UNIVERSITY OF
FORWARD THINKING
WESTMINSTER⌗

Multiple Selves, Marginalised Voices: Exploring Black Female Psychology Students' Experiences of Constructing Identity in UK Higher Education

Husbands, D.

A PhD thesis awarded by the University of Westminster.

© Dr Deborah Husbands, 2019.

Multiple Selves, Marginalised Voices:
Exploring Black Female Psychology Students' Experiences of
Constructing Identity in UK Higher Education

DEBORAH HUSBANDS

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the

requirements of the University of Westminster

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2019

Abstract

Introduction: What kinds of identity do Black female psychology students construct within higher education? Higher education research in the US and UK points to integration and attainment issues for Black and Minority Ethnic students. Black female students' experiences are not fully explored among accounts of university experience. As an under-researched group, their 'stories' risk being lost. This research learned from individual and collective voices of Black women enrolled on an undergraduate psychology degree programme at Russell Group and post-1992 London universities. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore how traditional [18-21 years at the point of enrolment] and nontraditional [22 years and above] Black female students construct identity within higher education. Theoretically driven sub-questions explored concepts such as self-efficacy and a sense of belonging.

Method: A pluralistic approach was used to explore experiences. Research was carried out across four phases: in Phase 1, qualitative content analysis was used to explore the experience of nontraditional students. In Phases 2 and 4, interpretative phenomenological analysis was used for traditional students. In Phase 3, a thematic analysis was used for mixed student groups. The research drew on social constructionism and intersectionality to situate students' experiences. The researcher acknowledged her subjectivity as a mature Black woman when interpreting students' narratives and used reflexivity to support an authentic exploration.

Findings: The participants constructed multiple identities in their academic environments. Nontraditional students constructed an identity of 'hyphenated' selves viewed through lenses of maturity and ethnicity. A sense of belonging was noted as crucial for their experience. Traditional students constructed 'shifting' selves in response to vacillating between challenges for transitioning and realising a 'future' self. Their multiple identities were

complicated by a sense of 'unbelonging', social class, perceptions of structural racism, and a lack of culturally responsive support that frustrated their attempts to form interpersonal relationships with staff and students. Different theoretical/methodological approaches appeared to be most useful for understanding the experience of different student groups.

Discussion: Identity construction is psychologically taxing for these participants with implications for progression and attainment in higher education. Their experiences and perceptions of constructing identities 'at the margins' [that is, places of invisibility/hyper-visibility] shed further light on the complexity of identity construction in Black women. The findings permit reasonable and novel theoretical inferences for the academic experiences of Black female students in these samples.

List of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Signed D. Husbands

……………………………………………………………………………………

On Sisterhood, Solidarity and Self-Empowerment

Because of sisters who came before us, we are free

To challenge the Eurocentric mentality,

We're free to express our frustration, we're free to complain

As empowered women, our resistance will never wane.

From a Black feminist standpoint, we analyse and critique,

Through sisterhood and solidarity, we expose the mystique;

We unpack the mechanics of raced and gendered discrimination,

micro-aggression and victimisation,

Together we share strategies for survival and success,

Through narratives of our experience we bear witness.

Our aim is not only to promote solidarity,

But maintain the tradition of activism, so other women can achieve.

So I thank you my dear sisters for your courage, strength and honesty,

Your inspiring words, your wisdom and your loyalty,

They help to keep faith and hope alive so that we can all continue to thrive.

Deborah Gabriel (2017)

Chapter 1

Introduction

With ongoing reports of Black and Minority Ethnicity (BME) student dissatisfaction (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2014a), low awarding/attainment for a 'good degree' (24% differential or 'gap' between Black and White students; Advance HE, 2018a), high attrition rates (9.6% for Black students compared to 6.4% for White students; Equality Challenge Unit, 2014), and even higher attrition rates for mature students (11.6%; Social Market Foundation, 2017), this research adds to a growing body of inquiry into BME students' experiences in UK higher education. However, little is known about the experiences of one group of BME students in particular; namely, Black women (Porter & Dean, 2015). Indeed, Universities UK and the National Union of Students (2019, p. 3) call for the importance of "disaggregating the broad category of BAME" in order to better understand experiences that have tended to be homogenised. Furthermore, a synthesis of the psychological research into intersectionality research in education (Ireland et al., 2018) reminds us why this kind of work is important: it brings the experiences of Black female students[1], who have previously been "hidden figures" (p. 234), to the fore.

An example of this limitation is seen in UK research that statistically reveals Black Caribbean female undergraduate students as under-performers compared to their male counterparts (Rodgers, 2013). However, little is known about the reasons for this under-performance. When socio-economic background was controlled for in this sample, non-completion rates for these students were not dissimilar to their White counterparts, suggesting a more complex backstory.

The aim of this research is to make a qualitative contribution to the small body of existing knowledge about this student population. This exploration of student narratives

---

[1] I selected this student group because my experience as a mature Black female undergraduate psychology student was a mixture of feeling supported at times but, for the most part, with strong feelings of being alienated. I wanted to understand whether this experience should be constructed as 'normal' for a Black woman in higher education by asking similar others about their experiences and perceptions. The research questions were designed with this in mind. I had initially toyed with the idea of a comparative study between the experiences of Black men and Black women in higher education. Noting that there is already significant reporting on academic outcomes for Black male students in the UK and US (e.g. the Black Male Education Research Collection; Howard, 2013; REACH, 2007; UUK & NUS, 2019), the experiences of Black female students are the focus of this research.

offers a richer understanding of how experiences are perceived and interpreted in higher education than that which might be obtained through quantitative methods. Thus, the present research concentrated on accessing the social reality and identity construction of Black female undergraduate psychology students. It was anticipated that their narratives would reveal reasons for the kind of outcome found by researchers such as Rodgers.

1.1 Research Rationale

This research is needed because entry qualifications and socio-demographic information explain only one part of the complex picture of student attainment (Richardson, 2015). Furthermore, Richardson alludes to the sub-culture of a 'hidden curriculum' in academic environments that reinforces, at its worse, a sense of entitlement and privilege for particular groups, who then have access to a form of extended educational capital. Viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy, a 'hidden curriculum' exists throughout the education timeline, playing out as a body of knowledge that enables *some* students to feel comfortable with accessing support and developing higher order knowledge (Margolis, 2001), meaning those students have better outcomes than others. Devlin (2013) suggests that students from lower social classes (who may have less 'activated' capital; Winne & Nesbit, 2010) seek to access the 'hidden curriculum' using 'trial and error'. These students can then become anxious about understanding the culture for help-seeking and appropriate academic behaviours in their institution, such as when and from whom to seek support as well as the construction of help-seeking language.

Research has shown that Black female students create a 'sphere of influence' in order to better navigate their academic environments (Mirza, 1998). This could include attempts to access the 'hidden curriculum'. However, if such efforts are being constructed as taxing, they could affect these students' physical and psychological wellbeing (McGee & Stovall, 2015). In recognition of the challenges faced by women in higher education, gender-based initiatives are directed towards creating better opportunities. For example, the Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network (popularly known as Athena SWAN) charter mark was launched in 2005 by the Equality Challenge Unit to support universities in progressing women in STEMM subjects. Many women have benefited from this funded initiative (ECU, 2018a). However, with noted racial disparities in STEMM (Williams, George-Jones & Hebl, 2018), the experiences of some women continue to be frustrated by a lack of recognition and support (Rollock, 2019), reiterating Cole's (2009) assertion that some groups are being ignored in higher education. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991) is a guiding principle

in the Athena SWAN framework (ECU, 2018a), but there is still a lack of focus on drawing out and responding to the diverse and intersecting experiences of some female groups.

The rationale of the present research is to access the experiences of a 'hard to access' (Huang & Coker, 2008) group of female students who could benefit from these initiatives, as well as to learn from their stories. BME students are fewer in number among student populations in UK higher education than their White counterparts (Bolton, 2018; Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2018a). Indeed, the small number of Black female students who took part in the research phases, despite extensive participant recruitment efforts, illustrates the challenges of accessing the experiences of this population.

The rationale is framed within the current discourse on Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) student progression and attainment. A consideration of Cole's (2009) questions for researchers into intersectionality supports the central and subordinate research questions posed in this research. This chapter acknowledges the researcher who, as a mature Black female doctoral student, engaged in reflexivity to separate her experiences from those of the participants in order to manage subjectivity. The researcher draws on Waddington's (2010, p. 312) thoughts on personal reflexivity as the practice of "thinking about oneself, thinking about one's research, thinking back and thinking around, with the danger that the experience of the research is simply that of the researcher"[2]. With reference to Markham's (2017) reflexive techniques for interpretive researchers, reflexive thinking is included in this thesis as footnotes and small blocks of italicised text – some of which are excerpts from the researcher's journal entries. The purpose is to avoid unduly disrupting the narrative that runs through the thesis. Consequently, the bulk of reflexive thinking is contained in Chapter 12 where the researcher describes her personal journey into and through higher education, explains the reason for her focus on Black female undergraduate psychology students, describes her experience of carrying out the research, and recounts her perspective on the chosen theoretical and methodological framework. Chapter 12 concludes with reflections on

---

[2] As a Black woman with multiple identities (for example, student, daughter, wife, mother and more), I realised that it might not be long before my analyses and reflections on the multiple identities of participants in this research could result in a 'collision' with my own identities. Without the practice of bracketing, such as in the form of journalling as well as occasions of temporarily 'stepping away' from the research process to reflect, our experiences and identities could become muddled to the point where, as Waddington (2010, p. 312) describes, "the experience of the research is simply that of the researcher". With this in mind, I have decided to 'use' the merging of participant identities with one of my identities [a Black female doctoral researcher, and the 'privilege' this affords] as a platform from which to propel our multiple identities into a body of knowledge that focuses on BME student experiences. In so doing, I recognise that our we-selves [mine and the participants] are both the informants, recipients and beneficiaries of the re-telling of our experiences as Black women in higher education.

ways in which the process of carrying out this research has enhanced her identity as a Black female researcher.

1.2. Research Context

Longstanding research in the US (e.g. Allen, Epps, & Hanif, 1991; Feagin & Sykes, 1995; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008) and UK research (e.g. Fielding, Charlton, Kounali, & Leckie, 2008; Modood & Acland, 1998; Stevenson, 2012) point to degree attainment and integration issues for BME students in higher education. Much of this research is broad, being generic to BME student experiences and is helpful for conveying situational heterogeneity. However, experiences and perceptions of specific populations, such as Black female students, are not being fully explored. Cole (2009, p. 176) asserts that these groups "are often overlooked in psychology" leading to their 'stories' being lost among accounts of student experience. Without the contribution of the present findings such as those from the current study, there is only a partial understanding of the experiences of BME students.

In recent years, a collective of UK researchers working under the Equality Challenge Unit as a policy think-tank for issues in higher education have addressed the experiences of such students, although largely from a broad quantitative perspective (ECU, 2010; 2012; 2014; 2015a). However, a focus on quantitative data offers limited appreciation for the perspectives both of those being researched and of the researcher (Cole, 2009). Furthermore, although some similarities exist between UK and US student communities, more research is needed to describe the experiences of UK Black student populations.

This research goes beyond a broad or generic exploration by focusing on the experiences of a specific sample of students: Black female undergraduate psychology students at HEIs in London and proximate [M25 geographic] regions. Positivist or *a priori* assumptions about BME students were resisted. Instead, an emic perspective (O'Dell, de Abreu, & O'Toole, 2004) was applied to obtaining first-hand accounts of the experience of constructing and managing identity in higher education for this student group. An emic perspective is further described as "subjective/idiographic/qualitative/insider" by Morey and Luthans (1984, p. 27). The researcher is a Black female doctoral student in psychology at a London university who has access to Black female psychology undergraduate students and took an insider [emic] perspective of this group's social reality using a feminist exploration of experience.

1.3 Theoretical Perspectives

The thesis explores identity construction through the lenses of social constructionism (Burr, 2003) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). From a social constructionist perspective, identity is seen as comprising multiple cultural, social and personal factors (Burr, 2003). Thus, social constructionism throws light on an individual's objective reality from several vantages: how they "describe, explain or otherwise account for the world … in which they live" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Intersectionality is a US-derived theory based on an acceptance that there are integration challenges for Black people, and Black women in particular (Crenshaw, 1989). The experience of living with structural forms of oppression, discrimination and domination can also shape identity (Hankivsky, 2014). From both perspectives, taken-for-granted assumptions [whether from prior knowledge, previous research or media representations] must give way to first-hand accounts of the construction of lived experience.

A conceptual framework that absorbed both perspectives was devised to situate identity construction. The theories also supported the pluralistic-style qualitative methodology adopted for this research. A review of the experiences of Black people in the UK and US helped to contextualise some of the differences experienced by these groups and fed into the development of the present frameworks. Together, the theories suggest that there is more than one way to understand [and therefore, interpret] 'reality'; that social processes drive social interaction to create knowledge, and that knowledge is affected by power relations (Burr, 2003). Thus, both theories were applied in a complementary fashion to analyses of the experiences of Black female students in UK higher education.

1.4 Student Types

General experiences for BME undergraduate students are considered in this research before addressing differences between a traditional and nontraditional student as types featured in this research. In the UK, traditional students enrol at university between 'normative' ages of 18-21 years old and enter with 'normative' qualifications (e.g. A Levels). Nontraditional students (also referred to as 'mature' students in the literature; e.g. Rautopuro & Vaisanen, 2001) enrol from 22 years old, often with 'non-normative' qualifications such as Access, BTEC, GNVQ and/or a history of work experience (Reay, Ball, & David, 2002). The nomenclature of a nontraditional student includes being the first in a family to go to university or having a disability (Morey et al., 2003), although students enter university with

a plethora of characteristics. For the present research, the main criterion for a traditional or nontraditional student was their age at entry into higher education.

1.5 Psychology Study

Despite improvements in university teaching methods and an abundance of pedagogic research, the retention[3] of BME students continues to be problematic and can also be discipline specific. Some experiences within a taught discipline (such as student/staff interactions, 'active' learning techniques and accessing resources, particularly for the subjects of psychology, mathematics or medicine) can influence feelings of inclusion or exclusion (Cashmore, Scott, & Cane, 2012). Perceptions of teaching practices and interpersonal relations that make up the broader sphere of academic life support the present study's exploration into students' experiences. The remit of the research sits within the domain of social psychology (including gender, ethnicity, intergroup relations and social constructionism; Quality Assurance Agency, 2010) as part of a broader psychological scope. Identity construction was situated within the context of undergraduate psychology study. This is not to say that other disciplines are less relevant. However, it was pragmatic to draw on BME psychology students' experiences due to the proximity of potential participants.

1.6 Thesis Contention

Cultural deficit perspectives (e.g. Brown, 2010; Harper, 2009) have, for too long, been used to explain lower degree attainment in BME students (Boliver, 2013; Stevenson, 2012). A cultural deficit attributes failing in certain groups to assumed cultural factors with less regard for individual characteristics, social influences or structural forms of power and privilege (Silverman, 2011). While poorer outcomes are pronounced in BME students (Johnson et al., 2007), their views of an unsatisfactory experience in higher education (HEFCE, 2014) have contributed to their greater sense of 'unbelonging' (Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003). In an attempt to move beyond assumptions that might be bound within deficit perspectives, the research premise is to learn from students' first-hand accounts of their experiences of retention, progression and attainment.

Using narratives that centre on the experience of studying psychology at undergraduate level, the research also considers the role of HEIs in providing appropriate support for Black female students as well as what this suggests for recognising such students' progress and

---

[3] Described as 'completion' of a full-time first-degree by HESA (2016) and National Audit Office (2007)

awarding attainment. Thus, the students' narratives shed light on interpretations of academic success as well as ways in which they acquire a sense of belonging to their academic environment [if at all], while also leading to new knowledge about this population. McCall (2005), an intersectionality researcher, outlines the wider benefit of using narratives for understanding human experience. She expresses the view that "narratives take as their subject an individual or individual's experience and extrapolate illustratively to the broader social location embodied by the individual" (p. 1781).

1.7 Research Programme

The programme supported the duration and methods of data collection (that is, in-depth interviews, focus groups, case study, a researcher-devised timeline activity and member-checking) that were used to locate identity construction within personalised perspectives. Data analysis was carried out over four research phases:

- Phase 1: Accessing nontraditional Black female students' experiences using individual in-depth interviews;
- Phase 2: Accessing traditional Black female students' experiences using individual in-depth interviews;
- Phase 3: Accessing mixed groups of traditional and nontraditional Black female students' experiences using focus group discussions, a timeline activity and member-checking;
- Phase 4: Accessing a traditional Black female student's experience using an extended interview as a single case study as well as a timeline activity and member-checking.

Each phase employed a qualitative research method which was considered appropriate for the sample size and which permitted exploration of the depth and diversity of identity construction in this student group.

1.8 Research Questions

1.8.1 Central Research Question

Drawing on social constructionism, emphasis is placed on understanding how the individual interacts with their institutional environment through a focused question: **what kinds of identity do traditional and nontraditional Black female undergraduate psychology students construct within UK higher education?**

1.8.2 Subordinate Questions

Theoretically-driven subordinate questions drill further into participants' experiences and perceptions, tapping into the possibility of an intersectional construction of identity:

How do participants develop a sense of belonging to their academic environments? For example, what does their identity construction suggest for academic efficacy? In what ways might cultural, personal and social capital define their identity? Chapter 5 (Identity Literature Review) reflects on core aspects of identity construction, providing answers to these subordinate questions.

How do Black female students perceive and experience higher education? For example, what can be learnt from their experiences of transitioning into and through higher education? Chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide the context for these questions.

From a social justice perspective, how can the experiences of Black female students provide a gateway for understanding the experiences of marginalised students? Further to the chapter which sets out the research methodology (Chapter 6), Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 present the findings from analyses of experiences of both Black female student types [traditional and nontraditional] using triangulated qualitative methods to address the final subordinate question.

In formulating these questions, attention was paid to the advice given by Cole (2009) to aid researchers working in this vein. Cole encourages researchers to address three conceptual questions (see Table 1.8) using five criteria across the research stages, as this will avoid over-reliance on demography as an explanation for the construction of identity and experience. These questions are:

1. *Who is included within this category?*
2. *What role does inequality play?*
3. *Where are the similarities?*

Table 1.8

Implications of the three questions for each stage of the research process (denoted as Table 1 in source)

Table 1
Implications of the Three Questions for Each Stage of the Research Process

Research stage	Question		
	Who is included within this category?	What role does inequality play?	Where are the similarities?
Generation of hypotheses	Is attuned to diversity within categories	Literature review attends to social and historical contexts of inequality	May be exploratory rather than hypothesis testing to discover similarities
Sampling	Focuses on neglected groups	Category memberships mark groups with unequal access to power and resources	Includes diverse groups connected by common relationships to social and institutional power
Operationalization	Develops measures from the perspective of the group being studied	If comparative, differences are conceptualized as stemming from structural inequality (upstream) rather than as primarily individual-level differences	Views social categories in terms of individual and institutional practices rather than primarily as characteristics of individuals
Analysis	Attends to diversity within a group and may be conducted separately for each group studied	Tests for both similarities and differences	Interest is not limited to differences
Interpretation of findings	No group's findings are interpreted to represent a universal or normative experience	Differences are interpreted in light of groups' structural positions	Sensitivity to nuanced variations across groups is maintained even when similarities are identified

Source: Cole (2009, p. 176)

In the context of the present research, the response to the first conceptual question ["who is included within this category?"] is individuals who self-identify as Black female undergraduate students and who are enrolled on a psychology degree program at a London HEI. The sample was further delineated by student type - traditional and nontraditional - given the view that there may be differences between the experiences of these groups, despite their similar ethnicity. While the sample can be considered as both homogeneous[4] and heterogeneous[5], few attempts are made to generalise their experiences to those of Black female undergraduate students, psychology students or to the wider body of BME undergraduate students at London universities. Instead, the research aims to highlight the uniqueness of these participants' individual experience.

The second question ["what role does inequality play?"] is addressed in Chapters 2 and 3 by considering the contribution of a history of inequality and relevant socio-demographic

---

[4] All participants were Black, female, psychology undergraduate students and London-based
[5] All participants were studying at HEIs varying by type and location, had various nationalities and differing student typologies

characteristics, in Chapter 5 by a review of the literature on identity and relevant theoretical perspectives, and in Chapter 6 by setting out a conceptual framework to explore lived experiences. The third question ["where are the similarities?"] is addressed in Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 through a portrayal of the experiences of participants in each of the research phases and by connecting those experiences in a general discussion of the findings from Chapter 11 onwards. Using more than one form of analysis during this research revealed both similarities and differences in the student samples.

1.9 Research Process

Black women were asked about their experiences of higher education study across four domains of inquiry. Initial information about the students was obtained via a socio-demographic questionnaire which offered insight into each student's construction of their cultural, personal and social capital. In this context, 'capital' is considered a personal and transmittable 'resource' (Lareau & Weininger, 2003) from which the student draws. Using a semi-structured interview schedule, participants' narratives provided broad insight into perceptions of their academic environment and the pedagogic practices used within the discipline of psychology as well as the development of academic self-efficacy and sense of belonging.

Questions about engagement with staff and their peers shed further light on students' potential sense of belonging. The quality of interpersonal relationships is considered a determinant for positive or negative experiences across the lifespan (Herbers & Meijering, 2015). Academic and non-academic interactions can provide a better understanding of the relative importance of interpersonal relationships for the academic experience (Kenny, Dooley, & Fitzgerald, 2013). Questions about identity, ethnicity, family and culture were used to explore social locations that further make up the students' cultural, personal and social capital. Finally, views about their involvement in this kind of research were drawn on to inform a wider understanding of the potential benefits of exploring marginalised experiences in student samples using similar methods.

1.10 Summary

The overall aim of this research is to create a credible 'space' in which to capture, understand and convey Black female students' narratives of their experiences of higher education. Stories about these students' past and present selves as well as their aspirations about a possible self will be captured using several formats. This research sits among the type

highlighted by Sanders and Rose-Adams (2014, p. 11) which is needed to better understand student experiences using their "life histories and [narratives about their] 'possible selves'''. The Black female researcher's experience of carrying out an intersubjective interpretation of identity construction in Black female students is set out as a reflexive exercise in Chapter 12. Reflexivity is not just helpful for a qualitative researcher. In the context of the present research, it is an essential practice when interpreting the experiences of similar others (Fine, 1994). A more detailed consideration of research into BME people and BME students follows. This was used to shape the development of materials used in this research.

Chapter 2

Education Perspectives and Student Experiences

Cultural deficit perspectives have, for some time, shaped views about under-performance in Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students. Deficit perspectives are defined in this chapter, which specifically reference the experiences of BME students in UK higher education. An overview of the degree award/attainment gap leads into a consideration of cultural deficit perspectives that have informed the gap and ways in which BME student outcomes are viewed. Student experiences in higher education are discussed more generally, with a descriptive account of the characteristics for a traditional and a nontraditional undergraduate student. Experiences of BME staff are briefly attended to as part of the broader academic picture for BME student experiences.

Chapter 3 discusses socio-demographic characteristics that include social, personal and cultural factors that make up the 'economy' with which a student enters university. These demographics informed the questionnaires and interview schedules used in the study phases of the present research. Finally, Chapter 4 references the experience of studying psychology, challenges for delivering an inclusive curriculum and concludes with an overarching summary of the three chapters[6].

2.1 BME Students

For all the benefits of higher education, there are concerns that quality of experience, even within 'multicultural' London, is negative for some student groups. Student satisfaction with London universities is reportedly lower than for universities outside London (Student Experience Survey, 2016). BME students [especially Black Caribbean students] are less satisfied with their overall university experience (HEFCE, 2014b). The motivation to attend university remains low among Black students, with higher drop-out rates for this population (SMF, 2017). One reason for this may be that more than 16% of BME students complain of racism in their campus environments (National Union of Students, 2012). However, Surridge's (2008) review of NSS data found a different picture: the study suggested that

---

[6] As recommended by Warner (2008) for intersectionality studies, the chapters outlined are used to situate 'social structural processes' for the construction of Black female student identities. I chose to do this because Warner advocates that this requires "an interdisciplinary perspective … [drawing on] anthropology, psychology or sociology … history, geography, and political science" (p. 460) as is necessary to situate the context.

Black students in the UK were more positive about teaching and learning than White students, while Asian students were among the most dissatisfied student group. Mixed findings for ethnicity satisfaction reflect a complex student experience that continues despite an overall increasing trend for student satisfaction (HEFCE, 2014a). By contrast, US research reveals that 'campus climates' are becoming more positive for diversity (Bridger & Shaw, 2012). Bridger and Shaw's review found differences for the conceptualisation of student diversity, with some universities focusing more on positive aspects of personal and social development than on ethnicity.

Another reason for student dissatisfaction may be that BME students are concentrated in a particular type of university (that is, post-1992 universities; Connor, Tyers, Modood, & Hillage, 2004). Research finds that BME students are less accepted at high-performing universities even when they have equivalent qualifications to their White counterparts (Boliver, 2013). Consequently, there is less ethnic diversity at more prestigious institutions (that is, Russell Group and pre-1992 universities), some of which are economically defined (Tatlow, 2015) as being more beneficial for employability (Noden, Shiner, & Modood, 2014). Indeed, UCAS data show an upward trend in applications to these universities by BME students, but the low number of acceptances requires further investigation (Reay, 2018).

The situation is worse for Black African/Caribbean students applying to elite universities (such as Oxford and Cambridge), with only 6% of successful applications over a 10-year period, even when these students have better A-Level results than their White counterparts (Boliver, 2013). Of all ethnicities, Boliver's findings show that Black African/Caribbean students submit the fewest applications to Russell Group institutions (35%) compared to their White counterparts (47%), and the highest number of applications to post-1992 universities (87% compared to 73% for White students). This pattern suggests that Black African/Caribbean students may be 'learning' that it is futile to attempt to gain entry into more prestigious institutions.

According to Cole (2009), the persistence of negative experiences for BME students requires a contextualisation of student experiences for improved explanations at the 'causal' level. In the UK, a toxic combination of dissatisfaction and low award/attainment in higher education has attracted the attention of the government which issued an All-Party Parliamentary call for evidence into experiences of belonging in BME staff and students. Responses followed from the BPS (Morrison Coulthard, Fitzgerald, Howarth, & Husbands, 2014), race equality organisations (for example, the Runnymede Trust, ECU) and trade

unions (for example, UCU) to inform future policies on achieving social justice in higher education. However, to date, the government is yet to formulate a response to the evidence.

2.2 Degree Award/Attainment Gap

Another factor that suggests a less than satisfactory experience for BME students is the award/attainment gap. More recently referred to as the 'BAME attainment gap' to specifically include outcomes for Asian students (UUK & NUS, 2019), this data captures the disparity in degree awarding for some student populations (Berry & Loke, 2011; ECU, 2010). This is distinct from the completion gap [10.3% for Black students compared to 6.9% for other home students] which might be related; however, the focus of the completion gap is the number of students *completing* a degree programme (SMF, 2017). The award/attainment gap is calculated from numerical differences [by ethnicity] between students receiving a first or upper-second class degree and students with lower levels of attainment (Office for Students, 2019; see Figure 2.2).
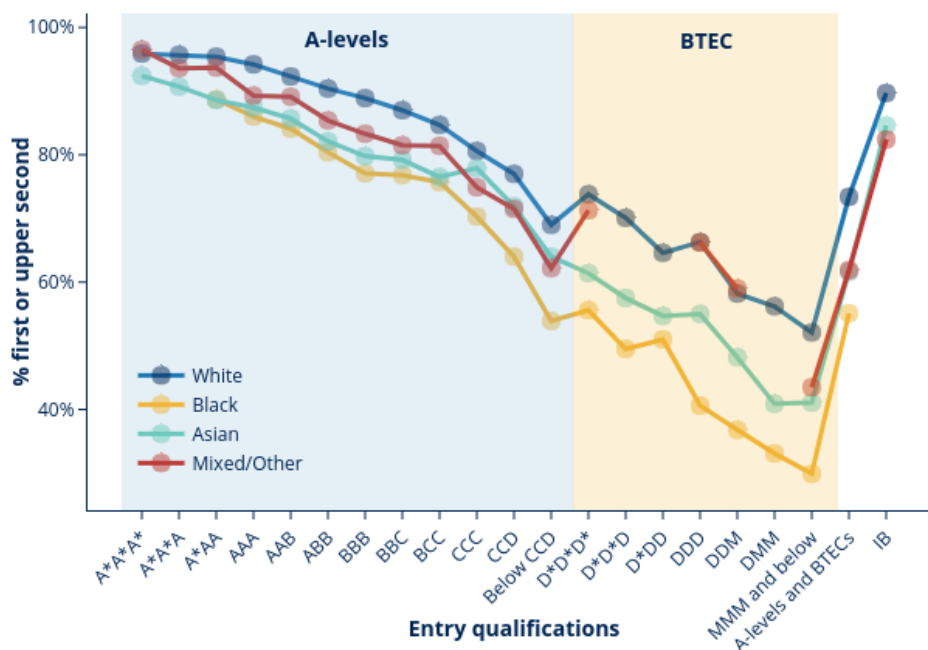
Figure 2.2. Degree outcomes for a first or upper-second class degree by ethnicity, entry qualification and degree classification (OfS, 2019)

By 2008, the award/attainment gap stood at an 18% differential for BME students across the sector (ECU, 2009) and this figure increased to 19% in 2012 (ECU, 2012). By 2015, there was a 26.3% differentiation in favour of White students being awarded a 'good degree' (ECU, 2015a). By 2018, that differential stood at 24% (Advance HE, 2018a). Although there

has been some improvement with the attainment gap standing at 13.2% by 2019 (UUK & NUS, 2019), the issue persists. Subsequently, there is a mandate from the OfS (Office for Students, 2018b) that the absolute gap (comprised of "structural and unexplained factors") must be eliminated by 2030-2031 (UUK & NUS, 2019, p. 9).

The gap is marked for Black, Asian, female and mature students and is more prevalent in certain subjects (for example, subjects *other than* agriculture, dentistry and medicine, pointing to the student demographic taking particular subjects; Richardson, 2015). An example of ethnicity prevalence is that there are now more Indian students in medicine and dentistry than any other minoritised ethnicity (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2018). For BME students taking STEMM subjects [including psychology], the gap is compounded by the extent and speed at which students are expected to become autonomous learners in these disciplines (Ceglie & Settlage, 2014).

The proportion of White students has fallen (Connor et al., 2004) and there are increasing numbers of BME students in higher education (up 18.4% in 2010/11 from 14.9% in 2003/4) and at London-based HEIs, in particular (HEFCE, 2013a). However, student timelines continue to show under-performance for BME student populations. This plays out as poor continuation and completion rates (Rodgers, 2013). Compared to their Asian and White counterparts, Black students have the lowest degree attainment levels (Bhattacharyya, Ison, & Blair, 2003) while Caribbean and Pakistani students have the highest non-completion rates (Rodgers, 2013). This finding points to the possibility of a worse outcome overall for Black Caribbean students.

The gap is pronounced even in secondary school. Here, Black Caribbean students are the worst performers, while ethnic minorities such as Chinese, Indian and Bangladeshi students tend to excel (Crawford & Greaves, 2015; SMF, 2016). Notably, White students continue to outperform their peers, although recent findings have attested to the emergence of a somewhat different picture. An analysis of census data between 2001 and 2011 for the London area showed that ethnic minorities are marginally outperforming White students, but only for GCSE attainment (Elahi & Khan, 2016). Even with mixed findings, these outcomes continue to translate into lower degree awards and lower prospects for highly skilled employment (see Figure 2.3), in particular for populations of BME students (Khan, 2019).
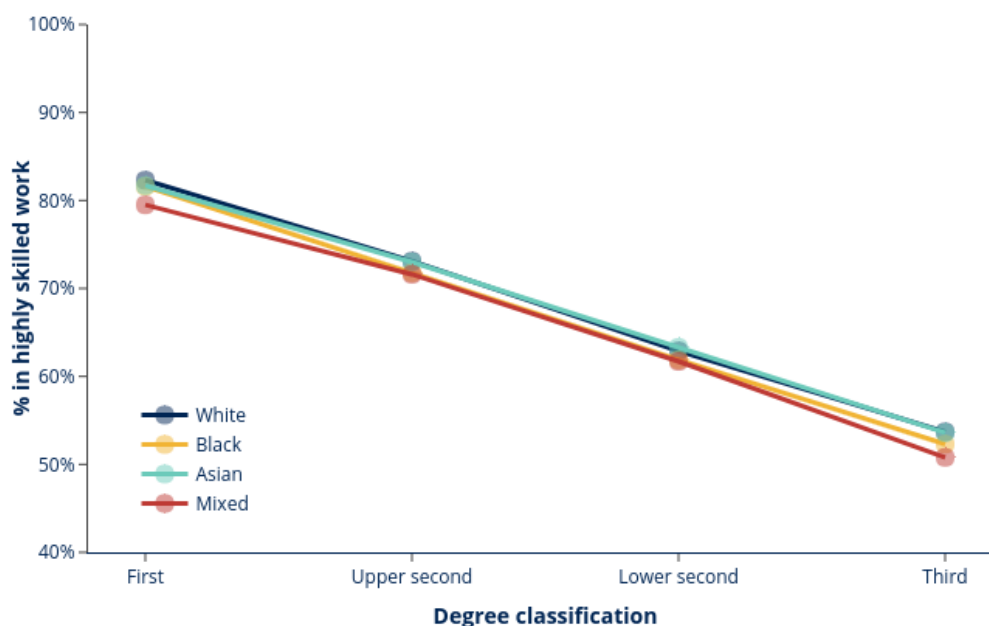
Figure 2.3. Employment outcomes by ethnicity and degree classification (OfS, 2019)

An ethnicity/generational stratification approach to degree attainment sheds further light on the issue. Lessard-Phillips and Li's (2017) multi-level analysis defines first-generation students as those born outside the UK, with both parents also born outside the UK. The 1.5 generation came to the UK to be educated between the ages of six and 16. Second-generation students are those born in the UK, with both parents born outside the UK. Besides further discrete increments in generational classification, third-generation students are those born in the UK to UK-born parents. Based on age range, the current traditional students [aged 18-21 years] are likely to be third-generation, while nontraditional students [aged 22 years and upwards] are either first, 1.5 or second-generation.

Of the ethnic groups currently resident in the UK, second-generation Black Caribbean people have the lowest attainment (29.1%). When attainment is stratified by ethnicity and social class, Black Caribbean students fare worse than other ethnic groups (15.5% compared to 12.1%). Even White working-class male students, often pointed out as being left-behind, are less disadvantaged than Black Caribbean male students (Crawford, 2019). When age, class and gender are controlled, Lessard-Phillips and Li (2017) found that [apart from Pakistani and some Bangladeshi cohorts, who tend to fall within low ranges] Black Caribbeans still have the lowest degree attainment.

2.3 Contextualising the Background

Higher education research has explored a wide remit of issues which are considered pertinent

to student experiences. For example, research from HEFCE (2014a; 2015; 2018), ECU and Higher Education Academy (2008) and ECU (2015a; 2016a) includes a consideration of the effect of cultural deficit perspectives and the degree award/attainment gap as well as perceptions of inequality and linked outcomes. This body of research has led to interventions that have reduced and even removed some academic disparities. Some researchers have highlighted the benefits of peer networks and professional mentoring for improving students' experiences (Hixenbaugh, Dewart, Drees, & Williams, 2005), while other researchers have focused on the importance of access to positive role models (De Beer, Smith, & Jansen, 2009). Interventions can offer practical and emotional support for a student's personal and academic development, although little is known about their effects for different student populations.

Where there is less access to a fuller scope of student experiences (e.g. Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander, & Grinstead, 2008; Stevenson, 2012) along with restrictions because of sampling issues (for example, experience sampled at a single point during the student pipeline; Stuart, Lido, & Morgan, 2009), the findings from higher education research can be limited. According to Huang and Coker (2008), accessing BME student samples can be particularly difficult because of the smaller numbers of these students who are willing to have their views included in research.

Nevertheless, studies that have focused on narrower aspects of student experience can be just as insightful. To illustrate, a London-based cross-institutional project exploring sense of belonging identified several factors that create a better student experience (Shoderu, Husbands, Holley, & Kane, 2012). This research found that students from *all* ethnicities value strong supportive relationships with staff and their peers, which can be summarised as social interactions that benefit the learning experience. Successful interventions included opportunities to socialise with staff outside of the curriculum. Moreover, staff who are experienced in establishing relationships with students showed more sensitivity towards the personal and financial costs of students transitioning into higher education, and had a greater awareness of administrative failures and the negative effect of a lack of staff empathy on the student experience (Shoderu et al., 2012).

Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) also emphasise the value of feedback as a useful tool for student engagement. They describe engagement as the process of students receiving constructive feedback on skills that lead to refinements which, in turn, improve teaching practice. Recommendations for good practice from the governing body for students (National Union of Students, 2012) resonate with evidence-based suggestions for improving student

experiences (Thomas, 2012; Zepke & Leach, 2010). These recommendations, with a stronger emphasis on responding to the needs of students from under-represented and disadvantaged backgrounds, are echoed in comprehensive findings from Stevenson, O'Mahoney, Khan, Ghaffar, and Stiell (2019) and a collaborative report between Universities UK and National Union of Students (2019). In broader terms, interventions that form part of an inclusive practice create a more positive experience for students. A comprehensive review of the dynamics of teacher-student relationships (Wubbels, 2017) further reveals that a teacher's ability to manage a multi-cultural classroom is paramount to reducing perceptions of disparity at a local level.

2.4 Cross-Cultural Perspectives

A growing interest in researching the learning experiences of BME students has produced a large body of work in the US. As this is a developing area in the UK, this has led to cross-cultural applications of the research. However, applying US research to the experiences of UK Black students could limit an appreciation for their experiences in a UK context. The reasons for this assertion are better contextualised by a brief consideration of differences between the socio-political history and racialised experiences of US Black people (also termed African Americans) and UK Black people.

2.4.1 American (US) Experiences

Over many centuries, whole societies of African American people have used tactics of resistance and resilience to fight oppression (Hankivsky, 2014). Padilla (2001), cited in Pyke (2010, p. 553), expounds on the root of oppression as a product of profound aspects of 'lived experience', saying: "The internalisation of oppression is a multidimensional phenomenon that assumes many forms and sizes across situational contexts, including the intersections of multiple systems of domination". During the civil rights movement (1954-1965), African Americans used collective efficacy (Bandura, 1982) combined with purposive action to self-organise and support the framing of a 'collective' identity in their fight against racial oppression.

A collective response to continued political enslavement and domination in the US showed the power of group membership and propelled the emergence of the Black Consciousness Phase, which includes the Black Power movement (1965 to late 1970s) and the rise of Black feminism (Ogbu, 2004). While the civil rights movement was predominantly associated with Dr Martin Luther King (a prominent minister of religion, scholar, orator and

social activist; Chakrabarty, 2013) as part of a Black male-dominated movement, Black feminists should also be credited with sparking that movement (Griffin, 2012).

However, Black feminists argued that these Black-originated movements denied Black women of a sense of agency because they were being centrally-operated from a pervasive male-centred ideology (Crenshaw, 1991). Even so, a positive outcome from such a troubled history was seen in an increase in the pursuit of higher education among African American males and females (Allen, 1992). More African Americans began taking up opportunities to study and pursue intellectual self-advancement to free themselves from mental oppression. The visible effect was an increase in Black staff and students on US university and college campuses, which had the dual effect of both heightening and moderating racial tensions (Musser, 2015).

Even within the seemingly homogeneous population of US Black people, perceptions of differences by ethnicity led to differential treatment for some groups, while an interaction of socio-economic factors was creating differential outcomes for specific groups. Woodward, Taylor, Abelson, and Matusko (2013) found that when exploring the intersection of ethnicity and wellbeing, Black Caribbean people, who are considered a homogeneous and disenfranchised group in the US, were experiencing higher rates of depression than African American populations. Another study found that African Americans and mixed-race immigrants had more positive experiences than Black Caribbeans (Massey, Mooney, Torres, & Charles, 2007).

Mixed findings from other sources diluted the picture further. African and Black Caribbean students were noted as outperforming African American students, were found to be more motivated to succeed, to have benefitted from role models in their local and native communities and to have embraced cultural diversity (Valentine, 2012). Moreover, stark differences were found in employment outcomes for African Americans and Black Caribbeans. Li (2013) presented evidence of a disparity in the US labour market for the intersection of occupation, gender and ethnicity. African American males held lower positions than Black Caribbean males, despite perceived advances in US social justice and equality.

2.4.2 British (UK) Experiences

In the UK, the Race Relations Acts (1965; 1968; 1976; 2000) and Equality Acts (2010; 2011) were introduced to tackle the discrimination of minoritised ethnicities by legislating for greater equality across a range of contexts, although mostly within employment and public services (Cabinet Office, 2017). However, these legal frameworks were less effective at

creating social change on the scale observed in the US (Runnymede Trust, 2015a). Researchers (Agyemang, Bhopal, & Bruijnzeels, 2005) have pointed out differences for people of presumed similar ethnicity, charting the requirement for culturally-sensitive treatment that distinguishes people by their ethnic group (Rathod, Kingdon, Phiri, & Gobbi, 2010). To this extent, the UK government has been asked to ensure that cultural distinctions are recognised in every aspect of community life (Sunak & Rajeswaran, 2014).

Whether in the US or UK, the diversity that exists within the homogeneous construct of Black ethnicity (Cross, 2000; Mirza, 1992) has shown that life and academic experiences can differ both *between* and *within* ethnic groups (Buck, Cook, Quigley, Eastwood, & Lucas, 2009). Cole (2009) asserts that an intersectional approach is necessary to understand the 'power differentials' (Collins, 2001) that exist within some groups. Early [or later] experiences in a host country can further shape experiences and cultural practices. West Indian 'immigrants' to the UK, as one example, faced the challenge of acculturating themselves and their children to what was experienced as a 'hostile' Britain despite similarities in dress and language as well as a monarchy shared with Commonwealth citizens (Tajfel, 1978). Indeed, experiences of hostility from the UK Home Office in the form of threatened and actual deportations (Johnstone, 2018) continue for the 'Windrush generation' (based on the name of the passenger ship, the 'Empire Windrush', that brought people to the UK from the Caribbean in 1948; Lowe, 2018).

However useful US research may be for understanding some student experiences, it seems that it may be less applicable for understanding experiences of students in the UK (Rodgers, 2013). The UK is yet to see collective efficacy on the scale of that conducted by US Black people, which has contributed to shaping lived and educational experiences in a particular fashion for the latter group; although it should be noted that Mama (1995) refers to a positive 'shift' in societal views following the Black Power movement that arose in South London in the 1970s. This shift led to a new movement of Black British feminists in the 1980s and gave fresh impetus to resistance and agency in UK-based Caribbean and African women. Indeed, African American responses to oppression empowered UK Black feminists to create their own form of collective efficacy (Bryan, Dadzie, & Scafe, 1986).

Thus inspired by their US counterparts, Black females in the UK have continued to strive for political, academic and social advancement, despite having less than equal access to opportunities (Mirza, 1998). Tajfel (1978) refers to this period of striving as a time of 'Black consciousness' when people rebelled against being treated as having less 'in common' with indigenous groups. Many immigrants to the UK found that their initial plans of returning to

their country of origin after a few years in the 'Mother Country' was becoming a fading option. Limited financial means to return to their home countries fueled a form of 'social agency' and a period of settlement within ethnic communities in the UK (Goulbourne, 1998). For others, a merger between cultures seemed a more peaceable response to combatting negative attitudes. Regardless of the outcomes, there were implications for the individual and a community sense of belonging. The challenge in these circumstances, according to Phinney (1990), was for these groups to either remain conflicted or to work on constructing an adaptive 'bi-cultural' identity. Under constrained circumstances, many Black people chose to embrace the latter (Goulbourne, 1998).

Although there are differences in the social history, and political and cultural challenges between Black people in the US and Black people in the UK, some parallels can be drawn that give rise to an understanding of present-day experiences for both populations. They have both experienced systematic forms of racism which have limited their progression in society. They have both attempted to moderate these challenges using organised protests. They recognise the value of engaging in higher education as a tool in the fight against oppression. However, differences in organising and engagement suggest the importance of viewing some experiences, such as student experiences, through a different lens.

2.5 Cultural Deficit Perspectives

Widespread discrimination, unemployment and under-achievement among African Americans gave way to the formation of cultural deficit perspectives that became a mainstay of White hegemonic thought about Black people's experiences (Brown, 2010). These perspectives were based on the notion that the difficulties being experienced by people of a Black ethnicity in achieving or succeeding were caused by the group themselves. In essence, the view is that these difficulties happened because of self-imposed circumstances rather than the effect of years of White privilege and structures that perpetuate dominance and power (Gillborn, 2015). Even within academia, there is documented evidence which demonstrates the racially-positioned struggles experienced by Black academics trying to integrate at doctoral levels and beyond because of deficit perspectives held by others about them (Grant, 2012; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Tillman, 2012).

Cultural deficit perspectives have a damaging and far-reaching effect. The social derogation of Black people extended to perceptions about their behaviours in multiple contexts that included their sexuality, parenting style and experiences of motherhood. In cases of rape, the judiciary viewed Black women as 'licentious' and deserving of sexual violation

(Crenshaw, 1989). Black matriarchy theory (Moynihan, 1965) superseded the 'docile Black mammy' archetype (Ansell, 2013) and revealed that Black women's parenting styles were constructed as aggressive, arising from perceptions of maternal over-dominance [especially in single mothers] without an appreciation that these women were simply trying to reduce the likelihood of their children [especially their sons] becoming victims of crime in their neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, single White mothers were less subjected to demeaning interpretations of their parental status (Phoenix, 2003).

Prospective employers considered African American female candidates as 'single' mothers and rejected them as suitable employees (Browne & Kennelly, 2000). Phoenix (1999; 2003) added that media coverage for single motherhood ascribed the collective failings of modern society for the state of White single motherhood, whereas a Black single mother was viewed as the outcome of reckless personal behaviours on her part. Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, and Caruthers (2004) found that these views continue despite increasingly positive representations of Black women in the media. Similarly, subjective negative stereotypes are attributed to Black men, who are constructed as being a problem to society, leading to their over-representation in the prison system (Ministry of Justice, 2017), as being prone to mental ill health (Howard, 2013) and considered useful only as hyper-visible money-generating media icons in the music industry (Milton, 2012) or sporting industries (Harrison, 1998).

In some research areas (such as medical literature), there is even less regard for ethnic diversity. Woolf, Cave, Greenhaigh, and Dacre (2008) found an almost exclusive focus on the experiences of Indian and Pakistani/Bangladeshi medical students. Limited regard for academic achievements or experiences of resilience in other ethnic groups (Eunyoung & Hargrove, 2013) presents a one-sided picture as it under-represents ethnic experiences or acts to maintain misrepresentations about particular groups in society.

2.5.1 Deficits Perspectives in Education

Turning to student experiences, Boliver (2013) found that deficit perspectives continue to dominate opinions about some students' ability to do well in academia, particularly when they are the first person in their family to attend university, are working class or live in so-called 'troubled' neighbourhoods (such as POLAR3 participation rate quintiles 1 and 2 - some of the most disadvantaged areas in the country; HEFCE, 2012). It is claimed that these students lack confidence or that they study competitive subjects which cause them to buckle under the pressure to perform. However, Stevenson (2012) found that BME students were as

confident about their ability to succeed as their White counterparts, only differing in terms of the sense of entitlement they felt in accessing support, university resources and opportunities. Furthermore, some measures (for example, POLAR participation quintiles) cannot, by themselves, be used to adequately predict students' ability to do well in academia (Gorard, Boliver, Siddiqui, & Banerjee, 2017).

Instead, these findings reinforce the ways in which an academic identity can be experienced differentially by a student and be constructed differently by others even when there is a similar evidence base (for example, similar ethnicity, social class and home location; SMF 2017). Other challenges for BME students, such as studying a STEMM subject (Pawson, 2012) and facing lower academic outcomes (Maylor, 2009a) have contributed to a tendency to default to student characteristics as explanatory factors (Universities UUK & NUS, 2019).

Harper (2009) adds that some widening participation programmes should be held accountable for fostering cultural deficit perspectives because they feed into the view that 'supportive' programmes are the only way BME students and students from under-represented groups can access and succeed in higher education. Consequently, researchers argue for a more cautious approach when drawing conclusions about student performance based on their ethnicity (Boliver, 2013; Richardson, 2015).

Although the degree award/attainment gap shows that there is underperformance by BME students compared to their White counterparts (Broecke & Nicholls, 2007), the extent to which academic experiences shape these kinds of outcomes is less understood. It is known that some student populations (for example, White middle-class students) have access to privilege that informs their cultural, personal and social 'web', leading to a heightened sense of entitlement (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004). For others, their cultural capital may not blend as well into institutional norms, particularly when this is enacted within a climate of bias (Milner, 2017).

Rodgers (2013) warns against a tendency for using cultural deficit perspectives to explain BME student experiences and outcomes since the picture for achievement is complex and incomplete. It is clear that there is a need to consider less judgemental approaches to understanding outcomes for these students. Furthermore, acknowledging that false beliefs, unconscious biases and negative attitudes feed into deficit perspectives is critical to tackling them.

2.6 [Un]conscious Biases

Biases are attributional judgements people make about others (ECU, 2018b). These biases are based on implicit attitudes, stereotyping and beliefs about individuals or particular groups in society (Cuellar, 2017). Moreover, they function as quick, impulsive assessments that seem to lack rational thought processes (Tate & Page, 2018). The McGregor-Smith Review (2017) of racism in the labour market goes as far as arguing against the use of 'unconscious' bias as a term, since this can act as a veneer for 'conscious' practices of wrongdoing. [Un]conscious biases are termed a collective "hidden blind spot" (Bellack, 2015, p. 63) that feed microaggressive behaviours, negatively affecting the way some people are treated.

Microaggressive behaviours can be verbal or non-verbal, intentional or non-intentional, and have the effect of making an individual feel unwelcome in their environment (Al-Mateen, 2017). They have been further termed as micro-assaults, micro-insults and micro-invalidations (West, 2019). Research suggests that BME students and staff operate within a daily climate of bias and racial microaggressive behaviours that are products of the discourse which surrounds hegemonic Whiteness (Gillborn, 2015). According to Sian (2017), hegemony is a feature of an environment that is dominated by White people and informs its cultural norms.

Milkman, Akinola, and Chugh (2014) illustrate how biases can limit prospects for BME students and afford more power to White academic hierarchy. Using mock applications, students with African or African-American sounding names received fewer offers for interviews by White professors. The study concluded that bias informs student selection processes, suggesting the potential to influence recruitment and selection for ethnic minority staff in HEIs and beyond. The findings have stimulated interest in using [un]conscious bias training as a vehicle for creating institutional and organisational culture change.

However, Devine, Forscher, Austin, and Cox (2012) caution that the 'one-shot' training approach favoured by some institutions might not sufficiently delimit the operationalisation of bias in staff who already have lower expectations of BME students (Stevenson, 2012). Supporting research reveals that White teachers under-rate Black male students and Black students in STEMM subjects compared with Black teachers' ratings of the same students (Gershenson, Bolt, & Papageorge, 2016). The implicit and complex nature of bias poses difficulty for the possibility of finding an effective solution (Atewologun, Cornish, & Tresh, 2018). However, it is for this reason that BME students' experiences must remain under scrutiny.

2.7 Student Experiences

An undergraduate student is part of a community of learners in which the trend for participation in higher education is increasing nationally, and more so for younger people domiciled in London and surrounding areas. More than 50% of first-year undergraduate students are influenced by socio-demographic characteristics when choosing to study at a university in and around the UK's capital city (HEFCE, 2014a). An increasing trend observed in LEA data (Goodman & Loverseed, 2013) indicates that many London-domiciled students are choosing to attend a university nearer home (Ball, Reay, & David, 2002). Furthermore, there are more universities in London than in other parts of the country (HEFCE, 2013a). Despite a range of inequalities from housing to employment, London remains a popular destination for higher education study (Elahi & Khan, 2016). This has been termed 'the London effect' (SMF, 2017), which sees London boroughs reflecting a higher progression rate for students than in other parts of the country (Bennett, 2017), but with universities that have the largest attainment gap (15.6%; Universities UUK & NUS, 2019).

Studying at a university 'local' to home has benefits. These include the prospect of reduced financial outlay, shorter travelling times and retained connection to family and friendship networks (Clayton, Crozier, & Reay, 2009; Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2003). Thus, a London university can provide a more convenient option for London-domiciled young people than studying at a university further afield. The attractiveness of London's diversity extends beyond its universities. The city's demographic profile is culturally diverse, with a population of more than eight million people. Of the non-indigenous ethnicities in London, which total 3.3 million, 1.5 million people self-identified in the 2001 census with a Black ethnicity (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Of this number, the proportion of Black students is 16.3%, increasing the opportunity for representativeness in universities (Blandford, Brill, Neave, & Allison, 2011).

The number of BME students entering higher education is increasing year-on-year (increase entry rates up to 41.2% for Black students compared to 29.5% for White students; Race Disparity Unit, 2019). More BME students are applying to London universities (Croxford & Raffe, 2015), whether classified as 'old' (that is, Russell Group or pre-1992) or 'new' (that is, post-1992) universities (Sanusi, MacDonald, Mosavie, & Mayi, 2012). An added benefit for these students is access to better employment opportunities in the capital city (SMF, 2017). Furthermore, despite increasing numbers, BME students continue to experience deleterious outcomes in terms of retention and attainment (Universities UK & NUS, 2019). BME students at Russell Group universities are not exempt from this effect with

notably high levels of unemployment after graduation (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2017), while the McGregor-Smith Review (2017) noted that employment prospects are fewer for BME people in general.

2.7.1 Student Characteristics

Traditional undergraduate students form the bulk of students at UK universities (HEFCE, 2014a). In addition, female undergraduate students make up most of that population (51%; Universities UK, 2013). Traditional students typically begin an undergraduate degree *before* the age of 23 years compared to their mature counterparts, who commence their studies later (Fleming & McKee, 2005). Other characteristics of traditional students include attending university soon after completing sixth form at secondary school or college, beginning university education at 18 or 19 years old, and being single and financially dependent (Center for Institutional Effectiveness, 2004). Traditional female students have stronger expectations for successful completion of a degree within the usual allotment of three years and may perform better than their male counterparts (National Audit Office, 2007).

A body of research suggests that nontraditional or mature students hold particular characteristics. They are frequently characterised by age at point of enrolment on an undergraduate degree: 23 years old and above (Fleming & McKee, 2005). In UK higher education, the entry age for a nontraditional student is set at 21 years and over (UCAS, 2016). These students are also likely to work longer hours in paid employment to supplement their student loan and may be supporting dependents (Taylor & House, 2010). They may study part-time, have limited or no previous exposure to higher education, or enter with FE qualifications (Reay et al.*,* 2002). Research suggests that nontraditional female students are more motivated, more anxious, and prefer to learn in informal environments (Nunn, 1994).

Mature students are more likely to attend post-1992 universities, since holding alternative qualifications may exclude them from applying to more prestigious institutions that favour traditional entry requirements (Boliver, 2013). The drop-out rate for nontraditional students is notably higher than for their traditional counterparts (SMF, 2017). Maturity, lower social class, lack of spousal or family support, mounting debt, unrealistic perceptions about academic readiness and perceptions of a lack of institutional support are cited as characteristics in nontraditional female students that may account for early attrition (Scott, Burns, & Cooney, 1996). When these characteristics are conflated with ethnicity, the picture for BME nontraditional student populations is more complex (National Audit Office, 2007).

2.8 BME Academic Staff

Role models are noted as important for students (Taylor & House, 2010). Black female students, in particular, value role models for the advice and support they bring to their studies (Ceglie & Settlage, 2014). However, the often 'temporary' status of BME staff employment limits their capacity to become influential models for Black students. Across the sector, BME academic staff tend to hold more temporary and fixed-term contracts (74%) than their White counterparts (61%; HEFCE, 2014b). Kwhali (2017) notes that the deliberate non-progression of Black staff into permanent and senior posts reflects an inherent cultural deficit perspective that is 'comfortably' played out as serving the best interests of a department, school or university, absolving the perpetrator(s) of blame. While students' perspectives are the focus of the present research, BME academic staff also have less than satisfactory experiences, leading to fewer BME role models in UK higher education.

Research into Black academic staff experiences finds that they are often treated as inferior, leading to an uncomfortable working environment (Bhopal, Brown, & Jackson, 2015). According to Oman, Rainford, and Stewart (2015), this treatment can stem from misconceptions over differences in customs, cultural dress and language. Misconceptions about cultural identity can fuel views that the Black person is a 'novelty', creating assumptions for the way Black people behave, dress, speak and so forth (Caplan & Ford, 2014). When enacted as racial microaggressions, attitudes and behaviours can create feelings of disempowerment that have the potential to affect identity construction and a holistic sense of wellbeing (Nadal et al., 2015).

Regardless of the source, there is growing recognition that microaggressions and [un]conscious biases can limit entrance into academe and progression for people from a range of ethnicities (Boliver, 2013). The toll on BME staff is not dissimilar to BME students, as they may feel compelled to conform to a dominant White hegemonic script. Consequently, some BME academic staff are choosing to leave UK HEIs because of limited progression and experiences of racism as well as disproportionate or tokenistic representation (Musser, 2015). Bhopal et al. (2015) term and document this phenomenon 'the Black academic flight', experienced as a significant loss of talented Black academics from UK HEIs. According to SOAS Student Union (2016), continuing negative experiences will affect the ratio of BME staff to BME students unless this issue is addressed by senior managers.

Thus, the outlook for staff ethnic diversity in UK higher education is reported as bleak (Showunmi, Atewologun, & Bebbington, 2015; see Figure 2.8). Only 6.1% of academic staff identified as BME (ECU, 2015b). By 2018, that figure rose to 16% (HESA, 2019). However,

statistics show a marked absence of BME staff at senior levels (HEFCE, 2014b) and even fewer Black female professors (Rollock, 2019), who report their experiences as demeaning, isolating and unsupported. By 2016, only 4.1% of senior staff at UK HEIs were BME and just two BME senior managers were serving as vice-chancellors (HESA, 2017a). Consistently, White and non-White staff outnumber Black academic and support staff at senior levels (ECU, 2015a). At menial levels, however, there is a noticeably larger representation of ethnic minorities in tradesperson and operative roles (ECU, 2013).
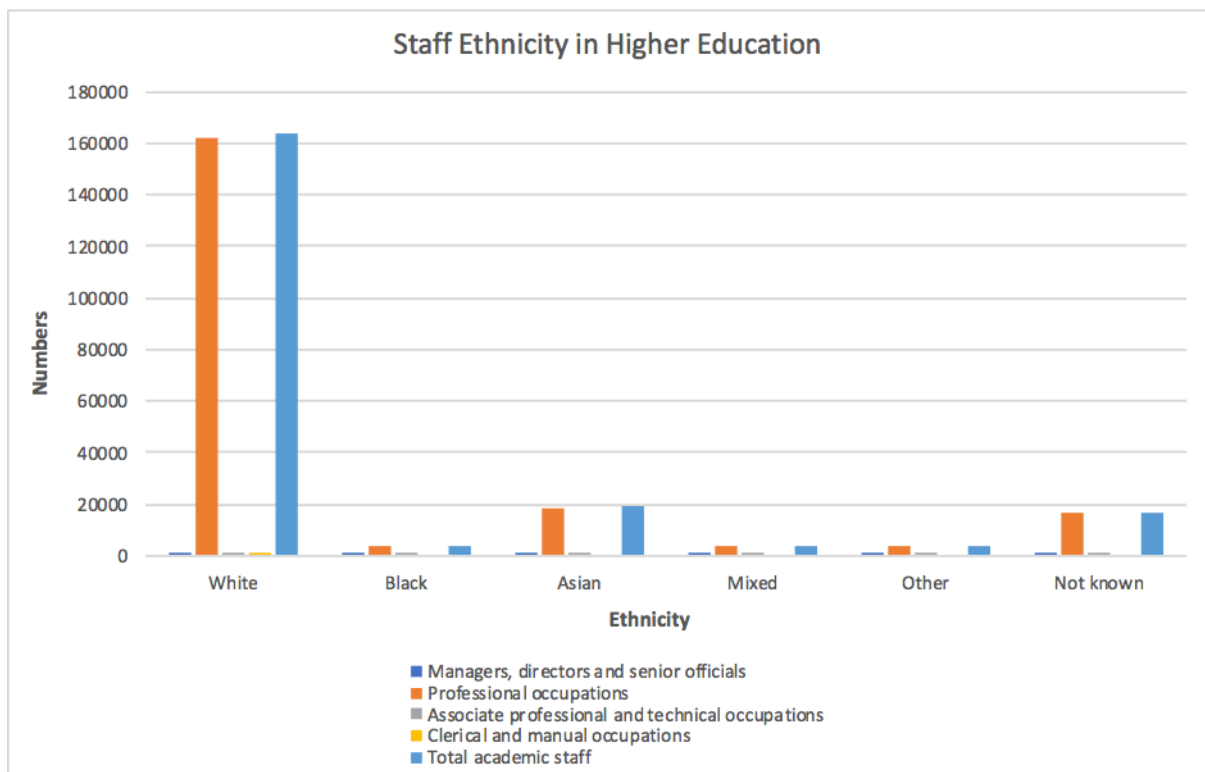
Figure 2.8: Staff ethnicity and employment role dispersion in higher education (HESA, 2019)

BME academics and practitioners often take up diversity roles in an attempt to create a fairer, less 'aggressive' working environment, but their involvement in trying to 'fix' institutional issues can take a toll on their wellbeing and professional development (Osseo-Asara et al., 2018). The toll is further experienced as limits on the quality and quantity of tutoring that can be offered to students. BME academic staff are known to take on disproportionate levels of pastoral care which, on the one hand, is empowering for BME students requiring access to specialist and cultural support (Bhopal et al., 2015). On the other hand, this extra workload can become time-consuming and unmanageable, detracting from other responsibilities. It is known that even more pressure is placed on female staff to provide high levels of pastoral

support to students, labelled as "academic moms" in the literature (El-Alayli, Hansen-Brown & Ceynar, 2017, p. 138).

Stoll and Williams (2016) point out that staff need to show competency in their area(s) of specialism in order to be successful role models for students. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that Black staff have the necessary skills or desire to become a role model (Maylor, 2009a), placing an additional pastoral burden on these staff (Universities UK & NUS, 2019). It is further noted that Black female staff can be constrained in reflecting credibility and often have a poorer sense of belonging due to the double bind of racism and sexism experienced from their counterparts and some students (Sian, 2017). These issues can affect the quality of teaching delivered by BME staff and, to an extent, might be reflected in the attainment gap experienced by some BME students. To better understand these outcomes, socio-demographic characteristics that include ethnicity are useful for understanding the drivers that shape students' experiences. These are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

This chapter outlines key socio-demographic data[7] that were used to form a demographic questionnaire administered to students in the present research. The questionnaire was preliminary to capturing a fuller account of the students' socio-demographic background using in-depth individual interviews and focus group interviews. The data set the context for students' narratives of experience and constructions of their personal, cultural and social capital. As identity is known to be multifaceted (Johnson, 2011), these factors were considered pertinent to an overall understanding of the construction of identity.

Factors such as age, ethnicity, education, family background, social class and religion are indicators of "economic position and educational attainment" (Manstead, 2018, p. 269). Socio-demographic data are fast becoming indicators for access to and success in higher education (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014; Lutz, 2007). Socio-economic status (SES) adds to the picture for social capital (Veenstra, 2000). For example, middle-class students with 'cultivated' capital (that is, those with access to extra-curricular experiences; Bodovski, Jeon, & Byun, 2016) are found to have a more informed approach to higher education and are more likely to graduate with a 'good' degree classification (SMF, 2017). Conversely, the 'autonomous' decision-making style typifying students from lower SES backgrounds is said to be uninformed and consequential of poorer outcomes (Brooks, 2002).

3.1 Age

Age data yields such rich findings that it is almost impossible to find social sciences research that does not take age into account. Data about participants' ages can helpfully 'situate' a sample (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999), in that it gives that sample an 'identity'. For example, Davis, McPherson, Wheldon, and von Randow (2012) used age and key socio-cultural periods in history to understand generational changes as well as perceptions of poverty and affluence. Age is associated with transitioning challenges for mature students (Reay, Ball, & David, 2002). Many mature students must combine studying with caring for

---

[7] I drew on my involvement with the Sense of Belonging project [an interdisciplinary, cross-institution research team which explored belonging in business studies undergraduate students between 2011 and 2014] to inform the selection of sociodemographic characteristics that might be appropriate to the sample. The project also referenced Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership scale and the National Readership Survey as measures for belonging and social class respectively.

dependents (Taylor & House, 2010). An intersection of age, gender and ethnicity may lead to a particularised experience. Its exploration is important for understanding how identity is constructed and experienced in higher education by some students.

3.2 Ethnicity

Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, Markus (2008) draws a distinction between race and ethnicity while placing both within a sociocultural/historical framework. Race can be seen as a sorting device, resulting in ranking, privilege and prejudice while ethnicity is considered an empowering characteristic that allows people to claim a sense of belonging based on having identifiers -in -common with others. In contrast with race, which is mainly based on classification by physical characteristics (Ansell, 2013), ethnicity is generally determined by voluntary classifications which are considered salient to identity, such as cultural heritage (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014). Ethnicity is also described as a nation of peoples with whom a person identifies, based on factors such as country of birth, parental country of birth, nationality, skin colour, shared ancestry or language, geographic location, religion or traditions (ECU, 2016b; National Statistics, 2003).

However, ethnicity can be difficult to define due to the variations and complexities embedded in the term. Indeed, this research took a simplified, if somewhat crude, but efficient approach to ethnicity classification where participants were asked to select the most appropriate label from a limited grouping offered in the national census. If a person has multiple ethnicities, self-classification can be even more problematic. When ethnicity is determined by others, this can be contentious as it is often based on a visual assessment of a person's characteristics such as their skin tone (Yudell, Roberts, DeSalle, & Tishkoff, 2016), hair type or facial features (Leach, 2005).

Modood and Khattab (2016) sought to advance the limited thinking around ethnicity classification by applying five dimensions to explicitly define ethnicity. They claim that particular practices sit within the domain of a specific ethnicity, known as cultural distinctiveness. The disproportionate representation of some ethnic populations, such as the high numbers of Black males in the prison system (Ministry of Justice, 2017) is one example of an ethnic dimension. Some ethnic groups, such as US Blacks during the Civil Rights movement, are known for their strategic response to oppression. Creativity is noted in ethnic groups, such as hairstyles or music, some of which are appropriated by White mainstream culture (No Space is Safe, 2017) with little acknowledgement for their cultural source (Raychawdhuri, 2015). Lastly, ethnic identity can carry pride, stigma or shame depending on

the circumstances and politics of an era. It is clear, however, that more work is needed to deconstruct ethnicity classification.

3.3 Schooling and Qualifications

Secondary school education is a gateway to further and higher education (Forrest, Hodgson, Parker, & Pearce, 2011; Halsey, 2013). Higher education contributes to a picture of upward social mobility in students "attending, staying and graduating" from university (SMF, 2017, p. 26). As the primary source for connecting students with university, UCAS uses secondary school qualifications [among other aspects] to determine a prospective student's suitability (UCAS, 2016). As such, school type can be an important factor for progression to university although Connor et al. (2004) found that BME students, and Black African/Caribbean students in particular, are being discriminated against during the application/admission process *regardless* of school type. In the US, there is a tendency for Black students from lower SES backgrounds to attend schools that result in poorer academic outcomes and create a marked gap in attainment (Cokley, Obaseki, Moran-Jackson, Jones, & Vohra-Gupta, 2016). Grammar, independent or private school students have a better chance of being accepted at prestigious institutions than when educated solely in the state school sector. This is because selective schools are more likely to prepare students to apply for places at these institutions. However, the experiences of BME students can also differ by geography.

Students in London schools perform better than those in other parts of the country (SMF, 2016). Further afield, BME boys attending a selective boys' school in the West Midlands performed worse than their White counterparts - although this was because of social reproduction rather than social mobility (Collins, Collins, & Butt, 2015). To explain, all students entered school with similar KS2 levels (Level 5 in key subjects), but subsequent socialisation and pedagogic practice combined with lower SES factors, such as particular domiciliary locations, aggravated their experience to the extent that the boys fulfilled lowered expectations for progression and attainment. Boliver's (2013) findings show that even where the experience of school background is not dissimilar, this can positively or negatively influence the type of university to which a student is accepted. Thus, SES factors can provide a strong indication for possible outcomes in higher education.

3.4 University Choice

A systematic review (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015) found that university choice is influenced by factors that include reputation, quality of teaching and learning facilities,

perceptions of a diverse student population, value for money, opportunities for personal and professional growth, employment prospects, proximity to home and the ability to escape from disadvantage. Some students have a 'taken-for-granted' assumption that they will attend a particular university as a 'legacy' applicant (because their parents attended university and are academically networked; strong features of applications to elite institutions; Reay, 2018). Inasmuch as a student's personal, social and cultural capital appear to influence their decision-making over university choice (Gao, 2017), prospective students may vary in the weighting they attach to each aspect.

3.5 Studying While Employed

More students are combining employment and study, leading to effects for wellbeing and engagement (Barone, 2017; Creed, French, & Hood, 2015). Some students find that working while studying can be stressful and can lead to negative consequences for academic performance (Robotham, 2009). There is some discussion about the point [in hours] at which employment becomes impactful on studying; one Norwegian study placed this at 20 hours per week (Hovdhaugen, 2015). Those authors considered part-time work as being up to 30 hours while full-time work was more than 30 hours. However, by engaging in just 20 hours per week, students face an increased risk of dropping out, regardless of whether they pay tuition fees or have access to financial support. The literature on student dropout suggests a complex range of causal factors (Duque, 2013; Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born, 2010a; Tinto, 1975), for which being in employment is just one factor.

3.6 Extra-Curricular Activities

Extra-curricular activities can provide opportunities for students to build on personal and social capital (Greenbank, 2015). These activities take various forms, from engaging in voluntary work to joining societies. Some activities can be facilitated through a university's students' union (Lau, Hsu, Acosta, & Hsu, 2013). Engagement can develop and enhance competencies (for example, team-working, problem-solving, communication skills), providing students with a competitive edge in the labour market (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013). Extra-curricular activities are also valued by nontraditional students (Stuart et al., 2009), but may be less accessible depending on personal circumstances. Perceptions of a smaller choice of options can restrict broader development, as well as opportunities for networking.

3.7 Living Arrangements

Students with a firm offer of a university place are usually guaranteed accommodation by the university but, with rising rents, this form of accommodation is not achievable for some students (National Union of Students & UNIPOL Student Homes, 2018). Accommodation expenses can feed into the decision to live at home because it is more economical to do so (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005). Fear of mounting debt constrains the choices of students from widening participation backgrounds (Callendar & Jackson, 2008). Widening participation is measured by the proportion of students attending university who were in receipt of free school meals and come from a low-participation area (SMF, 2017).

Research shows that students from certain ethnicities are more likely to live at home (SMF, 2017), while students from nontraditional backgrounds welcome retained access to support from family and friendship networks that come from living in the family home during their studies (Holdsworth, 2006). Younger students may find that blending home and university means missing out on opportunities to develop a different kind of autonomy from living independently, while mature students with family responsibilities can struggle to demarcate appropriate time and physical space for personal study.

3.8 Family Education

3.8.1 Parental Education

Some research suggests that growing up with two parents provides better opportunities for a child than a single-parent household (Cherlin, 1999; National Equality Panel, 2009). Research has also suggested that children whose parents are educated, or have rich cultural and social capital, show greater persistence in education compared to their less-advantaged counterparts (Munk, 2013). Academic persistence is linked to transmitting expectations and prior experience, especially where parent(s) attended university and have experiences to relay to their offspring (Connor et al., 2004). Therefore, parental education is implicated in children's academic success, but there is a stronger influence for maternal education on children's achievement (Reay, 1998). For example, Delaney, Harmon, and Redmond (2011) report that maternal education level in an Irish sample was more influential for male students than paternal education level. Female students recounted the influence of their mothers while pursuing a STEMM subject at degree level, especially first-generation students (Ceglie & Settlage, 2014). These students saw their mothers as a role model, especially where the mothers themselves were practitioners (such as nurses or teachers).

Some mothers have no alternative than to combine their studies with employment to ensure the wellbeing of their children. Collins (2004) re-constructs this as mothers working to preserve their child's personal and cultural identity, especially for Black student-mothers. Regardless of educational background, mothers are considered a source of support and encouragement, and have been shown to gain fulfilment from their children's academic success (Ball, Reay, & David, 2002).

However, ensuring that a child starts at university does not mean they have the *capacity* to complete, although previous exposure to forms of 'activated capital' might be beneficial for their university experience (Winne & Nesbit, 2010). Activated capital is ingrained via parent(s) who invest in extracurricular activities such as museum visits or who ensure that quality reading material is available in the home during a child's formative years. These resources can broaden the child's outlook and early experiences in ways that prepare them to be open to new experiences in other environments (Davis-Kean, 2005), culminating in what Zimdars, Sullivan, and Heath (2009) term 'cultural capital'. Reading for pleasure is noted as a strong indicator for developing both cultural capital and academic competency (Cremin, 2016). Strategic activity, such as consulting league tables, attending open days, touring a university and finding out more about its facilities, is linked to a higher set of socio-economic indicators (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997). Research shows that 81% of students who attended an open day reported a more positive university experience (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2017). A lack of prior engagement in these activities hints at the possibility of unpreparedness for the transition into university.

During periods of difficulty, early education experiences can act as a buffer when facing later challenges and can foster resilience that builds academic self-efficacy due to a feeling of control over external circumstances, especially in females (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999). An ability to construct and sustain helpful interpersonal relationships as well as to 'bounce back' from negative circumstances or criticism is also considered beneficial. 'Bouncing back' means that discouragement and despondency (examples of ruminative qualities; Wehrenberg, 2010) are re-channeled into becoming more prosocial and persevering.

3.8.2 Sibling Education

The extent to which siblings influence each other's educational opportunities is documented (Davies, 2019) and has been linked to the number of siblings in a household (Wei-Cheng & Bikos, 2000), their age and ethnicity (Schnell, Fibbi, Crul, & Montero-Sieburth, 2015) and

birth order (Powell & Steelman, 1990). These factors can influence decisions about priorities and resources for extending the best possible opportunities to each child. Smaller-sized families are significant for better achievement (Hillmert, 2013). Children from such families fare better than those from a single-parent household, although there are mixed findings in the literature for academic outcome depending on family composition and behaviours (Meeuwisse, Born, & Severiens, 2011; Miller, Waldfogel, & Han, 2012; Tillman, 2008).

3.9 Social Class

Social class has a long history as a hierarchical system that uses objective divisions (which can be basic or sophisticated) to categorise society into types based on employment, housing tenure or personal wealth (Craib, 2002). Various measures (such as the Registrar General's Classification, National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification: Croxford & Raffe, 2015; Indices of Deprivation: Rodgers, 2013; Great British Class Survey: Savage et al., 2013) are used to create sections that can feed into broader categorisations with an aim of capturing a realistic picture of class in present-day society. The National Readership Survey (NRS; founded in 1956) is one such measure that was used in the present research to indicate social class.

The NRS survey differs to the census. It includes fewer demographic characteristics as determinants of social class, which makes it easier to administer. Some researchers have successfully used the survey to contextualise a sense of belonging in London-based university students (Pokorny, Holley & Kane, 2011). Despite some limitations, it provides sufficient coverage of social status. However, there is a question of its 'relevance' for certain sections of the population, such as its use with nontraditional students for whom parental income may have ceased to have a direct influence on their current circumstances. Furthermore, surveys alone cannot be used to determine academic achievement.

Systems [or rankings] that concentrate solely on social class portray just one aspect of demography. Social background was once considered a stable feature for class (Park, Bryson, Clery, Curtice, & Phillips, 2013). It is now seen as a mutable characteristic (Greenhalgh-Spencer et al., 2015). Consequently, research points to the benefit of taking a more subjective approach to measuring social class (Rubin et al., 2014). Socio-economic status is considered a better reflection of a person's *current* social position (Rubin et al., 2014).

Although social class is globally-recognised, it must be contextually- and sensitively - understood as part of a suite of socio-demographic measures for the population of interest (Reisel, 2013). Rodgers (2013) contends that socio-demographic differences may be one of

the main reasons for the disparity in academic outcomes noted in students from a range of ethnicities, while social class differences in children's education can explain achievement gaps that emerge early in life and widen throughout childhood. Emotional and financial stability within a child's environment have also been implicated in later academic achievement (Brody & Flor, 1997; Najman et al., 2004), literacy skills (Niklas & Schneider, 2015) and perceptions of 'school readiness' (Blair & Raver, 2015). Thus, early education programmes (Smith, 1995) and poverty-targeting initiatives in female single-parent households (Buvinić & Gupta, 1997) are examples of interventions that use social class indicators to bridge gaps.

3.10 Religion

Research suggests that engaging in religious practices helps some students cope with stress (Kolchakian & Sears, 1999; Schindler & Hope, 2016). Religious practice weakens an association with depressive symptoms, although findings for this outcome vary by the extent of religious belief. Lee (2007) found that the more spiritual/religious the student is, the more likely they are to attribute their failings as being a deserved and justified punishment from a higher being. Although the extent of belief can be a mediating factor, a strong religious belief helps students cope better with stressful situations (Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001). Students bring their established beliefs into university life but may feel less able to maintain associated practices in that environment (Sharma & Guest, 2013) with consequences for coping ability. Regardless of their religious affiliation, a lack of institutional validation for religious beliefs can create feelings of marginalisation in some students (Stevenson, 2014).

3.11 Operationalisation in the Present Research

A snapshot of socio-demographic characteristics for students in the present research was obtained using a questionnaire to provide additional context for their narratives of experience. Age provided a context for student type, perceptions and experiences. The students in the current study were placed in research phases as nontraditional [mature] Black female students and/or traditional Black female students (see Chapter 2, 2.7.1 for traditional/nontraditional student characteristics). Ethnicity categories were extracted from census classifications for a Black ethnic identity (ONS, 2011). Although these categories are limited, a smaller group of identifiers aided participants in self-categorising their ethnicity. More detailed conceptualisations of ethnicity and nationality were expanded upon during semi-structured interviews.

Previous academic history was requested to provide context for students' perceptions of higher education as well as to understand how these might be shaped by the type of school attended [state or private] and qualifications held on commencing their degree course. Participants presented a picture of their academic history by stating whether they were educated in the state or public [private] sector, and whether higher education was also the experience of their parents and/or siblings. The participants fulfilled assumptions about the type of qualifications held on entry by student type. The traditional student participants had A-Levels and the nontraditional student participants held mainly GNVQ, Access, International Baccalaureate or a combination of qualifications and work experience.

Additional questions ascertained whether a student entered clearing to achieve a place or whether they attended induction. Research supports an almost seamless connection between attending induction and academic outcomes, with an assertion that there is a link between induction, SES characteristics [such as social class] and later attainment (Murtagh, Ridley, Frings, & Kerr-Pertic, 2017). Participants rated their social class using the NRS.

The present research considered the extent to which participants were engaged in employment of any kind [in hours per week], given that they were all full-time students [bar one]. Some types of work (for example, voluntary and work experience) can be considered extra-curricular and are possibly less impactful on a student's experience. The questionnaire sought to clarify students' accommodation preferences to situate proximity and access to their current university, as research suggests that many London-domiciled students choose to study in the capital (HESA, 2017b). Finally, Christianity was the dominant religion stated by nontraditional students as well as some traditional students in the present research. It is accepted, however, that there are multiple denominations within Christianity, which have differing practices and requirements for membership (Helicon, 2016).

The benefits of socio-demographic data and subjective measures include an assessment of the current context and promote their usefulness in reflecting students' experiences. Contextually, the present research is centred on the experiences of Black female undergraduate psychology students. The following chapter concludes this review of educational perspectives by addressing the study of psychology at undergraduate level.

Chapter 4

Studying Psychology

This chapter discusses the study of psychology as a popular subject choice for students coming to university from school, sixth form, college or other settings. Reasons for its popularity and usefulness for students' personal and professional development are set out. However, regardless of the benefits, BME students continue to underperform in STEMM subject areas, pointing to the possibility of systemic issues that require the attention of both psychology staff and institutions. One factor that might affect these students' experience is a requirement to engage with curricula that lack cultural representation.

The subject of psychology has sat within this category over a long period. It is only recently that this lack is being acknowledged and addressed (Priest, Hale, & Jacobs, 2011), while Hulme et al. (2015, p. 15) state that "ethics, diversity and inclusion" are strongly featured in areas such as individual differences. Educators are recognising the importance of delivering an inclusive curriculum for a more engaged and engaging university experience. Without the implementation of an inclusive curriculum, Black women risk experiencing a lower sense of belonging during their time as an undergraduate psychology student.

Psychology applies critical, appreciative, empirical, systematic and evaluative methods to the study of "… the mind, brain, behaviour and experience, and how they interact with the complex environments in which they exist" (QAA, 2016, p. 7). The scientific study of psychology in UK higher education is accredited by its professional governing body, the British Psychological Society (BPS), which confers graduate membership on students who have undergone the required training. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) sets the standards for teaching and learning in the discipline. Across institutions, differences exist in delivery for the content, scope, direction, history and style of psychology degree courses. This is because teaching may be informed by the expertise and interests of psychology staff as well as the location of the subject within a school or faculty (QAA, 2016). Therefore, it is understood that student experiences will differ institutionally.

Psychology is one of the most popular subject choices by prospective university entrants (QAA, 2016; Woolfson, Howe, & Smyth, 2006). During the course of the degree, a psychology undergraduate student can expect to gain competencies from a broad array of concepts that allow entry into other fields. Psychological knowledge is transmitted to undergraduate students, usually over a three-year programme using a variety of teaching

modalities and assessments that include lectures, tutorials, seminars and independent projects as well as laboratory classes, digital learning opportunities and distance learning (QAA, 2016). The student encounters a huge volume of theory and evidence and is expected to spend effort navigating and processing this information.

Previously, some researchers took a view that a psychology degree course is an experience of "overload", with less favourable prospects on graduation (Reynolds, 2006, p. 264). According to Reynolds, psychology students finish with poorer interpersonal and communication skills than students of other subjects because the traditional teaching methods favoured by psychology curricula supposedly led to fewer transferable skills, mainly taking the form of lectures that are disconnected from students' vocational concerns. However, despite Reynolds (2006) view, when lectures are combined with one-on-one opportunities for interaction with teaching staff, students cite lectures as one factor that encourages them to remain on their course (Webb & Cotton, 2018).

Furthermore, Hodges and Jobanputra's longitudinal study revealed that their participants, who were from a racialised minority and/or sexualised minority background, gained a deeper insight into their own lived experiences from studying psychology at undergraduate level, despite an understanding that the discipline "reflects and reproduces injustice" (2012, p. 146). Thus, Hulme (2014) argued that the study of undergraduate psychology has value for the broad influence on a student's realisation of their personal and professional aspirations.

Utilising the term 'psychological literacy' (Taylor & Hulme, 2015), Hulme (2014) describes this facet as "the ability of a psychology student to apply knowledge and skills that they acquire during their education to all aspects of life: the workplace, their personal lives and the wider social context" (p. 933). This translates into a form of preparedness (Singh, 2011) that equips graduates to take on real-world challenges beyond the core aspects of an undergraduate psychology degree curriculum. Perhaps, some of the challenges for the experience of studying psychology lie in the eclectic nature of a psychology undergraduate degree programme with the requirement to grasp many core areas over a three-year timeframe. For some students, this might be experienced as taxing since it requires the divergent parts of a psychology degree to be connected as a composite whole (Mair et al., 2013).

In essence, a psychology degree is a collective of academic skills summarised as an "ethical, scientific and critical approach" (Mair, Taylor & Hulme, 2013, p. 8) that provides a viable route for entry and progression into specific careers and wider industry. Post-

graduation destinations vary for psychology students and include the Civil Service or Armed Forces, although up to a third of students remain connected to the discipline and pursue employment as psychologists (QAA, 2016). Psychologists are known to have contributed usefully to almost every aspect of industry (Mair et al., 2013). However, fewer prospects exist for BME graduates (Connor et al., 2004), bringing their experiences of studying psychology [or indeed, any subject] under sharper focus.

Statistics show that by 2017-2018 there were 555,360 undergraduate students in UK higher education (HESA, 2019). Of that number, 233,970 were biological sciences students, which includes the subject of Psychology (HESA, 2019). According to HESA Student Records, 56,720 students took Psychology, of which 81.4% were female[8] and 20.2% were from a BME background. However, research that includes outcomes for Black female undergraduate psychology students suggests these students struggle to complete their studies (Richardson, 2015), despite an emphasis on delivering quality teaching for all students in higher education (Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

With increasing diversity, a challenge for universities is to deliver engaging curricula. While the resources directed at STEMM subjects are considered encouraging, their teaching quality is less favoured by some students (Pawson, 2012). Reasons for this dissatisfaction can include the choice of subject, which may be vested in a student's social class (Zimdars, 2007) and their gender (Blickenstaff, 2005). As stated, some students are particularly concentrated in subject areas with known competitive challenges. African and Asian students dominate in accounting, law and medicine (Sanusi, MacDonald, Mosavie, & Mayi, 2012). For other students [Black females in particular], academic study might be undertaken to fulfil a more altruistic desire to use their skills and knowledge to support their communities (Ceglie & Settlage, 2014). It is known that student volunteering and extra-curricular involvement can strengthen the relationship between a community and a university (Pilkington, 2019).

The present research is focused on the experiences of BME female students of psychology. However, the exact number of Black female undergraduate psychology students is difficult to aggregate from published UK data. It is known that there are more BME undergraduate psychology students than at postgraduate levels (HESA, 2016). The picture is even more stark at doctoral levels (Fazackerley, 2019), suggesting challenges for progression to more advanced studies for these students. Furthermore, Black women are under-

---

[8] As an important social location for women's experiences, I was surprised that the participants were less vocal about gender as an intersecting aspect of their identity in a university environment. This statistic could potentially explain the reason why gender was less of an issue.

represented in STEMM fields (Ireland et al., 2018). In the US, only 5.8% of psychology doctorates were awarded to Black students in 2009 compared to 76% for White students (American Psychological Association, 2009). High dropout rates are recorded for UK Black postgraduate students (HEFCE, 2013b; Shillam, 2014). These statistics suggest a requirement for further study into the experiences of BME postgraduate students as another marginalised student population.

4.1 Inclusive Curriculum

An increasing concern within education is to promote learning that develops and extends students so as to avoid privileging intellect and Whiteness, while embracing inclusivity. Inclusivity is complex. On the one hand, it is described as "general faddism possessing limited tenure, just another buzzword" (Berlach & Chambers, 2011, p. 529). On the other hand, multiple definitions for inclusivity indicate its multifaceted nature since it is linked to general wellbeing, participation, collaboration, evaluation and linguistic typology (Berlach & Chambers, 2011). Merely ensuring student access to suitable learning resources or technology does not necessarily demonstrate inclusivity. Instead, a critical examination of staff/student expectations and students' perceptions about experiences of feeling included is needed (Peters, 2015).

The '*Why is My Curriculum White?'* movement was started in 2014 by a London-based Russell Group university to highlight the challenges of studying a non-inclusive curriculum. This kind of curriculum does not recognise contributions of knowledge from those outside the mainstream with a heteronormative identity (Keval, 2019). The movement to decolonise the curriculum has gathered momentum across several UK universities. While its contextual brief was founded on rejecting a philosophy curriculum that is dominated by colonialist ideology and the views of 'dead White men', the message is consistent: scholars from diverse ethnicities and knowledges are being excluded from mainstream curricula (Muskett, Sandle, Gillborn, & Jankowski, 2017).

This brief is not restricted to philosophy. Staff at one university reported that "in 2017, 96 per cent of the authors of the reading we set on our BSc Psychology Hons curriculum were White" (Jankowski, Sandle, & Gillborn, 2018, p. 6). Peters (2015) adds that this amounts to a form of 'othering' that should be challenged to achieve balance and inclusion. Entwistle (2016) points out that Scottish people have held similar views about Scottish history, which is seldom highlighted in English texts. Such absences promote disconnection and dis-embodied experiences, termed by Collins (2001) as the 'outsider-

within' phenomenon that works to increase feelings of invisibility in marginalised groups. For BME students studying an unrepresentative curriculum, invisibility might be a felt experience throughout their time at university.

Consequently, universities are turning their attention to meeting the challenge of providing an inclusive curriculum as one way of improving student experience. Inclusive curricula can reinforce student-centred learning experiences (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Burnard, 1999; Taylor, 2000) and place students at the heart of teaching practice as responsible learners with fuller participation. The overall aim of an inclusive curriculum is to provide a quality learning experience that caters for students from a wide range of backgrounds (Carey, 2012).

Although delivering this kind of curriculum may be experienced by staff as resource-intensive, incorporating diverse practices (such as simply being culturally reflective; Pridham, Martin, Walker, Rosengren, & Wadley, 2015) does not need to be overly expensive or taxing. An inclusive curriculum recognises and responds to the intersecting effect of different social locations (such as lived experiences of disability, ethnicity, gender and class). One London university's psychology department has summed up its approach to delivering an inclusive curriculum, reproduced below with permission:

Psychology Department Approach to Race Equality – Summary Statement
The Psychology Department adopts an evidence-based approach to continuous improvement in the quality of staff and student experience. This approach draws upon good practice from other HEIs and is underpinned by the principles of evidence-based management drawing upon four sources of evidence:
1. *Evaluated external evidence – empirical research and national policy;*
2. *The organisational context – University policy, practices and processes;*
3. *The experience and judgement of academic staff;*
4. *Stakeholder (i.e. students and staff) preferences and values.*

Student Retention and Achievement
We are currently developing an action plan for student induction ... to include intercultural communication and competence, based on the model developed at (university name). This action forms part of the (college name) risk register which proposed further actions regarding:

Risk 3: Failure to recruit and retain sufficient high quality students.

Curriculum
In common with other courses re-approved under the (named) initiative, the new BSc Psychology course has a curriculum designed to develop in our graduates the (university name) Graduate Attribute "global in outlook and community engaged".

Psychology's provision will in future be stronger than in the old course design in this respect. For instance, currently all students had access to "(named module about the psychology of prejudice)" as an option module. Under the new degree, all students will be required to take "(new named module)" (core) which contributes to the course level learning outcome "Critically evaluate the contribution of psychology to the understanding of real-world issues such as diversity and social justice".

Using approaches like the example above, the aim is to make the study of psychology an accessible and inclusive experience for all students. Guidance from the Equality Act (2010) and Disability Equality Duty (2006) encourages inclusive teaching in which learning materials are provided promptly with wider use of mobile technology to support learning. At face value, these changes reflect a more inclusive curriculum, as they can support students from a range of backgrounds; however, unless BME student and staff perceptions for experiences of structural inequalities are addressed, such attempts may also be perceived as cosmetic or, worse, tokenistic.

4.2 Conclusions

Syntheses of research (National Union of Students, 2012; Sanders & Rose-Adams, 2014) show mixed results for student experiences that range from general perceptions about staff and teaching to BME students' academic ability, pointing to structural and systemic issues in institutional processes and practices. Some institutions have responded by offering mentoring to BME students or unconscious bias training to staff as first-line responses to issues arising from the effect of cultural deficit perspectives. Unresolved perceptions of the homogeneity of BME experiences may lead to expectations of [positive] outcomes from such initiatives, improvements for the experiences of BME students and a reduction in the award/attainment gap. However, there are concerns for the effectiveness of some race-centred initiatives by researchers, BME students, BME staff and Student's Unions, who consider these initiatives as nothing more than 'tick box' exercises (e.g. ECU, 2016b; SOAS Students' Union, 2016; Stevenson, 2012).

Research has shown that there is a long history of under-privilege and disadvantage for some populations resulting in complex issues for access to and through higher education (Cheung & Egerton, 2007). Some issues, such as social class, may be less overtly constructed as an 'ethnicity issue' in current times compared to other factors [such as an intersection of ethnicity with specific characteristics], yet they continue to contribute to differential outcomes in students. Some researchers (e.g. Gamble, Cassidy, McLaughlin, & Giles, 2016) argue that cultural deficit perceptions should be substituted altogether with a careful exploration of experience, while rejecting third-party explanations. Continuing experiences of bias in higher education support a call for educators to work with each student at their current level and from the perspective of their lived experience, rather than where they are expected to be in a 'normative' sense.

The number of BME students entering university may be less celebratory when viewed in the context of their perceptions of an 'impoverished' experience. HEIs are now under increasing government scrutiny for student ethnicity attainment (Sian, 2017). Only a small proportion of HEIs ($N = 12$) have achieved the Race Equality Charter Mark for the advancement of race equality in higher education (ECU, 2018b) compared with numerous institutional and departmental awards for the Athena SWAN charter mark ($N = 815$; ECU, 2018a), which attracts large amounts of funding and appears to focus on the progression of (mainly, White) women in STEMM. Multifactorial and culturally complex issues for retention, attainment and progression drive the award/attainment gap, and should be addressed as a combined effort by policymakers, HEIs, staff, students and the community. It appears that a fresh focus on institutional and pedagogic practice may be required to tackle issues that include delivering an inclusive curriculum rather than a focus on ethnicity or gender differences alone (Rodgers, 2013).

Society's mandate for higher education is to produce students who are reflexive and socially-engaged global citizens (Brennan, King, & Lebeau, 2004). Socialisation involves taking on others' ways of being while sustaining a web of relationships. It is an essential part of learning practice that supports experiences of engaging with a discipline. University experience is a form of continuing engagement with the world of academic activities (Matthews, 2013). Students need to be challenged in order for personal and professional development to lead to the kind of transformation that supports academic achievement and sustainable outcomes. A sense of belonging (Hurtado et al., 2007) and self-efficacy (Stubbs & Maynard, 2017) can sustain this engagement, and both are linked to persistence and academic achievement (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Thomas, 2012). As relevant factors for a productive academic identity, belonging and efficacy are considered in the following chapter as part of a review of theories and concepts for the construction of identity.

Chapter 5

An introduction to symbolic interactionism as an undergraduate psychology student served as a useful starting point for this literature review on identity and its construction, suggesting a chronological approach. As I read and re-read the literature, a mental map of points of theoretical connectivity emerged. For example, symbolic interactionism linked with developing a social identity; a desire for belonging influenced group memberships, and a need to find one's place in the world could be understood through the lens of social constructionism, suggesting a thematic structure. It is likely that I have drawn on both arrangements to pull together perspectives that could explain the contribution of concepts such as social cognition and self-efficacy to identity construction. My concerns about an absenting of cultural framing in some theories was addressed with reference to critical race theory and its influence on Black feminist perspectives, such as intersectionality theory. All theories pointed to a mediated construction of the self and caused me to reflect on the importance of moving beyond an experimental examination of attitudes and behaviours in this sample to a phenomenological exploration of their narratives and counter-narratives as meaning-making for experience. At times, I wondered whether I had simply become caught up with intersectionality as a 'buzzword' (Davies, 2008) or whether I could appreciate its value for dissecting the experiences of Black women in a UK context. These thoughts filled me with excitement as well as trepidation for a growing understanding that the application of intersectionality theory brings with it a responsibility to do something about what is being unearthed (Ladson-Billings, 1998). If Crenshaw's (1989) analogy of the probability of a car accident for people navigating the highways and junctions of their intersectional lives is accepted, did an exploration into these students' experiences mean that I must now assume responsibility for calling an ambulance? Must I become the attending paramedic? I pondered on the 'ethical' responsibilities of a researcher. These are not just bound up in the conventions of research ethics of the kind described in Chapter 6 but point to researcher responsibility for the wellbeing of participants. As some classic studies in psychology have shown (e.g. Milgram; 1974; Haney, Banks & Zimbardo, 1973), participants' wellbeing post-study was not often taken into account. A continuing review of the literature pointed to a threatened or 'hyphenated' identity as a response to difficult or extenuating life circumstances. I bookmarked these terms for later reference to see whether they would be apparent in participants' constructions of their identity. To that end, these knowledges have influenced my interpretation of the students' narratives. As pointed out by an experienced academic and researcher, I may not have taken a truly 'inductive' approach to the research methodology. With this acceptance, I wondered whether one could ever be truly 'inductive' when foreknowledge comes from not only being immersed in the literature but also from the sum of life experiences. All influences and exposures have pointed to the importance of regularly pausing for reflection to allow reflexivity to take hold and unravel the places where foreknowledge has stepped into the picture, jostling for a place with new knowledge. I have conceded, however, that there is enough room for them both.

Identity Literature Review

There is currently no widely accepted theoretical framework and little research specifically addressing the experiences of Black female undergraduate psychology students in UK higher education. Although the literature-at-large posits theoretical accounts of identity in generalised and specific groups, none are directly aimed at identity construction in this body of students. This means that there is a lack of understanding around Black female students'

formation and maintenance of a personal (for example, in relation to staff and peer interpersonal relationships), cultural (ethnicity or cultural background) and social identity (such as the presentation of their identity when acting alone or with peers). An intersection of various characteristics and roles in Black women suggest that their stories of lived experiences are of particular interest.

This chapter reviews identity theories including social identity and group membership (Tajfel, 1978), as well as identity concepts such as self-efficacy and a sense of belonging before looking at other theoretical perspectives that might have relevance for the construction of identity in Black women. These perspectives, which hold a keener race/ethnicity focus, include 'hyphenated' selves (Fine, 1994) and intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989). This body of knowledge could provide a theoretical lens through which to deconstruct the experiences of Black female students. It is accepted that these theories are not a bespoke fit for Black female students' experiences, however they may shed further light on the construction of an ethnic identity as well as contextualise felt experiences of discrimination.

It should be noted that the methodological framework of the present research (see Chapter 6) takes an inductive approach to understanding the experiences of this student group. There is therefore less emphasis on theory and hypothesis testing than in typical deductive studies (Frost, 2011). Consequently, the conceptual framework set out at the end of this chapter is based on a contextual interpretation of the contribution these theories make to understanding cultural backgrounds, and personal and social interactions of students in this research; that is, how their 'lived experiences' in UK higher education inform our understanding of these theories.

5.1 What is Identity?

Philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists have all attempted to define identity (Deaux, 2000). Interest in this area has led, over many years, to a focus on identity within mainstream social psychology research (Tajfel, 2010). In recent times, diverse opinions have surfaced about identity, broadening the scope of our understanding (Stryker & Burke, 2000). There is general agreement that identity takes many forms due to cultural diversity (Howarth, 2011). Hall and Du Gay's cultural school of thought expresses the view that culture is a common denominator for identity as it is "constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group" (1996, p. 3). They further describe identity as transformative and ongoing, stating that "…the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed — always 'in process'" (p. 3).

Thus, according to this school of thought, identity appears to be more about "routes" than "roots" (p. 5) towards what a person is 'becoming'.

5.1.1 Defining Identity

The question of the exact constituents of identity is still being addressed. Among a plethora of ideas, identity has been framed as a state that is developed and appraised in response to "institutional, political and societal" change, conflict and/or conformity (Warner, 2008; p. 459). This positions identity construction as a complex behavioural response to differing situations. According to Howarth (2011), internal negotiations can cause an identity to emerge in response to a presenting context. Shifting contexts appear to influence the ways in which identity is constructed and responded to as indicated by Phinney's (1990) overview of social psychology research into ethnic identities. Using this platform, Phinney identified three distinct approaches to the study of identity, namely: "social identity theory, as presented by social psychologists; acculturation and culture conflict, as studied by social psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists; and identity formation, drawn from psychoanalytic views, and from developmental and counselling psychology" (Phinney 1990, p. 501). Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) agree that identity is not experienced as a single entity.

5.1.2 Identity Terminology

The terminology for identity adds to its complexity. The literature adopts several terms for identity that include 'narrative', the 'self', a 'possible self' and 'multiple selves'. The term 'narrative' is not explicitly an identity, but can contribute to its understanding (Zhang, 2018); it has been described as being crucial for identity construction (Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011). Trahar (2009) explains that a narrative is a story framed within a personalised structure which has particular meaning for the storyteller. Stories as lived experiences can be anecdotal and, sometimes, highly-nuanced; but they can helpfully situate and affirm identity within the social world (Mohammed & Kranias, 2016). Thus, a narrative is a re-telling of a lived experience.

In contrast, the term 'self' has been described as "a baffling concept" (Bruner, 1995, p. 25). Bruner settles on the view that the self is "an intersection of culture and individual identity" (p. 28), while Hanna (2011) describes the self as a composite of consciousness [that is, the ability to have an experience]; intentionality [the drive that directs action]; caring for self, others or objects; and, rationality [the ability to be logical and make decisions]. These components drive thought, provide meaning and bring about a sense of moral responsibility

that is realised as agency. Rather than the self as a physical body, this view suggests that the self comprises mental states that are driven by individual agency (Hanna, 2011).

The construction of a 'possible self' offers another viewpoint (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The 'best possible self' is one that is considered creative, intelligent, attractive and successful. Within this construction, the future self [or best possible self] is the person we wish to become. At the other extreme, Markus and Nurius describe the 'dreaded possible self'; that is, the feared and rejected self, which is hopeless, sick, unsuccessful and desperate.

The idea of possible selves has been implicated in the formation of racial identity in Black students in the US, where poor academic self-concept is associated with lower aspirations for success (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002). These selves link the present self-concept with a future self, where identity is driven by goal-directed agency to become the best self or avoid the worst self. Over time, the past self, as part of this framework of selves, becomes embroiled in a history of personal, social and cultural capital, mental representations, and actual experience. In a socially constructed sense, these selves can act as a positive or negative template for future attitudes and behaviours (Swanson et al., 2002).

Much of the literature on possible selves is framed within a US understanding of transitioning identities, although Stevenson and Clegg (2011) add their study into students' aspirations to the small body of existing UK education research in this area (Hardgrove, Rootham, & Mcdowell 2015; Henderson, 2017; Papafilippou & Bentley 2017). Within these studies, class as well as social and cultural capital are centrally implicated in identity construction. However, there is less research that focuses on possible selves in UK students' constructions of identity.

Other researchers (e.g. Seto & Schlegel, 2017; Ratner, Mendle, Burrow, & Thoemmes, 2019) see identity as a series of selves; namely, past, present and future selves, or as individuals in a quest for their 'true' or authentic self. Studies reveal that a 'future' self is distinct from a present self, citing evidence from theory of mind and neuro-imaging studies (e.g. Jamison & Wegener, 2010) which supports the proposition for a relationship between how a person operationalises their present self and how they imagine their future self. These ideas contribute to the concept of an individual holding multiple or 'shifting' selves. Bhavnani and Phoenix (1994) explain that there are two assertions to support this concept: (i) that identity is mutable and shifts according to different contexts; and (ii) that racism directed at ethnic identity changes in response to the emergence of 'shifting' selves. Osseo-Asara et al. (2018) add the idea of 'whole selves' to the construction of multiple selves for the tensions that are inherent in identity expression in this setting. While noted as challenging, a 'whole

selves' identity appears to forefront the more positive aspects of the self in its environment (for example, social, professional and cultural identity), offering some stability.

Several identity studies support the idea of the existence of multiple selves in an individual. Ladge, Clair, and Greenberg (2012) found multiple selves in females when they transitioned from the identity of a professional working woman to motherhood. Johnson (2011) reveals that multiple selves can influence learning and perceptions in a teaching environment. Johnson notes that "people are multi-faceted, with diverse influences based on multiple roles in life — multiple selves" (2011, p. 216). The multiple selves that reflect an individual's personal, social and cultural capital appear to govern their response to transitioning and dictate how they acclimatise to a new academic environment (Farenga, 2018). The large chasm between university students' expectations of a smooth transition into university and the reality of their experience (HEPI, 2017) feeds into a possible construction of multiple selves.

5.1.3 Identity as Ethnicity

Returning to the idea of identity as a form of cultural expression, a review by Bhavnani and Phoenix (1994) of more than 70 empirical articles concluded that there is no agreement for what makes up an ethnic identity. Instead, shifting contexts for the construction of that identity are better explained through the lens of social theories, such as social identity theory. Bhavnani and Phoenix state that identity is the site in which "structure and agency" collide (p. 6), structure being defined as social constructions (such as ethnicity or gender) and societal forces that govern how identity should be enacted. An individual mobilises agency in response to structure, which comprises independent, goal-directed behaviours to shape their responses. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that, similar to an ethnic identity, an exact definition of agency is in conflict since it is contextualised differently by different disciplines and different theorists. Instead, Emirbayer and Mische assert that agency should be viewed for how an individual *becomes* agentic over time by utilising their past, present and future orientations [or engaging their multiple selves]. Following this school of thought, efficacy as an identity concept appears to play a role in driving agency.

Tensions for an assumed understanding of "sameness" [and difference] can be used to further construct and deconstruct identity (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, pp. 6-8). Examples of these tensions include:

(i) when an identity is formed as a rallying call for individual or collective social and political action for "self-interest" [an example of 'agency'] and to define social location;

(ii) a way of describing "sameness", whether real or perceived for "solidarity", shared dispositions or consciousness, or collective action;

(iii) a psychologically-distinguishing feature of a self;

(iv) the product of, or basis for, social or political action; and,

(v) as the "unstable, multiple, fluctuating, fragmented" self that has become a mainstay of research into ethnic identities.

With a plethora of differing ideas, a 'working' definition of [ethnic] identity is difficult to locate. In its broadest sense, identity appears to be a mixture of experience and heritage. To define an ethnic identity without including a person's heritage conveys only a partial definition. Related aspects, such as structure and agency, are also intriguing to interpret and are accessible to qualitative researchers because of the media (for example, narratives, cultural histories, stories, diaries) by which they can be extracted (Trahar, 2009). Narratives have been shown to add value to experiences of constructing identity in educational settings (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) and can lead to a clearer understanding of experience (Carcary, 2009).

5.1.4 A 'Racialised' Identity

Given its 'groundless' biological assumptions (Ansell, 2013), the term 'race' is regarded as an outdated essentialist concept (Casas, 2005; Garner, 2010) with negative constructions (Richards, 1996) that serve no useful purpose. While race was categorically applied to disempower socially-constructed groups (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001; Moore, 2000; Reicher, 2001), cultural divisions began to hold less weight when they were situated against an emerging understanding of people and culture fostered by a growth in ethnographic studies (Ansell, 2013). However, structural factors continue to create social divisions for racialised identities (Collins, 2001).

Race has been subjected to much debate (Mazzolini, 2014). Contentious assumptions and value judgements about race and skin colour have been added to social constructions of identity (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014). Hence, race is often placed in quotation marks, denoting a term that is held in contention (Spencer, 2014). Viewed through the lens of psychology as it emerged as a discipline, assumptions about race fuelled a jarring intersection with scientific racism (Augoustinos, 2009). These assumptions were used to justify racialised slavery and the [positive/negative] eugenics movement of the 19th century that followed, while at the same time propelling notions about intellectual inferiority by using classifications that lacked scientific rigour (Goodman, 2015).

Holding Social Darwinism as an 'authority' to explain biological differences (Augoustinos, 2009), a system of racialisation was constructed to classify ethnicity (Calhoun, 1994) in ways that conferred racial superiority or inferiority on particular groups in society as was considered appropriate for the social/political context of the time. Young's commentary encapsulates what was, essentially, a pervasive and damaging era:

> Race was defined through the criterion of civilisation, with the cultivated White, Western European male at the top, and everyone else on a hierarchical scale either in a chain of being, from mollusc to God, or, in a later model, on an evolutionary scale of development from a feminized state of childhood [savagery] up to full [European] manly adulthood. In other words, race was defined in terms cultural, particularly gender difference — carefully graduated and ranked (1995, p. 54).

To address a racialised history, a concerted fleshing out of sameness and difference is required if one is to even attempt to achieve a full structural critique of identity and cultural experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). According to Hall and du Gay (1996), reifying culture is as futile as reifying identity. In fact, Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) key argument is that cultural reification has encouraged the present state of flux for identity to the extent that a different approach may be required for its proper conceptualisation. They assert that race is one example of a concept that has become socially- and politically-reified, creating a dishonest understanding of identity.

The terminology used to describe ethnicity is another contentious area. Terms such as BME, 'Black' and 'minority ethnicity' have their basis in the politics of race and colourism (Mirza, 2017). Staubhaar (2015) cites examples of the term 'Black' being applied in a derogatory sense to categorise a group of people [in this case, the descendants of slaves] as a subordinate group deserving of particularised treatment *post* the dominant period of slavery. 'Black' is also associated with 'othering' and is often applied in a way that is contrary to its physical appearance in a person. Harvey (2013) states that "…the Negro — or if one prefers, the colour black — symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, famine" (p. 182). Tsri (2016) argued further that the terms 'Black' and 'White' should be abandoned altogether because of their respective 'negative' and 'positive' symbolism as well as what they mean for people who hold these socially-constructed categorical terms. Maylor (2009c) adds that 'Black' is contested because of its failure to successfully recognise difference and sameness for ethnicity.

The literature on student experiences takes a mixed view of ethnicity terminology. According to Stevenson and Whelan (2013), the term 'BME students' has been used to

exclude those who identify as White British or White Other. In the US, 'African American' or 'Black American' are applied in similar contexts, but with a preference for 'Black' because of the breadth of ethnic identities that it captures (Porter & Dean, 2015). Hurtado, Cabrera, Lin, Arellano, and Espinosa (2008) refer to 'Black' students as part of a group of *underrepresented* minorities, highlighting the need for attention to be paid to their experiences. Within the US context, this grouping includes African American, Latina/o and native American students. In the UK, census data uses a range of terms to capture and record different ethnicities (ONS, 2011).

Ethnicity terminology is not specifically contested in this thesis, but it is recognised for its contribution to homogenising the flawed assumption of 'race'. Indeed, sole use of the term 'Black' might be considered limiting because it does not sufficiently reflect the heterogeneity of a broad ethnic base (Maylor, 2009c); hence, the adoption of extended categories as definers such as Black Caribbean, Black African, Black British and Black Mixed/Other in the present research. Nevertheless, Griffin (2007) argues that it is sufficient for a researcher to state their reason for using particular nomenclature in research and then proceed with the discourse rather than getting caught up in the politics of terminology. For efficiency and to fit ethnicity categories for UK research participants, the categories used in the present research are those that have been subsumed under the broad conceptual category of 'Black' and are listed as part of census ethnic data collection methodology (ONS, 2011).

5.2 Structural Approaches to Identity

Structural symbolic interactionism (e.g. Mead, 1967, Bryman, 2008) is noted as suitable for the study of ethnic identities (Spencer, 2014). Its theoretical approach accords with a cultural studies tradition of interpreting identity as a process of ongoing transformation (Hall & du Gay, 1996). However, social identity theory (SIT) appears to offer deeper intrapersonal/interpersonal insight into ethnic identity formation than symbolic interactionism (Henwood, 1994). SIT stems from research that sought to shed light on the extent to which social categorisations could define identity, and how these are interpreted on a spectrum that ranges from the study of attitudes and behaviours to effects from intergroup relations (Hornsey, 2008). Social categorisation feeds into the creation of structures for self-categorisation such as to obtain group membership, and the act of structuring becomes a process of sense-making for the group's [positive] identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Laboratory-controlled experiments [known as the 'minimal group paradigm'] informed the development of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Results described the ways in which a person identifies with their preferred group [an ingroup that shares the same or similar social categorisations] and reduces identification with an outgroup of seemingly dissimilar others. These conforming behaviours have been seen to extend to religious, sporting and political affiliations as well as social class and gendered associations, and ethnic groups. Subsequent upward or downward comparisons made by these groups confirm their perceptions about who or what is better or worse (Festinger, 1954). Subjective categorisations can feel 'normal' and bring about a sense of structure and meaning to a person's life-world (Tajfel, 1978).

 However, a failure to fully recognise and reflect experiences of prejudice and discrimination in minority groups is considered a weakness of SIT, leading to it being labelled as an experimentally-controlled, White male-constructed theoretical device (Henwood, 1994). While SIT holds application for the reality of the broader social structures in which people live (Levine, Cassidy, Brazier, & Reicher, 2002; Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001), group studies that privilege co-operation and communication may reflect a better balance. The psychology of intergroup behaviours is one such development.

Drawing on Sherif's (1988) research into intergroup conflict, Tajfel (1978) states that an ingroup or outgroup status is defined as belonging to a social majority or social minority, often following a long process of group identity formation. Tajfel's later work (1982) reveals that power, status, rank and privilege are key definers for a social majority. Social minorities are governed by a converse set of boundaries and try to stay within those confines even to the point of marrying same-group members, where feasible (Tajfel, 1978). Tajfel sets out a critical distinction for a member of a social minority, in that:

> being assigned and/or assigning oneself to a particular social entity leads at the same time to certain perceived social consequences which include discriminatory treatment from others and their negative attitudes based on some common criteria [however vague] of membership that the awareness of being in a minority can develop (p. 4).

Thus, besides an acute awareness of minority status, a social minority will experience being held in low esteem by the social majority based on stereotypes and prejudices that pertain to their minority group (Gaunt, 2011). Minority members may even transmit a minority status to their descendants as a set of complex social factors that create an intergenerational transmission of inequality (Aizer & Currie, 2014).

Contrastingly, a positive social identity draws on categorisations and characteristics of an ingroup that are considered favourable for a positive self-concept, while the desire for

salience in an individual with a negative social identity may mean leaving an existing group to join one that is considered more appealing for identity reconstruction (Tajfel, 1978). Naturally, an individual with a negative social identity cannot forego their identity to achieve salience. However, they may choose to re-construct their identity by highlighting the positive characteristics of their group, thus influencing their perceptions about the quality of interpersonal relationships with ingroup and/or outgroup members. Using this framework, identity can take on a hierarchical structure with categories that are grouped according to perceptions of salience and importance (Deaux, 2000).

Even with a hierarchical structure that reflects salience, there can be movement from rejection to acceptance. Findings from a meta-analysis of intergroup studies (Pettigrew, 2016) showed that having just one friend from an outgroup can portray that group in a more favourable light. Beneficial experience from contact with an outgroup member [resonating with Zajonc's (2001) theory of mere exposure], being informed about characteristics of the outgroup rather than relying on perceptions, and willingness to extend empathetic attitudes to members of the outgroup [termed 'attitude generalisation'] are all cited as key factors (Pettigrew, 2016). Positive contact in whatever form [direct or indirect] offers some protection against experiences of negative intergroup relations, increasing the potential for favourable generalisations (Paolini et al., 2014). However, further investigation is required to understand the extent to which these generalisations might endure or the circumstances that lead to negative generalisations.

Falling under the broad domain of intergroup behaviours, student cliques are just one example of the 'divide' [that is, feelings of inclusion or exclusion] that plays out when groups negotiate assumed tensions for saliency and importance. Burke and Reitzes, cited in Stryker and Burke (2000), explain that students engage in self-evaluative behaviours to achieve identity salience, stating: "students with a strongly committed student identity work more effectively to verify and maintain that identity" (p. 289). Distortions between ingroups and outgroups may be more psychological than real but appear to be based on rules and practices that govern their membership (Cole, 2009).

While research has shown that group membership can have a positive effect on sense of belonging (especially among females, with better mental health implicated in both genders; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007), a student is seldom a member of just one group. Complex relationships within their communities or society suggest that they may identify more strongly with certain group characteristics. An exploration of identity construction in students could reveal areas with potential for shaping their self-concept.

5.3 Identity Concepts

Several concepts have shed light on how people evaluate their identity. The idea of a 'multi-faceted' self-concept (Markus & Wurf, 1987) has survived extensive criticism about its usefulness for understanding identity construction (Rosenberg, 1989) to achieve dominance in social identity and education research (e.g. Byrne, 1984; Gecas, 1982; Ommundsen, Haugen, & Lund, 2005; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Markus and Nurius (1986) point to the contribution of self-concept for understanding how identity is constructed in a stable sense. In this context, identity is shaped by personality traits and the self-concept is made up of consistent behaviours.

As previously stated, identity may be viewed as dynamic and changeable in response to differing situations and contexts, pointing to a construction that learns from the past and present as well as from expectations of the future. This has been termed the "working self-concept" by Markus and Nurius (1986, p. 957) and is comprised of an array of selves, affects and sentiments. If this collective is not 'organised' or made sense of, the result might be experienced as a fragmented or distorted identity. Markus and Nurius found that, to allay this potential, people tend towards making positive [and, sometimes, overly positive] attributions about their identity. Concepts such as social cognition, self-efficacy and a sense of belonging add to a general understanding of how people construct their identity. These ideas support the possibility of multiple selves that occur across the lifespan.

5.3.1 Social Cognition

Social cognition theory, accredited to Bandura (1989), explains how children and adults learn from others and develop their identities using cognitive capabilities. Bandura sought to understand "how people can, through exercise of personal agency, bring into being cognitive or cortical productions and translate them into actions" (p. 11). According to this theory, competencies are gained through interpersonal interactions that extend into social and cultural activities. Taking the university setting as an example, skills needed by students to produce an assessment might be gained through interacting with group members or by individual effort. Competencies such as problem-solving and information processing invoke procedural and declarative knowledge.

A person may have skills in one area but may be unable to explain those skills [procedural knowledge] unlike declarative knowledge, which is usually expressed. Accessing a community's language may be necessary for its membership. This is demonstrated through declarative knowledge, although both procedural and declarative knowledge require linguistic and language skills and are affected by the context within which a particular skill needs to be carried out. Thus, a skill that is considered proficient in one context may be less appropriate in another context, but may be honed using a self-efficacious [agentic] approach to identity construction.

5.3.2 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is "an individual's belief in their capabilities to meet situational demands ... [and] is important for psychological well-being" (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996, p. 208). Efficacy contributes to overall wellbeing (Bandura & Edwin, 2003) and an improved sense of belonging (Dru, 2007; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). Some researchers see self-efficacy as a collection of 'motivated' behaviours in which a person is engaged, persistent and achievement-oriented (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Pajares & Schunk, 2001) culminating, as with social cognition, in a sense of agency. Similar to social cognition, efficacy can be measured by tapping into perceptions about one's ability to perform a task [perceived self-efficacy] or by actual performance [demonstrable self-efficacy]. However, Bandura (1982) asserts that self-efficacy is a specific, rather than global, variable as it is based on perceptions of a specific achievement; for example, having the confidence to pursue a first-class degree.

As a significant predictor for academic achievement (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Green, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000), self-efficacy is seen as multidimensional in construction, aligned to self-concept, linked to mastery (Bandura, 1986) and social modelling behaviours (Bandura, 1989), and is a feature of social persuasion (Bandura, 1982). Academic efficacy is further denoted by persistent academic-related behaviours in the face of perceived adversity and is governed by behaviours which regulate emotion and physiology (Phan, 2001). Research shows that student-parents who have a stronger belief in their self-efficacy feel better equipped to overcome obstacles and handle multiple roles (Murphy & Roopchand, 2003).

The concept of self-efficacy extends to include 'racial mental toughness', a form of resilience that is a culturally-based response to adversity and is implicated as a missing factor for BME students studying STEMM subjects (McGee & Stovall, 2015) because of their experiences of structural racism while trying to 'stay the distance' (also described as "racial

battle fatigue"; p. 495). McGee and Stovall found that self-efficacy or 'grit' in Black students has been shown to tax their physical and mental health. Claxton and Lucas (2016) add that self-efficacy, as a form of 'mental toughness', develops over time. Therefore, its manifestation in a student should be considered a 'work-in-progress'. Furthermore, where an environment is experienced as unsupportive, the ability for a student to remain self-efficacious can be severely curtailed (Hurtado, Cabrera, Lin, Arellano, & Espinosa, 2008).

Other research reveals gendered and racialised differences for self-efficacy. Zhang and Smith (2011) found that Black female students show a strong academic ethic that is bolstered by inflated views of parental support, yet these students are found to underperform compared to White males and females. No differences were found when Black females' performance was compared with that of Black male students, suggesting that there is a stronger effect for ethnicity.

Negative expectations for ethnic academic performance can further shape achievement outcomes. When Black male students are perceived as independent and non-submissive by academic staff, they are rated and go on to perform more poorly than their peers (Ross & Jackson, 1991). However, studies have shown that a student's learning goal orientation is a better indicator of academic outcomes than teacher ratings (Kyndt, Donche, Gubels & Van Petegem, 2014), although this can be affected by factors such as working for pay or individual differences. Indeed, some students seem to have the ability to remain unaffected by the 'distractions' they might encounter during their studies (Hailikari & Parpala, 2014).

Self-efficacy has been considered in line with research on achievement orientation/motivation. Both concepts embody similar characteristics (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). An interaction of individual factors [for example, goals, needs and personality] and situational factors [family values, beliefs and attitudes] can motivate some students to achieve (Ford, 1993), while others will continue to experience difficulty with achieving self-efficacy. Martin and McLellan (2013) argue that the relationship between self-efficacy and agency is complicated, especially as both concepts are based on a Eurocentric model that should be dismantled for wider cultural applicability.

5.3.3 Sense of Belonging

With more UK researchers turning their attention to engagement and achievement in higher education (e.g. Pokorny et al., 2016; Winter & Chapleo, 2017; Yorke, 2016), sense of belonging is considered a useful indicator for understanding identity construction. Belonging shapes identity formation as it aligns with wellbeing (Milton & Sims, 2016) and can highlight

perceptions about stressful situations (Grobecker, 2016). Belonging is also a useful measure for perceptions of social support (Choenarom, Williams, & Hagerty, 2005) and is a global indicator for perceptions of teacher-student relationships (Chiu, Chow, McBride, & Mol, 2016) as well as a predictor for depression (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne, & Early, 1999).

Early development of a sense of belonging in a student's career is linked to better retention and can be nurtured using academic activities (Thomas, 2012). Students with a developed sense of belonging reflect a more positive self-construct and a greater leaning towards self-efficacious behaviours. This has been noted in mature female students, who are said to be more intrinsically-motivated (Murphy & Roopchand, 2003).

The literature supports the view that a sense of belonging is important for a successful student experience (Sanders & Rose-Adams, 2014). Thomas's (2012) synthesis reflects a growing body of UK research that highlights the value that a sense of belonging brings to academic success and self-efficacy, with negative effects for students who are unable to fit into their academic environments. Belonging is also cited as a critical factor for sustaining a healthy racial climate on university campuses (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

From a phenomenological perspective, sense-making is part of identity construction, marking the development of an identity that seeks [but can also struggle] to 'fit' into an environment. Helmich, Bolhuis, Dornan, Lan, and Koopmans (2012) found that first-year medical students reflected feelings of insecurity during their training, while some students felt they were in a place of compliance. Other students said they were 'developing', while another group felt they were finally 'participating' in their chosen field. For students in the latter category, meaning-making was part of their understanding of what constitutes a 'typical' medical student. Students who felt they fell short of that typology were more likely to experience a sense of 'unbelonging'. Further research has found that gender and ethnicity as well as the impact of intersectional experiences all have potential to affect confidence, efficacy and belonging (Ireland et al., 2018).

It is known that BME students have a reduced sense of belonging to their university environments (Johnson et al., 2007). Feelings of 'unbelonging' and disengagement were prominent among a large sample of nontraditional students that included BME students at an inner-London post-1992 university because of perceptions of restricted access to the 'culture' of their institution (Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003). Limited diversity or opportunities for inclusive socialisation place some students at risk of a sense of 'unbelonging' (Walton & Carr, 2011). Despite a growing understanding, deconstructing experiences of belonging in

BME students requires further work and gives rise to the possibility of an identity that might feel under threat in a university setting.

5.4 Identity Construction in Challenging Contexts

When a person feels threatened in their environment, identity is constructed as a reaction to change that is perceived as dangerous and imminent (Pervin & Cervone, 2010). Emotions may play out as reduced self-efficacy and self-esteem (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006). Identity process theory is accredited to Breakwell's (1986) conceptualisation of an identity under threat. According to this theory, an assumed sense of control and responses to change will guide an individual (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014), along with feelings of self-worth and coping strategies (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2011), self-esteem, self-efficacy and sense of belonging (Heath, 2015).

However, this theory does not address threat from the perspective of an ethnic identity. Identifying threats to ethnic identity as part of multiple selves is a key outcome for intersectionality research (Cole, 2009), notwithstanding that these selves may be difficult to define and moderate under such circumstances. One theory that provides an understanding of ethnic identity construction in a threatened context is the 'hyphenated' selves. Explicitly, the considers the cultural context in which ethnic identities are operationalised.

5.4.1 'Hyphenated' Selves

The literature on 'hyphenated' selves positions these as sites of conflict for the construction of identity (Katsiaficas, Futch, Fine, & Sirin, 2011). Hyphenation is described as a process of self-fragmentation in which "intense ambivalent feelings or emotions and thoughts are separated from each other in one's consciousness" (Counted, 2016, p. 271). Feelings of "abandonment, anxiety, loss, uncertainties, and premonitions of insecurity" (p. 281) can also predicate a 'hyphenated' construction of identity. Multiple selves split as a process of self-regulation to keep a semblance of authenticity, but the result is fragmented representations of what was once an 'authentic' self. Hammack (2010) analysed cultural narratives for young Palestinians who were attempting to 'reconcile their disparate identities' while caught up in the intergroup political conflict between Israel and Palestine. The non-binary aspect of the 'hyphen' shows that an identity can survive in turmoil, but only when this turmoil is re-constructed in a different space.

Unifying voices that speak of hope for the future can exist even in 'contested' spaces. There was an immediate fracturing of the identities of Muslim youth growing up in New York

during the time of the attack on the World Trade Centre, when they became constructed as a global threat. Their identities were joined and separated by a 'hyphen' due to their sense of "history … geography … biology … loss" (Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 152). Sirin and Fine stated that a process of identity re-construction was necessary for these youth to avoid complete defragmentation. The threatened identities of women are more often constructed at gendered, classed and racialised margins [also termed the 'hyphen'] or places of intersectionality where their multiple selves may merge or separate, leading to a more complex construction of the self (Fine, 1994). Thus, it is relevant to consider the contribution of Black feminist thought to the theoretical landscape.

5.5 Black Feminist Thought

Black feminism emerged in response to centuries of oppression and silencing of Black women (Dotson, 2016), who were being denied identity and agency by White men, White women, White feminists and Black men (Brewer, 1993). White women dominated Black women and children by meting out a form of gendered discrimination that only a new feminism could highlight; one that would capture and illuminate the struggles of an even more subjugated group (Mama, 1995). Traditionalist [older generation] Black women were also complicit in supporting forms of dominance as they were brought up to believe that Black women must remain silent, controlled and controllable, although they could be vociferous among themselves (Mama, 1995). As hooks (1990, p. 342) asserts, although considered a "site of repression or deprivation", the struggle for resistance often begins from within one's own segregated community.

This 'silencing' was also apparent in psychological research. While there was some recognition of social class, there was little recognition of 'distinctions' of experience by gender or ethnicity (hooks, 1987). Research into Black lives tended to misrepresent Black men and women; that is, it highlighted their failures and emotional ill-health but seldom showcased their successes. Pre-occupation with ridding the world of 'patriarchal domination' became such a driving force for feminism that racism and other forms of discrimination were being ignored (hooks, 2015).

Over several centuries, Black feminists have strongly resisted White feminists' attempts to homogenise women's experiences (hooks, 2015). Crenshaw reflected that "not only are women of colour in fact overlooked, but their exclusion is reinforced when White women speak for and as women" (1989, p. 154). Thus, during the second wave of feminism, a new breed of recalcitrant Black feminists threatened a long history that presumed Black women to

be demure and accommodating. The challenge for Black feminists was to re-define the purpose and characteristics of the movement without resorting to constructing and labelling identities as social categories, as was the practice of their White predecessors (Mama, 1995).

Thus, Black feminism brought a fresh perspective to understanding identity with a broader focus on ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality. The "politics of domination" was now being informed by interactions of feminine "care and connection" in private and social spaces and led to new thought that created "a practical setting for feminist critique, resistance, and transformation" (hooks, 2015, p. 21). Consequently, Black feminism began to re-situate White hegemonic feminist discourses (Mirza, 1997). There was a growing awareness that emerging standpoints for experiences of being dominated and oppressed could inform an alternative movement of articulate Black feminists who saw their experiences as intersectional. These feminists resisted the elitism practiced by White feminists by opening up access to feminist critiques and theory using intercultural discourse by men and women at all levels of society, including those considered privileged (hooks, 2015). In essence, Black feminists set the template for intersectionality with their standpoints.

5.5.1 Feminist Standpoint

There is value in paying attention to standpoints that arise as a response to power structures, hierarchies and experiences of privilege over extended periods of time. Standpoint is not an identity perspective, but it can helpfully illuminate lived experiences. It stems from differences between interpretations of reality and is resistant to normalised accounts of 'being' (Collins, 2001). Thus, standpoint is the enactment of personal, social and cultural capital, suggesting that "…one's standpoint, or unique world perspective, has been influenced by one's multiple identities, experiences with oppression, and place in society" (Nadal et al., 2015, p. 149).

Feminist standpoint works in tandem with CRT and intersectionality to reveal the ways in which identity is constructed as a social artefact (Warner, 2008). Standpoint is less associated with a traditional exploration of women's experiences and more associated with a fusion of qualitative methodology with researcher reflexivity (Sarantakos, 2012). In common with intersectionality, however, standpoint resists essentialist explanations (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Instead, it reflects on the value of narratives to shed light on women's experiences (Collins, 2001).

<u>5.5.2 Black British Feminism</u>

Women's issues were taken seriously by mainstream feminism in the US, but Black women were excluded, or their issues were relegated to the bottom of a list of feminist priorities. These developments led to alternative frameworks for exploring and interpreting Black women's experiences, of which critical race theory and intersectionality are core (Rollock, 2019). While a female gender is a shared construct for Black women and White women [at least, in a 'normative' sense], ethnicity is not shared, supporting the rationale for an alternative approach to explore Black women's agency (Cole, 2009).

Inspired by their US counterparts, Black women in the UK came together in solidarity, launching a movement of resistance in the 1980s termed 'Black British feminism'. The ontology and epistemology of feminism had been situated within the sphere of White higher social classes for many years (Buck, Cook, Quigley, Eastwood, & Lucas, 2009). Black British feminists such as Sara Ahmed, Heidi Mirza and Amina Mama began to re-define academic ideas about womanhood by exploring the struggles of Black women in the British context. Ahmed (2014) focused on dismantling White hegemonic discourse. Mirza (1992; 1997) gave voice to the challenges for Black women in education. Mama (1995) looked at the experiences of young Black women growing up in Britain during the 1970s surrounded by a White feminine ideal. Inspiration was drawn from the work of critical race theorists such as Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (2001).

5.6 Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) stands out as a responsive form of social activism that explicates lived experiences of racial division (Gillborn, 2015). It is described as the centering of race and its experience within theoretical conceptualisations of social phenomena that have defined groups in society (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018). Moreover, CRT constructs White supremacy as an embedded system by which everything has come to be defined (Rollock, 2012). As a 'movement of resistance', CRT theorists have sought freedom from the views and philosophies of 'racists' (Peters, 2012) to highlight the social reality of experience. CRT researchers have criticised neoliberal policies of the current times as veiled and, often, disingenuous attempts to impose even more damaging restrictions on people using practices that are experienced as the subjugation of some groups, while other groups are elevated to positions of superiority (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011).

With an expansion into the field of education (McGee & Stovall, 2015), this theoretical approach is also used to explore racially-constructed experiences of marginalised groups in

educational settings against a backdrop of White privilege. Thus, CRT holds, at its core, the aim of deconstructing under-achievement and the non-progression of Black people as shaped by cultural assumptions and misunderstandings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). In response, CRT theorists interpret Black cultural capital in more positive terms, including as a means for developing community wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Although a fuller application of CRT in a UK context may be constrained by its US-derived framework, similarities for the experiences of Black people [as discussed in Chapter 2] give prominence to its value in shaping Black [British] feminist perspectives on race and gender. Furthermore, while there is "no single position statement that defines CRT ... CRT scholars do have in common a social constructivist perspective of race and racism ..." (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011, p. 2). Delgado and Stefancic (2012, p. 8) describe this as the 'social construction' thesis. Ladson-Billings argued that "CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for the ... deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power" (1998, p. 10). Ladson-Billings further outlined the key tenets of CRT as follows:

(i) racism has become 'normalised', sophisticated and engrained in society;

(ii) the use of storytelling or counter-narratives give 'voice' to the reality of lived experiences, leading to the development of critical 'standpoints' (Collins, 2001);

(iii) slow change that is common to movements such as civil rights should be resisted as a direct critique of liberalism, which seems to favour little or no change. The result is that racist policies and practices continue to wield an enduring power; and

(iv) some affirmative actions have benefitted White people more than Black people. For example, there are still fewer Black people in senior, influential positions in society. Thus, 'interest convergence' is the only way to address some of these issues; that is, where the interests of White people [often driven by financial or reputational concerns] intersect with the interests of Black people, leading to necessary action.

Another tenet of CRT is the pursuit of social justice (Collins & Bilge, 2016). To achieve social justice, injustices must be identified, highlighted, explored, critiqued, narrated and publicised. Collins and Bilge further explain that, to address these issues, two tools are foundational. Theory and practice can be used to improve the experiences of marginalised people by creating and disseminating strategies of empowerment and resistance. Intersectionality theory, as one example, has opened up new ways to conceptualise the struggles encountered by particular groups. Consequently, experiences that were previously ignored are now made more visible.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal contribution to advancing the concept of intersectionality (Romero, 2018) represents a successful fusion of CRT with Black feminism to expose deficit experiences in particular groups in society (Wood, 2008). Furthermore, it is known that sociologists, critical race theorists, legal scholars, education researchers and health practitioners have used an intersectionality lens over many years to critique the practice and praxis of frameworks that support social oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality theory has two organising principles; namely, critical inquiry and critical praxis (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Both can exist independently, and each are important for asking critical questions and making suggestions that can inform actions to address social change. The work of Bonnie Thornton Dill as cited in Collins and Bilge (2016) is considered fundamental to illuminating the synergy between critical inquiry and critical praxis. Thornton Dill held an explicit focus on the requirement to address the intersection of race, gender and class within experiences of structural inequality. Intersectionality theory is considered the synergy of both principles.

Critical inquiry centres on a critique of existing knowledges, theories, methods and research that have sought to inform an understanding of how social phenomena are experienced as well as how structural inequality underpins experience. For example, while there is a plethora of research that has looked at the experiences of BME students in higher education and the attainment gap, there is still further work required to understand the 'awarding' aspect of the gap; that is, who has the power to 'award' and how the attainment gap is experienced by BME students. In a complementary fashion, critical praxis throws a spotlight on the effect of structural inequality on people's daily lives as part of institutional practices that have acted to constrain identity and its multiple social locations. The current research uses a triangulated methodology that facilitates an exploration of [predominantly, but not exclusively] experiences of the intersection of race, gender, class and higher education in order to better understand Black female undergraduate psychology students' experiences of constructing identity within a climate of structural inequality in their institutions.

Both CRT and intersectionality place value on using a phenomenological approach to interpret meaning from cultural narratives of experience (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Warner, 2008), although some researchers (e.g. Haddix, 2012) have criticised an emphasis on what they consider are carefully selected stories that appear to exclude other 'truths'. Intersectionality has also been criticised for a focus on the experiences of Black women (Carbado, 2013). However, its originating purpose was to emphasise the powerlessness of

Black women resulting from denial of their agency and an absenting of the consideration of their combined characteristics of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Consequently, counter-narratives are viewed as a powerful means of revealing tensions that are inherent in lived experiences of overtly racist as well as microaggressive behaviours (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Returning to student experiences, despite increasing diversity, outcomes for some populations do not accord with expectations from learning in an 'inclusive' university environment (UUK & NUS, 2019). These issues point to the possibility of 'interest convergence' as a response to social inequalities. Stories from Black female students who are less visible in higher education (Ireland et al., 2018) and, seemingly, more problematic because of their construction as 'Black women' (Nash, 2017) can offer powerful counter-narratives to 'normative' accounts of experience and may reflect the extent to which these students feel included. Using the critical praxis of intersectionality as a theoretical tool with feminist research methods [recommended as more appropriate for intersectionality studies; Warner, 2008], an interpretation of Black female students' stories supports the phenomenological direction of the present research while contributing to fresh knowledge about these students.

5.7 Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory is a 'named' lens through which to frame experiences of racialised, classed and gendered oppression. Tensions that are inherent in constructions of identity can be separated using this theory (Phoenix, 2006). Despite contestations from Collins and Bilge (2016) that intersectionality has become overrun with identity politics, there is still a place for studies that seek to understand the relationship between identity construction from a psychological perspective and intersectionality as a theoretical approach (Ireland et al., 2018; Settles, 2016). Ireland et al. go further, arguing that "*the psychology of intersectionality in education* [emphasis in original] adds value to theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding Black women and girls' experiences in STEM education" (2018, p. 229). Its application, they state, breaks down social structures that allow *some* groups to thrive while other groups experience a similar reality as disadvantageous.

Intersectionality theory is sensitive to a multitude of factors that combine to "affect a person's psychology" (Lee, 2012, p. 110). Hankivsky adds that intersectionality "… emphasises that people belong to more than one social category at the same time, focuses on interactions of different social locations, systems and processes, investigates rather than assumes the significance of any specific combination of factors" (2014, p. 13). These factors

can combine to drive agency in any situation. Social forces, as illustrated in Figure 5.7, work together to shape a person's identity. However, it should be noted that there are more forces/intersections than can be represented in a single diagram.

The outer circle of the diagram depicts typical structural forces (for example, politics and the education system) which shape identity on an individual or collective basis. These dominant systems dictate the policies and practices that govern societies, devolving to local communities. Moving inwards, the next concentric circle captures societal outcomes (for example, ageism, racism, discrimination) that arise from actions which are condoned and perpetuated by these structural forces. The successive concentric circle illustrates social locations that are specific to identity, for example [and relevant to the present research], gender, age, cultural background and education. The innermost circle represents an identity that is mediated by forms of privilege and power. A relationship between this diagram and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory is apparent.

Figure 5.7: Intersectionality displayed in a wheel (CRIAW, 2009)

Intersectionality stands out as a composite framework for situating Black female experiences since it addresses the complexity of identity or multiple selves within domains of

particularities: for example, having a 'particular' ethnicity, a 'particular' gender, a 'particular' social class. It has been applied to the experiences of Black women from both underprivileged and privileged vantages (Cole, 2009) and is relevant for addressing the multiplicity of experience inherent within divisions of social class. According to Hankivsky (2014), researchers must seek to understand what it means to live at the *intersection* of Black, female and social class — critically, the point at which all three connect [the 'hyphen'] — if they are to understand experience. The theoretical perspective rejects an 'additive' approach in favour of a multiplicative approach as social locations are interwoven and are not experienced as separate entities (Hankivsky, 2014). Positional simultaneity can be either a challenge or strength depending on the time and context within which they function, and the value that is placed on them by society (Breakwell, 1986).

With an initial focus on a marginalised group [Black women; Crenshaw, 1989], an intersectionality approach ousts perspectives that have, for centuries, relied on cultural deficit explanations for expected experience, actual experience and outcomes (Warner, 2008). Its assumed origins date back to at least 1982 when, in a landmark statement, a group of Black feminists [known as the Combahee River Collective] argued that it is impossible to separate experiences of class, race and sexual oppression because they are experienced as *simultaneous* positions (Cole, 2009). Following an investigation into a failed legal challenge by a group of Black women against a major car manufacturing company in the US (de Graffenreid vs. General Motors), the term [intersectionality] was first coined by Crenshaw in 1989. Before this, key feminists[9] (Guy-Sheftall, 1995) were expounding an intersectionality approach to assert Black women's rights to enact resistance from the perspective of a holistic sense of their identity (Mama, 1995).

5.7.1 Intersectionality Illustrated

Several researchers have attempted to conceptualise and illustrate intersectionality. Prah (2017) visualises intersectionality as a tree with a complex root system defined by its environment, an illustration shared by Collins (2000). According to Prah:

> the appeal of using intersectionality to work through lived experiences is its ability to ontologically hold a multiplicity of analytical lenses through which to understand social phenomena. Intersectionality positions social phenomena as relational, multiple, and continuous (2017, p. 2).

---

[9] including historical figures such as Harriet Tubman, Mary Prince, Nana of the Maroons and Sojourner Truth as well as more recent feminists including Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde and Maya Angelou

Agreeing with Collins (2000), Prah adds that age, as a social location, receives less attention in intersectionality research, but is also relevant. Crenshaw (1989) uses a traffic analogy, in which the intersection is the site where identity constructs collide, creating an experience of hurt, anger and confusion. Crenshaw (1989) explains:

> Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happened in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex or race discrimination (p. 149).

Like Crenshaw (1989), the present research sees intersectionality reflected through the analogy of a complex traffic system (see example in image below):

Source: Google images

Multi-layered routes (that is, major highways) representing structural forces, such as powerful institutions that recognise and celebrate hegemonic and binary constructions, interconnect at junctions to allow vehicles [analogous to people and includes those with multiple identities] to enter and exit major highways. These junctions represent sites where characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity and social class collide. People with multiple identities become marginalised from having to draw heavily on their resources to navigate these junctions while also assuming a sense of normality. Their navigation is experienced as confusing and frustrating and is also likely to be felt as oppressive and discriminatory by marginalised groups (Crenshaw, 1991).

5.7.2 Intersectionality Research

Intersectionality is gaining global currency (Hunting, 2014) and is being applied in diverse research contexts. Its theoretical perspective has opened up to include other experiences, such

as sexuality and queer theory (Borba & Milani, 2019) and lesbian organising movements (Carastathis, 2014), stemming arguments that its original lens was restricted and overly-focused on experiences of Black women (Musser, 2015) to the exclusion of other groups. To some extent, powerful stories of resistance that describe the intersection of ethnicity/race with gender, family, social class and political economy mute this argument (e.g. Collins, 2001; James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2001). Further examples of diversity in intersectionality research include experiences of weight gain differentials (Ailshire & House, 2011), leadership challenges (Showunmi et al., 2015), and raced and gendered health perceptions (Griffith, Ellis, & Allen, 2013). In most of these studies, narratives or 'voice' are used to convey the experience of an oppressive structure and provide a cultural understanding of living with racialised, gendered and structural inequalities on a day-to-day basis.

Going beyond gender, intersectionality has been used to expose differences *between* same-ethnicity groups (Black women *and* Black men; Settles, 2006). Its original conception was as a form of analysis that could be used to address the burden of double-discrimination (or 'multiply-burden'; Crenshaw, 1989) faced by Black women due to the effect of structural forces in society. Research has shown that double-discrimination is enacted not only by experiences of racism in communities such as White women towards Black women, but also by experiences of sexism within Black communities (Settles, 2006).

5.7.3 Intersectionality Approaches

Intersectionality theory brings different approaches to the study of experience (Prins, 2006). For example, a phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) offers a corrective and integrative approach to understanding an ethnic identity perceived as threatened (Swanson et al., 2002). Swanson and colleagues argue for an intersectional approach to understanding Black adolescents' experiences of education that resists deficit explanations, recognises multi-structured challenges for coping, and values an individual's efforts to achieve success within the complex construction of their multiple selves. PVEST refocuses construction and meaning-making for identity in the face of attempts to negate the influence of forces in the environment (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997).

US-framed intersectionality studies focus on systemic issues and are premised on challenging discourses of power, politics and structure, since they are strongly driven by a critical race theoretical perspective. Yuval-Davis (2006) refers to further two forms of intersectionality: (i) structural, in which the particularities of experience for Black women sit at the intersection of race and gender; and (ii) political, for scrutiny of policies that have kept

Black women marginalised and subjugated in situations of violence. Meer's (2014) review outlines other approaches: unitary intersectionality, in which one category is assumed to be stable and primary, and multiple intersectionality, which has several competing categories.

With such variety, the theory has come under criticism for a lack of alignment to a specific analytic method (Hunting, 2014; Phoenix, 2006). However, this freedom can be considered advantageous for researchers who can adopt the methodological direction most suited to the context under scrutiny (Cole, 2009), strengthening the identity and applicability of such research. A problem pointed out by Carbado (2013) is when a 'colourblind' approach is applied to intersectionality, meaning that ethnicity is effectively 'written out' of levels of analysis. It is this potential exclusion that has angered critical race theorists most about its misappropriation (Gillborn, 2015).

McCall's (2005) call for intersectional categorisation is helpful for defining clarity and purpose around this kind of research. Intracategorical categorisation is the approach applied in the present research and is when "… authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups" (p. 1774). The approach developed as a direct rebuttal to White male privilege, and the desire to separate out White female hegemony from Black female experiences. Categorical deconstruction, described as "drawing out the non-unitary, intracategorical and often 'neglected points of intersection" (p. 1780) informs the possibility of social change. A growing number of feminist scholars from a wide range of theoretical perspectives, political interests and disciplines, although with a majority in psychology (e.g. Cole, 2009; Grzanka, Santos, & Moradi, 2017; Rosenthal, 2016; Shin et al., 2017) are applying an intersectional approach to their research, recognising that a focus on one level of analysis is no longer sufficient to convey a fuller picture of experience (Davis, 2008).

5.7.4 Intersectionality Research Methods

According to Hankivsky (2014), seven guiding principles support intersectionality research: (i) using intersecting categories, (ii) applying multi-level analysis, (iii) recognising power, (iv) engaging with reflexivity, (v) understanding contextual changes over time and space, (vi) applying diverse knowledges, and (vii) the importance of social justice and equity.

Based on Hankivsky's model (Figure 5.7.4), an interplay of dynamic social forces (that is, intersecting categories) affects the extent to which research takes a broader framework approach for understanding the complexities of identity construction. Multi-level analysis is a 'taken-for-granted' principle, in that intersecting categories shape identity. Power

structures, such as institutions, politics and systems govern the way a society functions or controls its resources. Such structures have supported cultural deficit perspectives, where women are forced to construct a hierarchy of constraints. Focus is placed on one characteristic of identity; yet, intersectional identities are known to be experienced simultaneously (Collins, 2000).

Power structures can also be exclusive or inclusive, keeping some groups subjugated while elevating others. Political, social and legal frameworks work together [or separately] to shape experiences of power or oppression. Intersectionality theory deconstructs power systems from lived experiences of [in]equality by throwing a critical lens on disadvantage while questioning power within a given environment. Reflexivity aids researchers in asking searching questions about power, privilege and taken-for-granted assumptions, while disrupting their own position in relation to others' experiences.

Figure 5.7.4: Guiding principles of intersectionality research (Hankivsky, 2014)

As the model illustrates, intersectionality exists across time and space. Both states are fluid and changeable, creating shifting contexts within which a person experiences their multiple selves. These contexts are important for constructing meaning and identity. Diverse knowledges come from a range of sources including privileged and unprivileged positions. Marginalised 'voices' garner collective knowledge to convey stories of oppression and discrimination using various media. Social justice links to equity, as equity links with

fairness. A social justice approach emphasises equal and fair access to resources for all concerned. Resistance and resilience are more recent additions to Hankivsky's (2014) model which are still under development, and from which spring collective action to "disrupt power and oppression" (p. 11).

Intersectionality theory sees social locations as separate and combined aspects of a marginalised identity when contrasted with 'normative' experiences or forms of privilege. Engagement with social locations is constructed as resistance to oppression by taking on a pro-essentialist stance [that is, the recognition of differences and their characteristics], particularly where this leads to collective action to preserve identity (Crenshaw, 1991).

5.8 Social Constructionism

Scientific empirical methods were once a mainstay of social psychology research in order to understand identity, but this approach has since been rejected as the only way to understand its construction (Jost & Kruglanski, 2002). Social constructionism offers a useful understanding of the concept of multiple social identities since emphasis shifts towards the role of meaning-making in the formation of identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Instead of 'taken-for-granted' positions, social constructionism can be distinguished by its fluid criticality (Gergen, 2007) making it a useful theoretical lens through which to explore experience.

Of note, social constructionism holds the person at the centre of their experience from where they are constructing their identity, reality, knowledge, meaning and perceptions. Articulated through sensitivity to cultural change, the theoretical approach accommodates tensions in language and knowledge construction (Burr, 2003; 1995), suggesting an ideology that, in some ways, is similar to intersectionality.

According to Mirza (1998), Black females re-construct their identities to compensate for perceived differences and to achieve similarity with others. When interacting with a dominant group, a student may adopt a "cultural/language frame of reference" for acceptability by others, which is conspicuous by its non-parity with their cultural framework (Ogbu, 2004, p. 5). Experiences may be felt as detracting from one's core identity. Collins (2001) describes this as the 'outsider-within' phenomenon. A struggle to blend in alludes to an innate desire for a sense of belonging that can be difficult to achieve in some contextual settings.

Social constructionism also supports an exploration into the ways that people 'construct' the reality of their social world (Burr, 1995; 2003). The transformational nature of

identity suggests that it is a unique and dynamically-shifting process (Bakhurst & Sypnowich, 1995) which might be experienced as problematic in some individuals. Therefore, a socially-constructed identity can be considered the product of personal, cultural and social meaning-making regardless of whether it can be defined, analysed, categorised or de-constructed (Abes et al., 2007). These processes have been referred to by Crenshaw (1991) as the 'politics of identity'. Crenshaw maintains that whether identity is experienced as unique, particularised or in common, it is, nonetheless, valid. When identity is viewed through a dual lens of social constructionism and intersectionality, further light can be shed on the challenges for its construction.

5.9 Conceptual Framework

The plethora of ideas for the construction of identity that has been set out in preceding sections of this chapter suggests that gaining a concrete understanding of that concept may be difficult to locate. Nonetheless, these ideas are helpful for a broad understanding of identity. To that end, theories for the structure of identity have informed the design of a conceptual model for identity (Figure 5.9), beginning with a consideration of the contribution of structural symbolic interactionism through to the usefulness of intersectionality for understanding identity construction in Black female students. Concepts such as self-efficacy and sense of belonging, as well as theoretical perspectives that seek to explain identity when it is constructed during periods of tension and challenge have all pointed to the possibility of multiple selves. An emerging methodology feeds into the overall research framework (Chapter 6), which is designed to explore identity construction for the Black female students participating in this research.
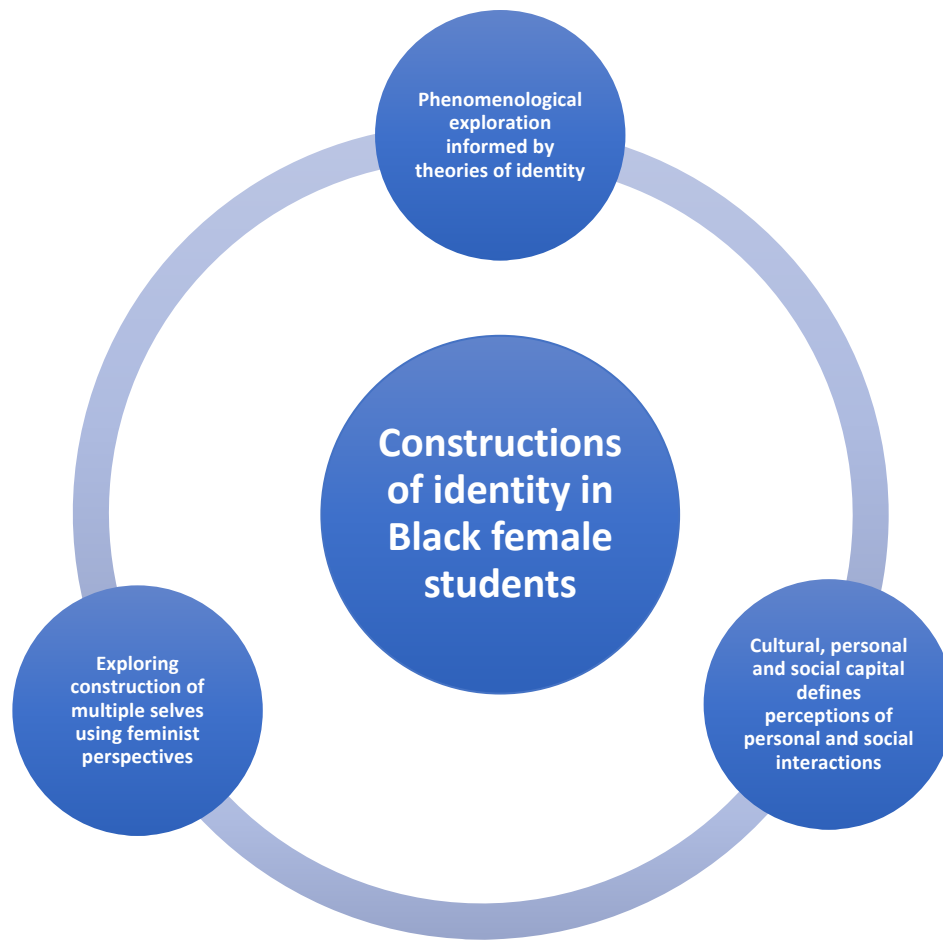
Figure 5.9: A conceptual model of identity in Black female students

The outer ring of the conceptual framework suggests that identity construction [represented by an unbroken circular ring] is a linked experience. Connecting lines between the three spheres are non-directional, suggesting fluidity for the unique and common aspects of identity. A phenomenological expression of identity [captured by the topmost circle] represents the contribution of lived experiences and meaning-making to identity construction in these students. Moving clockwise, accounts of the students' cultural, personal and social capital ground their experiences in the setting of a past, present and future identity.

Capital is defined as an accumulation of resources that accompanies a person throughout the lifespan (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). It is expressed in several ways that include symbolic or economic capital. Personal and social capital in a person's day-to-day existence mediate perceptions of risk and protective factors in their environment (Swanson et al., 2002). Whether they realise the outcome as adaptive or maladaptive, these perceptions can feed into and reinforce identity construction. Finally, the construction of identity as multiple selves is key to an intersectionality-informed exploration

into the lived experiences of Black female students. The conceptual framework was devised to situate the experiences of Black female students in UK higher education and gives rise to several considerations. These are explored reflexively throughout this thesis:

1. Identity is multifaceted and further complicated by a requirement to manage multiple selves. *Given this premise, is it possible to arrive at a full structural critique of identity? Crenshaw (1991) suggests that it is not; thus, limitations to the findings must be expected and accepted.*

2. Cultural, personal and social capital shape multiple selves, whether capital is self-defined or socially-informed. *As such, is their capital a liability or benefit for these students?*

3. Concepts, such as self-efficacy and belonging, shape identity construction. *Do we know enough about the nuanced aspects of experience to understand the role these concepts play in constructing identity?*

4. Where a situation or context is perceived as challenging or threatening, a fragmented/fractured self (for example, a weak sense of belonging or feelings of ambivalence) may cause an individual to become detached from their environment. *Once a student becomes fragmented, can they ever develop a sense of belonging and, if so, how?*

5. A detached or 'unbelonging' identity might be constructed as 'abnormal' in 'normative' contexts. *What is 'normal' or 'abnormal'? Who decides what is 'normal' or 'abnormal'? Whose responsibility is it to 'normalise' such perceptions, if at all?*

A model with multiple modes supports the use of pluralistic research methods for an inductive and feminist approach to exploring identity construction. Further research into student experiences may add support for the use of this model as part of an exploratory framework. The open nature of the model lends itself to redefinition. A flexible conceptual framework is considered acceptable in qualitative research (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013).

5.10 Conclusions

Despite varying interpretations, there is agreement over a common feature of identity. Reflecting on earlier definitions, one idea holds constancy: identity is transforming and transformative in a socially-constructed sense. In fact, it may be futile to compare identity theories as they are often based on the disparate philosophical or psychological leanings of their conceiver (Breakwell, 1986). Rather, a blend of theories and concepts seems to offer

more credence to the suggestion that ideas about identity can be interwoven to interpret perceptions and behaviours in differing contexts. The challenge for a researcher is to resist a fixed attachment to one or other theory and instead to embrace perspectives that accommodate theories at differing points across the lifespan and, even, in a multiple sense.

Concepts that feature within socially-constructed theoretical positions point to the influence of a sense of belonging and [academic] self-efficacy on meaning-making for identity construction (Vignoles et al., 2006). Therefore, there is confidence that the questions posed in the present research (see Chapter 1) are appropriate for understanding identity construction in Black female students. Another recurring concept, multiple selves, confirms the appropriateness of adopting a multiple framework approach for exploring cultural narratives, accepting that a person can experience positions of advantage and disadvantage within a single construction (Ansell, 2013).

Critical race theories recognise that there are effects for structural, gendered and racialised ecological systems that can place stress on an individual's identity construction. The dynamic nature of identity exists within power structures that continue to socially define what it means to be gendered and racialised. Applying phenomenology to feminist research methods gives 'voice' to an identity that may be threatened, disrupted and re-constructed at the 'margins' of a lived experience.

Multi-level analyses see intersectionality challenges arising from power structures such as macro, meso and micro policies and practices within an environment that shapes identity. This research considers how studying in a UK HEI, which could be considered a power structure, shapes ethnicity, gender and maturity in this body of students; in other words, how being Black shapes being female in an academic environment; how being a Black female shapes the experience of maturity in an academic environment; how being a Black mature female is shaped by academic experience … and in the context of intersectionality, how all of these elements are shaped by each other, *all at the same time*. Therefore, it is appropriate that the conceptual framework is supported by a pluralistic research methodology, which is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

Research Methods

This chapter describes a pluralistic framework[10] that was constructed to explore the social phenomenon of identity construction in Black female students. Qualitative content analysis (QCA), interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and inductive thematic analysis (TA) were each applied to different phases of the research. This triangulated approach offered a more integrated interpretation of the experiences of students participating in this research. Data, site and methodological triangulation were integral to the research methods and supported the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. Materials used included a demographic questionnaire, a semi-structured individual interview schedule that was adapted to suit the phases, a focus group interview schedule and a timeline activity. Implications for ethical issues are discussed.

6.1 Positionality

Defined as the researcher taking a position or stance (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014), the researcher's positionality was to view Black female students' experiences through the lens of two theoretical perspectives — intersectionality and social constructionism — and to take a pluralistic methodological approach to analysing their experiences. Intersectionality is a theoretical perspective for exploring multiple social locations and experiences of structural oppression and domination (Crenshaw, 1989). This perspective was adopted due to its relevance to the multi-dimensional experiences of Black female students as well as to support

---

[10] This was not the original plan. I had intended to use IPA with 8-10 participants, believing that a single method would be sufficient to understand identity construction in this student group. My reading of qualitative research methods texts, and Smith et al. (2009) in particular, indicated that this method and sample size were appropriate for a PhD research project. Following a recruitment drive, most of the first set of interviews were carried out with *nontraditional* Black female students. This was not intentional. These students seemed more willing to volunteer their stories. Perhaps, my identity as a nontraditional Black female student researcher contributed to their interest. With further interviews that included more traditional and nontraditional students, the participants seemed to tell the same kinds of stories but with expected and unexpected similarities and differences. I realised that it made sense to group the interviews by student type [nontraditional or nontraditional] for the purpose of a consistent analysis (Phases 1 & 2). However, exploring these stories through different analytical lenses seemed to resonate more closely with Frost's (2011) description of identity construction as fragmented, incoherent, illogical and messy. It became clear that, while IPA offers an in-depth exploration, accessing diverse stories or 'diving for pearls' (Smith, 2011) using just one type of 'equipment' might lead to missing other important 'gems'. I considered the suitability of including other methods. The research project presented an opportunity to gain and hone skills in more than one analytical method with the creative space to devise another data collection method (a timeline). Undoubtedly, taking a multi-methods approach has contributed to my development as a more rounded qualitative researcher.

the researcher's reflexive positionality as a Black female student (see Chapter 12). The central focus of intersectionality, which is to highlight the lived experiences of marginalised groups, supports IPA's phenomenological stance and is suited to in-depth qualitative research (Ireland et al., 2018).

In a complementary sense, social constructionism brings to research, "a body of assumptions, values, and practices, and the result of research will inevitably be fashioned by their [the researcher's] orientation" (Gergen, 2015, p. 212). This view is also shared by IPA researchers; the method is described as "the light at the end of the social constructionist continuum" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 184). The use of a pluralistic approach [QCA, IPA and TA combined in one body of research] provides an integrated method that brings phenomena to the fore (Shenton, 2004) and suits exploratory feminist-type research (Bryman, 2008).

Although feminist research does not exclude quantitative methods, some researchers (e.g. Bruce & Yearley, 2006) embrace the view that qualitative methods and the 'vulnerability' that accompanies researcher-investment in the process can reveal more about the depth of human experiences than quantitative methods alone. Thus, the combination of intersectionality theory, social constructionism and methodological pluralism may throw a wider lens on life lived at the margin[11] of social characteristics, fostering trustworthiness for the research process.

6.2 Feminist Research Methods

Feminist research data may be collected in interesting and novel ways, such as the innovative use of qualitative diaries and dialogues (Plowman, 2010), or mixed-methods that combine traditional surveys with interviews or observation as part of wider fieldwork (Silva, 2013). Feminist methodologies feature strongly in identity research. Identity research has included sexual identities (England, 1994); identity development (Moradi, Subich, & Phillips, 2002); constructions of a 'womanist' identity on university campus (Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992), and feminism, family and identity (Rom & Benjamin, 2011), all of which have relevance for the direction of the present research. This kind of research has also been used as a form of activism which, in pursuit of social justice, challenges inequalities experienced by marginalised groups (Carastathis, 2013). Feminist research methods can open up the question of 'power dynamics' in the research environment (Fine, 1994), and their findings can be

---

[11] the 'margin' is often referred to in intersectionality research as the place, space and situation where social locations, such as ethnicity and gender, collide

reflexively explored. While feminist researchers accept the complexity of reflexivity, they encourage engagement with it to reduce subjectivity for research findings (Doucet & Mauthner, 2005).

6.3 Process Overview

The research took a progressive approach, with four phases that spanned several years of inquiry into experiences of identity construction for an under-researched population of students. QCA was used in Phase 1 to support the broad epistemological position of a social constructionist approach, resulting in a conceptual analysis that was carried out on nontraditional student narratives (Chapter 7). The purpose of this phase was to identify key aspects of identity construction in this student group. The analysis informed the decision to take a more 'bottom-up' approach to analysing the experiences of traditional students in Phase 2 (Chapter 8) which could lead to fresh knowledge for identity in this student group. A phenomenological method (IPA) that suited an intersectionality perspective was used to access meaning-making in this sample.

Since less is known about these students (Madhill, 2015), a broad 'atheoretical' stance was held and methodological triangulation continued. In Phase 3 (Chapter 9), an inductive TA approach was used to analyse data from mixed focus groups of traditional and nontraditional students. Data collection ended with a single IPA case study in Phase 4 (Chapter 10). Students in the latter phases also commented as lay experts on the veracity of themes constructed from previous phases. Thus, the phenomenon of Black female identity construction was explored from three analytic vantages (Figure 6.3), reducing the potential for not obtaining "a complete understanding of the context" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1280).

thematic patterns (similarities/dissimilarities) for
identity construction

TA

Identity
construction
in Black
female
students

QCA

IPA

conceptual accounts
of identity
construction

phenomenological
accounts of identity
construction
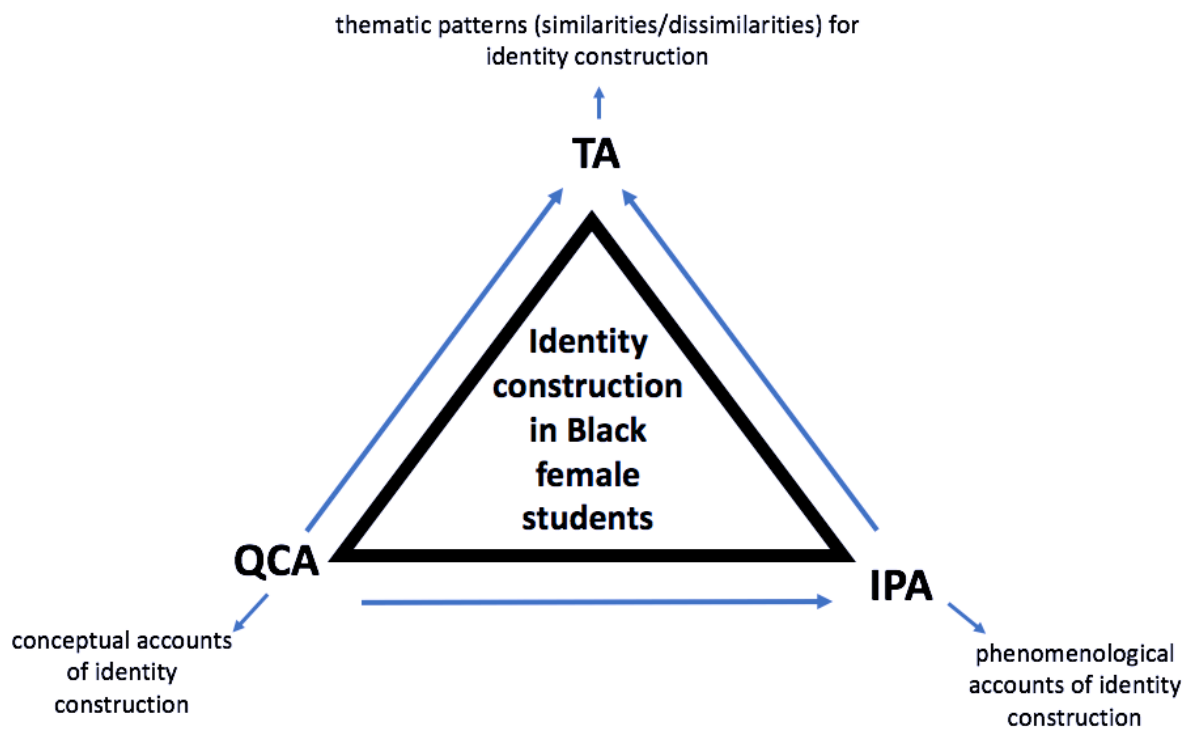
Figure 6.3: A triangulation framework

6.4 Rationale

Plurality in research methods offers diverse analytical interpretations (Shaw & Frost, 2015) and is well-established in psychological research studies (Frost, 2011). Research can be carried out in different ways within the same body of work. Clarke et al. (2015) maintain that "it is the comparisons drawn between interpretations that can offer something more to research in psychology, not least through promoting a reflexive critique" (p. 198). In-depth individual interviews, focus group interviews and creative methods can work together to explore multiple conceptualisations of ethnicity, gender and class in marginalised groups (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007).

Given that the 'plural and complex' nature of identity (Hall & du Gay, 1996) lies at the centre of this exploration, a multi-methods approach was considered justifiable to tease out a gendered and racialised identity that is constructed 'at the margins' (also considered places of invisibility; Sian, 2017) in ways that a single-method approach might be less able to achieve. As Hodges and Jobanputra (2012) point out, the place where multiple identities combine and experience exclusion from the mainstream is, indeed, complex. Pluralistic methods can support an in-depth construction of themes that show whether there is convergence and/or divergence for the experience of identity construction across datasets (Shaw & Frost, 2015).

This approach reveals the multiple layers that incorporate human experience. These layers are not linear, but can be fragmented, incoherent, illogical and messy (Frost, 2011).

6.5 Triangulation

Researchers interested in social phenomena lean towards three forms of triangulation: methodological, investigator and data triangulation (Mathison, 1988). Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2011) expand methodological triangulation to include 'across method' and 'within method'. The former is more commonly referred to as 'mixed-methods' and may include a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods; while the latter applies more than one *qualitative* or *quantitative* data collection approach to a research inquiry, but not a combination. Investigator triangulation sees multiple researchers working to collect and/or analyse data, depending on the research context; while data triangulation may be carried out by a sole researcher. Data can be collected across different time points and/or locations. The present research takes both a data and a methodological triangulation approach.

6.5.1 Data Triangulation

Data were collected from enrolled Black female psychology undergraduate students across six London universities and at different points in time. There was a gap of at least two years between data collection for the first and second phases [collected in 2013/2014], and the third and fourth phases [collected in 2017]. The samples varied by type: traditional or nontraditional Black female student. The interview schedule for Phases 1 and 2 addressed core dimensions of university experience and identity construction. Analyses from these phases informed the interview schedule for Phases 3 and 4, which centred on shared and non-shared university experiences as well as seeking student agreement for the findings from Phases 1 and 2.

6.5.2 Methodological Triangulation

Across the phases, in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus groups and a timeline activity were used to explore Black female students' experiences. Bekhet and Zauszniewski explain that: "with triangulation, researchers can use two research methods to decrease the weaknesses of an individual method and strengthen the outcomes of the study" (2011, p. 41). This research goes further than that. Data were analysed using three qualitative research methods and also included a researcher-devised activity [a timeline]; thus, data were gathered and analysed at more than one level [individual and group], an approach commended as

being more robust by Carey and Smith (1994). There are three possible outcomes of applying varied methodological approaches, and each has its benefits:

(i) convergence, where findings are consistent across approaches;

(ii) inconsistency, where there is an alternative proposition arising from the findings, stimulating further interest and research activity; and

(iii) contradiction, resulting from opposing findings (Mathison, 1988).

All outcomes can, and should, be questioned by the researcher using interpretation and explanation to close the gaps, while bearing in mind that the intention is not to create a seamless account of experience.

Complex social phenomena suggest a high probability of diverse outcomes from analyses. This view aligns with Mason's assertion that:

> explanations do not have to be internally consensual and neatly consistent to have meaning and to have the capacity to explain … if the social world is multi-dimensional, then surely our explanations need to be likewise? (2006, p. 20)

Patton adds:

> it is possible to achieve triangulation within a qualitative inquiry strategy by combining different kinds of qualitative methods, mixing purposeful samples, and including multiple perspectives (1999, p. 1193).

6.6 Trustworthiness

Drawing on Shenton's (2004) evaluation of trustworthiness for the qualitative process, there are five principles to be adhered to when carrying out qualitative research, regardless of the method: (i) truth value *or* credibility; (ii) transferability *or* applicability; (iii) consistency *or* dependability; (iv) neutrality *or* confirmability and (v) authenticity. Each is addressed in light of the present research. Triangulation [discussed earlier] is a connecting thread.

6.6.1 Truth Value/Credibility

According to Shenton (2004), research findings must present the 'truth' of experience; that is, whether participants are believable based on how they are reflected in analysis, while acknowledging that humans can also lie (Hanna, 2011). Although this might seem contentious, the aim of this research was for participants to narrate the 'truth' of their experience. This 'truth' was checked by asking participants in Phases 3 and 4 about the extent to which themes constructed from Phases 1 and 2 resonated with their current experiences as Black female students, a process known as 'member checking' (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King,

2014). The requirement was satisfied where focus groups of Black female undergraduate psychology students in the London area commented on experiences of Black female undergraduate psychology students who had also studied in the London area.

The duration of an interview must also offer confidence for robustness of the process from which data are obtained. Each interview in the present research lasted between 120 and 300 minutes. Ethical principles for research integrity were followed (see Ethical Considerations sub-section in Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10). Credibility for the research was further explored using reflexivity (Chapter 12) and during meetings with the researcher's supervision team, where the methodology and findings were discussed and critiqued. Opportunities were taken to present emerging findings from this research at national and international conferences, workshops and seminars, opening them up to wider scrutiny by the research community (Appendix A).

In the present research, the participants were of various ages and cultural backgrounds, while holding the central self-declared ethnicity and gender of a Black woman. All participants were enrolled at a London university at the point of interview. Each university has different characteristics, despite being located within a similar geographic location. For example, one university in the sample has one of the largest concentrations of students from minoritised ethnicities in the London area, while another lies on the outskirts of London and has a large contingent of London-domiciled students due to good transportation links to and from the university. Another way of reflecting credibility for the findings is to use more than one method to obtain data; for example, using individual interviews *and* focus groups for methodological triangulation, as in the current research.

6.6.2 Transferability/Applicability

Transferability allows for cautious inferences from research findings to be extended to a wider context (Carcary, 2009). Here, the focus is less on generalisability and more on whether similar findings might exist in other settings. Interviews were carried out at more than one institution, each with students of differing profiles, reflecting cultural heterogeneity. Self-declared ethnicity, university location and type of degree course were homogeneous, stable variables for these participants.

6.6.3 Consistency/Dependability

The principle reflected in this criterion is based on capturing variability in participants' experiences and narrative style in a consistent fashion. Tracking variability helps to establish

the findings as dependable. The current research explores human experience, which is unique and varied for each person. A nontraditional Black female student, who may experience university differently or similarly to her traditional White counterpart, may also experience this in different ways to another nontraditional or traditional Black female student [an example of a standpoint — see Chapter 5, 5.5.1]. The ability to detect similarities and differences should be carefully reflected in the design and methods of a study and then confirmed during analysis using selected excerpts from transcripts for illustrative purposes. Again, the researcher is encouraged to take a reflective stance to appraise these processes.

6.6.4 Neutrality/Conformability

Paradoxically, neutrality is best achieved by being immersed in the research process as opposed to being distant. The researcher must recognise and accept their biases and prejudices as well as being aware of any personal influence. They must deal with these in an objective, yet reflexive manner and so bring helpful insight to the interpretation of another's life experience. The unit of interest [Black female student] remains at the forefront and the researcher, as a Black woman, monitored her perceptions and reactions to narrated experiences using bracketing, journalling, mindfulness and supervision meetings as well as conversations with students and colleagues. To confirm neutrality in the present research, experienced researchers coded a transcript or section of a transcript for each phase and found that there were no areas of contention for constructed themes. Guba (1981) refers to this as 'conformability', where there is sufficient openness with analysis for researcher-agreement on authenticity of the findings. A consideration of the research limitations is also a useful exercise to maintain an objective stance (Reflexivity, Chapter 12).

> *I had preconceptions about the participants long before our first meeting that would likely inform my interpretation, aligning with Markham's (2017, p. 11) view that "the interpretive process begins even before the first research question is formulated". As I conceived the proposal for this PhD research, I drew on my imagination and interviewed these [as yet, unknown] Black women on numerous occasions about their experiences. These imagined outcomes reflected the possibility that their experiences might be similar to mine. I was once asked whether this research was about the Black female students featured in this research or about me. At the time, I vehemently denied the latter, believing this to be contrary to 'good' research. How foolish! This research was always about 'us' – me and them. To not acknowledge 'me' in this research would be akin to not acknowledging the Black women whose voices have contributed so richly to an understanding of my own experience as a Black woman in higher education. Indeed, to acknowledge both makes this research 'trustworthy'.*

<u>6.6.5 Authenticity</u>

A key component of trustworthiness is that processes of analysis should be based on trustworthy methodology. The use of a pilot interview for Phase 1, as data collection began, helped clear up vagaries for the ensuing process. This practice is advocated as a necessary step towards authenticity (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014). Consequently, minor adjustments were made to the protocol and interview schedule that improved the quality of data collection in subsequent interviews.

6.7 Sample Size

An absence of specificity for sample sizes in some QCA studies suggests that numbers are less important than data complexity. Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas (2013) argue that successful QCA [among other approaches] is dependent more on effort than on participant numbers. They add that it should be:

> … robust enough for conducting an introductory study on a novel phenomenon for which the quality of its data depends on the amount of energy and time the researcher spends on data gathering and analysis (p. 403).

Patton (1999) adds that a small sample taken from a niche group can provide rich information about their experiences. Elo et al. agree, stating that:

> there is no commonly accepted sample size for qualitative studies because the optimal sample depends on the purpose of the study, research questions, and richness of the data (2014, p. 4).

In-depth analyses were applied to narratives of experience from small samples of traditional and nontraditional students across the research phases. A 'hard-to-reach' student group (namely, Black student participants in research studies; Huang & Coker, 2008) from among a tightly-defined homogeneous sample justified intensive efforts for data collection. Although it was only possible to obtain small samples, these were considered sufficient for the planned analyses given arguments from experienced qualitative researchers who emphasise the importance of *quality* over *quantity* as a necessary condition for exploring and interpreting the depth of human experience (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Boddy (2016) asserts that a single case study is sufficient for obtaining rich, qualitative data and that data saturation can be evidenced from between six to 12 in-depth individual interviews. Data saturation occurs when it is clear that continued analysis reveals nothing new (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revel, & Mueller, 2016).

Smaller samples in IPA research — from a single case study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) to between four and 10 participants (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011) — are considered appropriate for the intensity of analysis demanded by the method. Data from even six interviews in QCA studies have been described as 'overwhelming' and 'daunting' for a researcher, depending on the depth and detail of their approach to analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Between two and four focus groups are stated as sufficient for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The sample sizes in Phase 1 ($N = 4$; in-depth individual interviews, QCA); Phase 2 ($N = 7$; in-depth individual interviews, IPA); Phase 3 ($N = 7$; 2 focus group interviews, TA) and a single case study in Phase 4 ($N = 1$; extended in-depth individual interview, IPA) were considered suitable for the qualitative research methods used in the current research. The transcripts provided over 35 hours of interview data to develop themes, sub-themes and categories. Indeed, such was the volume of data emanating from participant interviews that the researcher had to make stringent decisions about which extracts to feature when illustrating themes, as there was an abundance from which to choose. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) point out that 'high quality' data should allow the aforementioned trustworthiness principles (Shenton, 2004) to be more embedded in research. Although they do not elaborate on the characteristics that determine 'quality', Vaismoradi and colleagues refer to this kind of data as "complex" (p. 402).

6.8 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) was applied to data obtained in Phase 1 (Chapter 7). The aim was to "…identify or examine underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations — and ideologies — that are theorised as shaping or informing the [semantic] content of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Unlike phenomenological/interpretative approaches, QCA is said to be less likely to lead to new theory. A tension exists among some researchers around its ability to go beyond description (Schreier, 2012). However, it can be used thematically and in a more conceptual sense to contextualise phenomena as they are presented in data, making this method a helpful steer into deeper phenomenological exploration. Moreover, the method has sufficient flexibility to be combined with other qualitative methods (Mayring, 2000). QCA is similar to conventional applications of thematic analysis, such as Joffe's (2012) version.

6.8.1 Distinctions

Summative content analysis is a more well-known method that is concerned with counts and frequencies for comparative variables. Unlike that method, conventional QCA does not rely on counting and reporting frequencies or occurrences across the dataset (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In fact, Pylett (2003) states that there is little value from this type of responding in qualitative research. Instead, emphasis is placed on gaining access to 'meaningfulness' (Patton, 1999) following the principle of achieving data saturation [where the method permits]; that is, expending all that is useful from the data. This is said to be achievable with smaller sample sizes (Mason, 2010).

6.8.2 Applications

QCA has been used to interpret experiences from a health context (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Therefore, applying conventional QCA to interpret student experiences and constructions of identity is a more novel application of the method. However, its use also suits phenomena for which less is understood (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to researchers maintaining an inductive *or* theoretical [deductive] approach when carrying out thematic-style analyses. Using one or other approach is usually determined by the extent or fragmentation of prior research, or the applicability of an existing theoretical framework. Limited prior research about Black female students in UK HEIs justified taking an inductive approach, which is a feature of QCA. The method is considered "content-sensitive" and "flexible", can be used "critically", and is concerned with "meanings, intentions, consequences and context" (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p. 109).

6.9 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative method which is used to explore individual, single or *idiographic* experiences; lived or *phenomenological* experiences, and the meaning-making that informs these experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2019). Lived experience is described as encompassing "the embodied, socio-culturally and historically situated person who inhabits an intentionally interpreted and meaningfully lived world" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 181). The aim is to interpret each lived life as a unique case study. A key premise to interpreting lived experience using IPA is [triple] hermeneutics (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This is defined as (i) the researcher interpreting/making sense of what (ii) the participant is conveying or making sense of and

exploring this in a way that allows (iii) the reader to understand both positions (Smith et al., 2009). This forms the basis of hermeneutic-phenomenological traditions (Bryman, 2008).

Thus, IPA takes on a 'Gestalt' perspective (Guter, 2010) in which it is necessary to access the 'part' of an experience to understand the 'whole' experience. Each part is as important as the whole, and a complete understanding is needed to close the hermeneutic circle. IPA contextualises the 'whole' person in a phenomenological sense that includes paying attention to their relating of experiences and interactions between the 'part' and the 'whole' of those experiences. Interpretation is advanced by researcher-engagement with reflexivity; for example, using journaling and memo-writing (Smith et al., 2009).

The process of carrying out IPA is referred to by Smith (2011) as a researcher 'diving for pearls'. Smith uses this metaphor to define the gem that might be discovered during the analytic process. Much depends on a researcher's ability to adopt a double, if not triple hermeneutic lens to pull out nuanced aspects of an individual's life-world (that is, "the world as concretely lived"; Landridge, 2007, p. 23). Diving is linked to delving into, sometimes, deep and murky waters to discover something of value. Smith refers to discovering three types of narrated gems: shining, suggestive and secret. The shining gem is blatant and obviously-visible; little work is needed to uncover its meaning. The suggestive gem bears the hallmark of something interesting in a layered sense but may need more work to uncover — perhaps using deeper or several dives. The secret gem, on the other hand, is non-apparent on first dive or requires the use of different equipment [a different lens] by which to gain access. All gems are precious. The researcher's engagement in the hermeneutic circle brings these gems to the surface.

Smith (2011) notes that a gem may comprise an utterance, a phrase, a large section of a transcript or the whole transcript. There may be many similar gems or just one. All three gem types may be manifest in a transcript(s), or just one. What matters is the insightful interpretation of the gem, no matter its category. The 'gems' highlighted in Phase 2 were not selected because of their resemblance to an existing theory but are treated as a 'thing in itself'. The categorisations from this Black female researcher 'diving' for the gems of Black female students' experiences may differ from that of another researcher, even if they were also a Black female researcher.

6.9.1 Phenomenology

IPA should be understood in the context of its phenomenological underpinnings (Wagstaff et al., 2014). IPA researchers lean towards a deconstruction of experience provided by Smith et

al. (2009). Phenomenology is the philosophical study of the state of 'being' or 'experience' expressed by the work of philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. For example, Sartre's existentialist intervention, according to Smith et al. (2009), is that we have the freedom to *become* ourselves, which represents a continuous but changing, pattern. The process of who we are — our identity — is dynamic, fluid and changing, and may be resistant to objective investigation.

A phenomenological overview of the development of IPA research begins with the philosopher and scientist Husserl, who considered that phenomenology involved going "back to the things themselves" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). Husserl advocated that phenomenology identifies 'essential' features of experience through intentional reflection that is introspectively-relayed (Brooks, 2015). Its subjective application must lead to researcher decisions about what is 'essential'. Thus, reflecting on experience is a phenomenologically-driven activity.

Husserl's phenomenology emphasised the value in subjective experiences (Shinebourne, 2011). To better understand this, Husserl insisted that 'epoché' must come before investigating a phenomenon (Smith et al*.,* 2009). Epoché, or 'bracketing' of experiences, enables focus on the intensity of experience [akin to modern-day mindfulness techniques] instead of a human tendency to impose an objective understanding (Willig, 2001). However, Husserl provided little indication about what bracketing is, preferring instead to emphasise results or outcomes. Heidegger, Husserl's successor to the philosophy of phenomenology, contested whether people have the ability to bracket off preconceptions about others' experiences (Landridge, 2007). This may, in part, be due to the power of individual differences and for aspects of humanity to be experienced and interpreted differently.

When Husserl applied his understanding of the world to others' experiences, the result was frequently a flawed perspective, causing an objective 'stepping back' from experience to separate the innate characteristics and traits from a lived life, while accepting that this is almost impossible to achieve (Smith et al., 2009). To take the example of research into Black female students' experiences, the challenge for the researcher adopting Husserl's approach would be to suspend a 'normalised' understanding of what it means to be a Black female student in higher education, which carries particular assumptions about that experience. As humans, we try to attribute meaning to what we see and experience. Bracketing this natural tendency is what allows one to go 'back to the things themselves', reducing preconceptions so that the researcher becomes immersed in a participant's life-world.

Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre developed Husserl's phenomenological focus on 'intentionality' (an ever present awareness or consciousness of our existence in the world and how we relate to objects) to a more subjective understanding of experience ('existentialism'), noting that past actions and plans impact present experience ('temporality') and that consciousness of experience [or 'embodiment'] sits within the body (Landridge, 2007). These ideas brought a fresh focus to interpreting lived experiences.

<u>6.9.2 Applications</u>

IPA has been used to explore experiences of illness and well-being in applied health psychology settings (Pearce, Thøgersen-Ntoumani, Duda, & McKenna*, 2014). This has been its dominant application (Smith, 2010). Since the late 1990s, however, a divergent strand has emerged that considers identity beyond illness experience and reflects on identity as agency (e.g. Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Smith, 1999). In recent years, IPA has broadened to include areas of social, clinical and cultural psychology (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005) and supports analyses that combine data from several modes.

6.10 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was applied to narratives of experience in Phase 3 as "a method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data", with an emphasis on *method* rather than methodology (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 120). Freedom from methodological constraints (Vaismoradi et al*., 2013) infers that TA can be more flexibly applied when data are analysed using various modes, including focus groups (Joffe, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2013) outline four types of TA:

(i) the more commonly-applied 'inductive' TA which is not informed by existing theory and is the type applied in the present research;

(ii) theoretical TA which, by definition, is informed by existing theory;

(iii) experiential TA which explores sense-making for experiences; and

(iv) constructionist TA, which takes a more abstract approach for how topics are constructed by participants.

<u>6.10.1 Current Application</u>

Phase 3 was devised to collect data from focus group interviews with traditional and nontraditional Black female students in the same sitting. The phase explored university experiences, how they are being constructed and how sense-making is applied by these

students to deconstruct their experiences. TA suits capturing students' perceptions of others' experiences as well as first-person accounts of experience (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Applying a focus group method (Chapter 9) enabled participants to comment on theme salience from Phases 1 and 2 with respect to their more recent experiences. In fact, to a limited extent, the process borrowed from other forms of TA mentioned earlier and supported a general understanding of points of convergence, inconsistency or contradiction (Mathison, 1988) for these students' accounts.

6.10.2 Focus Groups

A focus group[12] is a more naturalistic setting for discussion than an individual interview (Willig, 2001), although engagement may differ based on the topic. Participants in a focus group may benefit from sharing similar characteristics, engendering a feeling of 'sameness' or comfort when using the method (Reed & Roskell Payton, 1997). A literature review on methodological differences (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014) found that participants in individual interviews engage in more idea-generating and discuss sensitive topics, while exchange in a focus group lends an alternative dynamic to sharing perspectives that could throw an alternative lens on student experiences. In sum, this is the group interaction to which Reed and Roskell Payton (1997) refer, with a cautionary note that to miss reporting on this as part of analysis risks an inferior analysis.

6.11 Visual Timeline Activity

A researcher-devised activity enabled participants in the current research to reflect on their experiences. The theoretical basis for the timeline activity was to provide a way of separating individual meaning-making from group meaning-making. From an intersectionality perspective, identity is known to be shaped by more than one influence (Crenshaw, 1991). Its expression may well be changed in a group setting where there can be perceptions of a collective identity (Munday, 2006).

The aim was for the timeline to create a visual picture against which to position narratives that were obtained from focus group interviews. It was anticipated that the activity might illustrate perceptions and experiences so that it could:

(i) offer further insight into experiences that shape identity for Black female students;

---

[12] Warner (2008, p. 461) adds that "focus groups … are good for seeing how people create and reinforce meaning and elaboration of identities through [negotiated and linguistic] interaction". This was certainly my experience of the focus groups in the current research.

(ii) allow participants to express those experiences using a creative mode; and

(iii) provide an opportunity for participants to engage in reflection and independent meaning-making for their experiences prior to a group interview.

Furthermore, the timeline was considered an opportunity to explore an assumption that was outlined in the conceptual framework (Chapter 5, 5.8); namely, that where a situation is perceived as challenging or threatening, one consequence could be that identity is experienced as a fragmented or fractured self which could become detached from its environment. This identity might map onto experiences of 'unbelonging' or ambivalence. An experience that is punctuated by events perceived as negative could lead to fragmentation. Nevertheless, this construction may have been difficult for some students to express in the more open setting of a focus group interview; hence, alternative opportunities for accessing this construction were made possible using other modes.

6.11.1 Process

Participants in Phases 3 and 4 were requested to create an individual timeline to illustrate their university experience and to include a relevant period prior to starting university. This would involve labelling sentiments and plotting events that collectively captured memorable experiences. They were provided with sheets of A4 graph and plain paper, A3 plain paper and post-it notes as well as assorted writing and drawing materials from which they could freely choose. Sentiments were placed on a y-axis that was labelled 'high' at the top of the sheet, 'average' around the mid-point, and 'low' at the bottom of the sheet. These labels reflected sentiments felt by the student at the time of the experience. Thereafter, these sentiments were referred to as high, mid and low points of experience. A high point might signify an event that went well for the student or a time when they experienced a sense of belonging. Conversely, a low point might reflect a difficult personal or academic circumstance such as a family bereavement or failed examination.

The x-axis was used to indicate the full duration of their university experience to date including the period before starting university. The axis was plotted by year of undergraduate study. An exact period for their preceding experience was left unspecified since it was assumed that this would vary by student. Before commencing the activity, participants were shown a fictitious timeline that was created by the researcher for example purposes only (Figure 6.11.1).
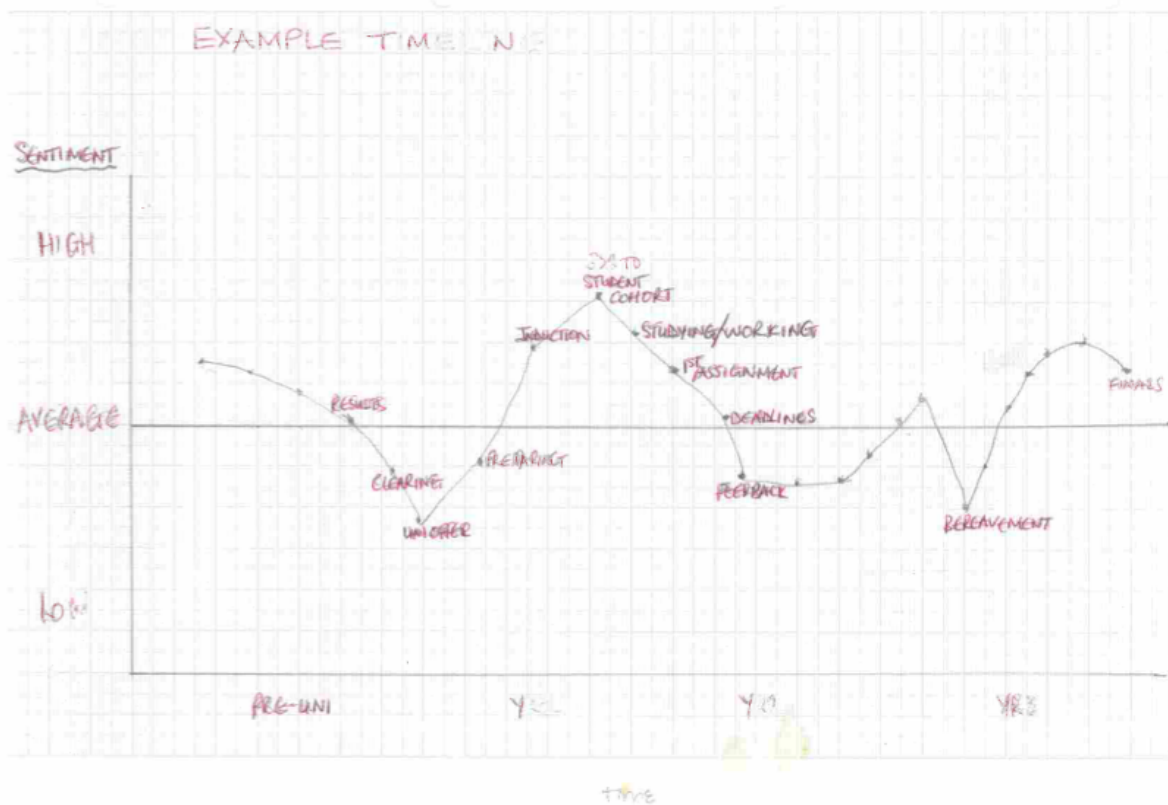
Figure 6.11.1: Researcher-devised timeline

Although the example timeline could have influenced the design of their individual timeline, it was considered helpful nonetheless to show this to the students for the possibility of a more consistent format that might support analysis. Variations in the design were accepted as a representative account of individual experience. Research cubicles were made available to create the timeline in privacy, if required. Participants were given up to 30 minutes to complete this activity.

6.12 Participants

Black female students were purposively-sampled for participation. Inclusion criteria included being a female, home (UK) student, identifying as having a Black ethnicity, being enrolled in an undergraduate psychology degree programme and studying at a London university. Notwithstanding differences *within* groups (that is, traditional and nontraditional students), participant homogeneity in this research was determined as belonging to the same or a similar ethnicity classification [Black], the same gender [female], the same level of study [undergraduate degree course at a UK HEI], enrolled in a psychology degree course [or a

closely-related degree: for example, cognitive neuroscience] at the point of interview, and the same university location [London and surrounding regions within the M25 geographic area].

These criteria satisfy intersectionality-informed research (Hunting, 2014) in that participants have intersecting social categories (for example, gender and ethnicity) and experience these within the setting of an assumed power structure [the university]. There was no restriction outside of the usual permissions required for study in higher education. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 52 years ($M = 26$). A mixture of nontraditional [22 years old and above; $N = 7$] and traditional [below 22 years old; $N = 12$] Black female students in this research meant that participants could be grouped as nontraditional students for Phase 1 and traditional students for Phase 2.

The focus groups in Phase 3 contained a mixture of traditional and nontraditional students. A traditional student took part in an extended in-depth individual interview for Phase 4. This phase was the consequence of the traditional student being the only participant who showed up for a pre-arranged focus group interview that was previously agreed with three other students who did not attend. With this student's agreement, the interview was carried out as an individual inquiry into her experiences and allowed for a more detailed account. Therefore, this interview was suitable for an IPA analysis of experience.

6.12.1 Nationality

A strength of the sample is variability within homogeneity, leading to a greater variety of personal, cultural and social experiences. Fluidity for ethnicity categorisation (National Statistics, 2003) supported the decision to include participants who self-identified as belonging to any Black ethnicity, with less regard for researcher-assumptions for their cultural heritage/ancestry or nationality. Self-declared nationalities included the following countries/islands: England, Germany, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Liberia, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, St Lucia, St Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago.

6.12.2 Qualifications on Entry

The students fulfilled an assumption for the qualifications they might hold on entry to university. The actual subjects and grades for each participant are unknown. However, in all cases, it is assumed that the traditional students achieved the required number of tariff points to secure entry onto their degree course.

6.12.3 Sampled Universities

Of the 33 universities in the London area (SMF, 2017), six were included in this sample. Four universities are categorised as post-1992 and two are part of the Russell Group institutions. Post-1992 universities (for example, Roehampton and London Metropolitan) are a group of colleges, polytechnics and other educational establishments that took on university status (Cartwright, 2007). These institutions are contrasted with the more prestigiously-perceived pre-1992 universities that form the Russell Group; a group of research-intensive universities that includes Kings College London and University College London (Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003). Barring one university that is termed on its website as being a 'public' institution, the post-1992 universities in this research belong to one of two institutional groupings: Million+ ($N = 2$) or the University Alliance ($N = 1$).

All universities in this research, apart from those in the Russell Group, have diverse student ethnicities. One post-1992 university in this study has one of the largest concentrations of BME students in the UK (Sanusi, MacDonald, Mosavie, & Mayi, 2012). The universities are located within London and the M25 geographic region, with 18 students at universities in London, and one student at a university within the M25 region with easy access to and from central London. Site triangulation (Shenton, 2004) — in this case, the use of more than one university — meant access to a wider range of university experiences.

6.12.4 Recruitment

At selected periods over a duration of four years, students were recruited using a poster campaign (Appendix B), via staff teaching on psychology modules, by direct emails and by word-of-mouth. At one university, all 67 Black female psychology students across all undergraduate levels were targeted on three occasions with an individual email inviting them to attend a focus group for Phase 3. The Vice Chancellor of another university sent a direct message to all staff encouraging them to ask students who met the criteria to sign up for the study, while personal tutors at another university's psychology department were encouraged to promote the study to their undergraduate personal tutees. Student unions and affiliated societies (for example, the African Caribbean Society) were also approached to promote the research and assist in the call for participants using their various platforms. External recruitment methods included social media (for example, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter), texts (WhatsApp) and a bespoke web-based participant recruitment service (Call for Participants).

Despite extensive efforts, recruitment yielded just 19 participants across the four phases, reiterating Huang and Coker's (2008) assertion that this student population is hard to reach. No incentives, inducements or payments were offered as part of recruitment, although several students received credits from their institution as part of a module requirement for participation in research. Some methods [such as focus groups] are said to be more effective for attracting hard-to-reach participants because of the feeling of 'safety in numbers', marking them as a useful tool for exploring experiences (Kitzinger, 1994). However, student response to the call for participation in a focus group was also limited with just 7 participants.

6.13 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval (Appendix C) was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Westminster in 2013. Principles for protecting participants and integrity of process, as laid out by the British Psychological Society (2009; 2018), were adhered to. Data were treated according to the Code of Research Good Practice (University of Westminster, 2012) and interviews were carried out in an appropriately-designated room on university premises. Written informed consent (Appendix D) was obtained for all phases. The participants completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix E) and were asked about their experiences using a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix F). They were informed that they could omit giving a response to a question if they chose to. They were also given the right to withdraw and/or to withdraw their data before the writing-up phase began (October 2018) without having to give a reason. At the close of the interview, the participants were debriefed (Appendices G & H).

Data were treated confidentially and stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Students indicated their willingness to take part in a future focus group by providing their contact details [email address/telephone number] for follow-up. Those details were collected solely for this purpose and were stored separately and securely. Focus group participants were subsequently recruited from separate populations. In all aspects of the research, the participants' identities were protected. The researcher applied a pseudonym or number to each participant. Names, locations and universities mentioned during interviews were anonymised on the transcripts. One participant had considered applying to two London universities because of their proximity to her home location before settling on her current [un-named] university. They were referred to as Uni A and Uni B in the transcript.

For some participants, recalling personal/social situations and events led to emotive-laden responses during the interview (for example, crying, bouts of laughter or long pauses).

Although the interview questions were neutral in construction, they may have triggered recall of painful or unresolved situations and memories. These instances were considered acceptable during the interview. For example, one interview lasted approximately 4.5 hours to allow the participant time to recover after each emotive instance. To ensure ethical integrity for the welfare of participants, all participants — and this participant, in particular — were reminded of the right to withdraw on several occasions during the interview.

As the interviewer, the researcher did not restrict the participant nor interject during a display of grief; rather, she remained sensitive to the experience by allowing 'contemplative silences' (meditative moments of quiet; Wong, 2013) and her role as an interested observer to empower the participant. In each case, participants continued to tell their story even after being asked if they wanted to take a break or stop. Alterio and McDrury (2003) also point to the power of storytelling as a form of cathartic reflection. In situations of racial oppression, Ladson-Billings (1998, p. 16) reminds us that "the story of one's condition leads to the realisation of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated, thus allowing one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself". Participants were reminded of university-based counselling services for support. However, even with these services, there can be challenges for accessing a culturally-sensitive provision that is supportive for Black female students.

6.14 Conclusions

The epistemological position of the research is directed at inductively understanding Black female students' engagement with higher education and their constructions of identity. Qualitative research methods that support a Black feminist inquiry can offer more flexibility for developing theoretical assumptions about the contribution of university experiences and perceptions to identity than can be obtained from a quantitative or singular qualitative approach. Applying triangulation allowed the central phenomenon[13] to be explored from several perspectives (Carter et al., 2014).

In this research, methodological triangulation involved three data collection methods: in-depth interviews, individual timelines and focus group interviews. The addition of the timeline activity is an example of a "flexible, creative approach" being taken to qualitative research (Mason, 2008, p. 21). For consistency, the interviewer, focus group facilitator and researcher was the same person across all phases.

---

[13] Identity construction in Black female psychology students

Each method led to a different manner of interpreting narratives that were centred on the same phenomenon. Mixed groups of traditional and nontraditional participants commented on earlier findings, a process which is referred to as 'respondent validation' and is considered enriching for understanding a phenomenon (Smith, 2008). Although Smith cautions that this should be managed so that the participants — essentially 'lay people' — are at an appropriate level of experience to comment knowledgeably on the findings [namely, that they have a shared understanding for the phenomenon], Patton (1999) advocates triangulation of data sources that increases validity and credibility of research.

Taking a pluralistic approach validates data as a researcher can compare interpretations constructed from each analytical method (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). Oliver-Hoyo and Allen's study revealed that of four popular data collection methods [survey, journals, field notes and interviews], surveys produced the most unreliable results when researching attitudes due to response effects. Surveys are useful, but they should converge at least with other methods to improve reliability for findings when researching aspects of human psychology.

In summary, twelve individual in-depth interviews and two focus group interviews were carried out over a four-year timespan. Sufficient spacing was allowed between each interview for the researcher to become familiarised with the qualitative processes described, review good practice guidelines for carrying out qualitative research (Elliot et al., 1999; Yardley, 2000), carry out credibility checks, manage personal subjectivity and reflect on how the process of carrying out these interviews brought about self-change. An analysis of the experiences of nontraditional students using QCA began the process of exploring identity construction in Black female students and is set out in the chapter which follows.

Chapter 7

Phase 1: Exploring Nontraditional Black Female Students' Experiences

One way of exploring identity construction is through the stories people tell about their experiences (Mohammed & Kranias, 2016). This chapter reports on an analysis of stories from a sample of nontraditional Black female undergraduate psychology students who were individually interviewed about their experiences of studying in UK higher education. Eleven themed clusters were constructed from the data using qualitative content analysis (QCA; see Chapter 6, 6.8), and eight clusters were reported on as part of the findings. The students conveyed their experiences from multiple perspectives that included ethnicity, maturity and a desire for belonging to their institution. Their constructions of identity supported the idea of multiple selves which are being formed and negotiated during a struggle for sense-making in an environment that is perceived by these students as structurally ageist and racialised.

In sum, their experiences were constructed and understood as being psychologically taxing, causing some students to consider dropping out of university. While students may decide to withdraw from their studies for academic or financial reasons, less is known about the personal reasons for the withdrawal of Black female students. The current study aimed to contribute to an understanding of the academic experiences of this student group and, thus, add to knowledge of their constructions of identity.

7.1 Background

Albeit a potentially challenging experience, returning to university at an older age is recognised as a route towards social mobility and self-realisation (Reay, Ball, & David, 2002). By 2012, there were 429,000 nontraditional students undertaking the challenge of higher education in the UK (McVitty & Morris, 2012). Of that number, BME students make up the largest population of nontraditional students and, of these, BME women are the largest group (ECU, 2014; Sanders & Rose-Adams, 2014). However, if the current trend for decreasing enrolment of nontraditional students continues, that number is likely to fall (ECU, 2016). Analysis of the number of applications from nontraditional students has confirmed a small decrease, reflecting a downward trend (-1% change on the previous year; UCAS Analysis & Research, 2015). Despite this negative trend, degree outcomes for nontraditional undergraduate students marginally surpass those of their traditional counterparts (HEFCE, 2014a), attesting to resilience and persistence in these students.

Reay et al. (2002) point out that academic study can be an enabler for nontraditional students to become successful role models or to support their children in becoming academically effective. Research affirms that children's educational outcomes are related to parental education outcomes (Reisel, 2013). However, participating in academic study can alter the balance at home for some nontraditional students due to a requirement to re-distribute domiciliary responsibilities and so cope with the demands of study (Reay & Mirza, 1998). Some cultural and domestic practices might constrain a student's involvement in extra-curricular activities, leading to challenges for a richer, more involved university experience.

A history of education initiatives (for example, Aimhigher or Lifelong Learning Networks) conveys the UK government's attempts to enable access to higher education for students from nontraditional pathways. In current times, universities have widened access by working in partnership with bodies such as OfS (the main regulator for higher education), HEFCE [now dissolved], Linking London and AccessHE, among others, to ensure that students from a wide range of social characteristics are able to study at university. Legislation such as the Equality Act (2010), applies a social justice approach that influences the scope under which universities must widen access to their courses. Widening participation (WP) was, at one point, overseen by OFFA, a body whose remit was to monitor the extent to which universities use access agreements to narrow the gap into higher education (SMF, 2017). Ratification of its agreement and WP recognition status was formally awarded to a university that complied with the WP agenda (Office for Fair Access, 2015). Agreements could be customised to suit a university's context and provisions. OfS has emphasised the importance of universities taking an intersectional approach to monitoring and reporting on access agreements and widening participation, with ethnicity noted as just one form of disadvantage (OfS, 2018a).

Although there are fewer nontraditional students at university, reported increases in applications from a wider range of WP students (DfES, 2003) suggest that financial aid initiatives are worthwhile for supporting attendance and retention. However, widening access might intensify the challenges for students with particular combinations of social characteristics. A student who is older, from a racially-marginalised group, living with a disability, from a particular social class and who has caring responsibilities is just one example of a complex combination of characteristics. In addition, some students have reportedly struggled to complete their degree courses following the 2012/13 tuition fee increase (now more than £9,000 per annum; HEFCE, 2014a). This experience is further

complicated by the marginalisation propensity of intersecting social characteristics (Callendar & Jackson, 2008).

Nontraditional students are said to hold different perceptions about the reality of debt and its power to inhibit progress based on personal circumstances (Declercq & Verboven, 2015). Black students, in particular, are known to perceive tuition debt as a tangible barrier to higher education study (Yorke, 1999). With an under-representation of BME graduates in most sectors (Connor, Tyers, Modood, & Hillage, 2004; ECU, 2014), there is a long-term consequence that comes with lower employment rates, which in turn impacts on a graduate's ability to repay tuition fees (payable on earnings of £21,000 and above with an interest rate of 9%; www.gov.uk, 2015). Consequently, dropping out due to financial reasons is a conceivable threat for some students (SMF, 2017).

Other factors are known to complicate the student experience. Proximity to home as well as the existence of local support networks can influence a nontraditional student's decision to apply to university (Brooks, 2002) and affect decisions about forming new relationships in their academic environment. Students with dependents can feel isolated due to additional constraints such as juggling child/elder care with university attendance (McGregor, Miller, Mayleben, Buzzanga, & Davis, 1991) or from managing high childcare costs, especially in the London area (Mulheirn & Shorthouse, 2011). Universities rarely offer on-site [subsidised] childcare facilities (Moreau, 2016).

Nontraditional students who have adult children or no children also face pressures. Challenges for integration into a normative student body are compounded by age differences that can affect embarking on, returning to or coping with academic study (Reay & Mirza, 1998).

7.2 Nontraditional Student Characteristics

Research suggests that nontraditional students hold a cluster of characteristics. It is on this basis that generalisations are tentatively extended to the nontraditional Black female students in the current research. Firstly, nontraditional students are characterised by their age at the point of enrolment on to an undergraduate degree programme; that is 21 years old and over for UK students (UCAS, 2016), or 23 years old and above for US students (Fleming & McKee, 2005).

Specifically, nontraditional female students are said to be more motivated, more anxious and happier to learn in informal environments (Nunn, 1994). They are also more likely to work for longer hours in paid employment to supplement their student loan and may

be supporting dependents (Taylor & House, 2010). They tend to study part-time, have limited or no previous exposure to higher education, enter with FE qualifications (Reay et al.*,* 2002) and be more likely to live at home instead of in halls (Christie, 2007; López Turley, & Wodtke, 2010; UCAS, 2018).

Allen's (1992) demographic research on US students further reveals that, compared to their Black male and White female counterparts, Black female students tend to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, be less aspirational than their male counterparts, have mixed outcomes for interpersonal relations depending on the university attended, be less likely to pursue a doctoral degree and be more likely to take on gender-stereotypical employment on completion (for example, as a nurse or secretary). Since UK research has focused less on the experiences of Black female students in UK HEIs, the extent to which these characteristics are applicable to nontraditional UK Black female students is still to be established.

Research confirms, however, that nontraditional UK Black students have a lower degree qualification rate than their nontraditional UK White counterparts (75% compared to 89%) and fewer are awarded a first or upper second-class degree (25% compared to 61%; HEFCE, 2009). However, their successes are being achieved alongside challenges for academic perseverance. A possible consequence for these students is therefore drop out (SMF, 2017). Research confirms that the cost of coping includes high rates of early acquittal (McVitty & Morris, 2012). Feelings of exclusion are also relevant factors for non-completion (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). While research also points to fewer role models in their environments as another possible cause (Ceglie & Settlage, 2014), an analysis of the experiences of nontraditional UK Black female students might provide more answers.

Black female undergraduate psychology students were interviewed about their university experiences as part of the current research framework. Using a semi-structured interview schedule, the student sample in this study were asked about the construction of their identity as a nontraditional [mature] student in UK higher education. The next section provides information about the characteristics of this student sample.

7.3 Participants

The demographic characteristics for participating nontraditional Black female students were captured using a questionnaire (Appendix E). The data are shown in Tables 7.3a and 7.3b. The participants categorised their ethnicity using census criteria for a Black ethnicity (ONS, 2011) as denoted on the questionnaire. The mean age for the participants was 42 years old.

They entered university with qualifications that are considered typical for nontraditional students (Reay et al., 2002). All participants, except Maureen who was a part-time student, were studying full-time for a BSc (Hons) in Psychology at a post-1992 London university at the point when the interview took place. The participants were each given a pseudonym to protect their identity.

The participants were 'first-generation' students based on Lessard-Phillips and Li's (2017) definition for a first-generation individual (see Chapter 2, 2.2). They classified their social status based on the National Readership Survey social grades by parental occupation type (see Chapter 3, 3.9). One of the participants (Rebecca) may have had a religious affiliation. However, her interview formed the pilot for this study and this item was not part of the original demographic questionnaire or interview schedule. A religious affiliation was not declared during Rebecca's interview.

The interview with Rebecca marked the first of the phase and contributed to defining the primary data collection method used in this research. Following good practice advice, this was a pilot where I could use the opportunity to learn from mistakes, refine the protocol, and reflect on the activity. In fact, I felt that I didn't have a researcher identity unless I was actively engaged in one of the hallmarks. In this liminal space, I could become comfortable with the interview schedule, deciding what to remove, add or re-arrange. I would learn how to use non-verbal expressions to encourage participants to continue speaking, sitting on my hands as a reminder not to interject at critical moments. I noticed during this interview that Rebecca seemed [too] careful with her responses, as if she was trying to determine which 'side of the fence' I sat on. Although she understood that her data would be anonymised, I wondered whether she felt she could trust me. I was the seminar leader for one of her modules, which could potentially become a confounding variable; but with so few Black female psychology students available [and only a small number responding to the request to be interviewed], I could only trust that I would be able to manage power dynamics sufficiently to obtain a 'good' story. Perhaps, Rebecca may have had her own thoughts about managing the potential to receive a good grade by participating, or she might have feared that I would view her differently thereafter. In this instance, it seemed that our ethnicity and gender similarity as Black women was not sufficient to prevent the experience of this kind of 'tension'. I did not know this at the time, but there would be two further participants for whom I would be known to them as their seminar leader. Thankfully, the remaining participants were unknown. I did not want to influence students' stories based on our foreknowing. On this occasion, I also learnt the 'danger' of not making a journal entry immediately after carrying out an interview. A later recollection [after a few days] did not benefit from the same depth of personal insight. I realised that I had become so caught up with the practicalities of carrying out this interview that I had forgotten to capture its essence. My focus was solely on recalling operationalisation of the process. The usefulness of this experience marked the start of many more 'researcher learning' moments.

Table 7.3a

Participant Characteristics NonTraditional Students

Participant	Ethnicity	Age	Previous educational qualifications	Current university first choice	Attended Induction	Extra-curricular activities (hours per week)	Non-university activities (hours per week)
Rebecca	Black British	24	A-Levels, Access	Yes	Yes	None	6-10
Maureen	Black African	52	International Baccalaureate	No	No	None	1-5
Yolanda	Black Caribbean	51	Access	No	No	None	None
Marcia	Black Caribbean	42	GNVQ	No	Yes	None	6-10

Table 7.3b

Participant Characteristics NonTraditional Students (continued)

Participant	Employment (hours per week)	Accommodation	Social class*	Student-parent	Religion	University-educated parent(s)	University-educated siblings
Rebecca	16-20	Parental home	AB	No	Not stated	Mother	Yes
Maureen	None	Privately rented	AB	Yes	Christian	No	Yes
Yolanda	None	Housing Association	C2	Yes	Methodist	No	No
Marcia	1-5	Own home	C2	Yes	Not stated	No	No

*Social class indicators by parental occupation:

Grade AB - higher and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional occupations

Grade C2 - skilled manual occupations

7.4 Procedure

Following a recruitment process (see Chapter 6, 6.12.4), participants completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix E). The questionnaire requested information about their age, ethnicity, qualifications, university choice, attendance at induction, employment patterns, duration [in hours] of extracurricular activities, accommodation, parental education, perceptions of social class and [post-pilot] religion. To maintain confidentiality and better manage the data, each participant was given a pseudonym: Rebecca, Marcia, Yolanda and Maureen.

In order to ensure trustworthiness in the research process, a pilot interview was carried out to identify potential issues with the questionnaire and interview schedule (Appendix F). Trustworthiness in qualitative content analysis (QCA; the method used in this study) is described by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) in three parts. Firstly, credibility can be demonstrated by the data collection method; amount of data gathered; a process of analysis that is suitable for the research question[s]; illustrating the findings with excerpts from the data; finding agreement with another researcher or where there is recognition of the findings from the participants.

Second, dependability conveys a sense of consistency for the way that data are handled and have been 'treated' or analysed over time. Finally, Graneheim and Lundman (2004) argue that transferability is carried out mainly by the reader, who decides whether the findings might have validity in another, similar context. The reader is aided by a clear description of the participants' characteristics and the research context. See Chapter 6, 6.6 for further treatment of the concept of trustworthiness.

Minor changes were made to the questionnaire so that items about tertiary education experiences, sibling education and religious affiliation were included. Semi-structured individual interviews were carried out at varying times/days of the week as suited the participants. Interviews took place in a confidential setting; namely, a purpose-built qualitative interview room on university premises. The schedule included open-ended questions with probes to explore responses in more depth and suited a conventional QCA analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Krefting (1991) suggests that researchers should attempt to achieve credibility and manage social desirability in qualitative research. Krefting also highlights the importance of being immersed in the participant's world for prolonged periods. Interviews lasted between 120 and 240 minutes, resulting in 'thick' descriptions of experience. Often considered a feature of ethnographic studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sacks, 2015), a 'thick' description is

translated as a richer and more authentic account of experience (Bowen, 2010[14]). The researcher was given the privilege of 'entering' into the richness of each participant's life-world for the duration of the interview. Following the pilot interview, interviews for Phase 1 were carried out over a six-week duration and QCA was begun soon after the final interview.

7.4.1 Interview Schedule

An exploration of student experiences was situated within four broad domains, which supported the construction of thematic categories:

- university experience
- engagement and belonging
- cultural, personal and social identity
- views about the present research

These domains informed the development of the interview schedule (Appendix F). Items that covered university experience were constructed to extract students' views on their progress and the degree classification they were aiming for as well as whether they were in paid employment. Engagement and belonging questions explored friendships inside and outside the university environment, perceptions of interpersonal relationships with students and staff as well as participants' views about teaching modalities. To obtain students' views on the construction of their cultural, personal and social identity, questions were asked about ethnicity, social class, culture, religion and post-graduate aspirations. The final section comprised a reflexive exploration of participants' views of taking part in the current research and, for final year students, a summary reflection of their experiences across the duration of undergraduate study. The supervision team approved the interview schedule before its administration.

7.4.2 Interview Process

Each interview began with a broad question: "Tell me about your experience of being a student at this university". This is in keeping with a well-developed interview schedule (Smith, 2008) since the participant can assume early control of the process and settle into the interview 'space'. For questions about university experiences, probes included: "why did you choose this university?" and "is this your first university?" Probing questions were formed using the participant's words precisely in the way they were articulated. For example,

---

[14] Bowen (2010, p. 867) adds that the qualities of 'thick description' include balance between analysis and interpretation, rigour, thoroughness, appropriate methodology, trustworthiness and transferability.

following a response, a probe began by re-stating the participant's response which was incorporated into the opening phrase of the question: "You said … [repeat relevant aspect of the response]" followed by "Can you tell me about a *particular* time when you experienced …?" A particular time could relate to a feeling, perceptions or whatever else seemed relevant to the participant and allowed for a more in-depth exploration.

At the conclusion of the interviews, participants were debriefed, thanked and offered a copy of the typed transcript although none requested this. A reflective journal entry was completed by the researcher immediately after each interview for improved recollection of the experience and to capture personal subjectivity. This is termed as 'bracketing' by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) as it creates a 'space' for the researcher to contain their thoughts and manage subjectivity so that there can be a fresh approach to each interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim using voice recognition (Dragon) and transcription (f4) software. Based on the duration of the interviews, the transcription process was lengthy. Usefully, this led to a closer reading of the narratives.

7.4.3 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics were given careful consideration to pre-empt any issues that might arise in subsequent phases. Care was taken to ensure that the study conformed to British Psychological Society (2009) guidelines for the treatment of human subjects in psychological research. Participants were given the right to withdraw during the interview, have their data removed up to the point of analysis, be assured that their data would be treated and stored confidentially, and that any identifying information would be anonymised. For more on ethics, see Research Methods (Chapter 6, 6.13).

7.5 Analysis

QCA was applied to the main unit of analysis (that is, the spoken word or 'voice') that combined to form larger, more comprehensive narratives of experience. Analysis was directed at uncovering meaning that might be less manifest in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method suits the application of manifest and latent coding to a dataset, either of which should be sufficiently robust to demonstrate 'trustworthiness'. Simply defined, manifest coding involves paying attention to what is "visible" and "obvious" in the data, while latent coding looks for "underlying meaning" in the text (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 106).

Elo and Kyngäs (2007) infer that the QCA researcher should choose between manifest or latent coding. However, Graneheim and Lundman (2004) maintain that interpretation at different levels [based on the researcher's subjectivity] lies at the heart of both forms of coding in QCA. Thus, the current research applied manifest and latent coding to differing extents throughout the process of analysis. Additionally, pauses, silences and laughter during the interviews informed the 'tone' of manifest content.

Trustworthiness is particularly emphasised in QCA (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014) given the lack of specificity for carrying out this method of analysis in qualitative literature. Helpfully, there is some assurance of trustworthiness due to the similarity of a QCA 10-step analytic process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) with more popular research methods, such as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

7.5.1 Analytic Process

Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) 10-step QCA analysis was adapted for use in the current research. In QCA, coding is carried out on a dimension or category-by-category basis (Schreier, 2012). The purpose is to identify and note ideas and concepts that spring out from words presented in the data with a framework in mind, recognising that this can be a subjective process as it is researcher-defined. First, transcripts were read and re-read iteratively on several occasions. All interviews were audio-recorded to be able to listen again to the context and content of the narratives. This was helpful for immersion in the data. The data were uploaded to NVivo [a Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package]. Once reasonable familiarity with the content was achieved, open coding was carried out on one transcript to create a coding frame (Appendix I). The frame aided coding for the remaining transcripts.

Contemporaneous notes that captured immediate impressions [including annotations and memos] were added to each transcript in NVivo to organise thoughts generated by the coding exercise, although these actions are not carried out as formal, consecutive stages. Instead, immersion in the data leads to fluid, continuous openness and responsiveness to one's inner thoughts during the coding process. Using a non-linear, inductive approach resists a strict, staged method of analysis. The data were re-visited in this manner on several occasions.

Further stages involved ordering codes into meaningful 'categories' (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007) to demonstrate [visually or otherwise] the ways in which codes/categories/concepts are interlinked (see Appendix J). The purpose of categories is to provide a grouping framework

for later decisions about theme constituents. They were developed by searching and grouping data by related ideas. Codes and categories were defined and refined — a process referred to by Elo and Kyngäs (2007) as 'abstraction' — until a sense of case, or cross-case saturation (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revel, & Mueller, 2016), was achieved; in other words, until no further new insights could be extracted from the data. This led to the formation of more succinct themes and sub-themes which were grouped into clusters.

The development of clusters improved data management and provided a sense of hierarchy, with each cluster broadly-defined to contain related themes and sub-themes. According to Morse and Field (1996), there should be no more than 15 clusters in order to aid data management and visual representation of the research outcomes. NVivo software assisted data management and presentation as well as being helpful for constructing and presenting figures. Including figures is considered good practice in QCA. Manipulating data in this way contributes to demonstrating the trustworthiness of the data (Elo et al., 2014).

7.5.2 Credibility

These steps aided development of a summary definition for each theme [and sub-theme] to the extent that the phenomenon under scrutiny could be described, interpreted and presented as part of findings that were supported by appropriate excerpts from the data. This process is described as moving knowledge on (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). To support credibility (see section 7.4), one transcript [not the one used to devise the coding frame] was coded by an experienced qualitative researcher using the frame. The researcher found agreement for the appropriateness of the coding frame, with no requirement for further changes. Thus, secondary coding involved coding one transcript. With just four transcripts in this dataset, this was equivalent to approximately 25% of the data. Schreier (2012) states that obtaining between 10-20% of trial coding is the usual rule of thumb for QCA. Face and content validity can be achieved in simpler terms for QCA than for quantitative methods. It is sufficient for another researcher to read a transcript and code all or part of it according to the coding frame and find a majority agreement (Elo et al., 2014). In later stages of the research, participants in Phases 3 and 4 commented as lay experts on the perceived credibility of themes developed from this phase.

7.6 Findings

Following an analysis of the dataset, 11 clustered themes were constructed from narratives of experience obtained from four nontraditional Black female students. Transcripts were

analysed on a case-by-case basis and analysis was supported by NVivo. A themed cluster was considered salient when it included excerpts from at least three participants. Sub-themes were also created. These included fewer excerpts since these were, at times, specific to the experience of just one participant. A sub-theme was included where it might further illuminate the reader's understanding of identity construction for this sample.

The prevailing finding is that multiple identities are being constructed by these students using lenses of maturity and ethnicity, leading to a web of clustered constructions. The clusters (Figure 7.6) should be viewed as part of a larger construction as each cluster 'hyphenates' into another. For example, pre-university experiences (Cluster 04) precede and are linked to university experiences (Cluster 05). A sense of belonging (Cluster 08) was experienced by students as a consequence of their pedagogic perceptions (Cluster 07), which are linked to perceptions about staff and students (Cluster 06). Identity construction (Cluster 01) is informed by students' cultural, personal and social capital (Cluster 02), and so forth.
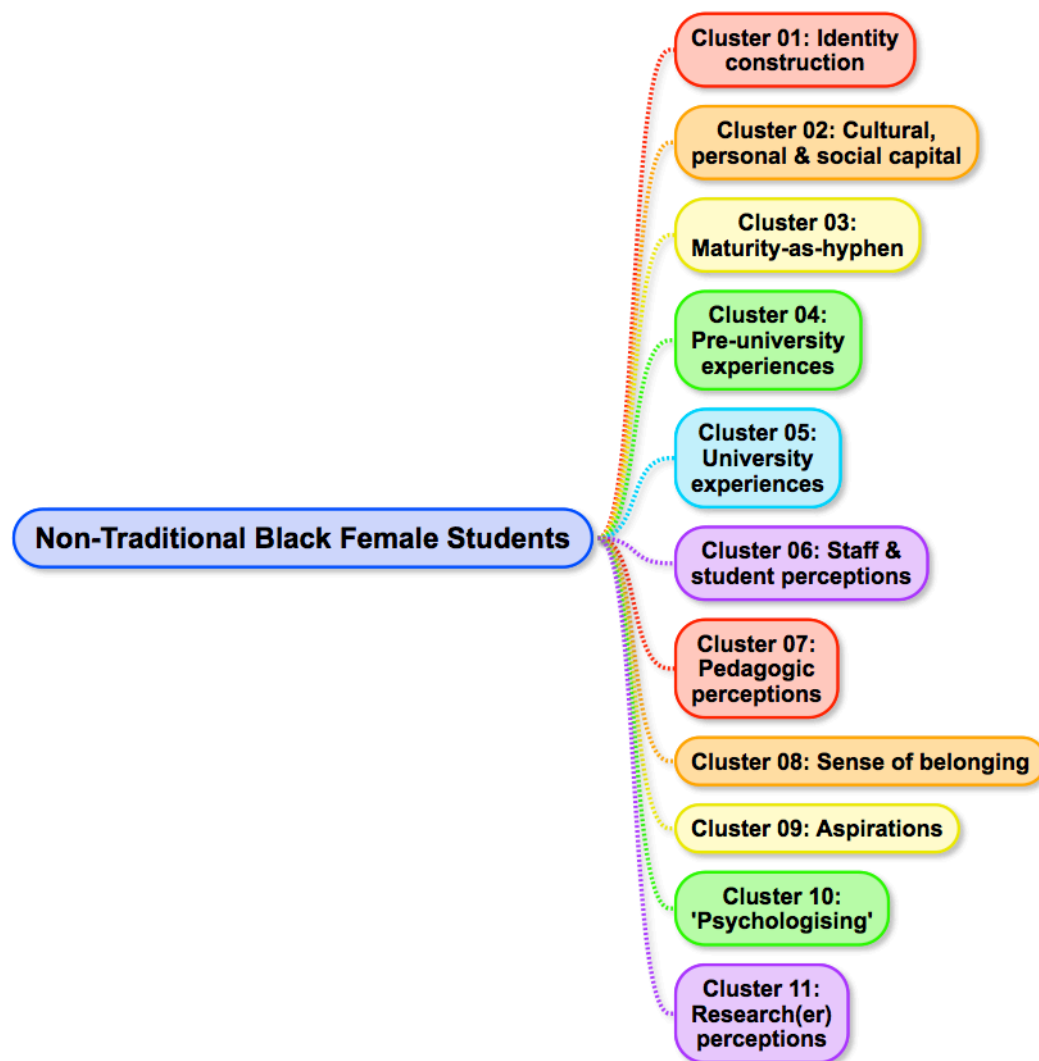
Figure 7.6: Themed clusters for nontraditional Black female students

7.6.1 Assumptions

A cluster analysis was carried out on the dataset using the Jaccard coefficient [a statistical test in NVivo]. Jaccard coefficient is a measure for detecting similarity and difference in coded sets. The output is illustrated in the horizontal dendrogram at Figure 7.6.1. Results revealed both expected and unexpected findings. A relationship between identity construction (Unit 01) and cultural, personal and social capital (Unit 02) was assumed, since participants drew on their capital when constructing identity in their academic environment. The link between pedagogic perceptions (Unit 07) and aspirations (Unit 09) was also assumed, since teaching practices formed a large part of participants' university experience and can inform future study or career aspirations. Similarly, a relationship between university experiences (Unit 05)

and maturity (Unit 03) reinforced the finding that these students are using a lens of maturity for meaning-making and to construct their identity.
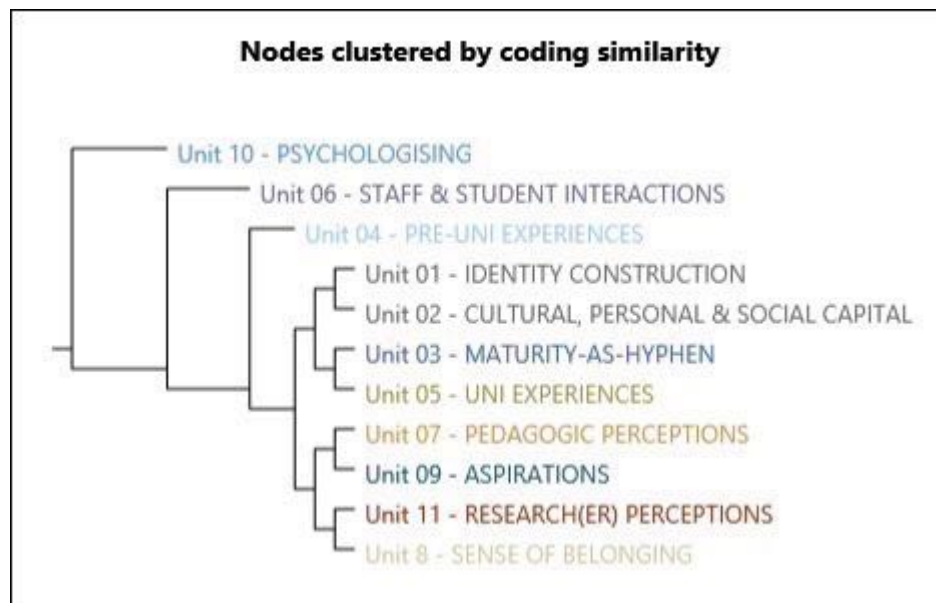
Figure 7.6.1: NVivo cluster analysis by coding similarity

The finding that sense of belonging (Unit 08) was strongly related to perceptions about the research(er) (Unit 11) was unexpected. The latter unit included an analysis of participants' views about taking part in the research and their perceptions about the researcher's ethnicity. This association was unexpected since analysis suggested that a sense of belonging was constructed primarily from students' overall perception of their university experience. This finding led to further assumptions from the statistical test. It appeared that sense of belonging had a weaker association with overall aspects of university experience for these participants.

Secondly, the opportunity to participate in research about the experiences of Black female students seemed to provoke a stronger sense of belonging in these participants or at least a stronger reaction to the concept of belonging. Sense of belonging as a thematic cluster is addressed later in this chapter. Assumptions for a sense of proximity to the researcher are also considered.

Interpretations follow for the clusters, beginning with identity construction and a summary of its meaning. Although initially constructed as a distinct cluster, university experiences (Unit 05) was not commented on to avoid unnecessary repetition, since these experiences are subsumed and adequately reflected on as part of other clusters. Additionally, much of the commentary that led to the creation of Unit 07 (pedagogic perceptions) was

considered similar to the experiences of other mainstream students. Thus, to maintain a specific focus on the experience and identity construction of nontraditional Black female students, only the clustered themes with the most relevance to their experiences are addressed in this chapter. For reported clusters ($N = 8$), the core theme and its relationship to sub-themes are diagrammatically conceptualised. Clusters are further illustrated using selected excerpts that aim to give prominence to participants' voices. A bracketed ellipsis within an excerpt indicates inaudible or removed data (for example, 'umms' and 'ahhs') or represents a short pause.

7.7 Cluster 1: Identity Construction

Participants narrated a complex construction of connected and disconnected identities (Figure 7.7). Their multiple selves were framed by an intention to succeed in their studies using a strong narrative of resilience, despite academic and personal obstacles. Obstacles were experienced as, for example, competing demands from family responsibilities and employment, perceived quality [or inequality] of interpersonal relationships with staff and their peers, and a lack of role models in their environment. All selves pointed to a sense of belonging as possibly being a critical factor for their student experience. More of the participants' multiple identities are revealed and explored in subsequent themed clusters and, in some cases, there is an overlap of constructed identities in these clusters. Two key aspects of students' multiple selves are highlighted below, including the desire to be able to act as a role model for Black female students. To begin, a sense of self-efficacy was considered important for coping with their experiences as nontraditional students.
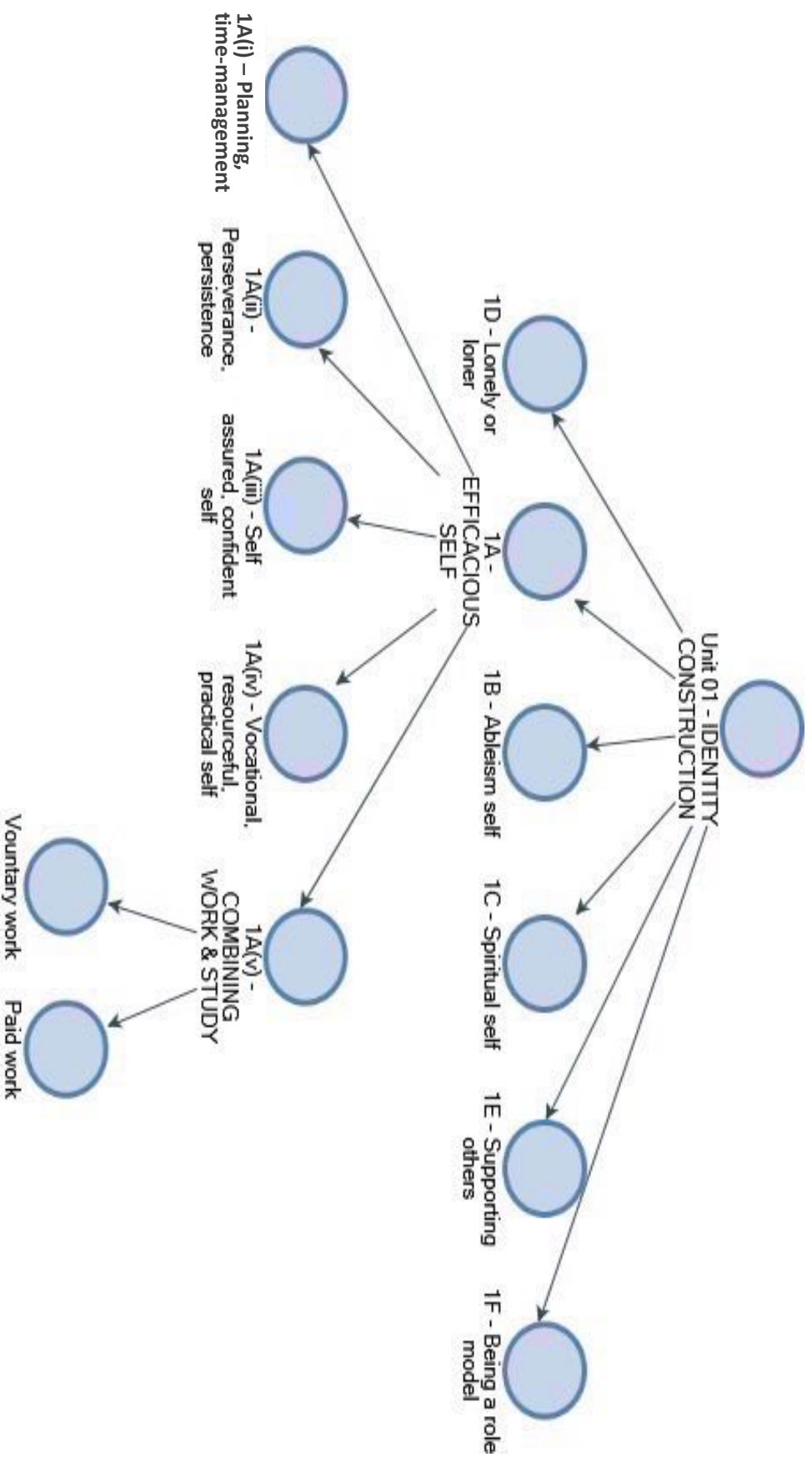
Figure 7.7: Thematic cluster - Identity construction

7.7.1 An Efficacious Identity

Self-efficacy is a broad concept and has been linked to perseverance and an ability to plan, manage and execute studies in ways that demonstrate continued engagement and progression (Schunk & Pajares, 2002). An efficacious construction in these students was portrayed as being resilient, persistent and prepared for taking action. Yolanda's construction of self-efficacy was informed by stereotypes about Black people that were based on her perception of negative cultural perceptions held by others:

> […] *we're not encouraged to be academic even though there are a lot of excellent academics, Black academics out there, but obviously they still have to, to fight and have a bigger voice, so I suppose that has inspired me to* […] *just to rise above accepting, okay, if I've tried my best and it doesn't work out, I say, well, I tried. I gave it my all. You know, I didn't accept the level that's expected of, of me because of my culture. (Yolanda)*

Yolanda's defiant tone suggested that her sense of efficacy is not only embodied in refuting these stereotypes but also in recognising that, as a Black female student, she was now part of a larger struggle that is engaged in resisting cultural deficit explanations. She points to a lack of encouragement from her institution to take on an academic identity despite the existence of Black academics who could act as role models. Notably, however, the Black academics are said to be "out there", suggesting that while they exist, they may not be immediately accessible as they are seemingly 'invisible' in her academic environment. Furthermore, it seems that these academics are themselves engaged in a struggle for recognition in academia, which makes them even less accessible.

> *Yolanda revealed a construction of efficacy in ways that I had not recognised in the literature. Her construction was not neat, strategic or obvious. Like identity, Yolanda's version of efficacy seemed 'messy' and was couched in other attitudes and behaviours. However, it was strongly personified in her dogged determination to finish what she had started. I was reminded of a conversation with a teacher while I was a prefect at secondary school. He referred to a young Black boy in one of the remedial classes [as they were termed in those days] where I was helping with reading and writing. The teacher smugly recited a host of characteristics that meant this boy could not succeed academically. He omitted to mention that, despite the boy's most desperate circumstances, he turned up to school every day. Perhaps, the benefit of a free school meal was one reason, but he should have been celebrated for his efforts. Yolanda, too, had many obstacles as her narrative went on to reveal. But she turned up to university for every session – even going beyond by seeking extra support for her studies, while some of her nontraditional Black female peers slowly dropped out. As a consequence of the revelation of a fresh sense of 'aloneness' during the interview, Yolanda seemed to work even harder to supress her emotions as if this might help her cope with re-living the experience of university as a mature Black female student. As an 'insider-insider', I was learning to appreciate the depth of seemingly 'sterile' statements from some of these participants, recognising that they were likely housed inside private negotiations that required no further interjection from me.*

Constructions of efficacy differed, with some participants citing more practical approaches than others. For example, Maureen stated that she recorded all lectures to listen to them as needed so she could understand core teaching material before engaging in additional reading. As a single parent, Yolanda had to factor in her work schedule and childcare responsibilities. Various approaches were used by the students to cope with the demands of academic study and deal with unexpected circumstances:

> *I record all my, my lectures so even if I didn't understand the [...] something first time round, after listening to it once or twice and going through my books, I usually found the answers I'm looking for. (Maureen)*

> *I use a chart where I've got my dates of my assignments written down and I work a week or a few days before it's due in so that if there's any erm not catastrophes like my USB stick's become corrupt, and OK, I've got to go and adjust another version that I've got, so I allow for those little mishaps and if there's anything else going on at home with the children. (Yolanda)*

With a focus on practical applications, a shared challenge among all participants was time-management. Combining work [whether working for pay or in a voluntary role] with family responsibilities was constructed as an obstacle to effective study. It was evident that a requirement to manage identities, whether as an employee, mature student, mother or wife, and often in a multiplicative sense, was experienced as problematic:

> *I work two days a week as well and that's another thing and I've just taken on voluntary work as well and, I think I just need to kind of manage my time a little bit better because this year's been a bit of a slap in the face, to be honest. (Rebecca)*

> *I used to do agency work, so work in nurseries but as the workload got harder and I've got three children, I've, I found that quite difficult to, to keep up. (Yolanda)*

It seems that these participants entered university with an expectation that they could multitask in ways for which they were in fact unprepared. The weight of being a student in higher education was not fully realised until time-management issues began to arise. Despite setbacks, participants' engagement with the subject of psychology seemed to help shape their determination to be assertive and confident. Indeed, developing a knowledge of psychology as a subject as well as the prospect of developing an academic identity seemed to help these participants make sense of challenging situations:

Counselling and psychology have brought me out, have showed me areas where people took advantage of me, and have made me say, no, I'm not going to accept the rubbish anymore. (Marcia)

[...] now that I have been to university because there are certain things you can only learn doing a degree and that's, that's, that academic identity, yes, it's going to put me on a different level. (Maureen)

> *Although I had felt for some time that this kind of research could have value, I first saw its potential as an aid to healing a damaged construction of the self during the interview with Marcia. I was surprised that the opening question: "can you tell me about your experiences of being a student at this university?" unleashed a flood of tears in this participant. I reflected on the wording as she wept, wondering whether there might be a hidden ethical issue. I deconstructed the sentence for its possible sensitivity before reconciling that since other participants had not responded in a similar way, the question was not necessarily the issue. It was probably the first time that anyone had shown interest in her experience of university. With Marcia's permission, the interview continued. I later learnt that a range of circumstances [some personal, some social] had contributed to an emotive response that was evoked by this single, benign request. Consequently, I realised that there is often more vested in a student's identity than might be initially observable. For some students, university is not only a time of growth and academic testing, but it can strip back the layers of a protective mantle to reveal a raw and vulnerable version of the self. Marcia's journey showed me just how difficult it can be to manage identities in a university setting with expectations of demonstrable capability. Instead, her multiple identities tumbled over each other like a toddler learning to walk. Competing identities seemed to weigh these students down as they held on to them even more tightly while trying to stay upright and balanced. I saw that the opportunity to reflect during this interview provided answers for Marcia's struggles. I could also see that the consequence of some experiences meant that she had deliberately 'othered' herself – frequently retreating into her own 'safe space'. This was a space that I, too, recognised during my experience as a mature student, although I also saw the importance of not staying there if I was to grow. I conceded that interviews might not be the best medium to gain access to a person's lifeworld. However, by carrying out this interview with Marcia, I realised that I had the privilege of seeing, first-hand, how a person can use this medium for necessary meaning-making that leads to deeper self-reflection.*

7.7.2 A Spiritual Self

Coping has been linked with having a religious belief (Park, 2005). Research indicates that spiritual belief can be beneficial for the student experience (Dwyer, Modood, Sangheera, & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2006). Its effects point to an improved awareness of self-efficacy and belief in one's self-worth (Ceglie & Settlage, 2014). In this sample, spirituality acted as a buffer for the demands of academic study. Beliefs [mainly, Christianity] and religious practices [mainly, prayer] were considered sources of support, stress relief and encouragement by these participants:

I believe that keeps me 100% honest with my workload, so my Christianity […] I always pray. I pray my Christianity into […] it's all areas of my like, my family life, my studying, always asking God for direction and to keep my faith strong, even if things don't go as well. (Yolanda)

However, religious beliefs were not always overtly-expressed, reflecting tension within the academic environment for some students. For example, Rebecca seemed to experience difficulty in articulating the higher power to which she referred, suggesting that there may be challenges for religious observances when in a university context:

It plays quite a big role in the respect that, you know, I put in as much as I can and then the rest isn't down to me. It's down to, you know, you know, I pray then once I know that I've put in as much as I possibly can and erm yeah, I think, I think in that respects it's, it's quite important. (Rebecca)

In a similar fashion, Maureen held to a general code of compassion for others but was careful about bringing her religious beliefs into her student identity for fear of being "distracted". Her muted approach seemed to stem from a wider awareness of the global tensions between Muslims and Christians. Under those circumstances, it seemed more important to suppress this aspect of her identity in a university environment that is dominated by Muslim students than to risk revealing this more sensitive aspect of herself:

I think maybe I've avoided the whole religion thing in university because erm I find myself in an era where Islam and Christianity are, are not so […] it's something that's debated a lot and I think you find it a lot in universities as well. I mean I noticed that we have a lot of students that are Muslim and it's, it's being a Christian country, I think it's something that doesn't always go smoothly so I've, I've not wanted to be distracted by that and with all this terrorist thing that's been going on the last ten years, so I've really, I've actually kept away from anything that would distract me in that sense. (Maureen)

Maureen's unwillingness to confront issues that have the potential to "distract" contributed to the formation of a solitary identity as a response to feeling threatened in her academic environment. Her hyper-visibility as a mature Black female student seemed to reinforce the need to assume an 'invisible' presence whenever considered necessary.

7.7.3 Role Modelling

Opportunities to act as a role model to others were welcomed by these participants. Some talked about the importance of 'giving back' to their local communities. Marcia, like other mature student parents (Reay et al., 2002), wanted to set a good example for her children by attending and completing her university course. In her opinion, quitting university was not an option, as she did not want to see similar behaviour replicated in her children. As the first person in her family to attend university, her response reflected the desire to set a new cultural trend of academic achievement:

> *[…] having my kids, because I have two, one 18 and one five and by starting the degree I have to show them that I have to finish it because if I don't then what would happen is that they would say, "Well Mum, remember you did not finish", you know. So, if you did not finish, then that's a good reason why they should not finish, but I have showed my kids it doesn't matter of your age, but once you decide to do something go through it and do it and do it well. (Marcia)*

Maureen's children were now adults and, by the time she started university, had all left home. Consequently, she turned her attention towards fulfilling what might be interpreted as an almost maternal need by becoming a role model to mature Black female students. She wanted to show them that it is possible to undertake advanced study at an older age and succeed:

> *I'm hoping to be in a position to tell people who may face the same challenges that I have faced what to expect and help prepare them because a lot of women, not only Black African women, but a lot of women who maybe after having families, something stops them. Life came in-between, want to study later on. They fall at the first hurdle because they just think […] oh my age, I can't go to university at the age of 30 or 40 and I think, hey, hey, I went, and I was almost 50. (Maureen)*

Although Maureen actively wanted to be seen as a role model, she found the idea of acting as a 'surrogate mother' for younger students unpleasant. Schneider (2008) refers to mothering as the silencing of one's own needs amid feelings of whether one is 'good enough'. For Maureen, mothering fell outside of the requirements of being a role model. Indeed, engaging with this construction might act to mask her own challenges as she might have had to provide more intensive support than she was willing or able to offer. Of note, Maureen looked on the idea of engaging in same-ethnicity 'mothering' more favourably in the sense that this meant

taking 'responsibility' for fostering the development of another Black [African] female student:

> [...] *a lot of times when I meet young, younger people, younger than my own children, I fall into a mothering role which I don't like* [...] *I've mothered enough* [...] *although again* [...] *I think if it had been a Black African woman, I think I would have reacted in a different way* [...] *because I think maybe her needs would have been different and I would have wanted her to, sort of, succeed, if you know what I mean*[15] [...] *(Maureen)*

From the perspective of her African cultural heritage, Maureen's inclination to support the development of a younger Black woman might be better contextualised through the lens of 'othermothering', a concept which has its roots in traditional African values of nurturing and supporting communities (James & Busia, 1993). This practice was once the feature of an enslaved life, in which older women took responsibility for mothering younger women by role-modelling ways to survive the brutality of life on the plantations. Based on their lived experiences, a woman who was over the age of 40 years generally qualified as an 'othermother' (James & Busia, 1993). When this is viewed from a cultural perspective, it is not surprising that Maureen [a mature Black African woman aged 52 years] believed that it was important to extend support to culturally similar others.

7.8 Cluster 2: Cultural, Personal and Social Capital

The participants' texturising of their capital was based on an accumulation of experiences from their cultural background as well as their personal and social characteristics (Figure 7.8), creating a unique and individualised construction for their identities. In this sample, participants' sense of capital was derived from perceptions about staff, conceptualisations of differences in student ethnicity, cultural background, relationships with family and friends, as well as their views about social class. For students with strong cultural drivers, the university appeared to offer a unique space in which to customise their identity. Interactions with others

---

[15] After the interview concluded, I spent some time talking with Maureen about life, family and other personal matters. True to form, once the recording stopped, other 'truths' began to emerge. To be precise, although participants were making the same kinds of comments after the device was switched off, there was a marked difference in their content and tone, which became more detailed. This turn to 'conversation' often led to sharing similarities in our journeys – almost as if I had stopped being the interviewer. I was now 'friend', or even 'confederate'. Sharing my 'truths' seemed to cement the view that we were in the struggle together. It was now 'us' versus the institution. With fresh exposure to these 'richer' narratives, I was reminded that my researcher training did not permit such exchanges to be included in analysis; but I wondered about the extent to which these encounters might constrain my ability to be objective when analysing the data.

could lead to perceptions of threat or reward, depending on their interpretation of a situation. As with the previous theme, there is an echo of resilience flowing through their narratives.
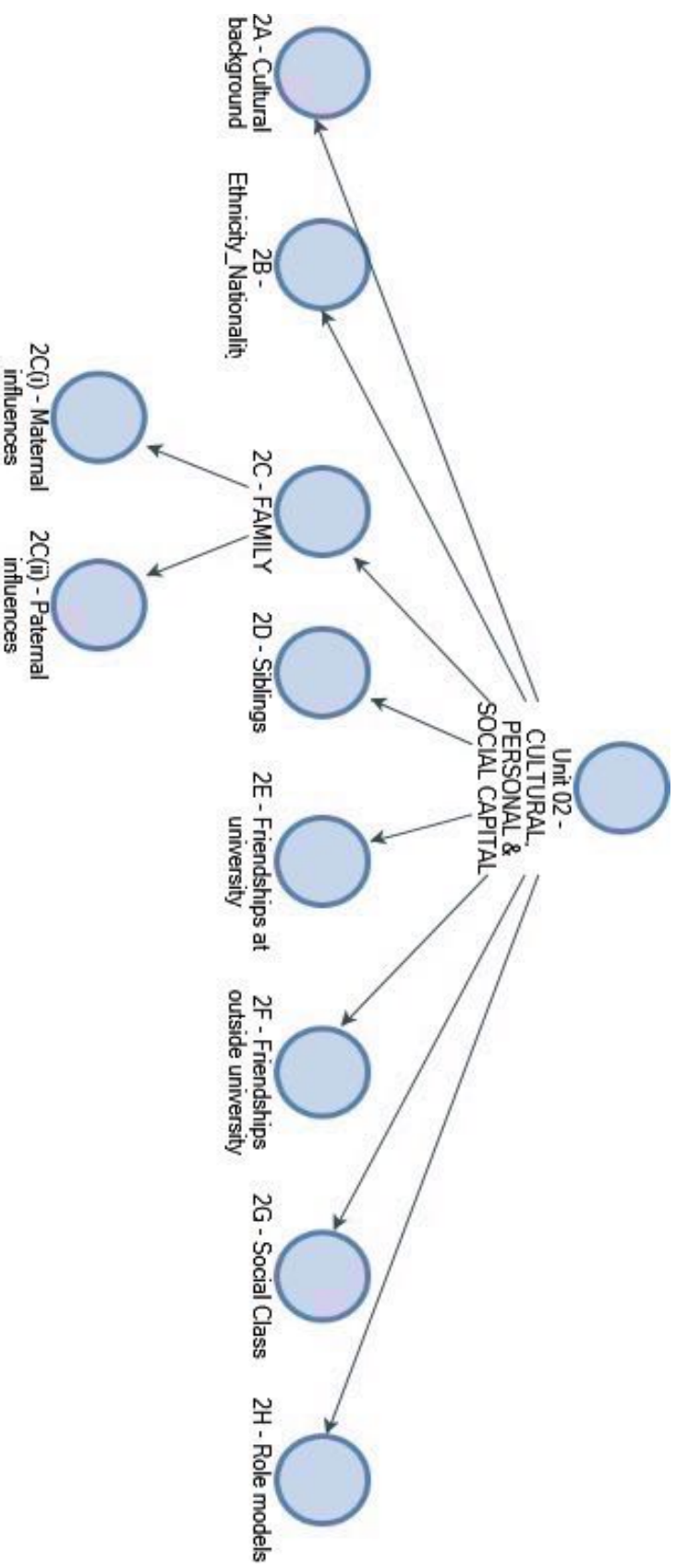
Figure 7.8: Thematic cluster - Cultural, personal and social capital

<u>7.8.1 Social and Cultural Capital</u>

Marcia's generalised perceptions about how university teaching staff view Black people might be one reason why these Black female students gravitated to each other for social support. Her association of 'Black' with 'bombing England' is a strong assertion and was, perhaps, tentatively linked to the political climate of terrorist attacks and their association with particular ethnic groups:

> […] *maybe sometimes, you know sometimes they* [White lecturers] *hear 'Black' and they think you want to* [laughs] *bomb England, you know, because they hear 'Black' because people think of everything Black is negative. (Marcia)*

> *I just think we're unknowingly more segmented than we perhaps realise we are, like for instance we maybe for one reason or another we do gravitate towards another* [...] *I just think we sometimes have a different outlook on things than other people based on our cultural background and our experiences more than anything else. (Rebecca)*

Rebecca's use of the word 'segmented' required further exploration [which was not attended to in this interview] and suggested a discomforting experience. Rebecca surmised that the cultural, personal and social capital of Black women play a role in determining their outlook. Rebecca's view was echoed by Yolanda:

> *I can see the, the difference in the White students, young, to the Black students there. I think they're more, some of them more switched on. They're more focused. They, they knew, from maybe a young age that they were going to university already, whereas I can see some of the, the young Black females are more immature, and they don't have that same drive and focus as the, the White female students. (Yolanda)*

Yolanda's view speaks to the idea of cultivated capital (Bodovski, Jeon, & Byun, 2016) and a sense of entitlement (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004), which are known aspects of privilege. Students with both are more comfortable in academia than students from less privileged backgrounds. Yolanda and Maureen both emphasised experiences that differentiated them from their White counterparts. The result was a university experience that was constructed as unique, taxing and requiring particularised support:

> *Black females, never mind mature or younger students, are not a neglected group but they're a group that needs support. I see, from my, my experience here at the university, I've seen, they will stick together as usual, but I don't know if they can support themselves, each other in the ways that they do. (Maureen)*

Ceglie and Settlage (2014) argue that capital in BME students is considered of less relevance in scientific studies because of the White male-centric history of those studies. However, its relevance for student experiences is highlighted by these participants' narratives, which outline the role capital plays in their university experience.

Participants narrated their cultural backgrounds in proud terms. Although she is part of a collectivistic culture, Maureen's background is built on deep-rooted African principles which encouraged her to be individually opinionated, albeit in a respectful manner. An early emphasis on education in the parental home kept her focused on academic achievement, even now she has reached a mature age. Marcia also attested to the value of her cultural background in helping her to hold to a fighting stance and determined focus to complete her degree:

> *I was thankful for my cultural upbringing because it gave me sure-footing. I was not easily swayed. I was not easily taken in by things, you know, and material things didn't matter too much. (Maureen)*

> *[…] cultural background, ethnicity […] I would say because of that I decide that, look, I'm gonna fight through it. (Marcia)*

Both Maureen and Marcia were born and spent most of their formative years in their place of heritage; namely, South Africa and Trinidad respectively. Yolanda's cultural upbringing and experiences as a British-born Black Caribbean woman of Jamaican parents were marked by the social and racial injustices of the 1960s and 1970s in the UK. In her opinion, the response of Jamaican people living in the UK during these troubled times contributed to them being labelled as aggressive by the indigenous people. Nonetheless, she also described a culture that is cherished for its strength and traditions, and rued the fact that her children do not share the same undiluted proclivities:

> *A strong, strong people with strong views and culturally not everyone's happy with the way the culture expresses themselves […] from what I can, what I've experienced but I think culturally we had to be or are seen to be a bit aggressive because we've always had to fight, you know, for our rights. (Yolanda)*

> *[…] it's very hard to keep the children within the original culture. There's lots of mixing up going on. (Yolanda)*

However, while Yolanda's culture and its traditions informed her ethnic identity in similar ways to those outlined by other participants, these aspects were not at the forefront of her academic identity.

7.8.2 Family Influences

In keeping with findings from the literature in this area, social mobility was constructed by one participant in particular in mainly financial and educational terms; namely, having a good job, owning one's home and, with hindsight, the benefit of attending university at a younger age. One reason Yolanda gave for not progressing as well as she would have liked was a perceived limited interest from her parents in ensuring that she and her siblings were able to pursue higher education as a means of self-improvement from a younger age. Yolanda believed that these kinds of resistant parental attitudes were symptomatic of the era in which she grew up:

> [...] *based on what my mother and my father did and that's all, they, they didn't, they weren't forward thinking, to say well, okay, let's get them through school, college, university at a younger age. So, for me I just find that, unfortunately, quite disappointing but that's how it was back in that era for some of us.* [...] *(Yolanda)*

Nevertheless, parental ambitions and their occupations [particularly, maternal] seemed to play a larger role in shaping her future. Yolanda initially pursued the same occupation [dressmaking] as her mother, which she subsequently rejected as unsuited to her needs and aspirations:

> [...] *sometimes you identify with, if your mother is a dressmaker, the daughter aspires to be like the mother so and that's unfortunate. That's what happened to me. I looked and thought, ooh, that's great. I'll do what, what my Mum does, not thinking what do I want to do. (Yolanda)*

Maternal influences have been referenced in literature as influential for the direction children, and women in particular, take; although some mature first-generation university students such as Yolanda and Maureen have bucked the trend by pursuing a degree:

> *She* [her mother] *had to stop because they said she was a girl, she had to get married and she had learnt enough although she herself had always, had wanted to go, but she, she could read, write,* […] *and she, she became a seamstress. (Maureen)*

However, the advantage of having an academic role model (for example, a relative who attended university) suggests that a student's cultural and social capital can be influenced and extended in a similar direction, although the quality of their university experiences and associated outcomes can vary (Pascarella, Pierson, Wozniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Siblings are also noted in the literature as being influential on a child's academic outcomes (Jacob, 2011; Knoester & Plikuhn, 2016). Rebecca, the youngest participant in this sample, has a brother who attended university. His experience was sufficient to affirm Rebecca's decision to embark on advanced study and, possibly, may have eased her transition into higher education: "[…] *my brother came here a few years ago, so he kind of influenced it slightly"*.

It must be recognised, however, that a degree in higher education is just one route towards social mobility. Other valid routes include vocational qualifications and apprenticeships (Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2016). For example, Yolanda's brother was successful without attending university:

> *My younger brother has a managerial position and he did that without going to university, but he worked his way up and he did go to college. I think he's done the best out of all of us. (Yolanda)*

Yolanda worked hard to buck the family trend for vocational pursuits by being the first in her family to attend university. Although now at a mature age, she subscribed to the view that a degree is a route towards an improved life status (Lee, 2014), particularly for young people:

> *Sometimes I think you don't need a, a degree to have a good job but in this day and age for, especially the young Black boys and girls, they, it does help, and the opportunities are there now. (Yolanda)*

7.8.3 Friendships

Research shows that when the employment market is suppressed, more mature students attend university (UCAS, 2018). However, overall, there are fewer mature students at university than previously (ECU, 2015a). The double bind for nontraditional Black female students suggests that there are even fewer nontraditional Black female students on UK undergraduate degree courses. The large age gap that separated these participants from their younger counterparts, combined with their ethnicity, appears to have influenced the perceived quality of their interactions:

It takes a lot to talk to someone and to be friends with someone that's, erm, slightly different and slightly older than it does to just stay in your comfort zone and stay with people that, you know, that are basically the same level. (Rebecca).

A construction of aloneness created an isolating experience for these students. To protect herself from the rejection that is often a product of being 'different', Maureen limited her interactions with other students to the status of acquaintances only, even when they shared social characteristics such as age or gender. Furthermore, she chose not to socialise with students beyond the university environment:

I've one or two acquaintances who are of non-African or non-Black ethnicity. We function at, on a level where we're both mature women who can talk about family, our interests and like every now and then about this stuff [...] but I don't think those are the relationships that will not continue but from my side because they're very, I think, superficial. It's not, there's nothing deep in there. (Maureen)

Notably, this barrier does not appear to extend to students of similar ethnicity. With reference to her potential role as an 'othermother' (section 7.7.3), Maureen welcomed opportunities to associate with Black female students. A similarity of their cultural contexts suggests that there may be less 'work' involved in initiating and sustaining conversations that could potentially develop into friendships beyond the university:

I am more comfortable with my own Black, and when I say Black, I mean like Black African or Black Other, not Black Asian, if you know what I mean, but Black, Black women because there's things you don't have to say. (Maureen)

Maureen's delineation of friendships is striking. It is clear that being 'Black' alone is insufficient to determine whether a relationship is possible.

In this case, a person's heritage or ethnicity is factored into an assessment of whether there is sufficient cultural similarity for the effort involved in forming a relationship to be worthwhile. Moreover, culturally-similar relationships need less work because "things" can remain unsaid and there can still be an accord between parties. Notably, Maureen did not include the identity of Black Caribbean among this friendship group. This could have either been an oversight or might suggest that there is insufficient cultural similarity with people from the Caribbean for Maureen to sustain a friendship with them. Either way, it is clear that Maureen has a preference for engaging with similar others in her university environment.

The experience of friendships outside the university environment can also be influential but in different ways. Participants with friends who had succeeded in their personal and professional lives were motivated to continue with their academic studies. Yolanda recounted friends who were academically successful, while friends who had dropped out of education or became pregnant during secondary school encouraged Rebecca to aim higher to avoid a similar outcome:

> *I've seen from my friends, a lot of success, you know. They've, they've stuck to it. They've gone through the three years. They've passed. They don't have the ideal job, but they've been through the university system and they've come through with, you know, 2:1. (Yolanda)*

> *I've got two friends that had babies […] one had her when she was, had her when she was 19 and the other one had her when she was about 17 and just things like that. I don't want that for myself. (Rebecca)*

It is worth emphasising that whether their friends did well or dropped out, their experiences were used as inspiration for these participants.

7.8.4 Social Class

Despite the differing social class statuses indicated on their demographic questionnaire (see section 7.3), all participants described their status as 'working class' during the interviews; however, some seemed less concerned with distinctions of class:

> *Poor class is poor class or low class, but the middle classes, you know, like you're, you're working class and you're middle-class, I, I don't know. I've never really understood, I've never understood what exactly that, what defines these classes […] I know I fit into a group that wants to go, earn my living as best as I can, pay my taxes, make my contributions to, to country and get on with people. (Maureen)*

Research suggests that the link between social class and students' aspirations is sufficiently tenuous to resist a clear association (Whitty, Hayton, & Tang, 2015). Maureen's muted description of class suggests that the construction is not important for her identity or as a definer for success. Similarly, degree completion is considered more important by Marcia for the possibility of earning a decent wage than for the nuances of social class:

> *I've broken through some barriers where, now, I can and for me doing that even, I wouldn't even see it as, you know, some people might see it as another class, you*

understand, but I just it, it's the same me now with a degree. I don't say well now I'm middle class or high class or lower class. I just say well now I would be able to earn better wages and perhaps then it would then probably then put me in a better situation of my financial situation than before. (Marcia)

Yolanda's conceptualisation of class was determined by education and home ownership. To achieve both would place her in another, unnamed yet improved status. Yolanda's parents were not homeowners. Therefore, achieving a degree represented a point of departure from the usual conceptualisation of her identity (namely, growing up and living in social housing). She marked the contrast between her siblings who have achieved the 'dream' and others, including herself, who have yet to make the shift. Using the example of her successful siblings, the usual conceptions of classed-based boundaries, such as level of parental education that might act as a 'ceiling' for one's aspirations, have caused Yolanda to reflect on her current situation:

[…] because I'm born into a family that my father, I think the highest level of his education took him to become an engineer and my mother, I think back in the day, she, she had limited education and went into dressmaking so I believe there's no ceiling there because my, my other siblings excelled from that level of class, as in they […] own their own homes […] they're in good jobs but for, for some of us we stayed within that remit […] of class. (Yolanda)

7.9 Cluster 3: Maturity-as-'Hyphen'

Identity was largely constructed by these participants using a lens of maturity. Maturity could be viewed as the 'hyphen' (Fine, 1994) that connected constructions of identity, such as an ethnic identity. The 'hyphen' worked to both join and disconnect participants' perceptions and experiences (Figure 7.9). In particular, a construction of maturity shaped their interactions with others. Domestic responsibilities (for example, caring for children, an elderly parent, a spouse or partner) may obstruct opportunities to nurture interpersonal relationships beyond formal teaching contexts. For some student parents, employment in some form is necessary to manage childcare costs (Reay et al., 2002), while rising tuition fees and a high cost of living can limit prospects for progression (Callendar, 2008). With competing demands, experiences for the participants in this sample were constructed as fractured.
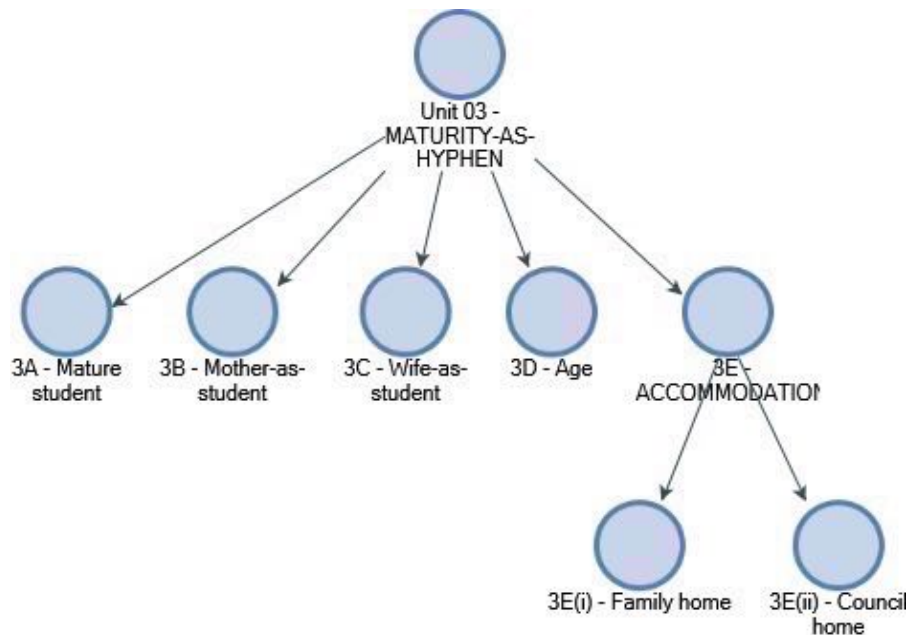
Figure 7.9: Thematic cluster - Maturity-as-'hyphen'

7.9.1 Maturity-as-Student

Yolanda's interactions with staff led to a problematic construction of her expectation of how mature students ought to be perceived and treated by staff:

> *Some of the tutors here, I suppose they're used to, maybe some of the younger ones not putting in as much work and just coasting and being a little bit annoying and I feel that sometimes they tarnish everyone with the same brush, you know, if you haven't done it, oh why? You haven't, you just haven't been bothered but, in my case, I put in a lot of work. (Yolanda)*

Yolanda's comments accord with research on the characteristics of nontraditional female students. She presented as motivated and hardworking and wanted to be perceived as such by staff. Instead, she was offended that staff might consider her to have a similar work ethic to her younger counterparts, whom she considered to be less engaged. Furthermore, she expected a particular kind of interaction between staff and her younger counterparts whom, she believed, had little respect for mature students. Consequently, Yolanda felt that some mature students had to become "aggressive" in order to assert themselves in their academic spaces: *"I have seen it with other mature students who have had to become aggressive."* Her use of the word 'aggression' can be interpreted as nontraditional students' methods for trying to establish their identity among a younger cohort and so could be a construction of

resilience. Yolanda took a one-sided view, not recognising that traditional students might also be struggling to interact with their nontraditional counterparts.

In contrast, Maureen recounted an occasion when her maturity and experience as a student-parent enabled her to offer effective support to a younger pregnant student in ways that she felt her younger counterparts could not:

> *I think the morning sickness, the not feeling well, this and that, and we just ended up actually sitting next to each other and she would talk about some of her private life or the way she was feeling and when she found out I'd already, have got grown up children, […] it, there was a lot of the usual asking advice or my mother used to say this or do you agree with that, and again that's, that's where you find yourself falling into the role where you start giving advice I think a lot of the other students didn't know what to do with a pregnant young woman. (Maureen)*

As well as Maureen's expressed tendency for 'othermothering', living with a construction of maturity and ethnicity seemed to make her more sensitive to the needs of students who might also be experiencing marginalisation. Notably, Maureen specifically mentioned the ethnicity of the pregnant student. Her willingness to help this student suggested that there may be situations where her assessment of need trumped her strong views about the importance of ethnicity salience: *"There was a young woman from Eastern Europe erm who we didn't know, but later on actually because it showed she was expecting".* With a veiled reference to her own challenges as a parent, Maureen further perceived cultural and familial challenges as specific to the experience of a nontraditional Black African female student:

> *Well, I think in the African culture you always have caring responsibilities […] I've got a daughter who's got her own child now, so I try not to interfere. I mean she's got her family but I try to advise and take the mothering role, the grandmother role, and I've got my stepchildren, same thing, you know […] a lot of Black African women have to support families at home so they have to work so they can't manage the work and the studying. (Maureen)*

Maureen went on to describe the combination of academic study and mature student identity as a "shock", signalling possible attrition for some mature students. She argued that these students were negotiating competing factors (for example, age differences), more demanding academic requirements than they had expected and complicated domestic situations. While some mature students may choose to leave their institution, Maureen highlighted a form of

resilience which meant that these students would not give up on their quest for self-improvement, but would seek alternative routes:

> *There were a group of about 12 or 15 part-time students, mature part-time students that I started with in my year but at the end of that first year, more than half had stopped for various reasons. Some felt they couldn't fit in [...] they couldn't combine working and studying at the same time. Others said they found it a shock. They had been out of school for a while [...] they found the work too hard and they were going to try to find another way to get to their [...] qualification. (Maureen)*

Laing and Robinson (2003) point out that student attrition is a general problem for UK HE providers, while attrition rates are more alarming in nontraditional student groups. They describe characteristics for the type of institutions most likely to be affected; namely, those with higher numbers of nontraditional students who have fewer formal qualifications or less experience of continuous formal education. Maureen's description of this 'critical period' suggests that it occurs following many years of being in employment, soon after commencing an undergraduate degree and at some point during the first year of study.

Among other factors, perceptions of support are influential in deciding whether students should stay at or leave an institution (Darrin, 2014). According to Maureen, an inability to retain supportive connections post the 'rites-of-passage' associated with the first year at university contributed to a decision for nontraditional students to quit. She inferred that, while the first year is a time of making connections, the nature of these connections may not be sufficiently robust to contribute to a sense of belonging and retention for nontraditional students:

> *[...] I feel most of the time as if I'm an island [...] the one year where I had interactions with my fellow students was my first year and I think that's because everybody was new, people were looking for to make connections, friends, so you [...] talk to people [...] the second year most of the mature students dropped out. (Maureen)*

As such, there may be different risk factors or critical points for these students.

7.9.2 Mother-as-Student

For some participants, maturity was accompanied by additional responsibilities that were further constructed in an academic context as challenges for the multiple identities of 'mother-as-student' or 'wife-as-student'. Role duality was being complicated by domestic

requirements - particularly for those from a patriarchal culture - and exacerbated their efforts to be a 'successful' student:

> [...] *you are expected to do everything and still do, be wife, be mother, be everything. So sometimes it's difficult I would say for mothers. I wouldn't so much say the fathers because it's not all fathers that way, but the role of a mother is harder in the sense that* [...] *if you don't have that support, in other words, you're on your own. (Marcia)*

> *I didn't realise the extent of the emotional side of erm the studying at university would have on my family life. Only, only when I was in it, I realised that whoa! What have I done? (Marcia)*

Like other participants, Marcia expressed a feeling of unpreparedness [and near shock] for the effort needed to combine the multiple roles of a student, wife, mother and [in her case] employee. A body of literature reflects the negative aspects of higher education for student mothers. Challenges for managing simultaneous life-worlds can affect academic performance (Bernarda & Munoz, 2005) and negatively shape the help-seeking behaviours of these students (Wilsey, 2013). There is an increased risk of attrition (McLaughlin & Randolph, 2012) while the "double burden of domestic and course work" (Griffiths, 2002, p. 277) influences student-mothers' perceptions of maternal and academic invisibility (Lynch, 2008). This toil culminated in Yolanda missing important signs that her children were having academic and emotional difficulties. She blamed a heavy focus on completing assignments for falling behind with the requirements of parenting:

> *I wouldn't like to use the word neglect, but I have to make a conscious effort to tap into what's going on at home because I can feel quite blinkered in how I approach things. So, when I've noticed things going wrong, I can say well, I should have spotted that before but because a lot of my time has been taken up with studying, revising, preparing for my assignments, staying sometimes long hours at university. (Yolanda)*

Yolanda was the only student-mother in the sample to narrate a sense of guilt for spending less time with her children. Her broken narrative about her daughter's near breakdown conveyed this conflict and culminated in a decision to shift her priorities:

> *Only when she was literally, not at breaking point, but more or less and then I felt really guilty that I hadn't seen* [...] *I hadn't been, I would say been a proper parent and was there for her* [...] *I will look back and think well, she was going through this important period of her life and all I can think of was, oh, my degree, my, my me me me so that*

makes […] I wouldn't use the word frustrating, but […] I feel I need to put her, her first and my assignments second now otherwise I don't want my daughter to have a breakdown because of my lack of caring. (Yolanda)

Contrastingly, Etienne's (2016) ethnographic study of Black female mothers returning to or entering education at a later age emphasises that a sense of guilt about combining higher education with childcare is less characteristic for this student type. In accord with those participants' views on social mobility, having a degree was viewed as an important means of improving personal and social circumstances in ways that could ultimately bring benefit to their families. Evidence further suggests that satisfaction with taking a degree course is a stronger characteristic among older female students (Rubin et al., 2016) and may lead to more persistence in their studies. As such, Yolanda's story illustrates an extreme, but credible, reaction to the sacrifice involved in pursuing a degree as a single student-mother at an older age while her children were experiencing their own academic turbulence.

7.10 Cluster 4: Pre-University Experiences

A comprehensive review of the literature has revealed that pre-university education experiences can influence BME students' outcomes for higher education (Museus, Palmer, Davis, & Maramba, 2011) and that this includes the experience of gaining FE qualifications in tertiary environments (Figure 7.10). Participants in the reviewed studies achieved their pre-university qualifications in more intimate settings than were offered by a university and enjoyed being part of a smaller cohort of students (Museus et al., 2011). Concurrent with the literature on the experiences of mature students who have taken an Access course (Brine & Waller, 2004), Museus and colleagues found that participants narrated feelings of unpreparedness for the demands of higher education. One consequence of feeling nurtured in tertiary education is that students may enter higher education with expectations of receiving similar levels of support. The challenges of transitioning into a new environment while coming to terms with an emphasis on autonomous learning from quite early into their studies can come as a shock for some students.
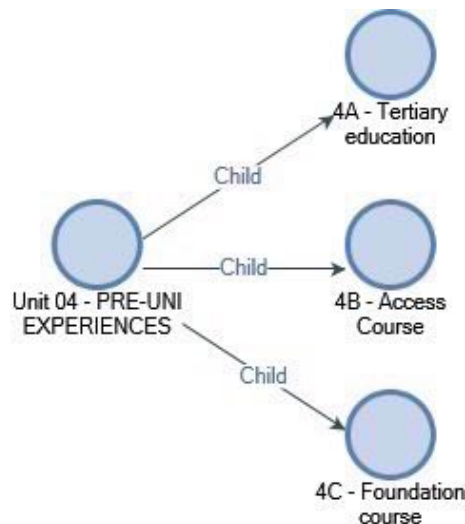
Figure 7.10: Thematic cluster - Pre-university experiences

7.10.1 Tertiary Education

At the time that this study was undertaken, post-16, pre-university education was being carried out in a variety of tertiary environments that include colleges, vocational training centres and foundation degree providers, leading to recognised qualifications (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2016). Maureen took pride in academic achievements gained during post-formal education and Yolanda saw her experience of tertiary education as an enabler for access to higher education:

> *Well, it's helped me not to feel so, so lost, maybe because of the schools I went to, the level of education, past education has helped. I can imagine if you don't have a certain level of education, you would find it really hard, yeah. So, I'm thankful for that because then I didn't have any problems with understanding or anything. It was just understanding the new stuff. That's, that's where I, sometimes it was challenging but I say thank God for my past educational level. (Maureen)*

> [...] *we completed an access course that enabled us to come to this, a particular university. (Yolanda)*

Their narratives also suggested that a more nurturing relationship with staff in those environments was beneficial for their perceptions of a positive experience. However, Rebecca's view was that being cosseted and 'spoon-fed' at college was less conducive to developing the kind of academic independence required at university:

[…] it was cosy and the lecturers were always on call if you needed them. I don't think it prepared me much because I think, context-wise it did because the information and the things that we covered last year, we're basically doing now but in a more elaborate form but, given that, we were babied quite a lot. Like literally anything we needed, we, we got and even for my research methods final exam, they put up a past exam paper that was pretty much identical to [laughs] to, my exam [laughs]. So, all we had to do was basically put in the answers, memorise it and that was it, so it was, I mean I [laughs], I say I worked hard but looking back I didn't work as hard as, as hard as I thought I did. (Rebecca)

Rebecca's contrasting view that tertiary education was supportive yet at the same time did not prepare her for studying at a more advanced level is one factor that added to an experience of shock for the participants in this sample, who all took a similar route into university. Her narrative also showed that the learning style of these students appeared to be based on memorising facts and concepts instead of critically engaging with the material, which required a process of undoing at university level. Furthermore, the shorter duration of some tertiary courses [approximately 9 months] seemed to insufficiently prepare students for the duration and intensity of focus required for an undergraduate degree. Yolanda hinted at the possibility of having learning difficulties (*"if you're slightly below"*) that may have held her back:

[…] so, for those who are used to the fast pace, who did A-Levels - I didn't do A-Levels. I did an Access course which again was condensed. Everything was squashed into nine months and they said that would prepare you for university and it, it doesn't. If you're slightly below, you're always playing catch-up and unfortunately that is reflected in, in your grades. I didn't have the opportunity to go to college when I left school, so I believe the Access course was my college and […] I was really proud of myself for achieving that even though I believe that should have been a two-year course, and then you would have been more grounded in your knowledge. (Yolanda)

Yolanda's views were echoed by Maureen. Being away from any kind of formal study for some time, Maureen believed that the time spent trying to understand lectures would have been better utilised if she had previous knowledge of psychology as a subject and that this would have helped with feeling prepared:

I wish I'd been a little more prepared before I'd come on the course, of what I was going to do on the course and learn on the course. A lot of it has been challenging.

Instead of sitting in the lecture and thinking 'what the heck is he talking about?' [...] actually familiarising myself with the modules and the content of the modules took up a lot of the time when I was supposed to be learning stuff, because then I'd go into different books or different places to, just to inform myself what, what is this and that took up a lot of my time. (Maureen)

Maureen does not equate the effort involved in familiarising herself with module content as relevant to the study of psychology, seemingly because she had an expectation that university study ought to be launched on the back of prior subject knowledge. Holding this view set her up for further learning challenges, as she constructed a typology around idealistic student learning behaviours which put her under more pressure. Furthermore, Rebecca's experience suggests that students with Access qualifications may struggle with learning requirements in higher education, although these challenges may be more specific to adapting to a different kind of learning experience than for learning a new subject. Yolanda added that grades attained on a preparatory course may be sufficient to pass but are insufficient for the standard required at university, so can leave a student with the perception that they are ready for university study when, in reality, they are not:

Although you pass, still all your work is marked by external verifiers, so it is correct but it's only correct to a C which isn't, it isn't enough for university life at this level, especially psychology. (Yolanda)

Learning at university level appears to require not just ability, but also an attitudinal shift and, as shown in the participants' narratives, a strong sense of resilience and persistence. Although this perception is not specific to nontraditional students, the usual duration of an undergraduate degree may lead to assumptions that there is more time available for the process than exists in reality. These assumptions could affect a student's ability to meet coursework deadlines, compounding feelings of anxiety. For students who have a shorter timeframe over which to explore their aspirations, time becomes a more critical factor in the face of fewer opportunities by virtue of increasing age. From these accounts, the summary position is that difficulties for transitioning from tertiary to higher education arise from uninformed assumptions that are a consequence of unpreparedness.

7.11 Cluster 6: Staff and Student Interactions

With diversity in UK universities on the increase (Runnymede Trust, 2010; 2011; 2015b), there is an expectation that students will have a more culturally diverse experience on their campuses. Student populations that poorly reflect these expectations may result in an unexpected experience (Showunmi, Atewologun, & Bebbington, 2015). Aside from a disproportionate representation of student ethnicity and age in some institutions, staff are not culturally representative, with most senior academics in UK higher education being White. Furthermore, Black academic staff tend to hold lower positions as well as fixed-term or fractional contracts (HEFCE, 2014b), reducing their visibility.

The extent to which a student identifies with students and staff can feed into a sense of belonging, also considered a form of attachment by Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001). Research indicates that BME students experience more hostile and micro-aggressive interactions from other students (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Doharty, 2018). Consequently, interactions with non-BME staff may also be interpreted as challenging and judged on superficial indicators such as approachability or friendliness. These evaluations also seem to influence a student's propensity for help-seeking. This theme, illustrated in Figure 7.11, reflects participants' views on diversity and staff support. As with previous themes, participants continued to articulate a resilient approach to overcoming perceived obstacles.
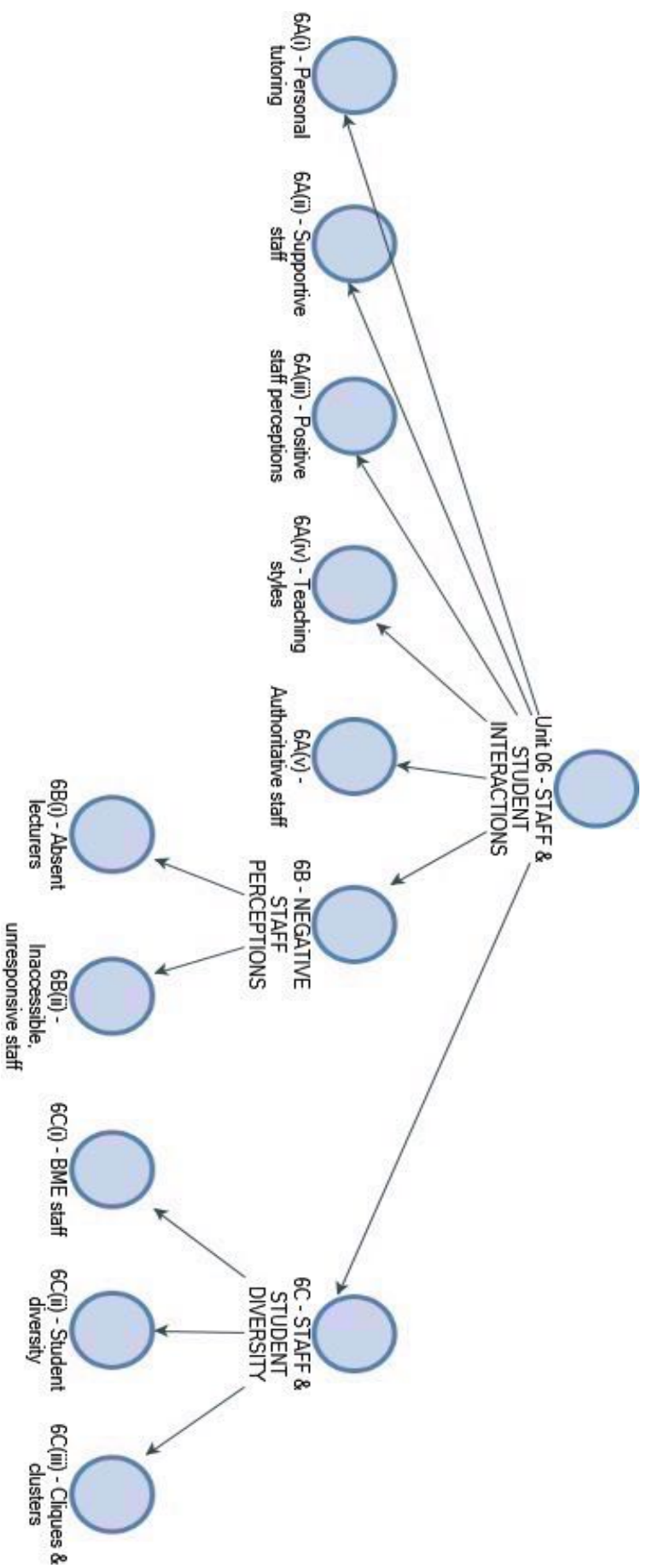
Figure 7.11: Thematic cluster - Staff and student interactions

6A(i) - Personal tutoring

6A(ii) - Supportive staff

6A(iii) - Positive staff perceptions

6A(iv) - Teaching styles

6A(v) - Authoritative staff

Unit 06 - STAFF & STUDENT INTERACTIONS

6B - NEGATIVE STAFF PERCEPTIONS

6B(i) - Absent lecturers

6B(ii) - Inaccessible, unresponsive staff

6C - STAFF & STUDENT DIVERSITY

6C(i) - BME staff

6C(ii) - Student diversity

6C(iii) - Cliques & clusters

7.11.1 Staff/Student Diversity

Rebecca stated that she came to university for a multicultural experience but was disappointed to find student groups from which she was excluded. She attended a university with a high concentration of Asian students, leaving her with little choice than to socialise with some of these students. She indicated that there was a marked absence of same-ethnicity students and wished she could form more diverse attachments. Participants such as Rebecca seemed to experience the very act of socialising as an 'ethnic penalty' (Ford, 2015). Although a sociological term that is associated with employment inequalities for ethnic groups (Heath & Ridge, 1983; Modood & Khattab, 2016), ethnic penalty is used in this research to denote experiences of 'felt' disadvantage for people who share similar abilities in similar settings but are excluded. As a consequence of her perception of a discriminatory experience, Rebecca tended to form attachments with same or similar ethnicity groups mainly based on a desire to achieve a sense of belonging:

> *Well, where it is so cliquey, the ones that I have kind of gravitated towards mainly have tended to be either of the same ethnicity or Asian, and those are predominantly the ones that I know and that I kind of go around with but, you know, if I had a choice then it would be a lot more broader. (Rebecca)*

Maureen also offered a view on this setting: *"People formed, you know like the Eastern Europeans got together and, yes, and they were not very many mature female Black African students".* Other participants, such as Marcia and Yolanda, saw these ethnicity groupings as less problematic, especially when this occurred in a university with a large BME cohort:

> *Well, the friends I have at university, to be honest they are Black because the class [laughs], the majority in the class is Black. (Marcia)*

> *I think they're OK with my ethnicity because there are a lot of Black women here, so I don't believe there is an issue with my ethnicity here at this university. (Yolanda)*

Participants with limited access to students of a similar ethnicity reported a more extreme perception for their identity. For Yolanda, there was a larger emphasis on her maturity as a compelling factor for continued experiences of exclusion, although she was uncertain about who was responsible for this perception. Of note, she was prepared to be reflexive about the possibility of self-limiting behaviours as one explanation: *"I'm not sure if that was because a lot of young students who grouped together and excluded myself or I wasn't able to integrate with, with them."*

The presence of student groupings is not restricted to higher education. It begins much earlier. Students are known to group by ethnicity in primary and secondary school social spaces (Urberg, Degrimencioglu, Tolson, & Halliday-Scher, 1995), creating the illusion of a segregated student landscape that imposes the possibility of an ethnic penalty on students who cannot find a group to which they can be attached. Cohen (1977) identified student grouping behaviours that stem from two premises: (i) the desire to be with others who have something in common and, to a lesser extent, (ii) the pressure to conform to a group's normative values. Cohen indicates that these groupings can, at their smallest, consist of friendship pairs. Maureen narrated difficulty over acceptance when citing the experience of working with a same-ethnicity pair as part of group work that led to an isolating experience:

> *One group was with two students from, both from Norway and they made it quite clear [...] they just [...] tolerated me to be in that group. Not a very nice feeling but we had to work together and they thought they knew it all and often, most of the time they spoke in a language, their own language that I couldn't understand but we needed to get a mark together so we stuck together just for the purpose of the project but they shut me out a lot [...] (Maureen)*

Maureen's experience suggests that she can work with diverse students when a task demands but, beyond this, there is no sense of connectedness. As an English language speaker, she was further excluded when the students frequently spoke to each other in their language, emphasising a feeling of aloneness for Maureen even when in a group context. Group members may target microaggressive behaviours at outsiders in an attempt to prevent fragmentation of the group's identity (Louis et al., 2016). Microaggressive behaviours are described as:

> a form of systemic, everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place. They are (a) verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward People of Color, often carried out in subtle, automatic or unconscious forms; (b) layered assaults, based on a Person of Color's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and (c) cumulative assaults that take a psychological, physiological, and academic toll on People of Colour (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015, p. 223).

Besides these microaggressions, Maureen's word choice ["thrown" into groups] suggests a process over which students have no control:

*I think a lot of them think the less Black people would be in this University, the better
and that's sometimes also just from conversations that you catch when you're sitting at,
in computer rooms or you find groups talking together and the mixture, the mixing is
not, I've found is not very, very good and I get that especially from when you're thrown
into groups to work together. (Maureen)*

Naturally, these behaviours tend to be negatively experienced by the recipient. Research
shows that being part of a group is beneficial for students' learning (Hendry, Hyde, & Davy,
2005). However, participants in the current study described such groups as occurring outside
their usual experience and without them being included, giving rise to Collins' (2001)
expression of being 'the outsider-within'. A study or task group that is formed as an extension
to an existing student grouping may *de facto* exclude BME students. Accessing these groups
becomes more challenging for those students' experience. Attempts to meet and discuss
learning issues can become frustrating. Maureen constructs this as younger students wanting
to retain a group's identity by excluding a mature student from their study group:

*I think they just thought I was too old. Maybe I was, I was another generation, or they
understood, they've got this, some young people have got this thing of 'they know it all'
and they thought they knew better, and I wasn't gonna fight about that. (Maureen)*

There is a long history of using group work to support the development of graduate attributes
(Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragnolini, 2004). Despite variations in group type (for
example, brainstorming, debating, presentation and problem-solving; Biggs, 2003), mature
students can find group work challenging. Too often, it is fraught with communication
difficulties and behaviours such as social loafing (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008). Social loafing
is a phenomenon observed in situations that require group effort where some members
significantly reduce their efforts to achieve a task in comparison to other group members
(Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 2006). Some students feel embittered about engaging in
compensatory behaviours (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007) and mature students may end up
assuming responsibility for addressing deficiencies in group input. Yolanda experienced
particular difficulty with fitting into self-selecting groups of [predominantly] younger
students as a mature student:

*Yes, when we're asked to go into groups, all the other students group together and then
you're left out so you, you, I have to take the initiative and even say to the lecturer, you
know, what group do I join or if there is one or two friendly faces within the group that*

have turned to the side, then I join that group and there are, not, not all the young students are the same but I would say in my experience, the majority are and that does, when I say are, hostile, so that makes my experience here quite difficult. (Yolanda)

Limited staff ethnic diversity seemed to further heighten the visibility of some student groupings. It was therefore unsurprising that Marcia recounted feeling empowered by seeing BME staff at her university. She was excited about the recent appointments of Black academic teaching staff:

[...] they hire some staff recently. I say wow! Wow! Black Dr, Dr, they've one, two, three, they have a lot of Black staff, yeah [...] most of them so far have been Nigerian, Black, yeah Dr, a Dr [name] who is clinical psychologist and stuff. (Marcia)

By contrast, a skewed staff and student ethnicity distribution was noted as a feature at Maureen's institution:

Our teaching staff never had any Black, I mean never mind men or women […] I think this university is seen as a White university and although, and this is just my, my perspective, when you look at it, it's not very 'White' from the students. When I say Black, when you look at the Black African, Black Other students and the Asian students, I think they are in the majority to the White students. (Maureen)

The idea of attending a 'White' university was denoted by staff ethnicity composition rather than student ethnicity, suggesting that this factor shapes the culture of a university or, at least, how it is viewed by others. Again, Maureen referred to Black African, Black Other and Asian students, but there was no reference to Black Caribbean students. One explanation for this absenting could be that these students are even less visible in her academic environment. Alternatively, as a Black African student, Maureen may consider that Black Caribbean students comprise part of the Black Other group.

7.11.2 Support from Staff

From their narratives, it was clear that several factors contributed to the overall quality of university experience for these participants. Support from the staff was one factor and was translated as seeking messages of reassurance that they could succeed. Reassuring messages were important for Maureen to be able to come to terms with the fact that learning in higher education is a process that takes place over a longer duration. She sought explicit support. When this was not forthcoming, she became resistant to help-seeking, viewing it as non-

beneficial for her progress. The concept of time seemed of particular import to the identities of these participants who may have felt that time was running out for completing their degree without a firm understanding of the subject. As a final year student, Maureen stated:

I went to other tutors who I approached and said I'm having problems with this and that and a lot of them were very, you can say reassuring. They'd say, what they would say actually is you will get it in time. They said 'don't worry about it. It's like that for everybody but you will understand it in time'. I'm finishing. I still haven't understood some of the things, you know, and unfortunately, I found that a lot of the tutors who said erm come back to us in the third year or later actually again were just saying it. (Maureen)

Staff members' limited understanding of the experiences of these students created further challenges for the participants. Furthermore, some participants experienced discomfort with acclimatising to a considerably younger lecturer or personal tutor. Their experiences were likely discordant with previous experiences of being taught in an environment where they were young, and their teachers were older. Maureen's interpersonal relationship with staff was affected by a perceived reaction to her maturity:

[…] maybe it's just from my perspective but anyway I never went back again to the tutors […] I think maybe they just didn't know how to deal with it. It's like I say when I look around and see mature students in my, in my course now, maybe in the other years later but, I think they're very, very few mature students. They're used to young people who ask <u>different</u> questions of which they're got answers […] maybe it's just me feeling that there's that look in their eyes to say, well that's what you get if you come to university at this age. (Maureen)

Her experience of shutting down access to tutor support was based on a feeling that she was being blamed by staff for not taking up the opportunity to study at a younger, more normative age. Seeing these episodes mainly through a lens of maturity caused her to interpret the responses from lecturers as ageist, affecting her learning experience. Both Yolanda and Maureen expressed the desire for a more 'partnership' based approach to accessing support, in which students take responsibility for developing the confidence to approach their tutors while staff work on being more empathetic. Nicholson and Putwain (2014) promote the value of positive staff-student relationships in fostering a sense of belonging and engagement. While participants in the current study relayed social interactions with BME and non-BME

staff and students alike, it seemed that their relationships *outside* the university environment offered more solace for the perceived superficiality of their interactions while at university.

Other factors that affected participants' perceptions were based on staff practices and their availability to provide mentoring and individual tutorials, act as personal tutors, respond to queries promptly, be authoritative [especially in managing student disruption in the lecture theatre], be effective in their teaching style and be clear about their administrative procedures. These factors were all commented on favourably by the participants and considered helpful for their experience but did not appear to be specific to the experience of being a Black woman in higher education. As such, these views are not illustrated here.

Common to all students was the desire to be able to pursue the construction of an academic identity without feeling that they were unappreciated in their environment. Where this was missing, they leant, instead, on inner strength to keep going:

> *I'd rather deal with something myself and be done with. (Rebecca)*

> *At this age, I'm not expecting anybody to pull me along. I know what I have to do. I sit down and I'll do this. It's best I sit and do it and get it wrong than not doing it at all. (Marcia)*

> *I've always tried myself to find the solution. Okay, maybe sometimes I haven't been as happy with the solution, but I've found it, the solution, and to carry on, and to know that it, it doesn't end there. (Maureen)*

Relationships with others shaped participants' experiences of connectedness within and outside the university environment. For this sample, staff reflected a dominant and, at times, inaccessible power structure that further complicated their life-world. These participants appeared to place more value on nurturing relationships outside the university. The current picture for student diversity suggests that, while these students are having to interact to various extents with students from diverse backgrounds, opportunities to interact with similar others are limited. Interactions with teaching staff are considered in an even more abstract sense. Nevertheless, genuine offers of support from staff in whatever form were cited as beneficial for participants' experience.

7.12 Cluster 8: A Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is defined by Goodenow (1993) as 'fitting in' or being part of one's environment. Belonging is also linked with self-efficacy (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2009)

and successful academic outcomes (Hurtado, Cabrera, Lin, Arellano, & Espinosa, 2008). According to Thomas (2012), belonging is craved by mature students who have social concerns about fitting in and making friends at university, but who also rate academic learning as a priority compared to younger students (Taylor & House, 2010). Before being questioned about their sense of belonging, participants were asked to define their understanding of the term for clarity. Their responses accorded with the definition given by Goodenow (1993). Their narratives further indicated that perceptions about staff, students and their environment influenced whether they felt a sense of belonging (see Figure 7.12).

For these participants, belonging was less predicated on being in an ideal environment. Instead, it seemed that it was possible to achieve a fleeting sense of belonging in conditions that might be considered unfavourable. Thus, a sense of belonging was not experienced as a continuous concept in the students' life-world. Rather, the experience could be summarised as transitory periods of 'fitting in' and 'falling out', illuminated as pockets of belonging and 'unbelonging' based on the context. According to Johnson et al. (2007), further deconstruction is required for some student groups as there is no normative picture for belonging. To disentangle experiences of belonging in this sample, two themes were constructed; namely, a feeling of belonging [positive sentiment] and a feeling of 'unbelonging' [negative sentiment].
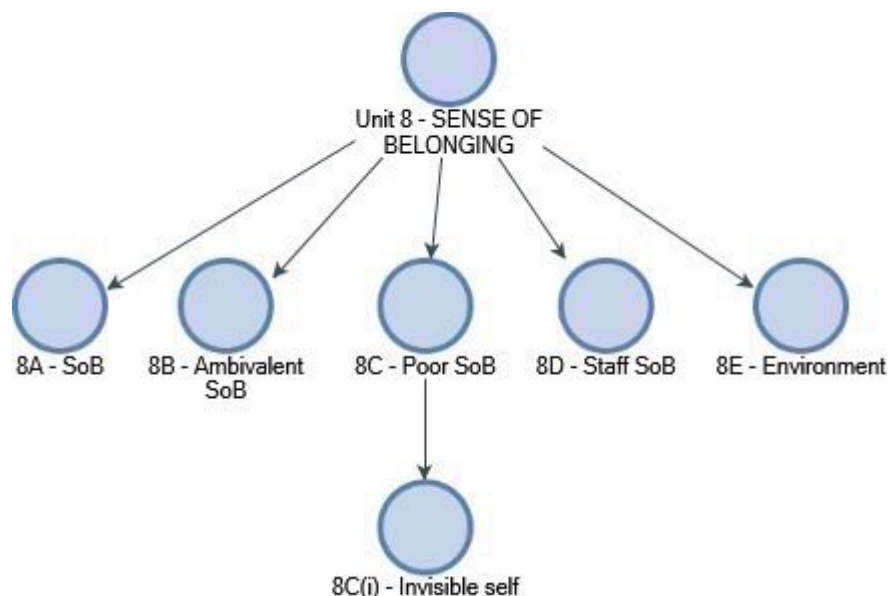
Figure 7.12: Thematic cluster - A sense of belonging

<u>7.12.1 A Sense of Belonging</u>

Interactions with staff and students contribute to feelings of belonging as well as familiarity with a validating learning environment, particularly for BME students (Meeuwisse, Severiens, & Born, 2010). Induction and orienting activities (Brooman & Darwent, 2014) can provide opportunities for students to socially integrate with staff and their peers. The induction programme was particularly welcomed by the youngest participant in the sample:

> *I think the induction week, although it was a little bit longer than I think it should have been, it was a good idea and it, they had kind of a little get together at the end and a couple of the lecturers turned up and it kind of gave [...] the opportunity to have a chat with a few students and to talk to some of the lecturers before the start of the module and I think that was quite a good idea and it helped to integrate you slightly into, into the university and also it kind of made you see that the lecturers aren't so scary and you can talk to them after the lectures if you need to. (Rebecca)*

This opportunity was important for helping Rebecca feel that she could settle into her new environment. Nevertheless, she also reflected on having a stronger sense of belonging during her tertiary education experience, which was more multi-cultural, and contrasted this with a racialised and ageist experience in her current educational setting:

> *There was someone Albanian, there was someone Scottish, there was someone, you know from South Africa, so it was, you know, a lot more diverse and I think you can, I think it broadens the experience a lot more when when it is like that and that's, that's just kind of what makes me feel accepted and comfortable and I don't think we have that as much here. Like here, it feels like, for instance, like the age issue that they stick to themselves and, you know, everyone's in their own little kind of cliques and in that respect it's not as diverse as it could be and, I think if it possibly was then yeah, I'd feel more accepted because I've always been used to different kinds of people like, you know. (Rebecca)*

A sense of belonging was constructed by participants as fragile and transient, shifting along a continuum of the extent to which these participants felt accepted in their environment. This view was dependent on work demands and cultural identity as well as having a sense of efficacy. Speaking about belonging in this vein, Maureen stated that:

> *It's time-limited, you know, I belonged to that group then but not in that group anymore [...] a lot of things that happen in evenings and I couldn't afford the evenings. I was*

usually in my books or trying to write up stuff so, yeah, but I definitely felt I, for a short time, I did belong to the [university name]. Yeah. For a short time. (Maureen)

By the time Maureen reached Level 5, some mature students with whom she had managed to form a relationship had either changed university or dropped out, while her peers at Level 4 were now part of their own preferred groupings from which she felt excluded. She asserted, however, that her sense of belonging was not shaped by whether younger students accepted her, nor was it linked to social events or belonging to the students' union. Instead, she saw belonging as mainly being operationalised when she was immersed in learning:

[…] when lectures were enjoyable, you looked forward to coming, you were understanding stuff and you were reading stuff and you thought, yes! That makes sense or I said, thought to myself 'I always suspected that. That's confirmed it. That's actually true.' That's when I felt a part of this learning institution. (Maureen)

Maureen's experience of belonging was also context-specific and linked to a sense of pride for being part of her institution. She reflected on the practical situations that evoked transitory 'moments' of a feeling of belonging, such as when swiping her student card to gain access to a university building as an authorised member of the institution, while those without a legitimate attachment must remain outside:

I think everybody feels like that about their university, when you're the only ones who've got the card that you can get into a certain building. Others have to stay outside. Yes, so that gives you that feeling of, yeah, and I mean I always defended my university outside, you know. I always laugh about other universities and say, "Your university's rubbish", you know, this and that. (Maureen)

7.12.2 A Sense of 'Unbelonging'

Studies have measured a sense of belonging using questions to unpack the concept; for example, what does it mean to fit in? How does one become a member of a community? How does a person develop a sense of belonging to their university environment? (e.g. Goodenow, 1993; Johnson et al., 2007; Uwah et al., 2008). A sense of 'unbelonging', as the converse sentiment, was interpreted as a feeling of being disconnected from the experience of being an undergraduate student, as expressed in Yolanda's repeating commentary: *"I don't feel as if I really belong here. I come here and I try my best. I don't feel that I belong."*

Frequently illustrated through the lens of the socially-isolated Black female student self (Carroll, 1982), a sense of 'unbelonging' in this sample could be attributed to several reasons.

Time constraints from combining work and family responsibilities with studying was one issue. Another difficulty stemmed from fewer possibilities to integrate with students from diverse cultural/ethnic backgrounds, creating distance in the form of enforced solitude as a default response to participants' failed attempts to connect with the wider student body:

> [...] *You would never be able* [...] *to get to meet them, you know, you'd suggest this and that, "oh, I'm busy, I'm doing this and that", and in the end, I got the idea to say you know what* [...] *it wasn't actually honestly meant. It was just a way of* [...] *being polite and fobbing you off* [...] *so* [...] *after a while you stop.* (*Maureen*)

Repeated experiences of this kind were managed by participants adopting a solitary self that only increased feelings of isolation from their peers. In a racially-positioned sense, this links to Harper's (2009) construction of 'onlyness' as the feeling of being the only person from their ethnicity in their situation. Solitary practices can reinforce isolation (Davis & Elias, 2003), meaning that students may have difficulty finding a study partner or joining study groups, thus reducing opportunities for learning from or creating knowledge with their peers. In effect, these students tended to study more in solitary situations than in shared learning environments when outside of a formal requirement. Maureen suggested that staff should specifically create opportunities for 'unbelonging' students. Her view was based on the supposition that these students needed additional time with lecturers outside of the standard teaching timetable to explore questions and ideas in similar ways that they could, had they belonged to a supportive group: *"There are students like me* [...] *who didn't associate so much with the others and they were left alone but had these questions* [...]*"*

With frequent experiences of feeling isolated from students, the participants' narratives suggested that when they were presented with opportunities to form social networks with other Black students, these are embraced: *"We usually just got together immediately, had a coffee together, talked together, discussed the module, you know, and exchanged news and views* [...]*"* (*Maureen*). These kinds of groups tend to be less academically-situated. However, Carroll (1982) notes that social networks can compensate for the absence of wider companionship although they may limit access to the 'hidden curriculum' (Sambell & McDowell, 1998), which is described as an 'underground' body of knowledge that helps some students to alleviate their anxieties about academic study. For Marcia, this limitation extended to seeing university only as a place to attend, do what is absolutely necessary then leave as quickly as possible. She expressed less desire to remain in the environment after a

requirement to attend formal teaching sessions. She also believed that a sense of 'unbelonging' was shared by academic staff, contributing to a poorer experience for all:

> *Those lecturers, they too just wanna get in, get their wages and go their way because I think, I think they, the lecturers is doing a lot more because the lecturers, I think, now at that university they have to do their own admin bit for the students and all of that and it's quite a bit of work. (Marcia)*

In Marcia's opinion, the university as a whole is disorganised. Her sense of 'unbelonging' is compounded by what she perceives as poor practice and administrative failures:

> *Just see it as I'm going there to do this thing and get out because there's so many teething problems there. There's [...] you know, everything is all over the place. If you go and ask a simple question, you get thrown to about four different people who then send you back to the beginning and that in itself is stress, so belonging? Hah! Fitting in there? Hah! [laughs] (Marcia)*

For Yolanda, maintaining an invisible self was concomitant with a sense of 'unbelonging'. She previously stated that being part of a university with a large BME student population meant her ethnicity was not considered an issue. However, she later expressed feelings of invisibility when in the company of another Black student with a lighter skin tone, alleging that the staff practiced a form of 'colourism' (Bodenhorn & Ruebeck, 2007), which is when people with particular skin tones [usually lighter] are treated preferentially:

> *[...] the lecturer will always say hello to one of us in the group. It's not me and I won't say who it is either but when that person is not with us then myself and this, my other friend will be ignored so obviously [...] they notice this other person and will say hello and call them by name and ignore myself and my other friend, so that to me shows that [...] you're not visible, you know. You're an invisible student. (Yolanda)*

Furthermore, Yolanda perceived a shift in staff attitudes towards her after making a complaint about another member of staff to the head of the psychology department for what she considered an unprofessional response to her concerns. The staff member had since apologised, but she perceived a difference in the way she was now being treated. The staff member avoided making contact with her and she felt both invisible and hyper-visible.

In sum, these experiences infer the possibility of a particularised construction of a sense of belonging in nontraditional Black female students. Research suggests that feeling a part of one's environment builds meaningful and supportive relationships that must, at times, be

developed through deliberate interaction (Meeuwisse et al., 2010b). These participants appeared to be working hard to negotiate the perceived social and spatial limitations of their environments illustrated by their attempts to socialise with staff and students during induction or by forming small networks. In Maureen's case, simply stopping to reflect could be constructed as a kind of determined negotiation to manage her perceptions.

7.13 Cluster 9: Aspirations

The participants entered university with aspirations that they hoped to realise on completion of their degree, some of which are reflected in Figure 7.13. These aspirations included the degree classification they hoped to achieve, a desire to embark on further study after graduation and/or the opportunity to pursue a particular career route. Participants unanimously aspired towards the award of a 'good' degree (namely, a first- or upper second-class classification) as the gateway to a more positive future. However, research indicates that, with continued academic experience, some BME students refine and possibly lower their aspirations, particularly those studying STEMM subjects (Strayhorn, Harper, & Newman, 2010).

For some participants, a psychology degree was viewed only as a 'means to an end', such as to gain employment. To an extent, this view seemed to reflect the student's age on completion of their degree, as older participants might have perceived that they had less 'available' time to embark on and complete postgraduate study. For others, family responsibilities created demands that restricted their options. They seemed to lack the guidance that could shape their post-university aspirations. Apart from enrolling on a work experience module [where this was offered as part of their degree course], there was little indication that they were specifically seeking or being given appropriate advice. From the history of their interactions with staff, it was apparent that they struggled to feel comfortable with seeking such advice. Their narratives seemed to suggest that the quality of graduate advice varied by institution.
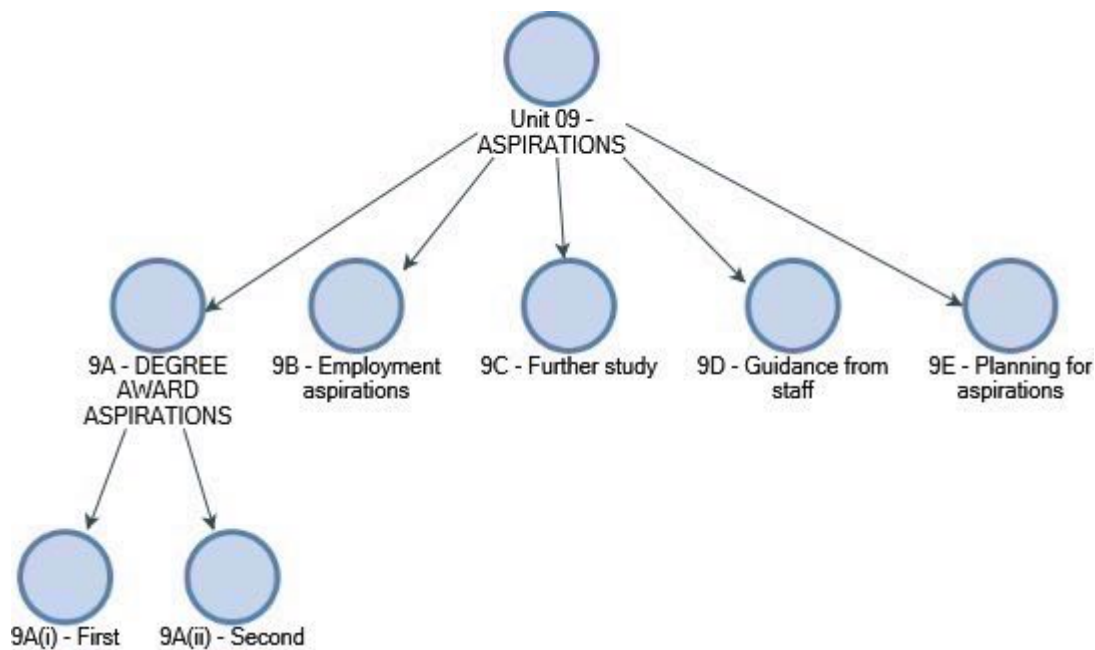
Figure 7.13: Thematic cluster - Student aspirations

HEFCE (2013) data reveal that Black students (61% compared to 41% for White students) are more likely to want to pursue postgraduate study than their White counterparts. However, high aspirations do not necessarily translate into better outcomes for students from WP backgrounds (Harrison, Waller, & Last, 2015). Given the challenges for BME students who are entering the job market (Connor et al., 2004), this is not a surprising finding. On a positive note, some participants' experiences in higher education did not discourage them from wanting to take up opportunities for further study. On the contrary, Marcia's negative experiences led her to decide that her association with psychology must end on graduation. She expressed a desire to be free from taking work home of any kind as well as a desire to mentally disconnect from thinking about her children: *"I want a job when I reach home, that's it. Put it down and that's it. I wanna relax. I don't wanna think about no children, no nothing, no, no schoolwork, no nothing."*

Marcia now aspired to become a midwife as she believed that midwifery would enable her to work anywhere in the world. Her view suggested that she had received little guidance in planning her post-graduation aspiration since midwifery requires further study. Nevertheless, the study of psychology seemed to have left an impression on her, informing the desire to pursue a career in an area that retains a connection with STEMM subjects (Pawson, 2012) by way of the study of medicine - in as far as this is applicable to midwifery.

In contrast, Rebecca had a clearly-mapped route to realise her aspirations which involved further study and a desire to remain in the field of psychology:

> *I either wanna get into clinical psychology, which is why I'm kind of doing the brain injury charity volunteering at the moment and I plan to next year start up a voluntary position with [hospital name] hopefully if all goes well and yeah, hopefully that can set me along a good path to getting erm a PhD position with the NHS* [...] *If that fails cos I do understand it is really competitive then I can hopefully go on to do a Masters with, Masters in counselling psychology and then go down that route cos it's something that really interests me. (Rebecca)*

Rebecca's age (24 years) might have been a factor for her more determined outlook. In addition, she appeared to have benefited from guidance: *"We've been given quite a bit of information on the different, the different routes to take within psychology so I think that's all been covered."*

Maureen's construction of an 'othermother' reappeared as she expressed a desire to help Black African females succeed. However, she was less definitive about how this might contribute to helping her to achieve her aspirations. She stated that she wanted to do a PhD. She also wanted a job with the caveat that she is told what to do. A PhD was constructed by Maureen almost as a 'badge of honour', but it is unclear whether she understood what a PhD entails:

> *I would really like to do a PhD for the one reason that everyone does it to have the doctor title* [laughs]. *No, because I think maybe by then I would have reached a level of being able to do research. I've got an aim and that's to, to do my PhD but also to be able to get a job. Full-time job that will enable me to travel. I enjoy travelling, so I would love to get a job and know how to do that job properly. Not to look at it and say, oh I can't do this, you know but to be able to say, yeah, I can do that. If somebody tells me what needs to be done. (Maureen)*

On the other hand, Yolanda's experience of undergraduate study has convinced her that her aspirations must be fulfilled over a shorter timeframe with the prospect of fewer years of employability if she is to realise her ambitions: *"I'm looking to complete my degree and then go into child development possibly erm doing shorter courses rather than do another two full years."*

7.14 Cluster 11: Research[er] Perceptions

Participants' views were sought about the current research to understand their expectations for involvement and, possibly, outcomes. Overall, they viewed engagement in the research as a form of 'giving back' in an altruistic sense; namely, if their participation could help Black female students to have an improved university experience, they wanted to contribute to that. Some participants were unaware of the existence of any kind of research into the experiences of people from minoritised ethnicities and higher education because of their exposure to the usual kind of psychology research that is promoted in their institutions (for example cognitive, forensic, health and developmental psychology). To capture views on a more complete account of the experience of undergraduate study, final year students were given the opportunity to reflect upon and provide a summary of their experience over the full duration of the degree programme.

With possible claims of 'bias' from the research community, Serrant-Green (2002) refers to the Black researcher carrying out research with participants of a similar ethnicity as the 'insider' and that it is important to explore this within the research context. She notes that researchers of a White ethnicity are seldom expected to justify their ethnic position. As such, participants' views were explicitly sought about the researcher's identity as a Black woman. Their views were expressed using sentiments that ranged from positive to negative, illustrated in Figure 7.14.
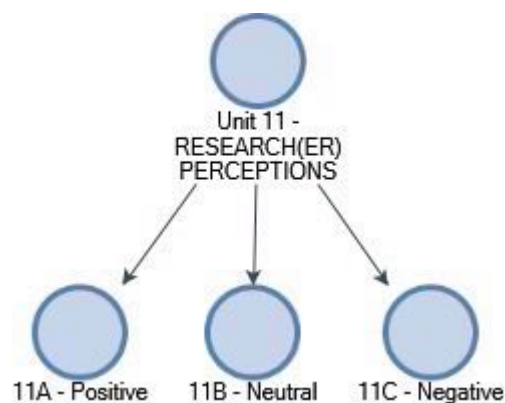
Figure 7.14: Thematic cluster - Perceptions of the research(er)

A summary of participants' views indicated a positive response to research being carried out into BME student experiences. Marcia argued that there might be a greater benefit for ethnicity research that is carried out in universities with larger numbers of White students.

Her view was that the experiences of isolated Black female students can be highlighted in these institutions. She was excited to hear that the researcher's university was interested in learning more about BME student experiences:

> *What I was surprised about is the topic in this area [laughs] and in this university and what I mean by that is this being in [location], being in this university, there might have been maybe challenges, you know, Black, you know that term 'Black' depending on how many White lecturers are here and […] you know, so I, I found it strange about the topic in this university. That's all, so for them to even allow it in this university I think is, is quite cool. (Marcia)*

Marcia's view was that the topic of Black female students' experiences was so contentious that a university would need to give explicit permission for this kind of research to be carried out. Therefore, it was unsurprising that participants' views about the researcher's ethnicity [a mature Black woman] were mainly positive. They indicated that her interest in this area and intersecting social characteristics encouraged more candid responding and made the experience of being interviewed seem more credible:

> *I think it has to be another Black woman. It couldn't be anybody else. So, I think that it's good that you're doing it and that you're not 24 or 25, either [laughs], you know, because that, that would change the whole, the thing completely. (Maureen)*

Yolanda welcomed the opportunity to participate in an interview that focused on her experiences and, at the same time, was reflective about confronting emotions that might be stirred up by the process:

> *I mean I've spoken about things that I wouldn't normally have spoken about today […] I hadn't sat down and think, ooh, I'm going to say this and that, so it's come out from deep within so I think it's, it really does help the female, Black females to put their life into perspective and make decisions or, not correct things but make decisions and even continue or make changes so I think this research is very important. (Yolanda)*

Not only did Yolanda consider the research to be necessary in itself, she also articulated the value of being given an opportunity to reflect on her experiences from "deep within". Rebecca highly rated research that sought to shed light on the experiences of BME students and their views about studying psychology. She took an optimistic view of the findings as a contribution to highlighting the progression of Black students while dismantling some of the issues around attainment and a sense of belonging:

[…] I think to look into the minorities and to see maybe how we kind of carry out our practices and how we view the subject as a whole could maybe help and to kind of open up an outlook as to maybe if we are performing as well as our counterparts then what else is going wrong why we're not being integrated into these groups and we're not being, well we're not rising as highly as our counterparts are. (Rebecca)

7.15 Discussion

A QCA analysis revealed that nontraditional Black female students view their academic experience through a dual lens of maturity and ethnicity. Otherwise represented as a 'hyphen', this lens connects and disconnects multiple identities that are informed by complex cultural, personal and social factors. Their 'hyphenated' identities appear to moderate perceptions of a reductionist and disconnected experience that seemed to be a consequence of studying in a younger environment that was staffed by, mainly, White academics. Managing competing selves [mother, wife, employee] seemed, at times, to take priority over investment in learning, influencing participants' academic aspirations and outcomes.

With the strong possibility of a fragmented identity, these participants placed an emphasis on protecting their multiple selves over the duration of their degree programme. This was realised as a solitary or 'unbelonging' identity that resisted engagement with other students for fear of rejection or from seeking support from staff for fear of ridicule. By contrast, the experience of a belonging identity accompanied a sense of self-efficacy, but only when the student was immersed in her environment. For most participants, a sense of belonging was a fleeting experience. According to both Settles (2006) and Collins (2000), managing interference from conflicted selves is a psychologically taxing experience and leads to a hierarchy of constraints; that is, students must make decisions about what identity/self should be presented in their environment based on their views about what is necessary for self-preservation.

Students' narratives revealed thematic clusters that are subsumed within the construction of identity. Identity construction (Cluster 1) revealed the existence of multiple identities. Each identity is closely aligned with the construction of maturity (Cluster 3). An efficacious identity sought practical solutions to combat issues for time-management that were a consequence of working, studying and, for two of the participants, being a caregiver. A spiritual identity was cautiously presented based on assumed tensions for an outward expression of religious beliefs in their academic environment, yet spirituality also acted as a buffer for the perceived demands of academic study.

Some participants took on a role modelling identity with a strong preference for supporting students of the same ethnicity based on an underlying desire to re-create experiences of cultural affinity. However, a solitary identity surfaced in several clusters and was particularly pronounced in Cluster 8, where a sense of 'unbelonging' caused these students to become detached from staff, students and their environment. Again, this self was reinforced by interactions that were shaped by negative perceptions arising from being a Black mature student.

Cultural, personal and social capital (Cluster 2) was more pronounced during intimate interactions (that is, with family and friends) than with other students. Where characteristics such as ethnicity and social class are bound within capital, a student may downplay their cultural background to fit in [commented upon by Ogbu (2004) and Jackson (2017) as a form of racial 'passing']; but the response of students in this sample was to enact an invisible self. Difficulty of fitting in was apparent in participants' perceptions about teaching practices such as group work. In these settings, Black students experience less autonomy unless they can activate a form of influence (Ireland et al., 2018). Feeling invisible is part of the narrative for older Black females returning to or entering higher education (Etienne, 2016).

Most participants identified as working-class. Social class is part of cultural capital (Webb et al., 2002), but less attention was given to its construction by these students. Instead, their focus was on using higher education as a means of self-improvement. Participants were already separated from the wider student body by immutable characteristics of ethnicity and maturity. To be further constrained by the subtleties of social class would only add yet another layer to an already challenging experience for these students.

Maturity also shaped participants' perceptions of interactions with staff and students (Cluster 6). In these instances, perceptions were value-laden, which suggests that there is an emotional investment in learning. Participants' narratives conveyed a desire to feel respected in their environments. Forming social relationships with students was viewed as less important than keeping up with their studies, suggesting that holding to particular standpoints may prevent these students from accessing some of the wider benefits to be had from interaction such as networking, belonging to a study group or experiencing sociality beyond core university activities.

Participants were locked into a life-world where they constructed their challenges as unique to their experience. However, research shows that experiences of 'unbelonging' are as much an issue for poorly-supported White students (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007), male students (Goodenow, 1992), first-year students (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, &

Salomone, 2002) and international students (Slaten, Elison, Lee, Yough, & Scales, 2016), suggesting the possibility of shared characteristics and experiences among these student types. An intersection of maturity and ethnicity in these participants reflected particular challenges for a more 'typical' university experience, formed as a protective reaction to an identity that is experienced as under threat and fragmented.

Possibly, BME role models could help to re-situate negative assertions that nontraditional students may hold about entering university with 'alternative' qualifications (Cluster 4). Participants' narratives suggest that there is a requirement for staff to be more sensitive and empathetic to their needs, while this might place a burden on BME staff to be the exemplary role model (Maylor, 2009a) for these students. According to these participants, staff need to be more approachable and genuine in their offers of assistance if nontraditional students are to engage more meaningfully with the experience of higher education.

There is little existing research that has focused on the experiences of nontraditional Black female undergraduate psychology students in UK higher education. Thus, there is little research with which to compare these findings. What is known about student experiences in this area focuses either on the experiences of nontraditional, female or Black students as homogeneous groups. As such, this study sheds new light on the construction of multiple identities for this student type. A fuller discussion for the implications of these findings can be found at Chapter 11.

I identified with these Black female <u>nontraditional</u> students in ways that I might not fully understand the experiences of Black female traditional students. Like the participants in this study, my experience as a nontraditional Black female student was defined by my ethnicity, age, previous academic history and social class. There were no role models in my institution of a similar ethnicity, gender and age to help me make sense of my nontraditional identity, although I benefited somewhat from a White female lecturer who showed me how to access the 'hidden curriculum' (Margolis, 2008). I later learnt from this lecturer that her White working-class background bore some similarities to mine – except that her Whiteness prevented her from sharing some of the more critical experiences that scarred my identity and prospects. Increasingly, I was becoming enveloped in a form of 'otherness' that defined me. Did these experiences and perceptions improve my ability to relate to perceptions of 'othering' expressed by the students in this sample? I believe they did. By contrast, did they cause me to overly focus on their struggles to the exclusion of their successes? This may have happened, too. Despite several readings of their transcribed accounts, I was finding little cause for celebration. I question whether I may have missed nuanced stories that could more positively frame the experience of studying in UK higher education as a mature Black woman. Perhaps worse, was I now guilty of pandering to the colour-blind narrative of the institution where I, too, might be considered part of the problem while attempting to be part of the solution? Had I unwittingly let White academy 'off the hook' in this thesis by placing the burden for achievement solely on the student despite my grand narrative that recounted the insult of cultural deficits? Alternatively, what if I bravely used this research to call out 'the problem' instead of attempting to 'fall in step' and recite 'comfortable' truths? What were the risks to my sense of identity [and future] as a member of the academy? I have realised that there is a dangerous 'veneering' in academia that can obscure 'truth' in the interest of survival and progression. To that end, I have tried to remain bravely detached, insanely-objective. But I continue to be haunted by the pathos in our stories.

7.15.1 Assumptions for A Sense of Belonging

A cluster analysis was performed on the themes using NVivo. The result led to an assumption for the effect of a sense of belonging in these participants (Figure 7.15a). Clustered themes for a sense of belonging (Unit 8) and research(er) perceptions (Unit 11) shared an association. However, further visualisation in NVivo (Figure 7.15b) revealed that while sources (that is, the participants' narratives) showed connections to both clusters (referred to as nodes in Figure 7.15a), a sense of belonging was weakly associated with these clusters. The word tree illustrated that the word 'belonging' was weakly illustrated across all narratives. The search included correlates such as 'fitting in'.
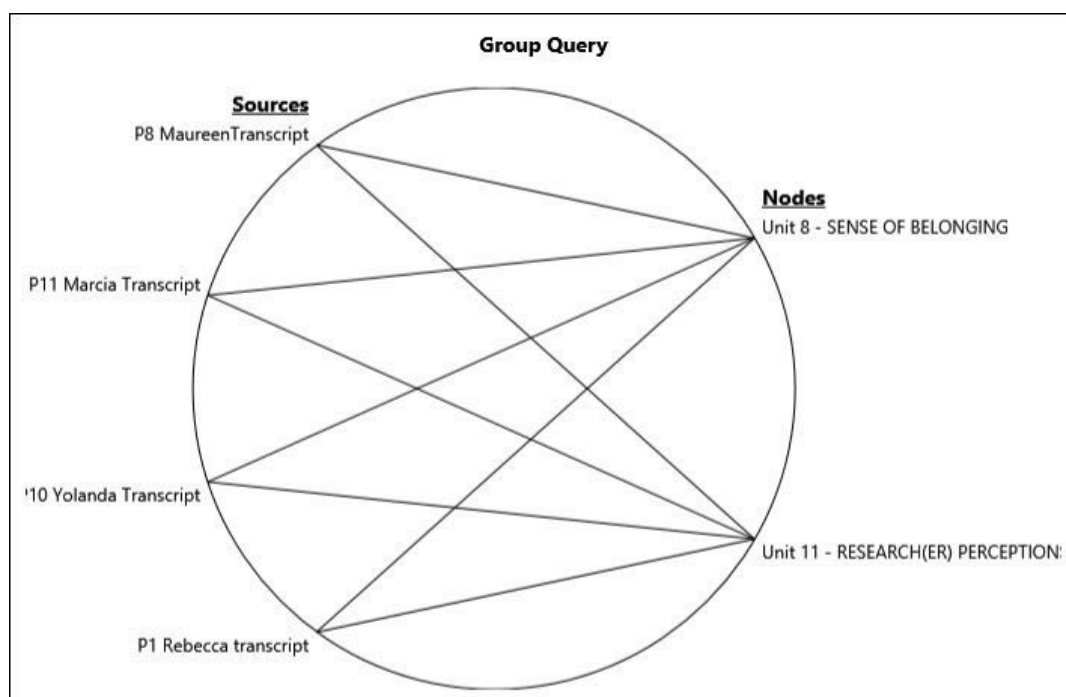
Figure 7.15a: NVivo group query for clusters 8 and 11
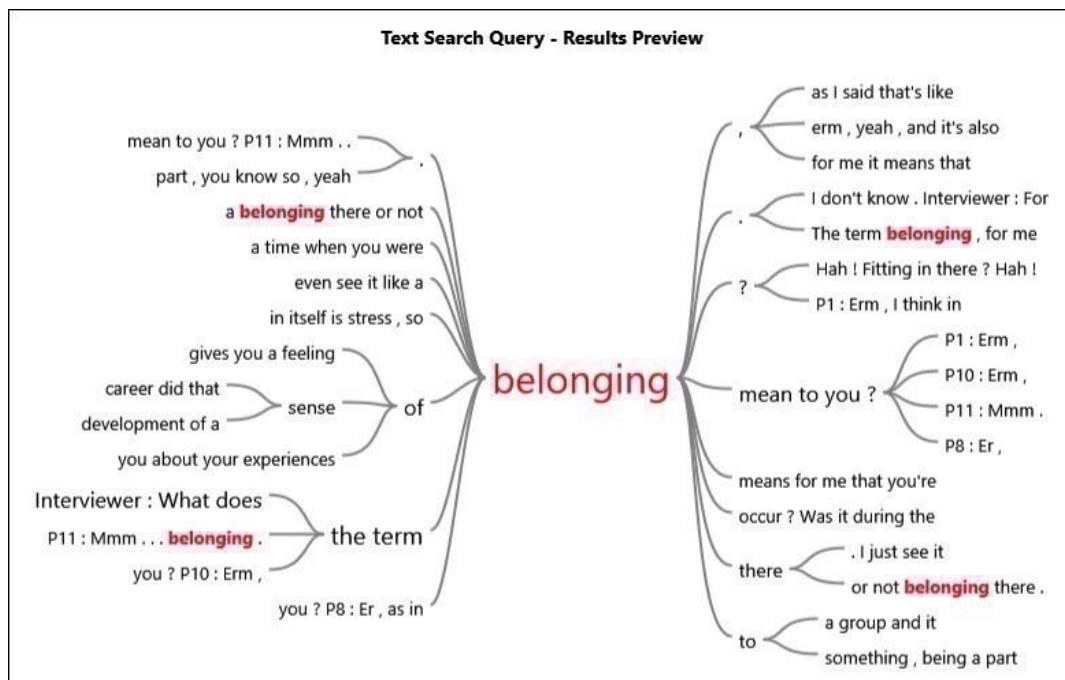
Figure 7.15b: NVivo text search query - Word tree for 'belonging'

A possible explanation for this finding is that positive views about this type of research and the researcher's ethnicity created an assumption for a sense of belonging, which may be the result of an over-emphasis on the concept of belonging during analysis. Where this assumption is difficult to substantiate otherwise, an earlier assumption of a relationship between these clusters may be of less consequence. An empirical measure such as a questionnaire for a sense of belonging was not administered due to small participant numbers.

It is also possible that the participants were more motivated than usual to participate in this type of research. As such, their motivation may have contributed to increased feelings of belonging that were only noticeable during this stage of the interview. Indeed, their positive comments (Cluster 11) offer support for this view. What remains unanswered, however, are the reasons behind this motivation. There is less of an empirical understanding of belonging in this student group pointing to the benefit of administering a survey to nontraditional Black female students to obtain a more representative understanding of belonging in this student type.

The main contributors to experience for these students are their perceptions of maturity and ethnicity, which appear to affect the development of a sense of belonging to their academic environment. Belonging is a long process in development, seemingly becoming more evident during the final year of an undergraduate degree, as long as the student continues their studies up to this point. Recognising this duration, support could be geared

towards sensitively and consistently addressing students' needs during the early years of undergraduate study using appropriately targeted academic and pastoral support, while recognising that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach might be less helpful. The students' narratives indicated a desire to be treated more individually across all teaching situations.

Universities cater to students who are entering higher education with a pre-loaded assumption about what it means to be an independent learner (HEPI, 2017). This assumption may be more of an issue for marginalised students who have restricted access to the 'hidden curriculum' (Margolis, 2001). A small sample size suggests that identity construction may be different for nontraditional Black female students at other London-based universities. Notwithstanding this, understanding the experience of a conflation of ethnicity and status (such as being a student-parent) with maturity could inform teaching practices and support services for these students.

7.15.2 Limitations and Strengths

The sample size in the present study is small ($N = 4$) and it is accepted that the findings cannot be generalised to the experiences of other nontraditional Black female students. However, the data obtained from these semi-structured interviews was rich and offered deep insight into experiences of invisibility and hyper-visibility for this group of students. The inclusion of experiences from more than one institution ($N = 3$) offers some credibility for accounts that are similar, pointing to systemic issues for these students in UK HEIs. Furthermore, a smaller participant base meant that each student's story could be more completely attended to and represented within the themes. Past work with small groups of Black female students (e.g. Porter & Dean, 2015) has yielded useful insights. The present study, with interviews more than double the duration of Porter and Dean's has yielded rich and extensive data enabling an in-depth exploration.

7.15.3 Conclusions

The findings from the present research accord with those of Porter and Dean (2015), who explored identity development in four Black women as minoritised undergraduate students on a US university campus. In fact, the similarities are striking. Porter and Dean's participants articulated a desire for support systems in their university environment and reflected on a role modelling potential, a strong sense of spirituality, being a first-generation student (that is, the first person in the family to attend university), persistence and resilience, and a deep respect and pride for their cultural and ethnic identity. The extent to which these stories of identity

development resonated with participant stories in the current study suggested that the geographical divide between the experiences of US and UK Black female students almost ceases to exist, with the exception that the US students were recruited from a support group that met weekly to discuss these kinds of issues.

To conclude, this phase marked the beginning of a phenomenological exploration into the experiences of Black female students in UK higher education. A QCA analysis of the dataset provided a conceptual basis upon which to build that exploration. The construction of clustered themes from participants' stories sheds light on their experiences. It is clear that the formation of multiple identities as a response to perceptions of a structurally racist or ageist environment (Collins, 2000; Deaux, 2000) is a psychologically taxing experience for these students, and that this should be recognised by HEIs. Indeed, there is a call for institutional spaces to be created that specifically support students with intersectional identities (Porter & Dean, 2015). At the same time, students' stories have been articulated in ways that resonate with hooks'[16] (1990, p. 342) definition of experiences of marginality as both a "place of resistance" and a position of strength. For a more complete picture of university experiences in Black female students, it was considered useful to explore identity construction in other student types. Indeed, future research should aim to widen the brief of the current study. To that end, an analysis of the experiences of *traditional* Black female students follows.

---

[16] bell hooks [real name Gloria Jean Watkins] deliberately chooses to not capitalise her pseudonym as a tribute to her grandmother (Bell Hooks) and to deflect attention from herself to her writing (hooks, 2015).

Chapter 8

Phase 2: Exploring Traditional Black Female Students' Experiences

This chapter explores the experiences of a sample of traditional Black female undergraduate psychology students. It provides a useful contrast to the accounts of nontraditional students in the previous chapter. Thus, a more holistic understanding of the construction of identity in Black female students is provided. Students' narratives in the current study revealed that, although there are some similarities with the experiences of their nontraditional counterparts such as the construction of multiple identities, those identities are being constructed differently. This difference is broadly depicted in Figure 8, below. They also showed little to no regard for the effect of age. Without the bind of a construction of maturity, these participants seemed less fettered in their experiences.

An interpretative phenomenological analysis led to the construction of four master themes. The themes indicated that these traditional Black female students are adopting a 'shifting selves' identity (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994); namely, an identity that continuously changes in response to their interactions as well as their perceptions of the benefits or challenges in their university environment. As shifting selves, there was further uncovering of the construction of multiple identities and meaning-making in these students (see Appendix K). Findings are supported by selected excerpts from participants' narratives. Implications of the findings are discussed.
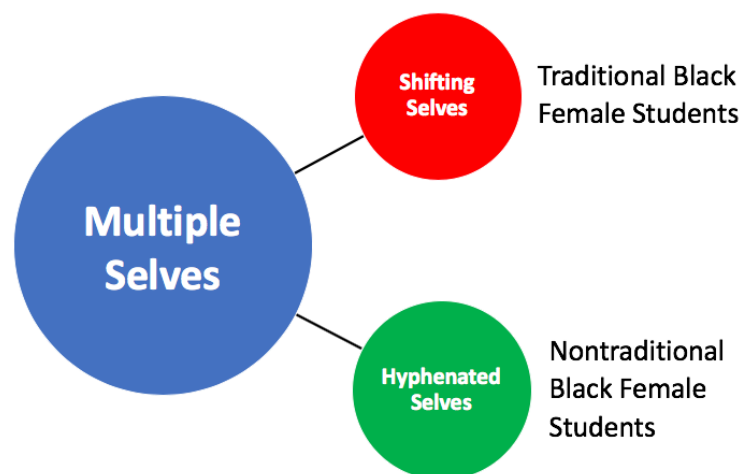
Figure 8: A multiple identity framework for Black female students by student type

8.1 Rationale

There is little research that has focused specifically on the experiences of *traditional undergraduate* Black female students as a specific population, although Henry (2008) found that concerns in this student population are not dissimilar to those expressed by White students. However, their experiences can be complicated by ethnicity. Henry highlights the importance of providing culturally-sensitive support for these students since their issues are constructed and experienced in ways that may be less evident to [White] academic staff. Henry also pointed to the challenges these students face when dealing with micro-aggressive behaviours such as hostile or negative messages (Doharty, 2018), which can increase feelings of 'unbelonging'.

   Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996) pointed to a shortage of studies which focus on identity development in Black women. Their study suggests that [feeling comfortable with] ethnicity is perhaps the most important aspect of Black female students' identity, followed by having a religious belief. Interpreted as 'strength', resilience was also noted as a characteristic in their sample, whereby students stated that they were either resilient or working towards this. Another US study by Thomas, Hacker, and Hoxha (2011) adds that both gender and ethnicity are important for understanding identity development in young Black women. However, there is little research in the UK that has focused specifically on experiences of identity construction in traditional Black female undergraduate psychology students.

8.2 Traditional Student Characteristics

It is known that traditional students form the bulk of students at UK universities (HEFCE, 2014). Female students make up the majority of this population (51%; Universities UK, 2013). These students typically begin an undergraduate degree before the age of 22, in contrast to their mature counterparts (UCAS, 2016). Other characteristics include attending university soon after completing sixth form at secondary school or college, as well as being single and financially dependent (Center for Institutional Effectiveness, 2004). Traditional female students also have stronger expectations for successful completion of a degree within the usual allotment of three years and perform better than their male counterparts (National Audit Office, 2007).

8.3 Ethnicity Differences

Despite positive expectations by students, a known disproportionality for academic outcomes termed the 'attainment gap' exists for students of particular ethnicities (HEFCE, 2015). ECU data reveal that more White female undergraduates (80.3%) achieved a first or upper-second degree classification than Black female undergraduates (66.9%; ECU, 2015a). The dataset also demonstrated that White students have better employability rates post-graduation than their Black counterparts (61.5% compared to 53.9%). Thus, some BME traditional students appear to face challenges-in-common with nontraditional BME students (see Chapter 7, 7.2). However, little is known about the experiences of students from the perspective of a stratification of their ethnicity. More research is required in this area.

8.4 Procedure

To achieve methodological consistency, a purposive sample was recruited for this study using the same procedure as outlined for Phase 1 (see Chapter 7, 7.4). Students participated in an individual semi-structured interview of between 120 to 300 minutes, with an average duration of 180 minutes. For the seven participants, this represented more than 21 hours of data.

8.4.1 Ethical Considerations

This study was carried out according to the British Psychological Society's (2009) principles of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity, which emphasise the integrity of research with human subjects and consideration for participant wellbeing. Participants completed a consent form to give their permission to take part in an interview and be audio-recorded. They were briefed and debriefed about the study aims and were informed of their right to refrain from answering any question as well as their right to ask for their data to be removed and/or to withdraw from the interview at any time. They were informed about the safe and confidential storage of their data and that the researcher would take responsibility for anonymising any details mentioned in the transcript or a future publication that had the potential to reveal their identity. Furthermore, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about any aspect of the research process or its rationale. The researcher did not offer advice on any issues raised during the interview. Instead, participants were reminded about the counselling services at their university.

8.5 Participants

Seven traditional Black female students participated in this study. Students were aged between 19 and 21 years at the time of the interview (see Tables 8.5a and 8.5b for participant

demographics). They were drawn from a sample of currently-enrolled undergraduate psychology students at one of three London universities. For confidentiality purposes, participants were each given a pseudonym (see Table 8.5a).

One student (Abigail) was the parent of a three-year-old child (see Table 8.5b). Described as a "deviant case" in sampling terms (Carcary, 2009, p. 14) or negative case analysis (Mena, 2016), this participant was of particular interest. Unlike her peers, her narrative revealed that she was constructing her identity using a lens of young motherhood. Her construction did not necessarily fit the characteristics expected of a traditional student. However, Vaus (2008) asserts that it is, at times, better to see what can be drawn from such heterogeneity than to reject it. A student-parent identity added to the multiple constructions of identity revealed in this sample.

Perhaps as a consequence of being the mother of a young male child and having two younger brothers, Abigail was the only participant who made comparisons with the experiences of Black male students. She had noticed that interventions were being offered to Black male students since primary school because of concerns for their educational outcomes. This focus meant that the needs of Black female students were being ignored. She attributed this lack of attention to the beginning of a downward spiral for Black girls in their motivation to succeed. Her views were perpetuated by what she saw as stereotypical behaviours in Black women that seemed to lower their prospects of being academically successful. She felt more should be done in primary and secondary school environments to re-define Black girls' aspirations and that successful role models were key. None of the other participants made comparative judgements about differences in learning experiences between Black boys and Black girls. However, I wondered whether there was tacit knowledge among them on this issue that might have affected their perceptions of being academically successful in other environments. Although not addressed in the current research, I noted Abigail's concern as a potential area for future research.

Table 8.5a

Participant Characteristics Traditional Students

Participant	Ethnicity	Age	Previous educational qualifications	Current university first choice	Attended Induction	Extra-curricular activities (hours per week)	Non-university activities (hours per week)
Sabrina	Black Mixed/Other	19	A-Levels	No	Yes	1-5	1-5
Samantha	Black African	19	A-Levels, BTEC	Yes	Yes	6-10	1-5
Kimberley	Black British	21	A-Levels	No	No	None	None
Jennifer	Black British	21	A-Levels	Yes	Yes	None	None
Tobi	Black African	21	A-Levels	No	Yes	None	11-15
Abigail	Black British	19	A-Levels	No	Yes	None	6-10
Hannah	Black African	21	A-Levels	No	No	None	None

Table 8.5b

Participant Characteristics Traditional Students (continued)

Participant	Employment (hours per week)	Accommodation	Social class*	Student-parent	Religion	University-educated parent(s)	University-educated siblings
Sabrina	None	Living with a family member	AB	No	Not stated	No	Yes
Samantha	None	Privately rented	C1	No	Christian	Yes	Yes
Kimberley	11-15	Parental home	AB	No	Christian	Mother	No
Jennifer	None	Parental home	AB	No	Not stated	No	Yes
Tobi	6-10	Parental home	AB	No	Christian	Mother	N/A
Abigail	None	Parental home	C1	Yes	Not stated	No	No
Hannah	None	Privately rented	C2	No	Christian	No	Yes

*Social class indicators based on parental occupation:

Grade AB - higher and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional occupations

Grade C1 - supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional

Grade C2 - skilled manual occupations

8.6 Analysis

IPA is an analytic method which is frequently used to explore identity (Smith et al., 2009). It was chosen to explore the construction of identity in this student sample. Smith et al. (2009) set out a six-step process for IPA. Analysis began with thoroughly reading and re-reading data that were obtained from in-depth interviews to achieve familiarisation. This is described as taking a "descriptive and empathic" stance to interpretation (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 189). Reading was aided by listening to the audio recording of each interview. A subjective understanding and reflexive approach (Willig, 2001) was applied by 'bracketing' assumptions (Smith et al., 2009) such as noting personal reflections in a journal after each interview.

Initially, exploratory analysis took the form of notes and observations that were annotated on the transcripts on a case-by-case basis. Questions were raised during this process to access and interpret material in a conceptual sense. This activity, which should not be rushed, served as the necessary groundwork for an in-depth interpretation. There are three modes of analysis that are applied at this stage; namely, descriptive [focus on content], linguistic [use of language] and conceptual (Smith et al., 2009). Engaging at a conceptual level by interrogating data and relating it to one's experiences and knowledge can facilitate more intuitive interpreting. On the surface, there was constant to-ing and fro-ing within each piece of data with a growing emphasis on interpretation.

The second stage is the development of emergent themes. Smith et al. (2009, p. 91) describe this as an "analytic shift" where the researcher focuses on making sense of the notes they have written on the transcript rather than on the transcription itself. As a precursor to abstraction [where decisions are made about comments that seem meaningful], the larger-scale commentary was reduced to summary headlines or themes. Each theme was explicitly-worded to capture the main idea emerging from related commentaries.

To bring order to themes, connecting ideas were categorised using abstraction to look for similarity/dissimilarity. Abstraction involves an assessment of whether the substance of a theme is also contained within another theme. For example, participants' comments about the challenges/benefits of their university environment could be considered part of the construction of an academic identity. Thus, this theme was not selected as a master theme. Selected themes included content that was considered more meaningful for understanding constructions of identity in these participants. Themes were grouped in an intuitive fashion with related ideas that, cumulatively, suggested a grouping title; that is, the development of a super-ordinate theme (Smith et al., 2009) under which the themes comfortably sat. The

themes were then grouped based on what the researcher chose to pay attention to, such as recurrences, contradictions, life events, language [including repetition, emphasis, metaphors], sentiments or a combination of these factors.

Smith and Osborn (2013) suggest that this process can be diagrammatically represented to aid the reader in understanding the researcher's thoughts in a hermeneutic sense. A summary table was devised to capture this iterative process which included a super-ordinate theme, sub-ordinate themes, a supporting extract [an 'in vivo' quote] and the line/page number for where the extract could be found on the transcript (see Appendix L for example). Super-ordinate themes were then categorised to form higher-order clusters [master themes], pulling together [or setting apart] experiences across the dataset. This was set out as an illustrated map for visualisation purposes (see Figure 8.7).

In keeping with an idiographic approach, the next step involved repeating the process for each transcript while attempting to bracket what had already been learnt from previous analyses. Smith et al. (2009) assert that there will inevitably be some contagion from previous interpretation as the researcher enters the life-world of each participant with new knowledge. Attention to reflexivity was helpful here since, by this stage, the researcher is becoming more "critical and questioning" of the data (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 189) and may recognise their own experiences (Shinebourne, 2010).

A pencil-and-paper method was used for analysis as opposed to NVivo, which was used in Phase 1. A paper template, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009), sees the researcher using hand-written notes to capture descriptive, linguistic and conceptual commentary on two margins positioned at either side of the transcribed text that is centred on the page. The decision to use a more tactile and interactive method was reinforced by an IPA requirement to achieve an in-depth understanding of lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). The process involved continuously returning to the text and making concurrent notes, thereby remaining closely connected to the participant's narrative and their interpretative notes without the intervening medium of a computer screen. Perhaps it is this 'to-and-fro' process when using a paper-and-pencil method, as opposed to more linear or computer-mediated engagement, that aids a deeper form of analysis in IPA.

Furthermore, a mind-mapping exercise were carried out on the dataset to better visualise the development of codes, subordinate themes and master themes (see Appendices M & N for examples). This activity was carried out over several days for each transcript in isolation, an important principle in IPA (Gee, 2011). Again, this was a manual activity using large sheets of paper and coloured post-it notes to provide a visual picture of experience that

was created for each participant before cross-case comparison. Different colours were used to denote descriptive, linguistic or conceptual codes so that patterns became more visible.

8.6.1 Credibility

Credibility in research studies indicates that there is a sense of accuracy about data interpretation (Shenton, 2004) and can include inviting others into the activity of interpretation (Flick, 2018). A three-fold process was used to achieve credibility; namely, IPA training, expert coding and member checking. Firstly, the researcher attended an IPA training workshop led by Professor Paul Flowers, one of the originators of IPA. Professor Flowers analysed an extract of Phase 2 interview data as part of a training exercise with other participants and found agreement with the themes being developed in this study. Dr Adele Dixon, another trainer who co-facilitated the workshop and has extensive experience of using IPA, carried out the same exercise. Dr Dixon also found agreement.

In addition, a qualitative researcher with experience of feminist research methods independently analysed a full transcript and found agreement. Finally, themes from this phase were subjected to member-checking where participants in Phases 3 and 4 commented as 'lay experts' on the validity of themes developed from this phase and Phase 1. Participants broadly agreed that the constructed themes provided a credible account of their experiences.

To present the findings, Smith et al. (2009) recommend that three extracts should be provided in support of each theme. There were occasions in the current study, however, where it was felt necessary to go beyond this recommendation to provide an inclusive and credible account of participants' views and experiences. Ultimately, the aim was to differentiate between homogeneous and heterogeneous experiences in this sample of participants.

8.7 Findings

The participants held a multi-focused and complex view of their experiences (Figure 8.7) which was influenced by their life history; personal, social and cultural capital; processes and perceptions of socialisation; and, their aspirations after graduation. The main finding was that the participants' experiences reflected the construction of multiple, shifting identities [or selves].

Seven themes were originally constructed from the data. Following abstraction, four master themes are presented as key findings in this study (see Table 8.7). Abstraction involved an assessment of whether the substance of a theme was also being narrated as part

of another theme. For example, students' comments about the challenges/benefits of their university environment were part of the construction of their academic identity as multiple selves. Thus, this theme was not selected as a master theme. Furthermore, selected themes include content that was considered more meaningful for understanding constructions of identity in these participants.

Table 8.7

Master Themes for Traditional Black Female Students

Master Themes	Sabrina	Samantha	Kimberley	Jennifer	Tobi	Abigail	Hannah
Constructing multiple identities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Importance of friendships inside and outside university	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cultivating personal, social and cultural capital	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Self-talk to my past, present and future selves	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
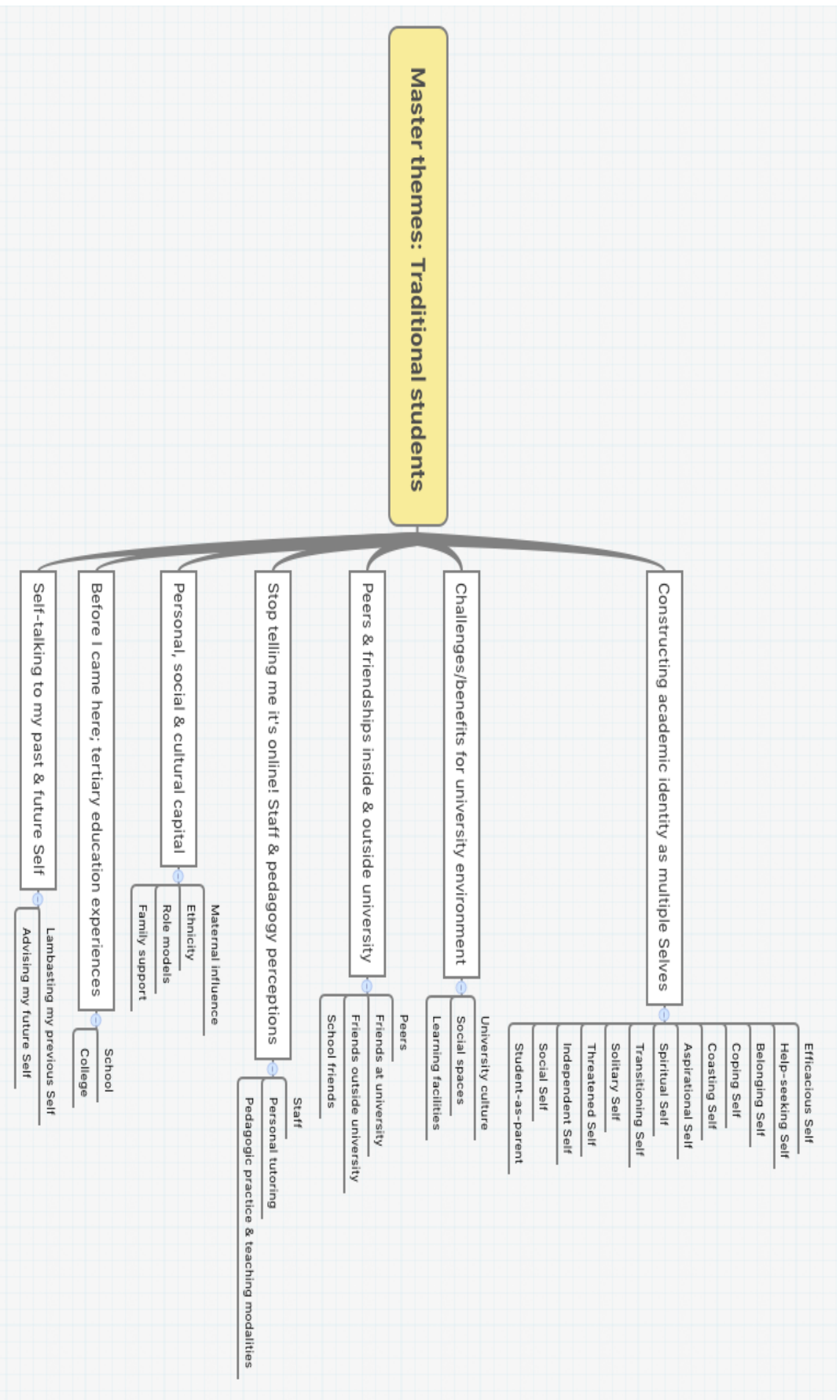
Figure 8.7: Phase 2 overview of traditional Black female students' experiences

8.8 Summary Finding: Multiple Identities

Traditional Black female students responded to perceptions of their academic experiences in various ways and this was interpreted as viewing their experiences through a lens of multiple, shifting identities. Table 8.8 sets out identities that were constructed from their stories and featured across all master themes. Some identities were more prominently experienced and expressed than others. The student-parent identity was an exception, as this was experienced by just one student. Nevertheless, this identity was included to obtain a fuller understanding of the experiences of these participants, recognising that a student-parent identity exists among current student diversity (Moreau & Kerner, 2015).

Table 8.8

Multiple Identities in Traditional Black Female Students

Multiple Identities	Sabrina	Samantha	Kimberley	Jennifer	Tobi	Abigail	Hannah
Efficacious	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Help-seeking	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Belonging	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Coping				✓		✓	
Coasting				✓		✓	✓
Aspirational	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spiritual		✓		✓	✓		
Transitioning		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Solitary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Threatened			✓	✓		✓	✓
Independent		✓			✓	✓	
(Un)social						✓	✓
Student-Parent						✓	

The most prominent identities in these students were (i) efficacious, (ii) help-seeking, (iii) belonging, (iv) aspirational and (v) transitioning. A solitary identity was also prominent. However, analysis revealed this identity to be a subset of belonging. 'Shifting' suggested an identity that was responding flexibly as a situation demanded or was perceived by the participant. This kind of multiple identity work appeared to help participants make better sense of their experiences. The first master theme to be discussed [constructing multiple identities] was based on deconstruction and interpretation of the salient identities above.

8.9 Master Theme: Constructing Multiple Identities

This section deconstructs participants' salient identities to more fully introduce them to the reader. To support this, extracts from the researcher's reflexive journal entries following the interviews are included as text box commentary.

8.9.1 An Efficacious Identity

Sabrina had specific views about efficacy and took personal responsibility for developing this construction of her identity. She expressed that, with hard work and determination, nothing was beyond her ability. Even when studying seemed daunting or boring, she persisted by setting a personalised standard for engagement: *"I will go home. I will research it. I will get the marks. You make it exciting for yourself."* Sabrina's use of short, sharply punctuated sentences distinguished her approach and commitment from the other participants. Each short phrase seemed to represent a completed action *en route* to self-efficacy. Of note, efficacy was achieved by Sabrina when she was away from the university environment suggesting that university was a place to acquire - but not reinforce - learning. By "making it exciting for yourself", she assumed control over the learning process and was prepared to put in place whatever was needed to remain engaged.

I thought this would be a difficult interview. It started badly. Sabrina answered my questions using short sentences, ending each with "...yeah"; then waiting, wide-eyed, for the next question. The interview started to feel formulaic. In part, this may have been a consequence of her mistaken early arrival (9am instead of 10am). An hour's wait seemed to lead to a frostier start. I adjusted the chairs in the room for us to sit opposite, but adjacent to each other. Sabrina immediately re-positioned her chair to directly face me, formalising the process. The interview eventually warmed up, especially when she described her construction of an efficacious identity. Even so, I noticed that she continued to use the third person ('you'). Was this a protective device? It certainly seemed to lead to more theorising than narrative in Sabrina's case. Furthermore, her responses were shrouded in descriptions of 'onlyness'. It was as though she was emotionally disconnecting from the 'experience' of talking about her experiences, which seemed strange since I had [vainly] imagined that the interviews would provide an opportunity for participants to explore and better connect with their university experience. A turning point came when she described her ethnicity (half-Mauritian/half-Trinidadian) almost as if this was the trump card that made her unique, shared with no other student that she had encountered. Unlike other students, <u>she</u> could draw on the best aspects of each ethnicity to shape her present self. This revelation changed the tone of the interview. Her assertions became more powerful. As a researcher with a single ethnicity (Jamaican), I wish I had intentionally explored this ethnicity intersection for its contribution to the construction of identity in a Black woman.

Jennifer, the only Russell Group student in this sample, expressed similar sentiments. She conveyed a strong sense of self-belief in her capacity to achieve a state of 'flow' when engaged with her studies. Flow is described by Abuhamdeh and Csikszentmihalyi (2012) as a unique balance between competence and task challenge. In Jennifer's experience, self-efficacy was achieved when she was immersed in her studies to the point where she could eliminate anything with the potential to be distracting: *"I'm really good at throwing myself into work [...] I'm really good at just getting to a point where nothing else matters [...] I'm able to just go for it."*

Jennifer's interview was possibly the most profound of the sample. I had not thought that this interview would affect me in such an emotive way. Even as she spoke [and thanks to her lengthy pauses], I subconsciously went on a personal journey that involved re-visiting the challenges of <u>my</u> upbringing, cultural background and education – all while staying 'in the moment' of the interview and dealing with failing recording devices. With a duration of more than four hours, this is likely to be the longest interview I will transcribe; yet, I felt as if I did not want it to end. I was annoyed at having to monitor the devices as I listened and took brief [emergency] notes. I was annoyed that I might miss something that was not only profound but so eloquently expressed that I could almost be consumed by its uniqueness. My pervading view of the 'perfect' Russell Group student had been overturned by Jennifer's story of entitlement, privilege, depression and self-destruction. A counter-narrative that revealed eventual acceptance of her present self was healing for us both. She cried what she termed 'happy tears' of gratefulness for a rich lived experience. I cried invisible tears for the rare opportunity to see her emerging self at the beginning of a renewed construction of her soul. At the end of the interview, she wisely cautioned that I should not generalise her experience to other Black female students and thanked me for giving her a 'voice'. I thanked her for allowing me to see contrasts and similarities to other participants playing out before me. I also listened to her 'contradictions' and affirmations – and both seemed to hold a correct place in her socially-constructed world. It was as if every facet of the human condition was being explored in a single interview. Such was the depth and construction of her thoughts that I realise I cannot process this interview properly using this cursory reflection. I have decided to discuss this interview in detail with my supervisor and request cross-validation of my analysis. I imagine re-listening to the recording and typing the transcript will cause me to re-live the experience of interviewing Jennifer. Even before doing these things, I've learnt that, in Jennifer's case, shedding herself of the vestiges of an imposed identity label that was carried over a number of years [the high-achieving Black female student] finally permitted fuller engagement with life rather than dwelling on the [surprisingly, negative] circumstances that can define that reality. I think a life lesson is here for us all.

By contrast, Abigail repeatedly recounted challenges for staying motivated. Her intersecting identity as a student-parent led to an experience of disturbed nights and limited time to engage with coursework. Consequently, she was convinced that she needed to adopt an even more focused approach in order to succeed. She was particularly sensitive to being judged by her peers for her identity of a student-parent, evidenced by statements throughout her narrative. On a positive note, however, these statements seemed to motivate Abigail towards a greater sense of agency. Coupled with strong family support, she was determined to prove to her peers, her family and herself that she could succeed despite the obstacles: *"It* [having a

child] *might make studying harder and stuff harder but I've got that motivation that means that failure's not an option anymore […] I just have to manage my time differently."*

Referring to a student-parent identity as "it" allowed Abigail to place distance between her situation as a young, single parent and a 'normative' student identity. To add further context, her use of "anymore" alluded to a backstory that situated her abhorrence at the prospect of failure, which was a direct consequence of becoming pregnant during secondary school. While she did not fail her examinations, she was unable to finish sixth form with her cohort and had to take on an extra year of study in order to catch up. In her opinion, that experience could never be repeated, adding a sense of urgency to the requirement to develop an efficacious approach to time-management.

> *When I started my undergraduate degree as a mature student, I was already a mother of adult children – two of whom were also at university. I remembered thinking how weird I felt in this setting, studying with young people who were the same age as my children while having to negotiate the language barrier between us that is typical of a generation gap. While this identity is recognised in the literature (e.g. Murphy & Roopchand, 2003), I had never met a young pregnant student or student-parent. Abigail's interview offered some insight into this identity as the parent of a three-year-old child. Her challenges were somewhat different to mine. Although I was still 'supporting' my children, their adulthood meant that this was distanced and, mainly, emotional. For Abigail, young motherhood created an immediacy that imposed itself on her attendance, engagement and progression as a full-time student. Besides age, our differences lay in our spiritual beliefs. We both came from a traditional religious background. However, studying psychology led Abigail to reject her belief in God [she said science made more sense], while psychology only strengthened and validated my belief in a Supreme Creator. Like some of the other participants, science and God comfortably co-existed as part of our university experience. I also saw commonalities. Abigail and I were tenacious in our quest for self-improvement and saw ourselves as potential role models. Her narrative highlighted another commonality. We entered university with the expectation of forging a new identity without realising the extent to which our past self would inflict itself on our present self. We both had a desire to break out of an unsavoury mould, an uncomfortable past, and we hoped this desire would be strong enough to initiate self-improvement. Of the things we could control in this new environment, it seemed that our construction of identity would be predicated on a sense of agency and ability to meet a different set of challenges as first-generation students with constrained circumstances.*

Samantha, whose cultural background reflected less adversity, expressed similar levels of determination but seemed to lack the drive conveyed by her peers: *"I know what I want but I know […] what I need to do to get it. It's just **doing** it."* Without propelling circumstances, Samantha realised that a non-efficacious approach was leading to unhelpful behaviours, such as cramming to meet coursework deadlines. Her narrative reflected a limited understanding of what was required to develop this construction. With an emphasis on "doing", it seemed that while she desired to be effective, there was less behavioural intent to achieve this.

Similarly, Kimberley constructed a boundary where she could only work at an acceptable level instead of striving for excellence: *"If I know I can achieve a certain level which is acceptable then I probably won't push for more. I do know that about myself cos that's how it was in high school as well."*

> *Kimberley's construction of identity seemed to raise more questions than answers, although I believe I made a 'brave' attempt at interpreting her narrative. She spoke softly. It was a challenge to capture her words. She was also concise to the point of seeming 'brutal'. I wondered about the kind of life experience that could shape a person so harshly. My attempts to probe her experiences were frustrated at every turn. Kimberley was determined to be as minimalist in her responding as possible. I decided that the tactic of using 'silences' (Wong, 2013) might cause her to clamp up like an oyster refusing to give up its pearl. Drawing on Smith's (2011) diving analogy, I decided I would need a different form of equipment to access her story but as the interview progressed, I was unclear about what that could be. I was also concerned that the terseness of Kimberley's responses might equate to a very short interview. Even in this difficult setting, time passed quickly. Somehow, we managed to arrive at the maximum allocation of 90 minutes. In part, this was attributable to Kimberley's fresh emphasis on the importance of my ethnicity to the research context. I learnt that there was value in asking about my ethnicity as the researcher as part of the closing set of questions to avoid participants feeling they had to pander to me as a Black woman in order to situate their story. By this point, the participants would have had the opportunity to articulate their thoughts about the contribution of ethnicity and culture to their construction of identity. The answer to a change of 'diving' equipment came unexpectedly. In Kimberley's case, this equated to non-use of equipment where she delivered a richer narrative after the recording was stopped. It was at this point that she more fully expressed her thoughts on teaching staff that she perceived as racist, a sense of loneliness that resulted from having few friendships, and the intricacies of a complicated family structure - all of which had been alluded to during the interview, but without the depth that I was now hearing. With hindsight, I could have sought Kimberley's permission to continue with the recording, but I suspected this might make little difference to a student like Kimberley, who would possibly have clamped up again. Like other participants, Kimberley stated that it was important for students to have a 'voice'. However, her 'voice' became muted when it could have mattered most. At this point, I wondered whether students like Kimberley would even be able to share their stories in the open setting of a focus group. Later, I discovered whether this was possible. Meanwhile, I left the interview with a feeling of regret for a lost narrative, but also with the realisation that participants must be respected in their choice to disclose or withhold their stories.*

Seemingly invoking a past self, Kimberley's assertion of this aspect of her present identity as 'fact' (*"I do know that about myself"*) seems to have been based on a learnt disposition formed over a longer duration. Participants who related satisfactory experiences during their secondary school education were more likely to recall their experiences at university in positive terms and to convey a stronger determination to succeed. Those students signalled the importance of developing self-efficacious approaches in secondary school which could translate into what has been termed 'academic readiness'; such approaches are known to provide a better chance of succeeding at university (SMF, 2017). However, as the interviews proceeded, it became clear that while this construction was desired by most participants,

some had difficulty with embracing an efficacious identity. One contributing factor was feeling uncomfortable with accessing support in their academic environments.

8.9.2 A Help-Seeking Identity

Samantha's assertion (below) of the importance of being seen as 'independent' was just one example of a student who had entered university with a pre-loaded assumption about what it meant to be an independent learner. Continued emphasis by staff on the importance of independent learning had caused her to become resistant to seeking help, even when her experience was obviously one of turmoil. Subsequently, it seemed that even if staff were to offer support, she perceived this as an insidious attempt to reveal her weaknesses, further embedding resistance to seek support:

> *Interviewer: So, what would you like academic staff to do to support you so that you can be successful?*
>
> *Samantha: See, when I hear that question it just makes me think like, is that a trick question, because uni's supposed to be independent [...] and now you're, you're asking me what can you do to help? Aren't I supposed to do everything by myself?*

Experiences of 'distancing' might explain why some students choose not to seek support for fear of a further threat to their identity. Samantha reinforced the notion of distancing in metaphorical terms. In her opinion, staff were a tool to be "utilised", although she acknowledged that they were available if she chose to move beyond a distancing construction:

> *I mean they've got office hours which I think is really handy if you use them as a student. I've never really like utilised any of the staff […] but I do think that, you know, if you ask them a question like after a seminar, after a lecture, they won't brush you off. They'll like take the time to answer your question, like refer you to whatever you can read or look up on. (Samantha)*

I am learning about myself as a researcher as I learn about these participants. Through the process of interviewing, I am improving my listening skills and honing the ability to ask the right question in the right way at the right time as well as recognising when to probe and when to be silent. I thoroughly enjoyed this interview with Samantha. She has a mature attitude and is comfortable talking about her experiences – except that she already knows me as a visiting lecturer (she was in one of my seminar groups). Perhaps, these 'turns' in my identity trajectory from Black woman to seminar leader to researcher/interviewer have broken down some of the objective boundaries that may lie between us. Samantha spoke about her experiences with frankness that was not apparent to the same extent in some of the other interviews in this phase. My concerns about social desirability bias were nullified by her candid responses. In particular, I am excited to see the literature unfolding in this participant; namely, her narration of an innate capacity to create a 'sphere of influence' (Mirza, 1998); her spiritual belief as a buffer for academic stress (Ceglie & Settlage, 2014); and, a careful construction of the identity of an 'outsider-within' (Collins, 2001). I was encouraged to hear Samantha say that she relished the opportunity to talk about her experiences. It caused me to reflect on the possible benefits of participating in this kind of research for BME students. If they can feel that their views are important enough to be the subject of [doctoral] research, what might this mean for future constructions of their identity?

Taking a fresh turn on the construction of a help-seeking identity, Kimberley introduced the idea of "nudged" support as the kind that might drive her towards realising a sense of agency and achieving success. At the same time, this support seemed to be constructed almost as a deflection from the requirement to take personal responsibility for her learning and to instigate help-seeking when required:

> *I can be very laid back and I kinda need someone to kinda nudge but again that's not really their responsibility per se. I would say that it would help me. Just keep my motivation high. Not sure how they would do that but that would help. (Kimberley)*

Kimberley recounted occasions where she had benefitted from a reminder or 'nudge' to persist in order to produce the required coursework. In this instance, nudging was given an almost tactile quality where, in response to being "laid back", Kimberley needed to be 'nudged' or 'pushed' into action. However, there seemed to be an overriding sense of guilt that this level of nurturing went beyond the responsibility of academic staff. Consequently, where she did not experience that level of encouragement, she might be tempted to disengage:

> *Usually I'm the only person that can motivate myself to actually do something. I mean, I'll hear it or they can advise me or whatever the case may be but I'm quite stubborn in the fact as if I don't really know, want to do it, I won't, but then maybe if they were to guilt trip me a little bit and say, well, you know, I think you can do better in this or that, then I'll say, alright, I'll try and then [...] I think if someone else is kind of relying on*

me to do something then I'll do it but if they're not then, just like, why do I have to do it
then, or not to my best ability? (Kimberley)

Kimberley's view provided a candid reflection on her approach to studying. She desired support but summarised the perceived boundaries of entering into a supportive relationship with staff. This perception appeared to come from a place of 'knowing', where Kimberley recognised that the intensity of this support could not be enacted on her own terms. She seemed to know that she must take responsibility for managing her progress. However, her perception of help-seeking was further underpinned by the realisation that this would have to be initiated and constructed in a manner that could be appropriately responded to by staff. Placing the onus on staff, nudged support was constructed as a series of motivational reminders to justify coming to university:

> *If I feel like I'm, struggling, if I feel like my teacher or whoever notices and cares*
> *enough to ask me, you know, 'is everything OK?', then it makes you feel like, you know,*
> *that people who are teaching you actually care about your progress and how you're*
> *doing and how you're getting on and something as well is that for me, remind me that,*
> *why I'm doing it, what the long-term goal is, and not just help me stay on track.*
> *(Kimberley)*

This view was not shared by all participants. Jennifer indicated that even if this kind of support was offered, she was unlikely to accept it:

> *I don't think it's got to do with anything that the academic staff has to do because even*
> *if they had said "look, you can talk to me, it's fine" or "you may be going through this*
> *and if you wanna", I, I wouldn't have taken it up* [laughs]. *I would have, like, […] I*
> *would have said "no, no, no, everything's fine, it's absolutely fine, I'm great,*
> *everything's brilliant"* [laughs] *and so it is really down to the student to be willing to*
> *look inside themselves and realise what's going on and as well ask for help if they need*
> *it. I don't, I don't think it's ever the responsibility of the university. (Jennifer)*

It seemed that the journey towards becoming an independent learner was complicated by the participants' construction of independence, perceptions about staff responses to their requests for support, and views of whether staff were responsible for actively pursuing students to offer support. Subsequently, it seemed that whenever the need for support arose, a help-seeking identity was suppressed by these students' in their academic environments.

8.9.3 A Belonging Identity

As with constructive help-seeking behaviours, a sense of belonging was predicated on good relationships with staff and students. Access to individuals with similar characteristics also had a positive effect on participants' perceptions. Samantha's assumption of being one of only a few Black female students on her course was disrupted by seeing other Black students in the university environment. However, it took a decision to join the African Caribbean Society (ACS) before these students became both visible and accessible to her:

> *On our course maybe I've seen at least five other Black girls, and I think there're no more than ten, if there are even ten and I just feel like it's just, you know, honestly the way I feel about it, it's just that I could come and go and no-one would even really notice. It wasn't until the ACS kind of re-started that I, cos you see like Black girls, Black guys dotted around, but you like, I can see you […] I'd look around and there's people that I could just recognise and it was just really nice, and we all met each other there. (Samantha)*

The ACS was different from Samantha's usual academic spaces [lectures and seminars], in which the emphasis was mainly on individual teaching and learning. In the ACS, student members were able to socialise and discuss topics both related and un-related to academic life. It seemed that, in this setting, it was not necessary to have prior knowledge of each other's situations since the ACS defined its own agenda and perceptions of inequality, even while operating within a constrained context for BME student diversity. It was simply *recognising* ACS students as 'Black' and 'available' that encouraged Samantha to experience a sense of belonging.

Of note, participants who were not members of a society at their university conveyed a somewhat different picture of belonging. Their narratives were peppered with experiences of feeling disconnected as well as increased accounts of student cliques [an unprompted term used by participants across all phases of this research to refer to student groupings with which they felt they did not identify or were not invited to join]:

> *I might be the only Black girl there, then everybody else kinda sticks to their own cliques of their own culture, so it's like OK, who do I speak to? (Kimberley)*

> *[…] All the people who are in the maths society are friends and they're always together. (Hannah)*

> *I could see groups forming and I wasn't in any of them [...] all the international Asians stick together; all the White people stick together [...] and all the Black people stick together. (Jennifer)*

Jennifer's reference to Black people 'sticking together' was of particular interest. At her [Russell Group] university, she was one of only three Black female students on the undergraduate psychology degree course. Instead of an action from which students might expect to benefit academically, the activity of sticking together was constructed as a type of ingroup/outgroup community. Sabrina's attempt to join one of these cliques [a group of White female students] was experienced as uncomfortable when the group resorted to using non-verbal pressure to restrict access to anyone who appeared 'different'. Thus, the group's identity was protected: *"They'll just stare at you the entire time [...] they'll just stare you down."*

Similar to their nontraditional counterparts, these participants' emphasis on the behaviours of student groupings reflected a strong need to feel accepted, not merely in a tokenistic sense. A [sometimes] strained relationship with their academic environment was constructed by some participants as a transient experience; namely, that the university was a place to come to, get what they thought they needed and then leave, with limited expectations of feeling connected in between these actions. Sabrina succinctly phrased this as: *"Just come here by-the-way to study"*. It seems that studying at university was constructed by Sabrina as an ad-hoc activity being fitted into other activities, rather than one that was considered critical for academic development, although this did not affect her construction of an efficacious identity. Kimberley's view picked up on Sabrina's construction: *"I come in, I don't speak to anyone in class and I just ask the lecturer a question if necessary and then I'd just leave, like if there was no necessary need for me to be here, I'd leave."*

Participants had minimal contact with staff. Their failed attempts at integrating with others became a reinforcing experience of deliberately resisting contact as if to protect themselves from enforced isolation and feelings of loneliness over which they had no control. Where the construction of an 'unbelonging' identity was deliberate, this was experienced as less disruptive, acting instead to moderate possible feelings of low esteem. To rationalise this construction, Abigail reasoned that responsibility for the development of a sense of belonging rested solely with her, devolving the university of further responsibility in this area. As a student-parent, she seemed more sensitive to the probability of an isolating experience. Abigail was prepared to embrace the identity work needed to establish a sense of belonging:

If I don't feel that I belong, then that's my own fault cos that's my own actions that have made me feel like that cos everything's there in place cos that's the last thing that the university would want. (Abigail)

If belonging exists at one end of a social identity spectrum, then an 'unbelonging' identity appears to exist at the other end of that same spectrum. For these participants, it seemed that the idea of a social identity was initially constructed as hopeful intentions which culminated, too often, in disempowered affectation, leading to an 'unbelonging' identity. Some participants had purposely chosen to disconnect from staff and students (*"I don't really spend much time talking to any of them" - Samantha*). For others, experiences of rejection by student cliques combined with perceptions of being rejected by staff and contributed further to a sense of isolation. There was pathos in Hannah's and Kimberley's accounts of preferred aloneness that seemed to hinge on the experience of a stifled sense of belonging:

I kinda sit down on my own, do my work and go (Hannah)

I'm a person that I've always kinda kept [...] I'm quite quiet and I keep myself to myself, so I don't usually have a lot of people around me anyway. I just kinda do my own thing. The question was 'do I feel accepted?' As part of a community, I'd say no. (Kimberley)

Their comments embodied a practised form of distancing which was utilised in order to survive in their environment. Kimberley's rhetorical reiteration of the interviewer's question ("*do I feel accepted?*") evoked a self-proclaimed conclusive response. Where an 'unbelonging' identity was compounded by the paucity of similar others, this served to magnify a feeling of 'onlyness':

It's just like everyone seems to be so erm like yeah, driven, and it's like they know what they want from it and they wanna do clinical, and they wanna do this and they wanna do that and it's a lot of the, I have to say it again, [...] a lot of Asian girls. They know what exactly they want from this and they're gonna do this placement and that and it's just like maybe they can feel driven, like, because there's so many of them to like push each other forward. [...] I can't look around and find any other girls and say yeah, we're gonna go and do this together so I'm kinda in a sense, kinda maybe the like enthusiasm, it kinda dims down in that bit. (Samantha)

There was little for Samantha to be enthusiastic about if she could not share her enthusiasm with students of a similar ethnicity. Her disappointment was reinforced on seeing female students of another [majority] ethnic group supporting each other on campus. To mitigate a sense of isolation, Abigail re-framed her solitary state into what appeared, on the surface, to be a positive attribute. Indeed, this may have been a direct rebuttal to stereotypes about Black women, particularly as a young Black woman with a student-parent identity. Again, Abigail appeared to be working hard to vindicate herself for being in this situation by boldly declaring that she was a 'smart' student, unlike most of her equivalents: *"I like being one of only few Black girls at the uni because then it shows that I'm actually one of the smarter ones."*

Throughout her narrative, Abigail was emphatic about the importance of being a role model, a rescuer of young Black female student mothers, a community worker. This interpretation stemmed from a deeper understanding of her cultural background. Since starting university, Abigail was going through the process of reframing an identity that included a rejection of her Christian upbringing. However, a strong moral tone suggested that her religion, with its value-laden principles, continued to play a part in the cultural capital from which she unwittingly drew to convey her values. Ultimately, Jennifer surmised that there was only one way to accept an 'unbelonging' identity:

> *I just decided it was OK to just be alone* […] *At the end of the day it kinda, the thought was I'm here to study not to make friends. Let me just do that and if that happens to come about from me being in a lecture then that's that but I don't always have to try and it's OK* […] *It got to the point of acceptance* […] *You stop seeking acceptance from other people and once you find that you can accept yourself* […] *All that really matters is self-acceptance. That's it. (Jennifer)*

Jennifer's almost fatalistic statement conveyed a resolve to accept her fate. It seemed to represent a process of 'letting go' of the struggle to not feel alone. She had finally given herself permission to shift into a 'new' identity. Occurring at a defining point in her university experience [during the final year of her undergraduate degree], this shift had the potential to shape every interaction thereafter. Perhaps Jennifer was the unwitting spokesperson for this sample of resilient students. She managed to capture the essence of what it meant to continue despite the challenges of solitude by accepting and embracing an identity shift that these participants had not expected to manifest in their academic environments.

8.9.4 A Transitioning Identity

During the first semester of the first year, Abigail learnt a lot from taking an overly relaxed approach to her studies. She recognised that the first year was foundational to developing a good work ethic for subsequent years: *"The first year's good cos you can learn about how you need to work in order to get the best results for the second and third year. I think my first semester I was way too relaxed."* Tobi indicated that she had expected a more challenging start to the degree programme. She was disappointed to find that the material did not much differ from A-Level psychology: *"In the first year it was very [...] introductory and [...] it was a bit repetitive from what I had studied at A-Level psychology."* Samantha noted the point at which she became disengaged; towards the end of the first year. This signalled that, as for her nontraditional counterparts, this is a critical period for students who were trying to acclimatise to more advanced academic demands: *"It kind of started actually towards the end of first year* […] *As soon as you hear your first year doesn't count towards anything, you're like, OK, what's the point?"* In part, her reference to "it' suggested that, like Tobi, she had also given herself permission to start that process of disengagement from her studies because she felt less incentivised to do well. On the other hand, Sabrina's experience [recounted as a first-year student] was not yet sufficiently embedded to provide a more reflective stance on the process of transitioning. Her use of 'new' (*"I feel really new"*) suggested that she was still orienting to her environment and had yet to experience the transitioning challenges of her peers in a more critical sense. Furthermore, as a strong proponent of self-efficacy, she may have been less prone to constructing challenges as threatening.

The second year was described by both Samantha and Tobi with travelling metaphors. Samantha's use of "bumpy" implied that she was navigating a path with an uneven surface and the possibility of stumbling in the process. Tobi continued this metaphor by defining her experience as "very fast-paced". There was a strong sense that she was struggling to keep up with the pace of lessons and demands of coursework, with little time to 'breathe' in-between. Kimberley's account of derailing was even more drastic. She resorted to not attending lectures or seminars for a lengthy period before the start of the second semester:

> *Second year's been really bumpy for me. (Samantha)*

> *Very fast-paced, especially with research methods* […] *like it was just one piece of coursework after the other. (Tobi)*

November up until the time when we came back in January […] *but that was due to me like not really coming in. (Kimberley)*

Like Kimberley, Hannah experienced a creeping sense of disengagement that began with infrequent non-attendance at lectures. Nevertheless, she retained a tenuous and fragmented connection to the university by attending a few lectures (*"I don't go to all my lectures anymore"*). Her experience was constructed as disappointing and constrained. Hannah's cultural background [Ghanaian] placed a strong emphasis on the importance of obtaining a university education. In addition, her siblings were successful at university and their achievements were underpinned by a strong maternal influence. Thus, although contemplated, it was unlikely that Hannah could have simply dropped out during the final year of her studies:

Mum's done a lot, like every time I think about someone that I know basically, it's always my Mum, like I go uni for my Mum [laughs]. *I do everything for her because she works so hard and I'm so proud of everything's she done and in order for, in order for me to, you know, like feel like I'm making her proud, I wanna make myself proud so I work really hard to, you know, like make my Mum happy. If, if my Mum was not the way she was and my upbringing was not the way it was, definitely don't think I'd be in the same situation but I don't think I'd be in a more positive one, so definitely influenced my decision to go to university. Influenced my decision to, if I do continue, that will be an influence as well, cos I know like, I know it'd make my Mum proud and I just kinda just wanna make her proud. (Hannah)*

As a traditional student, Hannah's narrative centred on two environments that were simultaneously experienced as chaotic: home and university – and she could only feel 'anchored' in one of them [home]. In contrast, the nontraditional students in Phase 1 appeared both 'anchored' and frustrated by their identity as a mature Black woman. I wondered about the importance of 'anchors' for university experience. Whether home, an aspect of one's identity or a social characteristic, these traditional student participants seemed to need an anchor for sense-making. To continue the metaphor, I am reminded of another participant's assertion that she is "the captain of her ship". In that sense, she retained control of her 'anchor', deciding if and when to be grounded or set adrift. Although Hannah presented as loquacious, feisty and culturally aware, she could easily become lost at sea without an 'anchor'. Her university experience suggested that she might be heading into that place and supported a characteristic of 'coasting' that was ascribed to her construction of identity (see Table 8.8).

In contrast, Tobi saw her experience during the final year as a consolidation of her previous years of study that culminated in a greater appreciation of the holistic nature of her course: *"I*

feel like now in the third year everything's kind of making sense and making more connections between the modules." Transitioning for these participants was an extended piece of identity work. Without concerted efforts by staff to maintain contact with students such as Kimberley, dropping out is a possibility and supports the desire to receive regular 'nudged' support as reminders to persist.

8.9.5 An Aspirational Identity

Jennifer's negative perceptions about studying psychology revealed a twist for its influence on her aspirations: *"I don't believe in psychology anymore [...] I no longer want to be a clinical psychologist. I know that this degree isn't who I am. It has no measure of my worth."* At one time, it seemed that Jennifer had 'believed' in psychology. There was an intertwining of her beliefs, knowledge about the subject and aspirations, to the extent that psychology had held an almost reified position in her thoughts. Now, as a third-year student who had passed through a series of negative experiences, those beliefs were shattered. Jennifer explained that recently acquired knowledge about psychology's contribution to a racist history of using standardised assessments to clinically diagnose and treat Black patients had caused her to doubt the veracity of the discipline. Her views reflected distancing from the degree programme based on what she now believed psychology stood for. Alternatively, her experience of studying psychology was simply no longer 'enjoyable' or what was required to validate her identity. During her second year, Jennifer experienced depression:

> *I stopped going to lectures the week before we had a lecture on depression and what I noticed was that for a long time I had a lot of the physical symptoms of depression. So, I was just constantly tired, a lack of concentration. I even had short-term memory loss and I kept on thinking "why is that I'm not even able to think?" and I just attributed it all to the stress of doing everything. I even went to the doctor [laughs]. I laugh now, but everything is meant to happen this way. I even went to the doctor and I said, and I had blood tests and they came back negative and I remember thinking there must be something physically wrong, and she started talking to me about my diet and my exercise and I just absolutely so burst into tears, I just burst into tears.*

During this dark period, Jennifer questioned her self-worth. She used this period of self-evaluation to release many concerns, giving herself permission to finally enjoy the experience of studying in her third year, even while no longer feeling enthused about the subject.

Participants who narrated positive experiences of studying psychology were more likely to want to remain in the discipline and continue their studies after graduation. Tobi was just one example. Indeed, to discontinue her association with psychology was perceived as wasteful. There was deliberate thought on her part: *"I definitely do wanna work in the field because I didn't just pick up this degree for no [...] reason."* Nevertheless, these sentiments were expressed as a kind of safety net by participants who might otherwise have contemplated dropping out. In a protective sense, it seemed that some participants were beginning a process of emotionally disconnecting from their degree at an earlier stage in order to protect the possibility of a fragmented academic identity. Both Jennifer and Tobi had previously believed that a psychology degree would make a significant difference to their identity. The degree was considered key to fulfilling their aspirations.

For other participants, the degree was constructed as a 'bridge' towards their preferred destination. For example, Samantha seemed at ease with creating an imagined academic plan, even when this contrasted starkly with her career plan:

> *I'm gonna do my psychology degree, then I'm gonna do a Master's, a Master's in counselling, then I'm gonna, if I can, do a doctorate and I'm gonna get awesome doctorate thing [...] this is my academic plan [...] but, at the moment, I think when I finish my degree, I'm just gonna for some time focus on my dancing. (Samantha)*

Samantha's rapid rhetoric seemed persuasive until the reader is blindsided by a sharp turn in direction where she announced a decision to focus, instead, on her dancing. The latter aspiration was delivered at a more measured and believable pace than her previous assertions. Indeed, this pronouncement was a more convincing reflection of her true goal. However, a seemingly vacuous reference [*"I'm just gonna for some time focus on my dancing"*] indicated that her preferred direction might be to continue her dancing career without boundaries, leading to the view that a psychology degree was merely filling a gap in her life-world: *"I think when I finish the degree, I'll put psychology on hold for a while and I'll just get on with what I've been really wanting to do."*

Kimberley held a similar view. While she recognised the contrast between studying psychology and engaging in a different area after graduation, her view reinforced the idea of psychology study as a 'bridge', while Abigail's sole concern was to achieve financial security for the wellbeing of her family without further reference to her degree:

> *I wanna get into property development which is kinda like a big contrast. (Kimberley)*

I just wanna have a job yeah, that will allow me and my son to be comfortable like, to not have to worry about financial things. (Abigail)

8.9.6 Summary

In general, participants expressed reluctance for seeking help with their studies. On the few occasions that this was enacted, help-seeking was characterised as being able to approach staff for assistance without a risk to the construction of their identity. Other sources of help ranged from consulting peers to searching the internet for information. Most participants seemed aware of the support available in their university but, overall, their efforts were less directed at engaging with staff. Instead, help-seeking was constructed by some as a sign of academic weakness that contrasted with their understanding of the identity of an efficacious student.

Some participants took pride in the construction of an 'unbelonging' identity as an indication of their ability to overcome negative experiences without the support of others. However, despite this, it was evident that a sense of belonging was also important for their perceptions of a positive experience. Nonetheless, the bravery that accompanied an 'unbelonging' identity seemed to act as a mask for participants' feelings of not being included. Their experiences were further complicated by seeing students of a similar ethnicity in groupings from which they were excluded because their ethnic identity was different.

Disconnecting from university study and subject-related aspirations at any stage had implications for the possibility of a satisfying experience for these participants, signalling ramifications for their retention in higher education. Fortunately, the range of competencies and attributes that can be acquired from a psychology degree suggest that graduates can go on to achieve employment in other areas (Reddy, Lantz, & Hulme, 2013). However, before they can arrive at that point, they must deal with the challenges of transitioning through the degree programme.

A transitioning identity appeared to be linked with a sense of 'unbelonging'. The mixed perceptions of these participants about transitioning suggest that it is experienced as complex. Their experiences spanned primary to secondary to higher education and, in higher education, included movement between different levels of undergraduate study. In a general sense, transitions are a typical aspect of a university experience rather than places to become unstuck, as these participants experienced. Drawing on personal, social and cultural capital helped these participants to make sense of experiences across the student timeline. For some

participants, this meant taking a more efficacious approach to dealing with obstacles. Their stories revealed differentiated accounts of experience by year of undergraduate study.

Participants' aspirations after graduation included being a stay-at-home mother or having a profession that required a doctoral degree with further years of training, such as becoming a neurosurgeon. Several factors seemed to work together to influence aspirations, ranging from a desire to show academic excellence or fulfil parental desires [particularly maternal], to wanting nothing further to do with the study of psychology due to negative university experiences. Participants' construction of an aspirational identity was not unlike Markus and Nurius' (1986) construction of the 'possible self'. Both constructions hold potential for excitement or dismay for the future. A crucial part of their identity construction was shaped by perceptions of interpersonal relationships within and outside their university experience.

8.10 Master Theme: Importance of Relationships Inside and Outside University

Research indicates that friendships are important for a sense of wellbeing, but this depends on how they are perceived and experienced across a range of variables that include friendship quality and depth (Hartup & Stevens, 1997), similarity and influence (Rivas-Drake, Umaña-Taylor, Schaefer, & Medina, 2017) and opportunities for contact (Knifsend, 2014). The variables in the aforementioned studies were related to the development of identity. Participants in the current study spoke about their friendships in three ways: location, context and characteristics. They discussed friendships that existed inside and outside the university. However, most participants were definitive that their friendships could not be shared *across* a time and space divide; thus, each was contained within a particular environment. Friendships were further defined as being in a school, college or university context. They were also based on ethnicity or other characteristics as well as their perceived value to a social identity. Moreover, participants with an 'unbelonging' identity tended to recall fewer friendships at university than those who expressed a stronger sense of connection to their environment. Perceptions of self-efficacy seemed to play a role in maintaining friendships.

8.10.1 University Friendships

Participants narrated experiences of rejection when recounting attempts to join student groupings that consisted of other ethnicities, which might also have accounted for more same-ethnicity friendships wherever possible. Where similar-ethnicity friendship groups existed, these minimally consisted of just a few students:

My circle of friends at uni is very, very small. They are Asian [...] the other girl is Black [...] she's Black African as well. The majority of my friends at uni are Black. (Hannah)

There are three Black girls in this group so we're like in in and everyone else is from elsewhere. (Samantha)

Smaller numbers can foster intimacy, but these groups may not go on to become academically-supportive as they appear to be formed primarily out of a need for social support. There was a strong desire for belonging that was, in part, satisfied by belonging to a defined group. Note Samantha's double reference to being 'in' as opposed to being from "elsewhere" - suggesting a secondary grouping that was comprised of students of other ethnicities. With limited opportunities for same-ethnicity friendships, there might be what could be constructed as a diluted effort by Black female students to retain cordial relationships with the wider cohort. Consequently, Samantha's mixed ethnicity friendships at university [Iranian, Asian, Caribbean] seemed to lack depth:

Erm, [student's name] *she's, I think like Iranian. Er,* [student's name] *is Asian.* [Student's name]*, I hope her name* [...] [student's name] *is it? D'you who I'm talking about?*[17] [laughs] *I don't know if you know who I'm talking about, but* [student's name] *and the other lovely girl, I can't remember her name, they're both Caribbean. No,* [student's name] *not Caribbean. I'm not sure but they're erm, they're Black girls. Erm, yeah, so it's, I, and oh* [student's name]*, so she's British, erm so it's quite a mixed group actually. (Samantha)*

Nonetheless, the alternative - forming relationships with anyone else - seemed less desirable. Again, Abigail's experience as a solitary student differed to the other participants. She focused, instead, on resisting an association with stereotypes about Black people: *"I don't talk to any of the Black girls. All the Black people* **cling** *together and then they feel they need to* [...] *like live up to the stereotype even more like, you know, cling on to that Black identity."* Abigail did not expand on what was meant by a 'Black identity' nor her use of "cling", although the latter term seemed suggestive of a desperate need by Black people for connection and identity. Unsuccessful interactions with other Black women appeared to have influenced her stereotypical perceptions and contributed to a reluctance to form relationships with Black female students: *"Some Black females are quite stereotyped for being like*

---

[17] The participant and the researcher were based at the same university; hence, the participant's assumption that the researcher might know the identity of the student to whom she referred.

difficult, so maybe it's like, you try and offer help and they'll turn round and be like, oh, I don't need your help. What are you talking about?"

By distinction, Sabrina - the 'efficacious' student in the sample - seemed less concerned with ethnicity: *"It doesn't matter to me [...] you're friendly, happy and we get along."* Sabrina's efficacious approach extended to her perception of friendships. She was more concerned with quality than their ethnic composition. Despite previous experiences of rejection by student cliques, her view attested to resiliency.

8.10.2 Employment

Participants who combined employment with study had the benefit of an additional setting in which to cultivate relationships and experience a sense of belonging. Furthermore, it seemed that the longer a student was engaged in some form of employment, the more influential friendships acquired in that environment could become, which could point to one reason why students are reluctant to give up employment even when their degree may be at risk: *"I was developing a lot more friendships* [at work] *than I was in* [university name] *and at home"* (Jennifer).

Samantha's relationship with a friend in employment appears to be influential. She saw dancing as part of her career plan and seemed to want to align herself with others in the industry:

> *I've only got two friends that I speak to, like speak to, speak to from the school and they were the two friends that I knew would be [...] and they were both in my performing arts class and so* [friend's name] *she's not studying but what she's doing is she's, she's been working to get money cos she wants to also do like a musical theatre course and you need to fund yourself if you're gonna go to drama school. (Samantha)*

An employment context offers students who are struggling with belonging a viable alternative for fitting in. Being in employment is not only helpful for the student's financial state, but can also enhance their identity. However, the requirements of work (such as irregular working patterns, early start times and timetable clashes) can compromise university attendance and create challenges for a student who is otherwise enjoying 'healthy' relationships in their work environment. Furthermore, bonding outside the university environment can be further secured by shared interests or characteristics: *"My close friends are doing similar things to what I'm doing"* (Hannah).

Participants narrated instances where a shared sense of identity was important for

situating the context of their friendships and experiencing a sense of belonging. Experiences of rejection from other students or student groups may be buffered from the security that comes from having friendships outside the university or being in employment. This could explain why cultivating a sense of belonging at university was less of an issue for some students. Moreover, the existence of external support groups curtailed the amount of time these students felt they needed to spend on university premises. However, depending on the construction of identity, the absenting of a university-based support network could be detrimental for some students.

8.11 Master Theme: Cultivating Personal, Social and Cultural Capital

Capital, as referred to in the current research, is based on Lareau and Weininger's (2003) definition of an accumulation of resources that can be obtained from a variety of contexts. A close reading of their narratives demonstrated that participants revealed characteristics linked to their personal, social and cultural capital (depicted in Figure 8.11).
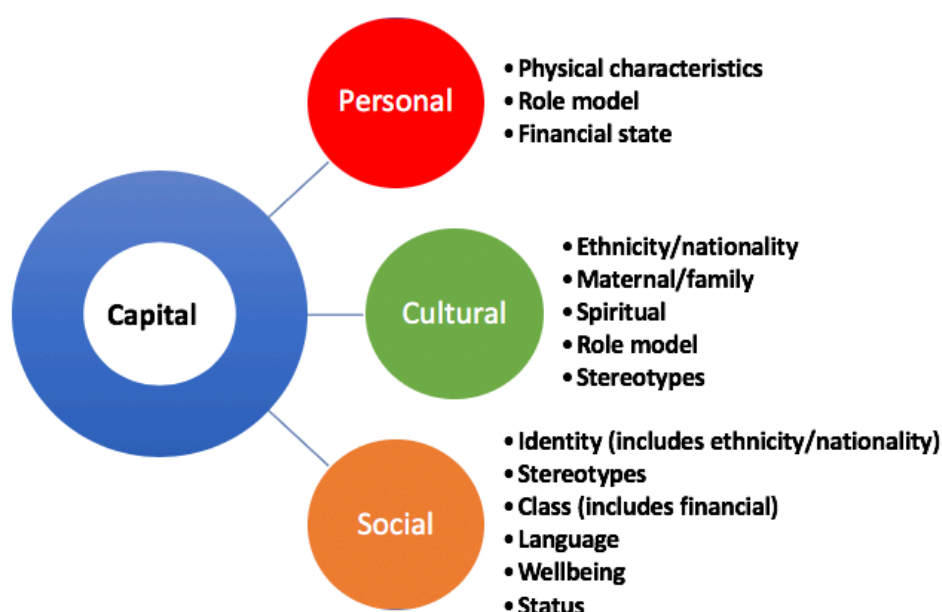
Figure 8.11: A summary of capital and associated characteristics from students' narratives

Some of these characteristics were not mutually exclusive. For example, role-modelling straddled both personal and cultural capital as this was deemed important by participants for growth and personal development. Similarly, ethnicity, in a broader sense, could not be separated from the construction of a social identity, further attesting to a complex web of

characteristics that make up the construction of identity. Because of this overlap, this theme is presented as a cohesion of participants' capital.

Participants drew on their capital to add meaning to externally-perceived situations. They valued opportunities to exercise capital overtly in ways that might extend and enhance their sphere of influence as a form of personal validation. Samantha decided that being part of classroom discussions was a matter of choice, and would only be exercised when she considered that she had something of weight she could add to the discussion which would enhance her standing among her peers: *"If I open my mouth to speak on something, I know what I'm talking about."* As powerful as this may seem, it flagged up the possibility that Samantha might also miss out on learning opportunities as she did not want to be part of the 'trial-and-error' conversations that might be experienced as riskier but could have potential to promote deeper learning. Her decision to speak was based on presenting herself as a 'knowledgeable expert', thereby enhancing her capital. The reward for this identity work was to earn the class' esteem: *"From then on, it's like whenever we've had these kind of debates everyone kinda looked at me to say something like, what she's gonna say today is so interesting."* Linked to a desire for belonging, Samantha 'played' the knowledge card to her advantage, withholding it at leisure, as this display of her capital was within her control.

Repeated experiences of isolation caused some participants to feel culturally alienated. These experiences affected their ability to contribute to class discussions, with some participants only doing so when they felt they had something profound to offer. Jennifer gave further insight into how an individual's capital in the classroom could be experienced as being 'shut down': *"No-one would initiate conversation with me, and this is from sitting next to loads of different people."* As a follow-on from experiences of silencing, Jennifer's identity became fragmented in an almost explosive sense: *"It's all to do with self-worth and self-esteem. It* [the experience] *just blew up the whole identity."*

Jennifer's experience of 'blowing up' is another example of why these students might benefit from receiving 'nudged' support in order to feel comfortable with showcasing their capital, while retaining a sense of control over their situations. For Jennifer, her multiple selves that presented as a whole identity were falling apart. A timely intervention from staff could have simply taken the form of checking in with Jennifer and asking if everything was going well with her studies or whether she was part of a study support group with other students. Without this kind of intervention, students with a fragmented or threatened identity must find alternative ways to cope. Jennifer's coping mechanism was to adopt a practice of meditation: *"I went on a spiritual journey* [...] *meditation helped me."*

Turning the focus inward helped Jennifer to deal with a 'blow-up' to her identity. She used meditation to halt her usual automatic responses to the perceived negativity of her circumstances. Coping was also bolstered by maternal support: *"Thank you for giving me the space to just pursue education without the pressure from you to be anything in it."* Jennifer expressed a strong sense of gratitude to her mother for being allowed to 'be a student' without the pressure to assume another layer to an already complicated identity. Throughout her previous education experiences, Jennifer had been lauded as the 'high-achieving Black student'.

This label is not surprising, since Black female students tend to be labelled as higher achievers than Black boys (Maylor, 2009a). Jennifer carried this identity into her Russell Group university experience and was initially shocked to find higher-performing students than herself. For a while, she bore the weight of a conflicted identity. Towards the end of the first year and early into the second year, she began to unravel. After a lengthy period of feeling depressed, she finally gave herself permission to let go of this label and assume a 'normalised' identity of simply being a student:

> *I've kind of let go of the need to get a 'first', the need to even get a 2:1 and I've realised that a lot of what was motivating me was I've always been, especially being at this uni, I've always been the A-star Black student, like the high-achieving Black student and that has always been my identity. It's been there since I realised even primary school, like, when I used to do well but that was always coupled with a belief that I have to prove myself or I'm not worthy enough to achieve that, which makes no sense cos they're contradictory but at the same time it was kind of […] because, because that was always not forced on me, but that's what was attributed to me: 'you are an academic high-achieving Black girl, female'. It was, like, why does it have to have anything to do with the fact that I'm Black, like. I always felt like it was, it was more appreciated in comparison to another high-achieving White person, say in my high school, and in a way that was a wonderful thing because it made me realise that I had the potential to do everything that another person did. (Jennifer)*

Although Jennifer's mother had always been part of the crafting of her cultural and education capital, she had not put pressure on her to be more than she could be in her current environment. With appropriately-distanced support, Jennifer managed the shift from an interdependent identity (Brady, Germano, & Fryberg, 2017), where everything rested on fulfilling a particular label, to a more independent sense of self that allowed her to reclaim a

settled, more stable identity. Jennifer was also learning to manage her experience of the imposter phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978), having previously felt that *"anything I've done or did was never as good as other people on this course"*.

Jennifer eventually stopped engaging in the self-sabotaging behaviours (*"last minute … last hour to the wire"*) that were frustrating her experience. She finally achieved a sense of belonging by shifting her identity from an 'unbelonging' self to one that had permission to be aspirational and experience a sense of belonging if only by her final year, bringing together the disparate parts of her capital: *"I feel like I belong here […] I'm enjoying what I'm doing."*

Cultural capital is important to these participants. Maternal support was constructed by Jennifer as key to continuing at university, despite real or perceived obstacles. Indeed, where some participants stated that they were solely on the degree course to please their mother, this tended to be articulated in affectionate terms that belied a blind compulsion. The transmission of intergenerational cultural values for the importance of higher education seemed to lie at the root of this obeisance:

> […] *so I think that's why I'm so determined to like even finish this degree because I **know** my mum, and she's like, as soon as you have your degree, even if you don't use it, you have it there and just, you know, education is really like a **big thing** in our kind of culture. (Samantha)*

In a further shift towards exercising the power of her social capital, Abigail found that once she began to be more open about her personal circumstances, she had more meaningful conversations with other students. As a student-parent, she was initially guarded about speaking to her peers and tended towards making value-based assessments of their responses to her circumstances: *"If I open my mouth, they're just gonna be judging me or whatever. I literally thought I'd be judged basically, especially cos I have a child as well. I just thought, what are people gonna think?"* Caring for a young child meant that Abigail could not justify staying at university for longer periods than were required. Her ability to nurture important relationships with others was affected, particularly as extra-curricular activities are not built into a student's timetable as a formal requirement. Thus, there was no compulsion for her to remain at university and so extend the identity work that might have validated her sooner as a student. However, she was pleased to learn that her 'unique' social capital led to desirable attention from other students who genuinely wanted to understand her situation and, perhaps, learn from her story of resilience:

That's what made me keep myself to myself the most, but getting to know people, I've realised it's the complete opposite. When I mention I have a child, they'll talk to me more and ask me questions like. They're so interested like, intrigued as well and […] I don't wanna get like too big-headed or whatever but like some people see it like as inspiration sort of thing. (Abigail)

Where Abigail was previously reticent to talk to students about her personal life, she now embraced opportunities to showcase her identity as a student-parent. Furthermore, she felt encouraged to be a role model for persistence - a characteristic that was extended into her local community as a mentor. She viewed the successful completion of her degree as intrinsic to that role. It appeared that her judgmental assertions about Black people were informed by the pervasiveness of social stereotypes. Deflecting these stereotypes lent further importance to her role as a potential model for other students:

I think it might be very easy then for like a Black female to come to uni, not really be in touch with their education and then, she just gets caught up in other things, student life, like just party too much, drink too much, get pregnant […] and you just waste the opportunity that you had. I've seen so many girls like they have a kid and like, that's just it […] they all just, they get their flat or whatever and just sit at home on benefits or whatever. Black girls and Black guys they don't have role models to look up to and even if they do, they just seem way off the scale. I just think I wanna show girls like that are in my situation that you can, you can actually achieve that. (Abigail)

The threat to Abigail's identity as a student-parent was both perceived and experienced as real:

Interviewer: *To what extent does having a child affect your university experience?*

Abigail: *A lot! A lot! Because no work gets done at home. No work can get done at home when he's there. Like phew! If I didn't have him, then I'd be living on campus. Like it affects it a lot more than, more than I thought it would because he's at that age now where it's like he needs, he loves attention.*

Abigail actively attempted to ward off a threatened identity by announcing that she was not the same as the stereotypical view of a Black female student; neither did she fit the stereotype of a single mother. Samantha expanded on these stereotypes by theorising on the cause of problems for Black female students:

[…] when they're not getting enough like attention or help in like the academic side of things, they'll just get lost in the whole social, and then going to uni is just like a whole social event. It's not really what they came for […] if you're not careful, if you're not very focused on what you're doing, you'll get lost in the whole uni life and you don't really get the most out of it. (Samantha)

Samantha's view suggests a reason why these students might lose their focus. An over-engagement in social activities is constructed as the by-product of neglected attention. Although Samantha was clear that the responsibility for maintaining an academic focus rested with the student, the idea of "getting lost" portrayed a student who, at an earlier point in time, might have been on the right track but was now, unexpectedly, in a place of helplessness. In Jennifer's case, when she arrived at that 'place', she simply stopped. Stopping meant disengaging until she found the inner strength to begin again and find her way. For some students, however, 'stopping' can mean a premature end to their academic aspirations.

8.12 Master Theme: Self-Talk to My Past, Present and Future Selves

Participants spoke in ways that suggested a desire for control over both behavioural intentions and non-efficacious practices. In Hardy's (2006) review of the literature on self-talk, it is variously described as verbal and non-verbal communication, talking to oneself as a means of self-regulation, using a series of self-statements, and can be expressed audibly or contained inwardly. Furthermore, it has several uses, such as instructing oneself or interpreting individual feelings, and can involve dialogue between two persons.

The participants used self-talk to convey the advice they gave to a 'former self', to motivate their present self and to caution a 'future self' with the benefit of hindsight. Furthermore, self-talk was used to express perceptions of the distancing they felt in their relationships with staff. Idealistic arrangements were constructed as desirable rather than as a possibility or a reflection of the reality of their experiences. It should be noted that Smith et al. (2009) state that paying attention to the way in which a participant uses language is important in IPA.

8.12.1 Self-Talk as 'Protection'

As a third-year student, Tobi gave herself permission to take an alternative view about academic outcomes, almost as though this could offer protection against the fallout from poorer outcomes. She engaged in self-talk in a protective sense as if to preserve a sense of

self-worth when summarising her academic attainment: *"A grade on an exam paper, that doesn't determine who <u>you</u>[18] are at the end of the day."* Thus, Tobi's rhetoric was a kind of 'safety net'. Its construction suggested that she might want to place distance between her grades and the construction of an aspirational identity.

Sabrina also used self-talk as protection against the possibility of an undesirable future. She reflected on the pressures and traditional rites-of-passage associated with her cultural background [Mauritian/Trinidadian] which included marrying and having children at a younger age. She immediately resorted to using 'you' when describing this unwanted situation, as if to place distance between her present identity and the prospect of an undesired future identity. When comparing herself with young women who are forced to take the marital route, she stated that: *"in Mauritius, back in the day they used to get <u>you</u> married as soon as <u>you</u> had <u>your</u> period [...] I would rather be here than where <u>you</u> are so then <u>you</u> take it more seriously".* Sabrina used 'you' to represent both herself *and* the 'other'. With skilful use of language, she remained at the centre of her narrative ('I') while successfully displacing a projected and undesirable identity ('you'). She used a motivated form of distancing to embrace her constructed identity [the final 'you' in her statement]. Hence, her current efficacious identity was protected.

8.12.2 Self-Talk as Idealised Self

As an infrequent attendee at university, Kimberley had previously expressed the desire to learn in a more intimate setting but seemed unsure of her identity construction even in that setting. Her narrative was peppered with phrases and words such as "I think", "you would" and "maybe". She seemed to visualise a learning environment that could allow her to feel comfortable in engaging, but mainly in an idealistic sense. A key aspect of Kimberley's identity was feeling comfortable enough to ask questions without the fear of feeling belittled or highlighted as lacking. Speaking in the third person acted as a buffer between experiences of visibility/vulnerability and perceptions of feeling powerful described through verbal and non-verbal interactions: *"I think with more intimate lectures <u>you</u> would feel more comfortable to put <u>your</u> hand up and maybe ask a question and <u>you</u> don't have to be shouting from the top of <u>your</u> lungs depending on where <u>you're</u> standing or sitting."*

In contrast, Sabrina felt it was important to take a bold stance and assume responsibility for engaging with her studies. She stated, for the second time [see section 8.9.1 for the first

---

[18] 'You' and its derivatives in these excerpts are underlined for illustrative purposes only and do not infer emphasis. However, these words suggest the instructional and motivation nature of self-talk (Hardy, 2006).

occasion], that "*you make it exciting for yourself*". Although she used the third person, there was a strong sense of ownership for her actions. She seemed less concerned with the perceptions of other students and was more interested in the actual experience of studying as well as how this could benefit her.

Samantha, however, seemed to focus more on how she might be perceived by other students. She had attempted to create an ideal identity which she subsequently had difficulty enacting. As an extended form of self-talk, using the third-person impersonal, she briefly stepped outside of her present identity and into a more aspirational academic identity; namely, one that was focused and had the benefit of hindsight. Referring to her current construction, she warned her present self of the danger of being "knocked off balance" using an analogy of movement, which seemed to resonate with her aspiration of becoming a dancer:

> *Maybe academic staff think, she's got a lot of potential there, but she just needs to concentrate, just apply herself and, you know, just get on it [...] I just feel like you should just be, you should just be who you are and just feel secure in that and don't let anyone try and, you know, knock you off your balance or whatever [...] you need to put the same if not more in psychology cos this is serious. This is just as serious [as dance]. This is, your, a lot of money is going into this. (Samantha)*

Abigail used self-talk to positively reconstruct the experience of becoming pregnant at an early age, as if to comfort a past self while offering hope for forging an aspirational identity. She drew heavily on the best version of her 'possible self' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and emphasised personal accountability as a way of convincing herself that an earlier mistake could be recovered with enough determination:

> *[...] you can still achieve the highest basically if you put your mind to it. So, yeah. I think cos if there's an expectation from you, then you're gonna wanna live up to that, especially, I think especially getting pregnant as well. Now I have to go even harder [...] you just need to know what you want to do and then do those necessary steps to get there. For me, I have to go to be where I want to be. (Abigail)*

By her final statement, Abigail seemed to use self-talk to set her herself back on an aspirational path and ended with an objective use of the first-person point-of-view.

8.12.3 Self-Talk as 'Nudged' Support

In the perceived absence of academic support, participants guided their current construction of identity towards more self-sufficient ways of being: *"I feel like I'm learning more now and it's my responsibility as well [...] you're basically in charge of your own success now [...] you just **have** to manage otherwise what you gonna do?" (Abigail).* Abigail's statement reflected a drive towards becoming efficacious. Her views suggest that there might be a role for self-talk in enabling students to become more motivated and directed, particularly where it involves learning from past mistakes. Possibly reflecting on the similar experiences of others, Abigail stated that role models could help these students stay on track and avoid ruminating about past failures:

> *[...] there needs to be that support elsewhere I think and the, your, the, okay, apart from your family the most time you spend is at school and stuff so if you're not getting that from school then you're gonna get it from your peers and sometimes they're not always the best people to be looking up to or gaining approval for or you're gonna get it from the hood,[19] like for boys anyways, or for girls, guys, d'you know that I mean? You'll just turn to the wrong things. If you've got that role model to keep reminding you where, where you're aiming for, like to not lose sight of that then, I just think it will make such a difference. (Abigail)*

Of note, Abigail did not insinuate that this kind of support or role models were available to her in her current university environment, suggesting that she had already decided that these must be sought from external contexts. In a similar vein, Samantha stated that taking a more responsible, accountable stance worked best for an efficacious identity, but only when she had taken time to reflect on tardy approaches to exam preparation that had created unnecessary anxiety:

> *So, we had like two months to prepare for the seen exam and I prepared for it the night before the exam and I was like, **why did you leave it this late**? You had all that time [...] that was the moment when I was like, something's wrong if you're like, for the night before an exam and you've had two months. You might not be fully in it, but you're in it. You can either go, stay and if you're gonna stay, do it properly. Stick to it cos you don't really have anything taking up your time like you did before so you can actually, you know, do what you've planned to do. (Samantha)*

---

[19] A slang term for the local community

Samantha's resolve to complete her degree was summed up as advising her present identity with a view to achieving positive outcomes for an aspirational identity. First, she acknowledged her current position, almost as if she was holding a mirror up to her present self. Next, she stepped outside of her present self and, in a reflective sense, provided options, using 'nudging' as both admonition and encouragement. Finally, she warned a potentially non-efficacious identity to prioritise her studies so that her current identity could achieve its aims. Using self-talk revealed how she was able to seal her decision to remain on the course and complete her degree.

8.12.4 Self-Talk as Bridging Device

All participants articulated the benefits of being able to speak candidly about their experiences during the interview. Although articulated in the first person, Kimberley used the opportunity to bridge perceived and actual experiences. She had found a safe space [the interview] in which to explore her perceptions. While there was still some doubt about what might transpire from this opportunity [indicated by a repeated use of 'maybe'], she seemed encouraged by the idea that some good might come from sharing her experience:

> *I finally feel that I can express what I feel about the university [...] and maybe be actually heard and taken into consideration. So, it's not really just in my thoughts and my being left to myself. There's maybe someone else hearing it as well and it might be useful. (Kimberley)*

Kimberley invokes self-talk as a dialogic piece. Hardy's (2006) review found self-talk included dialogue between two people. Kimberley was finally able to shift her inner dialogue to an external space [the interview]. In this space, her thoughts were articulated as part of identity work that could be observed by herself and heard by another person. She was no longer just 'left to herself'. Jennifer seemed to accord with Kimberley's view of the benefit of self-talk when asked about her coping strategies. Observing her thoughts helped her to accept her current situation and develop more effective ways of coping. Meditation was one way of creating distance between the complexity of a shifting identity and Jennifer's emerging thoughts as she worked towards developing a more positive construction of the self:

> [...] *Most people think that they're the thoughts that are coming up in their head, but if you're able to observe them then you're not that. They're a part of you, they're an aspect of you. I'm not denying that [...] but at the same time there's an element of power and control. If you're able to observe them, then you're able to not react to them*

and what meditation does and the practice of observing them does is it gives <u>you</u> the power to […] not react to them. (Jennifer)

In Jennifer's case, having another person in her headspace was satisfied by the process of meditation. Her third person narrative affirmed that identity construction is a 'work-in-progress'. Its success rested on a growing understanding of the role of meditation in harnessing her thoughts. The desire for "power" over her situation [and not in a reactive way] was repeated at various points throughout her narrative. Her cautionary refrain was that a failure to work with her thoughts would result in simply 'playing out' the role of a student without a fuller appreciation of the experience:

I realise now that it's just all playing out that belief that <u>you're</u> not worthy, that <u>you</u> have to prove <u>yourself</u> to give <u>yourself</u> a reason to excuse <u>yourself</u> that 'oh just in case I fail it's because I left it to the last minute it's got nothing to do with my ability' and I used to play it. That just played out all of first year and second year, even now with my dissertation I still did it and it took, like, nearly the realisation that I could do potentially really badly and it could potentially affect my grade to realise that that was the underlying belief and that's why it was coming and playing up like this. (Jennifer)

I was so proud of myself when I originally got here and I just realise I would get 2:1s instead of 'firsts' and it would be a big deal and [laughs] *other people, as well the way they speak, their presentations would be a lot more eloquent or well-presented or well-organised and I knew that I was, I was at that level but because I was playing out all those, the belief that I wasn't worthy so leaving it till the last minute and not trying as hard often what I did wasn't as good, but I know that as well that was just a perception in my mind. (Jennifer)*

Jennifer's construction centred on disposing of her previous identity as a 'high-performing Black female student' while embracing a shifting identity that comprised multiple selves for which she was still in discovery. Her former identity had successfully acted as a protective mantle that worked well in her previous education environments. Her emerging identity was raw, exposed, vulnerable and, based on her aspirational self, in direct conflict with the academic environment. Self-talk was an essential tool for meaning-making as she reflected on her experience as a final-year student. As suggested by the literature, self-talk seemed to support meaning-making for their experiences in these participants.

8.13 Discussion

This phase was designed to capture traditional Black female students' experiences in order to shed light on the forces that shaped their constructions of identity at university. Transcripts from seven in-depth interviews were analysed using IPA in order to understand these students' meaning-making. Four master themes were constructed from the data that were considered important for understanding the experiences of students in this sample. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) and social constructionism (Gergen, 2007) were drawn on to interpret participants' stories. These theories shed light on how identity was constructed by these students as multiple, shifting selves in their academic environments. When experiences collide with processes of identity construction (Swanson et al., 2002), a reduced sense of belonging as well as feelings of disempowerment and vulnerability are possible outcomes.

The sample of traditional Black female students was a comparative group against which to situate the experiences of nontraditional Black female students as well as BME students more generally. Both student types share characteristics-in-common such as ethnicity, gender and, for this sample, the same area of study [undergraduate psychology]. The main difference was being of a younger age. As well as the age difference, the nuanced experiences of these students should be taken into consideration.

8.13.1 Constructing Multiple Identities

Whether informed by conscious or unconscious processes (Reay, 2004), identity construction feeds into multiple layers of the being or development of selves that are governed by a mixture of "individual self-images and group we-images" (Mennell, 1994, p. 179), weaving contemporary ideas for identity construction with traditional symbolic interactionist perspectives. Identity construction is a struggle for distinctiveness and recognition by others. Participants' constructions of identity were centred on multiple, shifting selves as they experienced the triumphs and tensions that appear to be part of the life-world of the traditional Black female student reflected in this research. Although they were enrolled at different universities in the London area, similarities for their struggle to persist and achieve in higher education revealed the systemic nature of the experience of this student type. These similarities existed regardless of ethnicity parallels or social class differences and were framed within a construction of multiple identities.

As a driver for agency, efficacy is broadly associated with independence, motivation and autonomy (Jungert, Koestner, Houlfort, & Schattke, 2013). A motivated learner seeks to

recognise the boundaries of their knowledge and skills and puts in place processes whereby these skills can be extended for self-improvement. Student autonomy is further informed by holding to a work/study ethic that can include a plan for how studying is managed promptly (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Where particular identities intersected (for example, a transitioning identity with an efficacious identity), participants' experiences tended to be constructed in more positive terms. Indeed, the construction of an efficacious identity seemed crucial for mediating the challenge that accompanied transitioning during critical periods of university experience.

Findings revealed that an efficacious identity [informed by strategic help-seeking behaviours] seemed to sustain more positive attributions across differing scenarios that supported resilience and meaning-making. However, an efficacious identity could be derailed by the shift to a solitary identity in response to perceptions of threat. Adverse experiences were reflected as a sense of 'unbelonging' that encouraged practices of distancing and enforced isolation in order to retain a sense of self-worth. In contrast, an aspirational identity in these participants provided impetus and direction. In some cases, their aspirations were diverted by the pursuit of a career that was distanced from the study of psychology, reflecting the possibility of a protracted state of 'unbelonging' to the subject, the degree course and the university as a whole.

During the first year of an undergraduate degree, transitioning typically involves accommodating and assimilating to a new academic environment (Shoderu et al., 2012). Transitioning in the second year may be affected by a requirement to make important decisions such as final-year module choices or choosing a career route during a period of instability, with a possible effect for aspirations on graduation. Findings from the current study suggest that students with an efficacious identity fare better with transitioning as they seem to hold fewer rigid assumptions about their experiences, and so encourage a more flexible and resilient response to challenges. Hattie, Clinton, and Rowe (2016, p. 33) found benefits for students taking a strategic approach to developing a learning mindset; that is, "knowing when to be fixed and when to be in growth …". Claxton and Lucas (2016) assert that it is just as important to know when to stop or pause [like Jennifer] or to change tactic [like Abigail] as it is to persist.

Indeed, Jennifer's decision to pause during a depressive episode can be likened to the discovery of a subjective phenomenon that has similar characteristics to depression. Derailment appears to exist at the opposite end of a depression spectrum that includes a search for meaning during times of stress (Ratner, Mendle, Burrow, & Thoemmes, 2019):

A highly derailed individual may believe that current life aims are incompatible with pursuits of the past, resulting in an identity that has been lost and, in many cases, replaced by a new one. Thus, derailment is characterized by a diminished sense of self-continuity emerging from the inability to reconcile discrepant life pathways. (p. 2)

Jennifer became derailed during her studies. Similar to the description provided by Ratner et al., (2019), an experience of derailment worked to pull Jennifer out of depression and led to a more positive outcome and direction for a revised construction of her identity.

As a subjective phenomenon that reflects the criticality of student experience, transitioning appears to be better supported by seeing role models in an academic environment. Role models are beneficial in several ways. Cremin (2016) suggests that they promote creativity, connectivity, autonomy and idea-generation in students. Role models can stem from a range of networks (Ireland et al., 2018) and are admired for possessing a particular quality (such as educational achievement, wealth or business prowess) that can inspire students to themselves become a role model. Beyond this, Ceglie and Settlage (2014) found that gender and ethnicity similarity in a role model can be more effective for identity construction in others than gender alone. Some participants suggested that, with limited opportunities to access role models in their academic environments, they could potentially experience more difficulty in achieving a positive construction for their identity.

However, Maylor's (2009a) dissection of the experiences of Black staff in education suggests that they hold mixed views about being role models. While Maylor's study was based on the experiences of teachers in primary and secondary education, the findings revealed that a range of variables can affect students' ratings of BME staff as suitable role models such as their age, gender and whether they are perceived as an authority figure. The requirement to be exemplary and available was experienced as taxing in some BME staff (Maylor, 2009a). However, for students with a weak academic profile, same-ethnicity role models may be even more important for guiding them through critical periods, such as transitioning.

Transitioning was also aligned with a help-seeking identity. One participant indicated the benefit of a particular kind of support that could buffer negative perceptions and encourage persistence, translated as 'nudged' support in the current study. A desire for 'nudging' in this participant was articulated as receiving pep talks by staff that might reflect a genuine interest in her well-being and academic progress as a lead-in to deeper forms of inquiry. Importantly, 'nudging' seemed to support the construction of a help-seeking identity as it encouraged the student to become more proactive in making the shift towards efficacy.

On the other hand, seeking support was constructed by some participants as a visible indicator of weakness and translated as an experience of vulnerability.

'Nudging' is not a new concept. It is associated with social psychology, health psychology and financial management as a way to encourage productive and beneficial behaviours in populations while maintaining choice and personal control (Marteau, Ogilvie, Roland, Suhrche, & Kelly, 2011). In some learning environments, nudging is administered as a series of short messages delivered via social media that act as reminders to students to engage with their studies (SMF, 2017). Its extension to a form of support in the current educational context is, therefore, merited.

It is possible that other forms of support, such as staff or peer-to-peer mentoring programmes, may be of benefit to students who already view themselves as efficacious (Bayne, 2012; Sánchez et al., 2017), such as Sabrina in the current study. However, DeFreitas and Bravo Antonio (2012) found that while mentoring can support a student in their academic development, it is not a predictor of academic achievement. This finding suggests that students who participate in mentoring programmes may already be self-efficacious. Thus, engagement with support is more readily enacted by these students as part of a strategy towards greater self-efficacy. Moreover, participants with a sense of 'unbelonging' seemed less likely to want to access these kinds of supportive interventions.

In sum, intersecting identities can be experienced as sites of confusion and frustration (Crenshaw, 1991), while it seems that an identity that has completed its 'shift' has the potential to be experienced more positively, even if that shift might lead to a less desired outcome, such as Jennifer's experience. The challenge for these participants, therefore, is to enact an identity that is appropriate to the presenting context or challenge and to effectively engage with the psychological work required to manage a shift or maintain that identity.

8.13.2 Importance of Relationships Inside and Outside University

Friendships can influence a sense of belonging in young people (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005). Whether in intimate contexts such as friendship pairs or larger groups, interpersonal relationships can lead to important attachments. Often same-sex attachments, friendships are usually formed due to shared interests or other commonalities (Kuttler, La Greca, & Prinstein, 2010). Research shows that students can form cliques during the early years of secondary education that create a stronger sense of belonging (Hargreaves, 2006). These cliques vary in construction, although same-ethnicity cliques are a prominent characteristic (Urberg, Degrimencioglu, Tolson, & Halliday-Scher, 1995).

Universities are populated by these pairings or groups of students in presumed friendships. In this mode, information can be shared and discussed, and extended support can be accessed. However, it is known that development is shaped by lifelong experiences (Pervin & Cervone, 2010). By the time these students arrive at university, they are already forming distinct preferences and evaluating their peers for both sameness and difference.

Findings demonstrated that university friendships were generally considered less important to these participants. Existing friendships were still within easy access for these London-domiciled students, unlike the experience of young people who leave home to study at institutions at greater distances from home. Several identities (for example, help-seeking, efficacious and belonging) were implicated by these participants in securing friendships.

Substituting existing friends with new friendships in the immediate environment could possibly have widened the frame for developing a sense of belonging in these participants. Still, most were not able to do so. Furthermore, it seemed that the presence of pre-university social networks played a larger role in whether these participants actively sought to make friendships in their university environment as well as the perceived superficiality or depth of such relationships. Research suggests that where an individual holds multiple non-competing selves as part of their identity, they may be more self-reliant (Lester, 2003) to the extent that the work involved in securing friendships in their immediate environment is viewed as less important.

8.13.3 Cultivating Personal, Social and Cultural Capital

Viewed through a broad sociological lens, meaning-making is derived from understanding identity in relation to the cultural, group or societal context in which an individual exists (Somers & Gibson, 1994). This may lead to disillusionment if a person fails to comprehend the [sometimes, unfair or inexplicable] rules and practices that govern their culture, group or society. Therefore, to achieve meaning, an individual may choose to invoke their capital or create 'social gravity' through a process of self-investment. The younger a person is, the more opportunities they have to achieve social gravity in ways that are only limited by the subjectivities of social 'ageing' (Calasanti, 2005). This investment is both quantitative and qualitative in nature, creating linkages that can reinforce meaning.

Cultural capital is a property that is common to all social classes and ethnicities (Yosso, 2005). It is a reality for every setting, becoming problematic only when referenced against an assumed norm (for example, for experiences that suggest privilege). Webb, Schirator, and Danaher (2002) refer to cultural capital as a certain 'know-how'; that is, knowing how to

behave in specific circles flowing out of a cultural field formed of rules, norms and practices. In some situations, this is likened to having a sense of entitlement or feeling of privilege (Richardson, 2015; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004). Personal and social capital, according to Lareau and Weininger (2003), encompass family, friends and other private and professional networks and can be subject to forms of prejudice and bias. Nevertheless, these networks can help a person become more efficient in life. As such, capital adds meaning to a person's life-world.

Students bring their cultural, personal and social capital into their university environment by sharing their knowledge and experiences. When this is acknowledged and validated by the student community, a student is more likely to feel accepted and encouraged to develop a sense of belonging. If capital is perceived by others as 'symbolic' instead of legitimate (Reay, 2018), the struggle for recognition is experienced as taxing (Mirza, 1998). Symbolic capital, as Evans (2012, p. 105) puts it, is "misrecognition" that leads to symbolic violence.

Multiple identities such as belonging, spiritual, solitary and social selves were intertwined within participants' conceptualisation of their capital. An intersection of shifting selves within their academic environment was constrained by structural issues, such as the extent to which participants engaged with negative stereotypes about Black people, how they felt they were perceived by staff and the extent to which they were empowered to have a 'presence' among their peers. Activation of capital was considered important for demonstrating credibility in the classroom.

The quality of relationships with students of other ethnicities and staff affected ways in which participants' capital was manifested. For some participants, cultural capital was vested in accessing family support, especially maternal support. For others, this was negated when they were excluded from student cliques on the basis of their capital. It was clear from the narratives that these students had entered university with rich capital. Its positive enactment, however, required sensitive negotiations between students and staff. This study suggests that an ability to exercise capital in any form might be subsumed in a kind of validating (that is, 'nudged') support as a crucial aspect of encouragement.

8.13.4 Self-Talk to My Past, Present and Future Selves

Multiple, shifting identities were further situated within the domain of self-talk. Dolcos and Albarracin (2014) posit that when a person uses 'you' instead of 'I' in their narratives, they are more likely to be positive, imperative, take a broader overview of their situation and are

more determined to achieve that to which the self-talk relates. Research has shown that when self-talk is used as a linguistic device, it indicates meaning-making for deconstructing the past or learning from past mistakes (Orvell, Kross, & Gelman, 2017). Pronounced self-talk also infers 'wisdom' as an end-product of learning (Kross & Grossman, 2011) as well as self-regulation (Kross et al., 2014).

Markus and Nurius (1986) refer to scenarios that are practised in the mind before they are realised or activated in the present or future and, sometimes, not at all. Porpora and Shumar (2010) state that self-talk as self-organisation can be utilised to clarify thoughts for future action. Speaking in the third person [using 'you' or 'they' instead of 'I' or 'we'] can create sufficient distance for an individual to manage self-imposed criticisms about their past attitudes or actions and to comfortably articulate intentions for an aspirational self. To a large extent, self-talk in these participants appeared to meet these descriptions.

As participants narrated their experiences, their multiple identities were revealed and addressed to support meaning-making, particularly where a past self gave advice to a future self. The more reflective participants were, the greater their sense of declared agency for the possibilities of an aspirational self. For students with fewer positive constructions, self-talk seemed to support an analysis of their current situations from a 'safer' distance before committing to an action. Participants were sufficiently grounded in their constructions of identity to not become lost in a fantasy world of self-talk, attesting to a willingness to embark on a credible process of self-discovery. It is possible that engaging in self-talk might help students who experience marginality to take personal responsibility for achieving their goals.

8.13.5 Limitations

As with Phase 1, the sample size for this study is small ($N = 7$). However, this number is considered reasonable for an IPA study, where the preference is to use smaller sample sizes (see Chapter 6, 6.7) in order to elicit complex and layered constructions of individual experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Nevertheless, it is accepted that the experiences of this sample cannot be considered reflective of traditional Black female undergraduate psychology students at other London institutions, neither does it sufficiently address the heterogeneity of a Black ethnicity. Furthermore, the findings are constrained by a focus on the experiences of students at London institutions. Black female students at predominantly White institutions, in other parts of the country or studying subjects other than psychology, may have an entirely different experience to the participants in this sample. As such, more research is required to access the diversity of experiences for this student type.

The researcher's age accorded less with this sample than with participants in Phase 1. This characteristic could have led to a difference in interpretation of this dataset as a consequence of reduced proximity to the reality of participants' experiences as traditional Black female students. To moderate this potential, external scrutiny of findings was put in place to ensure interpretation was as robust as could be achieved by a sole researcher with a particularised set of social characteristics.

8.13.6 Implications

The current findings suggest that a re-think may be required about ways in which marginalised students are supported in higher education. Universities may need to understand how to leverage the particular capital held by these students to better support their progression (Brady et al., 2017). This level of insight goes beyond the usual suite of equality and diversity training that is offered to staff. Instead, it requires a more research-informed understanding of the nuanced experiences of BME students to better understand their experiences of both marginalisation and progression.

In addition, more work is required to ease the transition into and through higher education for these students. One suggestion is to encourage teaching practices that are sensitive to student diversity while ensuring that staff have the cultural competencies to engage in the informal but beneficial nurturing opportunities that have been translated as 'nudged' support in this study. Another suggestion is to provide more opportunities for BME students to showcase aspects of their capital of which they are most proud without nullifying meaning-making in other areas which are yet to be fully understood.

8.13.7 Conclusions

Little is known about the impact of social and structural forces on the construction of identity in traditional Black female students in UK higher education. Even less is known about the experiences of traditional Black female undergraduate psychology students. A relatively small body of qualitative studies has focused on experiences of identity construction in Black female students in higher education. As such, this research adds to the field.

Identity work in this sample suggests that processes of self-change are influenced, to a large extent, by perceptions and experiences in their academic environment. For example, if an identity is constructed as threatened, it is more difficult for some students to experience a sense of belonging. One reason is that they are having to negotiate between developing

resilience in order to cope and the requirement to sustain sufficient engagement with their degree programme to complete their studies.

As befits an IPA study, findings were discussed in the context of the psychology of the 'double hermeneutic', which foregrounds both the participant and the researcher in the interpretative process (Smith et al.*,* 2009). The final hermeneutic, which concludes the 'triple hermeneutic' circle (Smith et al., 2009), is left to the reader, who interprets both interlocutors. The chapter to follow considers a mixed-participants approach to access the experiences of traditional and nontraditional students, using focus group interviews. Phase 3 provided an opportunity for both student types to share and discuss their experiences in a consensual setting. The findings shed further light on the theoretical approaches outlined in Chapter 5.

I gained fresh insight of what it means to be a Black woman in higher education from listening to the stories and counter-narratives of eleven participants in Phases 1 and 2 of this research. I believe this knowledge helped me to approach the focus group interviews more effectively based on prior focus group experiences and the realisation that, with a handful of strong Black women in the room, I needed to have a clear, well-thought out agenda.

Chapter 9

Phase 3: Mixed Focus Groups - Traditional and Nontraditional Black Female Students' Experiences

This chapter is a thematic analysis of focus group interviews carried out with Black female undergraduate psychology students. There were two groups, each including both traditional and nontraditional students. Each interview was carried out in two parts. The first part explored the students' general experiences of their time in higher education. The second part provided an opportunity for students to member-check themes that had been constructed from earlier phases of this research for salience with their own experiences. In addition, a creative activity allowed students to track and illustrate their experiences across a timeline. The activity was used as an orientation exercise to set up focus group interviews that followed. This phase took a triangulated approach to data collection (Reid et al., 2005) while drawing on social constructionism (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2007) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Hankivsky, 2014) perspectives to inform the analysis.

Returning to the central research question posed in Chapter 1, the study continued the exploration into Black female students' constructions of identity. Students were enrolled at one of two London universities: one was a post-1992 institution and the other was a member of the Russell Group (RG). Diversity across student and institution type led to a range of views about participants' experiences.

9.1 Study Aims

There were six principal aims for using mixed focus groups in this study. One of these was to draw on a wide breadth of experiences in a setting where all participants had equal opportunities to present their views. Another aim was to reduce attention to age as a demarcation of experience. A third aim was to see whether participants would narrate their experiences differently in a group setting. The fourth aim was to explore whether multiple identities [a consistent finding from earlier phases] would also be evident for these participants.

A fifth aim was for participants to engage in a member-checking exercise which took part in the second half of the focus groups. Also known as respondent validation (Mays & Pope, 2000), students with similar characteristics were asked to comment on earlier analyses for credibility. In so doing, they were encouraged to take an active part in the research. Collins (2001) advocates that for successful member-checking, "… knowledge claims must

be evaluated by a community of experts whose members represent the standpoints of the groups from which they originate" (p. 187). Participants in the current study shared their experiences and interpretations of peer experiences, highlighting the benefit of exploring experiences within and between groups.

The final aim of this phase was to use a timeline activity to obtain further insight into identity construction. Prior to the group interviews, each participant illustratively created a timeline to capture high, low and mid-points of their experiences both before and during higher education. This method allowed participants to reflect on their experiences prior to the interview. The timelines added to the volume of data gathered in this research and were thematically analysed for any insight they might bring to understanding narratives of experience and identity construction in these participants.

9.2 Focus Groups

Individual interviews are useful for exploring depth of experience (Breen, 2006). However, focus groups are an efficient method for accessing breadth of experience (Fern, 1982) and gathering a large amount of data in one sitting (Farnsworth & Boon, 2010). The use of focus groups is established in empirical research (Sherrif, Gugglberger, Hall, & Scholes, 2014). Some researchers have used focus groups to complement individual interviews (Morgan, 1996). This method offers autonomous view-sharing with no requirement for consensus (Nadal et al., 2015) and supports negotiated meaning-making among participants (Warner, 2008). Both individual interviews and focus groups were used in the current thesis to access the depth and breadth of students' experiences.

Focus groups offer further benefits. In this setting, participants may have prior knowledge of each other and so may feel more comfortable exchanging their views (Catterall & Maclaran, 1997), although Reed and Roskell Payton (1997) found that prior association can, at times, inhibit candid responding. This limitation points to potential difficulty when using this method to discuss sensitive topics (Hennink, 2014). However, other researchers have found that focus groups can work particularly well with sensitive issues (Sagoe, 2012; Suyono, 1981). One reason for this is that sensitivity can be balanced by pooling views from a wider range of participants experiencing the same phenomenon (Farnsworth & Boon, 2010).

In the current research, participants in the first focus group were known to each other as they were enrolled on the same course at the same institution. In the second group, participants were enrolled at two different universities; two of the participants in this group

were on the same course. Observations for participant interactions were noted in both groups (see Section 9.6).

9.3 Participants

The participants were drawn from two levels of undergraduate psychology study. They were recruited in similar ways to participants from earlier phases, including email, a poster campaign, a snowball technique and social media platforms. Recruitment information (Appendix O & P) specified that participation would be in a mixed focus group, was addressed to both student types [traditional and nontraditional, with a brief explanation of these categories] and across two levels of undergraduate study [second and third year].

The aim was to carry out two focus group interviews, each with between four and six participants. However, the final number of participants in each group was based on response rate following an extensive recruitment drive. Despite regular reminders of forthcoming interview dates, six students who had agreed to participate did not attend. Consequently, the focus groups comprised smaller numbers of students than had originally been intended.

Initially, I was very disappointed that efforts to recruit students for this phase resulted in such small sample sizes. I looked back over the process and asked several questions. Was the timing right? Due to a heavy teaching schedule, most interviews had to be carried out during times when students were approaching exams or near the end of term. What about my use of terminology? Had the term 'Black' been off-putting for some students? I had not identified myself as a Black female researcher in recruiting material. I did not believe I should have to. After all, I had seldom seen recruitment information where the ethnicity of the researcher(s) was stated. However, due to the kind of study, could an early revealing of my ethnicity have encouraged more students to participate? Just before the start of the first focus group interview, I discovered that one of the students was not from psychology. She was referred by a contact from another university but had not been properly briefed on the criteria. I had to ask her to leave and was disappointed that this left only four students in the group. On reflection, I have realised that the number of students was appropriate, with each participant having sufficient space to share their experiences, leading to a richer account. Again, this was a place of learning for the multiple skills required to facilitate a focus group; namely, monitoring participants [one participant started nodding off!]; encouraging quieter voices; managing dominant voices; managing the protocol and time-keeping; staying close to the schedule while noticing and [where possible] rectifying issues as they arose [such as unnecessary repetition]; ensuring all three recording devices stayed working; noting points of particular interest to return to; and, using the first focus group interview as a pilot to assess effectiveness of the member-checking procedure. It was also in this setting that concerns about the timelines began to loom in the background. Although I was clear about taking a thematic approach, I was less clear about their usefulness for understanding more about participants' experiences. However, there were other gains. For this and the next phase, I used an amended version of the demographic questionnaire and was more confident that it reflected the accuracy of students' characteristics on paper, particularly without imposition of ONS (2011) categories in order to define their ethnicity.

9.3.1 Focus Group 1

Focus group 1 comprised four participants who were second and third year Black female undergraduate students. They attended the same post-1992 university (see Chapter 2, 2.7 for university characteristics). Student types were nontraditional ($N = 1$) and traditional ($N = 3$). Their ages ranged from 22 to 31 years, with a mean age of 24.5 years (see Table 9.3.1a). Similar to Phase 2, one participant in this focus group [S2, nontraditional] identified as a student-parent (Table 9.3.1b).

9.3.2 Focus Group 2

Focus group 2 comprised three participants who were second year Black female undergraduate students. Their ages ranged from 19 to 40 years, with a mean age of 26.3 years (Tables 9.3.2a & 9.3.2b). They were nontraditional ($N = 1$) and traditional ($N = 2$) students based at one of two London universities. The traditional students were enrolled at a Russell Group (RG) university and the nontraditional student was at a post-1992 university. The importance of this distinction for their student experience became clear during the interviews.

The mean age of participants across both focus groups was 25.4 years. Each student was assigned a number to protect their identity. Their student type and year of study are indicated in brackets. This practice is noted by Hennink (2014) as helpful for situating context.

Table 9.3.1a

Mixed Focus Group 1 Participant Characteristics

Participant	Ethnicity	Age	Previous educational qualifications	Current university first choice	Attended Induction	Extra-curricular activities (hours per week)	Non-university activities (hours per week)
S1 (tradYr3)	Black Caribbean	22	A-Levels	Yes	Yes	None	1-5
S2 (nontradYr2)	Black British African	31	Access	No	No	None	6-10
S3 (tradYr3)	Black African	22	A-Levels	No	No	None	6-10
S4 (tradYr3)	Black Caribbean	23	A-Levels	Yes	Yes	1-5	None

Table 9.3.1b

Mixed Focus Group 1 Participant Characteristics (continued)

Participant	Employment (hours per week)	Accommodation	Social class*	Student-parent	Religion	University-educated parent(s)	University-educated siblings
S1 (tradYr3)	6-10	Parental home	AB	No	Catholic	No	Yes
S2 (nontradYr2)	None	Privately-rented	D	Yes	Not stated	No	Yes
S3 (tradYr3)	11-15	Parental home	C1	No	Christian	Yes	No
S4 (tradYr3)	None	Family member's home	AB	No	Christian	Mother	Yes

*Social class indicators based on parental occupation:
Grade AB - higher and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional occupations
Grade C1 - supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional
Grade D - semi and unskilled manual occupations

Table 9.3.2a

Mixed Focus Group 2 Participant Characteristics

Participant	Ethnicity	Age	Previous educational qualifications	Current university first choice	Attended Induction	Extra-curricular activities (hours per week)	Non-university activities (hours per week)
S5 (tradYr2)	Black African	20	A-Levels	No	Yes	6-10	None
S6 (tradYr2)	Black Mixed	19	Int. Bacc	Yes	Yes	1-5	1-5
S7 (nontradYr2)	Black British/Black African/Black Mixed	40	BTEC	No	Yes	1-5	6-10

Table 9.3.2b

Mixed Focus Group 2 Participant Characteristics (continued)

Participant	Employment (hours per week)	Accommodation	Social class*	Student-parent	Religion	University-educated parent(s)	University-educated siblings
S5 (tradYr2)	None	Privately-rented	AB	No	Christian	Yes	No
S6 (tradYr2)	11-15	Privately-rented	AB	No	Christian	Yes	Yes
S7 (nontradYr2)	11-15	Privately-rented	AB	No	Not stated	Not stated	Yes

*Social class indicator based on parental occupation:
Grade AB - higher and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional occupations

9.4 Procedure

The setting for a focus group interview is important for participants to feel at ease (Sagoe, 2012). Interviews took place in a qualitative interview room on university premises and were held approximately six months apart. Participants provided written informed consent (Appendix Q). The procedure had four sections and began with each participant completing a short demographic questionnaire to obtain background information (Appendix R). Participants then completed a timeline activity (see Section 9.8).

The interviews were conducted in two sections. Participants were firstly asked about their experiences using a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix S) which began with an open-ended question ('tell me about your experience of studying undergraduate psychology at your university'). This type of question is cited as good practice when conducting a focus group (Rio-Roberts, 2011) as it helps to settle participants into the interview space. Schedule items were broadly constructed to access perceptions of a sense of belonging, identity as a Black female student, aspirations on graduation and the advice they would give to a newly enrolled Black female student. Probes were used to explore participants' responses further.

Participants were then presented with themes constructed from Phases 1 and 2, and informed that this was the researcher's interpretation of experiences from individual interviews that were previously carried out with Black female undergraduate psychology students. By first exploring participants' perceptions and experiences, the interview was not unduly influenced by findings from Phases 1 and 2. Themes were first presented by sample type; that is, nontraditional student experiences followed by traditional student experiences. The presentation was congruent with the order in which the studies were carried out. Explanatory commentary from the researcher was supplemented by a PowerPoint slideshow that further illustrated the themes using participants' quotes (examples at Appendices T & U). Participants were asked to comment on the findings for relevance and salience to their experiences. In this way, data were member-checked by a similarly constructed sample.

The interview portion of each focus group lasted 120 minutes, with a total duration of 165 minutes (see Table 9.4). Data were captured using two audio-recording devices; namely, a voice recording app on an iPad and the recording facility on a mobile handset. At the conclusion of the interview, the participants were thanked and debriefed (Appendix H).

Table 9.4

Phase 3 Study Sections

Stage	*N*	Mode	Duration (in minutes)
1	7	Questionnaire	10-15
2	7	Timeline activity	30
3	7	Interview	60
4	7	Member-checking	60

9.5 Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is documented as well-suited to analysing focus group data (Joffe, 2012) as it has theoretical and methodological flexibility and can be incorporated into a range of frameworks (Clarke & Braun, 2013). TA was separately applied to each focus group's data followed by a review of the full dataset for this study. An inductive approach was taken to analysis as little is known about the social reality of identity construction in this student population.

9.5.1 Analytic Process

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method, inductive TA began with data familiarisation by listening to audio recordings on at least two occasions and then reading and re-reading transcriptions. A sweeping coding process across the whole dataset followed to ensure that data were intuitively responded to and that patterns across the dataset were identified. Codes were entered into several Excel spreadsheets [one for each stage, delineated by focus group; see Appendix V for example]. Using that platform, codes were sorted into categories, providing an overall picture of theme development which generated ideas for the presentation of those themes.

While Braun and Clarke (2006) initially suggested adherence to one or other approach (that is, semantic for a realist and descriptive interpretation or latent for a constructionist interpretation), they later advocated the importance of taking a flexible approach to achieve a more nuanced interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Both semantic and latent coding were applied to draw out participants' experiences. However, there was a stronger leaning towards

a constructionist interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998) in keeping with the purpose and orientation of this research; namely, to explore the construction of identity in this student population.

The next stage involved theme-pruning, in which *some* themes were retained and others relegated to a lower category [sub-themes], while more still were amalgamated or discarded as necessary. The purpose of this activity was to tidy the dataset and to title, define and summarise each theme while keeping a sense of narrative progression. Braun and Clarke (2013) describe this process as theme 'development' rather than 'emergence' to reinforce active researcher-engagement with the process. An important addition was analytic memos (namely, contemporaneous notes made on the transcripts), which helped shape initial writing-up of the findings. The final step was to bring each theme to life using carefully-selected excerpts from the data. Thus, guided by the research questions (Chapter 1), data were coded with attention to semantic and latent content in order to organise data from codes into categories and themes.

9.5.2 Timelines

A broad TA approach was applied to the timelines, where patterns of similarity and/or dissimilarity were noted across high, mid and low points of experience [mostly denoted by year of study]. This helped to more meaningfully 'situate'[20] data across key student transitions. Kirkham, Smith, and Havsteen-Franklin (2015) used a similar approach to explore the experience of pain. Participants in their study were asked to graphically represent their pain. The resulting images were thematically analysed to situate experiences of pain within a phenomenological interpretation, adding yet another layer of interpretation to their findings.

9.5.3 Credibility

When carrying out TA, there is no 'hard-and-fast' rule for how credibility should be achieved, as interpretation is primarily based on the researcher's reality (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Charmaz (2006) acknowledges that this reality is different for each researcher. However, one purpose of a credibility check in qualitative research is to demonstrate a form of coding triangulation in which an alternative perspective has been invited into the final analysis,

---

[20] Causey's (2017, p. 41) comment on drawing as an ethnographic method states: "you are drawing to see, not seeing to draw. Seeing is the product, the line is the process to get there". In agreement with Causey, it was not necessary for the participants in this study to understand their experiences in order to create a timeline. They could use the timeline in order to understand their experiences. In coming to this knowing for myself, some of the doubts I had about the value of this activity to the research were mitigated.

rather than a process that strives to achieve agreement (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Approximately half of the focus group data were analysed by an experienced researcher, who found agreement for the direction that the analysis was taking.

9.5.4 Ethical Considerations

British Psychological Society principles for carrying out research with human subjects were followed (BPS, 2009; 2018). Participants were welcomed, briefed, debriefed and thanked on conclusion. They provided informed consent, and time was allocated beforehand to carefully review the consent form and briefing information, during which participants had the opportunity to clarify any aspect of the research process. During the interviews, each participant was given the opportunity to comment on scheduled items. Potential for dominance by one of the participants was carefully managed to support collective meaning-making, while quieter participants were regularly invited to comment.

As the facilitator, the researcher took full responsibility for ensuring that the focus groups were conducted ethically and according to principles of democracy [for freedom of speech] and equality [for equal access to shared experiences in this forum]. As the groups concluded, participants were given an opportunity to clarify any aspect not previously addressed and were referred to university support sources for anything that might have provoked discomfort. For data presentation and anonymity purposes, students were each allocated a number. See Research Methods (Chapter 6) for further comment on ethics.

9.6 Focus Group Observations

The composition of the focus groups in the current study is an approximate reflection of the ratio of nontraditional to traditional students in UK HEIs (HEFCE, 2018; HESA, 2018a; 2018b), where nontraditional students are outnumbered by traditional students. Given the student mix, it is worthwhile commenting on the interaction between participants in this study. This commentary is stated as good practice when reporting focus group analyses (Carey & Smith, 1994). Furthermore, Hennink (2014) argues for the benefit of reporting individual and group interaction when writing up findings from a focus group interview to convey a fuller picture of participant and group narratives.

Paying attention to sociocultural factors that include, but are not limited to, ethnicity and age is cited as good practice when reporting focus group outcomes (Farnsworth & Boon, 2010). This includes identifying similarities and divergences or reporting on assumptions for a 'deviant' case (Carcary, 2009; see also Chapter 8, 8.5). Similarly, the idiographic focus of

the current research suggests that there is usefulness in being mindful of a single participant's interactions to better contextualise interpretation of focus group data as a whole. Indeed, some researchers (e.g. Duggleby, 2005) argue that such observations are often the missing element when reporting qualitative analyses of focus group data. Attention to this area offers some insight into a researcher's perspective and their influence on subsequent analysis. Consideration of the dynamics of each focus group based on participant characteristics supported a contextual interpretation of the data.

9.6.1 Participant Observations

Interviews were solely facilitated by the researcher but were not wholly moderated in a similar fashion. There were occasions when participants questioned each other for clarification. This type of exchange, which is not uncommon in focus groups (Catterall & Maclaran, 1997), led to a richer interaction and allayed concerns for the effect of a power imbalance between the researcher and the participants. Nevertheless, the focus group setting may have activated memories of times when a participant felt 'othered' (Collins, 1986) or otherwise excluded. Subsequently, one way for focus group members to create a feeling of acceptance is to simply agree with other members or, more bravely, to outperform them by portraying an exceptional identity. Both behaviours were noted in participants. Moreover, participants' comments reflected wider challenges for acceptance by others.

According to Hennink (2014), there are different ways to present focus group interaction. These can include paragraphs to describe the interaction, descriptive text with a few illustrative quotes, or a series of quotes to show the interaction between participants. Farnsworth and Boon's (2010) research on the experience of poverty presented interaction from three focus groups as a longer descriptive account without the use of illustrative quotes, but with more consideration for the researchers' assumptions about participants' comments and behaviours. They described this as "a level of interaction and dynamics that runs entirely parallel to the information gathering process of the focus groups" (p. 616). Reed and Roskell Payton (1997) explored interaction using selected quotes with additional commentary to illustrate the group dynamic.

Reflexivity in the current research was also considered a necessary tool for deconstructing the experience of facilitating these groups and interpreting the dataset (see Chapter 12). However, with "no set formula" for how focus group interaction should be presented (Reed & Roskell Payton, 1997, p. 7), the current study used an approach that

provided examples of two participants to illustrate some of the group dynamics. What follows is not the main analysis, but a demonstration of group dynamics.

9.6.2 Focus Group 1

All students in this group participated in the interview, but one traditional student had a more dominant style. The facilitator moderated this student's contributions to ensure equal access to the views of all students. A possible consequence of this show of dominance was that the sole nontraditional student contributed mainly when invited by the facilitator and often deferred to the views of others. Although she was older than the other group members, the nontraditional student (S4) was the only Level 5 student among a group of Level 6 traditional students. Two short examples of her acquiescent interactions are illustrated below (in bold text):

> *I don't know* […] *do you know what I find and especially this year, and I've said this to you [student name] is people don't expect* […] *I don't think for me that people expect me to be smart. (S3, traditional)*

> **Oh, I get that all the time. (S4, nontraditional)**

> *She's the smart Black girl and she* […] *and it's just kinda like all, like not all Black women in this year can be smart. There's only a select few that get really high grades or she's, you know, or even the assumption that we're average. 'Oh, she's getting this grade'. And it's like when you get a 75, it's like 'oh! oh my gosh!' (S3, traditional student)*

> **So surprised like, wow! You actually got that, wow! So, it's like, why not? (S4, nontraditional)**

As the only mature student in the group, the nontraditional student may have felt less at ease stating her views. Her responding style as a member of an outgroup [nontraditional students] suggested that it was risky for her to voice her opinions in front of an ingroup audience of traditional students. In this intimate setting, she may not have wanted to appear different. To paraphrase Farnsworth and Boon's experience (2010): "… interaction tensions [between nontraditional and traditional students] walked into the room with the participants" (p. 616). Beyond a gulf that was being created by differences in student type, findings from earlier phases of this research suggest that tensions between Black female students are often rooted

in their experiences and perceptions as well as in the stereotypical views they hold about each other.

An alternative explanation is that this kind of tacit contribution resembles a well-known phenomenon in focus group settings (Catterall & Maclaran, 1997). Consensus among focus group members is not necessarily negative since it can indicate strong agreement for an issue and increase the reliability of findings (Breen, 2006). A focus group setting is known for situating and converging verbal responses and the non-verbal behaviours of its participants (Sagoe, 2012). Thus, this student's conforming style might have been based on a genuine agreement for a shared account of the group's experiences.

9.6.3 Focus Group 2

In contrast, the nontraditional student in focus group 2 was the dominant member of her group. In part, her responses may have been shaped by more fluent accounts of experience from the traditional students in the group. It was noticed that the nontraditional student seemed surprised by these students' stories. Their factual and comprehensive narratives were a marked contrast to her mainly sentiment-driven account. At times, it seemed as if the nontraditional student was competing with her younger counterparts by attempting to paint a better or worse picture of her experiences.

Comments about ethnicity also marked a point of divergence for these students. Unknown to the other students, the nontraditional student listed multiple categories for her ethnicity on the demographic questionnaire (see Table 9.3.2; S7, nontraditional]. However, during the interview, she offered a different account: *"So, I think that's where my form filling thing comes in, the whole thing, I just put Black. Black Others."*

When reflecting on her aspirations, this student used a particular term as a reference for her ethnic identity: *"I want to be part of an organisation of women or coloured women that actually go into school and give speeches to young kids."* 'Coloured' was in common use by both British and Caribbean people in the UK during the 1960s to denote people who came to the UK from the Caribbean islands (Oxford Dictionary, 2012). The American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style lists 'colored' as a racialised and now derogatory term with a long history, which includes its use in Apartheid South Africa (Houghton Mifflin, 2005). While the term might have some familiarity for a 40-year-old student, its use in the group reflected the possibility of a language and colonised identity that her traditional counterparts may not have fully understood.

The nontraditional student's account of her cultural experience raised further questions about her identity. She stated during the interview that her ethnicity was Lebanese. On being questioned about her native language by one participant, she responded that she spoke 'patois'. This response added to the confusion, particularly as patois describes a version of English that is spoken by people from across the Caribbean (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2015). Another later reference to her native language as 'African' was revealing:

> *I never actually spoke any African until a couple of years ago after, when my nan passed away and my mum stopped sending us to Africa for holidays because we used to go there for the long summer holidays, my siblings and I. (S7, nontraditional)*

The Columbia Encyclopedia (2018) states that there are more than 800 languages spoken across the African diaspora. As a primarily oral culture (Alkebulan, 2013), African people place a high value on regional language as an ethnic identifier. The student's reference to going to 'Africa' for her holidays suggests self-distancing (Kross & Ayduk, 2011) since there was no mention of a specific country or region. Although there was a clue in her narrative to being of mixed ethnic heritage, she did not choose to expand on this. The identity label this student repeatedly returned to was that of a 'Black woman' with a cultural mix that she was 'embracing', suggesting tension for the construction of her ethnic identity:

> *My mother is Lebanese, so I understand growing up, the whole concept of having a parent that's one colour and a parent of another colour and that can really cause a mental problem for certain children [...] When you look at me you will see **Black woman** but at the same time, I'm able to embrace that international side of me as well. (S7, nontraditional)*

This nontraditional student's constructions contrasted with the stable presentation of ethnicity from traditional students in the group, who were both from Africa. One student referred to her ethnic identity as a Ghanaian, while the other student was Nigerian and talked explicitly about her experiences in that context:

> *When people ask me where I'm from, I'm just gonna immediately tell them what they want to hear, which is I'm Ghanaian or I'm African, that's all I am. And in Germany it was more like nobody would question it; they wouldn't be, and what? It would be just like OK. It makes sense. You look like you're African. And from that point on I felt like I was just [...] I just said OK I have this and this against me, I'm Black, I'm a woman and I'm just gonna make that my thing. (S6, traditional, Russell Group)*

So, I was born here but I grew up in Nigeria, so I basically just have the passport and that's it! But I'm fully Nigerian, that's what I identify as. I grew up there and my pre-primary then primary, secondary, and then I came over here in year 9. So, I've always been around Black people and I've always been around Black people who are like me. (S5, traditional, Russell Group)

A further observation stemmed from the students' social class, as indicated on the questionnaire. Although all participants selected the highest social class (AB), there were differences in their histories that inferred that the nontraditional student might be constructing an idealised notion of her social status. Both traditional students proudly stated that they were recipients of an exclusive secondary education at private and internationally renowned schools in the UK and abroad. Both were 'legacy' students with university-educated parents (Reay, 2018). In contrast, the nontraditional student's life-world included education at state schools and a long period [more than 20 years] of employment before commencing her degree course.

Almost as an act of class-based defiance, the nontraditional student repeatedly stated that she had refused to "grovel" for a place at an RG university and decided instead to take up a place at a post-1992 university. However, her account was conflicted since she claimed that the RG university was indeed her first choice, while her current post-1992 university was a childhood dream:

Int: What was your [university] first choice?

S7, nontraditional: University name [Russell Group]. I missed it by a point, but I could have gone back but I didn't want to go back. I hate grovelling! (laughs) I didn't want to grovel. They offered me a place. I didn't want to grovel. I could have gone back and then I thought no, actually, my childhood dream has always been [post-1992 university name].

The pursuit and refusal of a place at a university was more of an iconic gesture that seemed to feed into this student's construction of her identity. Confusion about her identity continued throughout the interview. Her construction of a sense of belonging was also interrogated by a traditional student who, given the exchange, eventually seemed resigned to accepting that there would continue to be inexplicable differences between them:

I think personally because of my previous work experience as well and I've always been the carer in terms of overseeing everything around me so, I think I look [...] I take it

very seriously and I pride myself in the fact that I belong. They make me feel I belong, and I feel belonged because I'm there, not just a student, but I'm also there to help as well. So, I'm not completely losing my pre-life experience before university, I'm not completing losing my original identity, it's still playing a key part even though I'm a student. (S7, nontraditional, post-1992)

So, do you feel emotionally connected to the people in your course for example? Because it sounds like […] because you get along so well with everyone, you kind of help everyone […] almost? I don't know, it almost seems like […] I don't know. That's why I'm asking. Is that just how you see it in terms of it's just a kind of holistic, I'm just here to look out for everyone? But not really anyone really if that makes sense? (S5, traditional, Russell Group)

Yes, I definitely understand what you are saying. As I told you before, when I come in, whatever I'm feeling, that's my issue, it's completely […] and I will not discuss that with any of the students. But as soon as I walk in, 'hi [student's name]*, are you alright, shall we get coffee?' Or, that kind of thing and I'm OK with that. But I said as soon as I leave […] (S7, nontraditional, post-1992)*

Taken at face value, these observations may seem inconsequential, yet a benefit of this level of insight is to be able to reject 'grand narratives' of identity construction in preference for the subtleties of multiple constructions (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Where views and comments flowed out of a natural exchange between these students, this reflected the type of interaction suggested as typical of a well-designed focus group setting (Smit & Cillers, 2006). Furthermore, students' interactions were helpful for situating the tone and intent of interview content and supported the analysis of their experiences.

> *I was challenged by this nontraditional student's construction of her identity. In fact, an earlier draft of this section suggested that I was becoming overwhelmed by [what I had considered] an exaggerated expression of identity with multiple idiosyncrasies as a response to having the attention of a focus group audience. Readers of previous drafts of this section pointed out that my interpretation seemed to overly-criticise the student leading to a kind of researcher cognitive dissonance (Saldaña, 2018), and that what I was actually seeing was the 'messiness' of identity construction 'in action'. I came to understand the importance of putting reflexive 'distance' (Shaw, 2008) between me and my emotions as well as exposing my writing to the opinions of others, as recommended by Rugg and Petre (2004) and other writers in the area of thesis writing. This exposure was an important transition as a developing interpretive researcher; namely, that I would learn to give freedom to participants to express their constructions in whatever way they chose. Bracketing my 'truth' was essential for them to express their 'truth' unhindered by my values, assumptions and expectations. By the time I carried out the analysis of Desrae's story (Chapter 10), I had grown as a researcher and was a different person.*

9.7 Main Findings

Students were asked about their experiences of studying psychology, views on fitting in, cultural identity, perceptions about teaching and learning, as well as their plans after graduation. Thematic analysis revealed two central themes: (i) identity construction and (ii) perceptions of teaching and learning (Figure 9.7). In keeping with the purpose of TA (namely, to address patterns and similarities across the dataset; Braun & Clarke, 2006), results are a synthesis of both focus group interviews and are presented by section. Part 1 is an interpretation of students' responses to general questions about their experiences. Part 2 collates students' views on themes constructed from earlier phases.
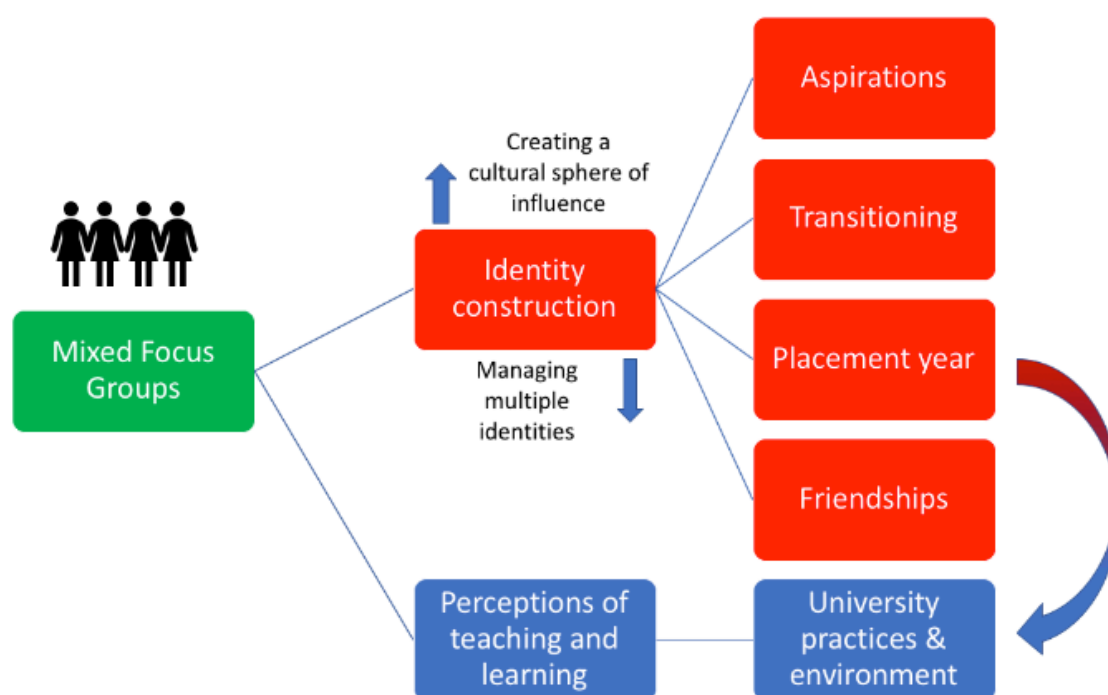
Figure 9.7: Phase 3 thematic map

As can be seen from Figure 9.7, other categories were developed from the data that might also be considered relevant for student experiences such as aspirations, transitioning, the placement year, friendships, university practices and the university environment. However, it was found that codes developed from these categories could be more naturally subsumed within the central themes, pointing to the probability of data saturation (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revel, & Mueller, 2016).

Although associated with grounded theory (Bowen, 2008), reaching saturation in qualitative research indicates that nothing new can be developed from the data. Thus, a

researcher can feel confident that they have extracted all that is necessary for a theme to be considered as established. For example, participants' comments connected their placement year with a general perception of their university [shown in the figure by the connecting arrow] as well as what the experience of that year meant for their identity construction and meaning-making during the final year. Before interviews commenced, the students participated in a timeline activity. A summary of the outcome of that activity follows.

9.8 Part 1: Visual Timeline Activity

A visual timeline activity was used to illustratively depict experiences of relevance to the students' experiences and to explore whether it would be possible to link findings from this activity with accounts of experience that were articulated during interviews. Each participant created a visual timeline that reflected their experiences before and during university. See Chapter 6, 6.11.1 for the process. Based on their experience and year of study at the time of the interview, some timelines included a placement year, and some ended at the second year, while other students chose to work backwards from the present moment, as shown in Figure 9.8 below. Students described this activity as "analytical", "therapeutic", taking "a third-person perspective", "beautiful" and "reflective": *"It was a very reflective, very, very reflective for me and it was the first time sort of someone has actually told me to sit down and write about that year." (S5, nontraditional)*

Timeline of Happiness

Academic — High / Average / Low

Personal — Low / Average / High

Pre-Uni | Year One | Year Two | Work Placement Year | Final Year

Academic (red):
- Average A-Level Grades
- Good grades – adjusting a career choice
- Personal issues affecting uni
- Amazing Placement – Sure of career goals – Sure of what step after Uni
- Good grades on exam, interviews or Masters degree

Personal (blue):
- 1st choice of university – Excitement about searching
- New friends – Uni/home – Exciting job
- Family Bereavement – Lost – confused
- 1st Choice Placement – Great people – Exciting
- Bad relationship – Stressed – Mother's ill
- Focused on career – Better place – Better personal/family life

Figure 9.8: Student timeline

9.8.1 Findings

A summary of participants' experiences encompassed sentiment-driven low, mid and high points across the student timeline. Analysis included the timeline for the student who participated as a case study in Phase 4 (see Chapter 10). Using a broad thematic approach to identify similarities/dissimilarities of experience, analysis revealed only slight differences between the timelines. Similar experiences reported across each year of study and by student type added to an understanding of systemic issues for these students. However, the timelines were not found to be as useful as an extended form of analysis outside of the focus group interviews. It seemed that their main purpose was to prime participants to think more deeply about the breadth of their experiences prior to taking part in the interview.

9.8.2 Low Points

Low points of experience were indicated by some students as academic failure or personal problems. Prior to attending university, students' concerns were for examination outcomes or the possibility of missing out on their choice of university. Fears about impending examination failure seemed to encourage feelings of depression and self-doubt. During the first year, students' experiences included a family bereavement, loneliness, a feeling of wanting to drop out, pressure from their family to continue, missing coursework deadlines, or feeling lost and confused. In the second year, experiences were compounded by unsuccessful placement interviews [for final year students], homelessness [second-year student], applying for mitigating circumstances, illnesses and a feeling of overwhelm. By the third year, fewer issues were depicted on the timelines, possibly because students were now feeling more in charge of their experiences. However, one student reported feeling burnt out, and several were anxious about their final-year grades.

9.8.3 Mid Points

Strongly associated with neither achievement nor failure, mid-point experiences were a mixture of challenges and opportunities. Highlighting individual differences in the interpretation of experience, pre-university experiences that were depicted as mid-points by some students were considered low points by others. Differences included perceptions about GCSE and A-Level results, entering clearing and a decision to defer university. Some students took an ambivalent view towards school and university examination results, while others vacillated around multiple factors that included employment stress, study fatigue as well as a feeling of aloneness and anxiety about forthcoming examinations. Family

bereavement was also indicated by some students as a mid-point experience, possibly signalling the relationship proximity of the student to the family member concerned. Balancing their workload with extra-curricular interests was highlighted as problematic during the second year, with some students listing a commitment to the Student Union African Caribbean Society (ACS) as an ambivalent experience. During the placement year, most students reported feeling alone. Indeed, this section of their timelines reflected a larger volume of depictions for their experience.

9.8.4 High Points

High points were similar for most students and included achieving excellent examination results and getting into the university of their choice [especially a Russell Group institution]. During the first year, students linked induction, their first day at university, finding employment and, in opposition to the previous sentiment, joining the ACS with the experience of feeling balanced and integrated. Plans for work experience supported student progress during the second year. Some students listed their placement year as an intentional break from university that was experienced as positive, especially as a result of seeing BME women in leadership positions. For these students, returning to university with enhanced skills added confidence and a feeling of being on track to achieve a first-class degree. Finally, it seemed that a more positive outlook was associated with good interpersonal relationships and improved personal circumstances.

9.8.5 Summary

The timeline activity played a role in helping students plot their journey into and through higher education. The students owned this process and reflected on their journeys in ways of their choosing. Thus, the visual timeline was applied in this phase as a crude measure of experience[21]. There is room to further develop this activity as a reflective tool as well as to identify an appropriate form of analysis that could convey a fuller understanding of participant experience. Visual methods for data collection are a growing area of interest in social sciences research (Coomber & Letherby, 2012; Flick, 2018). A systematic review (Schoones, Tiemensma, & Kaptein, 2018) found an increasing use of drawings as an aide to

---

[21] This was the result of poor planning and insufficient thinking about the value this activity could bring to understanding lived experiences in these students. One benefit is that I have realised that my own 'timeline', with its high, mid and low points needs attention. Consequently, I am writing the hypothesis, connecting the points, defining the method and disentangling the findings that flow beneath the surface of my life experiences.

sense-making in patients. Kirkham, Smith, and Havsteen-Franklin (2013) show that a visual method can add to knowledge of participants' experience of a phenomenon.

9.9 Part 1: Theme - Identity Construction

Social constructionism and intersectionality were drawn upon to inform an analysis of focus group interviews. Findings revealed two themes: namely, (i) a cultural sphere of influence and (ii) managing multiple identities. Set against a background of perceptions about racial stereotypes, it appeared that the protagonist in some students' life-world was the institution as a structurally racist power with which they had to regularly contend.

9.9.1 Creating a Cultural Sphere of Influence

In general, the identity portrayed by these students was culturally-aware, culturally-sensitive and culturally-resilient. Attempts to retain a cultural identity included an experience of feeling threatened. Tensions between 'internalising' judgmental views [by themselves and others] and establishing a toolkit to deal with these, otherwise known as a cultural sphere of influence (Mirza, 1998), were reflected in participants' determined approach to challenges. The struggle was illustrated by a traditional student who suggested that this tension might be specific to the study of psychology as limited numbers of Black students on her course heightened her feeling of invisibility. This student claimed to see a more diverse and integrated population in other subject areas:

> *And I thought about why that could be if it's psychology or because generally on our campus* [campus name]*, which is the medical and science campus, you generally see the most Black African-Caribbean students. (S6, traditional, Russell Group)*

The opportunity to exercise a cultural presence was offered by membership of the African Caribbean Society (ACS). This action seemed to satisfy some traditional students since they went on to experience a stronger sense of belonging in this environment. The experience of being part of the ACS had also been commented on by traditional students in an earlier phase of the research (Chapter 8, 8.9.3). However, there was a gradual realisation by an RG traditional student that tensions for ethnicity salience can exist even in this society, indicating that the struggle for belonging involves more characteristics than a person's ethnicity. Speaking of her experience of the ACS, the student said:

> *I didn't realise there really was a difference between British Black and Nigerian Black. And they are ethnically Nigerian, when you ask them where they are from, and they are*

> *[…] from Ghana, from Nigeria […] I'm from East London, I live in Woolwich, I'm from Essex. I didn't really know how to respond to that because I was like oh […] […] I was looking for a group **within** the Black group that I thought I could just join and belong to. (S5, traditional, Russell Group)*

Students also voiced concerns that efforts to retain their cultural identity were being undermined by staff and students whom they opined were constructing them as an 'angry Black woman'. Arising from stereotypical views about Black women (Proctor & Truscott, 2012), this perception was particularly noted in post-1992 traditional students as a consequence of their refusal to 'culturally downplay' (Sian, 2017) their identity in order to be accepted by others:

> *[…] people might assume that I am, or I'm a standoffish woman, or an angry Black woman, but sometimes, I just don't wanna play the role of speaking the way that you speak or pretending to care about the things you care about. (S2, traditional, post-1992)*

> *I hear a lot of things about being Black and being a woman and I think one of the main things is that I'm always conscious of this 'angry Black women thing' because if I'm in a lecture room or if I'm in a library and people are making noise, I'm more likely than not, I'm more likely to say nothing because I'm just like I can't be bothered to have that stereotype ascribed to me today. (S1, traditional, post-1992)*

Suppression of S1's 'natural' identity was reflected in her opinion about structurally racist ascriptions in her academic environment. The construction of a counter-narrative by these students attempted to situate Black women as intelligent, reinstating that they were not the stereotypes that were attributed to them:

> *What ends up happening is even your peers ascribe these stereotypes to you and they assume that you're less intelligent than somebody else or they get this surprise when a lecturer says that and it's like well, you know, people do ascribe that to me. (S3, traditional, post-1992)*

> *It benefits a certain group of people to think that an ethnic minority is less intelligent than the one in power, but it's not taught […] and it sounds crazy to say I'm saying power and different groups. (S2, traditional, post-1992)*

The term "angry Black woman" was taken up by these students to highlight an unjust and racist label that was being appropriated to their construction of a resilient identity. An interpretation of the latent meaning of this term suggests that 'angry' was not a form of hostility for these students. Instead, it represented the confident stance they were trying to maintain in the face of challenges to their cultural identity. Indeed, the construction of a 'strong Black woman' (SBW; Woods-Giscombé, 2010) seemed more appropriate for these students. An SBW is described by Woods-Giscombé as working hard to not be overcome by an insistence on 'sameness' or to be distracted by others.

On returning to university to complete their final year, students' opinions about discriminatory attitudes were reinforced by unexpected racist comments and behaviours from their lecturers:

> *Especially when you have lecturers saying that Black people are notoriously less intelligent than White people. (S3, traditional, post-1992)*

> *There's some lecturers that are [...] borderline racist to be honest. Well, we have had an experience with a lecturer [...] no names [...] this is when [...] we had gone to see this lecturer about a specific thing and this specific lecturer was complaining that nobody has English names, we can't tell who's from where [...]. (S3, traditional, post-1992)*

Given their comments, it was not surprising that students' views about their academic ability were affected by perceptions of purported differences in intelligence by ethnicity. One student's perception of her academic ability was undermined by a view that White students are considered more intelligent than Black students:

> *Maybe I made my own judgement there too because I assume them* [White students] *to be smart and I'm like, well, why am I making that judgement myself? Am I putting myself down? And it's like internalising that now. (S2, traditional, post-1992)*

Not wanting to waste further time on fighting racist perceptions, post-1992 traditional students appeared to shift their focus towards using a non-confrontational, outcome-driven narrative that reflected a desire to protect themselves from absorbing negative views that could detract from a more positive experience. Although their attitude to learning was already more focused since completion of their placement year, experiences of 'othering' and racism suggested that they had deliberately chosen to take a 'heads down' approach to their studies. They had decided simply to "push on" and not allow negative or seemingly trivial experiences to "jeopardise" their degree:

> *You just wanna push on because you don't want to literally jeopardise your own degree. I wanna push and get this grade that I know that I'm capable of and I don't want it to not happen to you because of something silly. (S2, traditional, post-1992)*

A desire to push on in this student hinted at the adoption of a resilient identity that could help sustain her progress and ability to cope with these kinds of challenges.

At the time of the interview, all traditional students in focus group 1 had completed a placement year that was directly connected to a clinical psychology setting. In general, they felt that their efforts were valued at their placements. The experience left them feeling better equipped to achieve their career goals despite being more sensitised to the challenges for Black people working or being treated in psychological mental health settings. On returning to university, the students seemed to express a different kind of belonging which functioned 'at the edge' of an empirical understanding of the concept of belonging (Goodenow, 1993).

To explain further, participants' construction of belonging appeared to feed into the construction of a resilient and solitary identity that was less reliant on a need for contact with others. This construction differed somewhat to accounts of belonging in their contemporaries (see Chapters 7 & 8), who specifically viewed belonging as being connected to others and their institution. Instead, this version of belonging was deliberately constructed as a form of agency directed at completing their studies despite reasons not to.

Paradoxically, maintaining this stance meant encouragement of a solitary identity as a means of coping. Nevertheless, post-1992 traditional students, in particular, resisted pressure from their peers to conform and so feel included. This was articulated by some students as not wanting to 'play a role':

> *I was very much isolated, and I think to be included you kind of have to play a certain role, and I can't be bothered to be honest, which is why [...] and I'm sure that people assume that I'm mean or rude. (S2, traditional, post-1992)*

Participants further distinguished themselves in the way their coursework was constructed. Not 'playing a role' meant confronting racism that is inherent within the psychology curriculum:

> *We were talking about psychosis in a lecture about how Black people are more likely to be diagnosed with psychosis and things like that, and we were like, you know, we've got something to say about this, and I think no-one else wants to talk about these issues. It's like we will readily put them now in our work. I want to receive recognition for*

acknowledging these issues and looking at the research which is looking at these issues instead of 'this is the syllabus and if you cite these couple names because they said this and they wrote this in 1960 whatever, that's gonna be what it is'. I feel like you have to conform to what's in your textbooks and what's in your lectures, which isn't the other side of things, you know. (S3, traditional, post-1992)

Attributions and self-monitoring played a significant role in the pressure to conform. These pressures flowed in various directions including to and from staff and students of other ethnicities. Participants used a collection of judgmental views to make sense of their peers and their learning experiences, which was found to further shape their assessment of the thematic construction of student experiences from earlier phases (see Part 3, section 9.11). The totality of their experience was summed up by one student who alluded to a competitive spirit among Black female students which had the effect of distancing them even from each other: *"Oh, forget the competition with everyone else, it's like there's competition between **us** because we're the only Black females so we have to outdo one another. Well, what's the point of that?!" (S3, traditional, post-1992)*

9.9.2 Managing Multiple Identities

The students described a construction of multiple identities which was similar to that of their traditional peers and nontraditional counterparts in other phases of this research. They frequently drew on solitary, resilient, high-achieving, independent, 'unbelonging' and invisible identities for sense-making in challenging circumstances. There was no further illumination of other identity types that could be developed from focus group participants' narratives. To avoid repetitive analysis, the construction of an aspirational identity is exemplified in the section that follows for its relevance to participants' views on the influence of teaching practices. Students' construction of self-talk is commented on as a feature of an aspirational identity.

A future or 'possible self' (Markus & Nurius, 1986; see Chapter 5, 5.1.2) was articulated as aspirations for further study or strategic plans on graduation that were shaped by participants' experiences of teaching practices in psychology, such as being given opportunities to listen to talks from visiting psychologists. A traditional student recounted an almost 'visionary' experience that set her 'possible self' in motion after listening to an established Black female clinical psychologist:

That talk was amazing. I think it was really important like especially with us where we are on our journey, but as long as you can feel kind of like, oh, what is the point, like to meet her, I was like wow! I literally left and I was like [...] she is my goal. Clinical psychologist. And it was amazing. I literally went home, and I was like, I met my future self today. (S3, traditional, post-1992)

This student's comment reflected the importance of role models for shaping aspirations for a positive self-image in Black female students (Ceglie & Settlage, 2014). Students were particularly concerned with the smaller number of Black female professors and leaders, suggesting that their aspirations could be limited by a racially-defined 'glass ceiling' for BME people in UK HEIs (Advance HE, 2018b) and beyond (McGregor-Smith Review, 2017). As noted by Bhopal et al. (2015), BME staff at lower levels tend to become overwhelmed with teaching and pastoral care, reducing the potential for their visibility on more influential platforms. Speaking of a photographic display of academic leaders at her placement, one student noted that:

[...] when I was doing my placement year, I was the only Black girl in my [...] to be honest, I was the only Black girl on like three floors, to be honest. There was two of us but that was because we were doing a placement. Other than that, anybody else there was not Black. There was one Black male. There was no Black women and they had this wall of female professors. There was only one ethnic minority on there and she was not Black. So, I saw that, and I was like, right, so I have to make this wall then to actually, you know. I thought it was a massive under-representation. It's hard when you look around everywhere that you wanna go to and there's, you're not there but you deal with it in one of two ways: either you aspire to be there, or it puts you off. For some people, it puts them off and that's the reality of the situation but [...] I guess because we've seen the flip side, like patients, you have a desire to help your people. (S1, traditional, post-1992)

A construction of 'onlyness' (Harper, 2009) stood out in this student's commentary and was reflected by the fact that culturally-relatable others in her environment were limited to just one other Black student. On seeing an ethnic minority professor showcased among photographs of female professors, this participant's sense of onlyness was compounded, since the professor was not of a Black ethnicity. However, like the accounts of her traditional peers, a resilient attitude enabled the student to remain focused despite ethnicity under-representation. Although she concluded that this was off-putting, her comment [*"so I have to*

make this wall then ..."] suggested an impetus and direction for her possible self. From the perspective of a prospective clinician, the student also seemed to experience compassion from seeing Black patients in a clinical setting.

Another student spoke of a tendency to use 'self-talk' to manage her multiple identities and felt it reasonable, on that basis, to refer to herself in the third person:

> *But I kind of have my aspirational self, my true self in the moment, what I wish I'd done, what I regret. But at the end of the day, I'm just kind of dealing with myself, like people are around me and it's true but technically this could just be all a distorted situation, not to get creepy or anything. But the only person I can be sure of is myself and the people that exist within me, not in a schizophrenic way. And that's [...] because when I think technically, I'm thinking in the third person almost because there are several people kind of [...] I know it's sounding very red flag-y. (S6, traditional, Russell Group)*

The student's "true self in the moment" seemed to act as an anchor for her multiple identities. In an experiential sense, the true self was where *in vivo* perceptions about experiences, judgements and stereotypes were practised. These perceptions and stereotypes could then be interpreted and enacted based on the student's view of a context. Thus, her true self represented a safe place for meaning-making where she could return in order to feel centred. Nevertheless, this self was experienced on a momentary basis only. The student did not define all of her multiple identities but referred to just a few that held particular significance: namely, her aspirational identity, her past self, her future conditional self and a regretful self.

Self-talk was also a feature of narratives from individual interviews in earlier phases, but this was the first time it was specifically referred to as a way of dealing with the complexity of managing multiple identities. Using 'thick' description (Bowen, 2010), the student explained that all identities [whether past, present, future or any other variants] must be addressed as part of her lived experience. From an observer's perspective, the student may have seemed 'distorted' or fragmented. In reality, her multiple identities were simply 'in conversation' with each other in order to 'deal with' herself and her situations. Another student also captured the concept of managing multiple identities:

> *There are just so many selves going on, you don't really [...] sometimes it's very difficult for you to [...] I went through a whole period of like identity crisis and I was asking my friends, what do you think about me? I don't know who I am. Who am I really if I'm different people when I'm with different people? You know what I mean? I don't know*

who am I really, when am I being my most truest self? Is it with my family? Is it with my friends? Then within the friends, there's different type of friends. Is it when I'm at uni? Is it when I'm by myself? Even now it's still having that ongoing battle [...] quite an aggressive discussion. Like who is my real self or are all my selves you, me, there? (S5, traditional, Russell Group)

A quest for the 'true self' was paramount for these students. A socially constructed identity pointed to where this self might exist, such as with family and, perhaps, in special friendships. The student spoke of a "battle" and an "aggressive discussion" between her many selves, suggesting inner turmoil for managing multiple identities. To succeed in their academic environment, it seems that an aspirational identity or a version of the students' best 'possible self' is most likely to win the 'battle':

The only thing that really keeps me going is where I want to be, and where I could be, and I have to kind of strive for that. That's what motivates me more than anything else, I think. (S6, traditional, Russell Group)

The question of whether a 'true' self can exist in a university setting is still to be explored. Indeed, this self seemed even more constrained by teaching practice in higher education.

9.10 Part 1: Theme - Perceptions of Teaching and Learning

In addition to managing multiple identities, some students' comments about teaching practice and interpersonal relations with staff reflected further constraints for their identities as Black female students. A focus on structural inequalities in their immediate environment was strongly articulated by the traditional students in focus group 1. Traditional students in focus group 2 also commented on their experiences as Black female students, but their challenges seemed less tied to institutional practice. Rather, they were more concerned with maintaining a social and academic presence as a student *per se*. Despite divergent views, there were occasions when all students recounted experiences of exclusion-based practices that were directed at them by staff and their peers, regardless of the institution attended or their student type.

According to one student, both stereotypical attributions and an intersection of gender and ethnicity informed staff views about her ability to do well. She added that the curriculum could be a powerful medium for uncovering and mediating prejudices:

First of all, I'm a woman, so they already expect me to be less intelligent than a man. Then I'm Black, so it's, she's average, she'll just barely scrape by. It's that attribution and it's a problem because it's not in our curriculum to think about the reasons why these are [...] it's taught as fact as opposed to underlying issues as opposed to prejudice as opposed to racism as opposed to there's other agendas [...] I've studied a specific module that covers that. (S2, traditional, post-1992)

Studying a module with a critical emphasis seemed to give this student the confidence to explore social issues at a deeper level. However, her commentary further suggested that while students may be taught about these issues as part of the curriculum, they do not have the tools to manage subtle but pervasive effects arising from various forms of prejudice in their own lives. Similar to the views of a nontraditional student in Phase 1 [also shown below], another traditional student recounted that receiving good marks and feedback were dependent on the quality of staff-student relationships as well as perceptions about her intelligence. Her comment inferred that there could be some tension involved in achieving good interpersonal relationships for BME students:

I don't know if this is because I'm a minority [...] I would hope that it's not because I'm a minority student or that or because a certain lecturer doesn't assume that I can get like a certain grade, but I find that unless I have a really good rapport with a lecturer or they perceive me to be intelligent, I won't get in-depth feedback. (S3, traditional, post-1992)

Unless like I say you were really a promising and an upstanding student maybe would stay in somebody's mind to say, oh, you are that or you are the sort of person who brought an apple, you know, for your tutor, otherwise I, I don't know. (Maureen, Phase 1)

It would appear that traditional and nontraditional students may share more commonalities than differences for their views on teaching in higher education. Taking a less racialised perspective, however, the traditional students in focus group 2 contrasted these accounts with comments that conveyed relationships with teaching staff that seemed socially and academically supportive. The RG staff were described as "immediate"; thus, they were proactive in approaching students and dispelled this student's assumptions about a more distancing experience:

They are very [...] immediate, even the professors interact with you. I always expected university to be very separate, but you are a student now, the teachers don't know you, they don't know your name, they don't really care about you. It's more like professor or student, but I was lucky with the course I guess that they are very much [...] come up to us. (S6, traditional, Russell Group)

These RG traditional students also conveyed an experience that went beyond rote learning, with less emphasis on constructing knowledge and more on dissecting knowledge, particularly for subjects with known difficulties for undergraduate students such as research methods (Malik, 2015). According to Gilovich and Ross (2016), this mindset is described as moving from knowledge acquisition to seeking wisdom about when and how to apply that knowledge. Nevertheless, the reality of these students' experiences indicated that while staff at their institution were approachable, this sociality did not always extend to the behaviours of other students. Jennifer, an RG traditional student in Phase 2, had recounted similar experiences of feeling isolated by her peers.

An experience of onlyness (Harper, 2009) in the account by S5 (below) reflected the awkwardness that accompanied interacting with other students. There was the echo of a requirement to suppress her 'true' self as a student with a visibly different identity in order to be accepted by other students, which expanded on her earlier comment about multiple identities and the aggressive discussion that defined her 'true' self:

I was very confused as to why there were no Black people in the course. And they kind of made things a bit awkward for me because even when I did try to make friends with other people [...] because this is uni, you meet all sorts of different people [...] it just felt awkward. I had a lot of difficulty relating, especially because I felt like I couldn't really be myself. I was just being a version of myself that I thought was appropriate to be in this particular friendship group. (S5, traditional, Russell Group)

However, unlike her traditional post-1992 counterparts, a construction of onlyness was not given permission to dominate S6's identity. Instead, there was an emphasis on finding ways to dispel this experience by driving it deeply into her subconscious until it felt 'natural', or to actively look for opportunities to connect with similar others:

But just going to the first day of university when I arrived, and we were signing ourselves in and stuff like that and I remember looking around thinking [...] really anxious about everything. But I kind of looked and I was [...] am I the only Black

student in this course?! So, I tried to not be so aware of it obviously [...] and I feel like I'm not in a lot of cases. (S6, traditional, Russell Group)

These experiences reflected the first year at university for RG traditional students. Despite initial challenges, a Black female ethnicity became less problematic for their overall experience. As they progressed on the degree programme, their multiple identities became stabilised by the construction of a more socially-oriented self. Primary and secondary education experiences in mixed-ethnicity, predominantly female, middle-class environments seemed to mirror their current environment to the extent that they became more settled at university:

"First of all, obviously the first thing I noticed — first of all there was loads of girls everywhere. Everywhere. I felt like I was back at school because I was at an all girls' school and I was like 'what's going on?'" (S5, traditional, Russell Group)

Unlike their post-1992 counterparts, who retained their cultural identity at the cost of a solitary experience, coping with a Black identity was recounted by S5 as an experience of "over-compensating", suggesting the construction of an ethnic identity that is so obviously 'Black' that there can be no question of who she is. Having learned to manage this aspect of her identity as a central part of her life-world, there was no need to continuously confront challenges to her ethnicity in her academic environment:

And I was still young at the time because he's 9 years older than me [her brother]*, so he dealt with people calling him racist things. We lived in the suburbs and also just [...] and he couldn't understand why it* [racism] *was happening to him. And it would frustrate him, and he'd not want to go to school, etc. And seeing that when I was younger, I thought I'm gonna over-compensate this and I'm Black. Like I'm 100% Black, that's all I am, that's all they see me as […] I feel like I've gone around; I'm trying to fight it a little bit but going around like over-compensating the 'I'm Black'. (S5, traditional, Russell Group)*

An environment that is perceived as structurally racist can be more problematic for students' construction of their identity. Post-1992 traditional students adopted a narrative of resilience which seemed to help them retain a stronger construction of their 'true' self in their environment. The "aggressive discussion" alluded to by one student was an important tool for making sense of university experiences. Nevertheless, it is clear from their comments that there is no right way to interpret or respond to an experience, but that each student must work

with the identities that are available to them and construct these in ways that are useful for the context. With different experiences and perceptions of university, students acted as lay experts for the experiences of other Black female students from earlier phases of this research.

9.11 Part 2: Member-Checking

Students were invited to comment on themes constructed from earlier phases. Following presentation of the findings from Phases 1 and 2, students agreed that the themes were a credible representation of the experiences of their traditional and nontraditional equivalents. Exceptionally, the RG traditional students in focus group 2 felt that a construction of cultural, personal and social capital in traditional students in Phase 2 differed to their lived experience. Two areas were of particular interest to these students; namely, the experience of a sense of belonging and a construction of multiple identities. Students' comments were pooled, and their agreement is shown in Table 9.11.

Table 9.11

Theme Agreement by Student Type

Themes: Phases 1 and 2	Traditional	Nontraditional
Pre-university experiences	✓	✓
Sense of belonging	✓	✓
Perceptions of staff and teaching	✓	✓
Multiple identities	✓	✓
Importance of friendships	✓	✓
Cultural, personal and social capital	x*	✓

*Russell Group traditional students only; focus group 2

9.11.1 A Sense of Belonging

Nontraditional students seem to occupy an 'awkward' space as they are older than traditional students and, in some cases, older than teaching staff. These students' struggle to fit into their communities translated into experiences that are being shaped by a weaker sense of

belonging. This view is supported by research into the experiences of nontraditional students in higher education who crave a sense of belonging to their environments (Thomas, 2012; 2017). Despite this consensus, an experience of 'unbelonging' in nontraditional students seemed surprising for at least one traditional student:

> *I think I was a bit surprised to see something about belonging and stuff. I thought maybe as a mature student they wouldn't have, not so much problems, but I thought they would have been a bit, kind of a bit more used to things, maybe a bit more able to handle it, like certain things than the traditional-aged students. So, I thought […] yeah, I'm a bit surprised by some of them really. (S1, traditional, post-1992)*

This traditional student's assumptions about nontraditional students facilitated an insightful interpretation of the experiences of these two groups. Although the student types share characteristics and concepts in common (including experiences of belonging and 'unbelonging'), it seemed that there was less understanding of how some concepts might be experienced by each student type. Assumptions about experiences might have acted to create barriers to connecting with each other and achieving a deeper awareness of what university might be like for these students.

Another traditional student reconciled the experience of a weaker sense of belonging in nontraditional students, using an intersectionality approach to unpack its complexity. She affirmed that opportunities to fully participate in university life can be limited for nontraditional, Black, student-parents:

> *[…] it's that dissonance cos you can't relate to the students as much especially if you're of a different race and then you're also a mature student so already there's this distance and you have a child and you have responsibilities and the experiences that the students are having, you can't really participate. Even things like talks, sometimes you can't come to them. (S3, traditional, post-1992)*

It seemed that this comment resonated with the nontraditional student in the group. During one of her rare unprompted inputs, she agreed with this account of her experience:

> *Like I felt like I had nothing in common with anyone to be honest because I have a kid as well. So, everyone was so young, and no-one had a child and they were all like Asians and it was just really hard for me, I think. It's kinda like you're here for a purpose, so just do it. Get it over and done with, whereas I think with you guys* [traditional students]*, it's more like everything to do with university life, you know,*

you're maybe living on campus whereas I'm at home, I've got a kid, I've gotta go back home, cook, be a mum, so it's more like and then after that put my daughter to sleep, start my coursework, so it's a lot like but […] yes so for me, it was more like something that I chose to do. (S4, nontraditional, post-1992)

Like Abigail [the traditional student-parent in Phase 2], an emphasis on the requirements of parenting strongly shaped this student's experience of university study, although she recognised that coming to university was her experience by choice even if the challenges she subsequently experienced were not. The traditional students were outspoken about a lack of awareness for the experiences of their nontraditional counterparts as well as validating shared experiences:

I can definitely see why they would perceive those problems in terms of belonging, because it's just adding something else that makes you different. I think pedagogic perceptions […] that resonates with my experience as well. (S2, traditional, post-1992)

When the concept of a sense of belonging was raised in focus group 2, the nontraditional student agreed with its importance for her experience, but for different reasons. She had conveyed the identity of a student who was academically and socially connected at all levels, describing herself as a "social butterfly". Despite this construction, when she was away from the university, this nontraditional student became an introvert, suggesting that the presentation of a socially 'connected' identity acted as a mask for her 'true' self:

The sense of belonging as well really stands out for me. I'm there for everyone, I'm a social butterfly. I'm an extrovert but I'm definitely an introvert in many, many ways. That's more my true character, being an introvert. So as soon as I leave, that stays behind, and I go into my real life. My real life is family, close friends, very private person. I do care about all of us because I look at it as it's a journey for us all to get to university. Some of us who are not your age group, you guys are coming straight from sixth form or colleges or whatever it is you're coming from. But in our course, there are quite a few elderly mature students as well. (S7, nontraditional, post-1992)

As the student reflected on a struggle for Black women to get into university, there was a hint of a nurturing, almost 'othermother' (James & Busia, 1993) construction, which was not unlike the identity that was constructed by one of the nontraditional students (Maureen) in Phase 1. Again, it appeared that assumptions about the characteristics of each student type loomed large in this student's commentary.

Firstly, the student assumed that traditional students' experiences might be less taxing as they were entering university from college or sixth form. Secondly, she referred to other nontraditional students in her environment as "elderly mature", even when this description might define her identity as a nontraditional student. Her description conjured up the image of students who might require extra care and specialised support in ways that would immediately set them apart from other students. Perhaps this framing was an attempt to distance herself from an identity with which she was uncomfortable or shift the identity of a nontraditional student from a minority to a majority group. Moreover, the reader is reminded of earlier observations about the 'messy' (Frost, 2011) construction of identity by this student (see Section 9.6). Nevertheless, her observations seemed to set the stage for an experience of 'unbelonging' despite her questionable assertion that there are more of these kinds of students in her environment.

9.11.2 Cultural, Personal and Social Capital

As previously stated, there was agreement for all themes except for the construction of cultural, personal and social capital from the RG traditional students in Phase 2. These students felt that this theme did not accord with their experience. Instead, they constructed their ethnicity, cultural background, interpersonal relationships and experiences in more positive terms:

> *I don't really feel like I can relate to that* [theme]. *I don't feel like there is ever a situation where that has prompted me to tap into that capital and have that feeling of being influential. And obviously there are times when you share your opinion about something based on your experiences, but it didn't really give me a sense of influence or make me feel like I belonged any more or less. But that's just me. (S6, traditional, Russell Group)*

Of all students in the samples across this research, the demographic profile for the RG students ($N = 3$) revealed a privileged upbringing. Their parents had previously attended university and were able to guide their offspring in doing the same. These students did not feel a need to deliberately 'activate' cultural capital, such as in rebuttal to perceptions of structural forms of racism or experiences of exclusion, as had been described by their traditional peers. Nevertheless, their experiences revealed that they were aware of the potential to be viewed as the 'ethnicity expert' by others:

I feel like with a lot of things, I feel that generally even any topics regarding discrimination of any kind when I speak, people are like OK, this is somebody with first-hand information here, which is not necessarily true at all. But to be fair, it could also be my character. I don't know what factors into it. I've noticed that generally also in friendship groups that I feel like I'm often listened to because people just think that I come from a place of more experience, which is also not always the case, but I'm just respected in that sense. And I enjoy it! [laughs] (S5, traditional, Russell Group)

Noted as a conflicted terminology by Maylor (2009c) and Tsri (2016), some traditional students seemed to reject being the voice of 'Blackness' (Prah, 2017, Yosso, 2005), particularly where this might lead to an assertion that they are the 'angry Black woman'. However, this RG traditional student welcomed the opportunity to showcase her identity in similar ways that Abigail (Phase 2) came to accept and, eventually, savour the experience of being the only student-parent in her cohort. It seemed that the activation of cultural capital in some students was being determined by the extent of a felt sense of belonging.

Before turning to the discussion, I have reflected on my position during this phase. I was in a 'place' and 'state' of [imposed] isolation. To explain further, I often worked alone at home and, when at the university, I shared a cramped office with other PhD students while also working as a part-time visiting lecturer followed by a part-time lecturer. I tutored undergraduate students in constrained settings and felt overloaded with teaching responsibilities while doing a PhD. Although I had a fractional post, I was located away from the main department. This compounded a feeling of distancing from other staff and my sense of belonging was weak. Besides the fact that we were at different stages of a PhD, I felt that I had little in common with these students, who were mainly White. There was also a large age gap between us. I wondered how my current state might affect analyses and writing-up. Would I become overly focused on the negativity of participants' experiences as a reflection of perceptions of my own experience? Although I used journalling as a form of 'bracketing', I was unsure whether this would be sufficient to separate our experiences. My default response was to ignore my feelings in order to focus on completing this research project. However, the construction of my multiple identities continued to get in the way. At that point, I sought help from a mentor and a coach to make sense of what I was experiencing. The mentor helped me explore the practicalities of completing the PhD and the sense of distancing I felt from the psychology department. The coach guided me in time- and emotion-management that were outcomes of conversations I was having with my mentor. Memoirs arising from those conversations revealed the construction of a sad, lonely and vulnerable Black woman; but they also showed that I had the tools to complete the journey I had started. I noticed how these conversations resembled some of the interviews I was carrying out with participants. I concluded the mentor and coach relationships with a sense that I had also been given a 'voice', although the actions required from those conversations were left for me to implement. Of note, the conversations contributed to milestones for self-change during the PhD: from a place of abject fear to now feeling calmer, competent and more reflective. Even with only seven students across two focus groups in this phase, I realised how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to listen to these strong Black women who generously gave of their time. A traditional student in this phase commented that she felt this was a niche research area, with its singular focus on the experiences of Black female undergraduate psychology students at London institutions. Although this focus may lead to a narrower interpretation of the experiences of BME students, I gladly defend my decision to focus on their experiences as 'hidden figures' (Ireland et al., 2018).

9.12 Discussion

Mixed focus group interviews were carried out with traditional and nontraditional Black female undergraduate psychology students. Students completed a demographic questionnaire, created a visual timeline to illustrate their university experiences, participated in a focus group interview about their current experiences and commented on themes that were constructed from earlier phases of this research. The analysis went beyond a singular focus on data interpretation by first reporting on observations of particular students in the focus groups, then to an analysis of whole group data. Two themes were constructed from the dataset.

For some students in this study, identity construction was shaped by activation of their cultural sphere of influence, with implications for the extent to which they felt a sense of belonging to their university environment. For post-1992 traditional students in particular, an intersectional identity was shaped by a perspective of the structural racism operating in their environment. This construction informed how these students perceived themselves as well as how they felt they were perceived by staff and other students. In contrast, a construction of identity in RG traditional students was centred on a social identity. A sense of privilege from their status as middle-class 'legacy' students (Reay, 2018) seemed to shape the quality of their interactions with staff and students and influenced their perception of an ethnic identity.

The construction of identity in each nontraditional student in the focus groups was less clear or consistent, although both students seemed to reflect the complexity that accompanies outgroup membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Gaunt (2011) describes this complexity as feelings of low self-esteem based on characteristics of increasing marginality that are associated with the identity of an 'outsider-within' (Collins, 2001).

9.12.1 Identity Construction

From an intersectionality perspective, it is known that being Black and female equates to integration challenges, resulting in an increased allostatic load [lifelong and cumulative stress] that must be emotionally regulated in order to cope (Giscombé & Lobel, 2005). Mirza (1998) found that Black women in education create a cultural sphere of influence to 'survive' in their academic environments, while the current study found that the extent of this sphere's activation seemed to differ by social class and type of institution attended.

The interviews revealed that a cultural sphere of influence in some Black female students was operationalised through persistence during challenging circumstances, paraphrased in the literature as the 'strong Black woman' (SBW)/superwoman type (Woods-

Giscombé, 2010). A counter construction ['the angry Black woman'] has been used to describe Black women who challenge racism in the classroom or among their academic colleagues, leading to assertions from White peers that they are 'playing the race card', are hostile or irrational (Sian, 2017).

A further definition of the angry Black academic woman by Chan, Dhamoon, and Moy (2014) cited in Sian (2017) describes her as "not easy to get along with, as hostile and unhappy, as someone who is responsible for tensions and divisions in society, as someone who is not a real scholar but motivated by ideology" (p. 15). Rollock's (2019) research into the lived experiences of Black female professors indicates that strength and resilience from Black women can be negatively interpreted by White counterparts as dominance. Although not explicitly articulated in student's narratives, the construction of a 'strong Black woman' seemed a more appropriate interpretation of their responses to experiences of structurally racist behaviours by staff and students. The SBW typology has been cited as the product of an intersection of race, gender and social class (Watson & Hunter, 2016). Not without challenges, an SBW may find herself mythologised by others and subject to expectations of being strong during difficult times. She might also be likened to the construction of the 'Black Mammy'; that is, a Black female who selflessly takes care of others at the expense of her own wellbeing (Watson & Hunter, 2016).

For some Black women, the requirement to hold a construction of inner strength may be costly. Negative experiences over the long term can lead to physical and mental health issues (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003). Moreover, grappling with stereotypical [and racialised] character attributions can contribute to emotional distress and distancing from support services (Gibson & Espino, 2016). When this is translated through experiences of feeling isolated, solitary female students are known to be at a greater risk of mental health issues (ONS, 2018).

The current study revealed that traditional Black female students at a post-1992 university conveyed more racialised narratives of experience and critiques of perceived structural forms of racism in their academic and work experience environments than traditional Black female students at a Russell Group university. The former student type had a sharper focus on a threatened identity and how this affected the quality of their interactions, further feeding into poorer perceptions of learning while highlighting the complexity of managing multiple identities.

9.12.2 A Sense of Belonging

Similar to a construction of multiple identities, a sense of belonging was also important for these students. As the interviews progressed, a subtle shift took place. The requirement for a sense of belonging seemed less of a pressing issue for traditional students who had returned to university following a year-long placement. The construction of a solitary identity in these students had begun to emerge in ways that were defining their multiple identities.

The placement year represented a turning point in their experience and seemed to supplement a need for belonging which students were unable to fulfil. Experiences during their placements were no less taxing for students with an ethnic identity, but it seemed that the experience of learning and working in an alternative environment helped to build stories of resilience and qualities of persistence in these students that would be helpful for the final hurdle. Both resilience and persistence are known qualities which contribute to a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Osterman, 2007). By contrast, their nontraditional counterparts in Phase 1 and traditional peers in Phase 2 expressed a more urgent need to experience a sense of belonging. Those students had not had the benefit of a placement year.

Some traditional students sought to achieve a sense of belonging by joining the African Caribbean Society (ACS). It has been noted throughout this research that nontraditional students did not refer to the ACS or any other society as part of their university experience, evidencing the difficulties these students have in accessing extra-curricular activities that could potentially offer support and moderate a sense of 'unbelonging' (Reay et al., 2002). However, one traditional student (S5) found that heterogeneity for people with Black ethnicities in this setting was at odds with her expectation of a more uniform reflection of her identity as a Black African woman. For some students, mixed views about the ACS were further eroded by their unmet idealistic expectation of a sense of belonging to the university as a consequence of society membership.

9.12.3 Theoretical Perspectives and their Relationship to Identity in Black Female Students

Social constructionism (e.g. Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2007) and intersectionality (e.g. Crenshaw, 1989; Hankivsky, 2014) were drawn upon to inform an interpretation of focus group data. The concept of multiple selves featured strongly in students' constructions of identity as well as activation of their cultural, personal and social capital. Regardless of student or university type, multiple selves were connected and defined by an intersection of ethnicity, age, gender and social class. The data revealed that this intersection was shaped by concerns about structural racism in their university and experienced as threatening for forming quality

interpersonal relationships with others, including relationships with students of similar ethnicity. Perceptions of threat and negative stereotypes were strongly implicated in some students' constructions.

The term 'structural racism' has been referenced on several occasions in this thesis. It is used to capture the perception that participants have about their institution. Here, the concept of the university as structurally racist is taken to denote an institution with a White power hierarchy that acts to exclude people from diverse ethnicities from that hierarchy (Ansell, 2013). In this setting, the people with the power to make significant changes that can affect students' experiences are invariably White (Kandaswamy, 2007). Without evidence of a strong desire to understand the experiences of students outside of a dominant majority, there is a strong possibility that minoritised students will be responded to inappropriately (Sian, 2019). The perception by minoritised [and marginalised students] is that the institution does not act in their interest. Without protracted effort on the part of the institution, the door may be open to claims of structurally racist practices and policies than can work *against* instead of *for* BME students.

This is not to say that universities are institutionally racist *per se* (Ansell, 2013), although Spencer (2006, p. 244) argued that universities are part of "political, economic, and education systems" with discriminatory practices. However, a picture of BME staff in higher education occupying positions with less influence (Barker, 2000) or located at or near the bottom of an institutional hierarchy (HESA, 2017a) reinforces views of structural racism. The persistence of an award/attainment gap in BME students (UUK & NUS, 2019) further contributes to the picture. Another contributor is non-recognition of cultural differences (Spencer, 2006). Knowles and Prewitt (1969) in Spencer (2006, p. 244) provide an enduring definition for institutional racism:

> Institutional racism is more subtle, less visible, and less identifiable but no less destructive to human life and human dignity than individual acts of racism. Institutional racism deprives a racially identified group, usually defined as generally inferior to the defining dominant group, equal access to and treatment in education, medical care, law, politics, housing, etc.

Students' views about teaching, learning and interpersonal relationships in a university environment indicated that the requirement to exercise a cultural sphere of influence in Black women might be class-based. The social status of some participants [if only the two traditional students] in this study suggested that intersectionality might not be the most appropriate theory to situate *some* types of students' experiences. Intersectionality theory

deconstructs the role structural forces have as a destabilising influence on people with multiple and marginalised identities (Cole, 2009; Collins, 2000; Lee, 2012). Accounts of the RG traditional students did not reflect this kind of experience.

In contrast, post-1992 students framed their experiences and, thus, a construction of their multiple identities mainly within perceptions of structural racism that seemed to be operating in an almost unchecked fashion in their environment. Their retelling of overt and nuanced perceptions of racism in teaching practices pointed to intersectionality as a more appropriate frame of reference for exploring the tensions of constructing their identity. The main focus for these students was on disentangling experiences and perceptions of discrimination that were occurring at the cross-section of their multiple identities.

An intersection of ethnicity and gender in RG traditional students was moderated by their status as middle-class students, which was defined by their experiences prior to and during university. The focus for these students rested more on the quality of their learning experience and the importance of interpersonal relationships as being beneficial for their overall experience. Salience to their environment was achieved based on assumed similarities to their peers rather than a focus on difference.

A process of negotiation [an *"aggressive discussion"*] before an audience of their multiple selves seemed to help the RG students locate an appropriate identity for each context. Summed up by Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007, p. 5) perspective of multiple dimensions of identity and meaning-making, these students had "less reliance on stereotypes, authorities, and the approval of others to shape their ethnic identity". The importance placed on the construction of social identity by these students supported the view that social constructionism was a better theoretical lens through which to view their experiences. A similar battle was taking place in post-1992 students, but in an environment perceived as structurally racist, this discussion caused them to become more guarded about the intentions of staff and other students. Furthermore, they viewed each other as competitors instead of possible allies.

Higher education research points to fewer Black students in elite and Russell Group universities (Boliver, 2013; 2016; 2017), suggesting the possibility of a somewhat impoverished cultural experience for these students. It was anticipated, therefore, that there might be challenges for integration and progression for RG Black female students in this study. The effect of their social background and the importance that these students placed on engaging in productive interpersonal relationships over the duration of their studies challenged this assumption. This is a novel finding in the thesis which adds to the body of

knowledge about these students' experiences, going beyond the challenges that have been highlighted in higher education literature.

9.12.4 Changes to the Conceptual Framework

In light of the above, the conceptual framework described in Figure 5.9 (Chapter 5) was revised (Figure 9.12.4) to include a distinction for the application of the core theories in this research. The first iteration of the conceptual model in Chapter 5 focused on the importance of understanding the experiences of Black female students from several aspects. It was proposed that a phenomenological exploration of experience in these students could be informed by general theories of identity. Secondly, students' cultural, personal and social capital could define the quality of their interpersonal relationships and interactions with others. Lastly, a construction of multiple identities would more likely draw on intersectionality as a critical feminist perspective to understand experiences of marginality. Thus, it was expected that social constructionism and intersectionality could inform an interpretation of the experiences of Black female students in these samples.

The reconceptualised model in Figure 9.12.4 shows that both intersectionality and social constructionist approaches can be used to frame a phenomenological exploration into the experiences of Black female students. This is because these theories can shed light on the construction of identity as individual experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008) as well as for minority group experiences (Gaunt, 2011). However, a divergence in cultural identity between post-1992 and RG traditional students suggested that an application of these theories did not solely rest on students' perception of their ethnicity but also on how their identities were shaped by their social class and interactions. This distinction was determined by whether students felt the need to invoke cultural capital as a form of influence. Multiple identities, on the other hand, were more firmly rooted in students' views about the university as a structural and [in most cases] racist power that could negatively affect their experiences.
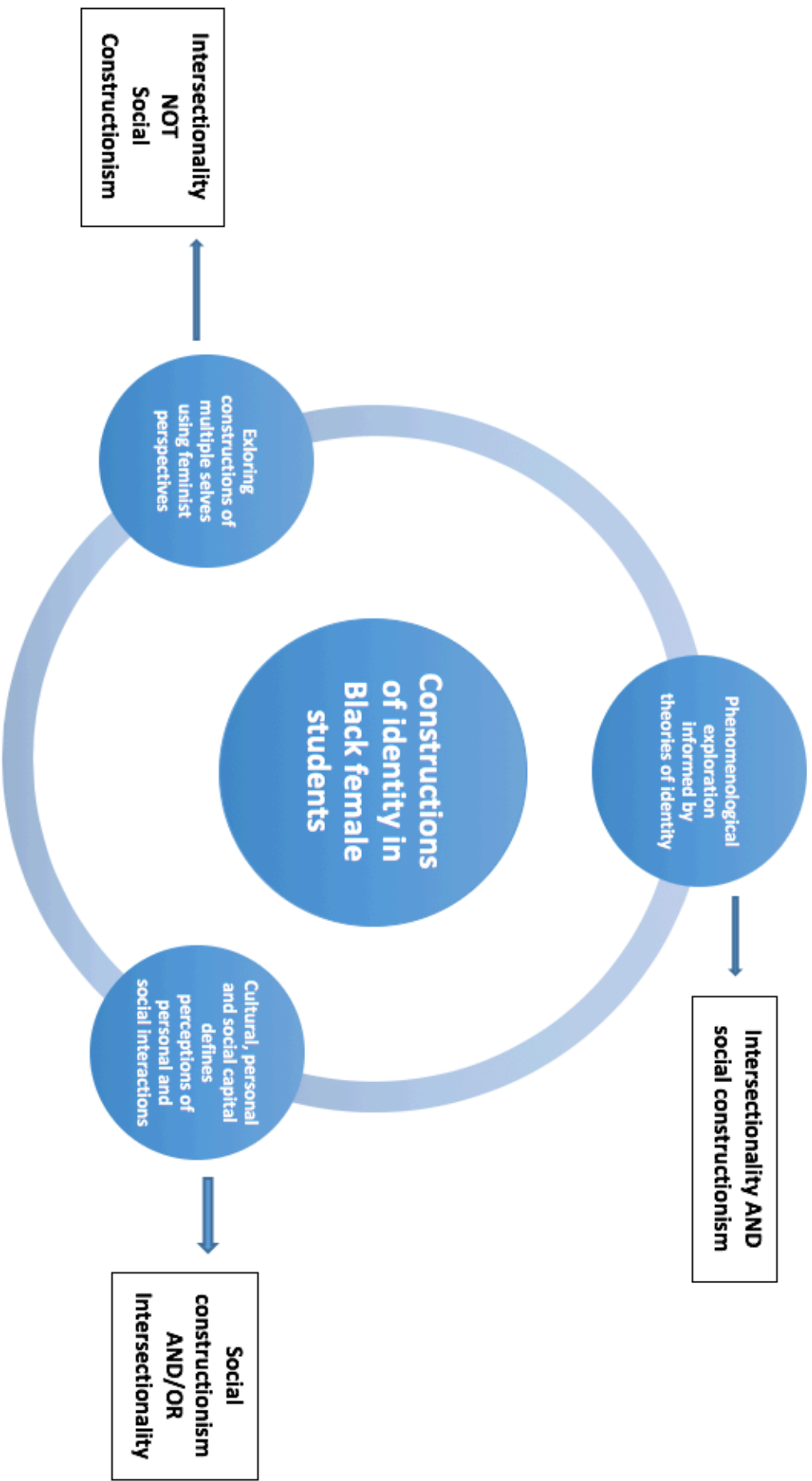
Figure 9.12.4: A (re)conceptualised model of identity construction in Black female students

Intersectionality
NOT
Social
Constructionism

Exloring
constructions of
multiple selves
using feminist
perspectives

Constructions
of identity in
Black female
students

Phenomenological
exploration
informed by
theories of identity

Intersectionality AND
social constructionism

Cultural, personal
and social capital
defines
perceptions of
personal and
social interactions

Social
constructionism
AND/OR
Intersectionality

A key aim of this research was to develop a framework that might suitably explore the experiences of marginalised student groups. The extent of activation of cultural capital as a specific sphere of influence was an inconsistent finding between these samples. The current study suggests that, whether from a critical race or feminist perspective, or within the broader theoretical arena of social constructionism, these theories must be selectively applied in order to better understand the experiences of particular student types who have tended to be treated as a homogeneous group in the literature.

9.12.5 Implications

The current findings benefit from being part of a larger research project that includes the voices of more Black women with a range of experiences and over a longer timeframe. Data triangulation reveals systemic issues for these students across key indicators that run as a thread throughout this research. These indicators include a weaker sense of belonging, perceptions of receiving less support and challenges for maintaining interpersonal relationships. While the picture is far from complete, further insight is provided into the experiences of this student population.

However, the study is not without limitations. Firstly, the sample size for each focus group is small, although researchers have noted that a low number does not discredit the identity or efficacy of a focus group (Smit & Cillers, 2006). Secondly, this phase used mixed student types in the focus groups. Social science research has leant towards a preference for homogeneous groups to explore similarities and dissimilarities of the experience of phenomenon (Reed & Roskell Payton, 1997). However, in the context of its origin as a mode of data gathering (namely, for market research; Sagoe, 2012), soliciting views from as wide a range of participant backgrounds and experiences as possible in a focus group setting could be considered a strength. Thirdly, each focus group included a dominant member, which raises the possibility of undue influence.

Finally, a divergence in theoretical direction is based on the accounts of just two Russell Group traditional students who were at the same university and on the same course. Although their data were rich, it could be argued that a homogeneous finding, even from these students, may be insufficient to forge a theoretical direction to better understand Black female students' experiences as a heterogeneous group. Indeed, there may be other theories that could better define these experiences, reinforcing a need for more longitudinal testing of exploratory frameworks in marginalised student groups (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

Notwithstanding the groups' heterogeneity in terms of university type, student type and cultural background, it is accepted that results from small samples cannot be generalised to the experiences of other Black female students, even where they share similar characteristics. Moreover, research cautions against relying on findings from the use of focus groups alone to form assumptions about a social phenomenon (Reed & Roskell Payton, 1997). Consequently, this study contributes as one of several studies in this thesis.

Nevertheless, the findings throw light on the potential for teaching practices and staff culture to have an effect on identity construction. One student pointed to the possibility of using the curriculum to dismantle experiences and perceptions of racism. There may be benefits from shaping the curriculum in ways that allow students to explore multiple constructs using reflective opportunities. The process of decolonising the curriculum can be informative for both staff and students (Keval, 2019).

9.12.6 Conclusions

Thus far, the construction of identity as multiple selves has been a consistent finding across all phases of this research. Student identity is shaped by a sense of belonging to people and university environments, such as to other students, family or friends, in the classroom or to a student society. A sense of belonging has been identified as a key factor in a report on BME student experiences (UUK & NUS, 2019). Moreover, the findings from this report revealed that experiences of privilege can positively shape some students' experiences. Privilege, as defined by social class, influenced the extent to which a cultural sphere of influence as a key aspect of their capital was activated in some students.

In addition to ethnicity, factors such as social class, upbringing, parental education, previous education experiences, student type and type of institution can contribute towards a student's conception of their capital. A combination of factors can place some students in a position whereby managing multiple identities must be prioritised above their studies. For others, there may be more emphasis on retaining connections with other people, thus employing a social construction of their identity.

Overall, these focus group interviews showed that Black females students have a variety of experiences in higher education. With fewer opportunities to tell their stories, detailed accounts of racialised or non-racialised experiences are less likely to be captured. A tendency in the literature to homogenise minoritised students' stories (Ireland et al., 2018) may seem efficient but can lead to less understanding for an appropriate methodology to

disentangle their experiences, limiting our understanding of ways in which these students can be better supported.

This phase, in particular, has shown that theoretical approaches [even where assumed as relevant for the population of interest] might require selective application. Moreover, difficulty in recruiting Black female students highlights a requirement for researchers to be persistent in accessing marginalised voices in order to obtain a more complete picture of these students' experiences. The final phase of this research took the form of a single case study that was used to close this exploration. The chapter explored identity in a traditional Black female student using an extended interview. Like her peers in the current study, this student also engaged in a timeline activity and reviewed themes which had been constructed in earlier phases.

Chapter 10

Phase 4: Single Case Study - A Traditional Black Female Student's Experience

> ***Desrae's Story***
>
> *When I first started university,*
> *I didn't take any of my multiple selves with me.*
> *It was just too risky.*
>
> *I didn't leave any of them at home, either.*
> *Especially the non-academic one.*
> *My parents thought that was my whole identity.*
> *I didn't want to make them wiser.*
>
> *Instead, I locked my selves away in a secret place,*
> *only bringing some of them out for this interview.*
> *I wanted to introduce them to the researcher, but not all at once.*
> *How could I get them back in if I let them all out?*
>
> *We now share a secret, the researcher and me.*
> *She's seen what lies beneath my cloak of invisibility.*

This thesis has explored the experiences of traditional and nontraditional Black female undergraduate psychology students, based on data arising from individual and group interviews, which were analysed using several methods. Themes were constructed to capture and convey participants' experiences and their constructions of identity. The final phase consisted of an exploration of student experience as a single case study. The aim was to uncover further meaning-making for the experience of Black female students using an extended individual interview. Data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Analysis revealed the core construction of an 'unbelonging' identity[22]. This identity shaped the student's perspective of university and included distancing from staff, other students and the degree course.

---

[22] I attended a National Centre for Research Methods workshop on using creative methods. We were encouraged to use visual methods to explore data and reflect on experiences. One method, poetry, seemed particularly appealing as a way of summarising my encounter with Desrae. The poem above is the result.

10.1 Background

The background for the current phase arose from participant recruitment for Phase 3 (see Chapter 9). Just one student arrived for a scheduled focus group interview despite confirmation from four students that they would attend. Not wanting to waste the opportunity and in order to show respect for the time the student had set aside to participate, the researcher sought the student's permission to interview her as a single case study[23].

10.2 Participant

Desrae [pseudonym] was a 22-year old final-year traditional student who identified as Black British. She had enrolled on an undergraduate psychology degree course at a post-1992 London university following the 'typical' route for traditional students (see Chapter 2, 2.7.1). In addition, she was in paid employment for between 16 and 20 hours per week and participated in non-university activities for between one and five hours per week. At one point, Desrae was a member of the African Caribbean Society (ACS) but, at the time of the interview, she was not participating in any university-based activities.

Desrae lived at home with her parents [who were not university-educated] and siblings in the London area. Following a university education, her older sibling was employed as a nurse, while her younger sibling was still at secondary school. Based on parental occupation, Desrae indicated her social class as C1 (namely, supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional according to the National Readership Survey; see also Chapter 3, 3.9). She further described herself as a Christian and practising Jehovah's Witness.

10.3 Procedure

The procedure and materials used in the current study replicated Phase 3 (Chapter 9). Peer-reviewed qualitative research indicates that an interview schedule for a focus group can also be used for an individual case study (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013). As the sole participant in this study, there was an opportunity to widen the scope of the interview schedule by extensively probing this student's experiences. A singular focus meant that the interview was more of a conversation between the participant and the researcher, which is entirely permissible in IPA (Shinebourne, 2011). Without the 'noise' from peers in a focus group setting, the participant was able to offer a rich perspective of the construction of her identity. Desrae told her story using a candid recounting of experience while seeking to

---

[23] "The case study examines identity as a process, with the capacity of being able to examine each one in context." (Warner, 2008, p. 461)

'satisfy' the researcher by asking questions to secure her understanding of what was being asked. The total study duration was 180 minutes (Table 10.3).

Table 10.3

Phase 4 Study Sections

Section	*N*	Mode	Duration (in minutes)
1	1	Questionnaire	10
2	1	Visual timeline activity	30
3	1	Interview	80
4	1	Member-checking	60

10.4 Analysis

IPA was carried out on the data (see Chapter 6, 6.9 & Chapter 8, 8.6 for an overview of IPA and the analytic process). Single case study analysis is permissible in IPA due to its idiographic focus (Smith et al*.,* 2009). Furthermore, the single case study approach is an acceptable methodology in published literature (see Eatough & Smith, 2006; Gee, 2011). Smith (2004, p. 42) states that the idiographic nature of a case study represents important work on identity that is being "sorely neglected in psychology", where the emphasis is on conducting empirical studies with large numbers of participants. Shinebourne (2011) points out that much can be learnt from a single case study. In the current phase, a single case study was used to close the exploration into identity construction in Black female students. The researcher interpreted the participant's narrative and returned to it several times to ensure her life-world (Smith et al., 2009) was being accessed as fully as possible.

10.5 Ethical Considerations

British Psychological Society principles of respect for participants and integrity of the research process were followed (BPS, 2009; 2018). The study was advertised to students as participation in a focus group interview and the student had signed up to the study with that understanding. When it became apparent that there would be no further participants in attendance, the student was asked whether she wished to proceed with the interview as the sole participant. Following her verbal agreement, written informed consent was obtained. The participant was given the right to not answer any question and told that she could withdraw from the interview at any time without having to provide a reason. Subsequently, the

participant was briefed, debriefed, thanked and directed to university counselling services for further support if required.

10.6 Key Findings

The rationale for this phase was to carry out an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences of a sole traditional Black female undergraduate psychology student. Findings from the student's visual timeline were reported as part of the activity that was carried out with Phase 3 students (reported in Chapter 9, 9.8). An illustration of low, mid and high points of the student's experiences just prior to and during university was not dissimilar in its construction to the students in Phase 3. However, as a single case study, IPA was used to interpret Desrae's narrative of her lived experience as a student as opposed to the thematic analysis of focus group narratives in Phase 3. During the interview, there were occasions when Desrae spoke positively about her interactions with staff as well as her desire to succeed at university. However, those occasions were clouded by an overwhelmingly negative construction that was coloured by her view of studying at an institution with a challenging picture of student diversity.

One master theme was developed from the data; namely, an experience of intentional 'unbelonging', with three superordinate themes (see Table 10.6). Each superordinate theme contained a small cluster of sub-themes. Together, the themes presented the picture of a 'fractured' university experience. An interpretation of the extended interview follows. Illustrative quotes were included to add meaning and support an idiographic approach (Smith et al., 2009) to the interpretation of Desrae's experience. There was less emphasis in her narrative on the construction of a 'Black' identity in ways that were articulated by some students in the current research. However, a phenomenological exploration of Desrae's lived experience as a Black female student drew on both social constructionist (Burr, 2003) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) perspectives as illuminating theoretical lenses through which it could be interpreted.

Table 10.6

Master Theme for Traditional Black Female Student

Master theme	Superordinate themes	Sub-themes
An Experience of Intentional Unbelonging	*"I didn't come here for a sense of belonging"*	Unbelonging identity
		University choice
		Parental resistance
		Resistance and resilience
		Who needs friends at university?
	"I found that uni takes up too much time!"	Instant gratification vs. slow churn of university
		Balancing university and employment
		University proximity to home
		Teaching and 'nudged' support
	The university is *"going a bit left!"*	Overdoing cultural diversity
		The problem with student cliques
		SU societies reinforce unbelonging

10.7 Superordinate Theme: *"I didn't come here for a sense of belonging."*

From early on in the interview, Desrae's experience characterised a state of intentional 'unbelonging' (Table 10.7). Although traditional Black female students in the current research expressed similar views about a state of 'unbelonging', their sentiments were not as extreme as the consistently 'unbelonging' identity constructed by Desrae. Drawing on Plaks, McNichols, and Fortune's (2009) theoretical assumptions for enacted intentionality, it seemed that Desrae chose to construct the identity of an 'unbelonging' student as a practised form of distal intentionality while studying at university without the endorsement of her parents. Plaks et al. (2009) found that when intentionality is enacted, it takes two forms; namely, proximal and distal. Proximal intentionality is described as a deliberate and purposive desire to act on a situation, person or thing. Distal intentionality incorporates the larger view, is

enacted over a longer term and is mainly carried out as a "means to an end" (Plaks et al., 2009, p. 1688).

Desrae's parents resisted her decision to come to university. An inability to fully engage with the experience of being a university student contributed further to self-imposed resistance for connecting with others. Besides parental resistance, there were other factors that contributed to her distanced stance. She knew nothing about her current university, which was not her first choice, before attending, causing her to feel unhappy about the prospect of spending three years in the institution:

> *I've never really been keen about being here or studying at university in the first place. And I wasn't keen on coming. I didn't know anything about the uni, but I wasn't gonna come here. I didn't do research with what the university was like [...] Nothing like that, just how good they were and that's it. Everything was university-focused. My sixth form was even called 'University Gateway', so it was just all university focused […] And I wish I was one of them few people that said, 'I'm not going to university'. But, yeah, definitely that pressure was there.*

Desrae did not elaborate on what she meant by "wasn't gonna come here", but this may have been expressed as part of parental resistance to her decision to attend university, made worse by pressure from her sixth form. Despite a negative start, attending a London-based university made sense to Desrae. She was a London-domiciled student with existing friendships at her local church and felt no need to invest effort in securing additional friendships in this new environment or to do the 'work' that might be required to form friendships with other students [her repeated references to "they"]. Instead, she was emphatic that she was not at university to achieve a sense of belonging and would not become engaged in processes that might help her to achieve that:

> *I'm only here for three years. Why do I need to try and force a friendship that's not going to come naturally? I'm not really here to learn about what they're trying to do or how they are with their friendships. For me it was just easier to stay by myself and I enjoy my company. So, it's fine […] I didn't come here for a sense of belonging.*

Having pushed the boundaries of her parents' wishes and committed to being at university, as can be seen below, Desrae could not allow university friendships or anything else to distract her from a focus on completion. She marked a contrast in the need for friendship-seeking between London-domiciled students and students at universities outside the geographical

zone of their support networks. Similar to her traditional peers and nontraditional counterparts in the current research, it seemed that close proximity to university from her home location dampened the view that she might need to develop friendships, even if this action could help to increase a sense of belonging to the university:

> *All of my friends live in London. It's not like anyone's moved away so I was like there's no point of me trying to make friends when I've got friends already. It's just too much unnecessary. I don't want to get distracted by friends in uni when that's not my aim of being in uni. I didn't come here to make friends; I came here to study. […] I didn't really want to gel with anyone [...] I didn't go out of my way to try and make any friends. [...] Especially not in London. I didn't see the point. I think maybe if I was in a different city or somewhere where I wasn't with my friends, I would need to make friends and need to gel and settle in that university because that becomes a whole new life, but whereas I have my life now and this is just an additional part of it, then there was no need for me to do that.*

Furthermore, her existing friendships provided support in ways the university did not, while time constraints [due to her employment] meant that she could not access university support services, further distancing her from the university:

> *My friend reads over my coursework; she studied English, so I trust her English. If I do have time then I try and book an appointment* [with academic support services], *what I did in second year, but I haven't had any time to do that this year, which is a shame. So, go to see people at* [building name] *but I haven't had the time to do that so I kind of sent it to my friend and she does it, helps me with that.*

Since she continued living at home, Desrae remained under the watchful gaze of her parents during her university experience. Desrae perceived that her parents felt certain she was unsuitable for university study as she would not have the capacity to complete a degree:

> *I'm not really an education-focused person. So, I was a bit like my head was in two worlds with it* […] *They* [her parents] *just kind of think uni is a waste of time, which is weird, well not really. They thought it would be better, my mum personally thought, because I don't like studying, doesn't make sense for me personally to go to uni.*

Desrae's reference to "*I was a bit like my head was in two worlds with it*" seemed to sum up the complexity of her experience. In the "world" that was shaped by her cultural, personal and social capital, Desrae drew on deficit perspectives that Black people are "not there for

education". That world also seemed to be shaped by her parents' views rather than a reflection of a wholly racialised construction of her experience. She attempted to culturally re-situate parental resistance at her decision to come to university:

> *But just the whole enjoyment of life and maybe not being serious about education. And there's just that massive stereotype there. Just that, it's not really* [...] *just the stereotypes of how people see Black people, so they're not being serious with life, they're not there for education* [...] *It might be a culture thing where parents don't want them* [Black girls] *to go to university or don't see the need of them going to university.*

The underlying message was that her parents might indeed have been correct about the wastefulness of a university education on Black girls. The counter-narrative lay in her current identity as a Black female student. Using the voice of this identity, Desrae contrasted her parents' negative response to her decision to come to university with the positive responses she claimed were expressed by her friends' parents, who shared the same ethnicity:

> *They're Black, female, African* [...] *So, my parents didn't want me to go to university, which is completely different to the culture that I've seen with the rest of my friends where their parents are like, you need to go to university. So, my parents didn't want me to go and I just decided to come anyway. And obviously, I've been in a place that I didn't want to be in, so I had to get on with it and prove that yeah, I'm gonna get something from it.*

Desrae's commitment to attend university was overshadowed by a stark absence of parental investment (An, 2009). Her muted reference to the importance of being "a strong person" with a resilient attitude was constructed as her only hope of being able to cope with transitioning into and through university against a backdrop of personal turmoil: *"If you're not a strong person and don't have a character, and you come into this environment, you're going to be very, very lost."* Desrae's multiple "worlds" were experienced as judgmental and emotive-laden. Her self-concept was also under threat. Consequently, it might have been less taxing to default to a parental view that could reinforce her identity as academically weak. Instead, she chose to attend university despite her parents' wish that she should apply for a desirable, but perhaps more competitive, paid apprenticeship - attesting further to a resistant identity. In that instance, she was unable to participate in her parents' sense-making:

> *And they* [her parents] *both kind of wanted me to go into an apprenticeship. I would make money and learn at the same time. It makes more sense. It does make more sense.*

> *But I didn't really spend too much time looking at apprenticeships so I didn't really get the chance to apply to any and I didn't think that I would get on to any […] So, I kind of left it there.*

Thus, Desrae worked to translate the experience of parental resistance into a story of resilience. Her narrative of toughness belied the confusing position she occupied by being in "two worlds". These "worlds" were further defined by Desrae as a 'world' of employment and a 'world' of the wider university. While an employment-study combination is not unique to students' experiences, in Desrae's case, there was a veiled understanding of why she simply had to do her best to survive in at least one of those "worlds": *"I kind of understand why I'm here. I wouldn't say I should be here, but I understand why I'm here. So that's the reason why I'm here."*

It was evident that, in Desrae's case, there was more to her multiple worlds than she might have been able to fully articulate. Smith (2019) refers to this kind of talk as meaning-making. Although Desrae would have preferred to be in a different environment or 'world', she did not seem to know where else she could be at this point in her life. With no perceivable alternatives, attending university seemed the only option towards constructing a future self.

10.8 Superordinate Theme: *"I found that uni takes up too much time!"*

While this superordinate theme was not specific to Desrae's identity as a Black woman, it was considered important nonetheless in that it conveyed an aspect of her identity that characterised her perception of university study and subsequent experience. When situated within the wider frame of Desrae's life-world, the period she had to complete her studies meant there would be just enough time and resources to succeed. However, there was a repeated view of university as an 'interruption' that surfaced in this theme (see Table 10.6).

Desrae's intense engagement with employment meant there was less time to study or seek support and represented a significant barrier to her studies. These modes of engagement [studying and seeking support] can be considered 'typical' of the student experience (Morosanu, Handley, & O'Donovan, 2010; Zuzanek, 2009). Furthermore, it is known that although working while studying can severely compromise their experience, undergraduate students continue to do so for a variety of reasons that include managing socio-economic pressures (Thielking, Brownfield, Quinn, & Bates, 2019).

It was not surprising that Desrae relished employment for its near instant gratification. Consequently, she constructed university as an interruption for which there was simply "not enough time":

I'm putting in everything but there's just not enough time. Yes, I just think uni just takes up time. I think because of that as well it stops you from working and you can't exactly rely on a student loan to kind of live. I don't think it's practical […] I'm much happier working, knowing that I'm getting something from it. So, I prefer to be at work and work was kind of a break from university. So, it kind of becomes a bit addictive in that I want to go to work. I'd rather go to work than have my head down. So, it became addictive and in third year it was really hard for me to kind of stop.

The 'world' of employment offered financial security for Desrae as well as a temporary means of escape from studying and being under the gaze of her parents, but there was an addictive quality to employment where she craved this in preference to studying. In the background, however, university continued to loom over her like an imposing structure. The phrase "not enough time" and the framing of university as a "waste of time" were scattered throughout her narrative like a mantra that defined a whole view of university as time-pressed and worthless. Almost as an act of intergenerational transmission of values (Aizer & Currie, 2014; Dohmen, Falk, Huffman, & Sunde, 2012), Desrae reinforced this view to her younger sister while incorporating her parents' view and insisting that her sibling should not make the same mistake:

My little sister, she doesn't really know what she wants to do. She's just, she's in year 9 so she's just done her options and stuff. But I've already told her that she's not going to university just because I've just hated the experience and I wouldn't want her to go through it. I think it would make more sense if she did an apprenticeship. She could start her own business or just do something. But for me, uni, the fees, I feel like it's a waste of time.

Thus, it was clear that Desrae's energies were diluted between engaging in employment [her preference] and studying. Additional time pressures that accompanied university study were viewed as an inconvenience:

[…] university isn't life. It's just university is only a couple of years from life. So, people don't want to put in […] you [researcher's emphasis] wouldn't want to just throw all your energy into something. It's only for a couple of years. It's a big part of life, but it isn't everything.

Desrae's restricted view of university seemed to buffer a less than satisfactory experience. Like her peers, she enrolled on a typical UK higher education degree programme with a three-year duration. However, on two occasions in the excerpt above, she referred to this

timeframe as "only a couple of years". On the surface, this might seem a passing reference. However, the phrase revealed Desrae's lack of connection to the programme. Her repeated reference to a shorter duration [two years] than is usual seemed to act as reassurance that the experience would be compressed and finished before she realised. Thus, she resisted the idea of expending all of her energies on university study. Furthermore, switching to a third-person narrative at this point [the underlined 'you'] resembled the self-talk of traditional students in Phase 2 (Chapter 8, 8.12.1), which was employed as a form of protection against the possibility of an undesirable circumstance.

Initially, Desrae's loose relationship to her current university suggested that her choice of university might have been more happenstance than deliberate, but a closer reading of her narrative was insightful. In an apparently strategic move, Desrae consulted university league tables but decided to attend a university that was listed as a low performer at that time:

> *So, all my choices were in London, but I wanted somewhere that was higher up in the league table. My A-Level experience wasn't great. It was a bit all over the place, so it was a bit affected […] I only ended up coming to [Uni A] because I think it was closer than [Uni B] so for me it just made sense, especially because I like living in the library. So, I just walk [...] What's the point of me travelling all that way just to stay in that library? It's a waste of time and money when I can just come to something that it's easier for me to get to. So yeah, that was why I came here.*

Falling under the broad description of a commuter student (Thomas & Jones, 2017), Desrae's university was sufficiently near to her home location that she could walk to university and make a monetary saving. Thomas and Jones assert that students with shorter travelling times to university are more likely to commit to attending. Furthermore, Desrae's comment about "living in the library" pointed to the possibility of an efficacious identity, but her use of "living" or "stay" to describe her experience of the library called into question whether it was being constructed as a space to engage and learn, to model the 'appearance' of learning, or to simply sit, such as in a living room. Furthermore, there was no reference to the benefit of the university's proximity in terms of attending lectures or seminars.

Despite Thomas and Jones's (2017) finding of an association between students' proximity to university and attendance, the extent of actual student engagement is still in question. In Desrae's case, attendance did not seem to equate to engagement, no matter how hard lecturers may have worked to make teaching accessible and engaging:

I think that they can try and make lectures engaging. I'm laughing because I wouldn't really be engaged. So, when they ask questions and stuff, you are so used to it [...] I think there should be more group work from first year so that by the time you get to the third year, so like you're talking to an alien. OK, this is OK, we need to talk about stuff sort of thing [...] but if it happened just randomly and then they're asking the questions, no one is gonna want to talk. I don't want to talk to the person next to me, what's the point?

Desrae's comment is revealing, since it suggests the possibility that she might have been willing to engage in conversation with her peers in group work activities during her first year; but by the third year, her involvement was negatively executed ("*I don't want to talk to the person next to me*"), reflecting the possibility of a more lengthy process over which she adopted an intentionally disconnected identity. Instead, by the third year, Desrae constructed an environment where learning required little thought or strategic engagement and was carried out in an almost mechanical or estranged fashion ("*talking to an alien*"). By this point, there is a strong sense of disconnect between herself and her peers. They are now viewed as "alien" and have become foreign to her.

 As previously noted, the university's proximity and an existing friendship network seemed to have fed into a protracted state of disengagement for Desrae. Moreover, the university's proximity to her home enabled her to commit even more time to employment, strengthening its potential to disrupt her student experience. Nevertheless, these factors did not fully explain Desrae's overall perception of university as an 'interruption', especially when she referred to some lecturers as supportive:

*Some lecturers are really good [...] like pastoral care sort of thing. So, they're really interested in just helping you learn and enjoy your time at university. They kind of [...] not that other lecturers don't but they **get** the fact that it's stressful, there's a lot to do, so they're focused on you as a person rather than just 'oh, I'm just teaching students'. It's more than just teaching. It's more of the individual or how they're finding it: 'Oh, I haven't seen you in a while. Is everything OK?' Just more things like that kind of makes the experience better. It's not that they can help you much with it exactly. It's all down to you, but things like that help the experience of being at university.*

Desrae's reflection on good pastoral care can be linked to comments about "nudged" support made by a traditional student (Kimberley) in Phase 2 (Chapter 8, 8.9.2). Described by Desrae

as a kind of 'corridor' conversation-in-passing, the construction of pastoral care is loose, informal and immediately 'passes the baton' to the student. The conversation she reported is not linked to a specific learning need, coursework or any other named issue. It seems that where university is experienced as an interruption, "nudged" support could allow students like Desrae to feel less anxious about not accessing more formalised or timetabled support, such as tutorials and scheduled personal tutoring, and find a way to get back on track. Ironically, it seems that a benign inquiry into a student's welfare might have the immediate effect of encouraging students who are struggling with self-efficacy and a sense of belonging to feel more supported and connected to their university environment.

10.9 Superordinate Theme: The university is "going a bit left!"

For the most part, Desrae's experience was premised on maintaining a clear divide between herself and other students. At the same time, she lamented that the university failed to recognise her culture and ethnicity in ways that other cultures were recognised. With a dominant ethnicity [Asian students] in situ, Desrae was concerned that the university considered it more important to satisfy the cultural needs of just one ethnicity, causing her to feel alienated. As a student who self-identified as Black British, she argued for the importance of upholding 'English' practices by providing "English foods", as though it was essential for an English institution to retain 'British' customs and practices to secure her identity:

> *Even with lunches and stuff, there's not English foods. You don't really see English foods but we're in an England country. It's just a bit too much. I don't have a problem with it. They have to do what they want to do, but I just think there's just too much emphasis on it and I don't think that's OK […] I feel like it makes everyone else feel alien when they shouldn't need to be. Whereas in the real world, it's a completely different story.*

This aspect of Desrae's experience was of particular concern, as she felt that it was important for students to be able to access all university facilities equally regardless of ethnic, religious or cultural differences. Her apparent contradiction [*"I don't have a problem with it. They have to do what they want to do"*] suggested that this was a situation over which she had resigned that she was powerless to change. Her perception of the university's attempts to recognise cultural differences reduced her expectation for an experience of 'sameness'. Instead, its well-meaning efforts appeared to contribute to the intensity of a divide that Desrae was

experiencing and contrasted with her view of what she felt was happening "in the real world". This was likely a reference to the "world" of employment where she was happiest and possibly may have felt a sense of belonging. There was a strongly politicised and racialised overtone to her narrative that informed the development of this theme (see Table 10.6).

Although London universities have the greatest concentration of ethnic diversity (Atherton & Mazhari, 2018), Desrae felt that an over-representation of one ethnic group was causing a problem in her institution. Moreover, she felt that the university's attention to meeting the needs of these students was unbalanced. Her experience of feeling minoritised was compounded by what she perceived as a lack of sensitivity in under-addressing the needs of some minority groups while over-emphasising the needs of another. She experienced this as jarring:

> The 'population' of this university; it's not something that fits with me. It's not balanced I should say, which is hard. There's a lot of minorities I'd say which are not really represented, but then there's a massive minority that's represented.

Desrae's feeling of being distanced was further reinforced on seeing students from one particular ethnic group forming into cliques from which she was excluded. A general tendency by students to cluster by ethnicity contributed to a polarised landscape. Furthermore, similar to other students in this research (for example, Kimberley), Desrae found that Black students did not tend to form into cliques, possibly as they lacked the numbers to do so:

> And they [Asian students] don't kind of look to have anyone else come into their sort of circle. So that's just annoying. When <u>you</u> go to like seminars, they just all sit together. Like certain groups just sit together. Like <u>you</u> have all the Eastern Europeans together. The Blacks don't really stay all together. But the Asians all stay together. And they're not really trying to get anyone into their little cliques. Like they're like what are you doing, sort of thing? [...] <u>You're</u> kind of like an anomaly [...]

Again, using self-talk [repeated "you"] almost as a caution to her present self, Desrae continued to dissect what this meant for her experience of feeling unappreciated as a minority student outside a 'minority mainstream' as a sharp contrast to the benefits Asian students seemed to enjoy from the university's recognition of their culture. Her attempts to make sense of what she was seeing amounted to a polarised understanding:

I don't think there's enough stuff to [...] activities, societies, whatever, to kind of represent who I would say I am. Things like that in general. The way the uni is tailored. So, like, we have prayer rooms for Muslims and that to me was like a massive shock. I've never seen that before, but then you would have a multi-faith prayer room; I didn't get that. And certain toilets are not specifically, but they're tailored to their religious practices. That for me was also another shock because I've just never seen anything like that [...] We're all just human. So, if you need to do something, kind of adapt in a way that's comfortable for you. I just think for me it was very strange, even with lunch and stuff. The food that they serve is all halal whereas in other places they wouldn't go out of their way to do that. You wouldn't find [...] but they don't say that it's kosher or anything like that. Why do you need to make that sort of differentiation and make such an effort I suppose for certain minorities? I just thought that was strange [...] So yeah, I just think that for me with this whole university setting [...] I wouldn't say is wrong, but I think it needs to be changed because it's going a bit left.

There was visible support at her university for Muslim practices that included ablution facilities in specially adapted toilets, same-sex prayer rooms and halal food on the university canteen menu. These adjustments were in direct contrast to what she had expected to find in a 'typical' university environment. Desrae's closing comments in this piece (above) were directed at the university for pandering to cultural practices that did not resonate with her experience and which seemed unjustifiable amid wider student diversity [*"Why do you need to make that sort of differentiation and make such an effort I suppose for certain minorities?"*]. She maintained that the current situation of 'inequality' was the fault of people at senior levels in the university:

And I think it needs to come through everyone at the top; lecturers, course representatives, everything. It just needs to stem down. Otherwise if it's left to individuals and certain students, it's not gonna happen. At the end of the day, we're here to study. Uni is not a simple thing. You don't have that much time, especially if you're working as well.

Desrae's assumptions about 'equal' treatment seemed to juxtapose with the university's recognition of 'difference', making her feel uncomfortable. It seemed that the more the university catered for ethnic differences, the more segregated it became, impacting on her perceptions of fairness and equality in this setting. A combined experience of being in employment while studying further precluded her from being 'available' to fix the situation

["*You don't have that much time*"]. This is one of the few occasions in her narrative where she re-claimed her purpose for being at the university; namely, to study.

Desrae's desire to extract herself from an environment that pandered to the needs of some ethnic groups extended to her perception of the student's union. She joined one of its societies, the African Caribbean Society, to achieve a sense of affinity with "a massive minority" and used this oxymoron in two ways; namely, to denote a large minority group of Asian students on her campus and, in the context of the ACS, a large representation of BME students. At the same time, she held mixed views about whether the ACS could enhance her identity as a Black woman or foster a sense of belonging. Although there were pockets of positive experiences in the ACS, her mantra of having "no time" came through:

> *I, personally, I don't take the African Caribbean Society seriously, which is a shame. Seeing as we're a massive minority here and it should be a nice sort of haven but [...] I enjoy it but it's just not serious enough. It's more like a youth group. There's no progression with it. And I don't know, if someone was looking in on to it, kind of reinforces stereotypes, which is a shame. But yeah, like I said, I've met a lot of people there and it's been nice to meet them, nice to be part of that sort of community. I don't know how it could be changed. I don't know. I think it's just with the leadership of it. I would get involved in it, but there's no time. It just wouldn't make sense, cos I'm not here to do that.*

Desrae persisted in her primary intention of remaining aloof from the student community by retaining only a fleeting connection to the ACS. Her association was clouded by personal and stereotypical views about how the ACS was perceived; namely, as a youth group without influence. In addition, her involvement had to be downplayed in the event of parental inquiry about her academic progress, which was already in a tenuous position based on her parents' perception of her ability:

> *You know when you go home to your parents and they're not going to ask you, 'so how is the African Caribbean Society?' They want to know what you've got on paper to show them. So, you're going there for the laughs and stuff, but kind of in the back of your head, you're like, I really shouldn't be wasting too much here.*

Returning to the theme of parental resistance, Desrae was conscious of how her parents might view time spent at university. Besides the challenge of completing her degree, recounting her experiences as a member of the ACS could not be allowed to form part of the construction of

her student identity. She was already in a constrained position and could not take the 'risk' of digressing further by investing too much of herself in extra-curricular activities or even allowing herself to experience a sense of belonging to the ACS that might occur as a result of continued exposure to the society.

Desrae recognised that, with limited opportunities to connect with other Black students on her degree programme, the ACS offered a unique opportunity, if only briefly, to experience that coveted sense of 'sameness' she had observed in Asian students and other same-ethnicity student groups. However, she also seemed to understand that the brevity of her experience with the ACS was unlikely to translate into a construction of situated belonging.

Desrae's construction of identity presented both a resistant and resisting façade in order to protect against negative feelings that might arise from parental disapproval, a possibility of academic failure and an experience of aloneness. Yet, beneath a seemingly tough exterior lay a vulnerable Black female student who, in a nuanced way, desired connection with staff and students. However, the cost of making those connections was possibly too great when contextualised against a chosen construction of intentional 'unbelonging'. It seemed that this was the only construction that could provide a sense of meaning for a lived university life that was replete with jarring experiences.

10.10 Member-Checking

The purpose of the final stage of the interview was to explore whether there was any salience between Desrae's experiences and themes that had been constructed from the experiences of Black female students from previous phases, particularly her traditional peers. Similar to the member-checking procedure outlined in Phase 3 (Chapter 9, 9.11), themes from Phases 1 and 2 were shown to Desrae via a PowerPoint presentation (Appendices T & U) and were supplemented with an explanation of the themes by the researcher in order to obtain the participant's views on the credibility of those themes.

Desrae agreed with the construction of themes for the non-traditional students in Phase 1, and seemed to share a kinship with those students in respect of a sense of 'unbelonging':

They [nontraditional students] *don't really fit in; you don't feel like you're going to fit in. I think they would take my sort of approach and mentality with things. I know some aunties that have gone to university and they know, they found it a bit weird because everyone's younger than them. They find it a bit worrying and they know that the*

students don't want to work with them, like group work because 'she's old, she might not understand, it might just take longer for us to explain stuff'. That's been a bit of a downside I suppose to their experience of it.

This finding was unsurprising, given Desrae's persistent construction of an intentionally 'unbelonging' identity. Furthermore, she related to nontraditional students' concerns about feeling accepted by others as well as combining work and study, since these aspects in particular resonated with an ongoing tension in her life-world. Of note, she felt empathy for the student-parent identity, which could have been a mirroring of those occasions when she was aligned with her parents' views; for example, her narrative about the advice she gave to her younger sister about not coming to university. The notion of university being experienced as a persistent 'interruption' eased itself into her comments about nontraditional students' experiences:

> *But I think they* [nontraditional students] *get the experience everyone else gets with the working sort of thing. It's just, it's just too much.* [...] *It becomes like uni is in the way instead of everything else being in the way* […] *You can detach from your family; you can detach from work. But if you're a mum, you have to go back home to your kids, you need to provide, you need to be there for them, your husband, whatever. That environment is still gonna be there regardless of whether it's in the way or not.*

By her own admission, Desrae acknowledged that she had limited exposure to nontraditional students and possibly as a consequence of a research project (*"I've met some* [nontraditional students] *because of my research, but I haven't sat down and spent time…"*). However, she seemed satisfied that the researcher's understanding of their experiences was correctly portrayed. It was also possible that she was drawing on the researcher's identity as a mature Black woman to arrive at her conclusions. Without multiple or contrasting voices in a focus group setting to stimulate alternative thinking, it is accepted that the researcher's identity may have influenced Desrae's overall agreement with the construction of themes for nontraditional students.

When commenting on the experiences of traditional students, Desrae initially agreed that her university experience was fully captured by the themes constructed for this student type, stating that *"I fit in everything"*. However, she later modified this view by alluding to two constructions of identity in traditional students she felt diverged from her experience; namely, an 'unbelonging' identity and a transitioning identity.

In its broadest sense, an 'unbelonging' identity did not resonate with Desrae's experience due to her resolution to maintain a state of intentional 'unbelonging'. Her constructed position was from a place of never fully attempting to belong to her university in the first place. While other students may have entered university with the hope of fitting in, this was not Desrae's abject intention, although her desire for belonging may have been more nuanced: *"I've never really tried to fit in and been rejected"*. Although not explicitly stated, it is possible that Desrae may have learnt from previous experiences [whether at school or in social settings] that if she did not try to 'fit in', she would not experience rejection.

As part of her deliberations, Desrae reflected on the concept of a 'threatened identity', which was noted as an aspect of the experiences of traditional students. She stated that this concept did not resonate with her. Instead, she returned to a repertoire of university as an interruption. It seemed that maintaining a state of 'unbelonging' reduced the possibility of feeling threatened:

> *Threatened identity? No. I only think uni, because it's so stressful, you can become a bit demotivated at life, not just university, but just at life and because uni becomes life* […] *I wouldn't say my identity was threatened* […] *but I wouldn't say that I'm that person because I haven't really tried to associate with anyone.*

Summing up, Desrae partially agreed with the construction of a transitioning identity, equating this to a feeling of being 'lost': *"because I wouldn't say I'm transitioning. I haven't really been affected by it like that. I'm not really* […] *lost"*. An earlier reference by Desrae to the type of student that might be 'lost' in their institution suggested that she had worked hard to ensure that this was not part of her experience. Indeed, how could she experience the state of being 'lost' if she had no intention of ever being 'found'? It seemed that purposefully wearing a cloak of intentional 'unbelonging' from the outset helped Desrae to mitigate this possibility.

10.11 Discussion

This single person case study revealed an identity that both supported and contrasted with findings from Black female students' constructions of identity in earlier study phases of this thesis. The case study approach permitted extensive probing of individual experience in order to obtain rich data. Although a sample of Black female traditional students had also participated in an individual semi-structured interview for Phase 2, the current study differed in format with the addition of a visual timeline activity. Member-checking was also used to

explore whether there was similarity between this student's experience and themes that were constructed for traditional students in Phase 2, as well as credibility for themes that captured the experiences of a sample of Black female nontraditional students in Phase 1.

Following brief comments on the timeline activity and member-checking, the findings are discussed relative to expected, divergent and unexpected experiences for this student. The key finding was that a persistent state of intentional 'unbelonging' defined Desrae's experience of university and was reflected in negative perceptions about the university's efforts to engage with students from a different ethnic minority. Desrae attempted to manage a disjointed experience by establishing a 'fleeting' connection with the African Caribbean Society (ACS), but this was affected by the negative tone set by her parents at her decision to come to university rather than pursue an apprenticeship.

10.11.1 Timeline Activity and Member-Checking

There was little difference between the timeline constructed by Desrae and timelines constructed by mixed student types in Phase 3. However, given Desrae's articulated account of her experiences, this suggested that there was a difference between the visual representation of her experience and an articulated account of experience. It is possible that Desrae was using different lenses through which to construct visual, perceived and articulated accounts of experience. More research using alternative methods is required to understand their effect on the re-telling of experiences.

Although Desrae agreed with themes that were developed to reflect the experiences of nontraditional students, her agreement should be 'considered cautiously' since she did not know many mature students aside from her aunts who had experienced higher education as a mature student, and to whom she only fleetingly referred. It was also acknowledged that the researcher's identity as a mature Black woman may have influenced Desrae's view as she may have assumed that the researcher was more knowledgeable about the experiences of this student type.

Desrae described some divergence between her experiences and the themes developed for traditional Black female students' experiences. She was unable to relate to constructions of transitioning and 'unbelonging' identities. This is not to say that these narratives of identity were entirely absent from Desrae's construction, but it seemed that at least some of those identities were being constructed [or interpreted] differently: namely, as 'resilience' rather than efficacy and as "lost" rather than transitioning. For the most part, 'unbelonging' was realised in Desrae as an *intentionally 'unbelonging'* identity.

10.11.2 Expected Findings

Combining Employment with Study

Research has shown that engagement in employment during university study has a complex effect on sense of belonging, including an increase in feelings of detachment and a lack of student identity (Kember & Leung, 2004; O'Keefe, 2013; SMF, 2017). Although Desrae spoke of the importance of studying in order to complete the degree programme, this requirement was concurrent with a felt need to engage in relatively long hours of employment each week. Her repeated interpretation of university as an 'interruption' seemed to stem from this lengthy engagement, which was prohibitive to the development of important relationships that might otherwise have helped embed a sense of belonging.

Student Cliques

A history of intergroup behavioural studies has shown that people form into groups based on a range of variables that include a desire for similarity (Billig & Tajfel, 1973), the need for a group 'leader' (Gleibs & Haslam, 2016), to achieve a sense of collectivism (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988) and to establish a micro-system with its own rules and culture over which group members can experience a sense of belonging (Vaes, Leyens, Paladino, & Miranda, 2012). Intergroup variables influence the decisions an ingroup makes about excluding individuals who do not meet their criteria. Same-ethnicity student groups, or as students in the current research called them, 'cliques', presented one of the greatest challenges to a feeling of fitting in at university. Similar to other students in this research, the absence of a same-ethnicity group within which Desrae could fit was constructed as an outgroup experience that seemed to be in direct opposition to her view of what diversity at university should look like and how it should be experienced.

10.11.3 Divergent Findings

Intentional 'Unbelonging'

From a behavioural perspective, it is relatively easy to see how 'unbelonging' can be linked with intentionality, leading to negative actions (Conner, Britton, Sworts, & Joiner, 2007). For example, intentionality has a suggested role in producing acts of racial discrimination (Apfelbaum, Grunberg, Halevy, & Kang, 2017). Agency drives intentionality as a mental state in pursuit of real-world objects (Segal, 2007). Little is known about intentional 'unbelonging' as a form of distal practice in student experiences, although there may be parallels with the concept of engagement. Disengagement in students has been linked to

behaviours such as non-participation in learning activities, poor coping, a feeling of dissonance and a process of disequilibrium and can also be linked to the social construction of an 'unbelonging' identity (Dean & Jolly, 2012). On the other hand, engagement is constructed as active involvement in the learning process and includes working and forming relationships with others (Masika & Jones, 2016). However, the finding of an intentional 'unbelonging' identity seemed divergent even to the experiences of disengagement narrated by students in the current research. Desrae's narrative and history conveyed distal intentionality that was the set point for her deliberate choice to view and experience university as a wholly disconnected period in her life-world.

Nudged Support

It is not coincidental that the same student type [Black female traditional students] interviewed at separate points in time during this research constructed a kind of support that they felt could be beneficial for the continuance of their studies and ability to complete. Kimberley, a traditional student in Phase 2 (Chapter 8, 8.9), described 'nudging' (Damgaard & Nielsen, 2018; Marteau, Ogilvie, Roland, Suhrche, & Kelly, 2011) as a form of support that could replace the absence of a personal sense of agency, almost as though nudging by staff might help her become efficacious. Re-appearance of the concept of 'nudged support' in Desrae's narrative suggested that a non-specific approach to support might be viewed as less threatening to students who are struggling with engagement. A 'light touch' approach could be a more palatable form for students who feel marginalised and lack a sense of belonging to their institution. As much as 'social' inquiries such as the type Desrae described might seem irrelevant in an academic context, they could provide a helpful scaffold upon which to build more formal lines of inquiry. Thus, a simple question directed by staff to these students such as, "how was your day?" seemed sufficient to create important connections for these students.

Recognising Cultural Differences

A compelling issue for Desrae's experience arose from the university's engagement with a large body of ethnic minority students in order to ensure that amenities on the premises were culturally accessible. This action appeared to exclude students from other ethnicities and was constructed by Desrae as a racialised and insensitive structural response to the complexity of ethnic diversity. Instead of inducing a feeling of being welcomed as a student from a minoritised group, the effect was counterproductive to her experience and reinforced

distancing. She translated the university's focus on one student ethnicity as lacking in recognition of student diversity.

With an emphasis on widening participation in higher education (Bibbings, 2006), universities are increasingly challenged to create an environment that is inclusive (e.g. Biggs & Tang, 2007; Bowl, 2003; Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005). Attempts by Desrae's institution to cater to student diversity were constructed as a form of privileging, especially where there was no mention of a visible framework or body of information in her environment that could helpfully explain a rationale for these actions. Moreover, distancing from the student's union meant that she did not access student campaigns for adjustments to be made to the university environment.

10.11.4 Unexpected Findings

Sense of Belonging

Belonging is discussed in higher education literature in a fairly dichotomous fashion; that is, the experience of having a sense of belonging or, as is more often the case in some student groups, a sense of 'unbelonging' (e.g. Choenarom, Williams, & Hagerty, 2005; Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003; Thomas, 2012). Rightfully, emphasis has been placed on avoiding pedagogic practices that might foster a sense of exclusion in students from marginalised groups (Spade, 2011), but a persistent state of intentional 'unbelonging' and the reasons for this are seldom mentioned.

Desrae had similar experiences to other Black female students in the current research. For example, she was employed while studying. She had few, if any, friends on campus. Moreover, she experienced exclusion from other-ethnicity student cliques. Similar to her peers, it was anticipated that Desrae would make attempts to locate a sense of belonging to her institution. For some students, this involved creating an attachment [mainly of a social nature] to one or two other students or relying on family and external networks to feel connected and supported. Some students joined the ACS, viewing this as a community of similar-ethnicity students with whom they could possibly fit. However, a deliberate construction of 'unbelonging' by Desrae affected all of her experiences and was reflected throughout her university experience. The possibility of experiencing a sense of belonging was not part of her agenda.

African Caribbean Society

Desrae's conceptualisation of, and subsequent relationship to, the ACS was an unexpected finding. Although there were mixed findings relating to membership of this society among students in the current research, Desrae's decision to downplay her involvement with the ACS to her parents revealed a tension for students who might be trying to construct the identity of a 'serious' student under extenuating circumstances. Although the National Union of Student's societies have come under criticism for their politically-charged agenda, they play an important role in fostering wider student engagement as well as preparing students for global citizenship through networking opportunities (Loader, Vromen, Xenos, Steel, & Burgum, 2015). However, from Desrae's perspective, possibly influenced by her parents' views, it seemed that these societies were viewed as spaces to unwind and have fun, having little to do with the overall experience of being a student. A consequence of non-involvement with extra-curricular activities might create limitations for the possibility of experiencing meaningful connections, further noted by their absence from the narratives of the nontraditional students in Phase 1.

Parental Influence

It was evident that Desrae's parents played a pivotal role in her view of her university experience. The literature has addressed the importance of parental involvement in a child's education (e.g. Ball, Reay, & David, 2002; Ceglie & Settlage, 2014; Reay, 2018). Research has focused on socio-demographic factors such as ethnicity, siblings, financial investment and social class on students' achievement and their relationship to parental investment (Charles, Roscigno, & Torres, 2007). Related factors such as parental education and role-modelling have been previously discussed in this thesis (Chapter 3, 3.8.1).

However, there is little literature that has addressed parental resistance to the pursuit of a university education by their child[ren] as a key contributor to a sense of protracted 'unbelonging' in students. Studies on parental disapproval in university students have mainly centred on areas such as attitudes to condom use (Bosompra, 2001), drug use (Candido et al., 2018) and eating behaviours (Deliens, Clarys, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Deforche, 2014). Therefore, more research is required to understand parental influence on educational outcomes, particularly the ways in which this might limit the 'activation' of cultural capital (Winne & Nesbit, 2010) in some students.

It was evident from Desrae's account that despite attending a school classed as a "University Gateway", this route did not accord with her parents' views on what was

appropriate for their daughter's mobility. According to Desrae, her parents were more favourably disposed to the pursuit of a [competitive] apprenticeship (Thompson, 2013) as a preferred post-secondary school destination. It seemed that parental resistance precluded the possibility of an early investment in an experience that might have sustained a more efficacious approach to university study. The extent of the effect of an absence of parental interactional investment (An, 2009) was an unexpected finding in this study while noting that this may have also sensitised Desrae to situations that lay on the periphery of her experiences.

<u>10.11.5 Implications</u>

As a single case study, this exploration reflected a limited account of the experience of higher education in that this was obtained from the perspectives and experiences of just one traditional Black female student. As a developing research area, the single case study approach has been reported in clinical studies (Martikainen & Korpilahti, 2011), psychodynamic therapy (Van Nieuwenhove, Meganck, Cornelis, & Desmet, 2018), parenting and attachment (Pazzagli, Laghezza, Manaresi, Mazzeschi, & Powell, 2014) and early childhood studies (Skär & Prellwitz, 2008). However, at the time of writing, there were no single case studies in the published literature that had focused on the experiences of a traditional Black female undergraduate psychology student in UK higher education. Its use in the current context represents a novel approach to understanding the particularities of experience for minoritised students.

It should be noted that Desrae commented on issues with teaching practices in psychology in similar ways to her nontraditional Black female counterparts and traditional Black female peers. To avoid repetition, these issues were not addressed in this study. Furthermore, it is likely that issues such as personal tutoring, data analysis, feedback and group work are not specific to the experiences of Black female students alone, and there is a plethora of higher education literature that has addressed student experiences in these domains. Moreover, Hulme and colleagues have carried out extensive research on psychology teaching practices that include feedback, pre-tertiary and tertiary experiences and the challenges for a smooth transition into a psychology degree programme, developing as an independent learner, data analysis and statistics anxiety, and the development of psychological literacy (Hulme, 2014; Hulme & Forshaw, 2009; Kitching & Hulme; 2013; Hulme et al., 2015; Mair, Taylor & Hulme, 2013; Reddy, Lantz, & Hulme, 2013; Taylor & Hulme, 2015).

Nonetheless, it is accepted that staff may need relevant, up-to-date training in order to be effective in their roles at a time when the student experience is being closely monitored (Jones, 2010). They will also need the confidence to connect with students from diverse backgrounds. Increasingly, staff must become knowledgeable about communicating with students in a variety of ways.

10.11.6 Conclusions

Without scrutiny from other students or the lack of privacy in a focus group setting, a single case study exploration of the identity work of this student revealed a more fragile construction of identity than might have otherwise been possible to access. The student's engagement in an in-depth interview that was wholly-centred on her experience and perceptions seemed, in some way, to contribute to a more meaningful picture of the reality of constructing identity under extenuating circumstances. If the experience of participating in this interview could be considered as another form of 'nudged support', the opportunity appeared to have enabled Desrae to reflect more deeply [and candidly] on her identity as a Black female student in higher education. At the close of the interview, the student was asked specifically about the experience, and responded:

> *It's been an eye opener for me actually really* […] *Understanding my overall experience, kind of summarising something in my head. Maybe more focused for the next couple of weeks I have ahead and just understanding that* […] *not understanding but being more aware that I am a Black female at this university. And at university in general. And what that means for me and how I need to allow it to affect my thinking in the way that I carry myself and the way I am going to approach things.*

Informed by social constructionism and intersectionality, an interpretation of the traditional student's narrative closed the hermeneutic circle of inquiry into Black female students' experiences. The interview revealed an identity that was constructed at the margins of experience as a complex, intentionally 'unbelonging' self. Notably, this was a construction by choice, as the student transitioned into university with the determination to remain detached from her experience. Parental resistance and intense engagement in employment framed an 'unbelonging' identity construction to the extent that efforts by staff and students to connect might have been ignored or perceived as unnecessary, impractical or destructive. Meanwhile, Desrae's fragile attempts to connect with similar others through the medium of the ACS as

well as limited recognition for supportive staff that were in her environment shed further light on the ambivalent nature of this student's experience.

Chapter 11

General Discussion

The final section of this thesis consists of three chapters. The current chapter situates findings within an overview of four study phases and re-visits the central and subordinate questions that were posed in Chapter 1. The researcher's reflexivity as a Black woman is addressed in Chapter 12, as well as the research methodology. Cole's (2009) questions for researchers using an intersectionality approach and the strengths and limitations of the research, are also set out in this chapter. Chapter 13 offers concluding remarks discussing implications arising from this research and summarising the thesis' main contribution to knowledge.

In previous chapters, an identity literature review (Chapter 5) provided an ontological basis for the discussion of theoretical perspectives that have informed the construction of cultural, social and personal identities. Of the perspectives reviewed, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and social constructionism (Burr, 2003) were revealed as appropriate theoretical lenses through which to contextualise experiences of identity construction in these participants.

The research took a feminist epistemological approach. Several qualitative methods were used (Chapter 6) to understand how "the participants are trying to make sense of their world" from a phenomenological and constructionist perspective, and applied interpretation and reflexivity to explore how "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 51). In keeping with the research questions, the main source of evidence used was narratives of experience that were obtained from Black female students enrolled at London universities. The main data collection method was the semi-structured interview [individual and focus groups]. Subsidiary data were obtained from a demographic questionnaire, participant engagement with a visual timeline activity and member-checking.

11.1 Key Findings

A consistent finding across all phases was that identity construction, in these samples, was experienced as challenging. Whether identities were constructed as 'hyphenated', multiple, or intentionally 'unbelonging', all participants experienced tensions because of the psychological work that was required to maintain an academic identity and progress with

their studies. Due to a lack of culturally-sensitive support in their institutions, some participants relied on internal negotiations to make sense of their experiences.

For some participants, this identity work was made more taxing by experiences of structural and societal racism that affected how they perceived themselves as Black women. In several cases this informed their assumptions about other students and teaching staff. Intersectionality focuses on marginality and the effects on identity, of structural forces in society (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). Collins (2015) reports that intersectionality is an example of a theory-in-the-making. Application of this in the present context, was relevant for understanding the intersection of ethnic identity and age-related experiences in nontraditional participants, as well as the intersection of an ethnic identity and experiences of structural racism in traditional participants[24]. Of note, both participant types were enrolled at post-1992 universities. The intersections described led to feelings of being distanced, a fractured sense of belonging and 'othering' (Harper, 2009) as a de-centred experience (Jensen, 2011). Thus, the participants conveyed a felt need to exercise their cultural capital as a valued aspect of their identity.

In contrast, identity work in the traditional participants at Russell Group (RG) universities was less predicated on an ethnic identity. Rather, a privileged form of 'activated' capital (Winne & Nesbit, 2010) fed into their educational experiences. A phenomenological and latent interpretation of their narratives revealed stories that were mainly situated within the perceived quality of their interactions with staff and peers. The benefits of their social class ['middle'] and a history of privilege emerged as key determinants of experience. Thus, social constructionism with its less racialised orientation (Burr, 2003) and greater focus on the reality of an individual's construction of the self in a social world (Gergen, 2007), was considered to be a more suitable lens through which to navigate the experiences of these participants.

Using a selective theoretical approach, the findings suggest that research into the experiences of BME students should aim to recognise the subtleties that a particular theory or theoretical lens can bring. This is important to consider when interpreting these students'

---

[24] Warner (2008) states that it is important for the researcher to pay attention to both visible and invisible intersections for what they convey about experiences of privilege. It is entirely possible that some intersections may have been missed during my interpretation of these students' experiences. In reflecting on why this could have happened, I must take responsibility for my present focus and accept that it is influenced by my experiences and perceptions. Another reason is the way these participants chose to tell their stories. Moreover, I did not explicitly ask participants to talk about their 'intersections' on the assumption that they might not have understood the term. Needless to say, a brief explanation from me may have been sufficient to elicit further insight.

experiences even if, on the surface, they appear to form part of a homogeneous group. While each study phase was carried out as a discrete unit, none were completely independent as they all addressed the phenomenon of identity construction in Black female students. The findings from each phase are summarised below as part of a composite body of knowledge about these participants.

11.1.1 Phase 1

Following a qualitative content analysis, 11 clustered themes were developed from the data (see Chapter 7). Of these, eight themes related to identity construction in a sample of nontraditional Black female undergraduate psychology students. The findings revealed that identity was constructed on a hierarchical basis (Collins, 2000), where a sense of belonging was the main priority. This hierarchy was operationalised within a network of 'hyphenated' selves (Fine, 1994) that were defined by participant ethnicity [Black] and maturity [their mean age was 42 years]. In fact, maturity was an overriding construction for these participants and acted as the 'hyphen' that connected and separated their intersectional identities. Moreover, without a sense of belonging, the participants struggled to complete their studies and some had difficulty with visualising their aspirations as achievable. Driven by strong feelings of invisibility or hyper-visibility, engagement with university study was at the expense of managing these 'hyphenated' identities in a psychologically taxing and, seemingly, segregated learning environment.

11.1.2 Phase 2

Using interpretative phenomenological analysis in a sample of traditional Black female students, four master themes were developed as representative of identity construction (see Chapter 8). The aim was to develop *some* insights about these students rather than to achieve a comprehensive account of *all possible* insights that might map on to some kind of 'ground truth' about their experiences. The main finding was that identity was constructed as multiple 'shifting' selves, unlike their nontraditional counterparts whose identities appeared 'fixed' and possibly anchored by the reality of their age as mature students.

This 'shifting' identity (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994) suggested the probability of more intense psychological work. For example, where an identity did not 'fit' within a presenting context, the outcome might be experienced as fractured or even threatening. Despite the difficulties presented by 'shifting', as well as issues with transitioning and help-seeking, a sense of agency directed a determination in these students to persist with their studies.

Like their nontraditional counterparts, the desire for a sense of belonging featured strongly in traditional students' stories and was reflected in their views about student cliques from which they felt excluded. Multiple experiences of distancing reinforced a solitary experience that acted to hinder the development of supportive relationships with students and staff. This outcome led to differing views between participants regarding where the responsibility for securing a sense of belonging lay.

11.1.3 Phase 3

A thematic analysis of focus group data using mixed student types [traditional and nontraditional students] yielded two themes that captured identity construction and perceptions of teaching in psychology (see Chapter 9). The quality of interaction between the groups during the interview confirmed their status as relevant groupings (Sagoe, 2012). The decision to interview the students in mixed groups revealed new knowledge about their student types as well as differences in experience related to the type of university attended.

Firstly, the tension of being in a mixed group was more pertinent in the case of focus group two. This group consisted of traditional students from a Russell Group (RG) university and a nontraditional student from a post-1992 university. Apart from the institutional difference, this was a [superficially] homogeneous group of Black female students. However, the extent of variability within the group, based on heterogeneous factors (for example, heritage, social class and parental education), caused the students and their experiences to be distinct from one another. This finding contributed to a picture of estrangement even among BME students.

Secondly, a social construction of identity portrayed by the RG participants contrasted with an intersectional identity that was held by post-1992 participants. This indicated the possibility of a parallel set of dynamics that played out in the focus group setting. With fresh knowledge, the framework (Figure 9.12.4) was re-conceptualised to accommodate a theoretical distinction between the construction of an identity with a social orientation in RG students and the multiple identities that were a response to perceptions of structural forms of racism in post-1992 students.

11.1.4 Phase 4

A disconnected experience was evident in the narrative of the Black female traditional student who participated as a single case study (see Chapter 10). Using an extended interview, the findings revealed that her identity construction was in conflict even before

commencing university. An aspirational identity conflicted with her parents' aspirations for her future. Attempts to construct a 'student' identity both aligned and conflicted with her parents' perception that she was not 'academic'. Commencing university on that basis meant that she worked to manage multiple and conflicted identities from the outset. This tension seemed to fuel her perceptions that she was studying at a structurally-racist institution.

The participant's decision to maintain an *intentionally* 'unbelonging' identity throughout her degree led to such a high level of disconnect that her whole university experience was emotionally-charged and psychologically taxing to an extreme. In fact, the rigid presentation of this decision sustained a fractured experience. Although ethnicity and cultural capital played a role, her personal and social capital also made a significant contribution to the construction of her identity.

Findings from a single case study may appear less informative for understanding the experiences of a body of students. However, even a seemingly 'deviant' case (Carcary, 2009) such as this participant, points to the possibility of similar or unexpressed experiences of 'unbelonging' in other Black female students in UK higher education. In view of the purpose of this research, to understand constructions of identity in these students, this single case study explored an experience *in extremis*, while simultaneously supporting the research remit [to explore experiences of Black female students more generally].

The central research question will now be discussed. This will be followed by consideration of the subordinate questions. The questions are first reiterated and then addressed as related clusters.

11.2 Central Research Question

What kinds of identity do traditional and nontraditional Black female undergraduate psychology students construct within UK higher education?

Constructions of identity in Black female students are likely to have been shaped by competing ideologies that include deficit cultural (Gillborn, 2015; Harper, 2009) and educational perspectives (Boliver, 2013). Even where, by virtue of being a twenty-first century Black woman, her experience may differ from the enslavement experiences of her forebears (Beech, 2001), a Black female student may continue to be exposed to microaggressive behaviours and unconscious biases (Atewologun, Cornish, & Tresh, 2018; Cuellar, 2017) that could negatively affect the construction of her ethnic identity. Indirectly,

derogatory remarks *about* a person's ethnicity or culture, can directly affect an individual's experience (McGee & Kazembe, 2015).

Borne out of a sense of entitlement in the perpetrator, racial microaggressions in social contexts are increasingly understood as both direct and indirect behaviours that vary in form and are levied at a person or people of a particular ethnicity (Nadal et al., 2015). Biases can be made more toxic when they are directed at people with multiple intersections. Intersectional microaggressions [for example, insults against a person's ethnicity *and* gender *and* age] are more complex to unpack and defend since they attack several layers of identity simultaneously (Al-Mateen, 2017).

11.2.1 Emergent Findings

Conceptually, the participants' accounts reflected the construction of multiple identities. Positive constructions included elements such as fleeting opportunities to experience a sense of belonging, agency/efficacy, coping, resilience, engagement in constructive approaches to help-seeking and aspirational thinking. These could be contrasted with more challenging constructions of transitioning and 'unbelonging'. However, these participants' positive constructions were clouded, on occasion, by experiences of the racial microaggressive behaviours of staff and students in their environments. While there is no agreement on what makes up an ethnic identity (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994) and also a recognition that ageing is a somewhat amorphous concept (Bowling, See-Tai, Ebrahim, Gabriel, & Solanki, 2005), it is accepted that societal forces shape the structures that govern the way these characteristics are defined and experienced (Crenshaw, 1991).

Some identity constructions in the case of these participants were operationalised subtly such as spiritual, role-model/'othermother', student-wife and student-parent. Identities were also experienced as 'invisible' (for example, a spiritual or 'unbelonging' identity), while maturity or a Black ethnicity were experienced as both invisible and hyper-visible. Students with parental/spousal responsibilities experienced changes in their demand and intensity over time. This affected the extent to which they were able to engage with their studies or other students. Where these responsibilities were embedded as part of their cultural capital, studying and extra-curricular activities were assigned a lower priority and created particular challenges. According to the archetype of a 'Strong Black Woman' (Woods-Giscombé, 2010), placing too much emphasis on 'caring for' or 'giving back' to others can leave Black women feeling bereft of the capacity to sufficiently nurture themselves.

Wellbeing benefits from group membership although, there is a known cultural effect whereby some ethnic groups [Asians] are less likely to join multiple groups (Chang, Jetten, Cruwys, Haslam, & Praharso, 2016). Groups are shaped by a collective sense of agency for their purpose (Bandura, 1999). In turn, a group's agency can affect identity construction (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Research suggests that as a factor of deciding whether to join a group, an individual may make an assessment of a group's contribution to their self-concept (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007). If the assessment is positive, there is an increased sense of belonging to the group (Paolini et al., 2014).

During a typical degree programme, students may hold several group memberships. For example, they are enrolled as a collective on a module, are part of a cohort and have wider membership of the student body. However, even these seemingly concrete forms of membership may be insufficient for identity salience (Stryker & Burke, 2000), for example if a student cannot find 'meaning' from memberships as they might from their connections with family or friends. In the case of the participants in the current study, the rules for membership of family and friendship groups (Cole, 2009) were experienced as less muted or complex and more accessible, than those regarding membership of student groups or cliques. As such, there was a noted absence in these participants, of a sense of connection to the student community.

11.2.2 Unexpected Findings

It was anticipated that a strong desire for a sense of belonging would have encouraged these participants to actively seek out opportunities to connect with others. Indeed, some participants explicitly stated that they came to university for a multicultural experience. Some also expected that this would form part of their induction into student life. It was assumed that this included connecting with people from diverse backgrounds. Other participants sought 'community' from membership of their Student's Union African Caribbean Society, but there were mixed findings regarding the benefits of doing so. Some participants reported a sense of community from seeing Black students, while for other participants, stereotypical assumptions about the society's usefulness to contribute to their construction of identity, weakened the connection. Although it is known that nontraditional students struggle to engage with extra-curricular activities (Reay & Mirza, 1998; Stuart et al., 2009), this finding was unexpected in the case of the traditional participants as here it was assumed that the society would have offered a sustainable opportunity for belonging, by connecting them with similar students.

<u>11.2.3 Summary</u>

Biases can influence attitudes and behaviours leading to beneficial or harmful consequences (Allen & Garg, 2016). Ethnic minorities have, for many years, been categorised and treated on the basis of implicit biases (Mazzolini, 2014). Some biases are deeply-held and rooted in historical and structural ideologies of racial superiority or inferiority (Augoustinos & Reynolds, 2001). Participants in the present research seemed sensitised to stereotypical views about Black people. They were intent on placing distance between biased judgments and perceived threats to their identity. There were occasions though when they also seemed to subscribe to stereotypical views about Black people that in turn affected their self-perceptions.

Nonetheless, for these participants, there are broader headlines within which multiple identities sat such as their pre-university and current university experiences; activation of their cultural, personal and social capital; perceptions of teaching and learning; experiences of staff and student interactions, and friendships inside and outside the university environment. However, the experiences of biases that played out in their environments, seemed to mould substantial feelings of 'unbelonging' in these students and this defined their constructions of identity.

11.3 Identity Construction

How do participants develop a sense of belonging to their academic environments? *For example, what does their identity construction suggest for academic efficacy? In what ways might cultural, personal and social capital define their identity?*

<u>11.3.1 A Sense of Belonging</u>

For some time, researchers have argued that a sense of belonging is a primary requirement for students (Cashmore, Scott, & Cane, 2012; Chalcraft, Pokorny, & Husbands, 2011; Chiu, Chow, McBride, & Mol, 2016; Erb & Drysdale, 2017; Goodenow, 1992, 1993; O'Keefe, 2013) with particular benefits for BME (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Slaten, Elison, Lee, Yough, & Scales, 2016) and nontraditional students (Kember & Leung, 2004). Thus, it was unsurprising that participants in the current research had a similar experience.

The development of a sense of belonging was often frustrated by the primary need to manage 'hyphenated' or multiple selves. Mirza (1998) suggests that this is an effortful task for Black women in higher education. In part this is due to the struggle to manage an identity resistant to the suggestion that they should downplay significant aspects of their culture

(Ogbu, 2004) or the need to negotiate labels such as 'the angry Black woman' (Woods-Giscombé, 2010) in order to be accepted by their peers. Racialised messages, stemming from deficit perspectives, can reinforce negative experiences in some student types (Heng, 2018; Ninnes, Aitchison, & Kalos, 1999). For participants with intersecting identities of a spouse and/or parent, belonging was further problematised by socio-cultural expectations.

These findings are supported by Thomas's (2012; 2017) extensive research into experiences of 'unbelonging' in mature students in higher education. A cluster analysis using NVivo in Phase 1 further revealed a weak sense of belonging in nontraditional Black female students. This is important because belonging is implicated in learning gain (Zilvinskis, Masseria, & Pike, 2017).

Unexpected Findings

Despite the commonality of constructions in these students, participants such as Abigail, Jennifer and Desrae revealed unexpected identities. Abigail's construction as a *traditional* student-parent seemed to bridge constructions of both traditional and nontraditional students. The hybridity of her identity opened up a different view of university experience. For example, Abigail believed that she had *sole* responsibility for achieving a sense of belonging, while other participants blamed staff, student behaviours and teaching practices for their experiences of not fitting in. These views seemed to reflect a pattern of belief about the responsibility for feeling secure in their academic environments.

There is a growing body of research that has focused on student-parents in higher education. Moreau (2016) took a critical look at universities and found that, along with other marginalised identities, catering for student-parents was a contentious area. According to Moreau this was because of a lack of awareness for the propensity of particular policies and practices to 'other' such students through timetabling and facilities. Van Rhijn, Quosai, and Lero (2011) found that student-parents represented a 'significant minority' in universities and that their experiences could be compounded by intersecting identities. Furthermore, these students were likely to be in employment to support dependents and have a strong desire to fit in with their peers. Additionally, they may find that they 'fit' better with staff because of their status as a parent. Identity construction is more complex when a 'student' identity juxtaposes a 'parent' identity since one of those identities might have to be either downplayed or highlighted depending on the context (Brooks, 2015).

There was an additional burden for Abigail in being identified as 'different' from the rest of her cohort. Based on her personal circumstances, her non-normative identity carried

particular assumptions that she had to manage throughout her educational experience. Stereotypical generalisations that can accompany the reasons for single motherhood in Black women (Phoenix, 2003; see also Chapter 2) seemed to have further informed her assumptions about how she might be received by other students. She initially surmised that the status of a single parent would be perceived negatively by her peers. Instead, she was surprised to find that once she managed to push past the 'protective' mantle of an 'unbelonging' identity, the students came to admire her tenacity in persisting with her studies and were genuinely interested in her experiences. Of note, Abigail's account of parenting while studying seemed to take on a more positive tone due to this acceptance. This reflects findings by Roy, Bradecich, Dayne, and Luna (2018) that student mothers can embrace the challenge of living with identity duality and are motivated by the positive influence they can have on their offspring.

As the only RG student in Phase 2, Jennifer learnt that her identity as a 'high-achieving student' during secondary school, was of little consequence when situated against even 'higher-achieving' peers at her university. This revelation led to a more introspective construction of her identity. Experiences of 'unbelonging' were further shaped by a period of depression during the second year of her degree programme. Similar to other RG students in this research, Jennifer used a less racialised perspective to explain her experiences, focusing instead on maintaining a social identity in her environment. After assuming a more 'normative' student identity, she was able to separate her feelings of unbelonging from negative experiences of studying psychology. This separation led to a more assured version of her present self.

Even so, Jennifer's view contrasted with that of other traditional participants who saw the act of walking away from a psychology degree as wasteful. Some participants expressed a desire to continue studying the subject after graduation in order to pursue a related career despite experiences of distancing. For other participants, family and friends bolstered their determination to continue with their studies and offered some relief in relation to their failed attempts to locate a sense of belonging. Moreover, the influence of a supportive maternal presence was particularly valued by some participants. Longstanding research points to the important role that parents play in supporting their children during primary, secondary and higher education (Ball, Reay, & David, 2002; Connor et al., 2004; Davis-Kean, 2005; Reay, 1998). In addition, a felt absence of parental support suggests the possibility of a more difficult university experience. The participant in Phase 4 (Desrae), who continuously had to

justify to herself and her parents that attending university was the right decision, revealed a particularly complex identity construction.

Learning from narratives of experience from traditional and nontraditional participants in previous phases, it was understood that the construction of an 'unbelonging' identity was a response to experiences and perceptions of being distanced by staff or excluded by peers. For example, despite the presence of large numbers of students in a typical lecture setting, participants frequently narrated experiences of 'onlyness' (Harper, 2009) that reinforced the prospect of an 'unbelonging' experience. However, this was the first occasion that a participant had narrated an *intentional* construction of 'unbelonging', almost as a form of protest against the probability of negative experiences and outcomes. As previously discussed, Desrae likely reflected processes of disengagement (Masika & Jones, 2016) that have been noted in students more generally. However, for Desrae these appeared present from an earlier stage than was expected, that is, prior to and throughout her university experience and seemingly in response to a lack of parental investment (An, 2009).

The findings further reveal that students with multiple constructions of identity can 'survive' in their academic environments. Indeed, Lester (2003) purports that living with multiple identities is a social reality. However, the current research pointed to one reason why these participants in particular, were more likely to have a weaker sense of belonging that included resistance to forming relationships with other students. According to some participants, they already had an 'inner team' of identities which they could draw upon for meaning-making, advice and support. As long as there was an external presentation of a 'whole self' (that is, an identity that included a social, professional and cultural identity; Osseo-Asara et al.*,* 2018), retracting into an 'unbelonging' self from time to time seemed to create the necessary space and privacy for that dialogue to take place. However, where their identities competed in an irrational sense or one identity became fixed regardless of the context, the student was at risk of becoming destabilised or disconnected.

11.3.2 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a set of beliefs or expectations about the ability to achieve goals or perform tasks and can influence behaviour (Margolis & Maccabe, 2006; Yusuf, 2011). Self-efficacy is also linked to psychological well-being and self-esteem (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Same-ethnicity role models are known to have a positive effect on students' academic experiences and can help them to moderate perceptions of racist experiences (Ceglie & Settlage, 2014; SOAS Students' Union, 2016). [Positive] role models are admired for

possessing certain qualities as well as the ability to demonstrate expertise (REACH, 2007). It is also known that role models can have a crucial effect on the ability of BME students' to seek support and develop self-efficacious behaviours (Valentine, 2012).

Role models were craved by the participants in this study, for the guidance they could offer as a template for success. However, these models were less visible in their university environments. Their absence problematised the possibility of a more positive construction of identity. Indeed, some participants felt compelled to assume the qualities of a role model themselves in order to nurture (or 'othermother'; James & Busia, 1993) other Black female students.

Unexpected Findings

An unexpected finding noted in these participants was that there was a lack of available strategy used to achieve academic efficacy, with most participants' narratives suggesting that they had little to no access to the 'hidden curriculum' (Devlin, 2013; Margolis, 2001) in their university environments. In some respects, this can be explained by a lack of felt support from other students and staff. On the other hand, it was assumed that their agency as narrated, might have driven intentional efforts to achieve academic success in ways that went beyond rote learning. In fact, the RG participants articulated this kind of agency using their accounts of engagement with teaching practices in more intentional ways, suggesting an efficacious approach to managing their studies. For post-1992 participants, their efforts in this regard were mainly unplanned or spontaneously enacted in response to coursework requirements. Furthermore, when an identity was perceived as being under threat, the possibility of developing an efficacious identity became more muted. In addition, several participants expressed the view that teaching staff regarded Black people as incapable of being efficacious. While some participants attempted to disprove this assumption, this was at times orchestrated as an overt display of cultural capital where they, like other BME students (e.g. Chigeza, 2011), focused instead on opportunities to exercise capital in the classroom. For other participants, they chose to simply 'keep their heads down' because they did not want to 'rock the boat'.

11.3.3 Personal, Social and Cultural Capital

Capital features strongly in sociological and educational research (Reay, 2004). Reay's review of the literature in this area indicates that capital is arbitrary and, of itself, has no intrinsic value. It is always intersubjective, value-laden and linked to external attributions.

Capital is also denoted by status and home location, but it can be more profoundly shaped by culture [as was the case for the participants in the present research]. A related term is 'habitus'. This is described by Reay (2004) as one's place or position in the world as well as the characteristics that are shared in common with all others, with some others, and with no others. 'Habitus' is the catalyst that transforms capital from passivity into activity by interacting with the social world. For example, a person may use the 'habitus' of language to generate new ideas once they have access to and an awareness of, the social conventions that govern those ideas. Similarly, a student might be able to access the 'hidden curriculum' (Margolis, 2001) once they have awareness of its norms such as the 'academic language' of a community. On the other hand, 'habitus' can act to keep a person 'in their place', dampening their aspirations to be able to mobilise. This is an example of social inequality that is enacted and maintained in some higher education systems to serve the self-interests of an institution which, according to James (2014), is painful yet necessary to acknowledge.

With a longer life history than their traditional counterparts, nontraditional participants drew on their capital to share stories of perseverance and resilience that were mostly acquired outside the university environment. With the benefit of 'anchored' life experiences, these participants seemed more grounded in their perspectives. However, a pressing issue was whether their capital could support them to achieve success *inside* the university. They appeared to work hard at adjusting their cultural, social and personal identities to the norms of their environment. The aim was to maximise learning opportunities in an institution that was perceived as not only academically challenging because of feelings of unpreparedness, but also socially challenging because of a cultural 'gap' for their ethnicity. Being out of education over a long period and adjusting to 'academic' language added to the challenge.

With restricted opportunities for personal and professional growth and little evidence of culturally-informed support, the possibility of success seemed more constrained for these participants than for their traditional counterparts. This culminated in a stronger focus on the need for a sense of belonging. By contrast, fewer life experiences and an ongoing development of cultural capital in traditional participants led to the construction of a more fluid identity. Their multiple selves had to be kept 'available' at all times since an identity might need to be drawn on without warning.

Unexpected Findings

Jennifer's cultural backstory included the benefit of having parents with resources sufficient to invest in their children's educational capital. Extra-curricular activities such as musical

instrument lessons and supplementary education have been shown to act as a form of 'concerted cultivation' (Vincent, Rollock Ball, & Gillborn, 2012) or 'cultural capital' (Zimdars, Sullivan, & Heath, 2009). Thus, it was anticipated that Jennifer's enriched capital would have supported a more successful university experience. Despite this investment, the identity of a 'high-achieving Black female student' placed her under considerable psychological stress in ways that could not be mitigated by her capital. According to Jennifer, this label was a "massive aspect" of her identity. The cost to her physical and mental health can be likened to the phenomenon of 'John Henryism[25]' (McGhee & Stovall, 2004) where maintaining this kind of identity under high stress conditions holds negative consequences. Identity work for this student was experienced as depression during most of the second year of her studies.

Summary

The struggle for a sense of belonging in these participants accords with previous research in this area. Likewise, the findings agree with the literature on nontraditional students, their struggle to achieve self-efficacy (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006) and their successes in doing so (Johnson, Taasoobshirazi, Clark, Howell, & Breen, 2016; Murphy & Roopchand, 2003; Spitzer, 2011). Agency is linked to [social] capital (Abel & Frohlich, 2011; Pleggenkuhle, Huebner, & Summers, 2017) although Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue that, similar to an ethnic identity, an exact definition of agency is in conflict since it is contextualised differently by different disciplines and different theorists. Instead, they state that agency should be viewed according to the way an individual *becomes* agentic over time by utilising their past, present and future orientations [or engaging their multiple selves] (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In any case, efficacy as an identity concept appears to play a role in driving agency. It is suggested that agency is mobilised in response to structure and comprises independent, goal-directed behaviours (Bandura, 1999). Self-efficacy and a sense of belonging are said to be mutable and complex (Erb & Drysdale, 2017). Their relationship requires further research (Martin & McLellan, 2013).

From a broader perspective, negative student experiences may not entirely be the fault of an HEI. However, these experiences might also be the result of an emphasis that has been placed on having a university education as the main route into employability (Aamodt, 2010).

---

[25] According to folklore, John Henry was an African American whose job involved drilling steel nails into hard rock. On one occasion and in competition with a machine which did the same task, John's self-efficacious approach and determination won out as he completed the task much sooner, but at the expense of his health. He collapsed and died immediately afterwards.

A 'good' degree has come to be associated with having a 'good' job, while 'good' has not yet been fully defined (ECU, 2015a). It must also be recognised that universities may have systemic practices that might work to deny students and staff of a sense of belonging or progression. Curricula are frequently seen as lacking the scholarly input of researchers from diverse backgrounds or ethnicities (Muskett et al., 2017) and there are fewer BME staff at senior levels (Bhopal et al., 2015; HEFCE, 2014a; Kwhali, 2017). In addition, some staff may be generally insensitive or unprepared to cope with students from diverse backgrounds (Pridham et al., 2015) contributing to a greater sense of 'unbelonging' in some students.

Characteristics such as ethnicity, age, class and gender (Hankivsky, 2014) are noted as subsumed within a person's capital (Cole, 2009). From an identity perspective, these characteristics include fixed and [presumed] immutable categories (for example, gender and ethnicity; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) or characteristics that are suggested as changeable and can be analysed over time (for example, social class; Mayer & Thompson Tetreault, 2001). This could help to explain the differing views that participants in the current research hold about their experiences. Intersectional researchers, such as Collins (2000), resist claims of social characteristic immutability that have the potential to "… mask the historical construction of racial categories, the shifting meaning of race, and the crucial role of politics and ideology in shaping conceptions of race" (p. 405). Therefore, the social characteristics that make up an individual's capital could be foregrounded in research for the significance they might bring to understanding their experiences.

11.4 Education Perspectives

How do Black female students perceive and experience higher education? *For example, what can be learnt from their experiences of transitioning into and through higher education?*

11.4.1 Transitioning

Some researchers have called for a shift in linguistics in secondary school environments from an indicative approach to enquiry-based reasoning in order to support the transition of students into higher education (Claxton & Lucas, 2016, p. 10). A teacher with an indicative approach might use the following kind of language with their students: "It IS called this; there ARE five factors to remember". Instead, an enquiry-based reasoning approach follows this example: "People have SUGGESTED that; there MIGHT BE five or more factors to bear in mind". Claxton and Lucas (2016) add that secondary school teachers should use words like

'assuming' and 'suggesting' with students as primers for critical thinking. The literature further purports that schools must take responsibility for providing advice that steers some students away from, or towards, higher education (SMF, 2017) with the recognition that transitioning into higher education can be more problematic for some students (Reay et al., 2002; Shoderu et al., 2012).

Challenges of transitioning featured in the experiences of all participants in the present research impacting the period before entry into higher education as well as progression from one level of undergraduate study to the next. At times, such challenges were framed within complex and extenuating circumstances which created difficulties for the possibility of a smooth transition. At other times, transitioning marked a period of growth and transformation as the student recognised her strengths and potential for developing from one 'chapter' in her life-world to the next. Without appropriate support, some narratives pointed to a risk of drop out during these transitions, compounded by feelings of being less engaged with staff or their peers.

Student cliques have been suggested as the basis for a selective network of enduring gender and/or ethnicity-based friendships (Urberg et al., 1995). By contrast, ingroup and outgroup behaviours (Cohen, 1977) are known to have a particularly damaging effect on 'outsiders' (Cole, 2009). The risk to participants in the current research seemed more pronounced during critical points in the degree programme such as at the end of the first year of study. Huntly and Donovan's (2009) case study led to the development of a theoretical framework that situated the role of persistence in completion of the first year of an undergraduate degree. Employment, domestic responsibilities, stress and anxiety, and unpreparedness were also cited as competing factors.

For the participants in the current research, the beginning of the second year also marked a period of challenge. This accorded with Miller's (2017) findings of a marked decrease in scholarly activity during this period. As these studies show transitioning challenges for students in general, it is suggested that challenges for participants in the present research are not unlike those of other students. However, the challenges expressed by the nontraditional participants were further complicated by perceptions of being unsupported. For example, barriers that made it more difficult to engage with [mostly] younger staff, as well as a view that [mainly White] staff could not relate to them as Black female mature students were described.

The narratives further suggested that limited access to a 'positive' template could make the experience of transitioning more difficult. Research suggests that even when in

employment, BME employees with limited access to positive role models experience difficulty with enacting capital in their environments (McGregor-Smith, 2017). Nevertheless, although constrained by fewer role models, participants without explicit access to a [same-ethnicity] exemplar in their environment were still able to progress with their studies. In part, this is addressed by research that suggests positive representations can come from siblings' experiences of university (Davies, 2019), as similarly indicated by some of the participants here.

As part of a planned transition out of higher education, some participants held aspirations for destinations that did not necessarily require a degree, such as a dancer or housewife. This possibly added to the conflict of putting up with a poorly-perceived experience for little gain. In sum, the experiences of transitioning in these participants pointed to a more difficult process overall than suggested in the general student population.

11.4.2 Summary

The present research has shown that the process of becoming an undergraduate student [and completing the programme] represents a major decision, undertaken as a life transition. Thus, undergraduate study can be understood to be situated within a broad cultural, personal and social experiential framework (Millward, 2018). Experiences for these students were apparently connected to past events including outcomes from secondary school/further education, advice regarding what university to attend or degree course to study and choices made during the university clearing processes.

The participants' experiences described here, connected to their aspirations. These included the desire to learn more about a subject at an advanced level and/or as part of a career path. The influence of participants' aspirations upon their experiences might be linked to parental aspirations and expectations for their offspring, as suggested by Brooks (2002). In addition, Dhanda (2015) suggests this effect is more pronounced for some BME students whose parents may hold the view that university is the main route towards social mobility. Both starting and transitioning through university can be summarised as a time of anticipatory excitement [or anxiety] bound up within the prospect of advanced study over a longer duration and a time of [yet to be fully developed] autonomy and self-discovery. To varying degrees, all these factors affected the experiences of transitioning into and through higher education for these participants.

Perceptions of support during transitional periods were important. Some participants seemed to forego the possibility of accessing structured forms of support instead preferring a

version that might be considered less taxing on staff time but more amenable. This is termed in the present research as 'nudged' support (Marteau, Ogilvie, Roland et al., 2011; SMF, 2017; see also Chapter 8, sections 8.9.2, 8.11, 8.12.3 & 10.11.3). Another method, self-talk as meaning-making (Hardy, 2006), seemed to create sufficient space between shifting identities to reconcile some of their issues.

The interaction between a Black female student's social characteristics and higher education poses a possible threat to her identity. For example, the student may feel unable to identify with the curriculum because her history and cultural experiences are noticeably 'invisible' in some texts. Negative experiences from studying a non-inclusive [Eurocentric] curriculum have been documented (Keval, 2019) and BME students have been associated with worse outcomes for developing self-esteem and a sense of belonging as a consequence (Peters, 2015). Furthermore, there are insufficient Black staff at UK universities to provide cultural support (Bhopal, Brown, & Jackson, 2015) and some staff simply do not want to take on this responsibility (Maylor, 2009a). It was evident in the research reported here, that the characteristics integral to these participants were punctuated by an internal struggle to manage their simultaneous and multiple life-worlds as they transitioned through a White hegemonic structure.

11.5 Implications for Marginalised Students

From a social justice perspective, how can the experiences of Black female students provide a gateway for understanding the experiences of marginalised students?

The participants in the current research share similar characteristics and perceptions with other students in UK education such as their age at enrolment (UCAS, 2016) or their perceptions of academic readiness (Blair & Raver, 2015; SMF, 2017). However, the conflation of some characteristics with ethnicity can create a particularised experience (National Audit Office, 2007), and this is no less the case for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Callendar & Jackson, 2008; OfS, 2018a). A sense of belonging is just one concept in a hierarchical list of needs that has been explored in marginalised students (see section 11.3.1). It is suggested that experiences of belonging are particularly complicated for marginalised student populations (Johnson et al., 2007). Furthermore, there are known challenges for accessing the perceptions of communities that may be more distanced from higher education, such as Travellers, Gypsy and Roma populations (Bhopal & Myers, 2009; Mulcahy, Baars, Bowen-Viner, & Menzies, 2017) with implications for their prospects of

forming an academic identity (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2003). Meanwhile, little is known about the capital that marginalised students bring into their academic environments or how this shapes their perceptions and experiences.

Under-achievement among students from disadvantaged backgrounds has spurred a plethora of initiatives such as mentoring (De Beer, Smith, & Jansen, 2009). Financial incentives such as grants and scholarships are often driven by a socio-political mandate to widen access for disadvantaged groups (Alon, 2007; Dearden, Fitzsimons, & Wyness, 2014; Glocker, 2011) however, some incentives [such as bursaries] have no influence on student choices (OFFA, 2010) or retention rates (OFFA, 2014). This may be because entry to higher education can also be achieved via tertiary qualifications such as Access or BTEC, which are routes more commonly pursued by marginalised students (Houston, Knox, & Rimmer, 2007).

With growing numbers of students enrolling at universities, focus has shifted away from widening access and toward ensuring successful completions (SMF, 2016). The latter is seen as more important since holding the required UCAS points for entry on to a degree programme does not automatically translate into finishing the course (HEPI, 2017; Scott, Burns, & Cooney, 1996). Instead, marginalised students are more likely to require support to transition in order to bring about positive outcomes during their degree programme (Bowes, Thomas, Peck, & Nathwani, 2013).

Participants in the current research held conflicting views about university support and some experienced difficulty reconciling their multiple identities. The idea of a help-seeking self and an independent student self existing simultaneously was a challenging experience. According to Aleven, Stahl, Schworm, Fischer, and Wallace, (2003) help-seeking behaviours can inform the quality of a student's experiences and are influenced by the learning requirements, student characteristics, and the variety and type of help that is available. An appropriate framing for help-seeking is particularly important for marginalised students who may not have access to a template for academic efficacy. Furthermore, participants in the present research suggested the need for a more nuanced type of support that might not fit within a 'normative' institutional offering.

The challenges for accessing support seemed to lie in one of three areas for these participants namely, a lack of same-ethnicity role models serving in this capacity, difficulty with acquiring academic literacy and the management of stereotypical perceptions. All these areas are documented in literature. Among other researchers, Ceglie and Settlage (2014) report the importance of same-ethnicity role models for Black female students. A requirement for academic literacy in higher education can confound students and challenges range from

difficulty with understanding scholarly articles to dealing with jargon and discipline-specific terminology (MacMillan & MacKenzie, 2012). Research goes so far as to suggest that, for marginalised students, acquiring academic literacy can feel like learning a second language (Kuehn, 1996). Teacher perceptions of BME students show that they are, indeed, poorly-rated by academic teaching staff (Collins et al., 2015). Such perceptions are perhaps influenced by knowledge of a history of poorer outcomes at secondary school for some student ethnicities (Maylor, 2009a).

Marginalised students are also at particular risk of disengaging from their university experience (Stephen, O'Connell, & Hall, 2008) or of dropping out (Bates & Kaye, 2014). The present research identified four critical points during a degree programme when additional support could have been helpful for their retention. These were (i) during the first two weeks of the first year - thus, soon after enrolment and induction; (ii) during the middle of the first year when, depending on a university's timetable, students might receive their first official 'break' from studies; (iii) towards the end of the first year; and (iv) during the second year. For some participants, feelings of disengagement during the final year were contingent on the quality of their experiences in earlier years.

Working for pay while studying can add to challenges for engagement in marginalised students. It is known that, whether out of necessity or because of unallocated periods during the academic timetable, students engage in paid work (Barone, 2017; Creed, French, & Hood, 2015). While not specific to marginalised students, class, privilege and austerity measures have contributed to some being in paid employment for longer hours than they might otherwise have desired increasing the risk of stress (Robotham, 2009) and dropping out (Hovdhaugen, 2015). Debt-management is a key area of concern for students from marginalised groups (Callendar & Jackson, 2008). The influence of this upon the retention, engagement and progression of these students requires further research.

11.6 Conclusions

Identity appeared to be multifactorial in participants in the present research who used a combination of their life history [personal, social and cultural experiences], pre-university ambitions [embarking on or returning to study], current university experiences and future aspirations to inform its construction. Their narratives accorded with existing theories regarding the construction of a cultural identity (Bruner, 1995; Hall & Du Gay, 1996; Oyserman et al., 2002). The participants' identities inhabited the past and operationalised the present, while imagining the future. This supported findings for the construction of identity

by Jamison and Wegener (2010) as well as Seto and Schlegel (2017). Similar to findings by Johnson et al. (2007), Read et al. (2003) and Thomas (2017), the participants' constructions of identity confirmed the need for a sense of belonging. Their constructions were driven by a desire to connect with others, as found by Ellemers and Haslam (2012).

Identities were experienced as 'shifting' (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994), multiple (Johnson, 2011; Lester, 2003), 'hyphenated' (Counted, 2016) and threatened (Heath, 2015; Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014; Pervin & Cervone, 2010). These participants had learnt to live with an ethnic identity that was subjected to stereotypes and adverse terminology (Mirza, 2017; Staubhaar, 2015), yet they were not completely destabilised despite the continuing politics of race and identity (Ogbu, 2004; Tsri, 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016).

It is clear that the construction of identity in Black female students is complex and mirrors a conceptualisation of multiple identity construction by women of diverse ethnicities presented by Jones and McEwen (2000). Factors such as shifting contexts, interactions with others, an ongoing process of negotiation and a desire for salience were all features of Jones and McEwen's model. This approach concurs with Bhavnani and Phoenix's (1994) view that identity is fluid and not immutable. The process of identity construction may have been made more difficult for some participants because of other people's perceptions of identity immutability, which presented particular challenges for the lived experience of an intersectional identity.

The current research strongly suggests that these participants require culturally-sensitive support differing from that which HEIs are accustomed to providing. Meanwhile, the adoption, by participants, of internal negotiations, such as self-talk, led to a more resilient and focused attitude when dealing with perceived obstacles, even if, for some participants, a resilient front was merely a tool to mask the negativity of their circumstances.

Peters (2015) argues for inclusive curricula for a positive learning experience for BME students. The participants in the current research wanted to experience a more inclusive curriculum and see more BME staff in their university environments due to the particular 'capital' they felt these staff could bring to their experiences. These findings suggest that universities will need to increase the numbers of BME academic staff in HEIs [and at influential levels] in order to demonstrate a broader commitment to diversity and inclusion. Concomitantly, there must be a fresh resistance to structures that have entrenched deficit practices within educational policies, processes and curricula. This may take forms such as encouraging uncomfortable dialogue, inclusive teaching, and reflexive practice and research that spotlights the fragility of human experiences. Ultimately, where any one population of

students [and staff] experiences university in less equal terms than their peers there is a risk of destroying a sense of equilibrium which in turn could threaten the quality of experience for everyone.

Chapter 12

You can't learn how to tell someone else's story until you first learn how to tell your own.
Johnny Saldaña (2018)

Reflexivity

This chapter is a reflection on the experience of carrying out this research and considers the appropriateness of the research framework (Chapters 5 & 6) as well as Cole's (2009) questions for carrying out intersectionality research (see Chapter 1). The chapter concludes with a consideration of the strengths and limitations of the current research. Reporting on the experiences of marginalised groups benefits from a reflective stance in order to support critical enquiry for self/other positioning that is taken up by the researcher (Hankivsky, 2004; Hunting, 2014). Reflexivity is advocated in feminist and standpoint research for similar reasons (Roper, Capdevila, Lazard, & Anca, 2015). Reflexive processes involve thinking about (Cooper, 1998) and understanding (Kolb, 1984) experiences and can lead to the development of sophisticated knowledge (Habermas, 1970). Reflexivity has a long history in educational research (Dewey, 1933).

With an awareness of my experiences as a Black female student in higher education, I used several methods (for example, journaling, supervision meetings and reflective conversations) to capture the ongoing dialogue between my *prescribed* views and an *emerging* understanding of the participants who had given me the privilege of entering their life-world. My multiple identities added subjectivity to the process, described by Bruner as "the situating of events, interactions and expressions in the 'symbolic space' that human beings define as shared by them with others" (1995, p. 21). In other words, this is my story. Or, as Saldaña (2018, p. 1) aptly puts it, I am taking a closer look at what is "inside the brackets".

12.1 Why Focus on Black Female Undergraduate Psychology Students?

I completed an undergraduate psychology degree at a London university within the last decade. On completion, I was invited to become a part-time visiting lecturer in psychology [also known as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in some settings]. Thereafter, I completed a post-graduate certificate in higher education (PGCHE) that conferred fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. I was offered a fractional position as a lecturer. As a part-time

lecturer, I delivered lectures and seminars as well as fulfilling the role of a personal tutor and undergraduate project supervisor. Soon afterwards, I achieved the status of an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society.

My focus during the PGCHE was the experiences of Black female undergraduate psychology students as a specific context of student diversity - unlike my cohort, who all chose to address learning disabilities. As the least experienced person in the cohort, I wondered whether my interest would be reined in or shaped into something more 'conforming'. Without restrictions, I proceeded with my research interest and quickly realised that a fairly short timeframe meant that I had only 'scratched' the surface of some complex issues for these students. To this day, stories of an impoverished experience shared by a small focus group of Black female students sit with me as scarring. With just one student in the focus group managing to achieve her degree after multiple attempts, I felt that it was important to locate a longer-term medium that would allow me to explore such experiences in greater depth. The PhD programme became that medium.

Tate (2014), a Black female professor, chronicled her experiences of being an 'outsider' in UK higher education. At that time, she was so disillusioned with the trivialising of her critical race perspectives within a structurally racist institution that she considered leaving to take up a professorial position in another country. Tate's comments resonated with my experiences. There are occasions when I understood what it felt like to be 'trivialised'. My research interest was neither quantitative nor neuroscientific, for which there are clear preferences for REF submissions (Riley, 2016). Nevertheless, I was reasonably convinced that the cultural narratives of Black female students' experiences, as reflected in this thesis, would make a meaningful contribution to research.

Prah's (2017) reflexive piece summaries her experience of contending with White hegemony in South Africa as a young Black female academic. Her emphasis on how youthfulness is perceived as inadequate reflects an important part of her 'multiply-burdened' (Crenshaw, 1989) experience. I empathised with her account for different reasons, since reactions to my age as a [very] mature student were part of my intersectional experience in UK higher education. Concomitant with the experiences of nontraditional students in the current research, we have both had to find ways to protect our invisible, yet hyper-visible, identities.

12.2 A Research Focus in Development

I had initially presumed that, with good advertising, every Black female undergraduate psychology student in London would be rushing to participate in my research. As indicated by the sample sizes, this was not the case. Despite Huang and Coker's (2008) assertion that Black students are reluctant to participate in research studies, I wanted to understand why salience with my ethnicity as a Black woman did not receive more positive attention. Indeed, other research paints a changing picture with Black students seen as more willing to participate in studies (Cottler et al., 2013). To an extent, this outcome is addressed by Maylor's (2009b) account of resistance against the credibility of an academic identity in Black researchers among one's own community. For students, the relative invisibility of Black academics (HESA, 2019) and Black female professors (Rollock, 2019) on their campuses, contrasts with Black hyper-visibility in non-influential spaces (ECU, 2013). Simply put, we did not amount to a critical mass.

As participant recruitment became more challenging, I felt that it was important to seek participants' views about my ethnicity and decided to explore this as part of semi-structured interviews I conducted. To my relief, most participants stated that a researcher's ethnicity was crucial for candid disclosure of their experiences. However, the extent of the 'truth' of this view is likely to be difficult to ascertain. Would the identity of a White researcher have led to more participants or less candid disclosure? It is difficult to say as there are few examples of this kind of research being carried out by White researchers. Could there have been a power differential during these interviews? I was known to some participants as a lecturer at their institution. These students might have been 'careful' or flattering in their responses in order to manage my impression of their identity. Interviews are known for socially-desirous responding (Moum, 1998) and, while they can be a useful tool to explore nuanced experiences, they may also be subject to power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee (Carcary, 2009). Nevertheless, I sensed that the participants were engaged in their own reflexivity during the studies and I was satisfied that my ethnicity helped, rather than hindered, their reflexive process.

The use of three qualitative research methods, a visual timeline activity and member-checking, opened up alternative ways to interpret the experiences of these participants. The original research proposal indicated taking a singular approach using interpretative phenomenological analysis. As the sample became stratified by normative [traditional] and non-normative [nontraditional] experiences, it was apparent that the central phenomenon of identity construction could be viewed from several perspectives. Each method threw a

different lens on the participants' experiences and allowed their accounts to be analysed within a particular theoretical context (see Figure 6.3). This helped to broaden my knowledge as a qualitative researcher, as well as my understanding of the diversity of student experiences. The project and data collection timeframe were sufficient that data analysis could be carried out according to the requirements of each method.

12.3 The Challenges

As a mature Black female researcher, I felt that I was better positioned to interpret the cultural narratives of Black female students than a White female researcher would be. I believed that my 'insider' knowledge (Morey & Luthans, 1984) of institutional structures could offer insight into the challenges which existed for these students. As a Black woman, I was the 'expert'. Smith et al. (2009, p. 195) refer to this insider knowledge as "cultural competence". This kind of insight has its own benefits. My biographical history meant that I had first-hand knowledge of some of the experiences that were narrated by these participants. I understood some of the difficulties associated with transitioning into university after being out of formal education for a while. I could empathise with the challenges of orienting through the university structure as a Black mature woman. However, I also understood that my background knowledge and experiences as a student and lecturer shaped my prejudices and biases. Shenton (2004) states that researchers should aim for neutrality in order to manage personal influences (see Chapter 6, 6.6.4). I used 'bracketing' (see also section 6.9.1) to reflect on my assumptions and, in particular, on *my* cultural, personal and social frame of reference.

I did not understand until I arrived at the stages of data gathering and interpretation, that I could benefit from challenges to my assumptions of 'cultural expertise'. For example, during my interpretation I was surprised to find that a construction of 'Blackness' was less strongly articulated by some participants. In fact, for some participants, their ethnic identity was only constructed as an issue when they recalled the propensity for other students to socialise and learn in same-ethnicity groups. Thus, I had to reflect on the influence of my identity, which was centred on almost daily encounters of constructions of 'race' and racism and borne out of the reality of my social and intersectional experiences as a Black mature woman.

Each member of my supervision team had research experience that helped during this process and which included identity and individual differences, student experiences, social psychology, race and ethnicity, counselling and critical theory as well as having qualitative

and quantitative research methods expertise. Furthermore, the team consisted of a mix of ethnicities and genders namely, White British, Indian, male and female. Individually and collectively, they challenged me to develop a more open and reflexive understanding of the participants' experiences, a process that would involve 'bracketing' some of my closely-guarded assumptions.

Functionally, bracketing resists a denial of one's experiences and biases (Smith et al., 2009). Instead, it is a researcher-driven process of accepting their reality by applying a non-judgmental perspective. Experiences that are linked with ethnicity can be so subtly conjoined with other social characteristics, that they may be misinterpreted by a researcher in the absence of careful and critical thinking (Stewart & McDermott, 2004). This observation supported the decision to take a broader theoretical and methodological approach to understanding these participants' stories. Indeed, the conceptual framework that was developed following conversations with my supervision team shed a helpful lens on the multiple nature of identity construction by the participants.

12.4 Research Framework

Approaches used in this research were chosen for the insight they could bring to the experiences of Black female students. In the following passages, firstly, the theoretical framework is reflected upon for its suitability in situating the experience of constructing identity. Secondly, the methods are addressed for their value in interpreting the participants' experiences.

12.4.1 Theoretical Framework

In its initial form, the framework (Figure 5.8) illustrated three ways in which identity could be conceptualised in the case of these participants: (i) phenomenologically; (ii) as a socially-constructed experience; and, (iii) as an experience of intersectionality. Application of a phenomenological construction led to an idiographic focus. This allowed the deconstruction of each narrative into descriptive, linguistic and conceptual elements to form an interpretation of each participant's life-world. Drawing on social constructionism as an interpretative frame (Gergen, 2015; see also Chapter 5), it was evident that the participants' personal and social interactions were shaped by their cultural capital.

Participants with rich capital had a network of interested family and friends, many of whom had prior experience of university and could guide them in their choices and in their responses to situations. These participants also narrated more meaningful interactions with

staff and peers that seemed to positively shape their growth and development. These findings reinforce Munk's (2013) assertion that such students are likely to be more persistent and perform better in education. Moreover, having access to 'activated' capital (Winne & Nesbit, 2010) supported a more introspective account of the experiences that were relayed by these participants during the interviews. This was particularly evidenced in the narratives of traditional Russell Group students in comparison with students from less privileged backgrounds, who invested more effort in exerting a cultural sphere of influence (Mirza, 1998) in their environment.

The constraints experienced by some students in managing their multiple identities [or selves] at the intersection of ethnicity, age, class and structural forms of racism, informed the application of a theoretical approach that could be centred on the complexity of their experiences. Noted as a feature of the experiences of marginalised groups (Crenshaw, 1989), critical race theorists and Black feminist researchers (e.g. Collins, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; McCall, 2005; Settles, 2006) have emphasised the importance of exploring racialised experiences from the perspective of structural forces that exist in society and the power they have to shape experience. As shown in Figure 5.6 (Chapter 5), these forces occupy a large sphere that governs society and affects individual experiences. Some forces function in a fairly benign fashion but others have the power to disrupt and oppress people, leading to positions of advantage and disadvantage (Cole, 2009).

As the research developed, the framework was re-conceptualised to incorporate a selective application of theoretical approaches specific to student/institution type (Figure 9.12.4). This was a consequence of an unexpected finding in Phase 3. It was assumed that intersectionality, posited for its ability to situate the experiences of Black women living 'at the margins' or with intersections (Crenshaw, 1989; Fine, 1994; Hankivsky 2014; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015) would be the most appropriate theoretical application for the current research. Instead, the participants' narrations of their experiences informed the decision to apply theoretical approaches selectively. This selective application of approaches functioned to conceptualise the construction of intersecting multiple identities in participants at post-1992 universities and to apply a social constructionist approach to participants at Russell Group universities. Moreover, in their experiences that included explicit perceptions of structurally racist practices at their institutions, the traditional and nontraditional participants at post-1992 universities seemed to share more similarities than dissimilarities, thus strengthening the theoretical divide.

12.4.2 Methodological Framework

The conceptual framework adopted informed the qualitative methods applied in this research. The purpose was to describe experiences, point out contributions of language and, in a conceptual sense, tease out and highlight subtleties of the participants' circumstances. A pluralistic approach consistent with feminist-type research (Bruce & Yearley, 2006) was mapped on to the conceptual framework and the methods used. The methodological framework (illustrated in Figure 6.3) positioned identity construction as a phenomenon that could be explored and understood in Black female students using a triangulated approach. Qualitative content analysis has been noted for its sensitivity (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007) and flexibility (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and as such permitted an in-depth exploration that drew out the singularity of the experiences of nontraditional participants as 'thick' descriptions (Bowen, 2010).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was applied in the case of traditional students, for its ability to achieve an in-depth idiographic exploration (Eatough & Smith, 2008) of meaning-making (Smith et al., 2009), revealing the complexity of their challenges and their construction of multiple identities. An inductive thematic analysis of focus group data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) facilitated an interpretation of the experiences of a student population for which less is known. The ability of inductive thematic analysis, to meld together and set apart the views of different student types and experiences, meant that patterns could more easily be identified across the dataset. With the inclusion of a visual timeline activity and member-checking, these methods not only strengthened an understanding of identity construction in these participants. They also informed the development of a rationale for these students having multiple identities as an internal team that could be relied upon for meaning-making during difficult situations.

12.4.3 Analysis

With more than 35 hours of audio recordings, transcription was a lengthy process. Nonetheless, I came to understand its value in achieving familiarity with the data in ways that I might not, had this activity been outsourced. As I listened, typed up and re-played the audio recordings, I began to understand experiences through the voice of each participant. Namely I became aware of the ways in which they narrated their experiences as well as the significance of their pauses, laughs and inflections. Taking these aspects into account aided theme construction, although it was not part of the methodology to apply a conversation analysis. Nevertheless, it was understood that language has been recognised as an important aspect of

some forms of analysis, such as IPA (Smith et al*.,* 2009), and should be considered for its role in conveying the detail of experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, social constructionism references language as a medium to convey the realities of an experience (Gergen, 2007). A more robust analysis resulted from engaging with the data in this way.

12.4.4 Individual Interviews

Turning to the participants, there were occasions during the interviews when their responses were sparse. Initially, I found this unsettling. Concerns that the data might be meaningless loomed over me like a dark cloud. It took a while to become comfortable with 'silences' (Wong, 2013). Beyond an awareness of the potential for power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee (Carcary, 2009), I came to understand that some things were deliberately being left unsaid because of a sense of 'knowing' related to our shared experiences. One nontraditional participant, (Maureen, Chapter 7, 7.8.3), aptly described these shared silences between culturally-similar others as silent agreement borne out of an implicit need to support each other by just being present as 'insider-insiders'.

As part of this 'learning' and as an 'outsider-within' (Collins, 2001), I began to understand that while the participants might not have viewed the construction of their identities as 'hyphenated', multiple, 'shifting' or 'unbelonging', I could use the tools of feminist and cultural interpretation to define these. This was particularly fruitful when exploring identity as a response to conflict, challenge or non-threatening situations that, on the surface, seemed to be obscuring the *actual* work of identity construction. The participants may have been simply responding to a situation, but they were also reflecting self-change as important identity work. Subsequently, I saw wider implications for the progression of Black female students who had less familiarity with the social and academic conventions of their environment, or, who may have been rooted [at times, inflexibly] in cultural [mis]understandings that stemmed from their interpretation of others' behaviours. I further realised that for some participants, a desire to dissociate from stereotypical assumptions about Black people led to experiences of fragility that frustrated their attempts to secure a sense of belonging.

12.4.5 Focus Group Interviews

Parker and Tritter (2006) state, that the role of the researcher in a focus group interview is to step back and facilitate discussion between participants. The participants in both focus groups reported here engaged in within-group interaction that was part of the group dynamic. As

Sagoe (2012) points out, focus group dynamics allow participants to interact and learn from each other. The facilitator can reflexively adjust the interview schedule to incorporate subtle shifts in these dynamics.

A challenge lay in the post-interview data analysis. I understood the process used for carrying out a thematic analysis. I also had experience of being a participant in focus groups and had carried out focus group interviews for other studies. However, as I re-listened to the interviews, I was struck by the interactions of some participants [particularly, the nontraditional students] and had to work at dissociating an overly subjective interpretation of their data. There may have been prior expectations on my part regarding their experiences, given that I had also returned to university as a nontraditional student.

Moreover, my attention was caught by participants' comments about teaching practice. As a teaching practitioner, I decided that these comments were useful for my learning. However, my tendency to overly focus on such comments led to my supervision team acting as a critical 'friend' and re-directing my thinking towards the overall aims of this research. I shifted between subjectivity and objectivity knowing that, although there were similarities, this research was not about *my* experience or assumptions but about the experiences of the participants. These kinds of tensions are not unknown for facilitators of focus group research (Farnsworth & Boon, 2010) and point to the importance of critical self-reflection.

12.4.6 Member-Checking

Member-checking was a useful activity to incorporate into the focus groups. 'Letting go' of my assumptions felt as if I was off-balance, but I realised that this was necessary for the voices in the research to speak for themselves. The activity satisfied a heuristic research aim that the participants should also benefit from their experiences of being interviewed about a topic for which they were an 'expert'. I aimed to accord with Shenton's (2004) view that "one should ensure as far as possible that findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (p. 72). Throughout the process, I was learning to 'trust' the participants.

12.5 Showcasing the Research

As Fine (1994) opines, unlike White researchers, when BME researchers carry out research in some areas, they are "more likely to be heard as biased, self-interested, or without distanced perspective" (p. 80). Collins (2001) states that some types of research are considered less 'credible' by the wider academic community and these include research on

race and ethnicity. Serrant-Green (2002) sets out the challenges for research/researcher credibility that can be part of the lived experience of a Black researcher who chooses to focus on Black issues. Maylor (2009b) adds her experiences of non/misrecognition as a Black academic and researcher, that calls into question White hegemonic assumptions about the Black self in academia and other educational spaces to this body of knowledge. The expression of microaggressive behaviours in higher academic environments can be sophisticatedly covert and have been recounted in experiences of Black academics presenting their research (McGee & Kazembe 2015).

Although these 'objections' have not prevented me from carrying out this research, they continue to gnaw away at my self-belief in the background and have led to concerns about producing research that might be considered 'less credible' (Gabriel & Tate, 2017) by the wider academic community. Despite these concerns, experiences of presenting this research in and outside academia as well as nationally and internationally (see Appendix A) have been affirming. Positive comments as well as critical inquiry from receiving audiences have been validating, albeit with the suspicion that this area of research has a tendency to attract like-minded people.

12.6 Developing as a Researcher

The participants' accounts of resistance and resilience have encouraged me to continue with reflexive practice. I now understand that US and UK feminism cannot fully explain the experiences of Black women. However, both feminisms add rich historical and contextual perspectives that can scaffold an exploration into the experiences of marginalised groups. The cultural narratives explored in this research are as grounded in the *constructions* of a Black woman's identity as they are in the *experiences* of constructing and *interpreting* that identity.

US and UK feminists (for example, Sara Ahmed, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Amina Mama, Leslie McCall, Heidi Mirza, Leah Warner) are actively translating their 'intersectionality' into agency. Their efforts have encouraged me to continue to fight an insidious battle that has shaped my social characteristics as a mature Black woman in a contemporary society that is dominated by normative perceptions for ethnicity, gender and age. In the process, I have learnt that my interpretation of others' experiences has been influenced by years of exposure to racist interactions and negative media despite some of the positive aspects of being part of a small, but growing number of Black female academics in UK higher education. Cumulatively, our experiences have shaped an 'otherness' that has flowed into this reflection.

There are times where I have sensed a subscription to the 'language' of academia in my writing, an 'othering' language that [sometimes, benignly] supports the flawed premise of cultural deficit perspectives. This language reinforces White privilege in institutional settings. McCall (2005) notes that feminist researchers must acknowledge "that it is impossible to fully escape the normalising confines of language because new relations of power/knowledge are continuously re-inscribed in new systems of classification" (p. 1777). Fine (1994) describes the power-dynamic thus: "The articulate professional voice sounded legitimate against the noisy dialect of the Other. The rationality of the researcher/writer domesticated the outrage of the Other … [tranquillising] the hyphen, ousting the Other" (p. 73). As a Black woman and researcher, I will continue to fight against a construction that threatens to stifle the 'hyphen' in place of a celebration of its uniqueness.

12.7 Cole's (2009) Questions for Researchers

Three conceptual questions were set out in Chapter 1, for researchers taking an intersectional approach to explore the experiences of marginalised groups. Although Cole's (2009) questions sit within the context of intersectionality research, they have merit for research in the social sciences more broadly. Moreover, addressing these questions demonstrates the respect a researcher holds for the privilege of being able to access experiences shared by these groups.

12.7.1 "Who is included within this category?"

Paraphrased from Table 1.8 (Chapter 1) and working across the general flow of a research study, the premise for the first question rests on five principles. Cole (2009) asserts the importance for research to: (i) address abject and nuanced forms of diversity; (ii) focus on the experiences of a neglected group in society; (iii) develop measures that can advance knowledge gained from their study; (iv) carefully apply appropriate approaches to understand the experiences of the group or groups; and, (v) emphasise the importance of not generalising the findings to other groups.

Taking each aspect in turn, this research was carried out to understand experiences of identity construction in homogeneous and diverse samples of Black female students in UK higher education. While all participants self-identified as Black and female and shared characteristics-in-common, their experiences varied by abject factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and type of university attended as well as nuanced factors such as cultural background and social class. The research was careful to access and acknowledge

participants' similarities through purposive sampling and highlighted systemic issues for their experiences. Their differences were recognised by drawing out the uniqueness of their constructions and experiences. This was more possible with smaller sample sizes.

Secondly, Chapter 2 set out a background to the experience and academic performance of BME students. Although these student numbers are rising (HEFCE, 2013a), there are fewer BME students in some subject areas (HESA, 2019). Smaller numbers and less attention to some student groups has contributed to an understanding that some experiences continue to be 'hidden' (Ireland et al.*,* 2018).

Thirdly, an idiographic focus (Smith et al., 2009) was maintained throughout the research by using a qualitative framework to access the depth and breadth of students' experiences. Fourth, qualitative research methods led to a greater understanding of the participants' challenges. Lastly, care was taken to avoid making generalisations about the experiences of other Black female undergraduate students at London HEIs. Moreover, it was understood that generalisations are frowned upon in qualitative research, since the emphasised goal was to recognise and highlight individual experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

12.7.2 "What role does inequality play?"

Using this question, Cole (2009) encourages the researcher to scope the importance of a group's experience in context, including the power of group memberships to create feelings of empowerment [belonging] or disempowerment ['unbelonging']. Cole notes that there is no requirement for a comparative study. However, if this is carried out, attention to structural forms of inequality should take precedence over individual differences. She adds that research methods should be sufficiently comprehensive to identify similarities and dissimilarities of experience. Where differences are identified, they should be interpreted in light of structural forms of privilege and under-privilege.

This research was not aimed at exploring differences between Black students as one population and their White counterparts as another. Instead, data collection methods explored the experiences of Black female students as differentiated by student type [traditional or nontraditional]. Nevertheless, in order to situate the experiences of this particular student group, it was necessary as part of an introductory overview to comment on outcomes for students of other ethnicities. For example, reviewing the degree award/attainment gap, research shows a marked difference between BME and White students, with BME students noted as consistently underperforming (Advance HE, 2018a). Other research has shown that

BME students are concentrated in post-1992 universities compared to their White counterparts (Boliver, 2013; Connor et al*.,* 2004). Experiences differentiated by student characteristics were captured in the data, less for the purpose of carrying out a comparative study than to obtain a comprehensive account of Black female student experiences. In so doing, it became clear that perceptions of structural racism were more prevalent in samples that contained traditional and nontraditional students at post-1992 universities.

An identity literature review (Chapter 5) established the importance of group membership for identity formation (Tajfel, 1978). For minorities, this importance can be experienced as an inequality where they are held in low esteem by a social majority (Gaunt, 2001). The review was informed by consideration of the damage arising from deficit perspectives (Chapter 2, 2.5) which have been used over many years to explain negative outcomes for minoritised peoples (Brown, 2010; Grant, 2012; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Tillman, 2012). Biases operating in nuanced and overt forms (Bellack, 2015; Nadal et al*.,* 2015) continue to be directed at people from BME backgrounds. This suggests a climate that is built on less regard for the deleterious effects that have stemmed from a long history of oppression and discrimination (Gillborn, 2015).

12.7.3 "Where are the similarities?"

Cole (2009) emphasises the importance of making a distinction between individual characteristics and social/power hierarchies. She points out that throwing a spotlight firmly on the latter might be more enlightening for understanding experiences of advantage and disadvantage. Similarity of experiences can be more telling than differences, particularly where there is a common thread running through a group. A research exploration should seek to identify such similarities. Notwithstanding this, similarity of experience *amid* group heterogeneity can be even more enlightening.

Whether participation in this research was as an individual or as part of a group, the current findings indicate similarities of experience. The participants experienced corresponding challenges for managing the construction of their identities. Their experiences reflected challenging practices and behaviours perpetrated by some staff and students. This culminated as systemic and structural issues that were evidenced across all phases of the research.

Focus group data brought to light similarities and differences that might not have been revealed had the research solely used individual interviews, or overly focused on accessing individual experiences. The power of group interaction seemed to draw out more nuanced

perspectives of experience. This kind of emergent and unexpected finding is concomitant with studies that have used focus groups in social science research (Kitzinger, 1994; Sagoe, 2012).

The methods applied permitted reasonable inferences about experiences for these participants. External validation of the findings shifted the research into the sphere of Shenton's (2004) views on establishing trustworthiness in research (Chapter 6). Addressing Cole's (2009) research questions provided justification for this research to be treated as 'intersectional' while supporting the use of theoretical approaches, such as social constructionism, as additional lenses through which to situate students' experiences.

12.8 Research Strengths

There are several strengths to be highlighted in this research. Firstly, the participants were recruited through purposive sampling. All participants identified as Black with a Black ethnicity/nationality and a female gender. All were enrolled on a UK HEI undergraduate psychology degree course at the point of interview. All HEIs were located in the London and M25 region, although there were some institutional differences. Some universities had a higher concentration of BME students, some were classified as a post-1992 university and others were a Russell Group university. However, any similarities or differences within the dataset reflected the actual experiences of these participants.

Secondly, an exploratory framework into BME student experiences satisfied a requirement for intersectionality-informed research where the participants hold homogeneous and heterogeneous characteristics (Cole, 2009). The research meets the requirement for an intersectional analysis to get to the heart of the disparities for these participants (Office for Students, 2018). The use of more than one data collection method led to a divergent exploration. A member-checking activity assessed continuity of students' experiences across time, validated their shared circumstances and identified dissimilarities.

Lastly, the volume of data obtained across all phases attested to the depth of the inquiry. Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, and Young (2018) refer to this as *information power*. It might be argued that methodological concepts such as data saturation are not feasible using small sample sizes. A systematic analysis by Vasileiou et al. (2018) revealed that the prospect of data saturation is nullified in some qualitative studies based on issues of sample size sufficiency. Furthermore, the possibility of data saturation in interpretative phenomenological analysis is rejected since it implies that there is nothing further to be gleaned from a participant's experience (Smith et al., 2009). Nevertheless, systemic findings from

participants' experiences and the number of interviews in the current research, demonstrate the possibility of saturation for *some* of the methods applied. This in turn reinforces the credibility of data that were collected at different points in time.

12.9 Research Limitations

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of Black female students in UK higher education. This has been largely fulfilled. However, the research is not without limitations which are discussed here for the betterment of future studies. Primarily, the limitations are confined to sample size, sample type, subject specificity, geographic context, the classification of ethnicity and the research epistemology.

12.9.1 Sample Size

The research employed three qualitative methods and obtained narrated experiences from 19 participants. This is a relatively small sample. Sample or 'set' size (Small, 2009) is the subject of ongoing debate based on the view that larger numbers bring more validity to studies. There is no specification for sample size for research that employs qualitative content analysis or interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). However, IPA researchers such as Donnison, Thompson and Turpin (2009) adhere to approximately eight purposefully-selected, homogeneous participants, to enable richer, in-depth analyses. Moreover, the *quality* of the relationship between the researcher and the participant during interviews can be more difficult to replicate with larger numbers of participants.

Braun and Clarke (2013) advise that thematic analysis works better when there are at least two focus groups from which to compare data. Sagoe (2012) suggests that the size of a focus group should be determined by the research requirements therefore flexibility is permissible. Sagoe further asserts that the guiding principles should be "common sense, financial resources and availability of participants" (p. 10). However, even experiences that are obtained from a single case study are considered reasonable as empirical evidence when the data are carefully analysed (Boddy, 2016). Moreover, if a researcher's purpose is to achieve singularity, depth, nuance and complexity of human experiences, this might be more difficult to interpret and convey using mechanistic [quantitative] methods and larger datasets. It is recognised that a smaller sample of students creates difficulty for generalising experiences (Sagoe, 2012). However, Smith et al. (2009) assert that 'generalisability' should be considered foreign to idiographic qualitative research where the emphasis is to identify uniqueness, rather than ubiquity, of experience.

12.9.2 Sample Variability

Limited availability of theoretically-suitable participants made recruitment difficult, especially as the intention was to explore and present a range of experiences. For example, views from only three Russell Group students are included. This number can be explained by the fact that only a small proportion of BME students are accepted into elite and Russell Group universities each year (Boliver, 2013). In addition, purposive sampling may have increased the possibility of sampling bias. Most of the participants were recruited from the researcher's institution and others were recruited via contacts at other London universities. Participants known to the researcher may have engaged in the research based on proximity to the researcher; consequently, socially-desirable responding may have muddled the 'truth' of their experiences. Nevertheless, students with similar characteristics and inclinations may have been the type that would have engaged with this kind of research in any case.

12.9.3 Subject Specificity

The research used the experience of studying undergraduate psychology as a reference point. This was also a criterion for participant recruitment. Settles (2006) notes that context is useful for situating experiences but, that researchers should aim for diversity in order to achieve representativeness. Thus, it is acknowledged that students in other disciplines may have reported different experiences. However, reporting on the experiences of students from across a range of subjects may have created challenges for a more contextual analysis. Future research could include a wider range of subject areas when exploring the experiences of marginalised student groups, but this should be contingent on a larger sample for a more even spread of experience.

12.9.4 Geographic Context

The findings are based on the experiences of Black female students from six universities. These were situated within a relatively small geographic area compared to the spread of HEIs nationally. This area [London and M25 regions] and the universities in the research framework, may hold a particularised experience for some students - sometimes referred to as the 'London effect' (SMF, 2017), thus limiting wider applicability for the findings. The rationale for choosing London universities is set out in Chapter 2, which explains why students [including a large number of domiciled Black students] are more likely to apply and attend these 'local' institutions. Moreover, large BME communities live in the London area, with many having settled in cities such as London, Bristol and Liverpool between 1940 and

1960 (McDowell, 2016); hence, there are likely to be ongoing generations of BME students residing in these areas.

Studying at a London-based university holds a particular attraction because of its position and centrality to a range of employment sectors (SMF, 2017). However, where students are already domiciled in the London area, there may be no real effect of the 'magic' of the capital city and, therefore, no extension of this to their university environment. Future research should go beyond this limitation to include the experiences of students from a wider spread of UK HEIs.

12.9.5 Ethnicity Classification

Ethnicity and its categorisation were problematic in this research. For Phases 1 and 2, the participants were asked, using a demographic questionnaire, to self-identify as belonging to one of four Black ethnicities[26] . These categories were extracted from census classifications for a Black ethnicity (ONS, 2011). Classifications have been adapted over many years to reflect changes in ethnicity terminology (National Statistics, 2003). However, politicised and racialised ideology stemming from a historical understanding of 'race' (Casas, 2005) has failed to embrace the multiplicity of identity construction along with the freedom for self-definition. Consequently, ethnic categories on census forms are fraught with difficulty for capturing detail (Spencer, 2014).

While perceptions of identity were further explored during the semi-structured interviews, the participants' responses may have been framed within the context of a pre-defined ethnic identity. A classification of 'Black Caribbean' or 'Black African' for example, does not fully capture other aspects of an ethnic identity, such as a person's heritage or their ancestry. Assumptions regarding ethnic identification were addressed in Phases 3 and 4 of this research where participants were simply asked to state their ethnicity, without the use of pre-defined categories, on a demographic questionnaire (Appendix R). The aim was to resist structural ideologies around race and ethnicity. However, it must be recognised that this could have occurred even where ethnicity classification was carried out with benign intent since recruitment material (Appendices O & P) stated that participants must identify as a Black female student. Stewart and McDermott (2004) advise that the brief for social constructions should be widened, especially in psychological research. Future research should ensure that,

---

[26] Black British, Black Caribbean, Black African and Black Other

where possible, participants are given the freedom to self-categorise their social characteristics.

A further consideration emerges from Maylor's (2009c) research on using 'Black' as terminology. All recruitment material pointed to the criterion of 'Black' as a form of self-identification for participation. As a contended term, students may not have chosen to identify as 'Black' and could have de-selected themselves from participation even if they fit the criterion. Maylor's study throws a spotlight on issues that can arise when trying to engage with groups that are defined by particular characteristics. Researchers may need to find alternative and 'acceptable' terminology in order to attract participants from marginalised groups.

12.9.6 Research Epistemology

The research questions centred on the experiences of Black female undergraduate psychology students to the exclusion of other student groups and subject areas. This may be considered a limitation and arguments may be put forward against an exclusive focus on this or any other student group (for example males). All student experiences are valid and warrant exploring, particularly in cases where deficit perspectives are rife for certain groups (Brown, 2010). However, there are situations [such as marginalisation] where attention should be paid to a specific group in order to highlight their issues without interference from competing narratives (Hunting, 2014). In such circumstances, the inclusion of a comparison group or taking a mixed-groups approach might detract from the required focus (Stewart & McDermott, 2004).

Combining methods can also create tension. The descriptive thrust of qualitative content analysis (QCA) may be considered a limitation. The extent to which a researcher can effectively 'interpret' experience may be questioned if the method of analysis is considered 'light touch'. However, QCA should be viewed as part of a wider 'family' of thematic-style methods of inquiry. As set out in Chapter 6 (6.8), the method was sufficiently robust to develop meaningful and clearly-constructed categories of experience. The sample for Phase 1 was small and QCA permitted early and meaningful access to the experiences of nontraditional students as a foundation upon which to build further exploration. IPA required a longer process of analysis and was applied to the experiences of traditional students in Phases 2 and 4. Phase 3 methodology enabled a sweeping analytic approach across two sets of focus group data and allowed the simultaneous interpretation of two student types [traditional and nontraditional students].

12.10 Summary

During the process of carrying out this research, I have become more open to reflecting on and challenging deficit discourses in higher education, notwithstanding that, as a Black woman, my identity might also be constructed as 'problematic'. I had an opportunity to speak with a young Black man who had dropped out of university during his second year of undergraduate study. He blamed himself for an [internal] lack of focus that led to academic failure. He resorted to working as a door-to-door campaigner for a children's charity. Listening to his self-deprecating account spurred in me a desire to help him re-situate his thinking and to perhaps consider that it was not he but rather the institution that had failed. The routine re-stating of a deficit rhetoric has acted to absolve institutions from the responsibility to create conditions where all students can be successful, given their appropriate motivation, agency and ability. As a Black woman, I am using my knowledge and experiences to reflect on how universities can be re-positioned to help *all* students [and staff] to maximise their potential.

It would be premature to conclude in this research, that where participants have narrated their experiences in more positive terms, universities have suddenly become post-racial and inclusive. Furthermore, these experiences cannot be generalised to other Black female students. Similarly, the findings cannot be claimed to represent the experience of studying other subjects at undergraduate level. Instead, the research has attempted to pull everything together to achieve, as termed by Smith et al. (2009), a degree of 'theoretical transferability'. In essence, I care enough about reflecting the 'truth' of experience to unpack those aspects of *my* identity and experience that might have muddled *our* 'truths' with emotion, or that might have hampered the possibility of 'emphatic neutrality' (Patton, 1999).

A number of Black researchers have used their lived experiences and cultural perspectives to inform research into the experiences of similar others. For example, Bhopal and Jackson (2013) are Black British academics who have researched the experiences of Black British academics. Gabriel (2016) is a Black British female activist and blogger who has explored the experiences of Black British female bloggers as a form of social activism. Shillam (2015) is a professor and practicing Rastafarian who has written extensively on the connection between Britain, Ethiopia and the Rastafarian movement. Maylor (2009b) powerfully articulates the challenges and resistance in White spaces that accompany the identity of a Black female academic.

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) have considered the implications for researchers with similar/dissimilar characteristics to their participants. They refer to this as the 'space between':

> The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We now occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords (p. 61).

Engaging in reflexivity allows qualitative researchers to navigate their own 'space between' in order to reduce subjectivity (Doucet & Mauthner, 2005). In carrying out this research, I have come to understand that, like the participants, my intersectional identity has been a threat to my reality. I have also recognised that my experience as a researcher has the potential to positively influence others. The application of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness model to the design and implementation of this research has led to a more credible account of students' experiences. Reflexivity has helped to better convey the stories shared by these participants. It has also enriched the journey I have undertaken as a 'subjectively-attached/objectively-detached' researcher-in-the-making. In this respect, I believe that reflexivity has served its purpose well.

Chapter 13

Conclusions

In this final chapter, the research implications and contributions to knowledge are set out, followed by the closing comments. The research framework applied theoretical and methodological approaches to deconstruct the identities of Black female undergraduate psychology students. BME student experiences were situated within a broader educational and socio-cultural framework. Thus, there was consideration for cross-cultural perspectives, cultural deficit perspectives, the award/attainment gap, experiences of BME staff, socio-cultural characteristics and the study of psychology at a higher education level (Chapters 2 - 4). The conceptual framework was informed by Black feminist perspectives such as intersectionality (Chapter 5, 5.6) and a phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (Chapter 5, 5.4.2). Besides the fluidity of social constructionism (Chapter 5, 5.7), theories and concepts such as 'hyphenated' selves (Chapter 5, 5.4.1), self-efficacy (Chapter 5, 5.3.2) and a sense of belonging (Chapter 5, 5.3.3) shed further light on identity construction. The methodological framework used qualitative content analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis and thematic analysis to interpret students' narratives of experience (Chapter 6). Not only has the conceptual framework added to our knowledge of BME students' experiences in UK higher education, it has also thrown a sharper focus on Black female students by distinguishing between their experiences at post-1992 and Russell Group institutions. Lastly, the research has shown the importance of drawing selectively on some of the aforementioned theories to explore experiences in these students.

13.1 Research Implications

With a diverse population of students in UK higher education, research now needs to turn its attention to marginalised student groups to better understand their experiences. By definition, a construction of marginality in a student references the possibility of an 'atypical' experience in a 'typical' setting (Chigeza, 2011). Student marginality has been further situated within arguments of power and access (Callingham, 2017) as well as within the disadvantages conveyed by having particular combinations of social characteristics such as being Black, disabled and with an 'atypical' sexual identity (Bernard, Fairtlough, Fletcher, & Ahmet, 2014).

This research has shown the importance of drawing out the experiences of marginalised students using qualitative research methods. The methods in this research supported studies that used small sample sizes. The emphasis in quantitative research methods for using larger samples (Smith & Little, 2018) would have made it more difficult to carry out this type of research, given the issues that were experienced with recruiting participants. Using smaller numbers, researchers can *qualitatively* understand the experiences of marginalised participants in more depth by way of careful exploration. Indeed, there is a call for more exploratory research that focuses on the experiences of marginalised groups (Oman, 2016). Research should also continue to explore the effect of a researcher's characteristics (for example, their ethnicity or status; Pan, Smith, Litvin, & Woodside, 2018) on participants' involvement in studies.

A comprehensive account of the Black female students in the current research informed the development of a framework to situate their experiences within appropriate educational contexts. Consequently, theoretical inferences could be drawn from their constructions of identity. However, both aspects were tempered by an awareness that this research presents only one gateway into the experiences of students with a minoritised ethnicity. Thus, the research methodology should be replicated with other marginalised student groups to explore identity construction and to identify similarities or dissimilarities of experience.

This research has also shown the possibility of an 'atypical' experience as a consequence of structural forms of racism in a university environment (see Chapter 9, 9.12.3). Thus, both normative and heteronormative experiences were captured and reflected to provide a more balanced account. In so doing, higher education research can be moved beyond notions of 'typicality'. Marginality, alternative experiences and diverse cultural perspectives can be embraced as legitimate forms of knowledge rather than being relegated to the 'other'. The disruption of 'typicality', with an acknowledgement that little is known about experiences of marginality in some students [and staff], could open up important discussions about experiences of difference and sameness in order to bring about institutional change.

13.1.1 Future Work

The limitations discussed in Chapter 12 (12.9) should be re-visited and a programme of research devised to address these. As previously stated, future work could include an application of the conceptual framework used here, to students from other marginalised backgrounds. This would allow exploration of its value as a broader interpretative

framework. Indeed, the extent of personal, social and cultural heterogeneity among participants in the current research suggests that the framework will require further conceptualisation.

There is growing use of creative data collection methods in feminist research. For example, Ardovini (2015) uses consciousness-raising in small group discussions. Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) have used creative workshops to facilitate digital storytelling. The use of a visual timeline activity in the present research offered a novel way of accessing students' perceptions of their experiences. Research shows that participants' drawings in health psychology studies can be similarly revealing (Kirkham, Smith, & Havsteen-Franklin, 2013; Schoones, Tiemensma, & Kaptein, 2018). Clearer guidelines for the development of hypotheses and analyses could strengthen the applicability of visual methods for exploring students' experiences. Furthermore, a single case study approach is less common, but in this case was insightful when exploring a divergent construction of identity. Therefore, future research should consider the inclusion of creative methods as well as work with participants as co-creators.

The questions and methodology in the current research were designed to 'explore' rather than measure experience. However, an alternative approach to investigating BME students' experiences might be the use of quantitative research methods on a large scale. Future studies could also use mixed methods, single case and longitudinal studies. Indeed, an approach that combines different triangulated methods might yield richer data regarding the experiences of marginalised groups.

With a history of cultural and educational deficit perspectives (e.g. Boliver, 2013; Brown, 2010; Richardson, 2015; Rodgers, 2013), it can be difficult to unpick the cause and effect of unsatisfactory experiences leading to questions about what should be addressed as a priority. The implications outlined above suggest ways to begin to address these questions. Noting the limitations, this thesis has focused on only one side [students], a smaller aspect [marginalised students] and a particularised context [Black female undergraduate psychology students] in higher education.

13.2 Contributions to Knowledge

This research has addressed a gap in the literature by using cultural narratives of experience obtained from a group of students with homogeneous and heterogeneous characteristics to inform our understanding of what it means to be a Black woman constructing identity in UK higher education. 'Framing' of the participants' narratives took place within the intersection

of their ethnicity, age and class with higher education. While all participants entered university with rich cultural capital, the requirement for its activation differed by student and institution type. For the first time, there is fresh insight into the lived experiences of constructing identity by these students. Yet, to remain true to critical intersectionality praxis (Collins, 2015), contributions to knowledge must move beyond reflecting an understanding of the issues to spurring action that addresses those issues.

13.2.1 Acknowledging Cultural Capital in Black Female Students

The characteristics revealed for the nontraditional participants in this research were not dissimilar to what is already known about such students (Nunn, 1994; Taylor & House, 2010; Reay et al., 2002; Scott, Burns, & Cooney, 1996; SMF, 2017). However, this research has extended our knowledge of nontraditional students by approaching them specifically as Black female undergraduate psychology students. For these participants, their identities were constructed as 'hyphenated' selves and revealed a need for a sense of belonging that was particularly pronounced. Although not always overtly articulated, experiences of studying in an environment that felt unnatural because of their age, parenting and caring responsibilities, juggling employment with studying, as well as feelings of invisibility and hyper-visibility, were shaped by their cultural capital.

Chen (2014) posits that nontraditional students use their life experiences as a form of agency to drive self-efficacy and become self-directed with benefits for their academic and personal development. However, the present research found that, in the case of these participants, agency is contingent upon feeling sufficiently supported in an academic environment to the extent that there can be recognisable indicators to encourage progress. This finding points to the importance of culturally-informed teaching and support that can be accessed by these students. For institutions, it is important to pay close attention to students' cultural stories and to learn from their experiences.

Identity emerges in response to a context (Howarth, 2011). Howarth adds that "all cultures are deeply complex and diverse and … all cultural generalisations are problematic. This leads to an understanding that all identities are deeply complex and constantly changing" (p. 13). Cultural capital in the post-1992 traditional students informed a complex construction of multiple identities. This was reflected in their experiences of transitioning through different levels of undergraduate study, as well as in their anticipations of their futures as graduates. Challenges for the expression of cultural capital were predominant during times when their identities had to respond to differing [and sometimes hostile]

contexts. This finding strongly supported Mirza's (1998) view that the expression of cultural capital plays an important role for Black women in higher education.

The research further conveyed an implicit understanding of capital in shaping some students' experiences. Russell Group traditional participants in particular, revealed that the activation of some aspects of their capital [personal and social attributes] was more important for their university experiences than their cultural capital, which was a more intuitive but less influential aspect of their identity. This finding supported the view that, in these students, a less fixed approach to their identity construction permitted the possibility of a more positive experience during times of perceived or actual challenge. An 'exceptional' identity, such as that constructed by the participant in Phase 4, further revealed that a 'fixed' identity might be unhelpful for both the student and the university because of a sustained resistance to engagement.

Cumulatively, the findings suggest that key to addressing an attainment gap is for HE providers to recognise the various forms of cultural capital and different identity constructions that these students bring into their academic environments. One method is to learn from growing research findings in this area as well as from students' stories. This recognition could lead to the creation of flexible learning environments wherein students might become more comfortable with expressing the 'truth' of their identities and the challenges that are a product of the attainment gap.

13.2.2 The Attainment Gap

When this PhD research project commenced in 2012, the attainment gap stood at an 18.5% differential between UK-domiciled White students and Black students in higher education. The awarding of a first/2:1 degree classification was 72.1% and 53.6% respectively (ECU, 2012). As the project drew to a close in 2019, that differential reduced to 13.6% (79.6% & 66.0%; Advance HE, 2018a). Yet, despite an improving trend, findings from Universities UK and NUS (2019) revealed that the experiences of BME students were not as positively aligned. Differences were found in student counter-narratives that seemed to convey a more complex picture. Critical race theory asserts that counter-narratives are important for uncovering the 'truth' of experience (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As co-producers of the 2019 report, BME students clearly stated a need for:

(i) stronger leadership that is committed to removing the attainment gap;

(ii) opportunities to talk about race, racism and the requirement for cultural receptivity in UK institutions;

(iii) a lack of ethnicity representation at senior levels to be addressed as a priority to foster a sense of belonging in students from diverse ethnic backgrounds; and

(iv) good quality data as imperative for evidence that presents a more complete picture of student experiences in order to prepare universities to close the attainment gap.

While not on the scale of the Universities UK and NUS (2019) report, the present research used the counter-narratives of 19 Black female students to shed further light on experiences of BME students more generally. These Black female students were less vocal about a requirement for good data collection practices and said nothing about the existence of an attainment gap that might directly influence their degree outcome. However, they were just as emphatic about the need for more representative teaching staff that might contribute to a stronger sense of belonging. Most of these students also commented on the importance of their cultural capital to be taken seriously (see section 13.2.1). These findings align with individual student voices that were featured in the Universities UK and NUS (2019) report. By contrast, the present research has resisted a 'soundbite' approach in favour of a fuller account of students' narratives and interpretations of their meaning. Thus, the thesis is an additional point of reference for BME student experiences and, specifically, for the experiences of Black women in higher education.

The attainment gap is a globally recognised term among higher education researchers and practitioners (e.g. Cobb-Clark & Nguyen, 2012 – Australia; Gradín, 2013 – South Africa; Lopez, 2009 – USA; Sosu & Ellis, 2019 – Scotland). Furthermore, the reality of the gap is now part of dialogic exchange between staff and students as indicated by research as well as a number of themed conferences that have taken place in London and nationally in recent years. As such, there is growing awareness of its potential to impact future BME graduates and suggests that the time is ripe for more studies to address its effect on the construction of an academic identity.

13.2.3 Self-Talk in Multiple Identities

Self-talk is revealed in the literature as a protective device that can keep emotions and aspirations in check. It may also connect experiences for better meaning-making, and visualise and guide a 'possible self' toward becoming self-supporting (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman et al., 2002). Self-talk occupies a self-concept spectrum that spans from declarations of positivity and determination (Dolcos & Albarracin, 2014), self-organisation (Porpora & Shumar, 2010), engagement in meaning-making (Orvell et al., 2017) and emotion regulation (Moser et al., 2017) to conveyance of a sense of 'unbelonging' (Reay & Mirza,

1998). An additional purpose of self-talk was not revealed until Phase 3 of the current research. Here traditional students offered their perspective on its use as a moderating device for the internal dialogue generated from their multiple identities. Its application in the management of a multiple-selves identity is a new discovery and should be further explored. Potentially, an exploration of self-talk might shed further light on experiences that could illuminate our understanding of the attainment gap for BME students.

13.2.4 Even 'Deviant' Identities Have Potential

The research revealed identities that might be considered 'deviant' (Carcary, 2009). The case of Desrae's story (Phase 4, Chapter 10) is just one example of a student whose identity did not fit the profile of either a traditional or nontraditional student. Without more research into factors that can create an 'unbelonging' construction of the self, students such as Desrae could be seen as simply 'disengaged' or 'unsociable'. Desrae's story should not be assumed as unique. However, to the researcher's knowledge, this is the first time that a student's account of what is termed *intentional* 'unbelonging' has been captured. While there may be little that an institution can do to shift persistent negative attitudes in some students, Desrae's closing comments during her interview suggested that the opportunity to participate in this research allowed her to reflect on her experiences as sense-making for both her parents' disposition and her construction of identity. Following the interview, Desrae successfully completed her degree, was awarded an upper second classification and [at the time of writing] was employed as a psychology teacher in a secondary school in the London area.

The literature reveals that a domination of 'Whiteness' in the curriculum (Jankowski et al., 2018; Peters, 2015), the experience of everyday microaggressions (Al-Mateen, 2017; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015) and constructions of cultural deficits (Chapter 2, section 2.5) can influence perceptions of university experience. Research argues for the importance of the 'climate' of a learning environment to generate a feeling of psychological safety and sense of belonging in students (Anderman, 2003). These findings are an important departure from assumptions of the student as solely responsible for the kind of academic outcomes denoted by the attainment/awarding gap for BME students (see Chapter 2, section 2.2). It is clear that the university as a structural institution contains [and has the power to maintain] an infrastructure that could be described as a racialised 'climate' (Spencer, 2006) and must assume its share of responsibility for experiences of 'unbelonging' in some groups of staff and students.

The positive outcome of Desrae's university experience suggests that an intentional 'unbelonging' identity is a far more complex aspect of the constellation of belonging than was initially understood, prompting the requirement to take a fresh look at its construction and associated concepts, such as [dis]engagement. As a precursor to understanding *university* sense of belonging and attainment, this thesis acknowledges research studies into school belonging and its measures [such as the psychological sense of school membership] for their helpful contribution to wider knowledge of the phenomenon (e.g. Gaete, Rojas-Barahona, Olivares, & Araya, 2016; Goodenow, 1993; Hernández, Robins, Widaman, & Conger, 2017; Israelashvili, 1997; Slaten, Ferguson, Allen, Brodrick, & Waters, 2016; Ye & Wallace, 2014).

Of further relevance to theoretical and conceptual perspectives drawn upon in this thesis, an association of belonging with social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), self-efficacy (Dru, 2007), depression (Anderman, 2002), wellbeing (Grobecker, 2016), race and ethnicity (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008), perceptions of academic relationships (Chiu, Chow, McBride, & Mol, 2016) and involvement in extra-curricular activities (Knifsend & Graham, 2012) have all been referenced as critical to the student experience. Although firmly situated in the schools' literature, parental involvement [relevant to Desrae's experience] is also noted as important for a child's psychological adjustment and engagement (Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; Simons-Morton & Crump, 2003). There are differences in experiences of belonging between students at schools and universities (Slaten, Yough, Shemwell, Scalise, Elison, & Hughes, 2014) as well as a tendency in the literature to side-step integration issues for students from marginalised groups or outside a 'normative' cultural frame of reference (Guiffrida, 2006). For this reason, the present research contributes to the call from Slaten et al. (2016b) for more [quantitative and qualitative] studies to address experiences of belonging in marginalised populations.

A large body of literature (e.g. Aerts, Van Houtte, Dewaele, Cox, & Vincke, 2012; Hagborg, 1998; Hamm & Faircloth, 2005; Ma, 2003; Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003) points to belonging as a longstanding area that will continue to require research, particularly where increasing diversity (for example, more students with complex intersections of protected characteristics) and 'climate' (observed in changing university infrastructures as well as opportunities to be involved or form key relationships) are implicated as evolving factors for the development of a sense of belonging. Slaten et al. (2016b) add that while school belonging is defined in consistent terms, the terminology used to describe belonging is less consistent, giving rise to the possibility of a spectrum that includes an intentionally 'unbelonging' identity.

13.2.5 Theoretical Perspectives for Black Female Students' Experiences

A Black identity was experienced differently by these participants, refuting an assumed notion of the homogeneity of 'Blackness' (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, social class, privileging and enriched cultural capital seemed to have a more enduring effect on the experiences of some participants than the impact of ethnic identity alone. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991) is noted for its ability to contextualise the experiences of marginalised groups in society (Hankivsky, 2014; Lee, 2012). Its application to the experiences of a group of marginalised Black female students was considered feasible in this research. The epistemology of social constructionism (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2007) sheds light on the construction of identity and meaning-making in a social world (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Its application was also considered feasible. However, the finding, that there needed to be a more selective application of these theories to Black female students' experiences, was unexpected. This is not to say that there are just two theoretical perspectives by which Black female students' identities can be explored. Critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and Black feminism include a range of relevant perspectives. Notwithstanding, in the context of the present research, a selective judgement was applied that shed new light on the application of the theories under review.

13.2.6 Research Methods for Exploring Identity Construction

This research has shown that there is a benefit to including more than one method to explore the multidimensional nature of identity construction. A triangulated methodology offered a more diverse interpretation of experience and facilitated the emergence of divergent identities. The data collection methods worked together to increase the volume and richness of the students' 'voices'. For example, individual and focus group interviews revealed that participants applied self-talk to their multiple identities. Although semi-structured interviews brought this activity to the fore, its purpose as meaning-making was not revealed until the focus group interviews took place. This level of insight might not have come about if the research had consisted solely of individual interviews. Moreover, a triangulated methodology revealed systemic [and divergent] issues concerning the experiences of these participants, regardless of student type or university attended, and so should be replicated. When exploring constructions of identity in marginalised groups, particularly where there is potential for multiple, conflicting identities, a single research method is unlikely to be sufficient for understanding both overt and nuanced aspects of lived experience.

13.2.7 Summary

The experiences of UK Black female students in higher education are under-researched. There is little UK research with which to directly compare the present findings. What is known about Black Caribbean, Black African, Black British and Black Mixed students in a UK context is often part of a wider discourse on BME student experiences, with the BME award/attainment gap at the forefront (UUK & NUS, 2019). For this reason, there is value in carrying out research on "hidden figures" in order to obtain a wider picture of experience (Ireland et al*.,* 2018, p. 234). In addition, there are limited theoretical perspectives that have adequately framed UK Black female students' experiences; neither is there a single theoretical perspective that addresses 'atypical' experiences. More contributions are needed from scholars and researchers to address BME student experiences within a contemporary milieu.

13.3 Summary Conclusions

This research has qualitatively explored the experiences of Black female students by using their cultural narratives. The findings contribute to identity research and higher education perspectives by providing new knowledge about these students. Taking the perspective of an 'insider-outsider' as well as an 'insider-insider', the researcher aimed to explore experiences that have been disadvantaged by implicit biases and deficit perspectives. Reductionist approaches to exploring Black peoples' experiences (Mirza, 1998; Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005) have contributed to the limited attention given to some marginalised groups.

Whereas Black women's experiences have tended to be problematised against a 'normative' frame of reference (Burman & Chantler, 2003), US Black feminists are attempting to re-orientate our understanding using epistemological frameworks (James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2001) that are resistant to the 'White male as norm' model. In recent years, more race equality organisations and researchers have focused on unpacking deficit perspectives using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. However, the lived experiences of some groups of BME students require further investigation.

This research has shown that an intersection of cultural, personal and social capital with ethnicity, age, social class and higher education can create a more complex picture of identity than might otherwise have been presumed. It is important that this complexity is not construed as a cultural deficit in Black women. Indeed, the participants in this research have worked hard at networking, accessing support and constructing an 'academic' identity to

complete their studies. This identity work, noted by Hall and du Gay (1996) as a process of 'becoming', is commendable in these participants.

There is little research that has addressed the experiences of this student population. One reason might be the difficulty in accessing marginalised groups, particularly where their experiences are challenging and/or centred around perceived or actual racism. Moreover, it might be difficult for some researchers to acknowledge the role that racism and structural forces can play in maintaining a state of vulnerability in some student populations. It is known that higher education reproduces inequalities and forms of bias by reinforcing structural issues of racism, ageism, classism and other forms of prejudice (Office for Students, 2018a). This thesis has used the stories of Black female students to throw a spotlight on these issues. It is an inroad to the kind of social justice work that could support marginalised students in UK higher education.

> *My final reflection rests on the memory of a particular day when the careers officer visited my secondary school. As a young Black female student, I remember queuing in the corridor along with other anxious 16-year-olds, waiting for validation of our career dreams. For as long as I could remember, I had always wanted to be a veterinary surgeon and was excited at the prospect of sharing this with someone who could point me in the right direction. When my turn came, I entered the room where the White male careers officer was seated. I sat down and he nonchalantly asked what I wanted to do when I finished school. I shared my aspiration with great enthusiasm. He looked me firmly in the eye and said, "Don't be silly! You can never do that. You should get a job as a typist or work in a factory". In just a few words, the careers officer dealt a serious blow to the vision of my possible self as a successful Black woman. I left the room feeling emptied of hope. The reality is that I neither became a vet, typist nor factory worker. It took a long time for me to believe that I could achieve anything of substance after that demeaning encounter. The years followed. My life lessons included many more experiences of racism, sexism and their intersection. With maturity, I have realised that while these experiences were disempowering, they also honed a sense of resilience and purpose in me that I had previously never thought possible. My present journey tells me that my future story **must** have a better ending.*

'We *must* tell our stories, or others will tell them for us … our stories must be told!'

Heidi Mirza (2017)

Postscript: Our Destinations

At the time of writing, I am pleased to report that many of the participants in this research are productively engaged in fulfilling their aspirations and shaping their careers. Of the participants in Phase 1, Maureen completed a Master of Science in Business Psychology; Rebecca applied to pursue a Master's in Psychology; Yolande became a family support assistant, and Marcia is a care worker. From Phase 2, Samantha [the dancer] is a freelance photographer; Hannah fulfilled her ambition to go to Law School, graduating with a 2:1; Tobi started a career as a local government officer in education, and Kimberley became a learning support assistant at a primary school. Three participants from focus group 1 pursued a master's degree in clinical studies, with one of those students going on to undertake a doctorate in clinical psychology. The destination of only one participant from focus group 2 is known; namely, the nontraditional student who became a health and wellness adviser. As stated in Chapter 10, Desrae is a psychology teacher in a secondary school. As for me, I finally submitted this thesis and continue to work as a senior lecturer in higher education.

List of Appendices

A: Training, Timing and Dissemination

B: Recruitment Poster

C: Ethics Approval

D: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

E: Demographic Questionnaire

F: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

G: Participant Debriefing Sheet (Individual Interviews)

H: Participant Debriefing Sheet (Focus Groups)

I: QCA Coding Frame

J: Nontraditional Students Mindmapping Exercise

K: Traditional Students Mindmapping Exercise

L: IPA Summary Table

M: IPA Mindmapping Exercise – Samantha

N: IPA Mindmapping Exercise – Hannah

O: Focus Groups Recruitment Poster (1)

P: Focus Groups Recruitment Poster (2)

Q: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

R: Demographic Questionnaire (amended)

S: Focus Group Protocol and Schedule

T: Slideshow Presentation - Nontraditional Students

U: Slideshow Presentation - Traditional Students

V: Phase 3 Thematic Coding

Appendix A

Training, Timing and Dissemination

Committees

2015:

Race Equality Charter Mark (RECM) University Self-Assessment Team

2016:

Athena SWAN Psychology Self-Assessment Team

2017:

BME Staff Network - Founding Member

RECM University Self-Assessment Team

2018:

BME Staff Network - Vice Chair

2019:

BME Staff Network - Co-Chair

Conferences

2015:

Inclusion Matters, Kingston University - November

SRHE Newer Researchers Conference, Newport, Gwent - December

2016:

Teaching and Learning, QMUL - January

Equality Challenge Unit, Glasgow, Scotland - April (co-presenter, Women in Hats and Talking Books)

HERAG Think Tank, London - June (co-presenter, Women in Hats and Talking Books)

END conference, Slovenia (Abstract accepted) - June

Life Beyond the PhD, Cumberland Lodge - August

2017:

BME Early Career Researchers Conference, Kings College University (featured mentor) - April

Strategic approaches to addressing disparities in student outcomes, Nottingham Trent University - June

BPS Identity Conference, Institute for Child Health - June

Consultancy

2015:

RECM Evaluation Panellist (ECU), London - May

2017:

RECM Evaluation Panellist (ECU), London - September

2019:

National Inclusion Framework Awards, London - August

Courses Attended

2012:

PhD Induction

2013:

Analysing Qualitative Data (Healthcare Research Group), Oxford University - April

2014:

Qualitative Data Analysis - March

Undertaking a Literature Review, Social Research in Higher Education (SRHE), London - May

Challenges of Analysing Qualitative Data (SRHE), London - June

Understanding Qualitative Methods & Analysis (British Psychological Society), London - June

Religion and Belief in Higher Education (SRHE), London - June

Developing Personal Resilience - June

2015:

Schooling, Attainment and Admission to Higher Education (SRHE), London - January

Academic Writing Skills (SRHE), London - February

Black and Minority Student Experience and Attainment (SRHE), London - March

Mature and Part-time Students (SRHE), London - April

Culture of HE and Student Experience (SRHE), London - May

Phenomenography (SRHE), London - May

University Outreach Activities and Progression to HE (SRHE), London - June

Widening Participation: Next Steps (SRHE), London - July

2016:

Read faster, read smarter - June

2017:

IPA Workshop with Professor Paul Flowers, Glasgow Caledonian University - May

Race, Ethnicity and Postgraduate Issues (SRHE), London - May

2019:

Creative Approaches to Research Methods, NCRM, University of Manchester - November

Events

2013:

Feminist Research Conference, University of East London - July

2014:

Dedoose qualitative software demonstration and seminar (organiser) - April

'Why Isn't My Professor Black?', UCL, London - July

Black British Academics Launch Event - October

2015:

Inclusive Leadership: Bridging Research & Practice (BPS Occupational Psychology Division - Queen Mary University), London - February

Graduate School Assembly - June

Keynotes

2016:

Invited Speaker: Research presentation at Athena SWAN awards ceremony, University of Sheffield - June

Invited Speaker: Research presentation and workshop, University of Swansea - October

2017:

Invited Speaker: Women's Network, University of Sheffield - June

Invited Speaker: STEM Gender Equality Congress, Berlin, Germany - June

Invited Panellist: 'What is innovation?' University of Westminster Learning and Teaching Symposium - June

Invited Speaker: Colloquium series, University of Limerick, Ireland - September

Invited Speaker: 'Space for Diversity In Fields of Excellence' - Johannes Kepler University, Linz, Austria - November

2018:

Invited Speaker: STEM Gender Equality Congress, Maastricht, Amsterdam - October

Invited Speaker: STEM Gender Equality Symposium, Brisbane, Australia - December

Presentations

2013:

Oral Presentation, Psychology Research Forum - April

Learning and Teaching Symposium - July

2014:

Poster Presentation, Postgraduate Fair - April

Poster Presentation, Psychology Research Forum - April

Oral Presentation, Roehampton University - May

2015:

Poster Presentation, Postgraduate Fair - April

Poster Presentation, Psychology Research Forum - April

What's Involved in a PhD?' Graduate School Induction - September

Reflexive Researcher, Graduate School Induction - October

2016:

'What's Involved in a PhD?' Graduate School Induction - January

Reflexive Researcher, Graduate School Induction - February

Poster Presentation, Postgraduate Fair (awarded 2nd prize runner-up) - April

2017:

Reflexive Researcher, Graduate School Induction - February

Oral presentation, Psychology Research Forum - April

Oral presentation, Postgraduate Fair (awarded 3rd prize runner-up) - April

Reflexive Researcher, Graduate School Induction - October

2018:

'What's Involved in a PhD?' Graduate School Induction - January

Reflexive Researcher, Graduate School Induction - February

What's Involved in a PhD?' Graduate School Induction - September

Reflexive Researcher, Graduate School Induction - October

2019:

'What's Involved in a PhD?' Graduate School Induction - January

Reflexive Researcher, Graduate School Induction - February

Reflexive Researcher, Graduate School Induction - October

Seminars

2015:

Improving Equality in the Research Environment, Vitae Hangout - March

Teaching and Learning Research Carousel, Psychology Department (facilitator) - November

Publishing Your Research (DRDP) - December

Westminster Higher Education Forum (Whitehall), London - December

2016:

Westminster Higher Education Forum (Whitehall) - April

2017:

University-wide Unconscious Bias Training (ECU), London - March

Workshops

2012:

Mendeley - November

RefWorks - November

EndNote - November

Strategic Literature Searching - November

2013:

NVivo workshop - June

Contemplative Learning, Contemplative Teaching - June

2014:

Identity Structural Analysis Workshop, Roehampton University - April

IPA researchers' group (Tavistock Centre), London - May

IPA researchers' group (Tavistock Centre), London - July

2015:

Inclusive Curriculum - January

DRDP Workshop 3 - February

Synoptic Learning and Assessment - July

Flipping Mobile Learning (1 Digital Badge earned) - July

DRDP Application to Transfer Briefing - September

Negotiating the PhD (PsyPAG, BPS), Institute of Education, London - November

Research in Education, Psychology Department - December

2016:

Higher Education Race Action Group, London - January

RECM Strategy Workshop, Institute of Education, London - February

Strategic Conference Attendance & Networking - May

HERAG Think Tank, London - June

2017:

Quality Papers, ThinkWrite - May

HERAG Think Tank, London - June

2019:

Finalising the Thesis - February

Preparing for the Viva - May

Leading Race Equality, Advance HE, London - November/December

Activities without a stated location have taken place at the University of Westminster

Publications

Husbands, D. (2019, January). Universities must listen more closely to their BAME staff and students. *The Guardian.* Retrieved January 8, 2019 from https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/jan/08/universities-must-listen-more-closely-to-their-bame-staff-and-students?CMP=share_btn_tw

Husbands, D. (2018, December). A kaleidoscope of mental illness. *The Psychologist.* Vol 31, 77.

Waddington, K., Donaldson, K., **Husbands, D.,** & Bonaparte, B. (in press). The added value of positive organizational psychology interventions: Enhancing Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) student attainment and employability in a higher education context. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology in Practice, Volume 9* (2018).

Husbands, D. (2016, February). 'Let's make a joyful noise!' *The Psychologist.* Retrieved from https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/lets-make-joyful-noise

Husbands, D. (2015, November). The world needs to come into music. *The Psychologist.* Retrieved from https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/world-needs-come-music

Swami, V., Tran, U. S., Thorn, L., Nader, I. W., von Nordheim, L., Pietschnig, J., Stieger, S., **Husbands, D.,** & Voracek, M. (2015). Are the scope and nature of psychology properly understood? An examination of beliefs in myths of popular psychology among university students. In N. Columbus (Ed.), *Advances in Psychology Research.* Hauppage, NY: Nova Science Publishers.

Morrison Coulthard, L., Fitzgerald, J., Howarth, C., & **Husbands, D.** (2014, January). British Psychological Society response to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) call for evidence: Race and Higher Education. Retrieved from http://apps2.bps.org.uk/_publicationfiles/consultation-responses/BPS_response_APPG_Race_HE_response_form-approved.pdf

Pokorny, H., Chalcraft, D., Haroun, J., **Husbands, D.**, Coldham, S., & de Neve, R. (2013, October). Sense of belonging in science and humanities students: Is there a difference? ISSOTL conference presentation.

Chalcraft, D., Pokorny, H., & **Husbands, D.** (2012). Notions of belonging: Engaging first year, first semester HE students. Initial findings from a three-university study. Paper presentation at Hawaii conference.

Shoderu, R., **Husbands, D.**, & Kane, S. (2012). Developing a sense of belonging: Findings from a three-institution study with implications for BME students and staff engagement. *Compass*, *5*, 67-74.

Shoderu, R., & **Husbands, D.** (2012, June). Developing a sense of belonging: Findings from a three-institution study with implications for BME students and staff engagement. Paper presentation at University of Greenwich, Widening Participation conference.

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER[#]
LEADING THE WAY

Responding to Diversity: Constructions of identity and self-efficacy in Black female students studying undergraduate psychology in UK higher education

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED: If you self-identify as Black British, Black African, Black Caribbean or Black Mixed/Other AND you are an undergraduate psychology student, your assistance is essential!

PURPOSE OF STUDY: I am a PhD research student in social psychology at the University of Westminster. My research brings together experiences of Black female students in UK higher education institutions using their cultural stories for a better understanding of identity construction in academic environments. I will be using semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO: You will be interviewed about your university experiences for approximately 1 hour. Participation in this research is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time. However, if you decide to take part in this study you are helping to advance knowledge of research in this important area which is currently limited.

WHAT NEXT: If you would like to participate in this study, please contact Deborah Husbands at husband@westminster.ac.uk **or Department of Psychology, University of Westminster, 309 Regent Street, London, W1B 2UW. Telephone: 0207-911-5000 ext. 69029**

Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
FORWARD
THINKING
WESTMINSTER⌗

Deborah Husbands
Psychology - SSHL
Room 556
309 Regent Street
London
W1B 2UW

13 February 2013

Dear Deborah,
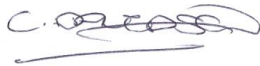
Application Number: 12/13/21A_Psych
Deborah Husbands: School of Social Sciences, Humanities & Languages
Mode: SSHL MPhil/PhD Research

Project title: Responding to Diversity: Constructions of identity and development of self-efficacy in Black female students' studying undergraduate psychology in UK higher education

I am writing to inform you that your application was considered by the SSHL Research Ethics Committee (REC) by correspondence in February 13. The proposal was **approved**.

If your protocol changes significantly in the meantime, please contact me immediately, in case of further ethical requirements.

Yours sincerely

Carmel Davidson
School Administrator, Research
Secretary, SSHL Research Ethics Committee

cc   Louise Sylvester, (Chair) SSHL Research Ethics Committee
       Dr Jeremy Colwill, Dean of SSHL
       Mike Fisher, Research Degrees Manager

Appendix D

Participant Information Sheet

Responding to Diversity: Constructions of identity, self-efficacy and development of a sense of belonging in Black female students' studying undergraduate psychology in UK higher education

Lead Researcher: **Deborah Husbands**

Director of Studies: **Carol Pearson**

You are being invited to participate in an interview about your experiences of being a student at university. Developing research in the US and UK suggests that there are areas of concern for the achievement and integration of Black and Minority Ethnic students, and for Black male students in particular in higher education (HE). However, there is less emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of Black female students as a specific context of student diversity in UK HE. The aim of this research is to contextualise experiences of Black female students in UK HE undergraduate psychology from themes emerging from cultural narratives that reflect ways in which social and personal identity is constructed and managed in academic environments. The research adopts a feminist social constructionist approach to Black identity construction, and considers the intersection of ethnicity, gender, class and power dynamics.

The study will involve you:

1) Completing a short demographic questionnaire

2) Participating in a semi-structured interview about your university experience, your perceptions of engagement and belonging in an academic environment, and constructions of your personal and social identity. This will take about 1.5 hours and will be tape-recorded.

Please note:

- Participation is entirely voluntary.
- You have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- You have the right to ask for your data to be withdrawn as long as this is practical, and for personal information to be destroyed.
- You do not have to answer particular questions in the interview if you do not wish to.
- Your responses will be confidential. No individuals will be identifiable from any collated data, written report of the research, or any publications arising from it.
- All personal data will be securely stored on University premises.
- Please notify me of any concerns arising during or after the research.
- If you wish you can receive information on the results of the research.
- The researcher can be contacted after participation by email: (D.Husbands1@westminster.ac.uk) or by telephone (020 350 69029).

---*please separate*

CONSENT FORM

Title of Study:
Responding to Diversity: Constructions of identity, self-efficacy and development of a sense of belonging in Black female students' studying undergraduate psychology in UK higher education

Lead researcher: **Deborah Husbands**

I have read the information in the Participation Information Sheet, and I am willing to act as a participant in the above research study.

Name: _____

My ethnicity is (please circle):

Black British   Black African   Black Caribbean   Black Mixed/Other

Signature: _____Date: _____

This consent form will be stored separately from any data you provide so that your responses remain anonymous.

I have provided an appropriate explanation of the study to the participant.

Researcher Signature _____

Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

Responding to Diversity: Constructions of identity, self-efficacy and development of a sense of belonging in Black female students' studying undergraduate psychology in UK higher education

1. Age_____

2. Ethnicity (please circle):

Black British   Black African   Black Caribbean   Black Mixed/Other

3. Are you (please circle):   British student   EU Student

International (non-EU) Student

4. Were you educated at (please circle):

Public School   Private School   Other_____

5. What high school qualification do you hold? (please circle the relevant one)

A-Level   BTEC   Int. Baccalaureate   GNVQ

Other (please specify) _____

6. What Degree are you studying for?

_____

7. Was this University your first choice of University? (please circle)

YES   NO

8. Did you apply to the University during clearing? (please circle)

YES   NO

9. Did you attend induction activities? (please circle)

YES   NO

10. About how many hours in a typical seven-day week do you spend doing the following? (circle one)

10.1. Working for pay:

   None   1-5 hours   6-10 hours   11-15 hours   16-20 hours

   21-25 hours   over 25 hours

10.2. Participating in other University activities (e.g. sports, clubs, societies, faith groups)

   None   1-5 hours   6-10 hours   11-15 hours   16-20 hours

21-25 hours   over 25 hours

10.3. Participating in non-University activities (e.g. sports, clubs and societies, faith groups)

None   1-5 hours   6-10 hours   11-15 hours   16-20 hours

21-25 hours   over 25 hours

11. Do you live in (please circle)

University accommodation/halls   Parental home

Another family member's home   Privately rented

Other (please specify) _____

12. Which member(s) of your family, if any, have been to University:

Mother	YES	NO
Father	YES	NO
Sibling(s)	YES	NO

13. The National Readership Survey classifies the UK population using the following classification. Using this classification please indicate that which most closely represents your parent/guardian's occupation (please circle one capital letter between A & D):

A   Higher managerial, administrative or professional

B   Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional

C1   Supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional

C2   Skilled manual workers

D   Semi and unskilled manual workers

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE

Appendix F

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Schedule

(Phases 1 & 2)

1. University Experience:

Being a student

- Tell me about your experience of being a student at this university: Why did you come to this university? Is this your first university? If not, how does this university compare with your previous university experience?

- What is your view of your degree course?

- What level of degree are you aiming for? Why?

- What are your views about your progress here as a student?

Probe: What do you think about your current academic achievement on your modules?

 - Do you do paid work outside of university? If so, what kind of work do you do?

Probe: On average, how many hours do you work each week? How does this affect your studies?

2. Engagement and Belonging:

Students

- What do you think students at this university think of you?

- What do you think students at this university think of your ethnicity?

Probe: Why do you think this?

- Do you think students at this university take you seriously?

Probe: Do you think they treat you with respect? Do you feel accepted by other students? If yes, why? If no, why not?

- If you have friends at this university, what is their ethnicity?

Probe: Do you 'hang out' with students at this university? Does it matter whether they are of the same ethnicity or a different ethnicity to you?

Staff

- What is your view of academic staff in this department?

- What is your view of the department's personal tutoring arrangements?

- What do you think academic staff think of you?

- What do academic staff do that is helpful for you?

- What do academic staff do that is unhelpful for you?

- What would you like academic staff to do to support you so that you can be academically successful?

Curriculum

- How has studying psychology changed you?

- What do you think about teaching practices in psychology?

Probe: What do you think about groupwork, project work, seminars, presentations, lectures?

- Which teaching practices or aspects of the curriculum best suit you? Why?

- Which teaching practices or aspects of the curriculum are problematic for you? Why?

Sense of Belonging

- What does the term 'belonging' mean to you?

Probe: What does it mean to 'fit in'? What does 'engagement' mean to you?

- What does the university do that helps you feel as if you 'belong'?

- What does the university do that makes you feel as if you do not belong?

3. Personal, Cultural and Social Identity:

Identity

- What does 'identity' mean to you?

Probe: What does it mean in relation to your identity?

Ethnicity

- How do you describe your ethnicity?

Social Class

- How do you describe your socio-demographic class? What impact do you think this has on your university experience?

Culture

- How do you describe your cultural background?

- How has your cultural background influenced your decision to come to university?

Probe: What is your parental education background? Do you have siblings? How have they influenced you? How have your friends influenced you? Are there others who have influenced you?

- How has your cultural background/ethnicity impacted your experiences at university?

Probe: Tell me about your experience of being a Black female student at this university; tell me about your experience of being a Black female student in the psychology department.

Religion

- Do you have a religion? If so, what role does religion play in your university experience?

Aspirations

- What are your ambitions for the future?

Probe: What do you want to do when you have completed your psychology degree?

- What can academic staff do to help you achieve your ambitions?

4. Views about this research:

- What is your view about carrying out research into Black female student experiences?

Probe: Do you think we need to do more of this kind of research? If yes, why? If no, why not?

- Do you think that Black female students have different needs to other students?

- What are your views about being part of this interview?

5. Reflection (for final year students only)

- Looking back over your years of being an undergraduate student, how would you summarise your experience?

6. Is there anything else you wish to add?

Appendix G

Participant Debriefing Sheet

Responding to intersectionality and (in)equality: Undergraduate students' experiences of identity construction in higher education

Lead Researcher: **Deborah Husbands**

Director of Studies: **Carol Pearson**

You took part in this study by:

(i) completing a questionnaire about your demography

(ii) participating in an individual interview about your experiences of being a Black female undergraduate psychology student at a London-based university.

The purpose of the study is to learn more about ways in which Black female students construct their identity in higher education, and what they perceive as the challenges and benefits of studying psychology in higher education.

The data will be qualitatively analysed to identity themes that will feed into this PhD research. The findings will inform teaching practices in psychology, as well as policies about equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education. We will learn more about 'lived experiences' for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students, who are generally positioned at the lower end of the degree attainment gap. The attainment gap depicts ethnicity differences for students who are awarded a 'good' (2:1 or a first-class) degree.

There is already a large body of research in the US about Black student experiences. However, less is known about the experiences of Black female students in UK higher education, although there is a growing body of UK research about experiences of BME students in general, to which this research adds. This study takes a more specific approach, because it focuses solely on one aspect of student diversity.

Furthermore, the research will be used to challenge deficit perspectives about BME students. These perspectives have been used to explain lower retention, poorer progress and lower levels of award/attainment for these students. This includes the unhelpful suggestion that BME students are entering university with less confidence.

Thank you for contributing your views and experiences to help shape this research.

Appendix H

Participant Debriefing Sheet

Responding to intersectionality and (in)equality: Undergraduate students' experiences of identity construction in higher education

Lead Researcher: **Deborah Husbands**

Director of Studies: **Carol Pearson**

You took part in this study by:

(i) completing a questionnaire about your demography

(ii) completing a timeline activity, and

(iii) participating in a focus group interview about your experiences of being a Black female undergraduate psychology student at a London-based university.

During the focus group, you were asked to comment on the extent to which the experiences of other Black female undergraduate psychology students resonated with your current experience, based on researcher-devised themes from an earlier analysis of their cultural narratives.

The purpose of the study is to learn more about ways in which Black female students construct their identity in higher education, and what they perceive as the challenges and benefits of studying psychology in higher education.

The timeline you created and the focus group interview data will be qualitatively analysed to identity themes that will feed into this PhD research. The findings will inform teaching practices in psychology, as well as policies about equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education. We will learn more about 'lived experiences' for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students, who are generally positioned at the lower end of the degree attainment gap. The attainment gap depicts ethnicity differences for students who are awarded a 'good' (2:1 or a first-class) degree.

There is already a large body of research in the US about Black student experiences. However, less is known about the experiences of Black female students in UK higher education, although there is a growing body of UK research about experiences of BME students in general, to which this research adds. This study takes a more specific approach, because it focuses solely on one aspect of student diversity.

Furthermore, the research will be used to challenge deficit perspectives about BME students. These perspectives have been used to explain lower retention, poorer progress and lower levels of award/attainment for these students. This includes the unhelpful suggestion that BME students are entering university with less confidence.

Thank you for contributing your views and experiences to help shape this research.

Category	Category description	Themes (sub categories)	Sub-themes (where relevant)	Granchild codes
Unit 1: Identity Construction	Presentation of different 'selves' during undergad study	1A: Loner, quiet, reserved		
		1B: Vocational, resourceful practical self (1D)		
		1C: Spiritual self		
		1D: Self-assured, confident self		
		1E: Supporting others		
		1F: Being a role model		
		1G: Self-talk		
		1H: Independent self		
Unit 2: (Academic) self-efficacy	Persisting (with studies) despite (real or perceived) hurdles	2A: Planning/time management		
		2B: Self-belief		
		2C: Perserverance/persistence		
Unit 3: Pedagogy perceptions in undergraduate psychology	Teaching practices which are beneficial (or not) for student's academic development	3A: Beneficial practices	3A1: Reading student drafts	
			3A2: Feedback	
			3A3: Embracing cultural capital in the classroom	
			3A4: Lecture slides	
			3A5: Competent & passionate staff	
			3A6: Authoritative staff	
			3A7: Accessible, supportive staff	
			3A8: Clear guidelines & consistent practices	
			3A9: Seminars	
			3A10: Presentations	
			3A11: Staff ethnicity	3A11(i): BME
				3A11(ii): Non BME
		3B: Non-beneficial practices	3B1: Groupwork	

Unit	Description	Code	Subcode
		3B2: Academic language barrier	
		3B3: Inaccessible staff	
		3B4: Absent lecturers	
		3B5: Unenthusiastic staff	
Unit 4: Sense of belonging	Feeling connected (or not) to one's environment	4A: SoB	
		4B: Ambivalent SoB	
		4C: No SoB	
Unit 5: Maturity factors	Distinguishing features of nontraditional student	5A: Age	
		5B: Wife	
		5C: Mother	
Unit 6: Personal & cutural capital	Aspects vested in student's socio-cultural lifestyle & behaviours; influential in uni experience	6A: Culture	
		6B: Family/extended family	
		6C: Siblings	
		6D: Ethnicity & Nationality	
		6E: Friendships at university	
		6F: Friendships outside university	
		6G: Social Class	
		6I: Maternal influences	
Unit 7: University experiences	General perspective on uni experiences	7A: Positive	
		7B: Neutral	
		7C: Negative	
Unit 8: Future aspirations	Student's aspirations	8A: Degree level	8A1: First
			8A2: Second
		8B: Employment	
		8C: Further study	
Unit 9: Perceptions of	Views about the research topic/ethnicity of researcher	10A: Positive	
		10B: Neutral	

researcher(er)	10C: Negative			
Unit 10: Pre-university experiences	10A: Access Course			
Combining work & study				
Psychologising				
Psychologising about BFSs				

Nontraditional Black female students' identity constructions

Role model
- supporting others

Practical self
- time-management practices

Maturity effects
- mother
- wife

Efficacious self
- self-belief
- confident
- self-talk
- independent

Personal & social capital
- social class
- friendships
- ethnicity
- nationality
- culture
- siblings
- family
- university friendships

(Un)belonging self
- clustering
- the 'outsider-within'
- socially isolated

Future self
- graduate study
- degree attainment
- employment

Spiritual self

Phase 1: Traditional Black Female Students

Shifting Identity

Transitioning Self
- 1st year
  - positives
    - activities
    - fun
  - negatives
    - feeling 'lost'
    - gradual disengagement
    - continued disengagement
- 2nd year
  - 'bumpy'
- 3rd year
  - negativity

Spiritual Self
- prayer
- Christianity
- faith
- culture
- church
- anger
- conflict
  - agnosticism
- dissonance with lectures
  - awareness of other religions

Coasting Self
- untocused
- skipping lectures
- missing coursework deadlines

Connected Self
- belonging
  - Staff
    - knowledgeable
  - Peers
  - Friendships
    - clusters
    - school friends
- unbelonging
  - exclusion from cliques
  - same-ethnicity student clusters
  - limited social activities
  - paucity of black female students
  - student union societies
    - African / Caribbean society
    - dance society
- Belonging OUTSIDE university
  - cultural networks
  - Friendships
    - nationality
    - school friends

Self-efficacious Self
- self-talk
- resilience
- persistence
- prioritising
  - time-management
- personal working practices
  - responding proactively to deadlines
- creating spheres of influence
  - opinionated
  - engagement
    - classroom visibility

Appendix L

IPA Summary Table

Participant	Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes	Page:Line	Key words/phrase
Abigail	Student parent		24:583	I was pregnant at 15, like year 11
			27:670-672	when I first came here, I thought maybe it'd be a disadvantage, or it'd make things more like awkward for me but I think it's the opposite, but I just didn't realise until like this last few weeks
			30:762-755	no work can get done at home when he's there…if I didn't have him, then I'd be living on campus…it affects it a lot more than I thought it would
			31:785-788	I think another main thing is sleep deprivation…I can't remember the last time I…slept…all the way through the night
		Uncertainty	1:11-12 examples throughout	I thought, I don't know. I don't know. I think maybe…
		Stereotyping, judging others and the fear of being judged	5:120-121	If I open my mouth, they're just gonna be judging me or whatever
			30:739-741	All the Black people *cling* together and then they feel they need to…like live up to the stereotype even more to like, you know, cling on to that Black identity
			7:176-177	I literally just thought I'd be judged basically, especially cos I have a child as well
			8:178-181	I just thought, what are people gonna think? That's what made me keep myself to myself the most but getting to know people, I've realised it's the complete opposite
			40:1009-1010	I've seen so many girls like they have a kid and like, that's just it…they all just, they get their flat or whatever and just sit at home on benefits or whatever
		Role modelling	3:62-64	I just think I wanna show girls like that are in my situation that you can, you can actually achieve that
			3:66-67	I wanna show him (son) as well like, you can do anything if you put your mind to it

Appendix L

IPA Summary Table

Participant	Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes	Page:Line	Key words/phrase
		Onlyness	25:606-607	I wanna show them (brothers) that they can do whatever they want if they put their mind to it
			25:617-619	cos I'm the oldest so you have to be an example really. There is more pressure on you as well, if you're the oldest
			6:132-133	I like being one of only few Black girls at the uni because then it shows that I'm actually one of the smarter ones
		Unsocial Self	5:118-119	There's just a load of Muslims, Muslim girls so like I never talk to anyone
			17:423-425	Like they do social events and stuff…but I just don't really get involved in any of them
			17:428	I don't like social situations really
		Intersecting identity	19:466	A student or a mum. I'm shy at times and I'm weird. That's it.
		Stereotype threat	6:134-135	I don't fit into the stereotype that they might…the stereotype that I've mainly created in my head
	Capital	Class	21:513-515	only thing I don't like about being working class is the way that I talk because I think growing up in the area that I did, you just pick up bad habits naturally
		Language	21:515-516	it's only now that I'm realising it because people that I talk to, they are so well-spoken compared to me.
		Ethnicity/nationality	19:471-472	I'm proud of being Black and I'm so proud of being British as well
			20:481	I love everything about being Black
			20:486-488	I don't feel like I'm at a disadvantage for being Black. I just think that your work and your grades and everything will speak for itself.
		Family/parental influence	23:564-565	I think it's more to do with my parents, like why I came to university
			24:586-587	they have *such a massive* influence on like where you go with your education
			24:9593	just having encouraging parents, it makes all the difference

Appendix L

IPA Summary Table

Participant	Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes	Page:Line	Key words/phrase
		Role models	31:776-778	my parents are a massive help cos my Mum will drop him to nursery and pick him up…if I didn't have the parents that I have…then it would be a completely different story
			26:657-658	my aunty is my biggest role model I think and my mum obviously
			26:646-648	cos I've got these examples to aspire to, like those, like examples that are like, they're relatable to me because they're close to me
			26:649-655	I think everyone needs a role model that they know and that's close to them on a personal level…if you know someone that's achieved these things and they're living that life then it makes you see that you can do it as well, especially if…they've come from the same background that you came from
		Role modelling	8:182-185	When I mention I have a child, they'll talk to me more and ask me questions like. They're so interested like, intrigued as well and…I don't wanna get like too big headed or whatever but like some people see it like as inspiration sort of thing
			40:1003-1005	Black girls and Black guys they don't have role models to look up and even if they do they just seem way off the scale
		Religion	23:577 28:696	my parents are Christians…I've been brought up in a Christian household
			23:569	my Grandad was a missionary
		Giving back: community work	39:1000-1001	we're trying to set up like a mentoring scheme
	Tertiary education	A-Levels	2:43-44	A-Levels, you get spoon-fed and at university it's the complete opposite
			3:54-56	it only sinks in when I do, when I like research it and like read it for myself. In A-Levels, you don't have to do that

Appendix L

IPA Summary Table

Participant	Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes	Page:Line	Key words/phrase
		BFSs are forgotten	39:988-991	I think in schools there's a lot more things for Black boys like, because they, they're like typically, oh yeah, Black boys underachieve, whatever, so there's more things for them but, so Black girls are quite often forgotten
	Uni environment	London effect	2:27	I've always wanted to stay in London
			29:712-713	I feel like everyone's equal here
	Independent Self		3:52	I like working by myself
			3:56-58	I feel like I'm learning more now and it's my responsibility as well…you're basically in charge of your own success now
		Coping	33:816-817	you just *have* to manage otherwise what you gonna do?
	Transitioning Self	1st year	2:48-49	the first year's good cos you can learn about how you need to work in order to get the best results for the second and third year
			4:81	I think my first semester I was way too relaxed
			4:83	I actually need to start doing work and not leaving it till the last minute
	Coasting Self	Procrastinating	4:109	I didn't do any revision until the day before
			36:906	I've always been like a coaster. I don't wanna be that…
	Efficacious Self	Resilience	8:187	…I'm still like coming to uni and stuff even though I do have a child
			31:771-772	it might make studying and stuff harder (child) but I've got that motivation that means that failure's not an option anymore
		Preparedness	5:104-105	I don't like feeling like that, like unprepared
		Time-management/being organised	4:87-88	one thing that I've got from this uni is like being more organised cos I'm really, *really* unorganised
			30:759	I just have to manage my time differently
	Spiritual Self	Religious practices	34:842	we (friend) go to the same church now
			34:845-847	I haven't really been like an active Christian, you know, like praying and reading my bible and stuff like that since…before I had my son

Appendix L

IPA Summary Table

Participant	Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes	Page:Line	Key words/phrase
			34:854-857	there's…certain things that I've heard in church that was, like really bad advice when it comes to studying. "Oh, just put it, put it in God's hands. Just pray". *No.* Study. Revise, like. It's not…like a magic wand, you know
		Non-belief helps	28:698-699	it's easier for me (university) because I don't really believe in that stuff (religion) anymore
			33:827	I don't really believe in God anymore, but then that could just be a phase
			33:838-840	for you to be a Christian and sit in some of them lectures, you'd just be angry half the time, like what?! What are they teaching?
			34:840-851	now that I *think* that I don't believe in God, it's just made it, made things easier for me to be in lectures really, and learn about certain things
	Student diversity	Peers as 'teachers and learners'	27:666-669	it's like you're actually teaching them something…at the same time, it's like I'm learning, learning things from them as well
			28:685-687	It's learning more about other people as well. I think before I came, I used to really like stereotype Muslim girls with hijab and stuff
		Few Black students	5:118	there's hardly any Black people
			7:175-176	I came, and I was just like whoa! Like there's *no Black* people
	Staff perceptions		9:225-226	all my lecturers and seminar leaders and that have been fine and helpful
		Personal tutoring	10:229	I've met my tutor once, so that's it
		Invisibility	10:237	I'm just a student number to them
		Teaching styles	16:389	some lecturers' way of teaching suits me more than others
			16:393-394	I think as well when you're passionate about your subject, it shows in your lecture
	Pedagogy	Lectures	14:329-333	I don't really like going to lectures…there's some lectures that I would *never* go to…I would literally be looking at the wall…I just zone out

Appendix L

IPA Summary Table

Participant	Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes	Page:Line	Key words/phrase
		Seminars	15:355-356	the lectures are *so* hard to follow, it's just like another language to me
			14:14:337	the seminars never match up to the lectures
			14:338-340	I like it when the seminars just, are just basically like the lectures but like more in-depth or like you can ask questions of things that you didn't understand the lecture
			17:939-940	you'd just like have a more intimate thing so you can actually ask questions and then you can make links that way as well
		Presentations	13:313-314	presentations especially like I hate, I *hate* talking in front of people
			13:322-324	I like the fact that we're forced to do presentations because otherwise I would get to the age of whatever and never be able to talk in front of people
		Feedback	4:96-98	I'm using the feedback that I've got cos I know that that's all I need to do is...what I'm being told, and you'll get the grade you really want
		Skills training	10:239	give us feedback, tell us how to write essays
			11:267-268	more things about essay writing and how to write reports and stuff, but is that even allowed or is that cheating?
		Using examples	11:271-272	when you're given examples as well of like good essays and good reports
		Formative assessments	11:255-262	maybe do more like little tests...if you do bad it can kinda shock you into thinking...let me go home and read about it
	Friendships	Secondary school	6:140-141	...at sixth form, the friends that I had there *never did work*
			9:207-211	in secondary school, I've always had friends from different races and stuff...it's only like the Black girls that I've really like kept in contact with
		At uni	6:139-140	the few girls that I do talk to, they're a good influence on me...when I'm with them, I'll actually be doing the work
			8:190-191	I literally talk to about three people
			8:192-193	I don't talk to any of the Black girls
		Outside uni	36:912-913	They're your friends but they're not going anywhere

Appendix L

IPA Summary Table

Participant	Super-ordinate themes	Sub-ordinate themes	Page:Line	Key words/phrase
	Belonging	With other students	18:449-450	there was a big group of us so I wasn't by myself
		Taking responsibility for SoB	19:456-458	if I don't feel that I belong then that's my own fault really cos that's my own actions that have made me feel like that cos everything's there in place cos that's the last thing that the university would want
		Group work	13:320-322	cos I just clicked with the girls in my group like…I think it was just 100 times better cos I felt comfortable up there
		Feeling accepted	7:174	More than I thought I would when I first came
		With family	17:417	My family
	Help-seeking	Staff	10:246-249	I haven't ever asked for help…I just feel awkward going to a lecturer
		Peers	10:246-247	if I have needed help, I've just asked another student
		Careers support	37:932-934	I think there should be more like career, you know like you have career days or whatever, but when do they happen? Like once, once a year, something like that
		Internet	38:954-956	I know what I wanna do but I just, you just don't know where to start really. You just need that advice. Careers advice.
	Future aspirations	Academic	37:942-943	I'm just googling things, getting things from Google
		Career	3:62	I wanna be a clinical psychologist
			35:869-870	I just want to have a job yeah, that will allow me and my son to be comfortable like, not have to worry about financial things
			35:887-891	I wanted to get my Masters and my PhD to become a clinical psychologist but then at the same time I'm thinking, why am I gonna spend all that time in uni to get a job that has a cap on it when you can set up your own business and the amount of money you make is unlimited?
	Self-talk	For child	35:874	I wanna be able to send him private school
		Advising a future Self/cautioning a previous Self	throughout	You, you and you: third person reporting and self-talk

PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES

APPRECIATES
- (PRACTICAL) ENGAGING LECTURES
- ENERGETIC TEACHER
- LESS SLIDES
- CONSTRUCTIVE F/BACK
- INTERACTIVE LEARNING
- PRESENTATIONS
- SMALLER CONTACT/CLASSES

DISLIKES
- REFLECTION
- IMPERSONAL EMAIL
- COURSEWORK
- GROWTH - TAKING THE LEAD
- MANAGING ISSUES

HANNAH P9

SOCIAL SELF: UNI AS SOCIAL SPACE - PREFERRED

SOB +ve
- WITH PAST FRIENDS
- CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Reduced by:
- -ve comparisons by ...
- CLEARING
- COMMUTING
- INDUCTION
- UNI NOT 1ST CHOICE
- PROBLEM IS STUDYING-UP

STEREOTYPE THREAT PROMOTING
- SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES
- DEFICIT PERSPECTIVES

STAFF PERCEPTIONS
- NEGATIVE
- DISTANCING STAFF
- STEREOTYPE THREAT
- +ve: SUPPORTIVE

FRIENDSHIPS
- SAME ETHNICITY
- AT UNI
- SUPPORTIVE
- SHARED CHARACTERISTICS

THE ACADEMIC CEILING
- DISSERTATION DEFINES ACADEMIC SELF

FUTURE SELF
- NO PLACE FOR ...
- LIMITED BY STAFF PERCEPTIONS
- LTD BY ENRICHMENT

SELF TALK

RESPONDING TO MICRO-AGGRESSION
- EXPERIENCES OF RACISM

ROLE MODELS
- SAME ETHNICITY
- MOTHER
- TEACHER
- VALUES

MATERNAL EFFECT
- FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

CULTURAL TRADITIONS
- CLASH @ UNI
- CLASH @ SCHOOL
- CLASH @ WORK

HIGH ACHIEVING BFS

SOLITARY SELF
- SENSE OF ONLYNESS
- BECOMING AWARE OF ETHNICITY

Call For Participants

Black female student experiences in higher education

3 hour(s) to complete

Sincere Gratitude and research participation credit (where applicable)

Focus group interview and short activity

115 New Cavendish St, Fitzrovia, London W1W, UK

University of Westminster

Black female students taking undergraduate psychology at a university in the London area will complete a short demographic questionnaire, create a timeline of their experience and be part of a focus group discussing researcher-defined themes for the experiences of other Black female students, as well as discussing their current experience. Duration: 3 hours

Find out more online

Poster printed on 19/03/2017   Study expires on 12/04/2017

More info
by scanning the QR code
or visiting the URL

www.cfp.cc/5KYVQ3

cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3   cfp.cc/5KYVQ3

UNIVERSITY OF
LEADING
THE WAY
WESTMINSTER▦

Research into the experiences of Black female students in higher education

Participants are required to tell us what it's really like at university!!!

Description

You will:

1. Complete a short demographic questionnaire
2. Create a timeline of your experiences
3. Participate in a small focus group to discuss your experiences of studying psychology at university

Requirements

1. You must self-identify as a Black female undergraduate psychology student
2. You must be available on **Wednesday 12th April OR Thursday 13th April 2017 from 2-5pm**
3. You should ideally be in the second or third year of study
4. If you are entitled to credits for participation in research, this can be arranged with your institution

For more information/participation, contact:

Deborah Husbands
E: husband@westminster.ac.uk
T: 020 3506 9029

Last date for contact: Monday 10th April 2017

Appendix Q

Participant Information Sheet

Responding to intersectionality and (in)equality: Undergraduate students' experiences of identity construction in higher education

Lead Researcher: **Deborah Husbands**

Director of Studies: **Carol Pearson**

You are invited to participate in a focus group interview about your experiences of being a student at university. Developing research in the US and UK suggests that there are areas of concern for the achievement and integration of Black and Minority Ethnic students, and for Black male students in particular in higher education (HE). However, there is less emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of Black female students as a specific context of student diversity in UK HE. The aim of this research is to contextualise experiences of Black female undergraduate psychology students using themes emerging from cultural narratives of experience that reflect ways in which personal and social identity is being constructed and managed in academic environments. The research adopts a feminist social constructionist approach to Black female identity construction, and considers the intersection of ethnicity, gender and the power dynamics of higher education. **The study is approved by the University of Westminster Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 12/13/21A_Psych).**

The study will involve you:

1) Completing a short demographic questionnaire

2) Creating a timeline of your experiences

3) Participating in a focus group interview about your university experience, your perceptions of engagement and belonging in an academic environment, and constructions of your identity. In total, this will take about 3 hours and the focus group interview will be recorded.

Due to the nature of the research, extracts from responses will be used in a report of the research, which may be submitted for publication in an academic journal or presentation at professional conferences. Please be assured that no identifying information will be collected, and so nobody will be personally identifiable in any of these research outputs.

Please note:

- Participation is entirely voluntary.
- You have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- You have the right to ask for your data to be withdrawn as long as this is practical, and for personal information to be destroyed.
- You do not have to answer particular questions in the interview if you do not wish to.
- Your responses will be confidential. No individuals will be identifiable from any collated data, written report of the research, or any publications arising from it.
- All personal data will be securely stored on University premises.

- Please notify me of any concerns arising during or after the research.
- If you wish, you can receive information on the results of the research.
- The researcher can be contacted after participation by email: (husband@westminster.ac.uk) or by telephone (020 350 69029).

--*please separate*

CONSENT FORM

Title of Study:
Responding to intersectionality and (in)equality: Undergraduate students' experiences of identity construction in higher education

Lead researcher: **Deborah Husbands**

I have read the information in the Participation Information Sheet, and I am willing to act as a participant in the above research study.

Name: _____

My ethnicity is (please state):

_____

Signature: _____Date: _____

This consent form will be stored separately from any data you provide so that your responses remain anonymous.

I have provided an appropriate explanation of the study to the participant.

Researcher Signature _____

Appendix R

Demographic Questionnaire

Responding to intersectionality and (in)equality: Undergraduate students' experiences of identity construction in higher educationion

1. Age (in numerals)_____   **2.** Gender (please state)_____

3. Ethnicity (please state): _____

4. Do you have a disability? (please circle)   YES   NO

5. Are you a (please circle)   Home student   EU Student   International (non-EU) Student

6. Were you educated at (please circle)

     State School   Private School   Other (please specify) - _____

7. What is the highest secondary school or further education qualification you hold? (please circle)

     A-Level   BTEC   Int. Baccalaureate   GNVQ

     Other (please specify) _____

8. What degree are you studying for? _____

9. Is your current university your first choice (please circle)   YES   NO

10. Did you apply to university during clearing? (please circle)   YES   NO

11. Did you attend induction activities? (please circle)   YES   NO

12. About how many hours in a typical seven-day week do you spend doing the following?

Circle one answer for each of the questions numbered 12.1 – 12.3.

12.1. Working for pay

None   1-5 hours   6-10 hours   11-15 hours   16-20 hours   21-25 hours

over 25 hours

12.2. Participating in university activities (e.g. sports, clubs, societies, faith groups)

None   1-5 hours   6-10 hours   11-15 hours   16-20 hours   21-25 hours

over 25 hours

12.3. Participating in non-university activities (e.g. sports, clubs and societies, faith groups)

None   1-5 hours   6-10 hours   11-15 hours   16-20 hours   21-25 hours

over 25 hours

13. Do you live in (please circle)

University accommodation/halls   Parental home   A family member's home

Privately rented   Other (please specify) _____

14. Which member(s) of your family, if any, has been to university?

Mother   YES   NO

Father   YES   NO

Sibling(s)   YES   NO

15. Do you have caring responsibilities; for example, for a child, a parent, or other family member?

YES   NO

16. The National Readership Survey classifies the UK population using the following classification. Using this classification please indicate that which most closely represents your parent/guardian's occupation (please circle one capital letter between A & D):

A   Higher managerial, administrative or professional

B   Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional

C1   Supervisory, clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional

C2   Skilled manual workers

D   Semi and unskilled manual workers

17. Please state your religion, if you have one_____

THANK YOU

Appendix S

Focus Group Protocol & Schedule

Responding to intersectionality and (in)equality: Undergraduate students' experiences of identity construction in higher education

Thank you for completing the questionnaire and the timeline activity, and for agreeing to take part in this focus group interview. Just before we start, I'd like to make a few things clear about what I'm doing. I've invited you to be interviewed about your experiences of being an undergraduate student. This interview is part of doctoral research at the University of Westminster. During the first part of the interview, you'll be asked about your experiences of studying at university, your experiences of fitting in at university, your identity and cultural background, and your views about teaching practices in psychology. For Part 2, I'll show a brief PowerPoint presentation and ask you to comment on my findings from previous research carried out with Black female students. I might take a few notes during the interview in case there's anything I need to come back to. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. If you wish, I can provide you with a copy of the transcript.

Your name will not be used in the transcript, nor will any other names - they will be replaced with a 'fictional' name. Your name will also not be used in any research output so you will not be identified through this.

You can withdraw from the research at any time. If you say I don't want to do this anymore, that's fine. However, as this is a focus group interview, your data cannot be excluded from the group discussion afterwards; but you can ask for something to be retracted at the time you've said it if you're uncomfortable with anything you say during the interview.

I hope you'll find the interview interesting. It should not take more than a couple of hours. I'll make time at the end to answer questions. Are there any questions for me now before we begin?

I'd like to set some ground rules for the focus group:

1. Please turn off your mobile phone

2. Allow each person to speak without butting in

3. Respect the confidentiality of things people say in this group and undertake not to repeat them outside this setting

4. Keep your responses to the point so that everyone has a fair chance to speak

5. Don't be intimidated by anyone else. Try to be involved in the discussion.

Now, we'll begin and I'm starting the recording.

Part 1

1. Tell me about your experience of studying undergraduate psychology at your university.

> Probes:
> What are the benefits or positive aspects for you?
> What are the challenges or barriers for you?

2. Do you think you fit in at your university? If yes, why? If no, why not?

3. What do you think about your identity as a Black female student in your university?
> Probe: Are there any cultural issues relating to your ethnicity?

4. What do you think about teaching practices at your university?

5. What are your plans for when you graduate?

6. Based on your overall experience, what advice would you give to a Black female student about to begin studying undergraduate psychology in higher education?

Part 2

1. What is your immediate impression of the themes constructed from Black female student narratives?

> Probes: How similar/dissimilar are those themes to your university experience?
> Which themes that are most similar? Why?
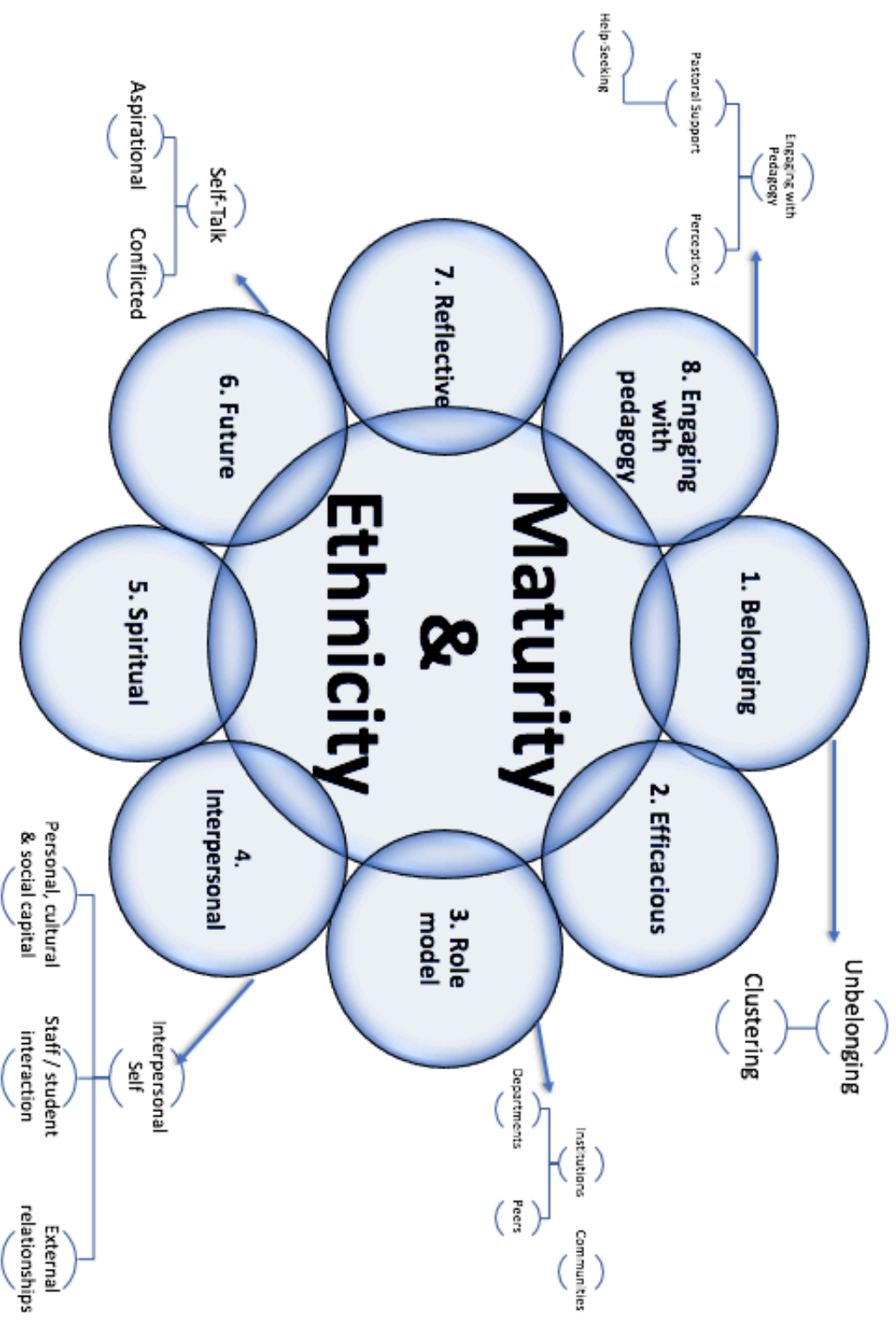> Which themes that are most dissimilar? Why?

2. Are there any final comments you'd like to make about what you've seen and discussed?

Thank you for participating in the research.

Phase 1: Nontraditional Black female students

Phase 2: 'Shifting' Selves – traditional BFSs

Transitioning Self

(Un)belonging Self

Coping Self

Efficacious Self

Aspirational Self

Positive

#	positive	WHO
1	positive	
2	responsive university	T
3	constructive feedback	T
4	manageable timetable	T
5	good degree content	T
6	helpful staff	T
7	available staff	T
8	good staff/student interactions	T
9	accountable staff	T
10	relevant modules in 2nd yr	T
11	developing self-belief	NT
12	mixed friendship groups	NT
13	creating a sphere of influence	NT
14	confident Black woman narrative	NT
15	desire to be a role-model	NT
16	developing cultural awareness	NT
17	Nigerian identity	T
18	friendship groups enhance SoB	ALL
19	mixed ethnicity friendships	ALL
20	SoB creates a safe space to explore uni	T
21	uni as 1st choice better for SoB	T
22	SoB in school	T
23	resilient attitude	T
24	consistent teaching practices	T
25	using the student voice to effect change	NT
26	preference for online learning	T
27	connected teaching practice	T
28	focused teaching in seminars	T
29	valuing a clear teaching structure	T
30	aspirations	ALL
31	1st year enjoyable	T
32	seeking mentoring	T
33	strategic plans for a future career	T
34	entrepreneurship/business	ALL
35	giving back to cultural community	ALL
36	further academic studies	ALL
37	advice to former self	ALL
38	work placement year	T
39	3rd year: better friendship	T
40	1st year: limited relationships with staff	T
41	1st year: not diverse	NT
42	1st year: shallow friendships	T
43	2nd year: friendlier students	T
44	multi-ethnicity friends increase SoB	T
45	multi-ethnicity friends buffer need to conform	T
46	personality governs mixed-ethnicity friends	T
47	cultural resilience	T
48	interactive lectures	NT

Negative

#	negative	WHO
1	negative	
2	research methods challenging	ALL
3	onlyness for ethnicity	T
4	psychology as female-dominated discipline	T
5	pressure to conform by cultural downplaying	T
6	enforced isolation	T
7	limited friendship support	T
8	not accessing academic support	T
9	weakly independent	T
10	help-seeking constructed as annoying staff	ALL
11	parents against psychology study	ALL
12	students clique by ethnicity	T
13	aloneness	ALL
14	limited Black role models	NT
15	mixed-ethnicity dilemma	T
16	over-compensating Blackness	T
17	managing intersections	T
18	high-achieving Black female	T
19	colourism	ALL
20	solitary self	ALL
21	negotiating grouping behaviours	T
22	ingroups/outgroups	T
23	ACS as hopeful place for SoB	T
24	unbelonging	T
25	mental health affected by unbelonging	T
26	1st year, 1st semester: aloneness	T
27	seminars not recorded	T
28	seminar leaders as PhD students	T
29	timeliness for receipt of teaching material	T
30	student-as-consumer	T
31	poor timetabling	NT
32	poor attendance at seminars	NT
33	group work	ALL
34	negative perceptions about GTS/visiting lecturers	T
35	psychology as subject/career devalued	NT
36	3rd year: less supported	T
37	feedback difficult to access	T
38	1st year: overwhelming	NT
39	2nd year: growing familiarity	NT
40	seminar leaders unavailable	T
41	inaccessible staff	NT
42	feedback not timely	T
43	3rd year: competitive students/ shallow friends	T
44	employability preparation poor	T
45	placement year affects SoB	T
46	academically judged by other students	T
47	Black people stereotypes: angry Black woman	T
48	poor SoB	T

Neutral

#	neutral	WHO
1	neutral	
2	seeking permission for a diverse curriculum	T
3	seeking independence	NT
4	being colour-blind	NT
5	maturity influences outlook	NT
6	maternal influence	ALL
7	cultural selectivity	ALL
8	social class defined by educational capital	ALL
9	solitary self	ALL
10	Black heterogeneity	T

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
49	placement year		T		psychology & staff are Eurocentric: difficult power relations		ALL				
50	leveraging cultural capital during placement year		T		psychology perpetuates deficit perspectives		T				
51	enthused to do ethnicity research by placement year		T		structural racism		ALL				
52	2nd yr more independent		T		hidden agenda to suppress critical thinking		T				
53					subjective feedback		T				
54					subjective marking		T				
55					inconsistent teaching practices		ALL				
56					not 'rocking the boat'		T				
57					fear of jeopardizing degree by questioning teaching practices		T				
58					antagonistic teaching style		T				
59					staff permit racism in the classroom		T				
60					wanting to be invisible/feeling powerless		T				
61					Black students not taken seriously		T				
62					limited BME senior management		T				
63					benefitting from BME role models		T				

Glossary

ACS - African Caribbean Society

BAME - Black Asian and Minority Ethnic

BME - Black and Minority Ethnic

CRIAW - Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women

CRT - Critical Race Theory

ECU - Equality Challenge Unit

FE - Further Education

GNVQs - General National Vocational Qualifications

HE - Higher Education

HEA - Higher Education Academy

HEFCE - Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEIs - Higher education institutions

HEPI - Higher Education Policy Institute

HESA - Higher Education Statistics Agency

IPA - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

LEA - Local Education Authority

NRS - National Readership Survey

NSS - National Student Survey

NUS - National Union of Students

OFFA - Office for Fair Access

OfS - Office for Students

ONS - Office for National Statistics

POLAR - Participation of Local Areas

QAA - Quality Assurance Agency

QCA - Qualitative Content Analysis

RECM - Race Equality Charter Mark

REF - Research Excellence Framework

RG - Russell Group

SES - Socio-economic status

SMF - Social Market Foundation

STEMM - Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine

SU - Student Union

UCAS - Universities and Colleges Admission Service

UCU - University and College Union

UUK - Universities UK

WP - Widening Participation

References

Aamodt, P. O. (2010). The quality of higher education and employability of graduates. *Quality in Higher Education, 16(3)*, 297-313. doi: 10.1080/13538322.2010.506726

Abel, T., & Frohlich, K. L. (2011). Capitals and capabilities: Linking structure and agency to reduce health inequalities. *Social Science & Medicine, 74*(2), 236-244. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.10.028

Abes, E. S. & Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2007). Reconceptualizing the model of multiple dimensions of identity: The role of meaning-making capacity in the construction of multiple identities. *Journal of College Student Development 48*(1), 1-22. Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved May 27, 2019, from Project MUSE database.

Abuhamdeh, S., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2012). Attentional involvement and intrinsic motivation. *Motivation and Emotion*, *36*(3)*, 257-267

Advance HE. (2018a). *Equality and Higher Education: Students Statistical Report 2018.* Retrieved from https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018_HE-stats-report-students.pdf

Advance HE. (2018b). *Equality and Higher Education: Staff Statistical Report 2018.* Retrieved from https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018_HE-stats-report-staff.pdf

Aerts, S., Van Houtte, M., Dewaele, A., Cox, N., & Vincke, J. (2012). Sense of belonging in secondary schools: A survey of LGB and heterosexual students in Flanders. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *59*(1), 90-113. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2012.638548

Aggarwal, P., & O'Brien, C. L. (2008). Social loafing on group projects. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *30,* 225-264.

Agyemang, C., Bhopal, R., & Bruijnzeels, M. (2005). Negro, Black, Black African, African Caribbean, African American or what? Labelling African origin populations in the health arena in the 21st century. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 59*(12). Retrieved from http://jech.bmj.com/content/59/12/1014

Ahmed, S. (2014). White Men. Retrieved from https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/11/04/white-men/

Ailshire, J. A., & House, J. S. (2011). The unequal burden of weight gain: An intersectional approach to understanding social disparities in BMI trajectories from 1986 to 2001/2002. *Social Forces*, *90*(2)*,* 397-423.

Aizer, A., & Currie, J. (2014, May). The intergenerational transmission of inequality: Maternal disadvantage and health at birth. *Science,* 856-861.

Aleven, V., Stahl, E., Schworm, S., Fischer, F., & Wallace, R. (2003). Help seeking and help design in interactive learning environments. *Review of Educational Research, 73*(3), 277-320. doi: 10.3102/00346543073003277

Alkebulan, A. (2013). The spiritual and philosophical foundation for African languages. *Journal of Black Studies, 44*(1), 50-62. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414703

Allen, B. J., & Garg, K. (2016). Diversity matters in academic radiology: Acknowledging and addressing unconscious bias. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*, *13*(12), 1426–1432. doi: 10.1016/j.jacr.2016.08.016

Allen, W. R. (1992). The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review*, *62*(1), 26-43.

Allen, W. R., Epps, E. G., & Hanif, N. Z. (Eds.). (1991). *College in Black and White: African American students in predominantly White and in Historically Black Public Universities*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Al-Mateen, C. S. (2017). Unconscious bias, microaggressions, and health. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 56*(10), 76.

Alon, S. (2007). The influence of financial aid in leveling group differences in graduating from elite institutions. *Economics of Education Review*. doi: 10.1016/j.econedurev.2006.01.003

Alterio, M., & McDrury, J. (2003). *Learning through storytelling in Higher Education: Using reflection and experience to improve learning.* London: Routledge.

American Psychological Association. (2009). *2010: Race/Ethnicity of Doctorate Recipients in Psychology in the Past 10 Years.* Retrieved from www.apa.org/workforce/publications/10-race/index.aspx

An, B. P. (2009). The relations between race, family characteristics, and where students apply to college. *Social Science Research, 39*, 310-323. Retrieved from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X09000854

Ancis, J. R., Sedlacek, W. E., & Mohr, J. J. (2000). Student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. *Journal of Counselling & Development*, *78*(2), 180-185.

Anderman, L. H. (2003). Academic and social perceptions as predictors of change in middle school students' sense of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *72*(1), 5-22.

Anderman, E. M. (2002). School effects on psychological outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *94*(4), 795-809. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.94.4.795

Ansell, A. E. (2013). *Race and ethnicity: The key concepts.* Oxon: Routledge.

Apfelbaum, E. P., Grunberg, R., Halevy, N., & Kang, S. (2017). From ignorance to intolerance: Perceived intentionality of racial discrimination shapes preferences for colorblindness versus multiculturalism. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 69*. doi: 86-101.10.1016/j.jesp.2016.08.002

Ardovini, J. (2015). Consciousness-raising: A tool for feminist praxis in research and granting voice. *Theory in Action, 8*(1), 51-59. doi: 10.3798/tia.1937-0237.15003

Atewologun, D., Cornish, T., & Tresh, F. (2018). *Unconscious Bias Training: An Assessment of the Evidence for Effectiveness*. London: Equality and Human Rights Commission. Retrieved from: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-113-unconcious-bais-training-an-assessment-of-the-evidence-for-effectiveness-pdf.pdf

Atherton, G., & Mazhari, T. (2018). *Preparing for hyper-diversity: London's student population in 2030.* An AccessHE Report. Retrieved from https://www.accesshe.ac.uk/yYdIx0u7/P.pdf

Augoustinos, M. (2009). Racism(s): One or many. *International Journal of Psychology, 1*, 43-45.

Augoustinos, M., & Reynolds, K. (Eds.). (2001). *Understanding prejudice, racism and social conflict.* London, UK: Sage.

Baker, S. E., & Edwards, R. (2012). How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research. *National Centre for Research Methods.* Retrieved from http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf

Bakhurst, D., & Sypnowich, C. (Eds.). (1995). *The social self.* London: Sage Publications.

Ball, S. J., Reay, D., & David, M. (2002). 'Ethnic choosing': Minority ethnic students, social class and higher education choice. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *5*(4), 333-357.

Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 2,* 21-41.

Bandura, A. (1989). Social cognitive theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Annals of Child Development: Six Theories of Child Development*, *6* (pp. 1-60). doi: 10.1037/001403

Bandura, A., & National Inst of Mental Health. (1986). Prentice-Hall series in social learning theory. Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, US: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Bandura, A. (1982). Self efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist*, *37(2)*, 122-147.

Bandura, A. & Edwin, A. L. (2003). Negative self-efficacy and goal effects revisited. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(1), 87-99.

Bandura, A., Pastorelli, C., Barbaranelli, C., & Caprara, G. V. (1999). Self-efficacy pathways to childhood depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*(2), 258-269.

Barker, C. (2000). *Cultural studies: Theory and practice.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Barone, T. (2017). "Sleep is on the back burner": Working students and sleep. *The Social Science Journal, 54,* 159-67.

Barr, R. B., & Tagg, J. (1999). From teaching to learning - A new paradigm for undergraduate education. *Change,* 13-25.

Bates, E. A., & Kaye, L. K. (2014). "I'd be expecting caviar in lectures'': The impact of the new fee regime on undergraduate students' expectations of higher education. *Higher Education*, *67*(5), 655–673. doi: 10.1007/s10734-013-9671-3

Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K.D. (Eds.). (2007). *Encyclopaedia of social psychology.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-529. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Bayne, M. L. (2012). Contributions of emotional intelligence, mentoring and self-efficacy to academic success and addictions treatment. UC Santa Cruz. ProQuest ID: Bayne_ucsc_0036E_10050. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5jw8fjw. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4307r62t

Beauboeuf-Lafontant, T. (2003). Strong and large Black women? Exploring relationships between deviant womanhood and weight. *Gender & Society, 17*(1), 111-121.

Beech, J. G. (2001) The marketing of slavery heritage in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration, 2*(3-4), 85-106. doi: 10.1300/J149v02n03_04

Beetham, G., & Demetriades, J. (2007). Feminist research methodologies and development: Overview and practical application. *Gender & Development*, *15*(2), 199-216.

Bekhet, A. K., & Zauszniewski, J. A. (2011). Methodological triangulation: An approach to understanding data. *Nurse Researcher*, *20*(2), 40-43.

Bellack, J. P. (2015). Unconscious bias: An obstacle to cultural competence. *Journal of Nursing Education, 54*(9), 63-64. doi: 10.3928/01484834-20150814-12

Bennett, I. (2017). *The path to higher education: Is there a London effect?* HE/FE and Skills Policy Analysis. Retrieved from https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/path-higher-education-london-effect/

Berlach, R. G., & Chambers, D. J. (2011). Interpreting inclusivity: An endeavour of great proportions. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 15*(5), 529-539. doi: 10.1080/13603110903159300

Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). A qualitative study of marginalised social work students' views of social work education and learning. *British Journal of Social Work, 44*(7), 1934-1949. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bct055

Bernarda, P., & Munoz, S. (2005). Educational opportunities and academic performance: A case study of university student mothers in Venezuela. *The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, *50*(2), 299-322.

Berry, J. & Loke, G. (2011). *Improving the Degree Attainment of Black Minority Ethnic Students.* Higher Education Academy, Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/improving-degree-attainment-black-and-minority-ethnic-students

Bhattacharyya, G., Ison, L., & Blair, M. (2003). *Minority Ethnic Attainment and Participation in Education and Training: The Evidence.* University of Birmingham and Department for Education and Skills. Nottingham: DfES Publications, 2003.

Bhavnani, K., & Phoenix, A. (Eds.). (1994). *Shifting identities shifting racisms.* London: Sage.

Bhopal, K., Brown, H., & Jackson, J. (2015). *Academic Flight: How to Encourage Black and Minority Ethnic Academics to Stay in UK Higher Education.* Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from *https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/academic-flight/*

Bhopal, K., & Jackson, J. (2013). *The Experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic Academics: Multiple Identities and Career Progression.* Retrieved from blackbritishacademics.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Research-Report-The-Experiences-of-Black-and-Minority-Ethnic-Academics-Dr-Bhopal.pdf

Bhopal, K., & Myers, M. (2009). Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in schools in the UK: Inclusion and 'good practice'. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 13*(3), 299-314. doi: 10.1080/13603110701748403

Bibbings, L. S. (2006). Widening participation and higher education. *Journal of Law and Society, 33*(1), 74-91. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6478.2006.00348.x

Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (2nd ed.). Berkshire: Open University Press.

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2007). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (3rd ed.). Berkshire: Open University Press.

Billig, M., & Tajfel, H. (1973). Social categorization and similarity in intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 3*(1), 27-52. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.2420030103

Black Male Education Research Collection. BMERC.org from the University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from https://diversity.utexas.edu/black-male-education-research/

Blair, C., & Raver, C. C. (2015). School readiness and self-regulation: A developmental physiobiological approach. *Annual Review of Psychology, 66*(1), 711-731

Blandford, E., Brill, C., Neave, S., & Allison, A. R. (2011). *Equality in Higher Education Statistical Report 2011. Part 2: Students.* Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-higher-education-statistical-report-2013/

Blickenstaff, J. C. (2005). Women and science careers: Leaky pipeline or gender filter. *Gender and Education*, *17*(4), 369-386.

Boblin, S. L., Ireland, S., Kirkpatrick, H., & Robertson, K. (2013). Using Stake's qualitative case study approach to explore implementation of evidence-based practice. *Qualitative Health Research, 23*(9)*,* 1267-1275.

Boddy, C. R. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, 19*(4), 426-432.

Bodenhorn, H., & Ruebeck, C. S. (2007). Colourism and African-American wealth: Evidence from the ninetieth century South. *Journal of Population Economics*, *20*, 599-620.

Bodovski, K., Jeon, H., & Byun, S. (2016). Cultural capital and academic achievement in post-socialist Eastern Europe. *British Journal of Sociology in Education*, *38*(6)*,* 887-907. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2016.1202746

Boliver, V. (2017). Misplaced optimism: How higher education reproduces rather than reduces social inequality. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 38*(3), 423-432.

Boliver, V. (2016). Exploring ethnic inequalities in admission to Russell Group universities. *Sociology, 50*(2), 247-266.

Boliver, V. (2013). How fair is access to more prestigious UK universities? *British Journal of Sociology*, *64*(2), 344-364.

Bolton, P. (2018). *Higher Education Student Numbers. Briefing Paper 7857, February 2018.* House of Commons Library. Retrieved from researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7857/CBP-7857.pdf

Borba, R., & Milani, T. M. (2019). Colonial intertexts: Discourses, bodies and stranger fetishism in the Brazilian media. *Discourse, Context & Media*. doi: 10.1016/j.dcm.2019.01.003

Bosompra, K. (2001). Determinants of condom use intentions of university students in Ghana: An application of the theory of reasoned action. *Social Science & Medicine, 52*(7), 1057-1069.

Bowen, G. A. (2010). From qualitative dissertation to quality articles: Seven lessons learned. *The Qualitative Report*, *15*(4), 864-879.

Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: A research note. *Qualitative Research, 8*(1), 137-152.

Bowes, L., Thomas, L., Peck, L., & Nathwani, T. (2013). *International Research on the Effectiveness of Widening Participation*. Report to HEFCE and OFFA. Retrieved from

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/indirreports/2013/wpinternationalrese arch/2013_WPeffectiveness.pdf

Bowl, M. (2003). *Nontraditional entrants to higher education: 'They talk about people like me'.* Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Bowling, A., See-Tai, S., Ebrahim, S., Gabriel, Z., & Solanki, P. (2005). Attributes of age-identity. *Ageing and Society, 25*(4), 479-500. doi: 10.1017/S0144686X05003818

Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brady, L. M., Germano, A. L., & Fryberg, S. A. (2017). Leveraging cultural differences to promote educational equality. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *18*, 79-83. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.08.003

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013a). *Successful qualitative research*. Sage Publications: London.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3,* 77-101.

Braxton, J. M., Milem, J. F., & Sullivan, A. S. (2000). The influence of active learning on the college student departure process: Toward a revision of Tinto's theory. *Journal of Higher Education*, 569-590.

Breakwell, G.M. (1986). *Coping with threatened identities.* London: Methuen.

Breen, R. L. (2006). A practical guide to focus-group research. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *30*(3), 463-475. doi: 10.1080/03098260600927575

Brennan, J., King, R., & Lebeau, Y. (2004). *The Role of Universities in the Transformation of Societies. An International Research Project Synthesis Report.* Centre for Higher Education Research and Information. London: The Open University.

Bridger, K., & Shaw, J. (2012). Beyond 'inclusion': Mainstreaming equality within the curriculum. In Y. Taylor (Ed.), *Educational diversity: The Subject of Difference and Different Subjects* (pp. 120-137). Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brine, J., & Waller, R. (2004). Working-class women on an Access course: Risk, opportunity and (re)contracting identities. *Gender and Education*, *16*(1), 97-113.

British Psychological Society. (2018). *Code of Ethics and Conduct.* Retrieved from https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/Policy%20-%20Files/Code%20of%20Ethics%20and%20Conduct%20(2018).pdf

British Psychological Society. (2009). *Code of Ethics and Conduct.* Retrieved from https://www1.bps.org.uk/system/files/user-files/Division%20of%20Clinical%20Psychology/public/Code%20of%20Ethics%20and%20Conduct%20%282009%29.pdf

Brody, G. H., & Flor, D. L. (1997). Maternal psychological functioning, family processes, and child adjustment in rural, single-parent, African American families. *Developmental Psychology*, *33*(6), 1000-1011.

Broecke, S., & Nicholls, T. (2007). *Ethnicity and Degree Attainment*. Department of Education and Skills Research Report No RW92. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/RW92.

Bromberg, M., & Theokas, C. (2014). *Falling out of the Lead: Following High Achievers Through High School and Beyond.* Retrieved from http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/FallingOutoftheLead.pdf

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*(7), 513-531. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.32.7.513

Brooks, J. (2015). Learning from the 'lifeworld'. *The Psychologist*, *28*(8), 642-646.

Brooks, R. (2002). Edinburgh, Exeter, East London - or employment? A review of research on young people's higher education choices. *Educational Research, 44*(2), 217-227.

Brooman, S., & Darwent, S. (2014). Measuring the beginning: A quantitative study of the transition to higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *39*(9), 1523-1541.

Brown, A. F. (2010). Descendants of 'Ruth': Black females coping through the Black male crisis. *The Urban Review*, *43*, 517-619.

Browne, I., & Kennelly, I. (2000). Stereotypes and realities. Images of Black women in the labor market. In I. Browne (Ed.), *Latinas and African American Women at Work: Race, Gender and Economic Inequality* (pp. 302-326). New York, US: Russell Sage Foundation.

Brubaker, R., & Cooper, F. (2000). Beyond "identity". *Theory and Society*, *29*, 1-47.

Bruce, S., & Yearley, S. (2006). Feminist epistemology; feminist methodology. In *The SAGE Dictionary of Sociology* (pp. 106-106). London: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi: 10.4135/9781446279137.n341

Bruner, J. (1995). Meaning and the self in cultural perspective. In D. Bakhurst & C. Sypnowich (Eds.), *The Social Self* (pp. 18-29). London: Sage Publications.

Bryan, B., Dadzie, S., & Scafe, S. (1986). *The heart of the race: Black women's lives in Britain*. London: Virago Press.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buck, G., Cook, K., Quigley, C., Eastwood, J., & Lucas, Y. (2009). Profiles of urban, low SES, African American girls' attitudes toward science: A sequential explanatory mixed methods study. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *3*, 386-410.

Burke, P. J., & Reitzes, D. C. (1991) cited in Stryker, S., & Burke, P. J. (2000). The past, present and future of an identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *63*(4), 284-297.

Burman, E., & Chantler, K. (2003). Across and between: Reflections on researching 'race' gender and mental health. *Feminism and Psychology*, *13*(3), 302-309.

Burnard, P. (1999). Carl Rogers and postmodernism: Challenges in nursing and health sciences. *Nursing and Health Sciences, 1*(4)*,* 241-247.

Burr, V. (2003). *Social constructionism* (2nd ed.)*.* East Sussex: Routledge.

Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism.* Cornwall: TJ Press (Padstow) Ltd.

Buvinić, M., & Gupta, G. R. (1997). Female-headed households and female-maintained families: Are they worth targeting to reduce poverty in developing countries? *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, *45*(2), 259-280.

Byrne, B. M. (1984). The general/academic self-concept nomological network: A review of construct validation research. *Review of Educational Research, 54*(3), 427-456.

Cabinet Office. (2017). *Race Disparity Audit Summary Findings from the Ethnicity Facts and Figures Website.* Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment _data/file/686071/Revised_RDA_report_March_2018.pdf

Calasanti, T. (2005). Ageism, gravity, and gender: Experiences of aging bodies. *Generations, 29*(3), 8-12. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/60044980/

Calhoun, C. (Ed.). (1994). *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (pp. 37-99). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Callendar, C. (2008). The impact of long-term employment on higher education students' academic attainment and achievement. *Journal of Education Policy, 23*(4), 359-377.

Callendar, C., & Jackson, J. (2008). Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study? *Studies in Higher Education*, 3*3*(4), 405-429.

Callingham, M. (2017). From discrete intervention to engage marginalised students to whole-school initiative to engage all students. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 21*(2), 131-145. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2016.1218947

Candido, F. J., Souza, R., Stumpf, M. A., Fernandes, L. G., Veiga, R., Santin, M., & Kluthcovsky, A. (2018). The use of drugs and medical students: A literature review. *Revista Da Associação Médica Brasileira, 64*(5), 462-468. Retrieved from https://doaj.org/article/dbec95c7acf444e58ec396ec79db84c7

Caplan, P. J., & Ford, J. C. (2014). The voices of diversity: What students of diverse races/ethnicities and both sexes tell us about their college experiences and their perceptions about their institutions' progress toward diversity. Retrieved from http://www.oa.uottawa.ca/journals/aporia/articles/2014_10/Caplan_Ford.pdf

Carastathis, A. (2014). The concept of intersectionality in feminist theory. *Philosophy Compass, 9*(5), 304-314.

Carastathis, A. (2013). Identity categories as potential coalitions. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *38*(4), 941-965.

Carbado, D. W. (2013). Colorblind intersectionality. *Signs, 38*(4). doi: 10.1086/521238

Carcary, M. (2009). The research audit trail - enhancing trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods, 7*(1), 11-24.

Carey, P. (2012). Exploring variation in nurse educators' perceptions of the inclusive curriculum. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 16*(7), 741-755. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2010.516773

Carey, M. A., & Smith, M. W. (1994). Capturing the group effect in focus groups: A special concern in analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *4*(1), 123-127.

Carini, R. M., Kuh, G. D., & Klein, S. P. (2006). Student engagement and student learning: Testing the linkages. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(1), 1-32.

Carroll, C. M. (1982). Three's a crowd: The dilemma of the Black woman in higher education. In G. T. Hull, P. B. Scott & B. Smith (Eds.), *All the women are Black, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave* (pp. 115-128). New York: The Feminist Press.

Carroll, J., & Ryan, J. (2005). *Teaching international students: Improving learning for all.* London: Routledge.

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, *41*(5), 545-547.

Cartwright, M. J. (2007). The rhetoric and reality of "quality" in higher education: An investigation into staff perceptions of quality in post 1992 universities. *Quality Assurance in Education*, *15*(3), 287-301. doi: 10.1108/09684880710773174

Casas, J. M. (2005). Race and racism: The efforts of counselling psychology to understand and address the issues associated with these terms. *The Counselling Psychologist*, *33*, 501-512.

Cashmore, A., Scott, J., & Cane, C. (2012). *"Belonging" and "Intimacy" Factors in the Retention of Students - An Investigation into the Student Perceptions of Effective Practice and How That Practice Can Be Replicated*. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/leicester_what_works_final_report_0.pdf

Catterall, M., & Maclaran, P. (1997). Focus group data and qualitative analysis programs: Coding the moving picture as well as the snapshots. *Sociological Research Online, 2*(1)*, 1-16. Retrieved from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/2/1/6.html

Causey, A. (2017). *Drawn to see: Drawing as an ethnographic method.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Ceglie, J., & Settlage, J. (2014). College student persistence in scientific disciplines: Cultural and social capital as contributing factors. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 1-18. doi: 10.1007/s10763-014-9592-3.

Center for Institutional Effectiveness. (2004). A fresh look at traditional and nontraditional undergraduates at KSU. Retrieved from http://eimirvic.kennesaw.edu/AnalyticStudies/Students_2004_Traditional_Nontradition al_Undergraduates.pdf

Chakrabarty, B. (2013). *Confluence of thought: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Chalcraft, D., Pokorny, H., & Husbands, D. (2011). Notions of belonging: Engaging first year, first semester HE students. Paper presented at Hawaii International Conference on Education, January 2012.

Chan, A., Dhamoon, R., & Moy, L. (2014) cited in Sian, K. (2017). Being Black in a White world: Understanding racism in British universities. *International Journal on Collective Identity Research, 2*, 1-26.

Chang, M. X. L., Jetten, J., Cruwys, T., Haslam, C., & Praharso, N. (2016). The more (social group memberships), the merrier: Is this the case for Asians? *Frontiers in Psychology, 7*(JUL). doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01001

Charles, C. Z., Roscigno, V. J., & Torres, K. C. (2007). Racial inequality and college attendance: The mediating role of parental investments. *Social Science Research*, *36*(1), 329-352.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practice guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chemers, M., Hu, L., & Garcia, B. (2001). Academic self-efficacy and first-year college student performance and adjustment. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *93*(1), 55-64.

Chen, J. C. (2014). Teaching nontraditional adult students: Adult learning theories in practice. *Teaching in Higher Education, 19*(4), 406-418. doi: 10.1080/13562517.2013.860101

Cherlin, A. (1999). Going to extremes: Family structure, children's well-being, and social science. *Demography, 36*(4), 421-428. doi: 10.2307/2648081

Cheung, S. Y., & Egerton, M. (2007). Great Britain: Higher education and reform - Changing educational inequalities. In R. A. A. G. Shavit & Y. Shavit (Eds.), *Stratification in Higher Education: A Comparative Study* (pp. 195-219). Stanford University Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=mVjC_VUK07UC

Chigeza, P. (2011). Cultural resources of minority and marginalised students should be included in the school science curriculum. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 6*(2), 401–412. doi: 10.1007/s11422-011-9316-8

Chiu, M. M., Chow, B. W., McBride, C., & Mol, S. T. (2016). Students' sense of belonging at school in 41 countries. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *47*(2), 175-196.

Choenarom, C., Williams, R. A., & Hagerty, B. M. (2005). The role of sense of belonging and social support on stress and depression in individuals with depression. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, *19*(1), 18-29.

Christie, H. (2007). Higher education and spatial (im)mobility: Nontraditional students and living at home. *Environment and Planning A*, *39*(10), 2445-2463.

Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy Theory, Research and Practice*, *15*(3), 1-8.

Clarke, N. J., Willis, M. E. H., Barnes, J. S., Caddick, N., Cromby, J., McDermott, H., & Wiltshire, G. (2015). Analytical pluralism in qualitative research: A meta-study. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *12*(2), 182-201.

Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist, 26*(2), 120-123.

Claxton, G., & Lucas, B. (2016). The hole in the heart of education (and the role of psychology in addressing it). *The Psychology of Education Review*, *40*(1), 4-11.

Clayton, J., Crozier, G., & Reay, D. (2009). Home and away: Risk, familiarity and the multiple geographies of the higher education experience. *International Studies of Sociology of Education*, *19*(3-4), 157-174.

Cobb-Clark, D. A., & Nguyen, T. (2012). Educational attainment across generations: The role of immigration background. *Economic Record*, *88*(283), 554-575. doi: 10.1111/1475-4932.12001

Coghlan, D., & Brydon-Miller, M. (Eds.). (2014). Positionality. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*. doi: 10.4135/9781446294406.n277

Cohen, J. (1977). Sources of peer group homogeneity. *Sociology of Education*, *50*(4), 227-241.

Cokley, K., Obaseki, V., Moran-Jackson, K., Jones, L., & Vohra-Gupta, S. (2016). College access improves for Black students but for which ones? *College Access and Opportunity, 97*(5), 43-48.

Cole, E. (2009). Intersectionality and research in psychology. *American Psychologist*, *64*(3), 170-180.

Collins, P.H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Collins, P. H. (2015). Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. *The Annual Review of Sociology, 41*, 1-20. doi: 10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112142

Collins, P. H. (2004). Shifting the center: Race, class and feminist theorising about motherhood. In D. Bassin, M. Honey, K. K. Kaplan (Eds.), *Representations of Motherhood* (pp. 56-74). New Haven, CT: Yale.

Collins, P. H. (2001). Social construction of Black feminist thought. In J. James, T. D. Sharpley-Whiting (Eds.), *The Black Feminist Reader* (pp. 183-207). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Collins, P. H. (2000). Black feminist thought. In L. Back, J. Solomos (Eds.), *Theories of Race and Racism*: *A Reader* (pp. 404-420). London: Routledge.

Collins, P. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of black feminist thought. *Social Problems, 33*(6), 14-32.

Collins, M., Collins, G., & Butt, G. (2015). Social mobility or social reproduction? A case study of the attainment patterns of students according to their social background and ethnicity. *Educational Reviews*, *67*(2), 196-217.

Columbia Encyclopedia. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, The Columbia Encyclopedia (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from https://search-credoreference-com.ezproxy.westminster.ac.uk/content/entry/columency/african_languages/0?institutionId=1703

Connelly, M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2000). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *American Educational Research Association, 19*(5), 2-14.

Conner, K. R., Britton, P. C., Sworts, L. M., & Joiner, T. E. (2007). Suicide attempts among individuals with opiate dependence: The critical role of belonging. *Addictive Behaviors, 32*(7), 1395-1404. doi: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2006.09.012

Connor, H., Tyers, C., Modood, T. & Hillage, J. (2004). *Why The Difference? A Closer Look at Higher Education Minority Ethnic Students and Graduates.* DfES Research Report RR552.

Coomber, R., & Letherby, G. (2012). Introduction to the special issue on the use of visual methods in social research. *Sociological Research Online, 17*(1), 1-2. doi: 10.5153/sro.2622

Cooper, D. (1998). Reading, writing and reflection. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 73*, 47-56.

Cottler, L., McCloskey, D. J., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Bennett, N.M., Strelnick, H., Dwyer-White, M., Collyar, D. E.,…& Evanoff, B. (2013). Community needs, concerns, and perceptions about health research: Findings from the Clinical and Translational Science Award Sentinel Network. *American Journal of Public Health*, *103*(9), 1685-1692.

Counted, V. (2016). Being authentic in the new image: A qualitative study on the authenticity constructions and self-images of Christian millennials in Africa. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, *19*(3), 268-294.

Craib, I. (2002). What is social class? *Group Analysis*, *35*(3), 342-350.

Crawford, C. E. (2019). The one-in-ten: Quantitative Critical Race Theory and the education of the 'new (white) oppressed.' *Journal of Education Policy, 34*(3), 423-444. doi: 10.1080/02680939.2018.1531314

Crawford, C., & Greaves, E. (November, 2015). *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation*. BIS Research Paper No. 186, Department for Business Innovation & Skills.

Crebert, G., Bates, M., Bell, B. Patrick, C., & Cragnolini, V. (2004). Developing generic skills at university, during work placement and in employment: Graduates' perceptions. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *23*(2), 147-165.

Creed, P. A., French, J., & Hood, M. (2015). Working while studying at university: The relationship between work benefits and demands and engagement and well-being. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 86*, 48-57.doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2014.11.002

Cremin, T. (2016). A response to Claxton and Lucas. *The Psychology of Education Review*, *40*(1)*,* 17-21.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241-1299.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum.* Retrieved from www.philpapers.org

CRIAW. (2009). Everyone belongs: A toolkit for applying intersectionality. Retrieved from www.criaw-icref-ca

Cross, W. E. (2000). Nigrescence Theory: Historical and explanatory notes. In K. A. Keough, J. Garcia (Eds.), *Social Psychology of Gender, Race and Ethnicity* (pp. 122-124). Dubuque, IA: McGraw-Hill.

Croxford, L., & Raffe, D. (2015). The iron law of hierarchy? Institutional differentiation in UK higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *40*(9), 1625-1640.

Crozier, G., Reay, D., Clayton, J., Colliander, L., & Grinstead, J. (2008). Different strokes of different folks: Diverse students in diverse institutions - experiences of higher education. *Research Papers in Education*, *23*(2), 167-177.

Cuellar, N. G. (2017). Unconscious bias: What is yours? *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 28*(4), 333. doi: 10.1177/1043659617713566

Damgaard, M. T., & Nielsen, H. S. (2018). Nudging in education. *Economics of Education Review, 64*(C), 313-342.

Darrin, T. (2014). Factors that influence college completion intention of undergraduate students. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, *23*(2), 225-235.

Data Protection Act. (1998). Retrieved from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents

Davies, K. (2019). 'Sticky' proximities: Sibling relationships and education. *The Sociological Review, 67*(1), 210-225. doi: 10.1177/0038026118784832

Davis, K. (2008). Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful. *Feminist Theory*, *9*(1), 67–85. doi: 10.1177/1464700108086364

Davis, P., McPherson, M., Wheldon, M., & von Randow, M. (2012). Monitoring socio-demographic risk: A cohort analysis of families using census micro-data. *Social Indicators Research, 108*(1), 111-130. doi: 10.1007/s11205-011-9869-7

Davis, R., & Elias, P. (2003). *Dropping Out: A Study of Early Leavers from Higher Education.* Research Report 386, London: Department for Education and Skills. Retrieved from

http://heer.qaa.ac.uk/SearchForSummaries/Summaries/Pages/GLM204.aspx

Davis-Kean, P. E. (2005). The influence of parent education and family income on child achievement: The indirect role of parental expectations and the home environment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *19*(2), 294-304.

Dean, K., & Jolly, J. (2012). Student identity, disengagement, and learning. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 11*(2). Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1033316252/

Dearden, L., Fitzsimons, E., & Wyness, G. (2014). Money for nothing: Estimating the impact of student aid on participation in higher education. *Economics of Education Review, 43*, 66–78. doi: 10.1016/J.ECONEDUREV.2014.09.005

Deaux, K. (2000). Reconstructing social identity. In K. A. Keough, J. Garcia (Eds.), *Social Psychology of Gender, Race and Ethnicity* (pp. 102-111). Dubuque: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Declercq, K., & Verboven, F. (2015). Socio-economic status and enrolment in higher education: Do costs matters? *Education Economics*, *23*(5), 532-556.

DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., & Schutz, P. A. (2014). Researching race within educational psychology contexts. *Educational Psychologists, 49*(4), 244-260.

De Beer, J., Smith, U., & Jansen, C. (2009). 'Situated' in a separated campus–Students' sense of belonging and academic performance: A case study of the experiences of students during a higher education merger. *Education as Change*, *13*(1), 167-194.

DeFreitas, S. C., & Bravo Antonio, J. (2012). The influence of involvement with faculty and mentoring on the self-efficacy and academic achievement of African American and Latino college students. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 12*(4), 1-11.

Delaney, L., Harmon, C., & Redmond, C. (2011). Parental education, grade attainment and earnings expectations among university students. *Economics of Education Review, 30*(6), 1136-1152.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.)*.* New York: NYU Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2006). *Critical race theory: An introduction.* New York: NYU Press.

Deliens, T., Clarys, P., De Bourdeaudhuij, I., & Deforche, B. (2014). Determinants of eating behaviour in university students: A qualitative study using focus group discussions. *BMC Public Health, 1*4(1). doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-14-53

Department for Business Innovation and Skills. (2016). *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice.* A Crown Publication.

Devlin, M. (2013). Bridging socio-cultural incongruity: Conceptualising the success of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds in Australian higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(6), 939-949.

Devine, P. G., Forscher, P. S., Austin, A. J., & Cox, W. T. L. (2012). Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *48*(6), 1267-1278.

Department for Education and Skills. (2003). *The Future of Higher Education.* London: HMSO.

Dewey, J. (1933) cited in Cooper, D. (1998). Reading, writing and reflection. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 73*, 47-56.

Dhanda, M. (2015). *Understanding Disparities in Student Attainment: Black and Minority Ethnic Students' Experience.* University of Wolverhampton Report. Retrieved from *http://www2.wlv.ac.uk/equalopps/mdsummary.pdf*

Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau Anderson, C. (2018). Where are we? Critical race theory in education 20 years later. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *93*(1), 121. doi: 10.1080/0161956X.2017.1403194

Doharty, N. (2018). I felt dead: Applying a racial micro-aggressions framework to Black students' experiences of Black History Month and Black History. *Race, Ethnicity and Education.* doi: 10.1080/13613324.2017.1417253

Dohmen, T., Falk, A., Huffman, D., & Sunde, U. (2012). The intergenerational transmission of risk and trust attitudes. *Review of Economic Studies, 79*(2), 645-677. doi:10.1093/restud/rdr027

Dolcos, S., & Albarracin, D. (2014). The inner speech of behavioural regulation: Intentions and task performance strengthen when you talk to yourself as a You. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.2048

Donnison, J., Thompson, A. R., & Turpin, G. (2009). A qualitative exploration of communication within the community mental health team. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, *18*, 310-317.

Dotson, K. (2016). Between rocks and hard places. *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research*, *46*(2), 46-56.

Doucet, A., & Mauthner, N.S. (2005). Feminist methodologies and epistemology. In C. D. Bryant, D. L. Peck. (Eds.), *21st Century Sociology* (pp. 11-36). Sage Publications.

Dru, V. (2007). Authoritarianism, social dominance orientation and prejudice: Effects of various self-categorization conditions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *43*, 877-883.

Duggleby, W. (2205). What about focus group interaction data? *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(6)*, 832-840.

Duque, L. C. (2013). A framework for analysing higher education performance: Students' satisfaction, perceived learning outcomes, and dropout intentions. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence, 25*(1-2), 1-21. doi: 10.1080/14783363.2013.807677

Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8*(1), 54-63.

Dwyer, C., Modood, T., Sangheera, G., & Thapar-Bjorkert, S. (2006). *Ethnicity as social capital? Explaining the differential educational achievement of young British Pakistani men and women.* Paper presented at the 'Ethnicity, Mobility and Society' Leverhulme Programme Conference at University of Bristol, 16-17 March. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/19721196/Ethnicity_as_social_capital_Explaining_the_diffe rential_educational_achievements_of_young_British_Pakistani_men_and_women

Eatough, V., & Smith, J. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In C. Willig, W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology* (pp. 365-400). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Eatough, V., & Smith, J. (2006). 'I was like a wild animal': Understanding feelings of anger using interpretative phenomenological analysis. *British Journal of Psychology, 97,* 483-498.

Eatough, V., & Smith, J. (2006). 'I feel like a scrambled egg in my head': An idiographic case study of meaning making and anger using interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice, 79,* 115-135.

Elahi, F., & Khan, O. (2016). *Ethnic Inequalities in London: Capital For All*. Runnymede Trust. Retrieved from https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/images/London%20Inequality%20report%20v3.pdf

El-Alayli, A., Hansen-Brown, A. A., & Ceynar, M. (2017). Dancing backwards in high heels: Female professors experience more work demands and special favor requests, particularly from academically entitled students. *Sex Roles, 79*(3-4), 136-150.

Ellemers, N., & Haslam, S. A. (2012). Social identity theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, E. Tory Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology* (pp. 379-398). London: Sage Publications.

Elliott, R., Fischer, C. T., & Rennie, D. L. (1999). Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *38*, 215-229.

Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, *4*(1), 1-10.

Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2007). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *62*(1), 107-115.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Psychology, 103*(4), 962-1023.

England, K. V. L. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *Professional Geographer*, *46*(1), 80-89.

Entwistle, N. (2016). A response to Claxton and Lucas. *The Psychology of Education Review*, *40*(1), 22-25.

Equality Challenge Unit. (2018a). *Athena SWAN Charter Mark*. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/

Equality Challenge Unit. (2018b). *Unconscious Bias*. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/employment-and-careers/staff-recruitment/unconscious-bias/

Equality Challenge Unit. (2018c). *Race Equality Charter Members and Award Holders*. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter/members-award-holders/

Equality Challenge Unit. (2016a). *Equality and Diversity in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*. Summary papers from ECU and HEA joint conferences. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Equality-and-diversity-in-learning-and-teaching-Full-report.pdf

Equality Challenge Unit. (2016b). *Race Equality Charter Awards Handbook*. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ECU-Race-Equality-Charter-handbook-March-2017.pdf

Equality Challenge Unit. (2015a). *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2015. Part 2: Students*. London: Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2015/

Equality Challenge Unit. (2015b). *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2015. Part 1: Staff.* London: Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2015/

Equality Challenge Unit. (2014). *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2014. Part 2: Students.* London: Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2014/

Equality Challenge Unit. (2013). *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2013. Part 1: Staff.* London: Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-higher-education-statistical-report-2013/

Equality Challenge Unit. (2012). *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2013. Part 2: Students.* London: Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-higher-education-statistical-report-2013/

Equality Challenge Unit. (2010). *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2010.* London: Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/external/equality-in-higher-education-statistical-report-2010.pdf

Equality Challenge Unit. (2009). *The Experience of Black and Minority Ethnic Staff Working in Higher Education: Literature Review.* London: Equality Challenge Unit. Retrieved from https://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/external/experience-of-bme-staff-in-he.pdf

Equality Challenge Unit & Higher Education Academy. (2008). *Ethnicity, Gender and Degree Attainment.* London: Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from

https://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/external/ethnicity-gender-and-degree-attainment-project-final-report.pdf

Erb, S., & Drysdale, M. T. B. (2017). Learning attributes, academic self-efficacy and sense of belonging amongst mature students at a Canadian university. *Studies in the Education of Adults, 49*(1), 62-74. doi: 10.1080/02660830.2017.1283754

Etienne, J. (2016). *Learning in womanist ways: Narratives of first-generation African Caribbean Women.* London: UCL Institute of Education Press, University College.

Eunyoung K., & Hargrove, D. T. (2013). Deficient or resilient: A critical review of Black male academic success and persistence in higher education. *The Journal of Negro Education, 82*(3), 300-311. doi: 10.7709/jnegroeducation.82.3.0300

Evans, S. (2012). Higher education, higher standards? In Y. Taylor (Ed.), *Educational Diversity: The Subject of Difference and Different Subjects* (pp. 99-119). Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Farenga, S. A. (2018). Early struggles, peer groups and eventual success: An artful inquiry into unpacking transitions into university of widening participation students. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 20*(1)*,* 60-78.

Farnsworth, J., & Boon, B. (2010). Analysing group dynamics within the focus group. *Qualitative Research, 10*(5)*,* 605-624.

Fazackerley, A. (September, 2019). 'Look at how white the academy is': Why BAME students aren't doing PhDs. *The Guardian.* Retrieved November, 18, 2019 from https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/sep/12/look-at-how-white-the-academy-is-why-bame-students-arent-doing-phds

Feagin, J. R., & Sykes, M. P. (1995). How Black students cope with racism on White campuses. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, *8*, 91-97.

Fern, E. F. (1982). The use of focus groups for idea generation: The effects of group size, acquaintanceship, and moderator on response quantity and quality. *Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)*, *19*(1), 1-13. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=5005869&site=ehost -live&scope=site

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. Retrieved from https://www.humanscience.org/docs/Festinger%20(1954)%20A%20Theory%20of%20S ocial%20Comparison%20Processes.pdf

Fielding, A., Charlton, C., Kounali, D., & Leckie, G. (2008). *Degree Attainment, Ethnicity and Gender: Interactions and the Modification of Effects - A Quantitative Analysis*. York: Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/cmm/migrated/documents/degree-eth-gender.pdf

Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and the other in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S, Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* (pp.70-82)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fivush, R., Habermas, T., Waters, T. E. A., & Zaman, W. (2011). The making of autobiographical memory: Intersections of culture, narratives and identity. *International Journal of Psychology, 46*(5), 321-345. doi: 10.1080/00207594.2011.596541

Fleming, S., & McKee, G. (2005). The mature student question. *Nurse Education Today,* 25(3), 230-237.

Flick, U. (2018). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (6th ed.)*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ford, M. (2015). Quantifying the ethnic penalty. *Criminal Justice Matters*, *101*(1), 22-28. doi:10.1080/09627251.2015.1080942

Ford, D. Y. (1993). Black students' achievement orientation as a function of family achievement orientation and demographic variables. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *62*(1), 47-66.

Forrest, L. F., Hodgson, S., Parker, L., & Pearce, M.S. (2011). The influence of childhood IQ and education on social mobility in the Newcastle Thousand Families birth cohort. *BMC Public Health, 11*, 895.

Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *Journal of Experimental Education, 75*(3), 203-220.

Frost, N. (2011). *Qualitative research methods in psychology*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Gabriel, D., & Tate, S. A. (Eds.). (2017). *Inside the ivory tower*. London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

Gabriel, D. (2017). On Sisterhood, Solidarity and Self-empowerment. Retrieved from https://blackbritishacademics.co.uk/2017/12/22/on-sisterhood-solidarity-and-self-empowerment-by-deborah-gabriel

Gabriel, D. (2016). Blogging while Black, British and female: A critical study on discursive activism. *Information, Communication & Society*, *19*(11), 1622-1635.

Gaete, J., Rojas-Barahona, C. A., Olivares, E., & Araya, R. (2016). Brief report: Association between psychological sense of school membership and mental health among early adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, *50*, 1-5. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.04.002

Gamble, R., Cassidy, T., McLaughlin, M., & Giles, M. (2016). Academic assessment, time for a revaluation? *Social Psychology Review*, *18*(2), 17-23.

Gao, F. (2017). Do heterophilous networks work? Investigating school-based social capital and the university choice process among less-privileged ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. *Race Ethnicity and Education,* 1-16. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2017.1395329

Garner, S. (Ed.). (2010). The idea of 'race' and the practice of racisms. *Racisms: An Introduction*, (pp. 1-18). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Gaunt, R. (2011). Effects of intergroup conflict and social contact on prejudice: The mediating role of stereotypes and evaluations. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *41*(6), 1340-1355. doi: 10.1111/j.1559-1816.2011.00762.x

Gecas, V. (1982). The self-concept. *Annual Review of Sociology, 8*, 1-33. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2945986

Gee, P. (2011). 'Approach and sensibility': A personal reflection on analysis and writing using interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Methods in Psychology Bulletin, 11*(1), 8-22.

Gergen, K. R. (2015). The quantitative/qualitative distinction: Blessed are the impure. *Qualitative Psychology*, *2*(2), 210-213.

Gergen, K. R. (2007). *An Invitation to Social Constructionism*. London: Sage Publications.

Gergen, K. R. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist, 40*(3), 266-275.

Gershenson, S., Bolt, S. B., & Papageorge, N. W. (2016). Who believes in me? The effect of student-teacher demographic match on teacher expectations. *Economics of Education Review*, 1-16.

Gibson, S. L., & Espino, M. M. (2016). Uncovering Black womanhood in engineering. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, *9*(1), 56-73. doi: 10.1080/19407882.2016.1143377

Gillborn, D. (2015). Intersectionality, critical race theory, and the primary of racism: Race, class, gender, and disability in education. *Qualitative Inquiry, 21*(3)*,* 277-287.

Gilovich, T., & Ross, L. (2016). *The wisest one in the room.* London: Oneworld Publications.

Giscombé, C. L., & Lobel, M. (2005). Explaining disproportionately high rates of adverse birth outcomes among African Americans: The impact of stress, racism, and related factors in pregnancy. *Psychological Bulletin, 131*(5), 662-683.

Gleibs, I. H., & Haslam, S. A. (2016). Do we want a fighter? The influence of group status and the stability of intergroup relations on leader prototypicality and endorsement. *Leadership Quarterly, 27*(4), 557-573. doi: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.12.001

Glocker, D. (2011). The effect of student aid on the duration of study. *Economics of Education Review*. doi: 10.1016/j.econedurev.2010.08.005

Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools*, *30*, 79-90.

Goodenow, C. (1992). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *62*(1), 60-71.

Goodman, S. (2015). Qualitative psychology: A weapon in the battle against scientific racism. *Qualitative Methods in Psychology*, *20*, 24-27.

Goodman, J., & Loverseed, V. (2013). *Accommodation Costs Survey*. Retrieved from http://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Campaigns/Accommodation%20Costs%20Survey%20V6%20WEB.pdf

Gorard, S., Boliver, V., Siddiqui, N., & Banerjee, P. (2019). Which are the most suitable contextual indicators for use in widening participation to HE? *Research Papers in Education, 34*(1), 99-129. doi: 10.1080/02671522.2017.1402083

Goulbourne, H. (1998). *From West Indian Immigrants to Caribbean Communities.* Retrieved from https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/from-west-indian-immigrants-to-caribbean-communities

Gradín, C. (2013). Race, Poverty and Deprivation in South Africa. *Journal of African Economies*, *22*(2), 187–238. doi: 10.1093/jae/ejs019

Graham, S., Furr, S., Flowers, C., & Burke, M.T. (2001). Research and theory religion and spirituality in coping with stress. *Counselling and Values*, *46*(1), 2-13.

Graneheim, U., & Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: Concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today, 24*(2), 105-112. doi: 10.1016/J.NEDT.2003.10.001

Grant, C.M. (2012). Advancing our legacy: A Black feminist perspective on the significance of mentoring for African-American women in educational leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *25*(1), 101-117.

Green, D.M. (2003). Self-efficacy. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, *23*(3-4), 107-116.

Greenbank, P. (2015). Still focusing on the "essential 2:1": Exploring student attitudes to extra-curricular activities. *Education & Training*, *57*(2), 184-203.

Greenhalgh-Spencer, H., Castro, M., Bulut, E., Goel, K., Lin, C., & McCarthy, C. (2015). Social class as flow and mutability: The Barbados case. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36*(1), 156-173. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2014.967838

Griffin, R. A. (2012). I AM an angry Black woman: Black feminist autoethnography, voice, and resistance. *Women's Studies in Communication, 35*(2), 138-157.

Griffin, F. J. (2007). That the mothers may soar and the daughters may know their names: A retrospective of Black feminist literary criticism. *Signs*, *32*(2), 483-507.

Griffith, D. M., Ellis, K. R., & Allen, J. O. (2013). An intersectional approach to social

    determinants of stress for African American men: Men's and women's perspectives.

    American Journal of Men's Health, *7*(4), 195-305.

Griffiths, V. (2002). Crossing boundaries: The experiences of mature student mothers in

    initial teacher education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *6*(3), 267-285.

Grobecker, P. (2016). A sense of belonging and perceived stress among baccalaureate nursing

    students in clinical placements. *Nurse Education Today*, *36*, 178-183.

Grzanka, P. R., Santos, C. E., & Moradi, B. (2017). Intersectionality research in counseling

    psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 64*(5), 453-457. doi:

    10.1037/cou0000237

Guba, E. G. (1981) cited in Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis

    process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *62*(1), 107-115.

Guiffrida, D. A. (2006). Toward a Cultural Advancement of Tinto's Theory. *Review of Higher

    Education*, *29*(4), 451. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2006.0031

Guter, E. (2010). Aesthetics A-Z. Philosophy A-Z. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Guy-Sheftall, B. (Ed.). (1995). *Words of fire: An anthology of African American feminist

    thought.* New York: The New Press.

Habermas, J. (1970). *Towards a rational society: Student protest, science and politics.*

    Toronto: Beacon Press.

Haddix, M. M. (2012). Talking in the company of my sisters: The counter languages and

    deliberate silences of Black female students in teacher education. *Linguistics and

    Education*, *23*(2), 169-181.

Hagborg, W. J. (1998). School membership among students with learning disabilities and

    nondisabled students in a semirural high school. *Psychology in the Schools*, *35*(2), 183-

    188.

Hagerty, B. M., Williams, R. A., Coyne, J. C., & Early, M. R. (1996). Sense of belonging and indicators of social and psychological functioning. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 10*(4), 235-244.

Hailikari, K., & Parpala, A. (2014). What impedes or enhances studying? The interrelation between approaches to learning, factors influencing study progress and earned credits. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *19*(7), 812-824.

Hall, S., & Du Gay, P. (1996). *Questions of cultural identity.* London: Sage.

Halsey, A. H. (2013). Reflections on education and social mobility. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 5*(6), 644-659.

Hamm, J. V., & Faircloth, B. S. (2005). The role of friendship in adolescents' sense of school belonging. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 107*, 61-78

Hammack, P. L. (2010). Narrating hyphenated selves: Intergroup contact and configurations of identity among young Palestinian citizens of Israel. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *34*(4), 368-385.

Hancock, M. E., Amankwaa, L., Revell, M. A., & Mueller, D. (2016). Focus group data saturation: A new approach to data analysis. *The Qualitative Report, 21*(11)*,* 2124-2130.

Haney, C., Banks, C., & Zimbardo, P. (1973). A study of prisoner and guards in a simulated prison. *Naval Research Reviews, 30,* 4-17*.* Retrieved from https://www.simplypsychology.org/zimbardo-paper.pdf

Hankivsky, O. (2014). Intersectionality 101. *The Institute for Intersectionality Research & Policy, SFU.* Retrieved from http://vawforum-cwr.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/intersectionallity_101.pdf

Hanna, R. (2011). What is the self? *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1234*(2011)*,* 121-123. doi: 10.1111/j.1749-6632.2011.06124.x

Hardgrove, A., Rootham, E., & Mcdowell, L. (2015). Possible selves in a precarious labour market: Youth, imagined futures, and transitions to work in the UK. *Geoforum, 60*, 163-171. doi: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.01.014

Hardy, J. (2006). Speaking clearly: A critical review of the self-talk literature. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise, 7*(1), 81-97.

Hargreaves, D. (2006). *Social relations in a secondary school.* Routledge: London, UK.

Harper, S. R. (2009). Am I my brother's teacher? Black undergraduates, racial socialization, and peer pedagogies in predominantly white postsecondary contexts. *Review of Research in Education, 37*(1), 183-211.

Harrison, C. (1998). The assassination of the black male image in sport. *Journal of African American Men, 3*(3), 45-56. doi: 10.1007/BF02902938

Harrison, N., Waller, R., & Last, K. (2015). The evaluation of widening participation activities in higher education: A survey of institutional leaders in England. *University of the West of England, Bristol, UK.* Retrieved from http://eprints.uwe.uk/26590

Hartup, W. W., & Stevens, N. (1997). Friendships and adaptation in the life course. *Psychological Bulletin, 121*(3), 355-370.

Harvey, J. (2013). *The story of Black.* Reaktion Books Ltd: London.

Hattie, J., Clinton, J., & Rowe, L. (2016). A response to Claxton and Lucas. *The Psychology of Education Review*, *40*(1), 30-37.

Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education*, *48*(7), 803-839.

Heath, G. (2015). Multiple transformations of qualitative data. *QMIP Bulletin Issue 19, British Psychological Society.*

Heath, A.F., & J. Ridge (1983) Social mobility of ethnic minorities. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, *Supplement No. 8,* 169-184. Retrieved from https://www.sociology.ox.ac.uk/materials/papers/2007-04.pdf

Hefferon, K., & Gil-Rodriguez, E. (2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. *The Psychologist*, *24*(10), 756-759.

Helicon. (Ed.). *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from https://search-credoreference-com.ezproxy.westminster.ac.uk/content/entry/heliconhe/church/0?institutionId=1703

Helmich, E., Bolhuis, S., Dornan, T., Lan, R., & Koopmans, R. (2012). Entering medical practice for the very first time: Emotional talk, meaning and identity development. *Transitions to Medicine*, *46*(11), 1074-1086.

Hemsley-Brown, J., & Oplatka, I. (2015). University choice: What do we know, what don't we know and what do we still need to find out? *The International Journal of Educational Management, 29*(3), 254-274. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/1668209538?accountid=14987

Henderson, H. (2017). Silence, obligation and fear in the possible selves of UK LGBT-identified teachers. *Gender and Education, 1-17*. doi: 10.1080/09540253.2017.1354125

Hendry, G. D., Hyde, S. J., & Davy, P. (2005). Independent student study groups. *Medical Education, 39*(7), 672-679.

Heng, T. T. (2018). Different is not deficient: Contradicting stereotypes of Chinese international students in US higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 43*(1), 22–36. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2016.1152466

Hennink, M. (2014). *Focus group discussions: Understanding qualitative research.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Henry, W. (2008). Black female millennial college students: Dating dilemmas and identity development. *Multicultural Education, 16*(2), 17-21.

Henwood, K.L. (1994). Resisting racism and sexism in academic psychology: A personal/political view. In K. Bhavnani, A. Phoenix (Eds.), *Shifting Identities, Shifting Racisms* (pp. 41-57). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

HEPI. (2017). *Reality Check. A Report on University Applicants' Attitudes and Perceptions.* Retrieved from https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2017/07/04/reality-check-report-university-applicants-attitudes-perceptions/

Herbers, D. J., & Meijering, L. (2015). Interpersonal relationships and subjective well-being among older adults in sheltered housing. *Research on Ageing and Social Policy, 3*(1), 14-44. doi: 10.17583/rasp.2015.1416

Hernández, M. M., Robins, R. W., Widaman, K. F., & Conger, R. D. (2017). Ethnic pride, self-esteem, and school belonging: A reciprocal analysis over time. *Developmental Psychology*, *53*(12), 2384-2396. doi: 10.1037/dev0000434

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2018). *Student Characteristics.* Retrieved from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/HEinEngland/students/age/

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2015). *Differences in Degree Outcomes: The Effect of Subject and Student Characteristics.* Retrieved from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/2015/201521/HEFCE2015_21.pdf

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2014a). *Higher Education in England 2014: Analysis of Latest Shifts and Trends*. Retrieved from www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/heinengland/2014report/EinEngland_2014_Key_Facts.pdf

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2014b). *What HEFCE Knows about Race Equality in the HE Lifecycle.* Retrieved from www.hefce.ac.uk.

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2013a). *Trends in Young Participation in Higher Education*. Issues Paper. Retrieved from https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv:59495

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (July, 2013b). *Postgraduate Education in England and Northern Ireland.* Overview Report 2013. Retrieved from https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/*/http:/www.hefce.ac.uk/

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2012). *POLAR 3: Young Participation Rates in Higher Education.* Overview Report 2013. Retrieved from https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/

Higher Education Funding Council for England. (2009). *Widening Participation.* Retrieved from https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101109122732/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10_13/10_13.pdf

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2019). *Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK, 2017/18.* Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/24-01-2019/sb253-higher-education-staff-statistics

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2019). *What do HE students study?* Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/what-study

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2018a). *Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2016/17 - Student numbers and characteristics.* Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/11-01-2018/sfr247-higher-education-student-statistics/numbers

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2018b). *Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2016/17 - Summary.* Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/sfr247/figure-4

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2017a). *Staff at Higher Education Providers in the United Kingdom 2015/16.* Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/19-01-2017/sfr243-staff

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2017b). *Students 2015/16.* Retrieved from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications/students-2015-16/introduction

Higher Education Statistics Agency. (2016). *Statistical First Release 224 - Student Enrolments and Qualifications.* Retrieved from www.hesa.ac.uk/sfr224

Hillmert, S. (2013). Analysing intergenerational transmissions: From social mobility to social production. *Class and Stratification Analysis Comparative Social Research, 30*, 131-157.

Hixenbaugh, P., Dewart, H., Drees, D., & Williams, D. (2006). Peer E-mentoring: Enhancement of the first year experience. *Psychology Learning & Teaching, 5*(1), 8-14. doi: 10.2304/plat.2005.5.1.8

Hodges, I., & Jobanputra, S. (2012). Mapping exclusion in undergraduate psychology: Towards a common architecture of the minority student experience. In Y. Taylor (Ed.), *Educational Diversity: The Subject of Difference and Different Subjects* (pp. 138-158). Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2002). Investigating "sense of belonging' in first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 4*(3), 227-256.

Holdsworth, C. (2006). "Don't you think you're missing out, living at home?" Student experiences and residential transitions. *The Sociological Review*, *54*(3), 495-519.

hooks, b. (2015). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black.* Oxon: Routledge.

hooks, b. (1990). Marginality as site of resistance. In R. Ferguson, M. Gever, T. T. Minh-ha,
C. West (Eds.), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (pp. 341-343).
Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

hooks, b. (1987). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism.* London: Pluto Press.

Hornsey, M. J. (2008). Social identity theory and self-categorisation theory: A historical
overview. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 2*(1), 204-222.

Houghton Mifflin. (2005). Retrieved from
http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/hmcontempusage/colored/0

Houston, M., Knox, H., & Rimmer, R. (2007). Wider access and progression among full-time
students. *Higher Education, 53*(1), 107–146. doi: 10.1007/s10734-005-3177-6

Hovdhaugen, E. (2015). Working while studying: The impact of term-time employment on
dropout rates. *Journal of Education and Work, 28*(6), 631-651. doi:
10.1080/13639080.2013.869311

Howard, T. C. (2013). How does it feel to be a problem? Black male students, schools, and
learning in enhancing the knowledge base to disrupt deficit frameworks. *Review of
Research in Education, 37*(1), 54-86. doi: 10.3102/0091732X1246298

Howard, J. A. (2000). Social psychology of identities. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 367-
393.

Howarth, C. (2011). Representations, identity and resistance in communication. In D. Hook,
F. Bradley, M.W. Bauer (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Communication* (pp. 4-19).
London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S.E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis.
Qualitative Health Research, *15*, 1277-1288.

Huang, H. H., & Coker, A. D. (2008). Examining issues affecting African American participation in research studies. *Journal of Black Studies*, 1-18.

Hulme, J. (2014). Psychological literacy - from classroom to real world. *The Psychologist, 27*(12), 932-935.

Hulme, J. A., Skinner, R., Worsnop, F., Collins, E., Banyard, P., Kitching, H. J., ... & Goodson, S. (2015). Psychological literacy: A multifaceted perspective. *Psychology Teaching Review, 21*(2), 13-24.

Hulme, J. A., & Forshaw, M. J. (2009). Effectiveness of feedback provision for psychology undergraduate students. *Psychology Learning and Teaching, 8*(1)*, 34-38.*

Hunting, G. (2014). Intersectionality-informed qualitative research: A primer. *Criminology, 4*(1), 32-56.

Huntly, H., & Donovan, J. (2009). Supporting the development of persistence: Strategies for teachers of first year undergraduate students. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 21*(2), 210.

Hurtado, S., Cabrera, N. L., Lin, M. H., Arellano, L., & Espinosa, L. L. (2008). Diversifying science: Underrepresented student experiences in structured research programs. *Research in Higher Education*, *50*(2), 189-214.

Hurtado, S., Han, J. C., Saenz, V. B., Espinosa, L. L., Cabrera, N. L., & Cerna, O. S. (2007). Predicting transition and adjustment to college: Biomedical and behavioural science aspirants' and minority students' first year of college. *Research in Higher Education*, *48*(7), 841-887.

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, *70*(4), 324-345.

Hurtado, S., Inkelas, K. K., Briggs, C., & Rhee, B. (1997). Differences in college access and choice among racial/ethnic groups: Identifying continuing barriers. *Research in Higher Education, 38*(1), 43-75.

Ireland, D. T., Freeman, K. E., Winston-Proctor, C. E., DeLaine, K. D., McDonald Lowe, S., & Woodson, K. M. (2018). (Un)Hidden figures: A synthesis of research examining the intersectional experiences of Black women and girls in STEM education. *Review of Research in Education, 42,* 226-254.

Israelashvili, M. (1997). School adjustment, school membership and adolescents' future expectations. *Journal of Adolescence*, *20*(5), 525-535. doi: 10.1006/jado.1997.0107

Jacob, M. (2011). Do brothers affect their sisters' chances to graduate? An analysis of sibling sex composition effects on graduation from a university or a Fachhochschule in Germany. *Higher Education, 61*(3), 277–291. doi: 10.1007/s10734-010-9377-8

Jackson, I. (2017). Inclusive ideals are not enough: Academia does not empower Black women. In D, Gabriel, S. A. Tate, (Eds.), *Inside the Ivory Tower* (pp. 67-79). London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

James, D. (2014). How Bourdieu bites back: Recognising misrecognition in education and educational research. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 45*(1), 97-112.

James, J., & Sharpley-Whiting, T.D. (Eds.). (2001). *The Black feminist reader*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

James, S. M., & Busia, A. P. A. (Eds.). (1993). *Theorizing Black feminisms.* London: Routledge.

Jamison, J., & Wegener, J. (2010). Multiple selves in intertemporal choice. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 31(5)*, 832-839. doi: 10.1016/j.joep.2010.03.004

Jankowski, G., Sandle, R., & Gillborn, S. (2018, May). Why is our teaching *still* mostly white and Western? *The Psychologist, 6.*

Jaspal, R., & Breakwell, G. (2014). *Identity process theory: Identity, social action and social change.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jaspal, R., & Cinnirella, M. (2011). The construction of ethnic identity: Insights from identity process theory. *Ethnicities*, *12*(5), 503-530.

Jensen, S. Q. (2011). Othering, identity formation and agency. *Qualitative Studies, 2*(2), 63-78.

Joffe, H. (2012). Thematic analysis. In D. Harper, A. Thompson (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Methods in Mental Health and Psychotherapy: A Guide for Students and Practitioners* (pp. 209-223). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Johnson, A. (2011). Multiple selves and multiple sites of influence: Perceptions of young adult literature in the classroom, theory into practice. *Theory Into Practice, 50*(3), 215-222. doi:10.1080/00405841.2011.584032

Johnson, M. L., Taasoobshirazi, G., Clark, L., Howell, L., & Breen, M. (2016). Motivations of traditional and nontraditional college students: From self-determination and attributions, to expectancy and values. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 64*(1), 3–15. doi: 10.1080/07377363.2016.1132880

Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Kurotsuchi Inkelas, K., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., & Longerbeam, S. D. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(5), 525-542.

Johnson, M. K., Crosnoe, R., & Elder, G. H. (2001). Student's attachment and academic engagement: The role of race and ethnicity. *Sociology of Education, 74*(4), 318-340.

Johnstone, R. (2018, Apr 16). Windrush generation: Home office to set up dedicated team to deal with concerns over immigration status. *Civil Service World.* Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/2025365586?accountid=14987

Jones, G. (2010). Managing student expectations. Perspectives: *Policy and Practice in Higher Education, 14(2)*, 44-48. doi: 10.1080/13603101003776135

Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development, 41*(4), 405. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/195173169?accountid=14987

Jost, J. T., & Kruglanski, A. W. (2002). The estrangement of social constructionism and experimental social psychology: History of the rift and prospects for reconciliation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *6*(3), 168-187.

Jungert, T., Koestner, R., Houlfort, N., & Schattke, K. (2013). Distinguishing source of autonomy support in relation to workers' motivation and self-efficacy. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 153*(6), 651-666.

Kandaswamy, P. (2007). Beyond colorblindness and multiculturalism: Rethinking anti-racist pedagogy in the university classroom. *Radical Teacher*, (80), 6-11, 48.

Katsiaficas, D. Futch, V. A., Fine, M., & Sirin, S. R. (2011). Everyday hyphens: Exploring youth identities with methodological and analytic pluralism. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *8*(2), 120-139.

Kember, D., & Leung, D. Y. P. (2004). Relationship between the employment of coping mechanisms and a sense of belonging for part-time students. *Educational Psychology, 24*(3), 345–357. doi: 10.1080/0144341042000211689

Kenny, R., Dooley, B., & Fitzgerald, A. (2013). Interpersonal relationships and emotional distress in adults. *Journal of Adolescence, 36*(2)*, 351-360. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.12.005

Keval, H. (2019). Navigating the 'decolonising' process: Avoiding pitfalls and some do's and don't's. Retrieved from https://discoversociety.org/2019/02/06/navigating-the-decolonising-process-avoiding-pitfalls-and-some-dos-and-donts/

Khan, O. (2019, February 5). Ethnic minority pupils get worse degrees and jobs, even if they have better A-levels. *New Statesman.* Retrieved from https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/education/2019/02/ethnic-minority-pupils-get-worse-degrees-and-jobs-even-if-they-have?amp&__twitter_impression=true

Kirkham, J. A., Smith, J. A., & Havsteen-Franklin, D. (2015). Painting pain: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of representations of living with chronic pain. *Health Psychology*, *34*(4), 398–406.

Kitching, H. J., & Hulme, J. (2013). Bridging the gap: Students' transition from pre-tertiary to university psychology education. *Psychology Teaching Review, 19*(2), 15-30. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1149739.pdf

Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: The importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 16*(11)*,* 103-21.

Knifsend, C. A. (2014). Extracurricular involvement, friendships, and social identity development in ethnically diverse middle schools. Retrieved from http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/3j12v5fr

Knifsend, C., & Graham, S. (2012). Too much of a good thing? How breadth of extracurricular participation relates to school-related affect and academic outcomes during adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *41*(3), 379–389. doi: 10.1007/s10964-011-9737-4

Knoester, M., & Plikuhn, M. (2016). Influence of siblings on out-of-school reading practices. *Journal of Research in Reading, 39*(4), 469-485. doi: 10.1111/1467-9817.12059

Knowles, L. L., & Prewitt, K. (1969) cited in Spencer, S. (2006). *Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation.* Oxon: Routledge.

Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Kolchakian, M. R., & Sears, S. F. (1999). Religious coping in college students. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *38*(2), 115-126.

Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 45*(3), 214-22.

Kross, E., Bruehlman-Senecal, E., Park, J., Burson, A., Dougherty, A., Shablack, H., … Ayduk, O. (2014). Self-talk as a regulatory mechanism: How you do it matters. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 106*(2), 304–324. doi: 10.1037/a0035173

Kross, E., & Ayduk, O. (2011). Making meaning out of negative experiences by self-distancing. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 20*(3), 187–191. doi: 10.1177/0963721411408883

Kross, E., & Grossman, I. (2011). Boosting wisdom: Distance from the self enhances wise reasoning, attitudes and behaviour. *Journal of Experimental Psychology.* doi:10.1037/a0024158

Kuehn, P. (1996). Assessment of academic literacy skills: Preparing minority and LEP (Limited English Proficient) students for postsecondary education. Retrieved from https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&as_vis=1&q=academic+literacy+barrier+students&btnG=#d=gs_cit&u=%2Fscholar%3Fq%3Dinfo%3AsEO1cbCma_IJ%3Ascholar.google.com%2F%26output%3Dcite%26scirp%3D7%26hl%3Den

Kuperminc, G. P., Darnell, A. J., & Alvarez-Jimenez, A. (2008). Parent involvement in the academic adjustment of Latino middle and high school youth: Teacher expectations and school belonging as mediators. *Journal of Adolescence*, *31*(4), 469–483. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2007.09.003

Kuttler, A. F., La Greca, A. M., & Prinstein, M. J. (2010). Friendship qualities and social-emotional functioning of adolescents with close, cross-sex friendships. *Journal of Research in Adolescence*, *9*(3), 339-366.

Kwhali, J. (2017). The accidental academic. In D. Gabriel, S. A. Tate (Eds.), *Inside the Ivory Tower* (pp. 5-24). London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

Kyndt, E., Donche, V., Gubels, D., & Van Petegem, P. (2014). Workplace learning within teacher education: The role of the job characteristics and goal orientation. *Educational Studies*, *40*(5), 515-532.

Ladge, J., Clair, J., & Greenberg, D. (2012). Cross-domain identity transition during liminal periods: Constructing multiple selves as professional and mother during pregnancy. *Academy of Management Journal, 55*(6), 1449-1471. doi: 10.5465/amj.2010.0538

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *11*(1), 7–24. doi: 10.1080/095183998236863

Laing, C., & Robinson, A. (2003). The withdrawal of nontraditional students: Developing an explanatory model. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 27*(2), 175-185.

Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological psychology: Theory, research and method.* Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.

Lareau, A., & Weininger, E. B. (2003). Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment. *Theory and Society*, *32,* 567-606.

Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3,* 102-120.

Latané, B., Williams, K., & Harkins, S. (2006). Many hands make light the work: The causes and consequences of social loafing. In *Small Groups: Key Readings* (pp. 297–308). Psychology Press. doi: 10.4324/9780203647585

Lau, H., Hsu, H., Acosta, S., & Hsu, T. (2013). Impact of participation in extra-curricular activities during college on graduate employability: An empirical study of graduates of

Taiwanese business schools. *Educational Studies, 40*(1), 1-22. doi: 10.1080/03055698.2013.830244

Lavallee, D., & Robinson, H. K. (2007). In pursuit of an identity: A qualitative exploration of retirement from women's artistic gymnastics. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *8*, 119-141.

Leach, C. W. (2005). Against the notion of a 'new' racism. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, *15*, 432-445.

Lee, J. (2014). The attainability of university degrees and their labour market benefits for young Australians. *Higher Education, 68*(3), 449-469. doi: 10.1007/s10734-014-9722-4

Lee, M. R. (2012). Teaching gender and intersectionality: A dilemma and social justice approach. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *36*(1), 110-115.

Lee, B. (2007). Moderating effects of religious/spiritual coping in the relation between perceived stress and psychological well-being. *Pastoral Psychology*, *55*(6), 751-759.

Lessard-Phillips, L., & Li, Y. (2017). Social stratification of education by ethnic minority groups over generations in the UK. *Social Inclusion*, *5*(1), 45-54.

Lester, D. (2003). Comment on "the self as a problem": Alternative conceptions of the multiple self. *Journal of Socio-Economics, 32*(5), 499-502. doi: 10.1016/j.socec.2003.08.010

Levine, M., Cassidy, C., Brazier, G., & Reicher, S. (2002). Self-categorization and bystander non-intervention: Two experimental studies 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 32*(7), 1452-1463.

Lewis, M. P., Simons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (Eds.). (2015). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (18th ed.). Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Retrieved from http://www.ethnologue.com

Li, Y. (2013). The labour market position of second-generation immigrants. *Class and Stratification Analysis Comparative Social Research*, *30*, 159-187.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., Xenos, M. A., Steel, H., & Burgum, S. (2015). Campus politics, student societies and social media. *The Sociological Review, 63*(4), 820–839. doi: 10.1111/1467-954X.12220

Lopez, M. H. (2009). Latinos and education: Explaining the attainment gap. Retrieved from https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/83166/LatinosEducationAttainmentGap.pdf?sequence=1

López Turley, R., & Wodtke, G. (2010). College residence and academic performance: Who benefits from living on campus. *Urban Education*, *45*, 506-532.

Louis, D. A., Rawls, G. J., Jackson-Smith, D., Chambers, G. A., Phillips, L., & Louis, S. L. (2016). Listening to our voices: Experiences of Black faculty at predominantly White research universities with microagression. *Journal of Black Studies, 47*(5), 454-474.

Lowe, H. (2018). "Remember the ship": Narrating the Empire Windrush. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing, 1-14*. doi: 10.1080/17449855.2017.1411416

Lutz, A. (2007). Barriers to high-school completion among immigrant and later-generation Latinos in the USA: Language, ethnicity and socio-economic status. *Ethnicities, 7*(3), 323-342.

Lynch, K. D. (2008). Gender roles and the American academe: A case study of graduate student mothers. *Gender and Education*, *20*(6), 585-605.

Ma, X. (2003). Sense of belonging to school: Can schools make a difference? *The Journal of Educational Research*, *96*(6), 340–349. doi: 10.1080/00220670309596617

MacMillan, M., & MacKenzie, A. (2012). Strategies for integrating information literacy and

    academic literacy: Helping undergraduate students make the most of scholarly articles.

    Library Management, 33(8/9), 525-535.

Madhill, A. (2015). Let a thousand flowers bloom. *The Psychologist*, *28*(8), 656-658.

Mair, C., Taylor, J., & Hulme, J. (2013). An introductory guide to psychological literacy and

    psychologically literate citizenship. *The Higher Education Academy.* Retrieved from

    http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/21814/1/Psychological%20literacy%20and%20psycho

    logically%20literate%20citizenship_0%281%29.pdf

Mama, A. (1995). *Beyond the masks: Race, gender and subjectivity.* London: Routledge.

Manstead, A. S. R. (2018). The psychology of social class: How socioeconomic status

    impacts thought, feelings, and behaviour. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 57,* 267-

    291.

Margolis, E. (Ed.). (2001). *The hidden curriculum in higher education.* London: Routledge.

Margolis, H., & Mccabe, P. P. (2006). Improving self-efficacy and motivation: What to do,

    what to say. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 41*(4), 218–227. doi:

    10.1177/10534512060410040401

Markham, A. (2017). Reflexivity: Some techniques for interpretive researchers. Retrieved

    from https://annettemarkham.com/2017/02/reflexivity-for-interpretive-researchers/

Markus, H. (2008). Pride, prejudice and ambivalence: Toward a unified theory of race and

    ethnicity. *The American Psychologist*, *63*(8), 651-670.

Markus, H., & Wurf, E. (1987). The dynamic self-concept: A social psychological

    perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 38*(1), 299-337.

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). 'Possible selves'. *American Psychologist, 41*(9), 954-969.

Marteau, T. M., Ogilvie, D., Roland, M., Suhrche, M., & Kelly, M. P. (2011, January).

    Judging nudging: Can nudging improve population health? *BMJ*, *342*, 263-265.

Martikainen, A. L., & Korpilahti, P. (2011). Intervention for childhood apraxia of speech: A single-case study. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 27*(1), 9–20.

Martin, J., & McLellan, A. (2013). *Being confident in what you do: Self-efficacy and agency.* Oxford University Press. Oso/9780199913671.003.0006

Masika, R., & Jones, J. (2016). Building student belonging and engagement: Insights into higher education students' experiences of participating and learning together. *Teaching in Higher Education, 21*(2), 138–150.

Massey, D. S., Mooney, M., Torres, K. C., & Charles, C. Z. (2007). Black immigrants and Black natives attending selective colleges and universities in the United States. *American Journal of Education*, *113*(2), 243-271.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 11*(3). Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1428/3027.%20%20%20%20%5BAccessed

Mason, J. (2006). Mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way. *Qualitative Research*, *6*(1), 9-25.

Mathison, S. (1988). Why triangulate? *Educational Researcher*, 13-17.

Matthews, E. (2013). *The philosophy of Merleau-Ponty.* Durham: Acumen Publishing.

Mayer, F. A., & Thompson Tetreault, M.K. (2001). *The feminist classroom: Dynamics of gender, race and privilege*. Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Maylor, U. (2009a). 'They do not relate to Black people like us': Black teachers as role models for Black pupils. *Journal of Education Policy, 24*(1), 1–21. doi: 10.1080/02680930802382946

Maylor, U. (2009b) Is it because I'm Black? A Black female research experience. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 12*(1), 53-64. doi: 10.1080/13613320802650949

Maylor, U. (2009c). What is the meaning of 'black'? Researching 'black' respondents. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 32*(2), 369-387.

Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative content analysis forum. *Qualitative Social Research*, *1*(2).

Mays, N., & Pope, C. (2000). Assessing quality in qualitative research. *BMJ*, *320*, 50-52.

Mazzolini, R. G. (2014). Skin colour and the origin of physical anthropology. In S. Lettow (Ed.), *Reproduction, Race, and Gender in Philosophy and the Early Life Sciences* (pp. 131-161). Albany: State University of New York Press.

McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs*, *30*(3), 1771-1800.

McDowell, L. (2016). *Migrant women's voices*. London: Bloomsbury.

McGee, E. O., & Kazembe, L. (2015). Entertainers or education researchers? The challenges associated with presenting while black. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2015.1069263

McGee, E.O., & Stovall, D. (2015). Reimagining critical race theory in education: Mental health, healing, and the pathway to liberatory praxis. *Educational Theory, 65*(5), 491-511.

McGregor-Smith Review. (2017). *Race in the Workplace*. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594336/race-in-workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf

McGregor, L., Miller, H. R., Mayleben, M.A., Buzzanga, V. L., & Davis, S. F. (1991). Similarities and differences between "traditional" and "nontraditional" college students in selected personality characteristics. *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society*, *29*(2), 128-130.

McLaughlin, A. N., & Randolph, K. A. (2012). Development of the school support scale for low-income mothers in college. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *22*(1), 68-76.

McVitty, D., & Morris, K. (2012). Never too late to learn: Mature students in higher education. Retrieved from http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/research/never-too-late-to-learn

Mead, G. H. (1967). *Mind, self, and society/from the standpoint of a social behaviorist.* Chicago London: University of Chicago Press.

Meer, N. (2014). *Key concepts in race and ethnicity*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Meeuwisse, M., Born, M. P., & Severiens, S. E. (2011). The family-study interface and academic outcomes: Testing a structural model. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 103*(4), 982–990.

Meeuwisse, M., Severiens, S. E., & Born, M. P. (2010a). Reasons for withdrawal from higher vocational education. A comparison of ethnic minority and majority non-completers. *Studies in Higher Education, 35*(1), 93-111. doi: 10.1080/03075070902906780

Meeuwisse, M., Severiens, S. E., & Born, M. P. (2010b). Learning environment: Interaction, sense of belonging and study success in ethnically diverse student groups. *Research in Higher education, 51*(6), 528-545.

Mena, J. A. (2016). I love my work, but this is not my life: Women of color in the academy. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education, 9*(2). doi: 10.1080/19407882.2016.1195274

Mennell, S. (1994). The formation of we-Images: A process theory. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (pp. 175-197). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority: An experimental view*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Miller, D. P., Waldfogel, J., & Han, W. J. (2012). Family meals and child academic and behavioral outcomes. *Child Development*, *83*(6), 2104–2120.

Millward, C. (July, 2018). Tackling the geographical disparities in higher education. *Wonkhe.* Retrieved from https://wonkhe.com/blogs/tackling-the-geographical-disparities-in-higher-education/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Monday%20Morning%20HE%20Briefing%20-%209th%20July&utm_content=Monday%20Morning%20HE%20Briefing%20-%209th%20July+CID_811d64c89feddede01416fb0dc789497&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=explains%20why%20to%20see%20the%20wider%20benefits%20of%20higher%20education%20we%20must%20improve%20opportunities%20for%20students%20who%20want%20to%20study%20locally

Milkman, K., Akinola, M., & Chugh, D. (2014). Discrimination in the academy: A field experiment. *SSRN 2063742.* Retrieved from *https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d3e0/37f3bfec5e87fc88cbfb198236b17c55d960.pdf*

Milner, H. (2017). Unconscious bias hurts. *Educational Leadership, 75*(4), 86.

Milton, T. (2012). Class status and the construction of Black masculinity. *Ethnicity and Race in a Changing World, 3*(1), 17–31. doi: 10.7227/ERCT.3.1.2

Milton, D., & Sims, T. (2016). How is a sense of well-being and belonging constructed in the accounts of autistic adults? *Disability & Society*, *31*(4), 520-534.

Ministry of Justice. (2017). *Lammy Review of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Representation in the Criminal Justice System.* Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642910/lammy-review-call-for-evidence-analysis.pdf

Mirza, H. (2017). 'One in a million': A journey of a post-colonial woman of colour in the White academy. In Gabriel, D., Tate, S.A. (Eds.), *Inside the Ivory Tower* (pp. 39-53). London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

Mirza, H. S. (1998). Black women in education: A collective movement for social change. In T. Modood, T. Acland (Eds.), *Race and Higher Education* (pp. 39-47). London: Policy Studies Institute.

Mirza, H. (Ed.). (1997). *Black British feminism*. London: Routledge.

Mirza, H. (1992). *Young, female and Black*. London: Routledge.

Modood, T., & Khattab, N. (2016). Explaining ethnic differences: Can ethnic minority strategies reduce the effects of ethnic penalties? *Sociology, 50*(2), 231–246. doi: 10.1177/0038038515575858

Modood, T., & Acland, T. (Eds.). (1998). *Race and higher education*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

Mohammed, S., & Kranias, G. (2016). Collaborative story-gathering template. *Health Nexus.* Produced in partnership with the Collaborative Leadership in Practice (CLiP) project. Retrieved from http://www.clip-lcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CLiP_Template_Story-Gathering.pdf

Moore, L. J. (2000). Psychiatric contributions to understanding racism. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, *32*(2), 147-183.

Moradi, B., Subich, L. M., & Phillips, J. C. (2002). Revisiting feminist identity development theory, research, and practice. *Counselling Psychologist*, *30*(1), 6-43.

Moreau, M. (2016). Regulating the student body/ies: University policies and student parents. *British Educational Research Journal, 42*(5), 906–925.

Moreau, M. P. (2014). Research evidence on student parents and implications for higher education policies. *The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.* Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/9336704/Towards_the_family-friendly_university_Research_evidence_on_student_parents_and_implications_for_higher_education_policies

Moreau, M., & Kerner, C. (2015). Care in academia: An exploration of student parents' experiences. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36*(2), 215-233. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2013.814533

Morey, A., Harvey, L., Williams, J., Saldaña, A., Mena, P., Watson, S., & MacDonald, M. (2003). HE Careers Services & Diversity–how careers advisory services can enhance the employability of graduates from non-traditional backgrounds. HECSU, Manchester. doi: 10.1016/j.nepr.2012.07.011

Morey, N. C., & Luthans, F. (1984). An emic perspective and ethnoscience methods for organizational research. *Academy of Management Review, 9, 27–36.* doi: 10.5465/AMR.1984.4277836

Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus groups. *Annual Review of Sociology, 22,* 129-152.

Morosanu, L., Handley, K., & O'Donovan, B. (2010). Seeking support: Researching first-year students' experiences of coping with academic life. *Higher Education Research and Development, 2*9(6), 665–678.

Morrison Coulthard, L., Fitzgerald, J., Howarth, C., & Husbands, D. (2014, January). *British Psychological Society response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) call for evidence: Race and Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://apps2.bps.org.uk/_publicationfiles/consultation-responses/BPS_response_APPG_Race_HE_response_form-approved.pdf

Morrow, R., Rodriguez, A., & King, N. (2014) cited in Brooks, J. (2015). Learning from the 'lifeworld'. *The Psychologist*, *28*(8), 642-646.

Morse, J., & Field, P. A. (1996). *Nursing Research: The Application of Qualitative Approaches* (2nd ed.). Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes.

Moser, J., Dougherty, A., Mattson, W., Katz, B., Moran, T., Guevarra, D., … Kross, E. (2017). Third-person self-talk facilitates emotion regulation without engaging cognitive

control: Converging evidence from ERP and fMRI. *Sci Rep, 7*(1), 4519. doi: 10.1038/s41598-017-04047-3

Moum, T. (1998). Mode of administration and interviewer effects in self-reported symptoms of anxiety and depression. *Social Indicators Research*, *45*(1), 279-318.

Mountford-Zimdars, A., Sanders, J., Moore, J., Sabri, D., Jones, S., & Higham, L. (2017). What can universities do to support all their students to progress successfully throughout their time at university? *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education, 21*(2-3), 101-110. doi: 10.1080/13603108.2016.1203368

Moynihan, D. P. (1965). The negro family: The case for national action. *African American Male Research.* Retrieved from https://web.stanford.edu/~mrosenfe/Moynihan%27s%20The%20Negro%20Family.pdf

Mulcahy, E., Baars, S., Bowen-Viner, K., & Menzies, L. (2017). The underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in higher education. *King's College London.* Retrieved from https://www.lkmco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/KINGWIDE_28494_FINAL.pdf

Mulheirn, I., & Shorthouse, R. (2011). The parent trap: Illustrating the growing costs of childcare. *Social Market Foundation.* Retrieved from http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Publication-The-Parent-Trap-Illustrating-the-growing-cost-of-childcare.pdf

Munday, J. (2006). Identity in focus: The use of focus groups to study the construction of collective identity. *Sociology, 40(1)*, 89-105. doi: 10.1177/0038038506058436

Munk, M. D. (2013). Completion of upper secondary school education: What mechanisms are at stake? *Class and Stratification Analysis Comparative Social Research, 30,* 255-291.

Murphy, H., & Roopchand, N. (2003). Intrinsic motivation and self-esteem in traditional and mature students at post-1992 university in the North-East of England. *Educational Studies*, *29*(2-3), 243-259.

Murtagh, S., Ridley, A., Frings, D., & Kerr-Pertic, S. (2017). First-year undergraduate induction: Who attends and how important is induction for first year attainment? *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 41*(5), 597-610. doi: 10.1080/0309877X.2016.1159288

Museus, S. D., Palmer, R. T., Davis, R. J., & Maramba, D. C. (2011). *Racial and Ethnic Minority Students' Success in STEM Education.* ASHE higher Education Report, *36*(6), 1-140. Published in Wiley Online Library.

Muskett, T., Sandle, R., Gillborn, S., & Jankowski, G. (2017). Chicken or egg, theory or action? A critical rethinking if how we do things in psychology. *QMIP Bulletin, 24,* 51-55.

Musser, A. J. (2015). Specimen days: Diversity, labor and the university. *Feminist Formations*, *27*(3), 1-20.

Nadal, K. L., Davidoff, K. C., Davis, L. S., Wong, Y., Marshall, D., & McKenzie, V. (2015). A qualitative approach to intersectional microagressions: Understanding influences of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion. *Qualitative Psychology*, *2*(2), 147-163.

Najman, J. K., Aird, R., Bor, W., O'Callaghan, M., Williams, G.M., & Shuttlewood, G. J. (2004). The generational transmission of socioeconomic inequalities in child cognitive development and emotional health. *Social Science and Medicine*, *58*(6), 1147-1158.

Nash, J. (2017). Intersectionality and its discontents. *American Quarterly*, *69*(1), 117-129. doi: 10.1353/aq.2017.0006

National Audit Office. (2007). *Staying the Course: The Retention of Students in Higher Education.* Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General. London: The Stationery Office.

National Equality Panel. (2009). *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK: Report of the National Equality Panel*. Retrieved from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28344/1/CASEreport60.pdf

National Statistics. (2003). *Ethnic Group Statistics: A Guide for the Collection and Classification of Ethnicity Data.* A National Statistics Publication.

National Union of Students. (2012). *Race for Equality.* Retrieved from www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12350/NUS_Race_for_Equality_web.pdf

National Union of Students and UNIPOL Student Homes. (2018). *Accommodation Costs Survey*. Retrieved from https://www.unipol.org.uk/acs2018.aspx

Newman, B.M., Lohman, B.J., & Newman, P.R. (2007). Peer group membership and a sense of belonging: Their relationship to adolescent behaviour problems. *Adolescence*, *42*(166), 241-263.

Nicholas, L. J., & Putwain, D. W. (2014). Facilitating re-engagement in learning: A disengaged student perspective. *The Psychology of Education Review*, *39*(2), 37-41.

Niklas, F., & Schneider, W. (2015). With a little help: Improving kindergarten children's vocabulary by enhancing the home literacy environment. *Reading & Writing*, *28*(4), 491-508.

Ninnes, P., Aitchison, C., & Kalos, S. (1999). Challenges to stereotypes of international students' prior educational experience: Undergraduate education in India. *Higher Education Research & Development, 18*(3), 323–342. doi: 10.1080/0729436990180304

No Space is Safe. (2017, Mar 30). *University Wire.* Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/2023917195?accountid=14987

Noden, P., Shiner, M., & Modood, T. (2014). *Black and Minority Ethnic Access to Higher Education: A Reassessment*. Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics. Retrieved from

http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/PDF/NuffieldBriefing.pdf

Nunn, G. (1994). Adult learners' locus of control, self-evaluation and learning temperament as a function of age. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, *21*(3), 260.

O'Dell, L., de Abreu, G., & O'Toole, S. (2004). The turn to culture. *The Psychologist*, *17*(3), 138-141.

OFFA. (2014). *Do Bursaries Have an Effect on Retention Rates?* Research Report. Retrieved from https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/OFFA-2014-02.pdf

OFFA. (2010). *Have Bursaries Influenced Choices Between Universities?* Retrieved from https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Have-bursaries-influenced-choices-between-universities-.pdf

Office for National Statistics. (2018). *Children's and Young People's Experiences of Loneliness*. Retrieved from

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrensandyoungpeoplesexperiencesofloneliness/2018#authors

Office for National Statistics. (2011). *Ethnic Group Prioritisation Tool.* Retrieved from http://www.ons.gov.uk/search/index.html?newquery=ethnic+cate.g.ories+2011

Office for Students. (2019). *Differences in student outcomes: 2013-2017*. Retrieved from https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/differences-in-student-outcomes/degree-outcomes-overview/

Office for Students. (2018a). *Topic briefing: Black and minority ethnic (BME) students*. Retrieved from https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/145556db-8183-40b8-b7af-741bf2b55d79/topic-briefing_bme-students.pdf

Office for Students. (2018b). A new approach to regulating access and participation in English higher education consultation outcomes. Retrieved from https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/b6e62c0c-e056-40c3-a2bd-0a5a25678bf2/ofs2018_33.pdf

Ogbu, J. (2004). Collective identity and the burden of 'acting White' in Black history, community and education. *Identity*, *36*(1), 1-35.

O'Keefe, P. (2013). A sense of belonging: Improving student retention. *College Student Journal, 47*(4), 605–613. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=93813989&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Oliver-Hoyo, M., & Allen, D. (2006). The use of triangulation methods in qualitative educational research. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, *35*(4), 42-47.

Oman, S. (2016). Measuring national well-being: What matters to you? What matters to whom? In S. C. White, C. Blackmore (Eds.), *Cultures of Wellbeing: Method, Place, Policy* (pp. 66-94). London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Oman, S., Rainford, J., & Stewart, H. (2015). Stories of access in higher education: A triumph (or failure) of hope over experience? Retrieved from http://discoversociety.org/2015/12/01/stories-of-access-in-higher-education-a-triumph-or-failure-of-hope-over-experience/

Ommundsen, Y., Haugen, R., & Lund, T. (2005). Academic self-concept, implicit theories of ability, and self-regulation strategies. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 49*(5), 461–474. doi: 10.1080/00313830500267838

Orvell, A., Kross, E., & Gelman, S. A., (2017). How "you' makes meaning. *Science*. doi:10.1126/science.aaj2014.

Ossana, S. M., Helms, J. E., & Leonard, M. M. (1992). Do "womanist" identity attitudes influence college women's self-esteem and perceptions of environmental bias? *Journal of Counselling and Development*, *70*(3), 402-408.

Osseo-Asara, A., Balasuriya, L., Huot, S. J., Keene, D., Berg, D., Nunez-Smith, M., Genao, I., Latimore, D., & Boatright, D. (2018). Minority resident physicians' views on the role of race/ethnicity in their training experiences in the workplace. *Medical Education, 1-11.* doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.2723

Osterman, K. F. (2007). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(3), 323–367. doi: 10.3102/00346543070003323

Oxford Dictionary. (2012). Retrieved from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/coloured

Oyserman, D., Terry, K., & Bybee, D. (2002). A possible selves intervention to enhance school involvement. *Journal of Adolescence, 25*(3), 313-326. doi: 10.1006/jado.2002.0474

Padilla, L. (2001) cited in Pyke, S. (2010). What is internalized racial oppression and why don't we study it? Acknowledging racism's hidden injuries. *Sociological Perspectives*, *53*(4), 551-572.

Pajares, F., & Schunk, D. (2001). The development of academic self-efficacy. In A. Wigfield, J. Eccles (Eds.), *Development of Achievement Motivation* (pp. 1-27)*.* San Diego: Academic Press.

Pan, B., Smith, W. W., Litvin, S. W., & Woodside, A. (2018). Online travel survey response rates and researcher ethnicity. *International Journal of Tourism Research, 20*(6), 779–781. doi: 10.1002/jtr.2230

Paolini, S., Harwood J., Rubin, M., Husnu, S., Joyce, N., & Hewstone, M. (2014). Positive and extensive intergroup contact in the past buffers against the disproportionate impact of negative contact in the present. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *44,* 548-562.

Papafilippou, V., & Bentley, L. (2017). Gendered transitions, career identities and possible selves: The case of engineering graduates. *Journal of Education and Work, 30*(8), 827-839. doi: 10.1080/13639080.2017.1375088

Park, C. (2005). Religion as a meaning-making framework in coping with life stress. *Journal of Social Issues, 61*(4), 707-729.

Park, A., Bryson, C., Clery, E., Curtice, J. & Phillips, M. (Eds.). (2013). *British Social Attitudes: The 30th Report*. London: NatCen Social Research. Retrieved from www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk

Parker, A., & Tritter, J. (2006). Focus group method and methodology: Current practice and recent debate. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 29*(1)*,* 23-37.

Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wozniak, G.C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *75*(3), 249-284.

Patiniotis, J., & Holdsworth, C. (2005). 'Seize that chance!" Leaving home and transitions to higher education. *Journal of Youth Studies, 8*(1), 81-95.

Patiniotis, J., & Holdsworth, C. (2003). *The Choices and Experiences of Higher Education Students Living in the Parental Home. Research results. Liverpool: University of Liverpool.* Retrieved from https://www.researchcatalogue.esrc.ac.uk/grants/R000223985/read

Patton, M. Q. (1999). *Enhancing the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative Analysis*. HSR: Health Services Research 34:5 Part II. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1089059/

Pawson, C. (2012). A comparative analysis of students' satisfaction of teaching on STEM vs. non-STEM programmes. *Psychology Teaching Review*, *18*(2), 16-21.

Pazzagli, C., Laghezza, L., Manaresi, F., Mazzeschi, C., & Powell, B. (2014). The circle of security parenting and parental conflict: A single case study. *Frontiers in Psychology, 5*, 887. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1558518885/

Pearce, G., Thøgersen-Ntoumani, C., Duda, J. L., & McKenna, J. (2014). Changing bodies: Experiences of women who have undergone a surgically induced menopause. *Qualitative Health Research, 24*(6)*,* 738-748.

Pérez Huber, L., & Solorzano, D. G. (2015). Visualising everyday racism: Critical race theory, visual microaggressions, and the historical image of Mexican banditry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*(3), 223-238.

Pervone, L. A., & Cervone, D. (2010). *Personality: Theory and research* (11th ed.)*.* New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Peters, M. A. (2015). Why is my curriculum White? *Educational Philosophy and Theory: Incorporating ACCESS*, *47*(7), 641-646.

Pettigrew, T. F. (2016). In pursuit of three theories: Authoritarianism, relative deprivation, and intergroup contact. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *67*, 1-21.

Phan, H. P. (2011). Interrelations between self-efficacy and learning approaches: A developmental approach. *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology*, *31*(2), 225-246.

Phinney, J. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, *108*(3), 499-514.

Phoenix, A. (2006). Intersectionality. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 13*(3), 187-192.

Phoenix, A. (2003). Social constructions on lone motherhood: A case of competing

discourses. In E.B. Silva (Ed.), *Good Enough Mothering? Feminist Perspectives of*

Lone Mothering (pp. 175-190). London: Routledge.

Phoenix, A. (1999). Multiple racisms. *The Psychologist*, *12(3)*, 134-135.

Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using interpretative

phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Czasopismo*

Psychologiczne - Psychological Journal, *20*(1), 7-14.

Pilkington, P. (2019, January 24). Narratives on higher education: Slumming it on civic

engagement. *Wonkhe.* Retrieved from https://wonkhe.com/blogs/narratives-on-higher-

education-slumming-it-on-civic-

engagement/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=The%20Monday%20Morning%20

HE%20Briefing%20-

%2028%20January&utm_content=The%20Monday%20Morning%20HE%20Briefing%

20-

%2028%20January+CID_199e1f24c841babfd0ce8ecfe85a4dc4&utm_source=Email%2

0marketing%20software&utm_term=back%20with%20narratives%20on%20higher%2

0education%20%20this%20week%20he%20offered%20a%20novel%20view%20of%2

0the%20civic%20role%20of%20universities

Plaks, J. E., McNichols, N. K., & Fortune, J. L. (2009). Thoughts versus deeds: Distal and

proximal intent in lay judgments of moral responsibility. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull, 35*(12),

1687-1701. doi: 10.1177/0146167209345529

Pleggenkuhle, B., Huebner, B. M., & Summers, M. (2017). Opting out: The role of identity,

capital, and agency in prison visitation. *Justice Quarterly, 1-24.* doi:

10.1080/07418825.2017.1339113

Plowman, P. J. (2010). The diary project: Revealing the gendered organisation. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 5*(1), 28-46.

Pokorny, H., Holley, D., & Kane, S. (2016). Commuting transitions and belonging: The experiences of students living at home in their first year at university. *Higher Education*. doi: 10.1007/s10734-016-0063-3.

Porpora, D., & Shumar, W. (2010). Self talk and self reflection: A view from the US. In M.S. Archer, *Conversations About Reflexivity* (pp. 206-220). Oxon: Routledge.

Porter, C. J., & Dean, L. A. (2015). Meaning making: Identity development of Black undergraduate women. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education, 8*(2), 125-139.

Powell, B., & Steelman, L. C. (1990). Beyond sibship size: Sibling density, sex composition, and educational outcomes. *Social Forces*, *69*(1), 181-206.

Prah, E. (2017). Stratifications of blackness: Meditations on the interact of gender, race and age. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity.* doi: 10.1080/10130950.2017.1354441

Pridham, B., Martin, D., Walker, K., Rosengren, R., & Wadley, D. (2015). Culturally inclusive curriculum in higher education. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 44*(1), 94-105. doi:10.1017/jie.2015.2

Priest, H., Hale, R., & Jacobs, G. (2011). Diversity in the psychology curriculum: The development of a toolkit to audit, monitor and enhance responsiveness to diversity in an inclusive curriculum. *Psychology Learning & Teaching, 10*(2), 158–163. doi: 10.2304/plat.2011.10.2.158

Prins, B. (2006). Narrative accounts of origins: A blind spot in the intersectional approach? *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *13*(3), 277-290.

Proctor, S. L., & Truscott, S. D. (2012). Reasons for African American student attrition from school psychology programs. *Journal of School Psychology*, *50*(5), 655–679. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2012.06.002

Pyke, S. (2010). What is internalized racial oppression and why don't we study it? Acknowledging racism's hidden injuries. *Sociological Perspectives*, *53*(4), 551-572.

Pylett, P. M. (2003). Validation of qualitative research in the "real world". *Qualitative Health Research*, *13*(8), 1170-1179.

Quality Assurance Agency. (2016). *Subject Benchmark Statement: Psychology.* Retrieved from https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/sbs-psychology-16.pdf?sfvrsn=af95f781_8

Quimby, J. L., & O'Brien, K. M. (2006). Predictors of well-being among nontraditional female students with children. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 84*(4), 451–460. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6678.2006.tb00429.x

Race Disparity Unit. (2019). *Entry rates into higher education*. Retrieved from https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/apprenticeships-further-and-higher-education/entry-rates-into-higher-education/latest

Rathod, S., Kingdon, D., Phiri, P., & Gobbi, M. (2010). Developing culturally sensitive cognitive behaviour therapy for psychosis for ethnic minority patients by exploration and incorporation of service users' and health professionals' views and opinions. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, 38*(5), 511-533. doi: 10.1017/S1352465810000378

Ratner, K., Mendle, J., Burrow, A. L., & Thoemmes, F. (2019). Depression and derailment: A cyclical model of mental illness and perceived identity change. *Clinical Psychological Science*. doi: 10.1177/2167702619829748

Rautopuro, J., & Vaisanen, P. (2001). Nontraditional students at university: A follow-up of young and adult students' orientations, satisfaction and learning outcomes. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, Lille, 5-8 September. Retrieved from www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00001880.htm

Raychawdhuri, A. (2015, Feb 17). Cultural appropriation has no place in hip-hop scene. *University Wire.* Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/2013445945?accountid=14987

REACH. (2007). *An Independent Report to Government on Raising the Aspirations and Attainment of Black Boys and Young Black Men*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government. Retrieved from https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6778/

Read, B., Archer, L., & Leathwood, C. (2003). Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of 'belonging' and 'isolation' at a post-1992 university. *Studies in Higher Education*, *28*(3), 261-277.

Reay, D. (2018). Race and elite universities in the UK: Racism, Whiteness and decolonising the academy. In J. Arday, H. S. Mirza (Eds.), *Dismantling Race in Higher Education* (pp 47-66). doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-60261-5_3

Reay, D. (2004). 'It's all becoming a habitus': Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *25*(4), 431-444.

Reay, D. (1998). *Class work: Mother's involvement in their children's primary schooling.* London: Taylor & Francis.

Reay, D., Ball, S., & David, M. (2005). *Degree of choice: Social class, race and gender in higher education.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham.

Reay, D., Ball, S., & David, M. (2002). 'It's taking me a long time but I'll get there in the end': Mature students on access courses and higher education choice. *British Educational Research Journal, 28*(1), 5-19.

Reay, D., & Mirza, H.S. (1998). Uncovering genealogies of the margins: Black supplementary schooling. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 18*(4), 477-499.

Reddy, P., Lantz, C., & Hulme, J. (2013). *Employability in psychology: A guide for departments.* The Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/employability-psychology-guide-departments

Reed, J., & Roskell Payton, V. (1997). Focus groups: Issues of analysis and interpretation. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 26,* 765-771.

Reicher, S. (2001). Studying psychology studying racism. In M. Augoustinos, K. Reynolds (Eds.), *Understanding Prejudice, Racism and Social Conflict* (pp. 273-298)*.* London, UK: Sage.

Reid, K., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2005). Exploring lived experience. *The Psychologist*, *18*(1), 20-23.

Reisel, L. (2013). From abstract to concrete: The practical relevance of parents' economic and cultural capital for persistence in higher education. *Class and Stratification Analysis Comparative Social Research, 30*, 223-254.

Reynolds, F. (2006). Studying psychology at degree level: Would problem-based learning enhance students' experiences? *Studies in Higher Education*, *22*(3), 263-275.

Richards, G. (1996). *Putting psychology in its place*. London: Routledge.

Richardson, J. T. E. (2015). The under-attainment of ethnic minority students in UK higher education: What we know and what we don't know. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *39*, 278-291.

Riley, S. (2016). What does REF mean for qualitative psychologists? *QMiP Bulletin*, *21*, 5-7.

Rio-Roberts, M. D. (2011). How I learned to conduct focus groups. *The Qualitative Report, 16*(1)*,* 312-315.

Rivas-Drake, D., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Schaefer, D. R., & Medina, M. (2017). Ethnic-racial identity and friendships in early adolescence. *Child Development, 88*(3), 710–724.

Robotham, D. (2009). Combining study and employment: A step too far? *Education & Training*, *51*(4), 322-332.

Rodgers, T. (2013). Should high non-completion rates amongst ethnic minority students be seen as an ethnicity issue? Evidence from a case study of a student cohort from a British university. *Higher Education*, *66*(5), 535-550.

Rollock, N. (2019). *Staying Power: The Career Experiences and Strategies of UK Black Female Professors.* University and College Union. Retrieved from https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/10075/Staying-Power/pdf/UCU_Rollock_February_2019.pdf

Rollock, N. (2012). Unspoken rules of engagement: Navigating racial microaggressions in the academic terrain. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *25*(5), 517–532. doi: 10.1080/09518398.2010.543433

Rollock, N., & Gillborn, D. (2011) *Critical race theory (CRT).* British Educational Research Association online resource. Retrieved from https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/critical-race-theory-crt

Rom, M., & Benjamin, O. (2011). *Feminism, family, and identity in Israel.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Romero, M. (2018). *Introducing intersectionality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Roper, S., Capdevila, R. Lazard, L., & Anca, R. (2015). How is this feminist again? Q as a feminist methodology. *Psychology of Women Section Review, 17*, 3-10.

Rosenberg, M. (1989). Self-concept research: A historical overview. *Social Forces, 68*(1), 34. doi: 10.2307/2579218

Rosenthal, L. (2016). Incorporating intersectionality into psychology: An opportunity to promote social justice and equity. *American Psychologist, 71*(6), 474-485. doi: 10.1037/a0040323

Ross, S., & Jackson, J. (1991). Teachers' expectations for Black males' and Black females' academic achievement. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *17*(1), 78-82.

Roulin, N., & Bangerter, A. (2013). Students' use of extra-curricular activities for positional advantage in competitive job markets. *Journal of Education and Work, 26*(1), 21-47.

Roy, B. A., Bradecich, A., Dayne, N., & Luna, A. (2018). The transition to motherhood: The experiences of college student-parents. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences, 110*(3), 48-57. doi: 10.14307/JFCS110.3.48

Rubin, M., Scevak, J., Southgate, E., Macqueen, S., Williams, P., & Douglas, H. (2016). Older women, deeper learning, and greater satisfaction at university: Age and gender predict university students' learning approach and degree satisfaction. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education.* doi: 10.1037/dhe0000042

Rubin, M., Denson, N., Kilpatrick, S., Matthews, K. E., Stehlik, T., & Zinger, D. (2014). "I am working-class": Subjective self-definition of social class and socioeconomic status in higher education research. *Educational Researcher*, *43*(4), 196-200.

Rugg, G., & Petre, M. (2004). *The unwritten rules of PhD research.* Berkshire: Open University Press.

Runnymede Trust. (2015a). *How far have we come? Lessons from the 1965 Race Relations Act.* Arts and Humanities Research Council. Retrieved from https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/Race%20Relations%20Act%20Perspectives%20report.pdf

Runnymede Trust. (2015b). *Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy.* Retrieved from http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Aiming%20Higher.pdf

Runnymede Trust. (2011). *Widening Participation and Race Equality.* Retrieved from

    http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/WideningParticipation-

    2011(Online).pdf

Runnymede Trust. (2010). *Ethnicity and Participation in Higher Education.* Retrieved from

    http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Parliamentary%20briefings/HigherEducationN

    ovember2010.pdf

Sacks, T. K. (2015). New pathways to analysis through thick description: Historical trauma

    and emerging qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, *14*(6), 753-757.

Sagoe, D. (2012). Precincts and prospects in the use of focus groups in social and behavioral

    science research. *The Qualitative Report, 17(29),* 1-6. Retrieved from

    http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/sagoe.pdf.

Saldaña, J. (2018). Researcher, analyse thyself. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,*

    17, 1-7.

Sambell, K., & McDowell, L. (1998). The construction of the hidden curriculum: Messages

    and meanings in the assessment of student learning. *Assessment and Evaluation in*

    Higher Education, 23(4), 391-402.

Sánchez, B., Mroczkowski, A. L., Liao, L. C., Cooper, A. C., Rivera, C., & Dubois, D. L.

    (2017). Mentoring as a mediator or moderator of the association between racial

    discrimination and coping efficacy in urban, low-income Latina/o youth. *American*

    Journal of Community Psychology, 59(1–2).

Sanders, J., & Rose-Adams, J. (2014). Black and minority ethnic student attainment: A

    survey of research and exploration of the importance of teacher and student

    expectations. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 15*(2), 5-27.

Sanusi, K., MacDonald, P., Mosavie, H., & Mayi, K. (2012). *Race to the Top. The Experience*

    of Black Students in Higher Education. Elevation Networks Trust. The Bow Group.

Retrieved from

https://www.bowgroup.org/sites/bowgroup.uat.pleasetest.co.uk/files/Race%2520to%25
20the%2520Top%2520-%2520Bow%2520Group%2520-
%2520Elevation%2520Networks%2520%28April%25202012%29_0.pdf

Sarantakos, S. (2012). *Social research* (4th ed.)*.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Savage, M., Devine, F., Cunningham, N., Taylor, M., Li, Y., Hjellbrekke, J., Le
Roux,…Miles, A. (2013). A new model of social class? Findings from the BBC's Great
British Class Survey experiment. *Sociology*, *47*(2), 219-250.

Schindler, N., & Hope, K. J. (2016). Commitment and relatedness: How college students use
religious coping to manage anxiety. *Journal of College Counselling*, *19*(2), 180-192.

Schooler, D., Ward, M. L., Merriwether, A., & Caruthers, A. (2004). Who's that girl:
Television's role in the body image development of young White and Black women.
Psychology of Women Quarterly, *28*(10), 38-47.

Schnell, P., Fibbi, R., Crul, M., & Montero-Sieburth, M. (2015). Family involvement and
educational success of the children of immigrants in Europe. Comparative perspectives.
Comparative Migration Studies, 3(14). doi: 10.1186/s40878-015-0009-4

Schneider, D. (2008). Reflections for a student of mothering. *Smith College Studies in Social
Work*, *78*(4), 469-474.

Schoones, J. W., Tiemensma, J., & Kaptein, A. A. (2018). A systematic review of patients'
drawing of illness: Implications for research using the Common Sense Model AU -
Broadbent, Elizabeth. *Health Psychology Review,* 1–21. doi:
10.1080/17437199.2018.1558088

Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. London: Sage.

Schunk, D. H., & Pajares, F. (2002). The development of academic self-efficacy. In
    development of achievement motivation (pp. 15-31). Academic Press. Retrieved from
    https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/SchunkPajares2001.PDF

Scott, C., Burns, A., & Cooney, G. (1996). Reasons for discontinuing study: The case of
    mature age female students with children. *Higher Education, 31*(2), 233-253.

Segal, G. (2007). Intentionality. In The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy:
    Oxford University Press. Retrieved from
    http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com.ezproxy.westminster.ac.uk/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9
    780199234769.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199234769-e-11.

Serrant-Green, L. (2002). Black on black: Methodological issues for black researchers
    working in minority ethnic communities. *Nurse Researcher, 9*(4). Retrieved from
    https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Laura_Serrant/publication/11232647_Black_on_bl
    ack_methodological_issues_for_black_researchers_working_in_minority_ethnic_comm
    unities/links/0922b4f699591e160d000000.pdf

Seto, E., & Schlegel, R. J. (2017). Becoming your true self: Perceptions of authenticity across
    the lifespan. *Self and Identity, 17*(3)*, 310-326.

Settles, I. (2006). Use of an intersectional framework to understand Black women's racial and
    gender identities. *Sex Roles*, *54*, 589-601.

Shamir, B., House, R. J., & Arthur, M. B. (1993). The motivational effects of charismatic
    leadership: A self-concept based theory. *Organization Science, 4*(4), 577–594. doi:
    10.1287/orsc.4.4.577

Sharma, S., & Guest, M. (2013). Navigating religion between university and home: Christian
    students' experiences in English universities. *Social & Cultural Geography, 14*(1), 59-
    79. doi: 10.1080/14649365.2012.735691

Shaw, R., & Frost, N. (2015). Breaking out of the silo mentality. *The Psychologist*, *28*(8), 638-641.

Shenton, A.K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. Education for Information, 22, 63-75.

Sherif, M. (1988). *Intergroup conflict and cooperation: The Robber's Cave experiment.* Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

Sherriff, N., Gugglberger, L., Hall, C., & Scholes, J. (2014). "From start to finish": Practical and ethical considerations in the use of focus groups to evaluate sexual health service interventions for young people. *Qualitative Psychology*, *1*(2), 92.

Shillam, R. (2015). Race and research agendas. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *26*(1), 152-158.

Shillam, R. (2014). *Black Academia in Britain. The Disorder of Things.* Retrieved from https://thedisorderofthings.com/2014/07/28/black-academia-in-britain/

Shin, R. Q., Welch, J. C., Kaya, A. E., Yeung, J. G., Obana, C., Sharma, R., . . . Yee, S. (2017). The intersectionality framework and identity intersections in the Journal of Counseling Psychology and the Counseling Psychologist: A content analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 64*(5), 458-474. doi: 10.1037/cou0000204

Shinebourne, P. (2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In Frost, N. (2011). *Qualitative Research Methods in Psychology: Combining Core Approaches* (44-65)*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Shoderu, R., Husbands, D., Holley, D., & Kane, S. (2012). Developing a sense of belonging: Findings from a three-institution study with implications for BME students and staff engagement. *Compass*, *5*, 67-74.

Shorter-Gooden, K. (2004). Multiple resistance strategies: How African American women cope with racism and sexism. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *30*, 406-425.

Shorter-Gooden, K., & Washington, N.C. (1996). Young, Black, and female: The challenge of weaving an identity. *Journal of Adolescence*, *19*, 465-475.

Showunmi, V., Atewologun, D., & Bebbington, D. (2015). Ethnic, gender and class intersections in British women's leadership experiences. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 1-19.

Sian, K. (2019). *Navigating institutional racism in British universities (mapping global racisms).* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sian, K. (2017). Being Black in a White world: Understanding racism in British universities. *International Journal on Collective Identity Research, 2*, 1-26.

Silva, J. (2013). Feminist research methodology. In J. Ainsworth (Ed.), *Sociology of Education: An A-to-Z Guide, 1* (pp. 283-284). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi: 10.4135/9781452276151.n145

Silverman, S. K. (2011). Cultural deficit perspective. *Encyclopedia of Child Behavior and Development*, 446-447.

Simons-Morton, B., & Crump, A. D. (2003). Association of parental involvement and social competence with school adjustment and engagement among sixth graders. *Journal of School Health*, *73*(3), 121–126. doi: 10.1111/j.1746-1561.2003.tb03586.x

Singh, G. (2011). *Black and minority ethnic (BME) students' participation in higher education: Improving retention and success. A synthesis of research evidence.* York: HEA. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/black-and-minority-ethnic-bme-students-participation-higher-education-improving

Sirin, S., & Fine, M. (2007). Hyphenated Selves: Muslim American youth negotiating identities on the fault lines of global conflict. *Applied Developmental Science, 11*(3), 151-163.

Skär, L., & Prellwitz, M. (2008). Participation in play activities: A single-case study focusing on a child with obesity experiences. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences, 22*(2), 211–219.

Slaten, C. D., Elison, Z. M., Lee, J., Yough, M., & Scales, D. (2016a). Belonging on campus: A qualitative inquiry of Asian international students. *The Counselling Psychologist*, *44*(3), 383-410.

Slaten, C. D., Ferguson, J. K., Allen, K.-A., Brodrick, D.-V., & Waters, L. (2016b). School belonging: A review of the history, current trends, and future directions. *Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, *33*(1), 1. doi: 10.1017/edp.2016.6

Slaten, C. D., Yough, M. S., Shemwell, D. A., Scalise, D. A., Elison, Z. M., & Hughes, H. A. (2014). Eat, sleep, breathe, study: Understanding what it means to belong at a university from the student perspective. *Excellence in Higher Education*, *5*(1), 1–5. doi: 10.5195/ehe.2014.117

Small, M. L. (2009). 'How many cases do I need?': On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research. *Ethnography*, *10*(1), 5-38.

Smit, B., & Cillers, F. (2006). Understanding implicit texts in focus groups from a systems psychodynamic perspective. *The Qualitative Report, 11*(2)*, 302-316.

Smith, J. A. (2019). Participants and researchers searching for meaning: Conceptual developments for interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 16*(2), 166-181.

Smith, J. A. (2011). 'We could be diving for pearls': The value of the gem in experiential qualitative psychology. *QMiP Bulletin, 12,* 6-15.

Smith, J. A. (2010). Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Health Psychology Review*, *5*(1), 9-27.

Smith, J. A. (2008). *Qualitative psychology* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.

Smith, J. A. (1999). Identity development during the transition to motherhood: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology, 17*, 281-300.

Smith, J. A. (1995). Qualitative methods, identity and transition to motherhood. *The Psychologist, 8*, 122-125.

Smith, J. (2004). Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 1*(1)*, 39-54.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Smith, J. A. & Osborn, M. (2013). In J.A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology*: *A practical guide to research methods*, (2nd ed.) (pp. 53-80). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Smith, J., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J.A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology. A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (pp. 51-80). London: Sage.

Smith, S. (1995). *Two generation programs for families in poverty: A new intervention strategy*. New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Smith, P. L., & Little, D. R. (2018). Small is beautiful: In defense of the small-N design. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review, 25*(6), 2083–2101. doi: 10.3758/s13423-018-1451-8

SOAS Students' Union. (2016). Degrees of racism. *Report.* Retrieved from https://soasunion.org/liberation/attainmentgaps/

Social Market Foundation. (2017). On course for success? Student retention at university. Retrieved from http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/UPP-final-report.pdf

Social Market Foundation. (2016). *Educational Inequalities in England and Wales.* Commission on Equality in Education. Retrieved from http://www.smf.co.uk/publications/educational-inequalities-in-england-and-wales/

Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. (2016). *Apprenticeships, young people, and social mobility*. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509123/Social_Mobility_and_Child_Poverty_Commission_Submission_on_Apprenticeships_final.pdf

Somers, M. R., & Gibson, G.D. (1994). Narrative and social identity. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (pp. 37-99). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Sosu, E., & Ellis, S. (2014). *Closing the attainment gap in Scottish education*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Spade, D. (2011). Some very basic tips for making higher education more accessible to trans students and rethinking how we talk about gendered bodies. *Radical Teacher, 92*, 57-62, 80. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/917635007?accountid=14987

Spencer, S. (2014). *Race and ethnicity: Culture, identity and representation* (2nd ed.). Oxon: Routledge.

Spencer, S. (2006). *Race and ethnicity: Culture, identity and representation.* Oxon: Routledge.

Spencer, M. B., Dupree, D., & Hartmann, T. (1997). A phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST): A self-organisation perspective in context. *Development and Psychopathology*, *9*(4), 817-833.

Spitzer, T. M. (2011). Predictors of college success: A comparison of traditional and nontraditional age students. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 38*(1), 82–98. doi: 10.2202/1949-6605.1130

Stephen, D., O'Connell, P., & Hall, M. (2008). 'Going the extra mile', 'fire-fighting', or laissez-faire? Re-evaluating personal tutoring relationships within mass higher education 1. *Teaching in Higher Education, 13*(4), 449-460. doi: 10.1080/13562510802169749

Stevenson, J. (2014). Internationalisation and religious inclusion in United Kingdom higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *68*(1), 46-64.

Stevenson, J. (2012). Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment. *Higher Education Academy.* Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/bme_summit_final_report.pdf

Stevenson, J., O'Mahoney, J., Khan, O., Ghaffar, F., & Stiell, B. (2019). Understanding and overcoming the challenges of targeting students from under-represented and disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds. *Report to the Office for Students.* Retrieved from https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/d21cb263-526d-401c-bc74-299c748e9ecd/ethnicity-targeting-research-report.pdf

Stevenson, J., & Whelan, P. (2013). *Synthesis of US literature relating to the retention, progression, completion and attainment of black and minority ethnic (BME) students in HE.* Higher Education Academy. York. Retrieved from https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/synthesis-us-literature-relating-retention-progressioncompletion-and-attainment-black

Stevenson, J., & Clegg, S. (2011). Possible selves: Students orientating themselves towards the future through extracurricular activity. *British Educational Research Journal, 37*(2), 231-246. doi: 10.1080/01411920903540672

Stewart, A. J., & McDermott, C. (2004). Gender in psychology. *Annu Rev Psychol, 55*, 519-544.

Stoll, L., & Williams, R. (2016). A response to Claxton and Lucas. *The Psychology of Education Review*, *40*(1), 42-45.

Stott, C., Hutchison, P., & Drury, J. (2001). 'Hooligans' abroad? Inter-group dynamics, social identity and participation in collective 'disorder' at the 1998 World Cup Finals. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 40*(3), 359-384.

Straubhaar, R. (2015). Trying to build a classless utopia in the land of racial democracy: The lack of racial discussion within the education materials of the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers' Movement. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 1-13.

Strayhorn, T. L., Harper, S. R., & Newman, C. B. (2010). Undergraduate research participation and STEM graduate degree aspirations among students of color. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *148*, 85-93.

Stryker, S., & Burke, P. J. (2000). The past, present and future of an identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *63*(4), 284-297.

Stuart, M., Lido, C., & Morgan, J. (2009). *The Impact of Social Identity and Cultural Capital on Different Ethnic Groups University: Full Research Report.* ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-22-2485. Swindon: ESRC.

Stubbs, N., & Maynard, D. (2017). Academic self- efficacy, school engagement and family functioning, among postsecondary students in the Caribbean. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 26*(3), 792-799. doi: 10.1007/s10826-016-0595-2

Student Experience Survey. (2016). Retrieved from http://digital.timeshighereducation.com/SES2016/index.html

Sunak, R., & Rajeswaran, S. (2014). *A Portrait of Modern Britain.* Policy Exchange.

Retrieved from https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/a-portrait-

of-modern-britain.pdf

Surridge, P. (2008). *The National Student Survey 2005-2007: Findings and Trends*. HEFCE.

Retrieved from

https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/council_and_committees/council_papers_and_min

utes/2008/TQI%2008%2079%20Annex%20A.pdf

Suyono, H. (1981). Family planning attitudes in urban Indonesia: Findings from focus group

research. *Studies in Family Planning, 12*(12), 433–442. doi: 10.2307/1965655

Swanson, D. P., Spencer, M. B., Dell' Angelo, T., Harpalani, V., Spencer, T. R., Noam, G. G.,

Lerner, R.M.,…Von Eye, A. (2002). Identity processes and the positive youth

development of African Americans: An explanatory framework. *New Directions for

Youth Development*, *95*, 73-100.

Tajfel, H. (2010). *Social identity and intergroup relations.* Cambridge University Press.

Retrieved from https://books.google.co.uk/books

Tajfel, H. (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Ann. Rev. Psychol., 33,* 1-39.

Tajfel, H. (1978). *The Social Psychology of Minorities.* Report No. 38. London: Minority

Rights Group.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity of intergroup behaviour. In K. A.

Keough, J. Garcia (Eds.), *Social Psychology of Gender, Race and Ethnicity* (pp.48-52)*.*

Dubuque: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Tate, S. A. (2014). Racial affective economies, desalination and 'race made ordinary'. *Ethnic

and Racial Studies*, *37*(13), 2475-2490.

Tate, S. A., & Page, D. (2018). Whiteliness and institutional racism: Hiding behind

(un)conscious bias. *Ethics and Education, 13*(1), 141-155.

Tatlow, P. (2015). *Participation of BME students in UK higher education. Aiming higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy.* Runnymede Perspectives. Retrieved from https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Aiming%20Higher.pdf

Taylor, P. G. (2000). Changing expectations: Preparing students for flexible learning. *The International Journal of Academic Development, 5*(2), 107-115.

Taylor, J., & Hulme, J. A. (2015). Psychological literacy: A compendium of practice. Retrieved from http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/22906/4/psychological_literacy_compendium_final2._amended.pdf

Taylor, J., & House, B. (2010). An exploration of identity, motivations and concerns of nontraditional students at different stages of higher education. *Psychology Teaching Review, 16*(1), 46-56.

Thielking, M., Brownfield, N. R., Quinn, S., & Bates, G. (2019). *We want to know: Financial Stress, Accommodation Insecurity and Food Insecurity in Undergraduate Students. Results from the 2018 Higher Education Accommodation and Financial Stress Survey.* doi: 10.25916/5cda0897ec397

Thomas, L. (2012). *Building Student Engagement and Belonging in Higher Education at a Time of Change: A Summary of Findings and Recommendations from the What Works? Student Retention & Success Programme.* London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Thomas, A. J., Hacker, J. D., & Hoxha, D. (2011). Gendered racial identity of Black young women. *Sex Roles, 64*(7–8), 530–542. doi: 10.1007/s11199-011-9939-y

Thomas, L., & Jones, R. (2017). *Student engagement in the context of commuter students.* Retrieved from http://www.lizthomasassociates.co.uk/projects/2018/ Commuter%20student%20engagement.pdf

Thompson, L. (2013). Quality apprenticeships: The new degree? *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. The OECD Observer, 295*, 41-42. Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/1460551319?accountid=14987

Tillman, L. C. (2012). Inventing ourselves: An informed essay for Black female scholars in educational leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *25*(1), 119-126.

Tillman, K. (2008). "Nontraditional" siblings and the academic outcomes of adolescents. *Social Science Research, 37*(1). Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/215861290/

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45*(1), 89-125. Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.874.5361&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Torres, V., & Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2004). Reconstructing Latino identity: The influence of cognitive development on the ethnic identity process of Latino students. *Journal of College Student Development 45*(3), 333-347. Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved June 13, 2019, from Project MUSE database.

Trahar, S. (2009). Beyond the story itself: Narrative inquiry and autoethnography in intercultural research in higher education. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 10*(1).

Triandis, H. C., Bontempo, R., Villareal, M. J., Asai, M., & Lucca, N. (1988). Individualism and collectivism: Cross-cultural perspectives on self-ingroup relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*(2), 323–338. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.54.2.323

Tsri, K. (2016). Africans are not Black: Why the use of the term 'Black' for Africans should be abandoned. *African Identities*, *14*(2), 147-160.

Twigger-Ross, C. L., & Uzzell, D. L. (1996). Place and identity processes. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *16,* 205-220.

UCAS. (2018). *Admission patterns for mature applicants: 2017 cycle*. Retrieved from https://www.ucas.com/file/175936/download?token=UVSBJLVD

UCAS. (2016). *Mature Students.* Retrieved from https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/mature-students

UCAS Analysis & Research. (2015). Retrieved from www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/26-aug-age-all.pdf

Universities UK. (2013). *Patterns and Trends in UK Higher Education.* Retrieved from http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2013/PatternsAndTrendsin UKHigherEducation2013.pdf

Universities UK and NUS. (2019) *Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #closingthegap*. Retrieved from https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf

University of Westminster (2012). *Code of Research Good Practice.* Retrieved from http://ww.westminster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/43450/Code-of-Research-Good-Practice-2014-15.pdf

Urberg, K.A., Degrimencioglu, S.D., Tolson, J.M., & Halliday-Scher, K. (1995). The structure of adolescent peer networks. *Developmental Psychology*, *31*(4), 540-547.

Uwah, C. J., McMahon, G. H., & Furlow, C. F. (2008). School belonging, educational aspirations, and academic self-efficacy among African American male high school students: Implications for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, *11*(5), 296-305.

Vacchelli, E., & Peyrefitte, M. (2018). Telling digital stories as feminist research and practice: A 2-day workshop with migrant women in London. *Methodological Innovations, 11*(1). doi: 10.1177/2059799118768424

Vaes, J., Leyens, J. P., Paladino, M. P., & Miranda, M. P. (2012). We are human, they are not: Driving forces behind outgroup dehumanisation and the humanisation of the ingroup. *European Review of Social Psychology*. doi: 10.1080/10463283.2012.665250

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, *15*, 398-405.

Valentine, C. (2012). Rethinking the achievement gap: Lessons from the African Diaspora. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/therootdc/post/rethinking-the-achievement-gap-lessons-from-the-african-diaspora/2012/09/04/eebc5214-f362-11e1-a612-3cfc842a6d89_blog.html

van Nieuwenhove, K., Meganck, R., Cornelis, S., & Desmet, M. (2018). Core conflictual relationship patterns in complex trauma: A single-case study. *Psychodynamic Practice, 24*(3), 245–260.

van Rhijn, T., Quosai, T., & Lero, D. (2011). A profile of undergraduate student parents in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 41*(3), 59–80. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/921584862/

Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018). Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: Systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 18*(1), 148. doi: 10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7

Vaus, D. (2008). Comparative and cross-national designs. In P. Alasuutari, L. Bickman, J. Brannen (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods* (pp. 249-264). London: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi:10.4135/9781446212165.n15

Veenstra, G. (2000). Social capital, SES and health: An individual-level analysis. *Social Science & Medicine*, *50*, 619-629.

Vignoles, V. L., Regalia, C., Manzi, C., Golledge, J., & Scabini, E. (2006). Beyond self-esteem: Influence of multiple motives on identity construction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*(2), 308-333.

Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S., & Gillborn, D. (2012). Raising middle-class Black children: Parenting priorities, actions and strategies. *Sociology*, *47*(3), 427-442.

Waddington, K. (2010). Organisational gossip, sense-making and the spookfish: A reflexive account. *International Journal of Management Concepts and Philosophy, 4*(3

Wagstaff, C., Jeong, H., Nolan, M., Wilson, T., Tweedlie, J., Phillips, E., Senu, H., & Holland, F. (2014). The accordion and the deep bowl of spaghetti: Eight researchers' experiences of using IPA as a methodology. *The Qualitative Report*, *19*(47), 1-15.

Walton, G. M., & Carr, P. B. (2011). Social belonging and the motivation and intellectual achievement of negatively stereotyped students. In M. Inzlicht, T. Schrader (Eds.), *Stereotype Threat: Theory, Process and Application* (pp. 89-106)*. Oxford Scholarship Online, Oxford University Press.

Warner, L. R. (2008). A best practices guide to intersectional approaches in psychological research. *Sex Roles*, *59*(5), 454-463.

Watson, N. N., & Hunter, C. D. (2016). "I had to be strong": Tensions in the Strong Black Woman schema. *Journal of Black Psychology, 42*(5), 424-452. doi: 10.1177/0095798415597093

Webb, O. J., & Cotton, D. R. E. (2018). Early withdrawal from higher education: A focus on academic experiences. *Teaching in Higher Education, 23*(7)*,* 835-852. doi: 10.1080/13562517.2018.1437130

Webb, J., Schirator, T., & Danaher, G. (2002). *Understanding Bourdieu*. London: Sage Books.

Wehrenberg, M. (2010, Nov). Deconstructing depression. *Psychotherapy Networker, 34.* Retrieved from https://search.proquest.com/docview/807633970?accountid=14987

Wei-Cheng, M., & Bikos, L. H. (2000). Educational and vocational aspirations of minority and female students: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Counselling and Development, 78*(2), 186-194.

West, K. (2019). Testing hypersensitive responses: Ethnic minorities are not more sensitive to microaggressions, they just experience them more frequently. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1-14. doi: 10.1177/0146167219838790

Whitty, G., Hayton, A., & Tang, S. (2015). Who you know, what you know and knowing the ropes: A review of evidence about access to higher education institutions in England. *Review of Education*, *3*(1), 27-67.

Williams, M. J., George-Jones, J., & Hebl, M. (2019). The Face of STEM: Racial phenotypic stereotypicality predicts STEM persistence by—and ability attributions about—students of color. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 116*(3), 416–443. doi: 10.1037/pspi0000153

Williams, M. R., Brewley, D. N., Reed, R. J., White, D. Y., & Davis-Haley, R. T. (2005). Learning to read each other: Black female graduate students share their experiences at a White research I institution. *The Urban Review, 37*(3), 181-199.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Wilsey, S. A. (2013). Comparisons of adult and traditional college-age student mothers: Reasons for college enrollment and views of how enrollment affects children. *Journal of Student College Development, 54*(2), 209-214.

Winne, P. H., & Nesbit, J. C. (2010). The psychology of academic achievement. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *61*, 653-678.

Winter, E., & Chapleo, C. (2017). An exploration of the effect of servicescape on student institution choice in UK universities. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 41*(2), 187-200. doi: 10.1080/0309877X.2015.1070400

Wood, J. (2008). Critical feminist theories: Giving voice and visibility to women's experiences in interpersonal communication. In L. A. Baxter & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 323-334). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi 10.4135/9781483329529.n24

Woods-Giscombé, C. (2010). Superwoman schema: African American women's views on stress, strength and health. *Qualitative Heath, 20*(5), 668-683.

Woodward, A. T., Taylor, R. J., Abelson, J. M., & Matusko, N. (2013). Major depressive disorder among older African Americans, Caribbean blacks, and non-Hispanic whites: Secondary analysis of the national survey of American life. *Depression and Anxiety*, *30*(6), 589-597.

Woolf, K., Cave, J., Greenhaigh, T., & Dacre, J. (2008). Ethnic stereotypes and the underachievement of UK medical students from ethnic minorities: Qualitative study. *BMJ,* 337, a1220.

Woolfson, L., Howe, C., & Smyth, K. (2006). Higher Still Programme in psychology: Implications of school and college provision for higher education. *Psychology Learning & Teaching, 5*(1), 42–46. doi: 10.2304/plat.2005.5.1.42

Wong, Y. R. (2013). Returning to silence, connecting to wholeness: Contemplative pedagogy for critical social work education. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, 32*(3), 269-285. doi: 10.1080/15426432.2013.801748

Wubbels, T. (2017). Teacher-student relationships and interactions as a factor of learning environments. The 36th Vernon-Wall Lecture presented at the Annual Conference of the Psychology of Education Section of the British Psychological Society. *British Psychological Society.* Retrieved from https://shop.bps.org.uk/publications/publication-by-series/vernon-wall-lecture/36th-vernon-wall-lecture-2017-theo-wubbels.html

www.gov.uk. Repaying your student loan. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/repaying-your-student-loan/overview

Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemma in qualitative research. *Psychology and Health, 15*, 215-228.

Ye, F., & Wallace, T. L. (2014). Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale: Method effects associated with negatively worded items. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *32*(3), 202–215. doi: 10.1177/0734282913504816

Yorke, M. (2016). The development and initial use of a survey of student "belongingness", engagement and self-confidence in UK higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 41*(1), 154-166. doi: 10.1080/02602938.2014.990415

Yorke, M. (1999). *Leaving early: Undergraduate non-completion in HE.* London: Falmer.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). 'Whose culture has capital?' A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race and Education, 8*(1), 69-91.

Young, R. (1995). *Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race.* London: Routledge.

Yudell, M., Roberts, D., DeSalle, R., & Tishkoff, S. (2016). Taking race out of human genetics. *Science*, *351*(6273), 564-565.

Yusuf, M. (2011). The impact of self-efficacy, achievement motivation, and self-regulated learning strategies on students' academic achievement. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 15*, 2623–2626. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.04.158

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist practices. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 13*(3), 193-206.

Zajonc, R. B. (2001). Mere Exposure: A Gateway to the Subliminal. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *10*(6), 224–228. doi: 10.1111/1467-8721.00154

Zepke, L., & Leach, L. (2010). Improving student engagement: Ten proposals for action. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *11*(3), 167-177.

Zhang, J. (2018). Developing proximity of possible disciplinary selves in narratives: An alternative approach to explore the representation of individual in context. *Discourse Studies, 1-19*. doi: 10.1177/1461445618754430

Zhang, P., & Smith, W. (2011). From high school to college: The transition experiences of Black and White students. *Journal of Black Studies*, *42*(5), 828-845.

Zilvinskis, J., Masseria, A., & Pike, G. (2017). Student engagement and student learning: Examining the convergent and discriminant validity of the revised National Survey of Student Engagement. *Research in Higher Education, 58*(8), 880–903. doi: 10.1007/s11162-017-9450-6

Zimdars, A. (2007). Testing the spill-over hypothesis: Meritocracy in enrolment in postgraduate education. *Higher Education, 54*, 1-19.

Zimdars, A., Sullivan, A., & Heath, A. (2009). Elite higher education admissions in the arts and sciences: Is cultural capital the key? *Sociology*, *43*(4), 648-666.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Self-efficacy: An essential motive to learn. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*, 82-91.

Zuzanek, J. (2009). Students' study time and their "homework problem". *Social Indicators Research, 93*(1), 111–115.