

**Claiming Voice and Identity: Black young Londoners’  
experiences of marginalisation, critical consciousness and  
empowerment**

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of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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## **Author's Declaration**

I, Ifeanyi Patrick Nwachukwu, declare that this thesis is my original research. All sources used in this work are properly acknowledged and referenced. I confirm that no part of this thesis has been submitted for the award of any degree or qualification at any other university or institution.

## **Copyright Statement**

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## Acknowledgements

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## **Dedication**

All glory belongs to God Almighty. I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my late father, Chief Ozobiani Iwubeh.

# **Abstract**

This thesis is a qualitative study that explores how London Black young people perceive and construct marginalisation. It draws on their experiences of marginalisation to advance a contextual understanding of this phenomenon and the use of voice. The study analyses the narratives of Black young people, how they construct their views, and how they see others as reifying their identities. I argue that cultural awareness, race factors and racial identity provide a better understanding of the issues of marginalisation and social inequality. Exploring the influence of cultural factors and values enriches our understanding of this critical issue.

The research involved forty-eight Black young people from London, aged 13 to 17, who participated in eight facilitated group discussions to share their experiences of growing up in Britain. Data were collected using a deliberative discussion method, and reflexive thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. An interpretive approach was used to construct meanings, focusing on the lived experiences of Black young people.

To examine how Black young people perceive issues of marginalisation, this study adopted a theoretical framework that draws on Paulo Freire's theory of critical consciousness and Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital. The study makes contributions to existing literature by offering methodological and conceptual insights into the exploration of marginalisation and identity.

The key issues identified by Black young people include social inequality, cultural capital, Black identity, racial discrimination, stereotypes, unequal educational opportunities, and a non-inclusive curriculum. This thesis illustrates the influence of cultural values on identity construction, emphasising the fluidity of social identities, as evidenced by practices such as code-switching and behavioural adaptation. The results demonstrate the complex and multifaceted nature of these issues, particularly the challenges faced by Black young people. Furthermore, the study identifies Black young people's resilience and coping strategies, illuminating a positive aspect of marginalisation.

A cultural framework is developed to show how cultural elements can offer better insights into the issues of marginalisation. It presents a strong argument for understanding how it evolves and the diverse ways it can be sustained. Resistance to marginalisation and the advocacy for social transformation is conceptualised as 'voice of resistance'. By amplifying the voices of

Black young people and introducing a cultural framework, this study offers an in-depth understanding of their challenges and perspectives, thereby advancing Black young people's scholarship within the UK context. Empowering voices of Black young people and acknowledging their critical agency is an essential step towards addressing the complexities of marginalisation, which are often influenced by interrelated social, cultural and temporal factors.



## Key abbreviations

CSJ	-	Centre for Social Justice
CRED	-	Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparity
CRT	-	Critical Race Theory
UCL	-	University College London
ONS	-	Office for National Statistics
BERA		British Educational Research Association
CROWN	-	Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair.
EHRC	-	Equality and Human Rights Commission
UN	-	United Nations
CRC	-	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DfE	-	Department for Education
RQ	-	Research question
SLT	-	Social Learning Theory
GPA	-	Grade Point Average
NEET	-	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
FSM	-	Free School Meal
GCSE	-	General Certificate of Secondary Education
SIT	-	Social Identity Theory
CCS	-	Critical Consciousness Scale
RTA	-	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
IPT	-	Identity Process Theory
BAME	-	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
DBS	-	Disclosure and Barring Service
WHO	-	World Health Organisation
OECD	-	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ISS	-	In-School Suspension
<i>SLT</i>	-	Senior Leadership Team
EPQ	-	Extended Project Qualification
SEND	-	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
IFGs	-	Institutions for Future Generations

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction to Study

### 1.1. Research context and study rationale

This thesis examines the phenomenon of marginalisation, focusing on the values of equity and social justice, to understand diverse perspectives within the study group. It focuses on the experiences of Black young people, especially on issues pertaining to race relations, human rights, and equitable outcomes. This involves an in-depth exploration of their views on equality and discrimination, seeking to understand what shapes their views. Research shows that Black young people are more likely to experience disparity in school exclusions, receive unequal treatment in the healthcare system, be subjected to racial identity profiling, and face economic disadvantages when compared to their white British peers (Alexander, 2018; Bailey et al, 2021; Borooah, 2011; Bruce & Smith, 2020; Ford, 2016; Mahmud & Gagnon, 2020; Shin et al., 2016).

This study is framed in terms of children's rights, particularly in light of disparities in racial relations. It references the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and various United Kingdom legislation, including the Human Rights Act 1988, the Children Act 2004 and the Equality Act 2010. A prominent and compelling theme that runs through these pieces of legislation and the CRC is the commitment to ensuring that children's voices are not only heard but are actively considered in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. The discourse around children's rights emphasises voice and agency as essential elements of the expression of these rights. The CRC has received widespread global endorsement and has been adopted by the great majority of states, including the United Kingdom. However, the implementation of human rights primarily depends on governments and their systems, which are responsible for upholding the rights of those living in them. As noted by Augenstein and Lindahl (2016), human rights 'creation, interpretation and enforcement' (p.1) are the responsibilities of the state that adopts them. Exploring the critical consciousness of Black young people provides a valuable opportunity to examine their awareness of human rights and the role they play in the pursuit of social justice. By understanding young people's perspectives and experiences, we can better appreciate the significant impact it can have on shaping a more just and equitable society. I will draw on Paulo Freire's theory of critical consciousness, which

emphasises the importance of critical thinking. Furthermore, I will examine the subtleties of social interaction, focusing on the spontaneous emotional expressions that occur during group interactions. This approach has the potential to articulate meaningful actions that challenge and transform the marginalised status quo.

In a study of this nature where the focus is on young people, it is important to provide context about how the term ‘young people’ is used. The concept of young people is not static; rather, it evolves out of various social contexts, leading to potentially imprecise interpretations and classifications. The definition of young people has had a subjective label in different social settings, and sometimes it becomes the categorisation that appears prejudicial. The literature suggests that age is socially constructed depending on practices, culture, policy and environment (Clark-Kazak, 2009; Kehily, 2013; Mortimer & Moen, 2016). This socially constructed perception of age captures the diverse experiences and identities of individuals classified as young, which emphasises the complexity and variability inherent in defining young people. This may explain the differing classifications of the youth age group across various countries and within different United Nations agencies. Young people have often been described as adolescents, indicating a transitional phase of life between childhood and adulthood (World Health Organisation). In this study, I will focus on young people aged 13 to 18, a crucial period where they experience significant developmental growth that sets the stage for their future as adults. This age group offers valuable insights into the foundations of adult life. Studies in the fields of medicine and psychology suggest that young people in this developmental stage are dynamic, actively engaging in interactions with others and exploring their social world (Blakemore, 2012; Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Fuligni, 2019). This body of literature highlights how young individuals at this stage seek meaning and construct their understanding through social experiences.

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin this research include critical consciousness, intersecting identities and voice, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. This study is particularly motivated by the disproportionately challenging experiences faced by Black young people, aiming to investigate how they assert their voices to address issues of marginalisation. An important area of focus in this research is to understand the role that critical consciousness plays in shaping their identities and advocating for human rights. Through this framework, I will explore how Black young people perceive marginalisation and how the development of critical consciousness empowers them to advocate for their rights. While the

scholarship on human rights is continuously evolving and presents numerous complexities, this research emphasises the perspectives of marginalised communities and the development of critical consciousness. This research seeks to empower young people by amplifying their voices and highlighting their resilience and agency as they navigate the sociopolitical landscape that shapes their experiences.

Critical consciousness is viewed as an important tool for empowering marginalised individuals who navigate the complexities of oppressive systems: Heberle et al. (2020) suggest that further exploration may be needed to understand what conditions can lead to critical consciousness development, engagement in social action, and personal thriving, as well as how contextual differences can impact the level of critical consciousness. This perspective raises two important questions. First, what specific conditions enable critical consciousness to inspire active participation in social action and promote individual thriving? Second, in what ways do contextual differences, such as cultural, social, and economic factors, affect the level and impact of critical consciousness in different communities? In light of this, I seek to explore how identity construction associated with critical consciousness influences the perceptions of marginalisation among Black young people. Examining these dynamics aims to provide insights into the ways in which identity and awareness intersect to shape the lived experiences of these young individuals.

The use of voice is conceptualised to support young people's agency in advocating for their rights. It goes beyond the simplistic overview of the term 'voice' to explore its significance in resisting marginalisation and inequity faced by Black young people. Hadfield and Haw (2001) viewed voice as a social construction, indicating a connection between voice and action. Their critical voice typology, which emphasises articulation and intended outcomes, closely aligns with the objectives of my research.

A critical 'voice' ... attempts to challenge the existing basis. It is often expressed by young people in 'actions and words' as they influence the power relationships with adults, workers, and their peers. It is a persistent voice that develops through dialogue and interaction.

Hadfield & Haw, 2001, p.490

Given the above, this study will explore the significance of voice in relation to the marginalisation of Black young people and the development of critical consciousness. It will focus on how voice serves as both a source of agency and as driving motivation to speak up against perceived societal injustices and inequities. This analysis will help us to understand how they perceive and respond to marginalisation. Exploring the development of critical consciousness among Black young people offers the opportunity to theorise the contributions of Black young people in the ongoing quest for social justice.

## **1.2. Key terminologies**

This study has been designed to explore the experiences of marginalisation among Black young people, with the intention of moving beyond the usage of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) label. The existing body of knowledge predominantly focuses on Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. This term has undergone a change in recent years, with a call to discontinue its usage in Britain. One of the arguments against it is that the term is not all-encompassing; it excludes certain groups and tends to categorise and misrepresent others. It does not recognise differences among various ethnic minority groups. In line with the recommendations outlined by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities Report, 2021), the UK government no longer uses the term and encourages the public sector and organisations to do the same. Additionally, the Office for National Statistics has updated its service manual to reflect this change in terminology (ONS, 2023). This study specifically focuses on Black young people of African, Caribbean, and mixed heritage, rather than using the BAME categorisation. This approach provides a platform for individuals to be recognised and to voice their concerns and aspirations for meaningful change in areas such as social justice, education, and employment opportunities.

The concepts of race and ethnicity are essential for understanding identity, inequality, and representation in modern British society. Although these terms are often used interchangeably in everyday conversation, they have distinct meanings in academic and policy contexts. Terminology continues to evolve in response to political and social change, which can vary depending on the context. In the UK, the term ethnic group is more commonly used than race in official contexts, such as the census, healthcare, and education (ONS, 2023). Understanding and using race and ethnicity terminology thoughtfully is essential for respectful communication and for effective policy-making and social research. Additionally, individuals should be

allowed to self-identify (Brubaker, 2016), and institutions should avoid using reductive or homogenising labels whenever possible. In this study, I strive to avoid lumping diverse groups under a single label while being mindful of historical contexts. Additional key terminologies are outlined below.

**Black and Blackness:** The term ‘Black’ has various meanings depending on the context, whether social, political, racial, cultural, or historical. It is a socially constructed racial category used to identify individuals and groups, and used to refer to people of Sub-Saharan African descent and their associated racial, cultural, and political identities. Additionally, it represents a broader cultural and social identity rooted in a shared history, struggles, and contributions, particularly in the context of systemic racism and colonialism. In the UK and some Commonwealth regions, the term ‘Black’ has historically been used politically as an umbrella term encompassing African and Afro-Caribbean communities. Therefore, it is essential to clarify the use of the term ‘Black’ in this research and how it influenced the selection of research participants. The term ‘Black’ is used in this research to refer to individuals of African and Caribbean descent. In the UK, it includes people and their descendants with ancestral roots in Sub-Saharan Africa (Black African) and those with African ancestry who migrated through the Caribbean Islands, also known as Afro-Caribbean (Agyemang et al., 2005). It is important to emphasise the diverse heritage within the Black community and that not all Black individuals necessarily have a dark skin complexion. To emphasise the importance of the ethnicity question in the UK population, the 2021 census (excluding Scotland) categorised Black as an ethnic group, which includes Black Caribbean, Black African, mixed - White and Black African, and White and Black Caribbean.

The participants in this study identified as Black and expressed a desire to share their experiences as individuals related to this identity. During the recruitment process, potential participants were informed that the study aimed to explore the perspectives and narratives of young individuals identifying as Black. This approach ensured that only those who self-identified within this community were invited to participate. To enhance our understanding of their backgrounds, the questionnaire (Appendix F) included a section that allowed participants to self-identify their heritage. Additionally, Table 3.2 in Chapter 3 illustrates how each participant self-selected their Black identity. This information contributes to our understanding of the discourse on Black youth experiences. While Blackness can be understood in various ways, this complexity often leads to debates about the risk of homogenisation (Aspinall, 2021;

Mitton & Aspinall, 2010; Volpe et al., 2022), which could obscure in-group differences within the community. Despite these discussions, the importance of self-identification remains a key aspect of both personal and collective identity. The data for this study reflected a diverse range of self-identifications within the Black category thereby illustrating its heterogeneous nature. Participants consistently expressed a desire to identify as Black and this term Black was repeatedly used during group discussions. This is supported by excerpts from participants included in Chapters 4 and 5, which illustrate the diverse perspectives and personal narratives that inform their understanding of Black identity. Their use of this terminology reflects the collective identity sought by participants and the complexities of their lived experiences.

**Racism:** Defining racism accurately, similar to the concept of race, is complex and challenging (Shiao & Woody, 2020). The term racism can be understood as discrimination and prejudicial practices against individuals based on their race, ethnic background, or cultural identity (Rodgers, 2015). Racism is constructed through racialised discrimination, highlighting systemic inequality and the privilege (Macpherson Report, 1999) that the dominant group possesses. It can manifest at various levels, including individual, institutional, and systemic.

**Race:** Race is a social construct that ignites intense debates and discussions in academic circles. Race is generally associated with perceived physical characteristics such as skin colour (Equality Act, 2010), while ethnicity relates to cultural identity, encompassing factors such as nationality, language, religion, and heritage (ONS, 2023). The interpretation of race can differ significantly, reflecting ongoing conversations about identity, culture, and power dynamics in our society. The Law Society of England and Wales (2025) definition: ‘Race is a categorisation that is based mainly on physical attributes or traits, assigning people to a specific race simply by having similar appearances or skin colour (for example, Black or white).

**Ethnicity:** Ethnicity is broader than race and is usually used to refer to long-shared cultural experiences, religious practices, traditions, ancestry, language, dialect or national origins (The Law Society, 2025).

**White privilege:** White privilege is the innate advantage white people have within society solely based on their race (The Law Society, 2025).

**Ethnic minorities:** The UK government guidance on the use of the term ethnic minorities provides some clarification. It states that ‘ethnic minorities’ refer to all ethnic groups except the White British group’ (GOV.UK, 2024).

**Reverse racism:** It refers to an anti-white bias, the notion of racism or racial prejudice against the white dominant group rather than the minority group. Given the contentious nature of the use of racism in favour of minority groups, the concept of reverse racism is an attempt to counter the arguments made in favour of racism.

### **1.3. Living on the margins: Disparity and the ethnicity gap in Britain**

The experience of marginalisation often arises from living on the margins of social, economic, or political structures, leading to various forms of exclusionary practices and discrimination. These dynamics can stifle an individual’s ability to effectively express their opinions and concerns. Conversations about living on the margins in Britain cover a variety of perspectives, including important topics such as migration, the challenges faced by the overlooked segments of society, and the coexistence among minority ethnic groups. It also extends to the experiences of individuals living in deprivation and those from lower social classes. Addressing these issues can enhance understanding and promote inclusivity within our communities. Marginalised groups, on the fringes of society, often experience economic challenges and deprivation (du Toit, 2008), which can lead to the exclusion of minorities. Economic marginalisation creates a feeling of disconnection from the opportunities available to others, significantly impeding the social mobility and overall well-being of these communities.

The characterisation of ‘living on the margins’ emphasises not only the challenges of accessing material resources but also reflects a diminished power and influence within society. This diminished status affects individuals' ability to engage with societal structures. All of these factors illustrate the realities faced by individuals and groups who are constructed as not fitting into mainstream society, both in terms of their geographical location and reduced advantages (Pollard, 1997). Menzies and Baars (2021) stated that many young people in England are falling behind in society, emphasising the issues of fairness and an equitable education system as crucial support mechanisms for these young people. While their focus centres on educational practices and policies, this emphasis is understandable given that these individuals are largely of school age, where their educational experiences can profoundly shape their trajectories.

Gaining a deeper understanding of these young people's lived experiences is a necessary step toward addressing the myriad challenges they encounter. Furthermore, factors such as their group identity and ethnicity play an important role in shaping these experiences, impacting the extent to which they may feel alienated or marginalised within society.

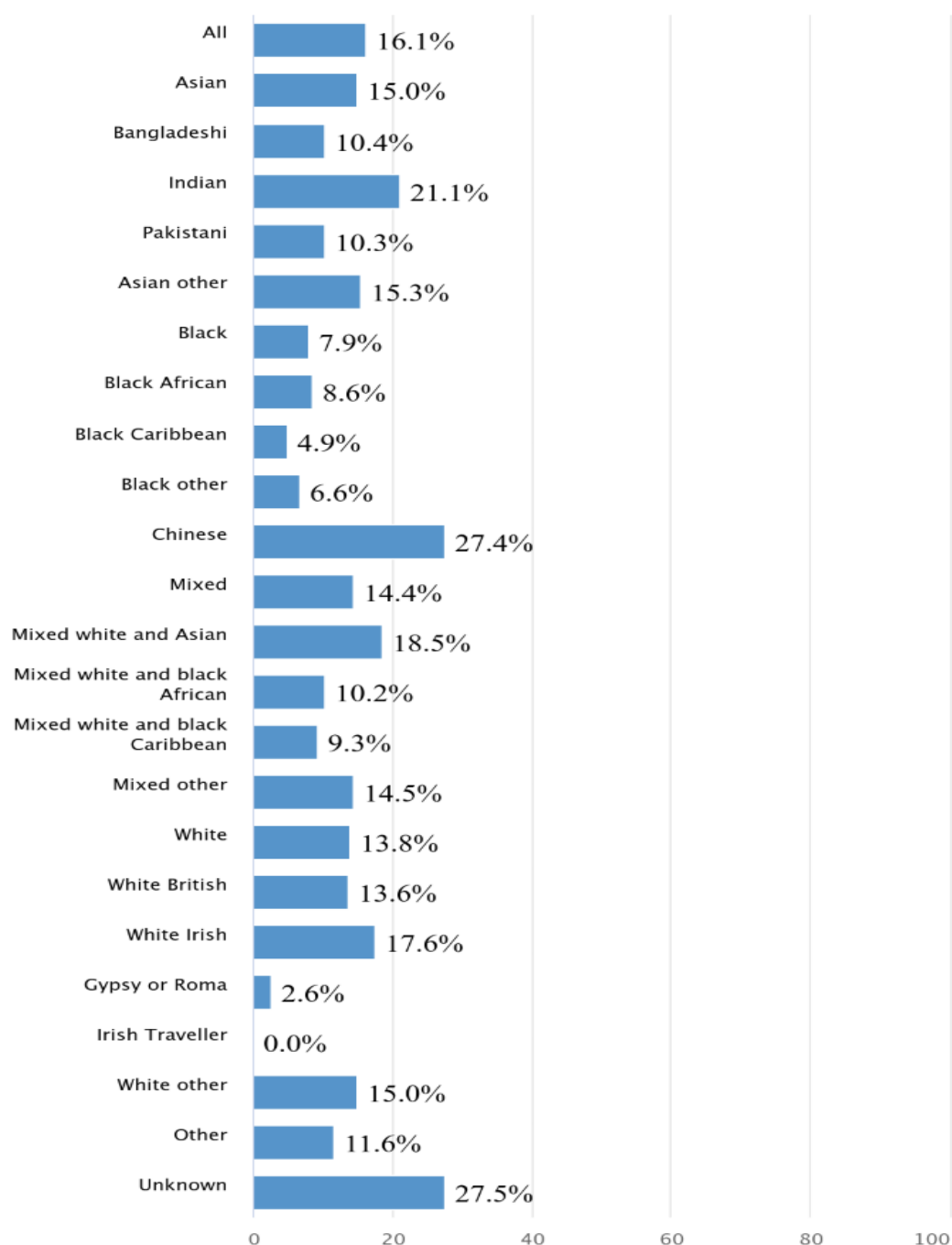
The inequalities among ethnic groups in the UK further exacerbate the issue of living on the margins, making it a subject of interest. Mirza and Warwick (2024) suggest, 'some groups are characterised by high levels of average qualifications, income and wealth, while others are persistently disadvantaged, faced with elevated levels of poverty and unemployment' (p.i365). This gap has led to differing educational outcomes among ethnic groups, which is essential for the future of young individuals (Strand, 2021). Ethnic disadvantage presents notable challenges to educational attainment among Black young people, influenced by social class and ethnicity. This disparity is even more pronounced in the admission processes for prestigious universities, where Black students face lower entry rates (Roberts & Bolton, 2023). Using the measures of parental education and socioeconomic status, Strand (2021) notes that, overall, ethnic minority groups such as Black, experienced an ethnic gap in educational achievement. Furthermore, Black young people often face disproportionate disciplinary measures, which can be attributed to discriminatory practices. This frequently results in exclusions, which can disrupt their educational progress and achievement.

Participants in this study are young people aged 13 to 18 who are in secondary school and A-level education. Figure 1.1 presents data related to A-level attainment, while Table 1.1 provides information on GCSE performance among various ethnic groups. To fully understand the context of this study, it is crucial to explore the disparities that exist within this demographic. Highlighting these differences helps clarify the rationale behind the focus of this research. As illustrated in Figure 1.1, the data highlight significant ethnic disparities in educational attainment among A-level students. These disparities contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups, emphasising the need for a deeper understanding of how these inequalities affect educational outcomes. The data indicate that Black students have the lowest A-level attainment rates. Furthermore, statistics reveal that Black students are more likely to drop out of higher education and generally achieve lower grades.



*Figure 1.1. Attainment gap for students getting at least 3 A grades at A level, by ethnicity in England during the 2022-2023 academic year*

Title: Percentage of students getting at least 3 A grades at A level, by ethnicity. Location: England. Time period: 2022 to 2023 academic year. Source: A level and other 16 to 18 results: 2023 (revised)| Ethnicity Facts and Figures GOV.UK



Source: Department for Education (2023): Percentage of students getting at least 3 A grades at A level, by ethnicity. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/a-levels-apprenticeships-further-education/students-aged-16-to-18-achieving-3-a-grades-or-better-at-a-level/latest/>

Table 1.1 not only examines ethnicity but also includes the variable of free school meal (FSM) eligibility to highlight disparities in GCSE English and Maths attainment. FSM is an indicator of poverty and deprivation, underscoring broader issues of marginalisation. The main focus, however, remains on the attainment gap observed among different ethnic groups, drawing attention to the significant challenges faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds in achieving academic success. Notably, as shown in Table 1.1, the attainment gap for grades 5 and above in GCSE Maths and English narrowed during the school year 2022 to 2023 between White and Black students, with Black students performing better than their White counterparts. This observation stands in stark contrast to the information presented in Figure 1.1. One possible explanation for this trend could be the influence of socioeconomic factors, particularly FSM eligibility. A credible explanation proposed by Strand (2021) is that recent immigrants tend to invest more time in education as a means to escape poverty. However, these varying levels of outcomes suggest distinct trajectories and generational differences between young Black students and their white counterparts.

*Table 1.1. Attainment at age 16 by ethnicity and FSM: Pupils getting a grade 5 or above in GCSE English and Maths by ethnicity (England, school year 2022 to 2023)*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>FSM eligible (%)</b>	<b>Not known to be FSM eligible (%)</b>
Asian - Bangladeshi	48.8	61.2
Asian - Chinese	75.3	78.5
Asian - Indian	48.6	72.1
Asian - Pakistani	36.2	49.6
Asian - Any other Asian background	44	67.3
Black - Black African	42	53.9
Black - Black Caribbean	22.2	36.9
Black - Any other Black background	29.1	45.4
Mixed - White and Asian	33	62.6
Mixed - White and Black African	29.7	51.5
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	19.2	37.7
Mixed - Any other Mixed background	31.3	56.1
White - White British	18	48.9
White - Irish	19.4	62.3
White - Gypsy/Roma	3.3	12.7
White - Traveller of Irish heritage	9.5	33.3
White - Any other White background	30.6	51.0

Source: Department for Education (2023). National curriculum assessments at key stage 4 in England. [https://social-mobility.data.gov.uk/intermediate\\_outcomes/compulsory\\_school\\_age\\_\(5\\_to\\_16\\_years\)/attainment\\_at\\_age\\_16/latest#tab\\_By\\_ethnicity\\_Data](https://social-mobility.data.gov.uk/intermediate_outcomes/compulsory_school_age_(5_to_16_years)/attainment_at_age_16/latest#tab_By_ethnicity_Data)

Living on the margins emphasises the precarious position of young people, recognising them as one of society's vulnerable groups. This perspective provides an opportunity to explore and understand the social structures influencing their lives. It suggests that they often face similar circumstances and experiences that push them to the margins. However, the complexities of marginalisation indicate that the issue is far from simple. With the emergence of the sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1997), children and young people have been politically and culturally constructed to create space for their voices to be heard (Moran-Ellis, 2010). For young people, feelings of marginalisation may arise from several factors, including barriers that prevent their voices from being heard. Acknowledging their views and ensuring their voices are heard not only affirms their human rights but also helps us understand their feelings and identify their needs. However, institutional practices focused on compliance and conformity can unintentionally hinder expression of youth voices (Menzies & Baars, 2021). We risk diminishing their contributions to mere involvement if we do not genuinely listen to their perspectives. There is a need to move beyond tokenistic participation toward practices that truly recognise children's voices and respond to their contributions.

The argument that young people are put at risk of marginalisation when there is a disparity in opportunities and attainment of individual potential (Mowat, 2015) remains a pressing concern. This is especially due to the impact that such unequal treatment may have on Black young people. The pervasive nature of implicit racial discrimination is believed to significantly affect social mobility and aspirations, and can potentially lead to social exclusion and isolation (Reynolds, 2013). A salient issue related to racial discrimination is ethnic penalties, which relate to occupational segregation and disparities in the remuneration of ethnic minority groups (Platt & Nandi, 2018; Zwysen et al., 2021). Although these issues may not be an immediate concern for young people participating in this research, racial discrimination can significantly affect the marginalisation of Black youth as they transition into adulthood. Recognising these challenges and advocating for equitable opportunities is essential for creating a more inclusive environment that enables all young people to thrive and reach their full potential.

### **1.3.1. Cultural habitus**

The concept of habitus, introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), is essential for understanding how young people navigate their social environments. Habitus refers to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and predispositions that individuals develop through their unique cultural and

social experiences. It reflects the impactful ways in which the culture around us shapes our thoughts, values and perceptions of the world. For example, consider two children: one grows up in a working-class environment, while the other is raised in a wealthy, educated family. The child from a working-class background is likely to develop a habitus that values practical skills, physical labour, and informal communication styles. In contrast, the child from the wealthy background may absorb a habitus that emphasises abstract thoughts, formal speech, and cultural capital along with a tradition of privilege and opportunity. The disparity between their upbringings creates distinct pathways that influence not only their skills and communication styles but also their perspectives of the world around them. A study by Gaddis (2013) explored how habitus influences the relationship between cultural capital and academic success. Using a longitudinal dataset derived from young individuals who participated in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America program (BBBSA) during the 1990s, the research found that cultural capital indicators like high-arts participation and reading habits positively impacted GPA, with these effects fully mediated through habitus. This underscores the role of habitus in translating cultural capital into academic outcomes for disadvantaged youth. In a separate ethnographic study, Scott-Arthur et al. (2021) examined how residents of a deprived urban area understand and practice health and well-being through the lens of habitus. The findings indicated that individuals' ingrained dispositions, shaped by their social contexts, significantly influenced their health behaviours and perceptions, highlighting the complex relationship between habitus and health in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

In this study, I aim to enhance the understanding of habitus in relation to Black young people by incorporating the distinctive cultural traits and values of Black communities. I will refer to this synthesis as cultural habitus, emphasising how these culturally specific frameworks shape identity, behaviour, and interactions across various social contexts. Tan and Liu (2022) conducted a meta-ethnographic review of thirty-seven qualitative studies, employing the seven phases of meta-ethnographic analysis to classify various types of habitus within educational contexts. Their review revealed how different forms of habitus shape students' educational experiences and influence their choices. This comprehensive review provides a clear understanding of how ingrained dispositions affect learning and academic trajectories. For Black young people in the UK, cultural habitus can influence their attitudes, behaviours, and interactions within various social contexts. This influence can affect social interactions and engagement with institutions. Class-based habitus, in particular, plays a crucial role in shaping educational and career trajectories. In the context of the UK education system, Black students

often face peculiar challenges, including underrepresentation in higher academic courses and systemic biases (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). Cultural habitus may affect student engagement with educational content and authority figures, which can impact academic outcomes. Research indicates that Black students often experience exclusion and encounter lower expectations from teachers, which ultimately impacts their academic achievements (Strand, 2014). In professional environments, Black young people may face microaggressions and unconscious biases that can hinder their career advancement and integration into the workplace (Smith & Griffiths, 2022). The concept of cultural habitus, which includes communication styles and attitudes toward authority, plays a significant role in how Black individuals might be perceived in professional settings (Rollock, 2011). This interaction between societal perceptions and individual behaviours highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Black professionals.

The responses of Black young people to societal stereotypes and how they assert their identity (Hall, 1997) are shaped by cultural habitus. The influence of familial and communal networks can play an important role in the formation of cultural habitus. For example, the support provided by family and local communities enhances resilience in the face of societal adversities and provides a strong sense of identity (Alexander, 2000). Within this context, Black families often emphasise the importance of educational achievement and cultural pride as strategic measures to counteract discrimination and systemic inequality (Mirza, 2009). Ngarachu (2014) applied Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field to study the construction of ethnicity among Kenyan youths. The study illustrated how young people's dispositions, shaped by their social environments, influence their ethnic identities, demonstrating the relevance of habitus in understanding ethnic dynamics in African contexts. For ethnic minorities in the UK, cultural habitus is influenced by both their ancestral heritage and the necessity to adapt to British societal norms. Vertovec (2007) described this phenomenon as super-diversity, where multiple cultural influences intersect, resulting in complex social dynamics. For instance, British South Asian communities often sustain cultural practices originating from their countries of origin, such as language use, religious practices, and family structures, while also adapting to British social and professional environments.

### **1.3.2. A constructive approach to diversity**

Diversity within the Black community in the UK covers various ethnic backgrounds, including African, Caribbean, and mixed heritage, each with distinct cultural practices, languages, and traditions. This diversity affects how Black young people perceive themselves and are perceived by others in various settings. Black young people in the UK often navigate multiple cultural identities, balancing their heritage with British cultural norms. This duality influences their sense of belonging and social cohesion, affecting mental health and social interactions (Warikoo, 2016). The experience of adapting language and behaviour in various cultural settings is common and influences social experiences and identity formation (Gillborn et al., 2016). Additionally, media portrayals significantly shape societal perceptions of Black communities. Black young people may encounter stereotypes that impact their self-image and societal treatment. Negative media representation can reinforce racial stereotypes, affecting both public attitudes and self-perception (Cottle, 2000).

The UK government has implemented policies to support diversity and promote equality. The Equality Act 2010 consolidated anti-discrimination laws, aiming to ensure equal treatment in employment, education, healthcare, and other sectors (UK Government, 2010). Additionally, initiatives such as the Race Disparity Audit seek to highlight and address racial inequalities across various public services (Home Office, 2021). Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Studies show disparities in employment, education, healthcare access, and income between ethnic minorities and the white British majority. For example, individuals from Black and Asian backgrounds experience higher unemployment rates and are underrepresented in senior management positions across industries (Mirza & Warwick, 2022). The education system also reveals gaps, with ethnic minority students often facing lower educational outcomes due to systemic barriers.

Despite the efforts of successive governments in Britain to address racial relations through various commissions of inquiry, significant challenges remain in achieving meaningful representation and inclusion of Black and ethnic minorities. These inquiries have often highlighted some issues related to racial relations, inequalities and discrimination; however, tangible outcomes have been limited. Some discourses in the UK, United States, and Australia deny the existence of racism, with some citing anti-white bias, termed 'reverse racism,' (Ansell, 1997; James et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2018; Norton & Sommers, 2011; Song, 2014). Reverse racism has equally been criticised as a myth or lacking meaning due to the power dynamics

which sustain racism. It is contended that the white majority possesses ‘institutional advantage and power’ to perpetuate racism while the non-white ethnic minorities do not have the same level of influence (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017, p.256). The unequal treatment of immigrants can impede their integration and create distrust among diverse communities (OECD, 2015). This situation presents an enormous challenge in developing effective equality policies. The experiences of Black young people in the UK are influenced by a complex interplay of diversity and multiple cultural backgrounds. These factors shape how they navigate social, educational, and professional environments.

The intersection of diversity and cultural habitus underscores the need for policies that are inclusive and sensitive to cultural differences. Educational institutions have implemented various diversity and inclusion programmes to address cultural disparities. For example, universities offer cultural competency training for staff and support networks for students from diverse backgrounds to improve educational outcomes and student well-being (Kruse et al., 2017). Understanding diversity and the cultural habitus of Black young people within the UK context is essential for creating inclusive, equitable, and cohesive societies, especially in educational institutions. Diversity brings a wealth of perspectives and experiences that can enhance social and economic development, while cultural habitus shapes how individuals navigate social institutions and cultural expectations. Addressing the challenges of inequality and cultural misunderstanding requires policies that are both inclusive and sensitive to the cultural realities of different communities. By promoting cultural competence in education, workplaces, and healthcare, the UK can foster a society where diversity is viewed as a strength and cultural habitus is recognised as a vital component of social interaction and identity.

#### **1.4. Statement of problem and significance of the study**

Scholarly discussions continue to enhance our understanding of the complexities faced by young people on the margins of society, particularly concerning their transitions during childhood and the impact of marginalisation. Within this discourse, there is a significant opportunity to further investigate the agency and reflexivity of Black young people. This exploration could illuminate their unique experiences and perspectives on pressing issues such as racial discrimination, the subtleties of race-related marginalisation, and their active roles in advocating for social justice. By examining these issues, we can gain a clearer understanding of the challenges and experiences that shape their views. This research advances discussions

on critical agency and the theoretical application of voice to issues of marginalisation and social justice among Black minority people. Ongoing debates are scarcely concerned about eliciting the voice of Black young people in the context of marginalisation. It is essential to actively bring their voices to the forefront and engage with their narratives to foster greater understanding. Additionally, it is important to consider methodological limitations (Windsor et al., 2022), particularly quantitative reification and inconsistent conceptual models of critical consciousness, which present challenges to conceptual clarity and the understanding of a constantly evolving reality. This research will adopt an engaging constructivist approach to explore the critical consciousness and lived experiences of Black young people.

The literature on young people, from political and sociological perspectives, has primarily focused on their participation in traditional ways, such as issues of apathy and disengagement from civic life (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Edward & Manning, 2014; Henn & Foard, 2014). Other studies focus on identity statuses of either national or European identities and how they are aligned; ‘factors at school and country level’ that moderate the relationship between both (Jugert et al., 2021, p.439; Prati et al., 2019); and how different practices of teachers prepare young people for citizenship (Quaynor, 2015). There is a need for this study because Black young people have consistently been overlooked in addressing their specific needs (Hadfield & Haw, 2001; Pickard, 2019), such as the relived experiences of discrimination, deprivation and oppression. Often, the strategic place and space young people occupy as agents of social justice is inadvertently neglected (Creswick et al., 2019). Rather than being ignored, ‘young people are in the best position to talk about’ issues that affect them, especially Black young people’s unique lived experiences and the assertion that ‘their voice is the voice of experience’ (Hadfield & Haw, 2001, p.497). The focus will be on how young people assert their voices in today’s evolving societal landscape. To empower young individuals, particularly from Black communities, it is essential to analyse the construct of ‘voice’ within this demographic. This analysis is vital not only for addressing perceived injustices and marginalisation but also for assessing the extent to which this ‘voice’ empowers them. Understanding the subtle ways in which voice is articulated and how marginalisation is perceived can inform strategies for advocacy and social change, ensuring that these individuals are heard.

The marginalisation of Black young people in the UK is a multifaceted issue, deeply rooted in a variety of interconnected factors, including education, race, gender, stigma, stereotyping, class, and ethnicity. Similarly, there are ‘feelings of marginalisation across work, education



and home' among NEET young people (Russell, 2016, p.172). This complex network of influences creates challenges for Black young people, who may face significant barriers that impede their social mobility and access to opportunities. In educational settings, systemic biases and low expectations can lead to a lack of support, resulting in poor academic achievement and diminished prospects for future success. Furthermore, societal stereotypes may perpetuate negative perceptions, impacting these young people's self-esteem and confidence. They may struggle to engage meaningfully in their educational institutions and might even feel disconnected within their communities. These experiences of marginalisation can contribute to a cyclical pattern of disenfranchisement and despair, making it increasingly harder for them to break free from the constraints imposed by societal norms and expectations. Scholars have noted that recurring government policies in economic, educational, and welfare spheres tend to reinforce this marginalisation (Fahmy, 2008; Russell, 2016). This reoccurring issue of policy-making has substantial implications, as it can lead to a deep-rooted systemic disadvantage that disproportionately affects these communities. To effectively address the marginalisation of Black young people in the UK, a holistic approach is needed that recognises the various ways this marginalisation can manifest. Acknowledging these factors is essential in tackling the numerous social, economic, and educational barriers they face.

Young people in the UK are actively seeking to assert their agency; however, they face the prospect of marginalisation that manifests through various critical factors, such as race, education, immigration, ethnicity, political disenfranchisement, poverty, and experiences within the care system (Mowat, 2015). Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic has been identified as an issue that exacerbated pre-existing inequalities (Duffy et al., 2021), prompting discussions about its impact on the education and well-being of young people. Furthermore, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) report (2020) emphasised the educational, racial, and social disparities, alongside disparate economic and political outcomes that persist in the UK. This report also highlighted the enduring effects on the well-being of households. These socio-political disadvantages collectively influence the experiences of young people, highlighting the importance of exploring the lived experiences of Black youth and amplifying their voices.

However, there is a counter view that not everyone who falls short of ideal values and norms of society such as equality, may be deemed as marginalised (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) report, 2021; Mowat, 2015). The 2021 CRED report has been a subject of criticism regarding its conclusion that there is no structural or institutional racism. The term

institutional racism, which is associated with the American civil rights movement, was first coined by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton in 1967 in their book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, and has been described in various forms ever since. The definition of institutional racism is still contested (Bailey et al., 2021) and subject to redefinition sometimes for reasons of clarity, ambiguity and simplicity (Williams, 2010). It came to the limelight in the UK with the Macpherson enquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993. Despite CRED's conclusion regarding institutional racism, the report acknowledged that biases and discrimination persist in the hiring of ethnic minority groups, as well as lower attainment levels for ethnic minority students, and emphasised the need to promote fairness. Webster (2008) introduced a concept he referred to as a 'counter-intuitive form of discrimination' (p.294), which suggests that there is a tendency to overlook the marginalisation of white ethnicity. Instead, the focus tends to be on how white ethnicity racialises other minorities. Webster's argument is based on the idea of 'hegemonic white ethnicity' (p.307), which underscores the dominant cultural narrative, class orientation and white hierarchies. My interpretation of Webster's view, drawing on examples from both the UK and the United States, is that white ethnicity should not solely be portrayed as a source of racism. It is important to acknowledge that inherent discrimination and marginalisation are present within whiteness, particularly along class differentiation (white working, middle and upper classes) or white(ness) superiority. This viewpoint does not undermine the ongoing debate about the marginalisation of Black ethnic minorities.

So far, I have highlighted disparities in education, healthcare, access to opportunities, racial collective identity, and social isolation among young individuals from minoritised ethnic groups. In addition, there has been limited focus on the reflexivity and agency of these young people in promoting equity and social justice. It is essential to conduct further research to gain a deeper understanding of how Black youth perceive marginalisation and how they assert their agency through their voices in response to these perceived marginalisations and structural inequities. Unlike previous studies (Diemer, 2020; Marchand et al., 2021), this research emphasises the critical action component of critical consciousness – specifically, the agentic expression of voice and its connection to intersecting identities. In the following sections of this chapter, I will present the aims, objectives, and research questions, followed by an outline of the thesis structure.

## **1.5. Research aims and questions**

This research aims to gain insight into the perception of marginalisation and the relationship between voice and critical consciousness. It will explore how Black young people's awareness of human rights, their sense of agency, and their voice intersect with marginalisation in the quest for social justice. Furthermore, this study will examine the role of critical consciousness in shaping identities. The aim is to investigate the phenomenon of marginalisation while highlighting the lived experiences of Black young people, particularly in relation to the socio-economic and political implications for policy and practice.

### **1.5.1. Research objectives**

The objectives include:

- a) To explore Black young people's perception of marginalisation and social justice using mainly a deliberative discussion group method to collect data.
- b) To understand Black young people's construction of human rights using critical consciousness theory.
- c) To investigate how voice, agency and reflexivity empower Black young people in the pursuit of social justice.
- d) To explore Black young people's lived experience of marginalisation.

### **1.5.2. Research questions**

The research question for this study principally centres on how Black young people perceive marginalisation and how the use of voice counters marginalisation. A further breakdown of this question into sub-questions includes:

Sub-questions:

- 1. How do Black young people respond to marginalisation?
- 2. What role does critical consciousness play in shaping identities and the construction of human rights?
- 3. How do Black young people express voice, agency and reflexivity?

The research questions outlined above represent a significant project for researchers to consider. This study will explore different perspectives on marginalisation and social justice, especially in a society where the participants identify as members of an ethnic minority group. By employing open-ended questions and facilitating engaging discussion sessions, I aim to garner insights about human rights awareness and their views on what constitutes a fair society. It will also seek to understand critical identity development among Black young people and how this may influence their response to marginalisation and resistance to injustice. To achieve this, I conducted primary qualitative research with participants aged 13 to 17. This age group is crucial as they approach adulthood, and their perspectives can provide valuable insights into the complexities of social issues that affect their lives.

## **1.6. Thesis structure**

The study of the experiences of marginalisation among Black young people is organised into seven chapters. This introductory chapter explains the rationale for the study, highlights its significance, and outlines the research questions it seeks to answer. To provide clarity and focus, it is important to establish the context in which this research is conducted; therefore, this introduction serves as an overview of the study. Chapter 1 includes definitions of key terms to ensure clarity and provide context for their usage throughout the thesis. This chapter also offers a comprehensive outline of the thesis, highlighting the focus and significance of each chapter in supporting the overarching argument. Providing a detailed structure clarifies the connections between various components and their contribution to the main argument of the thesis, offering readers a clear roadmap of what to expect in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter 2 offers a critical review of the existing literature, discussing foundational concepts and the theoretical framework that underpins this research. It focuses on Freire's critical consciousness theory and Bourdieu's cultural capital, which serve to help understand the dynamics of marginalisation, social engagement and identity formation. This chapter highlights the research's strong alignment with themes of social justice, exploring theories of identity, critical race theory, decolonising education and racial perspectives of inequality. By employing critical consciousness theory alongside an intersectional lens, the chapter seeks to use these concepts to illuminate the experiences of marginalisation faced by Black young people. It discusses the specific challenges faced, emphasising the intersection of race, identity, and societal structures that shape their unique experiences. Through this review, this chapter

situates the research within the broader discourse on social inequality while shedding light on the complexities of identity and social inequities that affect this demographic.

In Chapter 3, which focuses on the methodology, I provide a detailed overview of the research design and the intricate process involved in conducting this study. I discuss the philosophical assumptions that will guide my approach and influence the interpretations and decisions made throughout my research journey. In this chapter, I also discuss the specific research methods used, including the strategies for recruiting research participants and the techniques employed for data analysis. This research adopts a qualitative methodology. Additionally, I critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the chosen methods, while also acknowledging their limitations. For data analysis, I utilised reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to identify and interpret key themes within the data. An important aspect of this chapter is reflecting on my positionality as a researcher. This reflection involves considering how my background, beliefs, and experiences may have shaped my perspectives and influenced the presentation of the findings. Such reflective consideration is vital not only for upholding ethical standards in research but also for enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the results. By clearly addressing these factors, I aim to provide a clear understanding of the research process and highlight the significance of the findings.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings, focusing on the themes of racial identity and Otherness. It examines how critical consciousness develops and influences identity formation. Within this context, the chapter introduces several concepts, including Othering - the social practice of perceiving or treating individuals or groups as fundamentally alien or different. It also discusses identity denial, which refers to the rejection or invalidation of one's racial or cultural identity, as well as identity threat, a pervasive sense of devaluation that can emerge from societal prejudices. Cultural bonding is examined as a crucial mechanism through which individuals build connections and foster solidarity within their communities and counter narratives of exclusion. This chapter combines participants' personal stories with data extracts and theoretical frameworks to delve into the lived experiences of Black young people. It highlights how these processes of identity negotiation play out in their daily lives. The chapter illustrates the complexities of racial identity and the quest for belonging in a multicultural society, highlighting both the challenges they encounter and the resilience they display.

Chapter 5 continues to present the findings by focusing on the perspectives of Black young people to gain a deeper understanding of marginalisation. This chapter identifies several significant themes, including social inequality, the importance of cultural capital, and the ongoing issue of racial discrimination. Through compelling narratives and detailed accounts, it aims to illuminate the lived experiences of these young individuals as they navigate the challenges of marginalisation within society. The findings presented in this chapter are linked to the main research aims and questions, highlighting their significance within the broader context of the study. This approach not only places the findings in context but also emphasises the urgent need to address the issues discussed.

Chapter 6 offers a more in-depth discussion of the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5, linking them to relevant empirical studies to provide a richer context. This discussion chapter serves not only as an interpretation of the findings but also as a synthesis that presents a comprehensive perspective on marginalisation through various lenses. I introduce a conceptual framework developed to enhance our understanding of the complex nature of marginalisation. Within this framework, I examine how different structural factors influence the experiences of marginalised individuals, with a particular emphasis on the complex process of developing critical consciousness, which can raise awareness among young people. It involves a reflective understanding of social injustices, empowering individuals to recognise and challenge oppressive systems. I explore the intricate process through which identities are formed in the context of marginalisation. This exploration includes a consideration of the influences that shape self-perception and, at times, collective identity among Black young people. The chapter concludes with an examination of reflexivity and critical agency within this demographic. I emphasise the importance of acknowledging their unique experiences and use of voice as they navigate the challenges presented by their social environments. By amplifying these voices, the chapter highlights their role in actively challenging and reshaping the narratives that others construct about them and their experiences within a broader societal context.

Chapter 7 serves as the concluding part of this thesis, bringing together the various elements explored throughout the research. In this final chapter, I summarise the key findings and discussions presented in the preceding chapters, ensuring that the study's aims and objectives are revisited and clearly articulated alongside the specific research questions that guided my inquiry. I also take the opportunity to examine the implications of the research findings, discussing how they can inform and shape policy initiatives, as well as influence practical

applications in relevant fields. This includes an examination of how the insights gained may affect the perceptions of stakeholders, youth work practitioners, and policymakers. It emphasises the potential for meaningful change and improvement while addressing the identified issues. Additionally, this chapter highlights the contributions my research makes to the existing body of knowledge. I outline the critical knowledge gaps illuminated through my work, including conceptual contributions and efforts to amplify the voices of Black young people. Lastly, I offer suggestions based on the research findings to inform future research and practice. I also take the opportunity to reflect on my personal journey throughout the PhD process, sharing insights and experiences that have shaped my understanding and approach to this research. This reflection embodies not only my intellectual journey but also the emotional and personal growth I experienced along the way.

### **1.7. Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I provided the context for this study, explaining its rationale and significance within the broader sociocultural landscape. I also provided a contextual background on the investigation, emphasising the connection between cultural habitus - which includes the ingrained attitudes, beliefs, and practices of individuals - and the structure that shapes and influences them. This connection has a way of influencing the actions and behaviour of Black young people, shaping not only their individual experiences but also their interactions within the complex social environment around them. Through this exploration, I aim to illustrate the profound ways in which history and culture intersect to inform their present-day realities.

This introductory chapter addresses the persistent ethnicity gap in Britain, a crucial issue that worsens educational attainment disparities among different racial groups. I examined the complex nature of this gap, discussing how it appears in various sectors, particularly in education, and how it acts as a barrier to accessing a wide range of opportunities and essential services. This structural disadvantage often impacts the lived experiences of Black young people, potentially leading to feelings of marginalisation, which I seek to understand in this research.

To effectively frame the research, I aligned the investigation with the clearly defined aims and objectives outlined in this chapter. I also developed a list of research questions to clarify the focus and scope of the inquiry. Additionally, I defined key terms relevant to the study to

improve the reader's understanding of their usage within the context of this thesis. Furthermore, I provided a detailed overview of the thesis structure to enhance comprehension and set realistic expectations for the reader. This roadmap is designed to offer clear guidance for navigating the subsequent chapters, outlining the logical flow of the thesis.

In the next chapter, I will review literature on topics such as marginalisation, identity formation, critical consciousness theory, and the role of intersectionality in perpetuating disadvantage and inequality. This literature review will discuss the gaps and highlight areas for further research, laying a foundation for the analyses and discussions that will follow in the thesis.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature review of marginalisation, identity and voice**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

Understanding marginalisation requires an examination of the various aspects through which it can occur. The identities of individuals and groups potentially affected become an important issue to consider. It is also important to consider how the impact of marginalisation can be worsened by intersectionality. This term refers to ways in which multiple identities can place an individual in a disadvantaged position. This underscores the importance of the concept of identity in relation to marginalisation; thus, a critical review of identity theories and their construction is essential for contextualising how this research addresses the issue. This study, as described in Chapter 1, explores how Black young people perceive their experiences of marginalisation using the framework of critical consciousness theory. It is essential to review the background literature on this topic to provide context for my research and to highlight various perspectives from contemporary discussions. I plan to apply the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT), drawing on concepts such as critical pedagogy and decolonising education. In addition to examining identity formation, particularly among young people, I will discuss intersectionality, racial inequality, and Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. These elements are crucial to my analytical inquiry. This chapter reviews the literature on these concepts and theories to offer an understanding of how they can contribute to marginalisation and the systemic disparities faced by ethnic minorities. The goal is to clarify the focus of this study by examining the theoretical foundations underlying these issues. Gaining an understanding of the literature in this area will help identify any gaps. Thus, this review aims to identify additional research areas for exploration. The motivation behind this research is to enrich scholarship about young individuals from Black ethnic backgrounds.

This chapter is organised into three parts. In the first part, I discuss key concepts including marginalisation, intersectionality, identity, and critical consciousness theory, while also addressing the issue of decolonising education. This discussion is framed within the context of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to unpack the subtleties of these terms and their implications for understanding social justice. I examine how intersecting identities, such as gender, language, race, sexuality and class, can influence individual experiences of marginalisation and privilege.

The second part focuses on the framing of voice and human rights, emphasising the importance of amplifying marginalised voices and recognising their rights. The final section explores perspectives on education and cultural capital, concluding with a discussion of identified gaps and areas that require further research. I propose a framework that integrates the key concepts of this study, which will guide my analysis and inform the approach to addressing the research questions.

## **2.2. Examining the framework of critical race theory**

This literature review explores certain foundational concepts of Critical Race Theory (CRT), drawing on various perspectives. CRT analyses the intersection of race, power and law. It challenges traditional, legal, social, and political structures, positing that racism is not an individual aberration but a pervasive system embedded in societal institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). A commonly held belief is that racism is an isolated occurrence; however, this may not be the case as it is systematically embedded in societal institutions, often overlooked, which makes it invisible and subtle. CRT emphasises that race is a social construct. Omi and Winant (1994) argued that race is constructed through social processes and historical context rather than through natural or scientific categories. This view challenges essentialist understandings of race and draws attention to how racial categories are fluid and dependent on social, cultural and political factors.

Critics from the liberal tradition have also challenged CRT, arguing that its focus on race and structural inequalities undermines efforts toward colourblindness, which emphasises treating individuals equally regardless of race (Sandel, 1982). Some postmodernist critics of CRT argue that the theory's reliance on personal narratives and lived experiences leads to relativism, which undermines the possibility of objective truths (Fish, 1994). Additionally, conservative critics often accuse CRT of promoting division and resentment by emphasising racial differences and focusing on systemic oppression and historical injustices. They contend that this approach encourages a victim mentality, potentially impeding progress towards social cohesion (Hernandez, 2021). Despite these criticisms, CRT remains an essential framework for understanding and addressing racial inequality in contemporary society. It has influenced legal scholarship, social theory and political discourse. In the context of this study, the concepts of marginalisation, intersectionality and identity formation, which are also central to CRT, will be examined.

### **2.2.1. Marginalisation**

Marginalisation is central to this study, making it essential to consider it in the literature review process. CRT emphasises the use of personal narratives as a method for marginalised groups to challenge dominant, oppressive narratives (Delgado, 1989). By sharing their personal stories, Black young people can provide perspectives that are often marginalised or ignored in mainstream discourse. This approach highlights the lived experiences of those affected by racial inequality and serves as a tool for resistance. The marginalisation of ethnic minorities in the UK has been a prominent social issue for centuries, shaped by complex historical, social, and economic factors. Ethnic minorities in the UK often experience some degree of exclusion from key social, political, and economic spheres. This literature review critically explores marginalisation in the UK, examining its historical roots, structural dimensions, and social implications while also analysing the policies and responses aimed at addressing these issues. The review assesses key theoretical frameworks and debates within the literature and critiques the limitations of existing scholarship, especially in relation to policy and the intersectional nature of marginalisation.

Marginalisation is commonly defined as the process by which certain groups are excluded from full participation in the social, economic, political, or cultural spheres of society. Young (2000) referred to marginalisation as the systemic exclusion of groups from societal resources and opportunities, often linked to issues such as race, ethnicity, class, or gender. It is a complex process that results in the denial of access to resources and power, as well as the inability to shape the policies and practices that affect one's life. Additionally, marginalisation involves the social positioning of individuals or groups as 'outsiders' who are pushed to the periphery of society. This process not only entails exclusion from material resources but also involves the stigmatisation and devaluation of identity, culture, and experiences of the marginalised groups (Tilly, 2007). Ethnic minorities, in particular, are often subjected to social stereotyping, racism, and discrimination, which further entrench their marginalisation (Fanon, 1967). I begin by examining the historical context of marginalisation among minority ethnic groups.

A significant body of literature on ethnic minorities in the UK highlights the historical context of marginalisation, particularly the legacy of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. Much of the marginalisation experienced by ethnic minorities in the UK stems from these historical processes (Hall, 1992; Rattansi, 2007). After World War II, large numbers of individuals from former colonies, particularly from the Caribbean, South Asia, and Africa,

migrated to the UK, seeking work and better prospects. These immigrants often faced discrimination, both in terms of employment and in the broader social context, as they were positioned as ‘outsiders’ in a society that was predominantly white (Rattansi, 2007). The effects of colonial racism still exist, evident in higher unemployment rates, poor housing conditions, and lower educational achievement among many ethnic minorities (Hickman et al., 2008).

The structural inequality experienced by ethnic minorities in the UK is also well documented in the literature. Research indicates that individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately represented in lower-income jobs, with limited access to professional and leadership roles (Modood, 2007). Structural barriers, including institutional racism in public services and the labour market, prevent meaningful social mobility for these groups. The Macpherson Report (1999), prompted by the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence, documented pervasive institutional racism within the police and other public institutions, shedding light on the systemic nature of exclusion faced by ethnic minorities. Further, studies on educational inequality show how ethnic minorities in the UK are often concentrated in lower-performing schools with limited resources, resulting in poorer academic outcomes (Gillborn, 2008). The report of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2010) indicates that students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be excluded from school and face additional challenges in accessing higher education, despite significant progress in policy reforms aimed at promoting educational equity.

Within the UK context, economic marginalisation has been a significant feature of ethnic minority experiences. Economic marginalisation of ethnic minorities refers to the social and economic exclusion of individuals or groups based on their ethnicity, race, or cultural background, resulting in limited access to resources, opportunities, and economic participation. It can take the form of a race pay gap, which remains a significant topic in public discourse. Studies show that individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi individuals, tend to earn less than their white counterparts (Lloyd et al., 2014; Matejic et al., 2024; ONS, 2023). This pay gap continues despite individuals having similar qualifications and experience, suggesting that racial discrimination can adversely limit economic opportunities for ethnic minorities (Hudson et al., 2017). Moreover, ethnic minorities are more likely to experience job insecurity and are overrepresented in low-wage sectors (Barbieri & Sarti, 2017), where opportunities for advancement may be limited and working conditions less favourable.

Housing inequality is another key aspect of marginalisation. Ethnic minorities in the UK are more likely to experience overcrowding, substandard poor-quality housing, and increased rates of homelessness (Kofman et al., 2011). Recent data from the 2021 Census also reveals that ethnic minority groups in London are more likely to live in overcrowded homes compared to the white population, which continues to reflect long-standing housing challenges for these communities (ONS, 2023). Moreover, spatial segregation resulted in the concentration of ethnic minorities in deprived areas with fewer resources, further worsening social exclusion (Sibley, 1995). Recent studies continue to emphasise this issue. For example, research by the UCL Institute of Health Equity reveals that over half of Black children and nearly three-quarters of Bangladeshi and Pakistani children live in relative poverty, highlighting the economic disparity tied to spatial segregation (Thomas, 2024). Although some areas may have seen more ethnic integration, many areas still experience significant poverty and limited access to resources. This shows that while integration is occurring in certain urban areas, spatial segregation remains a key factor in exacerbating social exclusion.

In the healthcare sector, studies reveal a concerning issue: ethnic minorities in the UK often experience worse health outcomes compared to their white counterparts (Nazroo, 2024; Petersen et al., 2021). This disparity is evident in various areas, including access to healthcare services and key health indicators such as life expectancy, infant mortality rates, and the prevalence of chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension. The racial health gap has been linked to systemic factors, including racism within healthcare settings and broader socioeconomic determinants, such as poverty and inadequate housing conditions. These challenges contribute to the marginalisation of these communities.

Marginalisation occurs in various forms, including economic, social, and political aspects. It happens when certain groups of people are disproportionately disadvantaged and have limited access to basic rights, opportunities, and services. This disadvantage may arise from discrimination, deprivation, and the outcomes of policies, whether intentional or unintentional. Political disenfranchisement is one example of marginalisation. In the UK, ethnic minorities have historically been underrepresented in political institutions. There have been significant advancements in political representation, including the election of ethnic minority Members of Parliament such as Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng, Bernie Grant, and Keith Vaz, who were first elected in 1987. Over the decades, the number of ethnic minorities in Parliament has steadily increased, and by the time of the 2024 general elections, there seems to be a notable presence

of ethnic minorities in Parliament. Despite this progress, the political voices of these communities often remain marginalised. Research indicates that factors such as racialised voting patterns, voter suppression, and a lack of engagement from political elites contribute to limiting the political power of ethnic minorities in the UK (Alonso-Curbelo, 2023; Harrison, 2007; Heath & Richards, 2018; Sanders et al., 2015). Ethnic minorities may face systemic discrimination that limits their ability to fully engage in economic life, contributing to disparities in income, wealth, employment, education, and overall well-being.

There is also a challenge faced by ethnic minorities in the UK, which is related to cultural assimilation and recognition within the mainstream public sphere (Modood, 2007). Cross's (2003) critical evaluation of race and racism in the European context using the British case has shown that ethnic minorities are subjected to stereotypes, and that their cultural practices are misunderstood in broader society. Using a comparative European approach, Cross argued that Britain's racial inequality is deeply rooted in its history and structures, shaped by post-war migration, economic changes, and policy responses. Although Britain has introduced anti-racist policies, Cross argued these measures often fall short in addressing the deeper, institutional foundations of inequality. Multicultural policies in the UK, which have aimed to celebrate and recognise cultural diversity, have faced criticism for fostering cultural segregation instead of integration (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2017). Critics argue that these policies have sometimes resulted in cultural fragmentation, with ethnic minorities being segregated into specific neighbourhoods and excluded from full participation in mainstream British culture (Parekh, 2000). However, there is also evidence of resilience and cultural agency. Ethnic minority communities have developed vibrant cultural and social networks, and activism has been central to challenging marginalisation. Black British civil rights movements, such as the Notting Hill Carnival, have not only helped preserve cultural identities but also acted as a political tool for demanding equality and justice (Cochrane, 2024).

The fast-changing demographics of the United Kingdom population in the last three decades reflect a mixture of diverse races, cultures and related social and class divisions (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2017; Payne & Harrison, 2020). The disparity in racial relations and structural inequity has become a significant concern for ethnic minority communities, as it limits equitable access to educational opportunities and the justice system. The practice of racial identity profiling raises questions about collective identity, which problematises the construction of individual identity (discussed in sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3). The imposed categorisation of identity further

adds to this complexity. These categorisations often connect to race, immigration status, socioeconomic differentiation and other parameters imposed by government policies. Race itself is a social construct of identity that is contested and interpreted in various contexts. In many public discourses and debates, British society is described as multi-ethnic and multi-cultural (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2017; Catney et al., 2021). However, various social practices and policy frameworks on ethnic diversity in Britain have been criticised as having a ‘segregative effect’ (Taylor-Gooby & Waite, 2014, p.277), which undermines the benefits they were intended to provide.

Another dimension of marginalisation is the dominance of adults and their overriding power over the views of young people. This practice is supported by social norms that suggest the relative immaturity of young people to make real sense of the world and develop their views (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). Further to the social norm challenge is the imbalance in power relations (Ross, 2019), which perpetuates inequality and social injustice. These critical issues are further amplified by the concept of intergenerational justice, which advocates for addressing systemic biases (Linehan & Lawrence, 2021), that disproportionately affect Black young people. At the heart of intergenerational justice is a compelling argument for human rights. Linehan and Lawrence (2021) argued in favour of proxy representation through institutions for future generations (IFGs) to mitigate systemic bias and enhance the potential for achieving intergenerational justice. These arrangements do not provide a direct voice for young people; instead, their voices are represented by proxy through the IFGs. Under this scenario, where there is no direct expression of voice, the established class structure of dominance and social division can inadvertently become more apparent.

In response to public discourse on the marginalisation of ethnic minorities, the UK introduced various anti-discrimination laws and diversity policies aimed at reducing inequality. The Race Relations Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments prohibited racial discrimination in public life. The Equality Act of 2010 sought to address inequalities in various areas, including employment, education, and housing. However, critics argue that while these legal frameworks have reduced overt racism, institutional racism continues to be a significant problem (Macpherson, 1999). Some affirmative action policies, particularly those designed to increase the representation of ethnic minorities in higher education and the workforce, have been implemented, but they remain a topic of debate. Proponents argue that these policies are essential for addressing historical and structural inequalities, while critics contend that they

lead to reverse discrimination and fail to tackle the underlying causes of inequality (Modood, 2007). Additionally, cuts to public services and austerity measures implemented through government policies have disproportionately impacted ethnic minority communities, undermining the positive effects of diversity policies (Hickman et al., 2008). Despite efforts by successive governments in Britain, including setting up various inquiries, the Equality Act of 2010, and commissioned reports aimed at investigating race relations, there continues to be underrepresentation and exclusion of Black ethnic minorities. It is crucial to recognise and amplify the voices of Black young people (discussed in section 2.4) to better understand their identities and experiences, as well as how these connect critical consciousness, marginalisation, and social justice.

The literature on the marginalisation of ethnic minorities in the UK is diverse and complex, covering a range of social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Some scholars (Andrews, 2021; El-Enany, 2020; Gilroy, 2002; Hickman et al., 2012; Olusoga, 2016; Shilliam, 2018; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019; Virdee, 2014) have examined the historical roots of marginalisation, the structural inequalities that sustain it, and the various forms of social exclusion experienced by ethnic minorities. Progress has been made through legal reforms and policy changes; however, institutional racism remains deeply rooted, and new forms of marginalisation continue to emerge, particularly in the context of global migration and the rise of populist nationalism. An identified gap requiring further exploration is the intersectionality of marginalisation, specifically how factors like gender, immigration status, race, and class complicate the experiences of ethnic minorities. This important topic will be examined in the next section.

### **2.2.2. Intersectionality and identity**

To gain a nuanced understanding of how intersectionality and individual identity contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups, it is important to explore the ways these factors shape the experiences of oppression and disadvantage. When examining the demographics of young people, we should consider the intricacies of identity formation. The knowledge of who they are and the different attitudes they express can provide valuable insights into their experiences and perspectives. This understanding requires an examination of how these attitudes develop and evolve over time. It also requires a thoughtful consideration of the various social categories and how they intersect with the multiple, interconnected identities of these individuals. Factors



such as nationality, socioeconomic status, gender, race, sexuality, religion, language, and disability all contribute to a rich and diverse sense of identity. A careful analysis of these interconnections is essential for meaningful discussions about identity and marginalisation. Intersectionality refers to the interplay of intersecting identities. At the intersection of multiple identities, individuals may face inherent marginalisation (Ilten-Gee & Manchanda, 2021). Understanding the experiences of young people is not straightforward; thus, feelings of exclusion and discrimination can vary from person to person, as can the consequences of those experiences.

The significance of intersectionality in this study is worth considering. Proctor et al. (2017) defined intersectionality as ‘the simultaneous experience of social categories... and the ways in which these categories interact to create systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination’ (para. 1). This concept is relevant to this research as it highlights the systemic and structural biases that can affect equality, thereby continuing the cycle of marginalisation. Since Crenshaw (1991) developed this concept, various interpretations and arguments have emerged. Intersectionality has expanded its influence from gender and feminist studies to include education, health, and social science studies (Lutz, 2015). Like many other theories, the understanding and application of intersectionality have faced critiques, particularly in the context of left/right and liberal/conservative debates. Leftists advocate for equality and egalitarianism, while those on the right often prefer to maintain a status quo hierarchy (Robertson, 2017). Although critics argue that intersectionality can fragment marginalities, setting one marginality against another, its strength lies in reflexivity (Banerjee & Ghosh, 2018). Drawing on Crenshaw's *single-axis framework* argument, this study posits that categorising an individual's identity based on a single characteristic can lead to the exclusion of other important identifiers which may contribute to marginalisation. By adopting the concept of intersectionality, I will explore the various limiting factors and categorisations that can create disadvantages for Black young people, with a focus on social justice issues.

An understanding of intersectionality offers valuable insights into social justice and highlights the conditions of exclusion, marginalisation, and oppression within the social system. Proctor et al (2017) argued that intersectionality is essential for exploring ways of ‘creating more equitable and socially just outcomes for those with minoritised identities’ (para. 4). As young people transition into adulthood, it is common for them to navigate a complex web of identities. Cieslik and Simpson (2013) provided an insightful perspective, stating that ‘...youth cultures

and identities and transitions are models or shorthand forms that are used to represent a more complex empirical world' (p.ix). In this context, this study will empirically explore young people's reflexivity and critical action through the concept of voice.

Another perspective in the ongoing debate about identity focuses on positive identity construction (Roberts & Creary, 2011). In their illustration of the mechanisms for positive identity construction, Roberts and Creary drew upon classical theories of identity, including social identity theory, identity work, identity theory, and narrative-as-identity. These classical theories tend to impose identity and categorisation on individuals through the actions of government and society (Decimo & Gribaldo, 2017), rather than allowing individuals to be the agents in constructing their own identity. Robert and Creary (2011) focused on positive identity within a formal organisational context, which can be restrictive because it does not take into account informal settings. The classical perspective offers useful insights into the complexities of identity, but it assumes that individuals define themselves in positive ways. This assumption fails to acknowledge the many social factors that influence the construction of identity. In contrast, some identity scholars link adolescent identity to negative adaptations that can lead to deviant behaviours (Brinthaupt & Scheier, 2021). These varying perspectives focus primarily on the role of identity in the developmental processes of young people, suggesting there could be multiple ways to conceptualise identity. This study takes an epistemological approach that views identity as a constructivist concept (constructivism is discussed in Chapter 3). This perspective suggests that identities are multiple, socially constructed by individuals, and dependent on context. I emphasise that individual self-identification - viewed through the constructivist lens – offers a clearer understanding of how identities are constructed. Identity categorisation through the mechanism of governmentality (Decimo & Gribaldo, 2017) provides a convenient way of classifying individuals; however, it often overlooks the complexities of social interactions. Acknowledging the interplay between internal and external forms of identification (Jenkins, 2000) is essential when discussing the process of identity construction. In fact, external identification emphasises the production of categories imposed by political influences.

The concept of intersectionality is useful in understanding how race intersects with other forms of identity to create unique experiences of oppression. For example, stereotypes and the experience of being Black have disproportionately impacted Black individuals in relation to the police stop-and-search policy (Bowling & Phillips, 2007). The experiences of inequality

are affected by the complex interactions between factors such as ethnicity, class, and religion. This intersection influences how individuals perceive and experience disparities in society, emphasising the subtle ways in which multiple identities contribute to inequality (Modood, 2005). While intersectionality is a useful framework for understanding the complexities of racial inequality, much of the UK literature on race and inequality tends to focus on race in isolation. This approach often overlooks how other social identities, such as gender, sexuality, and disability, interact with race to influence experiences of discrimination. It is important to recognise that the issues discussed also affect other minority ethnic groups beyond just Black individuals. There tends to be a focus on the experiences of Black men and women, while the experiences of other racialised groups, such as South Asian women or Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, are sometimes not given due attention. These groups experience intersectional oppression in different ways. It is equally important to consider how these intersecting identities affect different age groups. For example, the experiences of young ethnic minority individuals can differ significantly from those of older generations.

The influence of contextual factors on shaping identity is significant and should not be overlooked. As mentioned earlier, young people's attitudes and responses to their social environments are changing and are shaped by various social influences. A study of young Europeans discussing political issues reveals that they tend to engage more in these conversations with their parents - especially those from middle-class backgrounds - than with their teachers at school (Ross, 2020). This observation is noteworthy, given that educational institutions have traditionally been seen as places for sharing and transferring knowledge. It prompts several important questions: Why are young people less able to discuss political matters in school compared to other contexts? Are they being discouraged from doing so? What type of pedagogy is being employed in schools? Is there room for developing critical consciousness? Does the relationship between teachers and students promote a passive acceptance of information instead of encouraging critical thinking and active participation? This is consistent with what Freire (1970) described as the 'banking concept of education' (p. 72). The need to further explore the political socialisation of young people has become increasingly important. With this in mind, in this study, I will explore young people's critical thinking skills, their understanding of human rights, and their capacity to question the status quo.

In summary, identity as a social construction is closely linked to the behaviours and attitudes of young people. It can be argued that the internalisation of certain habits as a way of life stems from the relationships young people build in various contexts, which significantly influence key aspects of their lives as they transition into adulthood. Therefore, this research aims to generate new insights into the voices and identities of young people, their learning experiences (both formal and informal), and how these factors shape their perceptions of human rights values, which are often used as indicators of social justice. Given the multitude of themes in youth research, this study will specifically focus on the role of critical consciousness in shaping identities and how young people leverage their voices to challenge perceived inequities. I will also discuss the process of identity formation in young people, along with a review of relevant identity theories.

### **2.2.3. Identity formation in young people**

The process of identity formation during adolescence and young adulthood is a vital aspect of their development. This period is characterised by an exploration of self-concept, which is significantly influenced by complex interactions between personal experiences, social relationships and cultural contexts. Several psychological theories offer frameworks for understanding how individuals construct a sense of self in response to these personal, social, and cultural influences. In this review, I will discuss key theories of identity formation, highlight recent empirical research, and critique both the theoretical approaches and their limitations in addressing the complexities of identity development in young people.

Erikson's (1968) psychosocial development theory remains a cornerstone in understanding identity formation. In the identity versus role confusion stage, adolescents explore different aspects of self and attempt to commit to an identity. Some recent empirical research continues to validate Erikson's assertion that the adolescence period is essential for identity development; however, some criticisms have arisen concerning the universality of his theory. Individuals who have successfully navigated identity exploration during adolescence are likely to exhibit better psychological adjustment in young adulthood (Klimstra et al., 2018; Klimstra & van Doeselaar, 2017; Luyckx et al., 2023; Skhirtladze et al., 2019; van Doeselaar, 2020). This suggests that the process of exploration and commitment is not always linear, as Erikson initially posited. Rather, identity exploration may occur inconsistently, with some individuals continuing to experience role confusion into early adulthood. Although Erikson's model

provides valuable insight, contemporary research has expanded his theory to reflect the increasingly fluid nature of identity in the context of modern challenges, including globalisation and social media. For example, Schwartz et al. (2005) argued that identity formation is more dynamic and affected by multiple environmental factors than Erikson initially acknowledged. Their study of emerging adults showed that identity development continues beyond adolescence and is heavily influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status and cultural background.

James Marcia (1966) proposed the identity statuses of diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement, which remain useful in contemporary identity development theory. Marcia's model emphasises that adolescents go through a process of exploration before committing to an identity. However, subsequent research offered an opportunity to deepen our understanding of these stages. A study by Schwartz et al. (2011) supported the four identity statuses and found that adolescents in the moratorium status - those exploring their identity without making immediate commitments - tended to exhibit higher levels of anxiety, suggesting that prolonged exploration can be stressful but is ultimately important for later identity achievement. Conversely, adolescents in foreclosure (who adopt identities handed down by parents or society without exploration) were found to experience lower levels of distress but also exhibited less psychological well-being in the long term (Schwartz et al., 2011). While Marcia's model has been instrumental in understanding identity development, recent studies have critiqued its focus on fixed identity statuses. Meeus et al (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of Marcia's model and suggested that the model fails to account for the complexity and fluidity of identity formation, particularly in diverse populations. Moreover, some adolescents may not fit neatly into the categories of exploration and commitment, especially in the face of shifting social and cultural contexts.

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, significantly changed the field of social psychology by explaining how individuals derive part of their identity from their group memberships. The theory suggests that people categorise themselves and others into social groups, which can lead to favouritism toward their own group (in-group) and discrimination against other groups (out-group) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While SIT has been foundational in understanding intergroup behaviour, it has also faced criticism regarding its theoretical assumptions and empirical applications. Social Identity Theory (SIT) focuses on conflict and discrimination between groups, often neglecting the aspects of

intergroup cooperation and harmonious coexistence. Brewer (1999) advocated for the optimal distinctiveness theory, emphasising the need for balance between group belonging and individuality, an aspect that SIT has underexplored. Additionally, Hornsey (2008) argued that SIT oversimplifies identity by failing to adequately account for multiple social identities (such as race, gender, and profession) and the fluidity between them. The theory typically assumes a singular, static social identity, while individuals may shift between different identities based on context. Furthermore, SIT tends to generalise group behaviour, overlooking individual personality traits or personal values that can influence group identification (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). This oversight limits the theory's effectiveness in explaining why some individuals resist conforming to group norms. Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory remains a seminal framework for understanding intergroup behaviour and social identity. However, SIT's limitations, such as its conflict-centric view, simplistic approach to identity, neglect of power dynamics, and insufficient consideration of individual differences, highlight the need for ongoing refinement.

McAdams' (2001) narrative identity theory proposed that individuals create a coherent sense of self by constructing a personal narrative that integrates life experiences into a meaningful story. It refers to the internalised and evolving life story that individuals create to make sense of their experiences and give their lives a sense of purpose. According to McAdams, narrative identity combines past events, current circumstances, and future aspirations into a coherent story that shapes a person's self-perception. This narrative-centric approach to identity highlights the importance of life stories in establishing a stable and coherent self-concept, suggesting that the way individuals recount their experiences plays a pivotal role in defining who they are. However, while narrative identity theory sheds light on how young people derive meaning from their diverse life experiences, it may place too much emphasis on an individual's capacity to forge a cohesive narrative. This suggests that the theory may overlook external structural factors, such as socioeconomic status, cultural background, and societal expectations, that significantly influence identity development. Such external influences play a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive themselves and their place in the world. Although the narrative identity theory offers valuable insights, it is essential to consider it alongside other frameworks that account for these systemic factors and cultural norms to develop a more comprehensive understanding of identity formation among young people, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. This aspect appears to have been overlooked in McAdams's (2001) narrative identity theory. In a subsequent publication in 2021, McAdams advanced this

discussion by acknowledging the critical role of culture in shaping personal narratives, thereby enriching the understanding of narrative identity in a culturally diverse context, and illustrating the dynamic interplay between individual storytelling and the broader cultural forces that affect identity formation.

Identity formation in young individuals is a dynamic and evolving process shaped by a blend of personal exploration, social relationships, and cultural contexts. Theories such as Erikson's psychosocial development, Marcia's identity statuses, social identity theory, and narrative identity theory offer valuable insights into the mechanisms of identity formation. However, recent empirical research indicates that these frameworks need to be expanded to reflect the complexities and fluidity of identity development in today's social world. Factors such as socioeconomic status, digital culture, and intersectionality influence how young people develop their identities. This study will examine how Black young people's identity formation occurs within diverse cultural, political, and social landscapes, aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this developmental process.

### **2.3. The lens of Critical Consciousness Theory**

This study is based on Critical Consciousness Theory, which serves as a theoretical framework for my analysis. This framework is useful for examining how it can contribute to social awareness and advocacy among marginalised groups. The study examines the lived experiences of Black young people, focusing on how the development of critical consciousness influences their understanding of systemic marginalisation and societal inequalities. By exploring the intersections of race, identity and social justice, I aim to illustrate the role of critical consciousness in shaping perceptions of self and marginalisation among Black young people. Additionally, cultural contexts that shape these experiences are analysed through the lens of critical consciousness, shedding light on the complex interplay of factors that contribute to marginalisation. Adopting this approach underscores the importance of developing critical consciousness as a vital tool for understanding the complexities of marginalisation and the numerous challenges it presents. This exploration aims to uncover how awareness and critical thinking can empower individuals and communities to confront and engage with the intricate realities of their lived experiences.

Since Paulo Freire developed the theory of critical consciousness, it has been defined and applied in various ways. A major assumption of this concept is that awareness of systemic inequity is essential for taking action to resist oppressive systems. Freire (2017) contended that, without this awareness, there can be no resistance, allowing oppressive systems to continue to affect marginalised groups. Similarly, Diemer et al. (2016) described critical consciousness as a mitigating mechanism against ongoing inequity. Jemal (2017) emphasised the importance of critical consciousness, presenting it in simpler terms for better understanding.

If inequity is likened to a disease or poison, then critical consciousness has been deemed the antidote to inequity and the prescription needed to break the cycle. As such, critical consciousness is a construct that has important scholarly, practice and policy implications.

Jemal, 2017, p.602

Although there has been continued interest and growth in the literature, there are also divergent views on critical consciousness (Diemer, 2020; Jemal, 2017). Freire described education as a pedagogy that helps young people develop critical consciousness, enabling them to actively challenge and transform social injustice. The Freirean theory has been criticised from the standpoint of its binary postulation of ‘oppressed versus oppressor’, and ‘banking versus liberation’ as simplistic compared to the complex differential outcomes of lived experiences (Magee & Pherali, 2019). Nonetheless, it provided a foundation from which other theorists and scholars advanced the discussion.

The three core elements of critical consciousness, as postulated by Paulo Freire, are critical: reflection, critical motivation and critical action. Diemer et al (2016) elaborated on these core elements; they referred to critical reflection as a process of learning that instils critical thinking to question inequalities embedded in the social structure and learning to understand how existing patterns support oppression and inequalities. This learning about existing biases is important in the social justice process. The second element, which is critical motivation, is the build-up of capacity to address injustices. It is assumed that the knowledge of oppression will spur a feeling of resistance. Third is critical action, used to refer to different activities, either individually or collectively, undertaken to drive change and initiate steps to address injustice. Applying these concepts to this research, the basic assumption is that the awareness or feeling of marginalisation among Black young people will inspire their engagement in critical



reflection, critical motivation and critical action. Diemer et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative study involving diverse young people aged 13 to 19, focusing on the development of the Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS). They identified three key components: perceived inequality, egalitarianism, and socio-political participation. The authors suggested that both perceived inequality and egalitarianism are closely linked to critical reflection, while critical action is associated with participation. Egalitarianism emphasises the idea of equality, highlighting equal social status. Although interpretations of equality may vary among egalitarians, I will approach it from the perspectives of moral and political status. I argue that upholding human dignity is essential and that all individuals deserve respect and basic rights. Furthermore, the issue of participation will be presented as a form of intervention that involves critically analysing social issues, engaging in dialogue, and collaborating for social action to challenge experiences of marginalisation.

The concept of critical consciousness has increasingly gained attention in the literature, yet there are inconsistencies in its conceptualisation and measurement. For example, Jemal (2017) argued that quantitative scholarship on critical consciousness does not clearly define the relationship between perceived inequality and action. It remains unclear whether taking action improves the perception of inequality or if understanding inequality motivates action among individuals. Additionally, while some researchers have operationalised critical consciousness in relation to educational achievement and racial relations (Ilten-Gee & Manchanda, 2021; Leal, 2021), critical consciousness encompasses a wider perspective beyond the identified areas, given the issues of intersecting identities discussed earlier. Therefore, in this study, the operationalisation of critical consciousness will not be confined to specific categories but will be open to gaining useful insights into its emancipatory role. The key element of Freire's theory relevant to my research is the 'praxis' philosophy, which refers to critical reflection on systemic bias, power dynamics and dominance, marginalisation, and the racial consciousness of minoritised Black young people. Freire's theory assumes that reflection should not be an isolated activity; it should naturally lead to the question: what comes next? It posits that critical reflection should be accompanied by action, whether taken individually or collectively. In a related manner, Freire asserted that the importance of education lies in its content and its potential to foster critical thinking. This assumption suggests that learning may stimulate critical consciousness and encourage participation.

### 2.3.1. Critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is closely connected to the theory of critical consciousness. Its primary focus is on developing an educational approach that aims to be transformative and liberating from oppressive systems. The concept of critical pedagogy was introduced by Paulo Freire in his classic book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). Since then, some educational philosophers have stressed the importance of this approach in addressing issues of injustice and inequality. Critical pedagogy emphasises the development of critical thinking skills and encourages young people to engage in discussions about social cohesion, social injustice, marginalisation, and the challenges posed by an oppressive status quo. This educational approach is believed to have its roots in critical theory, which traces back to early thinkers like Socrates and Plato, and later includes figures such as John Dewey and Antonio Gramsci (Cho, 2016; Guilherme, 2017). These philosophers used critical thinking to identify and illuminate the systems of oppression present in society. The core fundamentals of critical pedagogy, which include dialogue, action, hope, and a shift in mainstream education, were championed by Freire. He was passionate about democratic change and advocated for the altering of dominant power relations that are oppressive and which do not willingly offer freedom. The values of social justice and equality advocated by Freire remain relevant today. These ideas extend beyond the classrooms and represent what Darder (2015) referred to as the ‘living pedagogy that has to be infused into all aspects of our lives’ (p.5). Similarly, Giroux (2010) continued this discourse, emphasising that education is a moral practice that empowers students to become critical analysts and active agents who uphold the values of freedom and equality. This focus on agency and critical thinking underscores the importance of critical pedagogy in this study. Therefore, this study will explore these perspectives and their impact on Black young people’s understanding of social justice and the construction of human rights.

The purpose of education and the meanings that both practitioners and policymakers derive from it are critically important. Scholars in educational theory and research have examined this vital question from various angles, including moral purpose, inclusiveness, critical thinking, and the development of occupational skills, among others. In this discussion, I will focus on two of Biesta’s (2015) three functions and domains of education, as they are particularly relevant to the issues being considered. While gaining a qualification is considered a purpose of education, as Biesta pointed out, education encompasses more than just knowledge and skills. The other two elements are socialisation and subjectification; socialisation is concerned

with the process of initiation of young people to culture, tradition, politics and community space, while subjectification relates to the capacity for judgement, being independent-minded and being critical. Foucault's (1980) idea of subject and power, where the word subject refers to the connection of an individual to their identity, highlights freedom as an underlying impact of individualisation. Similarly, Biesta (2020) suggests that 'freedom is at the very heart of education as subjectification' (p.95), referring to the term 'subject' in subjectification. This perspective is further supported by Marshall and Bottomore (1992), who alluded to the indispensability of education in the pursuit of civic freedom and as a requirement of citizenship.

The compass of critical pedagogy evaluates the shortcomings of mainstream pedagogy and appears to offer an alternative to schooling pedagogues. Some of the emerging themes include critical consciousness, inclusion, hope and freedom. There is an ongoing argument about the role that critical pedagogies play in embracing different identities while also accommodating the inherent conflicts in order to bring about change (McArthur, 2010). While there are several pedagogical approaches and no single best fit, Freire liberationism aligns with this research. Liberationism is anchored on the need to address injustice by promoting freedom and social justice. The prevailing critique is that education in its current state - a seemingly narrative education - lacks creativity and 'transformative power' (Freire, 1970, pp.71,72). Although Freire's argument was mostly focused on educational institutions, the theory of critical thinking and critical consciousness deepens understanding of the values of social justice, freedom, equality and diversity. Furthermore, informal learning in public spaces, beyond formal institutions, is also critical to developing critical literacy.

The relevance of critical pedagogy for this research is, firstly, to awaken critical thinking about the values of equality, freedom and social justice for marginalised groups. Interestingly, the usefulness is not limited to the oppressed and marginalised; it may also be a useful tool for providing knowledge about rights violations to the privileged group (Uddin, 2019). Secondly, employing the dialogical approach proposed by Freire (2017) initiates the process of giving a voice to Black young people.

### **2.3.2. Decolonising education**

Colonialism fundamentally transformed societies and cultures across the world, often in ways that were not peaceful, but rather exploitative and destructive. One of the key areas where colonial powers exercised control was education. Colonial education systems were designed to

serve the interests of the colonisers, aiming to create a compliant and subjugated workforce that would facilitate the economic exploitation of colonised territories (Smith, 2012). These education systems not only reinforced colonial ideologies but also marginalised indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultural practices. In many cases, colonial education systems sought to *civilise* indigenous peoples by promoting western values, traditions, and histories (Loomba, 2015). The teachings of European superiority and the demonisation of indigenous cultures became deeply embedded in the curricula. This has resulted in long-lasting impacts on the identity, self-worth, and sense of belonging of individuals from formerly colonised nations. Even after the end of colonial rule, the legacy of colonialism continues to influence educational practices in many parts of the world (Fanon, 1961). Consequently, many educational systems find it challenging to fully adopt culturally relevant pedagogy, resulting in a complex interplay of historical influences that impact both students and educators.

The call to decolonise education arises from the recognition that contemporary educational systems continue to be shaped by colonial legacies. Despite the global movement toward independence and the promotion of multiculturalism, educational curricula in many countries still prioritise western knowledge, often overlooking the contributions of other cultures and civilisations (Mignolo, 2012). The continued influence of this colonial framework in education tends to have detrimental effects. Most educational systems, particularly in former colonies, continue to revolve around European history, literature, and philosophy. This creates a distorted view of the world, where western knowledge is considered the benchmark for intellectual achievement, while non-western knowledge systems are marginalised or deemed as inferior (Said, 1978). The dominance of western ideas often leads to the marginalisation of indigenous languages, practices, and knowledge systems. Students from indigenous or non-western backgrounds may feel alienated from the education system, as their own cultures and experiences are either ignored or treated as inferior (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019). This alienation can hinder their academic success and personal development. A salient argument concerning the effects of the colonial framework is that it reproduces inequality (hooks, 1994). Colonial-era educational practices were designed to maintain hierarchical social structures that privileged colonisers and oppressed colonised populations. Despite the formal end of colonialism, which may have abolished overtly racist policies, contemporary educational systems still reflect and reproduce societal inequalities related to class, race, and gender.

Decolonising education, especially the curriculum, is an important and transformative step toward promoting equity and justice in society. The process of decolonising education is crucial for ensuring all groups feel included and empowered, as the absence of such efforts could push certain communities further to the margins of society. In recent years, the call for decolonising education has gained significant traction worldwide, with scholars, activists, and educators emphasising the need to address the colonial legacy embedded within educational systems. I explore scholarly perspectives on the decolonisation of education, addressing the challenges and strategies identified in the literature, along with the potential implications for educational practice and society at large.

The process of decolonising education is multi-dimensional and involves not only a critique of the colonial legacies within educational structures but also the active transformation of these structures to promote inclusivity, diversity, and social justice. Decolonisation broadly refers to dismantling western-centric knowledge and power structures in educational systems (Bhambra, 2014). Therefore, decolonising education requires challenging and transforming educational practices, curricula, and institutions that sustain colonial ideologies and inequalities. Some scholars have emphasised the need to challenge the eurocentric foundations of educational knowledge, where western values, histories, and cultural practices are institutionalised as the norm (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2009). Smith (2012), in her seminal work *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, argued that the decolonisation of education must go beyond curricular changes to include rethinking research methodologies. She highlighted how indigenous communities' knowledge systems were historically suppressed by colonial powers, and she calls for the recognition of indigenous ways of knowing and learning. This aligns with Fanon's (1961) argument in *The Wretched of the Earth*, which stressed the importance of cultural reclamation as a means of empowerment for formerly colonised peoples. For Fanon, decolonisation of education involves dismantling the systems that have perpetuated the inferiority of indigenous cultures, replacing them with educational practices that acknowledge and incorporate these cultures.

In the context of post-colonial education, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) emphasised the importance of recognising the ongoing influence of colonial power dynamics in education, even after colonial rule has ended. He argued that the structures established during colonialism continue to shape modern educational practices, including curricula, teaching methods, and policies, which primarily promote western knowledge. This lasting legacy creates challenges for those

advocating for educational reforms that seek to acknowledge and integrate indigenous and marginalised knowledge systems. Loomba (2015) argued that the colonial educational system was designed to instil a sense of inferiority in indigenous populations while promoting the superiority of European thought and values. The historical domination of European narratives in curricula has resulted in a persistent eurocentric bias that continues to marginalise non-western knowledge systems. As Said (1978) suggested, this educational legacy has resulted in a worldview where western knowledge is valorised, and other knowledge systems are either ignored or dismissed.

The literature on decolonising education presents various strategies for addressing the colonial legacy in educational systems. One of the most widely discussed approaches is reforming the curriculum. Scholars such as wa Thiong'o (1986) have advocated for a radical rethinking of educational content, suggesting that the curriculum should be more inclusive of indigenous cultures, histories, and philosophies. By incorporating the knowledge and worldviews of marginalised groups, education can become a more empowering tool for all students. Similarly, Mignolo (2012) stressed that curriculum reform should not simply add non-western content but should involve a fundamental rethinking of how knowledge is structured and transmitted.

In addition to curriculum reform, the pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning must also be reconsidered. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* highlighted the need for a dialogical, participatory form of education that empowers students to critically engage with their learning and challenge existing power structures (see section 2.3.1). This pedagogical shift would allow students to question the authority of western knowledge and develop their own critical consciousness. Furthermore, Bhabha (1994) suggested that decolonising education requires the creation of spaces where diverse cultural identities can be expressed and celebrated, enabling students to engage with multiple perspectives and histories. A significant part of the literature emphasises the need to decolonise research methodologies. As noted above, Smith (2012) called for a rethinking of the research process itself, arguing that research practices must be more inclusive and recognise indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate sources of knowledge. This perspective is echoed by critics who note that many research methodologies are based on colonial traditions that prioritise western ways of knowing (Khalifa, 2016; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). These methodologies need to be decolonised to better reflect diverse epistemologies.

The need to decolonise education is widely acknowledged; however, the literature highlights several challenges faced by educators and policymakers in this process. One of the primary obstacles is institutional resistance. Educational institutions, particularly those in former colonies, are often structured around a western-centric framework that is difficult to change. According to Foucault (1980), institutions tend to resist change because they are embedded within systems of power that maintain the status quo. This resistance is often compounded by a lack of resources and support for educators to implement decolonising practices. Decolonisation requires not only curriculum reforms but also extensive professional development for educators, which is often neglected in many parts of the world (Khalifa, 2016). Additionally, political and cultural sensitivities also play a significant role in hindering the decolonisation process. In the UK, like many countries, education is deeply intertwined with national identity, and calls to decolonise may be seen as a threat to the nation's unity or social stability (wa Thiong'o, 1986). In some cases, political elites may resist decolonisation efforts in an attempt to maintain control over the dominant narrative, especially if it challenges existing power structures.

The potential impacts of decolonising education are significant and far-reaching. Many scholars have argued that decolonising education can lead to a more inclusive and equitable educational experience for every student. For example, Bhabha (1994) suggested that an inclusive, decolonised education can promote a deeper understanding of global histories and cultures, leading to greater tolerance and social harmony. Additionally, decolonisation can help reclaim and preserve indigenous knowledge systems, as highlighted by Smith (2012), empowering marginalised communities to assert their cultural identity and voice. Moreover, a decolonised educational system can foster critical thinking, as it challenges students to question the dominant narratives and examine the power structures that shape their world. Freire (2000) argued that this process of critical engagement is fundamental to both personal and societal transformation. Through decolonised education, students can develop the tools to challenge systemic inequalities, thereby contributing to a more just and equitable society.

Decolonising education, therefore, is not only about addressing these issues but also about creating a more inclusive, just, and equitable system that recognises the diversity of human experience and knowledge. It involves rethinking who has the authority to define knowledge, what knowledge is considered valid, and how this knowledge is transmitted (Foucault, 1980).

The literature on decolonising education highlights the importance of rethinking educational practices and structures that continue to perpetuate colonial ideologies. Many scholars agree that decolonisation requires not only curriculum reforms but also shifts in pedagogy, research methodologies, and institutional practices. While the challenges to decolonising education are significant, the potential for creating more inclusive, equitable, and just educational systems makes it a critical undertaking. To make progress, decolonising education must continuously evolve to create a learning environment that genuinely reflects and celebrates diverse cultural identities and knowledge systems.

### **2.3.3. Inequality: A racial perspective**

Racial inequality continues to affect various aspects of society, including education, healthcare, criminal justice, and employment. In the UK, legislative progress has been made to address discrimination and promote equality; however, systemic racial disparities remain widespread. This synthesis of the literature on racial inequality in the UK highlights historical legacies, contemporary disparities, and the intersections of race with other social categories, such as class and gender. The following discussion will identify limitations and gaps in current research and suggest areas for further exploration.

The discussion of racial inequality in the UK is informed by a historical framework that includes the legacies of colonialism and the arrival of Commonwealth migrants after World War II. This context underscores the structural inequities that have persisted and evolved due to these historical developments. Back and Solomos (2009) emphasised how the construction of racial categories was influenced by migration and the influx of migrants from the Caribbean, South Asia, and Africa, who experienced social exclusion and discrimination in post-war Britain. Structural racism is embedded not only in individual attitudes but also in the institutions and systems that govern society, such as education, employment, and the criminal justice system (Gillborn, 2008). These interconnected systems tend to perpetuate inequality that affects the availability of opportunities and the lives of individuals across generations. Although the historical legacy of colonialism is crucial for understanding racial inequality, it is also important to adequately consider how contemporary political and economic changes exacerbate racial disparities. For instance, the rise of neoliberalism and austerity measures since 1980s has significantly impacted social welfare and public services, disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities (Barford & Gray, 2022; Fisher, 2006). Research often overlooks



the complex relationship between contemporary policy decisions and racial inequality, focusing instead on historical factors alone. Moreover, some of the literature focuses primarily on the experiences of certain ethnic groups, sometimes with little attention given to other ethnic groups, who also face unique challenges related to racial inequality (Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002; Morgan et al., 2023). This limited perspective constrains the discourse and fails to address the complexities of racial disparities faced by other ethnic minority groups, such as Black young people.

Racial inequality can manifest through disparities in employment and wealth distribution. Minority groups, particularly those from Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities, experience higher unemployment rates, wage gaps, and underrepresentation in managerial positions (Khan, 2020; ONS, 2020). These disparities highlight systemic barriers and broader economic inequalities that affect employment opportunities and wealth accumulation for these groups. Other studies have shown that ethnic minorities, particularly Black and South Asian communities, hold less wealth compared to white British households, with a significant racial wealth gap persisting in both urban and rural areas (Matejic et al., 2024). Although the literature on racial economic inequality in the UK is extensive, it often overlooks the intersectionality of race and class in shaping economic outcomes. For example, ethnic minorities from lower socio-economic backgrounds face compounded barriers that are insufficiently explored in mainstream research (Modood, 2005). Economic precarity experienced by ethnic minorities is often discussed in isolation, without sufficient consideration for the broader structural inequalities. A noticeable gap in the literature is the underexplored role of institutional discrimination in the labour market. Despite evidence of racial discrimination in hiring practices (Ahmed, 2012), much of the literature tends to focus on the glass ceiling and disparities in managerial positions without addressing how broader labour market policies, such as temporary employment and zero-hour contracts, disproportionately impact ethnic minorities (Ochmann et al., 2024). Additionally, the literature often overlooks the importance of geography in shaping ethnic minorities' economic outcomes. The experiences of ethnic minorities in major urban centres like London differ significantly from those in less diverse regions, and the impact of this geographical variation may not be adequately explored.

The education system presents a platform for addressing and improving racial inequality, depending on the balance of power and cultural competence to tackle these barriers. Research

shows that ethnic minority students often face challenges that can negatively affect their academic performance compared to their white British peers. Identifying these barriers and implementing supportive measures can foster a more equitable and effective learning environment for all students. Some studies suggest that Black Caribbean, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi students, on average, achieve lower academic results and are more likely to be excluded from school (Connolly, 2013; Gillborn et al., 2017). The Department for Education (2024, updated in January 2025) also reports that Black Caribbean boys are disproportionately represented in school exclusions, a pattern that reinforces the connection between race and educational disadvantage. The literature frequently presents racial inequality in education as an issue of achievement gap between ethnic groups without sufficiently addressing the role of the school system itself in perpetuating these disparities. Studies by Gillborn (2008) and others (Gillborn et al., 2017) have emphasised the role of teacher expectations and institutional racism, but there is less focus on how school curricula may reinforce racial inequality by failing to reflect the cultural diversity of the student body. Research could benefit from a deeper exploration of how the curriculum and teaching methods may contribute to the underachievement of ethnic minority students. Additionally, some of the literature assumes that educational inequalities are predominantly a function of race, neglecting how socio-economic status and class interact with racial identity. For example, the achievement gap between Black Caribbean students and their white peers is often examined without acknowledging the different social and economic backgrounds within these groups (Alexander et al., 2015; Arday & Mirza, 2018), which highlights the role of cultural capital (this will be discussed in section 2.5). The challenges ethnic minorities face in accessing and succeeding in higher education deserve more attention, particularly as they relate to the effects of racial microaggressions and discrimination on students' experiences.

The health disparities between ethnic minority groups and the white population in the UK represent another major area of concern within racial inequality discourse. Nazroo (2024) suggests that Black and South Asian communities experience poorer health outcomes, including higher rates of chronic conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Additionally, the Public Health England report (2020) emphasised that the COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities, with higher mortality rates observed among Black, Asian, and ethnic minority groups. There has been increasing focus on health disparities, but the underlying structural factors contributing to these disparities must also be addressed. Often, these factors are only discussed superficially without any real action

being taken. Critical determinants of health, such as socioeconomic status, housing quality and access to healthcare, are frequently considered in isolation rather than as interconnected elements of a broader system of inequality. Some studies, including those by Bhopal (2007) and Stopforth et al. (2021), have addressed disparity and discrimination within the healthcare system. However, insufficient attention is given to the ways in which institutional racism in healthcare is compounded by factors such as lack of cultural competence and the socio-economic status of patients. Furthermore, while the impact of race on health is often discussed, there is not enough focus on how gender, age, and migration status interact with race to shape health outcomes. Agarwal and Watson (2021) suggest that the experiences of Black and South Asian women, for example, may differ significantly from those of men in terms of healthcare access and treatment.

In the context of the UK criminal justice system, the issue of racial inequality remains a common topic of discussion. As previously mentioned, the overrepresentation of Black, Asian, and minority individuals in police stop-and-search statistics, arrests, and prison populations has been clearly highlighted (Bowling & Phillips, 2007; Robertson & Wainwright, 2020). The Lammy Review (2017) and the Ministry of Justice (2017) both confirmed that ethnic minorities face harsher treatment at different stages of the criminal justice process. It is important to consider the broader political and social context that contributes to the racialised policing and social injustice experienced by ethnic minorities. The role of the media in shaping public perceptions of crime and racialised communities requires further exploration. The demonisation of ethnic minorities, particularly young people, in media portrayals of crime and terrorism has a significant impact on police practices and public attitudes toward these groups (Rogan, 2021; Wayne et al, 2010; Webber, 2022). Additionally, much of the research on the criminal justice system does not adequately consider the intersectionality of race and class, often treating racial inequality in isolation. This draws attention to how Black and Asian individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds face compounded disadvantages in their interactions with the criminal justice system, yet this issue is rarely addressed in depth.

The literature on racial inequality in the UK provides useful insights into the persistence of disparities in education, employment, healthcare, and criminal justice. However, there are notable gaps in the research. Future studies should explore the role of contemporary policy decisions, such as neoliberalism, austerity, and immigration control, in shaping racial inequality, as this is not within the scope of this study. Furthermore, research should adopt

more intersectional approaches, examining how race intersects with other identities, such as gender, class, and disability. This study seeks to examine these intersections. Finally, a more thorough understanding of the complexities of racial inequality across various ethnic groups and geographical locations is required to better inform policy and social interventions.

#### **2.4. Framing voice in this study**

The voices of Black young people have historically been marginalised in literature and media, which has impacted their cultural identity and how society views them (hooks, 1994). In the past, representations of Black individuals in literature have often been lacking or, when present, have relied on stereotypes that do not accurately reflect their diverse experiences (Gates, 1988). Moreover, educational curricula have frequently excluded or misrepresented their experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995), resulting in a distorted understanding of history. Therefore, amplifying the voices of Black young people is not only important but essential for promoting social justice and empowerment (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). hooks (1994) argued that societal resistance to Black narratives further complicates the efforts towards adequate representation.

Education also plays an active role in shaping childhood, as schools, curricula, policies, and pedagogical frameworks help define what it means to be a child, thereby influencing who is heard and how (Blundell, 2012). The sociology of childhood has highlighted children's agency and rights, bringing their voices to the forefront. Emerging in the 1990s, the 'new' sociology of childhood was championed by scholars like James and Prout (1990 & 1997), Qvortrup (1994), and Mayall (1998). These scholars argued that childhood is not merely a biological stage but a socially constructed category shaped by cultural contexts, temporal factors, and power relations. This perspective has transformed how children are understood in academic and policy discussions, challenging traditional developmental models that portray children as passive and incomplete. Instead, it advocates for viewing children as active social agents. A key theme in this shift is the focus on the child's voice, emphasising their right to participate in decisions affecting their lives. David Blundell's (2012) work offered a critical institutional perspective by analysing how education systems both construct and often limit this voice. He noted that, while schools and policy frameworks may give the illusion of agency, such as student councils, they often restrict the scope of dialogue, confining children's influence to predetermined topics, which ultimately upholds adult authority rather than challenging it. Blundell's analysis reflects broader critiques of institutional power and connects with the discourse on how governance

systems can shape, regulate, and limit voice. His findings suggest that voice does not automatically signify empowerment; it becomes meaningful only when adults genuinely listen to and respond to what children say (Blundell, 2012). This serves as a reminder that recognising voice requires more than inviting children to speak; it demands transforming the institutional contexts that determine how, when, and why they are heard.

The evolution of the new sociology of childhood has faced criticism (Canosa, 2020). Key concerns include tensions between interdisciplinary approaches, particularly those from sociological and psychological perspectives, and claims of Western bias. Developmental psychology often emphasises children's cognitive and emotional needs, which can conflict with the sociological focus on autonomy and voice. Critics argue that completely dismissing developmental frameworks undermines the field's ability to address crucial issues related to protection, vulnerability, and support (Hammersley, 2017; Uprichard, 2008). Additionally, decolonial childhood scholars are scrutinising the Western liberal bias inherent in the new sociology (Punch & Tisdall, 2012; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2024; Twum-Danso Imoh et al., 2022; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2019). They contend that conventional ideas of 'voice' and 'participation' are based on individualistic values, which often clash with the collective and relational understandings of childhood found in non-Western societies. These critiques highlight that while it is essential for the voices of young people to be heard and their agency recognised, there are also various actors involved in children's lives. This thesis concentrates on the experiences of young adults, emphasising their unique experiences, perspectives, forms of self-expression, and the issues that influence how they articulate their voices.

The concept of voice in relation to marginalisation may include a wide range of participation activities. These forms of engagement reflect diverse experiences and perspectives, indicating that they are not uniform or strictly sequenced. Each act of participation can hold different meanings and significance depending on the context and the individuals involved, highlighting the complexities of how marginalised voices are expressed and heard in society. This highlights the widening definition of young people's participation and the various ways through which they can engage (Checkoway, 2011; Pickard, 2019; Sloam, 2013; Weiss, 2020). As a result, the term participation has become increasingly contested and complex. In this study, the voices of young people are framed as a form of participation. This includes a wide range of activities, such as verbal and written communication, expressing opinions on social and political issues, engaging in protests, and signing petitions. Each of these actions not only demonstrates a

commitment to civic engagement but also highlights the importance of youth perspectives in shaping societal discourse.

Participation can take many forms, but its underlying principle is to give people a voice. This serves as a means to contribute ideas, influence decisions, or initiate actions (Narayan-Parker, 1995). Furthermore, having a voice is a crucial mechanism of human agency; it allows those engaged in social action to express their identities (Lawy, 2017). Leveraging the agency of young people in their advocacy for rights, this study will go beyond the conventional interpretation of the term ‘voice’ to conceptualise its significance in resisting marginalisation and inequity experienced by Black young people. Hadfield and Haw (2001) explored the concept of voice as a social construct and linked it to action in their typology of voice. Their voice typology, which emphasises articulation of ideas and desired outcomes, closely aligns with my research focus.

A critical ‘voice’...attempts to challenge the existing basis. It is often expressed by young people in ‘actions and words’ as they influence the power relationships with adults, workers, and their peers. It is a persistent voice that develops through dialogue and interaction.

Hadfield & Haw, 2001, p.490.

The framing of voice in this study is designed to promote social justice and highlight its importance in the pursuit of fairness in society. Social justice refers to a fair system that upholds dignity and respect, and preserves entitlements, liberties and basic rights of individuals and groups (Jost & Kay, 2010). To gain insights into social justice in racial relations, this study explores the viewpoints of research participants and how they construct their ideas of social justice and human rights. In addition to social justice, the use of voice will be explored through the lenses of critical consciousness and the complexities of intersecting identities. Each of these frameworks provides a rich context for understanding how voice is not just a means of expression but also a powerful tool for social change. The preceding sections provided a detailed discussion of these frameworks, emphasising their importance and the relationship among them as I explore the intricate connection between identity and advocacy. Additionally, it is important to apply social justice principles to the specific social contexts of research participants (Miller, 1999). The social justice perspective in this research focuses on the experience of inequities faced by Black young people. Although inequity and inequality are sometimes used interchangeably, they may have different meanings. This study focused on

inequity to provide a deeper understanding of an unfair and unjust system that exposes the vulnerability of marginalised groups. I argue that in the pursuit of social justice, considering individual or group circumstances can lead to better outcomes in achieving equality. The benefit of equity in advancing social justice is that it addresses the unique needs of individuals to foster a sense of equality (Cramer et al., 2018), thereby promoting equitable outcomes.

In a study focused on the experience of marginalisation among Black young people, the importance of having a voice is crucial not only for agency but to contribute to amplifying marginalised voices within the literature. Developing critical consciousness serves as both a form of agency and a motivation to advocate against perceived social injustices and inequities. This need arises from the fact that young people have consistently been overlooked in addressing specific needs that pertain to them (Hadfield & Haw, 2001; Pickard, 2019). For example, the lived experiences of exclusion, deprivation and oppression of Black young people warrant attention. Often, the strategic role that young people play as agents of social justice is unintentionally overlooked (Creswick et al., 2019). As a result, more attention should be given to their voices. Rather than being ignored, young people are uniquely positioned to discuss the issues that affect them, particularly the distinct lived experiences of Black youth, considering that their voices are the voice of experience (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). A pertinent question to consider is: how do young people assert their voices? To effectively express themselves in today's evolving society, it is essential to understand how 'voice' is constructed among Black young people, and further explore whether it is crucial for addressing perceived injustices and marginalisation, as well as for empowering them.

## **2.5. Education and cultural capital**

Education in the UK is often seen as a means of social mobility, but it is also a system that can perpetuate social inequalities. The education system is shaped by various factors, including government policies, historical contexts, and societal expectations (Ball, 2008). One of the most significant factors affecting education in the UK is whether a student attends a state school or a private (independent) school. Private schools tend to have better resources, smaller class sizes, and more access to extracurricular opportunities, all of which can provide an advantage in education (Blatchford et al., 2003). In contrast, state schools serve more diverse populations and often face budgetary constraints, which can limit opportunities for some students.

Research has consistently shown that children from higher social classes tend to achieve better educational outcomes. This is partly due to differences in parental support, access to resources, and the ability to attend better schools (Sullivan, 2001). In the UK, the link between social class and educational success remains strong, with children from low-income families often facing barriers to accessing higher education or achieving academic success (Blanden et al., 2007). Policies such as the introduction of free school meals, the expansion of free childcare, and the introduction of academies and free schools are intended to address inequalities within the education system (DCSF, 2007). However, these policies often do not fully bridge the gap between different social classes (Raffo et al., 2007).

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital provides a valuable framework for understanding how social inequality is sustained through culture and education. Cultural capital refers to non-economic resources such as knowledge, skills, education, manners, and cultural awareness that individuals can leverage for social mobility. Unlike theories that focus solely on economic class, Bourdieu emphasises the subtle and often invisible mechanisms by which dominant social groups maintain their power. A central aspect of this process is the role of high culture - forms of cultural expression considered prestigious or valuable by the elite - and its connection to institutions like education. High culture includes elite cultural forms such as classical music, fine art, literature, and opera. Educational institutions tend to reward individuals who are already familiar with these dominant cultural codes, thereby reinforcing existing class hierarchies. For disadvantaged groups, the impact of this cultural hierarchy is significant. In the educational context, students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds often enter school with a form of pre-approved cultural capital; they are more likely to have been exposed to books, museums, and academic discourse from an early age. Their cultural competence aligns with institutional expectations, giving them a distinct advantage. In contrast, students from less privileged backgrounds may possess equal capability, but their unfamiliarity with these cultural norms (high culture) often leads to lower academic achievement, perpetuating social disparities. By privileging high culture and devaluing the cultural expressions of disadvantaged groups, institutions contribute to the persistence of inequality.

Cultural capital plays a significant role in the UK's education system, as it can influence disadvantaged students' ability to succeed (Bourdieu, 1986). Children from middle and upper-class families tend to have access to more forms of cultural capital. For example, they may grow up in environments where higher education is emphasised, where parents can afford to



take them to museums or cultural events, or where they are exposed to a language-rich environment. These factors can give them an advantage in the educational system, which often values certain forms of cultural knowledge (Lareau, 2003). Teachers and educators often unconsciously value certain forms of cultural capital over others. For instance, students from working-class backgrounds might not have the same cultural capital as those from more affluent families, and this can affect their ability to engage with the curriculum or to navigate the social and cultural expectations of the school environment (Reay et al., 2001). Activities such as music lessons, drama, or sports can significantly contribute to a student's cultural capital. However, such opportunities are often not equally available to all students. Wealthier families are more likely to invest in these activities for their children, providing them with more opportunities to enhance their cultural capital (MacLeod, 1987). Additionally, students from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to attend prestigious universities like Oxford and Cambridge. This disparity arises partly because these families can afford extra tuition or private tutoring, and they often possess the cultural capital that helps them navigate the complex admissions process (Sullivan, 2001). Conversely, students from working-class backgrounds may lack the support systems that can help them succeed in gaining entry into these institutions, even though they may have similar academic potential.

The role of cultural capital significantly influences a child's educational journey and overall development. A child whose parents are professionals or academics is likely to grow up in a rich cultural environment. They may have access to books, engage in intellectual conversations, experience various cultural activities, and opportunities for foreign travel. This environment provides them with cultural capital that can enhance their academic performance in the classroom (Lareau, 2003). On the other hand, a child from a low-income family might not have access to these resources, which can impact their educational success. Private schools, which are largely accessible to wealthier families, often offer more cultural capital, in the form of better extracurricular activities, prestigious networking opportunities, and an emphasis on specific types of knowledge that align with elite cultural expectations. Conversely, state schools in economically disadvantaged areas tend to have fewer resources and offer fewer opportunities for students to acquire this form of cultural capital (Ball, 2008).

Cultural capital has faced criticism for its emphasis on education, as it often focuses too heavily on individual responsibility and skills while neglecting the structural inequalities within the system. Although cultural capital can provide some advantages, critics argue that it does not

adequately explain why certain groups are more likely to succeed than others. Structural factors such as income inequality, disparities in school funding, and access to social networks significantly influence educational outcomes (Blanden et al., 2007). The concept of cultural capital also raises concerns about cultural bias. The education system may prioritise the cultural capital associated with middle and upper-class families while devaluing the cultural practices, knowledge, and experiences of working-class families or ethnic minorities. This may lead to a form of educational elitism, where students who do not conform to the dominant cultural norms may be at a disadvantage (Reay et al., 2001). Critics argue that cultural capital reinforces social inequalities rather than challenging them. For example, the education system's reliance on cultural capital often means that children from less privileged backgrounds are less likely to succeed, not because they lack the ability or intelligence, but because they are deprived of the cultural capital valued by the education system (Bourdieu, 1986). This creates a cycle of inequality where disadvantaged students are more likely to remain disadvantaged in the long term.

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital has been influential in understanding how schools and other institutions reproduce social inequalities by favouring the tastes, dispositions, and knowledge of the dominant social class. However, his framework has been criticised for being overly focused on class and for not adequately considering the role of race in how capital is valued or devalued. Yosso (2005), drawing on Critical Race Theory, challenged the deficit perspective inherent in Bourdieu's work by asserting that communities of colour in the U.S. possess rich forms of cultural capital that are often unrecognised by dominant institutions. She argued that Bourdieu's concept of capital is too normative, centred around white, middle-class values, and misses the funds of knowledge rooted in communities of colour. Yosso introduced the concept of Community Cultural Wealth, which includes aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital - resources that are vital for the survival and progress of marginalised groups.

In a UK context, Rollock et al. (2015) examined how Black middle-class families possess and utilise various forms of cultural capital yet still encounter institutional racism that limits the recognition and rewards typically afforded to white middle-class families. Their research demonstrates that Black middle-class parents possess and use cultural capital, such as educational credentials, professional careers, and language fluency, but do not receive equal returns on that capital due to racism. Schools and institutions racialise cultural capital, treating

it as less valid or legitimate when embodied by Black families. Their work extends Bourdieu's framework by illustrating that capital is not neutral; it is racialised, and its legitimacy is affected by existing structures of whiteness. Together, these perspectives complicate the concept of capital by emphasising the importance of race and recognising the agency and culturally rooted practices of marginalised groups in navigating unequal systems.

*Table 2.1. A comparative critique of the concept of cultural capital*

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Bourdieu (1986)</b>	<b>Yosso (2005)</b>	<b>Rollock et al. (2015)</b>
Core Capital	Dominant cultural capital	Community Cultural Wealth	Cultural capital and racialisation
View on Marginalised Groups	Lacking dominant capital	Possess alternative, rich capital forms	Possesses capital, but it's devalued by racism
Key Critique	Class-focused	Race-blind, deficit-based	Race-blind overlooks racism's role
Solution	Reproduction of inequality via schools	Recognise and value community-rooted capital	Examine how institutions racialise capital

Despite the different perspectives of Yosso and Rollock and colleagues, the theory of cultural capital remains an important framework for examining structural inequality in society. This theory encourages a deeper exploration into how individuals and groups navigate social hierarchies, revealing the complex interplay between culture and economic opportunity. Yosso does not entirely dismiss Bourdieu's foundational ideas but instead shifts the focus of capital to affirm and validate the knowledge and resources possessed by marginalised communities. On the other hand, Rollock and her colleagues emphasise that race significantly influences how cultural capital is recognised, valued, or overlooked in various institutional contexts. This perspective underscores the ongoing issue of institutional racism, as defined in Macpherson's (1999) inquiry report (see p.189), which continues to present challenges for ethnic minorities in the UK. The inclination of middle-class parents to invest in private education for their children illustrates the powerful influence of cultural capital, even as Rollock and her colleagues' findings indicate that race can be a substantial barrier.

Efforts to address issues related to cultural capital, such as the introduction of pupil premium funding for disadvantaged students, can sometimes fall short. Raffo et al. (2007) suggested that while these policies aim to provide additional support, they often do not sufficiently address the underlying causes of inequality, such as the deep-seated social and economic factors that contribute to disparities in educational attainment. Cultural capital perspectives reveal inequalities within the UK educational system. Although education is often presented as a pathway to social mobility, it can also reinforce social stratification. The concept of cultural capital is vital for understanding that educational success is not solely based on merit; rather, it also depends on the availability of resources, networks, and opportunities that certain groups are more likely to possess. To effectively address educational inequality, policymakers must focus not only on improving access to education but also on reducing structural inequalities that restrict access to cultural capital for disadvantaged groups.

## **2.6. Chapter summary**

This research combines the concepts of identity, intersectionality, critical consciousness, and voice to explore the dynamics of marginalisation within the context of social justice. Although existing literature has addressed these concepts either individually or in a different context, exploring their intersections offers deeper insight into the experiences of Black young people in London. This study aimed to explore how different forms of marginalisation intersect and affect the lives of Black young people. By examining the unique challenges they face, I seek to fill a gap in the existing literature and deepen our understanding of how multiple identities combine to shape their realities. Using a framework grounded in human rights and social justice, this study will examine the experiences of marginalisation among young Black people in the UK context. It emphasises the implications of marginalisation for social justice and highlights the role of agency - expressed through voice and dialogue - in challenging inequalities. This integration allows for a systematic analysis of how critical consciousness enhances awareness and understanding of marginalisation, underscoring the importance of amplifying the voices of those directly affected. To explore Black young people's perceptions of marginalisation through voice and critical consciousness, this study presents a framework that examines the interrelationships between these key concepts (Miles et al., 2020). Social justice is central to these interrelationships, assuming that critical reflection is a foundational

step in initiating social justice efforts. This process encourages Black young people to reflect on and recognise experiences of marginalisation, inequities, and social disadvantages.

Existing literature on the development of critical consciousness among the demographic targeted by this study is insufficient. A review indicates that most research has been quantitative, primarily focusing on the critical consciousness of diverse youth groups. However, a recent study (Cea D'Ancona, 2023), which was also quantitative, mainly examined older Black individuals, leaving a gap in understanding the perspectives of younger people. This study aims to fill that gap by specifically exploring the critical consciousness of Black young people aged 13 to 18 within the UK context. Using a constructivist qualitative approach, it seeks to examine the lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings of these youths in depth, thereby offering a richer understanding of their awareness and engagement with critical social issues. Developing a heightened awareness - critical consciousness - of these issues is believed to align with human rights principles. This awareness can motivate individuals to speak out or take action, often referred to as political efficacy (Craig & Maggiotto, 1982; Scotto et al., 2021). Responses to experiences of marginalisation may manifest as vocal expressions of discontent or calls for change, catalysing dialogue and fostering empowerment. This empowerment enables Black young people to take an active role in advocating for social justice, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society. The framework suggests that developing a critical identity promotes resistance and the pursuit of systemic fairness. Developing critical consciousness and an awareness of human rights can empower young people to challenge perceived disparities and socioeconomic disadvantages. Additionally, participatory action and grassroots movements, especially among young ethnic minorities, have been instrumental in advocating for policy change and challenging structural inequalities in the UK (Hall, 1992). However, a limited understanding of systemic inequality and human rights may result in passivity or a lack of motivation for critical engagement. This study will explore these different scenarios by analysing data that reflects the diverse experiences of Black young people.

In summary, this research focuses on the intersection of voice, identity and marginalisation among Black young people. It emphasises that amplifying their voices can serve as a catalyst for social justice. To better understand social justice in the context of marginalisation, I will explore how Black young people construct and perceive marginalisation while expressing principles of social justice. Instead of relying on abstract definitions, social justice principles will be applied to the lived experiences of the participants (Miller, 1999), using a social justice

perspective to explore the inequities faced by Black young people. In the pursuit of social justice, addressing the unique circumstances of Black young people can lead to more equitable outcomes. The principle of equity is essential for achieving social justice, as it considers individual needs and abilities to promote fairness and equality (Cramer et al., 2018). Research on the experiences of marginalisation among Black young people is still limited.

The existing body of literature has explored several critical issues, including racialisation, discrimination, disparities in educational attainment, and the influence of socioeconomic capital. However, there is a need for further investigation into the lived experiences of Black young people in the UK. This study aims to enhance our understanding of the marginalisation faced by this specific demographic and to explore the diverse factors that contribute to these experiences. By adopting an intersectional approach, the study will illustrate how intersecting identities influence education, mental health, and employment. It seeks to uncover how multiple identities, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status, can shape experiences in these areas. Understanding these complexities is crucial, as they often determine the opportunities available to individuals within this study group. Additionally, the research will focus on the role of cultural practices, linguistic nuances, and familial expectations in shaping educational pursuits and career pathways. Examining these elements provides a detailed perspective that enhances the existing literature. Furthermore, there is a gap in studies specifically examining identity negotiation, experiences of discrimination and social belonging among Black young people. It is also important to explore how they experience community policing and the criminalisation of Blackness beyond the traditional justice system. Lastly, I will explore the factors that contribute to resilience and positive educational experiences among Black students.

In conclusion, this research presents a blend of theoretical approaches that enrich both the presentation and discussion of findings. Grounded in a mix of theoretical and empirical literature, it allows for a nuanced interpretation of the data. The primary frameworks utilised include critical consciousness, intersectionality, identity and voice, which are complemented by a broader theoretical perspective that enhances analytical depth and ensures rigorous contextual and conceptual understanding. This breadth is important not just by chance; it is crucial both methodologically and epistemologically. Studies indicate that relying on a single framework can obscure the complex realities faced by marginalised youths and communities (Ginwright & James, 2002; Mirra et al., 2016; Yosso, 2005). For instance, intersectionality

sheds light on how intersecting structures of oppression (such as race, gender, class, and ability) shape varied experiences. On the other hand, theories of critical consciousness provide vital tools to help young people recognise and resist structural inequalities (Watts et al., 2011). While these macro-structural and political frameworks are invaluable, identity and voice theories allow for a deeper exploration of the subjective and relational aspects of youth agency. They emphasise how young people make sense of their experiences, navigate their sense of belonging and articulate resistance (Archer, 2003; Holland et al., 1998). However, an exclusive focus on micro-level perspectives may overlook the structural conditions that shape those experiences. Therefore, a multidimensional theoretical approach is necessary to understand the interplay between structure and agency. The emphasis on each theoretical lens reflects its usefulness in examining specific aspects of the data. Although critical consciousness and intersectionality provide the overarching framework for understanding power dynamics, inequality, and positionality, identity and voice provide deeper insights into participants' lived experiences and how they construct meaning. Together, these frameworks help to unpack the findings. This theoretical pluralism, particularly utilised throughout the findings and discussion chapters, ensures the results are interpreted with depth and critical sensitivity, acknowledging the complex, intersecting, and continually evolving realities of young people's lives.

# **CHAPTER 3**

## **Research Methodology and Methods**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This study adopts a qualitative research method to explore experiences of marginalisation. This chapter outlines the methodology guiding my research, including the data collection process through deliberative group discussions. These discussions aimed to facilitate rich, interactive dialogues, allowing participants to share their lived experiences. I also discuss the data analysis phase, which uses the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) method. This approach enables me to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns within the data, providing a better understanding of the issues of marginalisation. Participants were recruited from a sample of Black young people in London. The choice of London is based on its sizable population of Black young people compared to other regions in the United Kingdom. In total, eight deliberative group discussions were conducted, and by the eighth session, I determined that the data had reached a saturation point, leading to the decision not to conduct further discussion sessions. This chapter is organised into three main parts. The first part discusses the research framework that supports this study, exploring the epistemological and ontological assumptions that guide the inquiry. The second part outlines the methodological approach, detailing how participants were accessed and recruited, along with the process of data analysis. The final part focuses on subjectivity and positionality, as well as ethical considerations and the challenges encountered during the research.

### **3.2. Research framework**

In this section, I discuss the philosophical foundations guiding my research, focusing on the methodological framework that shapes my approach. My research, like many social research, is influenced by certain beliefs that influence my worldview and the perspectives I choose to adopt. I have considered different theoretical perspectives related to epistemology, which concerns the nature and scope of knowledge, and ontology, which relates to the nature of existence and reality. This study examines the lived experiences of Black young people using a social constructivist epistemology and relational ontology. By adopting a constructivist lens, I seek to understand how these young people perceive and interpret their experiences of



marginalisation. I recognise that marginalisation is not merely an abstract concept; it is connected to the realities faced by individuals in their daily lives. Through an exploration of their personal narratives and the context of their social interaction, I will analyse the factors that contribute to their experiences and their response to their circumstances.

Ontology is defined as the study of ‘being,’ focusing on understanding ‘what is’ and the construction of meaningful reality, whereas epistemology pertains to the theory of knowledge and the explanation of ‘how we know what we know’ (Crotty, 1998, pp. 3, 10). Epistemology deals with *what knowledge is* and the production of knowledge. For Lapan et al. (2012), epistemology raises ‘questions about knowledge and how knowledge is acquired’ (p.7), while ontology explores the nature of reality. In essence, epistemology focuses on the scope of knowledge, including the processes involved in its generation. This is discussed further in section 3.4, where I outline my data collection methods, sampling, and accessing research participants. Blaikie and Priest (2017) suggested that ontology encompasses the assumptions made regarding the nature of reality. They argued that it is ultimately the researcher’s choice to determine the appropriate ontology and epistemology for addressing the research questions. These must be considered carefully, as they have a significant impact on how the research is conducted and the methodologies chosen to investigate the research problem.

Building on these foundational concepts of ontology and epistemology, I have chosen to adopt the interpretive paradigm for my research. Interpretivism, as an epistemological approach, contrasts with positivism (Crotty, 1998). It is based on the belief that our understanding of marginalisation emerges from how my research participants articulate and construct meaning through their personal narratives within their social contexts. This implies that the meanings derived are not fixed; instead, they are dynamic and shaped by individuals’ perceptions, experiences, and interpretations. In interpretive research, the researcher’s role extends beyond that of an observer to become an active participant engaged in the ‘setting and in interactions with study participants’ (Lapan et al., 2012, p. 77). In this study, I immersed myself in the data, taking time to reflect on and familiarise myself with the interactions and conversations that took place among Black young people during group discussion sessions. Unlike the approaches of positivism and critical realism, which prioritise empirical observation, hypothesis formulation, and the establishment of causal relationships, interpretivism aims to develop knowledge through understanding the social realities experienced by the subjects of study. In my analysis, I focused on the insights offered by the Black young people about their

experiences and the ways in which they interpret their own lived experiences. As a result, meanings are constructed through a collaborative process, informed by the subjective interpretations of reality shared by participants in my research. This approach reflects my constructivist perspective as a researcher and emphasises the importance of understanding individual narratives within their broader social contexts.

A common argument against interpretivism is that it lacks objectivity, is not value-free (especially from the researcher's perspective) and does not recognise social structures outside of the actor's purview. However, strength lies in the rigour and iterative nature of the process. Blaikie and Priest (2017) referred to this as 'reflexive cycles' (p. 111). Activities within these reflexive cycles raise issues that enable the researcher to 'further explore, cross-check, qualify, and define' as they interact with participants (p. 111). Using the RTA six-step process (Braun & Clarke, 2022), I ensured rigour in processing and analysing the data to derive meaning from what participants expressed (detailed discussion in section 3.5). Some argue that the objectivity of natural sciences cannot be replicated in social research, which is a more humanistic discipline, despite the fact that the objectivity of science has also faced challenges (Letherby et al, 2013). Critics of positivism have argued that knowledge cannot be separated from the problems of the real world that are external to science. In response to relativism, social constructivism emerged to address this challenge. Relativism suggests that different people construct the meaning of the same phenomenon or statement in different ways, dependant on both the context and contingency of its use. That is to say, there is no absolute claim to truth in explaining and understanding accounts of social phenomena, as these may be influenced by culture and environment. Relativism is a philosophical term that is disputed, but it continues to be relevant in philosophical discourse. Social reality and knowledge are constantly evolving as these are products of time (Ormston et al., 2014). I recognise that perspectives on the phenomenon of marginalisation among Black young people may evolve over time.

This research offers a perspective into how knowledge is constructed based on perceptions of social reality, emphasising the role that subjectivity plays. Through a critical analysis, I demonstrate how personal experiences and subjective interpretations shape our understanding of the world. By exploring the complexities of these viewpoints, I recognise that these subjective interpretations play a crucial role in the process of meaning-making. The ontological assumption of this research is that knowledge is not simply discovered; rather, it is actively constructed through human agency in a social context, which is characterised by social

interaction and exchanges among individuals. In conducting a study of this nature, prioritising rigour and robustness in the research methodology is essential (Simpson, 2022).

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggested that ‘we see things from a perspective’ (p.11), which highlights the importance of personal involvement along with the researcher’s values and beliefs in qualitative research. Human beings, as social actors, view and interpret the social world from different angles or perspectives (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). Therefore, knowledge is not constructed outside of human experience. It is essential to consider the creation of *what* knowledge, and *how* knowledge is situated, and the context of its production. Positivists advocate for neutrality and objectivity as the desired quality of any empirical research. However, in practice, this is not feasible for qualitative research (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). Instead, transparency and credibility constitute a more adaptable option, although this may also be fraught with ethical limitations (Moravcsik, 2014).

In this study, I employed social constructivism, which is particularly suitable for qualitative research. Social constructivism views the construction of knowledge as a product of interactions with individuals within their environmental contexts. It emphasises a cognitive process where individuals mentally construct their experience of the world they live (Young & Collin, 2004). Furthermore, it is important to note that the process of individual meaning-making is not viewed in isolation; it is also closely connected to social group interactions. In contrast, positivism and objectivism are typically associated with quantitative research methods. Unlike the positivist paradigm, social constructivists perceive reality differently; they believe that reality exists through human activity rather than being discovered or invented scientifically. Drawing on the social constructivist approach in this research, I argue that meaning and reality depend on the shared understanding (intersubjectivity) between myself and the research participants. In this context, the process of meaning-making involves co-construction through group discussions aimed at understanding marginalisation and social justice.

The philosophical beliefs of interpretivism and social constructivism align well with the chosen research topic. Blaikie and Priest (2017) described different research approaches as logics of inquiry, which include deductive, inductive, abductive, and retroductive logic, the latter combining inductive and deductive reasoning. While researchers with a positivist perspective often test existing theories, this study adopts an inductive approach, where theories are derived

from the study data. The ontological and epistemological beliefs discussed are embedded in the research framework and serve as guiding principles for this study. They enable me to actively work on developing knowledge from the research data through a rigorous process of coding and theme generation. This iterative process of sorting and categorising codes allows for the emergence and refinement of new themes. This method is connected to my subjective interpretation, a topic that will be further explored in section 3.6, which examines my positionality in this study.

While this is not participatory action research, I have embraced a theoretical perspective that highlights the co-production of knowledge between the researcher, participants, and social context, as these elements are essential to my research question. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, I draw on Blaikie and Priest's (2017) reflexive cycles by utilising a reflexive thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2022) for data analysis. Given the qualitative nature of this research, which aims to explore lived experiences, it is essential to carefully consider the individual meanings, behaviours, context, and viewpoints of the participants. Therefore, I have chosen the interpretive paradigm as the most suitable approach for this research, allowing for a step-by-step exploration of the data.

### **3.3. Methodological approach**

This qualitative study used the 'how' and 'what' questions (Silverman, 2017) to understand participants' lived experiences and the construction of their identity. This approach encouraged participants to reflect on how they see themselves and how they are perceived by others as ethnic minorities in the UK. The research is guided by a key question: How do Black young people in London perceive marginalisation, and how does the use of their voice counter this marginalisation? The sub-questions outlined below support the main research question.

Sub-questions:

1. How do Black young people respond to marginalisation?
2. What role does critical consciousness play in shaping identities and the construction of human rights?
3. How do Black young people express voice, agency and reflexivity?

The questions presented emphasise a substantial body of original research that deserves careful attention from both scholars and practitioners. This exploration utilises the lens of critical

consciousness theory to examine the lived experiences of participants. It argues that fostering critical consciousness and an awareness of human rights can be a transformative process, empowering young individuals to voice their concerns in the face of perceived inequities and socioeconomic challenges. This approach highlights the potential for Black young people to advocate for themselves and promote social change, thereby addressing the disparities that impact their lives and communities.

The two common methodological approaches to research are quantitative and qualitative, and a third is a mixed method – a combination of both. This study adopted a qualitative approach. A concise way to understand this approach is to differentiate it from quantitative research. While the quantitative approach is concerned with using numbers to predict and measure causes and effects, qualitative research focuses on words and emphasises the interpretation and contextualisation of data gathered. The priority here is not a generalisation of findings but to generate context-specific knowledge that can be applied to other social settings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Qualitative research has the potential to ‘attend to the contextual richness of real-world settings, which will enable the study of the everyday lives of many different kinds of people and what they think about, under many different circumstances’ (Yin, 2016, p. 3). When the goal is to gain an in-depth understanding of people’s experiences, qualitative research is most suitable for this purpose (Silverman, 2013). This approach enables the exploration of participants’ thoughts, feelings, and perspectives in detail, offering insights that quantitative measures often overlook. It offers a richer understanding of human behaviour and social interactions, providing the essential context needed to grasp the intricacies of people’s lived experiences. This design was adopted as an explanatory conduit to explore issues of marginalisation among Black young people in London. I acknowledge that the responses from research participants in London at this time may not represent the individual experiences and social interactions of people in other regions of the UK. However, these insights are valuable for understanding marginalisation from different perspectives. Critically examining their narratives can provide a deeper appreciation of the unique challenges faced by this demographic.

While this study is not explicitly framed as a critical race study, it draws on the foundational principles of critical race theory alongside elements of Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony (Lears, 1985). The assertion that race is a socially constructed phenomenon provides a race-conscious lens through which to explore the issues of marginalisation, racial discrimination,

and enduring inequality. A significant focus of this research is the exploration of the concept of voice as a social construct, a theme elaborated upon in the literature review featured in Chapter 2. The study pays particular attention to critical voice, which often emerges through expression in words and action (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). This critical voice serves as an essential mechanism for challenging and addressing systemic inequities. Furthermore, the theoretical framework adopted in this study is designed to be open and adaptable, allowing for theories to develop organically from the data analysis. It is important to clarify that this approach should not be misconstrued as grounded theory; rather, it represents a reflexive, interactive, and iterative engagement with the data analysis process (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). There were scenarios where data categories and themes that were not anticipated at the outset emerged during coding (Creswell, 2009). This method facilitates a deeper understanding of the complexities and subtleties of the issues being studied. In the following sections, I explain the methods employed for data collection and the approach used for data analysis.

### **3.4. Data collection methods**

#### **3.4.1. Deliberative discussion method**

The primary method for data collection is deliberative discussion groups, which involve bringing together a small group of participants to discuss (Ross, 2023, 2020) and provide insights on a specific issue. This approach allows for in-depth discussions and the exploration of varying perspectives, contributing to a broad range of data collection and analysis strategies. The discursive sessions are useful to 'reflect the diversity of voices' (Linehan & Lawrence, 2021, p.18), allowing participants to discuss their experiences. Group discussions also provide the researcher with access to hear interactions between group members who share conceptual understandings and similar characteristics. Deliberative discussion groups allowed me to explore and gain in-depth insight into the complex issue of marginalisation in a way that survey and interview methods may not. These discussion groups were created so that Black young people could engage in informal discussions among themselves in a less structured manner. This method, along with the interpretive method referred to earlier, is well-suited for addressing the 'how' and 'why' research inquiries commonly posed in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). To address the criticism of open-endedness and probable lack of structure, the various steps and procedures adopted are documented. A topic guide designed as part of ethics approval was followed during group discussions, recognising that discussions may not

necessarily follow a linear order. Although the practical steps of this research may not accommodate all of Creswell's (2009) validity strategies, which include 'triangulation of data, member checking, peer debriefing, clarifying the bias of the researcher, presenting discrepant information and use of external auditor to review the entire project' (pp.191-192), attempts were made to follow robust processes and harness their benefits. For example, I have implemented several key procedures to enhance my analysis. These include presenting alternative viewpoints related to the emerging themes, conducting a thorough and critical review of the perspectives shared by participants, and actively clarifying any potential biases I may hold as a researcher. These strategies not only deepen my understanding of the themes but also promote a more balanced and comprehensive exploration of the data collected and the discussion of findings.

The topics discussed during the group discussions were based on:

- Marginalisation
- Inequality and experiences of unfair treatment
- Critical thinking or developing critical knowledge about discrimination and racial inequalities.
- Voice – understanding how voice is expressed.
- Agency – young people as agents of change, and what changes would they make, if given the chance?

Questions around these topics were not in any specific order during the discussion sessions. Rather, the discussion was fluid among participants, and follow-up questions were asked based on what participants said to encourage more discussions and seek further explanations. Deliberative discussion groups were found useful for exploring the different perspectives from which participants expressed their views and shared their experiences, which otherwise might have been harder to capture as structured or semi-structured questions.

A pilot study was conducted to gain initial insights into practical, methodological, and validity issues that may arise (Kim, 2011), providing an opportunity to review the process before commencing the main fieldwork. In October 2022, I conducted a pilot of two discussion groups with 10 young people between the ages of 13 and 16 in Southampton, where the proportion of Black young people was smaller in comparison to London. These participants were recruited through a local church parish. This church community provided an affordance to access target

participants who fit the characteristics of target research participants and who attended the church. The study involved one sixth-form student and nine secondary students from various schools in the city. It was observed that the city was not as diverse as London, but it provided an excellent opportunity to test the research instrument and understand the environmental impact on this method. Lessons were learnt about efficiency in the moderation of discussion groups and the impact of environmental noises. The transition from the pilot to the main data collection in London did not require any major changes. The main data collection involved eight discussion groups from three schools across different London Boroughs, and a youth forum from one of the Boroughs, as further discussed in sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4. The participants and data from the pilot study groups were not included in the main data collection and analysis. The small number of participants may limit the diversity of participant perspectives on the research topic. This lack of diversity in perspectives could affect and skew the conclusions.

To ensure productive group discussion sessions, I started by asking a broad question about *what matters most to them in life*. This allowed me to gauge their views and gain insight into how they perceived issues of marginalisation. Before starting the session, I typically began with an introduction, going around the table, welcoming participants and then using ice-breaking questions to encourage interaction and build rapport. Each participant had the opportunity to introduce themselves and share a brief overview of their interests and activities. This helped create a warm and welcoming environment where participants were eager to listen to one another and share their views. This method proved effective in creating a relaxed and engaging atmosphere, allowing everyone to feel comfortable and open to meaningful discussions. The discussion was a fluid process with participants actively listening to each other while ongoing conversations guided their thinking and contribution to discussions. Although participation was voluntary, I occasionally needed to encourage participants around the table to contribute and to ensure that a few individuals did not dominate the conversations.

### **3.4.2. Questionnaire**

In addition to employing the deliberative discussion method, questionnaires were used to gather demographic data about the participants. The questionnaire was specifically designed to assist in the descriptive analysis of background information, including age, gender, and ethnicity (refer to Appendix F). This approach is aimed at ensuring that background information about participants is aligned with the intended research sample. The first part of the questionnaire



collected participants' names, dates of birth, and the schools they attended. The initial question in the second section addressed gender, providing options for male, female, non-binary, other (with a space to specify) or choosing not to disclose. The next question focused on identifying the participants' ethnicity, with options such as African, Caribbean, Black British, Black other, and offered participants space to specify multiple and mixed ethnic heritages. The final question was intended to explore participants' engagement and how these interactions might influence their perspectives and thoughts.

### **3.4.3. Sampling**

This study's initial delimitation was the United Kingdom, focusing on secondary and sixth-form schools. My initial search identified UK cities with the highest levels of ethnic diversity, including London, Cardiff, and Edinburgh. The Diverse Cymru 2019 survey showed Cardiff as having the highest percentage of ethnic diversity in Wales (18.5%), followed by Newport with 12.1%. In Scotland, the ethnicity statistics of the Scottish census (updated 3 August 2021) indicated Edinburgh had the highest score of 17.9%, closely followed by Glasgow, which had 17.3%. In England, London had 40.2% ethnic diversity. These statistics guided the selection of targeted locations for this study. A significant consideration of the universal ethical principle indicates that this sample frame configuration presents a picture of universality, with a somewhat hybrid approach that includes diversity (Msoroka & Amundsen, 2018).

Given London's cosmopolitan nature and status as a city with the highest percentage of ethnic diversity, an extensive search was conducted to identify areas with the highest concentration of Black young people in secondary schools. Four London Boroughs emerged as the top locations with significant Black ethnic minority representation in schools (see Table 3.1). Schools were subsequently sampled from these areas to recruit research participants, providing a centralised and convenient single-site location for engaging young people in research (Bartlett et al., 2017). The choice of schools selected was determined by the positive response to the research introductory letter (see section 3.4.4). Most importantly, groups of young people from schools are more likely to warm up to each other and engage in conversation. To address the challenges associated with accessing schools, a secondary plan was devised to engage participants through youth clubs.

*Table 3.1. The research sample: London Boroughs with the highest Black ethnic population in secondary schools, 2019*

London Borough	% Black students
Southwark	43.5
Lambeth	42.2
Lewisham	40.9
Hackney	35.4

Source: Department of Education (2019): Percentage of Pupils by Ethnic Group, Borough  
<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/percentage-pupils-ethnic-group-borough>

My data collection focused on locations with a significant population of Black young people in educational settings. The targeted participants were students from secondary schools and potentially sixth-form colleges, specifically within the age range of 13 to 18 years. Those who actually participated were between the ages of 13 and 17 years old. However, participation was not limited exclusively to educational institutions. I employed a non-probability, purposeful sampling method, using convenience sampling to identify the target population. Yin (2016) asserted that the ‘goal for selecting the selective instances is to have those that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data-rich information and at the same time avoid biasing the study’ (p.93). This approach enabled me to choose participants from schools who self-identify as Black (Brubaker, 2016) and were willing to participate. This selection process allowed me to engage with young people of Black ethnicity, providing a rich description of their perspectives on marginalisation and social injustice. When approaching schools, I clearly stated that my focus was on understanding the experiences of young people of Black ethnicity, using schools in London as a sampling location, rather than investigating the school policies and practices.

In designing this study, I considered the appropriate sample size for the small discussion groups and the number of discussion groups that would be sufficient. Guest et al. (2017) recommended a range of six to twelve participants in each discussion group. I planned for sessions of 60-80 minutes and a group of six participants. Most of the discussion sessions were under 60 minutes except for two that were nearly 70 minutes. The plan to have groups of six was to keep the numbers manageable, balance the response variability and provide an opportunity for everyone to contribute (Guest et al, 2017). This varied in some instances; on one occasion, I had a group

of four due to two participants dropping out on the day of the group session. While there is no general guidance on how many sample groups are sufficient (Blaikie, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2021b; Hennink et al., 2019; Guest et al., 2017), I planned to conduct eight deliberative group discussion sessions with different research participants in different schools. My approach was to select between three and four schools, depending on the number of schools willing to participate in this research. Out of the twenty-four schools initially contacted, only one responded and agreed to participate. A further fifteen were contacted, resulting in two more agreeing to participate. Through social networking, I connected with a London youth forum whose members participated in the research. In total, I had eight discussion groups - seven from three schools in three different London Boroughs, and one with a Youth Council group from one of the London Boroughs.

#### **3.4.4. Accessing and recruiting participants**

Accessing research participants is a crucial foundational step in the research process, as the quality and trustworthiness of findings significantly depend on the characteristics of the participant sample and the data collected. I had to maintain a careful balance between practical recruitment strategies and ethical responsibilities, ensuring that participation is voluntary, informed, and respectful of individual rights. The recruitment process begins with a defined understanding of the target population, as discussed in section 3.4.3. This definition includes specific inclusion and exclusion criteria that serve as essential guidelines for participant selection, which are outlined subsequently in this section. I ensured that the criteria aligned with the research objectives, ensuring that selected participants could provide relevant data for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The recruitment phase often presents challenges such as low response rates, sampling bias, and difficulties in reaching underrepresented groups. These challenges highlight the need for effective recruitment strategies. To address these issues, I focused on understanding the characteristics of the target population and employed various outreach methods to reach Black young individuals while maintaining high ethical standards throughout the process. By proactively addressing these challenges, I was able to minimise their impact on the research process.

Gaining access to schools can be challenging, but overcoming the obstacles can create valuable opportunities for data collection. One of the obstacles was identifying and gaining access to school gatekeepers such as headteachers and principals. These gatekeepers hold significant influence as guardians and decision-makers when it comes to recruiting research participants

(McFadyen & Rankin, 2016). Accessing sampled participants and fostering their willingness to engage in discussion sessions presented a notable challenge (Wanat, 2008). Focusing on strategies that can enhance participant cooperation was essential for productive discussions. Given the potential challenges, I planned to approach more schools than necessary for the target sample size. This strategy was aimed at accounting for possible rejections and non-responses by gatekeepers while still allowing me to approach more schools. As Ryan and Lorinc (2018) indicated, this method may not always yield the desired results. In addition to this approach, I used alternative recruitment strategies, such as leveraging social networks and seeking support from friends and colleagues to secure access to schools – an approach that Ryan and Lorinc (2018) found to be notably useful and effective in their study.

Other proactive measures were implemented, such as explaining the research benefits to schools and individuals. For example, it was emphasised that an understanding of the issues of marginalisation and social justice can be valuable to Black young people as they navigate the challenges of racial relations. Furthermore, existing literature suggests that critical consciousness may be high among those who experience an oppressive system (Heberle et al., 2020). Moreover, critical consciousness theory is thought to leverage this awareness to confidently address issues of inequality and their well-being (Pinedo et al., 2023; Tyler et al., 2020). The second potential benefit of participating in the study is that it helps build knowledge that can be valuable in helping others. Third, it provides an opportunity for young people to express their voices or ‘have a say’. Lastly, there was an offer to provide feedback on research findings to the school, students and parents if they wished to have it.

In order to enhance accessibility, I used a flexible approach, ensuring that the timing of meetings and sessions was minimally disruptive and did not conflict with school activities and events. The liaison staff members chose dates and times that were convenient for them. It is essential for researchers to prioritise being open to adaptation when designing their research, particularly in recruiting research participants and managing timelines. Being flexible is key to creating a realistic and effective research plan. Most importantly, the research participants were fully briefed on the research objectives, the purpose of data collection, and their role in the study.

Between November 2022 and April 2023, eight deliberative discussion groups were conducted across three schools and one youth forum, involving a total of 48 participants (see Table 3. 2).

Table 3.2. Participants: group details, pseudonyms, ages, ethnicity

Group	Date of group discussion	Females pseudonym, age, (self) selected identities	Males Pseudonym, age, (self) selected identities	Nonbinary Pseudonym, age, (self) selected identities	Number
<b>School 1 Group 1</b>	21 November 2022	<b>Abi</b> (14, African/Black British) <b>Tola</b> (14, African) <b>Cara</b> (14, Black British)	<b>Otito</b> (13, Black British) <b>Deo</b> (15, Caribbean) <b>Ethan</b> (15, Caribbean/Black British)		6
<b>School 1 Group 2</b>	21 November 2022	<b>Sonia</b> (16, Black British) <b>Mona</b> (16, Caribbean) <b>Hiba</b> (17, African)	<b>Dion</b> (17, Black British) <b>Caleb</b> (16, Black British) <b>Javis</b> (17, Caribbean)		6
<b>School 1 Group 3</b>	21 November 2022	<b>Maha</b> (16, Black British) <b>Ava</b> (16, Caribbean) <b>Dara</b> (17, African) <b>Olive</b> (17, Black British)			4
<b>School 1 Group 4</b>	21 November 2022	<b>Amelia</b> (14, Caribbean)	<b>Yaw</b> (14, African) <b>Tony</b> (14, African) <b>Winter</b> (16, Black British) <b>Bob</b> (16, Afrobbian - <i>multiple</i> ) <b>Devan</b> (15, Caribbean)		6
<b>School 2 Group 1</b>	1 March 2023	<b>Amoy</b> (14, Caribbean/Black British) <b>Harmony</b> (13, Caribbean/Black British) <b>Golda</b> (13, Caribbean/ Black British)	<b>Zain</b> (14, African/ Black British) <b>Dante</b> (14, Caribbean) <b>Lanti</b> (13, Caribbean)		6
<b>School 2 Group 2</b>	1 March 2023	<b>Luna</b> (15, Caribbean/Black British)	<b>Don</b> (14, Caribbean)		6

		<b>Salma</b> (15, Caribbean) <b>Larisa</b> (14, African) <b>Alma</b> (15, African)	<b>Sipho</b> (14, Black British)		
<b>School 3 Group 1</b>	18 April 2023		<b>Gozie</b> (14, African) <b>Delroy</b> (17, Caribbean) <b>Angelo</b> (17, Caribbean) <b>Dejen</b> (16, African/Black British) <b>Akin</b> (15, African) <b>Bimbo</b> (15, African) <b>Tega</b> (16, African)		<b>7</b>
Youth Council Forum Group 1	30 March 2023	Sasha (15, Black British) Ejiro (17, African) Calista (14, Black British) Dunya (14, Black Caribbean/White British - <i>multiple</i> ) Soki (13, African)	Ajay (14, Caribbean)	Emily (16, Black British)	7
<b>Totals</b>		<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>48</b>

As shown in Table 3.2, there were distinct groups for males and females. These groups were organised by the liaison school staff member. This arrangement was not intentionally planned during recruitment. Rather, the female-only group was coordinated by London School 1 to accommodate their schedule and ensure participation in the discussion sessions. This particular group ended up with only four females, as two chose to opt out on the day of the discussion. The situation at London School 3 was different, being an all-boys school. Upon reflection, there were no significant differences in the issues raised by the male-only and female-only groups. The major themes emerged consistently across all groups: male-only, female-only, and mixed groups.

A common concern involved hairstyle restrictions that affected all genders. Both males and females felt their Black identities were suppressed through hairstyle rules, as discussed in Chapter 4. However, gender differences emerged, with females often visibly expressing more

frustration about these limitations, especially concerning the acceptable number of hair units. During the group discussion, Tola remarked, 'Not that boys don't have anything to complain about, but with girls, there's like a bit more to do'. This frustration could be attributed to the prominence of glamour associated with female hairstyles, as well as the time and cost involved in maintaining them (Sow et al., 2023). For instance, Tola and Cara shared their experiences about the time-consuming and costly nature of Black hairstyles.

So like we girls... use the half term to do their hair...you have a life outside the school... there is lot that goes into...like they [referring to Black people] have to make an effort, they have to make you buy...and they are not cheap, you have to buy that and do it nice as well.

(Tola, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

...and with our hair we can't really like do it every day and the hairstyles that we want you can't do it everyday...Till they give us a holiday we can't dress the way we want because we have to keep our hair the same.

(Cara, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

The discussion about gang activities and crime mainly focused on males. This was within the context of stereotypes linking Black boys with drugs and gang-related criminal behaviour. The issue of criminalising Blackness was discussed in Chapter 5. In the context of theft in retail stores, it is important to acknowledge that both Black males and females are often implicated in such incidents. These assumptions illustrate the complexities of individual circumstances, personal experiences and broader societal issues that influence them.

The initial phase of accessing schools and recruiting participants involved utilising publicly available contact information to send personalised introductory letters to an initial twenty-four and an additional fifteen headteachers, inviting their participation in the research. Participants of Black ethnic backgrounds were recruited from schools that expressed interest and agreed to participate. To promote diverse perspectives and foster meaningful engagement, students from similar year groups were carefully selected to form discussion groups, fostering a positive environment for discussions between participants.

The selection criteria used in the recruitment process and planning of discussion sessions were based on the following specific factors and considerations.

- In order for schools to be selected for the sample, they had to be situated in inner London and have diverse ethnic populations. More specifically, the schools had to be located in the London Boroughs of Southwark, Lewisham, Lambeth, and Hackney, which were known, at the time, to have the highest Black ethnic population in secondary schools.
- Students from identified schools self-identify as Black ethnicity and must be between the ages of 13 and 18 to be eligible to participate.
- Participants for each discussion session were selected from similar school year groups to create a comfortable environment for interaction. This approach was intended to help balance the power dynamics between older and younger students, facilitating meaningful conversation while preventing older students' voices from dominating the discussions.

Consent was sought at two distinct levels: first, at the institutional level, requiring the schools' agreement to participate in the research, and second, at the individual participant and guardian level. It is important to note that the participants not only shared a historically common Black ancestry but also self-identified their gender and shared common feelings of marginalisation.

#### **3.4.5. Data collection challenges**

This study encountered some challenges during data collection that affected the progress of the study, especially in gaining access to schools and recruiting participants. Initially, there were difficulties with non-responses and obstacles posed by gatekeepers. It was frustrating to contact numerous schools and be met with a high percentage of non-responses. The ratio of contact letters sent to schools versus those that responded and agreed to participate was distinctly high. I found it easier to access participants through the church community during the pilot study. However, when transitioning to the main data collection in London, the cosmopolitan dynamics presented different challenges.



Another challenge was the data collection environment. Specifically, the issue of the data collection environment (Rimando et al., 2015) poses challenges such as noise, layout and ease of accessibility. The first four discussion groups were conducted on the same day, as that was the only date London School 1 could accommodate the sessions. I moved between different floors of the building, changing rooms and rearranging seating for the group sessions. Given the low response rate from the contacted schools and the challenges in accessing them, I had to accept the time slots offered by the school. The busy schedules of the schools required me to be flexible with their timing. This approach was part of the flexibility strategy adopted for this research.

Similarly, the presence of significant others in the room was another environmental issue during all the group discussion sessions conducted. This was thought to be part of the minimisation of risk policy of the schools. I had limited control over this situation. Initially, I was concerned that participants might feel uncomfortable expressing their views during the deliberative discussions in the presence of a teacher in the room. However, this did not pose a significant barrier to conversations among participants. All discussion groups conducted for this study generated rich data for analysis. Participants were encouraged to engage in the discussion, but not pressured to do so. In order to address recruitment challenges, I developed various strategies, as discussed previously. These challenges were anticipated well in advance and were considered in the planning. Overcoming the challenges of gaining access to schools and recruiting research participants required personal resilience, which I demonstrated through persistent efforts to explore alternative avenues for participant recruitment.

The context in which data are collected in qualitative research is crucial in shaping the nature and depth of participant responses. Schools can serve as valuable locations for recruiting participants, particularly when the study focuses on the experiences of young people. They offer a natural environment and provide access to a more diverse representation of the population compared to targeting specific self-selected groups outside the school setting. However, participants' responses within school environments may differ from those given in external settings due to contextual factors such as the presence of authority figures, privacy concerns, and perceived expectations. In schools, students may provide more guarded or socially desirable responses, influenced by the presence of authority figures and institutional norms (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; Bryman, 2016). Time constraints and the formal nature of the setting can also limit the depth of responses (Cohen et al., 2018). Sensitive topics, such as

bullying or academic stress, might be downplayed during school-based interviews to avoid potential consequences or judgment. In contrast, participants interviewed outside the school environment, such as at home or in community settings, tend to share more honest, reflective, and emotionally sophisticated responses, especially regarding personal or sensitive topics (Johannessen et al., 2025). These differences underscore the importance of carefully selecting or combining research settings to ensure the collection of rich, authentic data. The deliberative discussion method, which involves group interviews, can create a meaningful social experience. When responses are triangulated from both in-school and out-of-school environments, it can enhance the credibility and depth of qualitative findings (Patton, 2015).

Despite the differences, there is a balance to consider. The school environment provided a unique advantage because participants knew each other, fostering an atmosphere where they could openly share experiences. This familiarity encouraged a vibrant exchange of stories and insights, making the discussion more dynamic and relatable. However, they may also have a mindset shaped by school culture and rules. In contrast, discussions outside the school setting could have covered broader issues. For example, speaking to a different group of young people on the street or at another location might yield different results. The group discussion session, which took place in a youth forum, showed that participants shared similar experiences and referenced ongoing issues in their schools, even though they attended different schools. The presence of teachers and a youth coordinator during the group discussions was a necessary condition to access the research participants. While this could have an unintentional influence on the dynamics of the discussions, it did not affect social interactions among participants. The teachers and the youth coordinator remained silent and neutral, not interrupting the ongoing conversations. Participants were assured beforehand that there were no right or wrong answers and that their responses would be kept confidential. Although the youth forum included students from various schools, they often met there. Overall, the themes developed from the data collected at the youth forum complemented those from the school setting.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

The data analysis method was reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). This involves the process of systematically organising data, assigning codes to the data, providing a detailed description of

the data, and identifying overarching themes for interpretation and analysis. Thematic analysis (TA) refers to ‘a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data’ (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p.297). This method is well-suited for exploratory research, such as the current study. Kiger and Varpio (2020) suggest that ‘thematic analysis is an appropriate method of analysis for seeking to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a data set’ (p.846). The thematic analysis approach was used to identify, code data, analyse, interpret and describe patterns while refining themes. This method highlights flexibility as an important advantage of using the thematic analysis method. Commonly utilised in social science research, thematic analysis has been previously used by researchers to explore young people's understanding of social issues (Fielden et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2018; Penn-Jones et al., 2021; Throuvala et al., 2019). Using the RTA approach, I conducted a thorough exploration and interpretation of how Black young people perceived their experiences of marginalisation. This involved an analysis of their perspectives and understanding of the factors that contribute to their feelings of marginalisation in society.

Data collected from group discussions were transcribed manually and exported into qualitative data analysis software NVivo to organise the data and conduct a detailed analysis and description of emerging patterns or themes. In this research, I adopted constructivist epistemology to systematically and rigorously analyse data, constructing knowledge from it. In this study, the TA method is underpinned by *reflexive thematic analysis*. Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasise the subjective role of the researcher in interpreting meanings and the need for critical reflection on the research process. Hence, the term *reflexive* is used in thematic analysis. RTA is a research practice that emphasises the subjectivity and flexibility of the researcher as an added value. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe it as a ‘practice of critically interrogating what we do’ and how this influences the research (p.5). Throughout the data collection and analysis process. I consistently questioned my judgment, reflected on, and considered how my biases and preferences might have influenced the research process and data analysis. The reflexive researcher demonstrates creativity and transparency in the data analysis process.

This study's data analysis method draws from Braun and Clarke's (2022, pp. 35-36 & 236) six phases of TA. I initiated the following six phases while working with the transcripts.

## 1. Data familiarisation

2. Coding
3. Generating initial themes
4. Developing and reviewing themes
5. Refining, defining and naming themes
6. Writing up

To begin the analysis, a research project was created on NVivo software, and the transcribed data was subsequently imported into the platform. The first phase (and subsequent phases) involved adopting Braun and Clarke's (2022) method of 'reading and re-reading' (p. 35) the group discussion data. Their book offers guidance on achieving methodological coherence in reflexive thematic analysis, building upon their seminal methodology paper from 2006 and their 2021 text, 'Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide'. This updated work clarifies best and poor practices within a field that is widely but inconsistently applied across various disciplines. I read transcribed data numerous times to become familiar with the data extracts. This was intended to make the next phase of coding more effective and productive. The second phase was coding. During the coding phase, I generated initial categories and codes, 'capturing the analytic take on the data (p.35) and identifying expressions by participants that relate to my research questions. Here, Braun and Clarke suggested two levels of coding: semantic – identifying sets of data that are 'from very explicit or surface meaning' (page 35), that is, nothing more than what Black young people have said; and latent – the more conceptual or explicit meaning, which involves interpreting and identifying assumptions and conceptualisations from what research participants said. In the third phase, I identified initial themes and began making sense of the data by examining keywords and phrases and grouping them, searching for themes that might suggest answers to my research questions. The expectation in research of this nature was to actively construct themes and meaning through data analysis. The fourth phase was to develop and review themes. This required me to revisit the complete dataset and coded extracts to ensure that the themes accurately reflect the dataset. The fifth phase was refining, defining and naming themes (refer to Table 3.3). At this stage, I reviewed my analysis to ensure that the developing theme is suitable for a strong concept. During this process, the questions I asked myself were 'What story does it tell?' and 'How does this theme fit into my overall story about the data?' (p.36). From this stage of the RTA process, I began to explore the connection between themes and the construction of knowledge. The sixth phase involved writing up, which included writing a comprehensive presentation of my findings and a discussion of the results in relation to my research questions. Braun and Clarke

(2022) suggest that this formal writing-up process should ideally start from phase three. It is crucial to understand that my progression between these phases was not strictly linear. For example, during the process of defining and refining the themes, I had to re-read the transcripts, sometimes recode the codes, and review the supporting participants' extracts to understand the story conveyed by the data.

### **3.5.1. Findings presentation guide**

The forty-eight participants in this study represent young people from the Black ethnic group, reflecting various social classes across eight group discussions. The intended age range for participants was 13 to 18 years, but those who actually took part in the discussion groups were between 13 and 17 years old. During the sessions, participants shared their thoughts and feelings about how their race and ethnicity shaped their identities and influenced their lived experiences. Quotes from participants' conversations were used to support the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The extracts are referenced using the following format: Name, Gender, School/Youth Council Forum, Group session, Month and Year. For example, Winter, M, LS3, Grp4, Nov 2022, where Winter is the participants' pseudonym, M represents male gender, F used for female and NB for non-binary; LS1 is used as a code to represent the first school I conducted deliberative discussion sessions (the second and third schools as LS2 and LS3, and the youth forum as LYCF); Grp4 represents the fourth group in London school 1; month is November and year is 2022. The number of discussion groups (Grp) in each school was determined by the number of participants who volunteered from that school. For instance, only one discussion session was conducted in LS3.

Transcription is a vital step in qualitative research, particularly when working with spoken data from conversations (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014; Nicholas et al., 2019). I converted the audio recordings into a text format to enable systematic coding and in-depth analysis. To improve clarity and reflect the context and dynamics of interaction, I used specific transcription symbols and conventions. These techniques capture not only the spoken words but also the subtleties of communication, such as pauses, inaudible or missing words, and instances of overlapping speech (Bolden & Hepburn, 2018). For example, ellipses (...) are used to indicate pauses or unfinished thoughts, while brackets [ ] are used to include my explanations or additions to the excerpt (see transcription symbols in Appendix H). Using these symbols and conventions

allowed me to engage deeply with the participants' spoken contributions, revealing layers of meaning that might otherwise go unnoticed.

### **3.5.2. Coding and theme development process**

The research analysis process entailed a thorough process of coding, sorting, and categorising code clusters to identify and develop themes. This approach involved grouping coded values and then manually sorting and categorising related codes to generate the themes listed in Table 3.3. In conducting my analysis, I employed a combination of NVivo's data coding and categorisation features, Excel's data capabilities, and MS Word document for processing data. Leveraging the functionalities of NVivo software, I organised data, developed coding structures, and executed the analytical framework to derive meaningful insights. While analytical software packages are useful for conducting research, they should not be seen as a method of analysis (Silver & Lewins, 2014). As the researcher, I made decisions about the coding format, both on and off the NVivo platform, and the strategies adopted.

Table 3.3. Data analysis results

Main themes	Sub-themes	Research question context
<b>Social inequality and cultural capital</b>	Barriers within opportunities Inequality Unequal educational opportunities Lack of representation Deprivation	<b>Research question 1.</b> How do Black young people respond to marginalisation?
<b>Racial Discrimination</b>	Discrimination and unfair treatment Stereotypes In-group and outgroup category Racism	
<b>Criticality in Racial Identities and Otherness</b>	Fostering Black Identity Critical thinking Changing education curriculum	<b>Research question 2.</b> What role does critical consciousness play in shaping identities and the construction of human rights?
<b>Identity denial</b>	Hairstyle rules Threat to identity	
<b>From pessimism to changing narrative</b>	Changing the narrative (critical agency) Participation (protests and use of social media)	<b>Research question 3.</b> How do Black young people express voice, agency and reflexivity?
<b>Gaining voice by representation</b>	Valuing diversity Representation and inclusivity	

The steps used in the analysis process to generate themes that addressed the research questions are outlined below.

**NVivo Coding:** Transcript files were imported into NVivo. After becoming familiar with the content, I began coding by identifying and highlighting patterns in the text that suggest keywords, which are then labelled as codes. I organised the categorisation of these codes outside of NVivo and then brought them back into NVivo for further analysis.

**Export to Excel:** After coding all eight files, they were exported to Excel, where the dominant codes were sorted, grouped, and used to create a table in Word. Here, the dominant codes were

identified using the highest code count, which is the number of significant information from the text, as well as the case count (number of participants connected to the code).

***Categorise codes:*** Dominant codes were copied to a table created in a Word document and grouped together in clusters for each of the research questions. Codes were grouped into clusters based on the relationship between them. Next, I create labels that represent the codes in the clusters for each column.

***Develop themes:*** The themes were developed based on the identified labels, ensuring they effectively address the specific research questions.

***NVivo aggregation of codes and themes:*** The themes developed using the cluster labels were copied into NVivo for review, refinement, and naming of final themes. The developed themes were then aggregated with the codes.

Six major themes were identified through this data analysis, each supported by subordinate or sub-themes, which are presented in Table 3.3. The participants' discussions went through a refinement process for sentence clarity and sometimes omitted duplicated words in the transcript file to improve the readability of the selected extracts (see examples in Appendix G). The carefully selected excerpts were used in Chapters 4 and 5 to support the identified themes and interpretations presented in the findings. These themes are discussed in detail in the discussion of findings chapter.

### **3.6. Positionality and subjectivity**

This study considered the influence of subjectivity as an important aspect of empirical research. Acknowledging this could enhance the rigour of the study, enabling me to recognise my personal biases and perspectives. By being mindful of subjectivity, researchers can strengthen their approach and improve the reliability of their findings. In this context, it is important to consider positionality with particular reference to self-reflection, reflexivity, and subjectivity. The interpretive approach adopted implies that I cannot be practically removed from the research process. Researchers play a unique role in this process and are primarily responsible for interpreting data and deriving meaning and knowledge within the specific context of the study. Subjectivity influences how we interpret data and present our findings. This is especially relevant for me because of my Black ancestry, which positions me as an insider in this research,



given the study's objectives and the demographics of the participants. Academic discussions about the insider-outsider perspective in research have led to various claims and counterclaims regarding researchers' involvement in qualitative studies. Adopting the role of an insider allows for greater acceptance by participants, fostering openness and facilitating the collection of more in-depth data (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Upon reflection, I acknowledge my privileged position not only in constructing knowledge but also in shaping my own beliefs and experiences. Breuer et al. (2002) suggested that the research process and its ultimate results 'depend on the characteristics of the persons involved' (p.2) as well as the context in which the research occurs. For instance, the processing of research data, along with the analysis and interpretation of findings, is influenced by my perspective. However, my interpretations are substantiated by excerpts from participants and further illustrations from relevant empirical studies. This underscores the epistemic subjectivism that can arise in the convenient narratives provided by research participants during discussion sessions, as well as the interpretive approach used in this study. I contemplated the idea that, although qualitative research may be influenced by biases and prejudices, it is still possible to enhance its trustworthiness by adhering to rigorous processes and maintaining transparency. These processes include adhering to disciplinary regulations and established best practices, such as obtaining research ethics approval, iteratively reviewing the findings, and seeking feedback on my work. In this context, critical analytical reasoning is essential as it helps ensure a clear understanding of research outcomes without ambiguity (Ratner, 2002). To address potential subjectivity issues arising from the interpretive approach, this research is designed to engage with the process reflexively. This involves strategies such as self-reflection and clear, concise reporting.

As a Black person of West African descent, I was born and raised in Nigeria before moving to Britain. Unlike my previous experience working in urban corporate establishments in Africa, which are similar to London's high-end corporations often referred to as the London financial hub, I found myself in a marginalised position in the workforce here. This experience exposed me to the treatment of individuals as being the 'Other' in both social and economic contexts. The topics of discussion during the group discussion sessions and the experiences shared by participants resonated with me. Although I have lived in Britain and hold British citizenship, this does not take away or make me immune to the racial segregation and discrimination that has become an everyday experience of Black ethnic minorities in Britain. I have experienced

racial abuse, including comments like ‘Go back to your country’, ‘What are you doing here?’ and ‘Where do you come from?’. It is important to mention that the process of accessing and meeting research participants made me reflect on my identity and my awareness of who I am. My self-reflection goes beyond my personal experiences, prompting me to consider a rhetorical question: Could the research participants have said what they said because I am Black, or would they have said the same things if I were not a Black person? There is no simple answer to this. However, they felt more comfortable sharing their stories, assuming that as a Black person, I could understand and empathise with their narratives.

During the group discussion sessions, I started by building rapport with the participants. I introduced myself and shared my ethnic background, which helped establish trust and encouraged openness. This initial connection created a safe environment in which participants could share their experiences. I was careful not to get overly personal or guide them to frame their answers to reflect what they thought I wanted to hear. However, this does not imply that intersubjectivity was absent, as it can have different interpretations (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). The deliberative discussion method I adopted aimed to provide space for dialogue with minimal interference, allowing participants to express their views and personal experiences freely. Additionally, I was also mindful of time constraints and wanted to avoid spending too much time validating my own experiences. By taking an approach that does not interfere with participants’ responses, I demonstrated reflexivity regarding my own biases. This is essential for maintaining ethical standards and encouraging participant openness (Ide & Beddoe, 2023; Zhang & Okazawa, 2022). This approach also helps to address power imbalances, ensuring that my influence does not compromise the credibility of the findings. A detached stance, when applied thoughtfully and ethically, does not weaken intersubjectivity, rapport, or dialogue; in fact, it can enhance them. The key point is not to completely dismiss neutrality; rather, it should be redefined as a tool for critical distance (Cassell et al., 2018), ethical integrity, and analytical rigour, not as a form of emotional disengagement (Barrett et al., 2020; Finlay, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). I acknowledge that qualitative research often emphasises intersubjectivity, rapport, and dialogue as essential components of meaning-making. However, this emphasis does not imply that detachment automatically detracts from these principles. Instead, when neutrality is viewed as reflexive balance rather than emotional disengagement, it can enhance relational engagement. This approach enables researchers to maintain ethical boundaries and achieve greater analytical clarity.

I now address the issues related to my insider position in this research. The insider and outsider dynamics can take multiple dimensions within a study (Braun & Clarke, 2013), presenting a reflexivity dilemma that requires careful consideration. I acknowledge my responsibility to disclose my Black ethnic background, as this identity can impact the research findings, necessitating the need to take all necessary measures to avoid unethical research practices (Holmes, 2020). This disclosure requires critical reflection to determine how my positionality influences interactions and interpretations throughout the research process.

Another social research issue was the power imbalance question, not only as an adult researcher who may be knowledgeable about background information on the research topic, but also as an adult researcher dealing with young people as participants. Unlike some quantitative research traditions (section 3.3), I do not claim to be the ultimate authority or producer of knowledge. The role I played as a researcher, along with the role of Black young people as participants, may have impacted the research process. It presents challenges in the form of familiarity and biases, but it offers valuable opportunities to understand participants' views and experiences regarding marginalisation. In managing this power relation, I carefully selected the topic guide for discussion and made sure there were no sensitive topics relating to violence, abuse and safeguarding. Participants were encouraged to discuss without fear and were informed prior to the sessions that they could seek help if they worried about something. Participants were also told they had the right to discontinue participation at any time. During the group discussion sessions held in schools, a teacher was present in the room, even though they did not participate in the discussions. In one session with a youth forum, the youth coordinator was present in the room, rather than a teacher.

In this study, another important aspect of power relations was that participants were not merely passive sources of data (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Instead, they actively chose to participate in my research, and, through their involvement, they were empowered to express themselves. Prior to discussion sessions, the roles of participants were clearly defined, and their level of involvement was outlined in the research information provided. This ethical practice involves obtaining consent to participate in research, empowering the individuals to become active collaborators in the generation of knowledge. This collaborative process occurred in open, interactive sessions that were free from any imposed constraints, allowing for a more organic and unrestricted exchange of ideas and perspectives.

Similarly, Ryan (2015), using the dance metaphor, suggested that power relations are not static or linear and emphasised the awareness of multi-positionality and the role they play in insider-outsider dynamics. Therefore, it is important to point out that there were variations in the distribution of power before and during the discussion sessions. This illustrates the research process as a continuum where power is wielded between the researcher and participants, shifting from one end to the other (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). For instance, at different times during the data collection process, participants took centre stage and engaged in mutual interactions with each other. My role was to facilitate the sessions with flexibility to support rich interactions and meaningful discussions. Qualitative research heavily depends on the active involvement of participants, who play a fundamental role in shaping the entire research process. Although this research is not classified as participatory action research, their participation, input, and perspectives are indispensable and form the core of qualitative research.

Acknowledging the context and positionality of my research has been instrumental in gaining a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the individuals involved and how data are interpreted. It has also encouraged me to reflect on my insider status and its potential effects on data analysis and presentation of findings. Engaging with participants and immersing myself in the data has uncovered previously overlooked insights into the experiences of Black young people. As highlighted by Blaikie and Priest (2019), maintaining the mindset of a learner is crucial for any researcher. With this perspective in mind, I approached the study with an open mind, consciously avoiding the imposition of my personal experiences when interpreting the narratives of participants. It is important to recognise that research is not inherently neutral, acknowledging that the researcher is responsible for making choices about what to investigate and how to conduct the research. To minimise biases that could influence the research outcome, it is essential that I demonstrate a clear and transparent research process that could be replicated in the same context, time, and space.

Reflexivity is an important aspect of this study that needs to be addressed, as it remains relevant throughout this thesis. Reflexivity is essential in qualitative research for ensuring transparency and validity. By reflecting on their own roles, both researchers and participants contribute to a more accurate and contextually grounded understanding of the research topic. While reflexivity allowed me to reflect on how my biases and perspectives affect the study, participants also

engaged in reflexivity by considering how their identities and experiences shaped their contributions and perspectives during group discussions.

My reflexivity focuses on self-awareness regarding how my Black background, beliefs, and biases may have influenced the research process. This explains why I have chosen to discuss my positionality and how it can affect data collection, interpretation, and analysis (Bourke, 2014). As a Black researcher studying marginalisation among Black young people, my understanding of the issues discussed is influenced by my identity and background. This has helped me to ensure that I remain aware of my biases in the study's design and interpretation and to mitigate the impact of these biases on the findings (Finlay, 2002).

Participant reflexivity, on the other hand, involves reflecting on how their own identities, social positions, and experiences shape their responses during the study. Participants were not passive but actively shaped the data they provided based on their understanding of the research topic (Ross, 2017). For example, participants in this study were race-conscious, which influenced how they perceived issues of marginalisation. The reflexivity of Black young people enriched the data by providing insight into the ways social context affects their perspectives. Their reflexivity deepens the collected data by revealing the context in which responses were given. Both types of reflexivity are vital to the integrity and credibility of the research process.

### **3.6.1. Strengths and limitations of the study**

This methodology presents several strengths and weaknesses, which could have influenced the research process in some way. The strengths and weaknesses are stated below.

#### **Strengths:**

- The deliberative discussion method provided detailed insights into the issue being investigated.
- The pilot study was particularly beneficial as it allowed for a thorough review of the research design and instruments.
- This study incorporated a flexible approach which helped to address the challenges associated with recruiting participants both within and outside the school environment.
- The RTA data analysis method used facilitated a rigorous process that produced results that could be depended on for making informed decisions.

**Weaknesses:**

The methodological approach may have a potential weakness in terms of subjectivity, as it focuses on the marginalisation of a specific ethnic group. However, the research context provides a clear rationale for concentrating on Black young people. In addition, the issues of subjectivity and generalisability have been discussed in this chapter (see sections 3.3 and 3.6). Beyond the methods used in this research, it could be beneficial to consider employing mixed methods to triangulate data.

The process of analysing the data was quite demanding and required a lot of time and effort despite using NVivo software to help organise the data. In this type of interpretive research, human input is crucial for thoroughly analysing the data to ensure that the research results are reliable. I emphasise the human and manual effort in data analysis as NVivo software cannot replace the researcher's creativity in coding and categorising the data (Stuckey, 2015). The creativity lies in identifying the emergent codes and carving out a storyline from the data in a discerning manner, ensuring that the interpretation of the data addresses the research questions. In some instances, this process produces significant outcomes and topics that could be explored in future research.

**Limitations:**

This study has several limitations that highlight areas for improvement, particularly regarding the strategies and methods used. Acknowledging these issues can help refine methodological approaches and enhance the quality of future research.

- Researcher positionality and subjectivity. The implications and the proactive measures taken have been addressed in sections 3.4 and 3.6.
- The sample size was limited due to purposive sampling, which involved selecting a predetermined population of Black young people as participants.
- Lack of generalisability of findings.
- Homogeneity of the sample frame, which consists of Black categories, may limit the diversity of perspectives and experiences related to the research topic. For future research, a larger sample, a longitudinal design, and perhaps follow-up discussion groups with participants over time may be suggested.

### 3.7. Research ethics

Ethical considerations are essential in qualitative research. In this discussion, I will focus on the ethical issues associated with recruiting young people as research participants. I will specifically examine informed consent, safeguarding measures, and compliance with ethical standards. Additionally, I will outline the protocols for data protection and storage, ensuring adherence to relevant regulations while protecting participant confidentiality. The evolving nature of research ethics and politicisation stemming from complaints and allegations of research misconduct (Slesinger & Simm, 2024) presents a strong argument for researchers to clearly define their stance in their work (Simons & Usher, 2012). Some allegations of misconduct pertain to researchers' assertions of truth, as well as controversies surrounding issues such as gender, sensitive medical research, climate change, the positionalities of researchers, and the generation of knowledge (Schmid-Petri et al., 2022; Slesinger & Simm, 2024). In contrast, Hartley et al. (2017) argued in favour of the politicisation of research 'as it opens up decisions about the public good to public scrutiny through good deliberation and accountability' (p.362). These issues raise important questions regarding research integrity. This could explain the growing focus on universities and regulatory bodies to uphold ethical principles, maintain research integrity, and ensure the safety of human participants (Mellinger & Hanson, 2016). Given the potential for controversies that may undermine research integrity and lead to politicisation, it is important to emphasise good ethical practices in social research such as this. Moreover, ethical dilemmas may arise, creating challenges for researchers (Ryan, 2015). This awareness guided my preparation for fieldwork, enabling me to implement a transparent process, proactively address potential challenges and minimise the likelihood of unexpected distress.

The ethical considerations involved working with gatekeepers, recruiting participants, and ensuring privacy regarding their personal identifiers. The study was carried out in compliance with London Metropolitan research ethics guidelines and the British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018), which was updated in 2024 after my fieldwork. The BERA 2024 update emphasised the importance of transparency and inclusivity in research, acknowledging the UK Equality Act 2010. Approval was obtained from London Metropolitan University's ethics review committee in September 2022 (refer to appendix K). It is important to acknowledge that the students who took part in this research did so voluntarily. Additionally, I considered several ethical factors, some of which are outlined below.

**Consent:** I acknowledge that obtaining consent was an ongoing process, as participants had the right to withdraw at any time. Only eligible Black young people who provided their consent by signing the necessary forms were recruited, with the additional requirement of parental or guardian consent when applicable. Consent for the recording of the sessions was obtained. Before obtaining informed consent, the aims and the purpose of the study were thoroughly explained to the participants using the research information sheet. The process of obtaining consent involved two main steps. First, I gained access to schools through gatekeepers, such as the Headteachers and Principals, who then nominated a staff member to assist me in the process. Second, I asked participants and their parents or guardians to consent to their involvement in the research. In some cases, the return of consent forms took longer than anticipated, which caused delays in scheduling group discussion sessions. This necessitated a follow-up with the teacher nominated by the school to secure consent and agree on a date for the session.

**Confidentiality:** Research participants were informed how data would be used. I explained to research participants that their names and locations would not be identified, but they would be referred to by using pseudonyms and descriptive codes. This is a good practice used by researchers to anonymise answers and protect the identities of respondents. Any information that could potentially reveal the identity of participants was carefully avoided.

**Compliance with regulatory bodies:** As the research participants were young people, I obtained clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in accordance with the requirements for working with young individuals. The DBS clearance was secured before commencing data collection and was part of the ethical approval process from London Metropolitan University.

**Location.** I acknowledge that the safety of participants and the researcher is important. As a result, the group discussion sessions were conducted on school premises and at the local authority premises for the youth council forum.

**Recording and data usage.** Participants were informed that the sessions would be recorded to facilitate data preparation and analysis. Participants, guardians, and the school were assured of safe storage of data using password protection and data encryption. The recordings during sessions captured personal data and identifiers. Consent included recording and storage of data, and participants were aware of their right to withdraw their consent. All recordings and



identifiable data were destroyed after transcription, while anonymised data was archived using the London Metropolitan University's research data management system for future research upon completion of the study.

**Managing distressing situations.** I considered the possibility that certain conversations might be distressing for some participants. During the deliberative group discussion sessions, questions were only posed in response to topics brought up by the research participants themselves, which reduced the likelihood of causing distress. I planned to guide conversations away from topics that could cause distress. Additionally, teachers were available to intervene and redirect participants when necessary. Throughout the data collection process, no distressing situations were reported.

**Researcher reflexivity.** In compliance with ethical practice, I adopted a transparent stance and self-reflection throughout the phases, managing the research process and power dynamics. Conducting qualitative research with young people requires a careful approach to ethical considerations, as they may be a vulnerable group. To protect their rights and well-being while still gathering meaningful data, I implemented several proactive measures. These included securing informed consent from all participants and strictly adhering to confidentiality protocols to safeguard their identities and personal information. In section 3.6, I provided a comprehensive discussion of my positionality and the potential for subjectivity throughout the research. Additionally, the data collection methods outlined in section 3.4 and the data analysis techniques described in section 3.5 reflect my commitment to maintaining a careful balance and addressing any potential conflicts that might arise. Throughout the fieldwork, participants did not report any distressing situations, and there were no ethical dilemmas identified during the process. As mentioned earlier in this section, I established clear protocols for discussion sessions to ensure that teachers and coordinators would be available to provide support in case any distress arose. My preparation and overall plan for the study were guided by my awareness of ethical dilemmas. This proactive approach fostered a safe environment that encouraged open dialogue and enriched the overall research experience.

### **3.8. Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the methodological framework and specific techniques used in this research. Although interpretivism often faces criticism for its subjective nature, I argue that it

is the most suitable approach for achieving the objectives of my study. Qualitative research prioritises context-specific insights and embraces the complexity of human experiences, rather than striving for a singular, absolute truth or broad generalisability. This characteristic highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of qualitative inquiry.

To enhance the credibility of my findings, I focused on transparency and implemented rigour throughout the research process, particularly during data analysis. This approach strengthens the trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn and fosters confidence in the interpretive methods used in this research. Moreover, I emphasised the importance of identifying the saturation point during data collection. This practice ensures the collection of sufficient data and reduces the likelihood of redundant themes, thereby optimising time and resource management in the research process.

Throughout this process, I stressed the importance of flexibility within the research design. This adaptability was essential in developing contingency plans to address unforeseen challenges that arose during data collection. Such preparedness allowed me to remain responsive and resourceful when faced with difficulties. Despite encountering various challenges, I collected rich data that produced reliable results given the context of the study.

In this chapter, I also engaged in a critical examination of the strengths and limitations of the methods used. By reflecting on the difficulties experienced during data collection, I gained valuable insights that will inform future qualitative research endeavours. These experiences underscore the significance of being adaptable and maintaining methodological rigour in the pursuit of qualitative knowledge. Chapter 4 begins the presentation of findings, outlining key insights derived from the data analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Presentation of findings: Theorising the Role of Critical Consciousness in Shaping Black Identity**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This is the first of two chapters presenting findings from data analysis conducted using the reflexive thematic analysis method. This chapter focuses on the themes of racial identities, Otherness, and identity denial. It examines how Black young people construct and perceive their identities through the lens of critical consciousness theory and personal narratives. The chapter highlights the complexities of their critical identity development within a diverse social context, emphasising the centrality of Black identity in analysing the experiences of Black young people. My analysis explores the agency of Black young people in constructing their identities, the intersectionality of their identities, and how they perceive themselves as being constructed by others. By giving young people a voice, they were able to discuss their views on racial prejudice, marginalisation, discrimination and otherness.

The theoretical framework of critical consciousness views Black identity development as a process influenced by cultural markers - cultural values that foster a sense of belonging. These cultural markers, sometimes inherently political, tend to influence cultural identity formation (Lecours, 2000). The process of identity formation is dynamic, constantly changing and underscores its fluidity. The fluidity of identities (Brubaker, 2016; Gill, 2022; Gyogi, 2020; Katz-Wise et al., 2023; Osei-Kofi, 2012; Yang, 2024) indicates that understanding one's identity involves a complex relationship with social processes. This means that the sense of self may be linked to how and where it is developed in relation to others, as well as how it is defined within a specific time and context (Ross, 2019). To facilitate a clear understanding of Black identity development, I utilised concepts such as social constructivism, intersectionality, whitewashing, Othering and identity denial.

While the social categorisation of individuals and groups is not novel in identity conversations, as noted in Chapters 1 and 2, the experiences of ethnic minorities in Britain are a reoccurring issue in public discourse, emphasising the complexities of social layering inherent in contemporary society. These experiences of ethnic minorities are often presented either as a form of discrimination (Hackett et al., 2020; Jaspal et al., 2021; Pendleton, 2017) or under-

attainment (Cotton et al., 2016; Richardson, 2015) and ethnic disparities. It is important to note that disparity does not necessarily equate to discrimination. Disparity has been argued to represent a form of inequality that is not entirely rooted in prejudice or racism. Although Sowell (2019) bases his argument on differences in socio-economic outcomes, which offers a clear framework for discussing statistics and potential variables, it is also important to recognise that disparities may be influenced by specific contextual factors. Norrie (2020) puts it this way:

Disparity is more difficult since there are innocent reasons why groups may have different outcomes, such as differences in demographic profile, age or geographic region.

Norrie, 2020, p.ix

We know disparity and discrimination exist, but the extent to which the former is accounted for by the latter is an open question.

Norrie, 2020, p.102

Norrie's concern was that there is no consensus on how disparity is measured, although this is often assumed. Instead, he argued that effort should be channelled towards not only evidencing discrimination but also measuring 'its extent in the real world over time' (p.110) to provide the rationale for government intervention. This stems from his observation of the Conservative-led government reviews and recommendations on ethnic disparity and racial discrimination since 2010, which he says has not categorically stated 'why it exists or provided a moral theory of why disparity might be wrong' (p.ix). The argument that groups are different is unlikely to go away. Therefore, equal outcomes should not be used as a benchmark to explain the disparities that exist between them. However, Norrie acknowledged that both disparity and discrimination are linked. Given that this study is context-dependent, the focus is not on how disparity is measured or on statistical explanations to evidence discrimination. Instead, I utilised qualitative research to explore the contextual representation of groups, particularly minority groups, while analysing issues of marginalisation and Black identity.

The themes examined in this chapter draw on the rich discussions between the young participants of this study, revealing how they perceive themselves in the context of societal perceptions and external influences. The central research question guiding this exploration is: how do Black young people in London perceive marginalisation, and how does their use of

voice counter such marginalisation? To answer this question, this chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the participants' identities and their thoughtful reflections on pertinent social issues within the study's context. This detailed understanding facilitates a coherent discussion of the findings, using theories to analyse the complexities of identity development and to illustrate how critical consciousness emerges among these young people.

Some studies have used quantitative methods, framing causality (sometimes interpreted through a qualitative framework), and developmental research about the role of critical consciousness focused on adults (Brown, 2020; Collins et al., 2021; Diemer, 2020). In the last two decades, attention has been paid to young people (Diemer et al., 2016; Heberle et al., 2020; Pinedo et al., 2023; Seider et al., 2020). Most studies of critical consciousness are quantitative and either systematic reviews, longitudinal or cross-sectional studies (Diemer et al., 2017; Maker Castro et al., 2022). This study adopted a different methodological approach (qualitative and deliberative discussion group methods) and focused on young people, specifically those of Black heritage. Participants' discussions of their lived experiences are analysed to understand how they developed a critical consciousness of their disadvantaged position. The first section discusses the theme of racial identity and otherness. I use the concepts of intersectionality, Othering and identity theories to explain this theme. The second theme is identity denial, which is intertwined with the first theme.

## **4.2. Critical consciousness in racial identity and Otherness**

Before I explore the role of critical consciousness in shaping racial identities, I begin by discussing Black identity. Black identity development has long been associated with the history of social and civil rights movements organised by African Americans against institutional oppression in the United States of America. Although the context of this study is Britain, and the experiences may differ, it is helpful to refer to America's connecting semblance of civil liberties struggles for Black immigrants in the UK. Just like the 1955-56 bus boycotts of Montgomery in the US, the 1963 famous 60-day bus boycott against a Bristol Bus company's employment colour ban policy (Mansour, 2014) marked a significant shift in race relations in Britain. It inspired subsequent anti-racist, anti-discrimination struggles for Black ethnic minorities. These struggles illuminated the idea of collective identities, a feeling expressed by participants in this study. Irrespective of their country of ancestry or social and economic circumstances, being Black was a bond and a vital aspect of their being. Race is an essential

factor that connects Black young people in Britain. Delroy (17, M) gave an account of how his manager asked him to monitor a group of Black boys who came into the store where he was working at the time because they would steal from the store.

I work in a shop and a lot of the time I'm the only man, so sometimes, I find a lot of time, when Black boys walk into the store. The manager told me to observe them. Particularly closely to make sure they're not stealing. But I don't find that happening a lot. It doesn't happen at all actually when Whites was coming into the store. They don't really care, and they don't really ask me to observe them as well... The funny thing is that one of them actually came to the school. So I actually know him...So it's like racially profiling people. I find, obviously, some of it depends on age as well, to be fair. But I find when other whites come in, they don't have a problem, but when Blacks come in, they always pay a special eye to it.

(Delroy, 17, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

Delroy explained that his concern and hesitation in carrying out the manager's instruction were due to his feelings, a connection with the boys, and being a Black person himself. Parker et al. (2015), in their study of multiracial Americans, reported that people who were Black (some were biracial) felt they had more in common with people who were Black than white. In one of the group discussions, Sipho (14, M) described the cultural bond:

You don't really think about it, but when you as a Black person is in a group full of Black people, you just feel like, right, your spirit just feels alive.

(Sipho, 14, M, LS2, Grp2, 2023)

The discussion among participants presented a common narrative on the issue of fostering Black identity in what can be described as collective identity. A theoretical explanation to complement this idea of participants' collective identity can be seen in Gaertner et al.'s common ingroup identity model, a strategy for reducing the prejudice assumed for intergroup bias (Gaertner et al., 1993). There is also another view that a strong sense of in-group identity may not always motivate action for social change as a result of intergroup disparities, making intergroup differences more pronounced (Ufkes et al., 2016). However, the distinctiveness of in-group membership facilitates cohesion around identity to fight against injustice experienced by the membership. Relatedly, a seemingly common theme about race featured prominently in

participants' conversations, advocating for the recognition of Black identity. Tola (14, F) expressed concern about differences in cultural values and behaviours this way.

What happens to people that are like Black, because they are different, their culture is different, their religion is different? Some people aren't just accepting.

(Tola, 14, F, LS1 Grp1, Nov 2023)

I was curious to understand why Tola held this belief. In addition to Tola, Maha (16, F) also referenced social categorisation imposed by society, which can lead individuals to misplace their sense of self. This may be an example of what Emile Durkheim referred to as the notion of collectives, where categories may exist independently of the individual, and such imposition is infused into the individual's mind (Lukes, 1982). Maha (16) probably shared this view when she said, '...society will have the idea about you as a person, but you don't have the idea of yourself...' in an apparent emphasis on this being an issue of social construction. Beyond this effect of social categorisation on the self by others, the awareness of racial mistreatment and the contentious idea of code-switching was perhaps a way participants thought they could navigate the complex reality of growing up differently and devise ways of thriving. Participants critically thought of the need to deal with stereotypes associated with race (stereotyping will be further explored in relation to marginalisation in Chapter 5), and the issue of accent while also weighing the golden advice of mental productivity (Pickering & Garrod, 2004). This relates to what most participants emphasised regarding the charge from their parents to take their disadvantaged position as ethnic minorities seriously and work harder to succeed in life, as the following comments illustrate.

That's another thing I was saying about parents, what they will tell you when you're growing up and you're Black. That's something you'll hear a lot as a Black person; no matter how smart you are or educated, you will probably have to work ten times harder just to be seen as equal to that person or to get the opportunities that they get. So it's not as if you can't do it. I feel like everyone can do it. It's just not as easy.

(Golda, 13, F, LS2, Grp1, Mar 2023)

You have to put in ten times more effort to really get what we want, to get a good University or college. But white people can make just minimal effort and get into a good quality, good University because of their skin colour.

(Zain, 14, M, LS2, Grp1, Mar 2023)

Yeah, I think my dad says this most of the time. He says sometimes you need to work twice as hard to get to the regular standard, so it's like you're to say you're facing a downhill. You need to really work hard to get to the regular standard because there are so many barriers on the way.

(Dunya, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Like they say, my mum will say, you need to do better than the average white person because they have more advantages to being let into a job position, for example, than you do because you are Black.

(Sonia, 16, F, LS1, Grp2, Nov 2022)

The analysis of data indicates that experiences of racial prejudices were multi-layered. An aspect of that layering was the issue of whitewashing, a form of racial discrimination common in race-conscious society. Whitewashing in this context is conforming to white norms and how Black people 'mask their blackness by changing their physical enactments to appear whiter' (Ferguson & Dougherty, 2022, p.18). Although used in this study to describe the practice of adaptation to white culture by Black young people, there is a broad range of views about whitewashing. For example, critical views about multiculturalism and integration (Mason, 2018), professional occupation (Ferguson & Doherty, 2022) and education curriculum (Begum & Saini, 2019; Compton-Lilly et al., 2022; Henry, 2021) are some contexts where the issue of whitewashing is often discussed. Those who argue for preserving white culture suggest that Britain's culture is being eroded due to immigration (Sobolewska & Ford, 2019); this is a contentious topic that also presents a conflict of interest between policymakers and employers (Paul, 1997). The political angle to this is that policymakers want to devise ways of reducing immigration numbers, in contrast to employers who need immigration to shore up labour shortages. However, in the context of this study, participants see the whitewashing technique as a means of fitting into the dominant white culture. It reflects an intentional effort to make Blackness more acceptable to whiteness within the everyday life experiences of participants.

Ferguson and Doherty (2022) suggest that whitewashing is adopted as a way of survival in an environment of racial discrimination. Black young people expressed the view that adopting whitewashing practices for survival not only affected their confidence level but, in certain circumstances, also affected and shaped their views about the role model status of Black teachers, who participants thought had shifted in consciousness to fit the white narrative. It is



argued that the practice of whitewashing is undertheorised and perpetuates unfair deprivation and invincibility of the minority race (Nishime, 2017). While Nishime was analysing the Asian minority in the United States film industry, the practice of whitewashing is prevalent in Britain among the Black ethnic minorities, although in a different context, and I analyse it in the form of Black displacement and misrepresentation. Ejiro (17, F) and Larrisa (14, F) expressed their views on whitewashing.

I feel like sometimes Black... Black teachers want to be whitewashed like they wanna fit in, and they know that you're right, and they know what you're going through, but then still decide to ignore you just because they wanna fit this scenario.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

The way I grew up, I wasn't around Black people all the time because the people, my neighbours, were all white and my whole world was all white. So I was just, there were certain things that I would do. I wouldn't say it would be deemed as weird, but I was like, you can say in a way, I was what people would say is whitewashed. I used to be, I didn't know how to do my hair. I didn't know how to braid. I didn't know how to do anything that society would expect the Black girl to do until I started coming to this area and I felt more included because I was around more Black people and more people of my colour and have the same hair as me and stuff like that.

(Larrissa, 14, F, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

In addition, participants acknowledged the intersectional dimensions of racial discrimination. Crenshaw (1989) pioneered the concept of intersectionality, using the term to describe ways in which intersecting identities such as race and gender could enforce double discrimination. As noted in the literature review chapter, this concept has been theorised across disciplines and other minoritised categories. Social identities such as class, sex, ability, ethnicity and religion have been used to inform critical perspectives on social inequality, discrimination, marginalisation and sometimes social change. Participants in this study cut across a mix of lower-class families; some of their parents did not access higher education, and some had extra jobs to support their families. Others had sub-standard accommodation in council estates in the inner city. The marginalisation that arises in such contexts is multi-dimensional, ranging from limited access to basic services, low-income classification, stereotypes that are race-related, Black boys increasingly becoming the targets of suspicion for criminal behaviour (this is also

associated with neighbourhood), and religious stigma. Dunya (14, F), a Muslim, illustrates her understanding of intersectionality with an emphasis on race and religious beliefs.

There is a lot of like religion, sometimes me personally, people don't think I'm Black. I think it's because I wear a hijab. It's like, I mean, I am automatically Asian and automatically like in the other stuff. So I don't really get identified as a Black woman most of the time. Yeah, it's very different; I know that, but I don't feel connected sometimes because I obviously am isolated, not isolated but separated somehow, I believe. But I do think the experience is very different when it comes to gender...maybe colour and dark people may be discriminated against more than others.

(Dunya, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Likewise, Emily said:

When it comes to like, queer issues, for example, like when you're like, within all those groups, like I'm Black. And then I have Indian heritage, and I'm also queer as well. It just creates so many more issues.

(Emily, 16, NB, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Data analysis showed that intersecting identities influenced participants' perceptions of marginalisation as well as their emotions and experiences. During these discussions, participants would also use their emotions and feelings as they described their experiences of being Black alongside gender, class, deprivation, barriers and religion, as a psychological *affect* (Haviland-Jones et al., 2016; Hogg et al., 2020). Ejiro (17, F) became emotional when she made the following comment.

People have different experiences. If I use Dunya, for example, you are Black, a woman and also a Muslim, and that in society, it is harder for you because in the UK, obviously, it is very Islamophobic. You get what I mean. But for someone like me, who is Black, a woman and a Christian, I'll have a different experience because the UK is classed as a Christian country with Christian values that really stand out. But I'm not allowed, so I don't think people have the same. And also, people like Black boys are more targeted, and despite the religion they might fall into, they have it harder because they see them as criminals and delinquents.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

These examples raise the question of whether insight about discrimination is derived from their experiences or other forms of knowledge transfer. The knowledge of discrimination and the memory of being in a disadvantaged position while growing up as a young person of Black ethnic minority was a motivation for speaking about their experience and imbalance in power relations (Collins et al., 2021). For example, Sasha (15, F) felt racial discrimination based on her experience at school when her teacher wanted to forcibly categorise her and other Black students as having a mental illness and recommended that Sasha be sent to a mental health facility. Sasha narrates her experience:

My first experience of racism. And what happened was on a parent evening. My mum and dad were brought in, and my teacher was recommending me to a mental health institution, saying that something was wrong with me. And my mum felt, really got upset about it because she thought my child was fine. They had me evaluated, and it turned out that I was perfectly fine. Then it was found out that after my mum talked to other Black parents, the teacher was targeting all Black children in that class, recommending them all to mental institutions. She was fired in the end, but there was one girl who got involved with it and her mum actually believed what the teacher was saying and she got moved over to one of those places. So she left our school. I was actually horrified and that I could have been a part of it if my mum believed her. I would be where they are looking after someone insane and saying there's something wrong with me, but there wasn't.

(Sasha, 15, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

The discussion sessions afforded participants the opportunity to share knowledge and engage in conversation with one another. For those who had never participated in group discussion sessions or who had not previously discussed issues that were important to them, this opportunity was particularly interesting. Larrisa (14, F) reported that even when they had the opportunity to express how they felt, it was all about grading. Salma (15, F) reported that they lacked an environment where they could freely express themselves. Salma said: 'If we did ever get a chance to, in school, it would be in a class full of maybe like half Black people, maybe half white people. So, kind of like we don't really feel comfortable saying it because it's around them'. In a way, the group discussions gave participants a voice in expressing their views. Some participants enjoyed the interactive nature of the sessions and wished they had more time to continue discussions in the groups.

Furthermore, in the context of experiencing discrimination, Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT) brings another angle to participants' knowledge of discrimination. Bandura suggested that 'in the social learning system new patterns of behaviour can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behaviour of others' (p.3). However, due to the critique of the cognitive process of social learning, such as attention, retention and motivation, it does not go far enough to explain how the environment and other social factors control the range of behaviours. Bandura modified SLT and proposed the Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999), which considers individual's social experiences and recognises the social context of behaviour. That said, cognitive processes could have a positive effect on raising consciousness by thinking, listening to, and observing others in conversation, which again aligns with this study's critical consciousness theory framework. Participants articulated their analysis of discrimination as they listened to peer narratives and commentaries during the discussions. Imitative behaviour associated with social learning theory can also be linked to the issue of whitewashing and thriving, discussed earlier in section 4.2. Participants felt they could relate and learn from events around them; this includes personal experiences or experiences of others, both online and offline. Salma (15, F) said:

There's so much that you can relate with that even on social media platforms, there's a lot of...there's a big community on social media and it's kind of like we mainly all relate to the same thing with our upbringings, parents, family events and stuff.

(Salma, 15, F, LS2, Mar 2023)

Analysis of the data shows that experiences of discrimination, racism and other forms of prejudice raised the critical consciousness of participants. While those who attended youth forums or youth clubs had opportunities to discuss issues related to unfair treatment, discrimination and other concerns affecting young people, there were other participants who did not attend youth forums but instead discussed with their parents at home and followed contemporary issues on the news and social media. For example, Gozie (14, M) had discussed issues like this with his mother. Angelo (17, M) said he was inspired by his personal experiences and the things he has seen, perhaps observed or heard. Similarly, Emily had this to say:

There were times I've had discussions about race, which has to do with schools in general. It was like being on the leadership team, so I was in a school council team in

primary and secondary, in response to the current issues of conflict. We know it's like a lot of our conversation, which was mainly to champion issues by the Black students, whose club was going to shut down. So we signed up. It was getting shut down, so we decided to start a club, but before we kind of looked into the issues that we wanted to talk about, we were like, ok, the main reason why this was held up for so long is because we're majority Black and it wasn't encouraged by the *SLT* [*Senior Leadership Team*] and that's kind of like times we've been able to have honest discussions about this.

(Emily, 16, NB, LYCF, Mar 2023)

The influence of common narratives from collective identities discussed in section 4.2 contributed to the knowledge of discrimination. In other words, informal learning brings together knowledge exchange, enabling a trajectory of perceived marginalisation. As mentioned by Winter (16, M), such informal learning could involve reading history books and visiting museums.

I will say a museum... the history of Black people... In my history, I learned more about how every single minority and ethnicity migrated to London and England.

(Winter, 16, M, LS1, Grp4, Nov 2022)

Continuing with this theme of having knowledge of racial prejudice, the Black History Month, celebrated in October in the United Kingdom, stirs consciousness of Black heritage and reflection on belongingness and injustices. Although Black History Month seems to highlight the struggles of the Black race in a multi-racial society, it was also criticised by participants as a yearly ritual that does not go far enough and doubles down as a needless ticking-the-box exercise. Participants argued that Black history and literature should be incorporated into the educational curriculum as ongoing learning rather than a one-month event in a year. Bimbo (15, M) and Dejen (16, M) expressed this view in the following comments.

I feel like we should learn more about Black people, not always about Adolf Hitler and World War 1; we should learn more about Black people, not just about Black History Month. We just learn about one person. We should learn about different people, what they've done, and how they contributed to society, not just Adolf Hitler and stuff like that.

(Bimbo, 16, M, LS3, March 2023)

I think there shouldn't be Black History Month because it should be part of the curriculum and stuff you learn anyway. It shouldn't really have to be one part, one time of the year.

(Dejen, M, 16, LS3, Mar 2023)

Race consciousness is connected to a deep awareness of Black identity and a strong desire to see a greater representation of Black experiences and histories within the school curriculum. The comments made by Bimbo and Dejen highlight the passionate advocacy of Black young people for a more inclusive educational framework. Their voices challenge the prevalent whitewashing of the curriculum - a practice that marginalises Black narratives and perspectives. Through their critical consciousness, they seek not only acknowledgement but also a validation of their lived experiences, urging educational institutions to adopt a more diverse and accurate portrayal of history and culture.

In recent years, the marginalisation of Black British history in UK education has received increased attention. This concern extends beyond mere curriculum gaps to encompass broader systemic issues that impact students' understanding of identity, belonging, and citizenship. The campaign group, The Black Curriculum (TBC), has played a crucial role in addressing these gaps through educational outreach, advocacy, and research. Their work provides valuable insights and methodologies for qualitative educational researchers seeking to incorporate racial justice and inclusive history into their studies. Although Britain has a rich and complex Black history, the national curriculum largely fails to reflect this diversity. A report by Arday, commissioned by TBC in 2020, highlighted that the history curriculum remains Eurocentric and lacks statutory inclusion of Black British narratives. This exclusion distorts historical understanding and reinforces a limited and racialised conception of Britishness (Arday, 2020).

During group discussions, participants in my research have expressed their frustrations regarding this issue. TBC's Youth Consultation Report (2023) and programmes like Conversations with Young People have shown widespread dissatisfaction among students from all backgrounds, who feel that the curriculum does not accurately represent Britain's multicultural reality. This thesis aimed to amplify the voices of Black young people, which is vital for understanding how curriculum design affects learners' sense of self and their engagement with education.

#### 4.2.1. Cultural bonding

The influence of culture in strengthening community bonding was identified as one way participants understand marginalisation and discrimination. They viewed discrimination and marginalisation from the angle of race and social connections. Marginalisation and racial discrimination will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. While social connections may not be restricted to ethnic affiliation, participants felt that they all face a common struggle for the prospect of creating change, geared towards socio-economic justice. The cultural instinct to relate to one another and be able to see a common struggle was what Olive (17, F) and Larrissa (14, F) pointed to during the discussion about what it feels like growing up Black in Britain.

You have that aspect of culture and community; Black people obviously do tend to relate to other Black people because of their culture, and they use that to kind of find themselves in society. That is why there are obviously such things as finding other Black people and being able to relate to them and stuff.

(Olive, 17, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

I personally feel more comfortable with Blacks because, a lot about majority Black friends because I feel like there are certain things that I could talk to them about and I could relate with and I could, if I say something, they wouldn't be shocked or disgusted or whatever it is, they'll have an understanding to it because they might be able to relate to it because maybe it's happened to them, or maybe there's certain things that they have to do that I also have to do as well. But white people wouldn't relate to it as much, and they wouldn't really understand it. They'd be confused or shocked or whatever.

(Larrissa, 14, F, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

Weston et al (2018) and Williams (2004) suggested that cultural strategy and cultural identity foster cohesion for bonding and community development. Participants mentioned scenarios where the feeling of cultural belonging was noticeable. It included the rich aroma of different cultural food types in a typical council estate, food variety that highlights culture, cultural shows, art and music that depict Black culture within neighbourhoods with a substantial Black community. The importance of cultural connection overlays the experience of growing up; it is a lot more obvious in name-bearing and accent. This shared identity, previously mentioned was the point of emphasis by Emily (16, NB).

Some Black Brits are more connected to their heritage and their culture than other people, I would say, and I feel like that kind of affects how you live in society, your identity and how you change over time.

(Emily, 16, NB, LYCF, Mar 2023)

This section has explored cultural identity and how collective identities force stereotypes and racial discrimination. Through discussions in small groups, participants illustrated elements of critical consciousness while expressing their views. Data analysis provides insight into understanding Black young people's critical consciousness development. Further, their experience of racial discrimination and their knowledge of it, played a crucial role in articulating their views. One significant finding that emerged was the critical consciousness identity of young Black people. Data analysis showed that the social construction of identities was fluid, and the concept of intersectionality was portrayed by participants, highlighting perceptions of discrimination and marginalisation. Participants' descriptions of their identities were mostly dependent on their cultural affinity. This was in addition to other markers of social identity such as gender, sex, class and religion. The issue of Black identity was most emphasised; however, other factors that influenced identity construction were mentioned. It could be that the reason for this is that the social lens used in discussions was ethnicity. Participants seem to be aware of racial prejudices that inform their everyday life experiences from reflective action. As reported by participants, reflective action was motivated by their non-dominant group membership status, where they see themselves as different from other groups. Without clearly mentioning it, participants alluded to Othering when describing their experiences.

#### **4.2.2. The salience of Othering**

Othering was a prominent issue featured during deliberative group discussions and was observed to influence participants' thinking. The concept of Othering is often used to describe identity formation between groups; it raises the question of the difference between one group and another (Canales, 2000; Jensen, 2011; Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012; Strani & Szczepaniak-Kozak, 2018). Related to the difference between groups is the exclusion of individuals who do not fit certain characteristics of the social group. There is an intersectional perspective to Othering in the sense that an individual could be Othered based on gender, sex, language, religion, class and race (Brubaker, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). Participants alluded to the 'us



versus them', ingroup and out-group views during discussion and presented these social categories as a form of discrimination oscillating between in-group identity and out-group identity. Added to this were participants' pro-social behaviours, which tended to align with their membership of the same group (Carol et al., 2023).

Othering is a social construct that could be applied to different contexts and used to analyse different global issues. However, examining the collision of cultures and how it affects marginalisation is a necessary element in analysing voice and marginalisation. As described earlier, the categorisation of groups enforces the feeling of being left out by those outside the group, especially in circumstances where resource allocation is not equitable and social capital is underachieved. From the analysis of the views expressed by participants, it can be said that most group-based identities attract some form of inequality and marginality, which are also group and environment-dependent. Ava (16, F) and Winter (16, M) put it this way.

I will say that even though we are an identified social group, there is sort of an aspect of suffering that everyone will experience based on, let's say, the area they grew up in and what they witnessed in their childhood.

(Ava, 16, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

I feel like there is a segregation that probably everyone... is just, let's say, you don't see, and we don't notice it.

(Winter, 16, M, LS1, Grp4, Nov 2022)

Participants illustrated the theme of Othering using stereotypes and descriptions of other forms of prejudices experienced by Black people. They expressed the view that certain assumptions made about Black culture and mistreatment reinforce Othering against the Black community. One can argue whether discrimination contributed to Othering or whether the tacit delineation between in-group and out-group membership facilitated the process of Othering. Participants noted that there were differences in culture, identity and way of life peculiar to the Black community; nonetheless, people outside this group are not accepting these differences. Instead of harnessing the opportunities in these differences, it has been used to stigmatise, exclude and mistreat those who do not belong. Dunya's (15, F) and Salma's (15, F) comments illustrate how certain assumptions about the Black community contribute to Othering.

There are so many stereotypes in the way; there are so many people who are going to think that you are doing well, but you can't succeed because, oh, you're black. Oh, you're female, Oh, you're Black female. It's not right.

(Dunya, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Even in school, when they came in to talk about gangs, they brought in a Black boy talking about how Black kids get sent abroad to do this and that, that everything has to be about Black people. He didn't for once talk about a white person committing crimes. No white person selling drugs.

(Salma, 15, F, LS2 Grp2, Mar 2023)

The stereotyping of Black young people as potential criminals is an example of the Othering process. Specifically, Black boys and sometimes Black girls were susceptible to being accused of stealing in shops, and this contributed to the infringement of their human rights (Bradley, 2019; George, 2021). Delroy (17, M) narrated how he was denied access to a UK supermarket store based on the assumption that he would likely steal.

I remember the other day, a few months ago. I tried to enter Sainsbury's and he said you can't come in, he denied me access to the store... I felt like that was because of my race, to be honest. And then the other guy came, he allowed him in... Sometimes we go into the shop with some of our white friends and you can just see the look on the security guard's face that he doesn't really care. Whereas when we come in, yeah, they're always paying close attention to the cameras, always following you around. So I feel if you're going to, like, pay close attention, to make sure stock isn't stolen, you should do it to everyone, not just one particular group.

Delroy, 17, M, LS3, Mar 2023

Participants argued that stealing, whatever the reason, was not exclusively an issue for Black people. They maintained that anybody, regardless of their race, could engage in theft, including white people. The participants expressed a shared concern that issues of criminality and misrepresentation affect them as a group. In addition, there were differing views about knife violence and gangs as they argued between themselves, illustrated by Yaw (14, M) and Winter (16, M) in the following comments.

I personally disagree with what Winter said. Because...[I forgot] I was gonna say that if there are statistics proving that the people that are searched are, the majority of the time, a certain race, you would not lean towards that race when going for stop and searches because they're trying to get knives off the streets. And if the majority of those people who possess knives are Black, then it gives them a reason to search Black people the majority of the time.

(Yaw, 14, M, ;LS1, Grp4, Nov 2022)

I might have to disagree with you [Yaw] there because I feel like, you can see that white people aren't stopped and searched as much time as Black people, for example, in a stop and search in a car, for like five white cars will go past and this is real statistics, and then one Black driver will get stopped. So people... like they say, you can really use statistics to ensure ... that the same amount of people are being stopped and searched.

(Winter, 16, M, LS1, Grp4, Nov 2022)

The construction of racialised Othering remains a much-debated issue in critical race theory about racial inequality, discrimination, intersectionality and marginalised groups. Because race is a social construction, what one person might see as concepts or ideas emanating from Critical Race Theory might differ from what others see (Bridges, 2019; Delgado et al., 2012; Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). It is, therefore, not uncommon to see arguments from different interdisciplinary perspectives. Powel and Menendian (2024) suggest that the process of Othering has influenced inequality, and that divisions along the lines of race, religion and ethnicity are widespread. While Othering may take various forms as developed across different fields, the effect may remain the same (Bhugra et al., 2023; Brons, 2015; Sims-Schouten & Gilbert, 2022). Othering reinforces the marginalisation of people who do not fit a dominant social group. Therefore, disparities in opportunities and access to services become a common outcome of Othering, with racial discrimination, racism and other prejudicial issues being rooted in Othering. One example raised in a group discussion was when a participant mentioned how a white student wielded a knife in the classroom and was only told to put it down, while the case of a Black student in a similar circumstance would have been treated differently with huge repercussions, either from the school or by the police. Differential treatment is another

subtle way of Othering, which can affect the experience of young people both in the classroom and in the community.

Despite the signs of Othering expressed in the views of participants, they also expressed hope for an inclusive society. One of the positive reflections mentioned by participants includes more opportunities opening up for them, though still limited; however, it is a step in the right direction. Sonia (16, F), for example, who participated in competitive rowing sport, described it as a white male sport and said that she was the only Black person in her rowing club. As odd as that may sound, Sonia looked at the positive side, saying it makes Black people stand out, likewise comparing the English national football team. Further, Sonia said a Black person in such a sports environment would not only be representing himself but also the culture and the country, making England look more diverse in ethnic composition. Angelo (17, F) also expressed optimism about an inclusive society.

How we were treated before has changed a lot since then to now, as everyone is aware and like in terms of stereotypes, that sort of thing, they're not as like, heavily influenced in a lot of people's lives as much they used to be.

(Angelo, 17, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

These illustrations of the positive side of marginalisation seem to point to the strategy of inclusion for marginalised groups (O'Driscoll, 2018; Pratt, 2019). From time to time, society devises inclusion frameworks to cater for exclusion and diversity causes. One of the ways this framework is implemented is through education strategies; the education system adapts rules and regulations or legislation requirements to mitigate exclusion tendencies for the marginalised. Some participants mentioned how they signed up for certain educational programmes and bursaries that target students from marginalised groups. Ava (16, F) was able to access a medical bursary, which provides a pathway to medical applications to get into universities. Also, Olive (17, F) signed up for K Plus, which is a foundation mentoring programme, and some others meant to help those who want to continue their education at the university.

Camilleri-Cassar (2014) suggested that these frameworks are tokenistic gestures and sometimes end up perpetuating the marginalisation of the marginalised. The question Ava, Dara and Maha posed was, whether if they had not been categorised as belonging to marginalised groups, would they have had the same access to these programmes? Would their

talent count in the circumstances, if they were to go along with merit and be placed alongside mainstream dominant group members? Would they have been offered the same opportunities if their talent had been judged purely on its own merits? These questions appear to draw on the argument that it may be appropriate to detect and utilise the gaps between policy and practice because any opportunity this might give for meaningful participation would enable their self-expression (Morrison & Dearden, 2013). There have been arguments for and against tokenism; some argue that it helps pave the way for participation in decision-making, while others argue it is better to do nothing than engage in what amounts to tokenistic endeavour (Lundy, 2018). Lundy argued that it may likely result in disillusionment and disengagement, especially when there is no opportunity or recognition and not being able to make valuable contributions. As a concept, Othering can be linked to identity formation and agency. For this study, participants saw their belonging to an ethnic group as a social power base to construct their own identity. They saw themselves as Black (us/we) while refusing the category of the other (them/they); in this case, Black is diametrically opposed to white. Black identity came with distinct features and labelling. Some of these are cherished, and others are perceived as the demonisation of Black identity. For example, the notion of not being well-behaved and uncivilised forces subjectivity and limits the expression of self. In the following illustration, Cara (14, F) makes an argument for expressing who you are and denouncing stereotypes.

They think we are loud and ghetto, so they think we cause trouble. And especially for nails, they see it as threatening, so they'll caution me. And they think that will cause fights, but with our culture, we just need to express how we feel.

(Cara, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

Cara's account alludes to perceived Otherness and makes references to what Jensen (2011) described as 'constructing the other as pathological and morally inferior' (p.65), a dimension of Otherness that tends to interlock with other dimensions. Most participants perceived Otherness in different ways, either as stereotypes, racism, deprivation, unfair treatment or stifling the construction of Black identity in such a way that is expressive and non-restrictive. Salma (15, F) particularly pointed out how she was treated like the Other at her modelling agency and lamented the lack of inclusivity. As a person of dark skin colour, she felt there was a need to make provision for a Black hairdresser and to provide the right shades of make-up to suit her skin colour. These were not in place, thus affecting her photo features, whereas the provision of suitable make-up kits was part of Salma's paid subscription.

#### 4.2.3. The Reflection stage of critical consciousness

Adopting Freire's stages of critical consciousness (as in Diemer et al., 2016), this section examines the stage of reflection embedded in the critical consciousness process. I present participants' views of marginalisation and discrimination through critical reflection on their personal experiences or otherwise on prejudicial practices. These experiences are laden with memories and emotions about a process that is fraught with prejudices that are race-based. Freire noted that awareness of an oppressive system is important to proceed to the stage of action against perceived oppression. How did participants come to the views expressed on the issue of marginalisation? They reflected on who they are - their identity - and the social conditions and processes that enforce marginalisation. Dunya (14, F) emphasises the point about her identity in the following comment.

I just wanted to make sure I'm very clear on who I am and make sure that I'm Dunya the Black girl and not like Dunya the girl who might be Italian, might be Pakistani, or might be anyone else.

(Dunya, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Reflecting on how participants navigate experiences of discrimination in their everyday lives constituted a source of critical consciousness. I draw on Paulo Freire's (1970, 1974) Critical Consciousness theory to explain the Black experience of participants. Diemer et al. (2016), while espousing Freire's theory of critical consciousness, suggested that critical reflection is one of the three processes of critical consciousness. Critical reflection refers to the process of questioning structures and practices that enforce oppression and marginalisation. Specifically, Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, provided a useful guide for the critical discovery of oppression in the praxis of reflection and action. In Freire's view, the ability to reason is an essential characteristic of the social transformation of society. Participants demonstrated a strong ability to critically analyse their circumstances regarding various issues and to express concerns about discrimination. For example, they pointed out media narratives that often depict Black young people as being associated with knife crime and other forms of anti-social behaviour. They argued that negative media narratives and public perceptions of Black people, which perpetuate stereotypes (further discussed in Chapter 5 on racial discrimination), need to change, as illustrated in the comments of Tega, Calista, and Devan.

I feel like we need to change the media because that's where a lot of Black stereotypes come from. And like if the media is the first thing people see, of course, they are going to think of us badly. Of course, they're gonna think of us in that way. And especially like, even durag are associated with drugs and I feel like that could be a part of why they see us as such.

(Tega, 16, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

I think it's different for everyone, not only for just race and cultural stuff. It could also be like initially growing up; some people could be born in more high-cost areas, and some people could be born in low-cost areas. But even so, some areas are more diverse than others, so people may experience less or more racism depending on where they live, or they can just face more hardships because the place they live in has an unconscious bias or be more; how do I say this, be adaptive to a specific type of people.

(Calista, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

The fact that you've seen a Black boy and thought he probably stole something that's racist.

(Devan, 15, M, LS1, Grp4, Nov 2022)

The reference to the durag made by Tega is quite symbolic of the Black culture and particularly in relation to societal perceptions of Black young people, and their association with controlled drugs and substance misuse. A durag is a fitting piece of cloth tied around the hair, some as a cap, often used by some Black young people to protect their Afro hair, keeping it tidy and maintaining a neat appearance. Participants reflected on growing up and the contexts in which racism could manifest. Ejiro, Dunya, and Sasha reflected on the impact of racism on mental health, the school grading system, and social mobility. For instance, Dunya's mention of being the only Black person in a top set for a period spanning two years raised many questions about why this was the case. Cara (14, F) was also concerned about the proportion of Black students in the top sets.

...from my personal point of view, in my school, the top set is very, and it's still very, very white, and I am the only, I was the only one for like two years, wearing hijab in

my class. I was the only Black one in my class for a while. There's a lot of barriers and stuff...

(Dunya, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Even like the learning that is going on, I feel like a lot of the higher sets have white people inside them. They don't feel that we can do stuff like that.

(Cara, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

Ejiro was one of the older participants, in her final year of A-level (sixth form) course and an active member of the youth council, aspiring to attend University to study Law. She expressed concerns about social mobility and opportunities in the following comment.

I still feel like there's that element of race because a lot of what I've got to study, but basically, it's by Gillborn and Youdell. Basically, they've conducted a study into secondary schools in the UK. If...it was in London and they found out that Black students because they were Black, teachers thought they couldn't do well in education, so they got put in lower streams. So they were captured getting this C grade. So that's a five. So if you do foundation maths, that's the highest you can get, and people, employees, don't want people that have majority of fives; one or two is fine, but from English to biology, you're getting a C. They target you from a young age so they cap your abilities. And that's because they don't understand Black people because of racism...

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

The concern about Black students being put in lower streams, as noted by Ejiro, highlights the important issue of teachers' expectations for Black young people. These expectations play a significant role in shaping students' academic trajectories and can have a negative impact on their academic self-esteem. When students are placed in lower academic settings, it perpetuates racialised underachievement and contributes to long-term disparities in employment and life outcomes (Demie, 2019). This study indicates that the tendency to assign students to lower academic groups is systemic and may be rooted in institutional biases rather than genuine academic ability. The misalignment suggests that decisions about academic grouping are influenced not just by data, but also by racialised assumptions. Strand (2011) attributed the



under-representation of Black students to institutional processes, where subjective teacher assessments lead to their placement in lower academic bands. Teachers' beliefs, particularly a strong belief in meritocracy, may correlate with reduced support for marginalised students, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds. This underscores how deeply held assumptions can influence teachers' judgments and contribute to unconscious bias, which, in turn, affects student placement (Doyle et al., 2023). It strongly suggests that these misallocations stem from systemic bias and the influence of stereotypes rather than from objective academic judgments (Francis et al., 2016).

Such practices illustrate how racialised stereotypes about Black students, regarding them as disruptive, less academic, or lacking motivation, can distort professional judgments (Archer & Francis, 2006; Campbell, 2015). The assignment of Black students to lower academic groups might not simply be due to personal bias but could indicate an underlying systemic problem embedded in institutional racism. By misjudging ability, reinforcing stereotypes, and restricting opportunities, the education system contributes to racial inequalities in both academic achievement and aspirations. To address this issue, there needs to be a shift from merely discussing inclusion to implementing effective anti-racist practices that are based on evidence and focused on equity.

The analysis of participants' discussions also indicates that government institutions, such as the education system and police, as well as various societal layers, validated prejudicial and discriminatory practices. The case of police brutality was raised, where Black males were often targeted. Dejen (16, M) reiterated that police brutality is more likely to happen to Black males than Black females; in either case, it does still happen to Black people. Although not the only reason, it is attributed to the way they dressed in their hoodies; the police worked on the assumption of who it (the description) fits, thereby resonating the endemic issue of racial profiling. Tega (16, M) decried an experience where he was held down by police at the age of six. After that frightening incident, Tega expressed that he would never fully trust the police to be protective and that he would never call them for any reason.

Bimbo (15, M, LS3) and Gozie (14, M, LS3) also described similar personal experiences as very embarrassing. Bimbo was suddenly stopped by police who exerted excessive force on him in a stop-and-search.

I've been stopped and searched before... It wasn't a good experience and I was asking what I did, and they were trying not to let me know what I've done. They were very aggressive with me. I didn't like that, I tried to explain to them that can you please calm down? They were not trying to listen to me, and then I just felt like I had no control, it was quite, quite bad. There are a lot of people there as well, quite embarrassing as well.

(Bimbo, 15, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

Gozie had also been stopped and searched:

So there was a time I went with my mate to Greenwich, and then we got stopped by the Police, and then they were searching us. So the other people there were saying that they didn't do anything. The Police was saying that we've got knife on us that they saw it. So they searched us, they pulled our trousers, checked us, searched us everywhere and they didn't see anything. So they let us go, and then other people there were then like cursing the police and then, yeah. But I felt that it was because of my race. And then the person I was walking with was a white guy and they didn't search him, they only searched me.

(Gozie, 14, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

Delroy (17, M, LS3) raised the issue of racial discrimination about a five-star hotel in London that refused a young Black man in his twenties who had reached the final stage of the interview process because of the Afro-style hair grooming policy. Delroy (17, M, LS3) thought that he and his friends were likely to be victims of similar employment discrimination as they all had the same hair type. The hotel incident was widely reported by many UK news media, including the BBC website (Warren, BBC News, 2023, April 11).

By rethinking education and how the system accommodates Black young people, there could be the prospect of variability in outcomes, thus echoing racism in education. Race inequality, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, is one of the major barriers to attaining success for students of Black ethnicity. Gillborn (2008) argued that race inequality in schools has been obscured by incremental gestures of free school meals to accommodate not-well-to-do student backgrounds. Instead, the government focused on announcements branding a false image of minority achievements. While Mona (16, F) asserted that Black people now experience more racism, Caleb (16, M) viewed it from another perspective, arguing that the media's broadcast

and reporting on racism has now made it an overwhelming issue. There was also the issue of a lack of representation for Black teachers in schools, as illustrated in Ejiro's comment.

They've changed everything. This is in the schools because there used to be a lot more Black teachers who were representative of the students. Now, a lot of white teachers don't understand Black people, like I'm doing this thing in my EPQ. To what extent does institutional racism in UK secondary schools have an effect on the Black community that caused that anti-social behaviour, and because there's no representation within the schools now. The white teachers don't understand Black people or their mannerisms, they blacklist them, and it's threatening in the classroom. They're getting in trouble, getting excluded.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Participants emphasised the issue of race and inequality, and the attainment gap as a barrier to a successful life. They made sense of these inhibiting factors by alluding to the struggles they have had to contend with during their schooling years. In their research, Gillborn and Youdell (2009) came up with the conclusion of the racialised banding mentioned by Dunya and Ejiro. Gillborn and Youdell's idea of *educational triage* meant that Black students experienced lower expectations of achieving good grades by teachers; hence, Black students were banded in lower sets, which had the effect of capping their abilities. As noted by participants, there is also the issue of a lack of Black teachers, either due to low numbers in training and hiring or high turnover. Ejiro made the following comment about capping abilities for Black young people.

They target you from young so they cap your abilities. And that's because they don't understand Black people because of racism, because you can't tell me that it's not, it's anything else. It makes sense if you're a troubled child, you don't revise, like you get it? It makes sense, but when you're not any of those, and it's just a skin colour, that's another topic.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Participants in this study identified social mistreatment and cultural dynamics as significant factors in their push for a recognition of Black identity. The process of expressing Black identity is influenced by the social construction of race, perceptions of unfair treatment, and the perceived obstacles to self-expression. Many of the narratives shared by participants

resonated with the psychological strain associated with identifying as Black. This quest for self-affirmation crystallised into a yearning for recognition of Black identity. These narratives are examined further in the next section.

### **4.3. Identity denial**

Analysis of the data threw up an unanticipated theme; participants discussed their inability to express their identity. Black identity is the social identity used by people of African and Caribbean descent to make sense of their membership of Black ethnic groups. There were spontaneous mentions of hair during deliberative group discussions. Hair grooming and Afro-Caribbean hairstyles turned out to be cherished values that are attached to their cultural heritage. Participants discussed Black lifestyles as they relate to the politics of hair identity, pointing out that the Afro hairstyle is a prominent part of their cultural identity. The politics of hair identity is one way of explaining the tendency towards race-based hair discrimination. Participants reasoned that Black hair was a source of pride for their culture and one of the ways they constructed their identity. In addition, hair politics was viewed through the lens of the concept of intersectionality, as an intersecting hair identity which is racialised and discriminated against. Lukate and Foster (2023) describe this racialised hair identity as context-dependent. Lukate and Foster's research findings from their qualitative study of Black and mixed-race women in England and Germany suggest that different afro hairstyles can limit identity within a given context. This was replicated in this study as participants' narratives point to hair discrimination in schools and the incident of employment discrimination at the five-star London hotel mentioned earlier in 4.2.3.

Intersectionality was not a major focus for discussion but during group discussions participants used intersecting identities to express their views about discrimination, tied together with their understanding of marginalisation. As this study sought to understand the views of Black young people about marginalisation, I was keen to hear participants discuss their understanding of marginalisation from different angles, whether such views appear sophisticated, less relevant, or significant. Intersecting identities that force marginalisation on individuals or groups could be varied; in addition to gender, race, religion, language, class and race, hairstyles featured prominently in the discussion groups.

Hair is a symbol of Black identity for African and Caribbean people. The evolution of Black culture has been connected to personal expression through hair. Discussions about hair during the first group discussion in London School 1 were mostly taken on by female participants who spoke passionately on this topic, and I was curious to understand if it was only an issue for the females. The response was from every Black person, including the males whom the school rules had prevented from having fades and afros - (a hairstyle common with Black young males). Hair identity has become politicised with rules and prohibitions, hence the talk of 'hair politics'. The construction of racial identity by participants was lucid and embedded in Black hair. Ethan (15), a male who had long hair, narrated how he was told every day to tie his long hair, which he felt was a way of expressing himself:

With the hair situation, I was told every day to tie my hair because of its length... but I don't see it right... I feel like I am suppressed about how I can express my hair. As a younger boy, I had a lot of long hair, and I can't express it.

Ethan (15, M, LS1 Grp1, Nov 2022)

A review of hair discrimination in schools and workplaces shows that hair identity has become a tool for discrimination in the United States as well as in Britain. Although several rights and social movements for equality and social justice have existed for centuries, in the last two decades, hair discrimination activism has gained momentum in the United States, leading to the ban on hair discrimination through the CROWN Act. CROWN is an acronym for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair. The CROWN Act legislation has protection against Black hair discrimination in schools and workplaces and has been passed in 24 states as of February 2024 (Salhotra and Serrano, *The Texas Tribune*, Feb. 22, 2024). Despite this development in the United States of America, there is no such legislation yet in Britain that specifically addresses hair discrimination in schools and the workplace. Even though the Human Rights Act 1998 may appear to be the umbrella legislation to issues like this, the closest to such legislation in the United Kingdom is the Equality Act 2010, which recognises race as a protected characteristic but is still subject to legal interpretation. However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) Preventing Hair Discrimination in School Guidance (EHRC Guidance, 2022), though not a law, offers a glimmer of hope towards inclusion.

During group discussion sessions, participants made spontaneous references to hair when discussing how they felt as being different from others, which seems to emphasise the realities

of discrimination they encounter in their everyday lives (Onnie Rogers et al., 2021). Participants discussed how school hair rules were prohibitive and discriminatory. Their emotions promoted strong resistance to white dominance and suppression of their identity. In the following illustrations, Cara (14, F) and Ava (16, F) noted that hair is an aspect of personal identity that differentiates them from others, and this identity is being denied.

The hairstyle limits our character...and it makes all of us the same; it does not really differentiate anyone from someone else, so you don't really feel independent as an individual from the people around you. It feels like... you are just the same.

(Cara, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

In our secondary school, we had a rule that hair had to be in one unit. That was quite hard for a lot of us to deal with.

(Ava, 16, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

#### **4.3.1. Non-recognition of hair as an identity**

Black hairstyles constitute another aspect of identity denial. The narratives shared by participants emphasise the significance of hair within Black culture. During one of the group discussion sessions at a London School (LS1), I observed that the conversations among participants began rather quietly. To foster a more engaging dialogue among the participants, I made a deliberate effort to encourage their participation. When the conversation shifted to Black hairstyles, the atmosphere in the room changed dramatically, and enthusiasm for contributions became visibly evident. This kind of response underscores the significance and impact that hairstyles hold within the Black community. I noticed a similar pattern during other group discussion sessions as well.

Data analysis shows that Afro hairstyles define Black identity. Recognising Black hair is one of the ways to express who Black people are. Participants were critical of hair rules which they viewed as restricting and limiting. Hair discrimination is often referred to as the 'negative bias manifested toward Black natural or textured hairstyles typically worn by persons of African descent' (Nkimbeng et al., 2023, p.406). The perception of hair discrimination as a racial issue was highlighted, along with a comparison to white students. Calista (14, F) and Tola (14, F) illustrate racialisation and differential treatment regarding hair issues.

Basically, one day, some girls had dying hair. But it wasn't permanent; it was temporary, and they were excluded. There was this particular white girl who came into school, and she still had her hair dyed still dyed right now, but she's been walking around the school the whole time.

(Calista, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

We see other kids get to dye their hair and have piercings, like we can't do that...

(Tola, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

The findings show that the issue of non-recognition of Black hair as an identity was not limited to a particular gender. The reported race-based hair discrimination was an issue that affected all genders. All participants in this study, except for one, who identified as non-binary, were either male or female. Experiences of hair discrimination were common among all of them, as Cara (14, F) and Ava (16, F) illustrate.

They make the Black hairstyles to be seen as unprofessional.

(Cara, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

I remember I used to put my hair up, and teachers would tell me people behind me couldn't see. I remember once a teacher actually pulled me out and told me to take my hair band out and put it at the back of my head, which is not as easy as they would say, like to just do it right there in front of them without a mirror. Not even brush and type of things like that. I just feel it was against us in a way and made us lose part of ourselves in school.

(Ava, 16, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

Since participants were secondary and sixth-form students (the English education system), they primarily focused on their experiences in school. The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) guideline states that it could be unlawful for any school policy to ban certain hairstyles that are specific to certain races or religious beliefs without considering exceptions (EHRC guidance, October 2022). However, this non-statutory guidance is not binding; therefore, preventing hair discrimination was left to the discretion of schools. The EHRC acknowledges that research, as well as court cases they have been involved, and other

reported experiences indicate that hair-based discrimination disproportionately affects boys and girls with Afro hairstyles. The experience of Black young people appears to support this. Abi (14, F), Deo (15, M) and Ejiro (17, F) illustrate how the school rules affect them.

In education, some of the rules are made to target people of colour, specifically, hair rules...Like fades for boys, they are not allowed to have fades; it's a common hairstyle amongst Black boys.

(Abi, 14, F, LS1, Grp 1, Nov 2022)

In school, there is a rule that you can't get fades. I don't think that it should exist because it's a way you express yourself.

(Deo, 15, M, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

Even with hair as well, like long, straight, before you went messy at school, like I know some people, they'll get braids or they'll dye their hair red, and they're Black you'll get sent home. You have to dye it back to Black. When a white girl does the same thing, it's a different conversation.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Although participants were of school age and still in full-time education, they discussed the implications of hair discrimination in post-secondary education and how it affects the workplace. In addition to the previously discussed incident of hair discrimination in a London five-star hotel mentioned earlier (p.122), another noteworthy incident was reported by several British newspapers in 2015. This case involved a Black woman, Lara Odoffin, whose job offer was revoked because of her hair (*Independent*, Nov 2015; *Daily Mail*, Nov 2015; *The Telegraph*, Nov 2015). Delroy expressed concern about how they could also face hair discrimination when applying for jobs in the future. He said:

So obviously you look at my hair, it's quite coarse. I've also got a style. Majority of us have, in fact, I think all of us have the same like around the same types of hair, and if we were to apply, they would decline based on our hair type, which obviously is discriminating against us [...] sometimes it's part of our culture like we get our hair done like to like keep it in a neat form. So you usually wear things, like wear caps or durags, and they're actually not allowed in the school. In a lot of workplaces, they're



not allowed, in a lot of different other schools as well, which I find is not very good. Because it's like a way how you keep your hair. It's not only good looking, but healthy as well.

(Delroy, 17, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

Participants perceived hairstyle rules as a form of racism that contributes to marginalisation in both education and employment. Data analysis results indicate that Afro hairstyles represent a significant aspect of Black identity, a consideration that has often been overlooked in school and workplace policies. This lack of consideration for certain races and religions might be what Tola (14, M) referred to when she said, 'I feel like society lacks like Black sympathy,' in an attempt to describe racial discrimination. She highlighted the time and care they invest in styling their hair, which the school rules appear not to consider. Donahoo and Smith's (2022) argument on hair economics, which asserts that it could be expensive to style Black hair, supports this view. Across the literature, identity denial is argued to be a form of discrimination that questions one's sense of belonging (Cárdenas et al., 2021). Cara (14, F) expressed that the school rules portray Black hairstyles as unsuitable for a professional; she argued that it does not in any way affect the learning that occurs in school.

The concept of misrecognition, when applied to the narratives of participants, highlights the injustice faced by the marginalised, often indicated by labelling individuals in disrespectful ways that deny their right to self-identify (James, 2015; Martineau et al., 2012; Xie et al., 2021). Participants stated that their hair expresses who they are, and the different hairstyles for both boys and girls define their unique Black identity. Therefore, not being able to express who they are obscures their identity. To this end, a sensitivity check will rightly allude to Black hair as central to Black identity formation.

Identity denial does have repercussions for exclusion borne out of discriminatory practices. It raised participants' critical consciousness of Black identity denial through hair discrimination. The existence of rules and policies justifying discrimination in instances has been conditional on sufficiently good reasons; in any case, it still limits the right to self-identify. While the effect of hair politics in school may be reduced in face value to just how many units of braids (Afro-Caribbean hairstyles) girls are allowed to have, and the mere restriction of types of fades and afro styles, it has led to exclusion from school, and also caused social isolation within the

school. Participants were critical of one-sided hair rules that call out Black students but not their white counterparts. Ejiro (17, F) and Cara (14, F) mention their concerns:

There's this guy in 2017. He is a Rastafarian in school, and the school was like, uh, if you don't cut your hair, then you're gonna be excluded. It wasn't until he had that dreadlocks cut, and that was like an infringement on his, like, religion. Obviously, Rastafarian and I, I don't know. It's almost like the UK education system is against us, and there's only just one of the systems that are against us. We have the police aspects as well.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Some of the rules are very lenient towards white people. Their hair can be in the same style for a very long time, but ours really can't. So it doesn't consider our hairstyle for school.

(Cara, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

These comments appear to point to a lack of consistency in applying inclusive values, or at least to a sense of belonging in the school. Ejiro's account draws attention to the infringement of human rights; for example, the Rastafarian dreadlocks may have a religious attachment or a belief. Using the threat of exclusion to forcefully deny the student their identity and probably their religious belief, which is not in any way a threat to others, also reflects the human rights framing of this study. The Department for Education guidelines for suspensions and exclusions empowers Headteachers to exclude students if they misbehave in school. However, misbehaviour, or the extent of what constitutes bad behaviour, has some ambiguity, given the power of the Headteacher to determine who and what attracts exclusion and suspension. Misbehaviour, according to the guidelines, is described as an act or intent that can cause harm to others or oneself. The guideline states, 'schools must also ensure that any provision, criterion, or practice does not discriminate against pupils by unfairly increasing their risk of exclusion' (DfE, 2023, p.10). Similarly, the Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination against protected characteristics, for example, race, religion or belief, sex and disability, harassment, and victimisation. Crisp (2015) suggested that people may behave in bad ways because of required obedience to authority, and he further argued that frustration from oppression built up over time would always find an outlet for release. From this point of view, I argue that

indiscriminate racial discrimination can potentially provoke misbehaviour, thereby placing Black young people at risk of exclusion.

Schools have been increasingly focused on performance results, particularly through public examinations, at least in part because this has a direct impact on their funding. Schools thus tend to neglect students whom the schools feel are not good enough to be placed in the higher sets - a catch to attract higher government funding. Some of the participants mentioned how they felt their needs and abilities were rarely considered. For students in this category, this practice spells discrimination and marginalisation. Larrissa (14) and Dara (17) illustrate the point of not considering circumstances and abilities.

When we learn stuff in school, like where we're expressing how people felt like, how people are treated and certain Black people are treated till this day, most of the time it's just the grading, the whole time it's just the grading and as much as it's nice to express the bad things that happen and can get them out of the way.

(Larissa, 14, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

Most programmes and some universities don't have that, [consideration for support network]. They just look at what you've produced, not the kind of struggles you've gone through and I feel like that is a bit unfair.

(Dara, 17, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

These narratives draw attention to the English education system and the challenges that young Black people face in schools. Although a teacher was in the discussion room who could hear participants' conversations, they were not deterred from expressing their views. Ejiro's comment on the chain effect of exclusion was quite striking. She argued that it does not end with exclusion from school; there is a potential of going to prison.

They're [Black people] getting in trouble, getting excluded. Exclusions mean you're four times; if you're excluded, sometimes you're four times more likely to go to prison. You know what I mean, like, it's this kind of stuff, but it's all because of, like gentrification.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Analysing Ejiro's argument alongside the concept of identity denial sheds light on the cycle of marginalisation that continues to affect Black young people in various ways. This perspective highlights the ongoing challenges they face, as systemic biases and societal misconceptions can undermine their sense of self and belonging, thereby creating a difficult environment for their personal and social development.

Unsurprisingly, their discussion of individual experiences shows us how they constructed their sense of agency. These young people's narratives show their voices and reflections on the structural and contextual limitations that constrained their opportunities to shape their lives. The search for agency was highlighted in their discussions of the limitations constraining their expression of Black identity. White and Wyn (1998) argued that 'a contextual understanding of youth experience provides a better appreciation of how youth agency is constructed' (p.314). In this study, Black young people expressed the prospect of changing discriminatory rules, especially re-examining the role of institutions where power is located. Their responses were both defensive and a reaction to the threat to identity formation.

#### **4.3.2. Threat to identity**

Much of the discussion among Black young people focused on threats to their identity and their experiences of survival. They articulated identity denial as a form of discrimination. As a concept, identity threat refers to a diminished sense of belonging, exclusion, and feelings of being negatively stereotyped; all of these could be harmful to one's identity (George et al., 2023; Slepian & Jacoby-Senghor, 2020). What participants perceived as threats were mostly issues related to ignoring hair identity, discrimination, rules regarding Black hairstyles versus white hair, and accent stereotypes. To cope with these threats, Black young people adopted various ways of coping such as code-switching, and this was not only in language but also in socialisation. Olive (17, F) illustrated this.

There is the downside of just having a lot more difficulties like making appearances or the way you act, like in education, things like that... For example, I know I have that good balance, like I have Black friends and I have white friends and I am able not to get lost in who I am or whatever, and kind of maintain that myself. So yea... I feel like before, I might have switched how I act, but now I act like the same as other groups

are, which is what I mean that growing up Black like before, you might have to conform to whatever group you are with.

(Olive, 17, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

Code-switching and identity-switching are often used interchangeably. Code-switching refers to the adjustment of one's accent, language, behaviour, and presentation (McCluney et al., 2021), depending on the social context. This adjustment can also influence various aspects of social identity. Georgakopoulou and Finnis (2009) suggested that code-switching can actively create identities. An interesting aspect of code-switching is that it can mask an individual's identity, promoting different identities and thus appearing as a form of identity-switching. Additionally, changes in behaviour may be linked to shifts in identity, as alterations in identity may require some level of behavioural adjustment. Some participants discussed the issue of being Black and having an accent, especially for people who were not born in the UK. Olive referred to her mother, who modifies her voice when she speaks to people she does not know, both white and Black, because she does not want to come across patronising behaviour. She mentioned stereotypes of being Black, having an accent, having a harsh voice, and not being intelligent. She feels the switch is adopted so as not to be noticed by others and treated differently.

Continuing with the theme of threat to identity, Breakwell (2010) suggested that understanding how people respond to identity threats is important in understanding the processes that drive identity development. Her Identity Process Theory (IPT) proposes that the dynamic processes of assimilation, accommodation, and evaluation regulate the structure of identity. Breakwell described assimilation as the 'absorption of new components into the identity structure', while accommodation refers to 'the adjustment that occurs in the existing structure' (p.6.4). Evaluation involves the 'allocation of meaning and values to identity contents' (p.6.4). An important aspect of IPT is the social context of identity, which could be time-specific and comprises interpersonal networks and social influences. This theory recognises the role that the agency of the individual plays in constructing identity and helps to explain the threats vis-à-vis the social misrepresentation participants faced. In line with Breakwell's perspective on threats to identity, I argue that the distinctiveness of Black identity has not received adequate recognition, and the essentialist approach to identity perpetuates the low self-esteem of participants. The following comments illustrate Ejiro's (17, F) and Dunya's (14, F) responses to identity threats.

I think being able to, for white people or people that aren't Black, respect my Blackness and respect what makes me who I am. You can't change the colour of my skin. I am not bleaching for nobody. You get it, like I'm Black and I'm proud to be Black. I'm proud of my name. I'm proud of my heritage. I'm proud of my culture. Don't make me feel inferior.

(Ejoro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

I think for me it's being very firm with my identity and making sure to, like, correct people when they like, Marie [Ejoro's cousin], correct people about my name as well... all the wrong stuff.

(Dunya, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Participants' narratives show that modernisation, gentrification, and shifts in values pose threats to their identity and affect the experience of who they are. George et al. (2023) discuss how identity threats are perceived and show that they may vary in place and time. What some people may experience as an identity threat may not be so for others. More significantly, is how people respond to identity threats. Participants' varied responses, such as switching, appear to be more in alignment with Petriglieri's (2011) 'positive distinctiveness' response by 'distinguishing their threatened identity in a positive rather than negative way' (p.643 & p.648). Participants' narratives show they did not attempt to change the source of threat, and they maintained a positive demeanour while emphasising the distinctiveness of Black identity.

#### **4.4. Chapter summary**

This chapter offers a comprehensive discussion of a key finding from the study, focusing on the themes of Black identity and critical consciousness. I explored how Black identity is constructed, emphasising the perceived limitations that often emerge, including experiences of identity denial and threats to their identity. Through the analysis of their narratives, it became evident how these young individuals navigated the complexities of identity formation, developed a critical consciousness of discrimination and Othering, and reflected on how these experiences impacted their lives. Furthermore, a strong sense of cultural belonging emerged as an important aspect of understanding Black identity construction. In this chapter, I have emphasised the connection between identity and critical consciousness in Black young people.

I contend that hair identity is essential for expressing Black identity. Participants felt limited in their ability to fully express their individuality due to strict hairstyle regulations imposed by schools. These constraints suppress personal expression and raise concerns about hair politics that extend to the workplace and other societal contexts. They expressed frustration over rules that seem unjust, limiting their ability to showcase who they are. Many participants indicated that these discriminatory rules and prejudicial practices negatively impact their learning and have broader implications for their education. Furthermore, Black young people voiced a strong desire for reform in school policies regarding hairstyles, emphasising the need for more inclusive practices. They noted that having Black teachers in leadership positions could play a crucial role in advocating for their needs and amplifying their voices regarding concerns about hairstyle regulations.

Through their narratives, these young people illustrate their active role in shaping our understanding of Othering, racial identity and identity denial. While participants expressed a diverse range of views, they largely agreed that their lived experiences were significantly affected by racism. Their stories highlighted both their personal struggles and the broader societal implications of racial injustice. They emphasised the importance of recognising and embracing Blackness. Furthermore, Black young people demonstrated their agency by advocating for the decolonisation of the education curriculum to make it more inclusive.

In summary, my analysis reveals the diverse experiences of Black young people, emphasising how they construct and express their identities. The process of identity formation is complex, involving fluid adaptation and shifts within their social environments. Additionally, the development of critical consciousness among Black young people enhances their awareness of social injustices, which in turn shapes their perceptions of themselves and society. The study further underscores the importance of intersecting identities, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status, in shaping the lived experiences of Black young people. These insights enhance our understanding of their unique reality, highlighting the complexities of their experiences, challenges, and aspirations that shape their daily lives. The next chapter presents the findings, specifically examining how participants articulated their understanding of marginalisation. It looks at how their experiences of marginalisation are interpreted through cultural capital theory and how this interpretation contributes to social inequality.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Presentation of findings: Making Meaning of Marginalisation**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

The issues of marginalisation are explored in this chapter, focusing on how the narratives of Black young people illuminate the complexities and intricacies inherent in this issue. I analysed how feelings of marginalisation are constructed, highlighting the various ways in which identity and cultural backgrounds shape Black young people's perceptions and interpretations (Cast, 2003). The themes of social inequality, cultural capital, and racial discrimination reflect the experiences of marginalisation and the voices of Black young people who navigate and make sense of different dimensions of this phenomenon. Participants shared their experiences of unequal treatment and prejudice, providing insights into our understanding of representation and inclusivity issues. Their narratives call attention to the need to work towards a more equitable society that embraces diverse communities. Race emerged as a major factor contributing to various forms of marginalisation experienced by participants. Although other perspectives on marginalisation were explored, racism remained central to discussions, consistently shaping the conversation. In analysing the data, I observed that several themes and quotes from participants' discussions intersect. For example, racial identity (Chapter 4) stands out as a reoccurring issue, connected to themes of racial discrimination, social inequality and the lack of representation. These commonalities shed light on the complex nature of these issues and their effects on individual experiences and communities.

This chapter explores different perspectives on marginalisation, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. The chapter is organised into three key sections. Section 5.2 presents the theme of social inequality and cultural capital using Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Section 5.3 focuses on racial discrimination and the related issue of social exclusion. The final Section, 5.4, summarises key points and concludes the chapter.

#### **5.2. Social inequality and cultural capital**

Social inequality and cultural capital are presented as twin themes to explain patterns of marginalisation. This discussion draws on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to illustrate how it affects and exacerbates the disparities experienced in educational settings. By exploring



how various forms of cultural knowledge, skills, and educational credentials act as assets that can either uplift or hinder individuals, this analysis highlights the significant impact of inequality on students' experiences and opportunities within the educational system.

Data analysis indicates that social inequality can take various forms and may occur in different contexts. These include class, income gap, and access to opportunities in the context of cultural differences. Other forms of marginalisation I found include barriers to opportunities, such as limited access and lack of representation for Black ethnic minorities. Additionally, the voices of Black young people are often ignored or not heard. Cultural capital – which could confer some advantages to a person based on class, family background, parents' education, occupation or profession - reinforces social inequality. Participants pointed to a limited or lack of these forms of capital as restrictive to their chances of success in life, thereby inherently placing them in marginalised groups. This appears to be a common trend among children of Black ethnic minorities (Roberts & Bolton, 2023).

Participants expressed concerns about the various ways cultural capital could affect their lives, educational experience and access to opportunities. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984) advocated the important role cultural capital plays in class struggles in society. Some of the most important sources of cultural capital identified by Bourdieu include educational credentials, qualifications, language (accent), and mannerisms, all of which were referenced by participants during group discussions. For example, Sonia (16, F), Olive (17, F) and Ava (16, F) illustrate how cultural capital can be lacking in certain contexts.

It's also quite difficult to have a good education if you're not given the right circumstances to have that education.

(Sonia, 16, LS1 Grp2, Nov 2022)

When they speak to their parents, [referring to white students] it's like, yeah, you need to do this, and that. The same cannot be said of my parents. They didn't go to the university, they can't really guide me in that way and tell me exactly what I need to do. It's something I have to figure out for myself even though we do have teachers in school.

(Ava, 16, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

I don't have anyone who went to university and doesn't know how to write a personal statement. Whereas the majority of white people would have had parents who did that.

(Olive, 17, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

There was concern about the generational gap, which adds another complex layer to the issue of marginalisation. Some participants noted that the generational wealth gap contributes to this marginalisation, while others highlighted the gradual erosion of culture and the challenges of navigating a hostile coexistence. Overall, the differences between generations were seen as contributing factors that place Black young people at the margins, consequently leading to social inequality, as Jarvis (17, M) and Salma(15, F) illustrate.

In many cases, many people's parents, for example, came over from their own countries. So there's not that level of generational wealth that some of our white counterparts would obviously have because they've been here for a lot longer. And obviously, it gives them a very big advantage over us.

(Jarvis, 17, M, LS2 Grp2, Nov 2022)

Back in the day ... my mum told me about how she grew up; it's completely different from how I grew up. This generation is so different to how my parents and my grandparents grew up.

(Salma, 15, F, LS2 Grp2, Mar 2023)

Continuing with this theme of cultural capital, participants noted that the area where they grew up affects the way marginalisation is perceived. These indications tend to corroborate some studies that identified how the quality of the neighbourhood can affect the future of children (Chetty et al., 2016; Chetty & Hendren, 2018; Maguire-Jack & Katz, 2022; ONS, 2014). Among the many sets of factors that can affect life outcomes, these studies show that inequality, disparity, and barriers to social mobility are some of the neighbourhood-related challenges that children have to contend with while growing into adulthood. These challenges pose substantial obstacles for young people, affecting their opportunities and life trajectories. For example, children growing up in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods may experience limited access to quality education, health care and safe recreational spaces, all of which can hinder

their academic and personal development. Calista (14, F) and Sonia (16, F) expressed their concerns about how growing up in certain neighbourhoods could affect them.

Sometimes, people become the product of their environment, so it could either negatively or positively affect people depending on where they live.

(Calista, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

There are many deprived areas in London, not only in London but in England or the UK...And a lot of people may not have safe housing, or they cannot do any recreational thing because they are not in an environment where they can do that.

(Sonia, 16, F, LS1 Grp2, Nov 2022)

In a manner similar to Bourdieu's theory, Lamont and Lareau (1988) defined cultural capital as 'institutionalised, ...widely shared, high-status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion' (p.156). Their emphasis on social exclusion highlights how lack of cultural capital can serve as a barrier to employment and restrict access to higher-status in-groups. These limitations can create significant obstacles for individuals seeking social mobility. They may impede educational achievement, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities and limiting opportunities for upward mobility within society.

As discussions progressed during the group discussion sessions, participants began to talk more about their future prospects and the likelihood of achieving success in education and careers. They connected these aspirations to broader issues of ethnicity, inequality and cultural capital associated with educational and professional qualifications. For example, Dara expressed her concern:

Just because we're Black or just because we are in a minority group, then like, our talent is less small despite the fact that we are Black, and there are a lot more programmes just based on, like, okay, you are eligible if your parents were in university and stuff. And I get why they are doing that because, like most of our parents, they were born back home, they were not born here. So most of them were not in the university, so they couldn't tell us this is what you need to do here; this is what you need to do there; it's just harder for us. (Dara, 17, F, LS1 Grp3, Nov 2022)

There was a feeling among participants that their minority status contributed to experiences of social inequality, social exclusion and the limited amount of support networks. This may explain why they emphasised hard work and diligence as ways to overcome challenges and thrive in adulthood. Most participants argued that, as Black young people, they have to work harder than their white peers if they are to be successful in life (see Chapter 4). Sonia (16, F) explained this point in a more subtle way: ‘You need to do better than the average white person because they have more advantage to being let into a job position, for example, than you do because you are Black’. The comments by Sonia, Ava, Jarvis, Dara, and Calista illustrate the contexts in which Black young people experience inequality and limitations in cultural capital in areas such as education, type of neighbourhood and workplace.

### **5.2.1. Barriers within opportunities and lack of representation**

Participants identified how their differing experiences in accessing opportunities can affect their life outcomes. They reported that there are opportunities for them, specifically support programmes and bursaries targeted at people from minority ethnic groups. While they acknowledged that these represent progress compared to the past, they argued that there are also barriers to those opportunities. This scepticism was echoed by Ava and Maha.

Even though the opportunities are becoming more for us and like change for us, I still feel like there is a sort of barrier; right now I’m a part of a medical bursary and there are certain aspects to fulfil, like filling your medical applications, like you say gaining work experience which is way more easier for say to people that aren’t people of colour in the group to get because I guess they, their parents work in pharmacies or they are doctors already. So it’s more like they don’t really work as hard to find these opportunities that are sort of handed to them.

(Ava, 16, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

I feel like the advantages are getting more, and even within having that advantage, there’s still a disadvantage of reflecting who you are.

(Maha, 16, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

The issue of lack of representation for Black ethnic minorities was emphasised by participants as an important aspect of marginalisation. This observation aligns with existing literature on

ethnic diversity which highlights the underrepresentation of Black ethnic minorities in the teacher workforce, the creative sector and wider UK professions (Ali, 2020; Camilleri-Cassar, 2014; Francis, 2021; Maylor et al., 2006; Maylor et al., 2003; Sharp & Aston, 2024). Participants observed that even when there are seemingly few instances of representation, these often come across as merely tokenistic, suggesting a lack of true engagement and commitment to inclusivity. For example, Maha (16, F) thinks the targeted programmes for people of Black ethnic background may not be truly representative of who they are and their talents.

...Being a token, these programmes are really good. But there's always like that thought that you're only being aware, actually, because you are Black and because you are from that background. And if, like if you write on your CV and people see that they might, like me personally, I sometimes say that because I am in this programme oh people gonna think that am only deserving of this because of who I am and not like my talent and stuff so it's just tricky managing that I think.

(Maha, 16, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

Another aspect of the issue of representation is the insufficient representation of Black culture and mannerisms in educational settings. For instance, schools may require Black teachers in leadership roles who possess an understanding of Black cultural dynamics. The shortage of Black teachers, particularly male teachers, can be linked to the teacher education process (Maylor, 2018). Maylor points out that both the perceived undesirability of Black teachers in predominantly white classrooms and the challenges encountered during pre-service teacher training may undermine their commitment to the profession. This raises concerns about training and recruitment. The underrepresentation of Black teachers is further illustrated by Ejiro's (17, F) reference to schools that once had a higher number of Black teachers but no longer do.

You know what we were talking about representation and leadership. So I think there are statistics that say that 85% of white, out of all the schools, that 85% come from white teachers, whether that be actual Headteachers or actual teachers. And I think apart from the representation thing being like someone to defend, I think it's more of like a psychological mindset change because when you see people in that position, you feel that I can also do that as well...[...]. But when you see a Black Headteacher, which is very rare, or you see a Black assistant or deputy head, it makes you feel like they can

do this. I can do this as well. That's even like a motivation thing, and even I feel like if there were more Black Headteachers, a lot of school policies would definitely change, especially when it comes to hair, because there have been so many situations where obviously we've talked about the difference in dying hair.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Ejiro reiterated the positive effect of having Black teachers, who understand Black students' cultural values and can serve as motivation or role models (Louis & King, 2023; Maylor, 2018). I consider this to be useful in addressing the basic assumptions surrounding Black students, particularly the perception that being vocal and expressive equates to aggression. This misunderstanding often leads to unfair stereotypes and negative biases. Furthermore, there is the underrepresentation of Black cultural heritage in the curriculum content. Supporting Dejen's assertion on p.110 of this thesis, Bimbo (15, M) made a point about underrepresentation in the school curriculum, where Black ethnic minorities are not represented in the history curriculum.

Despite improved availability and accessibility in recent years, it appears to be specifically structured around race. Barriers to opportunities for Black young people still exist. Participants mentioned there were more advantages for white people and fewer advantages for Black people. I find from the narratives that this is partly due to parental background and class structure: few were in middle-class occupations, and the majority were in working-class occupations. Golda (13, F) illustrates the point that there are still disadvantages for Black young people despite the opportunities available:

I think that we have opportunities, but it's just that getting to the opportunities you have to work a lot harder than a lot of other people.

(Golda, 13, F, LS2, Grp1, Mar 2023)

Limited access affects opportunities in education, sports, and basic services such as housing and healthcare. One of the salient points in the House of Commons report on educational outcomes for Black pupils and students was the disparity for entrants to higher education (Roberts & Bolton, 2023). Gillborn and Youdell's (2009) study of two British schools indicates inequalities are reproduced in education through lower expectations of Black students in contrast to their white counterparts. They highlight the notion of rationing educational

opportunities, which I argue undermines individual talent and potential. Analysis of the discussions among participants indicates that there have not been significant changes since the findings of Gillborn and Youdell. Additionally, educational reforms and guidance appear to focus on implementing measures aimed at forcing an outlook of diversity and inclusion within the learning environment. The 2019 Ofsted guidance on school inspections (updated in 2024) includes references to cultural capital; however, it does not explicitly outline how this is implemented. It does not seem to address the specific concerns raised by participants, as illustrated in the extracts presented in section 5.2. The issue of low expectations of Black students and not recognising their potential was mentioned by participants, as Cara (14, F) and Luna (15, F) illustrate.

I feel like they underestimate our intelligence and stuff. The other set sees us like we are the dumb set; we are like, they put us all in one class...that's it.

(Cara, 14, F, LS1 Grp1, Nov 2022)

This is going to sound kind of like forced diversity in a way because, like, you know how universities do that thing where they say that they're going to pick, like, more Black people and stuff, which obviously is good. But at the same time, if you're only picking Black people to go to your school because they're Black and not because you actually see and recognise that they have the potential to do the same thing as a white person, then really, what's the point?

(Luna, 15, F, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

The points raised by Cara and Luna were similar to those made by Ejiro regarding the banding of grading sets and capping of abilities. In Ejiro's view, there is an element of racism which contributes to Black young people being put into lower streams. It may not be entirely an issue of racism, but it is also about understanding cultural values and Black young people's competencies and potential, rather than assumptions about their capabilities. Participants reported that some of these assumptions are based on the mannerisms of the Black young person, which are perceived as not aligned with a successful outcome. Moreover, the support available for budding talents may not be sufficient to help achieve the desired results (Bottian et al., 2016). Sasha (15, F) reported that 'people with lower grades or average grades, if you don't meet a certain behaviour in class, you are targeted, and then if you are a coloured person in that category as well, then you also get far more targeted, even further'. Participants were

concerned about not only the prospects of attaining good grades and gaining admission to quality UK universities, such as the Russell Group universities, but also workplace barriers. Dejen illustrates this when prompted further on examples of opportunities he was referring to.

In terms of routes for getting into universities or good universities, the Russell Group universities are routes for getting into good jobs.

(Dejen, 16, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

Many young people aspire to enrol in Russell Group universities, which are known for their prestigious standing. However, these institutions have rigorous admission criteria, leading some participants to voice concerns about their potential limitations and low grades. These top-ranking universities are recognised for their world-class research and education and play a significant role in providing opportunities for social mobility.

The inequities in educational access and the systemic barriers faced by Black young people present significant challenges that adversely affect their educational outcomes. These obstacles extend beyond academic performance; they profoundly influence the aspirations and ambitions of these young people, often limiting their potential and perpetuating a cycle of inequality deeply embedded in societal structures. A key aspect of the discussion on marginalisation is the feeling of not being heard, along with the widespread effects of economic and social deprivation, which resonate with the lived experiences of Black young people. The next section (5.2.2) will focus on these critical issues, emphasising the need for structural reforms and equitable practices within the educational system.

### **5.2.2. Addressing the effects of inequality**

Participants drew from their experiences growing up in Britain to share concerns about the impact of social inequality. This issue resonated deeply with their personal narratives and highlighted the disparities that have shaped their perspectives and development. Through their narratives, I observed a connection between inequality and the chances of thriving, as well as the effects of mistreatment and racism on them. There appears to be a common ground regarding the long-term effects of barriers that impede success in life. For example, several participants expressed that they would never achieve true equality, noting that their only option is to work considerably harder to be able to meet the standards of their white peers.



Beyond the critical issue of racial discrimination, which will be discussed in section 5.3, a notable concern among Black youth participants was the availability of equal educational opportunities. This raises the question: do the available educational opportunities truly apply to everyone? The straightforward response, as inferred from the participants' narratives, points to the barriers that hinder access to these opportunities. Existing inequalities and lack of equity have resulted in the marginalisation of certain groups and races. While social inequality is widespread in contemporary society, my emphasis is on equity, which involves treating individuals impartially and considering their needs and circumstances. This principle is closely linked to the overarching discourse regarding equitable access to opportunities, prompting a vital inquiry into the mechanisms governing the allocation of resources and advantages. Sasha (15, F) illustrates the lack of equity.

What I used to hear a lot is that for us to be equal, we have to be better and that always rubs the wrong way because then, if I'm not better, I will never be treated the same as everyone else.

(Sasha, 15, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Participants expressed a perception of inequity as an unfair advantage within the context of their lived experiences, particularly given the systemic challenges faced by themselves and their families. They contend that such contextual factors are frequently overlooked, even when opportunities are ostensibly available, thereby hindering the pathways to success. This underscores the importance of a critical understanding and application of equity principles. The inherent privileges afforded to their white peers do not provide Black young people with equivalent recognition and institutional support, which further exacerbates disparities in access to resources and the associated outcomes. For example, Sasha (15, F) expressed her frustration:

It does not matter how hard I fight if I'm not better than them, so they can't deny it anymore. I will never reach the point where I'm equal, and that scares me because what if I can't be better?

(Sasha, 15, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Sasha's perspective can be understood through the lens of equity and inclusion for all groups. Although the terms equity and equality are frequently used interchangeably, they represent fundamentally different concepts. A pertinent example can be found in the United Kingdom's

compulsory education policy, which mandates access to education until the age of 16, reflecting a legal framework aimed at ensuring uniformity in educational opportunity. This policy illustrates equality in access; however, achieving true equity may require additional measures to address individual differences in needs and circumstances among students. Equity takes into account the individual needs, backgrounds, and abilities of students, aiming to provide the necessary support to ensure equal opportunities for all. Van Vijfeijken et al. (2021) suggest that the ‘principle of equity justifies unequal distribution on the basis of students’ demonstrated abilities’(p.240). Participants’ perspectives concerning equity in education point to the importance of achieving equitable outcomes in the future. They stressed the need to address disparities in access to educational resources, alongside the need to consider the effects of the environment (see section 5.2.2.2) on higher education.

Dante illustrated how limited opportunities affect Black young people.

Many Black people might think that we don't have the same opportunities as everyone else. I feel like that's why they might resort to doing, bad things because they feel like what's the point of me working like to do this if like it's not like the same, like we don't get the same equality, that's why so they might just wanna, they might just feel like they don't care, so they might just do whatever, that it results to violence or crime or whatever.

(Dante (14, M, LS2, Grp1, Mar 2023))

Dante raises a compelling point that needs a deeper exploration: the underlying factors that might lead some Black young people to engage in criminal behaviour. It appears that a significant aspect of this issue is connected to frustrations arising from limited access to opportunities, which can leave young people feeling deprived and disillusioned. Additionally, the experience of social isolation further compounds these feelings, creating an environment in which young people may feel disconnected from society and its resources. Understanding these contributing factors is crucial for addressing the underlying causes of crime within these communities.

In a similar manner, actively listening to their voices and considering their concerns could alleviate fears related to a lack of equity and unfair advantages. Black young people are concerned about the long-term implications of existing inequities on their future. The study

also identified other dimensions of inequality, such as feelings of not being listened to and the adverse effects of material deprivation.

#### **5.2.2.1. Not listening to young people**

The feeling of being voiceless and having their concerns ignored is a common aspect of marginalisation frequently experienced by Black young people. Existing literature suggests that youth practitioners and academic researchers generally emphasise that listening to young people matters (Creswick et al., 2019; Davidson, 2013; Hadfield & Haw, 2001; Jones & Lucas, 2023). The absence of such engagement can lead to serious adverse effects, including profound feelings of isolation that disconnect individuals from their social networks. Furthermore, when young people lack a platform to express their views, they may encounter barriers to personal empowerment, leading to a perception that their views and lived experiences hold little value. For instance, Salma (15, F) articulated her feelings of marginalisation in relation to her involvement in football and a modelling agency, highlighting her experiences of being disregarded. When asked to explain the challenges she faced and whether she had the chance to discuss them with anyone, Salma's response was: 'I have brought it up to my modelling before, like probably last year. And there is not really any change... There, I am one of the only Black girls on the team. It is mainly just people that are not my colour, and it does not feel very, like the outside society, does not feel very inclusive sometimes'. Salma also mentioned her experience of being the only person of colour in her football team: Salma said, 'They [people of colour] are kind of left out but like not included so much'. The feelings of despair over being ignored and a lack of active voice were expressed by participants. Devan (14, M) stated, 'You can say what you want, but don't think anyone will listen.' Devan felt unacknowledged and lacked the empowerment to initiate change.

Several participants reported that their views were overlooked during school council meetings, citing a lack of opportunity to voice their concerns. They characterised their experience as one of tokenism, which left them feeling dismissed and marginalised, as if their viewpoints had little value in the decision-making process. Abi (14, F), Cara (14, F), Ejiro (17, F), and Dunya (14, F) illustrate this point.

The school council, even when you do have the meetings, they will kind of dismiss like when people talk about their hair, they say it's disruptive or challenging the school rules.

(Abi, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

The school make it seem like they give us these opportunities but I know it's not going to change. They try to make it seem like they are listening to us, but sometimes they don't; they are not going to change, really, even if you tell them how inconsiderate their rules are to Black people; they see us, like smiling, but they won't change the rules, it won't stop.

(Cara, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

They have various school councils. We're going to bring up the issue of race and want to make Black people feel welcome. All of that stuff is BS [bullshit] because it's the same conversation every single time, but nothing has been done about it. Absolutely nothing.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

It feels like they undermine sometimes. Like how you feel, your experience and stuff. It's like they undermine what you think and how you feel. Like you'll be talking, like long story short, Black people have a busy... and they don't understand? So instead of trying to understand and trying to sympathise... it feels like they're trying to undermine how you feel and make your problems become...

(Dunya, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

These comments underscore a gap in providing Black young people with a dedicated platform to express their thoughts and concerns within the school environment. While the school council may be intended to facilitate conversations around important issues, it has fallen short of effectively addressing the unique perspectives and needs of this group of students. As a result, many feel their voices are not being heard or valued in the decision-making processes that directly impact their educational experience.

This study's findings indicate that participants actively seek to exercise agency by having their

perspectives acknowledged. They indicated a strong desire to be recognised as social actors in their own right, aiming to leverage their voices to address issues of marginalisation, lack of inclusivity, and social inequality. The results show that despite the presence of tokenistic initiatives, such as encouraging participation in the school council as a forum for involvement, these young people are systematically overlooked. This systematic dismissal has resulted in considerable frustration over the lack of recognition and validation of their voices. Dunya explains:

They just don't understand, and it's frustrating but also again alienating. When you believe in something and you really want to tell people about it, really want them to, but they can't sympathise with you.

(Dunya, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Over the years, the demand for inclusion of youth voices in decision-making has intensified, sometimes occasioned by social unrest like the English riots of 2011 and the widespread protests of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. A prevalent viewpoint suggests that young people are marginalised in policymaking due to perceptions of their immaturity. Conversely, there are those who think young people should be heard less because adults inherently possess superior knowledge and experiential insight. It has also been contended that adults have a duty of care to young people. This perspective aligns with the discourse on the adult-child power dynamics highlighted in Chapter 2. However, the necessity of engaging with young people transcends the traditional adult responsibility of care and the relevant policy guidelines for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). When discussing important issues that affect young people today, like climate change, their sense of identity, education opportunities, and getting involved in politics, one key finding stands out: young people want their opinions and voices to be heard. As Hickman (2020) suggests, young people are often silenced because they say certain uncomfortable things which adults and authorities do not tolerate. Participants expressed feeling that voicing concerns about hair rules, microaggressions, and instances of unfair treatment often portray them as rude, disruptive or problematic. For example, the comments of Tola (14, F), Salma (15, F) and Sasha (15, F) allude to these concerns.

Like if you go to a teacher and say something, they tell us we can say it, we can go to them with problems and stuff. We should go to the teacher, oh like this is happening

and let's say I was going to the teacher that something really isn't working, they'd be like, this is how it's been, that the institution has been like this since they began and so I don't think my personal complaint will change anything.

(Tola, 14, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

When you talk to somebody about a Black girl, they're expecting them to be, like, loud, aggressive, and their hair should be done this and that. But when you, when you really come to think about it, that's like me saying that white people should be the same, like, have one picture of them in our head.

(Salma, 15, F, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

There was this white boy on a group chat with us who made a racist statement. And then we tried to report him because what our school does is that they love to promote the fact that we support everyone and that we love LGBTQ, disabled, everyone and that if you have problems, you come to us and we'll help you fix it. So when this happened on this group chat, he made an inappropriate joke about selling Africans. And then we were like uncomfortable. So we all went to a teacher. The minute we brought it up, all of a sudden, it was shut down... The main girl reporting him first was sitting in ISS [In-school suspension]. So it was all unfair, and we, I think my parents, got involved with it, but apparently they had concrete evidence that they weren't willing to show us. That made us deserve to be in isolation and in our reflection.

(Sasha, 15, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

The shared experiences of participants illustrate how racial bias can influence marginalisation. The feelings of being dismissed and ignored were attributed to entrenched stereotypes associated with their racial identities. This sentiment is further stressed by Salma and Sasha, who both articulated the frustrating reality of navigating a world where their voices are frequently disregarded due to their racial backgrounds. Next, I will explore deprivation as a critical determinant of yet another aspect of marginalisation, demonstrating how deprivation contributes to inequality.

#### **5.2.2.2. Deprivation**

The concept of deprivation was illustrated through narratives about low-income housing and life within council estates, which are sometimes associated with higher crime rates, and

environments characterised by limited opportunities. Deprivation pertains to particular conditions and circumstances that can hinder individuals from leading fulfilling lives. Material deprivation may explain why participants noted that their parents often engage in relentless work efforts, often necessitating working multiple jobs to care for family members and meet familial obligations. Emily (16, NB) was of the view that ‘... your parents' experiences obviously, ultimately become your own sometimes’. Hiba also illustrates the aspect of deprivation resulting from the effect of parental background.

Both of my parents grew up in Sierra Leone. They came here looking for better opportunities to give me and my siblings, which is why I'm very grateful for this. They worked really hard so that we could have a comfortable life here.

(Hiba, 17, LS1, Grp2, Nov 2022)

The phenomenon of cultural deprivation is particularly pronounced in predominantly white neighbourhoods. In these densely populated settings, the cultural norms and values of minority groups are often overshadowed, not just by the majority demographic but also by societal elites. Participants observed that individuals living in areas with fewer representations of Black ethnicities may experience loss of cultural values, such as language and certain traditional practices. Furthermore, children's developmental experiences can be positively or negatively shaped by the socio-economic landscape of their neighbourhoods, highlighting the influence of class structure on children's attainment. Calista said:

I think it's different for everyone, not only for just like race and cultural stuff. It could also be like the initial growing up. Some people could be born in more high-cost areas, and some people could be born in low-cost areas.

(Calista, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Building on Calista's point, Larisa shared her feelings of cultural inferiority and her concern that she was on the verge of losing her cultural practices and skills. This was largely due to the predominantly white neighbourhood in which she lived until she began attending a new school, where she participated in the group discussions.

I grew up a little bit differently from this area [referring to London School 2 location] because the area that I live in is far. I mean, it's like majority white. So, the way I grew

up was a bit like I wasn't around Black people all the time because the people in my neighbourhood were all white, and my whole world was all white. So I was just, there were certain things that I wouldn't do. I wouldn't say it would seem as weird, but I was like, you can say, in a way, I was what people would say is whitewashed. I used to be, I didn't know how to do my hair. I didn't know how to braid. I didn't know how to do anything that society would expect the Black girl to do until I started coming to this area, and I felt more included because I was around more Black people and more people of my colour and have the same hair as me and stuff like that.

(Larisa, 14, F, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

The dynamics of cultural deprivation can significantly impact young people's ability to succeed, particularly those from working-class backgrounds. This phenomenon limits access to essential resources needed for educational achievement, which in turn hinders learning processes and overall performance. While attention is often given to school-related factors, such as the quality of teaching and the curriculum that affect higher attainment levels, the perceived underachievement of working-class children may stem from deficiencies in individual capabilities linked to cultural deprivation. This factor, which exists outside the school, contributes to inequalities (Fu et al., 2015; Parsons, 2016; Spencer, 2012). The influence of cultural deprivation on socialisation was highlighted by Sonia (16, F), who articulated how an individual's environment can significantly impact their educational experiences.

Ejiro emphasises the possible linkage of deprivation, resulting in poverty, with crime.

I imagine having a family and a very small salary in this economy. Then it turns into poverty; what does poverty turn to? Crime. So it's like this vicious cycle.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

The interplay between cultural deprivation and social inequalities is closely linked to the concept of cultural capital, underscoring the influence of social class on the educational outcomes of ethnic minority students. Participants' accounts indicate a perception that crime and anti-social behaviour are prevalent in economically disadvantaged areas. The findings from these narratives show that social class is a key factor in inequality, highlighting participants' experiences of marginalisation. Similarly, cultural differences often afford advantages to



individuals from middle and upper socio-economic strata, which the education system tends to acknowledge and reward disproportionately compared to those from working-class backgrounds. This inherent disparity not only reinforces existing social hierarchies but also perpetuates a cyclical pattern in which students from marginalised groups struggle to access the same opportunities.

### **5.3. Racial discrimination**

This section explores how participants make meaning of marginalisation through discussions about racial discrimination. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, race influenced the dynamics of discussions within this study group. This influence comes from the fact that discrimination marginalises the individuals involved. Racial discrimination encompasses any treatment that differentiates individuals based on their race, ancestry, or ethnic origin, and this distinction may sometimes be subtle. Although participants frequently engaged in discussions about racism in relation to social inequality and identity, I have opted to delineate racial discrimination as a distinct theme within the overarching framework of marginalisation. This approach helps to focus on how racial discrimination contributes to marginalisation and intersects with other dimensions such as cultural, educational, and political factors. It reflects how Black young people perceive and articulate issues of marginalisation from various perspectives. Culturally, racial discrimination can lead to a lack of representation (section 5.2) and validation of diverse identities. Educationally, systemic barriers in schools, such as lower expectations from teachers and fewer resources in marginalised communities, can widen the attainment gap, limiting potential future opportunities. Politically, the underrepresentation of minority groups in decision-making processes can result in policies that fail to address the needs and rights of Black young people, perpetuating cycles of inequality. Furthermore, the sense of alienation stemming from racial discrimination compounds existing challenges of marginalisation. Therefore, through the theme of racial discrimination, this analysis aims to provide a clearer understanding of its ramifications while also acknowledging the interconnectedness of other marginalising factors in their lived experiences.

The experiences of discrimination based on race resonate with other themes identified in this study. This connection arises largely because race has become a topic of discussion among participants, who often feel that they are viewed primarily through the lens of their racial identity (Chapter 4). The theme of racial discrimination, as revealed in the data analysis, further

supports the literature reviewed for this study. Participants' heightened awareness of racial issues underscores the agency and reflexivity of Black young people - an aspect that will be further explored in Chapter 6. Participants think racial discrimination contributed to their feelings of marginalisation, social isolation and exclusion. They were of the view that negative stereotypes about Blacks are being advanced in the literature, television, movies and news media. Discrimination manifests in various forms of exclusion, particularly in educational settings, where participants noted limited Black history content in curricula. This absence not only limits their understanding of their own heritage but also diminishes the visibility of Black contributions to society. Similarly, in workplace environments, discriminatory practices can lead to unequal opportunities. The intersection of these experiences shapes a complex landscape where race significantly influences the lives of Black young people, rendering them acutely aware of their identity, marked by persistent stereotypes and exclusionary practices.

Exploring racial discrimination offers the opportunity to understand the various ways in which Black young people encounter racial injustice. The perception of such discrimination often drives them to conform to the standards of the dominant white culture. This clearly reinforces the notion of false belonging to the dominant white group, which has implications for microaggression (Sue et al., 2007). The feelings of marginalisation were attributed to systemic racial discrimination. The impacts of this systemic discrimination are particularly evident in areas such as access to opportunities, education, and employment. In the next section, I will explore the various aspects of discriminatory practices as discussed by participants.

### **5.3.1. Discriminatory practices**

Discrimination encompasses a wide array of actions, including everyday racialised language, harassment, implicit biases, and systemic prejudices. The impact is not limited to issues of race; it also encompasses broader social exclusions that are particularly pronounced in educational settings and workplaces. These forms of discrimination create barriers that hinder individuals from fully participating and thriving, ultimately perpetuating cycles of marginalisation. As discussed in Chapter 4, participants in this study had to adjust to the realities of their social environment (Skulmowski et al., 2014). Many of them had to find a way, albeit uncomfortable, to navigate the experience of growing up as a Black minority in a predominantly white British society. Don (14, M) illustrates some of the difficult choices they had to make in order to fit into this context.

If you're not comfortable with who you are, like where you come from, around other people, you feel like you have to hide them, like fit with them, like change how you are like, make yourself like kind of, what the community would love and I don't think that you'll be yourself.

(Don, 14, M, LS2, Grp2 Mar 2023)

Don's comment can be interpreted as suggesting personality and identity issues that are race-related. I would argue that concealing one's true self relates to masking one's identity, echoing the theme of identity denial discussed in Chapter 4. The underlying assumption for this behaviour is often to achieve social acceptance amid racial prejudice. There is also a connection between this act of conforming attitude to the broader workplace practice of masking one's identity among Black ethnic minority people to fit in. Research has shown a disconnect in personality among ethnic minorities who conceal their true personality in the workplace to cope with discriminatory and oppressive practices (Alleyne, 2004; Dickens et al., 2019; Ferguson & Dougherty, 2022; McCluney et al., 2021; Pendleton, 2017). The lack of an intersectional perspective in job recruitment further exacerbates the challenges faced by candidates, a concern expressed by the participants. Koval and Rosette (2021) highlight the biases against Black women's natural hairstyles in the recruitment process, which often leads to them being perceived as less professional and thus diminishes the chances of securing job interviews. As a result, the fear of judgment, rejection, and discrimination has led some Black women to modify their hairstyles in pursuit of job opportunities and during interviews. Although the issue of racial identity has been discussed in Chapter 4, it demonstrates how the impact of racial discrimination further entrenches marginalisation.

Golda shares a perspective similar to Don's regarding how predetermined behaviour shapes conduct, especially in public. I argue that this can lead to a diminished sense of individuality among young people, potentially affecting their personalities in adulthood. Golda said:

I feel like most Black people, especially our age, from when you're younger, your parents would have told you about these things. If you're Black, they would have told you about police, how you have to act when it comes to, when you're around, like white people

(Golda, 13, F, LS2, Grp1, )

Tega expressed concern about the awareness of being Black during interactions with others and the anxiety about getting into trouble.

I feel like being a young man, and especially being Black, there are some things that you can't be. Like, let's say I'm walking home at night, and there's a woman in front of me, like my sister always told me to cross the road. So that she won't, like the woman herself, I won't feel scared and like so that I can just reduce any risk of getting in trouble.

(Tega, 16, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

Angelo's response to Tega's comment was notably assertive in his analysis of discriminatory practices and living to conform to other people's standards in a way that references unfair treatment.

I feel that the fact that you have to live your life like that just shows that this world is not, because why should I, as a Black man, cross the road? I am not saying you have to, but why should I feel that I have to do that to satisfy someone else because of how you may perceive me? That's another example of Black, that is unfair. Well, it's not right to be honest.

(Angelo, 17, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

Participants did not explicitly mention experiences of discriminatory practices within the healthcare systems; however, there was mention of its impact on their mental health. Existing literature indicates the prevalence of such practices, particularly affecting Black young people in care and mental health facilities (Drydak, 2024; Ojo-Aromokudu et al., 2023). Additionally, another critical dimension of this issue involves the systemic discrimination and unjust treatment that Black young people face within the criminal justice system. These adverse experiences contribute to mental health challenges, which are linked to the broader implications of racial discrimination and marginalisation. For instance, Calista emphasised the importance of addressing mental health and noted that societal perceptions can affect their mental well-being. Calista describes it:

I think the most important thing really is probably mental health because, as a person, I feel like a lot of things in my life would negatively or positively have heavily affected my mental health and can be like a catalyst for a lot of things that people do and say in their lives. And so I feel like mental health is a big issue... I think, in general, mental

health can be like just like the way you present yourself and the way other people perceive you, because when other people perceive you differently from the way you perceive yourself, it just makes you change the whole way you see yourself. And then, inevitably, it affects your mental health because you're not only doubting yourself, you let other people think for you.

(Calista, 14, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

In relation to the previously discussed issue of conformity and forced identity (Chapter 4), Calista's observations amplify the complexities of identity and personality shifts and their implications for mental health. Similarly, Ejiro explained how different forms of racial discrimination and microaggressions can adversely affect mental health.

There are those, kind of, small things [participating in protests] that make a difference, just trying to see that you're not the only person that is going through that situation because I thought that sometimes yeah, when you're being targeted in the places where you're meant to be protected, it can take a toll on your mental health. And I remember seeing it after the Euros. I remember crying. I was like, wow, this is really the UK. Black footballers getting abused when it was the white guy that really missed the penalties and opportunities to score, like those small things and microaggressions you get, like people walking away from you when you wanna ask a question on the street.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

There was a strong sentiment during discussions that discriminatory practices are common and can lead to an alteration of one's personality, which becomes an accepted norm. The discourse on identity continues to be relevant, even after its exploration with critical consciousness in Chapter 4, due to its connection with the dynamics of marginalisation. In exploring the experiences of individuals who face marginalisation, it is essential to understand the specific identities that define these individuals. The concepts of false identity and identity manipulation for the sake of convenience and social acceptance carry significant implications for marginalisation. While participants may not completely substitute one identity with another (Segovia & Bailenson, 2013), it is evident that they ascribe an additional layer of identity to themselves as a result of the discriminatory experiences they encounter. The behavioural implication of this phenomenon is that an individual may act differently, disconnecting their actions from core beliefs and values that shape their identity and instead, acting out a

manipulated identity. This indicates a wider issue of systemic injustice that is embedded within the framework of marginalisation. As a result, Black young people often face difficult situations where their decisions and actions are shaped by external pressures, which can limit their ability to make choices that truly reflect their desires.

### **5.3.1.1. Criminalising Blackness**

The findings indicate that discriminatory practices often contribute to the disproportionate criminalisation of Black young people. Participants recounted their experiences with the stigma of being labelled as criminals, especially in contrast to their non-Black peers. They employed a racial lens to illustrate instances of discriminatory practices in their narratives. Caleb (15, M) and Sonia (16, F) cited examples of discriminatory practices in both sports and interactions with law enforcement.

It hasn't happened to me personally. I hear stories about Black people and how specifically they are searched more. I guess that is an instance where they are treated unfairly.

(Caleb, 15, M, LS1, Grp4, Nov 2022)

I think the difficult one might be sports in the UK because I mean generally, if you, let's take the English team, for example, how many Black people are there? ...Like, there's not that many Black people in, if you look at the English team in general. So, I thought that was an area in which Black people would find it harder to get into.

(Sonia, 16, F, LS1, Grp2, Nov 2022)

The presumption that Black young people entering retail shops are predisposed to theft or might be carrying knives, characterises an unjust generalisation. Many participants recounted the experience of being labelled as criminals, pointing to a common pattern among people of Black ethnic background. Harmony (13, F) and Amoy (14, F) said:

Especially if you are walking into a shop like a big group and people are like all Black, they just kind of assume that you have, like, let us say, knives on you, guns on you. They just assume what they actually do not know.

(Harmony, 13, F, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

I remember when I walked into Superdrug the other day, their security guard was white. Because I was waiting for my bus, I was not really buying anything. I was walking around, and she followed me around the entire shop. Then, at the shop's door, she asked if there was anything in my bag, and I said no. Then I just walked out.

(Amoy, 14, F, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

These narratives show that their perception of fairness was linked to racial prejudices and stereotypes. Negative stereotypes associated with Black people (section 5.3.2) have been linked to criminalising people of the Black race. For example, stop and search, police brutality and the assumption that Black young people are likely to steal in shops are a few of the identified discriminatory practices.

The cumulative impact of discriminatory encounters can be profound and varied, often resulting in diminished self-esteem and feelings of marginalisation among affected individuals. These difficult social realities call for targeted interventions that promote a more inclusive society. The next section will explore how media channels contribute to the perpetuation of discriminatory practices.

#### **5.3.1.2. Media channels impact**

Participants discussed how media representations of Black young people perpetuate racial discrimination and systemic racism. The portrayal of Black people as criminals is often done through the media. They articulated the belief that various forms of media, such as television, radio broadcasts, and print, impact public perceptions of Black people. This influence is evident in the persistence of harmful stereotypes and a widespread misunderstanding of Blackness.

Tega feels the negative perception of Black people in the media needs to change.

I feel like we need to change the media because that's where a lot of Black stereotypes come from. And if the media is the first thing people see, of course, they gonna think of us badly. Of course, they're gonna think of us in that way. Like, and especially like, even durags are associated with drugs. And I feel like that could be a part of why they see us as such.

(Tega, 16, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

In addition to Tega mentioning the print media, other participants were also concerned about negative representation on social media, as Akin and Gozie illustrate.

I think social media as well because you see when the Euros happened and like Rashford, Saka and Sancho [English men's national football team players], they missed the penalty. And for like a period of time, they were getting racially abused, and certain times you could even see there's like points awarded when you do something to Black people like, if you slap a Black person, you get like five points or something like that and things like that. Now you see on snap stories things like that. I didn't want to come to school that day just in case I just got run over or so. Like, it's not even funny. I did not want to come to school because I was actually genuinely scared because I didn't know. It's just a scary thing, and I don't want that to, like, happen to say my kids in the future. I don't want them to experience something like that.

(Akin, 15, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

There was a time on Instagram when I saw, it was the period when Saka and Rashford missed a penalty, so I saw Saka, what they edited, and they made him look like a monkey.

(Gozie, 14, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

Sipho pointed to media flattery of Black people and questioned the descriptive emphasis on Black when reporting events or achievements about Black people.

When Black people invent stuff or actually do stuff you always see on the news or the media. The first Black person to do this, like, I don't know, that just pisses me off. But if a white person invents it, they will not be, like the first white person to do this. They will not put white in it. They'll just put the person's name. But if a Black person invents something or achieves something, it will be like the first Black person to do it. And I'm like, why are they putting Black in it? Like they're human? Just put their name. They're as normal as anyone.

(Sipho, 14, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

The mainstream media framing of Black young people within negative contexts, especially concerning issues such as gang and knife violence, often depicts them as victims of criminal



activities. Participants expressed concern over this unfavourable coverage, stressing the need for change in media narratives. A common narrative during discussions was the call for a more positive representation of Black culture, with many asserting that this can be achieved by increasing the visibility of Black individuals in diverse media roles. They expressed hope that amplifying Black stories is essential for reshaping perceptions and fostering a more accurate and uplifting representation in the media.

### **5.3.2. Stereotyping**

Stereotyping was mentioned in Chapter 4 in the context of developing critical consciousness and Othering. This section shifts the focus to how stereotypes perpetuate marginalisation, exploring the ways in which these preconceived notions contribute to this process. Negative stereotypes associated with specific social groups exacerbate their marginalised status within societal structures. This limits their chances of meaningful social engagement and diminishes their status as equal stakeholders with other communities. During discussions, participants used stereotypes to convey feelings of racial discrimination. Unlike the broader definition of stereotypes, participants indicated that their experiences with stereotyping were particularly linked to racism, mirroring many other themes discussed. Their use of stereotypes pointed to the predetermined categorisation of Black people, typically made without considering their individual personalities and identities. Participants discussed certain assumptions about the manners and behaviours of Black young people. Stereotypes were described in various ways depending on the experience and what they thought. Cara was of the opinion that Black young people were assumed to be ‘loud and ghetto’, and often seen as causing trouble. She observed that this stereotype might explain why teachers often intervened, asking them to disperse from groups to prevent fights whenever they were in groups socialising. Dara (17, F) and Ava (17, F) have similar views.

When they see us smiling and clapping and looking happy and just talking to each other, there is no reason for them to split us up because they pre-empt us as having a fight, which shouldn't happen.

(Dara, 17, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

In secondary school, it happens a lot as you sit back having a little debate, and the teacher walks by and says, can you guys split up, like go that way, go that way, stop talking? Only speak to one person at a time. It's kind of weird because we won't always

just be speaking to one person...I feel like they have the presumption that Black people are loud and aggressive because they don't know how to behave, they don't know how to conduct themselves, things like that...they just have that assumption that oh something bad is going to come out of this or they need to learn how to behave well like it's just, yeah. It's not that there is something they're actually physically doing but this is just something in their minds.

(Ava, 17, F, LS1, Grp3, Nov 2022)

Ejiro (17, F) emphasised the connection between stereotyping and the assumption that Black young people are unable to attain high academic grades. This insight resonates with a previous discussion on grade banding and the capping of abilities mentioned in section 5.2.1, where the issue of access to opportunities was explored. Ejiro narrates her experience:

Especially with the whole campaign on your ability. So I remember, at one point, I wanted to apply to Cambridge. Happy I didn't. I remember I told my teacher I knew my predicted grade would increase because I was trying to apply to Cambridge, and I said I just needed one grade to move from B to A. And he laughed and was like Cambridge, I think that you are going to get a B. I mean like, it's sad that like those little things.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Analysis of the data indicates that certain stereotypes may have originated within the Black community, particularly among parents who fear that their children may not achieve success because of their race. In seeking a deeper understanding of stereotyping among Black young people, I analysed participants' critical perspectives to facilitate a constructive dialogue on the topic. The notion that Black people may inadvertently contribute to stereotypes about themselves will be explored further in Chapter 6. This critical viewpoint was expressed by Dante, Tega and Angelo who brought valuable insights to this discourse.

I was going to say even though people look at us in a bad way. That, as soon as we go to shops and things like that I feel like, even though it's not all Black people, we've kind of done it to ourselves.

(Dante, 14, M, LS2, Grp1, Mar 2023)

But ultimately, we have helped, we have made it worse for ourselves than other people have. We have that, we've been told in the history lessons that we've been loud, we've been disruptive. We've been, we've killed ourselves, we've been fighting among ourselves in gang wars, and all of this, and like if we don't change ourselves, what can we change?

(Tega, 16, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

So I feel like this has caused us Blacks to paint a picture of us being like the type of people who would steal, so that has caused everyone to keep an eye on us. So I feel like even though, I feel like we slightly did it to ourselves, but also I feel like it's not really something that could have been 100% like we could have changed, but we have kind of been put in that position.

(Angelo, 17, M, LS3, Mar 2023)

This phenomenon of reverse stereotyping has led Black parents to advise their children to work twice as hard as their white peers. While participants argued that state institutions perpetuate these stereotypes, it is important to acknowledge that parents may have also internalised this belief. Emily (16, NB) appears to make this point, and the issue of westernising names to avoid certain stereotypes.

It's just a stereotype that's been perpetuated through institutions like the police and education system. And just mentioning about like, as Black people, you are often told as children we have to work quite as hard for opportunities. A lot of the reason why I'm called Emily is not only just because my grandma calls me Emily, because it's not a stereotypically Black name, so I'm not gonna, like me I'm less likely to be discriminated, discriminated against when it comes to like having my name on a resume or having my name in, like photograph.

(Emily, 16, NB, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Emily's comment highlights the broader conversation around identity and marginalisation in society. It is interesting to see how names can carry cultural weight and influence perceptions. Emily's reference to name stigmatisation is linked to ethnicity, which Stelta and Degner (2018) refer to as 'name stereotypicality' (p.1), further illuminating elements of marginalisation. Just as Black hairstyles impact the experiences of Black people in workplace settings, so too can

names. Emily noted that if the name Emily, which is perceived as Western, were to feature on a resume, there would be a reduced likelihood of discrimination based on race. Stelta and Degner (2018) suggest that ‘merely knowing a person’s name activates a wealth of expectation’ (p.1). These expectations lean towards defining the person's ethnic group and perhaps socio-economic status. For example, Dunya (14, F) mentioned that ‘a lot of these assumptions are based on someone's name’. Ejiro (17, F) also narrated the experience of her cousin who attended a job interview; the recruiters were surprised to see a Black woman because the name on her CV did not suggest her Black ethnicity. They had anticipated meeting a white woman because the name appeared to be an English name.

I will say what happened to my cousin. I can't say her name because of... [confidentiality], yeah, but basically what happened is I'll say her first name, no I'll say the last name. So her first name is called [...] and then her last name is Portuguese and Irish. But they thought her last name was [...], but her last name was not said correctly, which is [...], it has an apostrophe. And so she came in and they thought her first name was [...] an Irish name. First, they thought she made a mistake on the application. So when she got there, they were thinking of seeing a white woman. And then she turned up and they're like, oh, we weren't expecting you.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

The criminal stereotypes attributed to Black young people are greatly influenced by their portrayal in films and movies, which reflect general media representations (section 5.3.1.2). Some literature suggests a wide disparity in the proportionality of Black boys' involvement with the UK criminal and justice system compared to white boys (Robertson & Wainwright, 2020). These disparities contribute to systemic marginalisation, highlighting critical issues of equity and justice. Participants noted that negative stereotypes associated with Black young people place them in the spotlight. Don, Salma, and Larisa illustrated criminal stereotypes portrayed in film characters.

Even with movies, like in Black Lightning [a movie], it's all about shooting and like different types of gangs and stuff and police brutality.

(Don, 14, M, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

Literally, all Black boys are doing what people expect Black boys to do, which is committing crimes, not being as successful as a white, living in Council Estates, smoking, and selling drugs, it's all associated with...[top boy movie]. All the Black, all the police officers in the movie, most of them were white, stopping Black boys for no reason and stuff like that. It's just that when you see a crime movie nowadays, you're expecting it to be a Black boy selling drugs or smoking weed.

(Salma, 15, F, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

So whenever it's a white movie, it will be like the successful white boy who lives with a rich family and all of this. But when it is a Black boy, he is the one holding guns and selling drugs and as much as it is such a stereotype, and some of them are true, either way, people should not be setting this view.

(Larisa, 14, F, LS2, Grp2, Mar 2023)

The above extracts reference the racialisation of the Black race in the film industry. Movies such as *Black Lightning* and *Top Boy* feature Black boys and girls in roles performing negative stereotypes. It depicts racialised views of Black young people as unsuccessful and associated with failure, illegal drugs and gang activities. Participants expressed concerns that associating Blackness with such vices in films could influence how they are perceived in society. On the positive side, Black actors signal progress towards racial diversity and social inclusion in the context of increased representation in Black British films (Nwonka & Malik, 2018). In contrast to portraying white privilege, the film industry promotes negative stereotypes of Blacks, which resonates with racial stereotypes (Hughey, 2009), and it effectively contributes to the 'problematisation of the Black British community' (Nwonka & Malik, 2018, p.1123). Larissa's comment supports the view that certain criminal activities, such as drug, knife and gun violence, may indeed be associated with Black young people. However, this perspective risks being overrepresented. Similarly, Dante (14, M) and Golda (13, F) contended that though some Black people may be involved in theft, anyone could commit such acts, making it unnecessary to stereotype Black people specifically.

Racial discrimination adds another layer to the experience of marginalisation faced by Black youth through social exclusion, stereotypes and alienation. Although social inequality exists across various segments of society, particularly within the class structures prevalent in every society, the minority ethnic status of participants offered explanations for the substantial gap.

Additionally, the lack of cultural capital was evident as a significant barrier to access to resources and opportunities. Despite these challenges, participants conveyed a sense of optimism, which is discussed in Chapter 6.

#### **5.4. Chapter summary**

This chapter offered valuable insights into how Black young people perceive marginalisation, examined through the themes of social inequality, cultural capital, and racial discrimination. The analysis shows that marginalisation is a complex issue that varies depending on the context. Due to a complex interplay of various factors, some of which are highlighted in the findings, the impact of marginalisation can differ across social groups. The findings demonstrate that participants' perceptions reflect elements of race-related issues as they attempted to express their feelings of marginalisation. This is not surprising given that the research specifically focused on Black ethnic minority participants.

The findings highlight the critical role of cultural capital in understanding the attainment gap and the systemic inequalities experienced by Black young people. The lack of cultural capital could affect Black young people's progression to higher education, drawing attention to structural barriers - in terms of socio-economic constraints, limited access to resources and a lack of representation - that inhibit opportunities for advancement. Participants expressed experiences of disadvantage, limited opportunities, access barriers, underrepresentation, and social inequality. Individuals from underprivileged backgrounds and distinct cultural values often feel a sense of alienation from the dominant white culture (Tuttle, 2022; Vo, 2021). All of these highlight the complex issues of marginalisation that intersect with various cultural elements.

In this chapter, I examined how racial discrimination affects the experience of stereotypes and criminalisation. These factors contribute to the complex web of marginalisation that many face. This issue is closely linked to social inequality, as racial discrimination can restrict access to quality education and limit opportunities for Black ethnic groups, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities and perpetuating cycles of marginalisation. I argue that racial discrimination is not merely an isolated issue of bias and prejudice; rather, it is a deeply entrenched, systemic problem that permeates every facet of society. This extends to economic structures that often favour a privileged minority, political systems that overlook the needs of marginalised groups,

and educational environments that do not provide equitable resources and support. Furthermore, disparities in healthcare and negative cultural perceptions serve to reinforce these inequalities. As previously stated in the introduction of this chapter, all of these elements are interconnected with race, drawing attention to the wider problem of racial injustice faced by individuals in this demographic. Consequently, racial discrimination sustains a cycle of inequality that restricts opportunities and further perpetuates marginalisation. This cycle worsens existing inequalities and creates barriers to achievement and social mobility, underscoring the need for systemic change to address both its overt and more subtle forms of discrimination.

Table 5.1 summarises the areas where participants identified marginalisation. This includes identity issues presented in Chapter 4, all of which collectively contributed to the feeling of marginalisation.

*Table 5.1. Identified areas of marginalisation*

Identified issues	Context
Unequal opportunities	Opportunities have improved; however, they seem to be specifically designed for Black young people without sufficient consideration for cultural capital.
Curriculum	The school curriculum is not inclusive. The education curriculum needs reform to incorporate positive elements of Black history.
Decision making	Black young people often feel unheard and marginalised in decision-making processes. Their voices are not being heard.
Media coverage	There is still a huge gap in Black representation. In addition, there is an overrepresentation of criminal activities.
Black stereotypes	Assumptions about Black young people are often misleading and this can limit access to opportunities and success.
Hairstyle rules	The focus is on hairstyle regulations that limit the expression of Black culture and identity. Modifying these policies to take into consideration their concerns is needed.
Racism	Perceptions and treatment of Black people are connected to race. Although attitudes towards them may not be overtly racist, experiences of microaggressions and discrimination are common. Increasing awareness of racism requires encouraging ongoing discussions.

Participants articulated their perceptions of marginalisation in ways that reflected their distinct circumstances and identities. This emphasises the interconnectedness of ethnic identity, inequality, and marginalisation. The constantly evolving and adaptive nature of social construction suggests that a paradigm shift in mindset is possible over time, especially within diverse cultural contexts. These personal narratives highlight areas needing improvement, emphasising the opportunity for society to address issues of injustice and work towards promoting equity and fairness.

The lack of Black role models in educational settings is an important issue that deserves attention. The presence of Black teachers as role models offers two main advantages. First, they inspire students to strive for higher academic achievement (Morgenroth et al., 2015), as indicated by participants in this study who recognise Black teachers as role models. Second, they assume that, in their quest for social justice, Black teachers are likely to possess valuable cultural knowledge and can act as advocates, amplifying their voices and championing their causes. Furthermore, the discussion about hairstyle regulations and hair discrimination, which contributes to marginalisation in both schools and workplaces, underscored the cultural sensitivity of participants. In Chapter 6, I will reflect on these findings and discuss how they address my research questions.



# CHAPTER 6

## Discussion of findings

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter advances the contextual understanding of the experiences of Black young people and presents a cultural framework for examining marginalisation. Using the empirical data discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, it considers how these findings relate to the research aims and objectives. To contextualise this analysis, I examine the various terms and constructs used to describe the lived realities of Black young people, focusing on how these are shaped by social and cultural factors. Through this lens, the chapter develops a cultural framework based on a critical review of key themes and the social construction of inequality. By applying critical consciousness theory to the complex narratives shared by participants, I argue that we gain a deeper understanding when we take into account the cultural aspects in the process of identity formation. Racial identity, cultural awareness, and the processes of racialisation are shown to offer valuable insights into broader patterns of social inequalities. The individual agency demonstrated by participants contributes to scholarship on critical identity development, offering a form of resistance and voice. For these young people, identity serves as a strategic and empowering tool to challenge exclusion and stereotypes imposed upon them.

Furthermore, this chapter examines the relationship between marginalisation, critical consciousness, and voice, offering a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Black young people. The findings highlight the importance of cultural factors in shaping both identity formation and experiences of inequality. Notably, the expression of voice emerges as a crucial site of resistance, enabling young people to challenge dominant narratives and assert their agency in the face of exclusion and discrimination.

The chapter is divided into four main sections:

- Section 6.2 presents a cultural framework as a theoretical basis for understanding marginalisation
- Section 6.3 explores diverse perspectives on social exclusion. It focuses on the lived experiences of Black young people and their perceptions of marginalisation. This section addresses research question one (RQ1).

- Section 6.4 centres on critical consciousness, the background conceptual framework of this study, and explores the construction of identities and human rights among Black young people. This is discussed in the context of research question two (RQ2).
- Section 6.5 discusses reflexivity and critical agency of Black young people and their expression of voice in addressing research question three (RQ3).
- Section 6.6 is the summary of the chapter.

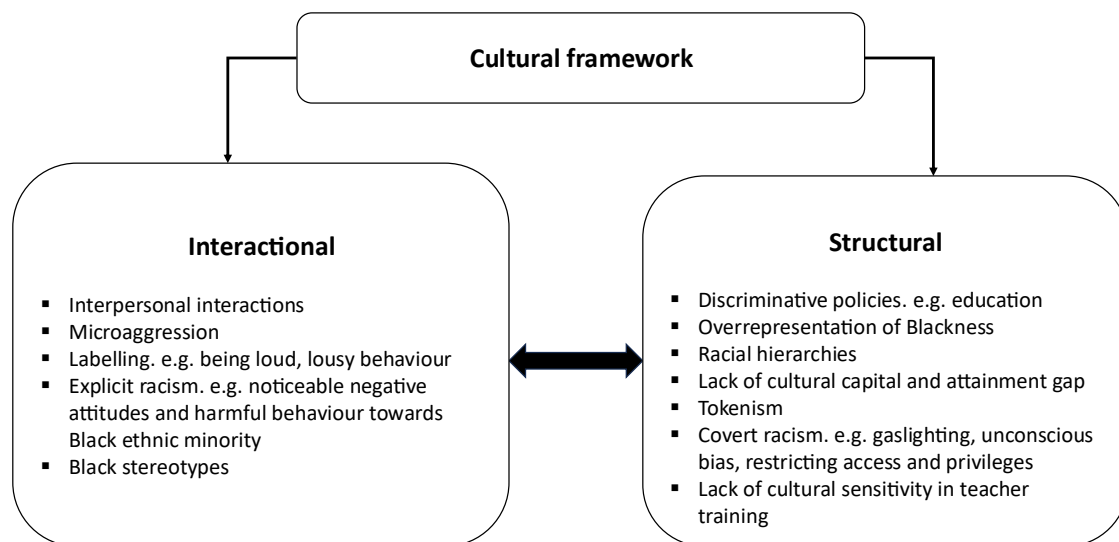
## **6.2. Theorising a cultural framework**

This study, through the themes of social inequalities, racial identity, and cultural capital, offers insights into how participants navigate and make sense of exclusion and disadvantage (refer to the findings in Chapter 5). The conceptualisation of these experiences extends beyond physical spaces such as places, neighbourhoods, or territories, to include identities shaped within diverse social and cultural contexts (further discussed in Section 6.3), and the processes through which marginalisation is produced and reproduced. A key argument of this thesis is that a cultural framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Black young people. When combined with an intersectional lens, cultural elements help to clarify how these individuals interpret and respond to their social realities.

Culture can have a powerful impact on how people behave and interpret the experiences of marginalisation. Weissman et al.'s (2005) seminal study emphasised the importance of recognising cultural issues when providing care in a cross-cultural context. The study acknowledged sociocultural differences in patients and physicians and highlighted the need for cross-cultural education to address racial disparities in healthcare. It demonstrated how cultural factors can contribute to broader patterns of inequality. In this chapter, I provide a detailed summary of the findings through the lens of a cultural framework. This framework is illustrated as two interconnected and fluid dynamic processes, suggesting they are profoundly connected to cultural identity.

To unpack this argument further, Figure 6.1 presents my conceptualisation of a cultural framework derived from data analysis in this study. Within this cultural framework, there are two related strands, and the arrow linking both represents their complementarity. The

interactional process is derived from the day-to-day lived experiences of racism, prejudice, and discrimination, which are identified as drivers of inequality. It addresses issues such as microaggression, racial labelling, stereotypes, discrimination, and harassment, all of which are influenced by cultural factors and contribute to marginalisation. The interactional process reflects the interaction between two cultures and how cultural attributes could influence relationships between cultural groups, resonating with cultural marginalisation. Cultural marginalisation refers to the process of ‘exclusion of individuals, organisations or communities based on their unique shared values, beliefs, attitudes and practices, which diverge from the prevailing norms of the dominant culture in a society’ (Sasaki & Baba, 2024, p.2). This places marginalised individuals on the fringe of society, where they navigate between different cultures (Soman & Koci, 2023).



*Figure 6.1. Conceptual framework of marginalisation*

The explicit narratives provided by participants underlie how central cultural marginalisation is to their lived experiences. As noted in Chapters 4 and 5, interactions with *Other* ethnic groups are masked with racial categorisation and assumptions. While this construction of race is based on interpersonal interactions and the stereotypical representation of Black young people, it helps in explaining marginalisation in light of racial inequality. Further, cultural relations at

the meso level - *groups and communities* - and micro level - *peer relationships and individual interactions* - were deeply associated with racial microaggressions, bias, and labelling, which explains an aspect of this study concerning cultural reawakening and racial identity consciousness. With this in mind, it is arguable that cultural interaction has yet to offer reciprocal relationships and mutual understanding that ought to benefit positive cultural relations (Schwarzenthal et al., 2020).

Turning to the structural perspective, the focus is on entrenched structural barriers, institutional hierarchies, and long-standing systemic factors that contribute to racial inequality. In many cases, the interactional framing of the cultural framework connects the transactional dynamics inherent in societal systems, such as education, media, policing and the judiciary which are embedded in policies, rules and regulations. Sasaki and Baba (2024) suggest there are various societal domains that actively contribute to marginalisation, especially in the area of cultural marginalisation. This study identifies existing systems that include various policy and operational issues significantly influencing racial dynamics, leading to both intended and unintended racism. For instance, the way issues of cultural capital of Black young people and social experiences intersect with systemic barriers to inclusive education. These barriers may include unequal access to educational resources, discrimination, and lack of cultural representation in the curriculum. It is essential to thoroughly analyse and address these challenges to understand the impact of racial dynamics within the system. Focusing on education becomes imperative because the formative years are strongly influenced by learning and schooling, making the education system a critical sector. It is evident that systemic racism significantly affects the educational achievements of ethnic minorities (de Plevitz, 2007).

The pervasive presence of racism, stereotypes, microaggressions, and discrimination within the functioning of societal structures and institutions contributes to the replication of unconscious bias, gaslighting, tokenism, and unequal access to opportunities. These systemic challenges not only affect individuals on an interpersonal level but also permeate various aspects of our society, creating barriers to equal access and perpetuating injustices. In recent times, these have opened up conversations about institutional racism and bias towards individuals and communities with marginal status. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the unequal access to opportunities for Black young people has both cultural and ethnic implications. With this context, we see that the interactional perspective emphasises the structural and systemic issues that contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups. These challenges are deeply ingrained

in institutions and tend to hinder the cultural validation of the lived experiences of Black young people.

The concept of race is frequently utilised to rationalise systems of privilege and power within societies. It is important to note that study participants often construct race in their narratives as a significant rationale for marginalisation and inequality. While racism is intricate and not always overt, it continues to be a contentious issue that emerged in participants' accounts of their experiences. Russell (2024) maintains that the White Racial Frame perpetuates the structure of racism. White Racial frame, a term coined by Feagin (2013) and also linked to White Supremacy, refers to stereotyping, discrimination and the broad white worldview that legitimises systemic racism. White Supremacy is often used to engage in discussions of white dominance, generally in western societies, though mostly attributed to the United States of America and its institutions where the use of the term race is more prominent. Russell (2024) suggests that the educational focus on ranking, testing, measuring and assessing constitutes an apparatus of racial structure and injustices. However, the ongoing Critical Race Theory (CRT) debate has offered different views about White Supremacy. In response to criticism of CRT's concept of white supremacy, Walton (2020) suggests that 'some neo-Marxist thinkers have sought to replace the concept of 'White supremacy' with 'racialisation' (p.78) and argued that white supremacy should not be dismissed as it helps to understand racism, and 'makes it more appealing to a broader (Black) radical audience' (p.78). On the other hand, Cole (2020) sought to develop the neo-Marxist critique of White Supremacy further, arguing that rather than a blanket description of racism using White Supremacy, which Cole refers to as ambiguous, 'institutional racism and racialisation are better placed to understand forms of racism such as those beyond the Black and White binary' (p.95). A salient point raised by Cole (2020) was that while Critical Race Theorists oppose the prevailing condition of racism and champion emancipation from oppression, there are no concrete strategies for this future vision. Engaging with these progressive views, nonetheless, acknowledges that racism exists from different dimensions, be it colour-coded racism, non-colour-coded racism or hybrid racism. In the area of education, there are systemic issues such as the categorisation of students into bands, the absence of cultural awareness in the curriculum and teaching methods, and the resulting unequal opportunities. These issues highlight the impact of race and culture on marginalisation within educational institutions. The empirical evidence from this study, especially the educational experiences of participants, indicates that racialised systemic barriers promote institutional racism in different shapes and forms. Ongoing conversations about institutional

racism and privilege should be encouraged to help deepen the understanding of the effects of racial bias.

The impact of race and culture could explain why the degree of marginalisation faced by Black young people may differ from that experienced by their peers from other ethnic backgrounds. The findings in this research support studies that establish ethnic inequalities and disparities in service outcomes in the UK (Arday & Jones, 2022; Evandrou et al., 2016; Reisner & Rymajdo, 2022), including education, healthcare services and the justice system. Similarly, the disparity in experience may be partly due to their disadvantaged upbringings, intersectionality (experience of multiple forms of discrimination), and underrepresentation. This study effectively illustrated the intricate link between intersectionality and marginalisation. For example, Emily (16, NB, LYCF) referenced her Indian heritage as well as being Black and queer (see Chapter 4, 4.2). Dunya (14, F, LYCF) also shared her thoughts on intersectionality, focusing on her experience as a person of dual Italian and African heritage and how her intersectional identity shaped her perspectives on religion and gender (see Chapter 4, 4.2). The identity of being a Muslim wearing a hijab often made people see her as Asian and not identify her as a Black woman. Hence, this study provides further evidence for Crenshaw's (1989) argument that the overlap of various identity factors leads to inherent disadvantages and biases that significantly impact individuals' experiences.

### **6.3. Marginalisation and theoretical perspectives**

The understanding of the phenomenon of marginalisation is explored by analysing the lived experiences of Black young people. Firstly, I theorised a conceptual framework for understanding marginalisation and problematised how culture is nested within the power structures of institutions and in cultural engagement between individuals and communities (section 6.2). The second part combines the empirical findings with the study's context to present a coherent discussion of marginalisation among Black young people (sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2). The empirical findings illustrate the role that culture and cultural capital play in understanding marginalisation and social inequality. The sensitivity of research participants to their Black identity significantly influenced their perceptions of marginalisation. This is not to say that their experiences and perceptions of marginalisation could not have been evaluated in a way that young people of other ethnicities would perceive marginalisation. The response to marginalisation was examined in context and does not serve as an argument for generalising

the findings. However, it strikes a similarity with the discourse on young people on the margins of British society (Menzies & Baars, 2021). As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the focus is on Black young people who may face greater risk of marginalisation due to disparity in opportunities and disproportionate disadvantage as a result of their ethnicity.

### **6.3.1. Theoretical understanding of marginalisation**

Following the illustration of the cultural framework of marginalisation in Figure 6.1, I will discuss marginalisation by referencing the empirical analysis in Chapter 5. This analytical framework will guide the discussion on marginalisation and its implications as both a process and an experience (McIntosh, 2006). The findings from this study indicate that marginalisation is primarily perceived through the lenses of social inequality and racial discrimination (including racial identity). It provides insight into how participants individually construct their understanding of marginalisation. This is further explored in Table 6.1, which explains the terms used by participants to describe feelings of marginalisation.

Although participants did not explicitly use the term marginalisation, they expressed their experiences through a diverse range of descriptive words to convey their feelings and the meaning of marginalisation. These words include disadvantage, lack of opportunities, barrier, deprived, undermined, alienating, unfair, racial profiling, capping abilities, forced diversity, inconsiderate, excluded and stereotype (see Table 6.1). The terms and phrases articulated by participants reflect various dimensions of marginalisation. Individually, these terms do not constitute a definition of marginalisation; instead, they differentially represent the idea of marginalisation as both a process and experience. These expressions of feelings of marginalisation reflect the diverse perspectives and subtleties of the study group's constructed idea of marginalisation. To further discuss the meaning of marginalisation that has emerged from the empirical analysis conducted in this study, Table 6.1 and Figure 6.2 below are utilised to explore the various issues of marginalisation identified in the themes.

Table 6.1 is a collation of the different words and phrases from the narratives of Black young people's lived experiences (column 1). It provides insight into the context in which those words were used (column 2) and how they build up to reveal different forms of marginalisation, such as cultural marginalisation, educational marginalisation and socio-economic marginalisation (column 3). The various forms of marginalisation outlined in column 3 of Table 6.1 are further explored in the subsequent discussion.

Table 6.1. Mapping key terms

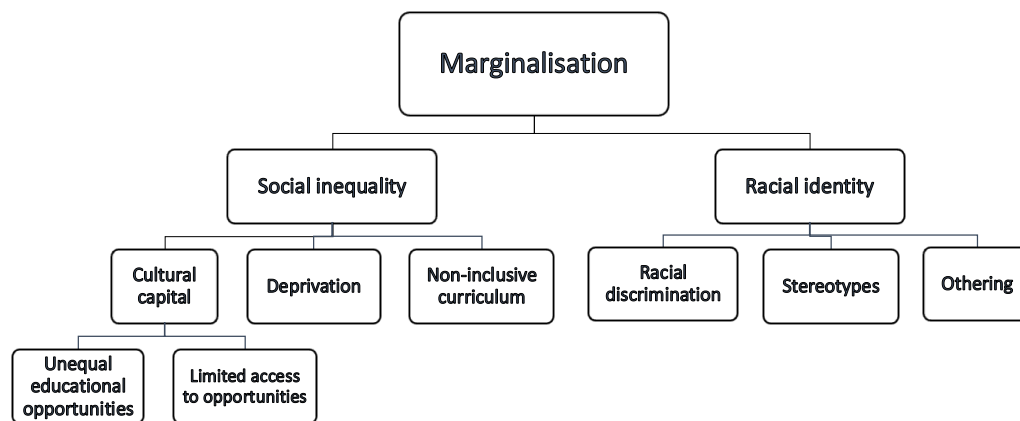
Words used to express feelings of marginalisation	Context	Type of marginalisation
<b><i>Disadvantage</i></b> (Ch 5, 5.2.1)	Used interchangeably with underprivileged to refer to cultural, linguistic, economic and ethnic barriers that hinder learning.	<b>Cultural marginalisation</b> (examples: racial discrimination, stereotypes and Othering), <b>Educational marginalisation</b> (examples: non-inclusive curriculum and unequal educational opportunities)
<b><i>Lack of Opportunities</i></b> (Ch 5, 5.2.1. & Ch 4, 4.2)	Limited access to quality learning and workplace opportunities.	<b>Socio-economic marginalisation</b> (examples: deprivation and cultural capital) and <b>Educational marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Barrier</i></b> (Ch 4, 4.2 & Ch 5, 5.2.1.)	This was used to describe limited access to opportunities and educational resources and choices of career paths.	<b>Educational marginalisation</b> , <b>Socio-economic marginalisation</b> and <b>Cultural marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Deprived</i></b> (Ch 5, 5.2.2.2)	Used to refer to low-income, working class and poverty neighbourhoods.	<b>Socio-economic marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Undermined</i></b> (Ch 5, 5.2.2.1)	Used to refer to voices not being heard or not being listened to, lack of consideration for their feelings	<b>Educational marginalisation</b> and <b>Cultural marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Alienating</i></b> (Ch 5, 5.2.2.1)	Used to refer to cultural alienation – a feeling of not belonging due to cultural differences.	<b>Cultural marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Unfair</i></b> (Ch 5, 5.2.2.1 & 5.3.1.1)	Used to refer to differential treatment based on race and class. It refers to treatment that is not based on justice or equality. <sup>1</sup> Also refers to discrimination, racial profiling and stereotypes.	<b>Cultural marginalisation</b> and <b>Educational marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Racial profiling</i></b> (Ch 4, 4.2.)	Used to refer to the linking of Black young people to theft, criminality, and stereotypes. Police stop and search.	<b>Cultural marginalisation</b>



<b><i>Capping abilities</i></b> (Ch 4, 4.2.3)	Used to refer to a grouping of Black minority students into low-performance groups in schools based on assumptions of low abilities. This is thought to limit their potential to take higher level tests and more challenging tasks.	<b>Educational marginalisation and Cultural marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Forced diversity</i></b> (Ch 5, 5.2.1)	The inclusion of Black students into university admission quotas to feel represented. While this has a positive side, it was criticised for downplaying those with the potential and talent to compete with their white counterparts.	<b>Cultural marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Inconsiderate</i></b> (Ch 5, 5.2.2.1)	Used to describe school rules on hairstyles that do not consider the uniqueness of Afro hairstyles.	<b>Educational marginalisation and Cultural marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Excluded</i></b> (Ch 4, 4.2.3; 4.3)	Exclusion from school, partly due to a lack of understanding of Black mannerisms. Also used to construct racism. Racism excludes members of the outgroups.	<b>Educational marginalisation and Cultural marginalisation</b>
<b><i>Stereotypes</i></b> (Ch 4, 4.2.2, 4.2.3 & 5.2.1, 5.3.1.2)	Assumptions about Black young people being loud, suspicion of committing crimes, and not likely to attain high grades in school (also refer to capping abilities) and media representation.	<b>Cultural marginalisation, Educational marginalisation, Political marginalisation and Socio-economic marginalisation</b>

<sup>1</sup> While the idea of what could be reasoned as just and unjust might be contentious due to differing personal interests, Rawls (1999) constructed a system of justice as fairness, prioritising the disadvantaged. He noted deep inequalities that exist in the social structure of society, focusing on fairness of institutions. Similarly, Sen (2009), in support of justice as being fair to all, emphasises that it is not just about fair institutions (as suggested by Rawls) but also individual actions and behaviour towards one another, which could be a determining principle of fairness.

Figure 6.2 conceptualises the complex process of marginalisation experienced by Black young people, drawing from the empirical analysis presented in Chapters 4 and 5. It visually articulates a theoretical framework that reflects the participants' lived experiences. At first glance, it summarises the findings of the investigation into the understanding of marginalisation and the interrelationships among the various markers and concepts used to explain this phenomenon.



*Figure 6.2. Perception of marginalisation*

The process of understanding marginalisation involves an awareness of culture and identity, both of which stem from developing critical consciousness, as discussed in section 6.3. Figure 6.2 illustrates how participants perceived marginalisation through their lived experiences. To shed light on this, two key themes are explored: social inequality and racial identity. The key terms in Table 6.1 support the key themes of social inequality and racial identity, illustrating their interconnected relationships. The unequal access to opportunities, rights and services between the Black ethnic group and the dominant white group provides insight into the forms of marginalisation. Specifically, the identified challenges with social inequality are parents<sup>2</sup> embodied cultural capital, deprivation and a non-inclusive curriculum.

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<sup>2</sup> Parents' embodied cultural capital refers to the support and motivation Black young people access in their learning and education

These factors are considered to constitute barriers to future opportunities and are associated with ethnic backgrounds, leading us to the second major issue of racial identity (section 6.3.2). In this context, cultural capital theory becomes an important framework for exploring social inequality and explaining the phenomenon of marginalisation. Although Rollock et al. (2015) argued in their study of Black middle-class parents that racism, rather than just cultural capital in the Bourdieusian sense, is a major factor, the narratives from participants in this study show how lack of cultural capital affects them. The Black middle class constitutes a relatively small segment when compared to the majority of Black families. I argue that the lack of cultural capital significantly contributes to the marginalisation experienced by Black young people.

Bourdieu's cultural capital and cultural reproduction theory support the findings of this study. Social class differentiation continues to be a hurdle for young people in this study, whose cultural capital may not align with the middle and upper-class categories and could be described as working class. Bourdieu and Passeron's (1989) argument from the Marxist perspective sees institutions such as schools as reproducing oppression and inequality along the lines of the privileges and support that the upper class can access. Although Bourdieu's idea was conceived with a sociological premise, cultural capital has been applied to scholarship in education. Sullivan (2001), in an attempt to operationalise cultural capital, argued that Bourdieu's operationalisation is inadequate. In a sense, Sullivan agrees that class differentials contribute to differentiation in attainment; however, 'cultural capital does not have a significant effect on GCSE attainment' (p.24). Sullivan was of the view that reading more complex resources and viewing more complex fiction has a significant effect on GCSE attainment. In other words, there exist various school factor elements and school types, such as private schools, that may instil cultural capital in students; this needs to be considered in addition to the capital of linguistic and cultural activities transmitted at home. However, Ball (2006, 1997) suggested that British education policies are structured in a manner that disproportionately favours middle-class parents by offering them a wider range of choices, potentially perpetuating educational disparities. Ball (1997) highlighted the contrast between private and state schools to underscore the valuable cultural capital that students acquire from attending private institutions.

Similarly, Reay's (2017) study underscores the segregation present in the English school system. Reay contended that, despite policy changes and incremental reforms, in a manner she referred to as 'arresting continuities', 'the English educational system is still one that educates

individuals according to their class' (p.175). The evidence from this study demonstrates that this is still the case, especially for participants who lack cultural capital. It also suggests that external factors beyond the school environment hinder the delivery of quality education. In addition to addressing the lack of cultural capital, the issue of deprivation, which is not adequately addressed within the schooling system, needs to be considered. While the concept of compensatory education to address deprivation is not new in the UK, it has not proven to be as enduring and impactful as it could be (Melhuish & Barnes, 2020; Reid & Brain, 2003). Chapter 4 discussed these inclusion frameworks, with compensatory education programmes serving as a key component of the effort to promote inclusive strategies within the education system.

Cultural capital, as articulated by Bourdieu, Ball and Reay, plays a significant role in creating inequality, particularly in providing unequal educational opportunities for Black young people. It is important to acknowledge that the national curriculum offers a uniform syllabus and content to all students, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds. However, there is an exception in the case of the mathematics curriculum in England, which is implemented through a tiered system tailored for different groups of young people. Many participants shared their experiences and perspectives on the education curriculum, suggesting that it lacks inclusivity. In this study, cultural capital encompasses more than just the passing down of cultural norms and values across generations. It also includes the educational and professional backgrounds of parents that significantly impact the educational success of Black young people. It is clear that the lack of cultural capital contributes to disparities and perpetuates inequality, impacting the experiences of Black young people in accessing education and other opportunities.

This study clearly demonstrates the unequal educational opportunities for Black young people resulting from inequality and social injustice in the complex landscape of marginalisation. On the one hand, children from low-income families lack the necessary resources to achieve high grades and pursue further education. Despite efforts to prioritise higher education in the UK, access to universities does not appear to be equal. Some studies have shown that students from low socio-economic backgrounds often lack sufficient information to effectively plan for their future, leading to instances of students dropping out (Crosnoe, 2009; Lorenzo-Quiles et al., 2023; Vadivel et al., 2023). Additionally, a briefing paper of the UK House of Commons (Bolton & Lewis, 2023) highlighted a higher likelihood of Black students discontinuing their higher education.

The theory of cultural capital and social class differentiation illuminates the entrenched social inequalities within the British educational system. Sonia's (16, F, LS1 Grp2) argument in Chapter 5: 'it's also quite difficult to have a good education if you are not given the right circumstances to have that education', underscores the importance of creating the right conditions for a good education. Sullivan's (2001) research emphasised the significant impact of factors such as holidays, high-profile event trips, access to a variety of reading and learning resources, and indulgence in luxury leisure on GCSE attainment. It is crucial to address how these privileges may be unattainable for working-class parents and work towards creating more equitable opportunities for all students.

### **6.3.2. Racial identity: Racial discrimination, stereotypes and Othering**

Exploring marginalisation through the lens of racial identity is essential for understanding its impact on Black young people. Acknowledging the central role of racial identity is important in understanding how their experiences are shaped by being marginalised as the Other. A theoretical framing of marginalisation helps in understanding the complexity of this issue and the broader societal implications it has on the lived experiences of marginalised groups. This study's empirical analysis indicates that a good understanding of marginalisation, to a large extent, hinges on acknowledging racial identity. As shown in Figure 6.2, the experiences of racial discrimination, stereotypes and Othering are all hinged on Black identity. Embracing a cultural framework offers deeper insights into the various factors contributing to the marginalisation of Black young people. Interrogating the cultural context provides valuable perspectives on the systemic issues that perpetuate marginalisation and offers a guide for meaningful action to address these challenges. This approach allows for a careful examination and understanding of the social, economic, and cultural influences that contribute to their marginalisation.

The narratives, which highlight the unaddressed concerns of Black young people, such as lack of representation, racial discrimination, and unequal access to opportunities, underscore the systemic imbalances that need to be addressed to better support Black young people. For Ejiro (F, 17, LYCF), she argues, 'there is no representation within the school, the white teachers do not understand Black people, their mannerisms, they are blacklisted, and it is threatening in the classroom. They are getting into trouble and getting excluded' (see Chapter 4, 4.2.3). The precarity of being excluded in English schools and the arbitrary implementation of exclusion

were discussed in Chapter 4 (4.3). There is a growing concern about the disproportionately high rates of exclusion, both permanent and temporary, of Black students from schools (Stewart-Hall et al., 2023). This is an important topic that requires thoughtful consideration and meaningful action. In addition to official statistics, there are valid arguments for undocumented informal exclusions (Daniels et al., 2022; Rota, 2022), which could potentially inflate the numbers beyond what is reflected in official records. Despite available statistics, there is a lack of a comprehensive approach to addressing the multicultural aspect of this issue, which could potentially lead to societal problems such as youth crime and violence. While the exact numbers remain uncertain, this study highlights the marginalisation of Black young people through the process of exclusion from school and learning. I suggest that an effective approach to this issue would require a policy-informed strategy focused on identifying the needs and vulnerabilities of Black young people, addressing negative Othering practices, and implementing early intervention measures.

Furthermore, participants engaged in discussions about the nature of Othering. In Winter's (16, M, LS1, Grp4) view, there is segregation along racial lines, which not everyone will see or notice (see Chapter 4, 4.2.2). I identified connections between school factors, race, and culture that often contribute to the marginalisation and educational experiences of Black young people. The teacher's idea of 'well-behaved' children places Black young people in the category of 'Other'. Black students are assumed to be loud and not well-behaved. Many participants argued that the teacher has preconceived notions about them being loud, troublemakers, and potentially engaging in fights - assumptions that likely do not apply to white students. This situation raises an important issue about how teachers perceive and treat Black students, particularly in the context of Othering. This observation aligns with the conclusions drawn by Wright (2010) in her examination of five British schools, focusing on the experiences of Black young people within the British education system. In this context, the concept of Other signifies an unacknowledged cultural difference. The individuals involved in this study displayed a tendency to push back against this practice, demonstrating a resistance that, I argue, reflects their heightened critical awareness and consciousness.

Black young people developed various coping mechanisms to respond to marginalisation and racism. These include codeswitching, volunteering for school councils, and engaging with youth organisations. For example, one participant in the discussion group was a member of the London Youth Forum, which participated in the deliberative discussion sessions of this study.

Some young people found comfort in connecting with fellow Black individuals, while others navigated a blend of Black and white cultures. Olive grew up with both white and Black friends and did not feel conflicted about it. However, she also experienced moments when the Black community perceived her choice to spend time with white friends as a form of rejection. Olive perceived this as a delicate struggle but concluded that it was a more effective approach to maintaining a balance. These young people mould themselves to navigate between two cultural spheres, highlighting the crucial matter of belonging and identity as they move into adulthood. This notion of navigating between two cultural spheres resonates with Powell and Menendian's (2024) concept of embracing diverse identities and the approach of fostering belonging without alienating others.

Another important issue highlighted by participants was the effect of cultural exclusion on racism and Black youth violence (see Chapter 4, 4.3 & Chapter 5, 5.3.1.2 & 5.3.2). The insights from their experiences indicate that deprivation and exclusion can drive some individuals to violence and crime due to a feeling that they have already lost opportunities that should be available to them. For example, Dante (14, M, LS2, Grp1) argued that engaging in crime and violence, or other antisocial behaviours, might be an expression of frustration stemming from exclusion and a lack of or unequal opportunities (see Chapter 5, 5.2.1). This emphasises the urgency of addressing cultural exclusion and its implications. This presents an opportunity to explore potential solutions and interventions to support these individuals and address the underlying issues. In a study of a group of young people involved in violence in London, Perera (2020) asserted that 'if young people are engaged in youth violence and or gang activity, they are, probably because there are no other viable options available to them' (p.40). It highlights the need to understand the root causes of Black youth crime and provide them with alternative pathways and support.

This study also draws attention to behavioural challenges faced by Black working-class youth, emphasising the necessity for additional school support in recognising and responding to aggressive behaviours linked to gangs. Additionally, I suggest that gaining a comprehensive understanding of Black cultural norms could significantly reduce so-called conduct disorders and the unfair exclusion and expulsion of Black young people from educational institutions. This corresponds with the viewpoint expressed by participants regarding the significance of Black teachers who can empathise with and understand the behaviours and worries of Black students. In general, the repercussions of exclusion, stereotypes and racial profiling have

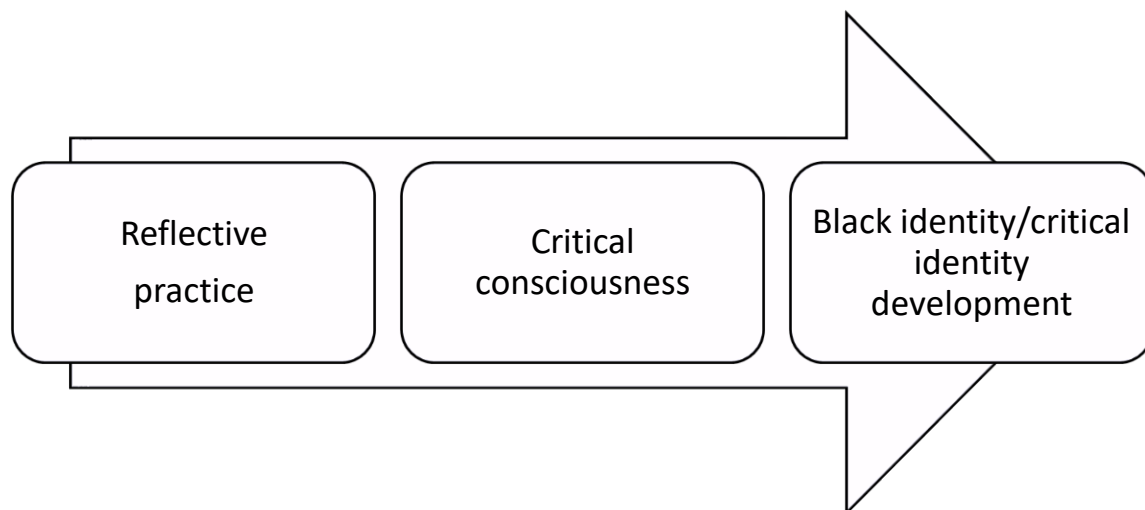
resulted in the disproportionate representation of Black young people in criminal activities and gang violence in London (Gunter, 2015; Perera, 2020; Pitts, 2020; Robertson & Wainwright, 2020).

It is evident that experiencing marginalisation significantly influences the future success of Black young people in terms of pursuing higher education and career paths. The potential for hindered success disproportionately affects Black young people, leading to higher rates of exclusion and underperformance compared to their white counterparts. As highlighted in Gillborn and Youdell (2009) and various other studies (Gillborn et al., 2017; Gillborn, 2008), the educational system has yet to confront the unequal educational opportunities that pose a challenge for Black young people.

#### **6.4. Critical consciousness and identity construction**

The research findings demonstrate how students' identities influence the way they are treated in school, especially the racialised assumptions and labelling of Black young people. Identity construction is fundamentally important in shaping the understanding of marginalisation. It reflects how individuals and groups define themselves in relation to societal norms and power structures. This research emphasises the reflective understanding of marginalisation within diverse contexts. It explored critical consciousness theory in the context of how Black young people perceive marginalisation while demonstrating awareness of human rights. The scenario presented in Figure 6.3 illustrates the process of developing critical consciousness and identity construction. This, in part, contributed to the expression of critical opinions and advocacy for racial identity by participants. The evidence clearly indicates that reflective practice and awareness of Black identity foster meaningful conversations about inequality and equitable access to opportunities.





*Figure 6.3. Identity construction*

The study's findings underscore Black people's significant preoccupation with racial injustice, indicative of a critical disposition toward racial discrimination and stereotypical portrayals of Black young people. This study provided valuable insights into the importance of critical consciousness, intersectionality, and the human rights-based approach to this research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) emphasises the significance of quality education and equality among various ethnic and religious groups, while also respecting individual freedoms (Articles 28 and 29). It also emphasises non-discrimination (Article 2) and affirms a child's right to express their views, have their voices heard, and be treated with respect within legal boundaries (Articles 12 and 13). It is important to recognise that each nation, as a signatory to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, may interpret and uphold these rights in line with their own national and domestic laws. While noting ideological and philosophical differences in enforcing human rights, Pollis and Schwab (2006) argued that human rights had limited applicability and suggested that the conception of human rights needs a rethink. Participants' narratives clearly demonstrated the importance of human rights as they expressed their views on issues of hair discrimination, derogatory labelling, human dignity, and equality. It is crucial to acknowledge that the voices of Black young people are often marginalised and disregarded. Racial discrimination and the lack of adequate representation of their voices were prominent themes in this research.

In cultivating critical consciousness, participants engaged in thoughtful reflection on their experiences and openly discussed the imperative of cultural sensitivity in shaping identity and fostering their sense of belonging. This reflective and constructive conversation serves as a

valuable element in developing cultural awareness and critical consciousness. The research findings indicate that the recognition of racial injustice played a significant role in the development of Black identity. Additionally, this study highlights the critical impact of racial discrimination on the emotional resilience and educational advancement of Black young people, as well as their social mobility. Their working-class background and identification with disadvantaged communities could justify the latter. The previous section highlighted the importance of cultural capital as a fundamental theoretical factor in the achievement gap and cultural marginalisation. Further, it is vital to acknowledge that the feeling of marginalisation among Black young people is closely tied to their encounters with racism. The data from this study is both inspiring and impactful, as it can be viewed as a powerful form of protest and demonstration of resilience against the challenges of marginalisation and social injustice.

A critical aspect of this study was to explore the impact of marginalisation on Black identity and the social representation of Black young people. Gaining this understanding could lead to valuable insights and opportunities for positive change. Figure 6.2 illustrates that identity can play a significant role as an indicator of marginalisation. To highlight the importance of identity in understanding marginalisation, Chapter 4 explored Black identity formation and how participants perceive a denial of this identity. Black young people not only face marginalisation but also grapple with challenges to affirm their Black identity. Participants stressed the importance of preserving Black culture through the recognition and acceptance of Afro hairstyles.

#### **6.4.1. Stereotyping criminal behaviour**

Societal influences that attribute identities to Black young people have been linked to criminal behaviour. Participants' identities were constructed by others in relation to their involvement in criminal activities, reflecting a connection to their experiences within the criminal context. This study's findings support the evidence that there is a disproportionate representation of Black young people in the criminal justice system. While the ethnic makeup of Britain's population includes various minority groups, both white and non-white, the disproportionate treatment of the Black minority is particularly pronounced (Alexander, 2023; Abrams et al., 2021). The findings align closely with the literature discussed in Chapter 2, highlighting the widespread nature of racial injustice within British society. Deliberative discussions among participants illuminated concerns about the police use of racial profiling and stop-and-search

tactics. For example, Tega (16, M, LS3) experienced a traumatic event that left a lasting impression on him (see Chapter 4, 4.2.3). Gozie (14, M, LS3) was subjected to a humiliating search for a knife, highlighting severe mistreatment that could adversely impact the well-being and mental health of Black young people (also refer to Chapter 4, 4.2.3). The study's findings show that stereotypes and media portrayals connect Black youths to violence, often linking them to the criminal justice system. Additionally, the study addresses the exclusion of Black students and the subsequent implications that lead to crime and violence. The narratives represent voices that have been overlooked, pointing to missed opportunities. The mistreatment of Black boys serves as a foundation for social injustice, which contributes to trust issues with law enforcement. This study examined the spectrum of challenges faced by Black youth, from racial discrimination and exclusion to the potential risk of involvement in crime and violence. It amplifies the concerns of young Black individuals about their future.

It is also important to consider how colonial identity is transferred and expressed when analysing marginalisation. The findings suggest a subtle connection to post-colonial theory, enhancing our understanding of the experiences of Black young people within their historical, cultural, and social contexts. Participants expressed the view that the experiences of Black individuals of African and Caribbean heritage represent a redefinition of imperial colonial dominance, reflecting their history of colonisation. Spivak's (1988) use of the term Subaltern illuminates the marginalised voices and stories of those on the fringes. It highlights the skewed narratives and biases inherited from the colonial period, particularly exemplified by the discussion of whitewashing in Chapter 4. I argue that the discourse on cultural capital is deeply intertwined with the historical impoverishment of Black people during colonial times, given the unsympathetic stance of Europeans in that era. Dante and Tega expressed the sentiment about their mistreatment, which mirrors the era of slavery and the subsequent period of subordination, characterised by limited choices, silenced voices, and strict orders to dictate their actions. Their experiences seem to demonstrate how the consequences of colonialism continue to shape societal hierarchies, perpetuating racial injustice through a sense of superiority versus inferiority. The constructed colonial framework, deeply rooted in historical and political structures, actively shapes and perpetuates internalised prejudices, biases, and discriminatory attitudes that Black young people confront in their daily lives. This framework has a profound impact on their sense of identity, opportunities, and interactions within society.

#### **6.4.2. Cultural differences and identities**

The complex dynamics of identity, culture, and difference are further explored to understand the existing cultural disparities and power imbalances. A skewed perception of cultural identity and the unique characteristics of an individual can lead to the belief that there is a disconnect between culture and the formation of identity. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that culture is closely intertwined with a range of contextual elements, including social, historical, and environmental influences. These multifaceted elements collectively shape the process of identity construction, highlighting the need to integrate culture as a fundamental component in this complex process. Participants clearly articulated their cultural identity, which not only motivated them to uphold their ethnic identity but also prompted a response to perceived discrimination. Empirical studies indicate a link between cultural identity and racial discrimination (Cea D’Ancona, 2023; Meca et al., 2020). The present study reveals that participants perceived discrimination based on their Black ethnicity.

Drawing on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony (Lears, 1985), which is deeply rooted in the dominance of certain social classes, it provides insight into cultural contrast and the use of power. This hegemonic control involves the use of the state and institutional mechanisms to perpetuate false consciousness. Specifically, within the realm of education, there is a distinct emphasis on promoting and prioritising British values, often overshadowing and undermining Black cultural values. Participants expressed the view that the education curriculum lacks inclusivity and does not incorporate Black history and literature. They were concerned that this oversight diminishes Black identity and raises awareness about marginalisation. The concerns they have expressed regarding their potential exclusion highlight the detrimental impact it has on the recognition of Black identity. Additionally, participants stressed the importance of acknowledging and integrating Black culture and identity into the curriculum design, as opposed to promoting colour-blind teaching practices. The perspectives shared by Black young people involved in the study point out the importance of recognising and respecting cultural diversity within educational frameworks. For instance, Otito (13, M, LS1, Grp1) argued that ‘people can be different in a variety of different ways. So it helps when someone can be equal and coexist’. This simple but compelling argument emphasises the importance of fostering equality and peaceful coexistence among individuals despite their many differences. It suggests that despite the varying backgrounds, beliefs, and individual experiences, fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding is crucial.

Building on Powell and Menendian's (2024) idea of an effective sense of belonging amidst *difference*, this study illustrates a thought-provoking paradox of scenarios of *difference* that encourages constructive reflection and exploration. The apparent contradiction of embracing both diversity and cultural identity highlights the use of colourblind ideology (Williams & Land, 2006), which often addresses issues of racism by overlooking differences and undermining racial identity. This approach can unintentionally overlook the value of diversity and the richness it brings to society. Oftentimes, in discussions on racial issues, we come across statements such as, 'racism is not real; it is just a matter of individual mindset,' dismissing the existence of systemic racism. A useful definition of systemic racism, also referred to as institutional racism, was given by the Macpherson inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, commissioned by the UK government. The Macpherson inquiry report (1999) defined institutional racism as 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people' (p.49). Additionally, there are suggestions like, 'let us not discuss racism as it may lead to resistance against acknowledging racial differences,' implying that addressing racial inequalities may stir up discomfort or opposition. However, it is important to note that one of the main criticisms of colour blindness is that it actually legitimises racism. In support of this, Norton et al. (2006) suggested that colour blindness is not an effective approach to tackling racial prejudice. Arguing against the idea of race neutrality, Lipsitz (2019) emphasised that 'very few problems can be solved by pretending that they do not exist' (p.23). Proponents of colour blindness believe that ignoring the issue is the most effective way to address racism. Participants think that rather than deny racism, it should be discussed with a view to creating awareness about racism and forging a strategy that will foster cultural identity as well as recognise those differences. Addressing the issue is likely to help reduce biases rather than perpetuate them, which is a positive step forward.

While the policy of accepting colour blindness has been suggested, it is important to consider whether this approach unintentionally supports white nativism. The construction of British identity has taken on various forms, such as nativism, and has influenced policy domains and the education system. This has been employed to differentiate British values from the cultural values of immigrants and ethnic minorities (Chadderton & Wischmann, 2023; Smith, 2021 & 2016; Stern, 2022). In her chapter 'How Color Blindness Flourished in the Age of Obama', in

an edited collection, Crenshaw (2019) argued that despite colour blindness existing throughout decades of the civil rights movement in the USA, the issue continues to be relevant. In recent years, the United Kingdom has had a non-white ethnic minority Prime Minister and First Ministers for the devolved governments of Scotland and Wales. These developments further help in denying racist structures and encourage minimal efforts to address racial inequalities and disparities. Although dating back centuries, multiculturalism has been flagged as an achievement by successive UK governments in the last four decades. However, colour blindness, argued to have promoted racial harmony, had the downside of neglecting cultural differences. Multiculturalism remains a controversial issue, and while some see it as the face of the dynamism and adaptive nature of British society, it is also discredited by those who see it as divisive and essentialist (Johnstone, 2011; Mason, 2018).

Disregarding existing cultural differences is another way to resist valued cultural distinctions that could benefit the harmonious coexistence of various ethnic cultures. An important aspect to consider is cultivating *cultural sensitivity*, which arises from being open-minded toward other cultures. Adopting an open-minded approach to other cultures fosters acceptance and respect for diverse cultural backgrounds. This was my interpretation of Tola's comment about how students of other cultures do not respect Black students and Black hair. Relatedly, this study found that cultural sensitivity is downplayed in education curricula, which further exacerbates the question of cultural sensitivity in teachers' training. The clamour for Black teachers by study participants, borne out of concern for someone who understands them, is not unconnected to a culture-sensitive education.

Everyday microaggressions reported in interracial interactions are often overlooked and sometimes lost within Britain's diversity and multiculturalism narrative. The view that Britain has historically been a diverse society has given rise to assertions such as there is no racism and I do not see colour, suggesting a disregard for the experiences and realities of individuals from diverse racial backgrounds. Within this enthusiasm for diversity is the endemic issue of race privilege and racial hierarchies (Crenshaw et al., 2019), which is often downplayed. Racial hierarchies refer to the show of superiority of some racial groups over other racial groups. The institutionalisation of racial hierarchies based on colonial slavery reinforces a belief in racial superiority within the education system and workplaces. Participants constructed racial hierarchies in descriptions of their experiences, detailing how they are considered to be low-intelligence students. Maha (16, F, LS1, Grp3), Cara (14, F, LS1 Grp1), Ava (16, F, LS1, Grp3),

Sasha (15, F, LYCF) and Dara (17, F, LS1, Grp3) felt that teachers underestimated their intelligence and assumed that their talent was judged to be of low pedigree because of their race and status as an ethnic minority. The comments made by participants about their abilities being capped and being placed in the lower stream in class highlight the ongoing oppression rooted in race within the education system.

Furthermore, participants' experiences bring to focus the *emotional* aspect of cultural difference. Emotions are expressed differently depending on the culture and context in which they occur. The notion that culture shapes emotion should not be ignored since people in different cultures express different emotions (De Leersnyder et al., 2015; Mesquita & Walker, 2003). For instance, the emotional framework of individualistic culture in the Global North differs significantly from the collectivist culture prevalent in the Global South. This study's findings indicate that stereotyping and labelling are significant factors that evoke strong emotions in the participants (Chapter 4, 4.2.2; 4.3). Behaviours embedded in Black cultural norms, such as vocal and expressive gestures, are probable guidelines for evaluating their conduct. The lack of understanding of different gestures and expressions, both verbal and non-verbal, which might be alien to the white culture, contributes to assumptions about the behaviour of Black young people. The study's findings remind us of the importance of recognising and understanding the significant role of culture in regulating emotions, especially within the context of Black young people's experiences. Ignoring the influence of culture can hinder our understanding of their behaviours, potentially leading to misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Participants in the study demonstrated various methods used for regulating their emotions, such as codeswitching, while attempting to maintain their cultural identity. This study highlights how the social experiences of Black young people illuminate issues related to identity prejudice and epistemic injustice. It also raises awareness of epistemic injustice and individual involvement in knowledge production. Fricker (2007) highlighted the importance of prioritising justice while recognising that there are instances where injustice becomes normalised. Fricker emphasised the need to consider power dynamics and social identities within epistemic practices. Her concepts of testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice offer valuable insights into the challenges faced by Black young people. These ideas deepen our understanding of these issues and underscore the necessity for positive change. In the context of hermeneutical injustice, it is important to note that while Black young people are able to articulate and reflect on their experiences, their expressions often struggle to resonate or make sense within broader society.

Participants encountered difficulties in developing a sense of belonging, as discussed in Chapter 4, particularly concerning issues of identity, feelings of Othering, and cultural connections. Reflecting on their experiences, individuals in this study expressed their struggles to conform to the established norms and practices within the institution. Many shared feelings of frustration and hopelessness regarding their school experiences. Tola noted that they were often advised to approach teachers to address issues they felt were problematic, only to be reminded of the institution's procedures and told that their complaints would not lead to meaningful change. Recognising and appreciating diversity was a key part of the conversations during group discussions. Participants identified core societal values, including equality, fairness, respect, and the freedom to coexist, as the foundation for an inclusive society.

## **6.5. Expressing voice and critical agency**

This section discusses voice and agency of Black young people, emphasising a key finding in their journey from pessimism to motivation and participants' change narrative (section 6.5.3). The study stresses the significant impact of vocal expression as a powerful instrument for the social, cultural, and political agency of young people. Investigating the development of vocal expression within marginalised communities has become increasingly vital for understanding and addressing issues of marginalisation in society. Conversations about the experiences of Black young people reveal a growing focus on acknowledging and valuing their perspectives. This emphasis arises from a pervasive concern about the underrepresentation of Black ethnic minorities across various societal structures and institutions. The findings show that Black young people encounter disempowerment and limited agency due to the lack of consideration for diverse perspectives. This situation impedes their ability to share their viewpoints and influence decision-making processes on issues that affect them. Throughout the group discussions, participants consistently expressed a sense of pessimism regarding the effects of stereotypes and systemic privileges that together silence and marginalise Black voices.

### **6.5.1. Voice of resistance**

The meaningful conversations and exchange of ideas between participants in this study have notably amplified the voices of Black young people, who can rightly be seen as a voice of resistance (Dutta, 2012; Lamber, 2015). Figure 6.4 clearly illustrates a critical voice emerging from a deep sense of critical consciousness, aimed at resisting marginalisation. Scott's (1985)



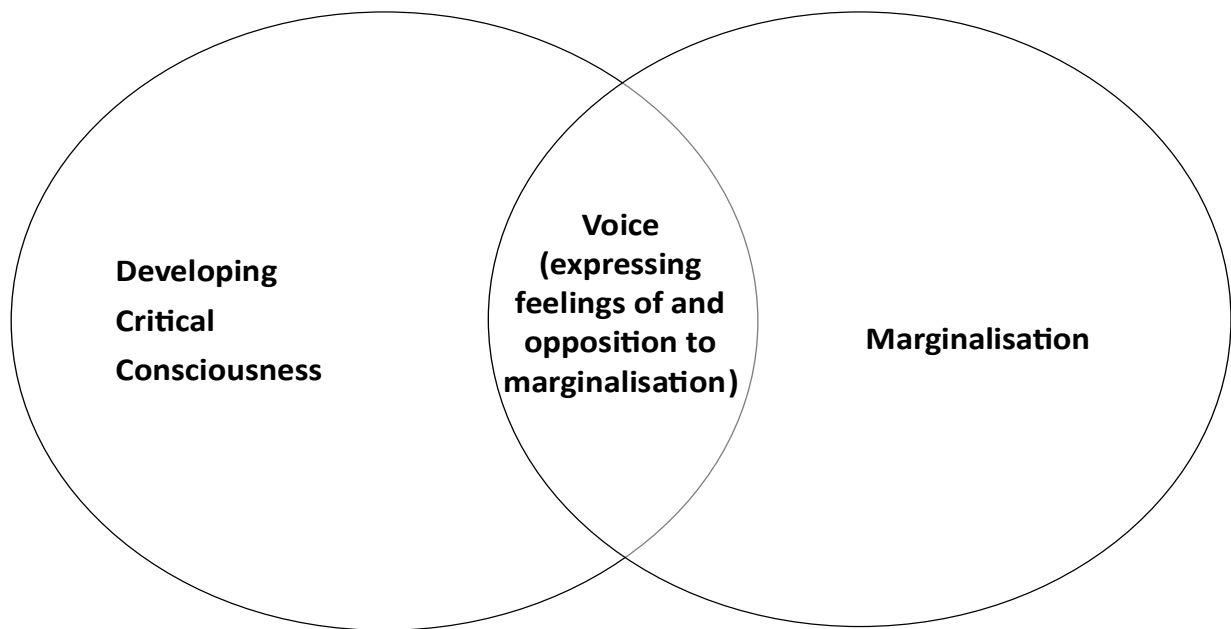
theory of resistance maintain that marginalised groups, such as disadvantaged communities or lower social classes, are in a constant struggle against the dominant elite. This struggle encompasses a clash of values and perspectives as the elite strive to uphold their privileged viewpoints within the broader societal structure. Drawing an analogy of peasants versus those in positions of authority and power in the Latin American context, Scott demonstrated the everyday forms of resistance exhibited by the weak and marginalised. These forms of resistance may, at times, be a subtle form of rebellion.

Charles Taylor's theory of the politics of recognition offers a useful lens for understanding the resistance expressed by Black young people. In his seminal essay, 'Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition' (1992), Taylor argued that recognition is not merely a matter of courtesy but a fundamental human need. The denial or distortion of this recognition - what he terms misrecognition - can genuinely harm individuals, trapping them in a 'false, distorted, and reduced mode of being' (Taylor, 1992, p. 25). This framework clarifies how the voices of Black young people serve as a counter-narrative to cultural misrecognition and systemic marginalisation. Taylor maintained that identity is shaped through dialogue and developed through recognition by others. Unfortunately, for many Black young people, this process is often interrupted by dominant social structures that either fail to affirm their identities or misrepresent them through racial stereotypes, educational erasure, and systemic over-policing. In defiance of this, Black individuals engage in both cultural and political resistance, reclaiming their narratives through protests, social media, music, and art. This resistance exemplifies what Taylor identifies as a demand for recognition, not just as individuals but as part of a historically marginalised cultural group.

Additionally, Taylor's concept of recognition applies both collectively and individually. The resistance displayed by Black young people can be connected with wider movements for racial justice, such as Black Lives Matter, where calls for recognition are intrinsically linked to struggles over institutional legitimacy, historical memory, and democratic inclusion. These efforts illustrate the 'politics of difference', where recognition involves affirming distinct group identities rather than merely assimilating into dominant norms (Taylor, 1992, p. 38). However, there are limitations to Taylor's framework. Critics like Nancy Fraser (1998) contend that an excessive emphasis on cultural recognition may obscure crucial material dimensions of injustice, particularly economic inequality and class exploitation. Fraser argued that achieving justice requires addressing both maldistribution (economic injustices) and misrecognition

(cultural or symbolic injustices), as these issues are often interrelated and mutually reinforcing. From this perspective, she advocated for a holistic approach that integrates recognition with redistribution. Fraser cautioned that an exclusive focus on identity can dilute the political significance of struggles deeply embedded in economic structures. For many Black young people, resistance goes beyond misrepresentation to encompass issues like hair, discrimination, economic inequality, state violence, and access to opportunities - challenges that extend beyond cultural concerns into structural ones.

Taylor's framework provides an important ethical basis for understanding identity and respect. However, it requires further enhancement through a deeper examination of racial capitalism and the mechanisms of institutional power. The resistance demonstrated by Black young people can be viewed as a demand for recognition in the Taylorian sense: a firm insistence on being seen, heard, and valued based on their own narratives and lived experiences. Their activism represents a response to systems of misrecognition, firmly asserting their right to self-definition, collective dignity, and justice. In this context, their actions not only challenge prevailing stereotypes and marginalisation but also serve to reclaim agency in spaces that have historically silenced their voices. While Taylor's theory lays the groundwork for understanding these dynamics, it must be critically evaluated alongside more concrete critiques that address the specific societal structures and lived realities faced by Black young people. An integrative approach will help illuminate the complexities of their struggles for visibility and validation in a world that often resists acknowledging their identities and perspectives.



*Figure 6.4. Voice as an act of opposition and resistance*

The resistance often stems from a desire to counteract the oppressive hegemonic influence wielded by those in power. Analysing the perspectives shared by participants has provided valuable insights from various standpoints, allowing for thoughtful consideration of these experiences. When exploring resistance, it is natural to focus on identifying the specific origins or forms that are being resisted. This involves a thorough exploration of the characteristics of the resistance and its intricate interplay with various contextual factors. The perspectives of these Black young people reveal a strong resistance to being silenced. They express feelings of being unheard and marginalised, the rejection of their right to address discrimination and the suppression of their identity through rules and policies related to hairstyles. This advocacy for social justice serves as a response to a sense of alienation frequently experienced as a result of widespread racial stereotyping.

There is similar resistance to whitewashing the curriculum and the pressure to conform to white cultural norms in order to succeed in education and career paths. The issue of identity has been a prominent feature in several discussions, with participants emphasising their Black heritage, even though most were born in the United Kingdom. Sipho expressed a deep connection to Black identity when he remarked, ‘You do not really think about it, but when you, as a Black person, are in a group full of Black people, you just feel right, your spirit feels alive’ (see

Chapter 4, 4.2). Recent studies have brought attention to the issue of racialised banding, unfair expectations of Black students, and instances of racial gaslighting in the education of underprivileged Black students (Davis & Ernst, 2017; Gillborn, 2024; Gillborn & Youdell, 2009; Rodwell, 2024). Gillborn (2024) refers to racial gaslighting as a situation in which efforts are being made to erase racist oppression from the debate by introducing alternative perspectives that challenge the core idea of racism. The findings shed light on significant barriers within the education system and the importance of addressing these challenges to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students. There was a strong voice of resistance to societal stereotypes and profiling, advocating for the freedom to express oneself without fear of judgment. Additionally, there was a clear determination to confront and address marginalisation and inequality within the education system.

The intersection of racial discrimination and participants' challenging parental backgrounds, such as poverty and a lack of cultural capital, significantly influenced their self-awareness, voice, and critical consciousness. This highlights the process of critical identity development and, importantly, how this identity is shaped. Many students are motivated by their aspirations to excel in their academic pursuits, pursue fulfilling professional careers, and provide meaningful support to their families. This remarkable resolve and ambition often originate from an inner voice and self-awareness that propels their motivation. It is vital to acknowledge that, despite facing systemic barriers and societal challenges, many Black young people consistently displayed unwavering determination in their educational endeavours. Participants expressed concerns about Black people who are often subjected to unfair labelling as underachievers. Hiba (17, F, LS1, Grp2) cited an example of her brother, who graduated from the University of Oxford with an engineering degree and appeared to have surpassed the stereotype associated with Black people. There was a feeling among participants that Black individuals are unfairly burdened by stereotypes associated with the Black community.

### **6.5.2. A sense of optimism and motivation**

Despite experiencing various forms of marginalisation, many participants in this study displayed an inspiring and optimistic outlook, envisioning a future where society is genuinely inclusive. It is remarkable to observe the change in perspective and the factors that contribute to this transformation. The study revealed that young people in this group exhibited resilience in facing challenges, which might be connected to the development of critical consciousness.

Participants showed great enthusiasm to succeed and demonstrated a commitment to attending university or pursuing higher education. They were optimistic about their future career paths, demonstrating a clear understanding of their potential goals. The findings of this study suggest that cultivating an optimistic mindset is beneficial for achieving personal aspirations. Several studies indicate a connection between dispositional optimism and overall life satisfaction (Oriol et al., 2020; Piper, 2022; Tavakoly Sany et al., 2023; Usán Supervía et al., 2020). In contrast, unrealistic optimism - an anticipated future outcome that may be less likely - has been found to have a downside. This includes consequences of overconfidence, failure to take necessary precautions and errors in judgment (Dawson, 2023; Harris & Hahn, 2011; Shepperd et al., 2017). Furthermore, Dawson (2023) suggests that individuals tend to exhibit more optimism in situations they can partially control, leaving room for uncertainty regarding uncontrollable future events. This debate needs further research to determine whether the benefits of optimism in life satisfaction outweigh the potential risks associated with unrealistic optimism. Shepperd et al. (2017) asserted that, despite the costs, unrealistic optimism still shares some of the benefits of dispositional optimism.

This study found that the disadvantaged backgrounds of participants served as a strong motivation, largely because of a cultural aspiration to support their families in escaping the cycle of poverty. It is plausible to hypothetically consider that individuals from underprivileged backgrounds may possess a heightened sense of motivation. This increased motivation could stem from a desire to overcome challenges and strive for a better future, leading to a greater drive to succeed despite the challenges they have faced. This factor played a critical role in the shift from a pessimistic mindset to an optimistic one (section 6.5.3). Therefore, assumptions regarding the poor academic performance and misjudged abilities of Black young people may be masking a lack of adequate support to help them achieve their aspirations. It sheds light on why Black young students feel a sense of marginalisation within the educational system. These experiences have inspired them to develop resilience and advocate for positive change within the system. The experiences shared by participants highlight the importance of implementing changes, such as establishing a supportive and culturally sensitive educational system. These ideas were developed in response to the imperative of addressing racialisation within and beyond the educational realm. As shown in Figure 6.4, the development of critical consciousness empowered participants, giving them a voice, at the intersection of critical consciousness and marginalisation. Such empowerment has enabled young people to become more aware of societal issues and has motivated them to drive positive change.

Motivation is an important factor that drives young people within the change narrative. Participants mentioned role models as sources of motivation, alongside the influence of celebrities. They discussed how both role models and celebrities serve as mechanisms for inspiration. Motivation is also one of the elements of the critical consciousness process, which comes after reflection. The determination of Black young people to challenge stereotypes, break down barriers that hinder the achievements of Black individuals, and excel in education and career paths fuels their sense of agency. For some participants, their personal experiences serve as a source of motivation, while for others, it is the qualities they admire in their parents, siblings and celebrities that inspire them. Winter (16, M) expressed his admiration for Cristiano Ronaldo, the professional footballer, citing his hard work and outspoken nature as key qualities he respects. Yaw (14, M) mentioned American basketball player Kyrie Irving, whom he believes inspires many Black youth in England and the United States of America through his philanthropy and positive impact on their lives. In addition, participants discussed the importance of education as a source of motivation. They suggested that increasing the number of Black teachers in schools and greater representation in senior leadership positions could inspire students to believe that they, too, can achieve successful positions. Many participants expressed concern about this issue during discussions. A notable example is the expression of Sipho (14, M): ‘For me, like anyone that is Black, that I just see doing something, they just inspire me. Like whoever it is, be it football, acting or anything, if you're even a Black teacher, just inspires me to be, like, to learn more. And because I know that if they can do it, I can do it’.

It can be argued that the goals and ambitions of participants influenced their motivational dynamics. The goal-setting theory (Fisher, 2009) offers a robust explanation for their behavioural orientation. This motivational framework suggests that establishing clear and specific goals enhances performance by directing efforts toward desired outcomes. In this study, participants articulated challenging objectives, notably the pursuit of high academic grades and the subsequent attainment of lucrative employment. Given their socio-economic backgrounds, these individuals are driven by a profound aspiration for professional success, which allows them to support their families and contribute positively to their communities. For example, one participant, Sasha, identified drive and ambition as core values that underpin her motivation.

Continuing the discussion on motivation, participants noted that culture, art and music are significant sources of inspiration. Music and art serve as vital mediums for expressing and preserving Black culture, allowing for the articulation of the lived experiences of Black young people. For instance, Tega (16, M) mentioned Santan Dave, a Black British rapper whose lyrical content resonates with the complex struggles faced by Black young people. Despite a challenging upbringing, Santan Dave stands out as a symbol of hope and resilience. This underscores that motivation drives action and includes critical consciousness, which may lead to participation, an issue to be elaborated upon next.

It is essential to examine not only the challenges of racial discrimination faced by these young people but also their motivations for social activism. A strong desire for agency propels Black young people toward active engagement in advocacy efforts. Many participants expressed concerns about their involvement in issues affecting them, such as regulations on hairstyles and tokenistic gestures by schools, which contribute to a feeling of being excluded from decision-making processes that impact their lives (Chapter 4). This heightened awareness of systemic discrimination and inequality has spurred their participation in protests and demonstrations against policies and institutions they view as unjust. The enthusiasm for self-expression among Black youth often seems to be overlooked.

Participants voiced a strong desire to express themselves freely and change the negative perceptions of Black individuals. This view was supported by Dejen (16, M) who said, ‘I feel like just based on the stereotypes that have existed for a long time in this country and all around the world. I feel like it needs to change if we are to make progress. People really need to know that we are not all committing crimes. There are always going to be anomalies within such a situation’. These discussions encouraged participants to explore various strategies for engaging in initiatives aimed at amplifying their voices. For example, Tony (14, M) participated in a Black History Month excursion to Go Africa, a community-based organisation in London that provides a platform to discuss issues of discrimination and prejudice. Devan (15, M) and Ejiro (17, F) took part in the Black Lives Matter protest in 2020. Most participants use social media as a platform for engagement in relevant discussions. Yaw (14, M) highlighted the potential of social media for self-expression, referring to instances like the *Black Out Tuesday* campaign on Instagram in response to George Floyd's murder in 2020. The findings indicate that participants demonstrate a strong commitment to nurturing the qualities and talents of Black

youth, with the aim of driving changes that they believe could enhance their opportunities for success.

### **6.5.3. Shifting from pessimism to change narrative**

The narratives illustrate an emotional journey for participants, moving from a sense of not belonging and experience of unfair treatment to a hopeful outlook for the future and the desire for a more inclusive society. An intriguing finding of this study was participants' ability to shift from a negative mindset to a positive one. While discussing issues such as racial discrimination, stereotypes, unfair treatment, and social inequality, participants felt inspired to advocate for a more equitable society. The initial pessimism described in this study arose from a feeling of hopelessness stemming from being unheard or ignored. However, this feeling evolved into a commitment to raising awareness about racism and social inequality. Participants' narratives emphasised the need to address systemic barriers, challenge stereotypes, and amplify the voices of marginalised individuals.

The agency of Black young people was demonstrated through their advocacy for recognising cultural differences and addressing their concerns. Engaging with the reflective cycle of critical consciousness (Section 6.4) prompted discussions about Black identity, the racial challenges they face, and their aspirations for success. By reflecting on their experiences with racism and discrimination, they sought ways to assert their agency in effecting the change they desired in society. The group discussion sessions provided participants with a valuable opportunity to talk about issues that they found unsettling. This marked a significant shift from their prior experiences of being unable to discuss matters affecting them. Some participants shared that they had discussed these topics informally, such as at home or among friends. For instance, Sasha (15, F) mentioned that such discussions could feel uncomfortable in certain environments, such as schools, and observed that their experience with school councils was somewhat tokenistic. She acknowledged the privilege of being part of the youth forum, where they could engage with peers who had similar experiences. This observation reinforces the idea that this study provided participants with opportunities to discuss their experiences and exercise their agency in changing the narrative.

The findings from this study indicate a growing sense of agency among Black young people, marked by their advocacy for policy reforms, increased participation, and a desire for their perspectives to be acknowledged. They actively raised awareness about systemic racism issues



to promote a more inclusive societal framework. Regardless of their immigration status - whether native-born or recent migrants - they all face numerous challenges. For example, Javis, whose parents were raised in Britain and who lives in London while keeping familial connections outside the city, emphasised that barriers still exist. Overall, the resilience shown by the participants is impressive, reflecting a shared optimism for a changing society and hope for a positive future.

#### **6.5.4. Gaining voice by representation**

Inclusion initiatives are often insufficient, as illustrated by instances of tokenism. Authentic and effective representation of Blackness across various sectors of society is crucial for amplifying marginalised voices. Such initiatives can lead to increased representation of Black individuals in educational settings, workplaces, and state institutions. Increased representation not only helps dismantle stereotypes and reduce barriers but can also motivate and empower younger generations. Participants engaged in a passionate discussion on the necessity of better representation of Black individuals. They viewed this as essential for empowering their voices and ensuring greater visibility. Improved representation could be instrumental in challenging the deeply rooted stereotypes that have historically affected Black minorities.

The findings highlighted a persistent lack of adequate representation, despite ongoing diversity and inclusion efforts. While important strides have been made over the years towards enhancing diversity and inclusion, there is still a need for improved representation. The emphasis is on how representation can promote a sense of belonging and affirm Black voices while also challenging existing narratives of stereotypes. Suggested areas for enhancing representation include education, curriculum, media portrayals, and senior leadership positions.

To conclude, this study demonstrates that the reflexivity and agency of Black young people are inherently heuristic. The use of deliberative group discussions created an environment where participants engaged in open dialogue, allowing them to explore diverse perspectives and foster self-discovery through the exchange of ideas. This investigation into the reflexivity of Black young people adds to the existing literature on cognitive development within this demographic. The findings reveal that participants can enhance their reflexivity and critical self-awareness through reflective practices and the critical analysis of their lived experiences.

The theoretical framework of critical consciousness suggests that Black young people utilise heuristic reasoning to express their voices and experiences. By incorporating concepts such as critical consciousness, intersectionality, and cultural capital, this research clarifies the complexities of identity, inequality, and marginalisation while advocating for a social justice perspective. This inquiry offers a radical view of agency that extends beyond the education system to include young people seeking to make an impact on society. It highlights the importance of creating platforms that promote open discussion, enabling participants to address and articulate the issues that significantly affect their lives.

## **6.6. Chapter summary**

The development of a cultural framework sheds light on the key themes, allowing for a deeper understanding of issues related to marginalisation, identity construction, and the concepts of voice and agency. Central to this discussion is the dynamic interplay between culture and race, highlighting the crucial importance of recognising and embracing cultural differences. Participants often express concerns rooted in their personal experiences of self-identity and their aspirations for the future, emphasising the complex relationship between individual identity and the broader socio-cultural environment. Additionally, an understanding of the use of voice has provided valuable insights into the connections between critical consciousness and experiences of marginalisation, revealing how these elements influence and shape one another. This enriched perspective offers a holistic view of the challenges faced by Black young people as they explore their identities and navigate diverse cultural contexts. These findings have implications and call for further investigation into the experiences of marginalisation within this demographic to deepen our understanding of this important social issue.

This chapter connects key findings to relevant literature and studies. The discussion reveals that considering cultural factors is essential for understanding the issue of marginalisation. While this study aimed to explore marginalisation, the findings clearly show that we cannot fully discuss issues of marginalisation without cultural marginalisation. Understanding the historical and systemic oppression faced by certain cultures allows for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the marginalisation that contributes to disparities in educational opportunities and socio-economic status. The study identifies cultural identity, exclusions, under-representation, and restricted access to opportunities rooted in prejudice and stereotypes as critical factors contributing to marginalisation. Furthermore, it emphasises the role of critical

consciousness in shaping perspectives on inequality and social injustice. I acknowledge that addressing these disparities can be challenging due to the issue of power imbalance.

This study delved into the complex themes of racial injustice and the notion of colourblindness, which can be viewed as an attempt to downplay the impact of oppression and racism. The analysis and interpretation of voice in this study aimed to deepen our understanding of marginalisation. *Voice* is depicted as the resistance of Black young people against oppression and prejudice within the education system, and societal injustices that arise from racial biases. Despite attempts to shift the focus away from racism by introducing concepts such as reverse racism and racial gaslighting, the findings support the rationale for this study.

The conceptual framework used in this study to explore marginalisation differs from traditional social policy analysis models. This research not only examined how marginalisation affects the fair distribution of resources, considering factors such as socioeconomic status, opportunities, and overall well-being, but also specifically focused on the experiences of Black young people. Drawing on various interdisciplinary theories, this study analysed the complex nature of marginalisation. By adopting a critical perspective, I aimed to uncover the complex interplay of class hierarchies and power dynamics that influence marginalisation within Black ethnic communities.

In conclusion, this chapter provided important insights into the complexities of cultural marginalisation, critical agency, and critical identity. These insights could potentially pave the way for future scholarly discussions, providing crucial understanding into the critical identity development of Black young people. Additionally, the findings emphasise the vital role of a cultural framework in gaining a deeper understanding of the experience of marginalisation. Recognising and valuing cultural differences is essential for effectively identifying and tackling issues related to marginalisation, especially within heterogeneous communities. Therefore, developing cultural competency is fundamental to any discourse on diversity. The concluding chapter of this thesis summarises the findings, highlights contributions to knowledge, and outlines implications for policy and practice.

# CHAPTER 7

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### 7.1. Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings, particularly in relation to how they address the research questions. It highlights the contributions to understanding marginalisation and implications for future research, policy and practice. This study drew on the experiences and narratives of groups of Black young people in London to understand their perceptions of marginalisation and their use of voice. I used critical consciousness theory to unpack the process of critical identity development and the relationship between critical consciousness, voice and marginalisation. This study introduces a cultural framework that enhances the understanding of marginalisation, showing how cultural elements provide deeper insights into marginalisation issues. ‘Voice’ was conceptualised as perceptions of resistance against experiences of marginalisation and the desire for change. The study highlights key issues of marginalisation among Black young people, which include a lack of cultural capital, social inequality, Black identity, racial discrimination, stereotypes, unequal educational opportunities and a non-inclusive curriculum. The different forms of marginalisation raised in Table 6.1 show the complexity of marginalisation in their lived experiences.

This study demonstrated the significance of the sense of belonging and how it is connected to Black identity. Study group members experienced a lack of acceptance regarding their identity and cultural values, which was evident in the questioning of their Afro-Caribbean hairstyles. Their increased cultural awareness contributed to a reawakening of cultural values among members, validating their lived experience from a cultural perspective. Despite widespread feelings of frustration and pessimism in their narratives of marginalisation, this study shows that young people’s resilience and agency could reframe what appears to be a negative outlook to a positive one. This final chapter examines how these findings provide insight into this community’s understanding of marginalisation.

### 7.2. Reflections on main study findings and research questions

I begin by reflecting on the research questions, the key themes and subordinate themes discussed in Chapter 6. This study aimed to investigate the perception of marginalisation

among Black young people. Participants expressed feelings of loss of belonging based on racial identity, which significantly influenced their perceptions of marginalisation at both individual and social levels. A critical perspective on the loss of a sense of belonging highlights the problem of treating Black young people as a homogeneous group, leading to stereotypes and assumptions about their identities and behaviours. Adopting a social constructivist approach with a clear theoretical framework and research design provided a suitable methodology to explore the intricate process of understanding participants' lived experiences. The complex nature of marginalisation revealed in this study highlights the salience of contextual factors and the empowering agency of Black young people. This initiated discussions about critical identity development and cultural framework as tools that can help us understand marginalisation. The discussions in Chapters 4 and 5 show Black young people's constructions of the multifaceted nature of marginalisation and racial identity. These perceptions address the three research questions.

#### *How do Black young people respond to marginalisation?*

Participants used social inequality to explain and rationalise societal unfairness and inequities. They emphasised the significance of the lack of cultural capital and how it contributed to their sense of unequal outcomes. It underscores their desire for increased support and resources to address these disparities. The response of Black young people to marginalisation was significantly influenced by their personal experiences, with racial identity and cultural influences playing a key role in shaping their perspectives (Chapter 6, 6.2). The insights gained from these narratives add depth and improve our understanding of marginalisation. Their feelings of marginalisation were expressed in various ways (see Chapter 6). These include:

- racial discrimination
- social inequality
- unequal access to educational opportunities
- non-inclusive curriculum
- lack of representation
- disproportionate exclusion from learning in schools as a result of being Othered

The study highlights how these Black young people effectively navigated challenges by modifying their behaviour through code-switching or identity-switching. This involved adjusting their behaviour or expression to better fit into various social or cultural settings as a

deliberate and strategic way of coping. These helped them navigate their lived experience of racialisation, but as an engagement strategy, it seemed less clear how it helped them deal with barriers to opportunities and marginalisation. Considering how cultural perspectives shaped discussions on marginalisation in this study, I conceptualised a cultural framework to gain deeper insights into the complexities of marginalisation. While existing literature has pointed out the disparities between Black individuals and their white counterparts (Chapter 1), this study explored the specific determinants and forms of marginalisation experienced by Black young people to provide a better understanding of their unique challenges.

*What role does critical consciousness play in shaping identities and the construction of human rights?*

Developing critical consciousness contributed to a heightened awareness of social, political, and economic oppression, which motivated participants to challenge these issues. It significantly influenced participants' construction of Black identity and their advocacy for Black hair (styles) as expressions of that identity and heritage. This process played a vital role in shaping their personal identities and understanding of human rights, as well as how they perceived and understood the experiences of marginalisation. Using the framework of critical consciousness theory offered valuable insights into the complex dynamics involved in identity construction and marginalisation.

Critical consciousness encouraged Black young people to question dominant narratives and recognise how power structures influence their sense of self. It empowered them to define their identities on their own terms and helped them understand how different aspects of identity, such as race, gender, and class, intersect in shaping their lived experiences. In terms of human rights, critical consciousness enabled them to see the root causes of injustice. Instead of viewing issues like poverty or discrimination as isolated problems, it reveals the systemic forces behind these issues. This awareness fosters empathy, solidarity, and a commitment to social justice, as well as the drive to take action and advocate for change.

The use of voice demonstrates an understanding of the challenges faced by marginalised communities through the lens of critical consciousness. Although the study primarily focused on marginalisation, it also prompted an exploration of the critical consciousness of Black young people and their perspectives on social and political issues. Additionally, the reflective process

that participants engaged in reveals a remarkable journey of reawakening that manifests as a transformative display of critical consciousness and racial identity.

In essence, critical consciousness empowered Black young people to become active participants in the struggle for justice. It deepened their understanding of themselves and the world, laying the foundation for meaningful identity formation and engagement with human rights.

### *How do Black young people express voice, agency and reflexivity?*

Black young people often experience systemic marginalisation and racial discrimination across various aspects of their lives, including education, media representation, and interactions with authority figures. These forms of exclusion significantly impact their daily experiences and self-perception. However, Black young people were not passive in the face of these injustices. By being reflective, exercising their agency, and using their voices to express themselves, they actively challenge the systems that attempt to silence or define them.

Many Black young people develop a critical self-awareness as they reflect on their experiences with racial inequality. They questioned societal norms, stereotypes, and the structures that disadvantage them. This reflective process is both personal and collective, influenced by conversations, cultural expression, and social consciousness. From this awareness emerges agency - their ability to act with intention to resist and reimagine the world around them. Black young people demonstrate this agency by reclaiming their identities, building community networks, joining protests, creating art, and aligning with movements that advocate for justice and equity. Their actions often challenge dominant narratives and confront the institutions that marginalise them. Reflexivity and agency were demonstrated through the engagement of Black young people in this study as they articulated feelings of marginalisation (Chapter 6, 6.4). A key aspect of both reflexivity and agency is the expression of voice. Whether through spoken word, music, fashion, digital platforms, or activism, Black young people share their stories and assert their presence. Voice expression serves not only as a form of resistance but also as a means of affirming identity and inspiring change. It empowers them to shift the narrative from one of victimhood to one of strength and openness to possibilities.

The study findings highlight the concept of ‘voice’ as a tool for challenging and opposing the power imbalances that result from the systematic marginalisation of certain groups within

society. Resistance to established norms and power structures is manifested in various ways, including fostering critical awareness through reflecting on personal experiences, expressing those experiences to shed light on the impact of these structural barriers, and actively advocating for changes in regulations and policies to assert agency and influence. ‘Voice’ is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon explored in this study. In the context of this study, it plays an important role in addressing and rectifying systemic inequities stemming from marginalisation. These findings build on the discourse of young people living on the margins of society and the profound impact of marginalisation on those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. This study not only advances our knowledge of critical perspectives on marginalisation but also shows the intricate ways in which cultural factors perpetuate and sustain marginalisation.

Despite experiencing ongoing marginalisation and racial discrimination, Black young people consistently reflect on their experiences, take action, and speak out. Their ability to express themselves in the face of systemic silencing is a powerful demonstration of resilience and transformation. This underscores the importance of highlighting their experiences, perspectives, and voices in the fight for racial justice.

### **7.3. Contribution to knowledge**

#### **7.3.1. Knowledge gap**

This study addressed significant gaps in the literature, offering valuable insights through a robust research design and insightful findings. Although there have been recent studies focusing on Black individuals (Abrams et al., 2021; Alexander, 2018; Arday & Jones, 2022; Bottiani et al., 2016; Cea D’Ancona, 2023; Compton-Lilly et al., 2022; Gillborn et al., 2017), there are still some conceptual and methodological gaps. Several studies have explored various aspects of young people’s lives, such as their political involvement, childhood and education, social identities, experiences of being in care, and activism. These studies have contributed to the expanding field of youth studies (MacDonald et al., 2019). Many of these studies adopt interdisciplinary approaches and a mix of different research methods. However, this thesis diverges from the typical generalisation of young people, lumping them into one category to specifically focus on Black young people’s critical consciousness, agency and intersectionality to explicitly explore marginalisation, voice and identity. The aim was to fill the gap by



examining their perception of marginalisation and intersections of voice, critical consciousness and identity.

Despite a substantial amount of literature focused on measuring socioeconomic status and deprivation in the context of marginalisation, there is often a tendency to overlook the specific disparities in access to educational, economic, and social opportunities among various groups. This oversight fails to recognise the compounded effects of multiple disadvantages experienced by young people with intersecting identities, particularly within Black ethnic minority communities. This study aimed to address this gap by exploring the narratives of participants to gain a better understanding of their perspectives and experiences of marginalisation across different settings. Although earlier studies have pointed out the educational gaps between Black individuals and their white counterparts, this thesis explored more thoroughly the sociocultural and structural elements that lead to the marginalisation of Black youth, affecting not just their education but also their overall experiences and well-being. It provided a detailed insight into how the interplay of various factors shapes their lives in both educational and social settings.

This study adds to the growing body of scholarship focused on the experiences of Black youth in urban Britain by amplifying the voices of Black teenagers in London. Their experiences may vary from those of youths in other parts of the UK due to the unique cosmopolitan and diverse nature of London. This diversity influences their daily lives, interactions and sense of identity. The London effect was also discussed on page 69, section 3.3. The group of participants consisted of young people of different genders; however, this diversity did not notably affect the main themes that emerged from the data. Both male and female participants expressed remarkably similar feelings of marginalisation, revealing a shared sense of alienation and exclusion. This convergence suggests that the detrimental effects of these systemic challenges are deeply entrenched and transcend gender boundaries, emphasising a shared struggle against widespread societal injustices.

The findings highlight their expressions of critical consciousness, resilience, and aspirations, offering a nuanced counter-narrative to the deficit-focused representations that often dominate academic literature and policy discussions about Black youth. By prioritising the perspectives of the participants, this research reveals how these young individuals understand, navigate, and challenge the structural barriers they face, particularly those related to race, class, and educational inequality. Existing research has documented the racialised barriers confronting

Black students in the UK education system (Gillborn, 2008; Rollock et al., 2015); however, this study offers fresh insights into how Black young people reflect on these challenges with a keen sense of socio-political awareness and enduring optimism. The teenagers involved expressed strong aspirations for upward mobility, a determination to succeed, and a belief in their ability to effect change, even as they recognised the structural disadvantages surrounding them. In this way, they embody Freirean concepts of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), actively questioning their social environments while envisioning alternative futures. This aligns with recent calls to move away from pathologising approaches in youth research, emphasising instead the agentic, reflective, and future-oriented aspects of young people's lives (Coffey & Farrugia, 2013; Keating & Melis, 2022).

Additionally, this thesis engages with ongoing interdisciplinary discussions in critical youth studies, critical race theory, and sociology of education by illustrating how voice, agency, and aspiration operate within contexts shaped by race and class. It challenges simplistic dichotomies that portray youths as either passive victims of inequality or entirely autonomous individuals (Oswell, 2013). Instead, it presents a more complex portrayal in which agency exists in tension with social structures.

This thesis deepens our understanding of what it means to be a Black teenager in contemporary London. It examined the ways in which these young individuals navigate their complex identities while facing the challenges of marginalisation and systemic inequality. Through their stories of resilience and hope, the research illuminates the experiences of Black young people, enriching both theoretical frameworks and empirical discussions concerning race, youth agency, and structural inequity. The findings have important implications for researchers, educators, and policymakers seeking to understand and better support the aspirations and potential of Black young people in Britain.

### **7.3.2. Conceptual contribution**

This study makes a meaningful contribution by introducing a cultural framework that enriches our understanding of marginalisation, emphasising the role that culture plays in this context. It provides insights into how cultural orientation can be influenced by social institutions, race, class and ethnicity, and how it is represented in the media and education system. This study supports existing literature on ethnic penalties, highlighting the issue of ethnic inequality

(Heath & Di Stasio, 2019). Although a lot of attention has been drawn to racial pattern of discrimination and the social integration of ethnic minorities (Heath & Di Stasio, 2019; Heath & Brinbaum, 2014), it can be argued that the legislative changes introduced in the UK to mitigate discrimination actually resonate with forced diversity and tokenism as the findings of this study suggest. Additionally, this study adds to the existing literature by addressing not only discrimination and ethnic penalties but also broader marginalisation issues with a specific focus on the cultural context among Black African and Caribbean ethnic minorities.

The key findings have been instrumental in developing a cultural framework that facilitates a constructive understanding of marginalisation. Researchers have used various conceptual frameworks to provide an understanding of marginalisation. Some of these frameworks include the resistance framework (Bounds & Posey, 2022), the rights framework (GEC, 2018), the broader interpretive framework through the lens of resilience (Mowat, 2015), the marginality framework (Gatzweiler & Baumüller, 2014), and the participatory-inclusive framework (Messiou, 2012). This study has contributed to existing conceptual frameworks, enhancing the understanding of marginalisation and highlighting the importance of cultural factors to fully grasp the complexities of marginalisation within this specific demographic. This cultural framework integrates barriers in educational and social contexts alongside the structural or systemic influences on marginalisation. It shows a complex structure comprising two interconnected components: the interactional component, which involves social interactions and relationships, and the structural component, which encompasses the wider societal structures and institutions.

This thesis added valuable insights into the critical issues of marginalisation that have emerged directly as a result of the research findings. It is essential to recognise that the historical factors contributing to marginalisation, as discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to post-colonial theory, are embedded within this cultural framework. This combination of historical and systemic factors gives depth to the understanding of marginalisation. However, it is important to emphasise that this does not diminish the individual agency and resilience of Black young people. On the contrary, these qualities play a crucial role in articulating and confronting the impacts of marginalisation. Some studies emphasise the resourcefulness and adaptability of marginalised individuals, focusing on their resilience strategies to navigate challenges and cope with the effects of marginalisation (Fisher & Buckner, 2018; Hall, 2018; Mowat, 2015).

This study brought much-needed attention to a demographic and subject that is not adequately addressed in existing literature. The underrepresentation of marginalised individuals and groups is a well-known issue (Wallace, 2023), and this lack of representation further perpetuates their marginalisation. A report commissioned by the Greater London Authority (2020) highlights substantial underrepresentation and workplace inequalities faced by young Black men. Despite some efforts to address these issues, there is still a noticeable imbalance in the representation of Black young people in literature, including within youth studies (section 7.3.4). This pattern is evident across different societal institutions such as education, art, media and politics, as well as in leadership roles, as indicated by the research findings. The problem statement in Chapter 1 emphasises the importance of concentrating specifically on the experiences of Black young people, rather than addressing the broader category of young people as a whole. This study was purposefully designed and conceptualised to focus on the lived experiences of Black young people, which are often misunderstood. Given the ongoing challenges of marginalisation faced by this group, their unique experiences should not be overlooked. This study demonstrates that critical consciousness significantly influences the construction of Black identity among the participants. The framework of critical consciousness theory enabled an in-depth examination of the development of critical consciousness identity and its impact on shaping Black identity. Furthermore, it provided insight into the interplay of intersectionality and cultural capital within the context of this study.

An important insight from this study is that optimism about a hopeful future energises Black young people to work harder to achieve their goals. This represents a departure, in a positive way, from the overrepresentation of Black young people in gang activity and violence, pointing towards a more effective way of nurturing their potential. Several studies have explored the racial discrimination and inequalities faced by Black ethnic minorities, including those by Wallace (2024), Wright (2010) and Gillborn and Youdell (2009). However, these studies have not specifically addressed this issue within this demographic. While the research conducted by Wallace, Wright, Gillborn and Youdell provides valuable insight into educational inequalities affecting Black ethnic minorities, the aspect of resilience in Black young people in the face of marginalisation requires careful consideration. This intriguing finding leads me to propose a hypothesis: marginalisation may have a positive dimension, as it could motivate people to strive towards their goals with greater determination. This perspective opens up an exciting area for future research, exploring how adverse experiences can shape strengths and motivations within marginalised communities.

### **7.3.3. Contribution to policy and practice**

These findings also have the potential to make a valuable contribution to policy research for marginalised and underprivileged communities. The present study illuminates how social inequality disproportionately impacts Black young people through power imbalances, lack of cultural capital, unequal opportunities, and deprivation. Additionally, there is a noticeable lack of cultural sensitivity in both education and workplace environments (Ali, 2015; Gorard et al., 2023; Ofori, 2023; Thomas & Quinlan, 2022). Despite numerous inquiries into race relations in Britain, the issues highlighted in this study have not been sufficiently addressed, perhaps due to denial, inaction or outright ignorance. The carefully analysed perspectives of those directly affected offer important insights for non-governmental agencies, policymakers and decision-makers to take into consideration. However, it is important to note that the findings of this study may not be generalisable as it was conducted within a specific context and, therefore, may be open to different interpretations and understandings outside of this study context. Nonetheless, it represents a meaningful contribution. The lack of generalisation does not affect the broader understanding of the issues raised.

In addressing the ongoing issue of racial gaslighting in an attempt to undermine the claim to social justice (Gillborn, 2024), a cultural framework in this study advances a fresh perspective for understanding marginalisation. The cultural framework critically explored the intersection of cultural factors and systemic barriers affecting the experiences of Black young people, shedding light on the dynamics of their marginalisation. The expansion of the understanding of critical consciousness theory to include its role in constructing a Black identity is an important addition. It illustrates how this theory has empowered Black young people's critical agency and the development of critical consciousness to shape their perspectives on marginalisation and social justice. Despite the argument in some quarters that young people are not mature enough to make decisions and that such decisions should be left to adults, the heightened critical consciousness of Black young people highlights the dynamic issues of Othering and discrimination. This study highlights the complex relationship between these issues and cultural factors, emphasising the need for a culturally sensitive and constructive approach to addressing them. Based on the findings from this research, I offer suggestions (section 7.5) that could enhance policies concerning race relations, particularly within education and the workplace.

### **7.3.4. Methodological contribution**

This study's methodological contribution lies in the integration of its theoretical framework with the empirical design. As mentioned in Chapter 4, most research on critical consciousness has primarily focused on adults and used a quantitative approach (section 4.1). In contrast, this study specifically targeted young people of Black heritage and employed deliberative group discussions and reflexive thematic analysis, as previously outlined in Chapter 3 (3.4.1 & 3.4.2). This study not only used qualitative methodology, including deliberative group discussions, but also focused on reflexivity and critical consciousness to better understand marginalisation within this demographic. The thesis consciously avoided making excessive claims and instead focused on data and the insights shared by young people during discussion sessions. The reflexive thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2022) used for data analysis involves a thorough and systematic exploration of qualitative data. This approach includes a series of rigorous steps, such as coding and pattern identification, ensuring they can be depended upon for making informed decisions. This research makes a significant contribution to the current academic discourse on the experiences of Black young people and the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies. It particularly explores the cultural, social and historical contexts that shape Black young people's experiences. The study provides an in-depth exploration of the diverse experiences, barriers to opportunities, and struggles faced by Black young people, offering valuable insights into their cultural identities, the development of critical consciousness, societal influences, and aspirations.

Methodologically, this study contributes to the ongoing debates on the politics of voice in qualitative research. Building on Spyrou's (2011) critique of unexamined voice paradigms, it adopted a reflexive approach that considers the relational dynamics and the constructed nature of meaning-making that occurs between the researcher and participants. In doing so, this thesis offers a model for conducting ethically aware and critically informed research with minoritised youth populations. It underscores the importance of appreciating the subtle nuances and complexities that characterise these interactions, thereby enhancing our understanding of their lived experiences and perspectives.

Using critical consciousness theory as a lens to investigate the experience of marginalisation among Black young people represents a remarkable shift from previous research in this area. The critical consciousness of young people of Black heritage has been a topic that has not received sufficient qualitative research attention. While Diemer's (Diemer, 2020; Diemer et

al., 2017; Diemer et al., 2016; Pinedo et al., 2024; Pinedo et al., 2023) work with his colleagues on youth critical consciousness has been extensive, it predominantly employs quantitative methods and primarily focuses on broader (mixed) youth populations and marginalised groups. Similarly, the study by Cea D'Ancona (2023) examined racial identity, critical consciousness, and racial discrimination among Black individuals in Spain, with an average respondent age of 31. However, this study concentrated specifically on the experiences of Black young people, which aligns with the focus of my research. My research advances critical consciousness scholarship within the UK context. Specifically, it aimed to address this research gap by examining the relationship between critical consciousness, voice, racial identity and marginalisation among a sample consisting entirely of Black young people in London.

The convergence of diverse viewpoints among young people to understand marginalisation without overly referencing the term is intriguing. This deliberate strategy was designed to foster active engagement and yield valuable insights from the discussions, as evidenced in the findings. Typically, young research participants are often difficult to reach, presenting their own challenges, as discussed in the fieldwork section of Chapter 3. The use of the deliberative discussion method helped facilitate meaningful conversations among participants, providing a detailed insight into how they formed their perspectives. The group discussion sessions were carefully planned to avoid simply eliciting binary responses. In addition to using open-ended questions, similar to those in interviews, as a guide, the sessions prompted participants to engage in discussions, revealing how they constructed their understanding of marginalisation.

### **7.3.5. Eliciting the voices of Black young people**

A key contribution of this research is its deliberate and sustained focus on amplifying the voices of Black young people. In a field where mainstream narratives often speak about Black youth rather than with them, this study prioritises their perspectives in the production of knowledge. Through a qualitative and participatory research design, the study created an environment where Black young people can share their lived experiences, viewpoints, and interpretations of their educational journeys on their own terms. Rather than making assumptions about what Black young people think, feel, or need, this research is grounded in the principle of listening. It viewed voice not as a superficial addition but as an essential expression of epistemic agency. Employing dialogic methods - such as group discussions and collaborative reflection - this study highlights the ability of Black young people to critically reflect on the social and

institutional landscapes they navigate. Their insights challenge deficit-based perspectives and instead showcase the richness, complexity, and resourcefulness they exhibit within systems often not designed for their success. This research gives voice to Black young people in two significant ways: first, by creating methodological conditions that not only solicit but also engage with their stories, and second, by ensuring that their input shapes the analysis, findings, and implications of the study. In doing so, the study avoids extractive forms of knowledge production and positions Black young people as knowledgeable individuals, cultural critics, and agents of change. By prioritising their voices, the research contributes to a more equitable and representative educational discourse, recognising Black young people not merely as subjects to be examined but as active participants in envisioning new educational futures. This study emphasises that giving voice is not just a methodological choice; it is a political and ethical imperative in the fight for social justice.

In addition, it provided meaningful insights into the cultural reawakening and heightened racial identity consciousness among Black young people. The strong attachment to racial identity further illustrates the influence of cultural contexts in shaping an individual's sense of identity. These findings support the concepts of identity denial and identity threat (Chapter 4, 4.3), contributing to a deeper understanding of these issues. The narratives of participants centre on their personal experiences and suggest a form of cultural identity denial. Acknowledging cultural attachment plays a critical role in Black youth development within a culture-sensitive framework, which can illuminate anti-racist perspectives (Stern et al., 2021) and highlight the resilience of Black young people. Participants perceived cultural bonding as a way of cultivating a deeper and more meaningful connection to their Black heritage. This process not only strengthened their ties to their cultural roots but also instilled in them a profound sense of belonging, nurtured their resilience and empowered them to embrace their unique cultural identity. This study also emphasised the importance of hair(styles) as a mode of self-expression. Hair identity is integral to the construction of Black identity, which may explain why participants highlighted hair discrimination when describing their feelings of marginalisation. The crucial next step is to ensure that their voices and concerns foster genuine, sustainable change rather than mere token gestures and superficial inclusivity strategies.

Role models have notably influenced the viewpoints of Black young people. Their inspirational guidance towards attainable goals and efforts to achieve desirable outcomes have played a pivotal role in shaping their expectations for change (Morgenroth et al., 2015). Participants



express hope for meaningful change concerning their lived experiences. Role models use their influence to highlight societal issues, and it is believed that young people could leverage this to amplify their voices on matters that affect them. For example, Winter (16, M, LS1 Grp4) cited the footballer Cristiano Ronaldo as an outspoken role model. In the discussions about experiences of marginalisation and racial discrimination, Winter expressed that Ronaldo's courage in addressing contemporary issues served as a source of inspiration for him. This study emphasises the positive impact that celebrities have on young people. Some participants felt motivated to participate in protests, such as the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, after seeing the involvement of certain celebrities. They saw this as a means to amplify their voices.

Participants voiced concerns that Black teachers do not fully represent and reflect the voices of Black students. This highlights the need for more Black teachers, to improve representation and inclusion in the classroom. There was a prevailing belief that Black teachers, due to shared cultural values, could better connect with and understand the experiences of Black students. This idea is consistent with the concept of cultural empathy, which asserts that individuals sharing similar cultural backgrounds are more proficient at handling intercultural interactions and mitigating the potential for misunderstandings (Zhang & Noels, 2023). The implicit assumption is that Black teachers may be more willing to address the concerns of Black students regarding unfair treatment and the challenges they face. Cassels et al.'s (2010) study of high school students and university undergraduates in the Vancouver area emphasised the influence of culture on affective empathy, which they referred to as 'one's emotional reactions to another person's emotions or situation' (p. 310). Among the two forms of affective empathy identified by Cassels et al. (2010) - namely, personal distress and empathic concern - the latter is particularly relevant in the context of this study and participants' expectations of Black teachers. Empathic concern refers to the feeling of concern for an individual and their circumstances, and it is an important attribute that participants expect from Black teachers. However, Ejiro (17, F, LYCF) suggested that Black teachers might feel pressured to conform to predominantly white cultural norms, which can hinder their ability to effectively address the needs of their Black students.

There is a growing concern regarding the difficulties of recruiting, retaining, and training teachers, which may have contributed to the shortage of Black educators in schools. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that has highlighted the substantial underrepresentation of Black teachers in many schools and the lack of adequate representation

in senior leadership positions (Fullard, 2024; Sharp & Aston, 2024; Tereshchenko et al., 2020). Therefore, this study highlights the need for increased diversity in English schools, especially as the representation of ethnic minorities continues to decrease. The ongoing challenges in retaining Black teachers undermine their role as positive role models for Black young people, which could negatively affect those students' academic attainment.

This study has demonstrated the importance of empowering Black young people to initiate change. These young people are eager for their voices to be heard, which further illuminates the need to address the lack of attention to their perspectives. The findings suggest prioritising initiatives that empower young people and amplify their voices. Through insightful deliberative discussions, this study provided an opportunity for Black young people, defined as those aged 13-17, to express their voices, particularly regarding the various challenges they face. Notably, the active participation of the participants allowed them to share their opinions, concerns and experiences from both formal settings, such as education, and informal community contexts that affect their lives. This diverse range of perspectives and approaches contributed to the representation of their voices across different areas.

#### **7.4. Research implications**

Amplifying the voices of young people has implications for shaping policies that address issues affecting their lives. This study reveals the critical role of cultural factors, emphasising that they must not be overlooked in conversations about marginalisation. Understanding cultural marginalisation is essential for examining the experiences of Black young people. Furthermore, amplifying the voices of Black young people brings attention to their perspectives and the unique challenges they face during adolescence and the transition to adulthood.

This study highlights issues related to the involvement of Black young people in crime. Participants expressed that frustrations arising from barriers, unequal access to opportunities, and exclusionary practices may contribute to this issue (Chapter 5, 5.2.2 & Chapter 6, 6.4.1). Therefore, the issue of youth crime, particularly in London's inner cities, which includes gang violence and knife crime, requires a thorough examination of its underlying causes and contributing factors. It is essential to consider various factors such as cultural influences, socioeconomic disadvantage, exclusion, limited access to educational opportunities, and peer pressure. These factors have a considerable impact on individual experiences and outcomes.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the vital role that youth practitioners can play in leveraging research findings to positively influence the lives of young people. This type of research offers valuable insights that youth practitioners can use in their work with young people.

In the last three decades, successive Labour and Conservative governments have implemented compensatory education policies aimed at addressing disparities in early childhood education. These initiatives include the introduction of programmes such as Sure Start, Education Action Zones, and the Pupil Premium. However, these policy measures have not sufficiently addressed the complex social and cultural differences, as well as the systemic shortcomings within the education system (Melhuish & Barnes, 2020; Power, 2018; Sosu & Pimenta, 2023). The findings of this study suggest that disparities in educational access for Black young people persist. It is essential to address factors such as cultural deprivation outside of school, as well as the cultural and racial dynamics within educational institutions, including the curriculum content. These areas require attention in terms of future policy direction.

## **7.5. Suggestions and recommendations**

Reflecting on the findings and challenges of this PhD study, my recommendations will be directed to future research and ways to better understand the lived experiences of Black young people. This study, driven by my commitment to race and equity values, has made meaningful contributions to the ongoing discourse on promoting racial equality and social justice. It supports initiatives aimed at fostering positive change and continuing to advance social justice for individuals from marginalised racial backgrounds. By focusing on Black young people in London, this research illuminated the different aspects of marginalisation they experience. This study demonstrated that differential treatment and disparities in access to opportunities represent a form of marginalisation for Black young people. It is important to recognise that racial injustice and marginalisation have a substantial impact on well-being, including emotional dysregulation and mental health issues. Therefore, future research should explore the emotional and individual well-being aspects, as these were not the primary focus of this study.

Based on the findings from this research, I present several valuable suggestions to improve ongoing race relations, particularly within the educational sector. The existence of

discriminatory and exclusionary mechanisms within state institutions, such as education, has once again drawn attention to the critical issues of power dynamics and social class. The findings have raised concerns regarding exclusion in schools. However, this aspect was not thoroughly examined. Anticipating and addressing this issue should have been incorporated into the research design and group discussion guide to encourage meaningful discussions on the topic. This research did not investigate schools for teaching and learning; instead, it used schools to recruit research participants, concentrating on Black young people. Future research could specifically target those who have faced exclusion from school.

The research also revealed that, despite expressing feelings of marginalisation from various perspectives, participants maintained a sense of optimism and determination to excel in education and their careers. This raises an intriguing question: why might this be the case? While resilience and challenging familial backgrounds were identified as potential factors, this raises the question of whether the concept of marginalisation may be ambivalent, carrying both positive and negative connotations. Given the insights into the sense of optimism among this study group, it is worth exploring whether marginalisation can have positive effects, such as motivating migrants to strive harder for success. This study presents a hypothetical scenario where individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds are motivated to pursue their goals and aspirations (section 7.3.2). This leads to the question: could marginalisation be perceived as a positive experience? Exploring this idea could represent a valuable area for future research.

The cultural framework presented in this study provides a strong argument for understanding how marginalisation evolves and the diverse ways through which it can be perpetuated. The research illustrates marginalisation as a social process, showing how individuals and groups can actively construct experiences of marginalisation depending on the specific context and time period. By shedding light on the multifaceted nature of marginalisation, the study emphasises that it is not a static condition but rather a dynamic and fluid concept shaped by interrelated social, cultural, and temporal factors. Advancing the theoretical development of this cultural framework in future research would greatly enrich our understanding and offer more insights into the complexities of marginalisation.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the limited understanding of the unique experiences of young Black individuals. Their behaviours are often misinterpreted, leading to the reinforcement of stereotypes such as being loud and negative assumptions about their

identities. These misconceptions have remarkable implications, influencing not only how they are treated within the educational setting but also how they are perceived in broader social contexts, where such biases can hinder their academic progress and contribute to the widening achievement gap. In light of these challenges, the following suggestions are proposed to address these issues.

The implementation of a culturally sensitive teaching approach within educational institutions is suggested. Educators are encouraged to undergo thorough reorientation and training programmes in order to gain a deep understanding of diverse cultural factors. This includes openly addressing and actively combating racism, as well as developing an understanding of how cultural influences shape behaviours in the learning environment. Additionally, the study emphasises the need for collaboration with Black parents to ensure that cultural differences are not only acknowledged but also celebrated with an open and inclusive mindset, thereby fostering a truly diverse and respectful educational community.

A constructive approach to addressing the cultural factors contributing to the marginalisation of Black young people involves revising the curriculum to incorporate culturally relevant elements that are often overlooked. This process should include a thorough analysis of relevant contexts and cultural considerations that will impact educational practices (Nijhuis, 2019). It would be helpful to have supportive legislation that acknowledges the influence of culture in curriculum development. Furthermore, I suggest the incorporation of provisions within the legislation that promote ongoing evaluation processes, considering the dynamic nature of time and space. Prioritising the implementation of diversity and cultural awareness training initiatives is essential for fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Ongoing discussions about decolonising the curriculum have highlighted the dominance of Western knowledge (Begum & Saini, 2019; Cusworth, 2022; Winter et al., 2024). Building on this, I propose a transition from the more generic model of curriculum development to the adoption of statutory learning guidance that integrates the experiences of Black young people as a fundamental aspect of curriculum reform. This strategy not only emphasises a shift to cultural awareness but also incorporates the previously mentioned principles, such as understanding the unique experiences of Black young people and employing a culturally sensitive teaching approach. While it is critical to have an inclusive curriculum, it is equally imperative to ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are represented to enhance the effectiveness of this approach.

Participants engaged in a meaningful discussion about various initiatives, including the school council and clubs. Throughout the sessions, many expressed feelings of being unheard and indicated that their concerns were not adequately addressed. This sense of tokenism suggests that these platforms could be enhanced to better serve as valuable avenues for marginalised groups to voice their opinions. Going a step further, I suggest actively engaging young people through mentorship programmes that highlight Black role models, which can foster a lasting positive impact on decision-making, motivation, and career aspirations.

Lastly, it is essential to confront the denial of institutional racism and to acknowledge its existence to effectively address it. Although the report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (2021) reported a lack of evidence for institutionalised racism, it is evident from this study's findings that there are elements of institutional racism in schools and workplaces. Numerous public discussions raised concerns about the evidence supporting the report's conclusions, while the Conservative government largely overlooked these issues, choosing instead to prioritise immigration control policies (Solomos, 2022). Macpherson's (1989) definition of institutional racism (section 6.3.2), stemming from the public enquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, is still relevant. As noted in Chapter 6, there are structural barriers that perpetuate racialisation in various forms, and in some cases, they are less visible. These barriers are sustained through tokenism, racial hierarchies, and discriminatory policies. There is need to prioritise genuine social transformation, which requires unwavering political commitments to racial equity and social justice.

## **7.6. Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of marginalisation among Black young people, their lived experiences, their use of voice, and their critical consciousness. In this concluding chapter, I discussed how the study findings addressed the research questions, contributed to existing knowledge, and outlined the implications for future research, policy, and practice. The study highlights the urgent need for substantial change in societal structures and attitudinal transformations towards Black young people. There are two prominent outcomes of this study that also serve as contributions. Firstly, this study has played a vital role in amplifying the voices of Black young people, offering them a platform to express their concerns and experiences. This has resulted in a better understanding of their challenges and perspectives, which had been ignored. Secondly, the study illustrates the process of developing critical

consciousness, emphasising the strong attachment to Black identity shaped by critical consciousness theory. The critical identity of Black young people was also evident. Overall, the study's findings illuminate the complex issues faced by Black young people and emphasise the need to empower their voices while acknowledging their critical consciousness.

The key findings of this research show that marginalisation is perceived in the context of social inequality and racial identity. The study revealed that cultural capital significantly influenced the educational and career achievements of Black young people. Furthermore, it supported the idea that intersectionality could compound disadvantage, leading to multiple forms of marginalisation. In the British context, gaining insight into the experiences of marginalisation within the Black ethnic group is greatly enhanced by a cultural framework. The study demonstrates how cultural factors shape experiences of marginalisation, including unequal educational opportunities, barriers to accessing opportunities, racial stereotypes, Othering, and racial discrimination.

In this study, I drew upon a variety of theoretical approaches to critically examine the complex experiences of Black young people. Their lived realities are influenced by overlapping social, cultural, and structural factors that cannot be fully understood through a single lens. The concept of intersectionality, for instance, highlighted how different systems of oppression interact to create unique experiences of marginalisation. By integrating various theoretical approaches, this study offered a deeper understanding of the lives of Black young people. Embracing theoretical pluralism allows for an analysis that is open, reflective, and responsive to the richness of the data, which helps to avoid simplistic interpretations and deepens our overall understanding (Blaikie, 2007; Domingues, 2024). Limiting the analysis to one viewpoint risks oversimplifying these complexities and overlooking the intricate dynamics of power, identity, and resistance that characterise their everyday lives.

The limitations of the study have been addressed, some of which were previously outlined in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, I have critically assessed their potential impact on the validity and contribution of this research. The research framework considers the effects of context and time on knowledge (Ackermann, 1982), specifically aiming to understand the real-life experiences of participants within their social environments. The process of analysing and interpreting the experiences of participants aligns with the philosophical foundation of constructivism that underpins this research. Participants actively constructed their understanding of identity and

feelings of marginalisation through social interactions and the social construction of knowledge within a cultural context. I have provided an overview of the research context, and the results presented reflect participants' narratives. It is envisaged that this research will inspire further research to advance knowledge in this area.

Reflecting on my doctoral journey, I have acquired valuable insights and learning experiences, particularly through my interaction with the young participants in the study. I have witnessed their adeptness at critical thinking, their skill in analysing complex issues, and their display of reflexivity despite the criticism surrounding the prioritisation of children's voices in qualitative research. This is particularly evident in relation to power imbalances regarding the analysis and interpretation decisions, which are typically led by adults (Spencer et al., 2020). The demonstration of critical thinking about complex issues challenges the misconception that young people are incapable of articulating their own perspectives and speaking for themselves. This study has yielded valuable data that could be further investigated in future research. It is evident that understanding identity and personality is valuable in examining issues of marginalisation. As an evolving concept, it can be interpreted in diverse ways depending on different perspectives, contexts, and individual experiences. From this viewpoint, the study has effectively explored the dynamism and complexity of social issues such as the processes and experiences of marginalisation.

Finally, the narratives shared by participants deeply resonated with me, particularly in relation to racial identity. They provided me with an enhanced awareness of how it influences everyday interactions and workplace dynamics in a diverse society like Britain. As someone sharing a similar ethnic background to research participants, I thoughtfully examined my positionality in Chapter 3. Reflecting on this research journey, I realise that it has been a blend of inspiration and pride. I have had the opportunity to amplify the voices of Black young people, who, like every young person, rightfully deserve to have their voices heard, rather than just the researcher 'simply giving voice' (Caslin, 2023, p.94). It is my sincere hope that this work will contribute to addressing the challenges faced by Black young people and serve as a springboard for meaningful change, instilling a sense of hope and empowerment within them.



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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Letter to Headteachers



### Letter of introduction

Date:

Headteacher:

School:

Address:

Dear ...

I am a PhD student at London Metropolitan University, undertaking research into young Black people's views on marginalisation, and how they see this as affecting their lives. I would very much like to undertake between two to four small group interviews with student volunteers from your school.

I hope to talk with small groups, each of about six students, who are willing to take part in a discussion for about an hour, in a suitable location on the school's premises. It would be specifically with students who identify themselves as of black heritage. The study is not about your school or its policies and practices or about the student's education and the school. Students will be anonymous and non-identifiable. All information will be stored in strict compliance with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018. Students will not need to prepare for the discussion in any way.

I appreciate that you and your staff have many demands on your time, but I would be really grateful if you could consider this request. I would be very happy to discuss my research proposals further with you or a designated member of staff if there are further details you need and to discuss practical arrangements if you wish to go ahead with this.

I look forward to hearing from you, either via email at [ifn0027@my.londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:ifn0027@my.londonmet.ac.uk) or by telephone at 07736911446.

Kind regards,

Ifeanyi Nwachukwu  
School of Social Sciences and Professions  
London Metropolitan University  
166-220 Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB  
Email: [ifn0027@my.londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:ifn0027@my.londonmet.ac.uk)

## Appendix B: Research poster/flyer

**LONDON  
METROPOLITAN  
UNIVERSITY**

**Research participants needed !!!**

*This PhD project aim to understand the views of Black young people on equality, marginalisation and social justice and how this affects their lives in Britain.*

**Who can participate?**

- Aged 13 - 18
- Identify as Black or mixed Black ethnicity (African – Caribbean descent)
- Resident in London

*If your answer is yes to all of the above we want to hear from you*



**Why participate?**

- It will give you a voice (to be heard)
- Opportunity to be involved in issues that affect your lives
- It could help practitioners and policymakers better understand young people

**What will you do?**

- You will complete a short questionnaire
- You will participate in group discussion (focus group)
- Informed consent will be required prior to participation in focus group



**How to participate**

- Please contact Ifeanyi Nwachukwu (PhD student at London Metropolitan University)
- Email: [ifn0027@my.londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:ifn0027@my.londonmet.ac.uk)

*This project has gained ethical approval from the Research Ethics Panel at London Metropolitan University*

## Appendix C: Research information sheet



### An invitation to take part in a research project with Black young people

---

#### Project information (research participants)

Date: 2 February 2023

#### Who I am...

My name is Ifeanyi Nwachukwu. I am a student at London Metropolitan University. I am a male, Black and of African origin. I am interested in Black young people's lives in Britain and will be learning a lot from you. I am hoping to involve other Black young people between 13 to 18 years of age in this research project.

#### What this study is about...

This study aims to understand the views of Black young people about how they fit into society. I want to talk to you about your lives, things that are important to you, the people who are important to you and what it is like growing up and living in Britain.

#### What the study involves...

If you decide to join this study you will be asked to provide information about your age, education, gender and ethnicity. You will have discussions in groups with other young people. During the group discussion with your mates 🗣️ you will share your views about

- 🗣️ life in the UK and the challenges you encounter
- 🗣️ things that matter most to you in life
- 🗣️ access to opportunities available to Black young people
- 🗣️ how you intend to pursue your aspirations and goals

#### How to get in touch






You can contact the researcher Ifeanyi Nwachukwu, at the school of Social Sciences and Professions, London Metropolitan University, 166-220 Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB.



You can email him: at [ifn0027@my.londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:ifn0027@my.londonmet.ac.uk).



For complaints, please contact Research and Postgraduate Office, London Metropolitan University at [rpo@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:rpo@londonmet.ac.uk)

   I will use a recording machine so that I can remember what you tell me.



## Some questions that you may have

### Will you tell anyone what I say to you?

- 😊 All your answers to questions and what you discuss with your mates will be kept private, safe and secure with me. The only time I would tell someone about it is if I am worried about your safety.
- 😊 your answers and views will be used to write my report on this study. Your name will not be mentioned in my report.
- 😊 as soon as I have listened to the recording it will be deleted

### Do I have to say 'yes' to talking to you?

- 😊 No, it is up to you to decide. But I really need your help.
- 😊 speak with your parent or guardian about taking part in this study
- 😊 if you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and I will ask you or your parent/guardian to sign a form that you agree to take part.

### Can I withdraw from the study after agreeing?

- 😊 Yes, you can change your mind at any time. Just let the researcher know.

### Where and when will we meet?

- 😊 the group discussion sessions will take place on your school premises after the lesson time
- 😊 a suitable time will be agreed with your school
- 😊 duration will be no more than one hour



### Who do I talk to if I feel uncomfortable or something worries me?

- 👉 Your school will name a designated member of staff to support you and your parent/guardian if you feel that way
- 👉 if you feel that way during the group discussions you can talk to the researcher

I hope to hear from you soon.



Thank you.

## Appendix D: Consent forms



### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (To be completed by the young person)**

#### **Research project with Black young people**

- I agree to take part in the study on Black young people and would take part in a group discussion.
- I have read and understood the project information sheet. I know what the study is about and the part I would be involved in.
- I understand I can stop at any time and do not have to give reasons
- I understand the researcher would use the information and answers I provide to write a report on this study without mentioning my name
- I understand and agree that what I say will be recorded

Your names \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## CONSENT FORM (To be completed by the Parent/Guardian)

### Research project with Black young people

**For the named young person to be included in the study this form must be completed and returned to the school office for collection by the researcher.**

Young person's name \_\_\_\_\_

- I have read and understood the accompanying project information sheet given to the young person and give permission for the young person (named above) to be included in the study.
- I understand and agree that the above-named young person will take part in a recorded focus group discussion session and complete a questionnaire.

### Data Protection

I understand that any information the above-named young person provides is confidential and that no information that could lead to the identification will be disclosed in any reports on this study, or to any other party or organisation. No identifiable personal data will be published.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to young person \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Discussion group topic guide



### Focus Group Topic Guide

Date:

Location:

Time:

This guide is for the use of the researcher to help in moderating the focus group and stimulating discussions. The guide is not to be given to research participants.

#### 1. Welcome/introduction

- a. Sitting arrangement: Circle seating and name cards
- b. Welcome: introduction of researcher and any accompanying observer

#### 2. Opening remarks/ground rules

- a. Researcher gives assurance of confidentiality and anonymity to participants
- b. The researcher states the purpose of the session and/or research overview

Aims: To understand how Black young people make sense of marginalisation. I would like to know how you as a Black young person fit into the society in Britain, and any experiences you may wish to share. I am open to both positive and negative comments but we must respect each other's views.

- c. Participants introduce themselves (one after another in a circle)
- d. Reassure participants it is not a test or examination session
- e. Participants are free to talk to each other
- f. Reminder that there are no right or wrong answers. Differing point of view is welcome
- g. Reminder to respectfully listen to others. You may not agree with others
- h. Researcher reminds participants the session will be recorded
- i. Inform participants their real names will be used in today's discussion session

#### 3. Setting the stage question

Take the next couple of minutes to tell me a bit about yourself.

#### 4. Discussion topics

The session is planned to encourage discussions among participants, and questions will be tailored in response to issues raised by participants. The topic questions below are mostly meant to stimulate discussions between group members.

##### *Marginalisation*

1. Unequal rights and social isolation (Do you think everyone in the country feel the same?)
2. How do you feel about who you are? (e.g. being Black, male or female, others)
3. Shared experience of being left out or treated unfairly (describe/explain any disappointing situation you have experienced)

- *The researcher take note of comments for further discussion*

##### *Critical thinking/Critical Knowledge*

4. What are your views about access to opportunities available to Black young people?
5. Do you ever feel you have fewer advantages than some other people?
6. Inclusivity (what do you think about British society being a better place for all?)

- *Note down the main points and probe further for details*

##### *Voice and agency*

7. Participation (e.g. Have you been involved in any activity/discussion about rights to basic services or conditions of living?)
8. Values (Things that matter to you most in life)
9. Engagement (identifying role models for desired goals and aspirations)
10. Agency (If you have the opportunity to change anything what will you change?)

- *Ask in more detail any specific things mentioned, using the words young people used.*

##### *Summary*

Reflecting on everything we have discussed here today, what are the most important issues to you?

#### 5. Conclusion

- a. Thank participants
- b. Inform participants if they decide to withdraw from the study their data will not be used.
- c. Encourage feedback

## Appendix F: Questionnaires

### Part A (Confidential)

1. Full names \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy) \_\_\_\_\_
3. Name of School \_\_\_\_\_

**For Researcher's use only** -----  
Ref/No Pseudonym  
-----

### Part B

- Q1. What is your gender?
- ☐ Male
  - ☐ Female
  - ☐ Non-binary
  - ☐ Other. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Prefer not to say

- Q2. Which ethnicity do you identify with?
- ☐ Caribbean
  - ☐ African
  - ☐ Black British
  - ☐ Black other
  - ☐ Multiple ethnic background (African, Caribbean and other).  
Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

- Q3. What do you do outside school? Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time.

**For Researcher's use only** -----  
Ref/No Pseudonym  
-----

**Note:** Participants self-identified, some combining categories from question 2 (for details, refer to Table 3.2 in Chapter 3).

**African:** 13  
**Caribbean:** 13  
**Black British:** 12  
**Multiple ethnic backgrounds:** 2

**Caribbean/Black British:** 5  
**African/Black British:** 3

## **Appendix G: Examples of how some participants' excerpts were refined.**

Ejiro said:

...people have different experiences. For example, if I use Dunya, for example, you are Black, a woman and also a Muslim and that in society, it is harder for you because in the UK, obviously, it is very Islamophobic. You get what I mean. But someone like me, am Black, a woman and a Christian I'll have a different experience because the UK is classed as a Christian country with Christian values that really stand out, but I'm not allowed exactly, so I don't think people have the same and also people like Black boys are more targeted and despite the religion they might fall into they have it harder because they see them as criminals and delinquent.

Refined as:

...people have different experiences. If I use Dunya, for example, you are Black, a woman and also a Muslim, and that in society it is harder for you because in the UK, obviously, it is very Islamophobic. You get what I mean. But [for] someone like me, who is Black, a woman and a Christian, I'll have a different experience because the UK is classed as a Christian country with Christian values that really stand out. But I'm not allowed exactly, so I don't think people have the same. And also, people like Black boys are more targeted, and despite the religion they might fall into, they have it harder because they see them as criminals and delinquents.

(Ejiro, 17, F, LYCF, Mar 2023)

Cara said (transcript file):

They think we are loud and ghetto so they think we cause trouble. And especially nails, they see as threatening they'll caution me. And things that will like cause fights but with the cultures that we have we just need to express how we feel.

Refined as:

They think that we are loud and ghetto so they think we cause trouble. And especially for nails, they see it as threatening, [so] they'll caution me. And [they think] that we will like cause fights, but with the cultures that we have, we just need to express how we feel.

(Cara, 14, F, LS1, Grp1, Nov 2022)

Dejen said (transcript file):

In terms of the routes into getting into universities or good universities, Russell Group universities or routes into just routes to jobs. I feel...

Refined as:

In terms of routes [for] getting into universities or good universities, the Russell Group universities [are] routes for getting into good jobs...

(Dejen, 16, M, LS3, Mar 2023)



## **Appendix H: Transcription Symbols**

In addition to refining excerpts to avoid duplication and ensure readability while keeping participants' comments (Appendix G), I will add some transcription conventions used in this thesis.

[ ] Researcher added terms and explanations

( ) Parentheses are used to mark uncertain or unclear words

(...) missing or inaudible audio

*Italics* – Used for emphasis or stress on words

(.) Pause or full stop

... This indicates the quote does not begin at the start of the sentence; instead, it appears midway through as part of a longer sentence. This explanation is to emphasise the specific portion of the sentence that is relevant to the issue being illustrated.

## Appendix I: Codebook

Project 1 (thematic analysis phases 1-6)

### Codes\\Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes

The table below provides an overview of the coding results generated by NVivo software. This codebook summarises the findings from the coding process described in Section 3.5.2 of Chapter 3. It highlights the thematic components and categories identified during the analysis, presenting the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. This codebook and the information in Appendix J illustrates the depth of the analysed data.

#### *Research questions*

The key question this research seeks to answer is, **how do Black young people perceive marginalisation, and how does the use of voice counter marginalisation?**

Sub-questions:

1. How do Black young people respond to marginalisation?
2. What role does critical consciousness play in shaping identities and the construction of human rights?
3. How do Black young people express voice, agency and reflexivity?

Name	Description	Files	References
Constructing identities (Sub RQ2)	The consciousness about discrimination and the experiences of being Black. And how this consciousness is shaping Black identity	8	171
<b>Black Identity (theme)</b>		8	127
(Theme) Fostering Black Identity	The social identity of people of African and Caribbean heritage emphasises Blackness as an identifier. It bestows the right to self-define as Black. Expressing	8	96

Name	Description	Files	References
	Black identity is important both for who they are (self-affirmation) and in the construct of power dynamics in a multi-racial society.		
Black experience and identity	The experiences of unfair treatment, stereotyping and not being listened to among Black people have raised the consciousness about who they are. This is expressed as a push for recognition of Black identity.	7	31
Cultural construct	The Black race and culture are showcased in different ways such as language and accent, food, hair, collectivism and skin colour.	8	54
Growing up different	Participants see growing up from a different perspective compared to their parents. People grow up differently – the place where they live, the people they associate with, the type of influence and parents.	5	11
(Theme) In-group and Out-group Categorisation	The social identity categorisations of in-group and out-group raised questions of favouritism and discrimination between members of different groups.	5	31
Identification switching	Identity switching, sometimes referred to as code switching, describes the adjustment that Black people make to their behaviour, mannerisms and language alternation to fit into the dominant white culture.	4	18

Name	Description	Files	References
In-group bias	This is a rare narrative about members of the Black community having negative views of each other. Examples given include instances of Black teachers not supportive of Black students, Black security guards in shops giving preferential treatment to white people. However, the prejudiced views between in-groups and out-groups are still an issue of discussion.	4	13
<b>Critical Consciousness (theme)</b>		8	44
(Theme) Critical thinking	Critical thought was used to describe experiences of marginalisation. It presented an opportunity to speak up about the racist order and inequalities prevalent in society.	8	44
Critical reasoning	Self-awareness and critical reflexivity of Black young people. The development of critical consciousness from experiences of discriminatory practices, oppressive hair rules and history was observed as shaping Black identity and the need for voices to be heard.	8	44
<b>Curriculum reform (theme)</b>		0	0
(Theme) Changing education curriculum	Advocacy for change in the education curriculum to include teaching of Black history and culture. The one month in a year generally tagged as Black History	3	10

Name	Description	Files	References
	Month is inadequate. Additionally, policy changes would be needed to increase inclusion and improve education standards for ethnic minority groups.		
Education curriculum	An inclusive education curriculum that teaches Black history, art and culture is desirable.	3	10
Expressing voice (Sub RQ3)	Thoughts on marginalisation, underrepresentation, racism and challenging the power dynamics.	8	142
<b>Changing the narrative (theme)</b>		8	112
(Theme) Agency	The ability of Black young people to effect change was displayed in their narrative of racism and discriminatory experiences. Based on their reflections and criticality about racist and discriminatory experiences, they focused on the search for agency regarding the change they want to manifest in society.	8	56
Change narrative	The search for agency continues. They want to see new rules, more engagement, voices to be heard, spreading awareness about racism and a more inclusive society. # Black young people's engagement # sense of agency # searching opportunities for agency	7	42

Name	Description	Files	References
Motivation	Motivation is one of the elements of the critical consciousness process after reflection. Young people's motivation to overcome stereotypes, break the ceiling on what Black people can't achieve, and be successful in education and careers propels their agency.	4	12
Music and art	Music and art is seen as a channel for showcasing Black culture. Through music Black artists tell stories that Black young people can relate with. E.g. Santan Dave	2	2
(Theme) Participation	Their involvement in issues that affect them such as hairstyle rules was seen as tokenistic. As such they were denied the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. The consciousness of discrimination and inequalities has led to participation in protests and demonstrations against institutions and policies that are discriminatory.	6	56
Firm attitudes	This refers to the agency of young people and the resolve to be the best they can be, hopeful and standing up for the values of equality.	5	9
Protest	Participation in protests and demonstrations	2	3
Self-expression	Desire to express personality and identity. Participants had opinions about certain issues of concern. For example,	6	39

Name	Description	Files	References
	expressing themselves through hair and fair representation, having more opportunities like the focus groups to discuss their concerns.		
Use of social media	Social media channels have been used to express opinions against racism and discrimination including social media protests (Black Out Tuesday on 2 June 2020)	2	5
<b>Representation and voices (theme)</b>		7	15
(Theme) Representation and Inclusivity	Beyond inclusion, the representation of Black minorities in institutions and organisations helps to break certain stereotypes.	7	15
Inclusive society	An inclusive society is envisaged as: # offering equal opportunities # equitable access to opportunities # hopeful in diversity	7	12
Poverty and stealing	Black people are generally seen as poor, low-income earners. This is thought to be a reason why Black young people might get involved in the act of stealing. Lack of opportunities makes them get involved in illegal adventures and unlawful behaviours.	1	3
<b>Valuing Diversity (theme)</b>		6	15

Name	Description	Files	References
(Theme) Societal values	Referring to a set of principles – equality, justice, freedom, respect, fairness – that are acceptable guides for a just society	6	15
Values	Important societal values such as right to equality, self-identity and right against unlawful discrimination	6	15
Perception of marginalisation (Sub RQ1)	Marginalisation among Black people is viewed from different contexts such as in education, class structure, workplace, limited representation, repression of culture and inequality. These are reflected in the burdensome power dynamics in everyday life experiences.	8	320
<b>Identity denial (theme)</b>		4	16
(Theme) Non-recognition of hair as an identity	Hair is important to Black culture. The Afro and other hairstyles define Black identity. Recognising Black hair is one of the ways to express who Black people are.	4	16
Hairstyle rules	Rules around hair grooming have seen Black young people marginalised in education and employment. Hairstyles have remained a strong definition of Black identity.	4	16
<b>Racial Discrimination (theme)</b>		8	229



Name	Description	Files	References
(Theme) Discriminatory Practices	Discrimination and different forms of exclusion are experienced in education and workplaces.	8	52
Conforming to white standards	Black parents encourage their children to act in conformity to the white race's standards. This is one aspect of false belonging to the dominant white group.	2	3
Discrimination and unfair treatment	Inequality and discrimination have unravelled elements of social injustice that Black people face.	8	48
Media channels impact	The media, which includes TV and Radio broadcasts, and print, have impacted the image of Black people. This is somehow reflected in negative stereotypes and the misunderstanding of Blackness.	1	1
(Theme) Racism	The views expressed as marginalisation pointed to racial discrimination as core and systemic. This has had adverse effects on issues of opportunities, employment, education, mental health and Black identity.	8	177
Criminalisation	Negative stereotypes ascribed to Black people have been linked to criminalising people of Black race. For example, stop and search and police brutality, the assumption that Black young people are likely to steal in shops. Participants argued that any other race could have	5	11

Name	Description	Files	References
	stolen or been involved in theft not just Black people.		
Racism	The perception of marginalisation is mostly seen from the point of view of racial discrimination.	8	105
Stereotypes	The frequency of the mention of stereotypes was high and therefore seen as a norm. These are general beliefs about Black people or Black race/ethnicity: # general classification of Black people # assumptions about Black people's manners and behaviours	8	61
<b>Social Inequality and Cultural Capital (theme)</b>		8	75
(Theme) Barriers in Opportunities	Increasing opportunities are hampered by certain constraints and barriers.	7	33
Lack of representation	There is no formidable representation of Black people and their culture and mannerisms. For instance, in schools, they need Black teachers in leadership positions who understand Black mannerisms and culture.	1	4
Limited opportunity access	While there seem to be improved opportunities over time, some of which are specifically structured around race, there exist barriers to opportunities. Some of these include more advantages for white people and fewer advantages	7	29

Name	Description	Files	References
	for Black people, parental background and class structure which put few in middle class and the majority in lower class.		
(Theme) Inequality	Inequality can take different shapes and different aspects of human rights among Black people such as religious beliefs, employment gaps, deprivation and freedom for self-expression.	7	42
Deprivation	Deprivation is exemplified in low income, housing and living in council estates which are sometimes linked to crime including living environments with fewer opportunities. There is also cultural deprivation for those who live in predominantly white areas.	4	10
Lack of equity	Inequality and lack of equity has kept certain groups or race marginalised	7	17
Not listening	Not being listened to is one of the contexts where marginalisation is perceived. The experience has been tokenism and dismissive.	4	15

## Appendix J: Code/Themes sorting and categorisation

### **Candidate themes**

#### 1. Perception of marginalisation (Sub RQ1)

<b>Cluster 1: Racism</b>	<b>Cluster 2: Discriminatory practices</b>	<b>Cluster 3: Barriers in Opportunities</b>	<b>Cluster 4: Non- recognition of hair as self- identity</b>	<b>Cluster 5: Inequality</b>
Racism Stereotypes Criminalisation	Discrimination and unfair treatment  Conforming to white standards  Media channels impact	Limited opportunity access  Lack of representation  Not listening	Hairstyle rules	Lack of equity  Deprivation

#### 2. Role of critical consciousness in shaping identity (Sub RQ2)

<b>Cluster 1: Fostering Black Identity</b>	<b>Cluster 2: Critical thinking</b>	<b>Cluster 3: In-group and out- group categorisation</b>	<b>Cluster 4: Changing the education curriculum</b>
Black experience and identity  Growing up different Cultural construct	Critical reasoning	Identification switching  In-group bias	Education curriculum

### 3. Expressing voice/responding to marginalisation (Sub RQ3)

<b>Cluster 1: Agency</b>	<b>Cluster 2: Participation</b>	<b>Cluster 3: Societal values</b>	<b>Cluster 4: Representation and inclusivity</b>
Change narrative Music and art Motivation	Self-expression Firm attitudes Protest Use of social media	Values (equality, diversity, religion, productivity, self- identity)	Inclusive society Poverty and stealing

## Appendix K: Ethics approval

### London Met Research Ethics Review Form

The sections highlighted in green and blue contain comments and suggestions from the research ethics application reviewers, while those in yellow represent my responses to their comments. The red and purple sections are comments made by the school ethics chair.

Section A: Applicant Details	
A1	Background information
	Research project title: Exploring Voice and Marginalisation: A qualitative study of Black young people in London
	School: School of Social Sciences and Professions
	Date of submission for ethics approval:
	Proposed start date for project: September 2022
	Proposed end date for project: June 2023
	Ethics ID # (to be completed by RERP chair):
A2	Applicant details, if for a research student project
	Name: Ifeanyi Nwachukwu
	Degree (MPhil, MPhil/PhD, PhD, DLitt, DSc, ProfDoc in ...): PhD
	London Met Email address: ifn0027@my.londonmet.ac.uk
A3	Principal Researcher/Lead Supervisor
	Member of staff at London Metropolitan University who is responsible for the proposed research project either as Principal Investigator/grant-holder or, in the case of postgraduate research student projects, as Lead Supervisor
	Name: Professor Alistair Ross
	Job title: Professor of Politics and Education - Lead Supervisor
	London Met Email address: a.ross@londonmet.ac.uk

#### Declaration

I confirm that I have read London Met's *Research Ethics Policy and Procedures* and *Code of Good Research Practice* and have consulted relevant guidance on ethics in research.

I confirm that I will carry out risk assessment before embarking on my research and if any risks are identified I will submit a report to Health and Safety.

I confirm that, before doing research abroad, I will carry out risk assessment incl. observing **UK Government travel advice**. I will discuss any concerns with my supervisor and will submit any documentation that may be required.

Researcher signature: Ifeanyi Nwachukwu

Date: 20 July 2022


## Feedback from Ethics Review Panel

	<i>Approved</i>	<i>Feedback where further work required</i>
Section A	Yes	
Section B	YES 20Sept2022	<p><b>Reviewer 1:</b></p> <p>The demographic questionnaire it too simplistic and does not allow the participants enough options.</p> <p>E.g. they may identify as non binary or they may identify as Black British.</p> <p>My response: The questionnaire is designed to be simple and non-complex. Firstly, on gender, there is an option for 'prefer not to say' if a respondent does not choose either male or female.</p> <p>Reviewer: To simply offer a prefer not to say option is not appropriate – young people may identify as non binary and prefer to say so.</p> <p><b>My response 2: Revised.</b></p> <p>Q1. What is your gender?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Male</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Female</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please specify</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say</p> <p>Secondly, the question on ethnicity is basically to get information about descent or origin. This is to confirm that participants are within the intended research sample. The question can accommodate a Black British (simply multi-ethnicity) who may have an ancestry of either African, Caribbean heritage or a mix of these with other ethnicities. Where there is a mixed origin or background there is a provision to specify. The term Black is used in this research to describe people of African, Caribbean descent and mixed origin (see research proposal)</p> <p>Reviewer: I understand your comment above, however, there needs to be more recognition of diversity and the different experiences this brings. E.g. Black British, is very different from Black African, Black Caribbean or Mixed Heritage. There should be the opportunity for participants to identify how they wish, not to conform to categories that a researcher gives them to choose from.</p> <p><b>My response 2: Revised.</b></p> <p>Q2. Which ethnicity do you identify with?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean</p>

		<p> <input type="checkbox"/> African  <input type="checkbox"/> Black British  <input type="checkbox"/> Black other  <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple ethnic background (African, Caribbean and other).  Please specify _____ </p> <p>Although the participant information sheet is detailed, it has not been suited for the ages of the participants. This needs to be produced in such a way that the information is made more accessible to the participants.</p> <p><b>My response:</b> See revised information sheet</p> <p>Reviewer: These amendments are appropriate</p> <p>Similarly, the consent form would be suitable for adults, but not 13 year olds.</p> <p><b>My response:</b> See revised consent forms</p> <p>Reviewer: These amendments are appropriate</p> <p>More information needs to be given over how parent/guardian consent will be gained. It is stated that consent forms will need to be signed by parents and returned to the researcher before the focus group takes place. There needs to be more information on how the parents will be given information about the project.</p> <p><b>My response:</b> See section C1b. Students who volunteer to participate are given an information sheet and consent form. For young people requiring parent/guardian consent, I will send research information sheet and consent form home with students. In this way, parents/guardians will learn more about the project before deciding to provide consent for their child or refuse.</p> <p>Reviewer: This suggests you will see the participants more than once. Firstly to give out consent forms and secondly to collect the data of those who get parental consent. Is this correct? The issue that is unclear is how you will get the consent forms to the children to give to the parents.</p> <p><b>My response 2:</b> Researcher will take the forms to school and the school gives young people forms to give parent/guardian. Signed forms are returned to school and researcher pick up forms from school. Researcher liaises with the staff member appointed by school for the project.</p>
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Section C	YES 20Sept2022	<p>Approval can only be granted once the student has received their DBS and this has been seen by her supervisor</p> <p>We are in the process of securing a DBS clearance.</p> <p>Please let the Chair of ethics know when this has been obtained</p> <p><b>My response 2:</b> The lead supervisor will get in touch with the Chair of ethics</p> <p>Chair - RERP DBS recieved</p>
Date of approval	20Sept2022	
<p>NB: The Researcher should be notified of the review outcome within <u>two</u> weeks of the submission of the application. If the outcome is re-submission of the application because of requests for further information or suggested adjustments of the project, a <u>further two</u> weeks from receipt of the re-submitted application applies, and so on. A copy should be sent to <a href="mailto:research@londonmet.ac.uk">research@londonmet.ac.uk</a>.</p>		
Signature of RERP chair	 C Chandler	