"Is it 'cos I is Black, Sir?" – African/Caribbean Males & British Higher Education

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ii. Abstract

"Is it 'cos I is Black, Sir?" – African/Caribbean Males & British Higher Education

This dissertation uses geographic thought to tackle an issue that has captured the British media's attention recently – black male under-representation and underachievement. It focusses specifically on higher education, an area to which very few authors (e.g. Mortimore et al, 1996; Drew et al, 1996; Modood, 1993) have accorded primary attention, looking in particular at under-representation at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Along with looking at problems in accessing higher education, the experience of black males at university will be explored, an area that has received virtually no coverage (Bell et al, 2002).

Looking at statistics gives some astonishing results – out of over 22,000 British students who achieved AAA at A-Level in 2002 and entered higher education, only 37 were black (Fanning, *Cherwell,* 23/01/04; Malde & Morgan, *The Oxford Student,* 04/03/04). For every young black Caribbean male at university in Britain, there are two in prison (CRE, 2004). However, too much emphasis has been given to quoting such statistics without sufficient examination into why such contrasts exist. This dissertation goes beyond the statistics and attempts to offer explanations, covering several areas within geography as an academic discipline, and draws up suggestions to improve the situation.

After exploring the academic literature concerning African/Caribbean underachievement (e.g. Sewell, 1995; Verma & Bagley, 1979; Troyna, 1987), this dissertation adopts a multidisciplinary approach in order to gather original data. Over a course of 15 months, over 600 African/Caribbean males in or shortly entering higher education have been spoken to or surveyed, via a range of methods including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires. Coupled with statistical analysis, participant observation, and interviews with politicians and black role models, the 'bigger picture' has been constructed and some clear findings have been identified.

Suggestions made using the dissertation research include making curriculum content more accessible and appealing to black students, actively recruiting more black male teachers to act as positive role models, and implementing a more multicultural structure in schools that benefits all groups. Major efforts to remove suspicion of institutional racism along with active promotion of career paths where Africans and Caribbeans are under-represented are also deemed essential for greater success of black students, particularly males, in higher education.

Research from this dissertation has been published in *Education Guardian, BBC News Online*, *The National Student*, and made front page of *The Oxford Student.*

iii. Acknowledgements

[Omitted from web version]

iv. A note on Ethnic & Racial Terminology

There appears to be confusion over use of the terms *'Afro-Caribbean'* and *'African-Caribbean'* – technically the term ought to refer to Caribbean natives who hold African ancestry, but is now commonly used to identify all members of this racial group. Since this dissertation aims to look at all descendants of this race[i], the author will use the term *'African/Caribbean'* and *'black'* interchangeably to refer to all dark-skinned people of African origin. In quoting other sources, the term *'Nigger'* will be used for this description. *'West Indian'* and *'Caribbean'* both refer to Caribbean natives with African ancestry, and *'African-American'* refers to American citizens of African descent.

When referring to British citizens, *'ethnic minority'* or *'minority ethnic'* refers to all of a racial group different from that of the majority – *'white'* (those of lighter skin, typically of European ancestry). Using accepted British terminology, *'Asian'* refers to those with ancestry from the main Indian subcontinent nations (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), whilst *'Oriental'* refers to those with ancestry from south-eastern nations of Asia, including China, Korea and Japan.

[i] 'Race' is defined as an aggregate of phenotypically similar populations of a species, differing taxonomically from other populations (Mayr, 1969), which can be differentiated due to barriers to genetic exchange (Templeton, 1996).

v. Contents

NB For reasons regarding the Data Protection Act 1998, length and relevance, several sections of the dissertation have been omitted from this online version.

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I.a Introduction

The serious problem of underachievement of British African/Caribbean students at school, particularly males, has been well-documented in recent times, and is clearly evident from the most recent statistics:

	Black Caribbean males	Black Caribbean females	Black African males	Black African females	All students
%	25	40	34	47	50.7

Fig 1.1: *Percentage of selected groups achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE in 2003.* Source: BBC, 2004; DfES, 2004

In 2001, only 17% of black Caribbean boys achieved 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE, compared with 49% of Indian boys, although results for black students overall have been rising since 18% in 1989 (Pathak, 2000; *BBC*, 2003). Black boys are over-represented when it comes to school exclusions – the permanent exclusion rate of black Caribbeans was 0.59% compared to a national average of 0.17% in 1998/9 – along with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and special educational needs (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002). The Mayor of London, Ken Livingston, labelled this failure to make a significant improvement in the results of black boys as "catastrophic" (Waugh, *Evening Standard,* 07/09/04).

The fate of African/Caribbean students in British higher education, on the other hand, has received comparatively little attention. Very few authors (e.g. Mortimore et al, 1996; Drew et al, 1996) have looked at this closely, and there has been next to no research on the experiences of minorities at university, or how they choose where to attend (Bell et al, 2002). At a superficial level, the situation does not seem problematic. Indeed, the 1991 Census (OCPS, Crown Copyright 1992) showed that black Africans were the most qualified ethnic minority group in Britain (Daley, 1996), with the 2001 Census (ONS, Crown Copyright 2003) showing that 38.8% of all 16-74 year-old black Africans held higher qualifications, compared to a national average of 19.8%. Whilst black Caribbeans in contrast to their African counterparts have typically been one of the least qualified ethnic groups, Figures 1.2 and 1.3,

using 2001 Census data, place them virtually on par with their white British counterparts, whilst the status of black Africans is similar to Indians:

	No Quals	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4 / 5	Unknown
White British, 16–24	16.0	16.2	34.6	21.5	10.4	1.4
White British, 25–34	11.9	25.8	24.5	8.6	25.8	3.4
Black African, 16–24	12.6	14.6	33.9	22.8	13.4	2.6
Black African, 25–34	11.3	10.0	17.6	10.5	45.4	5.1
Black Caribbean, 16–24	16.2	19.9	35.3	17.0	8.6	2.9
Black Caribbean, 25–34	10.8	24.6	24.1	8.5	26.4	5.7
All, 16–24	15.8	15.6	33.4	21.9	11.5	1.7
All, 25–34	12.5	23.4	22.7	8.8	28.9	3.6

Figure 1.2: *Highest level of qualification of selected ethnic groups, for 16-24 and 25-34 age bands, in % to 1 decimal place*. Source: 2001 Census, Key Statistics for Local Authorities, Crown Copyright 2003. *Key: Footnote*[1]

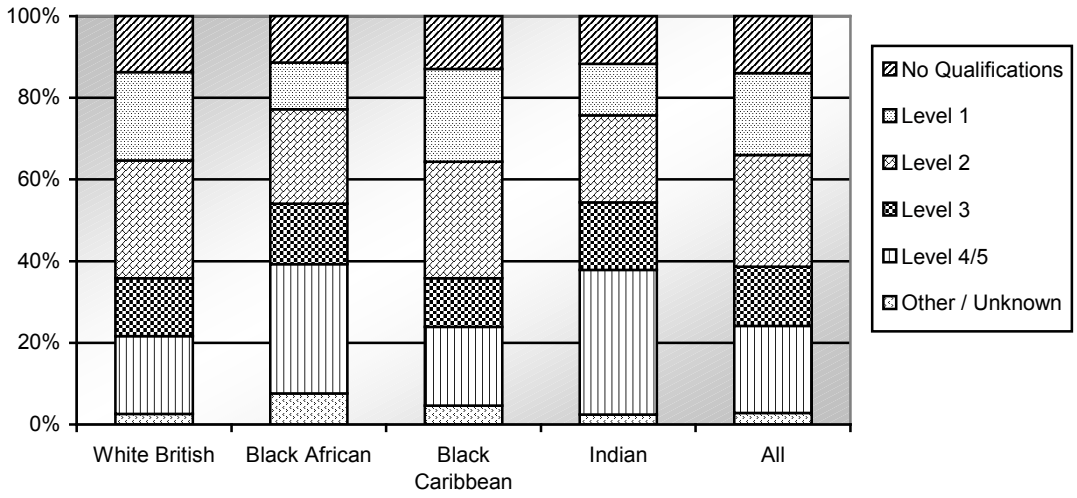

Figure 1.3: *Highest level of qualification of selected ethnic groups, for 16-35 age group.* . Source: 2001 Census, Key Statistics for Local Authorities, Crown Copyright 2003. *Key: Footnote*[1]

Although participation in higher education by African/Caribbean students is strong, many are at post-1992 universities with much lower entrance requirements (UCAS, 1999; Pathak, 2000), which do not necessarily improve one's prospects. An astonishing revelation (Fanning, *Cherwell,* 23/01/04; Malde & Morgan, *The Oxford Student,* 04/03/04) was that only 37 black students in the entire country achieved three A-grades at A-Level, out of those entering higher education in 2002. Even if this figure omitted those who did not continue to university or did not disclose their ethnicity, the actual figure is unlikely to exceed 50, when over 22,000 nationwide achieved this result. Furthermore, despite a greater proportion of

[1] 'No Quals' = No Qualifications; 'Level 1' = 1+ GCSE/CSE pass / 1+ 'O' Level pass / NVQ Level 1 / Foundation GNVQ; 'Level 2' = 5+ GCSE A*-Cs / 5+ CSE Grade 1s / 5+ 'O' Level passes / 1+ A/AS Levels / NVQ Level 2 / Intermediate GNVQ / School Certificate; 'Level 3' = 2+ A-Levels / 4+ AS Levels / Advanced GNVQ / NVQ Level 3 / Higher School Certificate; 'Level 4/5' = First/higher degree / NVQ Level 4/5 / HNC/HND / Qualified teacher/doctor/dentist/nurse status.

black Africans having higher qualifications, 13% of those with a postgraduate degree and 14% of graduates were unemployed in 1991 (OCPS, Crown Copyright 1992), and a decade later 13.3% of the economically active are unemployed compared with 5.0% overall (ONS, Crown Copyright 2003).

Furthermore, the numbers of black students both applying to and being accepted by the country's two leading universities, Cambridge and Oxford, is a serious cause for concern. In 2003, out of 3,077 offers given, only 3 were to black Caribbeans out of the 34 who applied – a 9% success rate compared to 27% for all applicants; 106 of 441 Indian applicants were successful. In 2002, black Africans had only a 12% success rate, and in 2000 this was 9% (6 offers) compared to 29% and 30% overall respectively. The situation appears to be particularly problematic for black males – only 1 of 33 black African males was accepted in 2000, and in 1998 not a single black Caribbean male was given an offer (Cambridge University Reporter, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004).

Figure 1.4 shows that the situation at traditional rival Oxford is just as appalling – in 2003, 'black' students made up 5.64% of university applications nationwide (UCAS, 2003; Malde & Morgan, *The Oxford Student,* 04/03/04), but only 1.4% at Oxford. Figure 1.5 shows that the success rate for black students is considerably lower in all but one case over the last three years, thus exacerbating the degree of under-representation:

	2002		2003		2004	
	Apps %	Success %	Apps %	Success %	Apps %	Success %
Black African	0.9	20.0	1.1	14.0	1.1	15.1
Black Caribbean	0.3	35.7	0.2	19.0	0.3	23.1
Black Other	0.1	8.3	0.1	15.4	0.2	12.5
All Applicants	100.0	33.3	100.0	30.2	100.0	28.3

Figure 1.4: *Applicants ('Apps %') and Success Rate ('Success %') proportions of selected ethnic groups to Oxford University, of those entering in 2002-4.* Source: Oxford University Gazette, 2002, 2003, 2004.

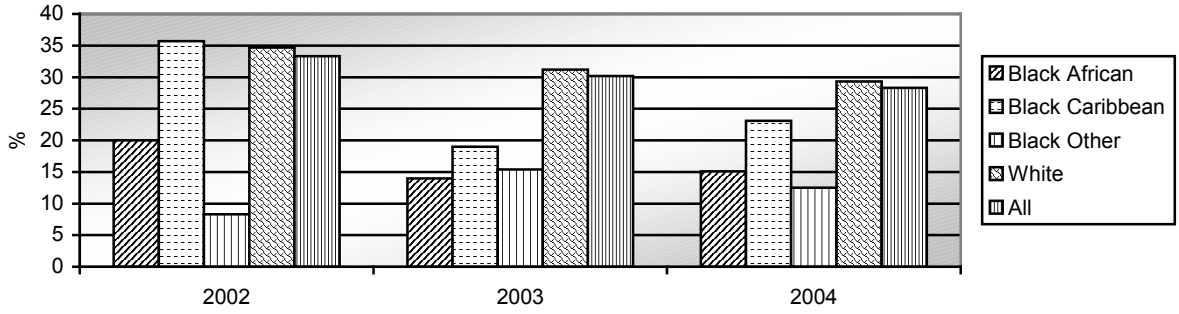

Figure 1.5: *Success Rate (%) of selected ethnic groups in applying to Oxford University, of those entering in 2002-4.* Source: Oxford University Gazette, 2002, 2003, 2004.

The problems go further than access – a four-year research project at Cambridge University showed that only 3.1% of black students were awarded 1st Class degrees, compared to 23.7% of Indian students and 21% of their white counterparts (*BBC*, 2003). Out of all students who applied, 72% of black African and 74% of black Caribbean applicants were given at least one offer to enter higher education in 2003, compared to 85% of Indians and 81% overall; figures were similar in 2002 (UCAS, 2002, 2003, 2004). Furthermore, black students have higher drop-out rates and as graduates they are three times more likely to be unemployed, and earn 9% less than their white peers (NUS, 2004). Similarly alarming statistics exist regarding the situation for British Africans/Caribbeans, particularly for Caribbean males, when it comes to higher education, and the consequences of the problems; as Peter Herbert, Chairman of the Society of Black Lawyers says (in Matthews, *Sunday Times*, 01/08/04), *"the closer you go to the centre of power and influence, the fewer black people you're likely to find here."*

But instead of continuing to quote statistics, the author intends to explore the reasons behind these problems, with the aim of producing policy recommendations to improve the situation. Theories regarding several key factors that potentially lead to the situation will be presented in the *Literature Review* (Chapter II), followed by a methodologically multi-faceted approach in conducting the research.

I.b Reasons for Choice of Study

Before entering higher education, I was aware that there were contrasts in the educational attainment of different ethnic minority groups, with figures highlighting striking disparities published on an annual basis (e.g. *BBC*, 2000, 2001, 2002). Being from a high-achieving ethnic minority group (Indian), I was particularly interested in these statistics, aware that familial attitudes to education were, as for the Chinese, central to the strong results.

In my first few months at Oxford University, it was very surprising to see a virtual absence of 'black' faces, and analysing the *Oxford University Gazette*'s breakdown of applicants by ethnicity yielded surprising results. As Deputy News Editor of *The Oxford Student* newspaper in October 2003, I was given the opportunity to co-write an investigation of my choice. Deciding to look at ethnic inequality at Oxford, initial coverage of the topic received a sizeable response, including from national papers, resulting in a publication in *Education Guardian* in December 2003, when the latest admissions statistics were released. The chance to explore the topic, highly relevant to 21st Century Britain, in a more academic rather than journalistic context, became highly appealing.

The dissertation title, *"Is it 'cos I is Black, Sir?"* is based on a catchphrase by *'Ali G'*, a satirical television character played by Sacha Baron Cohen. The white, Cambridge-educated Jewish comedian plays a black man who epitomises the stereotypical black street culture, wearing excessive 'bling-bling' jewellery, dealing drugs, and asking *"Is it 'cos I is Black?"* at any given opportunity.

II Literature Review

In this chapter, Section II.a presents a brief outline of African and Caribbean migration to the United Kingdom and how the 'black underachievement' issue has been treated, in order to provide a context for the issues at hand. Section II.b explores key theories that can be attributed to the problems of African/Caribbean males in British higher education; these have been categorised into socio-economic inequality and segregation (II.b.1), black masculinity, culture and identity (II.b.2) and racial discrimination (II.b.3).

II.a.1 Black African Migration to the United Kingdom

The education-based intent of many black Africans in migrating to Britain explains their high participation in higher education. Colonisation fuelled the desire of many Africans to investigate the source of power (Daley, 1996), with a notable influx of Africans migrating mainly for the purpose of higher education and technical training in the post-1960s independence period. With many originally working as sea men (Elam & Chinouya, 2000), Cardiff, Liverpool and London became popular port locations for settlers, particularly from Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Gold Coast, along with Somalia on the east (Banton, 1995). The Colonial Office came under pressure from aspiring Africans desiring socio-economic development and self-governance after the war, with new universities created as a consequence, and British universities establishing links with African colleges such as Ibadan in Nigeria.

Independent African governments had attempted to improve their education systems, but the widespread political instability of the 1980s exacerbated by economic crises, saw reduced state expenditure on education. Resultantly, overseas education became much sought-after, although something only the elite could afford. With British education being held in high esteem, Goody & Groothues (1977) claimed that the West African quest in particular for education was largely for wealth and prestige.

Heightened political instability has recently resulted in a rapid rise in black African migration to Britain – from 213,362 in 1991 to 485,277 in 2001 (OCPS, Crown Copyright 1992; ONS, Crown Copyright 2003). In the recent past, migration from Ghana (11,215 in 1971; 32,672 in 1991) and Nigeria (28,565 in 1971, 47,085 in 1991) was particularly sizeable[2] (OCPS, 1971; OCPS, Crown Copyright 1992), due, respectively, to surplus capital from the 1973 oil boom and political upheavals. In the last decade, migration of black asylum seekers, particularly from the politically unstable nations of Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola has been particularly sizeable with provisional figures in 2002 of 6,540, 2,215 and 1,420 respectively (ONS, Annual Abstract of Statistics, 2003). Of the 69,932 black African 16-24 year olds in the 2001 Census, 71% were students[3], compared to 41% nationally.

II.a.2 Black Caribbean Migration to the United Kingdom

The specific historic and cultural circumstances of the post-war immigrant wave of Caribbeans to Britain, arising largely from a rural culture of extended families unprepared for life in Britain (Appleyard, *Sunday Times*, 01/08/04) partially explain the low educational attainment of British Caribbeans today. Secondly, the fact that their parents and grandparents were mostly involved in job sectors that did not require higher qualifications directly influences their relatively low participation in higher education today. Indeed, before the end of World War II, around 8,000 Caribbeans were recruited to serve in the RAF, and foresters were recruited from British Honduras (now Belize) to work in Scottish forests (Glass, 1960; Richmond, 1978; cited in Peach, 1996). In the late 1940s, a post-war Britain had acute shortages of labour in particularly neglected sectors of the economy, such as the transport and health sectors, with political figures such as Enoch Powell actively encouraging members of the Commonwealth to fill vacancies. At the same time, jobs were scarce in the Caribbean, as

[2] Figures denote birthplace but not ethnicity, though for stated nations almost all migrants are black African.
[3] Counts both 'economically active full-time students', and 'economically inactive students'.

the dwindling sugar economy was no longer able to sustain them. Large-scale migration began in 1948, was at its most rapid between 1955-62, and had effectively ended in the early 1970s. Powered by free market labour forces, Caribbean migration paralleled British economy cycles, and there was initially approximately a three-month lag between employment demand and migration (Peach, 1968). Between 1974-94 there was more emigration than immigration, with strong correlation (r = -0.65) between unemployment and net Caribbean immigration (Peach, 1998). The Caribbean population in Britain rose from around 30,000 in 1941 to over half a million four decades later.

Gibson (1986, p.25) dramatically asserts that the post-war wave of Caribbean migration to Britain was *"a tragedy second only to slavery in its terrible consequences for the Westindian [sic] people"*. Whilst perhaps an exaggeration, it appears evident that many knew little about what Britain would be like, subsequently struggled to 'fit in', and unlike other immigrant groups failed to form a close-knit community, taking a long time to establish any cultural and ethnic identity.

II.a.3 Discovering the Problem of 'Black Underachievement'

As the influx of ethnic minority students grew in Britain, recognition of 'underachievement' was initially slow. Indeed, Gillborn (2001) suggests that in the immediate post-war period, the educational policy response to the influx of black Caribbean students, along with Asians, was to 'do nothing' – unhelpful when linguistic, cultural and racial-based problems were of concern. Issues concerning multicultural education began during London's 1958 Notting Hill riots with the Government responding by adopting the policy goal of assimilation, along with the physical dispersal of immigrants (AMMA, 1987), although this adversely resulted in greater vulnerability to racist attacks. *'The problems of coloured school leavers'* was published in 1969 by the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, a time when integration was favoured, with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)

established. Although teachings on race at this time were deemed patronising (Massey, 1991), the changes were at least a step in the right direction, with cultural pluralism and multiculturalism embraced in the decades to follow.

Following the 1981 Brixton riots, when more detailed data regarding educational achievement by ethnicity and gender was available, the Government commissioned investigations into the underachievement of certain minority groups. The 1981 Interim Rampton Report was the first to attribute the underachievement largely to racism, and along with Lord Scarman's (1981) investigation into the 1980 Bristol and 1981 Brixton riots, suggested that a multicultural focus in the curriculum for *all* pupils was necessary. Meanwhile, the Swann Report (1985), an extensive investigation into the performance of ethnic minority groups, suggested that a broader multicultural curriculum for all was a key way for education to help eliminate racial prejudice from society. However, many key policy recommendations were dismissed by a Thatcher-led Government which was regarded as 'colour-blind' in it's approach to the situation, by opposing the notion that different minority groups should be treated differently, thus denying legitimacy to problems of racial inequality (Gillborn, 2001).

The first census data on ethnic minority in 1991 revealed the major disparities in GCSE performance by ethnicity, particularly the underachievement of black African and black Caribbean boys (DfES, 2003), as highlighted in the *Introduction* (Section I.a). The problems associated specifically with African/Caribbean males and higher education have received some attention only in the last decade (e.g. Mortimore et al, 1996; DfES, 2003, 2004; Matthews, *Sunday Times,* 01/08/04), mainly in an era dubbed by Gillborn (2001, p.19) as *"Naive multiculturalism: New Labour, old inequalities."*

II.b.1 The Problems of Socio-economic Inequality and Segregation

Burnhill et al (1990) assert that poorer socio-economic class is the main factor in deterring individuals from pursuing higher education. This helps to explain the high number of black African students – the 2001 Census showed that more Africans are in socio-economic class I than British-whites, with the 1991 Census placing 14% of Nigerian-born citizens in this top class). Meanwhile, Figure 2.1 shows that black Caribbeans have a low presence in the top class, and the fewest students aged 16+ (Category 8), although the correlation between the two factors is not so clear-cut. Indeed, although research (e.g. Troyna, 1987; Swann Report, 1985; Drew et al, 1996) shows that socio-economic class can strongly influence attainment, this impact differs for different groups – Gillborn & Mirza (2000) show that the correlation between class indicators and attainment is weaker for Africans/Caribbeans than whites.

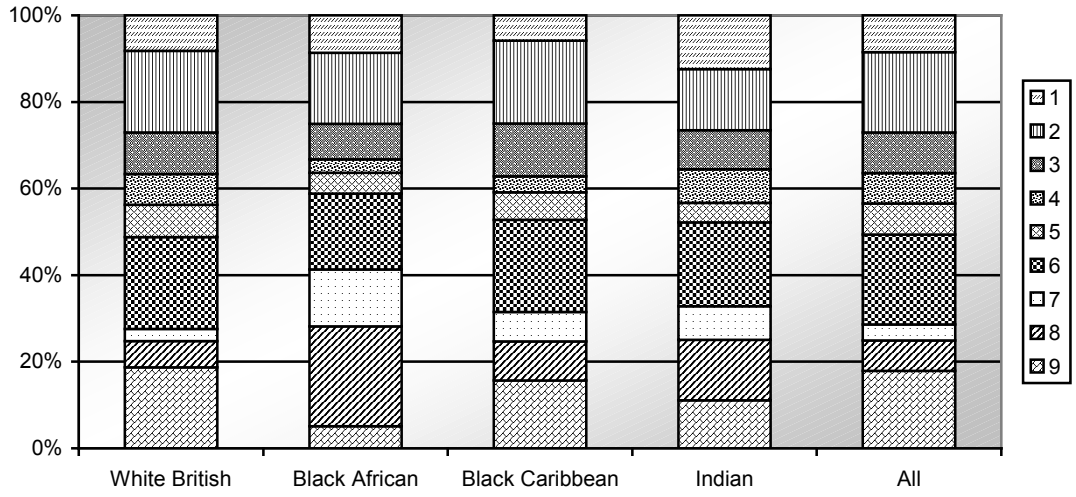

Figure 2.1: *Socio-economic class of selected ethnic groups, for 16-74 age group.* Source: 2001 Census, Key Statistics for Local Authorities, Crown Copyright 2003. *Key:* '1' = Higher Managerial & Professional, '2' = Lower Managerial & Professional, '3' = Intermediate, '4' = Small employers & own account workers, '5' = Lower supervisory & technical, '6' = Routine or semi-routine, '7' = Never worked / long-term unemployed, '8' = Students, '9' = Unclassified.

The family structure of many British black families – 48% of black children have single mothers (Home Office, 2003) – has a negative impact on education, particularly for males; many black male prisoners made comments to Sewell (*Sunday Times*, 01/08/04) such

as *"the old man, he wasn't there"*, suggesting that fathers can act as essential 'role models' in steering their sons away from a life of crime. Lobo's (1978, p.57) comment that a black male *"needs a father-figure to respect and to want to emulate, and a mother-figure to love"* also appears relevant – without a father-figure, black males may alternatively aspire to emulate a celebrity 'role model', many of whom dismiss the importance of higher education (II.b.2). Furthermore, a single-parent may typically have less time to dedicate towards their children, ensuring they are performing well educationally, if they are solely responsible for the household's income and housekeeping.

Gibson (1986) identifies three distinct Caribbean family structures – firstly, the 'unmarried mother' accounts for sixty-five percent of Caribbean families (bar those from strongly Catholic islands such as Dominica), and in such cases mothers could rely on their own mothers and relatives to look after their child, without experiencing stigmatism. Secondly, cohabiting without marrying is commonplace, meaning there is a greater likelihood of couples breaking up and not adhering to the European nuclear family model. Finally, child-rearing is deemed the biggest culture clash between British Caribbeans and the indigenous population, with West Indian upbringing being *"the paradoxical mixture of extreme permissiveness and extreme strictness"* (Gibson, 1986, p.23), typically incompatible with expected classroom standards. Figure 2.2 shows that in Britain, all 'black' groups are less likely to hold a 'nuclear family' structure, unlike Indians:

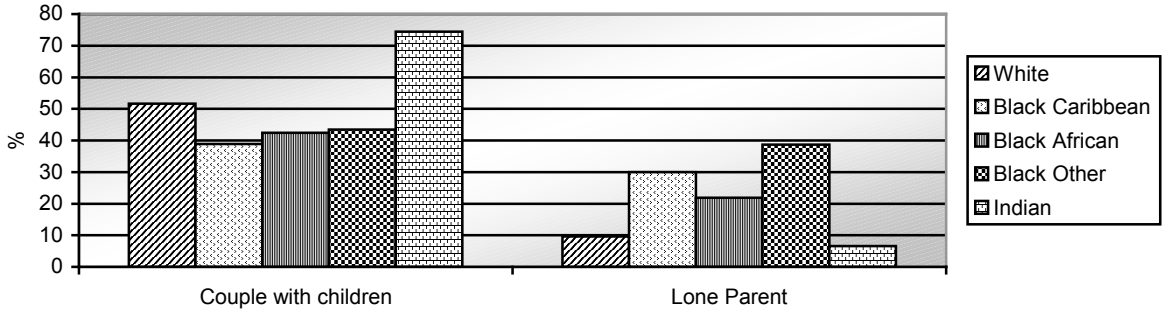

Figure 2.2: *Family structure of selected ethnic groups.* Source: Murphy (1996), using 1991 Census One Per Cent Household SAR, Crown Copyright.

The fact that only 15% of African/Caribbean boys on free school meals achieved 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE in 2003 compared to 26% overall (Holloway, *New Nation*, 2004) suggests that low socio-economic position alone does not explain the underachievement of black males, an assertion backed up by Osborne (2001).

Along with socio-economic class and family structure, issues of segregation could explain the major under-representation of African/Caribbean students at leading universities. Whilst segregation could be due to restraining influences – for example hostility from society reducing the ability to disperse (Peach & Rossiter, 1996) or exclusion in the housing market (Daley, 1996), it can be for positive reasons such as having a shared language and culture, as well as a method of defence. Indeed, Peach & Rossiter suggest that socio-economic factors only account for 8% of the observed level of segregation for black Caribbeans in London, whilst Daley (1996) suggests that concentrations of certain African groups in different areas of inner-city London is a cultural strategy providing easier access to ethnic foods and social networks. The absence of such a concentration at leading higher education institutions, along with professional sectors such as law and politics, deters many African/Caribbean students from targeting these arena. However, the fact that other ethnic groups such as Indians tend to be more segregated than black Caribbeans (Peach & Rossiter, 1996), yet are much more prevalent in leading institutions, suggests that segregation may be a minor factor in explaining under-representation in higher education.

II.b.2 The Problems of Black Masculinity, Culture and Identity

Many of the factors outlined in Section II.b.1 apply to both black males and black females, yet Section I.a highlighted a considerable disparity between the two genders. Much of this discrepancy can be attributed to the subculture of black masculinity, a relatively recent phenomenon which often openly embraces homophobia and mysogyny (Odih, 2002) and rejects academia – clearly a barrier for access to higher education.

Two theories behind this have been identified; firstly, Sewell (1995) asserts that the black male positions himself in phallocentric terms, confirmed by his 'obsessive jealousy' of other groups, leading to a strong confirmation of identity; dependency, racism and powerlessness create the phallocentrism as an attempt to recuperate some power influence. In exploring black masculinity at an inner-city comprehensive school, a teenager tells Sewell (1995, p.21-22) that *"the White boys here are just 'pusses'. They haven't got the balls like a Black man."* Indeed, masculinity is deemed of great significance in an educational environment, with Mac An Ghaill (1991) suggesting that 'macho' black males consider themselves 'sexually superior' to other races and the conformist black students, though in fact they are highly insecure.

Meanwhile, hooks [sic] (1992) suggests that the anxieties of a black male are linked to the extent that they *"absorbed White society's notion of manhood"*, in turn determining their level of bitterness and despair. Furthermore, hooks claims that integration greatly shapes black masculinity, and that black men feel 'cut off' from the patriarchal ideal, where they could assert authority due to tradition and religion (Christianity). But instead, under the phallocentric framework, even an unemployed black man can gain status (hooks, 1992). Thus, there is little desire for black men to succeed academically since their status is not greatly hindered by unemployment; this could partially explain why 43.5% of Caribbean male 18-19 year olds were unemployed in the 1991 Census.

British Africans/Caribbeans have had significant success in the entertainment industry – particularly chart music, the media, and various sports, particularly athletics and football. However, the success of a handful can have highly negative consequences for thousands, who will choose a lifestyle which apparently *"lacks discipline and is easy"* (Jones, to Sewell, 1995, p.24) instead of pursuing higher education. Indeed, the perceived irrelevance of academic higher education is satirically conveyed by rap star Kanye West (2004, track 8), in his aptly named album 'The College Dropout': *"these guys are out here making all this*

money all these ways, and I'm spended mine to be smart. You know why? Because when I die, buddy, you know what going to keep me warm? That's right, those degrees".

Arguably more problematic is how the attitudes of black musicians can be greatly influential on the behaviour of black males. As Appleyard (*Sunday Times*, 01/08/04) damningly says: *"The average black hit became a dumb, crotch-grabbing assertion of mindless cool, sexual potency and financial power, clad in sports gear and gold chains."* Lowenthal (*Sunday Times, 1994,* in Sewell, 1995) highlights terms such as 'Hoes' (whores), 'Bitches', AK47s (rifles) and 'gang banging' frequenting the lyrics of popular 'gangsta rap' artists such as *Snoop Dogg*, *Ice Cube* and *Dr Dre*. Gates (1990) on the other hand suggests that the music has a positive influence by providing a humorous, hyperbole-ridden parody of black stereotypes. I strongly contest this; for example, lyrics by British black act *So Solid Crew* such as *"my gun's rippin', yo there's no slippin'"* and *"niggaz countin' figures with their fingers on the triggers get set"* ('They Don't Know', 2001, Track 7) are far from parody, especially when two members of the band have been recently imprisoned for gun crime.

Interestingly, Fuller's (1980, in Fuller, 1997) study showed that black girls were able to accommodate aspects of schooling without losing respect amongst peers, but such a "juggling act" was deemed impossible by black boys, with the phallocentric response being deemed the easier option. As a result, we see British black Caribbean women more qualified than males (Mortimore et al, 1996), and more African/Caribbean women going into higher education than their white peers (Mirza, in Appleyard, *Sunday Times,* 01/08/04). As put by Professor Osler (in Appleyard, *Sunday Times,* 01/08/04), *"as the young black male appears to slip further into the margins, the young black woman becomes more powerfully integrated".*

Identity is another potential pitfall. The Caribbean author Gibson (1986) asserts that Caribbeans are ashamed of the slavery past that their ancestors led, and thus attach no cultural significance to their roots in turn fuelling a lack of a feeling of identity. However, this statement is questionable, since many British black citizens are explicitly proud of their race,

heritage, and nation of origin. Nonetheless, Gibson's assertion (1986, p.20) that being 'cultureless' is *"an identity crisis which has undermined the confidence of Westindian [sic] adults…unable to inspire confidence and a sense of identity in the young, who badly need it to help them in their development"* is clearly an important contribution to understanding the problem.

II.b.3 The Problems of Racial Discrimination

Whether the source lies in the fear of competition from an unknown group (Park, 1921, 1950; Said, 1978), the Freudian theory of frustration and aggression (Dollard, 1937) or conflicts in a plural society that 'follow the lines of racial cleavage' (Kuper, 1974), it is undeniable that racial discrimination, both institutional[4] and outright, exists in the United Kingdom, despite the implementation of numerous pieces of legislation. Indeed, student comments such as *"the teachers like white people more than Black people"* and *"Black kids are always stereotyped as troublemakers"* were frequently quoted in the recent 'Rampton Revisited' report (2004, p.194 & p.195). Despite black Africans being so well qualified, their high vulnerability to unemployment surely suggests that they are suffering a great degree of discrimination (Blackburn et al, 1996).

Being treated differently by teachers is obviously particularly damaging throughout one's education – Brittan (1976) and Tomlinson (1985) found that teachers often have negative, distorted perceptions of black pupils, with Carrington (1983) suggesting many believe black Caribbean boys have *"skills of the body rather than skills of the mind"* (Figueroa, p.413, in Lynch et al, 1992). Driver (1979) attributed the problems to the cultural dissonance theory – that white teachers cannot understand the culture of black children, and thus misinterpret their behaviour. This could help to explain a black boy telling McIntyre et al (1993, p.18): *"If one (black) gets in trouble, then they all get in trouble. They (teachers) don't*

see you as an individual. They see you as part of that group." The high exclusion rate of black boys, particularly Caribbeans, can be partially explained by the societal stereotype that associates 'black' with 'problem' (Sivanandan, in Bourne et al, 1994), and the perceived 'behavioural problems' could be in fact due to communication problems or the reaction of pupils to perceived racism.

Such discrimination has disastrous consequences when black students consequently turn against white teachers – one student told Jamdagni et al (1982, p.10) that *"a lot of kids don't learn in school because they don't want to be taught by white teachers. They don't want anything to do with white people."* As Matthews (*Sunday Times,* 01/08/04) says, *"Slavery, colonialism and racism have always been ideal fuel for our anger, bitterness and cynicism towards the white man"*. Since slavery can be regarded as provoking more anger than colonialism, this could explain the difference in attitudes between black Africans and black Caribbeans.

The Swann Report (1985) suggests that non-white groups are subjected to varying levels of racial prejudice because, for example, Asians *"keep their heads down"* whereas West Indians *"adopt a high profile"*, and the resultantly greater discrimination leads to a lowering of their self-esteem and motivation, which reduces their educational performance. However, Stone (1981) and Murray & Dawson (1983) suggest that the self-esteem of Africans/Caribbeans is as strong as whites, whilst Verma and Bagley (1979) suggest that low self-esteem has no relationship with educational attainment. I strongly contest the latter assertion – surely having low self-esteem would reduce one's ambition and motivation to succeed, both in the classroom and generally.

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4 Institutional racism is defined as "organisational structures, policies and practices which result in ethnic minorities being treated unfairly and less equally, often without intent or knowledge." (CRE, 2003).

II.c.1 Conclusions and Hypotheses

Too many authors appear to solely highlight their area of interest as the principal cause of underachievement, but it is clear that there is no one single factor that explains the situation for African/Caribbean males when it comes to higher education in Britain. It appears that different factors will influence each individual to different extents – it would be interesting to see what the black students contributing to this dissertation's research themselves highlight as the main causes for underachievement.

It is likely that there will be considerable differences in the achievement of black African and black Caribbean males. Several factors may be responsible, such as a greater likelihood of Caribbean boys lacking an essential father figure to act as a positive role model (family structure, 2001 Census) and having lower self-esteem and more anger associated with their slavery past as opposed to colonisation by the white man in the case of the black African (Gibson, 1986). Furthermore, the much greater proportion of middle-class African parents who value the high status and prestige and potential wealth associated with higher education (Goody & Groothues, 1977) would be a positive influence for African boys.

Much suspicion of discrimination and institutional racism may be evident for both Africans and Caribbeans, the latter an issue that has been of prime currency since the Steven Laurence Inquiry (1999). However, many of those who are succeeding in higher education may criticise fellow black peers who refer to issues such as racism, low teacher expectations and slavery in the past as excuses to avoid overcoming obstacles and advancement. Whilst some may also criticise the damning black subculture shown in the music industry, many others may aspire to such 'bling-bling' lifestyles (Matthews, *Sunday Times,* 01/08/04) due to an absence of black male role models in professional sectors such as law, politics, the City and academia. Reluctance to enter an environment where one's culture and social networks are absent could explain the gross under-representation at leading higher education institutions.

III Methodology

It is clear from the *Literature Review* (Section II) that the African/Caribbean male underachievement in British higher education is a multi-faceted issue, and subsequently one that requires research from several data sources for triangulation purposes. Triangulation reduces the likelihood of chance associations, as well as systematic bias from solely drawing upon qualitative or quantitative methods, leading to greater credibility in providing more fully substantiated claims (Fielding & Fielding, 1986).

III.a.1 Questionnaires

An important criticism (e.g. Phillips-Bell, cited in Jamdagni et al, 1982) of key publications such as The Rampton Report (1981) was that most 'experts' spoken to when conducting research were white, with insufficient input from black students and their parents. It is of great importance when conducting research of such a nature to gather data primarily from the group involved, since it is their experiences, attitudes and perceptions that directly shape their situation and response to the problems associated. For this reason, the main survey was exclusive to British black male students aged over sixteen who are currently in, or will shortly be entering, higher education institutions (universities and colleges).

The questionnaire (p.19) used two questioning techniques: a) rating scales (using a 1-10 scale) to obtain subjective information on student perceptions on issues such as racial discrimination in university admissions systems, and b) open-ended questions which allowed students to air their opinions without restrictions. It was initially sent to personally-known black male students by e-mail, placed on my personal website for five months (June 1st – October 31st 2004), with the link promoted on black community and British student online message boards, which ensured a strong sample size of 457. Adopting the 'snowballing' technique, respondents were encouraged to send the questionnaire on to fellow black male students; this enabled me to access part of the population I would otherwise have not been

able to reach, and more greatly capture the diversity of black male students nationwide (Siahaan, 2002).

A main limitation of the questionnaire was its reliance on online resources for distribution, which may be biased towards those who own computers, thus perhaps under-representing those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. However this may be insignificant since all university students and most at 6th form have email accounts provided. Also, the response from 254 black Africans and 149 black Caribbeans accurately reflected the 64:36 ratio between 16-24 year old male students of these two ethnicities in the 2001 Census (ONS, Crown Copyright 2003). Secondly, the questionnaires could have been answered by anyone, not only British black male students aged over sixteen. However, given that it was distributed to these students, had targeted audience of 'black' and/or student forums and bearing in mind no unrealistic responses were received, this was unlikely. Given the sensitivity of the topic and its potential to be deemed offensive, a cautious approach was necessary in composing the questions and presenting the questionnaire.

[Information on second questionnaire omitted from online version to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998]

III.a.2 Main Questionnaire (Website Transcript)

June 1st, 2004

Hi,

I'm Anjool, a Geography undergraduate at St Peter's College, Oxford. I'm currently conducting dissertation research, looking at the problems for black (African/Caribbean) males when it comes to British higher education. I appreciate that this is a sensitive topic – I simply wish to look into why there is such an under-representation of black students, particularly males, at leading British universities, and why well-qualified black males still face

difficulties. Previous work I've done on this topic includes http://education.guardian.co.uk/oxbridge/article/0,5500,1111898,00.html.

Below is a questionnaire, which is **exclusively for black males aged 16+, either currently in higher education (university or college), or currently studying AS/A-Levels (or equivalent) and intending on pursuing higher education.** Students of mixed race are welcome (see Q2). The questionnaire should not take longer than 15 minutes, and if you do not feel comfortable with any questions you don't have to answer them. It would be appreciated if you could forward it on to others you know who meet the required criteria. Email me back your completed questionnaire to mail[at]anjool.co.uk

1. What is your name? **(If you do not answer Q1, you will remain completely anonymous)**
2. Select your ethnic origin from the following: (a) Black African, (b) Black Caribbean, (c) Black – Other (please specify)
3. Select the area you live in from the following: (a) City Centre / Central Business District, (b) Inner City / Low-class residential, (c) Suburbs / Medium-class residential / Commuter zone, (d) Rural / Countryside
4. Are you either (a) currently in higher education (university or college), or (b) studying AS/A-Levels (or equivalent) and intending on entering higher education?
5. What type of school do/did you attend for AS/A2 Levels or equivalent (e.g. state/comprehensive; independent; grammar; 6th form college), and is it fee-paying?
6. What A-Level grades / UCAS points (or equivalent) did you/are you expected to achieve?
7. What university/higher education institution do you attend, or are hoping to attend?
8. What degree course do you study / are hoping to study?
9. At home, do you live (a) without either parent, (b) with your mother, (c) with your father or (d) with both parents?
10. On a 1-10 scale (1=very low, 5=average, 10=very high), what is your family's attitude towards your education?
11. On a 1-10 scale, how importantly do/did your peers at school value education?
12. On a 1-10 scale, how high are the career ambitions of your peers?
13. On a 1-10 scale, how well have your teachers motivated you to study?
14. What ethnic backgrounds are your friends from (e.g. mainly Black African; mixed)?
15. Have you recognised the general differences in educational achievement by ethnicity?
16. This problem is particularly bad for African/Caribbean males. Why do you think this is the case?
17. At A-Level in 2002, only 37 black students achieved three A grades out of over 22,000 nationally. What possible reasons are there for this?
18. At Cambridge University, a study last year showed that 3.1% of Africans/Caribbeans achieved a 1st class degree, compared to 21.0% of white and 23.3% of Indian students. Why do you think there is such a contrast?
19. On a 1-10 scale (1=strong positive discrimination, 5=no discrimination, 10=strong racial discrimination), do you feel there is racism against ethnic minorities in the university admissions system? Or could instead ethnic minorities be favoured ('positive discrimination'?)

If you are at university, go to Q23

20. On a 1-10 scale, (1=positive effect, 5 = no effect, 10=negative effect), if you are studying AS/A-Levels, to what extent will the introduction of top-up fees affect your decision to apply to university?
21. What are your general thoughts on top-up fees?
22. Are you aware that you will not have to pay top-up fees back until once you are earning over £15,000 a year, and if you are from a poorer family you will not have to pay at all?
23. If you watched BBC2's 'Black Ambition', what were your thoughts on it?
24. Do you value role models, and if so who are they? (e.g. family members, celebrities, older friends)
25. Do you have any other comments regarding topics that have been brought up in this questionnaire?

Please contact me if you are interested in taking part in an interview to discuss these issues in greater depth.

III.b.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Since a qualitative methodology enables greater understanding of the meanings attached to experiences and ideas (Barnes, 2001) than rating-scale questions, interviews made up a key part of dissertation research. The free-flowing discussion helps to get closer to the experiences of black students, which are situated in social spheres (Silverman, 1997), with a semi-structured method adopted to cover a similar range of topics in each interview, whilst allowing students to construct individual responses. In the free-flowing discussion, students were encouraged to introduce new themes that they felt were appropriate to the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

31 black students, again at or shortly entering higher education institutions, were interviewed for around one hour each at various locations (sample interviews in Appendix II). Most had expressed an interest in being interviewed from a request on the questionnaire form, and agreed for their comments to be possibly used by *BBC News Online* (Appendix IV.c). Along with issues concerning reflexivity (Section III.b.2), the fact that the students were keen on being interviewed and discussing the topics at hand meant that they may not have represented the black student population at large. Indeed, several were critical of their black peers for having a poorer work ethic and being less ambitious.

Additionally, 18 adult spokespeople were interviewed, ranging from those considered as 'role models' for black males, to politicians and those involved in higher education access initiatives. Whilst accepting Phillips-Bell's (cited in Jamdagni et al, 1982) criticisms of speaking to others rather than the population in question, the chosen interviewees here play a key role or influence in the social situation facing the target population. A major limitation was that the most desirable spokespeople, such as black politician Paul Boetang MP, and 'role models' such as *So Solid Crew* were not interested in, or too busy for, an undergraduate dissertation. Nonetheless, those who were interviewed included the Shadow Education Minister, the NUS Black Students Officer, and three black BBC television/radio presenters.

III.b.2 Reflexivity

[Omitted from online version]

III.c Online Focus Group Discussions

Another qualitative method, focus group discussions enable more than the question-answer interaction of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, with in-depth information on concepts, perceptions and ideas gained by group members discussing the topic themselves, guided by the facilitator (Varkevisser et al, 2003). The ability to develop research hypotheses by exploring the issues and causes in greater depth, as well as tackle a controversial issue through active discussion was ideal for this dissertation. Thus, I set up three 'online focus group' discussions, in December 2003, June and August 2004, where I introduced and ended the sessions, encouraged discussion and involvement, highlighted and guided participants through key issues and loosely controlled the discussions.

The focus groups took place on *The Student Room* website (thestudentroom.co.uk, formerly uk-learning.net), Britain's largest online student forum**,** and was open to all British students in order to see the different perceptions and attitudes of various groups towards the issues. There were several reasons why I chose to conduct focus group discussions online rather than via traditional means; the anonymity of users having alias usernames would help in freely airing opinions and experiences, and students from all parts of the country could participate, which would have been unfeasible face-to-face. Furthermore, the hundreds of students viewing the forum at any one time allowed a sizeable number of responses – indeed, the third discussion received 364 individual 'posts' (replies).

Some resistance was invoked by my desire to explore issues in an academic context (*"stop always trying to apply intellect and academia to all situations, racism is not one of those topics that can be analysed",* said a Kings College, London student). The main problem

however was that some respondents exploited their granted anonymity by airing overly controversial and offensive viewpoints, such as the assertion that blacks are an intellectually inferior race, which resulted in extremely heated debates, with some participants resorting to personal insults rather than discussing the matters at hand.

III.d Participant Observation

By immersing oneself in the subject being studied, a deeper understanding of the issues at hand can be gained. The phenomenological approach to participant observation aids inter-subjective understanding and empathy (e.g. Bruyn, 1966), with the participant observer seeking meanings of the experiences of the group being studied from each of the many perspectives within it. For these reasons, I attended the *'London Schools and the Black Child: Reaching for the Stars'* conference at Westminster, London in September 2004, to observe the attitudes towards education from the hundreds of black parents and students who attended. The event explored the issues of black underachievement, especially for males, throughout all stages of education, and included seminars on issues such as African-centred approaches to education, establishing the African-Caribbean Parents & Governors Network, and youth empowerment and engagement. Key speakers included the Mayor of London, Ken Livingston, and Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Chairman Trevor Phillips. A limitation of the participant observation technique is that it can reduce objectivity, since the observations could distort the behaviour of the researcher.

IV.a Results – Main Questionnaire, June – October 2004

Total surveyed: 457 black male students

IV.a.1 Breakdown of 457 African/Caribbean male students

All 254 African, 149 Caribbean, and 54 'Other' black males answered both Q2 and Q4.

	Black African				Black Caribbean				Black Other			
	AS/A-Level		University		AS/A-Level		University		AS/A-Level		University	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total	**101**	22.1	**153**	33.5	**47**	10.3	**102**	22.3	**20**	4.4	**34**	7.4

	Black African		Black Caribbean		Black Other		AS/A-Level		University	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total	**254**	55.1	**149**	32.6	**54**	11.8	**168**	36.8	**289**	63.2

Figure 4.1*: Breakdown of black male students by ethnicity and education level, in numbers (#) and percentage of total to 1 decimal place (%).* Note: 'AS/A-Level' includes equivalents such as International Baccalaureate.

IV.a.2 Geographic Location

246 African, 147 Caribbean, and 52 'Other' black males answered Q3.

Location Type:	Black African		Black Caribbean		Black Other	
	#	% of BA	#	% of BC	#	% of BO
1. City Centre / Central Business District	64	26.0	43	29.3	14	26.9
2. Inner City / Low-class residential	78	31.7	61	41.5	25	48.1
3. Suburbs / Medium-class residential / Commuter zone	93	37.8	40	27.2	11	21.1
4. Rural / Countryside	11	4.5	3	2.0	2	3.8

Figure 4.2*: Geographic location type by ethnicity of black male students*

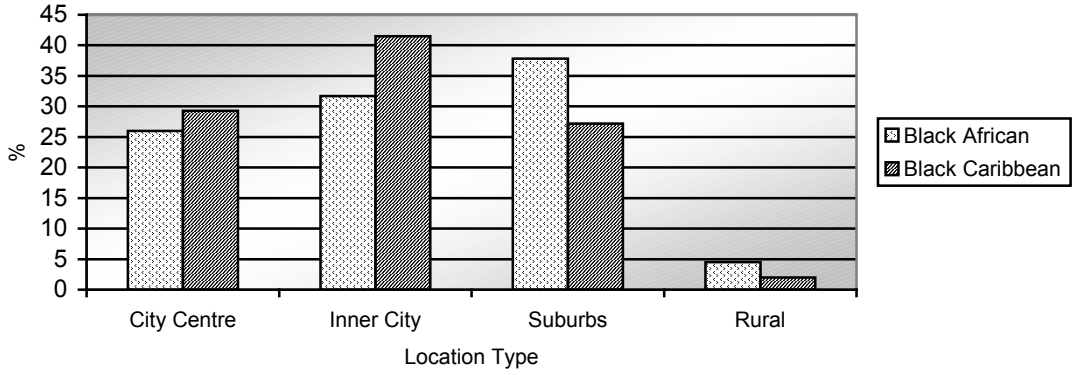

Figure 4.3*: Geographic location of black African and black Caribbean male students (for full key see Fig. 4.2)*

IV.a.3 A-Level grades (achieved or predicted)

254 African, 148 Caribbean, and 53 'Other' black males answered Q6.

UCAS Points:	Black African		Black Caribbean		Black Other	
	#	% of BA	#	% of BC	#	% of BO
0 – 6 (6 = E E E)	8	3.1	16	10.8	2	3.8
8 – 12 (8 = D D D)	15	5.9	23	15.5	4	7.5
14 – 18 (18 = C C C)	81	31.9	65	43.9	21	39.6
20 – 24 (24 = B B B)	101	39.8	32	21.6	19	35.8
26 – 30 (30 = A A A)	49	19.3	12	8.1	7	13.2

***Figure 4.4**: Achieved or predicted A-Level scores by ethnicity of black male students, using UCAS points system where A=10, B=8, C=6, D=4 and E=2, for a maximum of 3 subjects*

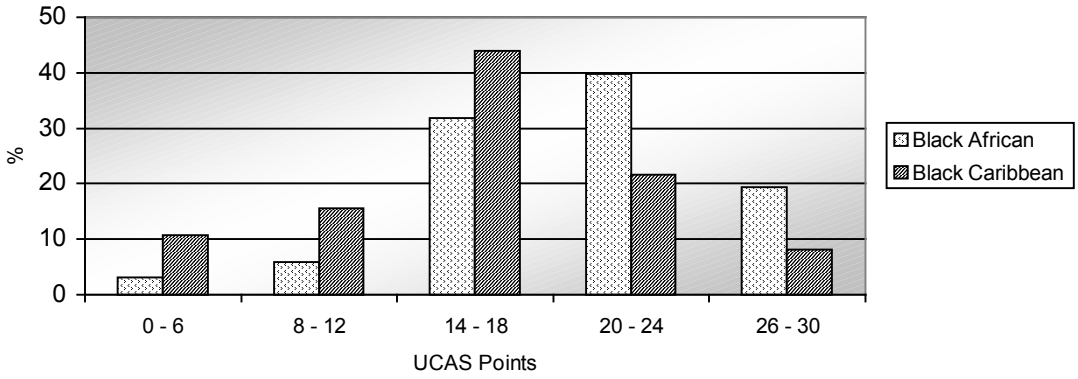

***Figure 4.5**: Achieved or predicted A-Level scores of black African and black Caribbean male students, using UCAS points system where A=10, B=8, C=6, D=4 and E=2, for a maximum of 3 subjects*

IV.a.4 University (currently attending or 1st choice)

207 African, 116 Caribbean, and 41 'Other' black males answered Q7.

University Ranking:	Black African		Black Caribbean		Black Other	
	#	% of BA	#	% of BC	#	% of BO
1 – 20 (1 = Cambridge)	23	11.1	9	7.8	4	9.8
21 – 40 (21 = Kings, London)	74	35.7	25	21.6	11	26.8
41 – 60 (41 = Swansea)	54	26.1	38	32.8	14	34.1
61 – 80 (61 = Northumbria)	22	10.6	10	8.6	5	12.2
81 – 100 (81 = Napier)	21	10.1	19	16.4	5	12.2
101 – 123 (101 = De Montfort)	13	6.3	15	12.9	2	4.9

***Figure 4.6**: Ranking of university (attending or 1st choice) by ethnicity of black male students, using Sunday Times University Guide 2004 rankings*

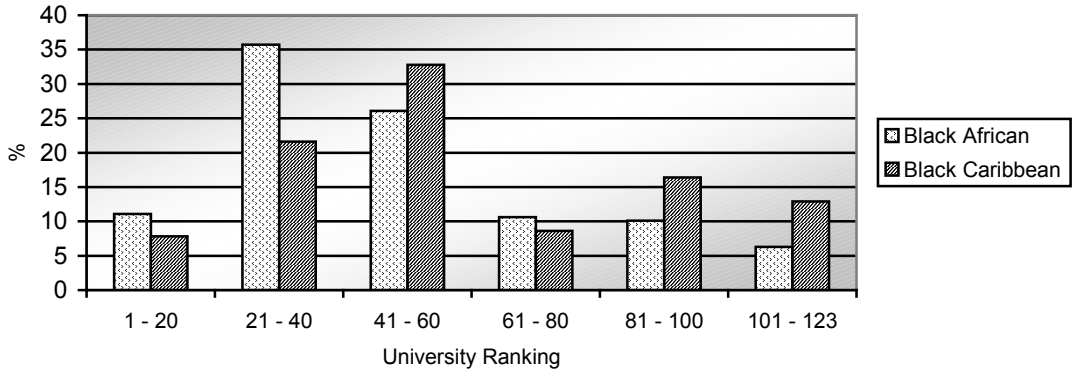

***Figure 4.7**: Ranking of university (attending or 1st choice) of black African and black Caribbean male students, using Sunday Times University Guide 2004 rankings*

IV.a.5 Family Structure

228 African, 132 Caribbean, and 49 'Other' black males answered Q9.

Family Structure – Student is:	Black African		Black Caribbean		Black Other	
	#	% of BA	#	% of BC	#	% of BO
Lives with **neither parent**	16	7.0	10	7.6	4	8.2
Lives with **Mother only**	28	12.3	41	31.1	10	20.4
Lives with **Father only**	11	4.8	9	6.8	3	6.1
Lives with **both parents**	173	75.9	72	54.5	32	65.3

***Figure 4.8**: Family structure by ethnicity of black male students*

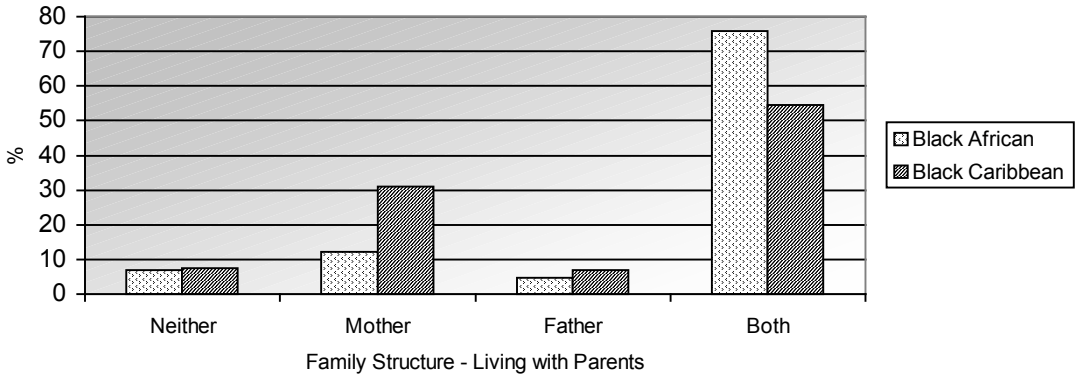

***Figure 4.9**: Family structure by ethnicity of black African and black Caribbean male students*

IV.a.6 Motivation from Teachers

251 African, 148 Caribbean, and 52 'Other' black males answered Q13.

How well teachers motivated student to study:	Black African		Black Caribbean		Black Other	
	#	% of BA	#	% of BC	#	% of BO
1 – Very low	9	3.6	13	8.8	2	3.8
2	4	1.6	15	10.1	2	3.8
3	35	13.9	22	14.9	6	11.5
4	47	18.7	31	20.9	12	23.1
5 – Average	57	22.7	20	13.5	11	21.2
6	31	12.4	14	9.5	7	13.5
7	28	11.2	9	6.1	5	9.6
8	13	5.2	12	8.1	4	7.7
9	16	6.4	8	5.4	1	1.9
10 – Very good	11	4.4	4	2.7	2	3.8

***Figure 4.10**: Motivation from Teachers, on a 1-10 scale, by ethnicity for black male students*

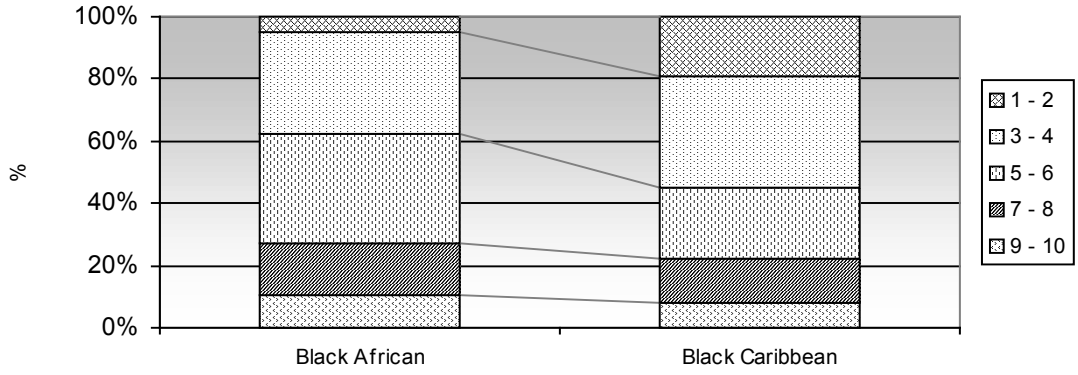

***Figure 4.11**: Motivation from Teachers, using 1-10 scale (as Fig. 3.10), of black African and black Caribbean male students*

IV.a.7 Reasons for Underachievement

232 African, 135 Caribbean, and 37 'Other' black males answered all or some of Q16, Q17 and Q18. Responses from the three questions have been merged; respondents may have stated more than one factor:

7 most common factors mentioned:	Black African		Black Caribbean		Black Other	
	#	% of BA	#	% of BC	#	% of BO
1 – Curriculum / teaching style does not suit black males	91	39.2	63	46.7	14	37.8
2 – Few black role models / successful black male students	83	35.8	47	37.6	12	32.4
3 – Black street culture does not favour academic achievement	75	32.3	44	32.6	13	35.1
4 – Racially prejudiced teachers / Institutional racism	70	30.2	53	39.3	8	21.6
5 – More black students are from poorer schools / backgrounds	36	15.5	31	23.0	5	13.5
6 – Black students are less intelligent than their peers	9	3.9	10	7.4	2	5.4
7 – Black families do not value education as much	3	1.3	12	8.8	2	5.4

***Figure 4.12**: Most common factors given for underachievement of black males, by ethnicity of black male students*

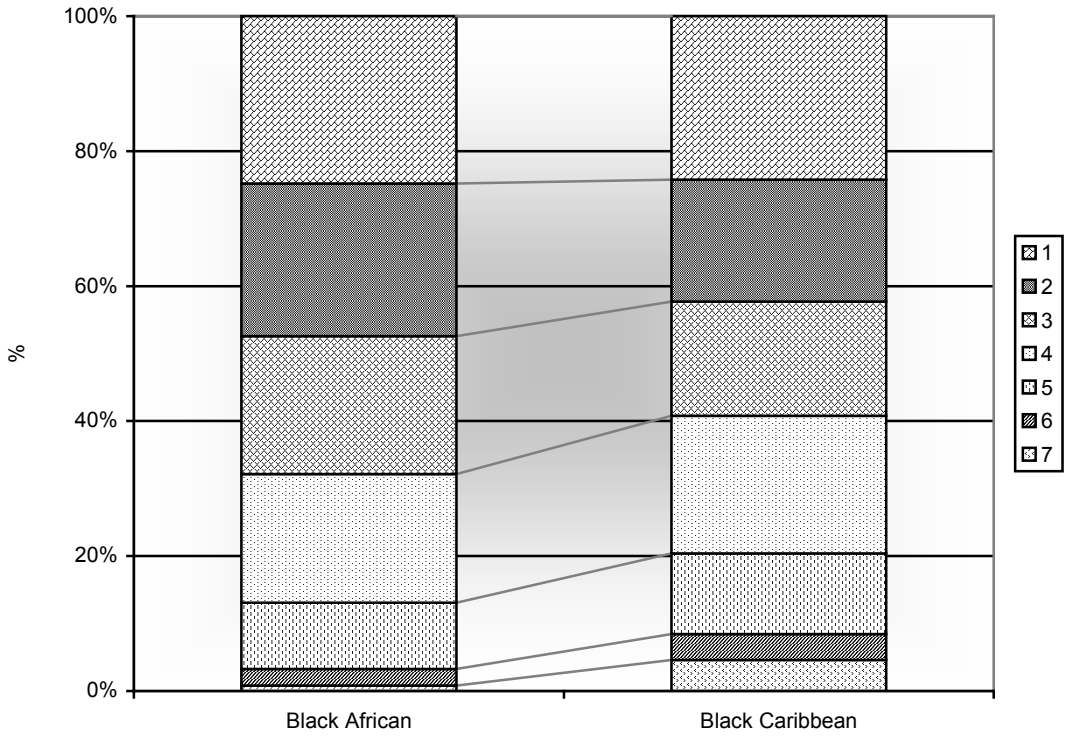

***Figure 4.13**: Most common factors given for underachievement of black males, for black African and black Caribbean male students; key as of Fig. 4.12*

IV.a.8 Racial Discrimination in University Admissions

214 African, 121 Caribbean, and 36 'Other' black males answered Q19.

Perceived racism against ethnic minorities in admissions system:	Black African		Black Caribbean		Black Other	
	#	% of BA	#	% of BC	#	% of BO
1 – Strong positive discrimination	9	4.2	3	2.5	2	5.6
2	1	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
3	2	0.9	2	1.7	0	0.0
4	12	5.6	7	5.8	4	11.1
5 – Zero discrimination	43	20.1	22	18.1	7	19.4
6	31	14.5	9	7.4	5	13.9
7	37	17.3	7	5.8	5	13.9
8	24	11.2	19	15.7	6	16.7
9	22	10.3	23	19.0	3	8.3
10 – Strong racial discrimination	33	15.4	29	24.0	4	11.1

***Figure 4.14**: Perceived racial discrimination in university admissions system, on a 1-10 scale, by ethnicity of black male students*

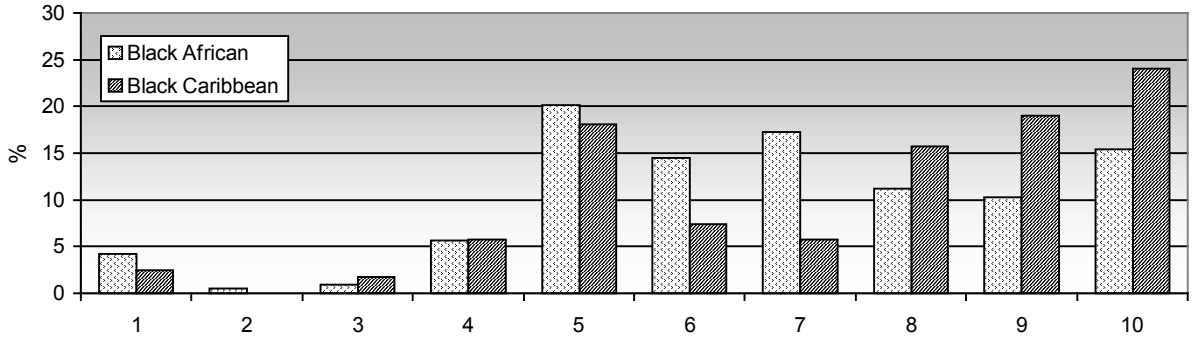

***Figure 4.15**: Perceived racial discrimination in university admissions system, on a 1-10 scale, of black African and black Caribbean male students; key as of Fig. 4.14*

IV.a.9 Other Survey Results

- **Question 5:** 374 of 451 respondents (83.0%) go/went to a non-fee paying school or college for AS/A2 Levels, including 198 of 250 black Africans (79.2%) and 132 of 147 black Caribbeans (89.9%).
- **Question 8:** 51 of 198 (25.8%) black African students are studying or would like to study Law or Medicine, compared to 9 of 103 (8.7%) of black Caribbeans.
- **Questions 10 – 12:** The mean average results were 7.8 for Q10 (8.1 for black Africans, 7.4 for black Caribbeans), 5.3 for Q11 (5.3 for black Africans, 5.2 for black Caribbeans), and 7.7 for Q12 (7.6 for black Africans, 8.0 for black Caribbeans).
- **Question 14:** 274 of 422 respondents (66.5%) have mainly black friends, including 146 of 239 black Africans (61.1%) and 107 of 141 black Caribbeans (75.9%).

- **Question 15:** 395 of 449 respondents (88.0%) claim to have recognised differences in educational performance by ethnicity, including 219 of 250 black Africans (87.6%) and 130 of 146 black Caribbeans (89.0%).
- **Question 20:** The mean average result was 8.4 (strong negative effect) – 8.1 for black Africans and 8.8 for black Caribbeans.
- **Question 22:** Only 50 of the 161 AS/A-Level respondents (31.1%) were aware of the given facts about top-up fees, including 34 of 99 black Africans (34.3%) and 13 of 45 black Caribbeans (28.9%).
- **Question 24:** 369 of 444 respondents (83.1%) say they value role models – 152 (34.3%) said a sibiling or relative, 138 (31.1%) said their father, 112 (25.2%) a black male rap / hip-hop star, and 92 (20.7%) their mother.

IV.b Results – Oxford Questionnaire

[Omitted from online version for reasons regarding Data Protection Act 1998]

V Analysis

This section will explore the various factors attributed to the problems of African/Caribbean males regarding British higher education, with the aim of considering how influential the individual factors are deemed to be, to aid the writing of conclusions (Section VI.a). The structure will loosely follow the order of results as presented in Section IV, with quoted comments from semi-structured interviews and online focus group discussions in boxes. Names have been omitted where interviewees wished to remain anonymous.

V.a Geographic Location

From the data gathered in the main questionnaire, the strong correlation[5] (r = 0.675, 99.9% significance, Appendix I.b.1) recorded between geographic location (IV.a.2) and A-Level grades (IV.a.3) suggests that one's socio-economic level[6] has a strong bearing on academic achievement, for reasons such as those cited in the following semi-structured interviews:

> *"Another reason is their geographic location. Take Brixton for instance – in the schools there, it would be very hard to bring up a child, same with Peckham, and expect them to excel and not derail. There's no one pushing them at school or motivating them, and the people they interact with on the streets are a bad influence."* – **Anon A**

> *"Firstly it's due to catchment areas. Where you're likely to see more blacks is in the inner city regions, with worse schools. It's important that parents have the right to choose what school their children go to in order to break down these geographic barriers."* – **Charles Hendry MP**, Shadow Minister for Young People

Fig. 4.3 (IV.a.2) clearly shows that there are more black Caribbean than black African males in the urban centre and inner city or low-class residential areas, and vice-versa in the suburban and rural areas. Factors such as typically poorer schools with less resources in inner

[5] *"Pearson's r" / "product-moment correlation coefficient"* calculated; it is acknowledged that strictly speaking, for this technique the independent variable ought to be continuous, not discrete.

[6] It is acknowledged that location is an imperfect measure of one's socio-economic level, since a home in London's Central Business District could be extremely lucrative, for example. With hindsight it would have been more beneficial to record housing tenure information, although again terraced houses and flats can often be in affluent areas.

city regions as well as more affluent, middle-class parents with greater aspirations for their children in suburban areas (Pathak, 2000) directly lead to different levels of academic achievement. No students from an inner city / low-class residential home area had achieved or expected grades of AAB/AAA (28+ UCAS points), though 2 stated ABB/AAC (26) and 5 BBB/ABC/AAD (24), suggesting that background is clearly an obstacle. However, Burnhill et al's (1990) assertion that socio-economic factors are of greatest importance is weakened by the fact that only 17.8% of respondents to Q16-18 (IV.a.7) referred to this as a key reason for underachievement in higher education, with four other factors more commonly cited. Furthermore, evidence such as that cited in Section II.b.1 shows that other ethnic minority groups with similar socio-economic circumstances, particularly Indians, achieve better results:

> *"When will black people stop blaming others and making up excuses and start taking power over their own lives…Asians also go to those run-down inner city schools but still manage to do well in life."* – **'Biggles'**, London School of Economics

When questioning interviewees about the variant levels of achievement of different ethnic minority groups of the same socio-economic background, various reasons were given, with differences in attitudes towards education more commonly cited:

> *"Other ethnic minority groups such as Indians, Pakistanis and the Chinese tend to adjust quicker and easier than black people - what that's due to I don't know, it could be a number of things. I wouldn't say one ethnic group has had it easier than another though, you can't put it down to that. So I guess it's down to different attitudes of various ethnic groups."* – **Anthony Yamson**, Brunel University (Appendix II.a)

> *"The reason for that is that different cultures take very different approaches to education, and this is something that shows up a lot in interviews at Oxford. Different cultures have different ways of learning and speaking, for example."* – **Anon B**

This again highlights that the issue is multi-faceted – whilst poorer socio-economic conditions may be an obstacle to higher education, other issues unique to African/Caribbean perception such as a different approach to education (Section V.d) exacerbate this problem.

V.b 'Role Models'

In the main questionnaire, the achieved or predicted A-Level results of respondents (IV.a.3) were below national levels (DfES, 2003, 2004), but nonetheless strong, with 48.4% stating grades equivalent to at least BCC (20 UCAS points) and 85% at least CDD (14). However, the standard of their university (currently attending or 1st choice, IV.a.4) did not match this – 8.2% were at universities or higher education colleges ranked outside the 'top 100', although 5.7% had grades which matched the standard entry requirements for these institutions. Meanwhile, 14.9% stated grades of at least ABB/AAC (26 points), but only 9.9% were at 'top 20' universities which often accept students with grades lower than these (UCAS, 2003, 2004). Whilst potentially due to factors such as discrimination in the admissions process, comments from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and online focus group discussions suggested that this is mainly because of a lack of 'role models' at the most prestigious institutions, for example:

> *"It's a chicken and egg scenario – if there's no representation in the first place then blacks will remain under-represented. There's hardly any role models in academia, so kids won't warm to it, as there's no feeling of personal belonging."* – **Pav Akhtar,** Black Students Officer, National Union of Students

> *"In the education system, there's very few African/Caribbean teachers, and thus a lack of positive role models. This results in blacks asking themselves: "What's the value of education?", and this feeds back into the schools. The role models African/Caribbean boys do see are pushing them down a route that doesn't require education to succeed."* – **Mark Hoban MP**, Shadow Education Minister

The absence of black figures, particularly males, in academia both at student and teaching levels is clearly a major problem, and one that could possibly be remedied by the controversial policy of 'positive discrimination', where black Africans and Caribbeans may be favoured over equally-qualified (or better qualified) peers. The response from African/Caribbean male students to this concept was mixed:

> *"Yeah that's fair, because white people are going to be successful anyway, wherever they go. But if you give black people the opportunity to go to those top universities, they'll become cleverer, and get better jobs, and more money, and as a result their children will be cleverer, as will future generations."* – **James**, Carlton Bolling College, Bradford

> *"I feel that it is necessary for people to succeed regardless of their colour but purely due to their aptitude. Boosting the number of blacks in Parliament is not the way forward. Instead you need to look at things from a grass roots level to redress the balance. You need to look at why blacks are underachieving in the first place rather than artificially boost their numbers."* – **Robyn Sargeant**, King Edwards VI School, Birmingham (Appendix II.b)

At the *London Schools and the Black Child* conference (11/09/04), a warm response was given by black parents to the Commission for Racial Equality Chairman Trevor Phillips' suggestion to pay black teachers more than their white counterparts, as was Lee Jasper's (advisor to Mayor of London, Ken Livingston) suggestion to give new black teachers 'golden handshakes'. However, Phillips' comments provoked outrage from white citizens on various online forums (e.g. *Coventry City FC*, *urban75* & *Stormfront* message boards):

> *"Sounds like a totally moronic idea to me. Why should people be paid more for the colour of their skin?"* – **'In Bloom'**, urban75 forum

> "*"Commission for Racial Equality"? Hellooo Newspeak."* – **'godwinson'**, Stormfront forum

Thus whilst it is clear that an absence of 'role models' has a major impact on under-representation of African/Caribbeans in higher education, ensuring a balance between redressing this under-representation (at both student and teaching levels) without appearing discriminatory against other ethnicities is evidently greatly challenging.

V.c Family Structure

In the main questionnaire, the moderate correlation (r = 0.433, 99.9% significance, Appendix I.b.2) between family status (IV.a.5) and A-Level grades (IV.a.3) suggests that, in line with Lobo (1978) and Gibson (1986), the absence of a 'nuclear family' structure can have a negative impact on one's academic achievement. A clear contrast between black African and black Caribbean families is evident, with 75.9% and 54.5% of students respectively living with both parents, contributing to the discrepancy in results between the two groups. Two black male student interviewees referred to the 'family unit' concept:

> *"A strong family unit is the ideal medium for these values to be distributed to the children and luckily this has been the case for me. In my experience many children of first generation immigrants lack this strong family unit so they find it hard to deliver these values, as they lack a suitable medium."* – **Tobi Rufus**, Oxford University

> *"The pressure African/Caribbeans have can lead to a disintegration of the family unit. When you look at role models who they can identify with and aspire to, look how entertainers lead their life. It's not exactly a 2.4 children mould is it?"* – **Robyn Sargeant**, King Edwards VI School, Birmingham (Appendix II.b)

Robyn's comment highlights the impact 'role models' (V.b) can have on family structure, and Appendix I.b.3 shows weak correlation (r = 0.366, 99.9% significance) between family structure and geographic location (V.a), again suggesting that several factors contributing to the problems with higher education are inter-related. The lack of two parents appears to create a 'ceiling' on academic achievement – in the questionnaire (Appendix I.b) none of the 99 students from a single-parent family expected or achieved AAB/AAA (28+ UCAS points) at A-Level, compared to 15 out of the 269 students (5.6%) who lived with both parents. However, very few mentioned family structure as a reason for underachievement in Q16-18 (IV.a.7), and the factor has little if any effect on the problem at Cambridge highlighted in Q18, since virtually all students live in college and not with their families. Thus family structure on its own may exacerbate, but is not a fundamental cause of, problems regarding *accessibility* to higher education, though has little impact once one has *entered* it (unless they continue to live at home).

V.d Curriculum & Teaching Style

In both the main questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, problems with the British curriculum or method of teaching were the most commonly cited reason for the underachievement of African/Caribbean males. 168 of the 404 respondents to Q16-18 – including 39.2% of all black Africans and 46.7% of black Caribbeans referred to these problems, as did black male adults who were interviewed:

> *"Not everyone cares about the geography of England or the history of what the white English pilfered. Teachers need to be more flexible with black students, and it needs to be realised that not everyone wants to know about white history or whatever."* – **Lee Johnson**, BBC 1Xtra presenter

> *"The only black history I ever learnt about was American slavery. I wanted to know about black history in Britain, and I'm only learning about this now, in my spare time. I can see a subtle change happening in the curriculum content, it's coming along slowly, step by step, but the pace really needs quickening, the process is far too slow right now."* – **Dave Benson Phillips**, BBC television presenter

The fact that current black male students shared the same grievances as those who finished their studies decades ago gives credibility to Dave's criticism that changes are occurring too slowly. Despite numerous policy recommendations (e.g. DES, 1977; AMMA, 1987) to make the curriculum more 'multicultural' and accessible to ethnic minority students, many questionnaire respondents referred to slavery and apartheid as being the only areas of black history covered in a 'Euro-centric' curriculum. Not only would a syllabus under-representing one's heritage and culture deter them from continuing their studies into higher education, but the areas that are covered (slavery and apartheid) could reduce their self-esteem (Swann, 1985) since it could induce feelings of inferiority, and a potentially negative impact on educational achievement. However, not all students believed that curriculum problems were a valid grievance:

> *"Ultimately History is only one subject and this does not explain underachievement in science, English and other subjects. At certain times individuals have to face reality and take responsibility for their own destiny and not use outdated, oversubscribed excuses."* – **Tobi Rufus**, Oxford University

> *"Slavery? I think that's nonsense. Sure, it's good to know what happened in the past. But using that as an excuse all the time just cancels yourself out. You can't say you can't do something because of slavery if other people are doing it…Are there extra obstacles for blacks? Yes. But therefore you should work ten times harder to overcome them. Doesn't it make sense to work harder to be on level par? Jump higher is what I say. But not enough blacks think like that I'm afraid."* – **Anthony Yamson**, Brunel University (Appendix II.a)

It is apparent that not all black students share Tobi's and Anthony's drive to "jump higher" via higher education – both are relatively high achievers with AAA and ABC at A-Level respectively. Making curriculum content more representative would greatly reduce the potential for these *"oversubscribed, outdated excuses"* (Tobi) to be used. Recently, supplementary schools for African/Caribbean students, operating on Saturdays, have become very popular, especially in London boroughs:

> *"In our black schools, they're taught about our life before slavery. We were independent for 150,000 years. We helped with Pythagoras and Aristotle. But the national curriculum does not teach them that. We need to change, and prove that we have a future."* – **Pat Lubumbe**, Chairperson, International People's Democratic Uhuru[7] Movement

However, the existence of institutions which are racially segregated have the *"potential to cause further tension"* (interview with Mark Hoban MP, Shadow Education Minister), and may do little to solve the problems in mainstream education:

> *"The British curriculum is just not appealing to African/Caribbeans, it's so different to in Australia. Take GCSE English Literature for example – we have to cover Shakespeare and poets such as John Donne – come on, for any streetwise teenager it's really boring surely. If I could do something to help that it would be to rewrite the British curriculum from scratch. Not only to make it accessible for African/Caribbeans, but to encompass popular culture. Include more things that students are actually interested in, instead of teaching them about John Donne and the rest of this isolated curriculum."* – **Anon C**, GCSE teacher, Neasden

[7] Swahili word meaning 'freedom'

Anon C's criticisms appear to be more a problem of class rather than race – a 'streetwise' white teenager may be just as disengaged with Shakespeare and Keats as their 'streetwise' black counterpart. Thus, making curriculum content more accessible to all classes, as well as ethnic groups, may have universal value.

Whilst it is clear that curriculum reform is essential to combat problems of under-representation in higher education and underachievement, reasons why the teaching style apparently does not suit African/Caribbean males were less clear:

> *"Black boys need to be taught in a different manner, I can't really explain why this is"* – **Dave Benson Phillips**, BBC television presenter

> *"It's quite hard to explain, but black guys aren't suited to the British teaching style. I'm not sure why, but they may react differently to figures of authority for example, and university admissions tutors need to account for these cultural differences"* – **Zakir Hussain**, Ethnic Diversity Campaign Co-chair, Oxford University Student Union

Greater research is necessary to identify the precise problems with the 'British teaching style', and the degree to which this can be redressed. This could potentially explain the major underachievement of Africans/Caribbeans at Cambridge University (BBC, 2003) where teaching via tutorials/supervisions are intensive, and especially in science-based degrees race and class-related issues related to the syllabus are of lesser relevance.

V.e 'Acting White'

A considerable problem was identified in the third focus group discussion, where a black African student expressed his anger at black peers who reinforce negative stereotypes having seen Darcus Howe's television programme "Who You Callin' A Nigger?" on Channel 4 the night before:

> *"They act 'rude' and 'bop'. They cannot form a sentence and believe that having a child at 18 years old is 'wising up'… I get so angry when I walk into the town centre and see yet another group of '50 Cent' black youths, looking 'straight out of the hood' and finding it funny to call me a 'bounty' or 'coconut'."* – **Anon D**

Whilst *Anon D*'s desire to work hard and not conform to this stereotype was applauded by several white students, his comments invoked an angry reaction from black peers. One black student with 5As at AS-Level branded him a "sell out", and a law undergraduate at Kings College London said he was a "disgrace" to his heritage – similar criticisms that Bonsu (*Evening Standard*, 19/08/04) claims to have suffered for having a professional career.

> *"If he's a sell-out for trying to improve himself and have a good life then I hope he is proud of it"* – **Anon E**

The above response, by a white undergraduate, was counteracted by Robyn's assertion that a black male can be academically successful without *"denigrating their people"*, and *Anon F* suggested that *Anon D* was suffering from an *"identity crisis"*. Thus, it appears that whilst academic achievement and may not be looked down upon by black peers, apparent attempts to lose one's identity and heritage in the process are. This is partially backed up by Sewell's (1995) research, where black boys were mocked more for not 'behaving black', rather than for achieving good grades.

This can be particularly problematic if black students wish to enter predominantly white institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge University – their ambition could be interpreted by peers as a desire to 'lose their heritage'. This is confirmed by Annette saying on 'Black Ambition' (BBC2, 29/12/03) that she was told *"you're selling out, why stretch yourself, why not go to Greenwich, why think you're better than the rest?"* by a friend when applying to Cambridge, with friend Lola being told *"well you're not really black then"*.

However, Fordham & Ogbu's (1986) assertion that for blacks to succeed they have to reject their black identity and 'act white' is somewhat counterbalanced by comments such as:

> *"I'm gonna keep chattin' slang, boppin' on road like a badgal, wearin' my bling & hoodies, and kissin' my teet, while also going to one of the country's best universities to read Law, all 'coz I'M BLACK AND I'M PROUD. It's about time people realised that skin colour means nothing, it's culture and identity you should be lookin' at."* – **Anon G**

On the other hand, whilst academic achievement and 'acting black' may not be mutually exclusive factors, the latter may well explain difficulties that black males face when entering the top higher education establishments, as well as professional careers:

> "*That is the problem, society trying to control black people by saying our image is inappropriate, and the fact we dress in a particular way must mean we are uneducated. I wear what ever I want, my presentation has no effect on my personal achievements…I am studying Law at university, I am going into my final year and I am on [course for a] first, but despite that I am unable to get a work placement."* – **Anon H**

Despite one's achievements on paper, attending a university interview dressed unconventionally, *"wearin' my bling"* or *"chattin' slang"* (*Anon G*, above) is unlikely to be considered favourably. However, again this appears to be a class rather than race-based issue, since this problem would fully apply to white candidates as well:

> *"I honestly don't think a respectable black man in a suit walking in the street with a briefcase will be treated like second class citizens - that just doesn't happen anymore, it's the 21st century. It's about respectability and how you present yourself; if you don't present yourself at least quite respectable, people will always be cautious. And rightly so, to an extent, lets not be naive here."* – **Nima Yazdami**, 6th form, Leeds

Thus any reluctance for an African/Caribbean male to 'reject their identity', even if this is based more on having a 'streetwise' attitude than one's race, clearly continues to be an issue that partially explains major under-representation at prestigious institutions.

V.f Racial Discrimination

Despite identifying that several issues may be based more on class than race, perceptions of racial discrimination by African/Caribbean males were highly evident when conducting research. 32.4% of all 404 respondents to Q16-18 in the main questionnaire (IV.a.7) cited racist teachers and/or institutional racism as a cause of black underachievement, with 69.3% of 371 respondents to Q19 (IV.a.8) believing that some racial discrimination existed in the university admissions system, leading to under-representation in the leading institutions. Interestingly 58.7% of black Caribbeans gave 8/9/10 on a 1-10 rating scale (where 10 represented 'strong racial discrimination'), compared to 37.0% of black Africans, perhaps suggesting that Caribbeans have greater *"anger, bitterness and cynicism towards the white man"* (Matthews, *Sunday Times*, 01/08/04), possibly based largely on the white man's negative impact on their heritage (Gibson, 1986). Discrimination was also suggested by Robyn following his rejection from Oxford:

> *On entering the JCR at Univ for the first time, the din emerging from the other applicants in the room transformed into silence, then stares. Passive apartheid, I think it's called…It is difficult to prevent cynicism from pervading my views on the Oxford admissions system but, to me, it was nothing but a cynical attempt to circumvent transparency, in order to maintain the status-quo; a framework which blacks are actively precluded from. And yet Oxford appear willing to make concessions – under the guise of 'widening participation' – but not to an ambitious, African-Caribbean male, applying for Law, with 8A*s, 4As at GCSE, 5As at AS-level, scoring an average of 92%. Oxford made sure that it put itself beyond my reach.* – **Robyn Sargeant**, King Edwards VI School, Birmingham (Appendix II.b)

Furthermore, certainty that institutional racism was still a major issue in Britain was highlighted by several credible figures in interviews:

> *"Institutional racism happens at a subconscious level in higher education. Tutors don't actively think racist thoughts, but do it very subtly, it's very embedded. Attitudes about certain groups strongly influence decisions."* – **Anon I**, admissions tutor

> *"Institutional racism is as evident as ever. Would you believe in 2004 a Cardiff newsagent was caught having a "No Blacks" poster in the window? Put it in context, particular groups have particular problems."* – **Pav Akhtar,** Black Students Officer, National Union of Students

Whilst Q9 in the Oxford questionnaire showed that 57.9% of black male respondents mentioned the term 'white' as a perceived obstacle for ethnic minorities in applying to Oxford (IV.b.3), the results of Q5a and Q6a (IV.b.2) suggest that false perceptions regarding racial discrimination are evident. For both diversity of the student body and accessibility/likelihood of getting an offer, the modal perception of African/Caribbean students was 'Low' before visiting, which became 'Average' after their stay at Oxford, whereas results for non-black students before and after visiting were relatively similar. This suggests that whilst discrimination based on race may continue to pose a problem, it is greatly exacerbated by false perceptions, perhaps caused by media exaggeration or hearsay, which need to be more actively counterbalanced through initiatives aiming to redress under-representation issues such as the *Oxford Access Scheme*.

V.g Intelligence

It was surprising to see one of the first respondents to the main questionnaire suggesting that black underachievement in higher education was due to differences in intelligence:

> *"We are a less intelligent race, studies show black IQ is 15 points less than white IQ, so there won't be so many clever people good enough for the good universities"* – **Anon J**

When questionnaire research was complete, 21 of 404 black male students (5.2%) had given the reason that their race is intellectually inferior, a theory that many white students appeared to believe was the principal reason for underachievement in the first online focus group discussion:

> *"You have to remember that genetically black men do not have the same intellect as white men in the same way black men can run 100m faster than white men…It is proven fact. White Caucasian males have in general a higher intellect than black males…Fact is black people are genetically better athletes, but to compensate you have to lose other skills. It is simple evolution."* – **Anon K**, Stonyhurst College

When challenged, *Anon K* presented data showing contrasts in average IQ scores, brain capacity, and quantitative, verbal and numerical assessments, according to ethnicity. Whilst many American academics (e.g. Loehlin et al, 1975; Vernon, 1979; Lynn, 1992; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) have suggested that black Africans/Caribbeans are less intelligent than whites, largely based around IQ test data, their credibility has always been strongly contested. For example, Atwell (1984) found that British examinations did not account for cultural and linguistic differences, Mackintosh & Mascie-Taylor's contribution to the Swann Report (1985) showed that IQ test scores vary widely for some ethnic minority groups because many do not speak English as a first language, and Lynn (1980) appears to completely dismiss Flynn's valid criticism that IQ scores do not indicate one's intelligence.

Whilst it may be partly understandable that some white students such as *Anon K* comfortably assert that black students are less intelligent, for example to demonstrate superiority against a 'rival' group (Said, 1978), it is disturbing to see that some black students openly believe and accept this. Believing oneself to be intellectually inferior can be highly damaging to one's self-esteem, and dissuade a black student from performing to their best level academically, if they are made to believe that their best potential is still 'inferior'. Thus it may be in educationists' interests to challenge such assertions and instead find ways to promote a positive self-esteem amongst African/Caribbean males.

V.h Parental Aspirations & Subjects

Observing the *London Schools and the Black Child* conference (11/09/04), it seemed clear that criticisms of African/Caribbean parents not valuing their children's education

enough were unsubstantiated, an opinion in line with DfES (2003, 2004). Hundreds of parents actively participated in focus groups that attempted to tackle key issues such as black exclusion rates and enthusiastically applauded the achievements of London's highest-achieving black individuals.

However, 17 black male students in the main questionnaire mentioned this factor in Q16-18 (IV.a.7), interestingly including 1.3% of all black Africans and 8.8% of black Caribbeans, and in a focus group discussion many suggested that other ethnic groups generally held education in higher regard:

> *"There are also cultural considerations – education is far more of a priority in Indian/Pakistani families than in the black community, so you have very able black kids who simply aren't encouraged to go on and pursue higher education."* – **Anon L**

When it comes to desired higher education courses, there is a clear contrast between Africans and Caribbeans. In the Oxford questionnaire (IV.b.1), 42.3% of black Africans wanted to study Law or Medicine, compared to 21.4% of black Caribbeans; in the main questionnaire (Q8) the results were 25.8% and 8.7% respectively. This confirms the assertion (Daley, 1996; Carey, 1956) that among Africans professional qualifications are seen as a key route to improving one's social status. The desire to take these subjects, where it takes five or six years to fully qualify, greatly contrasts with the 'get-rich-quick' lifestyle of (largely African-American) black role models in the entertainment industry. This suggests that instead of grouping all 'black' students together, it is specifically Caribbean students where greater encouragement to pursue higher education is recommended.

VI.a Summary of Findings & Recommendations

1. African/Caribbean male under-representation and underachievement in higher education is the result of several inter-related factors, rather than a single over-riding issue.

Whilst several academics (e.g. Burnhill et al, 1990) assert that a single factor is the primary cause of the issues at hand, dissertation research clearly shows that several factors are all of considerable importance, and are of various levels of influence depending on an individual's situation. This is confirmed by the fact that four separate factors – curriculum and teaching problems, a lack of role models, cultural issues and racism, were each identified by over 30% of black male students (main questionnaire, IV.a.7) as the main reasons for underachievement especially when entering and experiencing higher education.

2. Several problems relating to access to higher education are more closely linked to class rather than race.

Dissertation research showed clear relationships between socio-economic factors and A-Level grades (the standard requirement to enter higher education institutions) – a sizeable number of African/Caribbean males live in 'inner city', lower-class residential housing and/or single-parent households, environments typically not conducive to academic achievement. Furthermore, problems commonly attributed to racism such as being discriminated against in an interview for university admission based on how one speaks or one's appearance may also be fully applicable to white counterparts. Thus a shift of focus back to class may provide more universal solutions to the problems of access to higher education for certain under-represented groups, regardless of their ethnic origin.

3. The British curriculum does not sufficiently cater for African/Caribbean students; more 'multi-cultural' content is necessary, as is the revision of teaching styles.

It is evident from the dissertation research that curriculum content fails to reflect a multi-cultural Britain. In both the main questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, these

problems were the most commonly cited cause of African/Caribbean under-representation in higher education, and students disengaged from education at an earlier age are unlikely to voluntarily pursue studying after completing school.

Whilst steps in the right direction have been recently observed, such as the successful 'Black History Month' in October 2004, it is specific changes in curriculum content that appear to be necessary. To engage the interest of African/Caribbean students, the focus needs to shift away from slavery and apartheid, and more to positive aspects related to their race, for example accomplishments in History, and notable black authors in English Literature.

The assertion by black males in dissertation research that they require a different approach regarding teaching style requires closer analysis to identify the specific areas where this problem lies.

4. There is a major lack of positive 'role models' in education for black males; more black teachers and diluted 'positive discrimination' are essential to redress this.

With a relatively high absence of father-figures, African/Caribbean males often have no 'role models' educationally successful to aspire to, instead often using black male celebrities as an alternative. Over one quarter of questionnaire respondents referred to a black male rap or hip hop star – who have usually achieved success without requiring higher education – as a role model they value. Similarly, a major reason for under-representation of black students at leading universities is an absence of Africans/Caribbeans in the student body in the first place for younger students to aspire to, thus a vicious circle is in operation. The absence of role models in education can be counterbalanced by active recruitment of black male teachers – as one pupil told Jamdagni et al (1982, p.6): *"there's a great need to put black teachers in school today, as I feel it would give the black child a feeling they're part of the school and give black children an identity."*

Whilst the Commission for Racial Equality Trevor Phillips' suggestion to pay black teachers more is not recommended since it could provoke racial ill-feeling based on perceived

'special treatment' of minorities, providing a one-off "golden hello" sign-on bonus could be more acceptable. This kind of 'positive discrimination', along with initiatives at higher education institutions and career sectors solely aimed at ethnic minority students, would not be viewed so negatively by a large proportion of the white population if the reasons behind the 'discrimination' were more clearly defined. It is important to highlight that the aim is to provide 'role models' and show black students that all kinds of educational opportunities and careers are fully accessible to them, to help redress the under-representation in the long run, rather than to simply act as a so-called 'quota-filler'.

5. Black street subculture has a major negative influence on the education of many African/Caribbean boys; detracting black males from this culture is highly challenging.

The 'black subculture', a phenomenon largely the result of African-American male rap stars, promotes a 'get-rich-quick' attitude not in line with lengthy higher education, often through criminal activity such as drug-dealing. It also often makes black males rebellious and feel the need to differentiate from their white counterparts, leading to a backlash against 'conformist' black students. If censoring material that has the potential to incite violence and criminality is not an option, then strong denouncement of the lifestyle portrayed by the 'black subculture' is necessary, particularly by parents and teachers. However, part of the attraction to this lifestyle is it's rebellious nature, thus efforts to counteract it will prove to be highly challenging.

6. Institutional racism continues to be problematic in educational establishments, exacerbating problems of underachievement; problems related to racial discrimination need to be tackled at their root.

Despite anti-racism being high on the Government agenda recently, *"we still live in a country where your colour determines your success"* (Steven Twigg MP, Minister for Schools, *London Schools and the Black Child* conference, 11/09/04). Strong anecdotal

evidence from black students who were interviewed, along with the admittance that institutional racism is common at university from an admissions tutor who was interviewed, shows that problems continue to abound. However, media exaggeration and hearsay may greatly exacerbate perceptions of racial discrimination, which can be counterbalanced by positive initiatives that aim to tackle under-representation in higher education.

7. Some African/Caribbean students believe that their race is intellectually inferior; literature asserting this should be challenged at every point.

The most alarming finding from dissertation research was that some black students believed they are, as a race, less intelligent, drawing on much publicised claims of variation in IQ scores between different ethnic groups. Even though counter-lobbies have continued to expose major flaws in this theory, the research suggested that many black males have internalised the notion to their own disadvantage. It is highly problematic if some black students do not perform to their full potential because of a low self-esteem based on their belief that they are intellectually inferior, and thus literature asserting this ought to receive vociferous challenging. Asserting that one race is more intelligent than another not only serves no useful purpose, but is highly counter-productive.

8. The views of African/Caribbean students require greater consideration when academics conduct research on this group.

There appears to be a disparity between the principal causes of underachievement as postulated by academics and external commentators, and those perceived by African/ Caribbean male students themselves. This justifies Phillips-Bell's (in Jamdagni et al, 1982) criticism of conducting research without sufficient input from the population being studied – surely their own perceptions of the main problems deserve greater attention, and may be a vital missing ingredient to help understand and solve the problem of underachievement.

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h. Computer Software

- Adobe Acrobat Reader 6.0 – Access to PDF Reports and journal articles.
- Microsoft Word 2000 – Production of all textual and tabular content.
- Microsoft Excel 2000 – Statistical calculations, census data & production of graphs.
- Opera 6.0 – Access to web pages.

Appendix I

[Omitted from online version for reasons regarding Data Protection Act 1998]

Appendix II.a – Semi-Structured Interview with Anthony Yamson (aka BBC 1Xtra's Diggy Dan Darkness)

Available online at www.anjool.co.uk/dissertation_diggy.htm

Appendix II.b – Semi-Structured Interview with Robyn Sargeant

*Robyn is a British-born Caribbean A-Level student at King Edwards VI School in Birmingham, where he achieved 5 A grades at AS Level, and 8A*s, 4As at GCSE. He will be studying Law at LSE from September 2005. The first interview took place face-to-face at Robyn's home in Birmingham, on 9th June 2004, with the follow-up at Marble Arch, London on 20th December 2004.*

Malde: Could you provide a brief background profile of yourself?

Robyn: I'm a British-born Caribbean – my Mum's Jamaican and my Dad is from Barbados. I went to my local primary school in Birmingham and now attend King Edwards VI Camp Hill Boys' School, top ten in the country for A-Level performance.

Was it your or your parents' decision for you to attend King Edwards VI?

It was my decision, and my parents were very keen on the idea. Where I live, the comprehensive schools are in the lower bracket.

What occupations do your parents have?

They're both academics. My mum is a senior lecturer at Open University, and my Dad lectures in Sociology and History at Wolverhampton University. Even though they weren't that wealthy they both went to university and worked really hard to become academics.

What is the ethnic make-up of your area?

I'm in the suburb of Harborne in Birmingham. It's middle class and very white, with very few ethnic minorities around. Near me there's a handful of black families, and a few Asian ones.

Across Birmingham do you think ethnic segregation is evident?

Yeah there's definitely ethnic segregation evident. In certain inner city areas such as Sparkbrook and Ladypool ethnic minorities are in fact the majority. But they stick to their own specific ethnicities a lot. Like Darcus showed on "Who Are You Callin' A Nigger?" recently the West Indians and Africans are segregated.

[Quotes statistics] – Why do you think that there's such an underachievement of African/Caribbean males when it comes to higher education in the United Kingdom?

I can't pin it down to just one thing, but firstly if you look at the experience of blacks in the UK, you see a high percentage of single parent families, and a lot of children are fatherless, which greatly bears on how they live their lives since there's no father figure. Then if we look at the job market, blacks are on the whole likely to earn less than other ethnicities – there's strong correlation between academic attainment and economic position. Linked to this is the typical black male culture and mentality – black boys identify with less academically ambitious people. They look at the emerging American gangsta rap culture, and the entertainers and sportsmen on TV. These are the only people seen as successful blacks, successful being in inverted commas.

Why do you think there is a higher percentage of single-parent families of African/Caribbean origin in the UK?

It's difficult to pin down, but I think in terms of the society we live in, there's a lot of subconscious forces acting to make people think there's a glass ceiling on what they can achieve. The pressure African/Caribbeans have can lead to a disintegration of the family unit. When you look at role models who they can identify with and aspire to, look how entertainers lead their life. It's not exactly a 2.4 children mould is it? I think the problem is more with Caribbeans than Africans – in Caribbean culture education and hard work is not a vital part of society – I'm sure you've seen the Malibu adverts, and such a mentality is passed down. In fact a lot of Caribbean kids aren't brought up by single parents, there's a high incidence of them being brought up by their grandparents.

And what about economic position, why do you feel African/Caribbeans have been 'left behind'?

I'd say despite what everyone says about progression regarding race and labour legislation, it's still very hard for blacks to get a high-ranking job. There's still some unclear prejudices by employees and employers evident. If you look at the professional landscape in the UK, it's white-male dominated. Though things are improving since the days of mass-migration thirty or forty years ago.

Do you think prejudice against African/Caribbeans is much worse than against other ethnic minorities?

Yes to an extent, for example Asians in general suffer less discrimination and as a result are doing much better. But if we're using terms like 'African-Caribbeans' and 'Asians' we're talking about a wide range of people and maybe this sort of umbrella shouldn't be applied. In the UK when people talk about blacks or African-Caribbeans they're often just referring to Jamaicans, and we know that Caribbeans have intrinsically different cultures. For example in Barbados there's a 100% literacy rate even though the per capita expenditure on education is so low. If you look at the United Nations I believe Barbados is at the top for economic growth. So you need to consider a wide range of statistics and demographic patterns to consider prejudice.

Why do you feel the situation for African/Caribbeans is particularly bad in the United Kingdom?

Yes, in the UK, there would appear to be a degenerate, anti-education culture, prevalent amongest an alarming number of black males. But then we have to dissect the term 'black'. Most people in this country are, quite often, referring to Jamaican-born blacks, who are by far the predominant denomination of black Caribbeans. I firmly believe that black underachievement is very much a British affliction. Somewhere in the tradition between traditional Caribbean values, which promote education to the hilt, and the British education system, something is lost on many black males. Instead of academic stridence, several black males adopt an urban persona, with little interest in education, and a desire for instant gratification. However, I feel that large elements of British societies have an expectation, whether this is teachers or potential employers, that black males will conform to some of the degenerate traits named earlier – whereas this is not nearly as often the case for Asian males, particularly Indians and Orientals. I feel that a lot of British-born black males are caught in a 'cultural No Man's Land', trying desperately to forge a sense of identity, in a society which is overly hostile towards them. This, in my view, has spurred the evolution of a counter-culture, which pays little attention to social mores and, crucially, the views of the older generation. And all the while, this is taking place in a society which is overly hostile towards blacks and black achievement. This accounts for the fact that Jamaicans currently account for thirty five per cent of the British prison population.

What are your views about positive discrimination, both in education and the workplace?

I feel that it is necessary for people to succeed regardless of their colour but purely due to their aptitude. Boosting the number of blacks in Parliament is not the way forward. Instead you need to look at things from a grass roots level to redress the balance. You need to look at why blacks are underachieving in the first place rather than artificially boost their numbers.

They do well at primary school, but then they fall off the ladder between primary and secondary school. Why is that? Secondary school grooms people for higher education. This is why there's few blacks at university, their skills base is lower, and they are grossly under-represented in the top power spheres.

Do you have any final comments?

Just that I've been reading a lot that black underachievement is because blacks are less intelligent than whites. It's such a flawed concept to suggest that one race is superior to another. It's purely down to background and environment. You know what? If I'd gone to the local comp then I'd probably have been locked up for dealing drugs and stabbing someone like my ex-best mate just has. Instead because I went to one of the country's best grammars, I'm currently applying to Oxford University.

Follow-up Interview with Robyn Sargeant, 20th December 2004

What did you think of the ethnic diversity of Oxford's student body during your stay there for admissions interviews?

Oxford was an unparalleled disappointment. For some reason, I stepped into the Alma Mata of V.S Naipaul and Diwan Adebayo - University College, Oxford - expecting a diverse hinterland of scholarly endeavour; the reality was markedly different. In my three day sojourn at Univ, I encountered four ethnic minorities in an almost exclusively white institution. Perhaps, coming from the melting pot of Birmingham, I was expecting this cultural mix to be loosely mirrored at Oxford; and so it came as a great disappointment when, descending on Cornmarket Street, the only black people were to be found populating tills and slaving over deep-fat fryers at McDonalds. My dalliances in the other colleges yielded much of the same: I was the only black person there. On entering the JCR at Univ for the first time, the din emerging from the other applicants in the room transformed into silence, then stares. Passive apartheid, I think it's called. I felt marooned, in the principal seat of education in the world.

Was it a similar experience for your other ethnic minority peers?

On my return to Birmingham, I rang up my other non-white friends who had applied to Oxford and had their interviews at the same time. "It was dry, weren't it?", I ask. "Totally", they all said.

Do you know of the initiatives attempting to increase diversity at Oxford, however?

The previous summer, I'd applied to Oxford's primary vehicle in its quest to widen participation - the Oxford Access Scheme. Coming from one of the most underrepresented ethnic groups in Higher Education, I was of the belief that my admission onto the scheme was warranted, but according to the Oxford Access Scheme it wasn't. Precisely whom Oxford is trying to become more 'accessible' to is beyond me, but it certainly wasn't engaging with an African-Caribbean male from Birmingham. Looking back, it seems that obstacles were being laid in my path by all and sundry. For example, my school had sent off a UCAS reference which would be crucial in determining my future course for the next three years - and it was littered with 'mistakes'.

Do you feel that your ethnicity was influential in not receiving an offer?

*It is difficult to prevent cynicism from pervading my views on the Oxford admissions system but, to me, it was nothing but a cynical attempt to circumvent transparency, in order to maintain the status-quo; a framework which blacks are actively precluded from. And yet Oxford appear willing to make concessions – under the guise of 'widening participation' – but not to an ambitious, African-Caribbean male, applying for Law, with 8A*s, 4As at GCSE, 5As at AS-level, scoring an average of 92%. Oxford made sure that it put itself beyond my*

reach. It's admissions system, cultures and customs are self-perpetuating and talk of privatisation comes to me as no surprise. Oxford occupies a peculiar mantle in the landscape of Higher Education - and society as a whole - free, as it is, to determine its intake by arbitrary means and, in doing so, to preserve the archaic, unmeritocratic social arrangement, for posterity.

So what are your plans now?

Thankfully, I have an offer to read Law at LSE, the definition of cosmopolitan – rather than the antithesis.

Semi-structured interview transcripts with **Dave Benson Phillips** (BBC television presenter), **Lee Johnson** (BBC Radio 1Xtra presenter), **Mark Hoban MP** (Shadow Education Minister) and **Charles Hendry MP** (Shadow Minister for Young People; Deputy Chairman of Conservative Party) are available online at www.anjool.co.uk/dissertation.htm

Appendix IV.a Education Guardian: 'Race to Oxbridge'

Date: 22/12/03, URL:
http://education.guardian.co.uk/oxbridge/article/0,5500,1111898,00.html

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EducationGuardian.co.uk

Oxbridge and elitism

Race to Oxbridge

For true ethnic diversity at Oxbridge, issues of race need to be tackled in the classroom, argues Anjool Malde

Monday December 22, 2003

Oxford University's admissions statistics are once again under the media spotlight following publication of the latest figures. The decline in state school pupils for 2003 entry from 54.3% to 51.7% has been regarded as a failure on the part of the apparently elitist system. Ethnicity statistics also appear somewhat disturbing, but is Oxford really at fault?

The latest official data shows that just three out of 2,940 acceptances were to Bangladeshi applicants, and only four to black Caribbeans. The mere 9% success rate of Bangladeshis is more than four times less than white and Asian mixed race students. Overall, 21 black students accepted places, 14.9% of those who applied, half that of their white counterparts. However, black applicants have risen by 41% from 2001, when 18 out of 100 students were accepted.

Admissions statistics at Cambridge are a similar cause for concern. Just 12 black students and five Bangladeshis were awarded offers in 2001, the former having a 12.5% success rate compared to one in three overall. However, while both universities appear to be working to promote diversity and "access for all" based solely upon merit, a study at Oxford's traditional rival earlier this year claimed that 3.1% of black students are awarded a first at Cambridge compared to 21% of their white counterparts.

Such problems, however, appear endemic throughout the education system, with the underachievement of some ethnic minority groups already apparent at school age. Only a third of pupils of Afro-Caribbean or Bangladeshi origin are awarded five Cs or better at GCSE, compared to more than half of their white classmates.

David Johnston, co-ordinator of the Oxford Access Scheme, suggests a variety of reasons for the admissions figures, such as failing schools and inadequate social opportunities that result in a lower number of applicants from minority backgrounds. The access scheme was set up with a particular focus on encouraging applicants from ethnic minorities, and exemplifies a "strong university commitment to increase the numbers of under-represented groups" at Oxford. The initiative includes interview training days and access projects in inner city areas and at schools with little or no history of Oxford applications.

The active presence of the student union's ethnic diversity campaign, with the Target Schools initiative aiming to widen diversity, has led to speculation by some that positive discrimination against white students is in place. The significantly lower success rate of minority students on the back of virtually identical A-level grades suggests the contrary. But why do application success rates for various ethnic groups vary from 9% to 36.7%?

Zakir Hussain, co-chairman of the ethnic diversity campaign, is critical of the admissions process for failing to account for cultural differences. He suggests that black and Bangladeshi candidates may react differently to figures of authority. If so, 14 years in the classroom and the stereotyping by teachers may well be the issue that needs tackling, rather than focusing blame on admissions tutors.

Mr Hussain did, however, praise the work done in demystifying the Oxford stereotype, a stark contrast to the recent comments by the education secretary, Charles Clarke, and the higher education minister, Alan Johnson.

Tobi Rufus, an Afro-Caribbean student who was elected as treasurer of the prestigious Oxford Union, says many black students "do not believe they can afford higher education, with further [proposed] top-up fees just adding to the hardship". If this is the case, then plans for bursaries and grants need to be spelt out to students from less affluent backgrounds to prevent deterrence based on inaccurate perceptions of financial implications.

Edmund Hunt, who today received a rejection from Oxford despite achieving five A grades at A-level, argues that socio-economic factors should be taken into account. "I don't think race should come into it. However, admissions should take into account how hard candidates have had to work to overcome the disadvantages posed by their background."

Russell group universities are having a tough time attempting to strike the right balance, with Bristol suffering a backlash following its policy to favour state school candidates.

Regardless of efforts to promote access, it does seem that the traditional Oxford stereotype of the white middle class student may present a real obstacle to applications from some ethnic minority groups. Trying to tackle the problems at the university end, however, seems to be the wrong way to go about it. If the student body is ever to truly represent the diversity of the nation's most able candidates, it requires serious work from a grass roots level, focusing on the disparities evident at the early stages of education.

· Anjool Malde is news editor of The Oxford Student

Appendix IV.b The Oxford Student: 'Facing the Facts'
Date: 04/03/04, URL: http://www.oxfordstudent.com/2004-03-04/news/1

Facing the Facts

Of the 2,940 students offered a place at Oxford University in 2003, 21 were black. In an exclusive survey of ethnic minority Sixth Form students, *The OxStu* examines Oxford's continuing image problem...

MISLEADING MEDIA coverage and the persistence of negative stereotypes continue to dog Oxford's attempts to attract ethnic minority students, according to exclusive research conducted by The Oxford Student.

40 sixth-form students, of the 47 black[8] participants in the recent Oxford Access Scheme shadowing programme, took part in the survey. Of these, over 40 per cent wrote "white" as one of the major preconceptions they believed to exist regarding Oxford students, and saw this image as a key factor in preventing more ethnic minority students from applying to the University.

Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of those who took part saw either the continuation of this stereotype, or an admissions system perceived by some to be racially discriminatory, as significant barriers to many students applying.

After spending several days in the city as part of the Access Scheme, the majority surveyed no longer fully embraced the clichéd media portrayal of an outdated and unrepresentative institution, although the stigma traditionally attached to the university is still evident. One commented that "It's hard, when walking down the streets seeing only white faces, to believe that ethnicity is not an issue with such an institution, despite its claims to the contrary."

It is clear that Oxford is still lagging behind other universities in terms of access and ethnic diversity. UCAS figures state that for 2003 entry 5.64 per cent of applicants and 4.84 per cent of acceptances were to black[8] students. For Oxford the figures were 1.45 per cent and 0.71 per cent respectively.

Despite considerable effort from initiatives such as the Oxford Access Scheme, the University is still faced with a severe image problem that causes many students to differentiate between it and other top universities. 45 per cent of those surveyed did not believe that the obstacles preventing minority applications to Oxbridge were relevant to other high-performing universities.

Indeed, many students highlighted poor impressions from the media as a key explanation for the lack of applications. Several even expressed a concern that the Oxford application process is discriminatory. One stated: "It is portrayed that those selected to attend Oxford are white and have secured contacts within the university, enabling them to gain an offer."

However, one student interviewed after the survey said he believed that race was not an issue, criticising Bristol for their apparent positive discrimination and stating that actions such as categorically lowering grades for certain students was unfair and "out of order". *The OxStu* had wanted to ask students their views on state school quotas, but the question was vetoed by the Oxford Access Scheme for political reasons.

Another considered the "excessive emphasis on the acceptance of ethnic minorities as "patronising", believing that it made such applicants, "feel less valued as talented people, and more as quota fillers." Others were quick to distinguish between the notorious media image of the University and reality; although they had found that the white, middle-class stereotype of the Oxford student did hold true to some significant degree, upon actually visiting and experiencing university life, this appeared to be a less daunting prospect. One student, for example, was not worried about her status as an ethnic minority student but "proud that anyone and everyone can get in."

Even so, it would appear that the issue of race is a significant factor for many students thinking about higher education. Speaking to *The OxStu*, two black[8] females from London said they thought that it would be "harder to be accepted in Oxford" than at London's top institutions such as UCL and Imperial, which have a much greater

[8] An amendment by the chief editors meant 'ethnic minority' and 'Afro-Caribbean' were used to refer solely to African/Caribbean students and has been replaced in this version with 'black'.

ethnic mix. Another student said he was "realistic about the prospect of loneliness" in Oxford, given his minority position.

Misunderstandings about top-up fees also appear to be a problem, with 80 per cent of respondents stating that the fees will outright deter poorer pupils from attending university, even though no students will have to pay up-front, with the least affluent likely to receive bursaries.

However, David Johnston of the Oxford Access Scheme is keen to point out that, whilst encouraging applications from minority backgrounds is still an important priority, the issue of actual acceptance figures is perhaps more pressing: "The sad reality is that ethnic minority pupils overwhelmingly apply for the two most competitive courses - Medicine and Law. This already diminishes their chances of being offered a place."

The issue of black underachievement throughout the education system must also be recognised as an important explanation: only 37 students across the nation achieved three A-level A grades in 2002. Reasons behind this disparity however remain speculative, with several interviewees highlighting the lack of academically successful black role models.

Despite the problems that remain, the Oxford Access Scheme received an overwhelmingly positive response from those who took part. David Johnston and Maxine Lyseight, co-ordinators of the scheme but speaking in a personal capacity, believe that "when students are introduced to Oxford University, any negative perceptions they received from hostile media are radically altered." According to their own research, virtually all students who took part in the programme do indeed claim that their perceptions of the University have changed as a result.

THE RESULTS

40 of the 47 black[8] sixth form students participating in the recent Oxford Access Scheme shadowing programme were questioned about their perceptions of the University:

- In terms of ethnic diversity, 62.5 per cent rated this as 'Low' or 'Very Low' before coming to the University. Once arrived, this fell to 41.0 per cent.

- Accessibility was viewed as 'Low' or 'Very Low' by 65.0 per cent of students before visiting Oxford, with only 30.8 per cent still viewing it as such once they had taken part in the scheme.

- The cost of an Oxford education appears to be a particular issue for those surveyed, with 34.2 per cent believing living costs in Oxford to be greater than elsewhere.

- When describing their perceptions of the University, 69 per cent of participants mentioned "posh", "rich", or "middle class". 42 per cent said "white".

Appendix IV.c BBC News: 'Perceptions of black students'

Date: 20/09/04, URL: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/3646146.stm

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BBC NEWS UK EDITION

Last Updated: Friday, 10 September, 2004, 22:20 GMT 23:20 UK

Perceptions of black students

An education conference in London is again debating the issue of underachievement by black pupils - and encouraging them to aim higher.

Anjool Malde has been taking soundings among some young black people who are doing well.

Diggy Dan Darkness is about to start a law degree

Pamela Dusu, a Cambridge graduate who was featured on BBC Two's Black Ambition earlier this month, says the British curriculum does not cater well for black students.

They found it hard to identify with questions about Shakespeare, for example.

"If English is not your first language and you use colloquialisms or London slang then you end up misinterpreting at every stage."

Perceptions

Many black sixth form students I spoke to were misinformed about the Labour government's top-up fees proposals.

"I can't believe they're trying to make us pay £3,000 a year up-front, it's not fair to poorer students," said one visiting Oxford via the university's access scheme - unaware that fees would not be paid up-front and less affluent families would be exempt.

"Yes, the false perceptions regarding top-up fees is very worrying," said Pav Akhtar, black students officer at the National Union of Students.

"But perceptions are always based on something - even with bursaries, university can still be too expensive for less wealthy families to consider."

Furthermore, it was disturbing that several black schoolchildren referred to Britain's elite universities as exclusive to whites.

"I wanted to apply to Durham this year," a girl from London said. "So my mates said they thought I was too good for them, and that I should just apply to Greenwich or South Bank like they are."

Stereotyping

Many African-Caribbean students referred to the music industry as being a popular aspiration for their peers. But does this "alternative route to success" hinder their likeliness to succeed in education?

"Yes, the music industry may have its negatives for education as a lot of African-Caribbeans are talented in that area and see it as an easy and natural route to express themselves," said BBC 1Xtra's 18-year-old MC, Diggy Dan Darkness, who will be commencing a law degree at Brunel University this month.

"But the music industry can also have a good effect in giving African-Caribbeans something to aspire to and pursue."

"You see a growing number of blacks as lawyers and in the finance industry"

Marcus Dubois

"The stereotype of blacks being good at just music can be very damaging," said Marcus Dubois, who graduated from Oxford University and now works for Universal Music.

"But the future looks good. You see a growing number of blacks as lawyers and in the finance industry, and you can see active recruitment taking place."

Actively recruiting African-Caribbeans into the professions without appearing to discriminate against other races may prove challenging, however.

"I feel that it is necessary for people to succeed regardless of their colour but purely due to their aptitude," said Rob, a black student applying to Cambridge University this month.

"Boosting the number of blacks in Parliament is not the way forward. Instead you need to look at things from a grass roots level to redress the balance."