical context. Although general themes of race are referenced, the emphasis is firmly on the specific educational experiences of this particular demographic.

2.2 Historical Foundations and Colonial Legacies

The history of Black people of African descent in Britain spans centuries, predating modern discussions of race and racism. Figures like Roman Emperor Septimius Severus, who settled in Britain in 208 AD, highlight this longstanding presence, during periods when societal interactions were less defined by racial hierarchies (Banton, 1959; Fryer, 1984). However, Eurocentric historical narratives have often marginalised their contributions, overlooking African civilisations like the Mutapa Empire, which demonstrated political and cultural advancements in 1440. Scholars like Williams (1987) and Diop (1987) recognise achievements and figures such as Tudor musician John Blanke and Black soldier John Amboyne, whose legacies challenge reductive depictions of African societies as primitive (Gould, 1981; Said, 2005; Gilroy, 1992; Olusoga, 2016).

The advent of the transatlantic slave trade marked a brutal chapter in global history, reshaping demographics and economies. European colonisation, introduced slavery on a massive scale, forcibly transporting millions of Africans to the Americas. European chattel slavery reduced Africans to property, enforced through inhumane laws and practices exemplified by the horrors of the Middle Passage (Williams, 1944; Olusoga, 2016).

The systemic dehumanisation of Africans was underpinned by intellectual frameworks that emerged during the 18th and 19th centuries. Pseudo-scientific racism classified humanity into racial hierarchical categories, with White Europeans positioned as superior. Figures like Carl Linnaeus and Edward Long advanced these ideologies, portraying Africans as inherently inferior and needing European civilisation (Fernando et al., 1998; Fryer, 1984). Such narratives legitimised slavery and colonial domination, embedding racism into British society and policy. Craniological studies and works by individuals like Charles White and Benjamin Kidd further entrenched these views, aligning scientific racism with imperial ambitions and economic exploitation (Gould, 1981; Olusoga, 2016). While slavery originated from economic factors, racism emerged as its by-product, with pseudo-scientific racism offering a rationale for endorsing both slavery and colonialism (Banton, 1959; Fryer, 1984). This intellectual legacy has had long-lasting impacts, influencing societal attitudes and structures that persist to this day.

As the Caribbean transitioned out of slavery, the legacy of colonial rule continued to shape societies. Formerly enslaved people asserted their rights, contributing to more inclusive communities, while the emergence of the Commonwealth offered a platform for former colonies to collaborate with Britain. Caribbean nations played critical roles during World War II, with Black Caribbean soldiers and workers challenging racial hierarchies through their service. However, they also highlighted the parallels between British scientific racism and the ideologies of Nazi Germany (Fryer, 1984; Phillips & Phillips, 1998).

Post-war Britain relied heavily on Caribbean migration to address labour shortages. The arrival of the Windrush generation in 1948 marked a turning point, with Caribbean migrants revitalising industries like steel and contributing to Britain's reconstruction. Despite facing discrimination and hostile environments, they built resilient communities, particularly around Black churches (Benjamin, 2021). Caribbean women emerged as transformative figures in British education, exemplified by trailblazers like Yvonne Conolly, the UK's first

Black female headteacher, and Betty Campbell, Wales' first Black headteacher. Their leadership prioritised cultural history, professional development, and supplementary education, advocating for social justice and challenging deficit views of Black students (Johnson, 2021).

2.3 Post War Migration, and Race Relations in Britain

Historically, Black communities in Britain have often been 'othered', depicted as docile and inferior. However, 'othering' can also portray Black and non-White communities, as well as individuals or groups opposing mainstream elite views, as societal threats (Bloom, 2010). This form of 'othering' has been used to galvanise public consensus, particularly during times of political or national tension, often resurfacing colonial narratives to unify the populace around a common goal. Stuart Hall (Davison et al., 2017, p204) examines how the Thatcher administration's political rhetoric and government methods leveraged populism to create a unified national identity. Hall highlights how Britain was framed as a leading nation rooted in 'good old British common sense' while marginalising specific social groups (Davison et al., 2017).

A notable example is the Falklands War, during which patriotism was bolstered through imperialist and colonialist notions, reigniting the 'us versus the other' dynamic. Here, 'the other' was portrayed as primitive and savage, aligning national pride with historical imperial values. Hall argues that this rhetoric extended beyond wartime support, reshaping political ideology to align with neoliberal policies framed as 'common sense'. The strategy was not only to secure electoral support but also to redefine 'the people' in a way that normalised neoliberal values. The framing of the Falklands War as a patriotic cause exemplified this deliberate manipulation of public sentiment to reignite nationalist pride rooted in imperialism (Davison et al., 2017, p. 203).

Two significant outcomes emerge. First, this rhetoric perpetuates harmful stereotypes and entrenches divisions based on race, ethnicity, and ideology. By framing certain groups as threats to societal stability, exclusionary policies are justified. Second, it reshapes public opinion by normalising dominant ideologies, marginalising dissent, and reinforcing systemic inequalities. By presenting nationalist and imperialist values as patriotic, public

sentiment is swayed toward policies that undermine social equity while serving elite interests.

2.3.1 The Moral Panic

Moral panic occurs when public concern and state responses exceed the actual threat posed by individuals or groups perceived as endangering societal norms, often reflecting broader fears of change (Cohen, 1972; Hall et al., 2013). Contemporary examples include xenophobia, where media exaggeration amplifies fears and overstates the perceived danger. These panics gain momentum through societal consensus on the threat posed by the 'other', prompting calls for swift action and often resulting in disproportionate measures by authorities (Pitts, 2013; Stanley, 2023; Blackstone et al., 1998). Some suggest that dominant power structures use moral panic as a tool to maintain control, amplifying fears and framing certain groups or behaviours as threats through media and institutional narratives.

This reinforces existing hierarchies, targeting marginalised groups and justifying restrictive policies and practices. The concept provides a critical lens for understanding how groups, such as Black males in education, are unfairly stigmatised and subjected to systemic disadvantages (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). It is also essential to include labelling theory, a sociological concept highlighting how societal labels shape behaviour and self-identity, often resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies (Becker, 1991). This theory complements moral panic by examining how groups and individuals who are positioned within powerful institutions, such as the media and the criminal justice system, define and amplify deviance (Becker, 1991).

In *Policing the Crisis,* Hall et al. (2013) examines the strained relationship between the British police and Black Caribbean communities, focusing on the media's role in perpetuating moral panics. Hall highlights how the term 'mugging', adopted from the U.S., became synonymous with societal issues such as urban crisis, lawlessness, and rising crime. Despite street robberies already being prevalent in Britain, the media, politicians, and senior police officials began labelling such incidents as 'muggings' in 1972. This rebranding, accompanied by exaggerated claims of a 'mugging epidemic', lacked supporting data but fuelled fears of an American-style social collapse. The media's sensationalist portrayal of 'mugging' was not just linguistic but carried racial connotations, disproportionately targeting Black communities and reinforcing a moral panic.

In the context of education, moral panics might play a significant role in the social construction of the Black male student as a perceived threat to classroom management and educational outcomes for the institution (Bradbury, 2011; Demie, 2021; Gillborn, 2007; Perera, 2020; Rollock et al., 2015; Strand, 2011). Media narratives and societal stereotypes frequently exaggerate the behaviour and attitudes of Black boys, portraying them as disruptive, unruly and gang affiliated (Pitts, 2020), which fuels public concern and justifies disproportionate disciplinary responses in schools. This portrayal of Black males as 'folk devils' might reinforce systemic biases, resulting in harsher punishments and lower expectations in education—trends also evident in other sectors.

In health, negative racial biases significantly affect mental health treatment, particularly for Black men who are disproportionately diagnosed with schizophrenia and often perceived as violent due to cultural stereotypes (Mind, 2013; Wilson et al., 2022). This has led to excessive use of physical restraints, highlighted by the death of David ‘Rocky’ Bennett, a victim of forceful restraint by nursing staff. His death, examined by a public inquiry, pointed to institutional racism affecting outcomes (Mind, 2013).

Post-war migration brought significant increases in non-White communities to Britain, often met with hostility from residents, landlords, employers, police, and officials (Benjamin, 2021; Pilkington, 1988). Reports like *The Colour of Citizenship* (1969) exposed systemic racial inequalities in housing, employment, health, and education (Obelkevich & Catterall, 1994), prompting collective activism and resistance from Black Caribbean communities (Eddo-Lodge, 2017; Gilroy, 2007). Public figures like Enoch Powell exacerbated racial tensions with rhetoric, such as the infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech, fuelling moral panic, far-right violence, and institutionalised discrimination through the "colour bar" (Gilroy, 1987). Strikes against Black workers and discriminatory signs in housing markets revealed widespread resistance to integration amongst the White British population.

Key moments of Black resistance, such as the Bristol Bus Boycott of 1963, catalysed legislation like the Race Relations Act (1965), which was later expanded in 1968 and 1976 to address persistent disparities in housing and employment (Blackstone et al., 1998). Despite these advancements, systemic discrimination persisted, particularly in the criminal justice system, where fabricated charges and racial profiling undermined trust (Fryer, 1984).

Cases like the Mangrove Nine and wrongful convictions of the Oval Four revealed police corruption and contributed to increasing community unrest (Olusoga, 2016).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, racial tensions reached critical levels, culminating in riots like Brixton (1981) and Broadwater Farm (1986), which highlighted unemployment, discrimination, and aggressive policing practices such as "Operation Swamp 81" (Alibhai-Brown, 2000). The Scarman Report (1981) acknowledged racism in policing, though legislation failed to address law enforcement biases effectively (Blackstone et al., 1998). The Macpherson Report (1999) following Stephen Lawrence's murder exposed institutional racism and led to the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), mandating equality policies across public institutions.

2.4 The Education of Immigrant Children in the Post-War Period in the British Educational System

The 1969 report The Colour of Citizenship by Eliot Joseph Benn Rose, commissioned by the British Government, critically examined racial disparities in sectors like education and warned of the potential emergence of a Black underclass in England without systemic reforms (Coard, 2021). To fully understand the educational landscape of the 1960s, it is crucial to consider the significant challenges of the time, including a pronounced teacher shortage exacerbated by the post-war influx of migrants. This shortage placed immense strain on schools, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, further intensifying the difficulties faced by Black Caribbean children in schools (Plowden, 1967; Rose et al., 1969).

However, the primary challenges for Black Caribbean pupils extended beyond staffing shortages. Racial biases and stereotypes embedded within the British education system significantly impacted their experiences. British educators often questioned the academic abilities of Black Caribbean children, reflecting broader societal prejudices that cast doubt on their capacity to meet academic standards. Additionally, concerns arose among White parents that the rising number of Black and Asian pupils might negatively affect the educational achievements of British-born children. This belief contributed to the phenomenon of 'White flight', where White parents withdrew their children from schools with increasing numbers of Black and Asian students (Lowe, 1997; Rose et al., 1969).

In response to these racialised anxieties, the British Government introduced the Dispersal Policy, designed to prevent schools from being labelled as ‘immigrant schools’. This policy aimed to cap the number of immigrant children at 30% per school, with the intention of limiting the perceived cultural impact on the educational environment. Sir Edward Boyle, the then Minister of Education, justified this approach in the House of Commons, stating, *‘I must regretfully tell the House that one school must be regarded now as irretrievably an immigrant school. The important thing to do is to prevent this from happening elsewhere’* (Esteves, 2018; Lowe, 1997).These biases were not confined to public opinion but were echoed by influential figures in educational leadership. For instance, C.E. Cobin, an education officer in Smethwick, framed the presence of immigrant children as a major challenge, attributing it to language barriers. Similarly, a Birmingham headteacher in 1964 described Caribbean-born children as ‘lacking in intellect and lagging’ (Lowe, 1997).

Additionally, the British educational policies of the 1960s reflected an agenda of cultural assimilation rather than inclusion. The focus was not on embracing cultural diversity but on integrating Black Caribbean children into 'British values' and norms. This assimilative ideology was evident in a draft teacher recruitment advertisement from the Birmingham Local Education Authority, which expressed concerns about the increasing immigrant population and the challenges of integrating them into British society (Lowe, 1997).

> *Birmingham children they are White and they are Black*
> *Immigrants come: we can’t send them back.*
> *Really we’d like to, but now that they’re here,*
> *Millions who multiply year after year,*
> *It’s our job to teach ’em to live just like us,*
> *Nicely and soberly without any fuss.*
> *God knows how we’ll do it; we’d all like to cry.*
> *Have you the desire to give help and to try?*
> *And teach in our schools?*
> *We’ll see you get paid. May we please employ you to give us your aid?*
>
> (Lowe, 1997)

This poetic piece reveals multifaceted beliefs, from the ‘othering’ of ethnically minoritised children, the inherent low expectations rooted in xenophobia, to apprehensions about a burgeoning migrant populace. It’s crucial to recognise that during this period, the government’s strategy for migrant and Black Caribbean communities was unmistakably rooted in assimilation. The push to make Black children and migrant groups ‘live like us’, as

underscored in the poem, positioned teachers as instruments of assimilation. The education system, thus, became a conduit for furthering assimilative objectives, endeavouring to embed ‘British values’ not just in Black Caribbean children but also across minoritised ethnic groups. The role of education as a pivotal mechanism in the cultural integration agenda.

There were some who questioned the dominant narrative on the academic abilities of Black and migrant children. A 1969 inquiry by the Inner London Education Authority, examining fifty-two primary schools. Its findings contradicted prevailing beliefs, revealing that the perceived decline in White British children’s academic performance in schools with large immigrant populations was linked more to 'White flight' than to the presence of immigrant students. As White families withdrew their children, schools were left with fewer high-performing White students. Additionally, systemic issues like high student-teacher ratios exacerbated challenges in these schools (Rose et al., 1969).

Amid these difficulties, Spring Grove Primary School in Huddersfield, led by Trevor Burgin, and the Leeds Project, directed by June Derrick, emerged as successful case studies. At Spring Grove, a language centre for non-English-speaking students significantly improved outcomes, enabling many to progress to grammar schools while preventing 'White flight,' despite a diverse student body. The Leeds Project, involving 150 teachers across 30 local authorities, developed resources and training for schools supporting students with English as an additional language. This large-scale initiative not only improved academic outcomes but also influenced the national teacher training syllabus (Rose et al., 1969).

These efforts highlighted the importance of professional development and tailored resources for diverse pupil populations. Insights from educating South Asian children with limited English proficiency drew from earlier experiences with European migrants, influencing the creation of Section 11 funding under the Local Government Act to support linguistically diverse schools (Rose et al., 1969).

2.5 Education for the Educationally Subnormal, Bernard Coard’s Discovery

During a time of major educational reform and initiatives to remove language barriers in the British education system, Black Caribbean children faced a contrasting yet equally pressing

challenge. Unlike other migrant children who were non-native English speakers, Black Caribbean children were native English speakers yet faced systemic barriers that hindered their educational progress. In this context, Bernard Coard's seminal work, *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British Education System* (2021), emerged as a crucial intervention in the early 1970s, bringing much-needed attention to the overlooked struggles of the Black Caribbean community within the education system. Coard's investigation revealed deep-seated issues that disproportionately affected Black Caribbean children, shining a light on their educational marginalisation (Lawrence, 2007).

Coard's research exposed a troubling reality: a significant number of Black Caribbean children were being wrongly categorised and placed in schools designated for those deemed 'educationally sub-normal' (ESN). These institutions were originally intended to serve students with severe learning, mental, or physical challenges, with a curriculum designed to prepare them for low-skilled, manual jobs in adulthood; however, Coard's pivotal findings in 1971 revealed that this system was being misapplied, leading to the unjust assignment of many Black Caribbean children, as well as those from other migrant backgrounds, to ESN schools. This misplacement effectively denied these children access to the comprehensive educational opportunities to which they were entitled, highlighting a broader issue of systemic exclusion within the British educational system (Coard, 2021; Godwin Sule-Pearce, 2022).

The disclosure of the disproportionate placement of Black Caribbean children in ESN schools, as highlighted by Coard, catalysed a profound shift in the Black Caribbean community's relationship with the British educational system. This revelation not only led to the eventual dissolution of ESN schools but also ignited a strong sense of collectivism among Black Caribbean parents. These parents came to the realisation that relying on the British educational system was inadequate if they wanted their children to receive a fair and equitable education. The awareness raised by Coard's work thus became a turning point, prompting the Black Caribbean community to seek alternative avenues to ensure their children's educational success.

Table one: Breakdown of Black, Asian and Minoritised pupils by year

Year	School Type	No. of pupils on roll	No. of Black Asian and other Minoritised pupils	Percentage of Black Asian and other Minoritised pupils
1966	Mainstream	398,133	52,400	13.2
	ESN	3,876	904	23.3
1967	Mainstream	397,130	59,434	15.0
	ESN	4,109	1,166	28.4

(Coard, 2021, p. 88)

Table two. Breakdown of Black, Asian and Minoritised pupils by year

Nationality	Mainstream Schools	ESN Schools
West Indian (Black Caribbean)	54%	75%
Indian and Pakistani	10%	4%
Cypriot	16%	13%
Other	21%	8%
Total number of children	55,161	886

(Coard, 2021, p. 88)

In the face of this systemic disenfranchisement, Black Caribbean communities rallied together, forging a path of educational self-determination. They began establishing their supplementary schools, which became beacons of communal resilience and empowerment.

These schools, often nestled within the welcoming confines of churches, homes, and community centres, were sustained by the efforts of Black parents who volunteered their time and expertise to educate the children in their community. These supplementary schools were not merely educational institutions; they were a testament to the community's resolve to uplift and support the academic journey of Black children (Coard, 2021).

Thus, from the crucible of systemic educational inequities, a grassroots movement was born that underscored the indomitable spirit of the Black Caribbean community and its unwavering commitment to the educational advancement of its children. The allocation of children to ESN schools during this period was a practice that affected not only Black Caribbean children but also those of South Asian heritage whose primary barrier to mainstream education was often the English language. With the provision of language support in ESN schools, many South Asian children demonstrated significant improvements and transitioned back into mainstream schools (Coard, 2021).

The situation for Black Caribbean children, however, was markedly different. Language barriers were not a focal point, as English was their first language. This raised a critical question: why were they allocated to ESN schools? The answer to this lies in a confluence of factors that skewed the results of the intelligence quotient (IQ) testing administered to these children. Foremost among these factors was the pervasive subjectivity of White educators, whose assessments were influenced by their perceptions of race, class, and culture. Underpinning this bias was the re-emergence of the insidious legacy of racial Darwinism—a pseudo-scientific belief in racial hierarchies and inherent intelligence propagating White races were innately superior in intelligence while others were deemed inherently inferior (Coard, 2021; Banton, 1959; Fryer, 1984). This ideology, rooted in centuries of prejudiced thought, had seeped into the realm of educational psychology in Britain (Coard, 2021; Gould, 1981).

Coard's work played a pivotal role in exposing the systemic injustices faced by Black Caribbean children within the British educational system. His findings not only led to significant changes within the education system but also empowered the Black Caribbean community to take a more active role in advocating for their children's rights. This period of educational reform and the subsequent shifts in community activism highlighted an ongoing need for vigilance and collective action in the pursuit of educational equity.

2.6 Education and Race from the 1980s to the 2000s

Critical governmental reports have marked the journey towards educational equality for Black Caribbean children in Britain. The Rampton Report (1981), officially titled *West Indian Children in Our Schools*, emerged as a response to the concerns voiced by the Black Caribbean community and bodies like the Commons Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, regarding the persistent underachievement of Black Caribbean children in British schools. The Rampton Report's principal findings implicated low teacher expectations and prevalent racism among White teachers and within broader society as substantial contributors to this underachievement. Despite shedding light on these systemic issues, the report faced widespread discrimination in mainstream media, and Anthony Rampton's subsequent removal from his position only served to underscore the contentious nature of its findings (Gundara et al., 1986; Lynch, 1984).

The baton was passed to Michael Swann, whose subsequent investigation culminated in the 1985 Swann Report, *Education for All*. This report endorsed the Rampton Report's findings and laid down a roadmap to rectify the situation. It emphasised the urgent need to transform educational systems to cater inclusively to a multi-ethnic, multicultural society. The Swann Report's recommendations were clear: promote multiculturalism, combat racism, and dismantle racial stereotypes through education. However, these aspirations faced a significant barrier with the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act under the Thatcher administration, which began pivoting the educational system towards a more market-driven model, emphasising performance metrics and parental choice. This shift, compounded by budgetary constraints, gradually eclipsed the focus on multicultural and anti-racist education, slowly dissolving supportive services (Gundara, 1986; Lynch, 1984).

The conversation took a radical turn following the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence, and the subsequent Macpherson Report emerged from a public inquiry into the murder and police handling of the investigation. The Macpherson Report (1999) not only acknowledged institutional racism as a critical factor in the failures of the police and the criminal justice system but also provided a defining moment for educational discourse. Institutional racism represented the: *'systemic failure of an organisation to deliver equitable and professional services to individuals based on their race, culture, or ethnic origin'* (Macpherson, 1999). This report reiterated several recommendations akin to those proposed in the Rampton

Report (1981) and the Swann Report (1985), emphasising the role of the education system in combating racism. Over the past two decades, research into the underachievement of Black children in British education has been extensive, with a recurring theme highlighting racial inequalities as a significant barrier (Demie, 2018; Gillborn, 2007; Godwin Sule-Pearce, 2022; Hamilton, 2018; Richardson, 2007; Rollock et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2016).

2.7 Policy and Educational Reform From 2010

When examining the education system, it is important to acknowledge the pivotal role of policy in shaping educational experiences of social actors and educational outcomes. This recognition led me to explore policy as a crucial component for understanding the macro-level influences within education. Policy not only dictates formal structures but is also intertwined with political ideologies, moral beliefs, professional practices, and social implications (Chitty, 2009; Hyatt, 2014; Fairclough, 2013; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010), all of which influence the experiences of students and educators.

2.7.1 Policy Overview: The Importance of Teaching, 2010, and Educational Excellence Everywhere, 2016

The Department for Education's 2010 white paper, introduced by the Coalition Government, marked a significant shift in UK education policy. It identified three core goals: promoting social good, reinstating teachers' central role in education, and using education to address social inequalities, particularly among underachieving groups. To achieve these aims, the paper outlined five policy levers: increased focus on behaviour through Ofsted inspections, reforming exclusion processes to empower headteachers, expanding teachers' authority to search pupils, promoting free schools and academies, and improving alternative provision for students outside mainstream education.

While these measures aimed to restore order and elevate educators' status, critics such as Ball et al. (2010) and Chitty (2009) raised concerns that they could inadvertently worsen inequalities. Increased exclusions and alternative provisions, for example, could disproportionately impact marginalised groups. Similarly, Lupton (2010) argued that the introduction of free schools risked deepening social sorting by primarily benefiting parents with greater social capital, leaving lower socioeconomic families disadvantaged.

The Conservative Government's 2016 Educational Excellence Everywhere white paper continued this policy trajectory, focusing on social justice while emphasising that ‘children get one chance at education’. This rhetoric reinforced the urgency of tackling educational inequality while framing education as vital for national and global competitiveness. The paper introduced two significant reforms: centralising school autonomy by closely linking it to funding, control, and accountability, and pushing for all schools to transition to academies. The academisation process aimed to facilitate greater efficiency and accountability by removing schools from local authority control, placing them under direct central government management. While these reforms intended to modernise and streamline the education system, they also reflected a growing emphasis on performance metrics and standardised assessments, aligning with global competitive standards.

However, the centralisation of governance raised concerns about equity. Once again critics argued that reforms favoured middle-class families with greater access to educational resources and networks, further disadvantaging working-class communities. While the reforms aimed to improve educational outcomes through innovation and accountability, the policy shift also increased the risk of educational exclusion and reinforced social hierarchies. The emphasis on discipline, standardised testing, and parental choice often failed to address the systemic barriers that many marginalised groups face, suggesting that market-driven reforms, while framed as tools for progress, risk entrenching educational disparities rather than reducing them (Ball et al., 2010; Chitty, 2009; Lupton, 2010). Consequently, the challenges defined by tensions between driving improvement and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students.

2.7.2 Critical Policy Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

To critically explore how these policies shaped the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys, I utilised the methodologies of critical policy analysis (CPA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Policies are not neutral; they carry embedded discourses of power, ideology, and cultural norms that influence both how they are written and how they are implemented (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 2010; Fairclough, 2013; Hyatt, 2014). CPA, as outlined by Hyatt (2014), provided a heuristic tool for examining how policies shape social outcomes while questioning the ideological foundations beneath them. Within this study, CPA was instrumental in uncovering how educational reforms disproportionately

impacted Black Caribbean boys, particularly in terms of exclusion and academic marginalisation.

CDA, as theorised by Fairclough (2013) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010), served as a complementary method by focusing on the language and discourse within policy texts and participant narratives. While CPA allowed for the examination of structural forces within policy frameworks, CDA explored how language both reflects and reinforces power relations in practice. CDA investigates how discourse shapes and is shaped by social structures, revealing the deeper ideological functions of language that perpetuate inequalities. It allowed this study to uncover how certain phrases and omissions in policy documents upheld inequalities, often in subtle but impactful ways. The combined use of CPA and CDA was chosen specifically because these methods aligned with the second research question: 'How do the broader mechanisms within the education system influence the experiences of Black Caribbean pupils?' CPA exposed how policy priorities often marginalised the specific needs of this group, while CDA revealed how language reinforced exclusionary practices in the daily operations of schools.

2.7.3 Incorporating the use of Critical Policy Analysis

Following Hyatt's (2014) framework, I began by contextualising the policies under analysis, aligning this with the broader research objective of examining the macro elements of the education system. This framework prompted key questions, such as: What are the policy drivers and levers? What are the policy warrants, and how are policies legitimised? These aspects are revealed through policy discourse. Crucially, the framework also emphasises examining policy trajectories—how policies are interpreted, enacted, and ultimately affect the lives of social actors on the ground, which is central to this research.

Policy Drivers and Policy Levers

Understanding policy drivers and levers is essential for examining how educational policies are created and implemented. Policy drivers refer to the core goals and intended outcomes that shape the foundation of a policy (Hyatt, 2014). These drivers are more than aspirational statements; they are embedded in government statements, ministerial documents, and legislation, reflecting broader political and social objectives. Drivers often include aims such as improving academic performance, reducing exclusion rates, and addressing

educational inequities. However, these objectives must be critically examined to determine whether they align with the lived experiences of marginalised groups, such as Black Caribbean boys, who are frequently affected by systemic disparities.

Policy levers, on the other hand, are the mechanisms used by governments to operationalise these policy drivers (Hyatt, 2014). These tools transform policy intentions into actionable steps within the education system. Examples include performance targets, standardised testing, and inspection frameworks like Ofsted. These mechanisms influence how schools measure success, allocate resources, and prioritise practices. For instance, performance benchmarks can shift focus from holistic education to target-driven teaching, sometimes reinforcing existing inequalities rather than resolving them. By linking funding to these measures, policy levers can either drive meaningful reform or perpetuate systemic disparities. The interaction between drivers and levers is critical to understanding whether policies achieve their intended impact or simply reinforce pre-existing inequalities. In the context of this study, which focuses on the educational experiences of Black Caribbean males, a central concern was whether policies genuinely addressed the needs of vulnerable students or inadvertently contributed to cycles of exclusion and disadvantage. Exploring the relationship between policy drivers and levers allowed for a deeper analysis of how systemic practices shape educational realities and whether policy reforms are effective in reducing exclusion or reinforcing existing disparities.

Policy Warrant and Trajectories

A policy warrant refers to the justification for the introduction and implementation of a policy, serving as the foundation for its legitimacy (Hyatt, 2014). This concept is crucial in education policy as it reveals the underlying rhetorical strategies used to persuade stakeholders of the necessity of certain reforms. Policy warrants often rely on authority, evidence, and dominant discourses to justify actions. However, examining how these justifications are constructed is essential for evaluating whether they genuinely address systemic issues or merely present surface-level solutions.

One common form of policy warrant is the evidentiary warrant, which uses empirical data and quantitative evidence to support policy decisions (Hyatt, 2014). This approach aims to present policies as objective and fact-based, often using performance metrics or statistical

evidence to validate reforms. However, the selection and presentation of evidence can be influenced by underlying ideologies. As I analysed policy documents, it became clear that certain data were selectively emphasised to support predetermined agendas. This raises critical questions: Was the evidence used to address genuine educational disparities, or was it manipulated to justify a pre-existing political agenda?

2.7.4 Critical Policy Analysis (CPA): The Importance of Teaching (2010)

2.7.3.1 Policy Drivers

The policy drivers in The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010) were fundamental goals designed to transform the education system. These core drivers aimed to raise educational standards, empower teachers, and address educational inequalities while increasing school autonomy and accountability.

1. Raising Educational Standards:

A key driver was improving educational standards to position England as a global leader in education. This involved curriculum reforms, enhanced teacher quality, and setting higher expectations for student outcomes. International benchmarking against high-performing education systems, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, influenced these reforms, emphasising curriculum rigour and improved academic results.

2. Teacher Empowerment:

The policy aimed to restore the professional status of teachers, granting them greater authority and autonomy, particularly in classroom behaviour management. This included reducing bureaucratic constraints that were seen as barriers to effective teaching and enabling teachers to focus on instruction and student development.

3. Closing the Achievement Gap:

A significant policy driver was closing the educational achievement gap between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds. This focus was operationalised through the introduction of the pupil premium (policy lever)—a targeted funding initiative aimed at

supporting disadvantaged students and ensuring they had equitable access to educational opportunities.

4. Increased Accountability and Transparency:

Greater school accountability was another driver, with the policy advocating for more rigorous Ofsted inspections and enhanced public access to school performance data. This transparency aimed to build public trust and ensure schools were held accountable for both their outcomes and use of funding.

5. School Autonomy and Innovation:

A final driver focused on increasing school autonomy and fostering innovation. The policy aimed to reduce excessive government oversight and allow schools the freedom to develop their own educational approaches. By promoting academy conversions and free schools, the policy aimed to encourage diversity and innovation in educational practice.

2.7.3.2 Policy Levers

Policy levers are the mechanisms through which policy drivers are operationalised, turning broad goals into practical actions. The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010) introduced several key policy levers to implement its reform strategies.

1. Curriculum Reform:

The policy introduced a review of the national curriculum, prioritising core subject knowledge while granting schools flexibility to design their own content. The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was introduced to encourage a more rigorous academic focus across core subjects, aiming to prepare students for global competitiveness.

2. Teacher Training and Professional Development:

Recognising the link between teacher quality and student outcomes, the policy emphasised professional development. Initiatives like Teach First were expanded, and teaching schools were introduced, modelled after teaching hospitals, to lead professional development and mentoring for teachers at all career stages.

3. Pupil Premium:

The pupil premium was introduced as a funding mechanism to provide additional financial resources for schools with high numbers of disadvantaged students. The goal was to reduce the achievement gap by providing targeted support for students facing educational barriers linked to socioeconomic disadvantage.

4. Behavioural Authority:

The policy sought to empower teachers with greater authority to manage behaviour, including powers to issue same-day detentions, conduct student searches, and use reasonable force if necessary. These measures aimed to create positive learning environments and reduce classroom disruptions.

5. School Autonomy and Academy Conversions:

A core structural reform was the expansion of academy schools. Academies were encouraged to operate independently of local authority control, giving school leaders greater flexibility over curriculum design, staffing, and resource allocation. Low-performing schools were often required to convert into academies as part of intervention strategies.

6. Accountability and Transparency:

The policy enhanced data transparency by revising school performance tables and expanding the role of Ofsted inspections to focus more on teaching quality, student progress, and disadvantaged pupil outcomes. These measures aimed to improve public accountability and encourage consistent educational standards across schools.

2.7.3.3 Policy Warrants

The policy warrant of The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010) referred to the justifications presented for implementing the reforms. These warrants framed the reforms as essential for improving education and securing the UK’s long-term economic and social success.

1. Global Competitiveness:

A key justification was the UK's declining performance in international assessments like the OECD PISA rankings. The policy argued that systemic weaknesses needed urgent reform to keep pace with high-performing nations, positioning educational improvement as vital for global economic competitiveness.

2. Quality of Teaching:

The policy highlighted the link between teacher quality and student outcomes, drawing from countries like Finland and South Korea where top graduates were actively recruited into teaching. This formed part of the rationale for raising entry standards for teacher training.

3. Educational Equity:

The policy framed closing the achievement gap as both a moral and economic necessity, with the pupil premium presented as a solution for addressing disparities in student outcomes.

Evidentiary Warrant

The evidentiary warrant relied heavily on empirical data, such as the OECD PISA rankings and domestic GCSE performance data. These statistics were used to justify the need for reform by highlighting the UK's declining international standing in literacy, mathematics, and science.

Accountability Warrant

The accountability warrant justified the policy reforms as necessary for ensuring measurable improvements in educational performance. By linking funding, inspections, and student outcomes to school accountability, the policy sought to create a performance-driven culture.

Political Warrant

The political warrant positioned the policy as essential for addressing social justice concerns, particularly by targeting educational inequalities. The focus on the pupil premium

and school autonomy aimed to reduce barriers for disadvantaged students. However, the policy also emphasised national economic stability and global competitiveness, framing educational reform as critical for the UK's prosperity.

2.7.3.4 Modes of Legitimation

The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010) white paper employed various modes of legitimation to justify its reforms: authorisation by referencing successful international models like Finland and South Korea; rationalisation through data and performance comparisons; moral evaluation by framing reforms as necessary to ensure fairness and close achievement gaps; and mythopoesis by highlighting success stories from high-performing academies.

What the CPA Highlights so far

The 2010 education policy heavily relied on selective data use, emphasizing international comparisons to highlight underperformance. However, critics argued that this competitive approach oversimplified complex educational challenges and reduced education to mere performance metrics, rather than addressing broader concerns such as systemic inequalities. The policy's strong focus on quantifiable outcomes risked narrowing educational objectives, overlooking the holistic development of students and the unique challenges faced by marginalized communities. Additionally, there was a notable tension between its market-driven reforms—such as the promotion of free schools and academies—and its purported commitment to social justice. Critics contended that these reforms, rather than reducing inequalities, might have exacerbated them, further deepening educational disparities. And while the policy aimed to raise standards, empower teachers, and address inequalities, its reliance on exclusions and market-driven reforms risked perpetuating systemic disparities, highlighting the need for ongoing evaluation of educational reforms, especially for marginalised groups like Black Caribbean students

2.7.3.5 The Importance of Teaching (2010): Approach to Managing Poor Behaviour

The reforms to behaviour management in schools reflect the government's broader agenda to raise educational standards, improve school safety, and ensure fairness. The policy aimed to support teachers, reduce exclusions, and create equitable learning environments. The policy drivers behind these reforms focused on restoring teacher authority, reinforcing

discipline, and ensuring safer school environments. The government aimed to empower teachers with enhanced behaviour management powers while simultaneously addressing disparities in school exclusions. Additionally, the policy acknowledged the issue of false allegations against teachers, which it argued negatively impacted staff morale and retention. By safeguarding teachers' authority and professional reputation, the policy intended to create a balanced approach where discipline and fairness coexisted within the educational framework.

To implement these objectives, the policy employed several key levers, serving as practical tools to translate policy drivers into concrete outcomes. Legislative changes formed a significant lever, expanding teacher authority by granting powers such as same-day detentions, student searches, and the use of reasonable force when necessary. These measures aimed to create more disciplined and controlled classroom environments, enhancing both learning conditions and school safety.

A further lever introduced was the protection of teachers from reputational harm. The policy established safeguards to protect teachers' anonymity when facing allegations, ensuring their identity would remain confidential unless formal charges were brought forward. This measure aimed to reduce the professional vulnerability often linked with unfounded accusations, further reinforcing teacher authority and morale.

Exclusion reforms represented another critical lever, shifting decision-making authority by preventing independent panels from reinstating excluded students. Instead, headteachers were granted greater control over exclusion decisions while pilot schemes were introduced to hold schools accountable for the long-term educational outcomes of excluded pupils. The intention was to encourage a reduction in permanent exclusions by making schools more responsible for the consequences of exclusion. Additionally, the policy sought to improve alternative provision for excluded students, ensuring they continued to receive high-quality education despite their removal from mainstream classrooms.

Ofsted's role was expanded to link school evaluations more closely with behaviour management standards, incentivising schools to prioritise discipline and classroom conduct as a measure of overall performance. Another significant lever was the policy's extension of headteacher authority beyond school premises. This expansion empowered headteachers to

manage student behaviour not just within school grounds but also in the broader community, emphasising greater accountability and reinforcing positive behaviour both inside and outside of school.

The policy warrants, or justifications for these reforms, rested on three primary grounds: evidentiary, accountability, and social values. The evidentiary warrant drew on statistical data and teacher testimonies to highlight widespread concerns about classroom behaviour and staff vulnerability. The accountability warrant framed improved behaviour, reduced exclusions, and safer learning environments as measurable indicators of policy success. Politically, the reforms aligned with public priorities around discipline, fairness, and teacher empowerment, reflecting societal demands for safer schools.

However, despite these intentions, deeper analysis reveals significant risks, as these measures reveal potential unintended consequences, particularly for marginalised groups such as Black Caribbean pupils, who have long faced disproportionate disciplinary measures and exclusions within the English education system, often stemming from systemic racial biases and stereotyping. (Demie, 2018; Gillborn, 2007; Richardson, 2007; Rollock et al., 2015). Policies that promote intensified searches, detentions, and exclusions, unless rigorously monitored and regulated, risk perpetuating existing biases. This risk is exemplified by the widely publicised incident involving Child Q, a Black girl who was strip-searched by police at school while menstruating, based on a mistaken belief by school staff that she possessed cannabis. The report findings concluded that discriminatory assumptions about the child's race resulted in harmful disciplinary practices, leading school staff and police to neglect their safeguarding responsibilities.

In addition, while the policy aimed to enhance alternative provisions for excluded students, concerns remained about the quality of these educational settings. Critics argued that alternative provisions often failed to provide the same level of academic opportunities as mainstream schools, functioning more as holding spaces than genuine learning environments. Without sufficient oversight and quality assurance, alternative provisions risked perpetuating cycles of educational marginalisation rather than breaking them (Ball et al., 2010; Chitty, 2009).

Moreover, the policy's emphasis on stricter behavioural controls could reinforce existing power imbalances within schools. Black Caribbean boys, already vulnerable to racial stereotyping, faced a higher risk of being subjected to these expanded disciplinary measures compared to their peers. The introduction of pilot schemes holding schools accountable for excluded students' outcomes, while positive in theory, raised concerns about unintended consequences, such as increased informal exclusions or 'managed moves' designed to circumvent formal reporting.

The reforms also introduced structural changes through the promotion of free schools and academies, which further complicated issues of educational equity. While these institutions were intended to promote innovation and parental choice, critics argued they could contribute to social sorting, where families with greater resources and social capital were better positioned to access high-performing schools. Conversely, disadvantaged families often lacked the knowledge or capacity to navigate this complex system, leading to the entrenchment of existing inequalities rather than their reduction (Ball et al., 2010; Chitty, 2009).

2.7.4 Critical Policy Analysis: Educational Excellence Everywhere (2016)

2.7.4.1 Policy Drivers

The policy drivers behind Educational Excellence Everywhere reflected a blend of moral and pragmatic objectives. A primary driver was the government's commitment to addressing educational inequalities, particularly those affecting disadvantaged groups. Longstanding achievement gaps between students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and their peers remained a challenge within England's education system. The policy framed its reforms as essential for closing these gaps, aligning with broader societal values of fairness and equal opportunity.

The policy positioned education reform as a moral necessity for ensuring social mobility while simultaneously presenting competition and school autonomy as pragmatic tools for improving outcomes. The ambition to raise educational standards, particularly in core subjects. Building on earlier reforms, the government aimed to establish consistently high expectations for students and schools across all regions, particularly those historically

underperforming. The use of standardised testing and national performance metrics, such as Progress 8 and Attainment 8, reinforced this focus.

2.7.4.2 Policy Levers

To operationalise its objectives, the Educational Excellence Everywhere white paper employed several key policy levers. The most significant was the expansion of school autonomy through the academies programme. All schools were encouraged to convert to academy status, gaining greater control over curriculum design, staffing, and resource allocation. This structural reform reduced local authority oversight, placing decision-making power directly in the hands of school leaders. The policy aimed to position school leaders as key agents of educational change, capable of tailoring strategies to local needs. School performance was closely monitored through mechanisms such as Ofsted inspections and league tables, creating a system where schools were judged based on quantifiable success indicators.

Addressing Regional Underperformance and Social Inequality

A key priority of the policy was addressing chronic underperformance in disadvantaged regions. Specific regions with historical educational challenges were targeted for intervention, with the goal of narrowing the attainment gap. The evidentiary warrant supporting this approach relied heavily on national performance data, including measures such as Progress 8, to identify disparities in student achievement.

Teacher Quality and Recruitment as a Policy Focus

Recognising the critical role of teacher quality in improving educational outcomes, the policy introduced several reforms aimed at attracting and retaining high-quality educators, particularly in challenging regions. The National Teaching Service and other targeted recruitment campaigns were designed to direct top teaching talent into areas with persistent underperformance.

What the CPA Highlights so far

The 2016 education policy maintained a central focus on social justice but framed equity through a neoliberal lens, relying on market-driven mechanisms such as competition and

decentralization. Autonomy was promoted as a means of fostering innovation, yet it was accompanied by stricter accountability measures that placed immense pressure on schools to meet performance targets. While these measures aimed to uphold high standards, critics, including Perryman et al. (2011), argued that the emphasis on quantifiable outcomes risked narrowing educational objectives to test performance, potentially encouraging 'teaching to the test' rather than holistic learning. This approach was particularly concerning for under-resourced schools, which struggled to meet rigorous expectations despite efforts to provide additional support. Furthermore, the reliance on school choice models, as noted by Machin and Sandi (2020), raised concerns about exacerbating educational disparities. Schools with greater access to social capital and resources were more likely to thrive in competitive environments, whereas those in disadvantaged areas faced significant challenges, potentially widening rather than closing achievement gaps.

Additionally, the expansion of free schools and multi-academy trusts (MATs) heightened concerns about social stratification within the education system. Families with greater social capital were often better equipped to navigate school choice systems and secure places in high-performing institutions, while disadvantaged students faced systemic barriers due to limited access to information and resources. This dynamic risked reinforcing structural inequalities rather than dismantling them. The *Educational Excellence Everywhere* white paper underscored the increasing influence of neoliberal principles in shaping England's education landscape, emphasizing school autonomy, competition, and accountability as drivers of systemic improvement. While the policy's commitment to reducing achievement gaps was commendable, its market-driven approach posed significant risks for marginalized groups, particularly Black Caribbean boys and under-resourced schools. The effectiveness of these reforms depended largely on equitable resource allocation and sustained monitoring, ensuring that accountability measures did not disproportionately burden schools serving economically disadvantaged communities.

2.7.5 Incorporating Critical Discourse Analysis to Understand the Role of Language and Power: Educational Excellence Everywhere (2016) and the Importance of Teaching (2010)

The Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2016) and The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010) white papers introduced significant reforms to the English education system, blending social justice rhetoric with neoliberal principles such as competition,

accountability, and market-driven efficiency. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) lens (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010; Fairclough, 2013) reveals how the language and structure of both policies not only reflected but reinforced broader societal power structures, ideological leanings, and inequalities, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

2.7.5.1 Discourse as Social Practice: Constructing Educational Reality

Both policies framed education as essential to national progress and economic competitiveness while emphasising social justice goals. The Importance of Teaching (2010) presented education as a moral and national imperative, positioning academic underperformance as a national crisis linked to the UK's decline in OECD PISA rankings. Similarly, Educational Excellence Everywhere (2016) emphasised education as a transformative tool, asserting that a 'well-educated population' would make the nation 'stronger, fairer, wealthier, and more secure' (DfE, 2016, p. 5).

However, both policies' language shifted the focus from holistic educational development to quantifiable outcomes. The emphasis on raising 'standards' and 'life chances' reduced education to a measurable, data-driven process. Academic achievement was defined narrowly, with success tied to test results, global performance comparisons, and rankings rather than fostering broader personal growth or addressing systemic barriers. This shift constructed a meritocratic narrative, where success was portrayed as an individual accomplishment rather than a reflection of broader structural conditions.

Through the CPA, I uncovered how educational policies, rooted in neoliberal ideology reshaped the educational landscape in ways that often disadvantaged vulnerable groups. The CPA highlighted the socio-political and economic structures influencing policies like The Importance of Teaching (2010) and Educational Excellence Everywhere (2016), which emphasised competition, accountability, and market-driven reforms. These policies reinforced a meritocratic view of education, where success was measured solely by quantifiable metrics. Such an approach to education, while framed as a means to improve national standards, placed undue pressure on schools and educators, often at the expense of marginalised students.

2.7.6 CPA and CDA's Influence on Research Approach

The findings from the CPA and CDA analyses indicate that Black Caribbean boys may be disproportionately affected by these educational reforms. Policies emphasizing efficiency and performance often risk fostering exclusionary practices, particularly toward students whom educators perceive as failing to meet expected benchmarks. With a potential of an increase in exclusionary practices across schools when facing heightened competition. The insights from CPA and CDA underscored the need to examine these broader systemic issues in depth, which shaped my decision to adopt a phenomenological approach. By focusing on the lived experiences of Black Caribbean males prior to the implementation of these policies, I aimed to capture how these policies could translate into real-life outcomes.

2.7.6.1 CDA's Role in Shaping Methodology and Participant Selection

CDA played a crucial role in my research, as it illuminated how the language and narratives embedded in education policies perpetuated certain power dynamics and ideologies. The discourse of 'supported autonomy', a recurring theme in both The Importance of Teaching (2010) and Educational Excellence Everywhere (2016), framed autonomy for schools as something that had to be earned through performance. This narrative masked the hierarchical control retained by the government, where schools deemed to be underperforming were subjected to intervention or forced academisation. The CDA revealed that this focus on autonomy and accountability further marginalised underperforming schools, particularly those in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

These findings were instrumental in guiding my decision to include Group C, a cohort of education and community professionals in my research. By incorporating the voices of headteachers, teachers, and youth workers, I sought to understand how the policies shaped their daily practices and how they navigated the pressures of competition and accountability. Group C's inclusion allowed me to critically examine how these professionals, many of whom worked directly with Black Caribbean boys, interpreted and responded to the systemic demands placed on them. Their insights were essential for understanding the broader mechanisms within the education system that contributed to disaffection, providing a complementary perspective to the personal narratives gathered from the other participant groups.

The decision to include Group C participants was directly influenced by the need to juxtapose institutional perspectives with the personal narratives of Group A, formerly disaffected Black Caribbean males. CPA and CDA had demonstrated that policies like Educational Excellence Everywhere (2016) created a system in which schools and educators were pressured to prioritise performance over inclusivity, often leading to the exclusion of students who might hinder their results (Machin & Sandi, 2020). By including Group C, I aimed to explore how educators balanced these competing demands and how their practices were shaped by the neoliberal imperatives of competition and accountability.

2.7.6.2 Why CPA and CDA Were Important to This Research

The integration of CPA and CDA into my research approach was essential for understanding how political ideas, such as neoliberalism, embedded in policies could be a contributing factor into the exclusion and disaffection of Black Caribbean boys. CPA illuminated the broader socio-political and economic forces shaping education reforms, while CDA revealed the subtle ways in which policy discourses reinforced hierarchies and marginalised vulnerable groups. These methodologies was vital in enhancing my thinking on the discrepancy between the policy intentions of social justice, equity and the real-world trajectories of policy reforms. While framed as a means of improving educational outcomes, there are questions on whether are not education policies exacerbate inequalities for marginalised groups, like Black Caribbean boys. CPA and CDA were instrumental in shaping my research methodology, research design and key elements of my reading during my secondary research phase.

2.8 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring the historical background of the Black Caribbean community in Britain to help provide greater context, focusing on their contributions, systemic racial discrimination, and social exclusion. Examining how colonial legacies of racism and moral panics shaped public perceptions and policies, influencing labour, and race relations during the post-Windrush era. In tracing the educational challenges faced by Black Caribbean pupils over the decades, a clear thread of continuity emerges, linking historical injustices to contemporary issues. The seminal works of Coard (2021) and the 1969 report by Rose et al. exposed systemic racial biases within the British educational system as early as the 1960s and 1970s. However, despite increased awareness from

decades of national reports, these challenges persist. Scholars such as Richardson (2007) argue that meaningful transformation has been largely resisted, reflecting a broader pattern of systemic inertia. This enduring struggle underscores the necessity of a renewed focus on barriers to equity and inclusion, within educational landscape for Black Caribbean pupils.

The forthcoming chapter delves into an extensive review of the literature encountered during the secondary research phase. This aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the literature concerning the keep themes that emerge from the main research questions of this study. By exploring these sources, the chapter seeks to illuminate the persistent challenges faced by Black Caribbean boys and identify potential pathways for addressing any enduring inequities.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the literature surrounding the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys in the English education system, focusing on their links to youth disaffection. A detailed analysis of existing research aims to examine the education of Black Caribbean boys, situating this within the wider discourse of race, education and the broader educational landscape. Historically, Black Caribbean boys have been disproportionately represented in negative educational statistics (DfES, 2006; Gillborn, 2007), and disengagement from mainstream education during secondary school correlates with increased vulnerability to youth disaffection (Arnez & Condry, 202; Graham, 2014; Williamson, 1999) highlighting the importance of investigating these educational trajectories. This literature review lays a foundation for this investigation, exploring how educational experiences shape social dynamics. It sets a framework for understanding how the education system might better support Black Caribbean boys and reduce risks associated with youth disaffection.

To achieve this, the literature review is organised around several critical overarching objectives:

1. A**nalysis of Empirical Studies**
   Examines historical and contemporary research to identify dominant narratives and recurring findings about Black Caribbean boys' positioning in education. This includes an overview of how these narratives have evolved and their influence on current discourse.
2. **Evaluation of Theoretical Frameworks**
   assessing the effectiveness of key theoretical models used in race and education studies, providing the conceptual foundation for this research.
3. **Identification of Gaps**
   Highlights gaps in existing literature that this study addresses, positioning the research within the broader field of educational studies.

The chapter is divided into five overarching sections for comprehensive analysis:

1. **Theoretical Frameworks**
   In this section we critically evaluate the theoretical frameworks commonly used in the study of race and education, particularly those that have shaped research on Black Caribbean pupils. It provides a detailed analysis of key theories and clarifies the theoretical framework guiding this study. By exploring how the literature has influenced the selection of theoretical models, this section establishes a strong conceptual foundation for the research.

2. **Institutional Habitus**
   The second section investigates previous studies on the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys, examining how these experiences have been explored, analysed, and interpreted. It highlights the multifaceted factors influencing their educational trajectories, including institutional policies, teacher perceptions, and peer relationships. This section underscores how these elements interact within school environments to shape educational outcomes for Black Caribbean boys.

3. **The American Context**
   Comparative studies from the United States are included to provide a broader perspective on the educational experiences of racialised groups. This cross-national analysis helps to identify both similarities and divergences in the experiences of Black Caribbean pupils in England, offering insights into the cultural and institutional factors that shape educational disadvantage across different contexts.

4. **Systemic Perspective**
   This section broadens the analysis by exploring systemic and structural factors within the English education system that contribute to the educational challenges faced by Black Caribbean boys. It critically examines areas such as disparities in school funding, curricular biases, and the impact of standardised testing. These structural inequalities are analysed in the context of educational reforms and policy shifts, evaluating how institutional practices either support or hinder the academic progress of Black Caribbean pupils.

5. **Research Gaps and Conclusion**
   This section summarises key themes and debates identified within the literature, focusing on the unique challenges and experiences of Black Caribbean boys in the English education system. It highlights the gaps in the existing research that this study aims to address, analysing what the overall discourse presents on both micro-level interactions within schools and macro-level structural factors.

This literature review lays the groundwork for this study and contributes to ongoing conversations about race, education, and equity, identifying areas for further research to promote more equitable outcomes for Black Caribbean pupils.

3.1.1 Previous Studies on Black Caribbean Boys in the English Education System

The educational experiences of Black Caribbean pupils, particularly boys, in England have been extensively researched over several decades, revealing persistent systemic challenges. A seminal study is Bernard Coard's (2021) 1971 study, which exposed the disproportionate placement of Black Caribbean boys in ESN schools. Coard highlighted how racially biased assessments by White educators led to the misdiagnosis of Black pupils, unjustly labelling them with learning disabilities, denying pupils appropriate educational opportunities and exposing systemic racism. His findings sparked critical discourse on structural racism in education, setting the stage for subsequent research that delved deeper into these systemic inequities.

Building on Coard's work, later studies such as those by Gillborn (2007) and Demie (2018) examined the intersection of race, gender, and class on Black Caribbean boys' educational outcomes. They reported higher exclusion rates for Black Caribbean boys from mainstream schools and their overrepresentation in PRUs, highlighting entrenched structural inequalities that systematically disadvantage Black Caribbean boys, reinforcing a cycle of marginalisation. Research like The Commission on Young Lives (2022) and Perera (2020) termed this phenomenon the ‘school-to-prison pipeline’, linking educational policies and teacher biases lead to increased surveillance and disciplinary actions against Black students. The convergence of discriminatory school practices and broader societal prejudices contributes to the over-policing of Black boys, exacerbating their alienation from the educational system.

While early research predominantly highlighted the challenges faced by Black Caribbean boys, recent studies, including Rhamie (2012) and Robinson (2020), explored the resilience and academic success of high-performing Black Caribbean pupils who have exceled despite systemic barriers. These studies emphasised the significant role of external support networks, including family and community, which provide emotional encouragement and cultural capital helping these boys navigate and counteract adversities within educational institutions. This perspective aligns with broader literature emphasising how community engagement and strong familial ties foster academic and personal development, offering a counter-narrative to deficit-focused discourses (Wright et al., 2021).

Despite increased awareness of systemic biases, contemporary studies show exclusionary practices continue to disproportionately affect Black Caribbean boys. The Timpson Review (2019) reaffirms that Black Caribbean pupils remain three times more likely to be excluded than White pupils, mirroring earlier research findings. Lumby (2012) and Wright et al. (2021) link these disparity to teacher expectations and implicit biases, with stereotypes of Black boys as inherently disruptive or aggressive influencing disciplinary measures and institutional policies. Societal narratives surrounding Black masculinity exacerbate these biases, shaping teacher attitudes and decision-making.

Recent scholarship advocates for an intersectional approach to address these multifaceted challenges faced by Black Caribbean boys in education. Bradbury (2011) emphasised the interconnected dimensions of race, class, and gender in shaping educational experiences. Ignoring this intersectionality risks oversimplifying the barriers these boys encounter. Strand (2011) corroborates this perspective, demonstrating how socioeconomic disadvantage, coupled with minoritised ethnic status, intensifies educational inequalities. The discourse highlights the urgency of structural reforms in education, particularly in disciplinary practices and support systems for disadvantaged students. Black Caribbean boys face intersecting challenges of racism, classism, and institutional bias, significantly hindering their academic success and wellbeing. The literature advocates for policy efforts to dismantle these systemic inequities and foster an inclusive environment. Comprehensive reforms addressing discrimination's root causes are essential to enabling Black Caribbean boys to achieve their full potential.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The literature has been instrumental in guiding my choice of theoretical framework, by illustrating how the right theoretical lens can offer researchers an additional perspective, allowing for greater clarity and uncovering overlooked factors, providing a deeper understanding of social phenomena. For example, concepts like Yosso's Social Cultural Capital (Rhamie, 2012; Yosso, 2005) demonstrate how a well-constructed theoretical framework can deepen our grasp of the issues under study. Upon reviewing the literature in this field, it was clear that developing a theoretical framework that bolsters the overall comprehension was going to be essential in achieving my research aims and objectives. To ensure clarity, I will begin by analysing the theoretical approaches employed in selected research articles.

3.2.1 Rhamie (2012) Achievement and Underachievement: the Experience of African Caribbeans

The author employs an eco-systemic framework, underpinned by grounded theory, to examine the intricate interactions between individuals and the various ecosystems they inhabit, such as home, school, and community. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the experiences of Black Caribbean pupils in the educational system, as it highlights how the interplay between these social environments shapes behaviour and academic outcomes. By focusing on the interconnectedness of these ecosystems, the study seeks to uncover factors that either foster resilience or heighten vulnerability among these students.

A notable strength of this framework is its capacity to capture the cumulative effects of diverse social environments on individual development. This aligns with broader discussions on resilience in the literature, which emphasise the importance of supportive relationships and positive interactions across multiple settings in mitigating adversity. Through this lens, the research offers a comprehensive analysis of the complex experiences of Black Caribbean pupils, addressing the range of factors influencing their academic performance and overall wellbeing. Furthermore, the integration of grounded theory within this framework allows the author to transcend the limitations of pre-existing theories, generating new insights directly informed by the data collected. This approach is particularly valuable for addressing the unique challenges faced by Black Caribbean pupils,

providing a nuanced theoretical understanding of the factors shaping their academic trajectories.

The application of grounded theory is enriched by the inclusion of a phenomenological approach within the eco-systemic framework. This methodological choice enables a deeper exploration of participants' lived experiences, revealing how they perceive and interpret their educational journeys. Phenomenology, with its focus on individual perception and meaning-making, is instrumental in uncovering the personal and contextual factors influencing educational outcomes. It allows the study to capture the complexity of participants' experiences, offering a detailed understanding of the elements that promote resilience and academic success. This dual focus ensures that the study not only examines external influences on educational outcomes but also incorporates the subjective perspectives of pupils, providing a holistic view of the issues at hand.

By integrating the eco-systemic framework with grounded theory and phenomenology, the author constructs a robust theoretical approach that illuminates the educational experiences of Black Caribbean pupils. This combination facilitates a detailed analysis of the interactions between different social environments and their impact on individual development, with particular attention to resilience and vulnerability dynamics. The study's findings contribute to a richer understanding of the factors that support or hinder academic achievement among these pupils, offering a foundation for future research and policy development.

3.2.2 Wright (2010) Othering Difference: Framing Identities and Representation in Black Children's Schooling in the British Context

In this study, the theoretical approach is grounded in intersectionality, Whiteness, and the interplay of race, class, and gender within education. Intersectionality serves as a core lens, examining how social identities such as race, gender, class, and sexuality converge to shape experiences of privilege and discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This approach allows the study to critically address the underperformance and overrepresentation of Black students in school exclusions within the British educational system. Drawing on foundational work by scholars like Bell Hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw, the research

emphasises how intersecting social categories create compounded marginalisation for Black students, particularly males, in predominantly White educational spaces.

The relational nature of intersectionality is a key focus of the study, moving beyond an additive view of social categories to explore how they interact dynamically. This perspective illuminates the compounded vulnerabilities Black male students face, where the intersection of race and gender heightens marginalisation and adversely affects educational outcomes. Such a framework captures the intricate layers of discrimination and underscores the need for analytical tools that reflect the multifaceted nature of social inequities.

Whiteness theory is integrated into the framework, enriching the analysis by examining how Whiteness functions as an invisible yet dominant cultural norm that sustains racial privilege and systemic inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Within educational settings, Whiteness shapes curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional practices, disadvantaging racialised students while upholding systemic barriers. This critique of Whiteness aligns with broader literature exposing how educational institutions reinforce structural inequalities. By intertwining Whiteness with intersectionality, the study deepens its exploration of systemic barriers that disproportionately impact Black students, offering a robust critique of the structures that maintain inequality.

Additionally, the framework incorporates postmodern perspectives on difference and identity, challenging fixed notions of social categories. This approach highlights identities' fluid and constructed nature, shaped by specific social, historical, and cultural contexts. By adopting a postmodern lens, the research delves into the dynamic processes of identity formation among Black students, revealing how they navigate within an educational system often hostile to their existence. This perspective adds depth to the analysis, providing nuanced insights into the lived experiences of these students and the systemic challenges they face.

In relation to my study, I chose to adopt a theoretical framework—blending intersectionality, critiques of Whiteness, and postmodern theories of identity—offers a comprehensive analysis of the systemic inequalities within the British education system. This approach illuminates the barriers Black students encounter and calls attention to the root causes of these disparities.

The key focus of this study is analysing the educational trajectories of Black Caribbean males in English secondary schools and their transition into early adulthood, understanding the education system's role in shaping the phenomenon of social disaffection among this demographic. Through the lenses of race, gender, and school environmental factors, the study examines the implications of these experiences. Two foundational theories underpin this analysis: critical race theory (CRT), with its emphasis on concepts such as intersectionality, normalised racism, and Whiteness, and ecological systems theory (EST). Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for identifying key constructs and interpreting the complex interactions that influence educational outcomes and experiences.

3.2.3 Critical Race Theory

CRT, emerging within legal studies in the late 20th century, has become a crucial framework across various disciplines, particularly social sciences. Pioneered by scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado, CRT represented a shift from traditional civil rights approaches that often failed to critically address systemic racial inequalities, as highlighted by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Delgado and Stefancic (2017). Their work emphasised that racism is not merely an individual issue but is deeply embedded in societal institutions, making it a pervasive and normalised phenomenon. This insight reshaped how scholars examine race, moving beyond overt acts of discrimination to explore how racism is perpetuated through laws, policies, and institutional practices.

CRT, at its core, posits that racial inequality is not an outdated issue, but a persistent and evolving challenge. Researchers utilising CRT seek to uncover the often-hidden mechanisms through which societal structures perpetuate racial discrimination. As Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argue, these mechanisms are deeply entrenched in societal norms and practices, which subtly sustain racial disparities. By applying CRT, scholars aim to reveal how systemic racism operates beneath the surface of seemingly neutral policies, thus maintaining racial hierarchies. This approach is particularly useful in sectors such as education, criminal justice, and healthcare, where institutional frameworks can obscure the role of race in perpetuating inequality (Briggs et al., 2018; Hylton, 2012; Warmington, 2019; Yosso et al., 2022).

In the context of this research, CRT provides a valuable lens through which to explore the role of race in shaping the experiences of Black Caribbean males. The theory allows for a

critical examination of both micro-level interactions and broader systemic structures that contribute to the marginalisation of these students. By examining the intersection of race, power, and privilege, CRT facilitates a deeper understanding of how institutional practices within education may foster disaffection among Black Caribbean boys. This theoretical lens enables the research to move beyond surface-level observations and delve into the structural mechanisms that could perpetuate racial inequalities within the education system. I have incorporated three key concepts of CRT: intersectionality, Whiteness theory and the normalisation of racism.

3.2.3.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality, introduced through critical legal studies in the 1980s by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Yuval-Davis, 2006), posits that individuals' identities are shaped by multiple social factors, including race, gender, and class intersecting to influence their lived experiences. Unlike frameworks that examine identities independently, intersectionality focuses on how these identities interact, often leading to compounded forms of oppression or privilege (Bhopal & Preston, 2011). This framework is particularly effective for understanding the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys, as their social identities intersect in ways that create unique challenges within the school system.

In social research, intersectionality is used to analyse how overlapping social identities impact access to resources and opportunities. By examining the intersections of race, gender, and class, this approach enables researchers to investigate how various forms of discrimination and privilege collectively influence life trajectories. Intersectionality has been widely applied in studies across healthcare, labour markets, and education, where it helps reveal the complexities of social inequality and power dynamics (Baskin-Sommers et al., 2013; Byrd & Hughey, 2015; Flippen, 2014; Woodhams et al., 2015).

In this study, intersectionality provides a crucial framework for analysing the compounded challenges faced by Black Caribbean boys in education. By focusing on how race, gender, and class converge, the research offers a deeper understanding of the barriers these students face, supporting the need for policies and practices that address the complexity of their social identities.

3.2.3.2 Whiteness Theory

Whiteness theory also plays a significant role in this research, particularly in examining questions on how racial hierarchies might be maintained within the education system. This theory focuses on the social construction of Whiteness as a racial category and its role in perpetuating racial inequalities. As Frankenberg (1993) and McIntosh (1989) argue, other racial identities are often measured against the normative standard of Whiteness, which obscures the privileges associated with being White, allowing them to go unexamined and unchallenged. Whiteness theory seeks to deconstruct these privileges, revealing how institutions and systems reinforce and perpetuate racial hierarchies (Lipsitz, 1998).

In the context of this study, Whiteness theory provides a critical lens for understanding how institutional practices may be shaped by unacknowledged racial biases. By examining how Whiteness operates as the norm within educational institutions, we can explore how policies, practices, and individual attitudes contribute to the marginalisation of Black Caribbean boys. Leonardo (2009) highlights how educational settings often reproduce racial hierarchies by maintaining Whiteness as the standard, which can influence the ways in which Black students are perceived and treated. This perspective allows the research to critically examine both micro-level interactions between students and teachers and macro-level systemic structures that perpetuate inequality.

3.2.3.3 Normalisation of Racism

The concept of the normalisation of racism raises important questions about how racial prejudice, discrimination, and systemic inequalities become embedded in societal norms and accepted within everyday life (Berdini & Bonicalzi, 2022; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). When applied to the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys, how might this concept help in exploring the extent to which both overt and subtle forms of racism become part of the routine functioning of educational institutions? At the macro level, does the normalisation of racism occur through school policies and institutional practices that, although often framed as neutral or objective, could support the continued perpetuation of racial disparities? Are racist beliefs and behaviours rendered invisible or justifiable within these systems, potentially masked by political rhetoric or societal expectations that diminish the significance of racial inequalities in education?

At the micro level, how might this normalisation manifest in the day-to-day interactions between teachers, students, and policy makers? Could it be that discriminatory attitudes and biases directed towards Black Caribbean boys are no longer perceived as explicit acts of racism but rather as routine behaviours ingrained in classroom dynamics and disciplinary actions? What role does this play in fostering exclusionary practices, disproportionate discipline, and lowered expectations for these students, perhaps without such actions being recognised as discriminatory? If this normalisation is part of the educational culture, does it contribute to a broader social environment that downplays or ignores the harm caused to these students? Furthermore, would a process of the normalisation of racism make it more challenging to recognise and address systemic issues that could disproportionately affect Black Caribbean boys? The concept of the normalisation of racism invites researchers to scrutinise macro-level policies and micro-level interactions that may contribute to inequalities.

CRT and concepts such as intersectionality, Whiteness theory and the normalisation of racism provide essential frameworks for analysing the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys. Each concept offers a unique lens through which to explore how race, gender, class, and power intersect to shape student experiences within education. These theoretical approaches are integral to the broader objectives of this study, which seeks to critically examine the systemic and structural factors influencing educational experiences and outcomes.

3.3.4 Ecological Systems Theory (EST)

Ecological systems theory (EST) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding human development within the broader context of interconnected social environments. It highlights how an individual's development is influenced by dynamic interactions across multiple social systems, each contributing uniquely to the developmental process (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Navarro et al., 2022). EST's strength lies in its ability to explain how various social contexts collectively shape individual behaviour and growth (Rosa & Tudge, 2013), offering valuable insights into the complex ways that social environments impact human development.

At the core of the theory is the microsystem, representing the most immediate social settings such as family, home, school, and peer relationships. Surrounding this is the mesosystem,

which encompasses the relationships between different microsystems, such as the connection between home life and school experiences. Beyond this lies the exosystem, which includes broader social influences that indirectly impact the individual, such as a parent's workplace. The macrosystem represents overarching cultural values, societal norms, and institutional structures, while the chronosystem addresses historical and temporal changes that influence development over time (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020; Tudge et al., 2017). This multi-layered structure enables an in-depth exploration of how different levels of social context interact to shape individual development.

Since its introduction in 1973, EST has undergone significant refinement. Initially focused on the impact of various social settings, the theory later incorporated biological factors, evolving into the bio-ecological systems theory. This expanded version emphasised the importance of dynamic relationships between children and caregivers, such as parents and teachers, and introduced the concept of proximal processes—recurring interactions critical to development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This refinement acknowledged the importance of repeated, consistent relationships in shaping developmental trajectories (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Navarro et al., 2022).

While Bronfenbrenner originally focused on the positive effects of proximal processes, such as early maternal engagement with infants, contemporary scholars have expanded this perspective to consider negative interactions that may contribute to long-term developmental challenges (Navarro et al., 2022). This dual recognition of positive and negative developmental influences offers a more balanced understanding of the theory, acknowledging that repeated adverse experiences can shape developmental outcomes. This is particularly relevant to educational disaffection, where ongoing negative school interactions may influence a child's academic and personal development.

When applied to the educational experiences of Black Caribbean males, EST provides a valuable theoretical lens for understanding the complex interplay between social systems within the overall education system, allowing for a layered analysis of both micro-level dynamics, such as teacher-student interactions, and macro-level influences, including institutional policies and societal norms. By examining these multiple layers, EST provides insights into how structural forces and cultural factors shape educational environments, ultimately contributing to student development. This theoretical approach helps explain how

broader systemic inequalities and cultural biases within school systems can influence the educational trajectories of Black Caribbean students.

EST remains a powerful tool for analysing how interconnected social-ecological systems shape individual behaviour and development. Its multilevel focus allows researchers to explore dynamic relationships between personal, social, and institutional factors. In education, this framework offers a comprehensive approach for examining how interactions across different contexts impact student experiences, behaviour, and academic outcomes. Though other environments like home and community are critical to development, this study specifically centres on the school environment due to its central role in shaping educational experiences.

3.2.5 Theoretical Framework Summary

The integration of CRT and EST to examine the educational experiences of Black Caribbean males is designed to help reveal systemic structures and institutional practices that may create and perpetuate inequities. This lens highlights the hidden power dynamics shaping these students' experiences, interconnected environmental factors, from classroom interactions (microsystems) to broader cultural and institutional forces across education (macrosystems), influence educational outcomes highlighting factors that support or hinder student development. Together, CRT and EST provide a comprehensive framework to analyse both race-related factors and broader systemic interactions, allowing for a deeper understanding of relationships between experiences within the English education system and disaffection among Black Caribbean males.

3.3 Institutional Habitus

3.3.1 School Exclusions Nationally

The issue of school exclusions in the English education system has long been a topic of concern for Black Caribbean communities in England, and while disciplinary policies ostensibly apply to all students equally, reality reveals a different story. Historical and contemporary studies alike emphasise that certain groups of students—those shaped by particular social characteristics—are disproportionately affected by exclusions. Vulliamy (2001) and the Timpson Review (2019) both highlight that Black Caribbean students, boys,

those with special educational needs (SEN), and children in care (LAC) are most vulnerable to being excluded from schools. These patterns, rooted in systemic inequalities rather than solely individual misconduct, underscore how race, gender, and socioeconomic factors intersect to marginalise specific groups. This disparity suggests that factors beyond individual behaviour play a crucial role, with systemic biases influencing who is more likely to be excluded from school (Panayiopoulos & Kerfoot, 2007; Timpson, 2019; Vulliamy & Webb, 2001).

Intersectionality, as defined by Crenshaw (1991), highlights how overlapping social identities—race, gender, and socioeconomic status—interact to create unique forms of oppression. For Black Caribbean boys, these intersecting identities exacerbate their vulnerability to school exclusion, as documented by Vulliamy (2001) and Timpson (2019). Black students, it is argued, can be subject to both racial biases and stereotypical assumptions about behaviour associated with their race and gender, leading to harsher disciplinary actions. The intersection of race and gender further complicates their experiences, as studies reveal how socioeconomic disadvantage intensifies the marginalisation that Black boys can face. This compounding effect cannot be fully understood by focusing solely on race or class in isolation; instead, it requires an intersectional approach that considers how these identities operate together to produce exclusionary outcomes.

What is particularly troubling is the continued vulnerability of students of Caribbean heritage within the school system. Decades of research, policy reviews, and educational reforms have done little to alter the exclusion rates for this group. In secondary schools across England, Black students represent just 6% of the total student population, yet they are disproportionately represented in negative educational outcomes, particularly exclusions (Wright et al., 2021). Despite ongoing research and policy efforts aimed at addressing these disparities, the patterns of exclusion remain entrenched, highlighting the systemic nature of these inequalities. Addressing the root causes of exclusion of Black Caribbean boys in particular, requires a more nuanced understanding of the social factors that contribute to these outcomes, alongside a concerted effort to provide equitable support for vulnerable student populations.

Central to the conversation on school exclusion is the role of teacher-pupil interactions, particularly in relation to behaviour management. Lumby's (2012) research reveals that students at high risk of exclusion often cite strained relationships with their teachers as a major contributing factor. While these students acknowledge their behavioural challenges, many feel that teachers view them negatively, exacerbating their sense of alienation. This perception of teachers 'not liking or caring' about them becomes a significant barrier to their engagement with school. However, Lumby's findings also suggest that students value teachers who demonstrate authenticity, provide support, and offer praise, highlighting the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in mitigating the risk of exclusion. Adding to this, Thompson (2010) discusses how schools often promote a concept of the 'exemplary pupil', which can marginalise students who do not fit this mould. This construction of an idealised student, often based on academic achievement, creates a hierarchy where students' worth is measured by their performance. In this context, student identities are shaped not only by academic performance but also by how they are perceived and treated by teachers and peers.

The collective findings from the literature suggest that the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys can be shaped by a complex interplay of individual, institutional, and societal factors. The intersection of race, gender, and class within the education system creates unique challenges for these students, contributing to their disproportionate exclusion and marginalisation. However, the resilience and success of many Black Caribbean boys, supported by family and community networks, demonstrate that with the right support systems in place, these challenges can be overcome. As such, the literature underscores the need for targeted interventions that address both the structural inequalities within the education system and individual needs of Black Caribbean pupils, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

To better understand these patterns, both CRT and EST can be used to examine the relationship between the mechanisms driving disproportionate exclusion. For instance, national studies such as those by Vulliamy and Webb (2001) and the Timpson Review (2019) show that exclusion policies, while presented as neutral, often carry implicit racial biases that disproportionately penalise Black students. These students, particularly those who do not align with dominant White, middle-class norms, are subject to policies and practices that perpetuate racial hierarchies. Panayiopoulos and Kerfoot (2007) similarly

argue that exclusionary practices could reflect a structural bias, in which the behaviours of Black Caribbean boys are pathologies, placing them at greater risk of exclusion. These findings suggest that exclusionary practices observed are not isolated, but part of a broader institutional culture that perpetuates racial inequality, aligning with CRT's focus on the normalisation of systemic racism.

At the same time, EST offers a multi-layered approach to understanding these exclusionary practices. At the microsystem level, interactions between Black Caribbean boys and their teachers or peers play a significant role in reinforcing or alleviating negative educational outcomes. Wright et al. (2021) highlight that Black students are often subject to harsher disciplinary measures and lower expectations, which contribute to their disengagement and alienation. Negative interactions, as noted by Blyth and Milner (1996), accumulate over time, deepening feelings of disconnection and pushing students further into the exclusion cycle. The cumulative effect of these everyday experiences demonstrates how school environments, shaped by systemic biases, can become inhospitable to Black Caribbean boys and reinforce exclusion. The research by Panayiopoulos and Kerfoot (2007) suggests that when schools fail to involve families, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, the challenges these students face are intensified. This disconnect between school and home environments amplifies the sense of being unsupported, increasing the likelihood of behavioural issues that may lead to exclusion.

Wright et al. (2021) notes that behaviours commonly exhibited by Black Caribbean boys are often labelled as problematic, while similar behaviours in their White peers are tolerated or dismissed. These double standards suggest deeply ingrained societal and institutional biases that marginalise Black students. The macrosystem offers a wider perspective on how societal norms and values shape school exclusion patterns. Societal expectations that privilege Whiteness and view behaviours outside these norms as disruptive are internalised by educational institutions, reinforcing racial biases. By considering school exclusions through this broader societal lens, it becomes clear how entrenched biases perpetuate exclusion, disproportionately affecting Black Caribbean boys. Finally, the chronosystem addresses the historical and temporal dimensions of these issues, revealing how exclusion rates are shaped by contemporary policies and historical legacies.

3.3.2 Race and Racism in English Education

The exploration of 'Whiteness' as a normative standard, contrasted with the 'othering' of racially minoritised groups, serves as a critical framework for understanding the experiences of Black Caribbean pupils in schools. CRT scholars, particularly Gillborn (2007) contend that the institutional racism embedded in the English education system is not a coincidental outcome but rather a deliberate construct. According to this perspective, policies and practices within the system are designed to maintain racial inequalities and uphold the dominance of White supremacy. By establishing Whiteness as the default, the system marginalises students from minoritised racial groups, creating barriers that limit their access to educational success and broader social inclusion. This notion of systemic bias is pervasive in the literature, pointing to a deeply entrenched issue within the framework of educational policy and practice.

Studies such as Blair (2008) and Warmington et al. (2018) critique the shift in government educational reforms from explicit anti-racist strategies to 'colour-blind' policies, which, while ostensibly treating all students equally, ignore specific racial barriers faced by Black Caribbean pupils. This shift is seen not as an oversight but as a deliberate strategy to maintain racial hierarchies, reinforcing institutional racism and the normalization of Whiteness. The gradual erosion of anti-racist initiatives, such as the cessation of anti-racist training for Ofsted inspectors, highlights a retreat from addressing racial inequalities, perpetuating educational disparities.

The literature consistently points to the fact that Whiteness operates as an unspoken marker of power and privilege within schools, with racialised groups being systematically marginalised. The persistence of racial inequities within schools suggests that the issue is rooted in higher levels of government, requiring a critical reassessment of educational policies and the ideologies that underpin them. As CRT scholars like Gillborn (2007) emphasise, there is a need for a more conscious and sustained effort to address racial disparities in education, moving beyond superficial equality measures.

The argument made by scholars on the exploration of 'Whiteness' as a normative standard suggests significant implications for the micro-level experiences of Black Caribbean pupils in the classroom and the broader education system. Within the classroom setting, this could mean that teaching and learning practices are shaped by implicit biases that position White,

middle-class norms as the default resulting in imbalanced practices by teachers that leads to alienation of Black pupils, and reduced opportunities for meaningful engagement in learning. The classroom, therefore, becomes a space where any underlying racialised assumptions influence teacher-student interactions, often reinforcing stereotypes and marginalising non-White students. In addition, the wider school environment, shaped by 'colour-blind' policies, may appear neutral but would potentially fail to address the specific needs and challenges of Black Caribbean pupils, compounding the issue by further contributing to their disengagement and exclusion.

At the systemic level, what this might mean is that the education system's policies and structures, which are influenced by these racial hierarchies, could perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage for racially minoritised groups. The normalisation of Whiteness within institutional frameworks suggests that reforms must go beyond superficial equality measures and actively dismantle the entrenched racial biases that shape educational experiences and outcomes.

3.3.3 Passive Structural Racism in Pupil Attainment

Academics in both Britain and America have explored systemic inequalities embedded within education systems, revealing that disparities are not incidental but are entrenched in institutional practices, policies, and a pervasive 'hidden curriculum' (Ball et al., 2010; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Graham, 2014; Kupchik et al., 2015; Lynch, 1989; Macrae et al., 2003). This hidden curriculum, which conveys unspoken norms and values through teacher-student interactions, significantly shapes the experiences of marginalized pupils.

According to the literature, racism in education is embedded in everyday practices like curricular content and assessment methods. Bradbury's (2011) critique of the pervious contextual value added (CVA) model offers a pertinent example. The CVA model, intended to account for demographic variables—including ethnicity—when evaluating pupil performance, was accused of institutionalising racial biases. Bradbury argues that by incorporating race and ethnicity as variables, the model reinforces low expectations for Black Caribbean pupils, effectively sanctioning disparities in attainment. This critique aligns with the work of scholars such as Gillborn (2007) and Blair (2008), who contend that schools, whether consciously or unconsciously, uphold structures of White supremacy, further marginalising pupils from minoritised ethnic backgrounds. However, academic

debate surrounding educational assessment is far from settled. While Bradbury (2011) criticises the CVA model for perpetuating racial inequalities, others, like Leckie and Goldstein (2017), raise concerns about the shift that went to the Progress 8 model, which eschews demographic and socioeconomic factors altogether.

The exclusion of these factors, they argue, risks overlooking the significant social influences that shape a pupil's academic trajectory. This shift in assessment approaches highlights a fundamental tension within the discourse: should race and ethnicity be factored into educational evaluation, or does doing so risk entrenching the very biases it seeks to address? At the core of this debate is a broader question about the role of race in educational policy. While socioeconomic status, learning disabilities, and language barriers are often seen as legitimate factors warranting adjustment in educational assessments, race remains a more contentious issue. Was the inclusion of race in the CVA model an attempt to acknowledge the role of racism in limiting educational outcomes? Or was it an inadvertent perpetuation of racial inequality? The subsequent move to the Progress 8 model, which omitted these considerations, might have reflected a political shift in how race is understood in education—one that potentially downplayed the impact of racism on student achievement.

The discussion of assessment models also carries broader implications for how the education system addresses—or fails to address—racial inequality. If race is no longer explicitly recognised as a factor influencing educational outcomes, the risk is that any forms of systemic racism in the system will continue unchecked, hidden behind the guise of neutrality. Conversely, incorporating race into assessment frameworks may institutionalise racial disparities rather than dismantling them. The complexity of this issue suggests a pressing need for further research and policy development that carefully navigates the balance between fairness and the recognition of structural inequalities.

3.3.5 Teacher Low Expectations, Teacher Bias and Stereotyping

The interaction between both the teacher and pupil, and its impact on educational outcomes is another research area found in literature, highlighting the significance of teacher expectations in shaping student performance. A key concept in this discussion is the Pygmalion effect, which suggests that a teacher's expectations can create a self-fulfilling prophecy that influences pupil achievement (Friedrich et al., 2014; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992). This theory asserts that teachers who hold high expectations for their pupils may

unconsciously modify their teaching strategies, thereby encouraging better performance. However, Friedrich et al. (2014) extends this understanding by emphasising the importance of personalised expectations. They argue that while a teacher's general expectations for an entire class may not significantly affect individual student outcomes, but the expectations held for specific pupils can have a profound influence on their academic progress. This highlights the crucial role of individualised teacher-student interactions in fostering pupil success and suggests that systemic improvement in educational outcomes may hinge on addressing these dynamics within the classroom.

Building on this, the issue of racial bias in teacher expectations is explored by Rhamie (2012), who examines how White teachers' stereotypes about Black pupils contribute to the achievement gap. Rhamie's research reveals that negative expectations, often rooted in racial bias, can significantly impact Black Caribbean pupils' educational experiences. This is particularly important in understanding how resilience becomes a pivotal factor in determining academic success among Black Caribbean students. According to Rhamie, Black students who demonstrate academic achievement often draw on external support systems, such as family, community, and cultural identity, to buffer against the negative impacts of racial inequalities within the school environment. This resilience, fostered by strong connections to positive Black identity and external resources, is crucial in navigating the systemic challenges posed by teacher biases and low expectations. Further supporting these findings, Wright et al., (2016) underscores the role of cultural and community capital in enabling Black Caribbean pupils to resist negative stereotypes and low expectations within the educational system. Wright's study highlights the significance of community Black-led organisations and family networks in equipping students with the tools to challenge and overcome the negative labelling and racial stereotyping frequently encountered in schools.

These forms of capital, identified as resistance and aspirational capital, empower students to navigate the systemic challenges they face. This research also argues that there are deep-seated racial biases in schools, where White teachers often construct perceptions of Black pupils based on harmful stereotypes. Wright's findings provide critical insight into how Black Caribbean pupils use cultural and community resources to assert their agency and achieve success despite the systemic barriers imposed by racialised teacher expectations, highlighting the critical role of community-cultural capital in the development of resilience

to navigate systemic racism in schools. However, while invaluable, it does not make Black students immune to encountering racial inequalities within the education system. Instead, it offers a buffer, equipping them with the social capital needed to confront these challenges. For students lacking such support, particularly those from backgrounds that might be lacking Black social cultural capital, the absence of these protective mechanisms could further exacerbate their vulnerability to exclusion and academic failure.

Similar findings are found in Wright et al. (2021). Their research challenges the deficit narrative that has long dominated discussions of Black Caribbean pupils by highlighting examples of success and resilience, and argues that a key factor in this success is the racial and social consciousness developed by Black Caribbean men. An awareness of the racial barriers present within the educational system, even in subtle or covert forms, equips these individuals with the knowledge and strategies needed to navigate and overcome these challenges. This focus on racial consciousness not only reframes the narrative around Black Caribbean male achievement but also offers a blueprint for understanding how resilience and awareness can drive success within a system where there are forms of racial inequality (Wright et al., 2021).

3.3.6 Trajectories of the Excluded

As pupils become disconnected from their educational environments, they often engage in behaviours such as truancy and disruptive conduct, further isolating them from academic success. The long-term consequences of school exclusions are well-documented, with research consistently showing that school exclusion contributes to a cycle of social alienation and disengagement (Blyth and Milner, 1996; Cullingford, 1999). Beyond the classroom, the effects of exclusion can extend into adulthood, as students excluded from school are at greater risk of disaffection and involvement in the criminal justice system (The Commission on Young Lives, 2022; Perera, 2020).

Arnez and Condry (2021) explore the relationship between school exclusions and deviant behaviour, specifically examining the 'school-to-prison pipeline' in the UK. Their findings suggest that exclusion often heightens the risk of youth involvement in criminal activities, particularly when exclusion isolates them from positive influences. Graham (2014) expands on this by introducing the 'hidden curriculum'—the unspoken lessons, values, and norms conveyed in educational spaces. They argue that the hidden curriculum, combined with

exclusions, reinforces patterns of social control that prepare students for criminalisation, a process they describes as 'pre-institutionalisation'. Williamson's (1999) framework of youth disaffection further contextualises this issue, categorising disaffected youth into three groups: those disengaged from learning, those involved in substance misuse, and those engaging in criminal behaviour for economic gain. However, Graham (2014) critiques this framework for failing to fully explore how school disciplinary practices contribute to youth criminality. Case studies and serious case reviews have since reinforced Graham's position, highlighting how exclusionary school policies often serve as a direct link to youth involvement with the criminal justice system.

The link between exclusion and criminality is further examined by The Commission on Young Lives (2022), MacDonald and Marsh (2005), Windle et al. (2020), and Perera (2020), who argue that exclusion fosters stigmatisation, leading to further deviant behaviour. These studies stress the importance of educators developing a nuanced understanding of the social contexts in which students live, especially the risks associated with repeated exclusions. They also emphasise how certain vulnerabilities, particularly racialised ones, can shape the ways in which young people are perceived and treated within institutional spaces.

Davis and Marsh (2020) extend this argument by applying the concepts of intersectionality and adultification to explore how racial biases contribute to the criminalisation of Black children. Adultification, which involves perceiving Black children as older and as less vulnerable than their White peers, often results in harsher disciplinary actions rather than safeguarding interventions. Windle et al. (2020) further illustrates how children involved in criminal networks, such as 'county lines' drug operations, are often misperceived as offenders due to their 'road mentality'—a defensive, streetwise demeanour developed for self-preservation. These misinterpretations frequently prevents professionals from recognising these children as victims of exploitation, further exposing them to harm (Davis and Marsh, 2020).

The literature makes clear that professional biases, can significantly heighten the risks faced by Black Caribbean boys. Arnez and Condry (2021) and Graham (2014) argue that exclusion fosters stigmatisation, while the hidden curriculum in the school setting further entrenches disengagement. Davis and Marsh (2020) highlight how professional perceptions

of Black boys as more mature or aggressive can divert them from protective interventions and instead funnel them into the criminal justice system. The relationship between school exclusion, deviant behaviour, and broader social systems reveals profound insights when examined through a theoretical lens. The 'school-to-prison pipeline' concept is closely linked to CRT, as school exclusions in England disproportionately impact Black Caribbean boys, serving as mechanisms that reinforce systemic racism rather than addressing root causes. For pupils, exclusions often create further isolation and an increase in vulnerability to criminalisation, demonstrating how systemic barriers perpetuate patterns of racial inequalities (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017), thus, deepening the marginalisation of Black Caribbean boys rather than mitigating the issues they face.

The education system frequently criminalises behaviours that diverge from White middle-class cultural norms. Whiteness theory clarifies how racial hierarchies within society continue to marginalise non-White groups by upholding standards that fail to recognise cultural diversity (Frankenberg, 1993; McIntosh, 1989). For Black Caribbean boys, often perceived through a deficit lens due to their so-called 'road mentalities' (Windle et al., 2020). This could also contribute to exclusionary practices that affect Black Caribbean boys, perpetuating systemic disadvantage.

EST further enriches the analysis by examining how various social environments at the microsystem level, direct teacher-student interactions significantly affect student outcomes. Negative teacher perceptions and biases can harm pupil behaviour, self-esteem, exclusion and academic performance. The mesosystem, which encompasses connections between school and home, also plays a critical role, as strong community cultural-capital can buffer the effects of negative school experiences. However, for those families lacking access to community cultural-capital, the challenges faced by students may be amplified.

3.3.7 Peer Pressure, Black Masculine Identity and Self-Presentation

The academic exploration into the underperformance of Black Caribbean pupils, especially boys, presents a broad spectrum of perspectives, with many scholars pointing to the persistent role of racism in shaping educational outcomes. However, there is a noticeable divide in thinking amongst scholars regarding the extent of its influence today. Tony Sewell (2009, 2015), alongside Sewell and Lott (2007), suggests that while racism was undoubtedly more overt and damaging in the 1970s, its power has diminished in the current educational

landscape. Sewell argues that a range of other factors—peer pressure, notions of Black masculinity, absent father figures, and the association of academic success with ‘acting White’—now play a more significant role.

He introduces the idea of the 'migrant mentality', a concept he uses to describe how some minoritised groups view education as an opportunity, often leading to better academic outcomes. This mentality, Sewell posits, has been less present among Black Caribbean boys, which may account for their continued underperformance. Robinson (2020) offers partial support for Sewell's claims, highlighting how peer pressure and self-presentation play critical roles in shaping the school experiences of Black Caribbean males. Their research emphasises that those who achieve academically often develop strategies to navigate these pressures effectively, carving out paths to success in challenging environments. Parents also play a pivotal role. Sewell (2009) argues that the research landscape concerning Black boys has been somewhat skewed, emphasising institutional racism, perhaps at the expense of examining the ramifications of absent fathers.

Sewell's narrative is not without its critics. Several scholars, including Rollock et al. (2015), Gillborn (2007) and Richardson (2007), push back against the idea that racism has lost its grip on educational outcomes. Delving into the complex interplay of race and socioeconomic strata, Rollock et al. (2015) and Gillborn (2007) underscore that possessing middle-class capital does not preclude race-related challenges for Black parents and their children within the education system. Their findings highlight how different minoritised groups are stereotyped within the English education system, with some benefiting from more positive perceptions than others. For instance, they argue Chinese and Indian pupils are often stereotyped as academically driven and well-behaved, which may, in turn, bolster their opportunities and access to higher academic tracks. In contrast, Black Caribbean boys are frequently subjected to stereotypes of underachievement and disruptive behaviour. These damaging perceptions influence everything from their placement in academic sets to the disciplinary actions they face, often leading to harsher outcomes (Gillborn, 2007; Rollock et al., 2015). These stereotypes, critics argue, create an environment in which Black Caribbean boys are systematically marginalised, with their potential overshadowed by societal assumptions about their behaviour and ability.

3.3.8 Role of Class and Race in Education

The debate surrounding the impact of class status on educational outcomes has been a topic of significant scrutiny. Scholars such as Ball et al. (2010), Thompson (2010), and Hatcher (2012) stress the urgent need for educational reforms targeting the deep-rooted inequalities faced by socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, arguing that socioeconomic status profoundly affects academic achievement and addressing these disparities is essential for achieving educational equity. In England, some recent studies challenge the notion that ethnic disparities in education are predominantly driven by structural racism. Instead, they highlight the central role of socioeconomic disadvantage, noting that students from minoritised backgrounds often outperform their White working-class peers despite facing similar economic challenges (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021). Reports like *The Forgotten: How White Working-Class Pupils Have Been Let Down, and How to Change It* (2021) suggest that White working-class children, long neglected by the system, have been disproportionately disadvantaged due to socioeconomic factors rather than race.

However, this narrative is contested. Many scholars argue that socioeconomic status alone cannot explain the educational challenges faced by Black Caribbean pupils. Strand (2011) and Rollock et al. (2015) emphasise the continued impact of structural racism. Strand's (2011) research demonstrates that while economic disadvantage contributes to attainment gaps, it does not fully account for the disparities faced by Black Caribbean pupils compared to other minoritised groups like Bangladeshi, and Pakistani students. Rollock et al. (2015) extend this argument, showing that even economic privilege does not shield Black Caribbean pupils from institutional racism. Middle-class Black parents, despite their resources, report encountering systemic barriers similar to those faced by working-class families, underscoring race as a key axis of inequality.

For Black Caribbean boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, the intersection of race and class creates compounded disadvantages. Rollock et al. (2015) and Wright et al. (2021) argue that these boys face dual challenges, contending with racial biases alongside economic hardship. Scholars like Bhopal and Preston (2012) further highlight how political narratives often instrumentalise the struggles of White working-class communities, using rhetoric such as 'Broken Britain' to obscure the role of White middle-class privilege in

maintaining societal norms. This framing marginalises both ethnically minoritised and economically disadvantaged groups, complicating efforts to address educational inequality.

The literature calls for an intersectional approach that considers both race and class in understanding educational disparities. This framework is crucial for addressing the unique challenges faced by Black Caribbean boys, who experience overlapping forms of discrimination. The tension between studies focusing on socioeconomic factors and those emphasising institutional racism reflects broader debates in academia and policy. Additionally, the literature cautions against homogenising minoritised groups under terms like 'BAME', which risk erasing the nuanced experiences of specific ethnic communities. These complexities underscore the need for policies that address structural inequalities while recognising individual challenges.

Ultimately, addressing the underachievement of Black Caribbean boys requires a multifaceted approach that considers the intersections of race, class, and societal forces shaping educational outcomes. This approach must bridge the gap between government policies and anti-racist educational frameworks to ensure meaningful progress.

3.4 American Studies on Race and Education

When examining the intersection of race and education in the United States, numerous studies have consistently revealed pervasive racial inequalities across various dimensions, including Black masculinity during adolescence, racial dynamics within the teaching workforce, and the links between school systems and the criminal justice system. A significant focus within this research concerns the implementation of school disciplinary practices, which disproportionately impact Black African American male students. Studies by Bekkerman and Gilpin (2015), McElderry and Cheng (2014), Rocque (2010), and Brown (2007) highlight the overrepresentation of Black students in suspension and exclusion statistics. These exclusions often stem from subjective, minor infractions, revealing systemic biases within the educational system that contribute to racial disparities.

Bekkerman and Gilpin (2015) identify a consistent disciplinary gap, showing that African American students face harsher punishments compared to their White and Hispanic peers for similar behaviours, perpetuating educational inequalities. McElderry and Cheng (2014) further emphasise the disproportionate rates of school suspension among Black African

American boys, noting that while African American students made up only 17% of the total student population, they accounted for 33% of suspensions during their study period. Their research highlights the persistence of racial bias, even when controlling for variables such as parental involvement. The authors advocate for comprehensive bias training, particularly for White teachers, to address these inequities. They argue that current disciplinary practices disproportionately affect vulnerable students, increasing their likelihood of criminal involvement and perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

The school-to-prison pipeline offers a critical perspective on these disparities. This theory suggests that punitive school measures disproportionately targeting marginalised student groups create a pathway from the education system into the criminal justice system (Noguera, 2003; O'Connor et al., 2017; Raible & Irizarry, 2009; Rocque & Snellings, 2017). Rocque (2010) explores how cultural and social class differences between minoritised students and predominantly White, middle-class educators contribute to these patterns. Misunderstandings arising from these differences often lead to stricter disciplinary measures, particularly for Black boys, as their behaviours are frequently misinterpreted through a deficit lens. Additionally, low teacher expectations further exacerbate disparities in how discipline is applied across racial lines. To address these systemic challenges, Rocque (2010) calls for targeted interventions, including cultural competence training for educators. They emphasise the need for teachers to better understand the cultural contexts and lived experiences of their students to reduce disciplinary bias. Such interventions can bridge cultural divides, promoting a more equitable and supportive educational environment for all students, especially those from marginalised backgrounds.

The body of research on school disciplinary practices underscores the pressing need for systemic reform, particularly due to their disproportionate impact on Black African American boys. Exclusionary policies, such as suspensions and expulsions, continue to limit educational opportunities for these students while simultaneously increasing their vulnerability to involvement with the criminal justice system. Several scholars, including Bristol (2017) and O'Connor et al. (2017), have explored the severe social consequences of these disparities. Persistent patterns of over-punishment combined with low academic expectations contribute to the marginalisation of African American students, undermining their self-esteem and motivation for academic achievement. This sustained marginalisation

has been linked to higher dropout rates and lower educational attainment, factors which increase the likelihood of future encounters with the criminal justice system.

More recent scholarship, such as Markoff's (2024) work on racial disparities in U.S. school discipline, shifts the focus from bias alone to the structural violence embedded within disciplinary systems. Markoff argues that the discipline gap is not merely a reflection of biased practices but rather part of a broader system of normalised violence disproportionately targeting racialised students. By tracing the historical roots of corporal punishment from Native American boarding schools to contemporary school policing, Markoff reveals how modern disciplinary practices continue to disproportionately harm Black and Indigenous students. This violence, Markoff suggests, serves to uphold White supremacy by maintaining racial hierarchies within educational institutions.

Markoff critiques conventional efforts aimed at reducing the discipline gap, arguing that they often fail to address the root causes of educational disparities. Simply reforming existing policies, he contends, overlooks the structural violence inherent in the system. Instead, Markoff posits that Black and Indigenous students are subjected to forms of discipline that are both extreme and spectacular—designed to marginalise and control rather than educate or rehabilitate. This analysis aligns closely with Pyscher and Lozenski's (2014) assertion that educational institutions often 'discard' students they cannot normalise, using exclusionary practices as a mechanism of systemic control rather than meaningful intervention. Markoff emphasises that this violence is not an incidental flaw but rather a defining feature of the disciplinary system targeting racialised students. Building on this perspective, Markoff (2024) draws from Dumas' (2018) critique, emphasising that genuine freedom for Black children cannot be achieved within the constraints of an inherently oppressive institutional structure. Addressing racial disparities, he argues, requires a fundamental rethinking of the role of violence in educational spaces rather than the mere reform of existing disciplinary mechanisms. Markoff advocates for the dismantling of punitive disciplinary systems altogether, envisioning an educational model that promotes equity and nurtures all students without fear or coercion.

Complementing this theoretical critique, Barnes and Motz's (2018) empirical research examines the link between school discipline inequalities and racial disparities within the U.S. criminal justice system, providing substantial evidence for the school-to-prison

pipeline. Barnes and Motz reveal that racial disparities in school discipline explain gaps in arrest rates between Black and White individuals. They estimate that if school discipline practices were equalised, the racial gap in arrest rates could be reduced by up to 16%. This quantitative approach aligns with broader findings, including studies by Rocque (2010) and Welch and Payne (2010), which emphasise how school disciplinary policies disproportionately target Black students. Barnes and Motz extend this argument by quantifying the long-term impact of exclusionary school discipline on criminal justice involvement, but highlight the role of implicit teacher biases, as explored in the work of Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015). These biases, which often lead teachers to perceive Black students' behaviour as more problematic than that of White students, contribute significantly to the disciplinary gap. To mitigate these effects, Barnes and Motz argue for comprehensive training to address unconscious bias within schools, emphasising that reducing disparities requires more than policy reform alone.

Ross (2023) offers further insight by exploring how implicit biases among educators contribute to the overrepresentation of African American male students in suspensions and expulsions. Like Barnes and Motz, Ross emphasises the role of subjective interpretations of disciplinary codes, highlighting how systemic racism becomes embedded within the day-to-day operations of schools. However, Ross takes this analysis further by examining the historical dimensions of racial bias in education, citing examples such as the Kaye Task Force in New York, which aimed to address racial disparities in school discipline but failed to implement lasting change. Statistics from a New York school district, where African American male students were three times more likely to be suspended than their White peers, further underscore the persistence of these inequalities.

Ross also emphasises the psychological and social consequences of school exclusion for African American students, noting that harsh disciplinary measures often lead to feelings of alienation and mistrust toward school authorities. This cyclical nature of punitive discipline reinforces a sense of injustice and marginalisation, ultimately leading to disengagement from education. Ross connects these patterns to the concept of the 'code of the streets', where marginalised students, feeling excluded by formal systems of authority, adopt alternative group identities rooted in resistance and defiance.

Synthesising these studies reveals a consistent pattern of systemic racial disparities within U.S. school disciplinary practices. Barnes and Motz highlight the measurable impact of unequal discipline on future criminal justice outcomes, while Ross emphasises the subjective nature of disciplinary decisions and their long-term psychological effects on students. Markoff critiques the structural violence underpinning school discipline, urging a fundamental reimagining of education itself.

3.4.1 The Role of Racial Identity in Shaping Experiences within American School Settings

The discourse on race and education in the U.S. emphasises how in-school environments, racial dynamics, and covert structural racism impact Black pupils and Black male teachers (Allen, 2012; Bell, 2020; Bristol, 2017). A recurring theme in the literature is the role of schools as cultural institutions that subtly perpetuate racialised perceptions, resulting in practices and processes that reinforce racism. Allen (2012) explores how African American adolescent middle-class boys navigate their school experiences, balancing social identities with academic success. This balancing act poses significant challenges, as their efforts to maintain an image of trendsetters and popularity put them at greater risk within the educational system. These risks are compounded by the racial stereotypes that White teachers and policymakers associate with Black masculinity and subcultures (Allen, 2012).

Bristol (2017) found that African American male teachers working as the only Black men in their departments were more likely to leave their schools due to strained relationships with colleagues and administrators. In contrast, Black male teachers in schools with at least four Black male colleagues were less inclined to leave, suggesting that schools with more Black teachers create more racially inclusive environments (Bristol, 2017). Bell (2020) investigates the experiences of White teachers in schools where over seventy percent of the students are African American, revealing how they undergo a process of racial awakening. These teachers, who previously saw themselves as race-neutral, began to confront their Whiteness when working in predominantly African American schools. Bell describes this awakening as a three-step process of ‘becoming White’, involving seeing, feeling, and being White. For example, a White teacher who identified solely as a feminist began to recognise her identity as a White woman when exposed to the lived experiences of African American students. Bell argues that this colour-blind self-identity stems from the privilege of Whiteness, which rarely presents barriers in society—unlike the experiences of African

Americans, who are often held accountable for the actions of their racial group (Bell, 2020). When comparing Bell's findings with those of Bristol (2017) and Allen (2012), the pervasive role of race in shaping daily experiences within educational institutions becomes evident.

Phinney (1990) offers additional insights by examining seventy studies on ethnic identity development. The findings indicate that:

- Ethnic identity develops over time through self-evaluation and decision-making.
- Strong identification with one's ethnic group enhances self-esteem and self-concept.
- Identification with an ethnic group marginalised by the dominant group often lowers self-esteem.

Phinney emphasises the importance of understanding the dominant group's beliefs and attitudes toward marginalised communities and how minoritised groups navigate social inequality. These insights explain the challenges faced by African American students and teachers in Allen (2012), Bristol (2017), and Bell's (2020) studies. They also shed light on the disciplinary gaps, educational underachievement, and vulnerability to the school-to-prison pipeline among African American students discussed in previous research.

3.5 Systemic Perspectives – Taking a Macroscopic View of the Educational Landscape

The awareness of educational equality for Black Caribbean children in Britain has previously been acknowledged, including the Rampton (1981) and Swann (1985) reports advocating for multicultural education. However, the 1988 Education Reform Act shifted focus to market-driven policies, sidelining anti-racist efforts (Gundara, 1986; Lynch, 1984). Scholars like Gillborn (2007), Rollock et al. (2015), and Wright et al., (2016) have all explored how racial biases and institutional barriers remain embedded within the educational system. These studies reveal that despite numerous reports and policy recommendations, barriers faced by Black Caribbean students have proven remarkably resilient. More specifically, Richardson (2007, p. 155) and Demie (2018) emphasise that entrenched stereotypes and low expectations from teachers continue to disproportionately affect Black Caribbean boys, further reinforcing cycles of underachievement. Recent work by researchers such as Godwin Sule-Pearce (2022) and Hamilton (2018) further confirms

the persistence of these disparities, demonstrating that, while progress has been made in some areas, racial inequality remains a deeply rooted issue within the British educational landscape.

Thus, the quest for equality for the Black Caribbean communities in Britain has been a complex and ongoing battle, as evidenced by the trajectory of key reports, from the Rampton Report (1981) through to the Macpherson Report (1999). Each has exposed the deep-rooted nature of systemic racism within institutions and offered pathways for meaningful reform. Yet, these efforts have often been stymied by shifting political priorities and a reluctance to engage with the full scope of institutional racism.

3.5.1 The Contemporary Landscape of the English Education System

The literature consistently highlights the profound impact of systemic neoliberal policies on England's educational landscape. Neoliberalism, an ideology advocating market-driven mechanisms, limited government intervention, and privatisation, has deeply influenced educational policies, reshaping school operations and cultures (Goodwin, 2007; Heywood, 1999). These structural forces significantly shape students' everyday experiences, providing a foundation for analysing institutional dynamics and their effects on educational fairness. Globalisation has intensified education marketisation, with international performance metrics becoming the benchmark for success. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) highlight how the focus on standardised testing and league tables prioritises accountability and competition. While these policies aim to improve standards, they often undermine qualitative, experiential learning, particularly in schools serving diverse and disadvantaged communities.

Scholars argue that neoliberal reforms have reshaped educators' and school leaders' roles due to marketization, privatisation driving competition, performance metrics, and managerial efficiency, profoundly affecting teachers, pupils, parents, and communities, (Thompson et al., 2021). Schools increasingly operate like businesses, with success measured through narrow, quantifiable benchmarks. This has led to a diminished emphasis on holistic educational development, as schools prioritise performance indicators over meaningful learning and personal growth (Hughes, 2019; Perryman et al., 2011; Rayner, 2014). These macro-level policy shifts have significant implications for the micro-level realities within classrooms, influencing how students experience education. For

marginalised groups, such as Black Caribbean boys, these systemic changes can intensify existing inequalities. For instance, the focus on standardisation and competition often overlooks the unique needs of diverse student populations, creating barriers to inclusion and educational equity.

Within this neoliberal policy context, educators and students experience profound pressures. Teachers must navigate a system dominated by managerialism and performativity, which often prioritises data-driven outcomes over genuine student engagement and relational learning (Ball, 2016; Grace, 1993; Keddie, 2015). For marginalised students, including Black Caribbean boys, these policies risk reinforcing existing disparities due to the historical structural inequalities embedded within the educational system. The prioritisation of standardised performance measures often neglects the socio-cultural factors affecting these students, such as bias in assessment, cultural exclusion in the curriculum, and the impact of structural racism. Critically engaging with these systemic forces is essential for examining how they shape both the educational experiences and long-term outcomes of vulnerable student populations. By framing the discussion around neoliberalism and globalisation, the literature offers insights into the socio-political factors contributing to educational inequalities. (Hughes, 2019; Perryman et al., 2011; Rayner, 2014).

In addition to this, the rise of multi-academy trusts (MATs) and the appointment of CEOs have introduced corporate management models, impacting both individual schools and the broader educational system, with scholars like Hughes (2019) describing the restructuring of schools into corporate-style enterprises. While advocates argue that this structure encourages collaboration and pedagogical enhancement, the literature presents a more complex narrative. These reforms, intended to modernise education, have often deepened existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting economically disadvantaged communities where schools face heightened pressures to meet performance targets.

Thompson et al. (2021) highlight the pressure on headteachers and educators due to increasing accountability measures tied to narrowly defined success metrics. Perryman et al. (2011) note that the promised autonomy of academisation has instead led to heightened scrutiny, particularly from Ofsted, exposing a gap between policy intentions and realities. Rayner (2014) examines how performance-driven mandates force leaders in disadvantaged areas to prioritise data over holistic student development, often compromising their values.

Grace (1993), Keddie (2015), and Ball (2016) argue that neoliberal reforms commodify education, reducing students, teachers, and parents to data points while neglecting education's ethical responsibilities.

A particularly concerning consequence of this commodification has been the rise in school exclusions. Macrae et al. (2003) and Adams et al. (2015) highlight how performance-driven objectives often conflict with students' socio-emotional needs, warning that exclusionary practices might offer short-term statistical gains but ultimately harm long-term student development and wellbeing. The Commission on Young Lives (2022) and Kupchik et al. (2015) call for re-evaluation of disciplinary policies, emphasising the ethical tensions schools face as they balance performance metrics with their moral duty to ensure inclusivity and support for all students.

Despite the critiques, some scholars identify positive opportunities within this reformed educational landscape. Keddie (2015) acknowledges that while neoliberal policies present challenges, they have also fostered some collaboration between schools, leading to pedagogical innovation in certain contexts. However, Ball (2016) urges caution, advocating for reflective practices among educators to critically assess the deeper implications of these reforms. He warns that without such critical engagement, the negative effects of neoliberalism—particularly for disadvantaged students—may continue to outweigh the limited benefits. The cumulative effects of these reforms have created a moral conflict for educators, who now grapple with the tension between a data-driven system and their professional values of holistic education.

Rayner's (2014) concept of 'indentured autonomy' captures this contradiction, where schools, though ostensibly independent, remain bound by restrictive accountability measures. This conflict is particularly evident in the rising rates of school exclusions, which raise ethical concerns about the education system's true priorities.

3.5.2 Anti-Racist Practice, Teacher Development, and Leadership in Education

Scholars such as Marx (2006) and Lander (2011) highlight the critical need for educators to reflect on how their racial identities shape interactions with students. The absence of such introspection in teacher training reinforces colour-blind ideologies that overlook systemic inequalities. Creating safe spaces for educators to engage in discussions about race and

Whiteness is essential to fostering equitable teaching practices and addressing the needs of racially marginalised students. Teacher training must critically address these systemic issues. Solomona et al. (2005) argue that integrating discussions of race and systemic racism into professional development is essential for breaking down the barriers faced by racially marginalised students. However, the persistence of colour-blind approaches in teacher training perpetuates unexamined biases, allowing structural inequalities to persist. Without targeted interventions, teachers may unconsciously uphold inequitable practices, reinforcing the very disparities they aim to challenge.

Leadership also plays a crucial role in advancing anti-racist practices. Tomlin and Olusola (2006) and Blair (2002) emphasise the importance of school leaders fostering inclusive environments that address racial disparities. Schools where leadership teams actively engage with issues of race and promote equity often see better outcomes for Black and minoritised pupils (Demie, 2018). However, some further suggest systemic barriers to career progression for racially minoritised educators hinder their representation in leadership roles, limiting their ability to influence institutional change. Miller (2016) highlights these barriers, introducing the concept of "BAME capital" as a constrained form of social capital limited by systemic biases. This contrasts with "White capital," which dominates educational leadership networks. These dynamics foster an "invisible Whiteness" that privileges White educators while marginalising Black professionals.

Moreover, Black educators often face "pigeonholing," being confined to roles focused solely on diversity and inclusion, which restricts their broader contributions to the profession (Blair, 1994). Additionally, for those racially minoritised educators who do manage to obtain leadership roles, intersectional compounding challenges emerge. The literature suggests that Black and minoritised ethnic headteachers face unique challenges, as they are often expected to serve dual roles as professional leaders and community advocates acting as a dual burden, coupled with the emotional labour of representing racially marginalised groups (Johnson, 2017; Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2012).

CRT’s critique of superficial reforms that acknowledge diversity without actively dismantling systemic racism comes to mind when assessing the above arguments. The literature collectively reflect CRT’s call for a proactive, anti-racist approach in educational reform, where institutional practices are critically examined and restructured. Whiteness

theory provides an additional lens to explain why institutional racism often persists, even when reforms are introduced. Parsons (2009) critiques the passive stance many schools take towards institutional racism, a phenomenon Whiteness theory attributes to the continued dominance of Whiteness as an unchallenged norm, examples such as 'BAME capital' and 'White capital' (Miller, 2016) to describe the imbalance of social capital in educational spaces. EST highlights the dual expectations placed on racially minoritised headteachers, who face professional demands within schools (microsystem) while also navigating broader societal expectations tied to their racial identity (macrosystem).

3.5.4 Contemporary Racism and Institutional Racism

The subtle and evolving nature of racism is a significant theme emerging from the literature. Unlike the overt forms of racism of earlier eras, which are easily recognisable, some contemporary forms of racism manifest in covert and insidious ways (Salter et al., 2018; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). This hidden form of racism poses a challenge in its detection and confrontation, creating the risk that educators, often unknowingly, engage in practices that perpetuate racial inequalities. As these educators operate within a framework of deeply ingrained systemic biases, their actions can reinforce existing divides rather than dismantle them, which very much support much of what has already emerged from the literature.

This further suggest that racism in education is not merely a social issue but a structural one that extends beyond individual prejudices and into institutional operations. The literature frequently highlights a narrative that English schools are embedded within a cultural context that subtly perpetuates racialised perceptions (Gillborn, 2007). Salter et al. (2018) offer a compelling perspective. They describe the ‘structural dynamics of racism’ as the ways in which daily decisions and societal biases shape and sustain racialised environments. Despite a general consensus within the literature regarding the systemic nature of contemporary racism, Salter et al. (2018) note significant resistance to fully accepting the concept of institutional racism. Unzueta and Lowery (2008) highlight that many, particularly in White communities, prefer to perceive racism as the result of isolated acts by a few prejudiced individuals. This perspective is easier to accept, as it locates the problem in the actions of a few, rather than implicating entire societal structures. However, institutional racism paints a much more unsettling picture—one that forces individuals and institutions to confront the

privileges that Whiteness affords and the systemic disadvantages it imposes on people of colour.

Daniels' (2022) exploration in *The Anti-Racist Organisation* reveals a narrative that supports some of the arguments made by other scholars in this section. Her work portrays the delicate balance organisations attempt to strike between addressing racism superficially and committing to genuine change, a balance that often tips in favour of convenience over meaningful action. Daniels describes how many organisations, in an attempt to look 'progressive' and responsive, opt for quick, highly visible adjustments—like updating policy handbooks, rolling out HR technologies, or increasing diversity appointments. Yet, beneath these surface-level fixes lies a reluctance to confront the complex and ingrained issues of systemic racism that continue to shape these institutions. Rather than promoting genuine inclusivity, Daniels' argues that these approaches shift the responsibility away from the organisation's leadership, allowing complex issues of culture and power dynamics to remain unexamined. Daniels' stance echoes the works of Ahmed (2012; 2007) who emphasises that genuine anti-racist efforts require a deeper, often uncomfortable examination of institutional practices that perpetuate racial inequities.

In the context of the English education system, you could argue that such approaches manifest in practices like prioritising GCSE scores and school league table rankings, which, while outwardly objective, often serve the majority population and place marginalised students such as Black Caribbean boys at a potential disadvantage. Schools driven by these metrics may inadvertently contribute to systemic inequities by concentrating resources on students who align with these standardised measures, leaving marginalised students underserved and unsupported (Gillborn, 2007; Warmington, 2020).

Valluvan (2016) expands on the above discussions by situating the broader context of neoliberalism. They argue that contemporary neoliberal thought tends to treat racism as a relic of the past, something that has been largely overcome. They critique the idea of a 'post-racial' society, suggesting neoliberalism obscures the persistence of institutional racism, making it more difficult to address. Suggesting that this perspective limits institutional efforts to address racism effectively, as it downplays or ignores the structural nature of the problem. In this context, racism becomes harder to detect because it is

embedded in policies and practices that appear neutral but perpetuate inequality through subtle, systemic mechanisms.

Consequently, racism persists in a paradoxical form: it manifests even without overtly racist intent, sustained by institutional mechanisms that privilege certain groups over others, often through deeply embedded racial stereotypes and biases. The result is a form of racism that exists without clear markers of racial bias, making it an elusive yet powerful force within institutions. Facilitated by the rise of colour-blind policies and educational reforms—which claim to promote equality by ignoring race—may inadvertently hindered schools' capacity to foster genuine inclusivity, as this approach to policy obscure the complex ways in which contemporary racism operates, making it harder to identify and dismantle.

Confronting institutional racism requires more than just recognising how societal structures disadvantage marginalised groups; it also necessitates grappling with the uncomfortable realities of White privilege. These challenges seem to be particularly acute in the English education system, which is largely shaped by White, middle-class professionals—whether policymakers, educators, or local authority officers. Their perspectives, shaped by their positions of privilege, often hinder meaningful engagement with the systemic nature of racism, making it difficult to enact real change.

Warmington's (2024) *Permanent Racism* further deepens the understanding of how racial inequalities persist in Britain. The evolution of racism into more covert, institutionalised forms aligns with Warmington's concept of 'postracialism', which, Warmington argues, serves as a politically convenient mechanism, allowing policymakers to obscure the systemic nature of racial disparities by reframing them through non-racial lenses such as class or geography. This critique complements Valluvan's (2016) analysis of neoliberalism. Both scholars emphasise how this reframing hinders meaningful progress, allowing deeply entrenched inequalities to remain unaddressed.

Additionally, Warmington's concept of 'contradiction closure' offers a critique of symbolic policies, much like the earlier discussion of colour-blind policies. Just as Salter et al. (2018) caution against ignoring race in institutional practices, Warmington critiques British policies that offer only superficial solutions to racism. These policies, often poorly enforced and merely symbolic, give the illusion of progress without tackling the root causes of racial

inequality. Warmington's use of the concept of 'postcolonial melancholy', borrowed from the work of Paul Gilroy, adds another dimension to understanding Britain's contemporary racial dynamics. He argues that Britain's lingering nostalgia for its colonial past fuels ongoing racial hierarchies, preventing the nation from fully addressing its structural inequalities. This perspective aligns with Bhambra's (2014) critique of Britain's failure to reconcile with its colonial history, which continues to shape the racialised dynamics within modern institutions. The inability to confront this history allows Whiteness to remain the default national identity, while communities of colour continue to be viewed as outsiders.

Whiteness theory helps explain the reluctance to address institutional racism, arguing that recognising institutional racism requires individuals to confront the privileges of Whiteness which clashes with the preferred approach to framing racism as a result of isolated acts of prejudice rather than recognising the systemic advantages Whiteness provides (Unzueta and Lowery, 2008). This reluctance reflects the discomfort of acknowledging how deeply White privilege is entrenched in institutional structures, so in education, a hesitancy to engage with the structural nature of racism would hinder efforts to reform schools and address racial disparities. Without recognising the role Whiteness plays in shaping policies and practices, attempts to create equitable educational environments are likely to fall short.

The literature demonstrates that racism within Britain has evolved into a covert and systemic form. It is deeply embedded in daily practices and institutional structures, making it difficult to address through traditional approaches that focus solely on individual acts of overt prejudice. Suggesting that to tackle these issues, we must move beyond individual bias and confront the broader structural mechanisms that sustain inequality. This requires not only greater awareness of the subtle ways in which racism operates but also a commitment to challenging the policies and practices that maintain it. These arguments suggest that contemporary racism must be understood as a systemic issue, shifting focus—from not solely individual biases but to institutional dynamics. Additionally, what the literature highlights is that particularly within predominantly White demographic groups, the reluctance to fully acknowledge institutional racism, complicates efforts to address these disparities (Salter et al., 2018).

3.5.5 The Role of Power

The analysis of contemporary racism highlights the necessity of defining and understanding the role of power to fully comprehend racism as a phenomenon. Lukes (2005) concept of power in his book *Power: A Radical View* (2005) offers a critical framework for understanding how power is sustained systematically in societies. Lukes critiques earlier models of power that focus on visible decision-making or overt conflict, instead proposing a three-dimensional view that includes shaping perceptions and preferences, making inequalities seem inevitable or natural. His concept of 'latent conflict' highlights unexpressed tensions between dominant and marginalised groups, evident in biased decision-making, unequal resource distribution, and inequitable policies. These tensions are suppressed by shaping desires, preventing recognition of systemic inequalities.

'Manipulated consensus' further explains how power operates subtly, where the absence of visible opposition reflects internalised dominant ideologies rather than genuine agreement. For instance, marginalised individuals may view systemic barriers as justified, even when biases persist, due to socialisation and controlled narratives. Lukes' idea of 'systemic bias' shows how power embeds itself within institutions, shaping priorities and excluding marginalised voices. Educational systems, for example, reinforce inequities through seemingly neutral practices like admissions policies or standardised testing, disproportionately disadvantaging racialised groups.

This framework is particularly relevant in education, where practices such as selective admissions, disciplinary measures, and teacher-student interactions can perpetuate racial hierarchies. Disproportionate exclusions of Black Caribbean pupils exemplify latent conflict, while manipulated consensus shapes lower expectations and aspirations among minoritised students. Systemic bias limits meaningful discussions of disparities, reframing structural issues as individual failures. Lukes' analysis underscores that achieving racial equity requires addressing these covert mechanisms of power. By revealing how institutions sustain inequalities through latent conflict, manipulated consensus, and systemic bias, his framework highlights the need for deeper structural changes to dismantle systemic racism and promote educational justice.

3.5.6 The Role of Parental Choice and its Consequences

Several notable scholars, including Chitty (2009), Cahill (2015), and Hatcher (2012), critically engage with the rhetoric employed by policymakers, especially in relation to parental choice and market-driven educational reforms. Their research highlights a long-standing belief within UK policy circles that expanding parental choice and improving access to high-performing schools would foster competition, driving up overall educational standards. This line of thinking is deeply rooted in neoliberal ideologies discussed earlier that view market competition as the key to improving public services, including education. Accordingly, parents are positioned as consumers with the power to choose the best educational opportunities for their children, thus creating a competitive marketplace where schools strive to meet higher standards.

However, as Lupton and Hayes (2021), Ball et al. (1996) argue, the reality is more complicated. While the idea of parental choice sounds empowering in theory, it has often led to unintended consequences, most notably the phenomenon they describe as 'social sorting'. Despite the intent to democratise access to education, these reforms have, in practice, reinforced existing social inequalities. Middle-class parents, equipped with both material resources and cultural capital, are much better positioned to navigate the complexities of the educational system. This advantage enables them to exercise greater choice, ensuring their children secure places in the top-performing schools (Ball et al., 1996; Lupton & Hayes, 2021). Such parents have access to supplementary resources—ranging from private tutoring to extensive knowledge of the school system—that give their children a leg up in this competitive educational landscape. The ability to engage strategically with the system, leveraging social networks and interacting more effectively with school administrators, further compounds the inequalities. Lupton and Hayes (2021), along with Kalfa and Taksa (2016), emphasise that the very policies intended to promote equality often end up doing the opposite—reinforcing class divides and perpetuating systemic inequities.

Middle-class parents, are able to exploit the dynamics of the market-driven education system to their advantage, further entrenching their privileged status. This reality prompts a critical reassessment of how educational reforms are structured and the ways in which they inadvertently reinforce social inequalities. While the rhetoric of parental choice promises greater autonomy and improved educational quality, it ultimately creates a system of 'social

sorting' that disproportionately benefits those already in positions of privilege, leaving marginalised families at an even greater disadvantage.

An intersectional perspective reveals the compounded disadvantages faced by working-class Black Caribbean pupils, shaped by a confluence of racial inequalities, socioeconomic challenges, limited parental resources, and educational policies that often benefit middle-class families. Educational disparities cannot be comprehensively understood through isolated analyses of race or class; instead, an examination of how these factors intersect for both the child and their parents is required. This broader approach provides a more complete understanding of the systemic barriers encountered by Black Caribbean families within the educational system. EST elucidates how these disadvantages manifest across various social layers—from the immediate family and school environment (microsystem) to broader societal structures, including education policy reforms such as parental choice (macrosystem) (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Navarro et al., 2022). This influence shapes the realities of how social class enables parents to leverage the advantages of parental choice. When these factors are compounded by race, they significantly impact a child's educational trajectory.

3.6 Research Gaps and Chapter Conclusion

Upon reviewing the literature, three prominent themes emerge in the discourse on the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys within English schools. First is the predominance of qualitative methodologies in many studies, emphasising the importance of individual voices and lived experiences. While these methodologies provide rich narratives, they also reveal a division in understanding the causes of educational disparities. One perspective attributes these gaps to institutional racism, arguing that systemic inequalities embedded within school structures create persistent barriers for Black Caribbean boys. A contrasting view focuses on internal factors, such as peer influences, conceptions of Black masculinity, and external influences like parental attitudes or paternal absenteeism. A third perspective emphasises socioeconomic status as the primary determinant, suggesting that class, rather than race, plays the most significant role in shaping educational outcomes. This tripartite framework highlights the complexity of the issue, necessitating multifaceted and intersectional approaches to address these challenges effectively.

Building on these perspectives, the literature illustrates the evolving nature of racial inequalities within the education system. Scholars argue that racism now manifests in more subtle, yet equally pervasive forms, making it harder to identify and address. This evolution coincides with a lack of continuous professional development for educators, particularly in equipping them to recognise and challenge nuanced forms of discrimination. Suggesting teachers and school leaders may lack the in-depth knowledge required to confront these evolving dynamics, creating a disconnect between their understanding and the realities faced by Black Caribbean students. Compounding this issue are significant reforms in recent decades that have reshaped the educational landscape, altering governance structures, cultural practices, and relationships between educators, students, and parents. These changes have created a complex environment requiring systemic and individual-level exploration to fully understand the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys.

Within this context, two key gaps emerge in research and professional practice. The first gap concerns the need for educators to better contextualise the lives of Black male students at heightened risk of disaffection. While this need is broadly acknowledged, much of the action remains generalised, lacking a gender, race-specific focus on disaffection essential for addressing the unique challenges faced by Black Caribbean boys. Moreover, there is a notable absence of research capturing the voices of Black Caribbean males who experienced education in England, went through a period of youth disaffection, which involved engaging in criminal activity, and later reformed to contribute positively to society. These narratives are crucial for understanding the full trajectory from education to disaffection to reform, yet they remain underexplored in the current literature. This omission limits insight into how disaffection unfolds and how recovery pathways are forged specific to this social group, presenting a critical area for future research.

The second gap pertains to methodological approaches in participant selection across studies. While diverse voices—including parents, high-achieving individuals, and those facing social exclusion—are often included, there is a lack of integration of these perspectives into a cohesive analysis. Without connecting these varied viewpoints, the resulting narrative remains fragmented, failing to present a holistic understanding of Black Caribbean boys' educational experiences. Adopting a more integrated approach to participant selection and analysis would enable deeper insights into the interconnected factors shaping these students' challenges and successes.

The next chapter outlines the methodological framework designed to address these gaps, contributing to a deeper understanding of the educational challenges faced by Black Caribbean boys in English secondary schools and their link to disaffection.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive rationale for the research methodology, chosen research methods, and research assumptions that underpin this study. The primary aim was to explore the relationship between school experiences and youth disaffection among second-generation Black Caribbean males in Sheffield, England, with specific focus on individuals who had previously experienced disaffection but since transitioned into positive life outcomes. The chapter opens by presenting the key research questions that guided the investigation, ensuring the study remained focused on understanding how educational experiences shaped participants' current trajectories.

The methodological framework selected emphasised the importance of personal narratives as the primary source of data, highlighting how individual stories could offer profound insights into the educational journeys of Black Caribbean males. Next, the chapter critically examines my positionality as a researcher and its impact on the study. Recognising the influence of my background, experiences, and social positioning was crucial, particularly when working with marginalised communities. This self-reflection ensured transparency and greater awareness of how positionality shaped both data collection and the interpretation of findings.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions guiding this study were also clarified, establishing how knowledge was constructed and understood within the research. This theoretical foundation was essential for framing the methodological choices and ensuring consistency in data analysis. A significant portion of the chapter discusses the rationale behind the selection of personal narratives as a methodological tool. These narratives provided rich, contextually grounded insights into both educational barriers and pathways to resilience, offering a deeper understanding of participants' lived realities.

Ethical considerations were central to this research, particularly when working with Black communities. Issues of trust, representation, and power imbalances were critically examined, with strategies implemented to ensure the research process remained respectful and empowering. Ethical reflection informed decisions around data collection, analysis, and dissemination, emphasising the importance of positive contributions to educational equity.

Ultimately, this study aimed to generate actionable insights to inform strategies for preventing disaffection among Black Caribbean boys. By exploring the experiences of those who had successfully re-engaged, the research sought to identify both the factors that contributed to their disaffection and those that facilitated positive educational outcomes. Three core research questions guided the exploration of these dynamics in depth.

- How can the English education system leverage the experiences of formerly disaffected, second-generation Black Caribbean males in England to help address youth disaffection within this socio-demographic?

- What impact do the broader mechanisms operating within the education system have on the educational experiences of social actors on the ground, and how does this impact Black Caribbean pupils?

- Is there evidence from these components to suggest that the education system contributes to disaffection amongst Black Caribbean males in England?

4.2 Research Methodology and Methods

The research design adopted for this study was an inductive qualitative approach, employing a mixed intra-paradigm framework that combined elements of both ethnography and phenomenology. This methodological choice was strategically selected to align with the study's aim of exploring complex, lived experiences, allowing for deep insights into participants' perspectives. By prioritising an inductive methodology, the research emphasised the emergence of patterns and themes from the data itself rather than testing pre-established hypotheses, making it particularly effective for investigating the nuanced, subjective experiences of the individuals involved. This design underscored the importance of understanding participants' unique realities within their specific social and cultural contexts, aligning closely with the core principles of both ethnographic and phenomenological inquiry.

A key component of the study’s methodological framework was its interpretivist-constructivist philosophical foundation, which shaped both the data collection and interpretation processes. This paradigm asserts that reality is socially constructed and

knowledge is co-created between the researcher and participants. By adopting this approach, the study sought not only to gather data but also to interpret the meanings participants assigned to their experiences. This philosophical lens was essential for achieving the research objectives, which aimed to explore the lived experiences of second-generation Black Caribbean males in the education system while uncovering the broader structural factors. The interpretivist-constructivist approach ensured the research remained sensitive to both individual narratives and systemic influences. The study employed a combination of phenomenological and narrative methods to collect data, ensuring a rich exploration of participants' personal stories. Phenomenological methods were used to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences, while narrative methods focused on how individuals construct meaning from their experiences through storytelling. The integration of these complementary approaches allowed for a nuanced, multifaceted understanding of the participants' educational journeys, making it possible to explore both personal challenges and systemic barriers.

To analyse the data, thematic analysis was employed as it offers a robust method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative datasets. Thematic analysis facilitated a systematic coding process, helping identify recurring themes and patterns while acknowledging the diversity and complexity of individual experiences. This choice aligned closely with the study's interpretivist-constructivist foundation, as it allowed meaning to be constructed from the data while respecting participants' own interpretations of their educational journeys.

Overall, the integration of ethnographical and phenomenological frameworks, supported by an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, provided a solid methodological foundation for this study. These methodological choices were essential for addressing the research aims, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences while maintaining a focus on the systemic factors shaping their educational outcomes. The following sections will further elaborate on the rationale behind these decisions and critically examine their relevance to the study's goals.

4.2.1 Researcher Paradigm

The researcher's paradigm forms the foundational lens for research, encompassing the core assumptions, beliefs, and values guiding the study's methodology and interpretation of

findings. It shapes the formulation of research questions, methodological choices, and analytical coherence. Paradigms are broadly classified as positivist or interpretivist (Grix, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Positivism, rooted in objective empirical observation, contrasts with interpretivism, which emphasises subjective meaning and social context (Creswell, 2014). Defining the research paradigm is vital for ensuring methodological rigour and contributing meaningful knowledge.

This study rejected a positivist approach due to its limitations in addressing the nuanced, context-driven realities being explored. While positivism's focus on quantifiable data can be useful, it often fails to capture the depth required to examine complex social phenomena (Ryan, 2018; Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). Instead, the research adopted a constructivist paradigm, prioritising subjective interpretation and situating knowledge within social contexts. This approach was well-suited to exploring the lived experiences of second-generation Black Caribbean males, enabling a focus on personal narratives and systemic factors contributing to educational disengagement.

The constructivist paradigm guided the use of an intra-mixed qualitative methodology, combining phenomenological and narrative methods to capture both personal perspectives and broader societal influences. Positivism’s focus on objectivity often reduces social phenomena to quantifiable variables, overlooking lived realities and structural dynamics (Tuli, 2010). By contrast, the constructivist approach ensured a deeper understanding of the participants’ educational experiences within systemic frameworks, aligning with the study’s goals of addressing inequality and marginalisation. This paradigm framed all methodological decisions, ensuring consistency and alignment with the study’s objectives. Junjie and Yingxin (2022) emphasise the influence of paradigms on theoretical and methodological decisions, while Ryan (2018) highlights their role in defining valid knowledge. Anchoring this research in a constructivist paradigm allowed for a rich, contextually informed analysis, providing meaningful insights into the complexities of educational disaffection among Black Caribbean males in England.

4.2.2 Inductive and Deductive Approaches

The inductive approach in social scientific research begins with a research question or an observable phenomenon requiring exploration, rather than a predetermined theory.

Researchers collect data using methods such as observations, interviews, or surveys and analyse the data to generate theories or hypotheses that explain the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This approach is particularly useful in exploratory research where limited theoretical frameworks exist. One of its primary advantages is its ability to generate fresh insights, concepts, or theories directly from the data. According to Marshall and Rossman (1998), Grix (2002), and Denzin and Lincoln (2008), inductive reasoning is foundational for developing new theories that can later be validated through deductive research. Audi (2011) also highlights the flexibility of inductive methods, allowing researchers to explore findings that may not fit within existing theoretical frameworks.

A key strength of the inductive approach lies in its open-ended structure, making it especially effective when investigating complex social issues. Starting with data collection rather than a hypothesis ensures that the researcher remains open to unexpected patterns or relationships. For example, in studies exploring disaffection among specific demographic groups, this approach allows for a deeper understanding of personal experiences, revealing influential factors that might otherwise be overlooked. By prioritising participants' voices, the inductive approach captures the richness of qualitative data, offering valuable insights into social and cultural dynamics. Its focus on contextual understanding makes it particularly effective for examining phenomena involving multiple social and cultural layers.

The inductive approach also plays a significant role in theory development. As the collected data is analysed, themes begin to emerge, leading to the formulation of new theories or hypotheses. This dynamic process enables the researcher to adjust the study’s direction based on ongoing findings, a flexibility that is especially valuable when exploring under-researched populations or phenomena. Grix (2002) emphasises that this adaptability facilitates deeper engagement with the data, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter. Emerging themes contribute to the construction of a theoretical framework, laying the foundation for future deductive research that can test the newly developed theories.

By contrast, the deductive approach in social scientific research begins with an established theory or hypothesis. The research process is then guided by the need to test the validity of the theory using collected data. Unlike the inductive method, which focuses on generating

new insights, the deductive approach primarily serves to confirm or refute existing theories. Researchers often start with specific hypotheses, derived from prior literature, and use empirical data collected through observations, experiments, or surveys to evaluate those hypotheses (Grix, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This structured method provides a systematic way to assess theoretical assumptions, making it well-suited for confirmatory research where existing knowledge is substantial.

A defining characteristic of the deductive approach is its structured nature. Hypotheses and objectives are defined before data collection begins, ensuring a focused investigation into specific variables. For instance, a study on social behaviour might begin with a theoretical assumption regarding patterns of disaffection under specific social conditions. The data collected would then determine whether the theory holds true within the study's context. However, this structured approach may limit the flexibility to explore unexpected findings, making it particularly valuable in combination with inductive methods for broader theory development.

Both inductive and deductive approaches serve critical but distinct roles in social scientific research. The inductive method is ideal for exploratory studies where theories emerge from the data, while the deductive method provides a structured framework for testing and refining established theories. Together, these complementary approaches offer a comprehensive framework for knowledge generation, combining the strengths of theory building and empirical validation.

4.2.1.1 Reasons for my Adopted Choice

When beginning my research, I adopted an inductive approach to explore the relationship between school experiences and youth disaffection among second-generation Black Caribbean males in England. This approach, which starts with open research questions rather than fixed hypotheses, was particularly suitable for a topic with limited prior research. The lack of studies examining how Black Caribbean male's transition from disaffection to professional success made an inductive method invaluable, as it allowed theoretical insights to emerge organically from the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1998; Grix, 2002). To implement this approach, I collected personal narratives through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. This method provided participants with the opportunity to recount their educational experiences and personal journeys in their own words, fostering the emergence

of unexpected patterns and themes. Participants detailed moments of disaffection during secondary school, contributing factors, and pathways to re-engagement and success. These narratives revealed insights I had not anticipated, demonstrating the strength of the inductive process.

During data analysis, I continued to allow participants' accounts to guide the research, identifying themes that offered fresh perspectives on youth disaffection. Participants frequently described feeling marginalised within the school system due to cultural misunderstandings and inadequate support. These organically emerging themes highlighted how systemic educational structures influenced their experiences of disaffection, emphasizing the value of inductive methods in uncovering nuanced issues. The inductive approach was particularly effective in addressing a gap in the literature: the post-school experiences of Black Caribbean males who overcame disaffection to achieve personal and professional success. By centring participants' voices without the constraints of pre-existing frameworks, the study illuminated the challenges and strategies of this under-researched demographic, providing new insights into their resilience and re-engagement.

This method also allowed for an exploration of whether the English education system contributed to the disaffection of Black Caribbean males. Participants' reflections revealed systemic issues, including institutional racism, cultural barriers, and insufficient support for Black students. These findings, grounded in lived experiences rather than predetermined theories, underscored the flexibility and value of the inductive approach in identifying systemic challenges. Ultimately, the inductive approach enabled the research to be built from the ground up, ensuring the voices of participants shaped the findings. This method not only enriched the understanding of youth disaffection but also highlighted broader systemic dynamics within education, offering valuable insights for addressing inequality and fostering inclusion.

4.2.3 Quantitative Methodology

In understanding the complexities of social research, quantitative methodology was often associated with a deductive approach, focusing on numerical data to derive findings. This method relied heavily on the use of standardised tools such as surveys, experiments, and statistical analysis, aiming to produce objective, measurable results. Researchers in this tradition test hypotheses or theories by quantifying the social world in a manner similar to

the natural sciences (Grix, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). By converting human behaviours and social phenomena into data points, the goal is to achieve generalizable conclusions that could apply across larger populations, enhancing the perceived reliability of the findings.

Despite the appeal of quantitative research, it has its critics. Statistical analysis, while excellent at identifying patterns, was often critiqued for its inability to capture the nuanced layers of human experience. The richness of context, personal stories, and subjective meanings risked being diluted when reduced to mere numbers. Therefore, while quantitative research provided valuable empirical insights, it was important for me as the researcher to remain mindful of these limitations. The method was undeniably powerful for broad trends, but perhaps less equipped to tackle the depth of individual experiences, which qualitative research could offer.

4.2.4 Qualitative Methodology

Contrasting with the precision of numbers, qualitative methodology thrived on the voices and experiences of the research participants. This approach, grounded in inductive reasoning, sought to understand how individuals constructed meaning in their lives. It involved deep engagement through methods such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, each designed to draw out the subtleties and complexities of social reality. Unlike the quantitative approach, which assumed an objective social world, qualitative research embraced the idea that reality was subjective and shaped by the perceptions of those living it (Grix, 2002; Bryman, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Pring, 2004). By engaging with participants on such a personal level, qualitative research offered insights into how individuals interpreted their experiences and the meanings they ascribed to them. However, with this subjectivity came the challenge of researcher bias. The close interaction between researcher and participant meant that interpretations could be coloured by the researcher's own perspectives. To mitigate this, reflexivity and critical self-reflection were essential components, which are discussed in more depth later, ensuring that the analysis stayed true to the participant's voice rather than the researcher's assumptions.

4.2.5 Research Philosophies

Social scientific research is informed by two prominent philosophical paradigms: positivism-objectivism and interpretivism-constructivism. These schools of thought dictated not only the methods chosen but also the way researchers conceptualised knowledge and reality. Positivism-objectivism, often associated with quantitative methodology, posited that the social world existed independently of individuals and could be studied objectively, much like the physical world in natural sciences (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022; Ryan, 2018). Here, the goal was to uncover universal laws or patterns governing behaviour, reflecting a commitment to empirical evidence and a deductive approach to inquiry.

On the other side of the spectrum, interpretivism-constructivism championed a more subjective view of reality, contending that reality was constructed through individual experiences and interactions. Researchers within this paradigm emphasised the importance of context, relationships, and meanings to understand social phenomena. Rather than seeking universal laws, the interpretivist-constructivist approach aimed to explore how individuals made sense of their world (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020; Tuli, 2020). This perspective, tied closely to qualitative methodology, acknowledged that research was a collaborative process, where both the researcher and the participant played active roles in co-constructing knowledge.

4.2.5.1 Epistemology and Ontology

The divergence between these two philosophical paradigms was rooted in their distinct epistemological and ontological assumptions. Epistemology, concerned with the theory of knowledge, questioned how we come to know what we know. From a positivist perspective, knowledge was something to be discovered, collected, and verified through observation and measurement (Audi, 2011). In contrast, interpretivist epistemology viewed knowledge as constructed through human interactions and experiences. It saw understanding as emergent, developed through dialogue and context. Meanwhile, ontology addressed questions about the nature of reality.

Positivists assumed that reality existed independently of social actors and could be objectively studied, whereas interpretivists contended that social reality was co-created by individuals and could only be understood through examining these subjective experiences

(Opie, 2004). These foundational beliefs guided not only methodological choices but also how findings were interpreted and understood. For me as the researcher, engaging critically with these assumptions before starting a study was crucial, as they would inevitably shape the research process.

4.2.5.2 The Role of Objectivity and Subjectivity in Research

The tension between objectivity and subjectivity was central to the philosophical debate within social research. Positivist-objectivist approaches upheld the belief in value-free research, where bias was eliminated, and the researcher remained detached from the subject of study. This perspective relied heavily on quantitative methods and sought to test hypotheses in a manner that was replicable and generalisable. On the contrary, interpretivist-constructivist approaches embraced the subjective nature of social inquiry, recognising that both the researcher's and participants' perspectives influenced the research process (Ryan, 2018). Here, qualitative methods and inductive reasoning were often employed, with the goal of exploring meaning and developing theory grounded in lived experiences. Each approach had its merits. The positivist model allowed for broad generalisations, creating a framework that could be applied across various settings. In contrast, interpretivism offered depth, focusing on the richness of individual experiences and the complexity of human behaviour. Researchers needed to carefully evaluate their objectives and select the approach that most effectively aligned with their research goals.

Social scientific research operates within two primary frameworks: inductive and deductive reasoning, translated into qualitative and quantitative methodologies. These methodologies were not merely tools but were grounded in philosophical traditions that influenced both the process and the interpretation of research. As a researcher I was tasked with critically assessing my own philosophical assumptions, as these beliefs would inevitably shape the direction of my research study. The ongoing debate between positivism-objectivism and interpretivism-constructivism underscored the importance of my own epistemological and ontological awareness, and their role in shaping my choice of research approaches. By engaging deeply with these philosophical underpinnings, I ensured that my work was methodologically robust, capable of contributing meaningfully to the understanding of the social world.

4.2.5.3 Research Philosophy in Relation to This Study

In embarking on this research journey, I embraced an interpretivist-constructivist philosophical framework, a natural fit for how I perceive the world and the way knowledge emerges. I recognised that knowledge is not something static, waiting to be discovered, but rather, it is co-constructed through human interactions and shaped by our lived experiences. This approach, grounded in subjectivity and context, stood in direct contrast to the positivist-objectivist paradigm, which holds that reality exists independently of social actors and can be measured through objective, empirical methods (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022; Ryan, 2018). The positivist model, often associated with quantitative research, relies on deductive reasoning to uncover universal laws governing human behaviour. However, my research into the disaffection and re-engagement of Black Caribbean males required a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the individual and collective experiences that shape reality. The interpretivist-constructivist framework, which values the subjective meanings that people assign to their experiences, was more suited to exploring the complex social and cultural contexts in which my participants' lives unfolded (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

This philosophical stance not only informed but deeply shaped my methodological approach. Also by grounding my research in CRT and EST, I could interrogate the broader social systems and power structures that influence individual experiences. CRT, in particular, provided a critical lens for understanding how systemic racism is woven into the fabric of educational institutions, often leading to the exclusion and marginalisation of Black Caribbean pupils (Demie, 2021). Meanwhile, EST helped me explore the multiple layers of influence—from the immediate environments of family and school to broader societal structures—that shape educational outcomes. My position as a researcher, especially as someone sharing racial and cultural ties with my participants, required epistemological reflexivity. I had to be continually aware of how my own identity and positionality shaped the knowledge we were co-creating during this process (Bhopal & Preston, 2012). This awareness was crucial to acknowledging the power dynamics inherent in the research process, particularly as I navigated the delicate balance of being both an insider and an observer.

The interpretivist-constructivist approach also aligned seamlessly with the qualitative research design I adopted, particularly the use of narrative interviews and focus groups.

These methods allowed me to centre the voices of Black Caribbean males who had been marginalised within the educational system, offering them the space to narrate their personal stories of disaffection and eventual re-engagement. The richness of these narratives was essential to my research, as it revealed not only the participants' individual journeys but also the broader societal structures that shaped their experiences. For Group A, comprising disaffected Black Caribbean males, the narrative method allowed them to reflect on the meanings they attributed to their educational pathways and to articulate how they navigated both personal and systemic barriers. This method underscored my belief that reality is contextually constructed, and that each individual's perspective provides valuable insight into the larger social systems at play (Opie, 2004).

A pivotal moment in my research process came during the pilot focus groups conducted with retired Black males from education and youth work professional backgrounds. Their retirement offered them a sense of freedom that allowed for more candid reflections on the experiences they had witnessed throughout their careers. No longer constrained by professional obligations, these men spoke openly about working within the educational system and youth work sector. This insight not only deepened my understanding of the entrenched nature of institutional racism but also reinforced the importance of including participants who had the distance and perspective to offer unfiltered reflections. Their experiences illuminated the importance of studying systemic inequities from a variety of vantage points, further solidifying the value of qualitative research methods in this study.

My research was also profoundly influenced by the broader social and political landscape in which it was conducted. The COVID-19 lockdown, the murder of George Floyd, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement created a backdrop of heightened awareness around issues of race and injustice. During this time, there was a surge in public discourse about racism, which undoubtedly impacted my participants' willingness to engage in deep, critical conversations about their own experiences. The use of Zoom for interviews during this period facilitated more intimate and reflective dialogues, providing a platform where participants felt safe to express their thoughts and feelings on systemic racism in education. Concurrently, the Sheffield Race Equality Commission was conducting its own inquiries into racial inequality, further fuelling local conversations and encouraging participants to actively engage with the themes of my research. These external factors created an

environment that was particularly conducive to exploring issues of race and education with a heightened sense of urgency and relevance.

These external events also underscored the contextual nature of knowledge. The social and political climate of the time directly shaped the narratives my participants shared, reinforcing the constructivist view that knowledge is not simply discovered but is actively shaped by the contexts in which it is produced (Tuli, 2010). The interpretivist-constructivist paradigm became indispensable for understanding how these external forces influenced both the research process and the participants' willingness to reflect critically on their experiences. The heightened awareness of racial issues during this period provided an important context for the knowledge co-construction that occurred throughout my research.

4.3 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

When I began this research, I recognised that my assumptions, like those of any researcher, were embedded in personal paradigms shaped by social, economic, and political influences, alongside my beliefs and values. Ryan (2018) emphasises how these paradigms directly affect the selection of research methods and the interpretation of findings. Similarly, Greenbank (2003), drawing on Ball-Rokeach's (1973) work, argues that a researcher's paradigms and methodological choices are deeply intertwined, with personal values guiding decisions on which methods will yield the most meaningful results. This connection is critical when considering researcher positionality, which highlights how beliefs, values, and experiences influence the entire research process. Unlike the positivist-objectivist paradigm, which promotes detachment, positionality suggests that the researcher plays a central role in shaping the inquiry.

The debate over whether research can be truly objective has long existed in social sciences. Many scholars contend that complete objectivity is unrealistic, as researchers' social class, gender, race, and cultural background inevitably influence the entire research process, from the selection of topics to data interpretation. Holmes (2020) defines positionality as a researcher's personal worldview, while Bourke (2014) further explains that this worldview shapes how social phenomena are interpreted. The interpretive-constructivist paradigm, often associated with Weber (1949), posits that subjectivity can be a valuable tool for rich data analysis when openly acknowledged and critically managed. However, maintaining

transparency about the researcher's positionality is essential to ensure the integrity of the research.

In my case, my research topic was driven by a desire to promote positive change within the educational system, specifically regarding school inclusion. My professional background working with young people at risk of disaffection significantly shaped my worldview. As a Black male of Caribbean heritage from a working-class background, my perspective on educational challenges was further influenced by personal experiences of underachievement in school, despite regular attendance. While I did not experience school exclusion personally, I navigated periods of disaffection and witnessed more severe outcomes, including incarceration among family members and close friends. These experiences, combined with my professional work in educational and community settings with disaffected youth, directly informed my assumptions and values throughout this research.

To ensure my positionality did not compromise the study's integrity, I employed a structured reflexivity framework. Reflexivity, as described by Holmes (2020), involves continuously examining how personal biases and assumptions may influence the research process. This practice encouraged me to critically assess my position, ensuring that my experiences were acknowledged without dominating the findings. Regular self-reflection was key to maintaining rigour, allowing me to engage with the data in a way that was both critical and empathetic while managing potential biases.

The choice of research design was carefully considered in alignment with these principles. I evaluated both the positivist-objectivist and interpretive-constructivist paradigms from an ontological perspective. The positivist paradigm, which assumes an objective reality that can be measured independently, did not align with my study's focus on subjective experiences. Instead, the interpretive-constructivist approach, which views reality as socially constructed and shaped by interactions, provided a better framework for examining the complex educational experiences of Black Caribbean males. Scholars such as Ryan (2018) and Bourke (2014) emphasise that this paradigm offers the depth needed to effectively understand social inequalities and systemic challenges.

Recognising and addressing my positionality was essential for ensuring the credibility of this study. Engaging in reflexivity throughout the research process allowed me to remain

aware of how my background shaped the study while maintaining a focus on the participants' experiences. This self-awareness was critical to conducting rigorous, ethical, and meaningful research that aimed to explore and challenge systemic inequalities within education.

4.4 Insider and Outsider Researcher

My role as researcher in this social scientific study was both dynamic and multifaceted, shaped by my research questions, participant selection, and the settings in which the study was conducted. Central to this complexity was the relationship between myself as the researcher and the participants—an interaction that could significantly influence the quality and validity of the findings. To navigate this, the concepts of insider (emic) and outsider (etic) positions have become essential tools for researchers, allowing them to critically reflect on their relationship to the subject matter and their influence on data collection and interpretation.

Holmes (2020) describes an insider perspective as one where the researcher is embedded within the environment being studied. For example, a care nurse conducting research on elderly care within their workplace would be positioned as an insider. This status provides a unique vantage point, allowing for deeper access to knowledge of daily practices, relationships, and cultural norms that an outsider might struggle to observe. However, insider research also risks introducing personal bias, which can lead to assumptions and unintentional omissions of critical observations.

Conversely, the outsider perspective refers to a researcher external to the community being studied. This position offers a sense of objectivity, as the researcher is distanced from personal ties and emotional influences. An outsider’s detachment can provide a clearer analytical lens, focusing on aspects of the environment that may be normalised for insiders. However, the outsider status can also limit access to the deeper, context-specific insights and require additional time to build trust and rapport with participants (Holmes, 2020). The balance between these positions presents both advantages and challenges.

Unluer (2012) argues that insider researcher’s benefit from privileged access, existing relationships, and a deeper understanding of institutional culture, which can enhance the richness of the data collected. Costley et al. (2010) further highlights that insider knowledge

allows researchers to uncover details that might be overlooked by outsiders. However, these advantages come with limitations. The proximity of insider researchers to their subject can lead to blind spots or the risk of taking certain observations for granted. Moreover, insider research conducted within familiar environments, such as one's workplace, can strain professional relationships if findings challenge established norms. To manage these challenges, Weber (2017) and Beals et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of researcher reflexivity and transparency. Reflexivity requires researchers to actively examine how their own social positioning, values, and beliefs influence the research process. This transparency not only strengthens the ethical foundations of the study but also enhances the validity of findings by acknowledging the researcher's influence.

In my study, I navigated both insider and outsider roles. As a Black male of Caribbean heritage raised in Sheffield, I was predominantly positioned as an insider when exploring the educational experiences of Black Caribbean males in the English school system. My shared heritage and cultural understanding helped foster trust with participants, encouraging open discussions about their personal experiences. However, my positionality was not static. At times, I shifted into the role of an outsider due to variations in social backgrounds and personal histories between myself and the participants. For example, while I shared ethnic and cultural similarities with my participants, differences emerged regarding socio-economic upbringing and family dynamics. Some participants had experienced social care, single-parent households, or early exclusion from school, whereas I had grown up in a two-parent household and had not faced direct exclusion. This positional difference required me to remain critically reflective, recognising when my insider status was limited and when an outsider lens provided a more objective perspective.

My professional experience working in education for over two decades further complicated this dynamic. While my background allowed me to understand institutional challenges and the impact of exclusionary policies on students, it also distanced me from the lived realities of some participants who had experienced school disaffection first-hand. This reinforced the importance of reflexivity—continuously examining how my positionality shaped both the questions I asked and how I interpreted participants' narratives. Ultimately, my experience as a researcher illustrated the fluid nature of insider and outsider roles. While my insider status allowed me to build rapport and gain contextual insights, my occasional outsider perspective encouraged critical distance and deeper reflection on the findings.

The ability to shift between these roles provided a richer, more balanced understanding of the participants' educational experiences, while reflexivity ensured the research remained transparent, ethical, and contextually grounded. Acknowledging and actively managing these positional shifts was critical to producing meaningful, credible findings that honoured the complexity of the participants' lived experiences.

4.5 Chosen Research Approach

4.5.1 Mixed Phenomenological and Narrative Methodological Approach

The topic of this study was inherently multifaceted, so required a methodological approach that could capture the depth of the participants' experiences and provide insight into the factors that influenced their journeys. The phenomenological methodology was deemed most appropriate for this purpose, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of how research participants made sense of their experiences in the context of social disaffection. As Churchill (2022) described, phenomenological research focuses on understanding social phenomena by examining the lived experiences of individuals and discerning the motivations behind their decisions, making it an ideal fit for this study.

The phenomenological approach was selected specifically because of its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of social disaffection as a shared social experience. This methodological choice was driven by the need to gather rich, qualitative data that could reveal common themes and patterns across participants' school experiences. By analysing and interpreting these narratives, the study sought to uncover the underlying reasons for their disaffection and how these factors manifested within the education system. The interpretative nature of phenomenology allowed for a deeper engagement with the participants' perspectives, ensuring that their voices were central to the research and that their experiences were not reduced to mere statistics or abstract concepts.

Additionally, phenomenology provided the tools necessary to explore the intersection of individual and collective experiences, which was crucial for understanding the broader implications of disaffection within the school environment. By focusing on the commonalities among the participants' experiences, the study aimed to identify the systemic factors that may contribute to disaffection among Black Caribbean males. This approach also allowed for a more nuanced analysis of how race, identity, and educational structures

intersected to shape their experiences. The methodology facilitated an exploration of the subjective meanings that participants attached to their disaffection, essential for gaining a holistic understanding of the social phenomenon at hand.

In analysing the data, the phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to move beyond surface-level observations and engage with the deeper emotional and psychological dimensions of the participants' experiences. This process involved identifying recurring themes and interpreting the significance of these themes within the broader context of social disaffection. By focusing on participants' lived realities, the study was able to offer insights into how disaffection was experienced on both an individual and systemic level, thereby providing a richer, more detailed account of the social phenomena under investigation.

My decision to employ a phenomenological methodological approach was instrumental in achieving the research objectives. It allowed for a thorough examination of the school experiences of Black Caribbean males, while also addressing the complex factors that contributed to their social disaffection. By centring the participants' narratives and prioritising their subjective experiences, the study was able to generate meaningful insights into a social phenomenon that is often overlooked or misunderstood. This approach not only aligned with the study's goals but also ensured that the findings were grounded in the lived experiences of those most affected by the issue.

4.5.2 Narrative Approach

The chosen narrative research approach was particularly effective for exploring the complex lived experiences of Black Caribbean males who had faced social disaffection. This method allowed for a deep exploration of participants' autobiographical stories, focusing not only on the events themselves but also on the personal meanings and interpretations participants attached to these significant life experiences. Churchill (2022) describes narrative research as a powerful tool for understanding social phenomena by closely examining life stories, which suited the aims of this study.

Two conceptual lenses anchored the narrative methodology employed in this study: relational narrative and autobiographical narrative. Relational narrative, the first lens, emphasised the intersubjective relationship between the researcher and participants. Given the researcher's positionality and the study's focus on marginalised groups, this lens was

crucial for building trust and fostering meaningful dialogue. The second lens, autobiographical narrative, explored how factors like race, ethnicity, and gender intersected with participants' experiences. Scholars such as Ntinda (2018), Patterson (2018), and Callary (2013) emphasise the significance of these social components in shaping personal narratives, reinforcing the relevance of this dual-lens framework for this study.

The narrative approach was particularly effective in addressing gaps in the literature regarding Black Caribbean males and their educational disaffection. As Ntinda (2018) asserts, narrative research is not simply about storytelling; it delves into how participants make sense of life events and social contexts. This was essential for the study, as it aimed to reveal not just the events of disaffection but the underlying structural and personal factors contributing to these experiences. Elliott (2005) and Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) further argue that narrative research constructs coherent, chronological sequences of events, enabling deeper meaning-making—an approach well aligned with the research aims.

A mixed narrative and phenomenological framework was adopted to explore participants' life trajectories in depth. Li (2020) highlights how such an approach facilitates a richer understanding of social phenomena by capturing both the lived experience and the meanings participants assign to those experiences. This study examined three key stages of participants' life trajectories: their experiences in secondary school, their post-school disaffection, and their eventual positive life outcomes. This framework allowed for a holistic exploration of how educational experiences shaped their life pathways.

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection methods, carefully chosen to align with the narrative approach. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to share their stories in their own words, capturing the full complexity of their experiences. To ensure data accuracy, all interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed using Otter, a digital transcription tool. Sharing transcripts and recordings with participants allowed them to review the interpretations of their experiences, ensuring their voices were represented authentically. This collaborative process of data co-creation enhanced the study’s validity by allowing participants to clarify or expand upon their narratives.

The narrative approach also facilitated a participatory action research dynamic, as Riessman (2008) notes, empowering marginalised voices to share their lived realities. This was particularly relevant in the context of this study, which focused on Black Caribbean males who had experienced disaffection and, in some cases, incarceration before successfully transitioning into positive life outcomes. By prioritising the voices of those often excluded from academic discourse, the research provided a platform for authentic self-representation and contributed valuable insights into how systemic barriers impact educational and life trajectories.

4.5.3 Research Participants

To maintaining participant anonymity pseudonyms were assigned to participants, or ensuring these names bore no resemblance to their real identities or any identifying details of the research sites, for Group C participants a general professional role was given. Both the BERA Ethical Guidelines (2011) and AERA Code of Ethics (2011) emphasise the critical importance of confidentiality

Participants were categorised into three distinct groups—A, B, and C—to allow for a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of Black Caribbean males and the broader educational structures influencing them. Group A consisted of fifteen Black Caribbean males aged 37 to 59 who had experienced significant disaffection during or before their school years, with 11 having served custodial sentences between ages 16 and 21. Despite these early adversities, all members of Group A had since reformed their lives and established successful careers in fields including business, education, youth work and mental health. This group formed the core of the study, offering first-hand insights into the personal and systemic factors contributing to their educational struggles and subsequent successes. To capture a diverse range of experiences, participants were drawn from different areas of Sheffield, ranging from socioeconomically deprived neighbourhoods to more affluent regions.

Group B, comprising nine second-generation Black Caribbean males aged 41 to 54, provided a contrasting perspective. These individuals were medium to high achievers in secondary school and, unlike Group A, had not experienced disaffection or criminal involvement despite growing up in disadvantaged areas. Including Group B allowed for the examination of protective factors and positive influences that contributed to their successful

educational outcomes, offering a comparative lens through which systemic barriers could be analysed.

Group C included thirty-five education professionals from various backgrounds, including and retired headteachers, current schoolteachers, pastoral staff, and further education (FE) professionals. Some participants also held experience working in Sheffield's local authority education sector, ranging from strategic leadership roles to operational positions and community youth sector. This group's inclusion was critical for capturing professional insights into the systemic and policy-driven factors impacting Black Caribbean pupils' experiences. Their perspectives added depth by shedding light on the institutional practices and policies influencing educational disaffection and success.

Organising participants into these groups allowed the study to explore patterns of agreement, divergence, and contradiction across multiple perspectives. This structure provided a rich dataset for critically examining how individual experiences intersect with broader systemic influences, deepening the study's exploration of educational disaffection among Black Caribbean males in England. Group A participants were the central voices in the study, as the focus was on exploring their lived experiences with disaffection and educational challenges. Notably, a gap in the literature existed regarding Black Caribbean males who had overcome disaffection and criminal involvement to achieve personal success.

My personal and professional connections within Sheffield allowed me to gain access to this underrepresented group, enabling the study to address this gap. I chose to conduct narrative interviews with each Group A participant, focusing on their school experiences, their transition into adulthood marked by disaffection, and their eventual positive life outcomes. Capturing their voices and personal reflections was crucial to contextualising their journeys and understanding the systemic barriers and personal turning points they encountered. This methodological choice was also influenced by studies employing narrative inquiry for exploring race and educational experiences, including Graham (2014), Rhamie (2012), and Robinson (2020).

In contrast, Group B participated in two focus groups and interviews with narrative interviewing, mirroring Group A's methodology. However, the emphasis for Group B was

on understanding the factors that contributed to their educational success, despite facing challenges such as growing up in single-parent households and economically deprived areas. The goal was to identify protective factors and positive school experiences that had contributed to their resilience and achievement.

Group C, composed of education professionals, was engaged through both open-ended individual interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews were tailored to the participants' professional roles, with senior leaders, including headteachers and local authority officials, interviewed individually to better explore their leadership philosophies and institutional practices. Focus groups with teachers and pastoral staff explored day-to-day educational practices and policies, offering a broader view of systemic influences on Black Caribbean pupils' experiences.

The selection of narrative interviews and focus groups for all three groups was informed by literature that captured professional and personal voices within educational research. Studies such as Marx's (2006) *Revealing the Invisible* and Rayner's (2014) 'Playing by the Rules' provided methodological guidance, particularly regarding the use of qualitative interviews to explore race, leadership, and educational reform. These methodologies allowed this study to authentically represent participant voices while critically examining how institutional practices and systemic factors influence the educational trajectories of Black Caribbean males.

The selection process for my research participants, particularly for Group A, developed in unexpected ways. Initially, I focused on individuals from the Black community in Sheffield whose personal histories I was familiar with, having grown up with them. However, recruitment expanded through snowball sampling, as several participants suggested others they believed would provide valuable insights. Some interviewees also referenced figures from their youth, described as 'older heads on road'—(older disaffected young men) who, despite their challenges, had served as informal role models. I was able to locate several of these individuals, many of whom were willing to share their stories, despite not being part of my original network.

For Group B, participants were selected from deprived areas of Sheffield. I focused on individuals I knew had achieved positive educational outcomes, such as university

attendance, and were working professionals. Like Group A, recruitment also expanded through participant recommendations. Group C comprised education professionals, including those I had encountered throughout my career and others recommended by colleagues or chosen for their strategic and operational roles within their sector.

The comparative structure of Groups A, B, and C allowed the study to identify patterns, contrasting perspectives, and occasional contradictions, providing a richer analysis of educational experiences. This layered approach helped ensure a thorough examination of how systemic educational mechanisms shaped individual trajectories. For data collection, Group A participated in narrative unstructured interviews to explore their life journeys. Group B engaged in narrative focus groups, with some one-to-one interviews, while Group C underwent both individual and group interviews. A total of 59 participants were involved, offering a comprehensive exploration of Black Caribbean male experiences, systemic disaffection, and eventual positive life transitions.

4.5.3.1 Research Participants' Pen Portraits

Below is a breakdown of the pen portrait profiles of the research participants; all names are pseudonyms, for the group C cohort there is limited basic information about their professional profile as more details would impact on their anonymity. I did not include the names of schools, streets and local residential areas.

Table three: Group A

Marlon (age 45)	Raised in a working-class area of Sheffield, Marlon struggled with disaffection during secondary school. After serving time in prison, he transformed his life and is now a working professional.

Paul (age 52)	Growing up in a deprived part of Sheffield, Paul faced numerous challenges during his school years. Following a period of incarceration, got involved in community initiatives he became a mentor for young people and is now a working professional.
Derek (age 37)	Despite a middle-class upbringing, Derek became disaffected in his teens. He turned his life around after prison and is now a respected educator working with at-risk youth.
Leonard (age 59)	Leonard's secondary school experience was marred by disaffection and subsequent imprisonment. Today, he is a successful business owner and a local employer.
Anthony (age 41)	Raised in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area, Anthony faced significant obstacles. After time in prison, he now operates a successful business.
Christopher (age 46)	Chris grew up in an affluent part of Sheffield but still encountered disaffection. Post-incarceration, he has built a career in education.
Ben (age 47)	Ben's early life in Sheffield's deprived areas led to disaffection. He now works in adult mental health, helping others navigate their own challenges.
Samuel (age 41)	Despite growing up in a middle-class family, Samuel became disaffected during his teenage years. He has since reformed and established a career in marketing.
Benjamin (age 48)	Raised in a middle-class neighbourhood, Benjamin struggled post-secondary school, becoming disaffected. He has since built a twenty-year career in supporting young people with special educational needs.

Lewis (age 52)	Lewis's disaffection during his school years in a disadvantaged area led to incarceration. Today, he is a respected figure in the education sector, working to support disaffected youth.
Nathaniel (age 42)	Growing up in a mixed-income area, Nathaniel faced disaffection and imprisonment. He is now involved in community outreach programmes.
Stephen (age 49)	Stephen's challenging school years in Sheffield's poorer areas led to a stint in prison. He has since become a leader in adult mental health services.
Gregory (age 40)	Despite his middle-class upbringing, Gregory struggled with disaffection in his youth. After prison, he turned his life around and now works in construction.
Harold (age 58)	Raised in Sheffield's low-income neighbourhood, Harold faced significant adversity. Post-incarceration, he has spent the past twenty-five years building a successful career in the NHS supporting people struggling with substance misuse.
Lawrence (age 46)	Lawrence grew up in an affluent area but became disaffected during secondary school. After prison, he reformed his path and has spent the past twenty years working in construction.

Table four: Group B

James (age 45)	James excelled in secondary school and pursued higher education. Despite living in one of Sheffield's most deprived areas, he has built a successful professional career.
David (age 54)	David grew up in a single male parent household in one of Sheffield's most deprived areas and was a high achiever in

	school, continuing to further education and earning a degree. He now works as a designer.
Kevin (age 43)	Growing up in a deprived neighbourhood in a single female parent household, Kevin thrived academically and went on to further and higher education. He is currently a successful manager working in IT.
Richard (age 48)	Growing up in a deprived neighbourhood in a single female parent household. Richard was a mid achiever and did not achieve the grades he desired in school, however, had a strong academic performance in further education and went on to higher education pursuing a university degree. He has since established a career in the media and now works for the BBC.
Trevor (age 45)	Despite the challenges of living in a deprived area, Trevor achieved well in school and higher education. He is now a respected mechanical engineering professional.
Patrick (age 52)	Patrick did not excel academically in secondary school and was a mid-level achiever, however, he pursued further and higher education, and now works in a local authority as a manager in regeneration.
Clarke (age 41)	Clarke was a high achiever in secondary school and continued to higher education in drama. He now works as a professional actor.
Steven (age 49)	Steven had mid-level academic success in secondary school but went on to further and higher education, which led him to a career in finance and local government.
Charles (age 44)	Growing up in a deprived area, Charles maintained high academic standards, pursued higher education in law. He remains committed to supporting educational initiatives in his community.

Table five: Group C

(Retired Headteacher)	White male: Has dedicated over 40 years to education, leading diverse secondary schools in multiple cities including Sheffield.
(Retired Headteacher)	White male: Spent decades working in education in the UK and abroad, including Sheffield.
(Retired Assistant Head)	White Female.
(Teacher)	Black male.
(Teacher)	Black female.
(Teacher)	Black male.
(Teaching Assistant)	Black male.
(Learning Mentor)	Black male.
(Post-16 Practitioner)	White male.
(Former Senior Leader)	South Asian male, in local education authority.
(Former Senior Leader)	Black male, in local education authority.
(Retired Youth Worker)	White female senior leader.
(Teacher)	White female.
(Teacher)	Black female.
(Teacher)	Black female.

(Learning Mentor)	Black male.
(Teacher)	Black female.
(Retired Senior Leader Post-16)	Black male.
(Teacher)	Black male.
(Teacher)	Black male
(Retired Youth Worker)	Black male.
(Community Voluntary Youth Service Provider)	White Female
(Retired Youth Worker)	Black male.
(Community Activist/Voluntary Community Organisation CEO)	Black Male
(Project Manager Voluntary Community Sector)	Black Male
(Youth Worker)	Black Male
(Mentor)	Black male.

(Retired Post-16 Practitioner)	Black male.
(Former Senior Leader)	Black male.
(Senior Leader)	Black male, Local Authority.
(Senior Leader)	Black female, Local Authority.
(University Lecturer)	Black male, HE sector.
(Learning Mentor)	Black male.
(Social Work Qualified Practitioner)	Black male
(Social Worker Social Work Qualified Practitioner)	Black Female

4.5.4 Key Themes That Informed my Research Questions

Several key themes shaped my research questions, drawn from my professional experience and secondary research. First, data consistently showed the overrepresentation of Black Caribbean boys in negative school outcomes and their earlier involvement in youth disaffection, a pattern I observed first-hand as a frontline practitioner and which was also reflected in national serious case reviews. These experiences underscored the critical link between educational experiences and later outcomes. Additionally, the literature revealed significant gaps, particularly the absence of voices from formerly disaffected individuals, which further informed the development of my research questions.

Amongst the literature, key reports consistently documented negative outcomes for Black Caribbean boys, underscoring the necessity of addressing these issues through informed research, and the lack of formerly disaffected voice. All the above shaped the formulation of Question 1, '*How can the English education system leverage the experiences of formerly*

disaffected, second-generation Black Caribbean males in England to help address youth disaffection within this socio-demographic?'

Second, my perspective as a frontline practitioner fuelled my interest in exploring this subject from a different angle. Having spent over twenty years addressing these issues operationally, I was eager to understand the strategic factors at play—those influences occurring above my level that shaped my on-the-ground experiences as a frontline professional. Those broader mechanisms within the education system, particularly in relation to policy and the educational landscape, influenced the development of Question 2, *'What impact do the broader mechanisms operating within the education system have on the educational experiences of social actors on the ground, and how does this impact Black Caribbean pupils?*' The literature reveals how systemic factors and policies impact educational outcomes and experiences on the ground, making it essential to explore these dimensions to understand their effect on Black Caribbean pupils. Overall, questions one and two sought to generate insights that informed the third and final question. *'Is there evidence from these components to suggest that the education system contributes to disaffection amongst Black Caribbean males in England?'*

Although I had a clear plan in the research approach there were some key factors that contributed in shaping and adding to my fieldwork at different stages. For instance, during my research fieldwork I began with a pilot focus group comprising retired Black Caribbean male professionals from the education and youth work sectors. This group provided invaluable insights that contributed in shaping elements of the direction of my study. The decision to include retired participants stemmed from the realisation during the pilot that their extensive experience, coupled with their distance from current institutional pressures, allowed them to speak more candidly about sensitive topics like race, education, and systemic inequalities. Their reflections enriched the research by offering a broader historical context and unreserved perspectives that active professionals might hesitate to share.

Narrative interviews with Group A—formerly disaffected Black Caribbean males—were conducted first. These interviews were key to capturing the lived experiences of those who had faced disaffection, crime, and incarceration, and yet had reformed their lives. These initial discussions not only set the tone for the broader study but also shaped the focus group schedule, as the themes that emerged from these narratives informed some of the

development of subsequent discussion prompts. The insights gained from Group A's stories were critical in refining the scope of the research, helping to highlight systemic barriers and the complex factors influencing educational disaffection.

4.5.5 Analysing Data: Thematic Analysis and Data Coding Process

Thematic analysis (TA) is a versatile and systematic approach used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns within qualitative data. This method involves the process of coding, which allows researchers to identify units of meaning, patterns, and themes within datasets. TA offers tools for organising, exploring, and interpreting qualitative data while remaining adaptable to different research designs and contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Its flexibility made it particularly suitable for this study. Given the diversity of participants and the volume of qualitative data collected, TA provided a framework that facilitated the identification of meaningful patterns across multiple participant groups while allowing the data to speak for itself. TA was instrumental in making sense of the varied perspectives and experiences across the three cohorts involved in this study, by providing a systematic yet flexible structure for data analysis. It allowed the identification of themes specific to each group while highlighting shared patterns and differences across the entire dataset.

The primary strength of TA in this study was its compatibility with the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, which underpinned the research. This philosophical approach prioritises participants' subjective meanings and lived realities, aligning with TA's focus on capturing individual experiences while situating them within broader systemic structures. For instance, Group A's narratives frequently revealed systemic barriers such as racial bias and cultural misunderstandings within the education system. The use of TA ensured that these individual stories were interpreted not only as personal experiences but also as reflections of wider institutional patterns. This thematic approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how personal narratives intersect with structural inequalities, making it ideal for this study's focus on race, education, and social disaffection.

A core aspect of TA is the process of coding, which involves systematically labelling sections of data to identify patterns or recurring ideas. Coding was conducted inductively, meaning the themes emerged organically from the data rather than being imposed by pre-existing theories, ensuring that the findings were closely aligned with participants' own words and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022). TA began with listening to and reading

transcribes of all interviews and focus groups, including audio recordings from all participant groups, beginning with Group A. During this phase, I took detailed notes, highlighting recurring phrases and concepts that served as the foundation for initial codes.

The next phase involved refining the coding process using a colour-coded system to categorise and organise the data visually. This structured process allowed the identification of themes across different groups, such as the role of teacher expectations, school exclusion policies, and personal resilience in shaping educational outcomes. For Group C, participants were further categorised based on their professional roles—teachers, pastoral staff, and school leadership—allowing for a more targeted analysis of professional perspectives on educational policies affecting Black Caribbean pupils. Group A's data formed the central focus of the analysis, as their experiences with disaffection and subsequent positive transitions provided the primary lens for understanding systemic issues. Their data were coded and broken down into initial themes, which were then compared with those emerging from Group B's positive educational experiences and Group C's professional insights. This comparative approach helped identify shared challenges and unique perspectives across the participant groups, enriching the overall analysis.

To manage the extensive dataset, I printed hard copies of all transcripts and organised them on A1 flipchart sheets. By visually mapping the codes and themes from all three groups, I was able to explore relationships between themes, identify overlaps, and consolidate similar categories into stronger, more cohesive themes. This hands-on process supported the refinement of the data and helped maintain a focus on the most significant themes while discarding those that contributed less meaningfully to the overall narrative. The final phase of thematic analysis involved defining and refining key themes that had emerged during coding. This iterative process led to the identification of four overarching themes that captured the central issues raised by participants. These themes were not only reflective of individual stories but also illuminated broader systemic patterns, particularly regarding how race, education, and disaffection intersect within the English education system.

4.5.6 Research Design Strengths and Weaknesses

4.5.6.1 Design Strengths

The qualitative method of phenomenological narrative research has several strengths. Firstly, this approach acknowledges the interrelatedness between social actors and their environments, which is crucial for understanding the experiences of Black Caribbean males in the English school system. Secondly, it allows the gathering of rich and detailed data about participants' experiences and the construction of meaning and understanding of their experiences. Thirdly, it allows the researcher to explore complex and nuanced social phenomena and understand individuals' subjective experiences, providing a deeper understanding of the research topic.

4.5.6.2 Design Weaknesses

This research design has some limitations, however. One of the weaknesses of this approach is that it is time-consuming and resource-intensive, as it requires a lot of data collection and analysis. Another is that the results of this research may not be generalisable to other contexts, as the findings are specific to participants' experiences in the English school system. The use of thematic analysis can lead to some of those individual narratives' autobiographical stories being lost. This research design also brings the additional risk of the subjective nature of the research, which may introduce bias, as the researcher may influence the participants' responses.

Despite these limitations, the interpretivist-constructivist research paradigm and qualitative phenomenological narrative research approach, remain valuable tools for exploring complex social phenomena. Other studies have supported this approach for exploring the subjective experiences of individuals and understanding the meaning and interpretation of their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Giorgi, 2009).

4.5.7 Overall Justification for Chosen Research Design

A quantitative approach would not have been the best method to understand the experiences of Black Caribbean males within the English school system and adopting this approach would limit the ability to reach the overall research aims and objectives. As numerical measurements would make it difficult to understand the underlying reasons for racial disparities. A justification for using the interpretive-constructivist research paradigm and the

qualitative phenomenological narrative research approach other than a positivist-objectivist paradigm is that the former recognises that society and the natural world are interlinked and that social actors' experiences are shaped by their environments, which includes policies, educational reform, and the impact of gender, race, and social class. This is because this research paradigm acknowledges the interrelatedness between social actors and their environments, which is essential for understanding the experiences of Black Caribbean males within the English school system. As the researcher, the positivist-objectivist ideas that underpin a quantitative approach are not appropriate for this research, as they view society and the natural world as separate from social actors.

For instance, consider the case of Child Q, a Black female student who was strip-searched by the police in school under the supervision of school staff because they suspected her of possessing cannabis (City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership, 2020). Following an inquest, the report findings acknowledged that racism was a contributing factor in the professionals involved failing to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities. This suggests that the wider societal racial inequalities were specific to Child Q in that situation and played a significant role in shaping her experiences. Therefore, it is imperative to view society as inseparable from the social actors within it, and in social scientific research, we must consider the impact of the natural world equally across all social actors. In analysing the Child Q case, a race lens is crucial in identifying a critical component in the findings, revealing underlying reasons for the mistakes made. This case emphasises the importance of interlinking the social actors and the wider social world when investigating social phenomena.

4.6 Research Ethics and Validity

4.6.1 Ethical Considerations

The protection of participants' privacy was a central ethical consideration throughout this study. Given the sensitivity of the data collected, which included personal histories of disaffection, incarceration, and professional success, it was essential to implement a comprehensive anonymisation process. Ethical guidelines such as the BERA Ethical Guidelines (2011) and AERA Code of Ethics (2011) stress the importance of safeguarding participant confidentiality, particularly in small communities where identification risks are

heightened (Walford, 2018). Maintaining anonymity was critical to ensuring that participants felt secure enough to share their experiences openly and honestly without fear of exposure.

To uphold these ethical standards, I implemented a rigorous pseudonym system for all participants. The pseudonyms used bore no resemblance to participants' actual names, backgrounds, or identifiable traits. For example, individuals in Group A were given names such as Marlon, Paul, and Derek to ensure anonymity while maintaining the narrative flow of their life stories. This approach allowed participants' voices to remain central while protecting their identities. Furthermore, geographical identifiers such as school names, street names, and housing estates were excluded from the data to ensure participants could not be indirectly identified. This was particularly necessary given Sheffield's relatively small size and the recognisability of certain neighbourhoods and schools with historical associations of educational disadvantage.

Additional measures were taken for Group C, which included education professionals whose positions often made them highly visible. Participants in this group were identified only by generic professional titles such as 'retired headteacher' or 'teacher', without disclosing their professional history or specific schools. This decision balanced the need to present their insights while safeguarding their professional privacy, as their testimonies were crucial for understanding systemic educational practices without exposing them to personal risk.

These anonymisation strategies extended to the participant pen portraits, where personal identifiers were either removed or altered to ensure confidentiality while preserving the authenticity of each participant's narrative. This ethical commitment to safeguarding personal details was integral to the study's credibility, ensuring that the data presented remained rich and informative while respecting participants' privacy. Additional I adhered to the University of Sheffield's ethics policies, which required the completion of an ethics training module, submission of a research proposal and ethics application form. These preparatory steps enhanced my reflexive awareness of the ethical complexities involved in this research, particularly concerning the involvement of marginalised groups. Given the focus on formerly disaffected Black Caribbean males, ethical considerations were especially pressing, as participants were being asked to reflect on challenging personal histories, including school exclusion, incarceration, and underachievement.

Participants in Group A, many of whom had experienced prison, required particular care to avoid retraumatisation. Revisiting difficult life chapters could potentially trigger emotional distress. Acknowledging this risk, I ensured that relevant support services, such as the Sheffield African Caribbean Mental Health Association (SACMHA), were available to participants if needed. SACMHA provides culturally specific mental health services for African and Caribbean communities, including monthly support sessions for Black men. I shared information about these services, ensuring participants knew support was available if needed.

During interviews, I emphasised participants' resilience and positive transformation to mitigate potential distress. I highlighted their contributions as filling a gap in the literature and providing valuable insights for educators and youth workers. Additionally, I reassured participants that their stories, while personal, could inspire change within educational systems. I also informed all participants that I would host a community event upon completing my doctoral study to share findings in an empowering and positive way, reflecting the achievements of those who had overcome significant challenges.

Another ethical consideration involved my pre-existing relationships with several participants. As a member of the Black Caribbean community in Sheffield, I knew some participants personally. While this familiarity helped establish trust, it also introduced the possibility of participants feeling compelled to disclose more information than they would with a researcher they did not know personally. To mitigate this, I emphasised their autonomy in sharing information and clarified that they could withhold any details they were uncomfortable sharing. This balance between relational closeness and professional distance was essential in maintaining research integrity while respecting the participant's right to privacy.

This dynamic was evident in the interviews themselves. One participant openly acknowledged, 'I wouldn't share this with someone else, but I'm telling you because you understand where I'm coming from.' Conversely, another participant openly admitted, 'There are things I'm leaving out,' highlighting how personal familiarity could both encourage openness and create self-censorship. This tension underscored the importance of reflexivity and transparency throughout the research process, ensuring that my relationships did not compromise the data's authenticity.

Josselson (2007), highlights that narrative researchers must be transparent with participants about their motivations and the broader aims of their research. Consistent with this approach, I provided all participants with clear information about the study's goals and how their stories would be used. This ensured that participation was informed and voluntary. For those initially hesitant to participate, I offered time for reflection and made it clear that non-participation would be respected without judgment. Some participants declined after consideration, while others returned to participate after reflecting further. This ensured the process remained ethical and participant-driven.

To further protect participant confidentiality, data collection and storage practices were rigorously monitored. Interviews were audio-recorded using a secure, password-protected device and later transcribed using Otter, a secure digital transcription tool. Once transcribed, the data were anonymised and stored on an encrypted external hard drive, with all identifying information removed. Participants were informed that their data would be destroyed upon completion of the study. The ethical considerations extended to the professional participants in Group C as well. Prior to their interviews, I provided participants with the interview questions in advance. This approach, inspired by a pilot study where participants struggled with unexpected questions, helped reduce discomfort and allowed for more thoughtful responses. Additionally, participants were informed that they could decline to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any point without consequence.

Finally, narrative research presents unique ethical challenges due to its unstructured, open-ended nature. As Elliot (2005) notes, narrative inquiry often leads participants to share personal stories that can take unexpected emotional turns. To address this, I ensured the interviews were conducted where participants felt comfortable and had control over the depth of their disclosures. Participants were also given the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy and to withdraw or amend any statements they felt uncomfortable with before data analysis commenced. By consistently prioritising participant wellbeing, privacy, and transparency throughout the research process, I upheld the highest ethical standards, ensuring that the narratives shared were authentic and respectfully represented. These measures not only enhanced the study's integrity but also honoured the trust placed in me by participants who shared their personal journeys.

4.6.2 Research Validity

Research is commonly described as a systematic process aimed at generating new insights, confirming or challenging existing knowledge, and deepening the understanding of specific issues or phenomena. This process involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting data to answer key questions or address identified problems. By examining the personal narratives of second-generation Black Caribbean males in England, my study aimed to reveal how their educational experiences shaped their life trajectories and personal development.

To achieve this, I employed a narrative inquiry approach, which prioritises the co-creation of data between the researcher and participants. Callary (2013) identifies three key ethical issues in narrative research: the possibility of researcher influence on the results, whether the narratives genuinely reflect participants' life experiences, and the question of authorship over the constructed narratives. To address these concerns, I used unstructured interviews with open-ended questions to allow participants to express their experiences freely. I further ensured accuracy by asking clarifying questions during interviews, sharing personal reflections for confirmation, and revisiting recordings with participants to verify the interpretations of their narratives.

The primary goal was to explore the subjective meanings participants assigned to their educational experiences and the systemic factors contributing to their disaffection. To maintain ethical rigor, unstructured interviews were complemented by ongoing participant validation during the interview and focus group stages. Participants were given opportunities to clarify and refine their statements, ensuring their experiences were represented accurately. However, after this phase, I assumed full responsibility for the analysis and construction of narratives without further participant involvement. This decision balanced collaboration during data collection with the need to maintain research integrity and avoid participants inadvertently shaping the research outcomes.

Throughout the research, ethical considerations related to validity were carefully managed. Phenomenological principles, particularly reflexive bracketing, were applied to minimise the influence of subjective bias. Churchill (2022) describes reflexive bracketing as the practice of questioning one’s assumptions and positionality from multiple perspectives, a method that was crucial in maintaining clarity and objectivity in my study. Churchill further distinguishes between ‘impure reflections’, or ‘because motives’, where research is driven

by past experiences or personal bias, and ‘purifying reflections’, or ‘in-order-to-do motives’, where the focus is on understanding past and present events to influence positive change. His emphasis on the importance of purifying reflection during the research process reinforced the need for constant self-examination and critical awareness of my motivations as the researcher. Consistent reflexive practice allowed me to remain aware of my positionality throughout the study. As a Black Caribbean male researching a community with which I had both personal and professional connections, my motivations included a desire to promote positive change in educational practices and help support address any systemic inequalities. Regular reflection on these motivations was essential for ensuring both the validity and ethical rigor of the study.

4.8 Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, the interpretivist-constructivist research paradigm and qualitative phenomenological narrative research approach were most appropriate for this study. This approach acknowledged the interrelatedness between social actors and their environments. It allowed me, as the researcher, to gather rich and detailed data about the experiences of my participants within the English school system. Furthermore, this approach was well suited to achieving the research aims and objectives of understanding the potential underlying factors around school experiences and disaffection amongst Black Caribbean males involved in this study. The next chapter concentrates on the data analysed and the research results and findings from the data gathered.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a descriptive summary of the findings derived from the data collected during the primary research phase and is structured into three segments: an introduction, the main body, and an overall conclusion. The overarching research inquiry is centred on comprehending the lived experiences of formerly disaffected second-generation Black Caribbean males to enhance educational practices to mitigate disaffection amongst this demographic. The three key questions leading this study are:

- How can the English education system leverage the experiences of formerly disaffected, second-generation Black Caribbean males in England to help address youth disaffection within this socio-demographic?

- What impact do the broader mechanisms operating within the education system have on the educational experiences of social actors on the ground, and how does this impact Black Caribbean pupils?

- Is there evidence from these components to suggest that the education system contributes to disaffection amongst Black Caribbean males in England?

With an aim to deepen the understanding of the correlations between school experiences and youth disaffection among Black Caribbean males in England. By gaining significant insights into their journeys during a pivotal period of their lives, this study focused on their secondary school experiences and the critical post-16 transition into adulthood. Central to this research were Group A participants' voices. Group A, formed a collective of formerly disaffected second-generation Black Caribbean males whose voices would not just be key to meeting the research aims and objectives, but also in addressing a gap in the discourse. Throughout the literature, I identified a significant gap in the representation of Black Caribbean males who had navigated the English education system, encountered youth disaffection and crime, but ultimately made a successful transition and turned their lives around. As the researcher, I had a unique advantage in access to my participants due to my social background and being a lifelong member of the community in Sheffield.

5.2 Research Participants

5.2.1 Group A

Group A participants consisted of second-generation Black males of Caribbean descent, aged 37 to 59, who faced disaffection between the ages of 16 and 24, with many experiencing incarceration during their youth. These individuals originated from a mix of socioeconomic environments, including both working-class and middle-class backgrounds. Despite their adversities, each has successfully transitioned post-disaffection to become professionals and positive societal contributors. Their careers encompass various sectors, including education, mental health, youth work community outreach, construction, business ownership, and healthcare. Many are actively involved in mentoring or supporting others who face similar challenges, especially at-risk youth and vulnerable groups. This group played a critical role as a central voice in this research.

5.2.2 Group B

Group B comprises second-generation Black Caribbean males, aged 41 to 54, who achieved mid to high academic success during secondary education and consistently pursued further and higher education. Despite challenges like growing up in deprived areas and single-parent households, they exhibited resilience and determination in their educational pursuits. Many of these individuals obtained university degrees and have established successful careers in various fields such as law, media, engineering, finance, IT, acting, and design. Alongside their professional accomplishments, they maintain a strong commitment to community development and actively support educational initiatives.

5.2.3 Group C

Group C consisted of education professionals and community practitioners who had extensive experience across various areas, including teaching, senior leadership, youth work, and voluntary community engagement. The group included retired headteachers, former senior leaders in local authorities, current teachers, mentors and pastoral support staff, and youth workers, collectively bringing decades of expertise in educational and community development. This was an ethnically diverse group, with significant representation from Black professionals alongside White and South Asian individuals, had held influential leadership roles in secondary schools, local authorities, higher and further

education. Many had also made substantial contributions to community-based initiatives, with involvement dating back to the 1970s. Their collective experiences enriched this research, providing deep insights into the practical realities of education, alongside interconnected aspects of youth development, community engagement, and broader factors such as policy, practice, and strategic leadership.

5.3 Results and Research Findings

After using a thematic analysis approach to analyse the data gathered, I will now delve into the results. The process of thematic analysis revealed the emergence of four overarching themes that encapsulated recurrent patterns from the narrative interviews and focus group discussions. These themes provided results that helped contextualise the topic and provide various possible answers to the research questions.

The four emerging themes are:

- *Inescapable labels;*
- *Pathways and obstacles to empowerment;*
- *Challenges of culture within the education setting;*
- *Unveiling the invisible*.

Within these themes, there are subthemes and clusters of data excerpts presented, beginning with narratives from Group A—those formerly disaffected second-generation Black Caribbean males, whose accounts are then juxtaposed with insights from Group B and Group C participants. All extracts were downloaded directly from the recording software used to gather all the data during interviews and focus groups, so it picked up broken dialect with misspellings, which I corrected. To make it easier for the reader I have colour coded the extracts from each group. All extracts are presented in italic text.

Table 1: Participant coding

	Code	**Participant category**
Group A:	RED	Second generation Black Caribbean males formerly disaffected

Group B:	BLUE	Second generation Black Caribbean males mid-high achievers
Group C	Black	Retired and current professionals

5.3.1 Theme One: Inescapable Labels

The theme of 'inescapable labels' examines the profound challenges faced by Black Caribbean male pupils within the educational system and, to some extent, the broader society, due to the labels ascribed to them. Here it highlights systemic racial disparities in educational institutions, particularly how vocal Black pupils are marginalised and the significant power imbalances between teachers and pupils that often result in feelings of isolation, misunderstanding, and intimidation, as well as more severe disciplinary measures. Furthermore, the theme explores the negative impact of these labels on the educational achievements of Black Caribbean boys, noting that their talents and abilities are frequently overlooked within the confines of racial stereotypes. This issue is particularly acute during critical educational transitions, such as from secondary schooling to post-16 education, training, or employment.

Additionally, this section considers how these labels increase the risk of disaffection among this group, influenced by identity struggles, life in impoverished, high-crime areas, certain elements of popular youth culture, or the lack of positive Black male role models. Crucially, it underscores the limited recognition of covert forms of racism and institutional racism, and the harmful role stereotypes play in limiting opportunities and potential. It highlights a critical need for positive Black role models within the educational system and the importance of socially aware parents who are equipped to effectively navigate the education system.

5.3.1.1 Group A Participants: Stereotypical Labels

This section explores the narratives of theme one gathered for Group A, who all shared experiences of disaffection. Throughout their narrative interviews, a recurring theme emerged: participants recalled being assigned various labels by peers and educators. Notably, some acknowledged adopting these identities at the time. Their testimonies revealed that these labels were not just negative descriptors but actively shaped a

detrimental self-perception within the school environment. Several participants also linked these labels to the development of adverse behaviours, highlighting a complex relationship between identity, perception, and conduct.

Additionally, data from Groups B and C provided valuable firsthand perspectives, facilitating a comparative analysis that strengthened the study's methodological approach. This analysis was essential in enhancing the validity and robustness of the research findings. By juxtaposing these narratives, the study aimed to either corroborate or challenge the accounts presented by Group A, thereby constructing a multi-dimensional understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

'Primary school was mainly alright, I started to kind of recognise things more in secondary. I wasn't the best kid, a bit naughty as well. I say something I did realise when I started at secondary school is I would get called "the cock" of the school [means the toughest kid] *and I didn't understand this because I never had a fight.'* Marlon

'I felt that I was expected to put up with something a lot more than White pupils would have, too. It seemed to me in school like if I had any form of problem. Or, if I tried to address things in a certain way, [paused], *assertive, I were seen as being aggressive.'* Nathaniel

'Yeah, well, they [teachers] *didn't expect much from me to be honest. I wasn't the best-behaved kid in school. But the dynamics, I was classed as a bad kid at a young age and when you're like, 12 and 13 you see it as kind of a cool thing. You know, I mean, and if you embrace it that can go one way or the other.'* Paul

'*The first thing that comes to the forefront of their minds* [teachers] *is instead of that* [Black] *child being academically smart, they just presume that that child can run faster than the other kids.*' Samuel

5.3.1.2 Group C Participants: Stereotypical Labels

'But I think there is perhaps a broader point that within society, about Black boys, and the way in which they are seen, how they're seen by the media, seen by their peers, also needs to

be disaggregated. Black boys, they have had to fulfil a number of roles there seem to be sometimes "oh he's a cool guy", or "he's good at sport" or "he knows about music", or they become the centre of attention. And when you're a young guy, for example, girls interested in you that's a hard cocktail. So that can make you sometimes think well, I don't have to try so hard with my work or try so hard because I've got everything that a young man may want. And it's, it's sometimes helping those young people see between the lines, the way that society wants to pigeonhole them almost as just being physical beings.' (Retired Black male secondary school teacher).

'Teachers have low expectations as well, a lot of the teachers there just expect them [Black boys] *not to do well. They put them in more lower sets, for no reason whatsoever. So the expectations from the teachers, not all teachers, are lower.'* (Black female secondary school teacher).

'And the thing with African Caribbean children a lot was the teachers saying, "well I suspect they are good at sport", and not appreciating that they have other talents and abilities.' (White secondary school teacher).

'If you're a young Black boy, you're only seen for your physicality, whether that's you're a danger to society, or you're going to be the athlete or you're going to be the musician. There are so many of young Black boys, they don't have the chance to sometimes show the other sides to the same person, a person who can show compassion, or that they've got a poetic side. No, no, you're not meant to be any of those things because that's not how society wants to pigeonhole you.' (Black male secondary school teacher).

Additionally, within the scope of this theme, the responses from participants highlighted a significant concern about the perception that labelling profoundly influenced disciplinary practices and outcomes within educational institutions.

5.3.1.3 Group A Participants: Pupil Behaviour and Discipline

'I got excluded a bag of times [meaning a lot of times], *for a whole load of different foolishness. And now when I look back. It's a bit like when you keep on painting kids and*

telling them that they're this and that [negative feedback]. *Eventually, part of you just gives up and just says alright if that's the side of me that you want and I'm gonna go full force. Anytime I want to get out of this class now I'm gonna act up and get sent out of class to go sit down in a room.'* Derek

'There was a lower threshold for us, you know, so, you got to try twice as hard as a White pupil, just to not get the same amount of detentions or whatever, you had to try and keep your nose whistle clean, it was a different discipline for the White kids getting away with similar things, if not worse, than what we would do so we knew there was a disparity in the institution.' Benjamin.

5.3.1.4 Group B and Group C: Pupil Behaviour and Discipline

'I know some of us Black boys were feared, some Black boys, matured quickly and they were taller and the teacher, [pause] *some of the teachers got intimidated by that. So I think that sometimes they overdid the discipline; it's like a command and conquer sort of thing. I must conquer this one because he's a bit intimidating and we could probably have to double down.'* Richard

'*There was other experiences where you're like, the teacher should not of done that, sometimes I felt like they dealt with us like we were grown men. Yeah, like we were big men, when we were just kids.'* Clarke

'One of the other challenges is that, [pause] *some teachers view Black students, [pause] they're frightened of them. They treat them differently, they lack understanding, they deliver different punishments to Black kids and judge them more severely than they do other kids, so they've got different expectations, they wouldn't like to hear that, but it's true from my experience.'* (Retired White headteacher)

'The Black Caribbean students are treated differently in punishment and opportunities, so their punishments are harsher and they're treated as they are more aggressive, and also

they don't have the opportunities that the other students get, they're not promoted, you rarely see them get promoted to the higher sets.' (Black male secondary school teacher)

The collective extracts describe a complex combination of race, culture, identity and White professional perceptions within the education system. However, the accounts also reveal the intersections of societal perceptions, media influences, and peer dynamics that contribute to the pigeonholing of young Black boys into predetermined roles. The narratives argue that there is a limited representation that goes beyond physical attributes, perpetuating a cycle of low expectations and, in some cases, fear amongst White professionals.

The extracts also present a picture of the dynamics of how Black boys are disciplined in schools compared to their White counterparts and how, in the mind-set of those participants' from Group A, recollections of labelling manifested in school once there was an adoption of these labels. Here, participants expressed that the administration of discipline and punishments in school may not have been solely in response to misbehaviour, but also closely tied to their profiles as students and White teachers' intrinsic fears of Black boys. This suggests a complex interaction between racial profiling, underlying fears, and the enforcement of school discipline.

5.3.1.5 Group A and C: Pupil Behaviour and Discipline

Across the extracts from Group A participants', there were some contrasting accounts regarding behaviour. Some self-reflective narrative extracts revealed insights into personal responsibility during their adolescence, highlighting a stance of justified disciplinary experiences, one response touching upon questioning the role of perceived racial undertones in the school setting.

'There were certain people in the school, certain teachers, where I used to get dashed [removed] *out of class a lot for being a joker. That's why I'm saying everything teachers did to me was justified. If there was racial undertones I would have never seen it, because I knew that my behaviour warranted it.'* Harold

'What I remember about school was getting kicked out. I was a little shit anyway.' Nathaniel

'The middle-class White kids who came from Crosspool, they were just accelerating in their learning, they wouldn't get in trouble because they're just getting their head down.' Benjamin

'By the time I was 14, 15, which is a very important age now I look back, by then I was a bit of a tearaway, I think I was doing things that I shouldn't have been doing, and I was easily influenced by other things.' Gregory

In addition to this, these personal accounts are given additional context by a retired White assistant headteacher, who suggested that for Black Caribbean boys, peer influence often overshadowed parental guidance, indicating a complex interplay between individual behaviour, social influences, and the educational environment.

'I think, for the Black Caribbean boys, peer pressure, peer solidarity seem to matter to some of the students I dealt with. A lot what they felt their peers said was more important than what their parents said to them, some of the time.' (Retired White former assistant headteacher)

The collected narratives from individuals reflecting on their school experiences reveal a spectrum of acceptance in behaviours relating to disciplinary actions in school. Benjamin candidly acknowledges his disruptive behaviour leading to exclusions, attributing his actions to his choices rather than the school environment. In contrast, Benjamin observes a socio-economic divide, noting that White middle-class peers from affluent areas like Crosspool could focus on learning without the distractions that led to disciplinary issues. Whereas Harold views his experiences with a sense of personal accountability, recognising that his removal from the class was a consequence of his behaviour as a 'joker', and is unsure of the potential of racial biases affecting his treatment. Gregory offers a retrospective insight, recognising that his teenage years were marked by misbehaviour and susceptibility to negative influences.

5.3.1.6 Group A Participants: School Careers Post-16 Transition Advice and Guidance

The results suggest that issues of stereotype impacted all aspects of the participants' experiences at school, including preparation for career progression and post-16 transition advice and guidance.

'We [Black pupils] *would get pushed towards like oh, well, why you don't do a sports and leisure course. There wasn't no other avenues given to you.'* Derek

'I always wanted to do something creative. I remember at school when I was due to do work experience telling the careers teacher what I wanted to do, graphics, drawing and whatnot, I can remember the "twat" teacher telling me that I should think of doing some warehouse factory type stacking boxes dead-end job ting, I remember telling me mom and mom contacting the school bex [angry]. *My parents ended up finding me work experience through a family friend doing what I wanted to do. When I think about it now, if I didn't have a supportive family, that's how you kind of get pigeonholed and all of a sudden you're down that road and dead-end job.'* Samuel

'Tell you what I can remember is when before me leaving school I had the careers guy tell me I was going to be a cleaner or a butcher, when I wanted something better, this was weeks before I finished school. The options that they give you were like, things that were like low level. Butcher, labourer, warehouse work, I left the library without even taking the papers.' Paul

'When I was younger, I wanted to be a lawyer, that's want I wanted to be. I always wanted to be. But, when I used to tell teachers that, they were dismissive in a way like you know, you're never gonna amount to nothing. Instead of like, encouraging you and saying, look, this is what you need to do, they didn't [teachers] *they was just dismissive. So if everyone's dismissive of me in what I want to do as a kid, like I just took that and thought, well I'm not going to be nothing.'* Nathaniel

These extracts collectively paint a disheartening picture of the career guidance and expectations set for the participants within the educational system. Derek recalls being steered towards a sports and leisure course, indicating a narrow and stereotypical path offered to Black students, devoid of diverse or ambitious options. This sentiment is echoed in Samuel's experience, where despite expressing a clear interest in creative fields, he was

discouraged and directed towards menial labour. His family's intervention, providing an alternative work experience, highlights the pivotal role of supportive networks in countering institutional limitations.

Paul's narrative further underscores this trend of limited career aspirations being projected onto Black students. Recollecting a career advisor's suggestion of menial jobs shortly before school completion, Paul reflects on the low expectations set by the educational system. Similarly, Nathaniel's aspiration to become a lawyer was dismissed rather than encouraged, leading to a disheartening internalisation of these lowered expectations. These stories collectively reveal a systemic issue in career guidance for the participants during their time as pupils, characterised by a lack of support for high aspirations and an inclination to funnel them into low-skilled occupations. This pattern could have undermined the students' potential and perpetuated a cycle of limited opportunities and aspirations.

5.3.1.7 Group B Participants: School Careers Post-16 Transition Advice and Guidance

The mid – high achieving second-generation Black Caribbean participants in this study echoed similar sentiments to those of the primary voice extracts, particularly in the context of the advice and guidance they received from schools during their transition to post-16 education.

'In my careers advice I was told to do somewhat menial, go on a YTS and at the time it sounded alright, get better money, learn a trade and then I saw ---------- and he was like NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO, you're not doing that, you're gonna go to university. And then it was ---------- who filled in those gaps and showed me the process UCAS you got to college. They [teachers] *couldn't visualise us people at all being affluent, being educated.'* Kevin

'I remember when I was younger in secondary school, and they were asking you what you want to be, what careers, I always been into animals, and I used to want to be a vet, so when I said veterinarian, I remember being told by a teacher, you want to aim for something more attainable.' Trevor

'As far as trying to get you to excel no, and also they [school] *were just preparing us for working in shops, retail, working for Royal Mail, that's it, not to be leaders of industry, that's the impression I got.'* Clarke

The high-achieving second-generation Black Caribbean participants in this study echoed similar sentiments to those of Group A extracts, particularly in the context of the advice and guidance they received from schools during their transition to post-16 education.

5.3.2 Theme Two: Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment and Change

The theme of 'pathways and obstacles to empowerment' offers insightful results that align with a central aim and objective of my research: to explore practical strategies that could mitigate the phenomenon of disaffection among Black Caribbean males. This exploration is two-fold, targeting preventative measures for youth disaffection and re-engagement strategies for those who are disaffected. The narratives from the data provide tangible examples of best practices, showcasing key elements of successful teacher engagement with pupils at the greatest risk of disaffection. The extracts from the interviews vividly illustrate these practices in action, delineating the critical factors that facilitated the re-engagement of disaffected individuals.

Simultaneously, this theme casts a spotlight on the practices identified by participants as barriers to empowerment. Across the dataset, consistent themes emerged, revealing how these barriers manifest and delving into the participants' interpretations of the underlying reasons for these obstacles to empowerment for Black Caribbean male pupils within the educational system.

5.3.2.1 Group A participants: Teacher-pupil Relationship

'Mrs ------ [a Black teacher], *who is now the headteacher. She actually came into my school, and she taught me English for a short period of time. And you know what, I remember that she did care and it was like, oh, there's somebody who looks like me, there was that relatability, obviously all the majority of my main teachers were White.'* Christopher

'Mr ---------, he was a guy who most definitely did try to encourage you, empower you. I mean, again, he gave me a captain's role for the basketball team and for the football team. You know, so, in terms of sport I was excelling.' Gregory

'Mrs ---------- seems to stick in my mind quite clearly, she was quite genuine, she was one of the teachers I can remember, she was a maths teacher. I can just remember that this particular teacher, it was the way she talked to me I actually used to listen, whether I took the advice or not. I think it was just she was more genuine. I think if all the teachers were like that, I think maybe I might have done a little bit better than I did.' Lawrence

'Children's Services was involved with me so the school had a better understanding about my family structure. I had actually one teacher, she made it so that I just took my reports to her and she would try and support me. I would have been proper expelled if it weren't for her, definitely. Because she took time.' Paul

'Looking back at school, you can kind of see which teachers understood you more than others. And you can kind of see which teachers would go out of their way to do more. And the teachers who actually were relational, who tried to, you know, accommodate to the best of their ability and you know…' Ben

'There was a teacher called Mr --------, nobody liked him because he was seen as the detention teacher and plus he was kind of hardcore discipline. Well you know what, he used to take me to the chippy and sit with me. I can't remember the conversations we used to have, but he used to just take time with me and that's what stands out for me the most.' Harold

Within the Group A extracts, of formerly disaffected Black Caribbean males, their narratives reveal recollections of positive interactions with professionals they encountered during their educational journey. The transcripts provide instances where these professionals exhibited commendable dedication—often going beyond their formal duties. They displayed

traits such as recognising individual potential, a sincere desire to provide support, and a willingness to invest extra time and effort. For Group A participants, these actions were not isolated occurrences but common themes that resonated across the transcripts of the entire cohort, painting a picture of the profound impact those individual committed professionals had on them when they were pupils in school at risk of disaffection.

In contrast, narratives from the Group A participants that alluded to potential barriers painted a starkly different picture of the teacher-pupil relationship. These accounts were imbued with feelings of perceived indifference from educators—not only towards their professional duties as educators but also towards the participants themselves when they were in school. The narratives suggested a lack of genuine interest or empathy concerning the challenges these pupils faced inside and outside the school environment. An insightful revelation from the transcripts of Group A participants is the predominance of such negative experiences. During interviews, when participants reflected upon their educational experiences, the majority recalled interactions with teachers marked more by detachment than by genuine engagement or concern, and only one or two individual teachers reflected those positive interactions.

'Think also, they [school] *fail to recognise individually like, what each kid or what each young person is going through in their life, you know, they might be suffering at home, so the schools is a bit of a get out, school doesn't know that because school was not really paying attention.'* Nathaniel

'It just seemed to me like a lot of teachers was there just to do a job, and get that job done, they weren't really bothered. Some teachers just basically got paid to turn up and leave.' Lewis

'When I look back, there were teachers that wasn't really bothered, that didn't want to engage with you, they would not push you.' Leonard

'You could tell just by the teacher's attitude that they weren't bothered about you, so from them having that negative attitude that just rubbed off on us as youts [young people] *thinking, what's the point, well teacher's not bothered about me.*' Samuel

'I remember being accused of cheating by my English teacher I did not get along with. This was after I was diagnosed with dyslexia and decided to use a computer to do my work so that it would highlight my spelling and grammar mistakes. I spent six weeks at this computer hacking out these assignments. And then on the day that she marks my work [the English teacher] *in front of the whole class, stands up and calls me a cheat. She basically turns around and tells me that there is no way that you have done these pieces of work. And I'm like, why? She said you've gone from being like an E student to like an A student in a matter of weeks, so who have you bullied to get to do your work? I'm stood there and I literally felt about two inches tall I just wanted the ground to open up because I've really tried and put my whole effort into these pieces of work.'* Derek

5.3.2.2 Group B and C Participants: Teacher-pupil Relationship

The extracts from Group B mid-high achievers in this study offer results similar to those of their academic experiences. Richard reflects on a lack of proactive engagement from the majority of teachers, perceiving them as merely fulfilling their duties without genuine interest in their development. David's narrative brings to light his views on the impact of teachers' low expectations and negative labelling, highlighting the disservice done to Black pupils through substandard teaching, compounded by the unjust practice of placing a pupil in lower academic sets and labelling them as underperformers. Kevin's account of his experience of what turned out to be one of his strongest subjects in design technology further exemplifies the discrepancy between actual performance and teacher expectations.

'I don't think I was pushed, some teachers push, yeah. And they had the different methods. But the majority of teachers they weren't really interested, they were more interested in just turning up, and going through whatever the curriculum was.' Richard

'They could put you in a lower set then and call you thick. Yeah right. But it was all on you. You're not doing good enough and all that, that's the label they could shift when actually you had substandard teaching as well.' David

'In one subject design technology, I was estimated a really low grade, I think it was like D or E or something like that, and that was one of my best subjects. I really liked to engage with the subject. I did get a feeling that in certain areas of the school I was looked at differently. But in that class, I was producing some good work actually and I got my highest GCSE grades in it. So I always look back on that and think that was odd, why, why grade me so low and there was lot of kids around me, who were producing poorer work and getting higher grades.' Kevin

Group B participants also had accounts of positive interactions with teachers amongst those Black Caribbean male participants who were mid-high achievers. However, similar to the Group A participants, the reflections highlight just one or two teachers across the school.

'I had Miss ---------- at that school [a Black English teacher]*, and all the teachers in the school, really, really liked her so I think in my secondary school Miss ---------- was probably a very protective factor for me in that school.'* James

'When Mr ---------- [headteacher] *came when we got to know his background, he certainly taught in some places. He was like, this is nothing, you guys got all these opportunities for you, don't squander them. Because there's people got a lot less than you.'* Clarke

'He used to just tell us how it was. He would tell us, the Black kids and the poor White kids, if you speak like that, you're not going to get a job as a solicitor or a police man, and we're like blah, you can't tell us that, he knew what he was doing. He wasn't doing it to disempower us, that was the difference with he was doing it to properly switch you on, yeah,

so the information is ended up in your head, you were empowered because you could see the world in a more articulate way, so he was very good.' David

'So having taught in both types of schools, [schools within predominantly White middle-class catchment and poorer working-class racially mixed catchments] *there were more teachers, in my view, who could come from the schools that were deemed to be difficult, struggling, not as good, who can teach in the better schools,* [better meaning higher attaining] *there's some teachers who would be teaching in the better schools who couldn't go the other way, they wouldn't last five minutes, because they didn't have the interpersonal skills.'* (Retired White headteacher)

'The vast majority of teachers are well-meaning individuals. The problem is, at times they don't realise the mistakes they're making, you know, when it comes to implicit bias. Yeah, at times they aren't aware of what they're doing. So when it comes to…. [pause] *the question is how can we provide them with the skills or further developing the skills which they need.'* (Black male retired teacher)

The alignment among the narratives of these voices is noteworthy. Firstly, those extracts from high-achieving, second-generation Black Caribbean males resonate with the primary voice participants, particularly in the positive recollection of certain teachers but also with the negative reflections. Positive educators, as remembered, manifested behaviours indicative of their deep investment in pupils' academic success. They provided not only recognition of their capabilities but also fostered an atmosphere of affirmation, particularly highlighted by the presence of a Black teacher within the educational setting. However, those reflections on negative teacher-pupil experiences emphasise a level of disinterest in the pupils from educators but also low-expectations.

Additionally, the narratives unearth an external-to-school dimension where teachers' comments transcended the academic sphere, touching upon broader societal contexts. Phrases like 'he was doing it to switch you on properly, you were empowered because you could see the world in a more articulate way' and 'you guys got all these opportunities; don't

squander them. Because there's people got a lot less than you' were perceived by the participants as more than mere words; they were life lessons. Now reflecting as adults, the participants discern these educators' efforts as a conscientious endeavour to prepare them for life's multifaceted realities post-school. This attribute distinctively set a mark in participants' memories.

Corroborating these experiences, Groups B and C, which include excerpts from professionals, reflect parallel elements of support found in the Group A excerpts. The professionals acknowledged the existence of certain educators who lacked essential interpersonal skills or harboured biases that could detrimentally colour their interactions with Black pupils. Such admissions from within the professional realm lend further weight to the lived experiences of the Group A participants.

5.3.2.3 Group A Participants: Parental influences

'Getting excluded I was scared of my parents' response.' Marlon

'Yeah, got excluded for having a fight. I mean, school was, you know, you got your exclusion punishment whatever that was that, but the main worry was my parents [starts laughing]*.'* Christopher

'I always knew I was going to carry on education in some form as I always had my mum and dad banging that into my head, college, then uni, further education, so after school I always knew l was gonna go to college.' Samuel

'Once you get over that fear of telling your mom, getting excluded wasn't a problem and I don't really think it had an effect on me per se. It was just one of them things.' Nathaniel

The participants' experiences concerning school exclusion and parental influence reveal two distinct yet interconnected themes. Firstly, the fear of parental reaction to their school exclusion emerges as a significant concern for the participants, often overshadowing the consequences imposed by the school. The consistent emphasis on parental response

highlights participants' level of respect and fear towards their parents' opinions and expectations. The statement about overcoming the fear of informing a parent about exclusion and perceiving it as 'just one of those things' indicates a shift in perspective as the participants matured.

Secondly, the underlying expectation of continuing education beyond secondary school, instilled by parents, was a recurrent theme. Despite instances of exclusion or disciplinary issues, the participants express an ingrained understanding of the importance of further education, attributed to their parents' consistent emphasis on academic progression. This suggests a foundational belief system within their family units prioritising education as a path to success.

5.3.3 Theme Three: Challenges of Culture within the Education Setting

The third theme underscores common results about the challenges surrounding race, identity, and cultural pertinence within the educational environment. Analyses of the interview transcripts reveal multifaceted dimensions of these challenges. They encompass concerns related to the curriculum's cultural representation, the racial heterogeneity of the teaching staff's approaches to addressing race, culture, and racism in school, the adequacy of staff training on racial inclusivity, and the proactive role—or lack thereof—of Black teachers in championing the cause of Black race and inclusion.

5.3.3.1 Group A Participants: Race and Racism in School

'*At primary I was the non-threatening cute novelty Black pupil, and then as you get to secondary and when you start to find yourself, you become a bit more of a threat and teachers are a bit dubious of you and being more cautious.'* Anthony

'Am not trying to arr, [long pause] *bring no racial thing in but as a Black guy, you had to work 10 times harder in a class than the next man, the White man, sorry, to be blunt, but that's the way it came across for me.'* Leonard

'I remember my primary school teacher saying to my mum, he is gonna have to be twice as good as everybody else, I must have been what at that time, probably about eight, nine, it

didn't make much sense to me at the time. Over the years my mum latched on to that comment, always saying "even your teacher said you're gonna have to be twice as good as everybody else". ' Benjamin

'In secondary I remember someone wrote ------- is a Black bastard on a wall, when I found out who did it I beat them up and I got in trouble. This incident set the president for me amongst all the pupils but I felt I needed to do this because at the time there was only me and two other Black pupils in the school and I didn't want to be coming to school paranoid every day. Plus, I remember some of the parents were racist and was setting the example for their kids. ' Marlon

'Your race was like a stigma in school it was there, but it was also the areas you were coming from too. ' Paul

'As I got older, I realised that the curriculum system wasn't built for us. It's not built for Black kids, or it's not built for us at all. And I knew that later on in life, I knew that, but at that age, I didn't really see it. You don't see it, you're just a kid. Nathaniel

'What kills it as well, I think about how many Black teachers you know in schools back then? Where was your motivation? Where was your insight on a different level. ' Lawrence

'I didn't see anything what they [School] *were pushing towards me to try and help me to aspire that was really into my culture, everything what they were showing me was relating to their culture. So, what I started to do is turn away from that because I'm thinking well I don't see anything work related to me, and the teachers don't represent me physically or none of the images around school represent me, none of the lessons what they're teaching represent me. '* Samuel

'I came from a Catholic primary school and I was one of the only Black pupils there, when I went to secondary school there was more Black pupils and I started linking with them because I could relate to them more than my primary school friends who was all White. I remember my secondary school form teacher warning me about hanging around with "those kids" like when the Black pupils hanged around together they saw them as a gang.' Benjamin

'There were certain White kids who used to hang with us in school and you know, they was advised by teachers to be careful don't get too close with those guys, when they [the White pupils] *was just as badly behaved as us.'* Christopher

'I went to school when it was like teachers could get away with ignorance, what you couldn't get away with today. Some of the language teachers used back then, old school bigot language was used around us.' Paul

The predominant sentiment emanating from the primary voice excerpts in this section underscores the participants' conviction that race influenced their schooling experiences in myriad ways. These influences span from overt manifestations of racism to their relationship with the school curriculum, the ambience of the educational environment, perceptions of Black students by educators, and the disparity in treatment between Black students and their White peers.

However, I found some degrees of contradiction in the results. There were varying degrees of certainty among participants regarding the influence of race in their recounted experiences. While in some responses participants conveyed absolute confidence in race being a decisive factor, other times they expressed ambivalence.

'I can never say race played a part, but what I can say is I do think class played a part.' Paul

'I'd love to have a sit down and open discussion with set teachers I had, just because now I'm more knowledgeable about microracism, the little things, normal day-to-day things that you couldn't challenge back then.' Derek

'As a young kid back then it just felt like people had it in for me and might not have been too clear that this is actually racism. But if you look back now, I definitely can look back and I can sort of understand that you obviously didn't have the privilege as what a White pupil had.' Christopher

5.3.3.2 Group B and Group C participants: Race and Racism in School

Within the extracts drawn from Group B and C, narratives emerge that lend support to this theme, offering corroborative evidence that mirrors the experiences articulated by Group A.

'*I got such a desire to live with equality that anything other than that feels like death.* [Quote] *I got that from Huey P. Newton. So when I went into any situation, whether it's school whether it's college or university. I was like, yo, I need to, I need to be, I want everything to be on an equal playing field because this is my life. So, for me to deviate from there was doing myself a disservice.'* Richard

'The institutionalised racism, in particular how history was taught, it didn't surprise me that many Black kids got switched off, because the way the teachers taught history, first of all, Black people were Whitewashed out of it and then given a stereotype.' David

I tell you what kind of made me pick up my ideas. One of my drama teachers, she was dating a Black performer, guy called Clive Row, who I know now was extremely established. He came in to see our dress rehearsal and I didn't know who he was. Miss told me he's an actor on the West End. And it was the first time I'd seen a Black performer in the flesh. And that kind of registered with me, the first time I saw somebody who looked like me, sounded like he was of my class, so why couldn't I do it?' Clarke

'It was difficult because there wasn't that many Black role models in school back then, there was hardly any Black teachers.' Kevin

'I think, as well, with Black boys, a lack of feeling of belonging to the school, or being part of the school, or being part of the class, or a feeling of being separate, and not quite sure which way to put it, and the sort of, sometimes a feeling of injustice about some of the things that they have had to study and had to do. I think all those things may contribute to, to that kind of not engaging with the academic side of school.' (Retired headteacher)

'A lot of the curriculum just wants to totally ignore the anti-colonial struggle, the fact that people have only improved their lives, whether they're White or Black, by the struggles which they've waged as communities… their culture continues to be set aside. Their histories continue to be lied about and dismissed, their achievement continues to be unrecognised. And you know, that's at the heart of the British education system.' (Second retired headteacher)

The results share a powerful narrative about the pervasive challenges of racial and cultural relevance in educational settings at the time. Collectively, these extracts highlight systemic gaps in inclusive and representative educational experience for those moderate- to high-achieving Black Caribbean males. Richard's reflection on equality, inspired by the words of civil rights icon Huey P. Newton, highlights the personal significance of racial justice within educational institutions for him. Richard's insistence on equality as a non-negotiable aspect of his educational journey reveals the profound emotional and psychological impact of educational inequity. It highlights how personal identity and educational experiences converged in his reflection on his experiences in school.

David's commentary on the erasure of Black contributions from historical curricula highlights the feelings of a Eurocentric educational narrative around history. For him, by ignoring Black history, educational institutions inadvertently perpetuate a form of systemic racism that disenfranchises Black students, disconnecting them from their heritage and potentially stifling their engagement and academic curiosity.

Clarke's remarks about the scarcity of Black role models within schools touch on a profound deficiency in the educational workforce and Clarke's response on meeting Black performer Clive Rowe, highlights the importance of representation in educational settings. Seeing a successful Black professional within a domain within the paradigm of the participant, who was traditionally lacking in race diversity, served as a catalyst, inspiring Clarke to broaden his horizons about what is achievable for him.

In addition, the results from the two retired headteachers offer a nuanced understanding of the challenges Black students face in educational settings, particularly regarding racial and cultural relevance, that highlight a consensus across much of the results from the Black Caribbean male participants. The first headteacher's observations delve into the potential alienation Black students might encounter within the school environment, a lack of belonging, which extends from the classroom to the broader school community.

The feeling of injustice mentioned, particularly in relation to the curriculum, speaks volumes about how this school leader contextualised the disconnection Black students might experience when their history, culture, and experiences are not reflected or valued in their education. The second headteacher's remarks further acknowledge a systemic element within the curriculum. The intentional omission of anti-colonial struggles and the marginalisation of Black communities' historical achievements indicate that school leaders identify a possible gap in a curriculum which is deeply rooted in a singular narrative that fails to acknowledge the diversity of global history.

5.3.3.3 Group C Participants: Understanding the Cause of Racial Disparity within the Data

What also came out from the data concerning theme three were educators' views on understanding the underlying causes of the overrepresentation of Black Caribbean boys in the negative educational statistics.

'At that time, Black Caribbean boys were often very academic in infant school but in secondary schooling fell off somewhere, we were trying to pin down to whether it happened during primary school or was it on the entrance to secondary school. I was working with some of the EAL [English as an Additional Language] *team on trying to pin it back to what it actually was. But the kids that spectacularly under achieved, that was always such a, like, they should never have got those results, but I would say, they weren't putting in the effort,*

there wasn't any other factors that you could see, except they weren't putting the work in.' (Retired White assistant headteacher)

'I can remember lots of governors' meetings, and, rightly so, governors are saying, why are so many Black pupils being excluded? And it was a very hard question to answer because you kind of didn't see it in a holistic way, you saw it as that student and that student, and this student and what they did, and not what is happening in a wider sense to make that happen. (Retired headteacher)

The extracts collectively provide a perspective on the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys from the White educator's standpoint. The first extract delves into the academic trajectory of these students, noting a marked decline in performance transitioning from primary to secondary school. The extract highlights questions to identify the phase where this academic decline begins during primary education or at the onset of secondary schooling. A key observation is the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils who initially displayed strong academic potential from this participant's perspective, and this downturn was attributed to a lack of effort from the pupils.

In the second extract, discussions from governors' meetings reveal a concern about the high rates of exclusion among Black pupils. The participants highlight that exclusions are often viewed in isolation, focusing on individual behaviours rather than understanding them as part of a broader, more complex educational landscape. This might underpin the lack of a holistic approach to addressing the exclusions.

5.3.4 Theme Four: Unveiling the Invisible

The fourth thematic theme highlights narratives that intersect with broader systemic and societal factors, including political ideologies, the education system, and the role of schools in promoting racial equity. A key focus of this section is examining how these structural elements shape the lived experiences and outcomes of individuals within the education system. Some of these factors are evident only to those in specific professional roles, who, due to their positions, have insight into the strategic and operational dimensions of these issues. In contrast, other stakeholders may be unaware of these interconnections, lacking the

perspective to recognise how these elements collectively influence the social phenomena under investigation. Additionally, this theme explores Group A participants' transition into disaffection after secondary school, their reintegration, and their perceptions of contemporary youth and societal dynamics.

Overall, theme four serves as a tool for interpreting the modern education system, enabling me to align the current state of the education system with the past experiences of my participants captured in themes one, two and three. This alignment is intended to contextualise and understand the implications for Black Caribbean boys in the contemporary educational setting.

5.3.4.1 Group A and Group B Participants: The Commodification of Education in England

A common thread across these stories is a sense of neglect, with several students feeling left to navigate their educational journey without adequate encouragement or challenge. Within the collected narratives, a recurrent theme emerged, highlighting the interplay between students' academic achievements and their perceived treatment by educators. One narrative illustrates a participant's perception that his high academic ability (characterised as a 'grade A pupil') precipitated a more lenient approach from teachers. This leniency, he argues, may have been influenced by a commodification perspective on the part of the school, which stands to benefit from his success, whereas the other participant felt left behind. These results might connect a broader picture of the day-to-day interactions with faculty to broader institutional behaviours.

'Looking back now because I know the school system a bit, because I was a grade A pupil, they [the teachers] *were more lenient with me, not necessarily because they wanted to me to be successful, but because I helped them* [the teacher] *to get grades, it helped the school.'*
David

'You're already expected to fail, before you fail, you're not really pushed to excel, they won't push you.' Gregory

5.3.4.2 Group C Participants: The Commodification of Education in England

'And to be honest, when kids started becoming numbers, is when I started to really, really hate working in that role and it's partly why I retired early, I'd lost a bit of my heart for it by

then. I couldn't even entertain the idea that kids have been boiled down to a few numbers.' (Retired White assistant headteacher)

'Data gathering has improved, during my years in education but it's for what reason. What is data gathering improve for? Is it to try and prove that there is a reason to exclude this kid or, is it to try and get early intervention?' (Secondary school Black male teaching assistant)

'Getting rid of a child is seen as an easy solution to the problem that you're facing, and the fact that that's not absolutely best thing for the child doesn't really come into it anymore.' (White female secondary school teacher)

'Often they [school leadership] *do have that initial thought of which ones are likely to be excluded, but rather than looking how they can keep them in school, they're looking at, "have we got the evidence so that when they go to panel, we don't have to keep them?"'* (White female secondary school teacher)

'Kids getting kicked out of school is easier now. If you haven't got a bit of a brain, and you can't get GCSEs, and you're from a certain area or from a certain community, then you're not even getting entertained, they're [the schools] *probably trying to get you out, so they can concentrate on those* [pupils] *what they want there.* (Black teaching assistant in a secondary school)

Conversely, when considering the insights offered by Group C, a practitioner's perspective is introduced, enriching the theme with professional contextualisation. An integrative analysis that juxtaposes these macro-level insights with micro-level realities facilitates a deeper understanding, uncovering the dynamics but also highlighting the intricate mechanism shaping educational experiences. Professionals' perspectives collectively articulate a shift in educational paradigms towards a system overwhelmingly preoccupied with quantifiable outcomes.

This phenomenon is encapsulated in the sentiments of an assistant headteacher who chose early retirement, lamenting the depersonalisation of education. Her narrative, marked by a growing estrangement, suggests it speaks to an era increasingly dominated by numerical benchmarks and data-centric evaluations. This sentiment resonates with some sections of the literature covered in chapter three.

'The free market weakened schools in areas of deprivation, it will take time before they realise they need things like a local authority to actually keep an eye on what the academies are doing. It's like, to those who have, particularly when academisation came in, those who have more will be given more, and to those who haven't, even what they've got will be taken away. It took schools away from local authorities because that's what the government were trying to do, free up the market. That doesn't address inequalities within the system.'
(Second retired headteacher)

'I think we also have to be aware of the changes. I mean, we talked about the council. Well, the Conservative Government made a very good move in their eyes, they removed the council so that actually you're talking about educational trusts now, it's pointless, going to the council, they have no leverage, the leverage is within the trust. Most people don't even know who the trust CEO is. So things are changing, so therefore you have to be mindful of those changes as well. The power is now centred more and more in unseen faces, so you don't even know where to go to.' (Retired vice principle of local college)

The perspectives of key educational figures reveal a shared concern over the education system's entanglement with capitalist and neoliberal agendas. Participants, especially those with leadership experience, critique the push for academisation as a market-driven approach to education reform. This approach, they argue, compounds inequalities rather than mitigates them. The insights suggest a divisive outcome of the academy movement: schools that excel are rewarded and positioned to influence others, whereas those with less stellar performance are marginalised, with their struggles often attributed to a simplistic measure of academic success. Participants also expressed unease over this model's competitive ethos, arguing that it contributes to an exclusionary culture within school leadership and erodes the sense of community and inclusion.

Much of these results marry with the previous critique in reducing pupils to data points, a trend that some participants suggest erodes the humanistic essence of education, leading to their disengagement and premature departure from the profession. In sum, the results from these extracts portray an educational landscape where neoliberal-capitalist imperatives overshadow the holistic development of pupils and perpetuate systemic disparities, especially in underprivileged areas.

5.3.4.3 Group C Participants: Racial Awareness, Professional Development and Anti-Racist Practice

This theme also revealed that results concerning racism in education are interconnected with various issues. Foremost among these was the criticality of anti-racist training, a consistent topic where participants noted a stark paucity. They underscored an urgent need for systemic implementation of such training, which is presently insufficient or absent, pointing to a significant oversight in the professional development of educators. Results highlight concerns regarding the demographic composition of the teaching staff. The responses suggested that the current demographic makeup of teachers might inadvertently sustain structural racism within educational settings, necessitating a broader representation that mirrors the diversity of the student population. Moreover, the extracts highlight potential deficiencies in knowledge and comprehension about race and inclusivity among White educators working within the educational environment. These responses collectively suggest that the system lacks awareness in accommodating racial diversity within a school environment.

'The race factor, I struggled with it a bit because I thought, that's really difficult for me to answer, because in all the other groups, there's a kind of deficit that you understand. So the looked after children haven't got immediate family background, the special needs kids all got some kind of learning disability, that is something that once you understand you can try and put something in place to support them, with the free school meal kids they are obviously from much more disadvantaged and poverty backgrounds. But, the Black, Asian and minority ethnic kids. What's the deficit? That's what I struggled with, when I started thinking about it, I've never thought of it in that kind of way.' (White female secondary school teacher)

'When you get to that age of 11, you've got, what you call, identity versus conflict, so then you've not just got a young person that is growing up and developing. It is here he starts to realise and recognise who he is, as a person, who he is as a Black person trying to identify with his culture, and trying to find that in his surroundings a lot of the time, his school don't give him those positives. It's not reflective of him, then you've got almost like a crisis for that young person at period when they're going through development and change.' (Black male learning mentor)

'When I trained, I had a lady on my course, who came from Clowne, Chesterfield, and she had to go to ---------- *School* [a school that has high population of Black pupils] *to do a placement. Her question to me was, ''how do I talk to them?'' And I said, like you talk to anybody else. She was concerned because they were Black. And I think that is still the case now.'* (White female secondary school teacher)

'I had a conversation with my headteacher on Friday and we was in a discussion about this mixed race boy who is 11 but he's really big and looks about 14. He said as soon as you see this child, you'll have preconceived ideas. So this was him being honest with me, just saying what he sees. He said I shouldn't have it but I have got this idea, how do I get rid of this, so he was just being honest.' (Black female school teacher)

[Laugher in response to a question on anti-racist training] *'No, that don't exist, that what you're talking about. There's all kinds of training but there's not that kind of training.* [laughing, expressing this point with humour] *Sometimes they throw you into them groups, you are the training, because if they are those groups of kids they're gonna put you in there. Because they might say, ''well you are the Black man so you go deal with that'', even if they're Asian, don't matter what colour they are, just need any drop of ethnicity because he is the expert on ethnicity.'* (Black maths secondary school teacher)

'I did my teacher training 17 years ago, and I don't think you're prepared for the classroom at all. In terms of race, actually thinking now, it's a bit weird but we actually did nothing about race whatsoever.' (Black female primary school teacher)

This issue around the gap in institutions on their frameworks and practices regarding anti-training and race equity did not just solely emerge from responses of those Group C participants working in schools, but also from participants working within the local authority.

'I spent 20 years working in Sheffield and 15 of those for the City Council education team, and when I reflect from my experience, I felt that I spent a lot of that time fighting middle leaders, fighting people, particularly secondary schools in Sheffield, to try and get them to change things. And for me, that's where the blockage is, and I think the idea of getting those people to talk about what it is that is actually causing them to become blockers.' (Black retired council officer in education)

'Race and ethnicity, [pause] *because it's kind of wiped out at the moment from how we work in the council, I don't know how to describe it, but ethnicity, we don't even ask it on the referral form anymore. And there's a lot of questions about what do you do with that bit of data? So there's,* [long pause] *so it's like, almost things have been made that it's kind of wiped out.'* (Council officer in education)

'The reason why I left, we had a new head of service. And I was in a meeting with all the advisors and senior advisors and we're talking about going forward, and I said to the whole group, as the only Black person there, "Well, what about the appointment of more Black headteachers in schools, we have large significant numbers of Black kids, I feel we need more Black representatives", and the head of service at that time, said, "Oh, don't you think we're not professional enough to appoint somebody who's good?" And I was so scared, I could feel it and I can still feel it in my stomach because nobody in that room supported me at all, and I just felt so alone. Now I think I should have said, well, you know, I think of all the answers I could have said, I felt so intimidated by that meeting.' (Black retired senior education advisor Sheffield City Council)

'I don't think, I definitely don't think I've got enough resource in relation to staff and financial resources to do that [Race and school inclusion practice]. *And I think you need*

both. You have to educate staff, because if the staff don't see those things as issues, then it becomes difficult. So you have to educate the team so that legally as part of my responsibility will be to educate the team, but then also to have the resources to look at to really drill down and look at ethnicity.' (Black officer Sheffield City Council)

In addition to issues around anti-racist training, results within the collective voices from educator extracts highlighted issues around the agency of Black educators when considering the prospect of voicing out against racial discrimination within the school institution.

'I think that, not me, but if you [place extra emphasis on 'you' indicating to me as the interviewer], *as a Black professional, were to say that, if you were to say something and raise that concern about racism, then automatically they would think that you had got a chip on your shoulder, and then it wouldn't necessarily be their practice was wrong, it would be seen as you were wrong.'* (White female secondary school teacher)

'Teachers are on the teaching pay scale career progression, they can come up with all different reasons that they can say that you're not going to get a pay progression this year. And if you are, if you are raising your head up and you're making noise, challenging issues regarding institutional racism, then you are seen as a trouble causer, doesn't matter which institution you're in, I think in education if you start saying well I think this is wrong, you start making these little rumblings, then it effectively stops your career, you can't get any higher in that organisation.' (Black female secondary school teacher)

There's many incidents, so many incidents, [incidents in relation to race and racism in school] *it would be hard to recall them all. But basically, to answer the question, I don't do anything about any of them. Because my organisation has a very clear history of sacking people that make noise or complain or that, you know, want to raise issues.'* (Black male secondary school teacher)

One White participant accentuates the challenge that Black professionals encounter the moment they raise issues of race and racism. They risk being stigmatised as bearing a 'chip on their shoulder', casting doubt on their professional integrity rather than addressing the systemic biases at play. These sentiments are mirrored by another narrative that outlines the professional roadblocks for Black teachers who dare to spotlight institutional racism. According to this viewpoint, such individuals are often branded as 'troublemakers', claiming that this label potentially transcends institutional boundaries and follows them through their careers, irrespective of the setting. A third extract recounts personal encounters with racial incidents within their educational establishment. Their remarks highlight a prevailing fear of repercussions, which acts as a barrier to action against raising their concerns.

5.3.4.4 Group A Participants: Disengagement and Environmental Influences on Post-School Aspirations

Within the broader discourse of the fourth theme, another recurring narrative strand emerges amongst the Group A participants. This thread delves into the participants' reflections concerning experiences tied to disaffection during that post-secondary school period. More specifically, these narratives present the pivotal factors that facilitated their journey from a state of disaffection to one of re-engagement.

'For the first six months was [after leaving school]*, I had no plans. No plans, nothing for my career, my future. Not in the first six months, I couldn't wait to leave school.'* Lawrence

'When I left school my mind-set was I don't want to depend on my mom I can see how hard its for her, I need to be buying my own clothes, I have to provide for myself and take the pressure off my mum.' Derek

'As a child my playground was ---------- Street [red light area in 80s and 90s Sheffield] *so we knew what could bring money in so crime was always an option, when you're around stuff and you've got no skill, I didn't think I had skills so I had no aspirations.'* Paul

'I was doing a YTS at an auto parts shop, someone we all know came into the shop to buy vehicle parts and said, what are you doing in here you can make more money doing what I'm doing [selling weed]. *The same day he said that, the same day, someone who worked in the same place said "can you get me….."* [laughing]. *That was the start.'* Anthony

'I didn't really think, that's what I'm going to do [crime]. *But I knew that's a possibility. That's something what you can do. That's one of the possibilities one of the ways of getting out, that's what I've seen other man try so, that might even be why I weren't really engaged in college.'* Benjamin

'So being a Black boy gave you access in certain circles, but also when I first started going out [Accessing pubs and night clubs] *somebody looking around in the club or looking around for somebody to buy "tings"* [drugs] *and they see you they would always likely ask me then the White person in the club.'* Lawrence

'When I was at college and I saw these posh White kids shottin' weed [selling marijuana] *Seeing a group of White kids who lived in places like Bradway and Dore, rich White boys who had no reason to be doing what they was doing. They had their own enforcer where if certain debts that people weren't paid they would go and tell such and such. My White friend ask me to be his enforcer because I was Black, all his jimmys* [the dealer's customers] *would get fraid* [scared] *and pay up, so I started doing my own hustle at college; that was the start.'* Derek

The collective narratives from these extracts paint a picture of the post-school experiences and trajectories of the Group A participants. Lawrence's account captures a sense of aimlessness in the initial months after leaving school, reflecting a lack of career or future planning. A similar sentiment is echoed by Derek, whose desire was to alleviate financial burdens on his family, who felt the urgency to become financially self-sufficient. The narratives reveal a common element of economic factors, lack of preparation and limited guidance and support in transitioning from school to career, highlighting feelings of uncertainty and the absence of a clear aspiration.

The extracts further delve into lure and access to crime as a viable option due to the lack of perceived legitimate opportunities. Paul's childhood exposure to criminal activities in his community set a precedent for considering crime as a potential option for generating income. Similarly, Benjamin and Paul describe being drawn into illegal activities not out of a strong inclination but as one of the few accessible options. Also, what results highlight is that within certain communities, there were individuals who were viewed by the participants as role models.

'Lots of things because I used to look up to ---------- when I was younger, he used to smoke, so I used to smoke, the guy had the nice sports car, the guy could breakdance and he had a nice girl, so he had the three things that I liked.' Marlon

'And I'd be honest with you, this is 100% ---------- had a massive impact on me and I'll tell you why. Because of ---------- I ended up getting a gold tooth to the front, funky dread, I remember seeing ---------- thinking my man is wicked, because he was older than me.' Harold

'The key things, the key things in my decision making were my peers, no two ways about it.' Nathaniel

'I had influences when I was a yout [a teenager in this context], ---------- *back them times when I was young, these man were like gods. Nice cars, gold chains, girls, I was like, wow!'* Lawrence

'I can remember the whole timeline of it. I just remember hitting the road I rolled with different people like -------- and that relationship was militant, me and ---------- together was toxic.' Marlon

When discussing that early post-secondary school period, Group A participants provide a vivid illustration of the profound influence of peers and role models on their behaviour and lifestyle choices during their early stages of disaffection. Marlon shares how their emulation of an admired individual extended to adopting similar habits, such as smoking, and aspiring to have similar possessions, including a sports car and attracting a desirable partner. Harold's account further underscores this influence, where the admiration for an older individual led to specific style choices, like getting a gold tooth and wearing funky

dreadlocks. These aesthetic choices were inspired by the role model's perceived 'coolness' and status. Similarly, Lawrence reflects on their teenage years, describing the figures they looked up to as almost god-like, with their impressive cars, jewellery, and relationships. The narratives add a layer of complexity to their influences, describing the dynamics of their relationships with certain peers as 'militant' and 'toxic'. This acknowledgement indicates that peer influences were strong but sometimes led to negative or harmful behaviours and associations.

5.3.4.5 Group A Participants: Community Sector Role in Social Reintegration

Group A participants' extracts notably highlighted the pathways that facilitated their reintegration away from social disaffection and criminal activities. The examples of these pathways offer insights into the mechanisms of change and resilience and highlight the potential for positive redirection, even after periods of disaffection or involvement in crime. These stories of reintegration and recovery are integral to understanding the full spectrum of experiences of these participants, providing valuable perspectives to support some of the overall aims of this study.

'The --- [Caribbean youth centre] *was definitely, massive point for me moving forward. The* ------- ------- *project at the* ---------- *gave me some paid sessions to work with young people. For me, it was knowing I could do things in terms of work and a professional career, because at work I was getting praise from my manager, people telling me stuff you've never heard before, it gave me that confidence, and that's when my life kind of settled.'* Marlon

'Starting at a local community project doing youth work training, then I got some sessions at ----------*. People were telling me that I can apply for this, I never really envisioned working in schools, I didn't think it possible for me.'* Benjamin.

'---------- [Black male community youth worker] *for me, there is some people, I don't care what they told me it would just go in one ear and come out the other but certain people, you'd listen to and what they said it would stick with you, that was* ----------*.'* Paul.

Central to these transformative narratives is the instrumental role played by the community, as illustrated by the extracts that shed light on the participants' experiences during their disaffection. Although the narrative from these results was not directly linked with the subject of experiences within school, it was essential to incorporate as it provides insight into what factors provided solutions for these individuals, which overall supported some of the previous results that emerged within the data.

5.3.4.6 Group A Participants: The Current Picture of Youth Disaffection and Social Reintegration

The final point in Group A's findings highlights a shared perception that young Black Caribbean boys are experiencing increasing pressures, which have intensified over time. While these challenges are not unique to the current generation, the added influence of social media has exacerbated their impact. However, beyond the influence of digital spaces, a recurring theme in the data is the growing struggle of Black boys against a backdrop where traditional support structures—such as Black-led community centres—have significantly declined or disappeared altogether. These institutions once played a crucial role in providing targeted support for Black boys experiencing youth disaffection and school exclusion, and their absence has left a critical gap in available interventions.

In addition, Group A participants raised concerns about increasing peer pressure and violence within communities, with one participant likening the current climate to "Armageddon." The data suggests that the spectrum of young Black boys at risk has expanded, transcending socioeconomic backgrounds, and home environments. Even those raised in stable and supportive households are not immune to the realities of street culture and its associated dangers. Participants also pointed to a rising trend of hyper-masculinity, facilitated by social media, which has heightened sensitivities among youth, making even humour or critique a trigger for conflict. This shift has contributed to deteriorating peer relationships, increased social pressure, and an alarming rise in violent confrontations over trivial disputes. The following participant narratives provide further insight into these concerns, illustrating the lived experiences of those directly affected.

'Back in the day, how did we make contact with these professionals? 90% referrals was through the --------- [Black Caribbean-led youth club]. *There's no youth club, no more.'*
Marlon

'I will give you something what you might not like. It's mine and it's your fault. You see what we had, we had -------, we had ----, we had --------- (Black community youth workers). So where was you for these youts [young people] *where was I for them. We have to also take responsibility, we wasn't there for this generation because we was too busy benefitting from the support we got when we were youts. We wasn't there for them as our older generations was there for us.'* Stephen

'There's no services [tailored to meet the needs of Black youth] *so that means the balance or opportunities is off? Because there's always going to be some youts* [young people] *no matter what, want do a road ting* [crime]. *What you have to do is create the opportunity for the ones part of the group that will engage. Because when the opportunity is not there for the ones that are willing to engage, the balance is way out and that is what messes everything up in the community. Then the influence in the community becomes acidic, and when a community is acidic, so inside people are bitter with each other, outside people thinking well, I don't want to go in there, the problems just continue to get worse.'* Paul

'Pressures on them [young people] *as well, to be a certain way especially with social media, and then the violence is getting worse, more extreme.*' Lawrence

'The ego on the street has gone to another level [amongst young people] *and ramped up by social media, the ego out in the street, the masculine individual the masculine person has gone up another level. He can't take any sort of joke or diss.'* Marlon

'It got worse [disaffection amongst young people] *because I feel in today's world is I think social media, highlights the world that we live in, which is, is definitely segregated, and labelling, you know, everything is even worse.'* Nathaniel

'If I was coming up now [as a disaffected teenager], *in this era, this generation, there's a lot more access. So, if I was coming up now with my mind-set how I was then, I be gone, I'd be*

100% gone. So, for people like me who may have that mind-set now, it's not a good look. But at the same time I also believe there's maybe a bit more support in place, a bit more recognition of some of the issues out there then when I was coming up.' Harold

'Just think it's got worse. This is like Armageddon for them out there now, it's got worse as the stakes are higher.' Leonard

'Even when they [young people] *who has had the right guidance, can slip into that* [crime], *you know, I mean because it's there to slip into. It's a lot more perilous now out there. And the young people we're talking about, culturally, they don't have what we had, so you might not be getting it from home for various reasons and there's nothing in the community, there is no community to draw to get that culture.'* Benjamin

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we analysed the results through four themes: inescapable labels, pathways and obstacles to empowerment, challenges of culture within the education setting and unveiling the invisible. Analysing overarching narratives of the macro with the ground-level interactions, a picture emerges that helps formulate a greater understanding of the intricate dynamics within the educational sphere, plus the contextual journey through teenage adolescence of the Black Caribbean male pupil in English schools. A pervasive undercurrent within the amalgamated themes is the constant overlapping of racial considerations and their influence on various educational facets, whether that be teacher-pupil relationships, educational attainment, professional agency and advocacy, or the curriculum. An examination of the interwoven patterns reveals an insightful congruence. The subsequent chapter explores what these results imply, examining how the themes developed from the results respond to the central research questions.

CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I synthesise the results presented in the previous chapter, with the aim of offering a detailed analysis and researcher's interpretation. This process involves carefully aligning the findings within the literature review and the theoretical framework, aiming to extract and define the underlying meanings that have emerged from the data.

The primary objective of this chapter is to analyse the research results to address the overarching research questions that have guided this study:

- How can the English education system leverage the experiences of formerly disaffected, second-generation Black Caribbean males in England to help address youth disaffection within this socio-demographic?

- What impact do the broader mechanisms operating within the education system have on the educational experiences of social actors on the ground, and how does this impact Black Caribbean pupils?

- Is there evidence from the results of the two previous questions to suggest that the education system contributes to disaffection amongst Black Caribbean males in England?

By doing so, I aim to fulfil the overall objectives of the research, offering insights and drawing conclusions that contribute to the existing body of knowledge and, potentially, professional practice. This endeavour involves a restatement of the results and a deeper exploration of their meanings and implications, hopefully in the context of the literature, theoretical perspective and professional practical applications.

A key objective of this study was to analyse the educational experiences of previously disaffected second-generation Caribbean males who attended secondary schools in Sheffield, England, acting as Group A in this investigation. It also sought to incorporate voices of Group B, evaluating the experiences of high-achieving second-generation Caribbean males and Group C, professionals in Sheffield's education sector, including

schools, colleges, local authorities, and community sector. The goal was to understand their perspectives, comparing and contrasting these with the voices of Group A participants.

The methodological approach adopted in this investigation was qualitative and interpretive, incorporating phenomenological and narrative research methods. The theoretical framework integrated critical race theory (CRT) with ecological systems theory (EST), this theoretical approach was instrumental in further enhancing the understanding of the research participants' experiences and the phenomena investigated. A fundamental goal was to look at the educational journeys of formerly disaffected males, as told through their shared stories, and to analyse these narratives alongside the extracts from the Group B and Group C participants to support contextualising the educational journeys.

6.1.1 Discussion

In examining previous research, numerous studies emphasise the psychological effects on individuals stemming from the complexities of daily interactions within institutional environments (Glynn, 2018; Graham, 2014). These studies shed light on how routine exchanges within these settings, particularly racialised encounters, can significantly impact individuals' psychological wellbeing and perception. From the context of education, whether through educational attainment, the curriculum, discipline and punishment or the school ethos, it is essential to explore and understand the psychological impact. To deepen this understanding, the structure of this chapter utilises the emergent themes identified from the data analysis presented in the previous results section. These themes capture the day-to-day interactions within educational settings and the broader mechanisms that influence professional practice and interactions. By focusing on the emerging themes, we gain insight into the participants' daily experiences during their time in secondary education, the post-school transition period, and the systemic factors that shape their educational journey.

The four key themes identified from interviews and focus groups were: 'inescapable labels', 'pathways and obstacles to empowerment', 'challenges of culture within the education setting', and 'unveiling the invisible'. They revealed that the educational experiences of Black Caribbean males in English secondary schools were complex and multifaceted, suggesting that race and racism were central issues, which aligns with a large section of the existing literature. Additionally, the study found other important factors acting as primary

barriers like pupils' classroom behaviour, pupil learning attitudes, peer pressure, Black masculinity, and identity, which are also supported by a minority of the literature.

The method adopted here involves a three-layered approach using the themes taken from the previous chapter's results to understand the significance of these findings. This process includes analysing and interpreting the results from the overall data gathered, first focusing on the results of the Group A participants, those second-generation formerly disaffected Black Caribbean males, followed by an interpretation of the findings of those making up both Groups B and C, to compare and contrast and see whether this provides further meaning.

The first layer entails analysing and interpreting theme one, ‘inescapable labels’. I then apply an approach that combines Theme One with Theme Two, ‘Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment’, as a framework for analysing six key areas that emerged as common topics of discussion during the narrative interviews:

1. Educational attainment
2. Behaviour and punishment
3. Teacher pupil relationships
4. Post-16 transition
5. Disaffection amongst Black Caribbean boys
6. Reintegration and reform

I have combined themes one and two, ‘inescapable labels’ and ‘pathways and obstacles to empowerment’, because the results showed there was considerable overlap in the findings formulating both themes; they complemented each other and enabled me to investigate and understand the on-the-ground experiences of formerly disaffected participants, particularly from a micro educational standpoint.

The second layer in analysing the research results combines themes one and two as a lens through which to examine the two remaining dominant themes, theme three, ‘challenges of culture within the education setting’, and ‘unveiling the invisible’, as shown in Table 2. The findings from Themes One and Two, including stereotypes, low expectations, and racialised interactions, permeate all aspects of the journey examined, making them essential to understanding the participants' educational experiences. This approach was instrumental in

unravelling the intricate dynamics within these themes, significantly deepening the analysis of the other themes and better contextualising the participants' educational experiences but also understanding this from a macro educational perspective. This yielded more profound insights and detailed responses to the central research questions, as it firmly anchors the analysis in the lived realities.

The third layer of analysis further enriches this by taking a comprehensive review of the results incorporating the theoretical frameworks of CRT and EST. This layer aims to provide deeper meaning and understanding by integrating these theoretical perspectives, thereby offering a more nuanced interpretation of the overall findings. Additionally, in the early stages of this chapter, I have analysed theme one—inescapable labels—through the lens of the theoretical framework to provide a broader structural perspective.

Table 2: Combination of themes

Theme	**Theme One and Theme Two:** Inescapable labels/ Pathways and obstacles to empowerment	**Theme Three:** Challenges of culture within the education setting	**Theme Four:** Unveiling the invisible	**Overall findings** Theoretical framework
Analytical lens	*Educational attainment* *Behaviour and punishment* *Teacher-pupil relationships* *Post-16 transition* *Disaffection amongst Black boys* *Reintegration and reform*	Theme one: *Inescapable labels* Theme two: *Pathways and obstacles to empowerment*	Theme one: *Inescapable labels* Theme two: *Pathways and obstacles to empowerment*	Critical race theory (CRT) Ecological systems theory (EST)

6.2 Understanding the Impact of Inescapable Labels and Pathways to Empowerment on Educational Experiences

6.2.1 Theme One: Inescapable Labels

6.2.1.1 Group A

The results presented in theme one, illustrates the complex interplay between racial perceptions and pupil identity during their educational journey as students in secondary school. One recurring theme suggested a misalignment between pupils' self-perception and the labels imposed upon them within the school environment; for instance, Marlon's account of being labelled 'the cock' (meaning the toughest kid) by other pupils, despite not engaging in physical altercations. Similarly, Nathaniel's experiences of being perceived as aggressive by teachers when expressing assertiveness when making a point and Paul's descriptions of being pigeonholed as the 'bad kid' early on suggest a disconnect between actions and the perceptions of others, which may indicate systemic bias in how behaviours were interpreted within the institution. Samuel's observation of White teachers' presumptions of Black students' abilities that highlighted the stereotyping of Black pupils concerning sports and subjects like P.E. (physical education) points to a subtle yet pervasive form of racial bias, one that confines students' potential to physical rather than academic routes. These accounts collectively support previous studies that highlight a tendency within the education system in England to assign racial stereotypes to Black Caribbean boys, often misinterpreting their actions and intentions (Gillborn, 2007; Richardson, 2007).

6.2.1.2 Group C Participants

Supporting this, the Group C results within theme one from educators of different backgrounds converge with Group A results on the perception and treatment of Black Caribbean male pupils, suggesting a broader societal as well as educational stereotyping that limits Black Caribbean boys' perceived potential. The retired Black male secondary school teacher highlights the societal stereotypes that Black boys often face, portraying them as 'cool', athletically inclined, or musically talented, which may inadvertently encourage them to focus less on academics. Here, he argues that societal pigeonholing, rooted in physical and cultural stereotypes, poses a challenge in helping these students see beyond the narrow

roles society has carved out for them, emphasising their physical attributes over intellectual or emotional capabilities, but also suggests that this impacts on White educators.

A similar notion is echoed by the Black female secondary school teacher who notes that teachers often have low expectations of Black male students, leading to their placement in lower academic sets without justification. The White secondary school maths teacher adds that teachers tend to typecast Black Caribbean students as naturally good at sports, overlooking other talents and abilities. Similarly, another teacher amongst Group C participants points out the reductive view of Black boys as merely physical beings, either seen as threats or pigeonholed into roles like athletes or musicians.

Collectively, these educators' observations support the results from the Group A participants, underlining a systemic issue within the education system that Black Caribbean male pupils are often confined within narrow societal and educational stereotypes, impeding their ability to explore and develop diverse aspects of their identity and talents. Within the inescapable labels theme, the results suggest that the role of racial stereotypes within the school system and externally across wider society can act as barriers that negatively impact the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys.

6.2.2 Inescapable Labels/Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment: *Educational attainment*

In this section, I begin to interpret the research results from the key topics of the narrative interviews through the combine lens of theme one, inescapable labels, and two, pathways and obstacles to empowerment.

6.2.2.1 Group A

Derek's account of his confrontation with their English teacher illustrates an intersection of learning disabilities within the educational system, potentially compounded by racial and interpersonal relationship dynamics. His experience of being accused of cheating by an English teacher, particularly after being diagnosed with dyslexia, you could argue, may not have had anything to do with low expectations due to Derek’s race and may underline the teacher's critical failure in recognising and adapting to diverse learning needs. However, this decision by Derek to use a computer to assist with spelling and grammar, leading to significant academic improvement, was met not with encouragement or support but with suspicion and public shaming. This incident could highlight a broader issue in the rigid

perception of Derek’s capabilities for improvement by the teacher, evidenced by the accusation of cheating and bullying someone in front of his peers.

At the same time, this supports the idea of a deeply ingrained bias from the teacher in question, as their presumption that Derek's improved quality of work was a result of misconduct rather than his effort, that might reveal a failure to acknowledge the pupil’s academic potential, which possibly could have been exacerbated by a combination of teacher low expectations due to race and previous academic performance. However, the crucial factor to consider here is Derek's emotional psychological response, feeling ‘two inches tall’ and wishing for the ground to swallow him, illustrating the damaging impact such accusations can have on a pupil's self-esteem and motivation.

6.2.2.2 Group B

Other data gathered supports Derek’s example above; the experiences of David and Kevin, both second-generation Black male high achievers, reveal critical insights into the racial and academic biases present within the educational system. David's reflection on his claim on placing Black pupils in the lower set and being labelled as underperforming ('thick') highlights their feelings of systemic racial inequalities, where the responsibility for academic struggles is often solely placed on the pupil and overlooks other vital factors, such as quality of teaching. David's narrative suggests that the labelling and placement in lower sets of Black pupils were not always reflective of the pupil's true capabilities but instead influenced by prejudiced perceptions and poor-quality teachers.

Kevin's experience also further supports the theory around the issue of misjudgement and racial bias concerning Black pupils and academic attainment. Despite Kevin's engagement and strong performance in design technology, a subject he was passionate about from his account, Kevin was estimated to receive a low grade. This estimation was incongruent with his overall performance, where he excelled and achieved one of his highest GCSE grades. Kevin's observation of being graded lower compared to his White peers, who he claims were producing poorer work, suggests that there could have been a disparity in their school on how academic abilities were assessed and that racial biases could have influenced these assessments. If that were an accurate account of this event, then this disparity not only raises questions on the fairness and accuracy of academic evaluations but also reflects a broader

educational tendency to underestimate and undervalue the academic potential of Black Caribbean boys.

6.2.3 Inescapable Labels/Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment: *Behaviour and Punishment*

6.2.3.1 Group A

The narratives of Group A participants Derek and Benjamin present a picture which suggests a systemic issue in their educational experiences during their time at secondary school, characterised by frequent exclusion and perceived discrimination. Derek's reflection on being excluded ‘a bag of times’ for varied reasons speaks to a pattern of disciplinary responses in school, and his extract reveals a more profound psychological impact of the internalisation of negative labels.

> *When you keep on painting kids and telling them that they're this and that* [negative feedback], *eventually, part of you just gives up and just says alright if that’s the side of me that you want and I'm gonna go full force.*
>
> Derek

Derek's eventual decision to embrace the disruptive identity expected of him suggests a form of resistance or resignation, a psychological response to continual negative reinforcement. This narrative supports the theory of the Pygmalion effect (Jacobson & Rosenthal, 1992), how persistent negative feedback and exclusion led Derek to conform to the very stereotypes and expectations that penalised him, creating a vicious cycle of misbehaviour and punishment. Benjamin’s account highlights disparities in disciplinary measures between Black and White students, suggesting Black pupils face a lower threshold for punishment. This imbalance places additional pressure on Black students while fostering feelings of injustice and inequality. Benjamin’s observation that White students often avoided punishment for similar or worse actions reinforces the notion of an uneven playing field. These patterns suggest Black pupils may have experienced both more frequent disciplinary actions and different expectations, potentially impacting their academic journeys and self-perception in significant ways.

However, within Group A, the collective experiences of Harold, Nathaniel, Benjamin, and Gregory, and the insights from a retired former assistant headteacher produced contrasting findings where you find some contradictions in the results of the above responses. Harold

and Nathaniel acknowledge their disruptive behaviour in school, with Harold explicitly stating that any disciplinary action he faced was justified and not perceived as racially motivated. This acknowledgement of personal behaviour as a primary factor in disciplinary actions provides an important perspective, emphasising the role of pupil behaviour in their experiences in school discipline.

Whereas Benjamin and Gregory's reflections offer additional layers to this narrative, Benjamin notes a contrast between the academic progress, *'the middle-class White kids who came from Crosspool, they were just accelerating in their learning, they wouldn't get in trouble because they're just getting their head down',* highlighting factors that he believed influenced their educational experiences and outcomes. Gregory's admission of being a 'tearaway' and easily influenced during crucial developmental years in secondary school and his acknowledgement of susceptibility to external influences highlighted one of his challenges in school around peer pressure, a theme echoed by the retired assistant headteacher's observation about the significance of peer pressure and solidarity among Black Caribbean boys. These comments point to a complex interaction of individual behaviour and peer dynamics that may contradict other results concerning the topic of behaviour.

Supporting this narrative are the works of Sewell (2009), Sewell and Lott (2007) and Robinson (2020). There is a distinct shift in the understanding of the educational challenges faced by Black pupils. Their findings suggest a departure from the most common, straightforward narrative of racism as the primary cause of underachievement; Sewell and Lott, suggests that the type of racism of the 1970s that existed in the education system is no longer the cause and that it is due to a more complex interplay of social and cultural factors in contemporary times. Central to Sewell's theory is the role of peer pressure, constructs of Black masculinity, and the notable absence of father figures in the lives of Black boys. Sewell argues that these factors collectively suggest that internal community dynamics and family structures significantly influence Black students' educational trajectories.

This perspective points towards the importance of exploring beyond systemic racial biases and understanding the socio-cultural context in which Black pupils are situated. Robinson (2020) further builds on this discourse by delving into Black masculinity and its impact during teenage adolescence. Robinson's work highlights how Black boys navigate their

identities within the educational system, balancing the influences of peers and educators, emphasising the significance of peer pressure and self-presentation, particularly in interactions with other Black males.

6.2.3.1 Group B

In contrast to the above research, however, the collected accounts from Richard and Clarke, high-achieving second generation Black Caribbean males, alongside the response from one of the retired headteachers, support much of the previous results concerning behaviour and punishments of Black Caribbean pupils. These extracts suggest that misperception and over-disciplining based on physical appearance and racial stereotypes sometimes occur.

Richard's experience reflects a perception among teachers that some Black male pupils, due to their physical maturity, are viewed as intimidating. As Richard suggests, this perception leads to an exaggerated disciplinary approach, akin to a ‘command and conquer’ strategy, where teachers feel the need to assert dominance over a pupil they find intimidating. What this might suggest is that disciplinary approaches participants experienced might not just have been about maintaining classroom management but also about overcoming a perceived threat due to the teacher’s intrinsic racial bias that also could be something subconscious that they may not be fully aware of or in tune with.

Clarke's statement further reinforces this, highlighting instances where Black students were treated as adults (‘big man’) despite being children, which suggests a failure to recognise the age-appropriate behaviour of the pupils. This result supports the theory of adultification (Davis & Marsh, 2020). The retired headteacher's insights confirm these observations, acknowledging that some teachers are frightened of Black students and consequently treat them differently, often with harsher punishments and stricter judgments. These testimonies collectively reflect contrasting debates that I encountered within the literature on the role of racial inequalities within the education system concerning racial disparities in Black Caribbean pupils’ attainment and school exclusion statistics. I must note that only one participant from both Group A and Group B questioned whether their school experiences were influenced by race. Every other participant highlighted race and gender as factors.

The underlying common trend running throughout the results and also the previous studies reviewed suggested that in the educational system, there are those practices where Black

Caribbean male pupils could be subjected to higher levels of discipline but are also often perceived and treated through a lens tainted by racial and physical stereotypes. A misperception can lead to a distorted approach to discipline, interaction and low academic expectations between teacher and pupil, which can ultimately negatively impact the teacher-pupil relationship. The results also suggest another common trend: the psychological impact of a particular type of a 'hidden curriculum' (Graham, 2014; Lynch, 1989) that the participants were subjected to due to those practices underpinned by racial stereotypes.

The results demonstrate that the experiences in the participants' extracts are complex but underpinned by race and that, psychologically, these encounters created a sense of injustice, which some internalised, impacting their educational experience and personal development. Those research results, in connection with educational attainment, behaviour and disciplinary procedures in school, presented a typical pattern that suggests that while those participants who faced disaffection recognised their behaviour as a key factor in their adversities in school, the research results do indicate that their behavioural challenges likely served to reinforce pre-existing negative stereotypes amongst some White educators. These pre-existing negative stereotypes could have come from entrenched fears and low academic and behavioural expectations within the school environment (Wright et al., 2021, p. 4).

These findings support a wide range of previous studies when returning to the literature reviewed in this dissertation. For instance, the significance of the teacher-pupil relationship on school experiences and the extensive research in educational psychology underscores the pivotal role of teacher attitudes and expectations in shaping student outcomes. As mentioned earlier, a central theory to this discourse is the Pygmalion effect, as Rosenthal and Jacobson (1992) expounded, which posits that teacher expectations can significantly influence student performance, often resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy. This principle implies that educator expectations are critical in shaping classroom dynamics and student achievement. The results imply that specific excerpts capture the influence of teacher perspectives and opinions on shaping the beliefs and attitudes of participants during their secondary education.

In another similar study, Friedrich et al. (2015) argue that while high expectations for a class may not singularly drive each student's academic progress, a teacher's specific expectations can significantly alter their educational trajectory. When concentrating on those studies

more specific to the topic of Black Caribbean pupils, Rhamie (2012) and Wright et al. (2016) examine how the embedded negative stereotypes held by White teachers about Black students contribute to academic disparities, and that underachievement amongst this demographic is viewed by White professionals as normal (Wright et al., 2021). Their findings emphasise the role of resilience, nurtured through external support systems such as family and community networks, in shielding Black Caribbean pupils from the educational system's racial inequalities shows how cultural and community resources provided by family and Black-led community organisations endow Black Caribbean students with the tools to resist negative labelling and stereotyping in the school environment.

These studies, alongside a host of other recent studies (Wright et al., 2021), argue that prevalent negative stereotypes that White teachers often hold about Black Caribbean pupils contribute to a challenging educational experience for these pupils (Demie, 2018; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Richardson, 2007; Rollock et al., 2015; Wright, 2010). The collective research in this field suggests that Black Caribbean pupils without strong Black support networks could potentially be more susceptible to difficulties within the school environment. This vulnerability is intensified by institutional racism, as they lack access to external factors that foster the resilience necessary to counter specific racial inequalities within the school enviroment.

6.2.4 Inescapable Labels/Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment: *Teacher-pupil Relationship*

6.2.4.1 Group A

To further contextualise the school experiences and understand the types of hidden curriculum participants encountered, those results that delve deeper into teacher-pupil interactions presented some interesting findings. The collective experiences of the formerly disaffected Black Caribbean males revealed a separation in teacher engagement and its impact on participants' perceptions and performance during their time in secondary school. Some teachers seem to fulfil their roles without genuine investment in the pupils' learning or personal development. As described by several participants, this perception of disinterest suggested that it contributed to a sense of disillusionment and detachment towards the subject being taught, leading them to question the value of their educational journey. The results suggest that the lack of engagement and enthusiasm from teachers could have diminished the quality of the learning experience and negatively affected pupils' motivation,

as echoed by one participant's extract: 'What's the point?'. An alternative argument could be that teachers' suggested lack of interest could be due to classroom management and challenging behaviour.

Conversely, amongst the formerly disaffected participants, the positive impact of engaged and caring teachers is clearly illustrated in the research results. These references have experiences with Mrs ----------, Mrs ----------, and Mr ------, and what emerges is that you find that these teachers are remembered for different reasons. Their engagement addressed different gaps within the school environment for the participants. For instance, Mrs ----------'s highlighted genuine approach and effective communication resonated with Gregory, and the narrative interview suggested this teacher's authenticity in teaching, significantly enhancing the receptivity of the engagement with the participant. Mrs ----------'s relatability, primarily as a Black teacher in a predominantly White educational setting, provided a sense of representation and care that another participant deeply valued. Mr -------'s encouragement and empowerment, highlighted the importance of teacher support in nurturing the participant's talents and self-confidence during their time in secondary school. Collectively, these accounts contextualise the crucial role of teacher engagement, teacher empathy, and teacher diversity, suggesting that for the participants during their time in secondary school, these aspects were essential in fostering a sense of belonging and forging an inclusive and motivating learning environment that could potentially influence the participants' success and wellbeing as secondary school pupils.

Although there were these positive accounts, however, the results emphasise that reflections on positive teacher interactions, as described by the participants, were limited to one or two particular teachers, suggesting that such supportive teacher-pupil experiences were not commonplace. Instead, according to the research results, the more frequent, day-to-day interactions between pupils and teachers tended to reflect a negative dynamic, which could at times have been due to underlying racial biases. Furthermore, the impact of beneficial effects—initially confined to select teacher-student interactions that fostered a sense of community, inspiration, and confidence—may have waned when participants interacted with their larger group of teachers and the wider school setting. This suggests that the supportive influence of these beneficial interactions was potentially short-lived, as it wasn't consistently reinforced across the entire school environment.

6.2.4.2 Group B

When analysing the results that reflect the teacher-pupil relationship, the collective reflections from Group B participants, consisting of Black Caribbean males who, as pupils, were mid-high achievers and never experienced disaffection, supported those results from Group A. However, due to the inclusion of the professionals, these results provided varied aspects of teacher effectiveness and their impact on pupils' educational experiences, particularly for Black Caribbean pupils.

One Group B participant, recalls a strict maths teacher during his time in secondary education who was effective due to his attentiveness to pupils' effort and progress, illustrating the positive impact the participant felt from the small element of recognition and encouragement. In addition, the retired headteacher's findings offered an interesting contrast, observing that teachers from schools with racially diverse pupil populations often possess the interpersonal skills necessary to thrive in higher-attaining schools; however, the reverse may not be true. This perspective suggests that teaching effectiveness is not solely about academic prowess but also relies heavily on the teacher's ability to connect with and understand diverse student populations.

Group B participants' extracts of their experiences during secondary school education present other positive interactions. One excerpt highlighted the impact of their teacher's frankness in preparing them for real-world challenges and underscored the appreciation of the balance between empowerment and guidance. Also, a participant's extract supporting Group A results, was the presence of Miss ----------, a Black English teacher, who was seen as particularly beneficial for the participant in providing a sense of relatability and protection, similar to the previous finding reflecting the role of representation and empathy in the school environment.

6.2.4.3 Group C

Meanwhile, a retired Black male teacher comments on the unintentional biases of well-meaning teachers, emphasising the need for ongoing professional development to address these issues. The participant's recollection of his former headteacher's approach of motivating students to recognise and utilise their opportunities reflected similar results from Group A in what they saw as positive teacher engagement, someone who demonstrates a genuine interest in their development and success.

The combined findings from Group A, Group B and Group C offer deeper insights into the role of educators in shaping participants' views on their potential and future during their time as secondary pupils, particularly emphasising the complexities of teaching in schools with diverse racial and socioeconomic pupil cohorts. These accounts suggest teachers' need for empathy, cultural awareness, and a genuine commitment to fostering their students' comprehensive development and success. Much of what the participants encountered during school created a lack of belonging, which could have contributed to the participants' disconnect with their school and education and issues around challenging behaviour. The research suggests that a teacher's ability to connect with all their students is crucial in determining the success of their relationships. However, this ability to connect is influenced by pupil behaviour and the teacher's awareness of their unintentional biases. The results suggest that underlying biases can hinder a teacher's ability to relate to pupils outside their own social identity, especially teachers who lack exposure to racially diverse environments where they could potentially develop the necessary interpersonal skills that the headteacher referred to. If we suppose teacher training programmes and professional development do not adequately address acquiring these skills and awareness, there is a significant challenge for certain pupil cohorts, in particularly Black Caribbean boys.

6.2.5 Inescapable Labels/Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment: *Post-16 Transition*

6.2.5.1 Group A

Results reflecting on participants' experiences of post-16 advice and guidance present a consistent narrative where their aspirations and interests were consistently overlooked or undervalued, with educators steering them towards stereotypical or low-skilled career paths. For instance, many participants' described being pushed toward a sports and leisure course despite their lack of interest in that area. Another participant recalls being suggested roles like cleaner or butcher, positions they considered unaligned with their aspirations. Another participant, who currently holds a position as a marketing manager leading a large team, described that while in secondary school, he had the desire to pursue a creative field like graphic design but was met with a suggestion to consider manual labour, reflecting a significant disconnect between his aspirations and the guidance provided by the professional at the time. Furthermore, this participant credits their family for helping them find work experience aligned with their creative interests, suggesting that they might have been compelled into an unfulfilling career path without such support.

6.2.5.2 Group B

When I analyse the results from the Group B participants concerning careers and post-16 transition, I encounter similar experiences of Group A participants. For instance, those second-generation Black male high achievers reveal a significant disparity in career guidance and expectations that they encountered within the educational system.

One participant recounts being advised to pursue a menial path through the old YTS scheme. This suggestion was later challenged by an external mentor who encouraged university education, becoming the participant's eventual route. Another participant highlighted that, whilst in secondary school, they had aspirations to become a veterinarian, which was met with scepticism, being advised to set more 'attainable' goals. Similarly, the perception shared by another participant believed that the school system was preparing Black pupils only for basic roles in retail or postal services rather than for leadership positions, further illustrating the underlying feelings from reflection on their school experiences.

These narratives of both the Group A participants, and the high-achieving Group B participants, collectively suggest a common problem in the guidance received of educational careers. All these findings reflect a similar pattern of low expectations when assessing the overall experiences within the school system, suggesting a systemic issue where educators failed to recognise or foster the potential for higher education and affluent careers among these participants. The example of the influence of the external mentor, who guided the student through the college to university process, highlights the crucial role of supportive figures in bridging the gap left by inadequate school guidance. This trend could not only restrict professional possibilities but also, psychologically, have the potential to impact an individual’s self-confidence and motivation to pursue ambitious goals. Not only could this have diminished the participant's ambition but it also reflects a broader trend of underestimating the capabilities and potential of the Black Caribbean pupils at the time, and if there had been collective consistency in the undervaluing of Black Caribbean pupils' career potentials by educators, not only could this have potentially limited their opportunities but also contributed to some of the participants’ disaffection post school.

6.2.6 Inescapable Labels/Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment: *Disaffection amongst Black Caribbean Boys*

6.2.6.1 Group A

The reflections of Group A participants on their post-school experiences highlight the significant influence of the intersection between socioeconomic conditions and racial dynamics on their life decisions and career paths. Initially, they faced a lack of direction and clear plans for their future, a sentiment echoed in narratives where the individuals had no career or plans in the first six months after leaving school. This lack of guidance and aspiration is further illustrated by extracts that display immediate concerns for financial independence to alleviate the burden on their family. These narratives highlighted the crucial transition period for some participants, where the absence of structured goals or career pathways created an element of vulnerability and uncertainty about their future. The influence of the environment and perceived lack of skills also played a significant role in some decision-making processes. Exposure to criminal activities as a viable means of income, as seen in the individual who, influenced by their surroundings and a perceived lack of skills, considered crime as an option. This consideration was further reinforced by encounters with others who suggested or demonstrated the profitability of illegal activities.

Racial dynamics are also evident in these experiences, as being a Black individual led to accounts of assumptions about some participants' involvement in illegal activities. This racial stereotyping influenced their roles in these activities, as seen in the individual who became an enforcer and then started their own operations in college due to being approached by another student who said everyone was scared of him. These narratives collectively paint a picture of young individuals post-school, navigating a challenging socioeconomic landscape with limited career guidance.

6.2.6.2 Group B

Essential to this research was understanding what prevented participants living within communities exposed to youth disaffection and crime from avoiding those trajectories. When you analyse the data from Group B participants, these individuals' reflections highlight the schools' limited role in shaping their resilience and preventing disaffection. It could be argued that they could avoid becoming disaffected because of their academic success in school, however, all the participants indicated other components pointing instead

to the influence of peer relationships and family values that prevented them from becoming disaffected and achieving academic success.

One account clearly noted that staff lacked awareness of the social challenges within communities, making schools ineffective at steering young people from negative paths prevalent in areas where youth disaffection was a significant risk. The narratives collectively suggest that while the school environment plays a role in a pupil's development, they were inefficient at preventing youth disaffection within the communities that some participants came from, and those high-achieving participants relied on external structures and peer relationships to avoid disaffection, which supports previous studies on high-achieving Black Caribbean pupils (Rhamie, 2012; Robinson, 2020; Wright, et al., 2016, 2021).

6.2.6.3 Group A

Concerning disaffection, one important finding that we must consider is the Group A extracts, which describe honest accounts of their behaviour in school and the role of peer pressure. The narratives presented by the participants revealed the interplay of individual behaviour, peer influence, and perceived teacher attitudes in shaping some of their experiences during secondary education. Several participants reflected on their behaviour during school, acknowledging their disruptive actions and accepting responsibility. They recognised that their behaviour often warranted disciplinary actions, and one participant dismissed any potential racial undertones of his disciplinary interactions, irrespective of any deeper systemic issues.

Additionally, Group A participants' accounts emphasize the significant influence of who they viewed as role models on their decision-making and identity formation during the post-secondary school period when they became disaffected. Selected extracts recall emulating older disaffected peers they admired, often adopting similar lifestyles, including criminal behaviours, smoking, aspiring for material possessions like sports cars, and imitating fashion choices like gold teeth and hairstyles. This modelling often led to negative behaviours, with some participants acknowledging that their relationships with certain peers were 'militant' and 'toxic'. Frequently perceived as charismatic and successful, these role models significantly shaped some participants' aspirations and behaviours post-secondary school. It is important to recognise that these role models did not come from the mainstream

popular culture on TV, but individuals from within the immediate social circles of their local communities, and wider city, embodying a desirable lifestyle, marked by material possessions and social status on the streets, which strongly appealed to the narrators during this period.

The result here highlights how important it was back then for schools to have an in-depth understanding of the contextual lives of their pupils, and in recent studies of young people vulnerable to disaffection in England, there are still calls for schools and other professionals working with young people to have a better understanding of the contextual social factor in their lives (Arnez & Condry, 2021; Longfield, 2022; Perera, 2020). This phenomenon of idolising and emulating older peers underscores the importance of understanding the social settings and influences that shaped the participants' behaviour at that point and, ultimately, their decision-making to become disaffected.

However despite this, I would not solely place the cause of disaffection on the influence of social environments, negative peers and the wrong role models. Among Group A participants, only 30% resided in economically deprived areas with high levels of visible crime, areas which were known for crime and often referred to as 'frontlines'(red light areas). From the extracts, these locations were typically where you found the kind of role models mentioned by participants. Interestingly, six participants in Group A, lived in upper working-class to middle-class more affluent parts of Sheffield, attending high league table ranked secondary schools; nearly half of this group came from dual-parent households, with both parents employed, some in professional roles, while others were from single-parent families led by working mothers and one participant was raised in foster care.

For those residing outside those more socio-economically deprived areas of the city, their exposure to these 'frontline' areas and the influential figures predominantly began post-secondary school. The research results highlight how this period was marked by a number of vulnerabilities following secondary school. The evidence the results present suggests the possibility that the hidden curriculum encountered through their educational experiences caused the participants to develop a psychological predisposition towards disaffection. Although participants chose actions that labelled them as disaffected youth, their prior experiences in the education system significantly influenced these choices by fostering disillusionment with their future prospects in mainstream pathways, thereby increasing their

vulnerability. Additionally, for those Group A participants living within socio-economically deprived areas who were more exposed to youth disaffection and crime, you could argue that the school experiences presented in the results could have placed them at even greater risk.

Conversely, where there is a contradiction and conflict in these results is amongst the Group B participants, who were mid to high achievers and did not experience disaffection, all of whom resided in socio-economically deprived areas during their secondary education. In addition, all but one of these cohorts were from single-parent female households, and as mentioned earlier, none cited their school experiences as a factor in preventing their disaffection, referring to positive peer support and the influence of family values.

What is also worth mentioning from the findings is the notable aspect of parents. Across both Group A, formerly disaffected, and Group B, mid-high-achieving Black Caribbean males, all except for two participants characterised their parents as first-generation, strict disciplinarians with high academic expectations of their children. The participants emphasised the importance of respect for elders and appropriate behaviour as key messages received from their parents. Additionally, several participants noted that their primary concern when facing trouble at school was the possibility of their parents being informed. This uniformity in parental attitudes towards discipline and education suggests significant information coming from home, suggesting the participants' family upbringing was conducive to progressive educational outcomes.

Upon examining the collected data, certain patterns become apparent. Factors like socioeconomic status, community crime levels, and being raised in a single-parent household did not uniformly hinder educational success or lead to disaffection. For some high-achieving individuals, the presence of one supportive parent and a positive peer group proved sufficient. However, for those Group A participants who shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds and family structures—having a supportive parent alone was inadequate, often resulting in them leaving school with minimal qualifications and falling into associating with negative peer groups. Interestingly, even those from two-parent families and more prosperous communities were not immune to disaffection.

Regardless of socioeconomic background, household type, or academic achievement, both Group A and B participants shared similar experiences related to education's hidden curriculum regarding attainment, disciplinary procedures, and post-16 careers guidance, encountering fear, racial stereotypes and low expectations. This suggests that within the school environment, race was a significant factor influencing their experiences, and subsequently affecting their outcomes. While some displayed the resilience to overcome and not internalise these negative experiences, others were less able to do so.

6.2.7 Inescapable Tags/Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment: *Reintegration and Reform.*

6.2.7.1 Group A

The results from Group A on how they re-engaged and became reformed citizens emphasise the significant role of community-based projects and influential individuals in facilitating their professional development and confidence. One participant highlights the transformative impact of the Caribbean community centre, particularly through its ------- ---------- project, which offered paid work opportunities. This experience was pivotal in boosting the individual's self-esteem and professional aspirations, as positive feedback and encouragement from managers and colleagues starkly contrasted their previous experiences. The development of confidence marked a turning point in their life in fostering personal growth and professional development.

Similarly, the second individual's journey through local community projects into youth work training highlighted the importance of community initiatives in providing career pathways that the participants previously thought unattainable. This shift in perception about their potential career options highlighted the role of community projects in expanding the horizons of those formerly disaffected, who, according to the data gathered on their historical journeys from secondary school, may have felt alienated from traditional career paths at that stage. A third narrative further highlights the influence of specific role models for them, like a Black male community youth worker whose guidance was not only heard but deeply resonated with the individual, highlighting the impact that relatable and respected figures can have on disaffected young people, especially those who might otherwise dismiss advice from less relatable sources.

Collectively, these experiences underline the crucial role of the community sector and influential mentors in guiding, inspiring, and engaging young people, particularly those who have experienced disaffection, towards positive and constructive career paths. These findings reflect not only the importance of these kinds of services and practices within communities but also their importance within schools, as none of the practices discussed by Group A participants on what enabled their re-engagement was any different from the positive practices that they referred to when reflecting on the few positive teacher relationships they had experienced.

In the next section, I illustrate how I employ Themes One and Two, 'Inescapable Labels' and 'Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment,' as lenses to interpret the findings from Theme Three, 'Challenges of Culture within the Education Setting,' and Theme Four, 'Unveiling the Invisible.' This approach is vital for analysing and understanding the complex relationships between broader educational elements that shape participants' experiences.

6.3 Theme Three: Challenges of Culture within the Education Setting

6.3.1 Group A

Theme three further suggests race's ubiquitous nature within the educational system. One participant recalls a primary school teacher telling their mother that they would have to be ‘twice as good as everybody else’, a sentiment that became a recurring theme in their upbringing. This participant explained how this early introduction to the idea of needing to outperform others due to racial differences brought to light broader societal factors placed on being Black, which they felt worked in two ways. At times, this motivated them, but other times, they recalled it felt burdensome and demoralising.

Other participants reflected on how, as they got older they recognised the implications of what they were being taught in school, stating that the curriculum was not designed with Black pupils in mind. A further extract supporting this emphasises this lack of representation and cultural relevance in their schools overall. The participant explained how they felt alienated by the curriculum and school environment, which reflected the dominant culture, with little to no reflection of their own. The results from Group A indicate that the absence of representation in key areas of school institutions contributed to feelings of exclusion and a lack of belonging. In addition to this, when assessing previous results, you

find that this notion of needing to be ‘twice as good as everybody else’ also surfaced in the context of school disciplinary procedures, with many findings indicating that Black Caribbean boys often faced harsher punishments, so, needing to be twice as well-behaved as everybody else.

Collectively, these insights could imply that the influence of racial stereotypes, White fears, and low expectations may have created a situation where the participants would have needed to exceed the general pupil standards in academic abilities and behaviour in school to attain fair and equal treatment compared to their White counterparts. Not meeting this benchmark could have triggered mechanisms within the education system, such as streaming into low academic sets and disciplinary actions, including detention internal and external exclusions, mechanisms that are heavily influenced by teacher discretion and findings suggest that racial biases could, at times, have underpinned this discretion.

Combined with how an overall lack of racial and cultural representation forged feelings of alienation, we can better contextualise how those experiences could have been shaped. This analysis might unveil how race within the school environment might have contributed to the psychological factors underlying post-school disaffection.

6.3.2 Group B and Group C

Group B and C participants’ results also provide additional insight, which supports some of the Group A results. The notion of Black students having to work twice as hard to be twice as good as their White peers was supported by other findings across the data. The narrative quoted from civil rights activist Huey P. Newton's strong desire for equality in educational environments reflected the participants' commitment to seeking equal opportunities and resisting any disparity in their educational and academic journey. Whereas other participants’ extracts call out the institutionalised racism prevalent in the teaching of history, here the participant went further to suggest how the omission and stereotyping of Black people in historical narratives contributed to the disengagement of Black students.

The second retired headteacher's comments further compounded this argument on how history is taught in English schools. He criticises the British education system for failing to acknowledge anti-colonial struggles and the achievements of marginalised communities, emphasising the need for a more inclusive and truthful representation of history and culture

in the curriculum. As noted by another Group B participant, the scarcity of Black role models in schools further exacerbates this issue, highlighting the significance of representation in fostering a sense of belonging and aspiration among Black pupils, supporting previous results. This is further emphasised by one of the retired headteachers' statements on the feelings of injustice and separateness experienced by Black boys, suggesting that these sentiments may contribute to their disengagement from school.

The importance of representation was also evidenced among Group B voices. One participants relayed that the impact of seeing a successful Black performer in a drama class was the pivotal moment that acted as the catalyst for them becoming a professional actor, further illustrating the profound effect that relatable role models can have on Black pupils' motivation and self-perception within the school environment.

In theme three, it becomes apparent that participants' psychological perspective was shaped not only by direct interactions between pupils and teachers, such as the examples present in theme one, but also by a range of other components that make up the school experience. Elements such as curriculum, teaching staff, and limited racial and cultural representation within the school setting emerged as significant contributors to participants' experiences. The results suggest that these components were often as isolating for the participants as the experiences of disparities in punishments or the low expectations faced in educational attainment, highlighting the broader environmental impact on their school experiences and that sense of belonging.

6.4 Analysing Theme Three: Challenges of Culture within the Education Setting, Through the Lens of Theme One and Two: Inescapable Labels/Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment

Further analysis of these results—especially when viewed through the lens of theme one, 'inescapable labels', and theme two, 'pathways and obstacles to empowerment'—suggests a deeper issue within the school system. Analysis of the results reveals a lack of mechanisms to counteract negative racial labels and stereotypes faced by Black Caribbean boys in teacher-student interactions regarding attainment and behaviour, while the curriculum and wider school environment may have inadvertently reinforced these biases. The lack of inclusivity and racial-cultural recognition within the educational setting seems to play a role

in perpetuating these negative perceptions, indicating a systemic problem that extended beyond individual teacher-student dynamics at the time, which further created a lack of belonging within the school environment.

Amongst the literature, there is supporting evidence around the importance of pupils feeling a sense of belonging within the school environment. Wright et al. (2021) present case studies on how the school environment destroyed levels of confidence, highlighting how the impact of racial discrimination towards Black boys within the school environment on an individual's identity and character. Allen and Bowles (2012) focus on the crucial role of belonging in schools and its impact on pupils' social and emotional wellbeing. They advocate for additional research to develop comprehensive school interventions, suggesting that they should bolster pupils' sense of belonging through critical assessments of institutional structures such as policies, teacher training programmes, and pedagogical methods.

6.5 Theme Four: Unveiling the Invisible

The fourth and final theme, 'unveiling the invisible', uncovers narratives that intersect with broader systemic factors within the education system. This theme includes considerations of policy, political ideologies, the educational landscape, and perceptions of schools as institutions in promoting racial equity. This approach illuminates the complex interplay between individual experiences on the ground and the broader structural determinants that can impact educational settings. Theme four offers insights into the modern education system, enabling me to link the current educational landscape with my participants' past experiences. This aims to contextualise the implications for Black Caribbean pupils in today's educational settings.

6.5.1 Group A

When analysing the wider mechanism within the education system, the findings helped contextualise the experiences on the ground. Group A's insights reveal two contrasting yet deeply intertwined aspects of the educational system's approach towards pupil achievement and pupil identity within the school. One participant stated that although he experienced disaffection, he was a high-achieving pupil. His excerpt suggests that the leniency and

support he encountered from teachers was not rooted in a genuine desire for his success but rather in the interest of enhancing the school's performance metrics.

When interpreting the participants' voices, their perception indicates a transactional approach within the educational system; this might suggest that a student's value was assessed more on their ability to contribute to the school's achievements rather than on their individual growth and learning needs. In contrast, another Group A participant's experience highlights a predisposed expectation of failure, which they believed led to inadequate encouragement and support to excel. This suggested pre-emptive judgment might have contributed to low pupil motivation, particularly if they did not initially exhibit high academic performance.

6.5.2 Group C

The collective feedback from educational leaders highlights how capitalism and political ideologies like neoliberalism have shaped the British education system. One participant, a retired vice principal in the further education sector, supports the above notion as he highlights the diminishing role of local governance in education, noting the centralisation of power is in educational trusts, often led by executives unknown to the parents. This shift represents a significant restructuring of authority and accountability in education, making it more challenging to address issues within the system, particularly those not viewed as a priority and potentially those on the outskirts of government agendas. These observations collectively highlight a concern about the privatisation and marketisation of education and its implications for social equity, access, and governance in the educational sector, especially for those sections of society that experience disenfranchisement.

Numerous previous studies echo the above findings, presenting insights into the consequences of a free-market model within the education sector driven through educational reform, in particular, the academisation programme. Some studies argue that shifting control from local authorities to educational trusts has exacerbated educational inequalities amongst certain social groups. Lupton and Hayes (2021) identify a critical impact of educational policies that inadvertently promote what they refer to as 'social sorting'. This phenomenon disproportionately benefits middle-class parents by enabling them to effectively utilise their social class capital to navigate the educational landscape.

This viewpoint suggests that contemporary shifts in educational reform have placed an undue burden on parents to decipher the complexities of the educational system, disproportionately advantaging middle-class families and disadvantaging poorer working-class families who do not possess the same levels of social class capital. Armed with material and cultural resources, i.e., social networks where they can access educational advice and guidance, these families are more proficient at managing through the market-oriented educational system. In contrast, what the literature argues is that those who lack these social assets, and who might have already experienced inequalities within the education system before the reforms, are placed at a more significant deficit (Ball et al., 1996; Kalfa & Taksa, 2016; Lupton & Hayes, 2021).

This is important to this study because it raises questions about those Black Caribbean children coming from poorer working-class communities. These findings indicate class disparities exacerbated by the emergence of a free-market and privatised educational model. This raises the question: how does this affect individuals facing racial inequalities, particularly Black Caribbean boys, also taking into account a large section of these pupils coming from poor communities? The data points to a prevalent undercurrent stigma in the education system, where Black Caribbean boys are stereotyped as primarily skilled in sports, underperforming in key academic subjects, and being aggressive and disruptive in school settings. This situation exists within an education system that is increasingly target-driven, characterised by market-driven approaches, heightened privatisation, and reduced regulation and accountability by local authorities.

The statement from a retired assistant headteacher adds support. It captures a profound disillusionment with the changing landscape of the educational system, where they refer to '*students increasingly viewed as mere numbers'*. This shift towards a more quantitative, data-driven approach in education has evidently led to this participant's loss of personal fulfilment and emotional investment in the teaching profession. Her early retirement and disdain for reducing students to statistics suggest a concern about dehumanisation in education. As the researcher, my interpretation of her experience suggests that the system's growing focus on performativity indicators overlooks each pupil's individuality and unique needs, which could lead to a disconnection between educators and their primary role of nurturing a pupil's growth. Amongst the literature, research findings support this notion, suggesting that education policy reform has led to A) the construction of schools, B) the

construction of teachers and teaching, but also a construction of pupils that has inadvertently created a commodification of pupils (Bernardinelli et al., 2018; Grace, 1993; Hughes, 2019; Keddie, 2015; Rayner, 2014; Thompson et al., 2021).

These sentiments underline a broader systemic issue within the education system: prioritising quantifiable achievements over qualitative learning and personal development. A potential consequence of this transition might be a growing gap between the educational system's objectives and the holistic needs of pupils, which the research results suggest not only impacts educators' morale and job satisfaction but also potentially compromises the quality of education that pupils receive.

A systemic bias favouring high achievers for their statistical value risks creating a two-tiered education system that neglects underachieving pupils, and when reflecting on racial stereotyping it raising critical questions about the future of education and its implications for Black Caribbean boys. Hamilton (2018) contends that the current market-driven and private-sector model of the English education system has led to a more covert form of racism disguised as competition. According to Hamilton, this is because racism within the private sector tends to be hidden behind closed doors, so those prevailing issues in school, like negative racial stereotypes and low academic expectations, remain unaddressed internally. These factors act as hindrances to the educational success of Black pupils, further affecting their social mobility. Moreover, the heightened emphasis on competition overlooks these critical factors despite the data showing evident racial disparities in academic achievement and school exclusions.

Group C participants working within the education system discussed the demographic of the teaching workforce, where professionals' insights on challenges in addressing racial dynamics and diversity in school brought a range of arguments to the surface. A teacher recounts an encounter where a trainee teacher, unfamiliar with interacting with Black students, questioned how to communicate with them, suggesting they felt a lack of preparedness in dealing with racial diversity. In comparison, one teacher reflected on a conversation, which brought an acknowledgement by their headteacher of his own subconscious biases against a mixed-race pupil, illustrating the deep-seated nature of racial preconceptions.

A retired headteacher, suggested teachers who had the experience of working within racially mixed schools developed interpersonal skills that made them more effective practitioners than those without. This lack of real-world experience in racially diverse settings implies that any training about different communities might only scratch the surface, failing to foster deep understanding or effective communication. A learning mentor offered a perspective, where he shares an understanding of the identity crisis faced by Black Caribbean boys around the age of 11. He emphasises the role of identity formation and cultural dissonance in their academic and personal social development. According to him, the struggle to find positive reflections of their racial and cultural identities within their school environment can lead to a crisis during a critical developmental stage.

The findings suggest that many White educators may lack a comprehensive understanding of race and racism within the education system and how these manifest in daily school interactions, particularly for Black boys. Historical literature shows racism in education negatively impacts pupil outcomes, often through unintentional racial biases that shape professional judgments. For instance, differing perspectives between a retired White assistant headteacher and a Black male learning mentor on the declining attainment of Black Caribbean boys during the primary-to-secondary transition highlight this gap. The assistant headteacher attributed the issue to individual effort, while the mentor recognised systemic and cultural factors, emphasising how stereotypes and low expectations shape outcomes.

Bradbury (2011) critiqued the CVA model in the English education system for institutionalising low expectations for Black Caribbean pupils by using ethnicity as a contextual factor in pupil progress analysis. Wright et al. (2021) also linked long-term poor academic outcomes for Black pupils to White teachers' racial biases, reflected in practices like placing Black pupils in lower academic sets. Gillborn (2007) and Blair (2009) similarly identified how systemic low expectations undermine Black Caribbean boys' educational experiences.

Additionally, the lack of anti-racist training, as evidenced by a participant's reaction to related questions, highlights significant gaps in teacher preparation and professional development. Assigning educators of colour to address all ethnic minority issues, regardless of expertise, further reflects inadequate approaches to diversity. The research indicates a growing gap in racial literacy among educators and school leaders. Two key factors

exacerbate this issue: limited anti-racist training opportunities, from student teacher training to ongoing professional development, and the influence of neoliberalism in promoting colour-blind policies. Such policies disregard the importance of race and racism in education, fostering environments where these issues are overlooked. This conveys to educators that anti-racist practices are non-essential unless overt racism occurs, creating systemic barriers to equity.

Contemporary racism literature suggests racism is often framed as an outdated individual issue, rather than a systemic one, under neoliberal ideologies. This perspective obstructs institutional initiatives by dismissing racism as isolated incidents, enabling entrenched biases and stereotypes to perpetuate. These biases manifest unintentionally, aligning with Valluvan's (2016) paradox of racism occurring without explicitly racist intentions. Participant accounts reveal systemic challenges, particularly in the education system, where resistance from middle leaders and a reluctance to prioritise race and ethnicity in policies hinder meaningful progress.

Retired Black senior managers and a current council officer in Sheffield describe these systemic barriers. One retired council officer noted persistent resistance among middle leaders to engage in transformative conversations about race, hindering inclusive practices. Another former senior manager highlighted dismissive responses to efforts advocating for more Black headteachers, reflecting systemic reluctance to address racial representation in leadership. A current officer observed the absence of race and ethnicity in policy agendas, with race-related data often sidelined, further demonstrating systemic oversight in addressing the needs of racially diverse pupils. These insights point to systemic resistance and the need for strategic dialogue to address cultural and structural mechanisms that perpetuate inequities. Without prioritising race and ethnicity, the education system risks neglecting the unique challenges faced by racially diverse students, reinforcing institutional barriers to inclusivity and equity.

6.5.4 Group C: Black Educators and Their Level of Agency

The experiences of Black teachers in addressing racism within their schools offer insight into how broader institutional mechanisms influence the implementation of anti-racist practices at the ground level. The collective statements from Black teachers suggest a

pervasive issue concerning the repercussions faced by Black professionals who address racism. A White female secondary school teacher points out the stigmatisation Black professionals encounter when they raise concerns about racism. Her observation suggests that such concerns are often dismissed as personal grievances rather than legitimate critiques of systemic issues.

The participant here gave the perception of highlighting a defensive institutional posture towards raising concerns of racism, which demonstrates a switch of focus from examining and rectifying suggested problematic internal practices to discrediting the individual raising the concern. The results further indicate a dynamic which discourages open dialogue or raising concerns about racism and contributes to perpetuating suggested practices that potentially facilitate racism under a culture of silence and compliance. Reinforcing this narrative are other results taken from teacher extracts discussing the professional risks associated with challenging institutional racism. Another female teacher notes that vocal opposition to racially discriminatory practices can be career-limiting, labelling individuals as troublemakers and hindering their professional advancement. Similarly, a Black male secondary school teacher shares his reluctance to address incidents of racism, citing his organisation's history of penalising those who raise such issues.

Collectively, these teachers' insights, revealed a lack of agency as professionals when addressing issues of racism, particularly for Black educators. These responses paint a picture of a culture of fear of retaliation within educational institutions, where, as a Black practitioner, speaking up about racial issues can lead to severe professional consequences. This situation suggests a hostile environment for advocates of racial equality, discouraging them and potentially others from speaking out against injustices they observe or experience.

Other previous results from professionals who worked in the local authority support the above teacher experiences. For instance, the responses from retired council officers reveal deep-rooted challenges in effecting systemic change when concerning race and ethnicity. One participant describes their career in local government as a constant struggle against resistance. Their reflection points to a broader issue within the education system of a reluctance or inability among some professionals, particularly those in positions of influence, to engage in conversations and actions that could lead to meaningful transformation, especially in areas sensitive to race and ethnicity. Also like mentioned

earlier, the former senior advisor, who faced isolation when advocating for more Black headteachers in schools with significant Black student populations.

When analysing these findings, the first key consideration is the level of agency Black educators have, particularly in navigating the subtle nature of contemporary racism, as highlighted in the literature (Salter et al., 2018; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Research supports the argument that racism has evolved, often manifesting in covert forms within institutional settings, creating a paradox where it persists even in the absence of explicitly racist intentions (Salter et al., 2018; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008; Valluvan, 2016). This subtlety means that instances of racism in schools may go unnoticed or be dismissed by those who lack direct experience with them. However, Black educators, drawing from their lived experiences, are more likely to recognise these covert forms of discrimination. Addressing these issues or advocating for anti-racist practices, however, can come at a personal cost. Black professionals who challenge these inequities may face a hostile work environment, which can hinder career progression and have significant psychological consequences. As a result, many may feel that remaining silent is the safest option, even when they are acutely aware of and understand the systemic nature of the issue.

6.6 Analysing Theme Four: Unveiling the Invisible, Through the Lens of Themes One and Two: Inescapable Labels/Pathways and Obstacles to Empowerment

Finally, when analysing all the above through the lens of theme one and two, a picture begins to emerge. Firstly, assessing the earlier section, we must consider whether a culture that places a level of value on pupils based on academic ability, focusing on academic performance, impacts all students irrespective of race and ethnicity, but could disproportionately affect those who face racial stereotyping as underachievers.

When examining the results of Group A from themes one and two, the results suggest that Black Caribbean boys, in particular those who do not show academic excellence from the start, may find it even more challenging than their White counterparts, to access the necessary support within the school environment to reach their full potential. This is due to the added complexity of their racial identity and the stereotypical biases attached to the education system. The results of this study may suggest that, due to institutional racism,

Black Caribbean boys could potentially experience greater difficulties in academic settings focused primarily on performance metrics. In acknowledging the critical context of the study, it is essential to note that most of the second-generation Black Caribbean male participants in this research concluded their school education before the implementation of significant market-driven educational reforms.

A systemic flaw is rooted in several key areas: the insufficient development of trainees and qualified teachers and senior leadership in understanding and addressing race-related issues, the absence of race as a critical factor within educational policy frameworks, and a notable deficiency in the preparedness of some professionals currently working within the system. This lack of comprehensive racial awareness and responsiveness in educational practices and policies creates an environment where harmful stereotypes and biases can thrive largely unchecked. As a result, Black Caribbean boys could be particularly vulnerable to negative educational experiences similar to those described by the formerly disaffected participants in this study. These experiences might range from encountering low expectations to facing subtle yet pervasive forms of racial discrimination, which can significantly impact their academic journey and overall school experience.

6.7 Analysing the Overall Findings through the Theoretical Framework

When analysed through the combined lenses of CRT and EST, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the educational experiences of second-generation Black Caribbean males. CRT exposes systemic racial inequalities embedded in institutions and policies, while EST examines the interplay of interconnected systems shaping development. Together, these frameworks reveal how structural biases, institutional practices, and social environments converge to shape the schooling experiences of Black Caribbean boys.

CRT asserts that racism is deeply embedded in societal and institutional structures, as reflected in the narratives of Group A participants. These accounts, along with insights from Groups B and C, align with CRT's principles, including the centrality of racism, its normalisation in institutional norms, and the social construction of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Participants described experiences of alienation, stereotyping, and exclusion, with systemic racial biases influencing teacher expectations, school policies, and daily interactions. Through CRT, the findings reveal how the English education system

perpetuates exclusion for Black Caribbean boys, leading to academic underachievement and an increased risk of school exclusion.

EST adds depth by exploring how environmental layers influence development. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Tudge et al., 2017) highlights the impact of negative teacher-student interactions at the microsystem level, compounded by broader societal stereotypes within the macrosystem. Themes of "inescapable labels" and "pathways and obstacles to empowerment" illustrate how repeated exposure to biased feedback shapes self-perception and educational aspirations. Community and family contexts occasionally served as exosystem-level safety nets, offering crucial support that countered the adverse effects of school experiences. These external networks helped some participants reintegrate into education and achieve positive outcomes, aligning with research by Rhamie and Hallam (2002) on resilience among disadvantaged groups.

Positive relationships with educators and community influences emerged as protective factors, reinforcing the significance of relational experiences in fostering personal development. For participants in Group B, racial identity also played an empowering role, highlighting how supportive microsystems and macrosystems can promote positive identity formation. However, the diminishing availability of such resources due to austerity and funding cuts raises concerns about sustaining support networks for marginalised groups. This challenge underscores the importance of creating inclusive environments within schools to compensate for external resource gaps.

The findings across the four themes highlight the bidirectional influences of macrosystems, exosystems, and microsystems on Black Caribbean pupils' educational experiences. National education reforms within the macrosystem shape local authority policies and school practices, but disconnects between policy intentions and implementation can undermine efforts to promote racial equity (Warmington, 2020; Yosso et al., 2022). At the exosystem level, community dynamics, historical patterns of disaffection, and economic deprivation significantly influenced participants' school experiences. Within the microsystem, participants described daily interactions marked by low expectations, typecasting, and racialised treatment—patterns echoed by Group C educators reflecting on systemic biases.

Through CRT and EST, it becomes evident that systemic racial stereotypes and biases embedded in macrosystem policies shape daily classroom experiences for Black Caribbean boys. CRT underscores the persistence of structural racism, while EST highlights its operation across interconnected systems. These frameworks emphasise the urgent need for structural reforms that address disparities and promote equity-driven practices, moving beyond superficial policy changes to create meaningful, inclusive educational environments.

CHAPTER SEVEN: OVERALL RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This chapter encapsulates the culmination of this research, summarising how the study addressed its central inquiries, the three main research questions, and fulfilled its predetermined aims and objectives. In this concluding chapter we also touch on the research limitations alongside propositions for further scholarly pursuit. Additionally, this segment describes the contributions made to academic discourse, professional practice and sets forth recommendations followed by an overall conclusion.

Returning to the three research questions guiding this investigation:

- *How can the English education system leverage the experiences of formerly disaffected, second-generation Black Caribbean males in England to help address youth disaffection within this socio-demographic?*

- *What impact do the broader mechanisms operating within the education system have on the educational experiences of social actors on the ground, and how does this impact Black Caribbean pupils?*

- *Is there evidence from the results of the two previous questions to suggest that the education system contributes to disaffection amongst Black Caribbean males in England?*

A key objective of this study was to analyse the educational experiences of previously disaffected second-generation Black Caribbean males who attended secondary schools in Sheffield, England, acting as Group A in this investigation. It also sought to incorporate voices of Group B, evaluating the experiences of mid-high achieving second-generation Black Caribbean males and Group C, professionals in Sheffield's education sector, including schools, colleges, local authorities, and support services. The goal was to understand their perspectives, comparing and contrasting these with the voices of Group A participants.

The methodological approach adopted in this investigation was qualitative and interpretive, incorporating phenomenological narrative research methods to gather data and a thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the results. The theoretical framework employed integrated critical race theory (CRT) with ecological systems theory (EST), this theoretical approach was instrumental in further enhancing the understanding of the experiences of the research participants and the phenomena investigated. In exploring the topic at hand, a fundamental goal was to delve into the educational journeys of formerly disaffected males, as told through their shared stories, and to analyse these narratives alongside the extracts from the Group B and C participants to support contextualising the educational journeys.

The research findings identified various systemic factors falling into two broad categories, both of which addressed the research questions and contributed to achieving the study's aims and objectives. These factors encompassed a range of elements that influence disaffection and contribute to an exclusionary school experience for Black Caribbean boys.

1. Impact of teenage adolescence and intersection of race on educational experiences.
2. Wider social components: Vulnerabilities amplified within the school context.

7.2 Impact of Teenage Adolescence and Intersection of Race on Educational Experiences

In relation to the initial research question of: *How can the English education system leverage the experiences of formerly disaffected, second-generation Black Caribbean males in England to help address youth disaffection within this socio-demographic?* Acknowledgement of personal agency was evident among the Group A participants, who candidly recognised their poor behaviour, poor choices and missteps during their narrative interviews without attributing them solely to external forces. However, an essential dimension of this study's findings is the recognition, or the lack of recognition of teenage adolescence; secondary school being a critical developmental phase in which the participants were forging their identities, highly impressionable and susceptible to influence. This period in life presents universal challenges across all demographics, with the potential for misjudgements and poor choice irrespective of race, gender or ethnicity.

In assessing the intersection of race and gender during the adolescence of the Group A participants, the study's results and findings consistently underscored instances of negative racial labelling and stereotyping, not just within the school system but also after leaving school. These experiences appeared to persist, unaddressed by policy, the educational curriculum and prevalent whole-school practices, signalling a systemic inadequacy in educational structures. A noteworthy exception was the participants' recollections of their favourite individual teachers, who provided a contrasting experience free from perceived racial barriers.

Furthermore, when analysing Group A participants' results, acknowledgement of their own challenging behaviours and the results of both Group B and Group C, suggests that the actions of Group A participants during their adolescence, unintentionally might have reinforced the biased perceptions already held by some educators. These educators may have overlooked the role of youthful indiscretions and view behaviours as racialised norms due to racial stereotyping.

7.3 Wider Social Components: Vulnerabilities Amplified Within the School Context

Considering the broader social milieu provides answers to the second and third research questions. A segment of Group A participants, due to external circumstances, appeared predisposed to the risks of disaffection before their secondary education—especially those who resided in socioeconomically deprived areas with daily exposures to crime and local youth disaffection. When viewed through an intersectional lens, certain participants' narratives demonstrated the transition into secondary school exacerbated their challenges, with school cultures potentially amplifying their risk factors.

In relation to the research questions of: *What impact do the broader mechanisms operating within the education system have on the educational experiences of social actors on the ground, and how does this impact Black Caribbean pupils?* And, *Is there evidence from the results of the two previous questions to suggest that the education system contributes to disaffection amongst Black Caribbean males in England?* Upon synthesising the research results in the previous chapters, there are some key arguments. Firstly, from Group A narratives and along with previous studies, it becomes apparent that a Black boy's level of

racial cultural capital upon entering the English education system is crucial, which might support some of the research findings on how Black African boys are not as represented within the negative educational stats in the way third and fourth generation Black Caribbean boys are, in particular those of mixed White/Black heritage (Wright et al., 2021, p. 7). Without the crucial element of cultural capital, Black boys of Caribbean heritage may be more susceptible to disaffection, as the schooling experience could contribute to constructing a negative social identity, possibly setting the stage for a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The research findings revealed that within the Group A participants, social class background was a significant factor for some individuals in their experiences of disaffection. However, for others originating from more affluent backgrounds, class factors were not prominent in explaining their disengagement. Additionally, it was observed that high to mid academic achievers forming Group B, all hailed from economically disadvantaged communities with the majority coming from single parent households. Despite avoiding disaffection, their shared narratives of school experiences closely mirrored those of their formerly disaffected counterparts, Group A.

Upon analysing these aspects in conjunction with the overall research findings, it suggests that the schooling experiences and broader systemic mechanisms that govern it do contribute to the disaffection of some Black boys within the educational system, primarily due to forms of institutional racism, particularly in the form of stereotyping. The research findings further underscore that the risks of disaffection are amplified by more general factors such as socioeconomic status, care status, and educational needs. In general, collectively these elements, without the added component of race, increase a pupil's vulnerability of those negative outcomes such as school exclusion, as noted in Timpson's (2019) study.

The findings emphasise that, according to the narrative data, race can play a pivotal role in shaping Black Caribbean boys' experiences within the educational system, regardless of their social class background. This racial aspect can contribute to an increased risk of disaffection, and for those Black Caribbean boys who encounter intersectional vulnerabilities, such as those on pupil premium or pupils with special educational needs (SEN), with the combined factors of their race and gender, might further exacerbate the

potential risk factors that lead to disaffection. This insight highlights the complex interplay of race, gender, and other social determinants in their educational experiences.

Additionally, in relation to addressing the second research question of: *What impact do the broader mechanisms operating within the education system have on the educational experiences of social actors on the ground, and how does this impact Black Caribbean pupils?*, a critical examination of both primary and secondary data leads to the contention that broader systemic mechanisms within the educational framework contribute to amplifying and entrenching racial inequalities. National policies significantly influence local practices, such as teacher training and ongoing professional development (CPD). However, these frameworks lack robust structures to address racial disparities in education. This deficiency reflects an oversight or lack of commitment from central governments, as historical provisions have proven insufficient to prevent the systemic issues highlighted by Group A and Group B participants in this study.

7.3.1 Manifestation of Racism and Institutional Biases in Daily School Interaction

In addressing the first research question: *How can the English education system leverage the experiences of formerly disaffected, second-generation Black Caribbean males in England to help address youth disaffection within this socio-demographic?*, the research brought to light the convergence of racism, wider institutional mechanisms, and the experiences of Black Caribbean males students in daily school interactions, underscoring how these elements all function to influence their educational experiences. These insights offered responses to the initial question posed in the study, from Group A, those formerly disaffected, who had been through that unique journey and who each have become their own success story.

In relation to manifestations of racism and institutional racism, as observed in the everyday interactions within school settings, the evidence gathered from the data suggests that their interactions were frequently imbued with racial biases—many of which were negative and held by their White educators. The findings suggest that these biases critically shaped Group A participants' educational journeys, influencing teachers perceptions of behaviour, approaches to discipline, the meting out of punishments, post-16 career guidance and,

possibly, ultimately, their academic achievements, leaving them vulnerable to post-school disaffection.

The intensification of neoliberal ideology in English education policy since 2010 has arguably heightened this vulnerability. This scenario impacts Black Caribbean boys, particularly those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, face heightened risks of educational disaffection and exclusion. Boys with low racial cultural capital are especially susceptible, lacking the tools to build resilience against racialised systemic biases and internalising failure narratives. This conclusion emerges from a synthesis of the literature review and empirical findings that underline how neoliberal reforms have reshaped education into a competitive, market-driven sector focused on efficiency and performance metrics, often at the expense of social equity and inclusivity. Despite this the findings highlight that race can critically shape educational experiences, often independent of social class.

Further analysis revealed that the shift toward subtle, institutionalised forms of racism has become a defining feature of the neoliberal educational landscape. Framed as 'colour-blind' and merit-based, neoliberal policies obscure the structural racial barriers faced by Black Caribbean boys, allowing inequalities to persist under the guise of fairness. By neglecting race as a factor, schools become less equipped to address racial disparities influencing discipline, academic achievement, and educational access. The focus on limited government intervention further exacerbates these issues by stripping schools of necessary oversight and support to address systemic inequalities and institutional biases effectively. A retired headteacher described how the rise of multi-academy trusts and reduced local authority oversight have weakened accountability.

Additionally, this structural shift creates an environment where challenging racism for Black educators feels professionally risky, with decision-making concentrated in opaque systems. Another educator noted that removing council influence was a strategic move, leaving schools under faceless trusts and with limited means to address inequality. Lukes' (2005) 'Three-Dimensional View of Power' concept offers insight into how power works in capitalist societies. Power subtly shapes perceptions, normalizing inequities so in the context of this study, reinforcing racism's invisibility. 'Colour-blind' policies, as Gillborn

(2007) explains, obscure racial disparities under neutrality, maintaining the status quo. Evidence from participant responses, especially in theme three, supports this.

Rhamie's (2012) research on racial bias among White teachers shows how systemic policies privilege Whiteness while marginalizing Black Caribbean pupils, perpetuating hidden conflict. This is reflected in Group A's experiences, where low expectations and stereotyping into limited career paths reinforce disadvantage. Nathaniel's reflection captures the internalised impact of these biases.

> *'When I was younger, I wanted to be a lawyer, that's want I wanted to be. I always wanted to be. But, when I used to tell teachers that, they were dismissive in a way like, you know, you're never gonna amount to nothing. Instead of like, encouraging you and saying, look, this is what you need to do, they didn't [teachers] they was just dismissive. So if everyone's dismissive of me in what I want to do as a kid, like I just took that and thought, well I'm not going to be nothing.'*

The findings emphasize the need for systemic change, requiring anti-racist leadership committed to addressing inequities. However, questions are raised on whether educational leaders can enact change within a neoliberal framework that inherently limits efforts to combat systemic racism.

7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The exploration of the research findings invites a continued academic dialogue and further empirical scrutiny. Subsequent studies ought to delve deeper into various domains to enhance the collective understanding of the educational experiences concerning Black Caribbean pupils. A primary recommendation is to initiate more qualitative research that probes the 'hidden curriculum' (Graham, 2014; Lynch, 1989)—the covert messages and lessons embedded within educational environments—which Black Caribbean students navigate, contrasting their experiences with those of their White counterparts to dissect the multifaceted nature of educational inequity.

Additionally, it's important to assess the role of contemporary Black Caribbean communities in post-austerity Britain, particularly in terms of their contributions to the social and cultural capital that previous studies have shown support Black pupils in the education system. Such

research could highlight the communal mechanisms that bolster or impede Black Caribbean boys' educational attainment from a community policy perspective.

Research analysing the critical function of neoliberalism and embedding anti-racism in the education system within contemporary society's educational praxis also requires investigation, asking whether the two can actually work together. Future studies should assess to what level equality diversity and inclusion and anti-racist pedagogies and policies are being integrated into teacher training, ongoing professional development, school inspection processes, and educational policy across multiple strata of governance to gather an understanding of how embedded and widespread they actually are within the education system. This inquiry is essential to understanding how such strategies can be optimised to foster an equitable learning environment. Academisation, a significant reform within the UK education system, poses another area ripe for analysis. Investigating whether this transformation has repercussions or benefits on the educational experiences and outcomes for Black Caribbean students could provide insights into the efficacy of such structural changes.

The findings also prompt a critical inquiry into the additional need to support Black boys to navigate adolescence within the educational system. Research aimed at examining negative labelling and racial stereotypes to better support Black Caribbean boys in navigating racial challenges, particularly those who do not have access to the components that create social, cultural capital, highlighted by (Rhamie & Hallam, 2010; Rhamie, 2012; Wright et al., 2016). This could help sculpt greater models of transition into adulthood and the potential long-term effects on their social identity formation. The insights call for a reflective examination of the education system's role in facilitating or impeding the developmental journey of these young individuals. Further studies should also be undertaken on the school experiences of those Black Caribbean boys who are achieving success in secondary education so that we can gain more insight into their experiences and what currently works.

Finally, there is an imperative to expand research into the broader phenomenon of youth disaffection among Black boys in England. This would include examining the intersection of race, gender and class alongside developing an understanding of the role of social media's influence, conceptions of Black masculinity, and the formulation of Black identity. Such interdisciplinary research is critical for dissecting the intricate causality and correlation

between these elements in contemporary times and for conveying the ramifications and risks to a wider audience in a more coherent and accessible manner. Through these focused lines of inquiry, stakeholders can gain a more holistic and profound comprehension of the challenges and opportunities within the education system, contributing to the cultivation of strategies that facilitate the conditions for Black Caribbean pupils in England.

7.5 Research Limitations

While comprehensive in its approach, this study encounters certain limitations that must be acknowledged. Despite encompassing a broad spectrum of perspectives from Groups A, B and C voices, the scope of participant engagement presents certain omissions. Notably, within the section of individuals who have served in educational leadership, the representation was limited to four: two retired headteachers, one retired assistant and one college vice principal. This constrains the breadth of leadership insights within the data, and it is possible that engaging a larger number of school leaders might have yielded more nuanced variations in the findings.

Furthermore, the methodology employed in capturing the educational experiences of Black Caribbean boys—through the lens of participants whose secondary education occurred in the decades spanning the 1970s to the early 2000s—might slightly restrict the study's relevance to the contemporary educational landscape. Future research might be enhanced by including more current school leaders, as well as engaging with Black Caribbean boys who are navigating the existing educational terrain, to bridge this gap, which would encompass not only those within mainstream school settings but also those who are part of alternative provisions (AP) and pupil referral units (PRU), thereby offering a more current and diversified understanding of their educational experiences.

Finally, it's crucial to acknowledge the potential biases inherent in qualitative research, which can manifest at any stage. As the researcher, my personal and professional standpoint was firmly established prior to initiating this project, shaped by my socialisation and experiences in research. This pre-existing position could influence the research process. Furthermore, the process of data analysis is not immune to bias, particularly concerning the elements of the data that I, as the researcher, chose to include or exclude. Such decisions

inevitably shape the research outcomes and interpretations of the participants' narrative interviews.

7.6 Contribution to the Research Field

This research aligns with the corpus of extant scholarship (Gillborn, 2007; Graham, 2014; Rhamie, 2012; Richardson, 2007; Rollock et al., 2015; Wright, 2010) by providing an insightful examination of the educational trajectories of Black Caribbean males in English secondary schools. An addition to the field is the incorporation of narratives from a demographic infrequently represented in the literature—formerly disaffected second-generation Black Caribbean males. The reflective accounts of these individuals offer a retrospective lens that comes with the benefits of hindsight through which their schooling experiences, their post-school disaffection period, and their reintegration can be analysed with nuance and depth. This research sought to extract lessons from these participants' educational narratives to inform current educational practices to better serve Black Caribbean boys, particularly those at risk of exclusion and underachievement. The findings highlight critical factors within the schooling environment that either mitigate or exacerbate the dangers of disaffection.

7.6.1 Professional Practice

This study not only supports professional practices for educators and policymakers within the education system but also contributes to enhancing professional practices across other key services for children and families, such as youth justice services and other local authority services supporting schools.

7.6.2 Teaching Profession

It serves as a resource for enhancing teacher education programmes, such as postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) courses, by offering insights into the lived experiences of Black Caribbean boys, it can inform professional development initiatives for practising educators. This research can offer student teachers a deeper understanding of the teacher's role in identifying and addressing factors in the school experience contributing to disaffection among Black Caribbean boys before they enter the profession. The study provides educators with first-hand accounts of how their roles impacted students' school experiences, highlighting negative practices and their psychological effects, as well as the

few positive encounters participants had with educators. These positive examples illustrate the key qualities underpinning effective practices.

7.6.3 The School Environment

Additionally, this research offers valuable insights into how the school environment influences the link between school experiences and youth disaffection among Black Caribbean boys. It examines how behaviour management practices, the use of disciplinary systems, and approaches to educational attainment can shape the mindset and belief systems of these students, ultimately affecting their choices during the transitional period into adulthood. Additionally, this research underscores the necessity of implementing changes through a whole-school approach. The findings highlight four interconnected themes: behaviour management, educational attainment, curriculum content, and the racial diversity of the teaching workforce. These factors can work interdependently to create internal barriers and feelings of a lack of belonging among Black Caribbean boys within the school environment. Thus, addressing these issues comprehensively is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and supportive educational experience for these students. Additionally, the generalisability of this research approach allows for its findings to be employed in interrogating the educational needs of other marginalised groups.

7.6.4 Strategy and Policy

Strategically, the insights gained from this research are potentially invaluable for educational leaders across school academy trusts and local authorities. This study elucidates how broader mechanisms and macro factors, from both policy and practice at a strategic level, impact micro-level encounters, particularly those experienced by Black Caribbean boys. By capturing the views and opinions of retired leadership, senior local authority practitioners, and current qualified teachers, this research provides actionable intelligence for school administrators and education directors. Such intelligence can inform the shaping of service delivery to foster inclusion and reduce exclusion rates among Black Caribbean boys.

7.6.5 Youth Justice Services, Social Care Services and Voluntary Community Sector Professionals

For professionals working within youth justice services, the collective voices of Group A—the formerly disaffected Black Caribbean males—provide valuable insights through narrative interviews. These interviews shed light on their journeys towards disaffection, their lived experiences within the education system, and the mindsets that influenced the choices leading to their disaffection. This information is crucial for youth justice professionals working in partnership with schools. It enables them to both challenge and support educational institutions in advocating more effectively for Black Caribbean boys who are entering or, at risk of entering the youth justice system.

This research also supports professionals within social care services by highlighting the systemic barriers and community-level protective factors influencing disaffected Black Caribbean boys. The narratives of Group A participants provide critical insights into how educational disaffection intersects with broader social challenges, helping social care professionals understand the lived experiences that contribute to these trajectories. Additionally, this study reveals what facilitated Group A participants' transition into social reintegration and career access, which the findings showed came via the voluntary sector that was accessible within the Black Community. Much of the secondary research's key findings highlight the protective influence of community as an exosystem surrounding young Black men, (Rhamie, 2012; Wright et al., 2016). It is crucial for those working with young Black Caribbean boys who are disaffected or at risk of disaffection to recognise the significant impact of austerity politics. These policies have eroded the very services and provisions that supported Black communities, to the extent that they have been drastically diminished. However, the solution is to ask what can be learnt from the good practices that came out from the community sector that can be transferred into other sectors.

7.6.6 Educational Psychology

One critical area of professional practice where this study aims to make a significant contribution is within special educational needs (SEN), specifically focusing on the assessment process conducted by educational psychologists concerning Black Caribbean pupils. Various studies such as Richardson, (2007), Rollock et al. (2015), and Gillborn

(2007) have consistently highlighted the disproportionate diagnosis of social, emotional, mental health (SEMH) among Black pupils. They suggest that some diagnoses of SEMH may be inaccurate and that the emotional challenges these pupils face in school settings could be partly attributed to responses to institutional racism.

This study illustrated specific manifestations of institutional racism within school environments and explored their mental, emotional, and behavioural impacts on Black Caribbean boys, particularly those lacking access to supportive cultural community capital ecosystems (Rhamie, 2012; Wright et al., 2016). A recurring theme evident throughout the dataset was the perceived disparities in teacher-pupil interactions between Black Caribbean boys and their White counterparts, particularly concerning pupil attainment and disciplinary actions. Educational psychologists must consider these findings alongside existing research on Black Caribbean boys in England's education system, questioning whether the children they assess face similar challenges. Ignoring such factors risks excluding Black pupils' psychological needs from adequate support and may pathologize behaviours rooted in responses to institutional racism. Further research is needed to explore how this might contribute to the overrepresentation of Black pupils diagnosed with Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

7.6.7 Theoretical Contribution

This thesis supports the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives within a unified framework to better understand how specific social groups interact within educational institutions. It also suggests that this approach can serve as a model for examining the experiences of other at-risk groups, contributing to a broader understanding of inequality and educational strategies in diverse school settings. Methodologically, the research integrates the collective voices of Groups A, B, and C, enhancing the analysis and providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

7.6.8 The Role of the Researcher

A final contribution that I feel this study has made is a greater insight into the role of the researcher in this particular topic. I learnt how my social background as the researcher enhanced the richness of data I was able to gather, first as a professional working within the area of school inclusion but secondly as a Black male from the

community in which I was researching and having experienced elements of disaffection myself. During interviews with Group A participants, one participant highlighted that 'if it was not me doing this research, I would not be sharing this story'. At the same time, there was another who stated that there were things he was leaving out; however, the interview was still very personal and in-depth. Additionally, during my time following up with my research participants one teacher I had interviewed highlighted how they were happy to be open and honest as they trusted me with the information they were sharing and believed that it would be put to some valuable use. In group A, those formerly disaffected Black Caribbean males who are now all successful in their chosen careers, I was able to capture a missing voice, and I wonder, if I was not the researcher, would they have shared their stories in such depth or would these individuals have even participated.

7.7 Overall Recommendations

The study's collective results, derived from various cohorts of research participants, reveal several foundational themes that inform the recommendations. The responses from Group A and B were analysed, indicating the critical importance of role models, mentoring, and community representation. These participants underscored the necessity for education systems to embrace inclusivity and cultural relevance alongside an understanding of contemporary racism in educational contexts. They also emphasised the need for individualised support and genuine engagement in listening to and understanding students' needs. Their collective viewpoints suggest that education systems must adapt to the diverse needs of communities and highlight the necessity of having skilled, diverse, and committed professionals in schools.

Similarly, the perspectives of professionals were also examined. These professionals stressed the importance of diversity and competence within the educational workforce. They underscored the need for schools to respond to the varied needs of their communities and pointed out the significance of addressing more subtle forms of racism within educational settings. A major challenge identified from their responses is the need for effective listening and understanding beyond mere hearing within the educational community. Teachers, teaching assistants and pastoral support staff stressed a need for meaningful connections in the educational process, empathy from educators, and a learning environment that values

reciprocal learning and diverse cultural backgrounds. Their responses also identified a gap in discussions on strategies for success, particularly in diverse classrooms. Retired school heads and voluntary sector leaders highlighted the necessity of a curriculum that transcends traditional achievement metrics, favouring creative and individualised learning approaches. They emphasised the significance of comprehensive racism awareness programmes for educators and the importance of parental involvement in students' success. These responses also call attention to the need to reverse policies contributing to societal inequality and establish supportive educational frameworks that encourage community involvement and accountability.

There is a recommendation to reinforce educational self-confidence and identity in young people's development, especially in Black Caribbean boys, with the need to revisit moving beyond traditional educational frameworks and integrating external community influences to foster resilience and self-assuredness in Black Caribbean youth. The study identifies the critical importance of community-driven initiatives, such as references to the Hub (African Caribbean community centre), Saturday schools and mentoring programmes, as part of the educational journey. Schools and local authorities engaging with Black communities is essential to obtaining the knowledge and expertise in enhancing pupil confidence and resilience, and this engagement should expand beyond school boundaries, involving broader social interactions to build community bonds.

There is the importance of early intervention in educational settings, particularly during the KS3 adolescence period, strategic approaches to race and inclusion challenges, and the need for systemic changes to effectively address systemic racism and inequality. The research advocates for a transformational educational approach that capitalises on the cultural wealth of Black communities, empowering students to fully embrace their authentic selves. The overarching theme is a call for investment in young people, extending beyond financial support, to include fostering a sense of purpose, identity, belonging, and aspiration. The research underscores the need for holistic, culturally sensitive, and inclusive educational practices which should address student's diverse needs while advocating for systemic changes and greater community involvement, aiming to create a more equitable and supportive educational environment.

From my practitioner's perspective, these recommendations have a sense of familiarity. The proposed recommendations are not novel; rather, they represent a return to effective practices seemingly forgotten over time. Notably, many of these practices are already in place, like fostering positive relationships underpinned by genuine care and empathy from educators and valuing reciprocal learning. However, this study, along with previous research, indicates a persistent challenge in effectively applying these practices with Black Caribbean boys in England's schools. What the overall research findings highlight is that there has been a recognition of racism, but a failure in a consistent desire and commitment from consecutive governments to combat it.

Additionally, noted the scarcity of resources and the need for staff education on race and inclusion issues. Race relations in Britain are deeply rooted in a historical context shaped by slavery, colonialism, and the widespread influence of pseudo-scientific racism during the 18th and 19th centuries. These ideologies forged beliefs that racial discrimination was justified, raising the question of how much of this legacy still needs to be unlearned. Addressing these challenges requires advocating for strategic, wider initiatives that promote meaningful and systemic change.

7.7.1 My Recommendation to the Black African Caribbean Communities

To achieve sustainable change, this research questions whether schools and local councils, though essential stakeholders, can provide effective solutions given their role in perpetuating issues, particularly within a neoliberal, capitalist framework. The findings point to Black communities—the exosystems—as the most effective agents for equipping Black Caribbean boys with the resilience needed to counter institutional racism. Historically, community-driven initiatives, like the supplementary schools established in response to Bernard Coard's critique of ESN schools, have empowered Black children and challenged systemic inequalities in education.

This study echoes a recurring theme in the literature: the vital role of community support in enabling Black Caribbean boys to navigate and overcome educational disparities. While schools and councils must promote anti-racist reforms, their structural limitations hinder lasting change. Consequently, Black communities have consistently stepped in to fill the gaps, however, in recent times austerity measures have eroded large elements of this community's infrastructure. Rhamie's (2012) work highlights the damaging effects of low

teacher expectations and stereotypes, showing how Black students often depend on community networks for resilience. Similarly, Wright et al. (2016) underscore the importance of cultural and community capital in equipping students to resist systemic biases, with supplementary schools providing critical academic and emotional support. Wright et al. (2021) further demonstrate the transformative power of racial consciousness, fostered within community initiatives, in helping Black Caribbean males navigate institutional barriers. These efforts are not merely compensatory but essential for creating awareness and empowerment. Community-driven initiatives cultivate resilience and social capital, which remain critical for addressing racial disparities in an education system resistant to sustainable reform.

A critical element of long-term change lies in amplifying the voices of Black scholars researching the experiences of Black children in education. As part of this effort, I plan to hold a community event in Sheffield to share my findings, contributing to Black cultural capital and strengthening the exosystem's role in driving equity.

7.9 Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, reflecting on arguments on the role of masculinity, peer pressure, the lack of desire to learn, and the absence of fathers as key factors in the underachievement of Black Caribbean boys, my professional experience suggests that these issues are not exclusive to Black Caribbean pupils. Boys from various backgrounds, including White British, encounter similar challenges, but for Black Caribbean boys, the additional element of racial stereotypes intensify these challenges within the educational environment.

Interestingly, the experiences of my second-generation Black Caribbean participants defy simple categorisation. Those from stable, middle-class homes and single-parent households in economically deprived areas had varied academic outcomes, with some underachieving and others excelling. The common thread among the formerly disaffected and high to mid achievers was their experience of racial stereotypes in the education system, with some demonstrating resilience while others internalised negative experiences. For the findings of this study, much of the results suggest the market-driven educational model appears to contribute to educational disparities amongst marginalised groups. One example of this is governmental education policies that have shifted power away from parents and children.

Overall, the findings suggest that the current educational system is structured in such a manner that when statistical evidence points to educational inequalities in outcomes, it has become more convenient to cast blame on children, parents and communities. Concurrently, the imperatives of market-driven demands, alongside government reductions in educational spending in England (Andrews & Lawrence, 2018) have intensified pressures on schools. When assessing both of the above points, this dynamic, I argue, likely exacerbates existing educational inequalities for groups that are already disadvantaged within the system.

When considering the findings of this research, if I were to prioritise one recommendation, it would be to focus on educating professionals, particularly White educators, about race and racism in education, incorporating discussion around White fears and Black male students potential for academic achievement and success. This, although a singular focus to a very complex multifaceted issue, could be a starting point within the education system to re-introducing anti-racist practice and abandon the generic one-size-fits-all, colour-blind approach, making a step towards significant change.

It's essential to recognise that the challenges faced by Black Caribbean males in the English education system are not a recent development. The literature review has traced these issues back to the early post-war migration period (Coard, 2021). Reflecting on historical contexts reveals that racism, characterised by low expectations and fear, and has been a persistent issue since the arrival of the Windrush generation in England (Esteves, 2018; Lowe, 1997). All what post war migration did was to highlight the problems of racism that already existed in England. Over time, various events and reports, including those by Rampton (1981), Swann (1985), Macpherson (1999), have repeatedly highlighted this problem, suggesting a deep-seated systemic and psychological aspect.

Reflecting upon the serious case reviews that highlighted the deaths of Black boys, introduced at the outset of this thesis, a pattern emerged from the reports, and that was the pivotal role of maintaining inclusion within mainstream education. The reports consistently indicated that the risks to these children significantly increased after they departed from the mainstream setting, exacerbating disaffection and, tragically, in those cases, leading to premature mortality. Furthermore, the reviews highlight a spectrum of community and care dynamics as notable contributing factors. Nevertheless, a child’s experiences within the English education system should not be part of those factors contributing to youth

disaffection, a notion unfortunately contravened by the findings of this and previous studies (Graham, 2014).

The composite narratives of the Group A voices in this research delineate a vivid picture of how educational systems manifest in the lived experiences of Black Caribbean males, often contributing to their disaffection in school and potentially post-school. Yet, within these findings also lies a roadmap for intervention—illustrating what must be contested. This research advocates for an education system that operates not as a perpetrator of the problem but as a vital player in the solution, focusing on inclusivity and the potential to mitigate disaffection and, in some cases, save lives. It underscores the necessity for educational policies and practices that are responsive to the vulnerabilities of marginalised groups, ensuring that the education system functions as a protective, rather than a risk, factor in their developmental trajectories.

I will end with a statement from one of the participants in this research, a retired Black schoolteacher who was not just a teacher of over thirty years but also an activist for racial equality, who sadly passed away in 2023.

'Even if the Black boy has two parents together and is coming from a good home, sending him into the education system is still a lottery.'

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Appendix 1

Approved: 11/10/2019

Jonathan Williams

Registration number: 140210662 School of Education Programme: EDd

Dear Jonathan

PROJECT TITLE: Understanding the links between experience within the education system in England and disaffection among BAME young Males

APPLICATION: Reference Number 026017

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 11/10/2019 the above-named project was approved on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

University research ethics application form 026017 (form submission date: 06/08/2019); (expected project end date: 30/03/2021). Participant information sheet 1065863 version 2 (06/08/2019).

Participant consent form 1065822 version 1 (25/06/2019).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

1- To replace 'we' by the first person in two places in the participant information sheet: " You will be asked to be part of a one-to-one interview which we estimate will take 45 minutes"; "we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data." 2- In section 11. What if something goes wrong? Please signpost to section 18 where additional information is being provided. 3- In section 13. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used? Please explain who will have access to these recordings and when these will be destroyed. You also need to explain whether you will be transcribing and likely to use a number of excerpts from the interviews. 4

- A specific time-frame for withdrawal should be given after the data collection (2 weeks?) and not right up until you submit your work. This has also to be included in the consent form. 5 -Please check GDPR implications of using Otter - how does this app process the data and is data 'owned' by the app provider, processed or stored outside of the UK? UREC should be able to advise. 6- Please review the use of the word 'disaffected' in the information sheet as i) this may not be well understood by all participants, especially minors, and ii) it ascribes a particular identity onto your participants which is presumptive and potentially negative. Can you articulate the research aims in a more positive way? For example, in terms of the system deficit rather than the individual. 7- Regarding potential harm to participants, are you also able to add detail to the information sheet regarding access to support with their school for minors and to support within the institutions from which the adult participants are recruited?

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

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.
Yours sincerely

ED6ETH EDU

Ethics Admin School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf

The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Admin (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.

The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.

The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix 2

Research participant category	Interview and Focus Group Questions
Second-generation Black Caribbean Males who have experienced disaffection – Narrative one to one interviews **1hr 30mins**	What do you remember about your time in school How would you describe your time growing up home and community? How would you describe your experiences of school life in relation to the education you received? What did you leave school with in regards to qualifications and what factors would you suggest play a key role in those outcomes? How did your life experiences from the age of 11– 16 influence your life from 16 onwards to 24 What do you remember about your journey to becoming disaffected and how old was you when the process began? Please describe your day to day experiences during your period of disaffection, and how would you describe your mind-set? How did you manage to get out from being disaffected? What would you say was the key turning points? What kind of support did you get and from who? Looking back, what do you think would have help prevent you from becoming disaffected? If you compare your disaffected young self to today's disaffected young Black boys has anything change? What do you feel needs to happen to better support young Black boys from becoming disaffected?

Second-generation Black Caribbean Males high achievers who never experienced disaffection – Narrative one to one interviews and one focus group **1hr 30mins**	What do you remember about your time in school How would you describe your time growing up home and community? How would you describe your experiences of school life in relation to the education you received? What did you leave school with in regards to qualifications and what factors would you suggest play a key role in those outcomes? How did your life experiences from the age of 11– 16 influence your life from 16 onwards to 24 What was the key factors that prevented you from becoming disaffected? Looking back, what do you think would have help prevent some of your peers in your community from becoming disaffected? If you compare young disaffected young people back when you was young compared to today's disaffected young Black boys, has anything change? What do you feel needs to happen to better support young Black boys from becoming disaffected?
School Teachers focus groups **45mins**	1. What were the key influences that lead you to becoming a school teacher, and are those the reasons why you are still a teacher today? 2. Do you feel that the teacher training you undertook prepared you for the classroom, if not then why not? 3. On a day to day basis, what do you feel are the greatest concerns for teachers? 4. How effective do you feel that your school is as an organisation in dealing with those Black Caribbean pupils who are most at risk of exclusion? 5. Is there anything that you would change in your school that you would feel would improve the experiences of those Black Caribbean pupils who are at risk of exclusion? 6. Nationally, Black Caribbean and White/Black Caribbean boys are disproportionately more likely to experience exclusion from school, why do you thing that is? 7. Do you feel that institutional racism exists within the education system and if you do then are there any examples that you have witnessed that would evidence forms of institutional racism? 8. What do you feel needs to be done to reduce school exclusions amongst Black boys and other groups who are identified as being vulnerable to exclusion?

School leadership one to one interview questions **1hr**	1. Could you tell me a bit of history about your professional and academic background that contribute to taking you into school leadership? 2. As school leadership, what was your greatest challenges when addressing exclusions amongst BAME pupils? 3. As school leadership what was your greatest challenges when addressing attainment gaps amongst BAME pupils? 4. During your career in education, have you witnessed any forms of racial discrimination take place at a strategic or operational level and if yes you could provide me with any examples? 5. Nationally and locally in Sheffield, Black Caribbean pupils are disproportionately represented in school exclusions, why do you think this is the case and what do you think are some of the underlining factors? 6. One of my sub questions to my main research question is: *What has taken place above me over the past 20 plus years that has shaped what I have experienced on the ground as a frontline practitioner, predominantly working in education and inclusion specialising in reducing school exclusions?* Looking at some of the broader structures, what do you feel are key components that has impacted on the education system on the ground? 7. For those working within the education system who are passionate about racial equality and tackling forms of racial inequality in education, with an aim of working towards sustainable change, what do you feel will be their greatest challenges? 8. As you have had experience working in other locations, what do you think of inclusion education within Sheffield in contrast to other cities?

Appendix 3

"Primary school was mainly alright, I started to kind of recognise things more in secondary. I wasn't the best kid, a bit naughty as well. I say something I did realise when I started at secondary school is I would get called 'the cock' of the school (means the toughest kid) and I didn't understand this because I never had a fight"

"I felt that I was expected to put up with something a lot more than White pupils would have too. It seemed to me in school like if I, had any form of problem. Or, if I tried to address things in a certain way, (paused), assertive, I were seen as being aggressive.

"Yeah, well, they (teachers) didn't expect much from me to be honest. I wasn't the best behaved kid in school. But the dynamics, I was classed as a bad kid at a young age and when you're like, 12 and 13 you see it as a kind of a cool thing. You know, I mean, and if you embrace it that can go one way or the other"

The first thing that comes to the forefront of their minds (teachers) is instead of that child (Black child) being academically smart, they just presume that that child can run faster than the other kids"

"But I think there is perhaps a broader point that within society, about Black boys, and the way in which they are seen what they've seen by the media, seen by their peers, also needs to be disaggregated. Black boys, they have had to fulfil a number of roles their seen to be sometimes oh he's a cool guy, or he's good at sport or he knows about music, or they become the centre of attraction. And when you're young guy, for example, girls interested in you that's a hard cocktail. So that can make you sometimes think well, I don't have to try so hard with my work or try so hard because I've got everything that a young man may want. And it's, it's sometimes helping those young people see between the lines, the way that society wants to pigeonhole them almost as just being physical beings". (Retired Black male secondary school teacher).

"Teachers have low expectations as well, a lot of the teachers there just expect them (Black boys) not to do well. They put in more lower sets, for no reason whatsoever. So the expectations from the teachers, not all teachers, are lower" (Black female secondary school teacher).

"And the thing with African Caribbean children a lot was the teachers saying, well I suspect they are good at sport, and not appreciating that they have other talents and abilities" (White female secondary school teacher).

"If you're a young Black boy, you're only seeing for your physicality, whether that's you're a danger to society, or you're going to be the athlete or you're going to be the musician. There so many of young Black boys, they don't have the chance to sometimes show the other sides to the same person, a person who can show compassion, or that they've got a poetic side. No, no you're not meant to be any of those things because that's not how society wants to pigeonhole you". (Black male school teacher).

"I remember being accused of cheating by my English teacher I did not get along with. This was after I was diagnosed with dyslexia and decided to use a computer to do my work so that it would highlight my spelling and grammar mistakes. I spent six weeks at this computer hacking out these assignments. And then on the day that she marks my work (the English teacher) in front of the whole class, stands up and calls me a cheat. She basically turns around and tells me that there is no way that you have done these pieces of work. And I'm like, why? She said you've gone from being like an E student to like an A student in a matter of weeks, so who have you bullied to get to do your work? I'm stood there and I literally felt about two inches tall I just wanted the ground to open me up because I've really tried and put my whole effort into these pieces of work".

“In one subject was designed technology, I was estimated a really low grade I think it was like D or E or something like that and that was one of my best subjects. I really liked to engage with the subject. I did, get a feeling that in certain areas of the school I was looked at differently. But in that class, I was producing some good work actually and I got my highest GCSE grades in it. So I always look back on that and think that was odd, why, why grade me so low and there was lot of kids around me, who were producing poorer work and getting higher grades”.

"I know some of us Black boys were feared, some Black boys, matured quickly and they were taller and the teacher, (pause) some of the teachers got intimidated by that. So I think that sometimes they overdid the discipline, it's like a Command and Conquer sort of thing. I must conquer this one because he's a bit intimidating and we could probably have to double down"

"There was other experiences where you're like, the teacher should not of done that, sometimes I felt like they dealt with us like we were grown men. Yeah, like we were big man, when we were just kids"

"One of the other challenges is that, (pause) some teachers view Black students. (pause) Their frightened of them. They treat them differently, they lack understanding, they deliver different punishments to Black kids and judge them more severely than they do other kids, so they've got different expectations, they wouldn't like to hear that, but its true from my experience. I can say this because I'm not, going to go to work in the morning (laughing). Fear and ignorance of Caribbean aspiration and potential, lack of community provision, lack the youth facilities. The pros, the prophecies, self-fulfilled."