We Cannot Let a Lion Tell the Giraffe's Story

An exploration of Black men's academic and professional successes.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the narratives and lived experiences of successful Black men with Sub-Saharan heritage, using storytelling to amplify their voices and challenge prevalent narratives. The title, We Cannot Let a Lion Tell the Giraffe's Story, shows how important it is for Black men to control their own narratives, aligning with Achebe's (2010) critique of colonial perspectives in storytelling. This research emphasises their agency, rejecting deficit-based views and as an alternative celebrating their success.

Participants defined success beyond traditional metrics, emphasising emotional well-being, authenticity, and contributions to their families and communities. They placed importance on emotional well-being and authenticity and viewed their contributions to the families and communities as the foremost indicators of their success.

The study also critiques the power imbalances in research and education, advocating for culturally responsive education that acknowledges Black boys' success. There is an urgent need in the UK educational policies to address and undo systemic inequalities that hinder Black men's success. By reclaiming their own narratives, participants challenge misrepresentation, offering a counter-narrative to deficit-based representations.

The title reinforces the study's central argument: Black men must be at the forefront of discussions about their own success. Their experiences demand that we alter the discourse, prompting us to look at success through several more prisms. Their stories show us that success has many dimensions - it's about cultural pride, meaningful mentorship, and achievements that lift up entire communities.

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I dedicate this book to my children, Benjamin and Alice-Lily Nnene a fairly common practice in my line of work. But as I have reflected on this undertaking, and the impetus for it, I have come to realise that there is more to it than that. There is a reason I have chosen to honour my children in this way. My children, inspire me every day: My son is a true example of what a successful young Black male can achieve, with his BSc First Class degree in Economics & Politics and MSc with Merit in Global Finance and Banking, he has excelled and thrived in a field that requires discipline, ambition, and skill. Watching him take on the challenges of his career in the City of London has filled me with pride and joy. His success reinforces the core of this work - highlighting the power and potential of Black men.

To my daughter - who is beside me on this journey, pursuing her own dream of becoming a doctor, just as I am pursuing my dream of completing my doctorate—you are also an inspiration. The demands of medical school and the demands of life are not always such that a person can feel balanced. Yet you do seem to find balance, excelling in life, music and being a medical student. When I started this endeavour you were still a secondary school student. I have watched you blossom into a very strong and driven young lady. You are indeed destined for greatness.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AAMT	African American Male Theory
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BLM	Black Lives Matter
ABM	African Black men
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CCW	Cultural Capital Wealth
CEIAG	Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
EBM	Evidence-Based Medicine
EBSCO HOST	Online Research Database
ECM	Every Child Matters
ECT	Early Careers Teacher
EGC	Ethnic Gender Class
EIF	Education Inspection Framework
EMAG	Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant
ERIC	Education Resources Information Center
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HE	Higher Education
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
ICM Poll	Independent Communication & Marketing Poll
ID	Identity
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
IT	Information Technology
JSTOR	Online Research Database
LA	Local Authority
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NEU	National Education Union
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
REC	Research Ethics Committee
REACH Report	Raising Expectations and Achievement Levels for Black Boys
RQ	Research Question
RRAA	Race Relations (Amendment) Act

SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UoNREC	University of Nottingham Research Ethics Committee
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
WID.WORLD	World Inequality Database

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The tale of Black men's educational and professional successes in the UK is intricate and has received insufficient attention. Even though some Black men in the UK have achieved a significant level of academic and professional success, the prevailing view seems to focus on Black men's lack of achievement. This is somewhat ironic, in that the few voices we hear from accomplished Black men tend not to focus on their successful navigation of the education system and their professional lives but rather serve up a diet of underachievement to contrast with the presence of their being. In this study, I seek to make some sense of this issue by investigating a few of the paths to success taken by some Black male figures.

For several decades, a deficit model has predominated in academic writing and policy discourse about the achievement of Black men in the UK. This view sees them as perpetually disadvantaged and failing within the education system. Consequently, the public profile of Black boys in education is a very negative one. In contrast, almost no attention has been given to the serious under-representation of Black men in higher education, particularly in elite universities. It is simply not seen as a problem when giving the public a very negative profile of Black boys in relation to education.

Although there is an abundance of literature examining the difficulties that Black boys experience, there is not as much that looks at the accomplishments of Black men who have dealt with these difficulties. This research endeavours to redirect attention from Black male underachievement to Black male achievement and to give an account of how some Black men manage to succeed despite the systemic barriers they face. The impetus for this work comes from personal and academic encounters that call the deficit model into question.

I am a mother and an educator. I have seen up close the negative stereotypes and low expectations that Black boys often encounter in our schools. But the narratives I have heard about Black men and boys have not been my family's experience. My brothers and husband have all achieved

success. My son, an alumna of a prestigious private school, is doing very well in the world, and I am sure it will be the same for him as it has been for the other men in my family. So I am a bit conflicted about studies that focus on understanding the paths of Black men when that span has not been my experience. I recognise that these examples have undoubtedly influenced my viewpoint, but my research centres on the experiences of Sub-Saharan African Black men who have navigated state education system. It is important I explain and make this distinction as these young African Black men success are placed in a different set of opportunities, challenges and contexts. It is their voices and stories that is sought.

I will now provide an outline of my positionality and the context for the study.

1.2 MY POSITIONALITY

The qualitative research process is invariably imbued with the "who" of the researcher. The researcher shapes and is in turn shaped by the research context; this is particularly true when the research seeks to understand human experiences and the meanings participants attach to those experiences. Thus, it seems essential that I, as the researcher, begin by providing a description of my own identity and of the experiences and professional values that brought me to this research.

I am a Black woman with Nigerian roots, originating from the Igbo ethnic group, a prominent and culturally rich community in the south-eastern region of Nigeria. My upbringing in the UK as part of an expatriate family has profoundly influenced my perceptions of race, ethnicity, and success. My family's history of thriving goes against the stereotypical narratives about Black people not achieving. My father, a banker who worked in the UK as an expatriate inculcated in me and my siblings a strong sense of ambition, pride in our heritage, and the notion that we must work harder than others to succeed in a society where racial inequalities are prevalent. These early family lessons in resilience and the pivotal role of education formed the bedrock of my own academic and professional pathways. In my family, we are the umpteenth generation to prize education and to use it as a potent force for change. My mother is a very good example of that. She is a sous

chef, and she graduated with a First-Class degree in Culinary Arts from the United States.

My immediate family enjoys this same background of achievement. My husband, a medical doctor who owns his practice, represents professional success in a field where Black men are still hard to find. His sojourn through medical school and into professional practice was marked by both racial and systemic challenges in a largely White field. My son has likewise overcome incredible odds. He graduated with First Class honours as an undergraduate and an MSc in Global Finance and Banking. He now works in the City of London - a more rarefied air indeed, and even more so given how few Black men work there. My daughter, who is currently in medical school, continues our family's legacy of achievement both in the classroom and beyond. Black men are frequently framed as overrepresented in negative statistics related to academics, behaviour, and health. We are told they are more likely to drop out of school, to end up in prison, and to die young. But these are not stories that are true for my children.

As an educator with extensive leadership experience across various roles, including Head of Law and Politics, Head of Social Sciences, Head of Sixth Form (Assistant Headteacher) and Lead for CEIAG & Student Pathways for the whole school, I have an uncommon view of the educational difficulties that Black men, especially Black boys, encounter. Even with some policies and interventions in place, Black boys still hit wall after wall, and when they do reach some semblance of success, it’s usually an underreported story that gets told less often than all the deficit narratives that come their way. I have proximate knowledge gained over years of working in schools. I have seen firsthand the structural and institutional barriers that can hold Black children back, especially Black boys. In my role as an educator, I have often been the only Black person in the room, which has given me a good view of the issues of race, representation, and systemic bias that the educational system is grappling with right now.

Collaborating with external organisations like Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and various community outreach programs has allowed me to see up close the difficulty that Black boys have in obtaining a quality

education and navigating society. These professional experiences have brought into sharper focus for me the critical need for targeted support and interventions for Black boys, who far too often are underserved and over pathologised in schools.

Holding both insider and outsider status within this research, I share cultural and racial identities with my participants. I am a Black British woman of Nigerian heritage, and this gives me a certain level of insider status. Yet I also occupy an outsider position because I am, fundamentally, a researcher - someone who is looking into the lives and experiences of others. According to the outsider status theory, I should be able to secure trust and build rapport with participants almost as easily as if I were an insider. But while both statuses are important, research in this context is also about the stories that participants are willing to share.

Conversely, as a woman, I am an outsider to my participants' experiences in the navigation of education and professional life as Black men. I can empathise with their struggles as Black individuals, but my gender and personal story undeniably position me differently in understanding the dynamics of Black masculinity and the way race and gender intersect in the lives of my participants. Because of this, I am approaching this research with a commitment to allow the voices of my participants to take centre stage in the construction of knowledge.

1.3 CONTEXT

I have targeted my study specifically on understanding the lived experiences and successes of sub-Saharan African Black men in the English education system. The conversation about Black boys in education tends to favour a deficit model that underscores underachievement and behavioural problems. This is a very narrow and negative view of the diverse population of young men who identify as Black. Vis-à-vis my study, this is also a poor representation of Black men because it often fails to capture the full spectrum of their experiences, achievements, and potential.

In recent years, education policies have started to address some of the disparities experienced by ethnic minority students. However, much of this policy work has not adequately captured the unique needs of Black men. The

striking underrepresentation and concerning lack of success of these boys in professional spaces is a central issue that speaks to much broader concerns about both diversity and inclusion within UK society and, specifically, its institutions, workforce, and corridors of power. Despite the many and varied challenges that Black men confront, I have come to find that there are a growing number of what I call success narratives individuals who have navigated their educational and professional journeys quite well despite some adversity and obstacles. In this study, my participants share their stories.

Educational policy has placed explicit attention on addressing racial inequities, and this has increasingly been the case for over a decade. For instance, the Equality Act 2010 made it unlawful in the UK to discriminate against someone because of their race or ethnicity.

To understand how Sub-Saharan African Black men (and when they were boys) journey through the English education system, it is important to grasp the idea of cultural capital. This concept crafted by Pierre Bourdieu (Richardson, 1986) involves the non-economic resources individuals possess that give them a certain kind of value which becomes a kind of advantage in social setting.

Sub-Saharan African Black men bring a whole lot of cultural capital to the classroom that is ignored by a predominantly white, middle-class teaching force. This study employs Yosso's (2005) theorisation of cultural capital as a framework to investigate and analyse.

This means African Black men frequently find ways to succeed within the educational system. They tap into their cultural heritage for the tools needed to manoeuvre through the system, and they also use the unique ability they have because of their lived experiences, to adapt readily to predominantly different cultural environments. The part played by the extended family networks, community organisations, and religious institutions that African Black men have in their lives cannot be overstated. These entities provide them with the kind of essential backbone that all of us can agree is incredibly important for success in life.

One of the main obstacles that many African Black men in the United Kingdom encounter in the educational system is the slow turnover of

assumptions that accrue to them from an unfounded stereotype about their appearance, and a male-dominant presumption about their behaviour, that positively correlates with the miseducation of African Black men. Gillborn (2015) has pushed back against this uninformed collective racial judgment as being not objective, but it is still very much a part of the terrain of racialised and gendered space that we negotiate. Teachers and schools using unfair and dubious means to mete out discipline, as well as placing African Black boys in lower sets or subjecting them to exclusion from the classroom, are some of the ways that Black men deal with discipline issues that arise from being racially profiled. When this happens, it partially contributes to the achievement gap.

Nevertheless, successful African Black men have discovered methods to confront these prejudicial ideas by forging positive ties with educators, mentors, and companions who back their academic and personal development. By constructing formidable networks of support and demonstrating resilience against life's inevitable setbacks, African Black men frequently sidestep the road leading to low expectations and instead, find the path leading to success (Demie, 2021). Understanding the English education system's effects on African Black men requires an appreciation of intersectionality also. In the context of African Black men, intersectionality underscores how their identities as Black and male open them up to the twin forces of racial and gender bias.

For instance, negative stereotypes and racism do not always come directly to African Black men, but they come in the form of people not seeing them for who they really are. Traditional ideas about what it is to be male also come into play and can have a powerful impact on how young boys act and perform in school. When we think about issues of race and class, we also have to consider the kind of socio-economic backgrounds that the African Black men we are talking about come from. Many African boys come from working-class families and are school-focused but nonetheless have ambitions that are thwarted by this intersecting web of stereotypes, racism, and traditional ideas of manhood (Demie, 2021). The serious impacts of these forces being with us foster in a lot of African boys a kind of quiet resilience, who resist and navigate the winds that push against them.

African Black men live within a context fashioned by the English education system's recent policies, society's long-standing cultural expectations, and a few educational stereotypes. Although African Black men may not be judged positively before arriving at school, may still achieve and succeed. This is why the lived experience of a successful African Black boy and man matters. If successful narratives are the counter-narratives necessary to shade off the deficit models of contemporary discourse concerning African Black men in the UK, then one must listen closely to these boys and men; after all, they know our society's education system better than any embedded observer.

1.4 SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND GEO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

In this section, I outline the socio-historical and geo-political context of my study. To understand why success may be framed from a deficit viewpoint it is crucial we address and understand the socio-historical and geo-political perspectives.

My intention is by no means to present a comprehensive history but rather to address topics such as the origins of empire, particular social movements, inequality in education, the discourses of equality and social justice through implementation of education policy, consequence of social, historical and cultural frameworks in the construction of discourses in education and legislation.

1.4.1 The social and historical setting

Education is key to success and development in a society, and this comprises formal and informal education (Rollock et al 2015). It is a vehicle used to promote social mobility and maintain social structure. Yosso (2005) points out that Black African people nurture cultural wealth through a range of knowledge, skills and abilities as six forms of capital: aspirational capital where children dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, linguistic capital which includes storytelling and literacy skills, familial capital where there is a more understanding of family and kinship, social capital through supportive social network within their community, navigational capital which refers to skills that enable Black boys manoeuvre within unsupportive environments and resistance capital which challenges

inequality. These capitals show that education goes beyond the classroom. The importance of education amongst Africans cannot be over-emphasised.

A sophisticated way of learning had been developed in Africa whether it was from oral traditions such as oral communication of proverbs, poetry, songs and folklore, apprenticeship models or universities like Timbuktu (Cleveland, 2008). Education existed in Africa before the introduction of the slave trade or European colonisation. Things fell apart with colonialism for Africa (Tomlinson, 2019; Dorling, 2020).

1.4.2 Pre-colonial knowledges and learning

Africa was home to diverse, complex societies with their own systems of governance, knowledge, and education prior to the disruption of transatlantic slavery and colonisation. For example, University of Timbuktu, was an intellectual hub where one could learn about the law, medicine, astronomy and business. There were empires such as Mali, Songhai, and Benin who not only had organised political structures but also international trade links with Asia and Europe.

Education has always been integral amongst Africans.

1.4.3 The slave trade and colonialism

The African economy before colonisation was based on trade by barter which became a profitable market for UK manufactured goods and provided raw materials for their industries.

Ocheni & Nwankwo (2012) describe colonial education as essentially literary. It was not rooted in African culture and could not foster any significant development within the African environment because Africans' needs were very different from the colonisers. African forms of education were rooted in African technology which made them good sculptors, carvers, cloth weavers, miners, blacksmiths, etc. The western education was therefore antithetical to real or industrial development. Due to control imposed by the colonisers Western education took priority and African technological skills were abandoned (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012).

Britain dominated the slave trade between 1640 and 1807, transporting an estimated 3.1 million Africans to its colonies, of whom 2.7 million arrived

(National Archives, no date). This disruption caused collective and cultural trauma (Alexander, 2004) in that it fractured their systems, identities and traditions. However, ones trajectories depict success within and beyond unfair structures and constrains of history.

By 1780, Britain had a Black population of at least 20,000 people. They were literates. Warmington (2014) described the early Black British thinkers who were taken from Africa as children, sold into slavery, who grew up to write works that challenged British ideas about racism and demanded the abolition of the slave trade. They were educated hence educational contradiction to slavery which became a pathway to their success, and I will briefly tell four of their stories. Their stories underscore the critical importance of storytelling in explaining complex educational phenomena. Their stories clarify how unfair and oppressive systems can be challenged due to the contradictions these systems demonstrate. Storytelling of these four show contradictions that analysis may not be able to reveal. For example, analysis does not reveal how individuals navigate the contradictions of systems in place.

Olaudah Equiano was born around 1745. He was from the eastern part (Ibo) of what is now Nigeria. He was a child when he was kidnapped. Unusually, he was taught to read by his 'master'. Equiano bought his freedom in 1766 for £40. He was well known as Britain's first Black political leader and authored the best-selling autobiography which was first published about 1789 but recently independently published (Equiano 2020). Equiano was a member of a Black lobbying group called the Sons of Africa. This was a politically active body of Black men who worked towards the abolition of the slave trade and more civil rights for Blacks in Britain.

Ottobah Cugoano was born in Ghana in 1757, where he was captured at the age of thirteen. Although he endured a brutal period of enslavement he linked his educational journey with the freedom of African people as a whole. His book (Cugoano, 1787) demanded the total abolition of the slave trade and reparations to African nations crushed by large-scale human trafficking.

Ignatius Sancho, born in 1729, was brought to Britain as an infant and put to work as a household slave in London. As a critic of the slave trade he was

keen to learn and was supported by the Duke of Montagu, who encouraged him to borrow books from his extensive library.

Phillis Wheatley, was another child who was abducted from her parents in Africa. Despite the tragedy she wrote *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* which was published in London in (Wheatley, 1773), when she was about nineteen.

Although the Enlightenment claimed to promote the ideals of democracy, liberty and equality for all, restrictions on Black social mobility and education remained. Those restrictions did not stop the introduction of Black thought into the English language by a few African writers who began to challenge the degraded notions of human diversity prevalent during this period (Wigger and Hadley, 2020).

1.4.4 Decolonisation

The historical events on slave trade and colonisation still have influences on Black African education. Despite independence in many African countries, Rodney (1972) argues that due to the dismantling of African knowledge the structures that were set up have continued to shape the educational barriers faced by African young men. Tomlinson (2019) argues that successive British governments still deny events during the colonial times. Cobain (2017) cited in Tomlinson (2019) suggested that Britain claims to have lost these archival materials. British history taught in schools is rose-tinted. However, knowledge of Black history is essential as it brings about curiosity, understanding of the complexity in people's lives and diversity in society; it should not be forgotten (Alexander et al, 2015).

The British Empire eventually went into decline by the late 20th century. At the same time, the British National Act (1948) gave commonwealth citizens the right to settle in Britain so there was migration of labour from commonwealth countries after World War II. Colonialism continued for example the British East India Company, under the guise of aid or investment to developing countries (Banarjee & Linstead, 2001).

The imperialist beliefs, subjugation and superiority have persisted. A legacy of the slave trade is persisting marginalisation even though there was an established impoverished African community in England in the beginning of

the seventeenth century as a result of the slave trade (Fryer, 1984). Marginalisation and colonisation lead to poverty. Poverty can be a by-product of emigration because there remain colonial ties. Settling down in a new country like the UK can bring about tension between the white British population and the newly arrived immigrants. One of the reasons for this is because Africa is seen as barbaric and chaotic so anyone arriving from the continent must be saved from their worst fates (Everill, 2015; Lockley, 2010). This hostility is regularly pointed at Black Africans which can be described as racial discrimination and racial prejudice which is seen in the educational system. For example, in 2013, Godfrey Bloom, MEP for UKIP referred to Africans as coming from Bongo Bongo land, a pejorative term and a hostile Home Office sent out vans with billboards that read 'go home or face arrest' (Flynn, 2013) around diverse areas in London for one week claiming it was a pilot scheme. However, there was no mention of white Australian, US, Brazil or South African illegal immigrants who were overstayers (Toms & Thorpe, 2012). More recently the Covid-19 pandemic has shone a great light on the National Health Service which is staffed by thousands of ethnic minorities - 1.5 million people work in the NHS (Wilkinson-Brice & Evans, 2022).

1.4.5 Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is not just about a country regaining its independence and the end of colonialism. Instead, the forced dependency of colonialism had a profound impact on the economic, political, social and cultural fabric of the country. Therefore postcolonialism is a transformation from one level of past events to another level of change but this change also recognises decolonised situations (Williams, 2009).

Young (2003) suggests that postcolonialism means the nations of the three non-western continents (Africa, Asia, Latin America) are largely in a situation of subordination to Europe and North America, and in a position of economic disparity. The term postcolonial is not generally liked by people because it disturbs the order of the world, threatens privilege and power and refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures (Al-Saidi, H., & Ahmed, A. 2014; Williams, 2009). Britain had been shielded from reality because the empire gave a comforting delusion about their place in the world and a

conviction they had an inherent right to rule. The Brexit campaign slogan 'take back control' brought back memories of when the country governed over 700 million people across the world.

A database of historical inequalities has shown that the rich British became poorer when the empire disappeared (Alvarez et al, 2013; Saez et al; Francis-Devine, 2020). The wealthiest realised that their riches were depleting after the end of World War I. In 1913, the richest 0.01% of households in the UK received 425 times the average household income per year. Although it increased later in the years, it never returned to pre-1913 levels.

Connecting colonialism, postcolonialism and education shows that many including the policymakers remain nostalgic for an empire, a nationalist Britain.

1.4.6 Patterns of migration to the UK

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the UK saw huge investment in public infrastructure. The war destroyed many cities which needed to be rebuilt, transport systems expanded and new institutions, such as the NHS, needed workers. The reconstruction of the British economy brought about a large influx of immigrant labour. There were now employment opportunities and people from all over the Commonwealth came to the UK to help fill the labour shortage.

Since 1994 migration to the UK has been greater than emigration (Sturge, 2020). However for much of the twentieth century migration to and from UK has been in balance. Hatton (2004) posits there were two eras of migration – between 1853 and 1913 and 1951 – 1998 where 13 percent of the population in 1870 aged between 18 and 45 left the UK. Since 1996 immigration and emigration have increased to historically high levels, with immigration surpassing emigration by over 100,000 in each year since 1998 (Sturge, 2020).

With the increase in immigration from the 1960s there has been a series of Race legislation enacted to stamp out racism in areas such as education. Despite this immigrants face racial hostility from a minority of racists who believe that there should be policies banning all immigrants.

1.5 FOCUS OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the experiences and roadmaps to success of Black men with Sub Saharan African heritage identified as Black African in the UK census (ONS, 2021) who have been educated in the English state education system.

Academics such as Arday (2004), Gillborn (2008) examined the persistent focus on underachievement, especially concerning their performance in the educational arena, so much so that it can feel as if the conversation is stuck in a loop. But it is time to turn the conversation around and focus on the Black men who are doing well academically and, in some cases, astonishingly well. There is a compelling need for this research, led by Black academics, to interrogate the kinds of identities that Black men in the UK can imagine, and to open up a space in the discourse for these young men to locate themselves and speak for themselves.

This research places successful African Black men at its core to offer an uncommonly heard perspective. While we often hear about the struggles of Black men in society, this research illuminates the other side of the coin and talks about the successes of Black men. It attempts to explain why certain Black men have succeeded in life, despite societal forces that might suggest otherwise. It asks who they are, about families and communities they were raised in, the kind of schools they attended, and the type of interventions they experienced, if any, to arrive at an understanding of their success. This lends itself to a more rounded strategy for addressing educational failure among Black men in society on the whole.

This work also wants to be part of the larger dialogue around diversifying the education system and the workforce as a whole. It is not concerned with what happens to Black men in terms of negative outcomes in education and the workforce. Instead, it highlights the conditions under which particular Black men have succeeded in achieving educational and professional outcomes that are the opposite of what is expected of them. Black men who succeed in these two arenas are often seen as exceptions. This inquiry

examines their understandings of success by hearing the narratives that they tell about their lives.

The stories are examined to shed light on the recurring themes and the key strategies that led to the success of these young men - individuals who achieved academic success against the odds. I analyse the role of educational institutions and policies and programs in fostering the successes of these Black men. We do this primarily because the current systematic neglect of the academic achievement of Black men in secondary schools, colleges and universities has gone on far too long and must be counteracted with both clear knowledge and effective practices.

The research pushes back against the current deficit narrative surrounding the educational outcomes of Black men. We emphasise the spaces and places where Black men have found success in the current educational landscape. Our goal is to shift the conversation from one of concern and underachievement to one that recognises the success of Black men in education and among our communities. We do not present this work as a panacea for the multitude of issues confronting the Black community and its youngest members. However, we hope it yields some insight for both the community and our educators when thinking about how to better support Black men.

In the end, the research attempts to motivate transformation. It does this by offering clear instances of what is effective, fostering a more even-handed and affirmative conversation about the accomplishments of Black men, and working toward a English education system that is more inclusive and equitable.

1.6 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The prime aim was to investigate the successful paths through education and careers of Black men of Sub-Saharan African heritage in the UK. These are the profiles that usually are not reflected in the existing literature. Objectives of my study are:

To capture a glimpse of the profiles of those who have navigated the education system, overcome the inevitable barriers, and achieved professional success.

To investigate how success is defined by African Black men by listening to the personal narratives of men who have attained success in a society where they could easily have been typecast and dismissed.

To understand what they consider to be success.

To examine the key influences that enabled them to thrive as Black boys in the education system.

To develop a counter-narrative in direct response to the ubiquitous deficit narratives that surround Black men.

With these objectives, this research aims to do two valuable things: contribute to closing a noticeable gap in the literature; and provide a resource to educators, policymakers, and practitioners and all those who support the academic success of African Black men in the UK.

My research seeks to understand the success of African Black men in the UK and was guided by the following questions.

To explore this topic, my research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do African Black men describe their success?
2. What did African Black men need to thrive when they were boys in the English education system?
3. What systems were or are put in place specifically to underpin the needs of Black boys in the English education system?
4. How did African Black boys and men navigate the intersectionality of ethnicity (race), gender, and class in the education system?

   The overarching question - How did African Black men navigate challenges to achieve success?

1.6.1 My Conceptualisation of success

I also conceptualised success as a way of sampling for this study. I had initially framed success in traditional terms, which I took to mean completion of an undergraduate degree and employment in a professional field. I, therefore, used these two broad brushstrokes to sample the twelve Black men in this study. Each had completed his undergraduate degree and each was employed in a professional field. This is how I defined what it was to be a 'success'. I deployed these concepts because they are the standard gauges that are almost exclusively drawn upon in mainstream discourse on education (Warmington, 2014; Archer, 2007; Gillborn, 2008; Mirza, 2009; Rollock, 2007b). However, as I interviewed the Black men in this research and started to listen to the narratives, I started to think about success in a different way. The way my participants defined their success was not about their degrees and professional jobs. Instead, they talked about wellbeing, authenticity, resilience, community contribution and more. These themes were what constituted success for the Black men in this study. As I listened to the voices of the Black men in this study, I began to conceptualise success in a different way. Success, as it is conceptualised in this study, involves: the attainment of academic success, but in the sense that it is a demonstration of one's ability, perseverance and ability to operate within a system that was not designed with them in mind; working in a professional field, but in the sense that one is able to contribute and exercise one's agency, rather than simply holding a professional job title; psychological and emotional well-being and resilience in the face of racism and stereotypes; remaining 'oneself' and retaining a positive Black identity and sense of self, in spite of racism and exclusion; contributing to one's family and community. My conceptualisation of success has shifted from asking whether Black men have their degrees and jobs to listening to how they define their own success, resilience and survival. This has implications for the way that I will present and analyse the findings of this study. Instead of using my initial conceptualisation of success as the framework through which I look at what the Black men said in the interviews, I will use the framework that they have provided for me. This is a commitment to a counter-narrative methodology; the Black men are the experts on their own lives and success.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of this research lies in its potential to reframe the discourse about Black African men in the UK, particularly in the field of education. I aim to tell the seldom told stories of twelve Black men who have lived the experience and navigated to achieve success. Their lived experiences challenge the harmful and simplistic stereotypes that Black boys are somehow less intellectually equipped, under-resourced, and less resilient than their peers who are also successful.

This research aims to overturn the traditional (deficit) perspectives by exploring what I term the "success circuitry" (Nnene, 2024) the pathways and components through which Black men and communities in my study navigate the UK educational system in their pursuit for upward mobility. This study's results aim to add constructively and significantly to the areas of intellectual engagement served by the fields of social foundations of education, critical race studies, and wider conversations situated within the UK context about race, class, and gender. Furthermore, this research has basic and important relevance in the practical world for educators, policymakers, and system stakeholders who are committed to working against the grain to reduce inequalities in the educational system. Understanding what makes Black men successful in this context can inform and undergird developing strategies that work with and refine their strengths as part of a more inclusive educational policy and practice system.

1.7.1 Counter-Narratives: Success Stories of Black Men in the UK

One of the key contributions of this research is to develop counter-narratives that challenge the deficit model of Black male achievement. The participants in this study will describe their success not in terms of overcoming their identity as Black men but as part of that identity. For many, their success is rooted in their ability to draw on both individual resilience and collective support networks, including family, community, and mentors.

This study builds on the work of academics like Rollock (2012), Gillborn (2008), Bhopal (2018) who have sought to highlight the achievements of Black men in the UK. These counter-narratives are essential for challenging the dominant discourse of underachievement and providing alternative

models of success. The stories of successful Black men can serve as both inspiration and guidance for younger generations studying, offering insights into how they can navigate similar challenges and eventually pursue their own aspirations.

1.8 STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to understand how young Black men with sub-Saharan African heritage define and experience success in the English education system, centring their own voices and lived experiences as the primary source of knowledge.

This research contributes to educational knowledge by amplifying Black men's narratives of achievement, resilience, and educational meaning making, that is narratives that challenge dominant deficit discourses and centre their own understandings of success.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1: Introduction

The foundation for this study is in this first chapter, which provides background and context. The chapter's focus is on reasons for undertaking an exploration of the academic and success of Black men with African heritage in the UK. It lays out the serious concerns that have prompted this inquiry. It also places this study within the socio-historical and geopolitical context of the UK, addressing systems of knowledge that predate the colonial period, the impact of colonialism, and how migration to the UK has affected knowledge production. This chapter lays out the key inquiries driving the research, states the study's aims, and highlights its importance for knowledge and action. The chapter's final section describes the thesis's structure, thus priming readers for what is ahead in the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter critically examines the scholarship related to race, education, and success such as Gillborn (2008), Warmington (2014) and Callender (2020). It investigates the educational policies of the UK and their differential effects on Black African boys. The chapter makes some salient points that:

(1) A policy that labels young people largely accounts for their success or lack thereof; (2) Pathologising Black boys as at risk has failed; (3) There is a white space at the helm of UK education that needs to be disrupted. Finally, the chapter confers the value of ethical reporting and the significance of employing success as a headline story.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework and the research design. Guided by Critical Race Theory (see e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rollock, 2016 and Warmington, 2020), the study also uses Yosso's (2005) Cultural Capital framework to inform the research design and to interpret the data that reveals the lived experiences of Black men. A qualitative methodological approach serves as the basis of the research, with narrative inquiry as the primary method of data collection. The stories told by the participants were gathered through narrative inquiry, stimulated by an artefact. Considerations of how to ensure the research is valid, reliable, and trustworthy are discussed, as are the ethical ramifications of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

In this chapter, we present and discuss the findings of our research carried out in the UK. We begin by exploring the perceptions of success held by our participants and the individual and social factors they believe contributed to their achievements. We examine themes such as family, friends, and role models; we also look at critical incidents that, for some, made a decisive difference in their journeys. The discussion addresses the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in shaping the participants' experiences in education and beyond. Their stories, and the path to their successes, underscore the role of education, resilience, and determination. We finally address the overarching question.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter pulls together the threads of this research, weaving a tapestry that reflects the complex nature of success among Black African men. It interprets and explains the reasons behind the findings. It discusses the implications of these outcomes regarding further research, practise,

policymaking in the broader public educational arena. It considers an even wider implication: the political one because it is often the case that the power of the Black male to penetrate the educational system is curtailed at the behest of those who make the educational decisions and those who vote for the politicians who make these decisions possible. It follows with an outline of the limitations of the study and the recommendations for future research. Finally the chapter ends with a personal take on the entire study and outlines the contribution the research makes to knowledge and practice in the field.

Having established the rationale for this study, the next chapter reviews the existing body of literature.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

A study cannot be conducted in a vacuum and as with any research it is necessary to review what has been done before, the unsolved problem and the contribution to the existing knowledge.

Through my review of literature, I will address a multi-generational problem, the current hegemony and unfair discourse of Black Men and implications for change in the negative perceptions, stereotypes and popular beliefs of the broader society including academics, schools, universities, policy makers. It is a desire to 'Change hearts and minds' (Nnene, 2019).

Existing published works were reviewed. These were included because their seminal nature contributed to the knowledge base on Black men. For example, Gillborn's (1987, 1996) research brought CRT from the US to thinking about education in England. It was cited in more recent work. Richardson's (2005) book, "Tell it like it is" includes a reprint of an older work, Coard's (1971) book, 'How the West Indian Child is Made Subnormal in the British School System', for example.

The literature review is divided into sections. The first outlines the literature search.

I then move on to Race and the English Education System and Race and Education Policies, where I focus on the debates around achievement and underachievement, looking from the historical to the contemporary. I review material about the ongoing issue and debate concerning attainment of Black boys while in UK schools and showing that there has been improvement which underpins the need for a balanced discussion, anti-deficit approach to better understand Black men's academic success. I then make the connection between Teacher Expectations, the need for more male Black teachers and leaders in education. Specifically, this section provides an analysis of what research has been done and examines various policies that were set up to improve achievement and attainment among black students. In addition I make the point that there is not enough academic literature on success amongst Black teachers and leaders. The education policies on structure, recruitment and progress are lacking and institutions are still racist (Haque and Elliot, 2017).

I then move on to the next section about Black professors and HE. I want to address broadly what is known about this group. It is important to stress that an asset-based view does not mean a complete disregard to raising awareness of Black underachievement. However, it is crucial to give a balanced view.

I also outline theoretical framework that draw on critical race theory (CRT) which provides a lens to analyse how systemic and structural racism shapes educational outcomes. Additionally, Yosso's CCW framework challenges deficit narratives and highlight strength and resources that is brought into the educational space by marginalised communities.

In my review I will briefly discuss again the potential role of the media as this influence public perception and perpetuates barriers to explain why exceptionalism should not be the norm. I will finally present a summary and a broad overview of the importance of reporting the success of BMs. I argue that an asset-based discourse has largely been ignored, and my study will examine perceptions of educational excellence success amongst the new generation professional black men.

2.1 THE LITERATURE SEARCH

A comprehensive and systematic search of electronic databases was performed using the university's educational and social science search engines: NUsearch, online reading lists, BrowZine, online reading lists, moodle and externally EBSCO HOST (Academic Search Premier SocINDEX with Full Text), JSTOR, Google Scholar, Wilson Web Social Sciences Full Text, and ERIC.

The following key words and terms were combined variously until an overlap point was reached, which began to yield similar works: "African British Black boys" (Demie, 2021), "Black British men or boys", or "Black men or boys", Black men, Black students (Christian, 2005; Warmington, 2014; Gilborn, 2014; Callender, 2020), success (Wright et al, 2016), Black men and education, education (Rhamie and Hallam, 2002), academic success (Gilborn et al, 2012), UK Black professionals (Atewologun and Singh, 2010), successful black professionals (Morris, 2015), high attainment (Tomlin, 2007), education and Black men (Hotchkins and Dancy, 2015). Empirical

studies with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed designs were prioritised. I selected a wide range of studies because the literature on successful black men was limited but the studies selected were relevant to Black men with African heritage. Steps were taken to include the discourse of deficit on Black men. Consequently, I intentionally included works that highlighted or revealed "problems" with black men such as underachievement (Mills, 2000; Demie and Maclean, 2007; 2017).

My literature review was intentionally selected on the notion that the study:

1. used qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods study designs;

2. was conducted within the United Kingdom;

3. specifically addressed Black men or British Black men with African heritage;

4. reported disaggregated data on or about successful or high achieving British African Black men – these were in the keywords;

5. was published in a peer-reviewed journal, scholarly book; and

6. was conducted within the last 30 years.

It is my intention in this study to move away from underlying assumptions about ABM underachieving and establish a counter discourse however I need to know the deficit discourse too. The paradigm of ABM's underachievement has long been the accepted way of thinking and considered as a dominant discourse.

My study draws on the counter-storytelling approach of CRT (Love, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Studies that demonstrate persistence, resilience, and intellectual giftedness in Black men are crucial to the counter discourse in understanding the historical portrayal of Black men in the United Kingdom.

The literature review has enabled me work through my ideas. I have been able to explore and understand the deficit discourse and at the same time hungered the success stories, the high achievers in their education and beyond.

2.2 HOW SOCIAL AND EDUCATION POLICY ARE CONNECTED

The connection between social policy and education in my research focuses on how societal frameworks and government interventions impact educational access, inclusivity, and outcomes, for Black boys. Black boys, often face systemic barriers rooted in policies that fail to address inequities. It has been argued that education policies often reinforce systemic inequities, subtly maintaining racial hierarchies and how exclusionary policies limit access to education for marginalised communities, including racial minorities. (Gilborn, 2008). In addition, education policy often overlooks the intersecting impacts of race and gender which affects equity for Black boys which brings about the lack of inclusion in education policy and curricula (Warmington, 2014). Social and education policies shape funding, admissions processes, and infrastructure, determining who can access quality education. For Black boys, these policies often create structural barriers that restrict equitable access. Callender (2020) examines how institutional structures within education reproduce racial disparities, highlighting the ways social policies either reinforce or challenge these inequities. Education policy is the primary determinant of curriculum content and representation. A diverse set of histories and perspectives forms the basis for a relevant and inclusive curriculum. It also influences how success is defined which is why Yosso (2005) provides an alternative which emphasises untapped resources within the Black community. It has also been argued that social policy brings about the cursory inclusion of diverse perspectives in the curriculum which is not enough to challenge the dominance of those in power (the lion's perspective). This raises questions about whose voices and experiences are centred in the curriculum. If voices and experiences of diverse perspectives are absent, inclusion becomes meaningless (Gabriel & Tate, 2017).

Despite the evidence on race and racism, it is still common for mainstream social policy texts to treat debates on 'race' and racism as marginal (Craig et al, 2019). Britain distinguished its former colonies citizens from British born citizens under the British Nationality Act 1948. Tomlinson (2013; 2019) argues that the assumption was that immigrants were meant to be assimilated into jobs that the whites did not want, and they did where there was a labour shortage. Problems began to arise in the 1950s and 1960s as

these immigrants refused to stay as the underclass because they came with greater aspirations for their children and hoped that by settling in the UK, they would guarantee a better education for them.

Academics such as Warmington (2014) have criticised education and social policy in recent years in which education and social policy discourses have been de-racialised. Warmington also posits policy items might be subsumed under community cohesion and academic underachievement.

The published Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparity, 2021, has been published and it suggests the Conservative government were done with race equality despite some of their own findings. For example, academia remains notably white, the number of Black people at the very top of the top FTSE 100 companies recently fell from 2 to 0, and professions where there were disparities and clear structural racism were not made explicit by the report. The report suggests that we live in a post racial era. This is wrong and dangerous (Bhopal, 2018). The report also suggests we have a national government that is not committed overtly to a race strategy but more comfortable with diversity in all its guises. It also purports White working class boys now have the worst educational outcomes and essentially, White children are proclaimed as the new race victims.

According to Gilborn, (2008) and Department for Education, (2017) educational policies should be designed with a focus on equity to reduce inequalities within our society. Accessing services should never depend on one's race, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Social policies should identify ways of reducing inequalities. In the next section, I focus on Race and the English Education System. Market mechanisms were introduced to education in the light of these concerns in the 1980s and 1990s by the Conservative government to raise standards. Although market forces enabled competition between schools there was still social division within schools as students were placed in schools and classes according to their abilities, in selective education in some areas. Black men standards were not raised.

Governments are driven by external pressures which force them to focus on race and Hayles, cited in Gillborn et al (2016), posits that conflicts between Black communities brought about inquiries such as the Swann (1985) and

Rampton reports (1981). Policies emerge when there is a problem but the focus for such report is usually Home Office issues especially policing (Gillborn et al, 2016) and other vital areas such as education are ignored. Stephen Lawrence's murder needed a response, the government could not overlook it hence the Macpherson Report (1999) went beyond policing. In education, a case needed to be developed urgently as there were many criticisms of successive governments not having a grasp of the key issues around race in education. In the early 1990s pupil performance data was seen as the factor that would drive race equality in schools. This was used as leverage to open up discussions about race, inequality and inequity in our schools (Gillborn et al, 2016).

Assessment data management enabled tracking of individual students on how they were progressing. It also gave an overview of individual schools. There was now a national approach to generating and monitoring pupil performance data. These are just numbers they do not give us their stories. In addition, we may not be using holistic indicators.

To improve achievement and narrow achievement gaps amongst Black Minority Ethnic (BME) students in the 1990s and early 2000s targeted policies were introduced such as DfEE's Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), which provided funding to local government on the basis of underachieving BME pupils and pupils with English as an additional language (NALDIC 2011). There needed to be a more focus on BME groups whose outcomes were the poorest and provision for individualised support in the targeted schools in key London boroughs such Hackney and Southwark and expanding to West Midlands and beyond. Post 1997 various policies such as New Deal and Curriculum 2000 (Priestley, 2003), Education Action Zones (Reid and Brain, 2003), 14-19 Education and Skills (DfES, 2005), Raising Expectations (DCFS and DIUS, 2008) were introduced to improve standards for disadvantaged students, to provide centres of excellence, to raise standards and to gain skills for employment. A recently abolished AS/A2 level was also introduced.

The London Challenge, launched in 2003, was one of the very successful initiatives because it was based on the experience of previous failed policies. It also kept race equality on the national agenda, but it did not survive the

decade. London Challenge was used to improve achievements for Black and minority ethnic students (Kidson and Norris, 2014).

The focus of new educational policies should primarily be to address personal and academic progress and ultimately provide a more equitable education system for every child (OECD, 2012). However, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2006) stated that over the years the educational services have not always met the individual needs of BME young people who have for a long time been disproportionately affected which was recognised in the Every Child Matters (ECM) consultation paper, as it asserted that there are significant differences in educational attainment where BME groups were consistently below national average and they also face greater challenges than others in growing up (Youth Matters: Green Paper, 2005).

We now move on to race and the English education system.

2.3 RACE AND THE ENGLISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

In addition to the policy context, the empirical evidence of the lived experiences of Black men provides further evidence of the continuities of racism in UK schools. The work of Callendar (2018; 2020), Rhamie (2002; 2012) and Mirza (2024) has been critical in the shift to placing the voices and experiences of Black men at the centre of the analysis, and an attempt to move away from a deficit discourse and towards an exploration of how racism works in schools. Callendar explores the experiences of Black men and in particular, the ways in which the intersections of race, gender and class impact on the educational trajectories of Black men. Her analysis focuses on the ways in which Black boys (and in particular Black girls) resist and contest the stereotypes and low expectations that exist in UK schools and argues that the only way to challenge this is for schools to shift from a colour-blind approach to an actively anti-racist one that recognises the identities of Black men. Rhamie's (2012) longitudinal study on the achievement of Black men in UK schools provides empirical evidence on the impact of family background, the role of community and the effects of schooling on the educational achievement of Black men. The study is of particular relevance to this analysis as it highlights how family support, good teaching, positive role models and support from the school all contribute to the achievement of Black men and that achievement is not solely as a result of hard work and ability. Finally, Mirza's (2024) intersectional analysis of the context of Black families and their educational aspirations provides an understanding of the role that Black families (and in particular Black mothers) play in the education of their children. Her analysis highlights how Black families are not deficient or dysfunctional but are active participants in the education of their children with sophisticated educational strategies and high aspirations.

Although there has been much mainstream and scholarly attention with respect to Black men, there is a lack of rigorous and critical analysis of structural racism and an overemphasis on modifying behaviours, attitudes and culture. This suggests fixing the Black men because since the 1950s the UK policies have tried to manage diversity by expecting Blacks to abandon their norms, practices and cultures (assimilation), accept the English laws,

cultures, norms and values (assimilation) and recognise the multiplicity of cultures (multiculturalism) (Cheong et al, cited by Shain, 2013).

In this section I will be focusing on two areas, Race and education policies and Race and attainment. My aim is to highlight the existing structural inequality which shows that education policies mainly focus on access to education without addressing the factors that structural constraints reproduce inequality (Connelly et al, 2014; Alexander, 2015; Dorling & Tomlinson, 2016; Tomlinson 2019).

2.4 RACE AND EDUCATION POLICIES

As already outlined above, there was a recognition of educational inequalities and attempts to strengthen policies. However some of the policies I will [/

discuss further demonstrate that many of the English education policies brought about more inequity and injustice. For example, Vickers-Hulse and Whitehouse (2024) conclude there is underrepresentation of minoritised groups in the teaching profession, a lack of inclusive and supportive curriculum and retention of a diverse teacher workforce. Therefore blaming marketisation alone is too simplistic. Systemic inequalities are about who teaches, what is taught and whether diverse teachers remain in the profession.

The Runnymede Trust (Warmington, 2014) concluded that there was little evidence to show that the local authorities anticipated that demographic change might mean changes might be required to the education system. The curriculum in the 1950s and 1960s did not cater for growing diversity. There was minimal support for Black parents, and deep anger was felt by black parents and the black community concerning the education of their children (Tomlin et al, 2014). Poor resource allocation and manifest prejudices about the aptitude and ability of black children brought about supplementary schools (Warmington, 2014). Warmington (2014) cites Coard (1971),

"They knew something was seriously wrong, they didn't know how badly wrong, how it became that way, or what to do about it. They were groping for information and knowledge. They knew their individual kids had problems,

but they didn't have a general picture, so I tried to fill in the picture" (Coard, 1971 cited in Warmington, 2014: 57).

Tomlinson (2019) also points out that education policies favoured the middle and upper classes.

English education policies need to be viewed through a lens that acknowledges the racist structures and the processes which are shaped when it suits the white policy makers. Tomlinson (2019) posits when we look back on over 50 years of race and education policy progress has been made albeit mixed, unequal and at times evoking a sense of déjà vu.

The 1944 Education Act gave control over administration of schools to the local authorities and headteachers and their staff oversaw curriculum content and teaching methods. It is desperately unfortunate that this liberty led to the appalling treatment of Black pupils (HMSO, 1944; Tomlinson, 1997). This Act created eleven categories of handicap which included the Black children who were described as 'the educational subnormal' and 'delicate' (HMSO, 1944).

In 1985 the Swann report was identified racism within the education system as having a pervasive influence on institutional policies and practices which was seen as part of the problem within society.

In areas like London there was overcrowding in school with underachievement and Blacks were perceived to be the problem (Sivanandan, 1989). In response to white parents' anxiety, black pupils were 'distributed' to ensure immigrant children did not comprise more than 30 per cent in a school as recommended by DES 1965 – Circular 7/65 (Tomlinson, 2008). This brought about some funding, but it did not improve the problem of black children being defined as educationally subnormal.

Black boys especially feature disproportionately in terms of low educational achievement and high rates of exclusion from school in comparison to Chinese and Indian heritage children who are regarded as high achievers (Wright et al, 2016). Britain had not got ethnic minority education right.

By the mid-1980s the then leader of Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), Frances Morrell championed a new policy on race, class and gender

which acknowledged that race is equal to power, prejudice and discrimination (Johnson & Craballo, 2019) and she noted that power and resource remained in the hands of white people (ILEA 1983). It has also been argued by Brown and Donnor (2011), that racism, racial prejudice and social inequality in modern society continues to occur through subtler series of screens rather than overt and de jure methods.

The ethnic minority group has grown continuously since the late 1940s and the level of achievement gap is still wide between ethnic groups. Comprehensive data was unobtainable in the 1940s as they are routinely collected today. By 1948 the Black population was estimated to be still less than 20,000 out of a total British population of 49.4 million people (g-files.com, 2025).

Gillborn and Mirza (2000) suggest that by 1991 Black Males had improved however The Education Reform Act (1988) ushered in the new national curriculum and national testing which brought about an introduction of a new benchmark, teacher policing access to high-status subjects or low expectations for BMs restored inequality to historic levels. Educational trends became apparent. There was an achievement gap.

In the 1980s and 1990s the conservatives introduced 'market mechanisms' into the English education system. This move did not help schools to raise standards for young Black boys. This also increased parental choice and greater accountability of state funded schools. This benefited high socio-economic segregation across schools which reinforces socio-economic disadvantage where many Black men fall in.

The Macpherson Inquiry did not have an immediate impact on education policy. Gilborn et al (2016) argue that it was staggered. The education sector had become market-led that is, choice and diversity for parents. This was meant to address falling standards in literacy and numeracy in failing schools who were put in special measures. In 1992 the Education (Schools) Act had established Ofsted (Tomlinson 2008; Gillard 2011). Tomlinson (2019) argues that there had always been a long-term plan to change the whole education system to a semi-privatised system. Market choice brought about social

selection and house price increase where good schools were located (Tomlinson, 2019).

In 1997 the New Labour government established a series of Education Action Zones (EAZs) to attack the problem of educational underachievement amongst students from disadvantaged backgrounds and social exclusion. EAZs were the flagship of the New Labour education policy. Dickenson and Power (2001) identified a number of characteristics of EAZs and described as a third way thinking. It was called the third way because New Labour government were keen to move beyond both the previous Conservative government's neo-liberal approach and the social democratic approach of Old Labour (Tomlinson, 2019). There was a commitment to use EAZs to promote greater diversity in curriculum provision. However by March 2000 Mansell (2000) argues EAZs were waning. It could be argued that EAZs were beginning to fail because social disadvantage hugely constrained educational standards.

There was naming and shaming of failing schools, Hackney Downs was an example where schools were blamed for every failure and none of the government accepted that a shift away had been made from all the reports such as Scarman, Rampton and Swann, teacher training agency was not fit for its purpose in a multicultural society and the New Labour government introduced programmes built with Private Finance Initiatives (Gillborn, et al, 2017; Tomlinson, 2019). Narrowing the gap in attainment continued to fluctuate until the 2000s (Gillborn et al, 2017).

One of the key policies was the relentless focus on standards with test and exam results as shown in league tables. Ofsted was also part and parcel of such a policy with its assessment of teaching standards. The Standards Task Force and Standards and Effectiveness Unit were set up in 1997 and a website wholly dedicated to standards showed how central this issue had remained. The then Education Secretary Ruth Kelly vowed, in 2005, that no one could get GCSEs without mastering basic literacy and numeracy. This became optional in April 2009 and Ed Balls announced that the government would no longer issue centralised strategies in literacy and numeracy, but that schools would be free to choose the latter among various providers to

keep fostering "excellence". This era of Blair and Brown governments was rendered the madness of testing (Tomlinson, 2019).

The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) was introduced in 1999, and the purpose was two-fold – to narrow achievement gaps and ensure equality of outcomes and to meet specific needs of bilingual learners and under-achieving pupils. This grant was ring-fenced initially, but this changed and dramatically reduced making it impossible to meet the needs of the neediest. EMAG did not survive beyond 2011.

To create a just society there had to be a commitment to social justice and education and one of the policies that attempted to pursue this goal was the 2000 Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA). This Act compelled local authorities (LAs) to abolish discrimination and promote equal opportunities, as well as develop race equality policies in a positive rather than an impassive or insensitive way, as had been in the past (Tomlinson, 2005). Schools and teachers had responsibilities as part of the RRAA including having an agreed written statement of policy for promoting race equality and monitoring by reference to ethnic group, the admission and progress of pupils. According to Gallagher (2004), when education was marketised and driven by economic policies where parents would be forced to compete for good school places it removes integration, justice and equity because the most desirable schools would not be attended by Black students (Gary et al, 2008). This was a problem that had been foreseen by Lady Hooper during the passing of the 1988 Education Act where she concluded openly that 'racial segregation may be a price to be paid for giving some parents the opportunity to choose' (Tomlinson cited in Tomlinson, 2007). Tomlinson further argued that punitive policies against 'failing' schools created new disadvantages for minorities and a failure to develop a curriculum contributed to continuing ignorance.

The Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 came into force, requiring schools to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and ensure their policies, practices and curricula reflected inclusivity. All schools were required to have Race Equalities Policy, OFSTED was also given a new framework for inspection. Many reports did point to the lower teacher expectations for example, Shotte

as cited by Tomlinson (2007) posited good academic pupils who relocated from the Island of Montserrat following the Soufriere Hills volcanic eruption, began to decline rapidly in London schools due to teachers and parents misunderstanding of the achievements, behaviour, language and curriculum.

In November 2005, the DfES High Level Group on Race Equality recognised exclusions of Black pupils as a priority area for action. With the support from London Challenge, a Priority Review was brought about to examine the issue in depth which included interviews with Black young people and their parents. The review findings were of great concern on how the education system treated young Black students and this included the subjective racist judgements made by teachers which regularly led to a high number of exclusions. Racial inequalities in the education system matters because it becomes a powerful tool for subjugation. Exclusion from school brings about social wider exclusion this then creates unemployment and crime. The Parekh report (2002) showed that the education system was pivotal and well placed to promote a community of citizens and communities' (2002:148).

Significant changes have occurred, but these were due to protest and sometimes bloodshed. For example, The Macpherson Report (1999) after Stephen Lawrence's death had a significant impact on education policy which led to a revised national curriculum to prevent racism and value cultural diversity which meant schools and local education authorities creating strategies for dealing with racist incidents.

The REACH report (2007), expected to see success by 2010 for young Black boys in the following areas: role models, good resources for use in schools that reflect positive black male role models at all levels, positive portrayals and images and moving away from negative stereotyping, develop a national framework that focuses on engaging black parents with schools, third sector organisations helping black boys, local consortia showing good practice and OFSTED addressing racial equality issues consistently. In addition, the report expected to see more outcomes by 2020. This includes a significant reduction in attainment gap, exclusion rates, a change in the profile of universities chosen by black men because they are least likely to enter the more established universities, improvement in the representation of black men in

position of power including the government, board members in FTSE 250 companies and more. These matters are still expectations.

Schools are the outset for any transformation or change in attainment and ambition. Our education system in the UK should be the driver and measure of academic achievement (REACH, 2007). In addition, committed teachers can bring about incredible improvement in the lives of young black boys and Black men because maintaining high expectations of all (this includes black boys and young men) achieves successful outcomes.

It is imperative we understand historic trends and patterns over time.

It is true that market policies albeit not alone, in education, continue to exacerbate the hierarchy of more- and less-desirable schools, with the most desirable the least likely to be attended by minority ethnic groups. Wright (2013:5), reinforces this argument that neoliberal policy has led to the system increasingly driven by market forces, competition and group self-interest which can lead to disproportionate numbers of Black boys in the failing schools and more defined class and ethnic segregation. However this is not only the problem. The National Curriculum still needs to be more inclusive. It needs to be an anti-racist curriculum dependent upon the delivery of racially literate teachers, who have the skills, knowledge and confidence to implement that understanding in teaching practice (Smith and Lander, 2023). This is an area the policymakers are yet to fully redesign. Other initiatives such as Inclusive Britain Action Plan (2022) provide solutions to ensure inclusivity and more. However, my focus is on race and this initiative includes all underprivileged children.

More recently, there have been further developments on key policies and initiatives on integrating success strategies and career guidance into school curricula, particularly to benefit Black males.

The Careers Strategy (2017) objective outlines the government's plan to improve careers guidance in schools across England. It emphasises the importance of providing high-quality careers advice starting from Year 7. The purpose of this is to ensure that schools implement structured career education programs, which include early and ongoing career exploration, mentoring, and links to local employers. The government's intention is to

improve the quality of career guidance available in schools. The crucial point is that this experience is not something that should just be for privileged students.

The Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (Ofsted, 2019), has one clear goal: It wants to know how well schools deliver a "broad, balanced, and ambitious curriculum." The EIF places undue emphasis on the word "inclusive,". However, policies remain performative rather than transformative.

The present National Curriculum encourages schools to create a more inclusive educational experience for all students. This experience would reflect the varied cultures and histories of the students in the classroom, particularly those from marginalised communities. For schools to achieve this more inclusive atmosphere, they must design an educational pathway for all students that leads to spaces of belonging and inspiration. These pathways ultimately lead to a more resilient Black male and a more successful Black male, both within the educational system and in the career opportunities beyond it. This particular curricular design might create clear, significant, and profound spaces for inclusion and success for Black men. The government launched the Curriculum and Assessment Review on 19 July 2024 to ensure the curriculum remains relevant.

Progress has been made, but there is still work to do. To achieve the success of Black men that is, to ensure that they succeed in the fullness of life, there needs to be a more deliberate and intentional effort to demolish structural racism, to limit socioeconomic disparities, and to bridge the gaps between good intentions and good results in public policy. These are not isolated problems, and they don't have separated solutions. Systemic racism, which reaches into all of our institutions, must be counteracted with an ongoing and many-sided commitment to cultural proficiency; better allocation of public and private resources; and an inclusive, not an exclusive, pathway to support.

Before moving into a discussion of race and attainment it seems necessary to say that clearer anti-racism policies are desperately needed to institutionally embed a culture of anti-racism not just in school but society at large because

racism continues to underpin key socio-political events and shape lives in profound ways. As a society we cannot continue to deny racism because it only becomes an enduring problem. The uneven impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Blacks is a candid recent example which brought to light racial disparities that have persisted and plagued our schools for generations. The pandemic marked a watershed moment as it brought discussions regarding race and racism. Schools are not exempt.

Simply put the normalisation of racism in our education system has a negative effect and experience on Black men. However it is equally valid to include Black men's success experiences in research.

I now move on to race and attainment. Numerous academics have deployed statistical data to identify factors that explain the negative experiences of Black students and the pattern of their underachievement. Factors include claims regarding anti-intellectual, anti-school subcultures, Black children's apparent low levels of intelligence, their broken homes, Black boys having a predisposition to gang-related violence, teachers' expectations and assumptions, school senior management behaviour decisions and assessments (Doharty, 2019). However I think that because of the perception of Black boys academics have not generally honed in on the Black boys who do well and have succeeded in school. Their influences and dispositions may be different. This is section I will write more on after race and attainment.

2.5 RACE AND ATTAINMENT

The attainment of young Black boys in English schools is a complex issue. The journey of a child's schooling varies.

There is evidence suggesting that Black African boys in the UK perform better than other Black ethnic groups such as Caribbean boys, (DfE, 2023) and in some cases outperform the national average for certain metrics when socio-economic factors are considered (Social Mobility Commission, 2023; Roberts and Bolton, 2023; UCAS, 2023; DfE, 2023).

It is true that highlighting the performance of any particular group of students can intensify their problems by encouraging prejudice and damaging

self-esteem. This is discussed by Gillborn (2008) on how racialised discourse can reinforce biases. Equally, to adopt a 'colour blind' approach means inequalities will remain unchallenged:

> to deny race and ignore the existence of racism actually causes harm to people of colour because it (a) falsely perpetuates the myth of equal access and opportunity, (b) blames people of colour for their lot in life, and (c) allows Whites to their lives in ignorance, naiveté, and innocence. (Neville et al, 2016:8).

In Britain there are Black men who are high achievers. So, when highlighting overall patterns of success, there is a danger of appearing to suggest that all Blacks have complications and challenges or are victims of a school system that is failing them. This would be unethical to many students, families and teachers. However, to ignore patterns of attainment would be to put political rectitude and avoiding the pertinent questions on why and what is happening to Black men. This means that failing to acknowledge trends in academic accomplishment, among Black men, would prioritise political correctness over tackling the real and pressing challenges influencing their educational success. It implies that avoiding debates regarding race and attainment out of discomfort or fear of controversy precludes a more in-depth consideration of why these gaps exist and how to address them. Essentially, the idea is that ignoring educational gaps does not make them go away; rather, it impedes significant initiatives and policy changes that could help Black men achieve academic success.

It is also clear that different students in different schools will have their own individual experiences.

Black African pupils have generally done better than Black Caribbean pupils (Roberts & Bolton, 2020). Schools are already subject to equality duties to tackle differences in attainment but there is no longer ring-fenced funding to address disparities in outcomes (Roberts & Bolton, 2020).

Progress is considered between the end of Key stage 2 and the end of key stage 4 with the measure, Progress 8. Progress 8 scores which is a key metric for academic progress show Black African students generally have positive Progress 8 scores. A positive score means that on average more

progress has been made in a group than in a similar group nationally. In 2019, Black African pupils scored +0.33, which is above the national average of -0.03 for all pupils. While this includes both genders, localised studies show Black boys perform strongly within this group. In an Inner London study, (Demie, 2021) Black African boys from Nigerian and Ghanaian families were noted for their high levels of attainment in school. The study also emphasised the importance of understanding linguistic and cultural diversity within the "Black African" category, which directly correlates with educational success (Demie, 2021)

In 2022, 71.2% of Black African young people progressed to higher education by age 19, compared to 46% of Black Caribbean peers (Roberts and Bolton, 2020). This difference highlights a stronger pipeline to post-secondary education for Black African students. Furthermore, Black African men were notably represented in university admissions, making up the majority of Black entrants (Roberts and Bolton, 2020; Strand, 2021).

In the UK, male students of Black African descent have progressed considerably in several areas. In particular, they have moved forward in higher education, professional jobs, and positions of authority in educational settings (Bolton and Lewis, 2023). There is evidence for a new narrative for Black males in the UK, but it also creates an entirely new model for excellence. This analysis draws on several key sources, including a trio of governmental entities that provide data on education and employment (DfE, 2023). It also provides a wealth of information on the profiles, statistics, etc., related to this within the report (Roberts and Bolton, 2020; DfE, 2023).

While there has been progress in Black African males' educational achievement, the most intriguing development may be the dramatic rise in their success in STEM fields. STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) has been more popular among Black African men in recent years, according to data from the Department for Education (2023) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2023; 2024). Historically, Black African men have been less involved in STEM than their white male counterparts. However, new information and anecdotal evidence from

colleges that cater to this demographic paint a different picture (HESA, 2024).

According to UCAS (2023) and HESA (2024), an increasing number of Black African men are now gaining access to some of the most prestigious universities in the UK, including those in the elite Russell Group. The enrolment of Black African males in these institutions has risen by 4%, 2023/2024, which we may consider a significant uptick in access. Moreover, it seems to be happening particularly in sectors that are historically tough to break into, such as law, medicine, and various disciplines encompassed within the term 'economics'.

Strand (2021) references the immigrant paradigm to discuss the reasons why Black Africans are doing better. This theory suggests that immigrants devote more time to education as a way of out of poverty.

The Report of the Commission (2021) and research briefing (Roberts and Bolton, 2023), findings also demonstrate the newcomer optimism which motivates the Black African pupils to want to do well.

Despite the overwhelming evidence for Black pupils' underachievement in England, the data (Roberts & Bolton, 2020; 2023) also show that there has been improvement and beyond this improvement there are Black men who have exceeded expectations. Their voices need to be heard. This review of literature has found very little research attempting to establish what promotes success among Black boys. There needs to be a counter discourse, and this can only happen if the successful Black men tell their stories with their own voices. After all as a Nigerian proverb states, you 'Don't let the lion tell the giraffe's story' (unknown author cited by Washington, 2006), adapted for this project as 'we cannot let a lion tell the giraffe's story' (Nnene, 2019). It is hoped that this focus on success will make available recommendations for promoting success rather than ameliorating failure.

There remains an ardent exigency to succeed among Black Men. The commitment to succeed against the odds.

Discussions of race and attainment must also consider the expectations of teachers which is the next section. These significantly influence the motivation, engagement, potential, and academic achievement of students.

2.6 TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

A teacher's perception, expectation and behaviour can motivate or de-motivate a child. How teachers see and expect children's achievement is an extremely essential and frequently underestimated aspect of how schools operate (Rubie-Davies et al, 2015; De Boer et al, 2018). They have a significant impact not just on the paths students take to get their grades, but also on the official and unofficial curriculum that influence students' lives both inside and outside of school. For a long time, educational scholars probably did not give these teacher characteristics the attention they deserve. However, these two concepts can be easily understood if viewed through the lens of what is arguably the most well-known and significant educational psychology research ever conducted. This was dubbed the 'Pygmalion effect' after the manipulation of Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). Later discredited as an unethical study, it showed teacher bias among Mexican and white children based on photographs (Rosenthal & Lenore 1968).

Their controversial study demonstrated how teachers' expectations can have a significant impact on how well their pupils do. This can happen even if the assumptions are based on a few minor details.

Thus teacher expectations can contribute to the learning experience of Black boys and men and the key factor is the connection between accessing a safe learning environment, a less threatening education system and a feeling of belonging and purpose (Demie and McLean, 2017). When teachers expect greater intellectual development in certain children, those children would show greater intellectual development (Gilborn et al, 2012; Gregory et al, 2010; Rist, 1970).

Research has also indicated that Black men know the importance and benefit of education but spurn the broad racialised and gendered discrimination in the eyes of their teachers and peers (NUS, 2011). Patterns of corrective action in schools and the ethnic configuration of class sets and tiers of entry

to GCSE examinations should be monitored and reviewed because they contribute to the attainment gap (Dunne et al, 2011). McFadden (1995) argued that disadvantage and inequality of achievement at school was related more to the rejection of the curriculum and pedagogy encountered by students than to a conscious resistance of the dominant ideology of society. Gilborn (1987) showed that Black men particularly showed anti-school traits. Mac an Ghaill (1988), cited in Odih (2002), suggested Black pupils recognised the concept of education but rejected the repressive function of teachers and the framework and content of the syllabus or educational programmes. Law et al (2014) found in their research that the participants took an individualistic view of success which was associated with hard work. More recent research shows Black men desiring success and changing the narratives (Wright, 2013). This raises questions about overcoming labelling and struggles. Their stories and strategies can be turned into a positive resource.

Setting the benchmark high is crucial and teachers mantra should be high teacher expectation. Strand (2021, p.18) argues that negative expectation 'lead to greater surveillance and pre-emptive disciplining by teachers'. Teachers need to cultivate the genius within Black boys (Sewell, 2009).

Building on the impact of teacher expectations, the presence of Black teachers and leaders is crucial as they shape more inclusive and equitable educational experience. Their presence in schools not only provides representation, their knowledge and skills, but also influences institutional cultures, student aspirations, and the broader discourse on diversity in education.

2.7 BLACK TEACHERS AND LEADERS

I now turn to a review of literature within discussion of research on Black male teachers and leaders. Maylor, (2018) noted that perspectives of Black male teachers were rarely included within the study of Black male teachers. There is not enough literature that is centred on the narratives of Black male teachers (Thomas & Warren, 2017). Recruitment, representation, education policies, institutional practices, appeasement, white sanction and retention

are problematic themes that have emerged during the study of Black male teachers (Miller, 2020; Callender, 2020).

Phillips (2016, as cited in Miller, 2020) provides that 'Britain is not a racist nation', but there is significant evidence that many educational institutions in England are still racist. The NEU and Runnymede report (Haque and Elliot, 2017) revealed experience of daily discrimination and while the condition Black men teach is admirable, their working conditions can often be 'troubling and precarious' (Thomas and Warren, 2017:87).

Despite the work on underrepresentation and roles of Black teachers (Wallace, 2020) their absence in schools has been an ongoing concern for policymakers and schools in England, and as schools have become more ethnically diverse so have concerns that the pre-service teacher education PGCE plays a critical role in this aim, by identifying, recruiting, retaining and training those who demonstrate potential to become teachers in schools. However the policies have failed to address the numbers of Black teachers in schools. Blair, 1994, cited in Callender, 2020 argues that the impact of neo-liberal market ideologies, brought about changes in the curriculum which then gave a new construct of the ideal teacher. The ideal teacher was somewhat focused on skin colour. This then creates a division within the profession. In addition Black teachers are seen as "professional ethnic" that is those who are expected to take on extra responsibilities for black male students because there is a perception of connection to Black men in schools who are seen as aggressive and troublemakers. This makes it undesirable for the Black male teachers to stay in the profession. Callender (2020) also suggests that Black male teachers are seen as the disciplinarians in their role for Black boys in school. This is an additional responsibility which can result in burnout as it is akin to the role of a father, an invisible tax, (King, as cited in Callender 2020) which can eventually be draining, being short-changed and bring about a lack of career progression because one's career trajectory is not clearly defined.

Haque (2017) and Haque & Elliot (2017) argue that senior staff in schools practised covert aggression towards Black teachers, experience of everyday racism in schools and colleges was rife, promotion was stifled, and

institutional racism often exhibited in subtle ways. Maylor (2018) suggests that there is a nexus between Black male students learning experiences in their schools or colleges and the lack of Black male teachers in the teacher workforce.

The macrolevel of racist undertones of Black men provide a clearer understanding of why teaching is undesirable. Entering a profession where Black men are marginalised at all levels is not welcoming. Therefore more needs to be done by policymakers and school leaders to change this.

Blair, 1994, as cited in Callender 2018, notes that although Black teachers were seen as undesirables in predominantly white classrooms, the bias was applied more directly to Black male teachers due to the stereotypical believe of the typical Black men as troublemakers, lacking discipline and as aggressive which brought about very little appetite to hire Black male teachers in schools and colleges (Maylor, 2018). Due to this perception Black boys may also be treated harshly from pre-school (Gilliam et al, 2016).

In order to understand why there are few Black male teachers in the profession it is important to explore their lived experiences which then brings about a focus on the issues and needs of Black men in the teaching workforce, support them and find ways to increase their presence without making them hypervisible - by constantly legitimising their presence - and through these demonstrate they are invaluable to the teaching profession. It is not just Black male students who benefit from seeing Black male teachers in their classrooms and in leadership roles. All students benefit because these teachers are able to draw from their experiences to engage every student. It is true that Black male teachers are seen as role models which Wei (2007) describes as co-identification. Miller and Callender (2018) posit Black leaders are able to challenge racial stereotypes and lobby for and/or make changes throughout their institutions in order to address issues of unfairness, intolerance, bias and create a more inclusive environment.

For many years, there have been calls to increase the number of black male teachers in schools. It has also been argued that black boys need more male role models in school to help them overcome underachievement (Abbot, 2002 as cited in Callender, 2018) and Holley (2007) noted that male teachers from

ethnic minorities make excellent role models and are in great demand (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2012; Maylor, 2009). However keeping these men's careers stagnant will only frustrate them out of the profession because no one wants to remain in a position for an unreasonable number of years if their aspiration is to progress. It also becomes impossible for these teachers to become aspirational to the next generation.

Johnson, 2009 cited by Callender (2018) asserts that Obama's inspirational talk was needed to encourage thousands of children as they needed motivation and drive. This suggests that Black male teachers are often expected to be exemplary citizenship and overachieve as professionals in order to push back on expectations associated with their race and gender which invariably will motivate the younger Black male students (Brockenbrough 2015; Johnson 2005 as cited in Woodson & Bristol, 2020).

Callender (2020) suggests BME teachers are located in areas where there is a high ethnic diversity particularly deprived communities and found more of them in Academy schools (DFE, 2011, as cited in Callender, 2020). Although the Black teachers are high in number, they do not occupy senior positions. With very few Black teachers in senior positions it defeats the arguments of aspiration, inspiration and motivation for Black men. It also needs mentioning that there is also an increase in BME student population which does not match BME teaching staff (Rhodes 2017 cited in Callender 2020).

One of the long standing issue is the lack of Black male teachers in schools and in positions of leadership (Miller & Callender 2018). This raises concerns particularly as role models. Callender (2020) further argues that there have been few attempts to incorporate Black men's perspectives of their education or as teachers.

It is crucial that we understand the racialised experiences of black male teachers as they transition from teacher training into the early stages of their careers. As schools have become ethnically diverse it has been argued that the teacher workforce should reflect the communities it serves. Black teachers comprise 3.6% of the total teaching population in England (DfES, 2018) (of those who self-identify as black, 2.7% comprise class teachers, assistant and deputy heads and head teachers). There is a significantly lower

proportion of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff than the BME school population. Nearly a third of pupils in state maintained primary schools and about a quarter of pupils in state maintained secondary schools are BME (DfES, 2018). In 2019, 84.9% of all teachers in state-funded schools in England were White British and 92.7% of headteachers were white British, 89.7% of deputy or assistant headteachers and 84.9% of classroom teachers (DfE, 2019). In nursery and primary schools, African teachers made up 0.5% of the teaching workforce and African male teachers in secondary schools made up 1.4%. The data also showed that Black African headteachers made up 0.2%. It is evident that there is a lack of Black male teachers in leadership roles despite data, academic research and debates. Miller (2016) suggests that academics and teachers seem to be intentional in their working together through mentoring and networking. There is now a long standing concern on our education policies and the role of policymakers and politicians in addressing this problem. It is not enough to increase the number of Black male teachers.

2.8 BLACK PROFESSORS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Mahonya and Weiner (2020) state that there is a wealth of literature documenting the various forms of racism in UK universities. This includes evidence of institutional racism brought about by the structures within that make employment practices racist. In addition the ICM poll (Booth and Mohdin, 2018) commissioned to launch investigation into Britain being biased and the findings resonated with the various forms of racism in UK universities.

In 2020, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement forced higher education institutions (HEIs) to start having conversations about our shared history and its link to the disparities that impact Black people today (Ijoyemi, 2020).

While discussion of diversity and inclusion matters continued , the BLM movement has driven both matters especially racial diversity to the forefront of the recruitment and retention process (Ijoyemi, 2020). Across the UK, there are disparities in employment and pay for Black employees compared with white (Mahony and Weiner, 2020; Sandhu, 2018). Universities are no different and there still exist a wide divide particularly within senior academic

staff roles (The Report, 2021; Rollock, 2019). Although some institutions are doing well and addressing the issues successfully and publicly, there is still a concern that closing the gap is not happening fast enough (Ijoyemi, 2020) hence a need for a toolkit that will enable changes have long-lasting effects (Turner, 2002).

Bhopal (2014) argues that although the Equality Act 2010 brought about changes in the UK, many Black academics suffer discrimination through white individual mangers influencing recruitment, promotion and more. Deem and Morley cited by Bhopal note that while there have been policies on widening participation, identification of issues on racism, problems on staff equal pay, promotion and progression for Blacks remain. It was also found that discreet racist behaviours were masked by non-racist behaviour at all levels of managerial roles in universities and this had an impact on decision-making by the same managers on everything including ethos and culture. This becomes a revolving door of racism (Nnene, 2021) whereby university academic leaders publicly promote equality legislation but privately ignore it in practice (Bhopal, 2014). The issue of components of institutional racism in university buttresses this point that at face value race equality seems to be addressed correctly and progressing well however there has been no immediate need to address the pertinent issues. For example, Pilkington (2013) witnessed a formal interview panel for a Law Lecturer. A Muslim Asian who was well qualified was not acceptable for the Course Leader because from his own perspective the candidate had no sense of humour and would find it difficult to relate to the students. Therefore because of his ethnicity and culture he was not going to fit in. In this instance the criteria used was not one of suitability or eligibility, but acceptability may be known as the appropriate criteria. Universities need to be proactive because without this, equality and equity will continue to be a veneer. This behaviour is subsequently rationalised as unconscious.

Unconscious bias seems to have remained in our institutions despite policies such as Equality Act 2010 (Bhopal, 2020). Bhopal (2014) points there is evidence to support institutional racism exist in universities which includes conscious and unconscious bias in all aspects. Tate & Page (2018) argue that unconscious bias happens by our brains and has become the antidote for

universities in the face of racism. However UK universities remain predominantly white. If there is no acknowledgment of and restructure of our systems to embrace equality and inclusion, unconscious bias will remain and the number of training courses that universities enforce to be taken by staff will make no difference because it is ingrained into our thinking and emotions. Rooth (2010) found a correlation between implicit racial bias and shortlisting decisions. McConnell and Leibold, 2001 cited in Cornish and Jones, 2013, explored how participants responded to a white researcher compared to a black researcher and how it correlated to their implicit and explicit bias scores.

Tate & Page (2018) further argues that unconscious bias is used as an excuse to maintain the status quo – white supremacy in UK universities. It is seen as a wilful silencing of any issues raised as racism.

Unconscious bias is inherent therefore raising awareness is not enough. Kawakami and Gaertner (2002) in Tate and Page (2018) suggests that we can be sufficiently free of bias when we have the opportunity and motivation to assess the consequences of our actions. The lack of doing so facilitates unconscious bias and ignore racism and this subsequently underlying pertinent issues of Black academics and how it can have an impact on Black men.

Tackling structural racism within universities can mitigate inequality because institutions have power to eradicate racial inequalities through their decisions which could foster a wider range of diverse academics, their research which informs public policy and discourse and an acknowledgement that racial injustices continue to exist with academia connivance (Warmington, 2018). Johnson (2015) argues that the lack of Black staff in senior politicians shows that there is problem. Universities have to acknowledge there is a problem, move towards an approach that values skills of Black academics and at the same time challenge lack of career progression amongst these academics.

Regardless of how open we think we are it is important that those within the corridors of power in universities realise that it is our business responsibility all decisions and actions are taken based on evidence and fact not

stereotypes or hunches (Cornish and Jones, 2013). For example, having equality policies is not enough.

Dale-Rivas (2019), edited a collection of essays by senior higher education lecturers, recounting their own personal experiences as counter narratives (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). It purports institutional racism occurs from decision-making practices to the lack of representation in overt and covert ways and in addition, brings forth ideas for reducing racial inequality in higher education. The Higher Education Policy Institute (Dale-Rivas 2019) is the UK's only independent think tank committed to higher education. The HEPi report is valuable as it makes a number of policy recommendations as it comprises a range of topics from race to questions of policy and spending public money. It is not my intention to use it as a literature review or review the recommendations, but it makes an incredible resource for reflection, recommendation and effecting.

It has also been argued that occasionally it is 'who you know' and it makes universities incestuous because there are only certain individuals who have access to editorial boards, committees and panels (Bhopal, 2014). They are not the Black academics.

It is a misconception that academic spaces are just for whites. This is a myth. Wareing (2019) argues that as a society we have a long way to go because her own university's Race Equality Charter (REC) data showed not only did the student face barriers to success, but staff were also less likely to have permanent contracts and be appointed in senior roles. She further argues that in the face of all the challenges race still needs to be talked about. In one REC Steering Group meeting she found that it was also important to ensure that the Black academics tell their own story because at the first meeting she failed to anticipate that the white participants would naturally lead the discussion and speak at greater length than the Black participants. She found it unacceptable to have REC meetings led by white participants. To make changes she sat down with the only Black person in their REC Steering Group and listened to her experience. It was humbling. The meetings were subsequently led and reported by Black colleagues as it was their story to tell. This is not putting the burden of closing gaps on the Black academics. It

is about bringing inherent challenge, accepting and rising to these challenges. In order to achieve change, it is important for all stakeholders to know the difference between diversity and inclusion

Academics agree that something needs to be done but things have not changed. It is not that we do not have well qualified Black academics, it is just that the university leaders have turned a blind eye to this matter (HESA, 2022).

It is also important that we have data that shows the impact of poor staff diversity on outcomes for diverse students (Dale-Rivas, 2019). Data gaps can inhibit progress in an educational institution. For example, if the data does not answer how each university is diverse, does not know what diversity and inclusion means to us or we do not know whether focusing on increasing diversity and inclusion will impact our students, then there is a data gap. Data on unrepresentativeness is well documented, and research continues to demonstrate racism (Pilkington, 2013; Tate and Bagguley, 2017; Tate and Page, 2018). However data on promotion and retention by race and gender is not collected (Oloyede, 2018). Data is an important tool which informs and brings about change. When diversity is evident there are benefits for the students such as a culture of high expectations which brings about high attainment. In addition the students see the senior professors as role models. It is critical to have Black professors in universities because it allows not just other colleagues, students but the nation to see them as qualified, creative and as intellectuals. Academia can no longer be symptomatic of what happens to Black academics. It is no longer about churning out statements or policy commitments. It is now a matter of taking action and showing results (Bhopal, 2014; Pilkington, 2013; Tate and Bagguley, 2017).

I shall conclude with one of Pilkington's (2013:18) participant's comment:

> "On the face of it, there have been improvements because we have nice policies now and we write nice statements, and we are going to consider the equality impacts. Fine. But what does that look like? We have not moved further than changing the curtains, but behind the windows the grime still exists."

This expression is also my stance. Policies are good but they remain soundbites if there are no changes.

I will now go on to the anti-deficit approach. This redefines success and takes a different approach. It emphasises Black men and academics knowledge, skills, talents, achievements, and perseverance, and draws on their lived experiences to inform our knowledge of what success looks like. Policies and statements can recognise inequality. However, this strategy encourages us to move beyond policies and words and into the next step, which is achieving meaningful progress through action that yields measurable benefits.

2.9 ASSET-BASED PERSPECTIVE

This next section emphasises the importance of a research shift in the academia, with a focus on success rather than underachievement. Recognising and highlighting the achievements and strengths of Black men is critical in the academic literature. Not only for the sake of balance but also because illumination of those fewer-than-should-be-missed milestones may well provide the key to unlocking the next levels of success for a population that is still tragically undereducated. There were four academics who collectively shed light on this critically important perspective.

Harper (2012) critiques current narratives that emphasise barriers and failures and do not honour the resilience and strategies that allow so many Black men to succeed in college. This approach is essential for not just recognising what hinders Black men from succeeding in college but also for seeing what and who they have that equips them to succeed in spite of those barriers.

In the same way, Howard (2014) critiques the crisis narrative that surrounds the education of Black men. Howard presses for a need to find a kind of middle ground discourse that speaks to both the peril and the promise of Black male students when it comes to their educational journeys. When Howard speaks to this promise part, he's really trying to get us to shift our focus somewhat from the peril discourse that is often been put forth about Black men and their education and get us to look and think more about the successful Black male students in our schools and what they are accomplishing.

The 2006 study "Mo' Money, Mo' Problems?" conducted by Griffin and Allen adds depth to understanding the high-achieving Black male experience. This research is critical. It reveals more than just the problems encountered by these students. It highlights the access these young men have to an impressive array of networks and resources. When you consider this study alongside others, a more complete picture of the varying lived experiences of high-achieving Black men in our society emerges—one that includes both problems and pathways to success.

Wood and Palmer (2014) state that the kind of research focused on Black men in college needs to change. Too often, they said, this kind of research is deficit-focused. Indeed, Wood and Palmer cite "three deprecated areas" in the research on Black men in college, one of which is poverty and the social conditions leading to it.

The introduction of African American Male Theory (AAMT) offers a fresh perspective that champions an asset-based approach. Bush and Bush (2013) assert that research on Black men too often overlooks their strengths and the winning experiences that should define them. Instead, they maintain, such research feeds a singular narrative that fixes Black men in a pathologised zone. The authors of AAMT call for research on Black men that identifies their achievements and is celebratory in tone, rather than in a voice that sounds chastising or purports to issue a warning.

To sum up, these sources push for a major change in research toward an asset-based approach when studying the reasons for the success of Black men in education and why it is good to report success. They make a strong case for starting with and concentrating on the conditions and experiences that lead to and constitute success in their lives. That way, we have a much better shot at understanding all their life pathways some of which even include educational success. In addition, understanding what achievement means for them, both in and out of school, simply because they like all people are not a monolithic group.

In the UK the research is missing. My work will shed new light on the asset-based approach to Black men success which is why we must also delve into the dispositions that lead them to be successful in the next section.

2.10 DISPOSITIONS

This review of the literature shows that there is a gap in knowledge regarding the learning experience of successful black men in the UK. There is a need to reframe the deficit questions into an asset-based framework. This section also presents a broad overview of why reporting success is a good thing and briefly discusses some factors that contribute to success as suggested by academics such as Rhamie (2002), Byfield (2008) and Wright et al (2010). The notion that reporting achievements and success is 'wishful thinking' (Olusoga, 2016: 8), should be challenged. Discrimination persists, however we must ferociously begin to include the success of BMs in the discourses surrounding the Black British population.

According to Osler (1997, 1999), investigating and reporting academic success could lead to a neglect of positive action to raise standards. While acknowledging, reporting and responding to evidence of underachievement is important, if we continue to emphasise only negative outcomes unhelpful stereotypes will persist which contributes further to the problem. Bonner (2010) insists that if we begin to emphasise those who have been successful academically and beyond, we are more likely to develop future BMs who will eventually break the rancorous cycle of underachievement. Media headlines such as, 'The young men who refuse to bow to stereotypes' (Alibhai-Brown, 2008), will not go amiss either.

Some academics have asserted that black students generally have positive mindsets and beliefs towards the value of education (Carter, 2008; Cokley, 2003). This stems from their parents in many cases who value education and see it as a gateway to success. With the reminder by their parents of their high expectations, children tend to remain focused on their ultimate goal – success (Byfield, 2008).

Rhamie & Hallam (2002; 2010) discuss the notion that parents imparting ideals, principles and social values are beneficial because these values help as children mature in age. These cultural factors translate to success at school and career readiness. It also promotes resilience which Channer described as a 'buffer against racism' (Channer cited in Rhamie, 2012).

I will now move on to my theoretical framework which provides the lens through which the research was designed, and the data will be analysed thereby bridging existing research with my study's methodology in chapter 3.

2.11 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTEGRATING CRITICAL RACE THEORY, ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS, AND YOSSO'S COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH

Although this study centres on the counter-narrative aspect of Critical Race Theory and Yosso's community cultural wealth, the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) complements these frameworks. They together provide a means to analyse and interpret the narratives of my research participants.

The necessity of integrating ecological systems theory and critical perspectives is repeated in contemporary literature. For example, Renn (2023) states, Ecological models can be useful in examining the experiences of students across various levels of the ecological system but are particularly enhanced when situated within critical frameworks like Critical Race Theory that examine the role of racism at each of the system levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

Ecological Systems Theory

Understanding contextual influences in light of the data, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and Paat (2013), can help explain how the environments within which the participants developed, were interlinked. Bronfenbrenner argues that, children and adolescents live within a series of five nested systems. These include: the microsystem, which encompasses the immediate environment in which the individual lives, for example the family, school, peers and teachers; the mesosystem which involves the interaction between microsystem contexts; the exosystem which are factors within the broader social context, for example, the policies on education, school funding, and also racism; the macrosystem, which refers to the broader cultural context, for example, in the UK, cultural values about race, cultural ideas around success, the inequalities in the UK; and the chronosystem, which takes into account the nature of the systems over time, for example how the above four systems were when the participants were growing up and

during their lives, from being children, to the age they entered secondary school, onto university and then into the professional careers they have now. It is important to use Bronfenbrenner's framework here, as it shows that, the participants were able to achieve, not in isolation but within a complex network of systems, which all interact with one another.

Critical Race Theory

CRT provides a lens through which to examine the structural inequalities that shape the experiences of Black men in the UK (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It challenges the notion that racism is an aberration within an otherwise fair system, instead arguing that it is deeply embedded in social institutions, including education (Gillborn, 2008). CRT also emphasizes the importance of counter-narratives, which challenge dominant assumptions about race and achievement by centring the voices of marginalised groups (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011).

By concentrating on Black young men and their experiences in the UK education system, this study seeks to understand how these young men articulate their journeys toward success and the cultural resources they employed to navigate systemic challenges. CRT serves to recognise the role that race, and racism play in the education system. Using this theoretical tool allows this research study to find and reveal the narratives of these young men and how they counter not only the system of racism but also the systems of oppression that exist within the education system.

The lived experiences of marginalised groups are a central part of critical race theory. They are told through the act of storytelling. Study participants narrate their lived experiences with racism and how they navigated barriers created by it in their educational journeys. In doing so, they perform an act of authority.

There are five major tenets of CRT which I shall briefly explain but only the tenet counter-narrative and voice apply to my study. They are:

1. That racism is ordinary, not aberrational - Racism is common. It is so deeply woven into the fabric of our society that it is almost impossible

to escape. Even if you don't see it directly, you can feel its effects almost everywhere and on almost everyone.

2. Interest convergence - People only seem to make real progress in racial justice when it also benefits the main group. Only then does racial justice move forward. The limited achievements of the civil rights laws show this pattern (Bell, 1994).
3. Social construction of race - The idea of race is set up to keep certain groups in charge. Race is made by society and therefore a social construct, it's not something nature decided. We can change how we see it. We have the ability to shift our perspectives.
4. The intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of subordination - It examines how race and racism intersect with other forms of oppression, such as class and gender.
5. Counter-narratives and voice - To truly grasp systematic racism, we must listen to marginalised people's tales and understand their experiences. These storylines, which are frequently disregarded by the main stories, are extremely important.

The counter-stories aspect of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used in this study rather than the entire Critical Race framework. The counter-narrative method places the experiences and perspectives of raced subjects at the centre of the analysis, positioning them as having authority over their own educational experiences. The counter-narrative method is located in the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) who used critical race perspectives to disrupt the ways in which educational research is undertaken. In the UK context the counter-narrative method has been used by Callendar (2010) Rhamie (2011) and Mirza (2015) to explore the lived experiences of Black students in education and how they negotiate and achieve in the face of barriers. The studies outlined above provide the empirical and methodological underpinning for the conceptual framework of this study and its focus on placing the voices and definitions of success of young Black men at its core. Through the use of counterstory as method this study adds to the body of educational knowledge by privileging the counter-narratives of high-achieving Black men in education and the ways in which they make sense of success.

Community cultural wealth

Tara Yosso's (2005:77) pioneering concept of "community cultural wealth" is also an important theoretical contribution. Yosso challenges the deficit-oriented narratives that have hitherto dominated educational discourse on Black children by depicting marginalised communities' realities via a strengths-based lens.

CRT provides a lens through which to analyse and combat institutional racism, whereas my anti-deficit approach, based on Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural richness, focusses on Black African men's resilience, achievements, and aspirations.

Yosso applies critical race theory to education to do more than simply identify the social barriers that students from under-represented groups encounter. She covers key themes from critical race theory, such as racism as endemic. Yosso emphasises how racism is firmly ingrained in societal structures such as schools, curricula, and instructional methods. Racism is not limited to specific groups; it is a powerful force that impacts everyone and practically every aspect of life in society.
Another theme is Counter-Storytelling. She focusses on the tales of students from under-represented communities. She accomplishes this by incorporating their personal experiences into teaching and learning.
Intersectionality is another theme which was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw initially on how Black women were disadvantaged due to race and gender based prejudices. The concept has expanded into education where it has the potential to affect educational policy, pedagogy and curriculum development. In other to create more diverse environment it encourages teachers to acknowledge students backgrounds and experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Yosso (2005) also investigates how race intersects with other identities, such as class, gender, and immigration status. These create unique educational issues and opportunities.

Yosso's CCW framework revises the concept of 'cultural capital,' which originated with European academic Pierre Bourdieu (Richardson, 1986). According to Yosso, cultural capital is typically perceived as something that Black pupils lack.

Yosso also points out that individuals frequently use cultural capital to wrongly evaluate items or persons. For example, it is used to harshly criticise Black pupils based on how closely they resemble the standard behaviour of white, middle-class people.

Yosso identifies six forms of capital that Black people and other marginalised communities use to counter systemic inequalities. These are:

Aspirational capital – This is overcoming a setback and remaining hopeful which can also help people persevere when dealing with challenges. In addition they may find themselves moving forward in ways that surprise others, including themselves.

Linguistic capital - In addition to multilingualism, marginalised societies frequently have narrative (storytelling) traditions that can only be derived from living in tough times.

Familial capital – Kinship, extended family and community networks contribute to the growth of knowledge and support systems.

Social capital - Having the necessary contacts and resources in your community.

Navigational capital - The ability to operate and navigate systems that were not designed to involve everyone.

Resistant Capital is resistant - Coming back from adversity and fighting for justice.

It is evident that the framework of CRT and Yosso's CCW concept allows a nuanced approach in interpreting and presenting the educational lived experiences of Black men. I now move on to my conclusion of chapter 2.

2.12 CONCLUSION

The suggestion of the examiners on the structure for the literature review is that it is divided into three clear sections: 1. Racism in UK Education; 2. Black men/Black boys in UK Educational Policy; and 3. Black boys/men's experiences of UK education/schooling. This review includes all of these sections, but I have resisted the examiners' suggestions to separate them out as discrete. I do so for the following reasons: Firstly, the aforementioned

theoretical framework for the study, counter-narratives and voice, a tenet of Critical Race Theory, Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth framework, intersectionality and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, collectively suggest that systemic racism; policy; and lived experience are intertwined and are not independent of one another. For instance, sections 2.3 and 2.11 discuss how systemic racism permeates UK education from a CRT perspective. Sections 2.2, 2.4, 2.7, and 2.8 discuss how systemic and institutional-level educational policy marginalises Black men and boys, in particular in terms of the lack of Black men in leadership and policy contexts. Sections 2.5, 2.6, 2.9, and 2.10 foreground the lived experiences, agency, achievement and community cultural wealth of Black boys and men within ecological systems. In my view, it would be misleading to deal with these sections separately, for racism manifests in policy within nested systems, which in turn impacts upon lived experience; concurrently, Black men negotiate and resist these systems in sophisticated ways. A more holistic approach better captures the messiness of systemic racism, the ecological contexts in which Black men develop, and the lived realities of Black men in UK education than three discrete sections.

The purpose of this review was to examine studies presented above in addition to reading extensive literature around Black men and their learning experiences. My literature review revealed that a project that looks at Black men education is necessary. It cannot be over emphasised that education remains important. However, education and social policy have been de-racialised and subsumed under cohesion and academic underachievement.

In addition the review highlighted the myriad of ways social and educational policies have negatively impacted from a deficit perspective Black men within the educational system. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance. It is most urgent that we begin to have discourses on asset-based model because there are existing inequality and injustice. Therefore the curriculum needs to be anti-racist, and teachers must be racially literate. For these reasons and more the perception of Black men has generally not honed in on those that do well and succeed in school.

There is also the danger of homogenising experience but at the same time statistical data showed young Black boys were underserved in English education over a period of time.

Institutional responsibility has been denied by many, blaming it on Black boys achieving low grades and as adults, poorer socio-economic circumstance. This is false as the gap exists even when there are higher grades and wealth amongst young Black men.

Education was set up to serve a white population and this needs to have a systematic change. For example, a diverse student population without a representative workforce will not work. It is crucial that success among Black men is never seen as tokenism or exceptionalism but always the expectation.

There is a gap in the literature on the critical study of the Black middle classes. Wallace (2018) argues that the research on the Black middle class has been small with the exception of work by Rollock et al (2015). There is also a particular gap in the literature on the study of successful Black men. The paucity of research on successful Black men contributes to the assumptions that Black men are underachievers and when they do well, are known as exceptions. This gap in the literature provides a challenge for academics to examine this. At the same time, it is important to balance a litany of news on underachievement of Black boys with narratives of success. This is a counter-hegemonic approach that draws on Critical Race Theory.

This raises various questions such as, what is understood by success? When you think of a successful Black male, who comes to mind and why?

CRT scholars recognise that discourses have been the privilege of those influential in knowledge production. Counter-stories however can present views rarely evidenced in social research. The literature review includes a dearth of information on storytelling. As CRT is one of my theoretical framework it informs the choice of methodology and design of research instruments. It requires storytelling which demonstrates constructing knowledge, meaning (epistemology) and what is real (ontology). In the next chapter I move on to my methodology, and I describe the research design for this study.

3 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Methodology is the strategy for undertaking research, including how and what data are collected and analysed, and choice of methods. It is also known as a plan of action. In this chapter, I present eight main sections that outline the methodological approach of my study.

Part of my work also encompasses an exploration of how my methodological choices lead to a clear, robust, and meaningful exploration of Black men's success in education. It also recognises that close links exist between the philosophy we bring to our research and how we develop our framework to proceed with the research (Creswell 2013: 15). I came to recognise that how I interpret the data relies on my personal thinking, my beliefs and values, and this insight led me to identify with a constructivist research paradigm. A paradigm is a basic belief or theory that guides how we do things. Paradigms can be based on ontological (what is reality), epistemological (how do you know something?) axiology (value-stance) and methodological (how do you find out about something?) assumptions. (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995 in Cohen 2011: 3).

In the next section I present the methodological framework underpinning my study. I use a qualitative approach, which I believe is the most effective means of gathering in-depth information about the life experiences of Black men in education. My work is built on their voices which emphasises their lived realities.

I then move on to the methodology for data analysis. I provide my analytical process for studying the narratives shared by my twelve participants, including an overview of the structure and systematic order used. This section reveals the subtle patterns that arose from my participants' collective experiences, highlighting key themes and concluding with a synthesis of analytical findings.

Next, I discuss the specific methods I employed in my research. Because of the nature of my research, I used narrative inquiry which is ideal for gathering the human experiences of achievement that I am looking for. Within this paradigm, I used two primary ways of data collection from my participants. One of these featured the use of an artefact, which is a type of object commonly used in narrative inquiry to prompt reflection and conversation. I also did semi-structured interviews. These are interviews that are both flexible and structured, allowing me to achieve certain goals within the interview context while remaining in control.

Following that, I highlight how important my research journal has been throughout the endeavour. This core research tool was a lifesaver for capturing my shifting views, methodological decisions, and reflexive considerations during the more ambiguous and difficult stages of the study. The journal helped me preserve contextual awareness while preserving analytical clarity and methodological purity.

Next, I explain how I chose the population and sample for my study, including both the criteria I used to choose my participants. I utilised a method of sampling known as snowball sampling, which allowed me to recruit participants through existing networks while drawing on the diverse voices and viewpoints required for my study to thrive.

Researching ethics is an essential part of anything I may do in the future. In my current work, I went beyond what is typical for most studies and layered on extra safeguards to protect the autonomy and dignity of participants.

Ethical considerations were an important part of my research, and I gave a section to examining the steps taken to maintain ethical integrity. I highlight the necessity of respecting participants' autonomy and dignity, assuring the scientific value and social responsibility of my research, and taking precautions to reduce harm. Additionally, I describe how I gained legal consent and preserved confidentiality during my research. To maintain the participants' well-being, I combined a debriefing process in which they could reflect on their involvement and ask questions.

The next section is on validity and reliability, in which I outline the technique I followed to assure the trustworthiness and credibility of my research. In

addition, I highlight the study's dependability and confirmability, as well as how my approach provides for consistency and verification. Finally, in this segment, I discuss the study's transferability.

3.2 ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND AXIOLOGY

Constructivists assert that, reality is socially constructed, that is making meaning through my own thinking and interactions with participants through dialogue, questions, recording data, reflective sessions. Through this process my study will investigate multiple realities and meaning made from each of these realities. I want to understand the perspectives of those who have experienced it. I will inevitably be influenced by my values, which will inform the paradigm that I choose for inquiry, the choice of topic I study, the methods chosen to collect and analyse data, the interpretation of my findings and the way it is reported (Kawulich and Chillisa, 2015). As a constructivist researcher, I acknowledge the value-laden nature of the study and report my values and biases related to the topic under study that may interfere with neutrality (Creswell, 2013; Kawulich and Chillisa, 2015).

My ontological stance is in narrative inquiry, which recognises that social reality is shaped and understood through the individual and collective stories people tell. This complements a constructivist epistemology, which maintains that knowledge is actively created rather than passively observed.

I believe that the academic success of Black men cannot be fully understood through statistical data alone but must also be investigated through the individual and collective pieces that make up their stories.

Within my ontological stance, the narratives of Black men are regarded as reality. Their lived experiences are not just personal stories but authentic and fundamental sources of knowledge that reflect broader social structures, systemic inequalities, and historical contexts. According to narrative inquiry and Critical Race Theory (CRT), reality is multifaceted, subjective, and influenced by social, cultural, and historical processes, rather than a single, set truth. In this sense, the stories recounted by participants in my study are real and valid representations of the social worlds they inhabit.

The stories of my participants can provide several perspectives on the reality of their lived experiences which can serve as counter-stories challenging the cultural perspective of white supremacy.

My question is how can I find out what I believe can (should) be known? In this regard constructivism is linked to my ontological and epistemological approach.

The epistemology of CRT is rooted in the theory of knowledge that identifies how individuals construct meaning through their interactions with the world around them. It assumes that since individuals interact with the environment they create subjective understandings of the world. Therefore it is paramount the researcher listens to the experiences and stories of each participate as they must consider each constructed meanings in the data and avoid placing information into superficial categories. Because CRT emphasises the importance of listening to the lived experiences, maintaining that language is entwined with the meaning of a narrative, the researcher must ensure during their analysis, transcription and reporting that the voices were those of the participants.

In addition, it needs to be pointed out that Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework is rooted in relational ontology, in which development is conceptualised as occurring in and through person-environment interactions, and a naturalistic epistemology, in which knowing is conceptualised as occurring through direct observation of everyday life and through interpretation of lived experiences. As such, Bronfenbrenner's framework leaves open a space in which participants' perspectives of their own success are constituted as knowledge.

When I write about axiology I am referring to the objectives of my research. What do I find worthy? My axiology will also incorporate ethics as it is my value stance. Therefore my values will affect how I carry out my research and what I value in the results of my study. This leads to the bigger question which is what do I value in my study or what is the purpose of my research?

"The inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field" (Creswell, 2013:20).

"What is intrinsically worthwhile" (Reason, 1998:1).

Axiology is about the ethical issues and moral beliefs. Heron & Reason (1997) posit axiology as being the purpose and intent of research. Thus, I must determine the value I attribute to my participants, data, and audience. To ensure ethical integrity, I consider key questions:

- What values will I be guided by as I begin my research?
- How do I respect the rights of my participants and secure their goodwill?
- What moral issues and characteristics do I need to consider and address them?
- When cultural, intercultural issues arise how will I deal with them?
- Am I able to ensure that when I conduct my research it will be socially just, respectful and in a peaceful manner?
- How shall I avoid or minimise all kinds of harm? (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

Answers to these questions guided my choice of methods which enabled me to consider whether they (methods) are ethical, pragmatic and make sense. In addition because values affect the way research is carried out, the actions I undertook were aimed to produce more benefits than harm by considering all possible consequences of my research.

My moral values must always be upheld during this research thereby being truthful in the interpretation of my data and respecting my participants by showing fairness in every way. Reason (1998:430) clearly puts it:

> The axiological question can also be put in terms of the ultimate purpose of human inquiry… In the participative worldview the ontological account of reality as subjective-objective, as co-created with the given cosmos, leads over into the axiological question. For what purposes do we co-create reality?

We do this to change the world through engaging participants and working collaboratively with them but at the same time recognising that, that gives us (researchers) also a responsibility.

In summation the integrity of research is based on adherence to core values – honesty, objectivity, accountability and fairness. Values about equality, equity, diversity and inclusion means treating everyone equally, avoiding stereotypes, challenging any negative attitudes and having clear rules on how each person should be treated. In education I aim to reject discrimination, give students second chances, teach the curriculum that covers objective and ethical standards, integrity, and a sense of hope for all students.

My theoretical framework (see chapter 2), ontology, epistemology, axiology and positionality (see Chapter 1) led to my choice of methodology.

3.3 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

The researcher's philosophical position has to a large extent determined the research methodology appropriate to carry out their study and execute the research objectives (Silverman, 2000). A positivistic approach favours quantitative methods, whereas a constructivist approach usually employs qualitative methods. Creswell (2014) explains some examples of the methodologies favoured by the two philosophical groups. Quantitative group comprises experimental designs and nonexperimental designs such as surveys. Qualitative group comprises narrative research, ethnographies, phenomenology, grounded theory and case study.

In qualitative methodology, researchers reflect on the values and objectives they bring to their research and how these affect the study. It has been argued that subjectivity steers everything that is done in research from the choice of topic studied, to theoretical frameworks, to selecting methodologies, and interpreting data (Ratner, 2002).

This study used a qualitative design to investigate Black men educational experiences and success. My literature review chapter shows there is plenty of work to be done in terms of creating an awareness of successful black men. The counter-narratives of academically successful and high achieving Black men are missing. This study employs the use of qualitative research to

disrupt the typecasting of Black men. It is important to investigate alternative narratives that might inspire and encourage other Black men, and this includes some Black boys being inspired by narratives of injustice. The preponderance of scholarly literature focuses on a deficit perspective whereby it demonstrates the injustices. Therefore I seek to provide an analysis of rich lived experience that breaks the wall of silence.

This study seeks the narratives of the lived experiences of twelve participants who identify themselves with success. This study will analyse their experiences and challenge deficit narratives. In addition this chapter will provide descriptions of the setting, their biography, the selection method and demographics of the participants. I have already stated the overarching research questions that set a benchmark for my study in the introduction of this study.

As argued in my literature review, CRT uses counter-stories to challenge discrimination and works toward social justice by talking back to positivist and social-scientific research that supports racialised and marginalising pre-conceptions about Blacks. Counter-stories are narratives constructed using empirical evidence, or amalgamations of many people's personal experiences (often called composite stores), or completely fictional parables that use exaggerated circumstances to address contemporary racial issues (REFS). Arguably, Derrick Bell's article titled "The Space Traders" (1992) is the most influential (of the fictional sort). In it, Bell uses a short science-fiction story to argue that 'people of colour', a term I do not agree with, are sacrificed to benefit the white majority. Rather than argue that this exploitation ended with the civil rights movement, Bell describes a present in which the majority rejects racism but is still inclined to act in racist ways. Despite the elements of fiction, these stories are nearly always supported by traditional legal means of substantiation such as historical events, legal precedents, and the like, as well as existing qualitative research. Counter-stories rely on the power of people's "voices." According to Delgado (1990), voice results from the shared experiences of the structures of systems of power. In this study, it can be argued that my participants are unified (not essentialised) by their experiences of navigating the structures of power that marginalise them. As Black men, my participants have stories of times when they were rejected,

ignored, even subjugated. These experiences affect the way they interact with and understand the world. Importantly, in the stories of others we are able to recognise our own voices, our own experiences, and our own struggles within the narrative. It is this ability to create affect, to share and empathise, and to witness that makes voice such an important part of CRT research. Yosso (2005) argues that the methodology must highlight race and racism in all the parts of the research process. This means that critical race scholars will ask questions from a perspective that recognises the centrality of race which allows them to be reflexive about their relationship to research participants and therefore avoids or at least minimises the irresponsible use of scholarly privilege. The history of research is littered with academics who exploited, misrepresented, or ignored the voices of people of colour they studied (Solomon, 1985). In order to avoid this type of abuse, my methodology self-reflectively recognises power as a multifaceted challenging factor that cuts across social identities and recognises that researchers must be assiduous in their readiness to see difference and respect the people with whom they work.

In order for more Black men to achieve success in their education it is critical to focus on the stories of men, my participants, so as to identify the important factors it takes to bring about success.

The relationship between my ontological, epistemological and axiological stances described above, has led me to choose narrative inquiry as a good methodological match for this study within its theoretical framework of CRT. I aimed to co-construct a dialogue with what my participants say to construct new knowledge. CRT's counter-storytelling is an essential tool. Without it, the true stories of lived realities would never be openly stated (Hartlep, 2009). I am making a space for my participants. Solorzano and Yosso (2002:4) best encapsulate this below:

> Critical race theory recognises the experiential knowledge of people of colour as legitimate and essential for understanding racial subordination…It challenges traditional research paradigms, exposing deficit-informed methods that distort these experiences, instead

highlighting racialized, gendered, and classed experiences as sources of strength.

Consequently this approach has the potential to generate multifarious perspectives and insights depending on the participant, the researcher and the context because within the Black community exists a wide array of cultural traditions and experiences. That said, we must look to their own lived experiences as valid, appropriate and necessary forms of data because all families with sub-Saharan African heritage in the United Kingdom share a number of experiences and histories that are relevant to how they make meaning of and negotiate the education system (Rollock et al, 2014; Robinson, 2020; The Black Child Agenda, 2022).

Counter-narratives or counter storytelling, within the framework of CRT have emerged as powerful data sources to present the voices of silenced or marginalized communities. In their pioneering work on critical race theory of education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) defined counter-narratives as "naming one's own reality" or "voice" (p.56). For example, through stories, counter-stories, etc and revisionist histories critical race theorists illustrate the ambiguity and irony of civil rights legislation which was demonstrated in a high school district in Northern California. Delgado (1989:2414) described counter-story as "piquing the powerful and bringing them down to human levels… they can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live… quicken and engage conscience". Critical race theorists and scholars continue to argue for the value of drawing on lived experiences and voices of Blacks. Ladson-Billings (2003) pointed out eloquently that "CRT understands that our social world is not fixed; rather, it is something we construct with words, stories, and silences" (p. 11). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) stated that "critical race theory recognises that the experiential knowledge of people of colour is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analysing, and teaching about racial subordination" (p. 26). Several critical theorists and educators have presented similar definitions, such as "counter-storytelling is a means of exposing and critiquing normalised dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes" (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004:27), counter-narratives as stories of others that have never been told which challenges widespread beliefs and

discourses (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), or counter-narratives as "perspectives that run opposite or counter to the presumed order and control" (Stanley, 2007:14). In addition Stanley (2007) posits that counter-narratives act to analyse the master narratives and offers alternatives to the main discourse. In general, counter-narratives are an important means to document and share how race influences the educational experiences of Blacks, whose stories counter the stories of the privileged that are considered normal and neutral.

I have so far established the need for a qualitative methodological strategy, which is required to select the research method that is consistent with the assumptions and best fit the study and as directed by the research questions.

The next sections of this chapter outline the specific techniques used in my study to generate data. This includes discussing narrative inquiry further. Narrative inquiry is about giving the people the voice to tell their story and when this is not the case they are denied narrative justice. Social justice concerns should not be predetermined (Caine et al, 2017). Knowledge will be generated as my participants provide their lived experiences through thick rich stories. I will also provide the data collection methods used.

3.4 METHODS

3.4.1 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry resolutely aligns within the framework of critical race theory (CRT) as it is founded on the premise that, as human beings, we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through stories (Andrews et al. 2008). I must be clear that this is more than storytelling, it is a means of knowing, of producing knowledge: (Cotterill and Letherby,1993; Abercrombie et al, 2002). Cotterill and Letherby (1993:74) stated that it *"tell it like it is from the lived experience of the narrator. They are invaluable because they do not fracture life experiences, but provide a means of evaluating the present, re-evaluating the past, and anticipating the future".*

Narrative inquiry was used in this study as a means to reveal the researcher's participants' own spoken experiences about how they were able to successfully navigate the education system despite personal, institutional,

and environmental obstacles that are ever present in the lives of Black men. These voices are necessary to create well-informed policy and systems to support other Black men. This would potentially motivate a much-needed paradigm shift in how society views Black men.

Narrative inquiry is grounded mainly within the constructivist paradigm and constructivism demonstrates that knowledge is value-driven, and that reality is based on numerous perspectives, with truth entrenched in daily life through social dealings amongst people.

The literature review for this study states that Black men are beleaguered by significant educational attainment issues that begin in school right up to university, with the result that they are treated harsher than their White peers. Several scholars are critical of the fact that Black boys are discouraged by teachers (Sewell,1997; Rampton, 1981; Husband and Kang, 2020; Perera, 2020) and are placed in great numbers in lower ability classes (Husband and Kang, 2020). However, Black men are also completing schools, further education colleges and universities, and they are using those degrees to transition successfully into the workforce and into graduate and post-graduate learning environments. There is a great benefit to highlighting such achievements in an effort to motivate Black men to strive more readily to realise their potential.

If there is an opportunity for successful Black men to tell their story, voice their own lived educational experiences it must not be missed. We must recognise and seize the opportunity with every chance that we get because it creates a healthy venue for intrinsic reflection for them, and it has the capacity to promote greater self-confidence and respect. In addition it provides an opportunity for the potential of Black men to be intensified within society in terms of their intellectual assets. Society also benefits as all Black men will be afforded every opportunity to fulfil their potential and achieve.

My first premise is the desire to investigate whether there is a counter-hegemonic discourse, that draws on counter-narratives, that can be understood by using CRT. Manglitz et al (2006) pointed out that counter-narratives convert the individual experience to a collective societal understanding at both an emotional and intellectual level. When we use

counter-narratives we "examine the impact of differences in all our lives with the ultimate goal being a transformation of the material realities within the world in which we all live" (Manglitz et al, 2006:6).

"Stories (and histories) are more than just tales about the road – they are part of what the road is, or what a place is." (Mason and Dale, 2011: 5).

In the context of educational research, narrative inquiry as a method, when used with sensitivity and reflexivity offers legitimacy (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). We make meaning of our situations through narratives (story telling). Story telling is the way we understand and make sense of the world we find ourselves in. It can also be understood as an entry point to understanding a different experience of the world and presenting a different perspective of the world. Story telling gives meaning and knowledge. Olson (1997:490) argues that narrative "prompts us to recall, rethink, and reconnect personal and professional events in holistic, synthetical ways rather than in compartmentalized and linear ways". A narrative inquiry approach is best suited to understanding my participants experiences. A narrative inquiry fits with an epistemological stance in a way that affects someone's life by reviewing/examining power and structure. In addition, storytelling is an enthralling strategy used by marginalized groups to understand their life (or lives). The worth of narratives lies in giving the readers an opportunity to understand the experience of the storyteller (James, 2002).

I have chosen this research methodology because of the rich lives and respectful data it allows. The stories were told through artefacts and semi-structured interviews designed to enable participants to tell their stories. Narrative inquiry is a recognised method of generating knowledge.

In the next section I will discuss how I generated data at the two interviews with my participants.

3.4.2 Data Collection through narrative interviews

This study involved the use of two narrative interview methods: the first used artefacts to stimulate storytelling and the second used semi-structured interviews to follow up the first narratives. At the initial interviews my

participants were asked to tell their story, and each spoke uninterrupted; and the second session was a time to clarify points and ask further questions.

The artefact was requested of the participants to define their success and describe how this has been a motivation. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to enable the participants to elaborate on their journey. Each participant was asked to select an artefact (a photograph, an object, a song, a picture, or something else) that represented what success meant to them and bring them to the interview. Additional probing questions were asked. Data were analysed thematically using NVivo and, subsequently, theoretical constructs were applied to make sense of the analysis.

3.4.3 Artefact – an object – in Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry as a paradigm is focussed on the ontological primacy of story, with narrative researchers working together with their participants, studying each participant's lived experiences which is knowledge bringing about deeper understanding (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Embedding artefacts of value provides opportunity for capturing their stories, illuminate the ways in which they are reminded of their hard work. The artefacts accompany participants successful journey which provides excellent memory that generates their storytelling.

The emphasis on the artefacts of the participants were used to generate stories that could be tracked across the study on success. These stories are placed as new knowledge by drawing together the data with reference to theory and redefined into research narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This qualitative approach was implemented because it allows researchers to collect detailed data to tell the story of participants and understand how they construct meaning from their success (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the artefacts provide the researcher an understanding of the complexities of what success mean and can lead to intriguing findings (Eisenhardt, 1989) because you are investigating meanings of experiences by going on a journey. It can also be stated that scholars and practitioners can develop a greater understanding of participants' experiences from the artefacts – which can then assist in theory advancement, interpretation and clarification (Bailey & Fuller, 2019). For this study, artefacts and the analysis were used to examine

the success amongst the participants (Hodder, 1994). It served as one of the methods, a primary source of data.

There are different types of artefacts, and they include tools, books, utensils, pictures, photographs, and any other instrument of everyday living (Merriam, 2009). The participants were asked to bring an artefact that represented success for them. They each different artefacts that defined success. For example, one showed a mug which had been given to him by the charity organisation he volunteered in the evenings. He mentioned that he had always aspired to have that special mug and on a daily basis it reminded that hard work does pay off. This mug continues to inspire him to work harder (chapter 4).

According to Hodder (1994), the analysis of artefacts as a data source is vastly important to generating knowledge. This is because interviews, which inform the majority of qualitative research, rely exclusively on what individuals report. Yet, "what people say" is quite often very different from "what people do" (Hodder, 1994, p. 113). Thus, artefactual analysis has the ability to produce alternative perspectives and provide insight at a greater depth than traditional qualitative research methodologies.

The artefacts provided by the participants gave opportunities for them to give extended explanations of how the objects defined and depicted success for them but additionally how these artefacts were used in daily life. For example while one of my participant's story generated an 'aha' moment privately about his mug (chapter 4), it also demonstrated the ways in which storytelling surrounding artefacts can create spaces for the types of knowledge exchange that are not normally privileged in traditional academic research methods.

3.4.4 Semi-structured interviews in Narrative Inquiry

Narrative interviewing is a method of data collection where stories are generated through interviews. Narrative research expects thick, rich data, stories and examples of how meaning is constructed. Trahar (2006), outlines the importance of narrative inquiry by suggesting the following:

1. Narrative inquiry focuses on the participant's experiences and meanings

2. It is concerned with voice
3. It observes the personal human qualities of both the participants and researchers
4. It allows for the exploration of the research as a story.

The purpose of narrative interviews is for the participant to narrate his experience for the researcher. This represents a shift in the way roles are viewed: from interviewer–interviewee into narrator–listener.

The narrative interview is a method commonly used in narrative inquiry. To engage in a study about narratives, a researcher collects stories related to the topic of interest. Narrative interviews are the crucial method by which researchers obtain narratives for additional study. In this regard, the stories are accumulated, analysed, and unpacked in order to understand how meaning is widely constructed through storytelling. This research uses stories to provide insight into the participants lived experience i.e. their past, present and futures. The objective is to understand the participants, the issues, their meanings, and their experiences. The narrative is used as a way of getting this understanding.

Human beings are naturally story tellers. Therefore by telling stories, the participants do not only narrate their experiences we all make sense of those experiences too. If one is incapable of narrating an experience, it may mean he or she is unable to understand that experience. In addition, the researcher could not know the stories that would be meaningful to the participants and so instead of asking the participants series of questions the researcher invited them to tell their stories and through this, the researcher is able to ask relevant questions for clarity. Thus gathering knowledge from the past and not about the past (Trahar, 2009). Narrative inquiry is the most appropriate methodological approach for this study because the researcher was investigating meanings of experiences – a journey (Trahar, 2009).

The research method for this study was open-ended semi-structured interviews in narrative inquiry. The researcher collected all of the data. The researcher recorded, transcribed, and analysed the data to obtain information about the lived educational experiences of successful Black men. The researcher was investigating to uncover the experience with semi-structured

interview questions Merriam (2009). The lived experiences can be described as past events which the researcher had an interest in (Merriam, 2009).

It is also vital to state that although the researcher may have an interest in the study they must be able to structure their questions appropriately, pause, probe and prompt and encourage the participants to speak freely by making it easy for them to speak freely (Cohen et al, 2011).

Seidman (2006; 2013) posits anthropologists have long valued the significance of learning from listening and writing down the stories shared by others about lived experiences and historical events, then using these explanations to make sense out of what transpired. In fact, this type of discourse begun being referred to as an interview in the 17th century (Roberts, 2020). Silvester (1993) argues that journalistic interviews date back to the 19th century and were regard as a means for gaining and publishing knowledge or obtaining a past story or report of an event. Today interviewing is used to gather knowledge in various disciplines including education. It is true to state qualitative interviews has proven useful in the field of education.

That said, one of the criticisms of using semi structured interviews (SSI) to collect data is that it can be challenging to analyse the data if it is too rich or there is too much multiplicity between perceptions (McIntosh and Morse, 2015). However, an advantage of this method is that it gives participants the space to articulate their views and experiences in a safe space (Cohen et al, 2011).

Throughout the interview both parties, that is the participant, and researcher must work as a team. This may sound easy, but it is not. SSI requires a lot of skill, but it requires a high level of skill by the researcher. The researcher needs to be knowledgeable about the study and familiar with the methodology being used as well as understanding what it means to generate knowledge through narrative inquiry. Castillo-Montoya (2016) sums it up by stating skills have to be acquired, methods have to be determined, and interview questions has to be crafted that aligns with the overall methodology, goal, and purpose of the study. This pertains to everything from the overall structure of the study, which depends on the researcher's

methodological approach, to the strategies that are used during the course of the study, such as the manner in which the interview is conducted, as well as the structure of the questions posed within the interview. For example, the interview and the questions that are asked will depend upon what the researcher wants to know, concrete experiences, underlying meaning of a specified phenomenon, perceptual experiencing, etc.

One may describe semi-structured interviews (SSI) as closed and open-ended questions which is usually followed by 'how' and 'why' questions. Individual interviews were utilised to obtain information about the lived school and university experiences of successful Black men and the purpose was to uncover the experience with open-ended questions (Cohen, 2011; Montoya, 2016) which provided descriptive data through their stories (Patton, 2002). SSI require researcher sophistication, and it is time-consuming. However, because of the open-ended questions, I was able to probe to find candid answers as the setting encouraged and stimulated an interview.

When framing my questions prompts and probes were considered (Morrison cited in Cohen, 2011). Prompts were used to clarify topics, answers or questions while probes provided comprehensiveness, honesty and detail. Rubin and Rubin (2005) defined probes as skills to keep the dialogue going in order to provide clarification. In this study, a probe asked the participant to fill in missing information, and to ask for clarification of previously spoken statements. This clarification was the follow-up interview where the researcher utilised for depth and detail, and the clarification of anything that is nebulous. In the first interview the researcher (myself) let them speak. In my follow-up interview I had a semi-structured interview schedule which was used to provide me open-ended questions, allowing flexibility (Appendix H).

The definition of an interview schedule is the list of questions or topics the researcher intends to cover in their interviews. In this study my list of questions was utilised in depth in the follow-up interview (Cohen et al, 2011) because the first interview was designed for my participants to tell their stories without interruption. Each interview schedule for each participant had the same framework (McCracken, 1988) which comprised small talk and biographical questions to set the scene for comfort, e.g. the weather and

their family. By having a good rapport it allowed me to become familiar with the simple descriptive details of my participant's life and help them feel comfortable to speak.

The purpose of the follow-up questions was to help me reflect on wording and ensure there were no leading questions or closed questions which could be asked using a questionnaire. The research questions formed the basis of the interview questions. In addition, interview schedule for this study was developed and used to enable the participants discuss their lived experiences and all of the aspects that contributed to their educational success.

In summary, according to Newton (2010:1), *"The " interview" is a managed verbal exchange and as such its effectiveness heavily depends on the communication skills of the interviewer"*. This means there has to be structured questions (Cohen et al., 2011); the researcher listening attentively, pausing, probing or prompting appropriately (Cohen et al, 2011); and ensuring the participants are relaxed and able to speak easily by establishing good rapport.

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLE SELECTION

The twelve participants of the study were all Black, male, of sub-Saharan African heritage and living in the United Kingdom. All participants had to have graduated with an undergraduate degree from a United Kingdom university and had to be in professional employment. At the outset, these criteria reflected a conventional understanding of success as a university degree and professional status, yet as participants shared their narratives, the definition of success broadened to include aspects such as building a lasting legacy, finding true happiness and fulfilment, , and being of benefit to one's community. This also reflected initial conceptualisation of success as explained in Section 1.6.1. The findings presented here define success according to the participants' experiences rather than the initial criteria.

3.5.1 Sampling

When I began my journey of research I was quite clear about two things – to use snowball sampling as it fitted quite well with their study. Second semi-structured interviews would be one of my methods. However I was unsure about the number of participants.

I realised that there are no set rules with respect to the sample size for the study. Sample size is decided by what I want to know. To determine the sample size, the purpose of the inquiry and what is at stake must be clear. The size of the sample reflects the usefulness of the information.

Some qualitative researchers reject the quantitative criteria. Other researchers such as Korstjens (2018), argues that in order to trust the outputs of qualitative studies, and to know that it is an exact, solid, fine scientific research, studies must be assessed against certain criteria, just as in quantitative research. In summary there are alternatives. Criteria used in quantitative research are not suitable but there are alternatives that one could also describe as equivalent. Most important, qualitative researchers are adamant of trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility or reliability of research is the equivalent of internal validity from the quantitative study. Confirmability coincides with objectiveness and transferability is the equivalent of universalisability. In addition, Patton (2002) posits that qualitative research sample sizes should reasonably cover the studied occurrence, depending on the purpose of the study and the points of interest for stakeholders. In other words, a sample should be bona fide.

We now know that sample size is dependent upon what in the study will have credibility and is dependent upon what to do with available time and resources. Patton (2002) asserted that if the researcher is seeking depth then a variety of open experiences for a smaller number of individuals is appropriate. Patton added that information from an in depth study with a small amount could reveal valuable information of people especially if the information is a variable rich case. Such information rich cases may have as few as five (Creswell, 2013) or six participants (morse, 1994). For this study the final study sample consisted of twelve participants.

3.5.2 Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling is one of the most popular methods of sampling in qualitative research, and Cohen states that the researchers in snowball sampling "identify a small number of individuals who have characteristics in which they are interested" (2011:158) and once they are identified, these people are known as informants who put the researchers in touch with other

contacts who fit the research criteria and then are invited to become participants, they then are asked to invite others – in effect, it becomes a snowball sampling often described as a chain referral (Cohen, 2011) or networking. It has also been suggested that this method of sampling is used when the research topic is sensitive or access to the population being researched is difficult to reach or participants being suspicious of the researcher (Cohen, 2011). The researcher has to establish who the critical informants should be in order to facilitate contact between potential participants and the researcher. , therefore, use their social networks to establish initial links, with sampling momentum developing from these, capturing an increasing chain of participants. Sampling usually finishes once either a target sample size or saturation point has been reached. This entry begins with a description of the conveniences of snowball sampling, followed by some criticisms and limitations of the technique.

It is my intention to use snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is one of the most popular methods of sampling in qualitative research, centred around networking and referral. It is the selection through recommendations from other participants who bear similar characteristics and possess relevant knowledge (Cohen et al, 2011). Snowball sampling has been applied as a strategy that overcomes problems of data sampling in the study of difficult-to-reach populations and hidden populations.

However despite its useful role it has had many criticisms.

My sampling comprised 3 participants. The professionals were an engineer, a doctor and a teacher. The basis for using snowball sampling was that the participants would refer others. I also re-assured their participants that identifiable data will be removed from the report. My aim was to develop a participant profile which would allow me gather information about my participants prior to the interview. The demographic areas included age and education. In addition, I asked each participant to suggest others who would fit the profile or have the attribute. In addition I asked their participants if they knew of any Black men with Sub Saharan African heritage similar to them who might be keen to participate in this study. Their contacts were told to tell potential participants that they could contact the me if they had

questions about the study or interested in participating in the study. This method would be used after approval from the University of Nottingham Ethics committee. The participants did not receive any form of recompense for participating in my study. The inclusion criteria for this study included black men in the age bracket 22 – 35 years.

I already knew three of my twelve potential participants. In a process of snowball sampling, I did ask for other persons who fit the criteria. The following demographic questions (Appendix B) were communicated to the participants to determine the general characteristics of the participants and ensure they were all eligible to participate in this study.

When they (participants) were interviewed they in turn were asked to nominate any successful Black men (SBMs) who fit the criteria. The age range was 22 to 35. My rationale behind this was that this was the beginning of the definitive phase of the participant's careers. At the age of 22 – 35, the impact of one's education is still very relevant at the position these BMs have attained. I would also be able to recollect their educational experiences. The professionals were: teachers, lawyers, doctors, bankers, engineers, employees in finance, which includes banking.

Black men who met all of the selection criteria were sent a copy of the informed consent document (Appendix C).

We shall now examine research ethics as it is central when conducting semi-structured interviews, especially the obligations of the researcher to protect their participants from harm as a result of the research (Cohen et al, 2011). Cohen (2011) reminds me that there has to be a balance between their demands, in pursuit of the truth and the participants rights and values.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study followed University of Nottingham Ethics guidelines to obtain authorisation for the study. The authorisation process did proceed as follows:

1. I obtained permission from the University of Nottingham Research Ethics Committee.
2. I fulfilled all University of Nottingham Research Ethics Committee (UoNREC), British Educational Research Association (BERA), European

Union General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR) requirements and obtained approval from the REC to initiate recruitment and data collection.

3. I had a Participation Information sheet. See Appendix A.
4. The demographic questionnaire which set out questions (criteria) for participant profile. See Appendix B.
5. The participants were informed of the name of the study and the purpose of the study. For those interested participants who meet the criteria, a meeting was scheduled to sign the informed consent document and conduct the interview. The researcher met and explained the informed consent process to the participants. See Appendix C.
6. I informed the potential participants that their privacy was protected in the study and no real names were used.
7. The participants were informed that all data will be stored in line with UoN Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics.
8. Participants signed the informed consent document if they wanted to participate.
9. I conducted private interviews initially with two of the participants in a mutually agreed location in London.
10. The rest of the interviews were conducted virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic lockdown
11. The interviewer recorded the individual interview.
12. The interviewer transcribed the individual interviews.

I followed the ethical behaviours set out in the Nolan Principles. The principles informed me the value of producing excellent research through being irreproachable. The seven principles are, selflessness which means I must act solely in terms of the public interest; integrity where the researcher must act appropriately without any form of influence in my study such as financial gain or any other material benefits for myself, family or friends. I

must also declare and resolve any interests and relationship; objectivity, which means they must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias; accountability where they must be accountable for any decisions made and be ready to be scrutinised when and where necessary; openness, this means they must act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. In addition the information in the study should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing; honesty – they must be truthful, and leadership means that I must always comply and exhibit all these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect.

Permission (Note 1) and approval (Note 2) were obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Nottingham (UoNREC) before engaging with my participants and gathering data, to ensure compliance with ethical standards. The participants were emailed Participant Information Sheet detailing the study's aim and their part in it, stipulated in ethical guidelines (Appendix A). They also filled out a Demographic Questionnaire that was in place to screen prospective participants and ensure those involved met the study's criteria (Appendix B).

Before the interviews, I gave the participants detailed informed consent documents, which I had explained in a scheduled meeting (Appendix C). The participants signed the consent forms. I emphasised that the privacy and data security measures followed the UoN Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics (Appendix D) and were designed to protect the participants in my study.

I conducted one face-to-face interview before the COVID-19 pandemic required adaptation. The first cases in the UK were recorded on January 30, 2020. A nationwide lockdown began on March 23, 2020. After receiving ethics approval (see Appendix E), I carried on with virtual interviews. This format was new for me, but it opened up opportunities for ongoing research despite the imposed restrictions. I also held follow-up interviews with the same participants using this new format.

All my participants interviews were recorded (Appendix F) and later transcribed (Appendix G) for analysis. I also used a semi-structured interview

schedule (Appendix H) to probe deeper for clarification and deeper exploration of key themes.

At the end of their interviews the participants were given space for reflection and the opportunity to raise concerns, ask questions or share any comments. The participants were encouraged to contact me again if any issues occurred at any stage. Following the completion of the study, I had individual meetings with each participant in order to share with them the results of the study and engage them in their reflections and thoughts on the shared outcomes, particularly as the area of study is considered to be of high relevance in education.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Cohen (2011:480) expresses what data analysis involves - organising, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. When analysing data, we must abide by the principle of fitness (Cohen et al, 2011).

I did an initial coding at the start of my data collection where there were commonalities. Broad categories were developed during the initial interview. These data were coded into major themes.

3.7.1 Twelve participants' narratives of success

I will explain how I ordered these and why. I will also show how I analysed them. My intention is also to show how I categorised the narratives into seven categories.

Table 1.1 was organised systematically to link specific interview extracts to progressively more bite sized levels of coding and themes. The breakdown of how and why the table was structured in this manner, along with an analysis of the patterns that emerged is below:

1. Structure and Order of the Table (Table 1.1)

- **Interview Extracts:** The table begin with direct quotes from the interview transcripts. These extracts are the raw data from which the subsequent coding and themes were derived.

- **Primary, Secondary, and Third Codes:** After identifying the key points in each extract, I assigned a series of codes that gradually refined the understanding of the content. These codes move from general ideas (primary) to more specific aspects (secondary and third).
- **Primary, Secondary, and Third Themes:** The themes were developed from the codes, moving from broader concepts (primary themes) to more focused ideas (secondary and third themes). Each level of theme reflects a deeper understanding of the data.
- **Specific Words/phrase:** Having read through the developments of codes and themes I was keen to use more precise concepts (such as "legacy" and "financial stability") and matching them to the most relevant interview extracts. This step identified specific words/phrases which aligned with the extracted data.
- **Overlaps:** I included this column to highlight where themes or codes from different extracts transected, providing insight into recurring ideas or patterns across the dataset.

2. Analytical Process

- **Extract Identification:** I began by identifying meaningful quotes from the transcripts, ensuring that each extract represented the interviewee's perception of success.
- **Open Coding:** For each extract, I conducted open coding to break down the text into distinct concepts. The primary codes were broad, capturing the main ideas, while the secondary and Third codes drilled down into the specifics of each concept.
- **Thematic Development:** The codes were then grouped into themes. The primary themes encapsulate the overarching ideas from the data, while secondary and Third themes further categorise these ideas into more detailed patterns.
- **Matching with Specific Words:** The specific words were carefully matched with the relevant extracts to reflect how they fit into the broader discussion of success.

- **Identification of Overlaps:** Finally, I looked for patterns where themes and codes from different extracts overlapped. This helped in identifying recurring concepts, such as "social influence" or "personal evolution," which were common across multiple interviews.

3. Patterns Identified

Several key patterns emerged from the analysis:

- **Success is subjective:** Many extracts reflect the idea that success is highly subjective and personal, varying greatly depending on individual perspectives, contexts, and life stages. For example, the extract "success is relative" shows that success isn't a fixed state but rather an evolving concept.
- **Influence of Relationships and Community:** There was a strong pattern of individuals attributing their success to the influence of relationships and community support. Several extracts highlight the importance of being motivated by those around them and the impact of social connection or bonds on their success journey.
- **Aspirational and Long-Term Goals:** Another recurring theme is the focus on long-term aspirations and achieving personal goals. For instance, the discussion Sean gave, becoming the person one aspired to be as a child reflects the importance of long-term vision and legacy in defining success.
- **Visible vs. Emotional Fulfilment:** The data also revealed a distinction between visible measures of success (e.g., financial stability, recognition) and emotional or subjective fulfilment (e.g., happiness, personal growth). This suggests that success is multi-dimensional, encompassing both material achievements and inner satisfaction.
- **Public spirited and Impact:** A significant pattern was the emphasis on success being linked to positive impact on others or one’s community. Many interviewees defined their success in terms of their ability to contribute to the well-being of others, demonstrating a broader, altruistic view of success.

The organisation of the table and the analysis process were designed to provide a clear, hierarchical understanding of the data, moving from raw extracts to specific, nuanced themes. The patterns identified reflect the complex, multi-faceted nature of success as perceived by the interviewees, showing that success is not only academic, personal gain and changing but also deeply connected to social relationships, aspirations, and selfless contributions. In addition, the researcher used the interview extracts to summarise each participant's definition of success which showed concordance with preceding analysis in Table 2.1 (chapter 4, page 96-98).

Table 1.1

Interview Extracts	Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Third Codes	Primary Themes	Secondary Themes	Third Themes	Definitions of success	Overlaps
"I think the people around me...motivated me in little ways on a day to day, and it's organic." (Peter)	Community Support	Social Bonds	Relational Motivation Social connection	Social Influence	Relational Success	Interpersonal Dynamics	Positive impact on others or one's community; Financial stability	Overlap with Social Influence and Relational Success
	Natural Motivators	Everyday Encouragement	Organic Influence	Organic Growth	Subtle Motivation	Natural Growth		
"I think success can mean different things depending on where you're at... it evolves and then changes along with the individual." (Simon)	Success is Relative	Evolving Definitions	Changing Perceptions	Variability of Success	Changing Success	Resilient, versatile Success	Continuous learning and personal development	Overlap with Fluidity of Success and Resilient, versatile Adaptation
	Resilient, versatile Success	Resilient, versatile Success	Resilient, versatile	Personal Evolution	Resilient, versatile Flexibility	Evolving Criteria		
"I think success is relative... but I think it's only what you deem successful for yourself." (Anslem)	Personal Success Metrics	Individual Perception	Personal Standards	Subjective Success	Perception of Success	Self-Defined Success	Happiness and fulfilment	Overlap with Subjective Success and Internal Validation
	Self-Doubt in Success	Internal Validation	Self-Reflection	Internal vs. External Validation	Self-Assessment	Insightful Process		

"From a macro perspective, success ultimately means becoming the person I want to become...me becoming the man, that I wanted to when I was 10 years old." (Sean)	Ideal Self	Self-fulfilment	Aspirational Identity	Aspirational Success	Life Goals	Personal Legacy	Legacy Achieve specific goals	Overlap with Aspirational Success and Personal Evolution
	Long-Term Vision	Childhood Dreams	Visionary Success	Personal Evolution	Achievement of Aspirations	Long-Term Vision		
"Success to me would be the point at which you begin to enjoy the fruits of the labour...and the feeling of achievement." (Charlie)	Reward of Hard Work	Achievement Satisfaction	The pleasure of Success	Achievement	Visible Rewards	Post-Achievement Satisfaction	Financial stability; Achieve specific goals	Overlap with Achievement and Resultant Fulfilment
	Emotional Reward	Material Benefits	Consequential Fulfilment	Hard Work	Emotional Fulfilment	Result-Driven		
"I was successful if I was playing well... and I was in the first Ins and in the elite development group." (Tony)	Performance Metrics	Recognition through Skill	Elite Performance	Recognition	Competitive Success	Recognition of Skill	Achieve specific goals	Overlap with Recognition and Skill-Based Validation
	Success through Sports	Athletic Success	Skill-Based Validation	Practical Success	Performance -Based Validation	Athletic Success		

"For me, the word would be freedom...So, I think ultimately that's the goal I strive towards. I'm just being happy." (Magnus)	Freedom of Choice	Autonomy	Independent Success	Autonomy	Self-Determination	Personal Freedom	Happiness and fulfilment	Overlap with Autonomy and Personal Fulfilment
	Happiness as Success	Personal Fulfilment	Emotional Satisfaction	Personal Fulfilment	Emotional Wellbeing	Emotional Wellbeing		
"The ability to be able to help other people who aren't in this fortunate position as I am...that's the measure of success." (Uriel)	Social Responsibility	Community Contribution	Selfless or Altruistic/ unselfish Success	Public spirited	Societal Contribution	Helping Others	Positive impact on others or one's community	Overlap with Social Responsibility and Community Contribution
	Positive Impact	Empathy in Success	Societal Contribution	Community Impact	Empathetic Success	Community Success		
"Success is having an accomplishment in knowledge...a successfully run family unit..." (Tobias)	Knowledge as a Tool	Intellectual Success	Educational Success	Practical Success	Educational Achievement	Academic Success	Health and wellbeing; Achieve specific goals; Positive impact on others or one's community	Overlap with Family-Centric Success and Family Wellbeing
	Family-Centric Success	Family Stability	Family Wellbeing	Family and Knowledge	Family Wellbeing	Family Achievement		

"Success is very subjective...impact I have made on the world, which is what I am doing in my profession at present." (Immanuel)	Personal Growth	World Impact	Legacy Creation	Subjective Success	Professional Success	Career Impact	Legacy; Achieve specific goals; Positive impact on others or one's community	Overlap with Professional Impact and World Contribution
	Professional Impact	Career Fulfilment	Professional Contribution	Legacy	Global Influence	Philanthropy		
"My definition of success is striving to be the best version of yourself...achieving a sense of contentment." (Martin)	Best Version of Self	Self-Contentment	Personal Excellence	Personal Growth	Self-Improvement	Personal Growth	Continuous learning and personal development ; Achieve specific goals; Happiness and fulfilment	Overlap with Best Version of Self and Continuous Improvement
	Continuous Improvement	Navigating Challenges	Inner Fulfilment	Contentment	Emotional Balance	Emotional Contentment		
"I think the people around me. I feel when I look at the people around me I see not just me on some mountain looking down on everyone else. I am still around people	Relational Success	Social Motivation	Interpersonal Dynamics	Relational Motivation	Community-Based Success	Relational Motivation	Positive impact on others or one's community	Overlap with Relational Motivation and Social Bonds

that motivated me in little ways on a day to day, and it's organic." (Daniel)								
	Community Support	Collective Growth	Organic Influence	Social Influence	Social Bonds	Social Influence		

3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Cohen (2011) contended validity is an important key to effective research. He further argues that if a study is invalid then it is worthless. Although much of qualitative research abide by the principles of validity there have been different opinions on the term. Guba and Lincoln (1989), as cited by Cohen (2011:180) argue that validity should be replaced with authenticity. Maxwell (1992), cited by Cohen suggests 'understanding' as a term is more suitable in qualitative research. For there to be sufficient grounds for validity and reliability, data must be representative of the sample and address content, construct and concurrent validity (Cohen 2011). The research studies have to be rigorous by 'careful audit trails of evidence, respondent validation i.e. confirmation by participants, through coding, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, triangulation and adequate reference to standard materials in the field' to be valid and reliable (Lincoln and Guba 1985, as cited by Cohen, 2011:181).

In this study, the key criteria of validity I used for thoroughness are credibility, transferability, confirmability and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.8.1 Trustworthiness and credibility

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, results were maintained by participant validation, to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences and prolonged engagement with not just the participants but also the data and prior literature as strategies to ensure trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Every participant received a write-up of his interview and checked it for accuracy. The ultimate concern of participant checking is to establish truth (Cho & Trent, 2006). In addition my supervisors examined the results and were able to share their expertise enabling me to understand my data better (Creswell, 2007).

3.8.2 Dependability and confirmability

It has also been stated that qualitative researchers seek results that are sensible, dependable and consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore auditing trail ultimately improves the dependability and confirmability of data

analysis which leads to more meaningful and useful results. Audit trail – steps taken from the start to the development and reporting of the findings of the research - was a strategy used to establish confirmability.

Confirmability refers to objectivity and indicates that the data represents the information provided by the participants and interpretations of the data are not invented by me. This means the findings must reflect the participants' voice, and not my biases, motivations, or perspectives. In the next chapter one of the ways I will reflect the participant's voice is to present representative quotations from transcribed text specifically to show a connection between the data and results. I also have to be careful that quotations are not misused, thus weakening the analysis. For example, if quotations are misused in the Results section, the results of the analysis may be ambiguous or vague.

In addition, to ensure the trustworthiness and especially credibility of the results, it is also important to assess the categories that cover the data and identify whether there are similarities within and differences between categories.

3.8.3 Transferability

This is also known as external validity which seeks to determine how transferable the results of the study are. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit with transferability which means I will not be responsible for the burden of proof. It is the person who is seeking to transfer the study results. However, it should be noted that I still have the responsibility which means I have to do a thorough job to ensure the provision of sufficient descriptive data to make transferability possible.

This study utilised the following strategies for transferability in the study:

- Thick description. Rich thick description is the description of the setting and the participants. Rich thick description contained a detailed description of the study findings and had sufficient evidence in the form of direct quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and memos (Merriam, 2009). In this study, rich thick descriptions came from the participant interviews.

• Purposive Sampling. A good study sample is imperative for transferability, which in this study was twelve successful Black men who had completed their educational journeys. The study utilised significant quotes from the participant interviews as part of the research data.

3.9 JOURNAL

I kept a journal to capture and process my journey, challenges, ongoing ideas and that moment analysis. This helped during the data analysis as I was able to reduce bias and ensure my thoughts or decisions did not influence the data that was being analysed. Journaling also enabled me to track all sorts of emerging patterns, to refine themes, and to recheck, in a systematic way, my interpretations of the data, all of which enabled me to maintain transparency and reduce bias, aligning with my constructivist approach and commitment to ethical research.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the rationale for a qualitative methodology within the constructivist paradigm in line with the research aims. The constructive research paradigm is distinguished by a need to understand the world as it is from a subjective point of view and seeks a clarification within the frame of reference of the participant rather than the objective observer of the action. The research methods and questions were outlined, as well as information pertaining to the methodology used, my role, participant selection, and the semi structured interview guide and interview protocol are discussed. The chapter concludes by detailing the data collection process, trustworthiness of the study, data analysis, presentation, and management. Thick description and member checking were used to improve trustworthiness.

Ethical considerations were explored in depth, in line with the expectations of a doctoral thesis and constructivist research. Now that methodological issues have been explored, Chapter 4 will present the findings of the analysis.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing body of research about the challenges affecting Black male students. Academics provide critical reviews that highlight underachievement, including a litany of statistics that shows this also. While these concerns are important, it is also vital to report the success stories. For example, to ask what we can learn from the successful Black male students. Questions such as this can enable educators gain richer insights.

This chapter presents and discusses the findings derived from the research questions crafted for this study. This chapter identifies the key themes and patterns that emerged from the data, offering valuable perspectives on my participants' lived educational journeys of success. By examining these findings, we can glean insights into the multifaceted nature of success and the complexity of factors that interplay. Each research question was carefully developed through the lens of the theoretical framework developed from critical race theory, intersectionality and Yosso's (2005) conceptualisation of cultural capital. I remind readers that I am presenting the findings and discussion of this constructivist study, utilising qualitative research methodology. The purpose of this study was to explore the learning experiences of a new generation of Black men regarding the factors that made them successful.

Next, I provide an overview of how the chapter is structured.

Section 4.2 presents and discusses the findings to address the research question: RQ1 - How do Black men describe their success? I provide Table 3 that shows how my participants describe success.

Section 4.3 presents and discusses the findings to address two research questions: RQ2 - What did Black men need to thrive when they were boys in the English education system? and RQ3 - What systems were/are put in place specifically to underpin the needs of Black boys/men in the education system?

I picked out pertinent passages from the participants' stories framed as:

A. Stories of dispositions

B. Stories of influences

C. Stories of expectations

D. Stories of a critical incident

Section 4.4 presents and discusses the findings to address the research question: RQ4: How did Black boys/men navigate the intersectionality of 'race'/ethnicity, gender, and class in the English education system? My participants referred to how navigating the intersectionality of race/ethnicity, gender and class was a complex process. In their lived experience they narrate on the multitude of barriers. They also stated how they confronted these challenges.

Section 4.5 presents and discusses the findings to address the overarching research question: How did young successful Black men navigate challenges to achieve success? They tell us how they set clear, ambitious goals and developed a strong sense of purpose. They all leveraged education as a pathway however, their strategies were multifaceted. Their stories serve as powerful insights and examples.

The chapter ends with a conclusion showing the findings clearly demonstrated that successful Black men, possessed inquisitiveness, intelligence, and sagacity. When we learn more about the factors and values that shape Black men's educational lives, we will recognise and enable the development of the positive attributes necessary to succeed. According to the participants in this study, there were various factors such as family support, environment, supplementary school, work ethics, sense of responsibility, sense of awareness, finances, skills, and networking that impacted their success.

The overarching aim was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the participants' paths to success. Through the lens of the theoretical framework, these research questions were designed to investigate various aspects of their experiences, to shed light on the dynamics shaping their successful paths.

4.2 How They See Success

The purpose of asking the first research question was to gain an understanding of how each participant described success: RQ1 - How do Black men describe their success? The participants were asked to bring an artefact to the first interview (Dhlula-Moruri et al, 2017) that described their success (see Table 2.1). In the Table I also included extracts of what they defined success to be. Using an artefact enabled them to convey the significance of their success because it added a visible dimension to their narrative, they shared insights which included how they overcame difficulties.

Table 2.1 Participants' definition of Success through Their Own Artefacts

NAME OF PARTICIPANT	ARTEFACT AND DEFINING SUCCESS
Peter	A photo of him and his childhood friends who grew up together and have remained friends. *"the people around me…I see not just me on some mountain looking down on everyone else…"*
Simon	His practice certificate as a solicitor. *"success can mean different things depending on where you're at…it evolves and changes along with the individual…"*
Anslem	A photo of his nuclear family. He also had one of his parents. *"success is relative…it's what you deem successful for yourself…"*
Sean	BMW 4 series – *"it is **what** that car represents."* His values and journey to success.
Charlie	First full-time professional employment contract – *"it represented the hard work that I*

	had done up to that point through education."
Tony	Rugby Ball – *"the rugby ball is symbolic of the network of friends and colleagues and employees that rugby's given me over the last 15 years. Rugby for a long time was the way that I had determined success as a teacher."*
Magnus	Personalised office engraved name plate with his job title – one on the door and the other on his desk. His hard work had paid off successfully. *"the word will be freedom…"*
Uriel	An award mug showed his commitment to the charity organisation was finally recognised. *"the ability to be able to help others who aren't in this fortunate position as I am"*
Tobias	Photo of his family was personal success. *"having an accomplishment in knowledge for your job…a successfully run family unit that lack nothing…and I mean general knowledge because that gets you anywhere"*
Immanuel	His reputation as an entrepreneur teacher showed innovation and expertise in his field. *"my personal growth and impact I have made on the world"*
Martin	His ID card which states SLT (teacher). *"striving to be the best*

	version of myself while navigating challenges and achieving a sense of contentment"
Daniel	His medical qualification. *"the realisation of my aspirations and recognising not just my efforts but also those around me including family and friends".*

I will now present and discuss the findings about what all twelve participants described during their narratives.

4.2.1 The description

Peter showed a photo of him and his childhood friends (his artefact). His construction of success from the artefact symbolised support, camaraderie, and shared experiences. For example, the shared history that represented their challenges and how they overcame these to celebrating achievements, the artefact highlighted their milestones and accomplishments which reinforced success for him. In addition, it invoked their strong successful community. He also mentioned collaborative success which meant collective success.

Simon explained that his Practice Certificate as a solicitor showed his journey from his culmination of years of education, training, and examinations. Success was the final recognition and competence to practise law.

Anslem's construction of success was his ability to balance his professional ambitions and personal life by maintaining strong family ties. Success for Anslem meant a photograph of his nuclear family which evolved deep feelings of happiness, contentment and pride which was the cornerstone of success. This was a holistic success.

Sean's construction of success was his car keys which showed he had achieved a level of financial success and afford luxury items. He stated his success symbolised high social status and wealth. His artefact was his

personal story of hard work, dedication, and attainment of personal and professional goals.

Charlie's professional employment contract was success to him because it showed his education journey, his skills development, transition from temporary jobs to a full time professional permanent job. He explained that success was the relief that his career trajectory had brought financial stability which was his benchmark for success.

Tony's rugby ball anchored his narrative on his success. His narrative lay on his growth and development, how he achieved significant milestones and how he overcame challenges with his team. He also believed that part of his success represented strategic thinking which enabled and motivated him to achieve higher levels of success in becoming an Assistant Headteacher. His rugby ball was a multifaceted artefact in his construction of success.

Magnus engraved nameplate with his job title commanded respect and admiration. He explained that the nameplate anchored his educational success story about his primary, secondary and medical school journey which reflected success in perseverance, success sacrifices and success in the milestones achieved.

Uriel chose an awarded mug which symbolised recognition and appreciation from colleagues in the organisation he volunteered at for a number of years. He narrated how he had for years, seen others awarded their mugs. Therefore, achieving this anchored his story about his journey to achieving the milestone it represented. He spoke about his hard work, dedication, and challenges. For Uriel, success was the fact that his efforts and achievements had been noticed and valued from this charity organisation which was of great importance to him.

Tobias's family photo elicited a validated his success of building a loving family. He described his family as integral to his sense of accomplishment and purpose. It was his cornerstone of personal and social success.

Immanuel's interpretation as an entrepreneur teacher showed success in his innovation, a representation of expertise, deep well of knowledge, leadership,

and ability to inspire and guide others. He also stated that his success was his role as a teacher in contributing to others success stories.

Martin showed me his ID card that read "SLT" – senior leader team – because it recognised an important milestone in his educational career. He also said it represented his role in shaping the college's policies, strategic decision-making and success was the acknowledgement of the culmination of his past efforts and hard work, experiences and achievements that led to his position as an Assistant Headteacher. He was also a successful Black teacher in the eyes of other Black younger colleagues.

Daniel showed me his medical certificate that was a symbol of achievement and validation. It represented who he is and what he stands for which is more than just academic achievement. He stated that in a broader sense, within his community, this success is a cultural and familial expectation. One that carries an amount of value. It also reminded him of how he overcame barriers in his journey to success.

The participants defined what they understood success to be. Definitions were subjective. Participants spoke at length about their own success. I provide detailed quotations below to provide insights and perspectives on their success. These excerpts showcase their lived experiences and personal definitions. By highlighting their voices, the chapter captures the nuances and complexities of their journeys, adding depth and credibility to the research while making their story relatable and impactful. Peter explained that success was being part of a motivated group of friends who share knowledge and strive for ambitions.

Peter expanded on his construction of success

> *"I am still around people that motivated me in little ways on a day to day, and its organic. These are people I have known for at least 10 years. We are a good group of people that are just fully motivated although we do different things in life. Success for me is having to look at my group of friends. I have got pictures of them if that's okay."* (Peter)

Evolving or changes over time and finding balance and contentment in different aspects of one's life was Simon's explanation of success.

Simon added

> *"I think success can mean different things depending on where you're at. So, I think the definition of success doesn't necessarily become static, it evolves and then changes along with the individual. I think it's quite specific to everyone's journeys. I think right now in my current life circumstances, the definition of success is quite broad, and I'd say it means being happy with life and hope."* (Simon)

Anslem explained that success is relative and personal but added that he did not consider himself successful because in his own eyes, he had not done anything special but recognised that most people would consider him successful. He said:

> *"I think success is relative, to be honest, and do I consider myself successful? Probably not. Well but I think a lot of people do consider myself successful, but I think it's only what you deem successful for yourself. So, for me personally, the reason why I don't necessarily say "I'm successful" [participant gesticulates quote], is because I don't think I've done anything special and that's probably because of my upbringing. I have been around people who have achieved what I have achieved and more, so I wouldn't expect anything less from myself if you get what I mean."* (Anslem)

Focusing on values and character was Sean's aspiration since he was a child.

Sean elaborated that:

> *"From a macro perspective, success ultimately means becoming the person I want to become. That's what it means to me. Now in more practical terms, what does that mean? That means me becoming the man, that I wanted to when I was 10 years old. Am I that man, do I have those values? Do I have those qualities? Am I respectful? Do I treat people based of what I was saying when I was younger? Do I treat women appropriately? That's what success is. It's more characteristics."* (Sean)

Charlie expressed success as reaching a point in life due to hardwork, his education and perseverance. He stated:

> *"Success to me would be the point at which you begin to enjoy the fruits of the labor of hard work and the point in which you feel like you've accomplished something and the feeling of achievement."* (Charlie)

Sports was very important for Tony. Playing exceedingly well and achieving elite status while in university was success for Tony.

Tony said:

> *"I was successful if I was playing well. I was successful while I was at university if I was playing well, and I was in in the first Ins and in the elite development group."* (Tony)

Freedom was success for Magnus.

Magnus explained:

> *"For me, the word would be freedom. It comes down to me to be able to do what I would like to do the way I'd like to do it, at which times I'd like to do it, obviously within reason. So, I think ultimately that's the goal I strive towards. That's what success would mean to me. I'm just being happy."* (Magnus)

Uriel …

"The ability to be able to help other people who aren't in this fortunate position as I am. And for me that's the measure of success." (Uriel)

Tobias …

> *"I'll say success is having an accomplishment in knowledge in and for your day to day job. It is also having a successfully run family unit that is they lack nothing. When I say knowledge I mean general knowledge because that gets you anywhere. You know how to fit into different groups when you have general knowledge."* (Tobias)

Immanuel …

> *"Success is very subjective. My success is my personal growth and impact I have made on the world which is what I am doing in my profession at present."* (Immanuel)

Martin

> *"My definition of success is striving to be the best version of yourself while navigating challenges and achieving a sense of contentment."* (Martin)

Daniel

> *"Success is the realisation of my aspirations and recognising not just my efforts but also those around me including family and friends."* (Daniel)

The responses reveal seven key themes from my interview analysis.

Table 3.1 Seven Key Themes from Interview Analysis

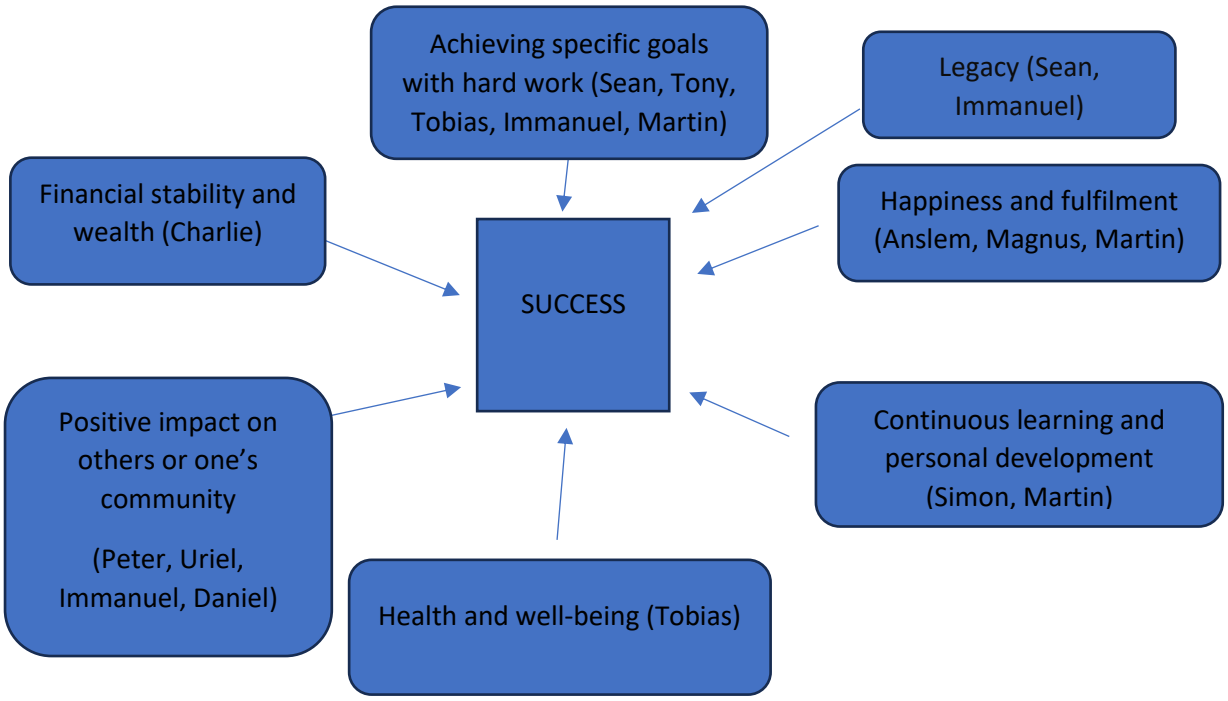
Theme	**Interviewees**
Legacy	Sean, Immanuel
Happiness and Fulfilment	Anslem, Magnus, Martin
Continuous Learning and Personal Development	Simon, Martin
Health and Well-being	Tobias
Positive Impact on Others or One's Community	Peter, Uriel, Immanuel, Daniel
Financial Stability and Wealth	Charlie
Achieving Specific Goals with Hard Work	Sean, Tony, Tobias, Immanuel, Martin

Figure 1.1 below shows the participants that appear in each category.

4.2.2 Defining Success

Seven categories below sum up participants' constructions of success as a multifaceted concept. The data reveals success as: A multifaceted path defined by achieving specific goals through hard work, building a lasting legacy and finding true happiness and fulfilment. It encompasses continuous learning and personal development, maintaining health and wellbeing, and making a positive impact on other's or one community. Ultimately it includes attaining financial stability and wealth to support a life of purpose, balance and meaning.

Figure 1.1 A mind map representation of Success



The complexity of their experiences and the full spectrum of their achievements refute the narrow definition of success found in my literature review. This is explained below. As we will also see, there were some expansive viewpoints on the meaning of success.

The seven identified themes show how my participants' perspectives on success align with my literature review.

The concept of legacy expressed by Sean and Immanuel relates to several academics in my research such as Yosso (2005) who articulates this through her concept of aspirational capital within Community Cultural Wealth, where future orientation and legacy-building serve as resistance strategies. Sean's desire to *"become the person I want to become"* exemplifies this forward-looking aspiration. Joseph-Salisbury (2019) examines how Black mixed-race men navigate identity formation and legacy within educational contexts, providing context for understanding Immanuel's focus on *"personal growth and impact I have made on the world."*

Gillborn (2008, 2015) recognises legacy-building as a counter-narrative to deficit perspectives that often dominate policy discussions about Black male achievement, aligning with both participants' emphasis on self-defined success.

Anslem, Magnus, and Martin's focus on personal fulfilment connects to Rollock (2007) who explores how success for Black men often involves negotiating between external metrics and internal measures of fulfilment, similar to Anslem's view that *"success is relative."* In addition, Sewell (1997) examines how Black men often construct alternative value systems that prioritise well-being over dominant definitions of achievement, aligning with Magnus's emphasis on *"freedom"* and *"just being happy."* Richardson (2007) discusses how Black educational experiences involve developing personalised narratives of success that centre authenticity and personal satisfaction, echoing Martin's focus on *"achieving a sense of contentment."*

The emphasis on growth and evolution that Simon and Martin have connects with Warmington (2020), who explores Black intellectual traditions that frame education as an ongoing process of development and not as something that has finite achievements. Warmington's ideas resonate closely with the views that Simon expressed in conversations with us.

Gillborn (2015) considers how successful Black men often seem to develop very clear and robust understandings of education as an actual space of continual growth that they must navigate in order to get around some truly insidious institutional structural barriers. This aligns perfectly with Martin's recent focus on what it means to strive to be the best version of yourself.

Yosso (2005) discusses the concept of navigational capital. Navigational capital is about the skills needed to manoeuvre through social institutions - schools included. Of course, it is about much more than just schools. But Yosso's work is about understanding the schooling experiences of certain students. And it speaks to the idea that some of us have an easier time navigating the educational pipeline and some of us have a much harder time, and it is not always because of capabilities.

Tobias's concentration on family well-being aligns with Majors (2001), who investigates how Black male identify success with family stability and collective well-being. This is right in line with Tobias's work, which emphasises the value of *"having a successfully run family unit."*

Tomlinson (2021) looks at how the educational success of Black men is usually viewed with a much broader conception of their academic and non-academic wellness than is typical for most white students.

The structures of Black families are often resilient in the face of systemic inequalities; this is something that I am able to pull from the work of Shah and Traynor (2020). They really give a good context to understand why Tobias would place such a high value on family wellness.

The ways in which Peter, Uriel, Immanuel, and Daniel define their communities relate directly to what Yosso (2005) teaches about social capital. They weave networks of community support that enable them to do what Uriel describes as his motivation: *"helping other people."*

Joseph-Salisbury (2019) looks at how Black male identity and success often hinge on community contributions. This aligns with Peter's take on Black male success in that it is not centred on individualistic pursuits.

Richardson (2007) investigates the phenomenon of successful Black men, who she observes tend to develop pathways that lead to achievement and that often

involve what she calls collectivist orientations. These orientations reflect an understanding that achievement is not simply the result of one's individual efforts but also (and sometimes mainly) the result of the efforts of others.

Charlie's focus on financial rewards is in alignment with the work of Gillborn (2008). Gillborn examines how the economic success of Black individuals often represents not just the achievement of personal goals but also the overcoming of historical exclusion and structural obstacles that have been put in the way of many individuals who are now purported to be succeeding. It is as if Gillborn is saying that when Black people become financially secure, they don't just become financially secure; they also prove wrong the naysayers and break all glass ceilings in their way. Gillborn's work gives context to Charlie's focus on enjoying the fruits of one's labour.

Sean, Tony, Tobias, Immanuel, and Martin's belief in achievement aligns with CRT in the sense that the counter-narratives they told challenged the misconception of a meritocratic society and highlighted the role structural oppression keeps certain groups down. This echoes CRT counter-storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

My participants' multidimensional conception of success aligns particularly well with Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework, which recognises diverse forms of capital that extend beyond traditional metrics. The emphasis on community impact, personal fulfilment, and legacy-building demonstrates what Yosso terms aspirational, social, and resistant capital. Yosso writes on other forms of capital which I have already mentioned in Chapter 2, page 58.

In my literature review, Gillborn’s Critical Race Theory approach helps contextualise these success definitions as counter-narratives to deficit perspectives that often dominate educational discourse about Black male achievement.

Joseph-Salisbury (2019) and Rollock (2007) provide frameworks for understanding how participants navigate multiple identities and expectations in constructing personal definitions of success.

Together, these connections demonstrate how my participants' perspectives both reflect and extend existing theoretical frameworks, offering nuanced insights into how Black men conceptualise success beyond conventional achievement metrics.

My study also exposes major deficiencies in the current body of work, especially where it concerns these topics. Joy and fulfilment are key to Black male success tales; the significance of relational identity and community effect; the temporal flexibility of success definitions as they vary during life paths; the use of personal, family, and communal well-being as success indicators.

The need to broaden the definitions of success for Black boys in UK education is underscored by these findings. Success should include holistic, culturally relevant, and community-informed measures. These measures would not only better reflect the lived experiences and aspirations of Black males but also serve as a more accurate basis for informing educational policy and practice. I am not suggesting that such a basis is inherently better rather, it may be more effective and responsive because it has the input of a critical mass of Black males who have overcome both the poverty of aspiration and the poverty of means.

I now move on to the factors that my participants narrated that contributed to success which enabled them to thrive.

4.3 FACTORS WHICH ENABLED BLACK MEN TO THRIVE

Having defined success, in this section I address two research questions: RQ2 - What did Black men need to thrive when they were boys in the English education system? And RQ3 - What systems were/are put in place specifically to underpin the needs of Black boys in the English education system?

In this section I discuss the four main findings that emerged from the participants' narratives about what factors contributed to their success as: Dispositions; Influences and Motivations, including role models; Expectations, including self-expectation; and Critical Incidents .

4.3.1 Stories of dispositions

All the participants focused on the importance of developing strong long-lasting qualities. The participants explained how their inherent qualities allowed them to

advance the path to success and self-actualisation. Their inherent qualities contributed to them remaining focused and successful in their academic studies. I am describing these personal qualities as a disposition as the participants highlighted a prevailing quality that was consistently exhibited. This was a prevalent nature embedded within their core attributes (Gillborn, 2008; Joseph-Salisbury, 2018).

4.3.1.1 Inherent qualities

Anslem, Simon, Sean and Peter detailed their inherent qualities. It was the description of their remarkable determination and resilience in overcoming various challenges to succeed academically that I found in their narration. Despite facing systemic barriers and stereotypes, the participants exhibited incredible strength and perseverance. They also explained that in spite of what the teachers thought of them they had it within them to debunk negative attitudes from their teachers and focused on the reason they were in school. Some of the things they mentioned was a resilient attitude which meant they were able to adapt, problem-solve, and persist despite obstacles or setbacks. In addition to this they all talked about coping strategies which enabled them to develop effective coping mechanisms such as finding healthy outlets for stress like playing football or music. I found that one's disposition is a major factor that contributes to success and is paramount.

Anslem's stated, "*my teachers are here as servant leaders. I am here to learn as my education is my pathway to succeed*."

Anslem went on,

"I had other teachers that I didn't get along with, a French teacher, I didn't like the way she talked, and she actually told me I was going to fail. But, because I am quite stubborn I told her I will not, so I passed."

For Anslem, hearing negative predictions served as a motivator to prove the teacher wrong and this led to increased determination and a drive to succeed. His response stemmed from a desire to defy expectations or overcome challenges. Although a belief in a students' capability will often yield more positive and lasting results compared to teachers using fear of failure as a motivator (Filgona et al, 2020). Anslem's response demonstrated the reverse.

Simon said,

"in year 10, I developed a good relationship, with another student and we both read a book by Robert Kawasaki, called "Rich dad, Poor dad" about the same time and the principles in that book... the building blocks, actually figuring out how to navigate life and the importance of deferred gratification became my disposition."

For Simon, self-control and enhanced goal achievement enabled him to set long term goals which made him work persistently towards achieving them. This aligns with what Rollock (2011) describes as careful navigation. The disposition of cultivating deferred gratification often leads to not just success in education and career but also better decision-making and improved self-regulation in one's life (Rollock, 2011).

Sean recounted,

"In English lessons, my teacher would move away from teaching us the syllabus and she'll try to inspire us and motivate us…which ultimately increased my aspirations, and it reaffirmed that I had the potential to actually do better."

By integrating values into lessons and modelling those values as educators, teachers contribute significantly to shaping the moral compass and character of their students (Gillborn, 2008). Teachers are architects of the future, not constructing buildings. They are there to shape the hearts and minds of the next generation (Nnene, 2024). This teacher showed humanity and optimism which inspired Sean. When teachers express emotions explicitly and foster a culture of humanity and empathy in their classrooms it can indeed be considered a highly responsible pedagogical approach because it contributes to the holistic development of the students.

Peter stated,

"In university, I made a timetable. I was always in the library because I was so bored, I went to the library and with my first essay, I got a first. I was like, wow. Is it this easy? From there, everything got done as it was documented. Study, revise and it works!"

Like much of the literature reviewed in this study (Demie, 2017; Warmington, 2014; Callender, 2020), a determined and organised disposition in a Black boy oe man is crucial. Although I fundamentally disagree with the Commission on Race and Disparities (2021) findings it demonstrates the newcomer (immigrant's) optimism which motivates the Black African pupils. Peter was not born in the UK but grew up in the UK from an early age. While teachers, schools, colleges and universities have their own parts to play, Peter emphasised that one must be present in lessons, go to the library (study), and ask for help when needed because "it works!" He wanted to do exceedingly well so he took the steps to achieve. His disposition his was very important.

4.3.1.2 Navigating challenges

In one capacity or another all my participants cited encouraging and supportive positive dispositions which helped them navigate the unique challenges they faced while striving for academic success. I have chosen to present findings from Anslem, Charlie, Peter, Simon, Sean and Tobias as they delved deep on this matter.

Anselm showed how his disposition countered negative experiences in school from his French teacher (see above):

> *"…I'm quite stubborn, because of my inherent qualities and perhaps character I told her I was not going to fail. I passed. …."* (Anslem)

It was Anslem's state of readiness, preparedness and positive stubbornness that made him achieve in French. He added *"she actually told me I would fail. Because I was quite stubborn, I had to prove her wrong… I made sure I passed."*

Charlie described his work ethic:

> *"from a young age all I wanted to do was just play but I also had the mentality of work hard and play hard so I wanted a balance in order to justify the time I had for leisure with what I had for my schoolwork."* (Charlie)

He further explained it was:

"*Easier for me to navigate because by nature I was a bit more reserved. So it was easier to extract myself from certain distractions because as you can imagine you get exposed to a lot more growing up within South London. I was*

exposed to some of it for example, gang culture and other illegal activities but luckily it did not really impact my journey in secondary school." (Charlie)

Charlie's conduct inside and outside his home demonstrated personal control in terms of what he accepted and did not accept. His behaviour was not underpinned by any extra strict rules to control him. He already had high expectations of his behaviour which showed in his character.

4.3.1.3. Self

Peter, Simon, Sean, Tobias demonstrated agency and resistance. Their Self resonated with Yosso's (2005) concept of navigational capital.

According to Peter:

> *"I was just organised, I was always in the library, and everything was scheduled. The formula of study, revise and rest worked. It is not difficult to be good. There is a point in your life where you just rise and say it is alright to be smart."* (Peter)

Peter made this point loud and clear. It was refreshing to hear a young Black man say this categorically without mincing words because as a Black woman I have always believed in the coolness of being smart and the strategies that harness Black male's academic successes and resilience and being able to recognise that it is independent of the stereotype comments.

Peter described chasing the intellectual and academic aspect of university which made his life less difficult. Having this right disposition should not be seen as an oppositional culture and a Black youth, who is studious is not acting white (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986).

Simon's disposition was focused on being content, *"Being happy with life and hope…having a balance"*. He mentioned life having different compartments and being content with each of those compartments. These compartments were work, relationships, family, finances and being focused.

Sean was ambitious; meaning he had the desire and determination to achieve success. Success to Sean was attitudinal. He questioned whether other Black men had the relevant characteristics, good attitude, and ambition. If so, it was possible to be successful.

Tobias' disposition was to value soft skills and general knowledge. Soft skills are crucial because it can aid to success not only in the classroom but also in the workplace and beyond.

Law et al (2014) found that boys took an individualistic view of success which was associated with hard work. One participant in this study emphasised the role of hard work in success. Through the lens of Yosso's (2005) CCW framework this emphasis on hard work represents my participant's strategic response to navigating educational systems that were not particularly designed to meet the needs of Black boys. Hard work plays a great part in achieving soft skills because there are competencies that must make one classroom and career ready such as teamwork, communication, leadership, IT, intercultural fluency and to achieve these competencies each person must be hard working.

Success can be viewed as subjective. It aligns with one's values, aspirations and what truly matters as has been shown by the participants in this study. It is a process because it is an evolving path which involves achieving goals, overcoming challenges, and improving oneself. It is what you accomplish not what you acquire.

I now write on the stories of influences.

4.3.2 Stories of influences and motivation: Family, friends, and role models

For all the participants, influences were powerful motivators for success, in terms of their personal growth and achievement. I am using both concepts because an individual can be motivated by external positive influences; motivation is not only intrinsic, as seen with Anslem. This aligns with Yosso's (2005) conceptualisation of familial and social capitals. Positive influences are significant in facilitating the personal growth and development of Black men (Yosso, 2005; Rollock, 2015).

Attaining academic success can lead to future opportunities and social mobility, developing skills and enabling personal and professional experiences. Participants shared stories of influences and motivation which brought about academic success. They adopted an assets-based approach to tell their stories which enabled me to understand their successes better. Each participant when defining success took steps in explaining what motivated and/or influenced them during their academic years towards achieving success despite challenges.

4.3.2.1 Family

The importance of familial capital is one factor already identified (Yosso, 2005) and this study further substantiates it as a factor contributing to Black men's success. In this section the experiences of Uriel, Charlie, Magnus, Tony, Simon, Daniel, Carlos and Aslem illustrates the importance of family.

Uriel indicated that his mum and dad mostly inspired and motivated him which enabled him to thrive for excellence. He described:

"my mom and dad did professional jobs. My dad is a consultant surgeon/lawyer and my mom retired as a ward matron - she trained as a nurse. I was brought up in a Nigerian household, in the North of England, but my culture at home was to focus on hard work and meeting your responsibilities and moving with integrity. Therefore, when you have that at home …it's hard to be swayed. My parents gave me the freedom, told me the parameters of how they wanted me to be, but they also gave me the freedom to understand this for myself. Because of this, I was never really swayed. I did my own thing. I was very sure of myself from an early age. And I think that helped me out massively at school. (Uriel)

Education was paramount for Uriel, and along with his parents' background and knowledge, it contributed to his success as they jointly navigated his education journey. He also saw his parents as inspirational.

Uriel was motivated by the opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of others and to contribute to a greater cause.

Uriel's mug (as seen earlier) symbolised his contribution to the community through a charitable organisation. Even when he had not received it, he stayed persistent.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979), Uriel's family support is a proximal process in the microsystem, influenced by the high expectations and constant reinforcement his parents gave him. Rhamie (2012) found that family support and parental expectations are significant longitudinal predictors of the academic achievement of Black males. Uriel's parents drew on what Yosso (2005) calls community cultural wealth (specifically, the navigational, social, and aspirational capital) in the practices they used to consistently provide support throughout his schooling career.

Charlie described the structure of his family, a single parent unit he explained:

"*I had my grandma who lived with me, she helped support me with studies after school. I also had older cousins, whom I looked up to and followed their paths. They were like the first blueprint really. I also had a network of likeminded friends as well.*"

Education was very important to the family and although his mother was working quite hard as a single parent there was a family presence in the house every day. His grandma was instrumental in his upbringing, but he also had his cousins nearby who looked out for him. Charlie believed he had the right people in place to support him.

Charlie had invested effort, time and hard work in achieving his goals. Charlie was content and fulfilled with what he had achieved at that point which gave him a sense of accomplishment. Ultimately the connection between his success and enjoying the fruits of his hard work enabled him to continue working towards greater success. This became a motivational cycle where success begat success.

Bronfenbrenner's model illustrates that Charlie's extended family (mother, grandmother, and cousins), which represented interconnected microsystems, served as proximal processes for Charlie. In fact, Rhamie (2012) concluded that extended family involvement significantly predicts Black male achievement. At the macrosystem level, Charlie's family was intentional about providing a sheltering environment amidst gang culture and systemic inequalities. Each of the components of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth is clear in the story: Charlie was able to navigate to the support he needed (navigational capital); he was connected to networks (social capital); and he was able to hold onto his hopes and dreams despite living in poverty (aspirational capital).Magnus grew up in a household where it was clearly understood that education and doing well was desirable. His parents taught him how to challenge himself and push for excellence in everything he did. It was also understood that having a good work ethic was valuable. According to Magnus,

"*It was pretty down to my parents really. There was absolutely no ambiguity over what school was for. There was no, "I'm too lazy" or "don't do the*

homework" or "don't want to go to this lesson" or "I want to talk in class on XYZ" because that was not going to be tolerated in the home. I always saw that as my little responsibility. I didn't feel like I needed to be pushed."

Magnus's success was his freedom which was deeply personal. Success meant financial freedom, time freedom, independence, freedom to pursue his passions and interests, personal development and freedom of choice. His success was shaped by his values, goals and aspirations. Achieving these things motivated him.

On the microsystem level, Magnus's parents provided clear educational values by having non-negotiable high expectations of their children. In Rhamie's (2012) study, she found that families with clear expectations for education in addition to challenging their children results in educational endurance. Instead of accepting mediocrity, Magnus's parents had what Yosso (2005) refers to as aspirational capital: they had hope for the future and refused to settle for anything less. Providing clear educational values from a young age and sustaining that throughout Magnus's life, allowed Magnus to feel he had the autonomy and freedom that he desired.Tony discussed the role his parents played in his life. At age 6 Tony was still unable to read. Each time he had a book close to his eyes the words would move around, and he always got frustrated with this. He explained that people regarded him as unintelligent because every other 6-year-old could read. He had a problem with his eye muscles which his parents found out after he had seen a specialist.

"*I had a problem coordinating my muscle generally. And when my parents and I saw the Optometrist and eye specialist, they told my mother, that the only reason I'd been able to do anything so far was because I was so head strong. And they said that if it wasn't for my strong willed character, I wouldn't have been able to do anything really, without making a clumsy kind of mess of it and once my parents understood that they always said 'if you think you can do it well, you do it well.' And that was what drove me in terms of early development. And because of that, there was that internal kind of generation of mentors*."

Although his parents were aware that he had a medical issue it did not stop them from encouraging to be the best in anything he set his mind to do. They understood the value of education as teachers themselves and being a head

strong boy from an early age they ensured he was geared the right way to use that trait.

The case of Tony illustrates the potential of parents to transform the negative experiences associated with a diagnosis into strength and ability. Within the microsystem, Tony's parents developed proximal processes that viewed his stubbornness as a positive attribute instead of a liability. The mesosystem connection, as the parents engaged with the specialists and then served as advocates for their son, also presented a form of navigational capital. This placed the definition of self in the realm of ability, and established a resilience trajectory for Tony that persisted throughout his trajectory.

Simon articulated achievements and discipline influences in his life which provided the pathway toward social mobility and success. He stated:

> *"… failure will only ever happen if I allow it to happen. I found myself in a position where I was being encouraged to do a law degree. My sister is a lawyer, and I said to myself, with my kind of skill sets from an early age I have always been in the arts. I've always been able to read and write and argue quite comprehensively."* (Simon)

It was important to recognise strengths for himself, as these were critical to self-confidence and how they may be perceived by others.

The participants reflected on how teachers could benefit in taking an asset-based approach instead of the deficit approach. The participants did state they were empowered by their parents who as far as they were concerned knew them very well. Therefore, their parents were the experts.

As Daniel stated, *"if I don't see me in the school, how can I aspire? I was lucky because my parents kept telling me, talking to me and believing in me."* The absence of Black male teachers can result in a lack of aspirational figures for Black male students, potentially impacting their academic motivation and success. The presence of Black males teachers provides not only role models but also cultural understanding, mentorship, and higher expectations, all of which are crucial for fostering the aspirations and achievements of Black men. Ensuring diversity in the teaching workforce is essential for creating an inclusive and motivating educational environment for all students (Maylor et al, 2006).

Simon outlined the cumulative influence of family members for his success. His story showed resilience and strength,

> *"I was in an environment where educational attainment was important."* (Simon)

Charlie described his influences as being valued and protected.

> *"I had a grandparent, grandma who lived with me…she valued and protected me.* (Charlie)

Anslem shared a similar experience. He was the first son of his parents. His parents were highly educated but did not understand the British system. However they understood parenting as he stated. He described his influence as follows:

> *"I also had uncles who were in good careers and mainly engineering career."* (Anslem)

The extended family represents a mesosystem that links the family and the extended community and work, and Rhamie (2012) found that the inclusion of extended family members in occupational roles served as models for career aspirations for Black families. Anslem relayed the presence of uncles who were engineers and this presence created a model of a possible career. This extension served as a counter-narrative to the negative notion that Black men were unable to succeed in this way, and thus this extended community served to present images of counter-narratives. Positive images of family members were present throughout their schooling, and their presence relayed the notion that success was expected, it was the norm, and it was possible.

The narratives presented reveal a highly sophisticated interplay between individual dispositions and external influences that together shape Black male educational success.

Through the Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens, these narratives function as powerful success stories that call into question deficit perspectives on Black male achievement (Gillborn, 2008).

Black men in this study consistently demonstrated what we can conceptualise as strategic navigation—an ability to take potentially limiting educational environments and turn them into self-actualising opportunities. This is what Yosso (2005) calls navigational capital. What these young men have in abundance is an ability to navigate through educational institutions that were not designed for their success. I now move on to the value of friends.

4.3.2.2 Friends

Charlie, Peter, Sean and Simon expressed the value of developing close knit ties with fellow Black students who had similar principles and values. These participants set up a group and gave it a name. This bolstered confidence in their own inherent abilities. It also reminded each of them of their high achievement orientation and hard work. They did this through navigating around the odds that made it impossible or difficult to succeed. The group set up is also to encourage the younger ones. It is now a charity organisation.

Each of them spoke about their charity organisation and gave their own personal reasons why they were passionate about this. Charlie recognised the barriers he had to navigate and wanted to support what he found lacking. He said:

> "the younger ones need to be informed about where they can get specific supports. This is unlikely to be in school." (Charlie)

Simon was keen to embody what Yosso (2005) described as social form of intergenerational knowledge transfer. He said:

> "I want to connect the next generation, the younger ones, with successful role models who are able to advice on strategies for success". Yosso describes this as "networks of people and community resources" (p.12, 2005) aspect of social capital.

The friendships, mentoring, and networking, therefore, serve as exosystem and mesosystem level factors that connect systems to expand opportunities. These men accessed what Yosso (2005) calls social capital; in other words, these men used networks to open doors. Callendar's (2018; 2020) research shows that successful Black men gain from networks of peers that support a sense of both attainment and identity. These men knew that support is required at particular

developmental stages and built counter-spaces in which the attainment of Black men is not only normal but expected, unlike in mainstream education spaces where the attainment of Black men continues to be viewed as exceptional.

Peter spoke passionately about resource redistribution which was similar with Simon. This is what Joseph-Salisbury (2019) describes as social capital mobilisation. Peter said:

"I want to see existing resources channelled towards community advancement" (Peter)

He also stated that the charity organisation was to create and extend networks to facilitate upward mobility for the younger generation. This is defined by Yosso (2015) as social capital.

4.3.2.3 Role models

Regarding their chosen careers, all the participants stated that role models were an important factor in their journey.

Sean was adamant and spoke with conviction about one of his teachers who motivated him and enabled his success. He saw her as a role model and could go to her for any reason and her advice guided him.

> *"To give you perspective, she was a Black teacher. She was not like other teachers as far as I was concerned those other teachers questions were based off the textbook. For example, she would always teach the specification and inspire us and motivate us through life stories that are relevant within her lessons…it was...unique. It was somewhat a life lesson in terms of, working hard, believing in yourself, aiming higher or um, not taking issues or matters as a joke and trying to see the bigger picture…some of my classmates moaned but I concluded that they were not good listeners".* (Sean)
>
> To his classmates she may have waffled, but Sean always knew there was value in what she said. He suggested he was always the type of person who listened carefully to make meaning, especially from educators. Her life lessons – he called it sense and that really did help him. This teacher connected academic achievement to her personal

history and philosophy of life, Sean saw that he could be a good student without disowning his own identity, the definition of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). At the level of the macrosystem, this teacher actively combatted the deficit theories about Black people. At the level of the mesosystem, Sean could be his whole self in her classroom. Rhamie's (2012) research informs us on this kind of interaction which is crucial: it causes students to reevaluate how they see themselves as learners and what is possible for them to achieve.

As Sean eloquently put it,

"Role models are very important and not any role model. I think role models that look like you are important because it makes it much more real. It also makes it much more credible. So, I definitely think role models play a significant part because they guide you and you invariably follow the footsteps. It makes achieving stuff attainable."

Role models play a crucial role in the development and success of Black boys and young men (Leader et al 2009; Brownhill, 2014). Seeing professionals who look like them and have achieved success in their chosen fields can be highly motivating and inspiring. Positive role models provide visible examples of what is possible and can help Black boys in education envision their own potential and future possibilities.

By showcasing successful Black professionals, these role models can break down stereotypes, challenge negative perceptions, and instil a sense of pride and self-belief. They can also offer guidance and mentorship, sharing their experiences and insights to help Black boys navigate their educational and career paths (Leader et al 2009; Brownhill, 2014).

Having diverse role models in all professions is vital for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society, where every individual, regardless of their background, can envision and pursue a fulfilling and successful education journey and career (Leader et al 2009; Brownhill, 2014).

Participants' narratives revealed a complex relationship between teachers', family and self-expectations.

In addition, role models operate at multiple levels of the system. At the microsystem, they offer one-to-one guidance and support. At the mesosystem, they connect the academic to the professional. At the macrosystem, they question dominant representations of those in positions of power. Research by Callendar (2018) highlights how the lack of Black male role models gives children a broader system-level signal about their place in the world. Mirza's (2009) research into intersectionality demonstrates how 'someone who looks like you' can be a particularly effective role model because they evidence that race and gender do not preclude success. This matters at critical junctures of your development because it impacts your educational and career choices.

4.3.3 Stories of expectation

All twelve participants of this narrative inquiry had high expectations in their academic work and unwavering self-expectations. My findings suggest that with high standards and aspirations all participants placed an internal pressure on their performance and behaviour to meet or exceed those expectations.

Factors such as high expectations of those around them served as buffers to aid in their success. The discussion that follows highlights this.

Anslem stated,

"*My school definitely didn't push me in this direction…my parents had very high expectations*."

Anselm often wondered if his teachers' low expectations in some subjects, like French, was compounded by some of his teachers not believing in him. Yosso (2005), argues that teachers were often seen as gatekeepers of power due to their autonomy and control over which students were admitted to an advanced curricula. In Anslem's case, his teacher had low expectations and did not provide support for him to achieve.

Anslem's experience shows the disconnect that can happen between the expectations of the home and school. In this case, there was a broken mesosystem whereby the microsystem of his home in conflict with the microsystem of his school. The Rhamie (2012) study concluded that, in the case where there is an active counternarrative coming from the home, often the higher expectation is the one that wins out. Anslem's parents had adopted some

level of navigational capital, in the sense that they were navigating a system that was not designed for the success of Black males. Callendar (2020) asserts that students who experience lower expectations from teachers are often the targets of racist and sexist bias and stereotypes, which, as far as the macrosystem is concerned, serves to exclude Black students from engaging with high-level coursework. He had motivation to prove his teacher wrong which shows systemic injustice that required him to have to work harder than his White counterparts.

Charlie explained,

"So, during growing up there was gang activity and illegal stuff and stabbings and shooting. So, these are things that aren't foreign to me, and it's easy for one to get caught up with it so that's why mum could only do so much to keep me in line and that's why she got help where she could."

Charlie's mum held high educational expectations, so his expectations were influenced by his mum. His success was a necessity and reflected a particular form of cultural wealth often shown by Black families (Yosso, 2006). These expectations are what Yosso (2006) describes as aspirational capital, or the ability to maintain hopes and dreams despite inequalities. These aspirational messages of academic success resonated clearly with Charlie. It could be argued that in some cases, his academic efficacy was influenced by fear of punishment or fear of disappointing his mother and grandmother.

From the microsystem level of Bronfenbrenner's model, his mother's explicit message of value on education can be seen as a clear example of a proximal process that influenced Charlie's values. What the macrosystem adds to the picture is that the mother's positive messages were communicated directly and frequently, despite her single parent and poor status. Rhamie (2012) found that direct messaging along with active engagement helps combat students' negative stereotyping and perceptions of low academic expectations from school. These early expectations, which were instilled in Charlie, remained stable throughout his education, indicating that parental expectations stemming from love and cultural values can be protective factors against structural barriers.

Simon stated,

"*Um, so although I was raised in a working class background (my dad worked within the diplomatic service), I'd say there was a certain level of education, performance that needed to be met. There was an expectation. There was always the kind of family pressure from within to do well. So, I knew I needed to do well*".

Simon's statement illuminates parental expectations toward education and in his own words it was "*success in education and nothing more*".

The desire to have high expectations was integral to participants' beliefs that success in education is essential for them to progress in life. They all had been told by their parents over and over again that high expectation should never be seen as an academic anomaly.

The power of high expectations went a long way when they heard it. It encouraged them to aspire more and work hard in mastering their skill set.

Simon articulates it well,

"*I was that student that came from a working class background where my parents verbalised high expectations three or four times, every day*."

Simon's parents provided proximal processes in the form of clear, consistent verbal messages that conveyed high expectations. Simon termed this family pressure, yet this pressure came from investment and concern, from a sense of education as a leverage point. They had, according to Yosso's (2005) language, aspirational capital that they passed to their children. As Rhamie (2012) found, the intergenerational transmission of positive perceptions about education predicted persistence and attainment. Simon's parents did not simply send one message about their expectations but several, so that doing well was understood as both expected and possible.

In particular, Uriel, Anslem, Immanuel, and Daniel talked about self-expectations.

Uriel discussed what his mug (artefact) represented for him in terms of success. He stated that the recognition of his voluntary work was a highlight for him as it has always been his desire to help younger people, especially young Black

children. He wanted to be a positive representative, helping the younger generation combat negativity, frustration, peer pressure which can be overwhelming for them. Uriel saw success not just in terms of making a positive impact on the lives of others. Therefore, his voluntary work in this charity organisation aligned with this view of success. In addition, the mug and his public-minded spirit boosted his self-esteem and a sense of purpose.

This participant's self-expectation highlighted an integral piece in his explanation of success which fed into what he did and how he did his volunteering. It also enabled him to seek better for himself by acquiring and honing valuable skills such as leadership, communication and problem-solving skills, teamwork and the organisation where he volunteered. This self-expectation also enabled him to recognise negativity which he ensured he stepped back and considered neutrality.

Uriel's self-expectation served as a benchmark and motivated him to strive for self-improvement and success. His self-expectation enabled him to set expectations for his own performance, behaviour, while at school, and achievements. He also indicated that occasionally his expectations were both empowering and burdensome.

Anslem did not expect anything less from himself because as far as he was concerned that was the minimum expectation because he was surrounded by a supportive and skilled network of family, friends, mentors and colleagues.

Immanuel mentioned his expectations in terms of personal growth which is a fundamental component of success. For him it was about continuous personal development, challenging himself, learning from his own experiences and others and striving to become a better version of himself. He saw success as not only what he was achieving but who he is becoming in the process.

Daniel mentioned his personal aspirations. This was a significant part of defining success for him as he explained. He was quite clear that his success was about realising his own objectives, not anyone else's because it was vital to enable him to find a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment. In addition he gave a clear plan and strategy on how he reached his aspirations. This was by breaking down his goals into smaller, manageable steps. He also mentioned hard work and dedication which included making sacrifices occasionally, overcoming challenges

where you may encounter obstacles or setbacks such as failing an exam. When Daniel failed one of his exams, he realised he needed to be resilient and reflect on what he needed to improve on – being honest with himself.

Earlier I reviewed research about how teacher's perceptions and expectations can motivate a child (Gillborn, 2008; Rollock, 2012). It is clear from my findings Black boys and men know the importance and benefits of education.

Tobias, Martin and Immanuel shared their own experience on self-expectation. Self-expectation was one of the factors that contributed and played a significant role in their success. How they perceived themselves, their abilities and potential greatly influenced their academic performance and beyond. They all believed in their capabilities to succeed by accomplishing tasks, setting higher goals for themselves, working diligently toward those goals, and exhibiting higher levels of motivation and perseverance in their academic endeavours. They all also spoke of the expectations from their family and extended family/community.

According to Tobias,

"I built a radio from scratch…I failed all my subjects when I sat my GCSEs. I went to college and was still bent on doing A levels, so I chose history politics and economics. I failed all three. The irony also was I was a mentor and my mentee passed and I failed. I was still determined because I knew what I wanted for myself. School was tough BUT I wanted to do well. It was my expectation."

This participant's self-expectation correlated with his resilience and persistence. He had many setbacks and could have given up, but he bounced back, overcame those obstacles, and persisted in his efforts to achieve his goals. In addition, as has been identified in my literature review on teacher's expectations, he challenged the negative stereotype that came from his teacher.

Another participant, Martin, explained how he always knew he wanted to do well. He had very high self-expectation or in his own words,

"I expected more from myself in school, out with my friends or even at home because it was what was instilled in me."

Martin further explains that when he knew his parents were going through a divorce the urgency to do exceedingly well became more. In his case although there was a critical incident which was the divorce, but he had always had certain expectation for himself. Martin further explained that despite his mediocre results in his GCSE, it did not stop him.

Immanuel stated he had always known that:

"there were no books that identified factors that support and promote success as far as knew but there was a lot on underachievement which did not help me as I wanted more information on how to do very well in my academic work. There was the need in me for respect, social status, coolness and popularity but I also wanted to do very well. I made a choice, and I chose friends who I could study with but at the same time have a good time with. I did not want to undermine my achievements or even sabotage any success. These friends have stayed with me till today. We influenced each other positively."

He faced a dilemma by experiencing academic success but at the same time wanting to be accepted by his peers. He explained that although there was a slight dilemma, he had his parents whom he looked up to. His parents gave him the confidence to make decisions that perhaps may have been seen as uncool. Isaac pointed out that he never wanted to disappoint his parents, so he strived to do his best. He explained his parents came from nothing except their academics and were able to build something for themselves and his siblings.

His confidence was also gained because his parents were mostly positive. They told him he could attain goals no matter how high they were. This is what Wright et al (2010, p. 64) call "respectability status" which influenced his success orientation.

The participants narratives on influences aligns with the literature in this study. The participants also explained how they managed their academic success to avoid being seen as uncool. However, as they got older, they realised there was no pleasing and began developing a good sense of healthy competition amongst themselves. These participants identified with their group of friends which brought about that hunger to succeed even more.

"I wanted to be successful and I knew I needed to surround myself with good friends who will have a positive influence on me but at the same time I was also thinking of the younger ones and being a role model." (Immanuel)

"I wanted to be able to let them know that and give them the steps of what I did to achieve success. I wanted them to know that as an individual you were enough." (Tony)

The participants alluded to the fact that having good friends helped them navigate their journey in school towards success. This fits existing literature implicating the role of peers which bring about positive relationships that can foster a sense of belonging and acceptance. This can have an impact on their academic achievement because they regularly motivate themselves to excel academically (Wright et al 2010).

For all the participants, setting aspirational benchmarks with their friends who were classmates, motivated them to do well.

I will now present and discuss findings about the challenges some participants had to navigate to succeed.

4.3.4 Stories of critical incidents: challenges

In this section, I report the findings of Peter, Tony, Martin and Anslem's & Uriel talk about 'something that occurred' which I later termed, 'critical incidences' (Nnene, 2023) in their lives. Each of these participants narrated a particular time in their life.

As mentioned earlier, Peter's object was a photo of himself and his friends who grew up together. His friendship group reminds him of the challenges they went through with the police, gang culture, problems in school, college and university. Some of Peter's friends had committed an offence but on the day it occurred, he was not with these group of boys. However, the police did not believe him and frustrated him by making sure he did not begin university in the first week because they demanded more information from him. In his opinion the police wanted to frustrate him. The university was informed of the case, and they refused his entry. He had to fight his case and succeeded. He was allowed on his course but with very stringent conditions. Suffice to say he had no friends in his first year. His routine was wake up, lectures, meal, library, meal, library and

back to his accommodation. He did excellently well in his first year and found joy in his education. He also found that his hard work had brought great achievement. Peter had a shift in his mindset to improve, and these challenges were a crucial path to his success.

"On the summer going up to university something big happened in my life, on my road, someone got murdered and I wasn't involved…but I remember coming back from holiday, I got arrested at the airport…then I was on bail for probably a year. I had to sign in three times a week at the police station…had to register in my university's town police station. The police informed the university they kicked me out in the first week. So, I missed my fresher's week and that completely changed my life…" (Peter)

The quote above is indicative of his actions which were directly connected to his success. This critical incident yielded positive results which he reaped when he began engaging in constructive activities. This changed his perception of reality. It shocked him and changed his trajectory. He began asking himself if this was what he may go through for the rest of his life. The fear of jail made Peter realise he had to change.

He also observed his friends from outside (as a free man) and it greatly influenced him. This incident was awful, but Peter also saw this as a motivation. Without this, it was doubtful if he would have been as successful as he became in university and beyond. After this meeting with the police it looked like he was saying to himself *"I am going to be good, do good and prove myself in university".*

He added

> *"And I remember moving into my accommodation on campus. I didn't talk to anyone…it was just awkward… I made my first timetable. I was always in the library because I was so bored…and with my first essay, I got a first. I was like, wow. Is it this easy?."*

This was a critical moment for him which brought about a change in his attitude to succeed. It instilled a sense of determination to do exceedingly well. This critical moment was used as fuel for his ambitions. This aligns with

Yosso's (2005) aspirational capital and how aspirational attitudes become a driver towards success (Warmington, 2014).

This critical incident of being arrested and dismissed from the university for Peter also served as a chronosystem transition that brought together the macrosystem element of racism and microsystem element of university education to facilitate the transformative development of the individual. In order to respond to the incident, Peter employed what Yosso (2005) called 'navigational capital': the cognitive and social ability to navigate through such hostile systems. Peter challenged the decision of the university and constructed the meaning of the incident as an opportunity for distinction through achievement. As indicated by the studies of Callendar (2020) and Mirza (2009) , Peter did not embody the criminalising discourse; rather, he drew upon aspirational capital. He was also grounded by the mesosystem element of his peer group. Renn (2023) also demonstrates that when ecosystem is seen through a critical lens we can see how racist aspects of the macrosystem (his arrest and the university admission policies) combine with the chronosystem (a critical moment in the developmental trajectory) to limit or facilitate success.

Tony continuously challenged himself in pursuit of achieving success as a teacher and rugby player. His description of this:

> *"The sports I played is symbolic of the network of friends and colleagues and employees that it gave me over the last fifteen years of my life, and it was for a long time the way that I had determined success…elite sport…put me in a better position…to get to where I am".*

Rugby is a competitive sport but when Tony was injured this critical incident made him use his skill in competitive sport to strive for academic excellence by taking ownership of his learning and preparing for future academic and professional challenges. Competition was crucial but it was combined with a specific critical incident and the challenge that presented.

Thus, Tony's injury (critical incident) served as a catalyst for rechannelling his competitiveness in academic achievement rather than rejecting achievement. According to Bronfenbrenner's model, the injury threatened his ecosystem, however, it presented microsystem opportunities. As Tony demonstrated what

Yosso (2005) calls navigational capital, he rejected lowered expectations and channeled his abilities elsewhere. His parents' occupations as teachers and values they instilled in him served as a mesosystem that made the idea of rechanneling his energy academically possible. The chronosystem suggests that the skills he developed while playing rugby (e.g., discipline, strategy, competition) were transferable to his academic achievement. This finding has implications for education systems in the ways in which they might recognise and develop the talents and abilities boys and men develop in non-academic settings.

The themes identified in this story resonate with prior research, particularly competition which should be a facet domain – smaller components within an individual's ability or motivation that can drive them to succeed (Essien, 2017). Essien argues that a competitive mindset and culture can be leveraged as an asset to bolster one's engagement and focus while in school. Kilduff (2014) argued that competition has a motivational effect but it was also crucial that education is framed as relevant beyond school (Albrecht & Karabenick, 2017).

Participants demonstrated that critical incidents that are well managed, that foster healthy outcomes such as teamwork and learning can bring about success and achievement. This was Martin's story when he defined success as *"striving to be the best version of yourself while navigating challenges and achieving a sense of contentment."* In Martin's case his parents' divorce, a critical period, was undoubtedly challenging for him however, he found refuge in his academic achievements. He saw school as a consistent and structured environment which provided stability. Therefore, excelling in school was his pathway to success.

Furthermore, the critical incident of Martin's parents getting divorced could have potentially destabilised his path, but rather, as he reports, it strengthened his resolve. In the language of Bronfenbrenner's model, the divorce can be said to have occurred at the level of the chronosystem and affected both the family structure and the family's economy. Martin, however, was able to rearticulate the meaning of school in relation to this event as a 'place to go, a steady place' when his family was undergoing upheaval. In this way, his re-articulation of the meaning of school can be said to have evidenced his possession of navigational capital. Warmington (2014) suggests that critical incidents can function as a

driver for Black students' ongoing educational attainment. School, for Martin, was the steady place that his family could not provide, at that moment, and Martin threw himself wholeheartedly into his attainment there.

His parents' knowledge of the existence of racism within society, and in particular that 'the education system would always see him as being a Black boy first' did not deter Martin's attainment but rather hardened his resolve. In terms of the chronosystem, it can be said that the socialisation by his parents into a knowledge of racism (evidencing the protective power of parents), when allied to his attainment, was the strategy that Martin adopted to deal with the crisis.

Uriel had challenges which brought about success. When for years he had not gained the mug, he saw this as an opportunity for reflecting, approaching his situation with a learning orientation and resilience. His critical incidence was not achieving the mug which made him more determined in life. Eventually he was awarded the mug years later. This to him was success.

Rather than becoming disillusioned with his volunteer work, Uriel said he learned to cope with the missed opportunities to be recognised and instead continued to volunteer, thus developing his resilience and learning attitude. For Uriel, the mug became a key moment because it came after years of unacknowledged service. I believe his perseverance explains Yosso's (2005) notions of aspirational and resistant capital where Uriel persisted in his desire to serve his community and believed that the recognition was something he deserved to achieve. The connection between the mesosystem is apparent here, as his volunteer group did ultimately recognise his efforts and grant him the recognition he so deeply desired. Uriel's story defies the notion of instant gratification; he continued in his efforts and believed they were worth it even if the desired outcome took a very long time to achieve. The meaning of success for Uriel shifted to include the process as well as the outcome.

Anslem's critical incident was based on life circumstances. Anslem revealed:

> *"my Dad passed away when I was 18 which made me grow up really quickly actually."*

Anslem lost his father as he was finishing sixth form. The unspoken expectation that had been ingrained in him was that he would attend university. It was the

expected norm. Losing his father at that age was a huge change. He had to grow up quickly as he had two other brothers who looked up to him. Warmington (2014) addresses the fact that key experiences can serve as the motivating factor to succeed.

Critical incidents are conceptualised as turning points in their lives. These critical incidents are impactful. Critical incidents and challenges can bring about success. These are ah-ha moments that can trigger activation of aspirational and navigational capital among Black boys and men (Yosso, 2005). In addition, Sewell (2009) argues that life events can serve as powerful catalysts for change among Black boys and men.

The desire to achieve educational success, to carve out a career path and achieve social mobility was a common theme emanating from the Black men's narratives. The combinations of their dispositions, the influences of those around them, their own high expectations combined with critical incidents enabled them to achieve.

When we discuss support systems put in place for Black boys it indicates a complicated interplay between formal policies and informal networks. Tomlinson (2019) and Gillborn (2015) have argued that our policies tend to be inconsistent and does not do enough to address underlying systemic concerns. In their stories, my participants mentioned school-based support which they said was rare, community-based systems (supplementary schools, religious institutions, mentoring programs), and family structures (parental guidance and emotional support). This is consistent with Rollock's (2007) findings that teacher expectations matter, as well as Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural riches. When comparing the literature with my participant accounts, the finding that emerged was that the most impactful supports were typically informal, relationship-based, and culturally responsive, rather than the formal initiatives emphasised in policy literature. An effective support systems should hold high expectations while providing practical help, affirmed cultural identity, attending to whole-person development, and feature sustained relationships (Nnene,2025).

This analysis indicates that educational institutions might better aid Black boys by bringing in elements of community and family approaches to better serve them.

I have recounted and analysed the participants' narratives regarding the factors contributing to their success which enabled them to thrive, and systems put in place. It is hoped the findings derived from this can help ensure that all Black male students are encouraged to engage intellectually and have the opportunity to thrive academically and professionally. The findings highlight the importance of understanding and addressing the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Black men in education through the lens of CRT, and on Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth (2005). It also builds on Gillborn's application of CRT to UK education (2008, 2015), and on Warmington's examination of institutional responses (2020).

I now move on to the intersectionality experiences of Black boys and men in education primarily focusing on ethnicity, gender and class (EGC) which addresses my fourth research question. Here their narratives reveal experiences of intersectionality in education. In addressing this I am able to have a better understanding of how they navigated while pursuing their education.

4.4 EXPERIENCES OF INTERSECTIONALITY IN EDUCATION - ETHNICITY, GENDER AND CLASS

In this section I address the fourth RQ: How did Black boys/men navigate the intersectionality of 'race'/ethnicity, gender and class in the education system?

Intersectionality has already been explained within the 5 tenets in chapter 2 section 2.11 of this study.

My participants weaved intersectionality into their narratives by emphasising the fact that they were young men, Black and predominantly working class background. I interpreted this as intersectionality. They highlighted the importance of intersectionality which show the persisting inequalities based on ethnicity, gender and class (EGC). The research on EGC shows that there is still a problem in this area, and it may take more research to understand the root cause (Crenshaw, 1991).

Anslem's narrative made it clear that one problem facing Black men was intersectionality and the lack of understanding of its impact. He reflected on one of his challenges, he said,

> *"when I was in school and university it was difficult being many times the only Black face. I did not want to come across aggressive, so I chose when to participate in lessons…this slow response occasionally was seen as one who was not bright. This was a hard path to walk because the teacher would fail you for not participating…if you showed emotion you were also seen as weak and if you did not show this emotion you would be seen as a threat…I learnt never to respond straightaway…So you cannot win!".* (Anslem)

Anslem's story tells us what happens when systems are not aware of the concept of intersectionality, the interaction of different systems of power and privilege. In the realm of Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem, Anslem faced racism (the stereotype of the angry black man), gender (the expectation to be an active male participant), and class. His classroom was a performance arena where he gauged his every move, his every timing and his every emotion, so he wouldn't fulfil the stereotypes, a sign of cognitive labour that constitutes navigational capital, but is detrimental to the mind. As Mirza (2009) found in her study, black students have learned to steer a hostile, pathologising educational environment by developing a range of advanced strategies. His muted response was not a lack of intellect, but rather a tactical way to counteract the racist discourse. Black students don't have to navigate in classrooms when their teachers understand intersectionality. The fact that Anslem was able to achieve what he needed despite these obstacles brings us to this thought-provoking question: should students who achieve within an oppressive system be praised for their resilience and successes, or should we be appalled that the system has failed them?

Furthermore, the data benchmarks that are set by government and applied by institutions and academics have been shown to reflect inequalities in educational or labour market opportunities, bringing about a Black disadvantage and white advantage (Gillborn et al., 2017; Wint et al., 2022).Anselm also made it quite clear that he was *"well grounded by my parents"*. He explained that through his

parents he had a sense of stability and security and was equipped to navigate the challenges and opportunities that came his way.

Tobias and Charlie confirmed the impact intersectional inequalities may have had on them. When they were young Black boys, they were aware of the labelling and stereotyping which they believed were the experiential realities in education. As Tobias explained he was only interested in doing well.

> *"I also had to take all of intersectionality out. I had to focus on passing my exams in the short term. I didn't want to think of any distractions (intersectionality), I was aware of intersectionality and the difficulties of being Black, a male and even if I came from a middle class background I would still be seen as poor".* (Tobias)

Tobias's choice to take the intersectionality out of his life and instead concentrate on academic outcomes is a high-level coping mechanism for navigating spaces not created with his various identities in mind. Using Bronfenbrenner's model, the macrosystem generated obstacles for Tobias based on his intersecting identity positions of race, gender, and class. Tobias's choice to concentrate on academic outcomes illustrates Yosso's (2005) concept of navigational capital: managing energy to obtain immediate success. However, it also speaks to the psychological cost of compartmentalising his thinking in order to remain engaged and motivated in a system he knows to be unjust. My study also demonstrates that Black males have to decide whether they will embrace knowledge of an unjust world or whether they will choose to be optimistic in order to achieve in it.

Tobias's story gives us an example of intersectionality as a lived experience that guides daily decisions and investments of emotional labour, not simply an academic theory. His ability to recognise his teachers low expectations is evidence that recognition of the obstacles he faced mobilised rather than immobilised his resolve.

Charlie knew that *"being Black and male alone could put you in a disadvantaged position in terms of not getting away with certain things like a white or Asian guy*". He explained he knew the teachers would berate, punish or criticise him as a Black boy which was one of the reasons he *"kept his head down"*. Charlie had to self-regulate and often remain hyper aware of how Black boys in school, were

often seen as threatening which made him suppress expression to avoid any further scrutiny. In terms of social class, Charlie explained:

> *"I would say it was same in the sense I was seen as poor so treated like I did not have anything, and my parents did not understand the school system however what they* [teachers] *did not realise was that I always had someone at home with me keeping an eye on me and asking questions"*. (Charlie)

This shows the importance of recognising that participants experienced various kinds of disadvantages and discrimination which intersected. In order to improve students' experiences focus should be on multiple identities not just a singular. This is why Gilborn (2015) argues that unless there is an intersectionality approach in educational policy and research, systemic inequalities will not be fully understood through single-axis frameworks.

Simon and Peter's narratives were similar. Both men revealed the effects of the challenges they faced while in education. Peter stated intersectionality was *"deep. I knew I was at a disadvantage. Those three things (ethnicity, gender and class) were individually a disadvantage and together it was hard each step of the way, but you navigate".*

The words of Peter, 'it was intersectionality, it was deep. It was hard but you just get on with your lessons', illustrate the contradiction of living through multiple layers of disadvantage. At the level of the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Peter experienced racism in policing and higher education. The intersection of racism, sexism and classism meant that Peter was positioned as a young, Black, working-class male, and, therefore, was subject to racist and classist discourses. Mirza (2009) found that it is these intersecting discourses that influence the way in which individuals are responded to by institutions in a manner that cannot be reduced in single-axis analyses.

Peter's suggestion that 'it would have been nice to have support that was targeted' supports the argument presented by Callendar (2018) that in order to address the ways in which individuals experience intersecting inequalities, it is important that these systems undertake an intersectional analysis. Peter's account highlights how being isolated can exacerbate both difficulties and agency. It poses the question as to whether individuals should find ways to climb

over their intersecting inequalities or whether these systems should be adjusted to remove them?

A possible solution is to implement teaching strategies that are culturally responsive (Hoytt, 2022; Samuels, 2018). The English education system needs to be culturally responsive, recognise the importance of creating classrooms that value diversity, promote equity and supports the academic success for all students.

Magnus provided an interesting juxtaposition between two experiences one with the whites and the other with the Blacks. His racial identity outweighed his class similarities because the exclusion from his white classmates was not just on class status but also on shared cultural practices and interests which reflects a form of cultural capital. On the other hand, with his Black peers there was a shared sense of solidarity based on racial identity. This underscores the importance of finding communities that accept and affirm who you are, beyond the constraints of societal expectations and stereotypes. This also created a context where one could understand the sense of unfairness, labelling and low expectation in how Black men had to navigate to enable others to engage with them. According to Magnus,

> *"I believe everyone should be someone and I don't know what white people experience, but I feel like they have more freedom to be whoever they want to be. Whereas as a Black person you're a Black person, you are expected to act a certain way and be a certain way and dress a certain way. And unfortunately, part of those expectations, doesn't include being successful in any way.".* (Magnus)

When Magnus comments that white students have more liberty to be who they are while Black students are expected to conform to a particular set of behaviours and attitudes, we see his experience of macrosystem intersectionality. According to Bronfenbrenner, the restricted nature of Magnus' liberty is an ecological fact due to the systemic issues of racism and stereotypical images of Black masculinity. Mirza (2009) writes that Black men enter social spaces with an acute awareness of how their race and gender influence how they are perceived and treated by others. In this way, the macrosystem in which Magnus established his identity included dominant

representations of Black masculinity that presented Black men as dangerous or inapt for leadership positions, representations that were not associated with white male colleagues. In this way, Magnus bore an additional burden of intellectual and emotional attention to deal with stereotypes, a burden that his white counterparts did not accept. Although it was within a systemic context of constraint, Magnus held on to an ideal of excellence and experienced liberty as agency and choice, a way of resisting the dictates of stereotypical representations. Sean, Tony, Immanuel and Uriel explained they were very much aware of the fact that there were three things - ethnicity, gender and class - they were up against. In addition, they spoke on why they had to navigate through out their education journey to avoid problems with teachers or friends because they knew the impact it could have on them and like Immanuel said, *"I got the memo"*. In his narrative he explained that because he had observed *"things in his school"* he knew what he was up against, therefore he had to strive to be the best. He said,

> *"I got the memo…unfortunately, you have to try and be great. You have to be great, or you have to be, you can't be mediocre… I think you could navigate with those things is by excellence and just doing your best…"*

Immanuel's narrative supports Tony's words.

"I navigated through what I would call social life support… there is power in numbers but mine were likeminded classmates". (Immanuel)

Immanuel was aware that his social life support provided the academic backing he needed to navigate what he called "complexities" in his own education journey as it helped him build resilience, cultivate a strong sense of identity and purpose and achieve success (Carter, 2007).

Uriel was unapologetically a Black male. He explained, *"I was taught by my parents never to be apologetic for whom I am… I had to believe I was there to achieve"*.

Although Immanuel acknowledged school was tough, he explained that intersectionality was having *"my friends who looked like me, talked like me and had similar values"*. He explained that this was his own coping mechanism. Being a young African boy in a white educational space opposing assumptions

about his academic capability, performance and behaviour. Therefore with these friends he found camaraderie and perhaps resilience.

In addition, Immanuel's language of, "I got the memo," suggests he understands intersectional obstacles at the macrosystem level and is attempting to overcome them. Instead of internalising obstacles as permanent or insurmountable, Immanuel internalises academic excellence as a strategy for overcoming obstacles. Positive support from his peer group supplies important microsystem resources for facilitating academic achievement in the face of obstacles at the macrosystem level. Intersectionality clearly had an impact on these Black men, so it was crucial they found their community because they found challenges throughout education. None of them wanted to be labelled as troublemakers so they became metaphorically speaking, chess players in school (Nnene, 2024) that navigated education and life strategically.

Martin gave very little attention to how his teachers treated him. His narrative suggested that he was very much aware of these three intersecting factors of being Black, male and from a particular social class – because his parents had always reminded him that the education system would always see him as being a Black boy first. This crystallised his hardworking ethics and enabled him to strive for the best,

> *"Being Black, a male and my parents going through a divorce put me in a difficult place financially and navigating these three things was ensuring I was the best in school and I was"*. (Martin)

These participants refused to capitulate to the perils that challenged them and believed that success in their academic experience would be through their own substantial hard work and resilience which eventually pushed back against stereotypes put against them.

The literature review in chapter 2, 2.7, shows that teacher expectation is significant in education. Research has shown that motivation plays a crucial role in Black men education and if aspirations and motivation do not coincide with teachers expectations and perceptions, achievements may decline (Gilborn et al, 2012). Motivating Black men is crucial because when they succeed, others may emulate their success.

Challenges in education for Black men are multifaceted such as disproportionate exclusion rates, stereotyping and bias, the lack of male teachers and role models in education, harsher discipline, achievement gaps and socioeconomic factors. Although it is well researched that they can have an impact in their academic success, these challenges can also sometimes become the factors that enable them to succeed as the participants in this study show. These factors are highlighted as isolated instances of strength and asset based approaches which I would call emerging positive practices which are not widespread or deeply integrated into mainstream educational systems.

My final section looks beyond education to address the overarching research question: How did young successful Black men navigate challenges to achieve success? I was curious to identify how my participants' lived educational experiences has had an impact in not just their educational journey but also their professional careers and how their story on this particular issue will have an influence.

4.5 SUCCESS EMPHASISING EDUCATION, RESILIENCE AND DETERMINATION.

The overarching research question asked: How did young successful Black men navigate challenges to achieve success? The participants were Black men working in high-status occupations — teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and bankers. These participants defined professional success differently from educational success. Focussing here on professional success gives us the chance to see how these men navigated to get to their present position. Understanding strategies that have been used by them is educative. It is also crucial to understand how their individual choices and motivation accounted for their professional success.

These narratives contained recurring themes: the men stressed individual choices which were influenced by self-expectations, which then serves as a significant source of personal motivation to succeed. The participants also revealed ways they were exposed to and sought important contacts, connections, and opportunities to access a larger social network that provided them success in the mainstream of professional life.

Most of my respondents described largely amicable relationships established with their white male co-workers by easily capitalising on culturally masculinised interests and activities to forge a bond with them.

The participants touched on how they navigated predominantly white work settings. I found that their relationships in their workplaces were informed by gender and race in interesting ways.

The success narratives show they had many twists and turns and trying to achieve professional success is not easy. I was keen to know how they became accomplished.

Anslem, an engineer offered a case in point. When asked about his success, he replied,

"For me, I seek out the people of influence (networking). And I tell them what I want to achieve or what I can offer. It is about determination and hard work. I have to say I got these two from my parents instilling in me that education was paramount. (Anslem).

That was the beginning of his success.

Participants described their success in terms of their job description or how they viewed themselves. For instance, Charlie offered his own perspective on success. He shared:

"I would say my education background, and my soft skills…". (Charlie).

He spoke about his experience in university which helped his professional success. His engagement in university especially during writing his dissertation enabled him to understand how to navigate the world of work.

Peter admitted that it was *"a lot of self-motivation"*. (Peter). He shared that with self-motivation he was able to break his goals into manageable tasks (CPD) and as he maintained in his story, he continued to stay disciplined in all his efforts and celebrate small victories along the way to maintain momentum. This was his own sense of professional success and identity.

Simon described his success as a series of steps,

"I guess in the first instance not everyone that go through the legal training contract is able to obtain an associateship. That would be the starting point of professional success for me - being able to qualify and find a firm to work at (specific goals). Being able to use my professional position as a lawyer and experiences to assist those to get integration, is something that is quite important to me. It's also another thing to pick up a publication and see that your name is there, is a reality check that you were a part of this". (Simon)

Magnus stated that it was by his actions people would judge him. He said:

"*And really the only way to truly show professional success and define it is knowing and doing something because at this age and stage in my career you're judged by your actions. Cause to know and to not do is really to not know. So, you can acquire as much knowledge as you want, but it's really what you do with that knowledge, what you are today that becomes a summation of all your actions."* (Magnus).

Reflecting on his actions regularly enabled Magnus to ask pertinent questions. Magnus also honed in on feedback from trusted individuals as he explained this was invaluable. This is because it provides insights, identifies blind spots, and

offer constructive criticism to help him grow because to know and to not do is really to not know (Sewell, 2009). Feedback in education is crucial as it clarifies expectations of the teachers and encourage reflection.

In education it is expected that teachers give students feedback because it is important for students' growth and development. Students are also able to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. It is also important to enable the students strive for excellence and reach their potential. In addition, it enables them to take responsibility for their actions which brings about success. For teachers like me I know to achieve these for our students warrants investment in professional development, guidance within our schools, development of effective strategies. This is success in education because when teachers have high morale and expectations it influences achievement among students (Castaneda and Varela, 2022).

Sean described his success as being able to *"give back to his community".* He stated that this contributed to his success because it enhanced his reputation as a responsible and engaged man, and he was able to build valuable networks and relationships. He also stated that giving back to the community improved his leadership and communication skills which are crucial for his career advancement.

Being happy in one's profession was another factor raised by a participant. He explained this by stating that he had never regretted a day at work.

"I've never regretted a single day working at the school and I've never had a day where I've come home and wish I didn't work there (happiness and fulfilment). This to me is professional success". (Tony)

The title, Associate Assistant Principal, was not important to him neither was it solely about the salary because as far as this participant was concerned it did not guarantee happiness in his job. It could also be argued that his chosen career was a personal journey that involved aligning his values, interests, resilience and passions with his career path. The determination that pushed him to take on new challenges and continue growing. Tony's resilience in his education journey played a crucial role here as he had overcome significant obstacles and applied this in his professional career. A significant form of professional success is when joy and satisfaction are derived from one's job.

He continued by stating, *"happiness, stability and progress in my job gave me the motivation for my students".* These three concepts relate to optimal levels of teachers functioning. Tony derived satisfaction from knowing he was making a meaningful impact on the lives of his students. He saw his students not only learn but grow,and succeed academically and personally which was extremely rewarding for him. It can be compared to a parent witnessing their child succeed in their academic life and they move on to achieving greater heights in their career. That parent would be very happy because they can see the hard work they have put in, in bringing up that child. It is completely rewarding and satisfying.

Uriel defined success as *"not only personal achievement but also working hard to inspire others to pursue their own goals…empower the community"*. This aligns with his definition of what success meant to him.

Tobias saw his success as no regrets/being happy and having a job that links with their knowledge.

Martin saw his as being able to influence decisions and advocate for diversity and inclusion. He was also able to demonstrate in his job that it was possible to achieve success with the right mindset. He also showed that while education provided the foundation, overcoming challenges and pursuing one's goal needed resilience and determination.

Immanuel tied his success to the idea of leaving a legacy through hard work. This aligns well with what he has built so far. He is not only a teacher but has also been able to go into different organisations and industry to teach young students his subject area. This is having a lasting impact beyond his community. Daniel posits that success was breaking through glass ceilings that occasionally may hinder one's progression (Wingfield, 2010).

4.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I presented and discussed the findings by maintaining the integrity of narrative inquiry respecting my participants through them telling their own stories.

This chapter provided an overview of the findings derived from the research questions crafted for this study. The findings are a) multifaceted definition of success which included legacy building, making community impact, achievement goals through hard work. b) their artefacts showed success as holistic. There were four main narratives themes that emerged namely, dispositions, influences (and motivation), critical incidents and expectations. c) navigating the intersectionality challenges of ethnicity, gender and class through developing their own strategies such as strategic classroom participation, maintaining excellence to debunk stereotype narratives, building their network and having a strong positive community around them. d) their support systems were not through the formal educational systems but rather informal, family focused, and culturally responsive. Their families and friendship network were crucial in reinforcing positive values and principles. e) through These complex interplay of personal agency and more they also found professional success.

This chapter synthesises the key themes and patterns that emerged from the data, offering valuable perspectives on my participants' lived educational journeys of success.

Each research question was carefully developed in alignment with the theoretical framework, aiming to illuminate the journey of success experienced by the participants.

By examining these findings, we can glean insights into the multifaceted nature of success and the complex interplay of individual attributes, societal influences, and environmental factors.

I now proceed in the final chapter to draw conclusions.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Academic success and beyond for Black men is achievable. It should not be seen as an exception, it should be the norm and expectation.

This study sought to examine the success stories of Black men. It provided valuable perspectives on their lived educational journeys of success. The absence of an asset-based approach perpetuates a narrow understanding of Black men in education, reinforcing negative stereotypes and overlooking their success stories.

The dominant deficit narratives in academic literature and educational practices predominantly focus on the challenges and failures of Black male students, highlighting underachievement. This perpetuates a deficit-based perspective. There is a significant lack of research and discourse that highlights the achievements, resilience, and strengths of Black male students. I have also demonstrated the structural and institutional barriers that continue to impede the educational success of Black men, often overshadowing their potential and accomplishments. I will now give a summary overview of the answers to my research questions.

5.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

RQ1 – How do BM describe their success?

The research revealed that success for Black men is multifaceted and extends beyond traditional academic metrics. In other words, they do not always correlate with standardised measures of academic achievement or attainment. There were different descriptions of success such as achieving specific goals through hard work, building a lasting legacy and finding true happiness and fulfilment. It also encompasses continuous learning and personal development, maintaining health and wellbeing, and making a positive impact on other's or one community. In addition attaining financial stability and wealth to support a life of purpose, balance and meaning.

RQ2 – What did Black men need to thrive when they were boys in the English education system. These are: disposition, influences, critical incidents and expectations.

Dispositions which were their inherent qualities such as resilience, determination and self-control.

Influences of parents who were positively consistent, asked questions, gave advice, friends who had similar values and principles which bolstered confidence, role models who provided visual example of possibilities helping Black men to envision their own future.

Expectation is interpreted as a complex relationship between teacher, family and self-expectations. All of these are crucial for success as they shape self-belief, a strong work ethics which motivates high achievement, parental expectations instil a sense of confidence which counteract external prejudices and discriminations. Teachers who have high expectations communicate belief in students' abilities, so they feel valued and believe they are capable of achieving academic excellence.

Critical Incidents or Challenges brought about shock, a perception of reality and change in their trajectory which brought about the pursuit of achieving success.

RQ3 – What systems were or are put in place specifically to underpin the needs of Black boys in the English education system.

There are gaps in the systems because the implementation of policies is inconsistent and there is a lack of funding. Many of these systems are still evolving such as Bridge programmes like skill building in schools, culturally responsive teaching through teacher training and incorporating relevant pedagogy that connect better with Black boys in school. For example, The Black Curriculum which provide training for teachers incorporating Black history and culture into lessons across various subjects.

RQ4 – How did Black boys and men navigate the intersectionality of race, gender and class in the English education system?

My findings have discovered that Black men experienced the complex interplay of EGC throughout their lived educational experiences creating distinct barriers

that read specific navigation strategies which was used to prevent reinforcing stereotypes. It was also noted that many teachers lacked proper training in understanding intersectionality to appreciate the support for them. Therefore my participants developed coping mechanisms such as support from family, navigating educational spaces which is what I term chess playing. My findings suggest embedding culturally reactive educational practices, could aid in addressing intersectional challenges.

The voices of my participants expressed intersectionality, lived the experiences and provided valuable insights. It will take more research to understand the root cause of intersectionality. I now move on to my contribution to knowledge.

Overarching research questions

My overarching findings show that successful Black men strategically navigated challenges through leveraging education, maintaining resilient, contributing to community and clarity of purpose. Their success was underpinned by intelligence and determination and strategic mindsets instilled in them at a young age. This was predominantly supported by informal culturally relevant systems not educational formal supports which emphasise the importance of viewing success from an asset-based lens.

5.3 MY CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This research makes several significant contributions to research in the field of race and education studies, particularly in the context of Black men success in the UK education system:

1. Counter-Narrative Platform: My study seeks to reframe the deficit discourse dominant in the conversation surrounding Black men by offering up a counter-narrative that affirms and recognises the success of these individuals against a backdrop where their success remains largely invisible or unacknowledged. By centring their voices and experiences, my research re-affirms the importance of knowing, recognising and understanding the diverse forms of capital that these students bring to their educational journeys.

2. Redefining Success: My work challenges conventional metrics of success in education by demonstrating that success for Black men cannot be fully understood through standardised academic outcomes alone. Instead, I highlight

the importance of my participants redefinition of success. They saw it as achieving goals with hard work, legacy, happiness and fulfilment, continuous learning and personal development, health and wellbeing, positive impact on others or one's community and financial stability and wealth.

3. A unique perspective (broader indicators): My research not only contributes to the field of education but also enhances the ongoing scholarly discourse within Critical Race Theory. This provides a unique perspective on how CRT can be applied in educational research, particularly in exploring the success of Black men in the UK through storytelling. My work offers new insights into its application in understanding Black men success.

4. Intersectionality Implications for Practice and Policy: My research makes a clear case for educating teachers about intersectionality, developing curriculum framework that embeds success stories of BMs rather than underachievement, creating mentoring structures that provide navigation strategies and using approaches that engage Black families in ways that are responsive to the cultural capital. My research critically engages with recent UK educational policies and initiatives, such as the Careers Strategy (DfE, 2017) and the Education Inspection Framework (2019). By analysing these through the lens of young Black male success, my work shows the limitations of current approaches.

5. Methodological Contribution: The study's use of narratives with successful Black men offers a methodological contribution to the field. This approach, grounded in asset-based perspectives, provides a model for future researchers seeking to explore success stories among Black men and other marginalised groups in education.

In summary, my research makes a substantial contribution to both theoretical and practical knowledge by amplifying the narratives of successful Black men, through the lens of CRT, and applying Yosso's (2005) framework to reveal the strengths that these students bring to their educational experiences. This work sets the stage for future studies that may further explore the intersection of race, education, and success in the UK context.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Theoretical Implications: The findings underscore the urgent need for a paradigm shift in how Black male students are perceived and supported within educational systems. The multifaceted nature of success challenges existing academic literature that have failed to account for success outside its narrow definition. It therefore challenges conventional metrics of success in education.

Practical Implications: It is also crucial that educators and policymakers must adopt and implement asset-based approaches that recognise and nurture the capabilities of Black male students. This includes providing supportive environments that encourages a sense of belonging and academic success, implementing mentorship programmes, ensuring robust and meaningful training for all staff to address implicit biases and promote cultural competency, on the diversity of the teaching workforce, developing curricula that reflect positive representations of Black men and their contributions to society.

5.5 REFLECTION ON LIMITATIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into the success stories of Black men, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. It is important to note this study has acknowledged several limitations, and this can be found in Chapter 3, the Methodology chapter. I shall sum them up in this section. It can be challenging to analyse data that is too rich or has too much multiplicity; I had to be knowledgeable about my study and familiar with the methodology being used as well as grasping what it means to generate knowledge through narrative inquiry and the process was time consuming.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Schools should integrate asset-based approaches into their policies and curricula, actively seeking to highlight and build upon the strengths of Black male students.

I suggest five recommendations for future research into this area, the first being to continue research in policies which aim to improve career outcomes. Research is needed to assess how effectively policies are being implemented in schools with significant populations of Black men. This research could help identify best practices and areas where additional support or policy adjustments are

necessary. I believe that this will evaluate the effectiveness of any policy implementation, in order to enable teachers to identify the improvement of career readiness of Black men. Even well-designed policies can fail if teachers are not properly trained to implement them.

Second, I recommend research on Initial Teacher Education and Early Career Teachers (ECT) training curriculum to discover if there is an awareness and understanding of the issues inherent in the policies and how they can be brought to the foreground of teachers reflection. There are many reasons why this is important. Indeed, it is crucial to ensure the training curriculum incorporate sufficient content on the policies and challenges affecting Black men. ECTs should be trained to recognise and address the unique challenges faced by Black men which will shed light on the effectiveness of current educational policies. If these issues are not adequately covered in their training, it may limit their ability to implement policies effectively and address the needs of Black men in their classrooms.

This recommendation also enables ECTs to assess the extent to which their curriculum promote cultural competency and encourage teachers to reflect on racial equity in their teaching practices. Cultural competency is crucial for teachers to understand the diverse backgrounds of their students and to create inclusive learning classrooms. Research could evaluate whether ECT curriculum are equipping teachers with the skills to reflect critically on their biases and practices, particularly concerning race and equity.

This second research could also highlight successful components of ECT curriculum, providing a model for others to follow. Understanding what works well in teacher training can lead to recommendations for improving curricula, thereby enhancing the educational experiences of Black men. This recommendation will suggest ways to bring the issues inherent in educational policies to the forefront of teacher training, ensuring that new teachers are not only aware of these challenges but also actively engaged in finding solutions. In addition, researching into the curriculum will provide crucial insights into the preparedness of new teachers to support Black men effectively. This could lead to more informed recommendations for enhancing teacher training programs,

ultimately contributing to better educational outcomes for Black men with success stories.

While there has been research on mentorship, my third recommendation is to conduct longitudinal studies to track the educational and career outcomes of Black men over time and long-term effects of mentorship programs on their academic and professional success. This can offer insights into the long-term factors contributing to their success. While there is evidence that mentorship can positively influence the outcomes for Black men, more longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustained impact of these programs. Research could explore how these programs influence not just academic but also long-term career success, leadership development, and community engagement.

My fourth recommendation is to continue to document and analyse success stories of Black men who have excelled academically and professionally, identifying common factors and best practices. More success stories can provide valuable insights into what works. Research could compile these stories to understand the common elements of successful journeys and how these can be replicated or scaled in different contexts.

My fifth recommendation is to have a complete review of the national curriculum to ensure it reflects the contributions and histories of Black people in the UK and make this content mandatory across all schools. A curriculum that includes various point of view can help cultivate a sense of belonging and pride among Black students. In addition, where there is evidence of Black histories, achievements, it brings about positive conversation and role models. Policymakers should prioritise the development of initiatives and funding aimed at supporting anti-deficit educational practices.

More studies are needed to explore successful Black male students' experiences and strategies. Research should focus on identifying effective anti-deficit practices and how they can be bolstered.

5.7 PERSONAL REFLECTION

The exploration I have undertaken - this research journey - has been a deeply personal and context-rich investigation into the lives of a few Illustrative (not exhaustive) successful Black men living in the UK. I embarked on this study with the desire to understand deeply and exquisitely the factors that make them succeed and how they navigate a society often riddled with systemic barriers and fraught with challenges. Two mantras have stayed with me throughout my research journey are "If we knew what we were doing, it wouldn't be research" and "Slow and steady wins the race." With these two mantras, I have experienced several moments of uncertainty and procrastination, and to be honest, I have had a few breakthroughs in the deep moments of clarity and purpose that I have experienced. However there was always a light at the end of the tunnel.

While undertaking this research, I was privileged to hear the success stories of Black men who have made it through the educational system. Their narratives have not just inspired me; they have educated me about the kinds of things that enable these men to be successful. They have made me understand more profoundly the kinds of things that I believe are necessary for Black men to succeed in life and in school, such as resilience, support from the community, and positive role models. Hearing these men's stories has reinforced my belief that we must pay more attention to these kinds of factors.

In this journey, I have learned to cope with the dual requirements of the research world and the everyday realm. I have become or, at the very least, I am attempting to become more proficient at research planning and execution while managing a competition of other life obligations. Yet the most rewarding aspect of the process, by far, has been the chance to work through an ample and diverse selection of a rich body of literature and to revisit some academic areas with which I was previously familiar. From this reading, I have unearthed theoretical frameworks and key concepts that are serving as excellent tools for thinking about the issues at hand. More importantly, I have a renewed appreciation for the type of work that serves as the bedrock of any education research project.

One major lesson to come out of this study has been about the importance of making a serious and sustained effort to engage with what the government's doing in the way of policy and more or less direct educational initiatives. My first inclination - hatched out of some notion of commonsense - was to assume that one should just engage with this stuff in a straightforward way: accept it at face value; work with it, as necessary; and attempt, all the while, to direct it toward real, practical outcomes. But my inclination now is to engage in something like a critical reading of policy documents and the God-awful stuff that sometimes issues from the educational establishment.

This research has allowed me to play a part, however small, in the invigorating and essential dialogue about educational equity. On a much longer and deeper personal journey toward understanding (and better embodying) the sort of equity that ensures all young men can succeed in life and love - as well as all Black men - I have had the honour and privilege of listening to the voices of many such men during this research. I am ever thankful for their sharing.

Looking back on my journey, I can see the fraying thread that ties together the two sides of the educational system, with my desire to effect change and the workforce reality of the system in which I work. Like many, I am pulled in two directions: the first by the accountability measures that are so often tied to standardised tests, and the second by my students - a group for whom I want and need to think holistically. On this path of two directions, I have not yet found a real commitment to change or a real ally in either direction.

Undertaking this research has been a means of record for me, not just in the learning I have gained but also as a vehicle carrying me through personal growth and newfound exploration. I now feel a much stronger connection to the community of scholars, educators, and students with whom I share a commitment to equity and inclusion, particularly because I have learned so much from them and have come to appreciate their work on behalf of those we serve.

As I progress in my profession, the tales of the Black men I have met through this research inspire me. These individuals have overcome so much to achieve success that when I consider their lived experiences, it is hard not to take

seriously the values of resilience, the necessity of a supportive community, and the empowering notion that change can and does happen.

As we move forward we must ensure we are working towards an educational system that not only recognises but celebrates the successes of Black men ensuring that their achievements become the norm rather than the exception.

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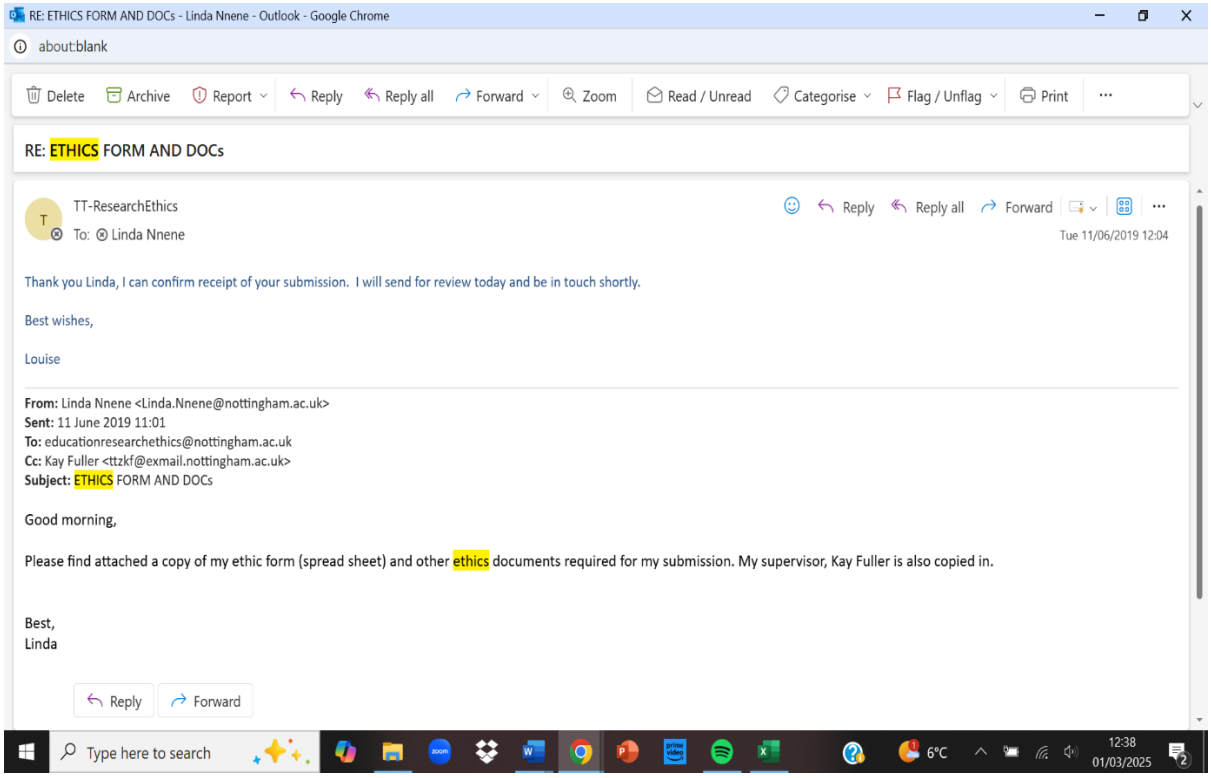
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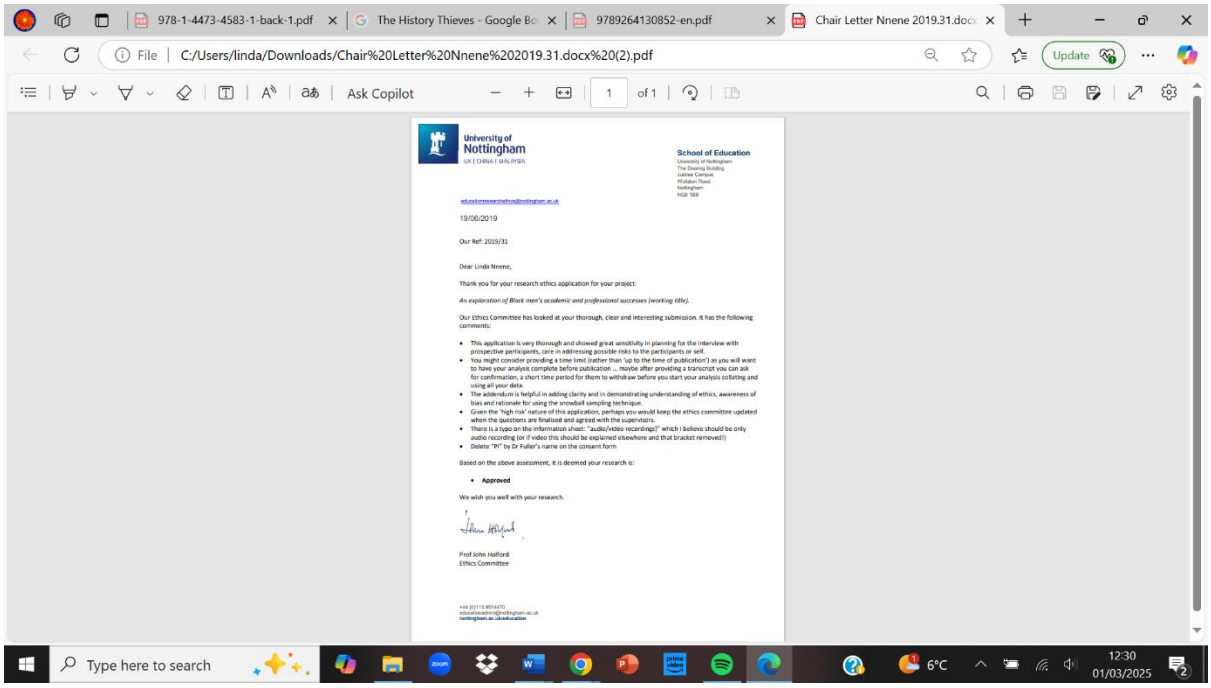
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APPENDICES

Note 1



Note 2



Appendix A

Participant Information Sheet

Date: 21 May 2019

Title of Study: An exploration of the learning experience, educational excellence and success amongst the new generation of professional Black men.

Name of Researcher(s): Linda O Nnene

This doctoral research is being undertaken as completion of the EdD at the University of Nottingham. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Before you decide I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. I will go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have. Talk to me about the study if you wish. Ask if there is anything that is not clear.

What is the purpose of the study?

There is an argument to develop a counter discourse about young black males (BMs) and their education. Little is known about determinants that enable high academic achievements in Black men with Sub-Saharan heritage. This study examines perceptions of educational excellence and success amongst the new generation of professional black males. This study explores Black men's academic successes. It seeks to scrutinise their learning experience and elucidate strategies that they have used to attain success.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to take part in this study. Additionally, given your educational achievements and experience, your views, opinions and insights are invaluable as part of this research. I am looking for 12 participants.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent and to complete a questionnaire. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw without giving a reason at any time until the date of publication.

What will happen to me if I take part?

- The study will require attendance at mutually agreed and scheduled times
- For this interview I intend to use Zoom to (record and) facilitate the discussion, and this means that our discussion will be subject to their terms and conditions. These can be read at: https://zoom.us/privacy-and-legal. Note in particular clause 3c which states inter alia that "you are giving Zoom consent to store recordings for any or all Zoom meetings or webinars that you join, if such recordings are stored in our systems". I intend to record the sessions using Zoom. (OR While I do not intend to use the Zoom recording facility, I cannot guarantee that our discussion will not be recorded on their system.)
- Interviews will be recorded and a transcript will be produced
- You will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors, or to change, remove or add material

- The transcript of the interview will be analysed by Linda Nnene as the researcher
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to Linda Nnene and her supervisors
- The field work will take place during one academic year [2019 – 2020] and your involvement would only be for that year. During this time, I would like to interview your three times for approximately an hour each time. The reason I may call upon you for a second or third interview will be for clarification or to follow up a particular perspective.
- Summaries of the data, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified.
- Care will be taken to ensure that any other information given in the interview that could re-identify you is not revealed. This is in connection with EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Data will be stored in line with the UoN Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics. I will use the university storage system One Drive. Data security arrangements will be sufficient to prevent unauthorised breaches of confidentiality and Personal data will not be kept for longer than is necessary (UoN Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics). All research data will be kept securely for 7 years.

Expenses and payments

Participants will not be paid an allowance to participate in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The narrative approach encourages participants to tell their own story. However, it is possible that some questions might remind you of potentially unpleasant experiences associated with your education journey. If this happens, support or counselling groups such as your local Wellbeing Service through their helpline number 0300 123 1503. If you have a complaint about the conduct of this study, please contact educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk to raise your concerns.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I cannot promise the study will help you but the information I get from this study may be of benefit to society because the researcher is able to learn more about the topic and through this create clarifications to importunate problems. The focus is on narratives of BMs that will provide new knowledge which will develop a counter discourse about young BMs and their education.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this by contacting the School Research Ethics Officer. All contact details are given at the end of this information sheet.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

I will follow ethical practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence.
If you join the study, the data collected will only be looked at by me and possibly my supervisor. I have a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant and I will meet this duty.

All information which is collected during the course of the research will be kept **strictly confidential**, stored in a secure and locked office, and on a password protected database. Data will be anonymised as soon as possible and a unique code will be used so that you cannot be recognised from it. Anonymised data may also be stored in data archives for future researchers interested in this area.

Your personal data (address, telephone number) will be kept for the minimum amount of time, after the end of the study so that I am able to contact you about the findings of the study (unless you advise us that you do not wish to be contacted). All research data will be kept securely for 7 years. After this time your data will be disposed of securely. During this time all precautions will be taken by all those involved to maintain your confidentiality, only the researcher will have access to your personal data.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?
Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time prior to publication of the data, without giving any reason.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results will be used for the purpose of the Doctoral degree in Education thesis. However, they might also be disseminated at conferences or published in peer-reviewed publications. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the final report, please contact the researcher on linda.nnene@nottingham.ac.uk and it will be sent to you.

Who is organising the research?

This research is being organised by the University of Nottingham.

Who has reviewed the proposed study?
All research in the University of Nottingham is reviewed by Research Ethics Committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee.

Further information and contact details
Researcher:
Linda Nnene
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Wollaton Road Nottingham
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Supervisor:
Dr Kay Fuller
Kay.Fuller@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix B

Demographic Questions

1. First Name: _____Last Name_____

2. E-mail address_____

3. What is your age?

4. Where did you grow up? City or Region _____

5. What kind of secondary school did you attend? If you attended more than one school, consider the one where you spent the most time. Please specify.

6. Current employment position: _____

7. What is your mother's highest level of education?

8. What is your father's highest level of education?

9. Educational Institutions Attended/Degrees Earned (include undergraduate and Post graduate)

10. Please describe your family structure while growing up?

11. Please describe your family socioeconomic circumstances while growing?

Tell me more about university

Name of University _____

Degree Awarded_____

Date degree was awarded:

Month_____Year_____

Please state any other post graduate or professional qualification_____

Did you attend: □ full-time or □ Part-time?

Were you involved in student clubs or other forms of involvement: □ Yes □ No

Tell me more about your job

What is your job title?

Give a brief description of your duties

Appendix C

Participant consent form for interviews

Project title … An exploration of the learning experience, educational excellence and success amongst the new generation of professional Black men

Researcher's name …Linda O Nnene

Supervisor's name …Dr Kay Fuller

- ☐ I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- ☐ I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- ☐ I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified, and my personal results will remain confidential.
- ☐ I understand that I will be using zoom to record and facilitate the interview.
- ☐ I understand that data will be stored in line with the UoN Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics. The researcher will use the university storage system One Drive. Personal data which includes name, contact details, audio recordings will be handled in accordance with the EU GDPR so that unauthorised individuals will not have access to them. Access to the interview transcript will be limited to Linda Nnene and her supervisor or other academic colleagues with whom she might collaborate as part of the research procedure. Data security arrangements will be sufficient to prevent unauthorised breaches of confidentiality and Personal data will not be kept for longer than is necessary (UoN Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics). All research data will be kept securely for 7 years from publication.
- ☐ I understand that I may contact the researcher or her supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed …… (research participant)

Print name …… **Date** ……

Contact details.

Researcher: *{linda.nnene@nottingham.ac.uk}*

Supervisor: *{Kay.Fuller@nottingham.ac.uk}*

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix D

PARTICIPANT SIGNED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

Project title … An exploration of the learning experience, educational excellence and professional success amongst the new generation of professional Black men

Researcher's name …Linda O Nnene

Supervisor's name *…Dr Kay Fuller*

☒ I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

☒ I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.

☒ I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.

☒ I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.

☒ I understand that I will be using zoom to record and facilitatethe interview.

☒ I understand that data will be stored in line with the UoN Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics. The researcher will use the university storage system One Drive. Personal data which includes name, contact details, audiorecordings will be handled in accordance with the EU GDPR so that unauthorised individuals will not have access to them. Access to the interview transcript will be limited to Linda Nnene and her supervisor or other academic colleagues with whom she might collaborate as part of the research procedure. Data security arrangements will be sufficient to prevent unauthorised breaches of confidentiality and Personal data will not be kept for longer than is necessary (UoN Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics). All research data will be kept securely for 7 years from publication.

☒ I understand that I may contact the researcher or her supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed …[redacted]…… (research participant)

Print name [redacted]…… **Date** …21.07.20……

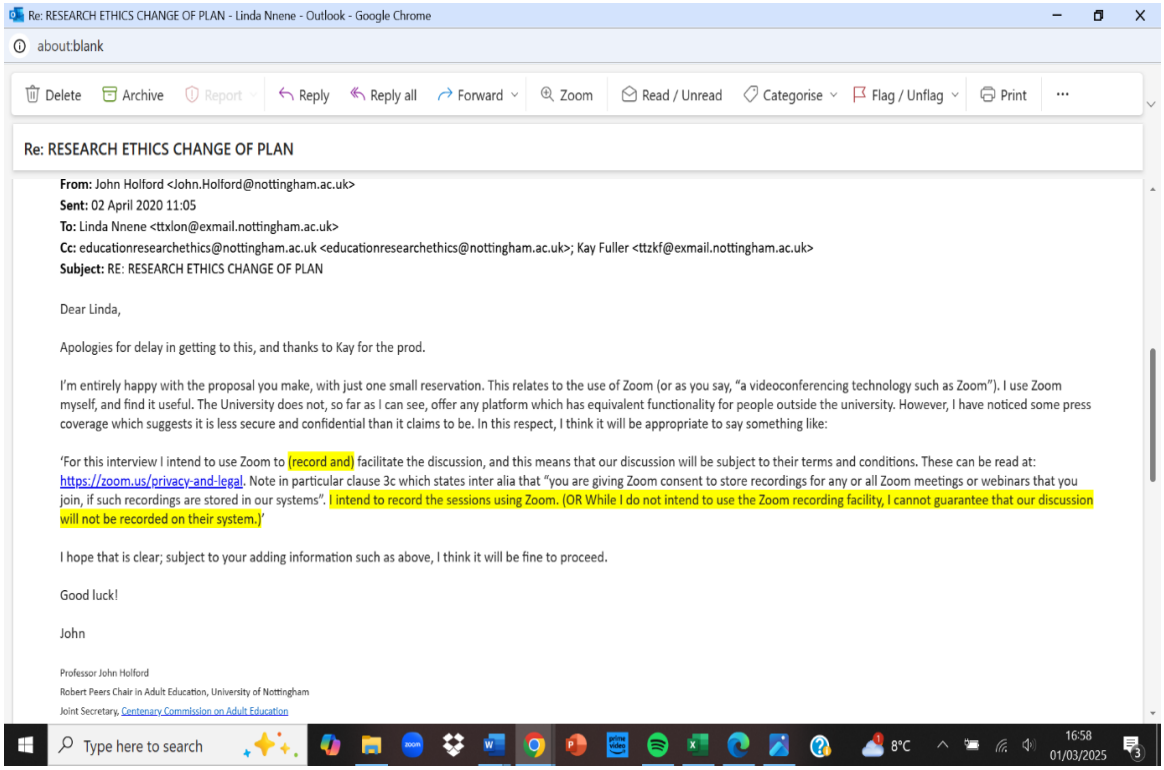
Contact details

Researcher: *{linda.nnene@nottingham.ac.uk}*

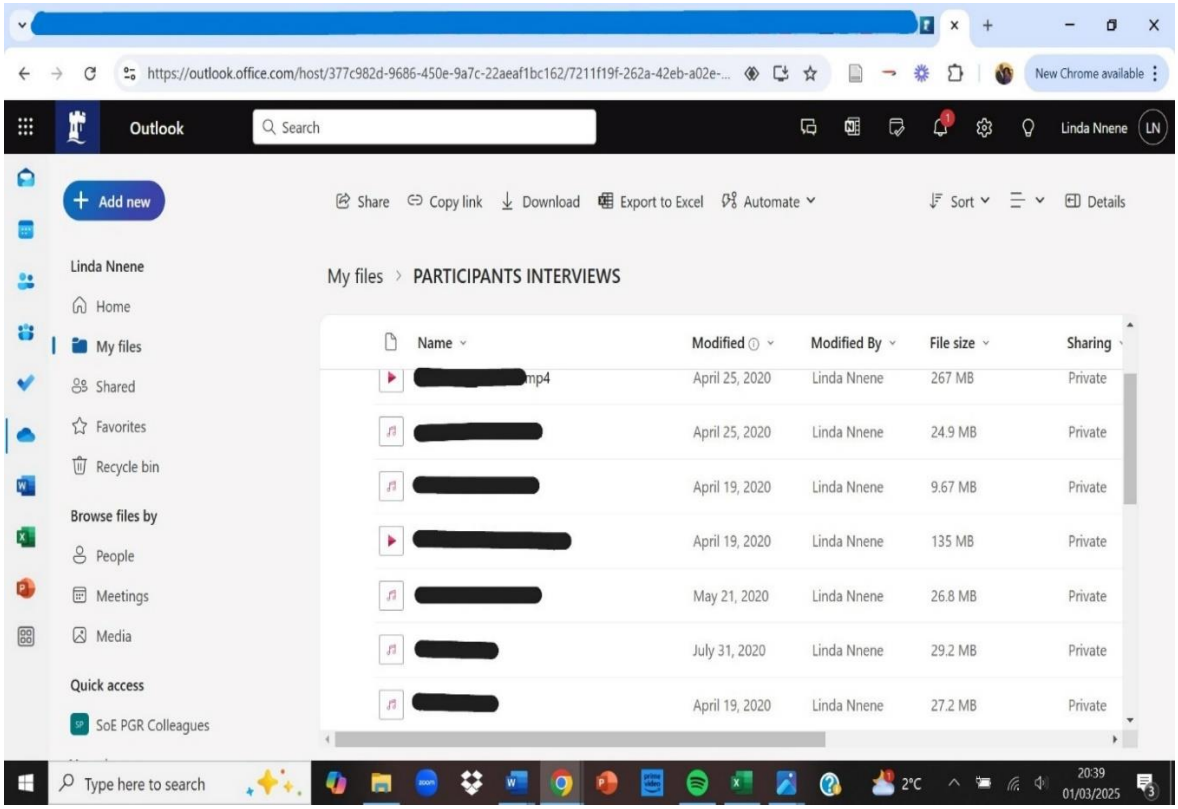
Supervisor: *{Kay.Fuller@nottingham.ac.uk}*

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

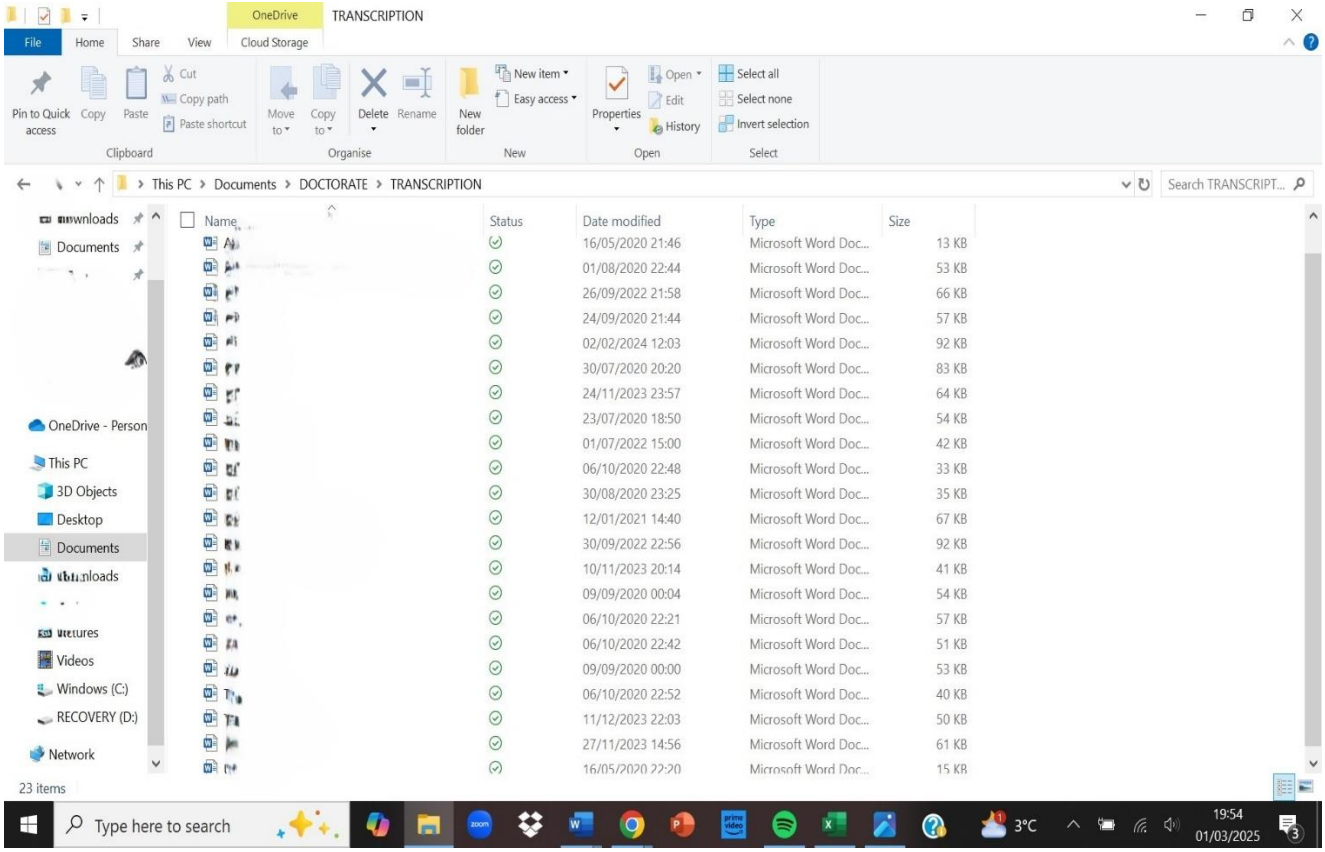
Appendix E



Appendix F



Appendix G


OneDrive
TRANSCRIPTION
File
Home
Share
View
Cloud Storage
Pin to Quick access
Copy
Paste
Cut
Copy path
Paste shortcut
Clipboard
Move to
Copy to
Delete
Rename
Organise
New folder
New item
Easy access
New
Properties
Open
Edit
History
Open
Select all
Select none
Invert selection
Select
This PC > Documents > DOCTORATE > TRANSCRIPTION
Search TRANSCRIPT...
Name
Status
Date modified
Type
Size
Microsoft Word Doc...
13 KB
53 KB
66 KB
57 KB
92 KB
83 KB
64 KB
54 KB
42 KB
33 KB
35 KB
67 KB
92 KB
41 KB
54 KB
57 KB
51 KB
53 KB
40 KB
50 KB
61 KB
15 KB
OneDrive - Person
This PC
3D Objects
Desktop
Documents
Videos
Windows (C:)
RECOVERY (D:)
Network
23 items
Type here to search
3°C
19:54
01/03/2025

Appendix H

Follow up semi-structured interview schedule

The follow-up interview plan below built on what I learned in the first interview. It is meant to keep exploring the main topics we discussed and look at them in more detail. It will also clear up any confusion and check out new ideas that might have come up. I have divided the schedule into eight parts, and it runs from section one to section eight. However these questions below are not set in stone. They are my prompts and allow flexibility for clarification.

It tried to do three main things:

1. Understand the important topics better and get deeper insights.
2. Help me clarify anything that was confusing previously.
3. Sought to see if any new ideas or viewpoints have come up.

Follow-Up Interview Schedule: Building on Key Themes

Here's a follow-up interview schedule based on what we learned from the first interview.

Follow-Up Interview Schedule: Building on Key Themes

Section 1: Reflections on the First Interview

Since our last talk, have you thought more about what you discussed?

Is there anything you wish you had talked about or explained more during our first interview?

Section 2: Deep Dive into Key Themes

You said that [particular thing or event] was really important. Can you tell me about it and how it affected your path?

4. What specific situations or events happened in your life that show how [key theme, like stereotypes, mentorship, or certain rules] affected you? Can you give us some examples?

5. How do you think your cultural background has influenced what society or institutions expect from you?

Section 3: Social Policy and Structural Influences

You talked about [policy or systemic issue]. How do you think it could change to better help Black men?

Do you think today's schools show young Black boys a fair image and give them good role models? Why or why not?

Since our last discussion, have you seen any programs or initiatives that you think work really well (or don't work so well)? If so, can you share them with me and explain why you think they are (or aren't) effective?

Section 4: Success and Motivation

Looking back at your success, do you think that other people could achieve the same results? Why or why not?

Over time, has what you think success is changed? If it has, how has it changed?

How important is resilience in keeping your achievements, and how do you stay resilient?

Section 5: Relationships and Networks

As I've gone along my journey, how have my relationships with family, friends, or mentors changed? Well, they definitely have. Some relationships that I thought would last forever have changed a lot, and some have stayed pretty much the same. From your comment on (perhaps something they may have shared) how would you describe relationships and networks through your journey?

Have you joined any groups or communities lately that have changed the way you see things or given you new chances?

How do you guide or help people who are on a similar path to yours?

Section 6: Hopes for the Future

What do you hope to achieve personally in the next few years? Also, what changes do you want to see in society?

How do you hope that sharing your experiences will impact other people, especially important decision-makers in education?

If you could start a program or plan just for Black men, what would it be about?

Section 7: Clarifications and New Perspectives

You said something in our last interview that really stood out to me. It was about [specific point]. Can you explain more about what you meant?

Is there anything we've missed about your life or experiences that you think is important for us to know?

How has being part of this research changed how you understand the journey you're on?

Section 8: Closing Questions

What are your thoughts on this process? Is there something that you think would make the interviews better or easier to handle?

Do you want to add anything else or share your last thoughts?

23. Is it okay if I contact you again later to ask more questions while I work on this?

Additional Notes for me, the Interviewer

A NOTE TO SELF:

To keep the conversation going, I will need to first go over the main ideas from the first interview.

Motivate the participant to think carefully and make their participation more personal. I want this to feel like an easy conversation instead of a presentation.

Try asking open-ended questions. If I have to ask a yes-no question, it must be an open-ended one too. For example, instead of asking, "Did you feel happy?" ask, "How did you feel?" or "What was your reaction when you..." and then say what they did.