PERCEPTIONS of ACHIEVING BLACK PUPILS: FACTORS

CONTRIBUTING to SUCCESS

Vernella Fuller

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores factors supporting the achievement of black pupils of African and African-Caribbean backgrounds living in the United Kingdom. It analyses their perception of factors that impact on their performance and achievement. There is a discussion on the nature and measurement of achievement and it is argued that achievements that are most valued are those based on performance in external examinations.

Key elements of the findings are that a number of factors within and out of school seem to affect achievement of black pupils: teachers' perception and expectation, pupils' attitude, behaviour and motivation. Factors both within and out of school include peer affiliation and pupils' self-perception. Outside school factors significant in achievement are family values, attitudes, relationship to their heritage, religious beliefs and values.

Highlighted in this thesis is the racialised nature of the society in which black pupils are perceived, assessed and treated. They therefore have to employ a number of strategies within school to win and retain the favour of their teachers who sometimes bring negative views of black people to their interaction in the classroom. Highlighted also in the research is that achieving black pupils can impact positively on their teachers' perception of them by adopting overtly pro-school and pro-teacher attitudes and approaches. Finally, family members, especially parents, play positive roles in the performance of their children in school, often reducing the perceived disadvantages of society and schools.

The conclusions drawn from this analysis confirm the importance of parents and community in the achievement of pupils but emphasise the areas that school can address in the achievement of black pupils.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the achievement of black pupils in education. (The concept and definitions of blackness are explored further in the thesis, see pp. 84-85.) As a black person and part product of the British secondary school system, I have been concerned over the years with the disproportionate focus on the low achievement of black pupils. This study therefore seeks to draw attention to black children achievers who have generally escaped attention and to examine the factors that they feel contribute to their performance in schools and colleges.

The thesis therefore has two main focuses and is organised into two sections. One focus is that of research that has been conducted in this area of performance of black pupils. Since I have argued that the main focus of research on the performance of black pupils has been on low achievement, I feel it is essential to begin in Chapter 1 with a full exploration of this research. The attention given to low * achievement was possibly because in the early days of migration of black people to Britain, there was concern that black children were mainly to be found in the lower academic classes in mainstream school or in schools for children with learning and behavioural difficulties. This research offered a number of explanations for the perceived failure of black children in schools, many of which laid responsibility on their families and culture. These explanations and others focusing on low achievement are analysed in depth for a number of reasons, because I feel they address important questions relating to the nature of the society in which black pupils, as minorities, are schooled. Thus they place into context the issues that are highlighted and explored in the data derived from black achieving pupils. Likewise they illuminate the issues that have informed both theory and practice in relation to black pupils, and continue to do so.

Some of the explanations therefore inform my research questions, others provide important background and a clearer context for my debate.

The position presented in this Chapter is that black pupils are raised and educated in a racialised society by which is meant they are perceived, assessed and treated first and foremost on the basis of their colour. More, that they are generally perceived in negative ways as a result of a number of historical, economic and social conditions and that this mainly negative perception of black people in general and black pupils in particular has partly informed the overwhelming focus on low achievement.

Continuing with this focus on previous research, in Chapter 2 I seek to balance the debate on the performance of black pupils in school by drawing attention to the work conducted on their achievement. I argue in this Chapter that there has been relatively less focus in debate and research on the achievement of black pupils. I have also analysed the concept of blackness since it is argued that racist ideas are incorporated into the consciousness of both black and white individuals in society and have a profound bearing on black pupils' experiences in school and indeed, how they may perceive themselves. I argue therefore that black pupils who manage to perform well in school are accomplishing a tremendous feat. In this light the meaning of achievement is assessed, and the argument made is that although most pupils invariably make some progress as they move up the school, it is academic qualifications manifested in performance at external examinations that are most highly rated and desired by society and importantly by black pupils and their families.

Chapter 3 provides an account of the research problem and strategies. It seeks to explore the justification for the qualitative theory and methods that are used to address the question of black achievement. That is how black pupils manage to

achieve in schools when the overwhelming experience and indeed expectation over the years have been that they have a tendency to low achievement. In seeking to address this question I have analysed a number of research studies on the achievement of black pupils that have employed qualitative methods. Likewise, I have attempted in this Chapter to clarify the exact focus of my research, its design, issues around sampling, structure and data collection methods. Further issues of ethics and reflexivity are discussed in relation to improving the quality and reliability of data and of obtaining the trust and inspiring confidence in respondents.

Section two of the thesis is an analysis of the data that I have collected in schools and colleges. The data deals with the factors that black achievers stated were significant in their achievement. While all the factors analysed are deemed important by achieving pupils, some of them are considered more important than others. The factors considered important in their achievement are discussed in reverse order, with those considered most important analysed in the latter part of the section.

The section begins with Chapter 4 which is an analysis of teacher expectations as perceived by pupils. The Chapter is based on the premise that interaction is a two-way process so as well as being impacted on by teachers, pupil attitude and behaviour can impact on teachers' perception and expectation of them. The Chapter's main focus however is on the achieving pupils' view of the impact of their teachers' expectation on their academic performance. I begin this Chapter by briefly reiterating the research on teacher expectation and performance which have tended to argue that teachers' expectations of pupils can have a significant impact on pupil performance. Since it is possible that both white and black teachers may teach black pupils, the Chapter also assesses pupils' perception of the relative impact of their teachers' colour on their experiences and performance in school. The argument that is

presented is that of a complex interweaving of factors, which inform teachers' expectations and pupil performance. A significant interpretation of the view of black achieving pupils is that teachers' expectation cannot be separated from the predominantly negative views that some teachers are said to hold generally of black people. This is however juxtaposed with the position that teachers tend to have high expectation of black achieving pupils due to their proven achievement over their years in school. The relative importance of pupil motivation and ambitions are analysed with the argument that these can have a significant impact often despite negative teacher views.

Chapter 5 examines the perceived impact of peer affiliation on achievement. Previous research in their area has suggested that peer groups can influence the school performance of all pupils. In relation to black low achieving pupils, research tends to argue that they gravitate towards friends whose influence is more negative than positive while for achievers, research has argued that their friends do not always exert negative influences. The questions that are therefore analysed in this Chapter relate to who or what influences the peer choice of black achievers and the reasons for this. Likewise, since friendship affiliation is an important part of adolescent life in terms of, for example self-definition, self-image and general well being, who do black achievers choose as friends and, to what extent do they feel their choice of peers impacts on their school achievement?

Chapter 6 analyses the issues surrounding self-image and self-concept because these have often been cited as significant in the performance of black pupils in school. Indeed the general view has been that because of their objective positions in society, black pupils are prone to self-loathing, fail to internalise information of black significant figures or to identify with them. These conclusions I have argued in this

Chapter tend to be related to low achieving pupils and that there is a gap in research in relation to achieving black pupils. In attempting to contribute to this area, this Chapter therefore addresses such questions as how black achievers perceive themselves in white dominated society, the role of parents and teachers in developing self-image, pupils' knowledge of significant black figures and the significance of these in their performance.

Of all the factors cited by black achievers as significant in their achievement, their families, especially their parent or parents are deemed the most significant. Chapter 7 therefore examines the impact of the family, its structures, attitudes and values on the achievement of black pupils and identifies why the black family is so significant in the achievement of black children.

It is concluded that a number of interrelated factors impact on the achievement of black pupils. On balance it seems that achieving black pupils feel that they are regarded negatively both in the wider society and in school. This means they have to initiate positive interactions with teachers and employ complex strategies in order to achieve. Likewise extra responsibilities are placed on their families to facilitate their achievement.

The way forward seems to be for all involved in the education of black children to avoid trapping them within the narrow confines of often outmoded theories and ideologies. Likewise it is to understand the aspirations and ambitions of black pupils and to view their role, as should parents and pupils, as a joint one. It is to expect and demand high standards of black pupils even while considering how their experiences within society can impact on them and influence their responses to school.

*I have chosen to use the term *low* as opposed to *under* achievement because I consider the latter problematic being more a relative than a definitive definition.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW: BLACK PUPILS' LOW ACHIEVEMENT

RACE, RACISM AND EDUCATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Research on the performance of black pupils in school tended to focus overwhelmingly on their perceived poor achievement. This focus was arguably influenced by concern that children of new immigrants to Britain in the late 1950s and 1960s were not faring well within the educational system. Politicians, theorists, educationalists and families therefore urgently sought explanations.

Research studies eventually offered a multiplicity of explanations, the majority of which blamed the child, his/her family and their culture for their stated poor performance in schools. In seeking to analyse these explanations, this Chapter is based on the premise that black people in general and black pupils in society live in a racialised society. By this is meant that this society deems race to significantly define the individual and hence the group, often superseding factors such as class, religion, country or island of origin or the norms and values of individual families. Colour is therefore said to determine intelligence, behaviour, culture and hence performance in school. Black pupils are therefore assessed, ranked, judged and treated on the basis of their blackness.

The Chapter therefore begins with an assessment of the meaning and the impact of race for black people in British society and for black pupils in school. It argues that the racialised nature of society has influenced the overwhelming focus of educational discourse on low achievement and that as a consequence researchers and educationalists have overlooked the possibility of black achievers in school.

The Chapter then assesses the most common explanations that have been given for the low achievement of black pupils, namely, IQ, teacher racism and negative teacher attitudes, teacher expectation, cultural deprivation and family, cultural deprivation and language, poor self-concept, peer relations, social class and school exclusions (see pp. 23-76). It will be shown that most explanations have tended to place the onus for the performance of black pupils almost entirely on the pupils themselves and their families. That is they have tended to blame pupils and their families for poor performance rather than schools.

This Chapter will however also assess research that teacher racism manifested in low teacher expectation and negative teacher attitudes, and the responses of black pupils to these factors impacts on the pupils' disadvantaged position within the educational system.

Finally, this Chapter will shift the focus from the black child and black family, to scrutiny of schools and assess the role that it is said school practices can play in the performance of black pupils in schools (see pp. 76-78). The argument is made that contrary to what has been argued over the years, schools are not impotent as regards the performance of black pupils and that contrary to what seems to have been generally argued, schools can indeed impact positively on the performance of black pupils.

The rationale for assessing the research on low achievement in such depth is three-fold. First, these often-classic studies form the bulk of work on the performance of black pupils in schools in Britain and constitute vital information. Arguably they therefore need to form the basis of any work on the performance of black pupils in schools. Second, these studies provide important insights into the perception of and the experiences of black pupils in school over the years. Finally, the findings of these

studies on low achievement have had a profound impact and influence on the view of society in general and schools in particular of black pupils and indeed the view of what is or can be expected of them by their teachers. Arguably too these have impacted on black pupils' views of themselves. As such they influenced the direction of my research and my research questions.

This Chapter will conclude that much of the existing debate although perhaps well meaning has focused on the negative aspects of black pupils' performance. Therefore black children are presented with a number of obstacles in the society and hence in the educational system. In the main they and their families are presented as being incapable of performing well in school. It is concluded that this is especially true of black boys who as a consequence of teacher perception and pupil response, often seem to have an adversarial relationship with their teachers. However the conclusion will be that although the main focus has been on low achievement of black pupils, evidence exists to show that there are black achievers in schools and that also outline the factors that impact on their achievement.

1.2 BRITAIN - A RACIALISED SOCIETY

Black children in Britain are raised in a racialised society. That is, they are subjected to a continual process whereby they are perceived and defined first and foremost in terms of their race. This feature is not new, evidently it dates to the period around slavery when there was a systematic construction and application of tenets to explain and justify the subjugation of black people (Rodney, 1972). So effective was it that it is now completely embedded in the British psyche and mentality as well as societal institutions.

It may be argued that race is the consequence of racism, only existing because racism does (Williams, 1964). In Britain racist ideology and discourse surround black children, which structure and impact on their social world. Racism, both institutionalised and individual, is therefore an unavoidable feature of their lives. Following a formulation by John Rex, Chris Mullard argued:

> ...we speak of racism, as both a structural and ideological form, in terms of race relations structure in which the inequalities and differentiation inherent in the wider social structure are related to physical and cultural criteria of an ascriptive kind and are rationalised in terms of deterministic beliefs systems which tend to make reference to biological science. (Mullard, 1980:7)

Mullard has been criticised for the difficulty of this definition (Oldham, 1987), for its vagueness and for confusing the two separate definitions of "racism" and belief in genetic inferiority (Keefe, 1986). Perhaps he has done so because the two are indeed inextricably linked, that is, belief in genetic inferiority feeds discriminatory behaviour.

What is clear however is that racism is a powerful force, it is about domination and oppression, which are founded in history and traditions and is therefore intricately enmeshed in culture (Williams, 1964). Racism is founded on the premise of hierarchical positioning of groups considered to be physically different from each other and with an essential aspect of this being that white race is superior to the black race (Tinkeer, 1997). It could be argued however that that this conception of racism is obsolete, that racism is not just overt practices but can be subtle and insidious and is often couched in seemingly benign language and based on separateness and exclusivity. According to Martin Baker,

> A theory about race can be concealed inside apparently innocent language. Its concealment enables it to provide form and structure to people's experiences and reactions, without displaying itself as a whole theory with big and dangerous implications. (Baker, 1981:3)

Thus racism according to the above definitions would be deemed to be a common feature of British society and pupils are therefore invariably socialised into it. Racism is not a passive force it is virulent and dynamic.

1.3 RACE, RACISM AND LOW ACHIEVEMENT IN SCHOOL

The education system as one of the institutions of society is not exempt from the forces of racism. It is therefore not surprising that in the last forty years the picture that has emerged is one of the disadvantage and under-performance of African-Caribbean pupils in schools. Indeed the fact that the major focus has been on low achievement with little attention to those children who, despite the odds, have succeeded in the educational system, may be viewed as a graphic example of the entrenched racism in British society. So successful has this process of labelling and stigmatisation of black children in the education system been that many can hardly accept that there can be black achievers in the education system. On the other hand it could equally well be argued that the impact of racism on the black child is such that it is hard to understand how black children *are* able to achieve.

Faced with the presence of black children in schools in the late 1950s and 1960s, it was soon clear that all was not well. Immigrant children were found to generally be in the low streams and remedial classes and schools for the educationally subnormal (Coard, 1971). Black children transferring to secondary schools were found to be performing at a level below indigenous pupils (Verma & Bagley et al., 1979). Additionally, there was evidence of a disproportionate number of black children requiring special education (Townsend, 1971). Likewise, there was shown to be a preponderance of West Indians in Educationally Sub-normal (ESN) schools (Coard, 1971). Official acknowledgement of this situation was presented in The

Rampton Report where 1978 statistics from five authorities highlighted the poor performance of West Indian pupils (Rampton, 1981). The criteria used to assess performance in the sixties and seventies varied but included psychometric tests, tests in reading, verbal and non-verbal reasoning, occasionally tests in mathematics, over-representation in ESN schools, under-represented in grammar schools and performance in external examinations. With the demise of the tripartite system, there was still evidence of the over-representation of black children in the lowest parts of the school structure. The evidence of low achievement therefore over the years has been seemingly overwhelming (Figueroa, 1991).

British society, including the school system, was already ill prepared for the relatively large number of 'coloured' people that came to Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. The majority had come at the behest of the mother-country at a time when post-war reconstruction demanded a greater number of manual labourers than it could provide (Dodgson, 1984; Fryer, 1984). But it was soon clear that the education of their children had not been fully considered (Coard, 1971). It seemed that the expectation was that the children would merge into the existing school system and present no challenges. When they did not, society could not accept that there could be any other explanation than that of individual and family pathology. Indeed the educational system failed to acknowledge difference as an important issue in educational performance and seemed to perceive difference as a deficit.

The concern and consequent debate and research which emerged in the initial stages therefore focused almost exclusively on out-of school factors that were said to be impeding the achievement of black children in schools. They were based on a Culturalist Perspective where black low achievement was analysed in terms of individual pathology, family structure and cultural systems (Mac an Ghaill, 1988).

This was said to be exemplified by low intelligence, by cultural differences which had as their corollary, linguistic problems, problems of self-esteem and self-concept, child rearing practices, behavioural problems and so on. Individual pupils and their families were therefore held up as being responsible for how they fared in schools. Strangely, the education system, whose role was precisely that of educating, seemed in the case of black children to have abrogated responsibility.

Currently there is still some evidence that there is discrepancy of performance in Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) and in external examination results (Garside, 1990; Department for Education and Employment, 1999a, 1999b). The issue therefore, was, and still continues to be seen as one of low achievement.

However, this concept and views of low achievement have not been accepted uncritically however; Channer challenged the use of this term arguing that it focuses blame on the child rather than education. She feels that the term disadvantage is more appropriate since it rightly focuses attention on the deficiencies within the education system and not on the child (Channer, 1995). While it is true that there are deficiencies within the education system, which disadvantage some black pupils, this too should only be seen as part of the picture with societal, historical and individual factors being perhaps equally important considerations.

In the research and debate on low achievement over the past forty years, little attention has been paid to those black children who have departed from this perceived under-performance. There are black children within the education system who have succeeded and continue to do so, despite the diverse criteria that have been used to measure achievement. The significant question is, why has relatively little attention being paid to this group of achievers? How does the answer relate to the premise of societal, institutional and individual racism and racist discourse that structure our

society and hence can be said to inform much of the research described so far in this Chapter? The aim of this research is to map the factors, which may enable large numbers of these pupils to do better because despite the well-documented issues and obvious areas of concern, what is not known are the factors that contribute to the achievement of black children in schools.

The debate about the poor performance of black pupils has raged for forty years but the evidence remains contradictory, inconsistent and inconclusive. Many of the issues and explanations have been visited again and again with varying degrees of emphasis, agreement or divergence from researchers.

Much of the early research has to be analysed in the context of the general perception of black people by British society. The preoccupation with low achievement cannot therefore be analysed without consideration of the type of society in which the children found themselves, surrounded by the weight of stereotype, prejudice and racism. Nor can a full understanding of this phenomenon be obtained without consideration of the position of black people in the economy of the society.

Thus as with other children, a number of factors, both in school and out of school affect school performance. These include class, poverty, teacher expectations, curriculum, school structure, teacher in-put, aptitude and motivation and family to name but a few. I have argued that if black children are indeed low achieving en masse, the root cause of low achievement must be as a result of a multiplicity of factors, both in and out of school with the racialised nature of this society being among the most significant of these factors.

Racism and its impact on different groups and on different individuals is complex and is manifested in different ways. It has indeed been exemplified and manifested over the years in many ways. It can be seen in the perception of black

families as pathological, in the insistence that intelligence, as are aspects of attitudes and behaviour, is inextricably linked to physical characteristics and that blacks are less endowed with this. It is manifested in the perception of blacks as having low self-image and as being linguistically deprived. Racism is demonstrated in the entrenched view that black children present such behavioural difficulties that they are uneducable and are therefore best dealt with in separate out of school units or even better, totally excluded from schools.

This view that racism, structural, institutional and individual, is the basis of the perceived low achievement of black children has gained ground since the initial period where explanations focused almost exclusively on the child and family.

Schools do not exist in a vacuum; racism will inevitably be manifested in schools despite liberal ideology. Pierre Bourdieu argues:

> It is probably cultural inertia which still makes us see education in terms of the ideology of school (as a liberating force) and as a means of increasing social mobility, even when the indications tend to be that it is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one. (Quoted in Dale et al., 1978:110)

Education, it is true, is often perceived as a liberating agent within society, an agent which can possibly affect the attitudes of its pupils who will in turn change society. It is my contention, however, that racism is structural and fundamental to social formation. Black workers constitute a useful buffer at the lower end of the occupational ladder and thus indigenous racism has real material conditions at its roots. The structural and ideological features of the educational system, which often serves to reproduce the educational disadvantage of black pupils, persistently contradict egalitarian and liberating aims (Rex, 1973).

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I would argue that school must be seen as one of the structures, which serves to reproduce black workers at the bottom end of the workforce. Within the debate about black low achievement there has been a tendency to detract questions of race from their true economic, social and political bases and contexts, to view race as an external problem.

Within the educational system specific structures serve to reproduce educational disadvantage in black pupils and consequently to reproduce young black workers at the lowest end of employment and production skills. Such mechanisms include testing and grading procedures, practices of streaming, banding (Bowles, 1976), wrongful placement in special schools (Bowles, 1976), and disproportionate numbers of exclusions from school (Bourne et al., 1994).

In addition black children have traditionally experienced both cultural and linguistic expropriation as they go through the educational system. This takes the form of total denial, devaluation or mis-recognition of the child's culture and language in the curriculum, in textbooks, resources and teaching materials used. Where they are portrayed this is normally from an ethnocentric perspective or there is superficial tinkering by way of some of the strategies that have been employed over the years to 'educate' black children. Rather than providing occupational opportunities for them many have served only to perpetuate their inferior position in the economy (Stone, 1981).

The traditional definition of racism linked power to prejudice, where prejudice is defined as pre-judgement without consideration of facts or arguments. The addition of race to this equation is the belief that there are definitive races, that race is a prime determinant of all the important traits of human behaviour, and those races are organised hierarchically (Fanon, 1952; 1967).

In contemporary complex technological societies this definition seems rather dated and simplistic. In the first place it can be argued that distinguishing one 'race' from another with the diversity of bi-racial and multi-racial mixtures is indeed nonsensical. More profoundly there is the argument that cultural domination is more relevant and significant than a belief in a hierarchy of races (hooks, 1992).

Figueroa has offered another perspective. In his discussion of the construction of reality he talks of 'racist frames of reference' where actors in defining situations call on previous knowledge or experience which may seem relevant. 'It is "maps" of such "knowledge" or "experience" which serve to orientate the actor, that I refer to as frames of reference' (Figueroa, 1991:35).

Figueroa further argued that these frames of references are inherent to social interaction so:

> The myths and assumptions that serve in the modern world (and in particular, in Britain) in defining and structuring particular situations in terms of 'race' are the racist frames of reference. They provide an important definition of boundaries along which power is distributed....Such a racist frame of reference...is a socially constructed and socially reproduced and learned way of orienting with and towards others and the world, such as: there do actually exist objectively different 'races...each person belongs to one (and only one) such 'race' thereby possessing certain physical and cultural characteristics....(Figueroa, 1991:39)

Figueroa argued that racist frames of reference have a number of functions such as; permitting categorisation of the social world, contributing to identity and providing rationale for the existing order of institutionalised racism such as the positioning of black people, '...in a low social location' (Figueroa, 1991:39).

Using this perspective it is easy to see why racism propelled by racist frames of reference can impact so profoundly on the education experiences of the black child. It is not a conspiracy theory but rather the inevitable consequence of the history of European culture in which racism is deeply imbedded, so deeply entrenched that it is

easy to believe that societies have always been racist and that racism is 'natural'. Such a belief is not substantiated by history. Discrimination based on racial grounds was a European invention (Williams, 1964). The propositions of racism was developed especially by those engaged in the slave trade as weapons of defence against the growing tide of opposition to the slave trade (Williams, 1964).

The idea of race was, in fact, the deliberate creation of an exploiting class, which was seeking to maintain and defend its privileges against what was profitably regarded as an inferior social caste. The different physical appearance provided a convenient peg upon which to hang the argument that represented the external sign of more profound ineradicable mental and moral inferiorities (Williams, 1964).

Racial prejudice therefore was developed and used to maintain and justify the institution of slavery against the attack of the abolitionists. In earlier societies, discrimination and persecution was practised on the grounds of religion, culture, politics or class but not on biological grounds or facial differences. The latter is a special development of the European and thus, a culturally produced difference in social status converted into a difference in biological status. What had once been a social difference was now transformed into a biological difference, which would serve, it was hoped, to justify and maintain the social differences (Williams, 1964).

Racial difference, as defined above, is completely impotent without power. Racial prejudice is ineffective without power and cannot be converted to racism without power. In a society where the proportions of racial prejudice have been assimilated into the culture and embedded into the minds and hearts of a particular group, and if this group also has economic, political and cultural power, then this constitutes a racist society.

From the above it follows that both white and black people can be racially

prejudiced in our society, but only whites in general can practise racism since in a society such as ours it is they who control the levers of power. The implication of this is that racism essentially is a white problem in British Society. It is instituted by and is maintained by whites for the benefit of whites. However, since power is concentrated in the hands of a few it is they who have a vested interest in perpetuating this and isolating race from class and giving it an importance which has no real base on its own. Race and class are important features of this society; they can operate independently of each other or in concert, each impact forcefully on the lives and experiences of black people.

My contention in this thesis is that class is often superseded by race in the reaction to and the treatment of black people. Importantly in relation to my thesis understanding of the impact of race on black people is crucial to an understanding of how black pupils perform in schools.

1.4 EXPLANATIONS FOR THE LOW ACHIEVEMENT OF BLACK PUPILS IN SCHOOL

1.4.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the last section, early education research on black children focused almost entirely on explanations for their perceived low achievement. To fully understand the education system today as it impacts on black children, both low achievers and especially achievers who are the focus of this thesis, I feel it is important to examine these explanations. This is because analysis of research on low achievement will enable me to:

- Develop relevant research questions

- Assess the possible impact of these explanations of low achievement on current education, thought and practice as experienced by black achievers. This process will in turn help in the process of refining my research questions or provide relevant context for my research

- Provide background for, and place into context the perceptions of achieving black pupils, providing possible understanding of and justification for their views.

This discussion will therefore explore what I consider to be the most important explanations for the low achievement in schools. These are the IQ debate, teacher racism and negative teacher attitudes, teacher expectations, cultural deprivation and language, poor self-concept, peer affiliation, social class, school exclusion and ineffective schools. Although my research focus is achievement, as I have argued above, understanding of achievement entails understanding of the debate about black low achieving pupils that have focused attention and dominated research.

1.4.2 THE IQ DEBATE

This discussion of IQ highlights the debate about the importance sometimes accorded to nature as opposed to nurture in the performance of black pupils. Although emphasis was placed on low IQ as an important explanation for the low achievement of black pupils, the evidence has not been convincing. Rather it has shown that while genetics may be one of the factors in achievement, it is by no means the only or even the most important factor. The discussion on IQ therefore provides relevant context rather than informs my research questions.

In grappling to isolate explanations for the perceived low achievement of black pupils in schools in America and Europe, it has been argued that since blacks scores are on average lower than their white counterparts in IQ tests, they are

therefore genetically less intelligent. Herein lies, it has been argued, the explanation for the perceived low achievement of black children in British schools. This issue was hotly debated in the 1960s and 1970s and undoubtedly influenced the perception of black children and hence their position and performance in schools.

Jensen, one of the proponents of this theory, defined intelligence as 'abstract reasoning ability' and went on to say that even when environments are equalised, significant differences in IQ scores of blacks and whites remained the same (Jensen, 1972). Verma labelled this theory 'scientific racism' and argued that although a number of criticisms have been levelled against it, it has had a tremendous effect on educational policy in England (Verma, 1975). This means that over the years IQ tests results have been used to justify the predominance of black children in schools for the educationally sub-normal (ESN.), in their over-representation in the lowest bands and streams of comprehensive schools and in the disproportionate exclusion rates. They were placed in ESN schools and lower sets of mainstream schools as a result of verbal reasoning tests administered in primary school and tended to remain there for their entire school life. In these subjects and streams they were offered a totally different curriculum, so called 'soft-options' as opposed to 'wide academic subjects' which lead to examinations deemed inferior by the system; City and Guilds and Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) as opposed to 'O' levels and 'A' levels. As a result of this a number of avenues were closed to them when career choices were made (Coard, 1971). But this was all justified by the educational system because the belief in the significance of and the infallibility of IQ tests detracted attention from the inequalities within the society and the educational system and placed them on the genetics of blacks, a trait which is deemed to be unchangeable.

Thus, the schools viewed this state of affairs as being non-problematic since the tests were conceived to be totally reliable and valid. Other research has indicated however, that a wide range of environmental factors can affect performance in IQ tests. Otto Klinebery summarised some of these, he stated that the successful solution of the problems in the IQ presented by the tests depend on many factors. These he itemised as follows; the previous experience and education of the person tested, the pupils' degree of familiarity with the subject matters of the test, motivation and desire to obtain a good score. In addition, emotional state, rapport with the experimenter, knowledge of the language in which the test is administered, and also physical health and well being as well as on the native capacity of the person tested (Klinebery, 1971).

A vigorous attack of scientific racism has been the monograph by Kamin in his fundamental critique of the whole concept of IQ. He arrived at two conclusions:

> The first stems from a detailed examination of the empirical evidence, which has been adduced in support of the idea of heritability and it can be stated simply. There exists no data, which should lead a prudent man to accept the hypothesis that IQ test scores are in any degree heritable. That conclusion is so much at odds with prevailing wisdom that it is necessary to ask how can so many psychologists believe the opposite? The answer, I believe, is related to the second major conclusion of this work. The IQ test in America and the way we think about it has been fostered by men committed to a particular social view. This view includes the belief that those at the bottom are genetically inferior victims of their own immutable defects. The consequence has been that the IQ test has served as an instrument of oppression against the poor dressed in the trappings of science rather than politics. (Kamin, 1974:1-2)

A different but equally devastating attack on the concept of IQ is that of David McClelland. He argued that the key issue in considering IQ tests is their validity. If they are invalid, he says, their use cannot be justified. Evidence suggested, he went on to say, that IQ tests have poor validity. The correlation with school achievement, he argued, was imperfect and school achievement is in turn a poor prediction of occupational success. IQ scores explain little variance in the measure of degree of

occupational success. The correlation of IQ with all kinds of job proficiency is low and for higher status jobs there is little or no correlation. He stated, however, that the direction of cause in these matters is unknown but he speculated that educational success tends to be a function of social class and the type of education received (McClelland, 1973).

In the meantime, there is some acceptance that elements of intelligence, is inherited, the exact proportion however is not established. The most important issue seems however to be the relative importance of genetics and environment. On one side there is the assertion that environment is the most significant and it is not difficult to understand the scenario where environmental conditions might well impact on achievement. If Martin Luther King, for example, had been born in a country where racism and segregation were not featured, would he have achieved the brilliance in oration and organisation that he did? Or indeed if Louis Armstrong had never seen a saxophone or if Stevie Wonder had not had access to musical instruments. One might inherit aspects of intelligence but environmental conditions might well be needed to bring this out.

Another aspect of the polemic seems to rest on how one constructs adequate tests to measure intelligence and indeed how significant race is in this equation. It has been demonstrated that preconceived ideas can determine the way that data is interpreted in order to produce scientific 'fact'. That is, once a theorist has formulated a view of something, such as the explanation of intellectual differences between racial groups, data are moulded to fit and so support the theory (Gould, 1981). According to Segall et al., IQ tests are biased against those whose cultural background differs from that of the tests original normative sample. They argued that all the attempts at constructing 'culture-fair' or 'culture-free' tests have failed because culturally

mediated experiences always interact with test content to influence test performance (Segall, Dasen et al., 1990).

Frijda and Jahoda, distinguished between culture-free and culture-fair tests (cited in Segall, Dasen et al., 1990). Culture-free tests they argued are those tests that actually measure some inherent quality of human capacity equally well in all cultures. Obviously no such test is possible. On the other hand, a culture-fair test could be composed of areas which are equally unfamiliar to all possible persons in all possible cultures, so that everyone would have an equal chance of passing, or failing. This is a theoretical proposition because the task is seemingly as difficult as culture-free tests.

A fundamental point made by Gardner was that contextualization is the most important aspect of this debate (Gardner, 1993). He felt that one should not assume that intelligence is independent of the culture in which one lives. He argued that many scientists now see intelligence as an interaction between, on one hand certain proclivities and potentials and on the other hand opportunities and constraints that are a feature of a particular culture.

There has been a revival of the debate on race and IQ with the publication of Herrnstein and Murray's work in which they claimed that extra funds spent on black education is ill spent and that the solution is for wealthy white families to adopt black children (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). The book has been a best seller, with over half a million copies sold in the United States alone. There was nothing new however in this book, only a regurgitation of old ideas and data.

The popularity of 'The Bell Curve', although genetic differences between those usually defined as constituting different races are said to be so statistically small to be almost insignificant (Gould, 1981), suggests that this area continues to intrigue and cannot be excluded from consideration when debating education achievement.

Interestingly, a recent study in New York by scientists at the New York Academy of Medicine, recorded the birth weight of 3,500 babies and when they were seven years old, their IQ. The data, which had been taken thirty years previously, suggested that birth weight has an effect on intelligence. The researches concluded that the results show a clear trend, with every 100 grams of birth weight accounting for half a percent in IQ (Matte et al., 11 August, 2001; *The Times*, Saturday 10 August, 2001). This adds a new perspective to the question of IQ and may perhaps in the future be used to cast further doubt on the arguments of a straight correlation between race and intelligence. Indeed to add further to the evidence of the relative significance of nurture in educational attainment. The belief that race determines intelligence and performance has however not been eradicated from education thinking and practice according to Mirza (in Owusu, 2000).

In light of the strength of debate on IQ and Race, it is conceivable that one of the explanations for the perceived low achievement of black pupils may well be the continued influence of these views about intelligence. Teachers do not live or teach in a vacuum, education theories, not least that on IQ, are bound to influence thought and practice of education practitioners and impact on the performance of black pupils, perhaps reinforcing or generating negative racist or negative views towards black pupils.

1.4.3 TEACHER RACISM AND NEGATIVE TEACHER ATTITUDES

Documented cases of individual teacher racism, which it is claimed impact on the performance of black children, have continued steadily over the years. Teachers and by that is normally meant white teachers, have been shown to hold attitudes and to adopt practices that devalue black pupils and hinder their progress. That is not to say that all teachers have been tarnished with the same brush. Studies have also found

some teachers to be self-examining and seek to develop all their pupils irrespective of their colour. Channer, for example in her study of achieving black people, stated that some black achievers credited inspirational and devoted teachers for their eventual educational success (Channer, 1995). A high proportion of studies however paint a less favourable picture, suggesting that racism manifested in negative stereotyping and low expectation have been the norm in teachers' interaction with black pupils, forming barriers to their achievement (Nehaul, 1996; Gillborn, 1990; Channer, 1995).

One of the earliest reports to be published, which cited racism as a crucial factor in low achievement, was the Rampton Report. The conclusion was drawn from the evidence presented in this study that, 'Racism both intentional and unintentional has a direct and important bearing on the performance of West Indian children in our schools' (Rampton, 1981:12).

The report showed that it was a commonly held view among teachers interviewed that West Indian pupils inevitably caused behavioural difficulties. The pupils were therefore seen either as problems to put up with or at best in need of sympathy.

It was also found that teachers often said that West Indian pupils were unlikely to achieve in academic terms. Teachers were likely though to have high expectations of their potential in areas such as sport, dance, drama and art, which means, of course, that they were likely to encourage these pupils to pursue these subjects, not in addition to but at the expense of, their academic studies. Rampton concluded:

> While we cannot accept that racism, intentional or unintentional alone accounts for the underachievement of West Indians in our schools, we believe that when taken together with, for example, negative teacher attitudes and inappropriate curriculum racism does play a major part in their underachievement. (Rampton, 1981:70)

Findings by Maureen Stone are also significant here (Stone, 1981). She looked at a number of schools in London running Black Studies courses. In one school a programme of cultural activities was introduced. This included a steel band scheduled to run during class time. As many of the boys were already engaged in non-academic activities (mainly sports) which took up a lot of time, some of the staff, both black and white, protested to the Head about the time tabling of these activities within the normal school day. Their argument was that these activities contributed to the fact that blacks were mainly to be found in the lower streams and that therefore these activities should be carried out after school. Another argument they voiced was that activity such as music and sports confirmed old racial stereotypes. Indeed, that there can be no real educational justification for such activities and thus one could only assume that academic subjects were deemed even subconsciously to be unimportant for these children.

Coard also documented a number of explicitly racist occurrences in schools. He wrote:

> There are many teachers who are patronising or condescending towards black children. These are the sort who treats a black child as a favourite pet animal. I have often overheard teachers saying, 'I really like that coloured child! He is quite bright for a coloured child.' One teacher actually said to me one day, in a sincere and well meaning type of voice, 'Gary is really quite a nice boy considering he is Black.' There are other teachers who will not press the black child too hard academically, as 'he isn't really up to it, poor chap'. Children see through these hypocritical and degrading statements and attitudes more often than adults realise, and they feel deeply aggrieved when anyone treats them as being inferior, which is what patronisation is all about. They build up resentment and develop emotional blocks to learning. (Coard, 1971:19)

He also cited examples of teachers refusing to teach black children and Heads of Schools who tried to persuade children to leave school when they had reached school leaving age, even when their parents wished them to continue their education.

This situation seem to have changed little over the years, indeed new racist

discourse seems to have been added to the old ones. Ashton and Barrows argued that education is the pillar of racism and as a result there is great hostility between teachers and black pupils which adversely affect their performance (Gibson & Barrow, 1986).

Channer in her study of black adults who have been through the education system cited familiar experiences of teacher racism, of low expectation and negative stereotyping. There is considerable evidence, Channer argued, to indicate both intentional and unintentional racism among teachers, both in their perception and expectations of black children. Many of her subjects who had 'failed' in schools, later through self-education and further education managed to achieve professional occupations that they were thought incapable of in schools (Channer, 1995).

Likewise Nehaul in a study of black primary high-achievers, documented cases of teachers blatantly relating to young black children in much less favourable ways than they did other pupils. In one case, in group discussion work, a young black primary school pupil was repeatedly ignored when he held his hands up in answer to questions eventually leading to frustration and misbehaviour on his part. When Nehaul discussed this with the teacher at the end of the session, she admitted that she was aware of her negative perception of black pupils and that she was working to rectify it (Nehaul, 1996).

One of the first researchers to conduct studies on the implications of racism was Green who looked at teachers in primary and secondary schools. He found that teachers gave less of their time to pupils of Caribbean heritage and gave them less opportunity for initiator talk. Green found that West Indian pupils seemed to have relationships with teachers that were characterized by, 'Criticism, questions and directives.' (Green, 1985:5)

This position was not new since Driver had also found that West Indian pupils' relationship with their teachers were more likely characterised by conflict than pupils of other ethnic groups (Driver, 1980). Likewise Gillborn found that teachers were more critical of boys from Caribbean heritage than they were of white boys, criticized and reprimanded them more than boys who exhibited similar behavior. In a series of case studies of West Indian and male white teacher relationships, Gillborn concluded that, in the case of West Indian boys, '...Ability, hard work and commitment to academic achievement may not be sufficient...West Indian pupils face the additional barrier of staff ethnocentrism' (Gillborn 1988:371).

Further, pupils in his sample said that teachers were prejudiced and so they formed sub-cultures that challenged the authority of teachers' leaving both sides little room for manoeuver and locked in a conflictual relationship. Likewise records of discipline showed that those teachers' reasons for giving detention for Caribbean boys were vague and not as specific as for other boys (Gillborn, 1988).

Work by Mirza and Brook also supported the view that teachers treated West Indian children in less favourable and indeed in discriminatory and racist manner (Mirza, 1992; Brook, 1991). Indeed studies argued that children of Caribbean heritage experience more hostility from teachers than other groups. Teachers were often especially antagonistic towards black pupils, holding negative views not just of the children that they said they knew but also of their parents and families that they often did not know (Sewell, 1997).

These sentiments did not seem to begin in secondary schools when it could be said that pupils have become problematic. In examining the interactions of five different teachers with multi-ethnic classes of five and six year olds, teachers were found to interact less frequently with black children than with white children. In

addition their exchanges with black children tended to be shorter and when it came to discussing particular tasks set, less time was spent with them (Briggs & Edwards, 1991).

Racism therefore, it appears from the evidence, finds expression in schools in negative teacher attitudes towards black pupils, low expectations and indeed often in the curriculum, which overtly ignores black people or presents a negative picture of them. There is nothing inherent in racial differences, which by themselves generate good or poor performance in school or indeed determine behaviour or attitude. Within the conception of society and schools however, significance is given to race in that racial groups are placed hierarchically in relation to one another with blacks seemingly at the bottom. This background of how black pupils have been regarded in school is important for my thesis since current factors such as high exclusion rates suggest race is still extremely important in interaction between black pupils and school practices. It would appear that the educational system intentionally or unintentionally maintains this hierarchy of racial groups and teachers wittingly or unwittingly give expression to the ideology in their relationship with black pupils and their perception and treatment of them.

1.4.4 TEACHER EXPECTATION

Negative perception of black pupils by teachers, it was claimed time and again in research studies, can manifest itself in low teacher expectation of them (Nash, 1976; Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1999; Showunmi, et al., 1995; Gordon, 1995; Brophy, 1983; Gordon, 2000; Nash, 2001). Among the most influential of the early studies that have been used to assess the impact of teacher expectation on pupil performance, was that of Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968). This classic study of the effect of experimenter's bias apparently demonstrated that an experimenter's bias could affect the performance

of animals on learning tasks. Specifically, rats labelled 'bright' and 'dull' were treated differently by students working with them with more 'petting' being given to the former than the latter, even though they were from a homogeneous sample.

This study has been extrapolated to the classroom situation where it is often argued that teachers may give more favourable treatment to bright pupils resulting in more favourable learning outcomes than for children who are labelled dull.

There has been evidence in this vein from social research focusing on the concept of labelling and the self-fulfilling prophecy. In the sixties Jackson in a study of streaming in primary schools, suggested that views held by teachers of working children operated against them and in favour of middle class children (Jackson 1964).

There is little consensus in previous research since it has similarly been argued that pupil achievement may accurately reflect accurate teacher expectations, rather than be affected by it. Indeed, it can be argued that teachers as professionals, are capable of putting aside their expectations in the face of evidence to the contrary from pupils. Brophy & Good in fact argued that some teachers are able to put aside their expectations and treat pupils appropriately (Brophy & Good, 1974). In later works however Brophy suggested that those children whom teachers expect to do well do indeed tend to do so (Brophy, 1979; 1983).

Another influential study was that of Rist. This study conducted in an American kindergarten found teacher expectation to be influenced by knowledge of the pupil's social background and by indicators of social class such as clothing and use of American English. Rist argued that these factors influenced the allocation of pupils to fast and slow learning groups at the start of the school year. Thereafter the teacher's attention and interest was directed to those said to be 'fast learners'. This

group made the most progress and the initial discrimination between pupils was perpetuated in subsequent years (Rist, 1970).

In a similar vein, a British study found that it was children of below average ability whose progress were most likely to be adversely affected by low teacher expectations. Likewise that pupils also seemed to believe they could be affected by teacher expectation (Galton & Delafield, 1991).

The above focus therefore even though lacking consensus point to the view that teacher perception is an important area in pupil performance in school.

Specifically in relation to black children, negative teacher expectation has usually been viewed as adversely affecting the achievement of black children. Low teacher expectation has likewise been seen as one of the factors hindering the achievement of black pupils in schools. We have looked for instance at the Rampton Report which argued that negative stereotyping of the abilities of ethnic children pupils may lead to low teacher expectations of them (Rampton, 1981).

This position was supported by Eggleston et al., in their study of the educational and vocational secondary school experiences of young people of different ethnic groups (Eggleston, Dunn et al.., 1985). They found that teachers' negative stereotyping of black children led to them being directed to relatively low level courses such as vocational as opposed to academic courses.

Other studies also identified a relationship between teacher expectation and pupil achievement. In one such study Rothbart, Dalfen and Barrett, gave false information to pupil teachers in relation to the ability of pupils. The pupil teachers had been told that some of the pupils were 'lacking in intellectual potential' while others were rated 'high expectancy'. Tape recording of the sessions showed that the pupil teachers spent more time with the latter pupils than the former. In addition pupil

teachers rated the 'high expectancy' pupils as having more potential than the others. The 'low expectancy' pupils were in additon defined as having a need for approval (Rothbart, Dalfen et al.., 1971).

Another study by Rubovits and Maehr was specifically related to teachers' expectations of black pupils (Rubovits & Maehr, 1973). They set up experimental lessons with sixty-six undergraduate women on a teaching course and two hundred and sixty-four pupils of mixed ability and race. Each pupil teacher was given four pupils of the same ability, two of whom were white and two of whom were black. One black pupil and one white pupil were randomly given high IQs and labelled gifted thereby setting up an 'expectation' to which the teachers' responses could be studied. The teachers were told to pay special attention to this information and to be mindful of the fact that they were dealing with a mixed ability group and should pay particular attention to differences in interest, verbal ability and so on. Each lesson was observed for forty minutes. The observation schedule was based on six items of teacher behaviour. They were: teachers' attention to pupil statements, encouragment of pupil statements, elaboration, ignoring, praise and criticism. Teachers were found to request fewer statements of black pupils than white, black pupils were praised less and criticised more than whites. Researchers did not find any differences in the amounts of pupil initiated interaction. Of equal significance was that more statements were requested from pupils defined as 'gifted' who suprisingly were also criticised more. It was clear from this research that teachers favoured pupils in the following order: 'gifted' whites, 'non-gifted' whites, 'non-gifted' blacks, and 'gifted' blacks.

According to Rubovits and Maehr,

> A pattern begins to emerge in which the expectation of giftedness is associated with a generally positive response of teachers – if the pupil is white. For black pupils, if anything, a reverse tendency is evident in which the expectation of

giftedness is associated with less positive treatment. (Rubovits & Maehr, 1973:125)

This finding is extremely disturbing. It appears that even when presented with what would be a desirable and ideal pupil, if he/she happens to be black, teachers responses are to negate and criticise them and their efforts. Black children it seems therefore cannot win. It is almost as if there is a vested interest, as I have argued at the outset of this thesis, to create and perpetuate disadvantage and low academic performance, even when the propensities of black pupils are clearly towards achievement.

A converse view has however been put forward by Galton and Dalafield who argued that teachers expectations might be influnced by their classroom experiences of ethnic minority children rather than formed by preconceived negative views of them (Galton & Delafield, 1981). That is, black children may well be exhibiting negative behaviour patterns in the classroom to which teachers are reacting. This position was supported by Mortimer et al. In their school project they found, 'teacher expectations to be tied to specific knowledge of previous attainment and performance in the classroom' (Mortimer, Sammons et al., 1988).

They also found that teachers rated Caribbean pupils as having more behaviour problems than other pupils, especially those connected with learning difficulties. This study again found that pupils of Caribbean backgrounds also received more neutral and negative feedback on their behaviour than other pupils and argued that this could be due to poorer view of the behaviour of this group (Mortimer, Sammons et al., 1988:).

This study however did not answer the question that seems a natural corollary of this latter finding that is, why did the teachers in their study give black children more negative feedback on their behaviour? Why did they perceive that black children

were more likely to misbehaviour than other groups? The answers to these questions seem to lie in the assumptions about black people that are inherent in the social structures of the sociey and which form part of the consciousness of all individuals within in. Teachers like others within the society are socialised into a culture which has historically used race as the basis of thought and action. This is not to say that all individuals among them teachers, accept this uncritically. My argument is that so pervasive is the importance of race that it takes more than a force of will on the part of individual teachers to lessen its impact on children. Teachers are therefore more likely to have negative views of black children and to think them more likely to misbehave because this is part and parcel of the profile of black people that has served to justified their treatment both historically and in comtemporary society.

Despite the weight of evidence about negative teacher perception and low expectation, important questions are whether pupils are aware of this and whether this indeed impacts on their achievement. Likewise do black pupils generate the same or different responses from black teachers to that which is suggested they generate in white teachers?

In relation to the first set of questions, various studies would seem to argue that black pupils are aware of teachers' negative views and attitudes to them. Nash for example said that, '...a teacher's perceptions of individual children may be translated into expressed attitudes, and that these may be recognised by pupils' (Nash, 1976:29). And Silberman found that teachers attitudes were evident in their behaviour (Silberman, 1971).

Of crucial importance however is whether this recognition affects the performance of pupils. Nash argued that there is no evidence that, '...these attitudes directly affect their school attainment' (Nash, 1973:29).

This position is likewise supported by Garner and Bing who call this situation a 'chicken and egg' scenario, one irresolvable by their data.

> ...but it might be reasonable to assume that the process is interactive: an impression is formed on the basis of a child's behaviour which then acts as an interpretative framework within which subsequent behaviour is construed, which in turn leads to teacher expectations which in turn helps to determine the child's subsequent behaviour (Garner & Bing, 1973:29).

Black children are therefore seemingly aware of teachers views and expectations and feel that this can impact on their attitude, behaviour and their work.

Indeed Mortimer et al., concluded that expectations can be relayed subtly and it is through these differences in teacher attention that, '...teachers were signalling differential expectations' (Mortimer et al., 1988:169).

As I have argued, black children are not passive recipients in this or any other situation. Both individuals and groups respond to their positions in this society and in schools in different ways, motivated by a numbers of factors that relate to their own history, class, upbringing, heritage and so on. If this were not the case, the society and indeed the school system would be producing a homogeneous mass of black low achieving people, all oppressed by the weight of historical and contemporary forces.

In relation to the responses and the relationship of black teachers towards black pupils, few studies have focused on this and those studies that have done so, according to Callender, have tended to concentrate on low achievement of black children. Those she said that have looked at this have, '...portrayed them (black teachers) as insensitive, authoritarian individuals, upholders of the status quo who are ill-suited to teaching Black pupils effectively' (Callender, 1997:19).

An example of this portrayal of black teachers is that of Rist. In his observational study of black kindergarten and second grade teachers he concluded that they divided pupils into 'ideal' types. He argued that this categorisation was

based on factors such as physical appearance; clothes, body odour, condition of hair and shade of skin tone (Rist, 1970).

Another interesting study that seemed to support the above argument, was that of Callender (1997). She spent six months studying two schools in London where there were significant numbers of black teachers, approximately 40 per cent. The numbers were whittled down to an ethnographic study of six black teachers and two white teachers. Also observed were two hundred and eleven pupils aged between five and eleven. Her findings on what she termed the 'connectedness' of black teachers with blacks pupils seem plausible and are most persuasive.

> Connectedness was evident in my study in a number of ways. Many teachers pointed to their personal experience of schooling and highlighted the ways in which it had shaped their practice in British schools.... Connectedness was also shown in the close personal relationships that exist between the teachers, their pupils and the children's parents. (Callender, 1997:19 & 120)

Teachers in Callender's study regularly reminded black pupils of their ethnicity, with the phrase, 'remember you are black'. One teacher in her study said,

> I hit them hard (the pupils), knock them down and try to build them back again. When they realise you are building them up again, they will come and say 'remember you are Black.' This is a good feeling because you can see they are realising. They respond in a positive way. The white teachers get very nervous when I say things like that. The headteacher's opinion is that he does not mind as long as it does not come back to the school, or the teacher. (Callender, 1979)

While this teacher's motivations might be laudable, it is arguable that inherent within this view is the position that black teachers have more responsibility than other teachers to black pupils. Indeed that such overt focus on colour is the only way of educating black pupils to understand the nature of this society and to motivate them. Ideally all teachers would recognise and acknowledge difference and not regard this as necessarily problematic.

Another study that does not apparently portray black teachers in a negative way is that of Lightfoot (Lightfood, 1973). She seemed to find evidence of a 'hidden curriculum' where black teachers sought to empower and educate black pupils. The teachers in her study were not assumed to form a homogenous whole but were seen to hold different ideas about what constitutes school success. Indeed they were credited, like other *normal* people, with having different political and social ideologies for instance as individuals and not necessarily because they are black.

As in other areas of a racialised society black teachers in positions of responsibility and authority seem to be stuck between the 'rock and a hard place'. On the one hand they are professionals and have a responsibility as such to themselves as individuals, their school which employs them and to all their pupils regardless of colour. The reality of the situation is that everyone in this equation sees them differently. They are not excluded from the negative perceptions society holds of them as blacks, the negative stereotyping or perhaps even low expectations that black pupils and other members of society are subjected to. Neither are they freed from the added pressure, real or perceived, that they may be under to perform and to progress as representatives of black people. They are arguably among the achievers. Black children will therefore be asking many questions of them either overtly, in their behaviour and attitudes to them or covertly and silently. *Why are you where you are? How have you managed to get there when the majority do not or cannot? Have you sold out? Are you a coconut? Do you identify with us? Do you understand? Will you treat us the same way as others do? Do you accept or challenge discrimination for yourself and/or for us?* Similarly pupils may make demands based on the same premise that as black people there is necessarily a shared allegiance. Demands such as, *you should help us more than you do other pupils, you should make concessions*

for us, you should stand up for us, and no doubt countless other demands, pleas and expectations. And all these most usually in schools and colleges where these black teachers are underrepresented and with relatively little authority and responsibility.

Black teachers like white teachers are therefore under scrutiny and seemingly are similarly adjudged as potentially significant in the performance of black pupils in school. In addition as we have seen it is conceivable that they are under added pressure from black pupils, their parents and the schools in which they teach, with an even greater onus being placed on them in relation to the performance of black pupils.

The research questions that will be explored from this discussion of teacher colour and perception of black pupils are:

- How do teachers perceive black pupils as black people?

- Do teachers have high expectations of achieving black pupils? If yes, why? If not, why not?

- Do teachers' colour make a difference to the achievement of black pupils?

- What strategies do black pupils employ to win and maintain the support and high expectation of their teachers?

- What are the pupils' perception of their own role and obligation in influencing teacher' perception and expectation of them?

1.4.5 CULTURAL DEPRIVATION AND THE BLACK FAMILY

Another explanation for the supposed failure of black children in school was said to be cultural deprivation and language deficiencies.

Evidence of the cultural deprivation ideology could be seen in various reports on the education of immigrant children. For example, immigrant children were perceived to have inadequate pre-school experiences to prepare them for school (Schools Council, 1970). This particular report further argued that many of these

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children entered school with little play or toy experiences never having played with toys such as clockwork toys, building bricks, modelling clay or plasticine. They were not familiar, it said, with British nursery rhymes and stories that involved numbers and would have no experience of house numbers.

The emphasis in this report was on the inadequacies of the child and not on the responsibility or role of schools in meeting the needs of the child, the assumption it seemed being that children should be presented to schools already fully schooled hence abrogating schools of their duty.

The 'inadequate mother' hypothesis was also evident in a number of reports on the black community, the West Indian woman being subjected to most of the criticism. For example, the School Council report referred to above concluded, 'Whereas 86.7% of English mothers spent at least one hour a day with her children only 16% of West Indian mothers do' (Schools Council, 1970).

The author of the report devised a scale of adequate mothering and concluded that the 'greatest deprivation' of West Indian children was in maternal care and attention.

Authoritarianism among West Indian parents was also cited as a cause of failure in schools. Miller, undertook a study to investigate particular areas such as methods of child control, relationship between parents and children, and attitudes to school and learning (Miller, 1970). One finding to emerge from this study, carried out with a large sample of ten to eleven year olds in North London, was that the authoritarian parental behaviour which emerged from children's descriptions of relationships with parents tended to predict achievement independently of social class. He argued that authoritarianism and controlling behaviour on the part of parents were particularly related to poor achievement.

Banks and Finlayson later supported this position claiming that West Indian parents were particularly likely to be strict and authoritarian with regard to their children. Therefore it argued that some of the low achievement was due to the fact of authoritarian parents (Banks & Finlayson, 1973).

Similarly Verma, Bagley et al., in a study of one hundred and fifty black children, also ages between ten and eleven, with at least one parent of West Indian origin, taken from four schools in the London area, argued that their evidence from authoritarian behaviour of parents came not only from children but from mothers who described the behaviour of fathers in a similar way (Verma, Bagley et al., 1975).

Within Miller's study the factors representing parental authoritarianism was said to correlate significantly with reading ability, independently of social class (Miller, 1970). West Indian parents were seen to be 'significantly more authoritarian than English parents'. To emphasise this point he quoted twice as many West Indian children as saying that they were spanked if they were naughty at home, while substantially more English children agreed that their parents thought that children were the most important people in their homes. Verma and Bagley concluded:

> ...the authoritarianism which is a traditional feature of child rearing in Jamaican parents may have been functional in an era where creativity was heavily sanctioned, keeping children in their place was, perhaps, a cultural lag from the days of slavery into an era of domination by a white light-coloured minority in Jamaica. Today such parental values are no longer functional, and indeed create considerable problems when black teenagers, influenced by standards of their white peers, may in consequence rebel at the strictness and passive conservatism of their parents. (Verma, Bagley et al., 1975:93-94)

This view has not gone unchallenged. In her study, which focused on the achievement of black people in Britain, Channer looked at this issue of authoritarianism in black families. Her respondents, although perceiving their upbringing as strict and disciplined, did not view this negatively as presented by researchers. Their methods of upbringing were placed in the context of their parents'

ambitions for them to succeed in school and in relation to the values they held. Those who were subjected to it, though perhaps different to that of the dominant culture, did not consider this method of discipline, excessive or inappropriate (Channer, 1995).

Of great significance is the fact that beliefs in the brutality of black parents have led to an excessive involvement of Social Services in the black family. Over the years, black families, in their attempt to bring up their children as they see fit, have faced an onslaught of criticism and interference from the state in the form of intervention by the Social Services (Essen-Valen, 1966; Marsh et al., 1986). It can be argued that this excessive interference has led to the disproportionate amount of black children in the Care System both in foster homes and residential children's homes over the years (Gill & Jackson, 1983; Haskey,.., in Ford & Millar, 1988) no doubt impacting on their performance in schools. So on one hand, the approach of parents has been labelled extreme and excessive and, on the other, as inadequate. According to Beskin,

> In previous years with the removal of black children from real parents who are considered unfit to care for them, and into the care of white foster parents who are seen as fit parents.... Many black parents were led to believe that their children would be taken into care temporarily...but when the parents realised, many of those children were being fostered out to white families. (Beskin, 1994:65)

This policy has been considered justified because black children were said to be out of control in society (Institute of Race Relations, 1986; Hood, 1992; Percy, 1998). In schools, especially in inner cities area, black children, especially boys, are seen as presenting real and obvious disciplinary and criminal threat (Young, 1994; Phillips, Brown et al., 1998; Flood-Page & Mackie, 1998). The criticisms and policing of them both in and out of school have therefore been unrelenting (Bucke, 1997; Fitzgerald & Hale, 1996; Fitzgerald & Sibbitt, 1997). Sewell found that the

black boys were considered more conflictual and antagonistic than were other boys and seen by teachers as being more physically threatening (Sewell, 1997).

The overall message which has come across is therefore contradictory with parents being severely criticised for trying to influence the behaviour of their children and on the other hand being told that their children are out of control and failing to achieve in school because of this.

The most typical analysis on authoritarianism clearly perceived black people as a homogenous group devoid of differences such as culture, class or individual traits. They are lumped together in one mass seemingly incapable of escaping historical determinism. It seems extraordinary that any evidence could lead to such sweeping conclusions of a whole group of people. In addition this analysis shows little understanding of Caribbean society, which is as diverse and complex as any other, making linear explanation for behaviour pattern perplexing.

The analysis was also founded on the common assumption that low achievement was separate to anything else that was happening in the education system or the wider society. Similarly that low achievement was an easily identifiable and testable phenomenon; a problem generated by West Indians themselves.

From such positions the school and society were perceived as waging a losing battle since according to Midwinter no matter how much was done inside the school, almost no impact can be made without the informed support of the home (in Rushton & Turner, 1975). He said that whether we like it or not the family, the peer group and the neighbourhood are the true and influential educators.

Ironically school was therefore seen as almost redundant in the education of the black child. In Coleman's view:

> Perhaps the most pervasive research result of recent time, in educational achievement...is the strength of the effect of family differences in creating achievement differences among children, compared to the relative weakness of effects of school differences. (Coleman, 1974:27)

Further support for this view came from Smith who said that schools had little influence on achievement, which was independent of the child's background and general social context (in Masteller et al., 1975).

From these conclusions, emphasis on the important relations between families and children's achievement and the concept of cultural deprivation gained tremendous credence.

In an attempt to challenge the premise of the above positions, opponents denied that black children and their families had deficient cultures. From this opposition an interpretation of inequality developed which challenged deficiencies of children and their families and placed them instead on the school. According to the cultural differences or cultural relativism position, once teachers accepted minority group culture as being valid on their own terms, the problems confronting teachers would disappear. Bernstein wrote:

> We need to distinguish between the principles and operations that teachers transmit and develop in children, and the contacts they create in order to do this. We should start knowing that the social experiences the child already possess are valid and significant and that the social experiences should be reflected back to him as being valid and significant. (Bernstein, 1971)

The impact of the cultural relativism approach seemed to have been brief and transient, its criticism of the cultural deprivation models assumed that the issue was still a matter of culture and mere acceptance of different cultures as valid. Neither of these models focused sufficiently on the deficiencies within the education system and racial and class differences and the power relations which exist in society. Nor do they generally focus on the fact that educational equality is only possible where there

is an egalitarian society which is not structured according to an ideology of race, class and gender differences.

The representation of black families as incapable of providing the required environment and support to enable their children to benefit from school provides important contextual information for my thesis and is re-assessed in the discussion of the field work data (see pp. 156-235). My research data on the culture of black achievers, parental role and parental values and their impact on the performance play in the achievement of their children provides new insight of black families and their role in achievement.

1.4.6 CULTURAL DEPRIVATION AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE BLACK PUPIL

The language, as well as the culture of black children, has also been considered to adversely affect their performance in school. The children were seen as coming mainly from lower class homes and were therefore said to be linguistically deprived. Beriter and Engleman said that the use of language in these homes was severely restricted, that language was not used, '...to explain, to describe, to instruct, to hypothesise, to analyse, to compare, to deduce and to test. And these are the uses for academic success' (Beskin, 1994:52).

Likewise, the Fourth Report of the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration argued that even those children who were born here of ethnic groups, '...will be handicapped by language difficulties, family backgrounds and different cultures' (HMSO, 1978:18). Hence, the cultural background of the black child is perceived as presenting insurmountable 'problems' for education authorities. In relation to language spoken, Creole or Patois has been said to impede the progress of black children because of the perception of it as a sub-standard form of Standard

English (Edwards, 1978; Dalphinis, 1985; Crystal, 1974). There was scant acknowledgement of the richness of Creole which is in fact a mixture of English and African languages mingled with various distinctively Caribbean neologism and consistent with the dynamics of language development. So difference was again interpreted as deficit.

Tomlinson (1990), in assessing the findings of Jeffcote (1984) therefore argued that as the medium of education is Standard English those not speaking it will be disadvantaged. The Bullock Report (1975) suggested however that children should not have to dispense with their language and the culture of their home before they enter schools and Bhatnaghar (1981) suggested that to maintain cultural identity it is essential for ethnic minorities to retain their languages.

Indeed many black children, some of whom have never set foot in the Caribbean or have no Caribbean parents, seem to take pride in speaking their version of Patois, especially Jamaica patois. (These children, whites, Asians, and blacks, are labelled *Jamafakeans* in some inner city London playgrounds because of this.) As to whether this pride is to indicate cultural or racial identification, to demonstrate rejection of standard English and their perception of its association with the society from which they feel alienated, or simply because it is an aspect of their youth culture is not fully established. What is true is that a diverse range of language forms and dialects are spoken among the traditional indigenous sections of the British population, and rarely is this diversity in itself used as a blanket explanation of underachievement of white children.

It is clear that Standard English is the medium of school knowledge and that pupils need to be proficient in this in order to fully access knowledge as well as educational and employment opportunities (Tomlinson, 1990). It seems however that

the prejudice of teachers and educators to Creole in particular seem unrelated to whether it is said to interfere with the education of pupils. Few children enter school with the exact dialect used by every individual teacher. In relation to Creole or Patois, Francis Beskin argued that teachers' response seems to be one of irritation and annoyance because they cannot understand what pupils who use it are saying (Beskin, 1994).

Further Mac an Ghaill found that teachers see Creole as a sub-standard form of English (Mac an Ghaill, 1988) and Sewell found that teachers were antagonistic to its use because it was perceived as the language of rebellion and defiance (Sewell, 1977). And as with other aspects of perceived 'black culture' to gain favour from teachers black pupils needed to be seen to reject all aspects of it before entering the school gates (Taylor, 1981).

Another argument is that the notions of racial dominance and superiority are reinforced in schools, and the language of Third World peoples are denigrated and marginalised (Wong, 1986). Despite this however, for many black adolescents,

> Patois is a powerful social and political mantle, by emphasising its own subversive rhythms and 'foreignness', becomes an aggressive and proud assertion of racial and class identities. (Wong, 1986:119)

Wong further argued that their 'cultural dependence' is therefore, '...transmuted into greater autonomy and independence primarily through use of Patois to create linguistic barriers' (Wong, 1986:119).

But schools reject Patois and in the process negate the child's linguistic competence. Further by being hostile to language other than standard English it is argued, schools have contributed to rather than alleviated academic failure (Richmond, 1996).

In some Caribbean Islands such as Jamaica, for example, the use of patois has historically been controversial (Henriques, 1953; Rodney, 1969; Cassidy, 1971; Kuper, 1976; Whyte, 1997, Pollard, 1998). In line with the ideology and white dominated power structure from slavery to post colonial society, there has been ambivalence to Jamaican patois. However in reality it was and still is the language of society regardless of class or shade of colour, it is the language first spoken by children having been passed to them by their families. Yet is has never been the language of the education or political system. Children naturally learn that they speak Patois at home and in the playground but they do not write it and use it in formal situations such as job interviews. Standard English is at the same time seen as the language of the ruling class, who were up to the sixties near white or white and entirely the progeny of slave keepers (Henriques, 1953). Yet although they too spoke Patois in informal situations, Patois was seen as bad English and children were inconsistently reprimanded for using it. To some extent there has been a dramatic change in the ideology of Language in Jamaica since the period of Norman Manley's democratic socialism and the influence of reggae artists, the most powerful being Bob Marley (Miller, 1992).

Marley's lyrics are entirely in Jamaican patois if not the vocabulary the syntax. His music, especially his early songs, reminded Jamaicans of past oppression and present hardships and extolled Jamaicans to escape mental slavery and to take pride in their blackness and Jamaican heritage, including language (Marley, B. 1977; 1979). It is still however true to say that although Patois is not now used with apology and shame as in the past, it has still not attained the status of a language and is not the medium of education. Most school children in Jamaica can effortlessly move between the two main language forms used on the island and are fully conversant with the

appropriateness of each in particular settings and situations. There seems to be no interference with the achievement of children in Jamaica who of course use Patois more frequently than black children in England.

It seems therefore that to extract language and culture as separate from other dynamics of society is to divert attention from the complexity of factors that affect the performance of black children in British schools.

Indeed the language and culture of black children are not uniform. The simplistic analysis that was prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s of black people was questionable then and is certainly open to challenge today. Black children like other children in a complex technologically advanced society are subjected to a range of diverse influences. The West Indies can no longer be 'blamed' for the raw material that the schools are presented with. The majority of black children in Britain today are products of British Society and the other global influences that impact on them and other school children (Leung & Harris, 1997). The impact of culture and language and issues relating to self-image/self concept, which is examined below cannot therefore be fully understood if separated from the totality of influences that come to bear on black children and their families. Examination of the issues above have however revealed two main areas which have formed important research areas for this thesis. They are:

- The significance of the social, language and class backgrounds from which black achievers come in their achievement

- The role of parents, family members and indeed their wider community in the achievement of black pupils.

1.4.7 POOR SELF-CONCEPT AND THE BLACK CHILD

The low self-concept theory gained credibility in the 1970s and was widely argued to be a significant factor in the low achievement of black children. It was based on the premise that black children realistically perceived their status and position in society to be poor. This along with material factors such as poor housing in inner city decaying areas, high levels of unemployment, discrimination and racism, it was argued led to self-negation and an absence of feelings of self-worth. This in turn adversely affected their attainment in schools (Stone, 1981).

Numerous studies and articles were written to support and reiterate this position. However, while it can be shown that the objective position of many black people in Britain is indeed one where they are constantly being devalued, it did not necessarily follow that they suffered from negative self-concept and poor self-image which impacted decisively on school performance.

Indeed, according to Stone the evidence in this area has been contradictory and confusing. She argued that even if it is to be accepted that these traits were measurable, the whole debate seemed meaningless and diversionary, distracting attention from the issues of what was going on in society and in schools with regards to black children (Stone, 1981).

The self-concept theory was developed as a result of what appeared to be insurmountable 'problems' in inner schools. If the 'problem of underachievement could be seen as reflection of the individual and family pathology of working class black children, then the focus would be on these individuals and families and the structure of society and the schools would be left intact and beyond criticisms.' (Smith, 1977)

The social-psychological solutions were voiced by researchers who seemed to be unaware of the wider social structure and its impact on the school system. The

'failure' of black children in school was seen to be related to poor self-concept and so the duty of the school was to provide curriculum and methods to ensure the development of positive self-image. The role of the teachers was to give the children the opportunity to enhance their self-concept. This would in turn give children more positive attitudes to school leading to improved attainment.

Maureen Stone argued however, that this theory grew from a white blinkered middle class perspective and that it was inappropriate for understanding West Indian personality. She wrote:

> In many respects the aim of teaching for improved self-concept or self-esteem more closely resembles social work in its mental health guise, or psychotherapy than 'normal teaching for academic or related goals'.... In education therapy functions on the fringes of formal school structure-in withdrawal units, truancy centres, adjustment units etc..... Schooling as therapy has influenced general education thought in this country, particularly as it relates to non-achievers and early leavers. (Stone, 1981: 16 & 18)

Thus in many cases instead of concentrating on academic goals, educationalists that have used this theory as a basis on which to formulate policies, have found themselves trying to improve nebulous self-esteem at the expense of academic pursuits. Examples of this might include teaching the black child to write in dialect or getting them involved in music and sports at the expense of subjects that are valued in terms of job prospects and achievement in society. If the black child is deemed to fail in these contexts it is therefore hardly surprising. Bagley et al., attempted a definition of self-concept. They said:

> Self-concept in its purest sense is a cognitive variable, and concerns what it is about himself that an individual recognises as salient or relevant. But this self-conception almost always involves an evaluation of oneself and thus related in a logical way to self-esteem. Self-esteem is largely an affective dimension, measuring how the individual feels about himself, and evaluates himself relative to others. (Verma, Bagley et al., 1975:177)

Further they argued that a number of different self-esteem measures have been used in research studies and that little attempt had been made to check the relationship of these methods to one another.

Yet, a great deal of credibility has been given to such tests. Bagley, Verma et al., themselves, argued that in the study they conducted in a large number of schools, they 'found' that the level of self-esteem in male West Indians was below that of both female West Indians and male whites. Their explanations of this difference in self-esteem of West Indian males and females was stated as follows:

> This poor self-esteem is a result of an historical situation in which the ravages of slavery led to a matriarchal and authoritarian family system which devalued males and also to the continuance of severe racial discrimination against West Indian males. (Verma, Bagley, 1975:190)

It can however be argued that the effects of slavery in terms of both males and females cannot be quantified in this way. Indeed that the ravages of slavery especially in terms of the sexual exploitation and rape of black women coupled with their position in the economy over the years would objectively place them in an even more devalued position than men. This is however equally unhelpful and preposterous, analysing the ravages of slavery in this way is to detract from its brutality on black people in general.

In another study conducted by Bagley, 'cultural awareness and identity' of West Indian school children in London was examined (Bagley in Verma & Bagley, 1975). Various questions were asked of these children about their culture, for example, 'Have you heard of Paul Bogle, Toussaint L'Overture?'

He found that black children were embarrassed to talk about the black people mentioned in the study. The children, he argued, also displayed a low level of knowledge concerning the cultural heritage of the West Indies. In addition, a substantial number rejected their ethnic identity, colour, hair and eye colour in terms

of European characteristics. This rejection, he argued was not found in the sample of whites. He further suggested that there was a tendency for children who have poor cultural knowledge to reject their ethnic identity and to have behavioural problems in school.

Commenting on these findings and in a scathing critique of them, Maureen Stone asks how many five and six year old English working class children displayed cultural knowledge comparable to that required by the West Indian child, for example about Nelson, Waterloo, Dickens. She argued that if all their figures are put together nearly 80 per cent did not reject their identity, thus she argued:

> If the conditions of life for black children in London are examined – a minority group discriminated against, experiencing appalling housing and environmental conditions and generally 'stigmatised' status – this is indeed an encouraging testament of group loyalty and cohesion (Stone, 1988: 52).

Bagley's position was not however an isolated one, Hill provided a similarly scathing attack on the West Indian self-image in his study conducted among adolescents in Birmingham. It argued that the longer West Indian adolescents have been resident in Britain, the more likely it is that they have high levels of neuroticism, in comparison with their English peers. He argued that what is possible is that a prolonged exposure to forces of English racism has negative rather than positive effects of adaptation, identity and self-esteem of black adolescents especially if they form a small minority in a school dominated by racist ethos (Hill, 1975).

A similar argument had also been voiced by Alan Little. He wrote that as a result of discrimination and rejection by the dominant groups in this society, West Indians 'introject' the negative view of themselves and come to see themselves as failures. He said that the low economic and social status which new Commonwealth immigrants are frequently accorded in our society must affect the identity of these

groups themselves and the self concept they pass on to their children (in Verma & Bagley, 1975).

Other studies however have argued that it is schools, which damage the self-image of black children, since they can play a significant role in either building or lowering pupils' self-image. Silberman found in his study of high school pupils that 80 per cent of black children entering school had a positive self-image; 20 per cent still did by the fifth grade; yet only 5 per cent did by their senior year (Silberman, 1971).

In a similar vein Bell studied the progressively decreasing scores of black pupils on Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills in the District of Columbia Public schools. Bell found that as black children matured, they experienced many hostilities imposed by the majority culture. By early adolescence, many black children felt that academic achievement would not improve their status or benefits. These children learnt to adapt to this perceived definition of reality by giving less time and energy to their work (Bell Jr., 1985).

It is not difficult to understand why arguments such as this are given credence, black children are undoubtedly subjected to various expressions of racism or perhaps more mildly devaluation of self on a daily basis (Price, 1979). In the media they are usually underrepresented. Black children have more knowledge of what it is to be white than what it is to be black, images of *whiteness* and the normality of this pervade their consciousness. From how to care for hair and skin, what physical features are deemed beautiful or desirable, to what a normal family is supposedly like. Blackness in this context is seen to be a deviation from the norm and usually when there are representations of blackness it is often questionable as to whether these roles reflect the ranges of normality or the stereotype.

Black children, especially in their formative years, soon realise that in this society they do not represent the norm and more they not only represent themselves and their immediate families but all black people in the society or even in the world. Further that the weight of prejudice and stereotype certainly define and are supposed to dictate their every move. Objectively this might well seem to lead inevitably to negative self- image. However it is an equally plausible view that no two children can be expected to react to the impact of racist stereotypes and images in the same way, or even to perceive their situation in the way that researchers deem a natural consequence of their objective position. If this was the case no black child in Britain would succeed in school and clearly many do and even those who do not and seem to be positively anti-school do not seem to be stricken with negative images of themselves.

Black boys in particular seem to be affected by a particularly stringent form of attention and treatment in the British school system, yet the absence of anything resembling poor self-image seems to reflect their self perception. It has been well documented that black men are seen to present a particular threat in a white racist society and schools, as microcosms of society, seem to reflect this perception of them.

Sewell for example, found that teachers in the inner city school he studied had a particular antipathy to black boys. Black boys were blamed for being big and black and said to naturally present a threat because of these physical traits (Sewell, 1997). Yet Sewell did not find boys who were full of self-loathing, to the contrary, he found boys who were imbued with confidence and self-assurance who were leaders of youth culture, the very traits ironically that worked against them in schools. Their youth culture was found to conflict with that of the school and led to antagonism towards them and the culture they were said to represent. Indeed it was not just the schoolboys

who were perceived negatively, stereotypic views were also held of their families and their parents (Sewell, 1997).

Mac an Ghaill in his study of back girls found likewise that the girls did not capitulate under this weight of negativism that they confronted in schools and colleges. Instead they were focused on their educational ambitions rejecting at the same time the idea of being caught between two cultures. Rather they inverted the dominant racist white idea of blacks, they said that they were superior to whites and they identified positively with black culture, 'They are proud to be black and female and are a central link in the black working-class community's struggles' (Mac an Ghaill, 1988:35). The Rasta Heads, as the radical black girls were called in this study, rejected the teacher views that they were culture-less and the model of white culture presented by the teachers. They resisted incorporation into white cultural identities by developing their own strong and identifiable youth culture.

In another study, adults recounted their experiences in school which they said were suffused with negativism, low expectations and racist stereotyping (Channer, 1995). Yet, these life-story subjects said their negative experiences with teachers at school contrasted with the positive and supportive interactions with members and elders in their churches. Consequently they did not express any of the feelings cited of self-hate. Indeed as Adventist and Pentecostal church members they had been socialized into thinking that they were special both in the eyes of God and their communities.

So this issue is not as simplistic and one dimensional as previous research might have argued. It is plausible however, as Gilmore said, that individuals need a high self-image to cope effectively with the demands of life and that embedded in each child's self-image is hope for the future (Gilmore, 1982).

Black children are not just passive recipients of racism and its related ideologies; various factors mediate their impact on them. So in their school performance black children often demonstrate that the directions their lives take can be determined by factors other than those dictated by the wider society or by schools.

In order to shed further light on these issues in relation to black achievers in school the questions that will form the focus of research for inquiry in this area are:

- How do black achievers perceive themselves in a white-dominated society? What are the roles of parents and schools in developing their self-image?

- What do black achievers know about significant black figures? Do they lack cultural knowledge? Are they embarrassed to discuss these? Are they significant to achievement?

- Are black achievers neurotic as a result of extended exposure to British society?

- How do the ways they see themselves impact on their school achievement and ambition for the future? Is there a gender difference?

This Chapter however continues now by exploring another area that has been cited in previous research (Ogbu, 1990; Sewell, 1997) as significant in the low achievement of black pupils namely, peer affiliation.

1.4.8 PEER AFFILIATIONS

Generally and independently of race and ethnicity, peer relationships are regarded as an important aspect of adolescent development. Research has argued that during adolescence there is usually noticeable increase both in peer orientation and in peer-related activities (Smith et al., 2000). The ability to make friends and be part of friendship groups are said to be critical stages in psychological growth and maturity (Fieldman, 1990).

Peer relations can influence the development of self-evaluation, self-perception and social behaviour with an increased tendency in adolescence for this social behaviour to include practices such as smoking, drinking and delinquency (Mash et al., 1996).

On one hand, peer influence has often been conceptualised as undermining the influence of the family (Fieldman, 1990). On the other hand, it has been concluded that peer affiliation is mediated through the influence of parents leading young people to seek peers similar to themselves (Moen et al., 1995). Likewise, a seemingly opposing view suggested that parents, though similar in terms of their attempts to monitor their children's behaviour, are less so in their actual success in doing so (Smith, 2000).

The majority of studies that have attempted to measure black pupils' attitudes to their peers have concentrated on friendship patterns and friendship groups (Taylor, 1981). These studies on friendship choices tended to indicate that pupils choose friends from their own ethnic groups (Rowley, 1968; Kawwa, 1968; Jalinek et al., 1975; Milner, 1973).

A significant study was that of Tony Sewell who conducted an in-depth study of black boys in an inner city comprehensive school. Sewell illustrated the profound impact of peer relations on attitude to school, behaviour and achievement. He found that black pupils tended to stick together demonstrating that colour is a more important basis of peer affiliation than academic ability. Sewell demonstrated how, especially in inner cities, the values of peer groups can conflict dramatically with that of school since in this case, anti-school attitudes were formed and perpetuated within black male sub-cultures.

Black boys, Sewell found, became trapped in peer activities that were hostile to academic performance. These youths did not only equate school with 'acting white,' but also made no attempt to 'act white'. Boys in these sub-cultures refused to learn or to conform to school rules of behaviour. Learning and academic achievement were seen as white and being fiercely and ostensibly 'black', school was not only rejected by them but was also overtly challenged (Sewell, 1997).

This assessment is seemingly peculiar to social contexts where black young people are in the minority and for a range of complex personal and social reasons define certain traits and aspirations as white and others as black (Kunjufu, 1988; hooks, 1992, 1993, 1994; Connell, 1989). Of serious concern is that it appears that it is the more negative traits that are associated with being black for a significant group of black inner city children. The idea that black can act white, can be *coconuts*, that is white on the inside though black on the outside is a standard term of abuse for black people who are said to deviate from the 'ideal of blackness'. In British school playgrounds this slur is often thrown at black children by other black children. Later as adults, blacks whose accents are said to deviate from a certain form, who have certain aspirations, whose families reside in certain areas are likewise labelled *coconuts*. Coupled therefore with the pressures associated with racial stereotyping in society, potential black achievers are seemingly confronted with various barriers to achievement from both sides, that is from within their own black peer groups, their own black communities and within the inherently racialised structures of society.

Ogbu has argued that when minority group pupils think of making good grades and doing school work as 'acting White,' they fail to achieve to the best of their ability (Ogbu, 1990).

This is not surprising, conceivably, some black pupils feel isolated from white society and dare not risk further isolation from black society by 'acting white' in their attitude to schools. The pupils described by both Sewell and Ogbu tended therefore to under perform in school because of having to straddle what they deemed to be the demands of two opposing cultures. The question for me was how were these tensions and difficulties resolved by achieving pupils?

A significant study of achieving pupils was that of Nehaul. Her work focused on achieving primary school pupils. Her high achieving pupils contrasted with those studied by Sewell and Ogbu. Rather than receiving negative attitudes and values from their peers, these pupils received extra status and positive reinforcement. Consequently, these pupils developed increased pride and confidence in their ability (Nehaul, 1996).

Another study on achieving black pupils was that of Ricciuti who suggested that high achieving pupils, especially females, usually chose high achieving pupils as friends and that these friends characteristically had a strong belief in self and resilience to negative factors (Ricciuti, 1999).

Research on achieving pupils is however relatively sparse, the major emphasis being on the negative effect of peer relations on the achievement of black pupils. Black pupils are said to choose the wrong friends who wield adverse effects on their schooling. From this perspective, the school and society are again perceived as waging a losing battle against the challenges presented by peers.

Research on achievement seem to agree on the importance of peer affiliation both for individual well-being and for its impact on school performance. Many questions are however left unanswered especially in relation to the impact of peer affiliation on black school achievers.

Black pupils are, in their need for friends, no different from other children. Like them they rely on friends for security, self-image, companionship and generally for their well-being. Similarly they are not unlike other young people in society who are under constant scrutiny and even criticism from adults. Often it seems young people, of whatever colour, can do nothing right by adults. They are often all generalised to be challenging delinquents, constantly pushing back deeply held norms and values of society. If you are black and young, perceived anyway in negative ways, arguably scrutiny and criticism are increased many fold.

It is therefore deemed valuable in this thesis to establish how achieving pupils respond to this and how, if at all, their choice of friends impact on their school performance.

The research questions that arise from exploring this area are:

- What/who influences the choice of peers of black achieving pupils?

- Who do black achieving pupils choose as friends?

- To what extent do black achieving pupils peer affiliations impact on their school performance?

Another area cited in previous research on low achievement of black pupils is social class. What does this research contribute to our understanding of the impact of the social class position on the performance of black children in school? How valuable is this to the context of this thesis?

1.4.9 SOCIAL CLASS

Black people in Britain constitute an essential sub-proletariat (Aron, 1965; Craft, 1970). They were invited to Britain to fulfil such a role and many have continued generally to hold this position. Although it is the case that many black people have excelled in education and have risen up the occupational ladder in various areas (Mac

Donald, 2001), they are still more likely than whites to be found in low status, low paid jobs and indeed to be unemployed (Jenkins, 1986; Drew & Gray, 1992; Leslie et al., 1998; Blackaby et al., 1999).

They also have similar disadvantaged positions outside work, for example in housing (Modood et al., 1997). Generally they are said to live on the fringes of society having neither political nor social equality (Wrech et al., 1996). Indeed, they are particularly vulnerable to racist abuse and persecution from fellow working class members who see their interests as being in conflict (HMSO, 1989). This situation does not seem to be improving as recent well-publicised racist murders have demonstrated (MacPherson Report, 1999; *The Daily Mail*, February 1999; Race, Class, Commentary, 1999).

It is one of the contentions of this thesis that the position of black people on the margins of society and in relation to the indigenous working class is maintained and perpetuated by all the institutions of society and the school plays a particularly important role in this process. This process is unlikely to be as a result of a national conspiracy; rather this appears to follow naturally from the racism that is inherent in the structures and institutions of the society (Gillborn & Gipps, 1999; Peach, 1996; Fitzgerald et al., 1999).

Of more importance than the independent role of schools, are the race and the class position of black people in British society (Kundnani, 2000; Power 2000). The majority of West Indians play a useful role in that they can be utilised when the need arises and dispensed with in times of economic recession, or used as scapegoats to explain economic problems. Their stigmatisation by society also renders unity with the indigenous proletariat impossible, since their interests are portrayed as being in opposition (Hall et al., 1978). Thus, 'achievement' or 'underachievement' may not be

particularly important in the light of their class position, racism and stigmatisation.

The educational system, educational researchers and others are, however, adept at justifying the position of black people in society in terms of their own failures. It therefore seems to go without saying, that there is an inextricable relationship between them and this has led to schools ignoring the essential fact that they reproduce the social division of labour. Stuart Hall et al. argued that it is the education system, which reproduces the wage earner within the class-structured division of labour. It distributes the cultural skills appropriate to each sector within the technical division of labour, and attempts to construct collective identity and disposition appropriate to the positions of subordination for which the majority are destined (Hall et al., 1978).

The debate around the education/social reproduction issue insists however that schools are not reducible to the relations of production. It contends that there are contradictions and that schools are not always functional to the needs of capital, the link often being broken by the conscious and unconscious resistance of teachers and pupils (Reynolds, 1984).

This position is supported by a significant work by Mac an Ghaill. His work gives prominence to this group of successful black working class pupils, who challenged the prevalent view of black low achievement and who developed their own strategies to survive the institutional racism of school and college. Mac an Ghaill labelled their approach, '...resistance within accommodation'. (Mac an Ghaill, 1988:9)

The pupils were seen to reject the racism within their institutions. However, '...on the other hand they highly value the acquisition of academic qualification.... A strategy that is anti-school but pro-education...' (Mac an Ghaill, 1988:11).

However, it can be argued that the education system has 'reproduced' the young black worker at the lower end of the employment production and skills (Bordieu in Dale et al., 1978). This is accomplished, in part, through a variety of racially specific mechanisms. For instance, if we take the view that social reproduction is accomplished through cultural reproduction, and that the school system 'favours' the inheritors of the dominant culture, the culture of the black child is being constantly expropriated, by its practical devaluation. This may take the form of the patronising stereotypical and racist attitudes of some teachers and schools. Or it may take the form of total rejection and mis-recognition of their culture in the curriculum or indeed misrepresentation of their culture (Wilson, 1987; Haskey & Wheatley-Price, 1998; Modood, 1997).

Sewell found that teachers were in general antagonistic to Black culture (although Sewell rightly asked 'which black culture?' arguing that the concept black is a politically constructed category and that there is no such thing as a homogenous black culture). However he demonstrates that teachers within the school blamed the 'black culture' that black boys in the school presented (Sewell, 1997).

Pierre Bourdieu's assessment of the process at play in the French context might be applicable here also. He argued:

> In general, children and their families make their own choices by reference to the constraints, which determine them. Even when the choices seem to them to follow simply from taste and vocational sense they nevertheless indicate the roundabout effect of objective conditions.... The structure of the objective chances of social mobility and, more precisely, of the chances of social mobility by means of education, conditions attitudes to school and it is precisely these attitudes which are most important in defining the chances of access to education, of accepting the values and norms of the school and of succeeding within the framework and thus rising in society. (Quoted in Dale, 1978:110)

He further argued that psychologists have observed that the level of aspiration of individuals is essentially determined by reference to the probability (judged

intuitively by means of previous success and failure) of achieving the desired goals.

The experience of first-generation blacks has been a lesson to the succeeding generation of the discrepancy between hard work, loyalty and achievement (Dodgson, 1984). The struggles of the first blacks that came to England have seemingly not reaped them much political, social or cultural benefit.

Levin's arguments further supported this point. He said:

> A successful individual typically sets his goals somewhat, but not too much, above his last achievement. In this way he steadily raises his level of aspiration....The unsuccessful individual, on the other hand, tends to show one of two reactions. He sets his goals very low, frequently below his past achievement.... Or, he sets his goal far above his ability. If the standard of a group is low, an individual will slacken his effort and set his goal far below those he could reach. He will, on the other hand, raise his goal if the group's standards are raised (Levin, 1948:113).

So it is possible that the aspirations of black children in the British educational system will be related to their perception of the objective position of black people in the economic/social and political system.

Bourdieu summarised his own position as follows:

> The influence of the family milieu and the general social environment...tend to discourage ambitions seen as excessive and somewhat suspect in that they imply rejection of the individual's social origins. Thus, everything conspires to bring back those who, as we say, 'have no future' to 'reasonable' hope and in fact, in many cases, to make them give up hope. (Quoted in Levin, 1948:25)

This position seems to echo some of the realities of the black experience in British schools. It is, therefore, not surprising that black children in some inner city schools opt out of and rebel against the school system and indeed against society as a whole. One wonders what role the sustaining view or even more the assertion that black children are hopeless low achievers, that they cannot be contained in schools and have to be excluded and so do not have or deserve a future, play in their responses in school and in society.

The French philosopher Althusser argued that the school reflects the relations

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of production and serves the interest of the capitalist ruling class (Quoted in Cosin, 1972). For the ruling class to survive and prosper, he argued, the reproduction of labour power is essential. He argued that the reproduction of labour power involves two processes. First, the reproduction of skills necessary for an efficient labour force and second, the reproduction of ruling class ideology and the socialisation of workers into it. These processes combine to reproduce a technically efficient, submissive and obedient workforce. The role of education in capitalist society, he contended, is the reproduction of such a workforce. Thus Althusser argued that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time a reproduction of its submission to ruling ideology. This submission is reproduced by a number of ideological state apparatuses, which include the mass media, religion, and education.

Although Althusser's views are not backed by specific evidence, it would seem that the education system does not radically alter the class structure of society. It is not an agent of social change but replicates the structure of society within its own organisation and generates the hierarchical traits of society inter generationally. In addition to the class ideology, it can be argued that racist ideology impacts on and structures the relationship of teachers to pupils, the perception of pupils of themselves, their outlook and their ambitions. Some, as in the case of those young people studied by Mac an Ghaill, and some who are the subject of this study, seemingly refused to capitulate under the weight of this negative ideology be it class or racist and do succeed in schools. By so doing they were perhaps demonstrating that they were more than capable of rejecting and subverting dominant racist and class ideologies and succeeding. The pupils in Mac an Ghaill's study said they were superior to whites and identified positively with black culture. 'They are proud to be

black and female and are a central link in the black working-class community's struggles.' (Mac an Ghaill, 1988:35).

Another significant contribution to this debate was that of Bowles and Gintis who contended that the major role of education is the reproduction of labour power. They argued that education contributes to the reproduction of a workforce with the kinds of personalities, attitudes and outlooks which will fit them for the exploited status. For example, traits such as obedience, submissiveness and discipline (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

In a study based on a sample of two hundred and thirty-seven members of a Senior High School in New York, they examined the relationship between grades and personality traits. They found that low grades were related to creativity, aggressivity and independence and concluded that these traits were penalised by the school. They found a number of characteristics, which they argued indicated subordinacy and discipline associated with high grades and concluded that the school rewarded such characteristics. These included perseverance, consistency, dependability and punctuality.

Bowles and Gintis concluded that personality which can be summarised as submission to authority, is related to high grades, that schools foster types of personality development compatible with the relationship of dominance and subordinacy in the common economic sphere.

Capitalism, they contended, requires workers who will obey, submit to control from above and take orders rather than question them. By encouraging certain personality characteristics and discouraging others, schools help to produce this kind of worker. Schools, they argued provided justification for educational inequalities by creating the belief that they provide the opportunity for fair and open competition

whereby talents and abilities are developed, graded and certificated. The educational system was portrayed as a meritocracy but they posited that occupational attainment was based on family background rather than talent.

Thus, the wealthy, powerful, non-working class whites, in our context, would tend to obtain high qualifications and highly rewarding jobs irrespective of their ability. The education system disguises this with the myth of meritocracy and thus provides the legitimisation for pre-existing economic disparities (Young, 1958). The education thus serves to legitimate inequality by creating the myth that those at the top deserve their power and privilege; that they have achieved their status on merit and that those at the bottom have only themselves to blame. In this way the education system reduces the discontent that a hierarchy of wealthy power and prestige would tend to produce.

This issue of the position of black people in the class system and the seeming preoccupation with the 'underachievement' of black children are relevant to my thesis since these can be said to have detracted attention from the real basis of the problem, which is not one of equality and meritocracy, but one of marginalization and continued stigmatisation of black people. The whole concept of 'underachievement' of West Indian pupils arguably therefore aims to cloud this fact and to blame them for the inferior and unequal position that they hold in British society. Further, schools seem to have a particular antipathy towards black pupils, especially black boys who are perceived, rightly or wrongly, as presenting a particular challenge, young people perhaps who do not acquiesce under the role ascribed. Conversely those who, despite the system, succeed are generally ignored in research and debate, while the focus has steadfastly remained over the past forty years on the construction of blacks as low achievers. This is exemplified in many areas but overtly in their disproportionate

exclusion rates, an analysis of which now follows.

1.4.10 SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS

I feel that a brief analysis of the controversial issue of the exclusion of black pupils,

especially that of black boys, will further emphasise the tense or even adversarial

context in which black pupils appear to be schooled in Britain. This analysis will

further illuminate the educational environment in which black pupils are educated and

add to the overall understanding of how black achievers might see and experience

schooling and why.

The exclusion rates of black pupils are disproportionate to their presence in the

school population (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996). Data from secondary schools show that

exclusion rates for children from African Caribbean backgrounds are nearly six times

the rate of whites (Bourne et al., 1994; Office for Standards in Education, 1995/6;

Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Wright et al., 2000).

> The latest figures allow the calculation of how many individual young people
> are accounted for by the over representation: compared to the rate of white and
> Asian exclusions, each year around 1,000 extra young Black people are
> permanently excluded from school. (Gillborn in Donovan, 1998:13)

This phenomenon may not be seen as surprising since according to

Sivanandan blacks are already more excluded than others from most aspects of social

life in Britain (in Bourne, 1994).

Explanations for the disproportionate exclusion rate for black pupils include

both personal and environmental deficiencies. Black children, it is said, are more

prone to bringing their problems to schools because of the social environments and

families from which they come – environment of bad housing and harassment for

example (Bourne, 1994; Haskey, 1998; Cullingford, 1999). However, it is not only

black children from inner cities who are more likely to be excluded from school than

their white peers. Even in leafy suburban areas black children are over represented in

exclusion figures, though the figures may be said to be statistically small (Smith, 1998; Coppins, 1998; Blair, 2001).

The exclusion of black pupils from school is not new. Coard described a pattern of exclusion that was initially presented as being in the interest of the black child until the black community succeeded in arguing that it exemplified the racism inherent in the educational system (Coard, 1971).

Little seems to have changed since Coard's report. Indeed, the current pattern of exclusion may arguably be worse in effect than the previous exclusion of black children from mainstream school. Currently many excluded pupils do not receive any education at all. Pupil Referral Units (PRU), established to educate excluded children are often hard pressed to keep up with the demand. Home tuition, the other alternative, is often also operating with long waiting lists and where it is available, allocates only five hours per week tuition for excluded pupils. Most recently the Government has talked of giving more power to schools to exclude pupils considered disruptive (DFE website Press Notices, 2001). Considering current statistics, this does not augur well for black pupils, especially boys.

Explanations for the exclusion of black children tend to focus, as have other explanations, on pathologising black families, rather than on school policies and structures. Black children are said to have intractable behavioural problems. Time and again teachers are shown to perceive black pupils as more aggressive and confrontational than other children (Mac an Ghaill, 1998; Sewell, 1997; Mirza, 1992; Donovan, 1998). According to Gillborn,

> There is growing evidence that the exclusion of young Black people reflects the operation of deeply held, but complex, differential expectations and assumptions. Qualitative research, often involving detailed interview and observational work in schools, indicate that white teachers frequently expect Black children to present a more severe threat to their authority. This can lead to teachers acting more against Black children more quickly than their peers,

sometimes for 'offences' that others may 'get away with. (in Donovan, 1998:14)

Further, it has been argued that it was inevitable that the education reform of the Tory Party, culminating in the Education Reform Act of 1988, would lead to an increase in pupil exclusion from school since it inadvertently promoted racial segregation through its 'open enrolment' policy. Delegated budgets, publications of results and league tables inadvertently became a marketing strategy to obtain more of a certain kind of pupils and hence more funds (Bourne et al., 1991). In an article in *The Guardian* in 1992, it was argued that schools were excluding troublesome pupils in order to 'improve their image', fearing that 'disruptive children' could drag down their reputations when they were required to publish examination league tables (The Guardian 17 June, 1992).

Cutbacks in support services such as education psychologists may also be part of the explanation of the growth in exclusion where the intervention and prevention needed may not occur (Bourne, 1991). Faced with the increased bureaucratic demands of the National Curriculum, one education initiative after another, and the associated pressure of school league tables, staff may also be said to lack the time to deal with breaches of discipline. Matters may therefore be referred more often than usual to senior managers where the situation may escalate and result in permanent exclusions. According to Stirling, heads who had previously been sympathetic to offering extra support to difficult and low achieving pupils were now seeing them as a liability (Stirling, 1992).

Governing bodies of school to whom appeals are presented, anxious about their schools' reputation, eager to be seen to support classroom teachers and head teachers, may view exclusions as an easy way out. All this instead of tackling issues

that are said to be presented by pupils or even more daring, challenging the recommendations or decisions and actions of classroom teachers and head teachers.

The assumption is also that the problems that schools cite as reasons for exclusion *are* indeed the root causes. Exclusions are often not exclusively caused by one factor but a number of factors. For example, they can be said to reflect the stereotypical assumptions and attitudes of individual teachers and governors towards black pupils and in policies and practice of schools. Of importance too are social and economic factors and the disruptions to the lives of black pupils resulting from police treatment, racial harassment and attacks and the response of the black child, especially boys, to these pressures (HMSO, 1989; MacPherson, 1999).

The government legislative reforms in the Education Act 1993 and publication of draft circulars containing mass advice to schools and local authorities on pupil behaviour and exclusions, have sought to highlight the issue and the poor practices and attitudes which contributed to the problem (DFE, 1993). These have seemingly had little or no effect. The exclusion rates of black pupils continue to rise.

> ...the 'exclusions' issue shows us one of the sharpest and clearest deformity of the system, and one which affects thousands of young people and their parents on a daily basis, cutting them off from their human right and entitlement to the best in education. (Bourne, 1991:27)

The exclusions of black pupils from schools demonstrate that black pupils generally do not find schools places that are conducive to learning and development, rather schools seems to be places of conflict where they are under constant surveillance, pressure and threat of exclusion. A vicious cycle is therefore created where black pupils are fully aware that teachers have different expectations of them to that held of other pupils, hold seemingly intractable stereotypes of them and generally treat them less favourably than they do white pupils. It is conceivable that the reactions of pupils, especially black boys, to the disparaging labels attached to them

and the consequent treatment of them, may in part contribute to the rising exclusion rates of black pupils which, in turn contributes to the presentation of black children as underachievers in school. Indeed that achieving pupils may well be those who are adept at finding strategies to avoid being excluded from school.

The above discussion on factors cited in previous research on low achieving black pupils have mainly focused on deficiencies of pupils and their families. The glaring question however is, what of schools? What are their roles in the performance of black pupils?

1.4.11 INEFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

Although my thesis will not focus on individual schools in relation to their effectiveness or ineffectiveness but rather on the perceptions of black achieving pupils and their school performance, I feel it is necessary to briefly refer to the debate on school effectiveness. There has it seems been a subtle shift in focus from the family and the child to the role of the school in the performance of pupils. This has coincided with the National Curriculum, SATs tests and the publication of external examination results and hence the ranking of schools and in League Tables. Along with these there has been the 'shaming' of schools that are deemed to be failing by their placement on Special Measures and indeed by public scrutiny of their results. This whole area has been extremely controversial because of the differential between the 'raw materials' that schools begin with in the first place and factors such as the social environment of schools, social class, background and the issue of 'value added'. None of these has removed the focus from the role of schools and how they can and should be affecting the achievement of pupils in their charge.

In challenging the view that has been held almost uncritically for many years, that schools can be only a marginal influence pupil performance, Rutter et al.,

published a study of twelve London secondary schools (Rutter & Maughan., 1979). And Mortimer et al., conducted a study of fifty London junior schools (Mortimer, Sammons et al., 1988). Both these studies demonstrated that schools can and do make a difference and pointed to factors within schools, which impacted positively on pupil achievement. In the Mortimer study it was shown that effective schools enhanced the performance of pupils regardless of their background. Pupils from working class backgrounds attending effective schools achieved better than children of middle class backgrounds who attended the least effective schools.

One other study that received a great deal of attention was that by Tomlinson (1990). She conducted a qualitative longitudinal study with 3000 pupils, from their transfer to secondary school to the end of their fifth year when they sat GCE and CSE examinations. It was a large study with a great deal of quantitative and qualitative data. The conclusions drawn were that in effective schools, pupils gained good results regardless of their ethnicity.

> There are considerable differences between urban comprehensive schools in the levels of attainment reached by pupils with similar background characteristics and initial attainments...the 'same child' might get CSE grade 3 in one school and an 'O' Level grade B in another...and schools that were more effective for white pupils were also more effective for ethnic minority pupils. By shifting the focus of school performance from pupils to the school, the difference in performance between schools can be very substantial. (Tomlinson, 1990:340-341)

These studies do not deny that a variety of factors outside school impact on pupil achievement but rather that schools cannot completely absolve themselves from responsibility for the performance of their pupils.

On the face of it, this focus seems to be potentially a breakthrough for black pupils. Surely if schools accept that they can make a difference, all pupils with black pupils among them, will see improved academic performances as schools fulfil their obligations to them. There is, however, another side to this focus on school

effectiveness. This preoccupation with school performance may well be further disadvantaging black pupils. Schools conscious of the positions in League Tables, the perception of the local and national community of them and of course that of the Local Education Authority, the Government and the Inspectorate, may well be less tolerant of pupils who rightly or wrongly are said to be failing. One wonders whether the disproportionately high exclusion rate of black pupils is evidence of this, demonstrating that whatever the ideological and policy shifts, black pupils are scapegoated, potentially disadvantaged or even sacrificed by the system. It is not therefore surprising that theorists and researchers, whatever the new initiatives, can hardly comprehend that achievement is possible for black pupils in British schools.

1.5 CONCLUSION

The evidence presented above indicated that the education of black children is beset with obstacles. Both they and the families from which they come are perceived in negative ways. Seemingly incontrovertible scientific evidence has falsely suggested that they are less endowed with intelligence than pupils from other races. They are said to be stricken with low self-image and poor self-concept. Likewise the weight of evidence indicated that teachers viewed them as potential deviants, had low expectations of them and as a consequence were more likely to focus on their misdemeanours, punish them and even totally deprive them of their educational entitlement by excluding them from school.

In general, according to the evidence, black pupils, especially boys, do not respond well to such pressure, often creating, it appears, adversarial relationships between them and their teachers in schools. This impacts adversely on their achievement, informs further the view held of them by society and schools, and

thereby creates a vicious cycle which is perpetuated by schools, society and arguably black boys themselves.

Girls in the main are said to react differently to the pressure presented by the racialised society. Like boys, the evidence indicated, they are fully aware of the negative perception and low expectation held of them. They are aware that they do not enter a level playing field in school or in society. Evidence indicated however that black girls understand that education enhances their opportunities, even in a society that is perceived to discriminate against them. They therefore develop appropriate strategies to defy negativism, survive and achieve the goals they set themselves in the education system.

New evidence on effective schools has attempted to shift the more usual emphasis and arguably the blame from pupils and their families by analysing the role that schools can play in impacting on the performance of black pupils. This evidence stated that schools should not, as they may have done in the past, absolve themselves from responsibility for the performance of some of their pupils. It is not clear whether change in emphasis is impacting in any significant way on the perception, treatment or overall experiences of black pupils in schools. Or whether black pupils and their families continue to lose faith in the school system and see schools as a hindrance rather than help in their bids for educational advancement.

This above is however not the entire picture, although as we have seen the major focus of research has been on low achievement, there have been studies which have looked at black achievers, studies which indicated that the black children do not all underachieve in schools. Rather that there are black pupils who, despite the unequal society, the shortcomings of the school system and individuals within it, manage to succeed in the school system.

I will now turn our attention to these studies of achieving black pupils to provide further background to my thesis which has as its focus the perspective of black achievers and factors which they consider impact on their achievement in school.

CHAPTER 2

FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON BLACK PUPILS' EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION - BLACK PEOPLE IN BRITISH SOCIETY

In the previous Chapter I have argued that the majority of research work and debate on black children in British schools has focused on low achievement. I have argued that because of the perception of black people as intellectually inferior, from pathological families, living in deprived impoverished cultures and subjected to racism and discrimination, researchers in the main have not been able to countenance the possibility of black *achievers*. A scattering of research has suggested that black pupils do not all fail in schools and indeed has explored both in school and out-of-school factors that can impact on the performance of black pupils' educational performance (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Nehaul, 1996).

In this Chapter I therefore balance the debate on the performance of black pupils in school by focusing on issues of achievement. That is, the factors that have been demonstrated in research to contribute to the achievement of black pupils and those that are said to detract from such achievement. This is being done because these research have also helped me to refine my research questions and to complete the picture of the experience of black pupils in the British educational system.

The Chapter therefore begins by analysing the concept of blackness. It argues that the terminology and labels attached to this group are generally given by those wielding power in society and that these labels by implication generalise about black people often taking little account of, for example, diverse histories, cultures, family traditions, values, educational and occupational backgrounds. It therefore assesses the implication of racial stratification in society in general and in the education system in

particular. It argues that on one level it is considered almost uncouth to make references to the impact of race in British society but that on another, so powerful is this concept of race that it impacts on all aspects of social life, including education.

This Chapter demonstrates that blackness is not perceived in a positive light in British society. It argues that this negativity is reflected in such factors as (1) the definition and perception of people of mixed heritage as black and more profoundly (2) on the basis on which parents exercise choice of schools for their children.

The rationale for this discussion is to demonstrate that racist ideas are incorporated into the fabric of British society and hence into the mentality and consciousness of people, both black and white. Likewise it is to demonstrate that black children are faced with what might appropriately be defined as an uphill struggle to achieve in schools since their race affects how they are perceived and treated. It is therefore to place in a context the feat that black achievers accomplish when they manage to defy the negative labelling and low expectation that seem to be attached to them by society.

The Chapter then debates the concept of achievement and attempts to arrive at a conclusion of what this means and hence what is actually being looked at when one researches the achievement of black pupils in schools. It argues that arguably all pupils achieve in some way as they progress through school, that academic achievement, as represented by formal examinations, is the achievement that is most valued and desired, not least of all by black children and their families.

In reviewing the literature on achievement, I will try to isolate both the in-school and out-of school factors that have been found to impact on achievement, enabling me to add to the research questions that have emerged from my analysis of the literature on low achievement. Not least, the inclusion of research on achievement

serves to acknowledge that black children can and do achieve in school and that there is evidence which testifies to this fact, despite the focus that I have outlined in the previous Chapter on low achievement.

Previous research on the achievement of black pupils has looked at both factors within-school and out-of-school. In analysing this research I attempt to distinguish between these and to analyse the relative significance of in-school and out- of- school factors in the achievement of black pupils. I believe that establishing a distinction and assessing the relative significance of both is important because in the past it seems that schools have been seen as almost impotent with regard to the performance of black children. As was argued in Chapter 1, black low achievement has been blamed on black children, their families and their cultures. The analysis of the factors in relation to achievement will add another perspective to understanding of how the education system impacts on black children as well as how they, their families and their communities impact on the education system and their performance within it.

The Chapter concludes that despite research on achievement and a seeming shift in emphasis from blame of black culture, community, families and pupils to a critical assessment of how effective schools can impact on pupil performance, overwhelming evidence still tends to favour the position that black children are prone to underachieve and are a behavioural liability in schools. The Chapter therefore further concludes that the latter views continue to have the greater impact and that the experiences and perception of achieving black pupils do not therefore enter the public domain where they can impact positively on the general experiences and performance of black pupils.

The main arguments of this Chapter are therefore:

- Research studies have identified black achievers within the British educational system

- There has been a shift of emphasis from *blaming* the black family and the black community for the perceived low achievement of black pupils in school

- A number of within-school and out-of-school factors are cited in research as contributing to the achievement of black pupils in school

- Despite research on achievement of black pupils, overwhelming evidence still points to their low achievement

- This latter evidence continues to have the greater impact on the perception of black pupils in British schools.

2.2 TERMINOLOGY

Over the past forty years, the terminology used to define black people has changed, ranging in turn from immigrant to coloured, to West Indian to Afro-Caribbean, to African-Caribbean to black, the latter two terms now being used interchangeably (Berthoud, 1998). This fluctuation in terminology is a graphic illustration of the racialised nature of this society and the fact that in the main, it is those wielding power who most powerfully impact on the labelling process. Indeed, confusion in defining this group leads inevitably to the question as to how conclusions can be drawn about black people when it is often not clear which actual group is being assessed (Ratcliffe, 1996; Bonnett & Carrington, 2000).

Colour is culturally specific; a white person in the Caribbean would not always be defined as such in Britain and would most certainly not be defined as white in the United States (Henriques, 1953; Dalphinis, 1985). The term 'black' can be used as a political, historical, social or visual definition; sometimes having little to do with

the degree of pigmentation, often having everything to do with it. In this section, however, as in previous ones, I will use the generic term 'black' to mean those of African or Caribbean heritage. I will not replace terminology used in specific research or debate.

2.3 RACE AND SOCIETY

It was argued in Chapter 1 that the focus in relation to the education of the black child has been almost exclusively on their perceived low achievement. Indeed this preoccupation demonstrates the racialised nature of the society. By racialised I mean that, in addition to class, gender and age, for example, our society is structured in terms of the socially constructed racial grouping of individuals within it. This position is in line with Jenkins et al's definition of our society as a racially stratified society (Jenkins, in Verma & Bagley, 1997).

This stratification of individuals into racial groups is a complex process, determined and influenced by a variety of factors such as colour, religion, interpretations and perceptions of historical events such as slavery and colonialism, political ideologies, geography, intercultural relationships, language, socio-economic position and status. Patricia Williams in the 1997 Reith Lectures argued that even though the racial feature of our society is all pervasive and powerful, '...the power of race resembles...a public secret' (Williams, 1997:10). This is, she suggested, because, 'racial and ethnic experience constitutes a divide that cannot be spoken' (Williams, 1997:10) She describes the society as one, '...driven by bitter histories of imposed hierarchy' (Williams, 1997:3).

Yet it is almost said to be unseeming to refer to this racial divide and hierarchy. So powerful is this concept of race and its impact on social processes that

even its definition is determined by those wielding power. Leicester and Taylor argued that in Britian the concept of race is determined by white people.

> Our concept of race (which largely means what white people think are not white) and all that flows from them are powerful determinants of social processes and ethnic identities. (Leicester & Taylor 1992:72)

This allocation into racial categories consequently affect treatment, they exemplied:

> People whom white people think are white get treated in one way, and people whom white people think are something other than white get treated in less favourable ways. (Leicester & Taylor 1992:73)

An example of this is people of mixed race/mixed heritage. It can be argued that the negativity attached to blackness is graphically illustrated by the general tendency to define such individuals as black and not white. It can therefore be said that blackness taints and defiles the purity of white, thus they cannot possibly be white.

All social groups are intrinsically diverse yet the assumption seems to be that black children constitute one homogeneous mass. Rarely is the complexity of the backgrounds from which black children come taken into consideration. Black people in Britain originate from diverse geographical regions, the Caribbean, Africa, North, Central and South America. There are, for example, over two hundred and fifty Islands in the Caribbean alone, each with its own particular historical, political, economic, social and religious developments. Each family has its own particular history, beliefs, practices and traditions, social class, economic position, religious affiliation, expectations and outlook. The list is not exhaustive but appears seemingly irrelevant in a racialised society.

It has been argued by Mullard that Britain is endemically racist (Mullard, 1980). Analysis of the experiences of black people in almost all areas of society reveal evidence of this, from their disproportionate numbers in the criminal justice

system (Home Office, 1997, 1998a, 1998b), their higher unemployment rates (Blackaby et al., 1999) to their higher exclusion rates in schools (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996). Indeed, according to Suthcliffe and Wong, 'manifestations of this racism – individual and institutional- can cut across class lines' (Suthcliffe & Wong, 1986:12).

Evidence of the racialised nature of the society can even be found in parental choices of schools. Bagley (1996) found that between one third and one half of white parents interviewed cited the presence of Asians in schools as a major factor negatively influencing their choice of school. This indeed has been a feature of schooling in Britain since the sixties (Bagley, 1996). The belief that the proportion of black children in a school has an adverse impact on it is not obsolete, despite being a complex idea with an equally complex rationale on the part of those holding this position. This philosophy could be said to influence not only white parents but also black parents (Sewell, 1997).

In his study of black boys, Sewell found that over the years, white and Asian boys have almost disappeared from the school (Sewell, 1997). The foundation of Sewell's explanation for this is that black boys are subjected to a particular brand of racial stereotyping not attached to black girls or Asian boys or girls. Sewell demonstrated that as a result of this, and within a context where black boys are predominant, it is not only white teachers who hold negative views of them but black teachers too were found to use racist discourse in their analysis of black boys (Sewell, 1997). Likewise, in relation to black parents, it is possible that even though they are subjected to discrimination and racism, they too have been influenced by the racist ideology of society. Racist ideas have therefore become incorporated into both their mentality and into their consciousness, leading them to judge predominantly black schools using racist frames of reference. Alternatively, it is possible to argue that

many black parents are simply suspicious of schools that are packed with black children. They too are aware of how these schools are perceived and, in addition, are perhaps fearful that only alongside white children and certain Asian children will their children be properly schooled (Sewell, 1997).

This is clearly a worrying picture, one that illustrates the powerful impact of racial stereotyping and disadvantage both in policy and practice. There has, however, been a radical transformation over the years in how perceptible the impact of race has been on policy and practice. In the past, when the presence of black people in Britain was relatively new, expressions of racism was arguably more apparent (Coard, 1971). Now at the start of the 21st Century, the subtleties of racism makes recognition difficult, possibly leading to the conclusion that racism is an anachronism.

On the contrary, the experiences of black children in school suggest that their race affects how they are perceived, treated and, more profoundly, it impinges on the outcome of their schooling. Many do underachieve as a consequence of the racialised nature of the society but many somehow perform well. If schools, like all institutions are racialised, how do some black children manage to overcome this and achieve? What does existing evidence on black achievement tell us about the factors that contribute to their achievement? Indeed what constitutes achievement generally, specifically for the black child? It is to an analysis of these that we will now turn.

2.4 BLACK PUPILS AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT - WHAT CONSTITUTES ACHIEVEMENT

In a society where it can be argued that the premier role of education is to provide workers at different levels for the workforce (Bowles & Gintis, 1975; Davis & Moore, 1967), it could be argued that the only failures in this system are those who are not

placed in work after completing their education. However our society is highly differentiated and class based (Boudon, 1974; Westergaard & Resler, 1976; Goldthorpe et al., 1968), and achievement is judged in more complex terms than simple placement in work. Indeed achievement is not easy to define or to monitor. This issue needs further examination.

All children make some kind of progress as they move from infant to secondary school. If children were to be compared with themselves as they progress though school, all children would be deemed to have achieved and only the degree of achievement would then be the issue. But how does one measure this nebulous area? A child's performance in schools can be measured against her own ability that is, what she is capable of. But this begs the question of how a child's particular capacity is to be assessed and when (Foster et al., 1996). It has been said by Cole that achievement can also be measured against others in the same class, the same year group, area or region of school, type of school, area of residence, and so on (Cole, 1989).

Indeed, there are issues around knowledge and skills themselves. Which of these are to be considered most important? Academic achievement, achievement in sports, the arts, social skills including relationships with peers and adults, initiative, organisation, the list is endless. This question of achievement is therefore not straightforward, since what may be deemed achievement for one child in one school may easily be viewed as low achievement of another child in the same class, school, family or area. Herein lies the area of 'value-added' and the vexed question of the impact on achievement of individual factors such as, the school, family, environmental factors and countless other permutations (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Schagen, 1998; Goldstein et al., 2000; Sanders & Horn, 1994; Goyochea, 1998).

Achievement can also be said to relate to the wider role of education in society. Willis demonstrated that rejection of school in the case of the working class boys he studies, was a preparation for future semi-skilled and unskilled labour (Willis, 1977). Indeed Bowles and Gintis' assertion that the importance of education is 'behaviour modification' is seemingly still relevant in contemporary Britain, especially as it relates to black children (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). They argued that school is repressive and this is evident in the grading system operating in schools (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Teachers are said to reward able children who conform to, and strengthen, the social order of the school and punish violators with lower grades and other forms of disapproval.

> The education system legitimates economic inequality by providing an open, objective, and ostensibly meritocratic mechanism for assigning individuals to unequal economic positions. (Bowles & Gintis, 1976:103)

Achievement here is seen as high grades and eventual placement in jobs offering high rewards and status. And since the school system is portrayed as providing the right framework within a meritocratic system, it can justly be said to absolve itself from perceived failures within it.

Specifically in relation to black children in America, Bowles and Gintis have argued that as:

> Clearly as blacks have moved towards educational (and regional) parity with whites, other mechanism - such as entrapment in centre-city ghettos, the subordination of jobs...have intensified to maintain a more-or-less constant degree of racial income inequality. Blacks certainly suffer from educational inequality, but the root of income exploitation lies outside of education, in a system of economic power and privilege in which racial distinction play an important role. (Bowles & Gintis, 1976:35)

A similar view is put forward by Walter Rodney, who saw education as crucial in society for the preservation and the maintenance of the (existing) social structure. If a society is structured along racial lines it follows that in-built within it are structures

which serve to maintain the status quo, including schools (Rodney, 1972). All forms of grading systems, including external examinations are arguably part of these structures.

Achievement cannot therefore be viewed solely in relation to what occurs within school. It is arguable that the real achievers among black children brought up in this racialised society are those who realise that, according to Illich, 'Not only education but social reality has become schooled' (Illich, 1973:110). And similarly that, 'School has become the world religion of the modernised proletariat, and makes futile promises of the salvation of the poor' (Illich, 1973:18).

Black achievers may therefore be those who realise that schools cannot truly be effective for black children since they are part of a society which is founded on perpetuating their inequalities. Intelligent black children especially, are aware of this. They know that no matter how well they do in school, the battle remains impossibly incomplete. Mac an Ghaill (1988) found that black achieving girls were pro-education but anti-school. Schools were seen by them as creating a negative mould in which they were being forced and in order to achieve, they had to develop a particular strategy which emphasised only the outcome obtainable from school rather than the process of schooling itself (Mac an Ghaill, 1988). That is, they found no intrinsic satisfaction from school so focused on the extrinsic rewards. Although this strategy seemed to work for these girls, it is arguable that this cannot be held as the ideal. It can be argued that both, that is intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction, are desirable since, if only extrinsic satisfaction is derived, only those pupils with sufficient motivation and foreknowledge will benefit from school.

Less commonly, achievement can be viewed more widely than simple attainment of high grades and formal qualifications. Peters argued that, ' "Education"

covers a range of tasks as well as achievements. It is used to cover both trying and succeeding' (Peters, 1966:26). This suggests that some aspects of educational achievement cannot be measured easily even though an individual may have perceptibly advanced from one level of learning to another. A child going through school may have developed the ability to see the connection between the knowledge gained in the classroom and other things but unless an examination is devised to verify this, the achievement passes unrecognised. It goes without saying therefore, that generally achievement is based on a narrow definition of what pupils gain from school over the period of compulsory schooling.

The complexity of school achievement and its relationship to external factors must therefore be acknowledged. There seems to have been consensus over the years that the most important measures of achievement for schools, and indeed for society, are external examination results analysed in terms of national averages. This has become more obvious and significant since the advent of the National Curriculum and the publication of examinations results, the ranking of schools and the naming and shaming of the ones perceived to be failing. As well as the traditional external examinations, there are currently Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) at the Key Stages, ages seven, eleven and fourteen, that are subjecting schools to scrutiny and analysis. In addition, with the concern over attendance and exclusion rates, these too are now in the public domain. It can be said therefore that achievement is a complex amalgam of school and individual performance with the most important of these being external examination performance at school.

However, while I focus on this latter aspect of achievement, that is achievement in formal examinations such as SATs and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs), I am fully aware that black children, as other children,

attain other successes in school. In a society which in the main can be said to frustrate and debilitate black people, what seems to be required of black children is a great deal of resilience starting in school and later in society. Arguably, many black children for whatever reason do not find this resiliency in order to attain formal qualifications. Many do not find it during their school days or do not realise what special skills and strategies are needed to achieve or that school achievement is important and a valuable tool for their futures. Others achieve, though not less laudably, after their period of compulsory schooling (Channer, 1997; MacDonald, 2001). Channer demonstrated in her study of black achieving adults, that many who would have been deemed failures at school, attained later success through further education, access courses and higher education (Channer, 1995). However while this is laudable for the individual, it leaves unanswered the question as to how and why achievement in terms of formal qualifications is actually attainable by black children in school when the converse is expected. Indeed when the nature of the society renders the opposite almost inevitable.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the above discussion is that although there are various forms of achievement and black pupils as do other pupils invariably make progress as they move up the school, both school and society place greater value on academic achievement than on other forms of educational achievement. Likewise, since school is closely aligned to the economy, it has among its roles allocation of pupils to appropriate jobs (Davis & Moore, 1967). Schools justify such allocation by its claim of meritocracy (Young, 1961). However, some evidence refutes this, suggesting rather that both society and the education system within it work to maintain the status quo, perpetuating inequality and racism (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, Fuller, 1984 in Hammersley & Woods). Black pupils who manage to

cope in school and achieve are therefore those with foreknowledge, motivation and those, who although perhaps gaining little or no intrinsic satisfaction from school, realise its significance and work to fulfil their own educational goals.

Having discussed the concept of achievement and assessed both the shortcomings and the complexity of this concept, this Chapter now turns its attention to research that has focused on other factors, both in and out of school, that have contributed to the achievement of black pupils in school.

2.5 STUDIES OF BLACK ACHIEVERS IN SCHOOLS - INTRODUCTION

Over the past forty years, the focus of research on black pupils has been on their low achievement. It appears that researchers have successfully convinced educators that the objective intellectual and social conditions and experiences of black children necessarily lead to low achievement and schools are impotent against this background (Jensen, 1972; Rex, 1973; Figueroa, 1991; Rampton, 1981).

There has been research which shows that black pupils do not constitute a homogenous mass and that some do 'deviate' from the mould of low achievement to which they have been ascribed (*The Sunday Times*, 1994; Channer, 1997; Nehaul, 1996). Indeed Bagley confirmed that, 'Much less emphasis has been placed in both British and American research on the reasons why some black children are particularly successful in schools' (Bagley, 1996:84).

One of the studies that has looked at achievement was that of Nehaul. She conducted qualitative research in four primary schools that were said by advisory staff to be, '...more positive i.e. genuinely interested in ensuring that equal opportunities are available to their black pupils' (Nehaul, 1996:50).

All the schools included black teachers and one had a black head teacher. Among Nehaul's conclusions were that teachers did not explain poor behaviour of their black children in terms of ethnicity and, that they were positive about the ethnicity, families and culture of these children. That they generally said parents of black children were supportive of the school, that many kept in touch with the activities of their children and supported the school in many ways, such as visiting and talking to teachers and listening to other children read.

Nehaul, in identifying black children who were high achievers suggested that:

> ...several factors promoting achievement were all operating and the key to their excellent performance was a cycle of success. This pattern was self-generating, promoting confidence in carrying our tasks, motivation and interest on the part of the child and special valuing on the part of the teacher. (Nehaul, 1996:72)

In one school she studied, high achieving pupils received extra status from peers and consequently an increased pride and confidence in their ability. Clearly in relation to learning, achievement was not devalued and the race of the children did not seem to detract from the 'status' they received from their peer.

Children in her sample, however, still had negative experiences related to their colour through name-calling and negative stereotyping. So these children, although only in primary school, did not have a school environment devoid of negative responses to their race. Nehaul did not however explore the strategies that these children employed to overcome the negativism they faced in school. It is not clear either which of the factors that she identified as contributing to their achievement had the greatest impact.

While this research presented a perspective that has not been dwelt on before, it was small scale, four schools in total and a sample of only twenty-five pupils. In addition, the fact that the schools were purposely selected on the basis of their

positive attitude to black children and had a recognised interest in overtly promoting equality among its pupils, introduced a bias that perhaps explained the achievement of the pupils highlighted. In addition, knowing the aim of the research, it may well be that teachers gave the response to her that the stated ethos of the school demanded.

An interesting explanation for the achievement of black children in school was put forward by Bagley et al. (1998). They studied one hundred and fifty black children of ten to eleven years with at least one parent form Caribbean background in a working class area of London. They found that the alienation of black parents from English culture was positively related to the achievement of black children. By this they meant that black children, '...who are alienated from English culture and institutions (including school and educational system) tend to have children who do *well* in school' (Bagley et al., 1998:89).

This alienation they found also provided evidence of the value of a positive ethnic self-image. Black children who succeeded in school in this sample therefore did so only because their parents were seemingly drawing from a source outside this society, perhaps something from their heritage or background. This is contrary to commonly held views of black people, especially in relation to low achievement, that so impoverished and pathological are their heritage families and environment that little within them can impact positively on their education.

In relation to general school performance, studies on achievement in school tended to find almost exclusively that social class is an important basis of attainment in school (Makler, 1970; Hymen in Bendix & Lipset, 1967, Dale & Griffith, 1970). I have argued above that rarely is the diversity to be found in black social grouping in Britain taken into account when assessing their performance in schools (see pp. 84-88). Mackler, in his review of studies in this area suggested that the picture of black

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success is a replica of white success (Mackler, 1970). That is the factors that tend to be important in the achievement of white pupils in school are the same factors that are important in the achievement of black pupils. Factors such as social class, parental interest and type of school attended. However, although it can be argued that similar factors have a bearing on the attainment of both groups, other convincing evidence suggest that there are significant differences between and within both groups (Sewell, 1997; Channer, 1997; Bagley, 1998; Mirza, 1992). Not least because of the impact on families and young people of the racial stratification previously discussed (see pp. 84-88).

One such difference was the differential level of achievement between black females and males. According to Mirza, 'Black girls do relatively well in school' (Mirza, 1992:10). Mirza too posed the question as to why this achievement of the black child, in this case black females, have been, '...consistently neglected for three decades?' (Mirza, 1992:10). Her explanation is of racism exemplified in hostility and fear towards black people. This having its roots in the early days of migration of these people to Britain and the invisibility of women, especially black women in British Society. Her assertion was that black females are achievers in British society, that their success is mainly ignored unless it is, '...manipulated to undermine the position of the black male' (Mirza, 1992:16). Or indeed when it is recognised it is used to portray black women as impossible superwoman. She does not however present the road to achievement as an easy one for the black female. In her study of comprehensive schools, she found that black girls had to contend with low expectation from teachers and overt and unintentional racism. By necessity therefore they had to employ their own strategies to, 'get by' (Mirza, 1992:83) and succeed.

Even before Mirza's study, Mary Fuller, in her study of black girls in the final year of compulsory schooling, found that they were orientated towards academic achievement. This is despite what she calls the 'double subordination' of black women in British society (Fuller, 1984).

I find this concept of 'double subordination' an interesting one. This belief has led to the assumption that black women are inextricably trapped by their biology. In reality black women are defining themselves and their goals, rejecting, like Mac an Ghaill's pupils, society's negative definition of them, achieving both in schools and employment (MacDonald, 2001). It is inconceivable that black women spend their lives stricken with the belief that because they are black and women, they cannot have high ambitions and achieve personal goals (Chigwada, 1987). I believe analysis of their education and employment achievement in Britain and other western countries, not to mention societies like the Caribbean, would contradict this position.

Further, the complexity of this general issue of black achievement is graphically illustrated in the differences in achievement that have been found within the group usually labelled 'black'. Separating Britain's blacks into black Africans and black Caribbeans, dramatically changes the academic performance hierarchy. Black Africans, for instance, outperform everyone, including Asians and whites. According to the latest figures, black Africans, Chinese and Asian Indians are 'over-represented' at the universities according to their presence in the population (Berthoud, 1999).

It is clear therefore that black children do not form a homogenous group within British society and so do not fail en masse in schools. Many do succeed but seemingly have to confront overt and subtle obstacles determined by the racialised nature of the society in the process of achievement. Likewise even though they have achieved, recognition of this is sparse with society's perception being that black

people steadfastly reside at the bottom of the achievement ladder. The implication of this may be cyclical with this ideology impacting adversely on black pupils in school who, in turn, may not see the point of application and hard work. Impacting on teachers, whose negative views and low expectations may be reinforced and hence again affecting adversely a high proportion of black pupils. Likewise, on employers, who may likewise internalise the negative ideology and may therefore feel potential black employees unworthy or unable to perform certain jobs, gain promotion, affecting therefore the economic position of black people in society and so conceivably the process continues.

The main conclusion, therefore, that can be drawn from this, considering that a number of seemingly unassailable factors are weighing against black pupils in school and in the wider society, is that only exceptional black children from exceptional backgrounds will manage to challenge and defy prevailing thought and practice and succeed in school, despite the value of school achievement.

2.6 THE VALUE OF SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

Despite the many aspects of achievement discussed above, it is clear that the most

significant of them are formal qualifications which gain children access to Higher

Education, training and work. Drew and Gray asserted that:

> Performance at 16 plus in public examinations is widely recognised as being a
> major determinant of young people's roles through the structure of post-
> compulsory education and training opportunities. (Drew & Gray, 1990:107)

In discussing the achievement of ethnic minority groups, Tomlinson observed

that:

> Parents are acutely aware that without education credentials their children may
> be deprived access to higher levels of education and training and may thus
> remain in unskilled employment or unemployed. (Tomlinson, 1989:16)

In addition, it was argued by Leslie and Drinkwater that in the 1980s, which they

defined as a decade of increasing unemployment, young people from ethnic minority

groups were motivated in studying for qualifications and to stay on in school. This

argument is plausible because it is understandable how in the face of the strong

competition for training and work, black young people realised that without formal

qualifications, they would be further disadvantaged (Leslie & Drinkwater, 1999).

Young black people are, however, astute enough to realise that there is not a

direct correlation between school achievement and advancement in employment. In

their communities, they would be aware that black people are over-represented in

unemployment figures, that they are less likely to be promoted once in work and

when in work earn a fraction of their white counterparts (Leslie et al., 1998). Indeed

that there is a multiplicity of stereotypes about them, that they hardly dare walk the

streets without being stopped and searched by the police, without women grasping

their bags in fear (Phillips et al., 1998). In school they are targeted more than other

groups in schools for reprimand (Sewell, 1997), punishment and as we have seen, exclusion (see pp. 71-76).

Contrasted with this are the material successes and acclaim that seem to be effortlessly achieved, albeit by a few, in sports, music and indeed by less laudable means. It is not surprising, therefore, that some black youths, especially those whose communities exemplify struggle, harassment, crime, poverty and deficiency, would adjudge effort and or success in school as futile waste.

In conclusion, black pupils are faced with two seemingly contradictory realities. On the one hand is the claim made by schools that education achievement is an important basis for success and advancement in social life. Therefore without educational qualifications one is more likely to be disadvantaged in work. Yet pupils are aware that black people regardless of educational achievement are more likely to be unemployed and to remain on the lower rungs of occupational ladders (Leslie et al., 1988). This is compounded by their vulnerability in schools and on the streets manifested in the greater likelihood of being excluded from school, arrested and imprisoned (Young, 1994). On the other hand, they might believe escape lies in areas such as music and sports, which ostensibly demand little of the education system.

So the question of whether schools achievement is said to be valuable and relevant relate to a variety of related factors. These include factors such as social class, educational background and personal experiences of parents and significant others, and the influence of those whom young people have or see as their role models in their communities and in areas that the media choose to emphasise and applaud such as music and sports.

2.7 OUT OF SCHOOL FACTORS THAT MAY IMPACT ON BLACK PUPILS ACHIEVEMENT

As was discussed in Chapter 1, factors such as family structure and peer affiliation are said to have a bearing on school achievement (see pp. 42-52, 60-64). Sociological researchers have suggested however that the single most significant determinant of school achievement, is social class (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bendix et al., 1967; Cole, 1989). Social class has a bearing on examination results, on post-compulsory school participation and on higher education admission (HMSO, 1989).

Different explanations have been offered for the differential levels of achievement of children from different classes (Douglas, 1967; Dale & Griffin, 1970). Hyman said that the value-system of the lower classes creates a barrier to achievement (in Bendix & Lipset, 1967). Conversely, it can be said therefore that there is a pro-school value, which is a monopoly of the middle classes and this is one of the explanations of their higher achievement levels.

J.W.B. Douglas, in his now classic and influential study, concluded that factors such as pupils' health, family size and the quality of the school impacted on children's performance (Douglas, 1967). The most important factors cited however were, the experiences and attention given to children in the early years and the degree of parental interest in the children's education. His findings suggested that middle class parents expressed a greater interest in their children's education, exemplified in more frequent visits to parents' evenings and had higher expectations of them. Later findings such as that by Dale and Griffith have supported this position (Dale & Griffith, 1970).

Over a long period of time the black family in Britain has been perceived as pathological, without the necessary traits to support its young successfully through

school (see Chapter 1). This argument superseded for a considerable period the fact of diversity naturally found within social groups such as those discussed above, for example class, family tradition, religion and so on. Today the focus though not so much on factors such as authoritarianism within the black family, seems to remain on aspects of pathology.

Studies in Canada and the United States of America for instance, point to the preponderance of single parenthood in the black community compared with that found among whites and Asian ethnic groups (Popenoe, 1997; Ricciuti, 1999; Daenzer, 1989). They suggested that this is a damaging phenomenon generally and that it has an adverse effect on school performance of black pupils. Family breakdown and single parenthood are often said to be the cause of a host of juvenile problems as well as poor school performance. Research, especially those based on American evidence show children in single-parent families to be more likely to drop out of high school, get pregnant as teenagers, abuse drugs and be in trouble with the law. Patricia Daenzer of McMaster University for instance, found that the majority of dropouts in their samples lived in single-parent families (Daenzer, 1989).

Further, family sociologist David Popenoe, concluded that family arrangements other than that where marriage is the foundation, were damaging to individuals and to society (Popenoe, 1977). He stated that marriage and the nuclear family - mother, father, and children - are the most universal social institutions in existence and that in no society has non-marital childbirth been the cultural norm. Although this position may seem farfetched, belief systems such as these are arguably the determinant of social norms. They probably inform the life chances and lives of such non-marital families in inner cities.

Further, Popenoe argued that even though in the inner cities of the United States, where the greatest social disruptions in North America have occurred with non-marital childbirth almost becoming the norm, with more than half of black children born out of wedlock, this situation, he said, is undesirable. Fathering, he said must confer great evolutionary advantages; having both parents being important in ways we do not completely understand. An important issue however may be that mothering has nurtured so many young people, probably because fathers have failed families.

In Britain too, many believe that the absence of a positive male role model in the homes of pupils bring difficulties to school and society. The view seems to be that single-parent families, headed mainly by females, cannot properly socialise children, especially male children and the society is said to be left with dire problems when these families are concentrated racially and geographically. Such arguments have been influential in sections of the black community in Britain. Inner city schools have recruited male volunteers and often, paid mentors in their anxiety to impact positively on black boys and to raise their school achievement (*The Guardian*, 14 September 1999). It is not clear whether the anxiety here is because single parents tend to be females or whether the view is that whether the lone parents are males or females there would be problems. For clearly there is no reason why black women cannot be role models for black boys as well as black girls so mentoring schemes might be getting it wrong too and reinforcing gender bias and stereotypes.

A large elite multiethnic Cornell University study headed by Henry Ricciuti has indeed found that single motherhood does not necessarily affect how well prepared six and seven-year-olds are for school. Ricciuti examined the effects of single motherhood on school readiness, achievement and behaviour in about 1,700

six- and seven-year-old children from white, black and Hispanic families. (Single motherhood was defined as the mother having no partner or spouse living at home at the time of the survey). The average mother's age at birth of her child was twenty to twenty one years. The study found that although one-parent families had lower incomes, what mattered most for children's school preparedness was the mothers' ability and educational levels (Riciutti, 1999).

Other earlier studies have however been inconsistent as to whether growing up in a single-parent home puts children at risk of poor school performance or social or behavioural problems. Some of the studies, such as that of Reis et al., has focused on adolescents or high school pupils and have tended to report adverse effects, typically attributed to differences in family income (Reis, Heert et al., 1995). Ricciuti's study is one of the few that focused on younger children. Although Ricciuti found no consistent relationships between single parenthood and children's school readiness and achievement, he found strong and consistent links in white, black and Hispanic families between a mother's education and ability level and her child's maths, reading and vocabulary scores, as measured in the home by survey interviewers. Ricciuti stated that these links remained strong even among single-parent families with incomes below the poverty line.

Indeed, he argued that many children in single-parent homes might have the advantage of smaller family size and the increased likelihood of the presence of a maternal grandparent, aunt or uncle in the household. Against this however, he did find that the majority of single mothers did not typically have the social, material and economic resources which supported quality parenting and child care as readily as two-parent families have. This is of course precisely one of the reasons which commentators have suggested render children in single parents' homes disadvantaged.

In the study headed by Reis and Heert (referred to above), involving a 3-year research project comparing the characteristics of 35 high ability pupils who were identified as high achievers with pupils of similar ability who underachieved in school, different findings to that of Ricciuti were made. The 35 pupils attended a large urban high school comprising of 60 per cent Puerto Rican pupils, 20 per cent African American, and the remainder white, Asian, and other. Qualitative methods were used to examine the perceptions of pupils, teachers, staff, and administrators concerning academic achievement (Reis, Heert et al., 1995). The study found that achievement and underachievement are not disparate concepts, since many pupils who underachieved had previously achieved at high levels and some generally high achieving pupils experienced periods of low achievement. A network of high achieving friends was characteristic of achieving pupils. The study found no relationships between poverty and low achievement, between parental divorce and low achievement, or between family size and low achievement. Successful pupils however had supportive adults in their lives, and participated in multiple extracurricular activities. Likewise high achieving females usually chose not to date low achieving boys and characteristically had a strong belief in self and resilience to negative factors.

An earlier study by Clarke seemed to have drawn similar conclusions (Clark, 1984). Clark studied the types of activities, interactional styles, and support systems found in the homes of successful and unsuccessful pupils of needy, urban black families. The research posited that it is the quality of life within the home - not class position - that determined family educational competence. Clark's contention was that it was family socialisation processes (not composition) that comprised the hidden curriculum of the home and determined the level of a child's preparation for school.

Clark believed the qualities that characterised families of high achievers could be generalised across racial, ethnic, and social groups, whether or not the family included both parents.

If conclusions can be drawn from these seemingly contradictory findings, they seem to be that factors outside school can make a difference. However the findings in relation to whether structure of family, size of families and single parents families have an adverse effect on school performance, seem to be inconclusive.

The argument in this Chapter so far suggests that in order to draw valid conclusions on a subject such as single parenthood a number of factors need to be taken into consideration. These include reasons for single parenthood, social class, education, support network, area of residence, type of school attended, the economic status of the parent and similar such factors.

These studies however seemed to be more emphatic in their claims of the importance of peer, supportive adults, and participation in extra-curricular activities and strong self-belief, to school performance.

On the perennial question of self-image, as we have seen, the low self-image of black children was said to be one of the factors contributing to their low achievement (see pp. 52-60). Above we see again this question of self-image but with the emphasis placed on self-belief and reliance as crucial in achievement (Mac an Ghaill, 1988). Racism or discrimination aside, it is possible to argue that all pupils need these traits to succeed but more so those children who are said to be devalued and negated by society on account of their colour.

As was argued earlier in this Chapter, self-image is an individual's self-concept, it is both a belief in self and a respect for self (see pp. 52-60). In children, self-image is said to be formed largely by how they think significant adults in their

lives perceive them. Praise and acceptance are said to strengthen self-image, while criticism and disapproval are said to lower it (Stone, 1981; Verma et al., 1979). It seems that individuals, especially those subject to oppression or discrimination, need a high self-image to cope effectively with the demands of school in particular and life in general. Often, it seems, older children and teenagers base their self-image primarily on the perceptions of their peers as Sewell demonstrated (Sewell, 1997). Often, however, especially in inner cities, the values of peer groups can conflict dramatically with that of school (Kunjufu, 1988). Thus, it seems, the development of a particular self-image is an important barometer of future educational success. This perspective is slightly different in emphasis to the argument on self-image that relates to low achievement. Here, what is being argued is that somehow black achievers are taught or develop an understanding that they do not necessarily have to be victims, that they do not necessarily have to accept and internalise society's perception of their race.

Schools can however be said to play a major role in building or lowering pupils' self-image and in creating a self-image which is pro or anti-education. According to Silberman, 80 per cent of black children entering schools in America have a positive self-image; 20 per cent still do by the fifth grade; yet only 5 per cent do by their senior year in high school (Silberman, 1971). It seems that as black children mature, they begin to experience the many hostilities imposed by the majority culture, hostilities that they could be sheltered from in early years. By early adolescence, many black pupils believe that academic achievement will not improve their status or benefits (Sewell, 1997). These pupils learnt to adapt to this perceived definition of reality by giving less time and energy to schoolwork (Sewell, 1997). The expectation would be therefore, that achieving pupils develop strategies despite

objective reality, to circumvent or challenge the status quo. Likewise that whatever their self-image it must coincide with that which supports education achievement. This is important since the question of low self-image is not simply that of whether a pupil's is high or low. Evidently a pupil can have a high self-image which is anti-school (Sewell, 1997), so a high self-image needs to be pro-education in order for it to be supportive of achievement.

A contrasting perspective on the impact of other out-of-school factors such as poverty on black achievement might be that black people are taught that they are the victims of economic and social injustices and that educated and prosperous blacks have *sold out* (Channer, 1995; MacDonald, 2001). This could lead to some pupils accepting these excuses and incorporating them into their identities (Sewell, 1997). By the time many black children reach adolescence, they may well be supplied with rationalisations for their lack of effort and lack of success. So while poor material conditions and economic and social injustices do exist, arguably this will impact more on some black people than on others.

Poverty has always been linked to poor attainment in school. This issue has recently received new attention as a result of a series of articles on education in The *Guardian* newspaper (Davies, September 14 1999). Poverty, he argued, is the most powerful factor working to exclude many, especially in urban areas and the black community from accessing educational opportunities. Using evidence from Durham University and quoting from the 4th report of The Treasury on the modernisation of Britain's tax and benefit system. He wrote:

> The differences between advantaged and disadvantaged children are apparent from a very early age. At 22 months, children whose parents are in social class one or two are already 14 percentage points higher up the educational distribution than children whose parents are in social class four or five. (Davis, The *Guardian*, 14 September, 1999)

The arguments put forward by Davies are indeed powerful and cannot easily be refuted. It is interesting, however, that in countries like Jamaica and in some other countries in the Caribbean with high percentages of single parent families headed by a female and often in great poverty, children manage to achieve in school (Miller, 1992). It may well be that other factors such as established support networks, high expectations among families and within school and the obvious value of education as a way out of poverty are impacting on them. What this suggests, however, is that isolating family structure from other factors within the society as the main cause of difficulties within school may be misleading. Indeed this may support the point made earlier that women are very much capable of impacting positively on their children whether they are boys or girls (see pp. 102-107).

Peer group affiliation is arguable as important a factor in school success as family structure and support. In many respects it could be argued that friends are more powerful influences than family members. In Britain, Tony Sewell graphically outlined the tremendous impact of peer relations on attitude to school, behaviour and achievement. He found that black pupils tended to stick together often colour being a more important basis of peer affiliation than academic ability (Sewell, 1997). This observation is not new, predominantly in inner city schools in England, friendship groups have long been defined along colour lines (Peshkin, 1991).

Some black youths, however, become trapped in peer orientation and activity that are hostile to academic performance. These youths do not only equate school with 'acting white,' but make no attempt to 'act white.' They refuse to learn, to conform to school rules of behaviour and standard practices; which are defined as being within the white cultural frames of reference (Sewell, 1997).

Seemingly therefore, for black pupils to achieve, they have to equate achievement with being black rather than white. Similarly, they have to define positive traits and aspirations as black as opposed to white. They have to shrug off and disassociate themselves, their ambitions and their aspirations for the future from the negative racial stereotypes that appear to permeate society. This clearly is no easy feat and conceivably cannot be achieved by individual black pupils in isolation from family, peer, community network, individual inclination and motivation towards achievement.

The stresses of urban living and associated experiences were also said to impact adversely on children (Parsons, 1994). Parsons stated that children who witness injury, suffering and death, respond to these events with fear and grief, often experiencing dramatic ruptures in their development (Parsons, 1994). The list of psychological reactions is long and grim: hatred for self, profound loss of trust in the community and the world, tattered internalised moral values and ethics of caring, and a breaking down of the inner and outer sense of security and of reality. They are particularly vulnerable, he states, to traumatic stress illnesses and related behavioural and academic abnormalities (Parsons, 1994).

Some other factors that can be said to have an impact on school achievement are the physical environment in which black children are predominantly found and the messages that are transmitted to them from occurrences within the wider society. From an early age, some black children living in the inner cities are frequently exposed to the misuse of drugs, harassment or fear of it and more so recently in some areas, guns and random violence (Davison, 1997). Not least, many are brought up in families who have dire tales to tell, of negative experiences and treatment from white society. Many of this at the hand of authority figures such as the police (Percy, 1998),

and teachers, in employment (Leslie et al., 1998) and not least in the criminal justice system (Hood, 1992).

They hear that black men are over-represented in prisons, get higher sentences for the same offences as their white counterparts, that they are more likely to be stopped and searched and charged (Young, 1994). In addition, they are more likely to be diagnosed as schizophrenic (Littlewood & Lipsedge, 1988; Davies et al., 1996; Glover, 1989), to be found in mental hospitals (Cockrane & Sashidhharan, 1996) and to be out of work (Leslie et al., 1988)

Recently, the well-publicised cases of the black families such as the Lawrences having to do the work of the police and investigate the racist murders of their family members (McPherson, 1999), reconfirmed and reinforced to black children that they are not valued in this society. Many, seemingly as a response to this, develop a sub-culture which is both anti-school and anti-achievement (Sewell, 1997). Some despite these objective conditions manage to maintain a converse attitude and approach (Mac an Ghaill, 1988).

Clearly therefore assumptions cannot be made about how each black child will respond to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Out-of-school factors that might be predicted to militate against them, might be those very factors, which motivate and drive them to excel.

2.8 EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS AND BLACK ACHIEVEMENT

At this point it is important to make reference to the debate on school effectiveness, since in recent years there seems to have been a shift in emphasis from solely blaming the home and pupils to looking at the important role of schools in pupil performance. However while this is clearly an important development, it is debatable whether this is

impacting positively on the experiences and outcome of black pupils in and out of schools.

For instance, as we have seen black pupils are more likely to be excluded from schools than other pupils (see pp. 72-76) and those who are successful at school often find that they face impregnable barriers to their advancement in work and career advancement (Wrech et al., 1997; Moodood et al., 1997). This, the area of employment, as with other aspects of black achievement in Britain is complex so cannot easily be explained and addressed. Berthoud illustrates this complexity for instance in his findings that there *are* differences in the employment trends of various ethnic groups. For example he found that even though young men of African descent have high levels of qualifications, they are disproportionately represented among the unemployed. On the other hand, a group he defined Anglo-Caribbean graduates are falling behind other ethnic groups in higher education but are almost as successful as young whites in the employment market (Berthoud, 1999).

The effective school movement has, however, been influential in recent years, shifting (it can be said) the view of the perceived impotence of school. This school of thought is emphatic in its view that distinction can be drawn between effective and ineffective schools (Mortimer, 1995; Banks, 1993; Tomlinson, 1995).

As argued earlier (see pp. 76-78) the focus on school effectiveness has coincided with the National Curriculum, SATs tests and the publication of external examination results and the ranking of schools through Tables (OFSTED, 2000a; 2000b). Along with these there has been the 'shaming' of schools that are deemed to be failing by their placement on Special Measures and indeed by public scrutiny of their results (Winkley, 1999). This whole area has been extremely controversial because of the differential between the 'raw materials' that schools begin with in the

first place and factors such as the social environment of schools, class background and the issue of 'value added'. None of these has however removed the focus from the role of schools and how they can and should be affecting the achievement of pupils in their charge.

In challenging the view that has been held almost uncritically for many years that schools can only marginally influence pupil performance, Rutter and his colleagues (Rutter & Maughan, 1979), published a study of twelve London secondary schools and Mortimer and his colleagues conducted a study of fifty London junior schools (Mortimer & Sammons, 1988). Both these studies demonstrated that schools can and do make a difference and pointed to factors within schools, which impact positively on pupil achievement. In the Mortimer's study it was shown that effective schools enhanced the performance of pupils regardless of their background. Pupils from working class backgrounds attending effective schools achieved better than children of middle class backgrounds who attended the least effective schools. Mortimer defined an effective school as, one in which pupils progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake. He further criticised approaches, which focused mainly on an individual learner as being of only limited value (Mortimer, 1995).

A particularly interesting aspect of the studies of Mortimer and Rutter was the bid to come to grips with what schools actually add to educational possibilities already brought by the children. Schools were not to be judged simply on the results of standardised tests, as most of the early American studies had done, since these results may have been more a factor of the children themselves rather than of anything the school had 'added'. Rather they were judged on the basis of what development the pupils had made during the course of their school career.

Rutter and Maughan (1979) and Mortimore and Sammons (1988) acknowledged the more complex interactions that needed to be addressed at the school level and a different view of school effectiveness emerged. The Mortimore study of fifty English junior schools, sought to:

> ...find a way of comparing schools' effects on their pupils, while acknowledging the fact that schools do not all receive pupils of similar abilities and backgrounds (Mortimer & Sammons, 1988:176).

Factors such as the ethnic composition, language, background, social class and family composition of the pupils, together with other considerations, were all used as relevant data to assist in the determination of the gains that pupils made during their time at school. The study not only considered attainment, but progress as well, in academic areas such as reading, mathematics, writing and also the non-cognitive areas of behaviour, attendance, self-concept and attitudes towards school.

Banks, however, argued that even the value-added definition can be looked at in two different ways:

> We can have basic value-added effectiveness, which adds value to all children equally, thus maintaining their initial) advantages or disadvantages, or mediating effectiveness, which brings advantaged and disadvantaged children closer together over time. (Banks, 1993:3)

He used a staircase analogy:

> ...with children standing on a step which represents their traditional level of advantage or disadvantage in the learning stakes. The more advantaged (say, those from wealthy families or white male children) are on the higher steps. With value-adding effectiveness all children move up one or more steps but the distance between the most and least advantaged remains the same. For mediating effectiveness, the children on the lower steps move up more steps than those higher up and so the distance between the most and least advantaged becomes less. (Banks, 1993:3)

This position can be said to relate to the expectations that young people and their families have of school. It can be argued that there is often a difference in the expectations that sections of the black community have of schools and those which

the society perceives them to have (Channer, 1995). Black people arguably do expect schools by definition to teach and make a difference, that is to *add value* to that which the pupil brings. The disappointment seems to be however that rather than adding value, schools seems to detract from the raw materials that black pupils present to them. Scattering of research suggests that black pupils make a good start in primary schools but gradually fall behind as they progress up the school (OFSTED, 1999; *Sunday Times*, 4 December, 1994).

Townsend found that the expectations that parents, teachers and pupils have of school communities varied however, not only from school to school, but also from region to region (Townsend, 1994). His research showed that, in a predominantly middle class area, many parents, teachers and pupils said that the major role of school was academic (to prepare people for further education). In a more working class area however, parents, teachers and pupils were much more supportive of the role of the school being vocational (to prepare people for work). He argued therefore that an effective school is one that develops and maintains a high quality educational programme designed to achieve both system-wide and locally identified goals. This would mean that, schools would not be excused from fulfilling their obligations to all pupils and would have to engage in dialogue with parents, in this case black parents, as well as their pupils, to identify their particular expectations while at the same time not trapping them within narrow boundaries. The tendency has been it seems to make assumptions about black families and their children and to generalise about them.

One of the studies in relation to effective schools that received a great deal of attention was that by Tomlinson (Tomlinson, 1990). She conducted a qualitative longitudinal study with 3000 pupils, from their transfer to secondary school to the end of their fifth year when they sat GCE and CSE examinations. It was a large study with

a great deal of quantitative and qualitative data. The conclusions drawn were that in effective schools pupils gained good results regardless of their ethnicity.

> There are considerable differences between urban comprehensive schools in the levels of attainment reached by pupils with similar background characteristics and initial attainments...the 'same child' might get CSE grade 3 in one school and an ' O' Level grade B in another...and schools that were more effective for white pupils were also more effective for ethnic minority pupils. By shifting the focus of school performance from pupils to the school, the difference in performance between schools can be very substantial. (Tomlinson, 1990:340-341)

These studies do not deny that a variety of factors outside school also impact on achievement but rather, that schools cannot absolve themselves from responsibility for the performance of their pupils. Reynolds said that, overall, the school effectiveness research has had the positive effect of helping to destroy the belief that schools can do nothing to change the society around them. Likewise it has destroyed the myth that the influence of family background is so strong on children's development that they are unable to be affected by school (Reynolds, 1994).

As was argued in relation to low achievement, there is another side to this focus on school effectiveness. This preoccupation with school performance may well be further disadvantaging black pupils (see pp. 76-78). Schools conscious of the positions in League Tables, the perception of the local and national community of them and, of course, that of the Local Education Authority, the Government and the Inspectorate, may well be less tolerant of pupils who rightly or wrongly are said to be failing. Or schools, even before this stage, may allow preconceived ideas about them to bar them access to school.

Whatever the ideological and policy shifts therefore, black pupils are often still scapegoated, potentially disadvantaged or even sacrificed by the system (Donovan, 1998). Schools therefore often regard black pupils as a liability. Even schools viewed as effective may therefore well seek to limit the numbers of black

children on their roll because of the overwhelming evidence over the years that they are irredeemable underachievers and are behavioural liabilities.

It can further be argued that the forces of both individual and institutional racism often mediate against the bid for schools to work effectively with black children, especially with the competition for places at the top of examination league tables. It is therefore not surprising that theorists and researchers cannot comprehend that achievement is possible for the beleaguered black pupils in British schools.

This thesis however attempts to bring to the fore pupils in schools, Sixth Form and Further Education colleges, who confound prevailing opinion of them as natural underachievers. It focuses on those black children who have in the main been ignored and seeks to highlight and analyse their perspectives on the factors that impact on and contribute to their achievement.

2.9 CONCLUSION

The following conclusions can be drawn from this Chapter. Uncertainty as to how to define black pupils has led to a variety of labels being attached to them over the years. The implication of this has been that attempts to assess and compare research on the performance of black pupils, may not be assessing or comparing like with like.

Race is, however, one of the means by which society is stratified and it has a profound impact on how individuals are viewed and assessed. Black people in general and black pupils in particular tend to be viewed in negative ways both by the wider society and in schools. Related to this, is the fact that although diversity is natural in every social group, the general perception presented in research is that black pupils form a homogenous group. The suggestion is therefore that each black individual represents the whole and the whole represents the individual, leading to entrenched stereotypes of black people, compounded by their over-representation in areas such as

the criminal justice system (Hood, 1992; Percy, 1988), unemployment figures (Leslie, 1988) and school exclusions (Donovan, 1998). Aware of the racism that they and others of their colour face, black pupils can be debilitated by racism, with black boys, affected by a particular brand of racism, especially so. This is said to be one of the explanations for their experiences in the school system. Research suggests that there is a gender basis to achievement of black pupils, with girls being more likely than boys to be oriented towards academic achievement, to defy the negativism they experience in school and to achieve (Mac an Ghaill, 1988). In defining achievement, it is concluded that although there are different types of achievement and all pupils progress in some way as they go through school, academic achievement, in terms of high grades and academic qualifications, is the most valued both for employment, and by pupils and their families. However, because one of the roles of education is to maintain the status quo where black people are usually to be found at the bottom of the occupational and economic ladder, schools appear to wittingly or unwittingly hinder black pupils from achieving the valued academic qualifications and predispose them to low occupational positions (see pp. 71-78).

Research on achieving black pupils has further suggested that factors both within school and out of school, affect their achievement. Indeed that within the group usually labelled *black*, there are to be found differences in school performance (Berthoud, 1998; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Fuller, 1984). A significant finding however is the acknowledgement that black pupils can and do achieve in schools, in spite of the negativism that exists towards them in British society (Nehaul, 1988; Channer, 1995). Likewise that schools have a role to play in the achievement of black pupils (Mortimer & Sammond, 1988). However, despite such research, and a seeming shift from blaming factors external to schools, to a critical assessment of how effective

schools can impact on pupil performance, the majority of evidence still tend to favour the position that black children are more likely to underachieve than to achieve in schools.

In relation to the value of achievement, black pupils are aware of the importance of academic achievement but realise that there is not always a direct correlation between school achievement and progression in employment. This therefore means that a range of factors in addition to colour influence the success of black pupils in school. Factors such as the impact of significant others such as peer, teacher expectation, family, self-image, motivation and response to racism and stress.

However the view of black pupils' low achievement continue to have the greater impact and the experiences and perception of achieving black pupils do not therefore enter the domain where they can impact positively on the general experiences and performance of black pupils and the education community.

This thesis therefore seeks to highlight black achievers who do indeed exist within the educational system and to bring to the fore the factors that are contributing to their attainment in schools. This Chapter and the previous one which have outlined existing research on achievement and low achievement of black pupils, have helped me to refine the research questions for this thesis. The areas that seem to have a significant impact on black pupils' achievement are teacher expectations, peers, families, parents and black pupils themselves, research questions will therefore be focused in these areas.

The following Chapter will explore the theoretical and practical issues underpinning the methodologies used in my fieldwork. It will assess design, data collection, practical and ethical issues surrounding the collection and analysis of data.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION - THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of this Chapter is to discuss the theoretical and practical issues that inform the methodologies employed in my fieldwork. In order to do this, the Chapter examines my initial research questions and assesses how they have been modified in light of analysis in the preceding Chapters. Further the Chapter assesses the theoretical framework of my fieldwork, discusses research design, data collection and the practical issues surrounding collecting and analysing data.

I have argued that since the migration of black people to Britain, there has been a preoccupation and emphasis on their perceived low achievement in schools. The research discussed demonstrated that there has indeed been cause for concern and offered a range of plausible explanations (see Chapter 1). There has however, been a noticeable absence in research and debate on black children who have and are achieving in schools.

It was argued that although some of the evidence presented has been persuasive (Garside, 1990; Channer, 1995; Dale et al., 1978), the over-emphasis on low achievement is indicative of the racialised nature of this society, an essential aspect of how black children experience society in general and school in particular.

Despite the negative impact of race, there are black children who do achieve in schools. Given my argument that black children are schooled in a racialised society, the issues with which this thesis is concerned are the factors that impact on their achievement and circumstances and strategies that achieving black children employ to attain and maintain success in schools. The overriding question is therefore how black

children manage to achieve in schools when the prevailing theories and expectation over years have been that they have a propensity to underachieve.

In trying to find answers to the questions, previous research, while providing some explanations and issues for consideration, still leaves some questions unanswered. In part this may be due to the nature of questions asked or the reluctance to depart from the tradition of previous thinking. However, previous research provides important insight into some of the methodological issues and difficulties which research of this nature entails.

In attempting to provide a theoretical justification for the methods that I have used in this Chapter, I have analysed the use of quantitative methods and show that they were initially employed to assess and explain the performance of black pupils in schools, especially those of West Indian backgrounds. I have argued that the predominant use of these methods related to the traditionally higher status of quantitative over qualitative methods. I contend however that qualitative methods provide more varied and in-depth data than that provided by quantitative research, thereby providing a rationale for my use of this method.

I have analysed a number of research studies on the performance of black pupils that have employed qualitative methods and assessed the data that have been generated, my aim being to demonstrate the depth and variety of information that such methods have produced. It is hoped that this analysis will demonstrate the appropriateness of such methods to my area of research.

In this Chapter, I therefore outline the exact focus of my research, its design, issues around sampling, structure and methods of data collection. I also analyse both the rationale and drawbacks for my chosen research method. I further highlight issues such as those of ethics and reflexivity and demonstrate how awareness of and

consideration of such issues and techniques improved the possibility of obtaining trust and honesty from my respondents and thereby obtaining reliable data.

3.2 RESEARCH FOCUS

My research focus has been influenced both by my own interest and concern with the seeming over-preoccupation on black pupils' low attainment in school and by subsequent research explanations.

My pilot study (discussed below) further modified and refined the focus of inquiry, illuminating a number of areas that seem to be crucial in the performance of black pupils in school.

I have already argued (see pp. 14-22) that there has been an over-emphasis on low achievement yet some black children, despite the multiplicity of factors that are said to weigh against them, do achieve in schools. On this question of achievement, various measures of achievement are possible and indeed can affect the conclusions drawn on attainment. While being aware that academic outcome is only one measure of success, this is one that is most commonly used both within schools and in institutions outside school.

The criteria of success that I have therefore used are academic measures and are two-fold. For year 11 pupils it is performance in SATs tests along with estimated GCSE grades. For 'A' Level pupils, the criteria is 5 or more passes at Grades C or above, or equivalent qualification such as General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) Advanced, Merit or Distinction grades.

Explanations for their achievement however can relate both to factors outside the school and to factors within the school (see pp. 94-118). The evidence collected in

this research points to the interaction of complex factors in accounting for the performance of the black child in school (see Chapters 4-7).

My research focus and questions therefore cover three broad areas with a number of sub-categories. The three broad areas are institutional or school processes, family and community impact and the individual factors that were said by black achievers to contribute to their performance. More specifically how or to what extent do the following impact on the achievement of black children?

- Teacher expectations, teacher treatment and colour

- Peer affiliation

- Pupil responses, attitude, behaviour and motivation

- Pupils self-perception

- Family and religious values

3.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Predominantly in the 1960s and 1970s statistical evidence, historical analysis and psychometric test results were used in investigating the performance of black children in school. The aims of these researches were to locate where black children were in the school system and to make inferences from this. Little, for example, looked at percentages of ethnic minorities transferring to secondary schools and used statistical information to demonstrate that they were performing at a lower level (Little, in Verma & Bagley, 1979). Townsend again used statistical returns to assess the number of immigrant pupils needing special education as an indication of underachievement (Townsend, 1971). Coard made use of statistical information but with radically different analysis and explanations (Coard, 1971). The Rampton Report likewise

made use of statistical return from five Local Authorities to draw conclusions about the performance of black children in school Report (Rampton Report, 1981).

Early work in this area therefore tended to rely on quantitative research methods. This no doubt coincided with what Scott and Usher termed the 'privileging' of quantitative research over qualitative research, '....with the implication that quantitative research is "better" in the sense of being more *legitimate* as research.' (Scott & Usher, 1999:10).

The consequence of this was that there was hardly a critique of the use of such statistical evidence or a critical assessment of the validity of such evidence to answer questions of such complexity.

Qualitative research can however be said to provide the varied and in depth data that I feel are essential if explanations are to be found for the successful performance of black children in schools. The approach that I took in this research was therefore linked to the approach of Max Weber and to symbolic interactionism, which is influenced by Weber's work.

It was Max Weber who first emphasised the importance of social action in understanding behaviour. Weber said that it was necessary to understand the meanings and motives which underlie human behaviour (Weber, 1958). Meanings and motives are an essential aspect of this approach since it is based on the principle, according to John Lewis, in his Marxist critique of Weber's work that,

> Human life is endlessly varied and changing and novel events are always happening. People are not machines following repetitive sequences of predetermined actions, they follow their own changing motives and intentions. All social phenomena reveal people pursuing ends, holding different values and so behaving differently. (Lewis, 1975:50)

It is therefore the role of the researcher to interpret the meanings of social situations given by actors themselves.

To apply this approach one must be knowledgeable about society. One has to have knowledge of human behaviour and one must have the ability to guess or know the motivation of individuals within society. This approach rejects the ideal of value freedom. Weber insisted that his selection of a model was determined by his values. His standpoint indeed is that it would be dishonest to state otherwise. According to Lewis it would be, '...to pretend that there can be objectivity and neutrality in the point of view from which we conduct our science of society' (Lewis, 1975:50).

Therefore, to take his approach is to take a 'value-orientated.' approach but at the same time to be open about our subjective bias. Further, when we have established our model we need, according to Lewis to be, '...ruthlessly objective in showing exactly how it works, what its natural logic is....The logic of our chosen motivation is what is value free' (Lewis, 1975:52).

Weber called this model an 'ideal type' meaning according to Lewis in his critique of Weber, '...roughly typical of a certain type of living and acting...' (Lewis, 1975:53).

> Talcot Parsons position futher clarified and emphasised that:
>
> The ideal type as Weber used it is both abstract and general. It does not describe a concrete course of action, but a normatively ideal course, assuming certains ends and modes of normative orientaion as 'binding' on the actors. It does not describe an individual course of action, but a 'typical' one – it is a generalised rubric within which an infinite number of particular cases may be classified. (Parsons, 1947:13)

Consistent with this perspective Weber rejected the inductive method for the social sciences choosing instead a method which is practical and adaptable. In commenting on this, Lewis argued that this solution is a *pragmatic* one, chosen because we believe that it will work, retained so long as it does appear to work (Lewis, 1975).

I have referred to the early reliance on statistical data in explaning the performance of black pupils in schools. Symbloic Interactionalism, influenced by

Weber's work, however tend not to believe that this form of data provide sufficient insight into human behaviour. On the contrary human behaviour is said to be governed by the processes by which people interpret the world and give meanings to their own lives. Of paricular importance and relevance to my research is the position taken by symbolic interactionists that individuals possess a self-concept, or image of themselves, which is developed or changed in the process of interaction with other members of society. This image that the individual holds of herself will influence how she acts and the responses of others to an individual will reinforce action or make sustaining of an action impossible (Haralambos, Holborn et al., 1990). This idea is closely linked to the idea of labelling and self-fulfilling prophecy and renders the idea of a causal relationship simplistic.

To fully understand such social action, according to Blumer, the researcher has to immerse herself in the area of life that she seeks to understand, attempting to understand the actor's view of reality (Rose, 1969). This is clearly by implication a difficult task. According to Blumer,

> It is a tough job requiring a high order of careful and honest probing, creative yet disciplined imagination, resourcefulness and flexibility in study, pondering over what one is finding, and a constant readiness to test and recast one's views and images of the area. (Quoted in Haralambos, Holborn et al., 1990:70)

Closely akin to Symbolic Interactionism is Phenomenology. Phenomenologists do not believe it is possible to measure the social world objectively. Human beings, they believe make sense of the social world by attaching meanings to it. It is these meanings, they insist, that make up the social world. There is therefore no objective reality beyond these subjective meanings. Phenomenologists do not assume they know what things mean to the people they are studying, says Douglas (1976). They emphasise the subjective aspects of people's behaviour. They

believe that people can interpret events in a multiplicity of ways through interacting with others. Reality is therfore 'socially constructed.' However,

> While qualitative researchers tend to be phenomenological in their orientation most are not radical idealists. They emphasise the subjective, but they do not necessarily deny a reality *out there*. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:32)

The aim and outcome of a qualitative study is therefore, '...not the generalisation of results, but a deeper understanding of the experience from the perspectives of the participants selected for study' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1984:44).

This is seemingly the perspective taken by more recent researchers who have used this approach in studying the performance of black pupils in education, for example, Channer (1975); Nehaul (1996); Mac an Ghaill (1988) and Gibson and Barrow (1986). Their studies have provided interesting and valuable insight into the performance of black pupils by using such qualitative approach. That is, where the data for analysis are people's words. For example, Yvonne Channer used the life story method in exploring the relationship between education achievement and religion. This produced *thick* descriptions of the experiences from the respondents' perspective (Channer, 1975).

Similarly, in looking at the achievement of black girls in education, Mac an Ghaill collected data using both observational methods and in depth interviewing and provided original insight into black girls' own perspective of education (Mac an Ghaill, 1988).

Another study which approached the question of achievement from a qualitative perspective was that of Nehaul. She studied achieving black pupils in primary schools by observation and interviews (Nehaul, 1996). Yet another study using this approach was that of Gibson and Barrow, who conducted in depth interviews of both parents and children in collecting data on the performance of black

children in schools (Gibson & Barrow, 1986). These studies generated data that no doubt would not have emerged had the methodology not given scope to the researcher to look for key issues, recurrent events, or activities. Preset categories and themes can be said to restrict the researcher to hackneyed theories and perspectives.

Another aspect of this approach that seems to lend itself to my area of research is the scope it allows for me to locate myself in the research. This is because the nature of the topic enables me to bring my own understanding and experiences of the education system and the black community into the research thereby it is hoped enriching the data produced.

I consider reflexivity to be important in the approach I take in this research. My approach is based on the belief that my own values cannot be separated from the 'facts' that I seek to discover. Rather it is to acknowledge that I, too, am a product of the structures and processes of this society. It is therefore a more realistic aim to be explicit about the particular value position that I take. This 'value' to my mind was present from the outset of this research, from the selection of the research problem, to the schools and colleges chosen, to the selection of the areas of exploration and the analysis of my findings.

Identifying a research problem and selecting the area for exploration were thus based on my interest, experiences, knowledge and my ethnicity. However as Scott pointed out:

> The researcher finds out things during the course of the research, which they did not know. Reflexive practices are therefore considered essential elements within post-positivist, post-modernist and post-structuralist research traditions, and they relate to examination of both the researcher's own conceptual and effective maps, the way those maps mediate and structure reality for the researcher, and what is being researched. (Scott in Mckenzie, Powell et.al., 1997:156)

Scott further argued that researchers who place themselves within these positions would accept the, '…value-laden implications of their position, but seek to understand and conceptualise it by adopting reflexive stances' (in Mckenzie, Powell et. al., 1997:156).

Information about me as researcher is an important aspect of this approach. According to Mayuk and Morehouse:

> …since the researcher is the human instrument collecting and analysing qualitative data, it is important to report information about this person(s), particularly as it relates to the focus of inquiry. At minimum we believe researchers should report their gender, education, training and personal experience that is especially relevant to the study (Maykut & Morehouse, 1984:66).

To do this I should state that I am a black woman who has experienced the education system at all stages and from all sides, as pupil, teacher and lecturer. Indeed it may well be argued that I am an achiever within the system. My experiences should I feel therefore be seen as an important aspect of my research. In addition I am a mother of a teenager daughter who is currently going through the education system. I have five siblings all of whom, including myself, being products of both the British and Jamaican schools systems. Three of my siblings were born in England, were schooled in England for a period of time and then taken to the Caribbean by our parents and completed schooling there. The three older siblings including myself had the entire or the major part of our primary education in Jamaica, were brought to Britain by our parents in the late 1960s and completed our education here. These experiences and knowledge I believe inform and enrich the perspective that I bring to this thesis.

My knowledge and experiences cannot therefore conveniently be set aside for the period of my research since they have been incorporated into my thoughts and values and influence with other experiences and knowledge, the perspective I have of

this society and its education system. Added to this will of course be my 'reflexive sense' (Mason, 1999) and my 'reflexive practices' (McKenzie, Powell et. al., 1997). I am therefore fully aware of the fact that although, according to Mayuk, the qualitative researcher is a part of the investigation she must also remove herself from the situation to rethink the meanings of the experiences derived in the data collection process (Mayuk & Morehouse, 1984). In my case this was done by allowing some time to elapse between the collection of data, its interpretation and analysis. Thereafter I was able to analyse the data both for what I felt the respondents meant and to draw inferences from the particular educational contexts.

Mason (1996) says that if one wishes to derive data in a *reflexive* sense, then what one is wanting to do is 'read' something about one's role, and interface with the interaction. She contrasts this with deriving data from interviews in a *literal* or *interpretative* sense. In the former she says one is interested in aspects of interaction such as the literal dialogue, including form, sequence and substance. In the latter sense, she is wanting to 'read' the interviews for what one thinks they mean or what one can infer from something outside the interview interaction. It seems to me however that these need not be mutually exclusive since in my case I would wish to derive data from all three processes. Indeed Mason acknowledges that one may wish to derive data in all three ways but that in doing so one must, '...think carefully about what kind of balance between them you are hoping to achieve' (Mason, 1996:54). In the case of my research careful thought was given in analysing pupils' responses, since the methods employed of using respondents perceptions as data entailed obtaining their opinions of the views and attitudes of others such as teachers and parents. Analysis of this data was therefore more interpretative, while analysis of their own experiences were analysed in a more literal sense. So while this research is

concerned with deriving data from the interviews in a literal sense however, it is also concerned with deriving data in an interpretative sense. The balance may well vary however at different aspects of the research.

Taking a qualitative approach to my research enabled me to derive detailed data from my respondents and enabled the use of analytical tools such as reflexivity, which I feel contributed to reliable and valid conclusions.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Traditionally the design of a study is seen as the product of the planning stage of research. The design is then implemented, the data collected and analysed, and then the writing is done (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). According to them however,

> While qualitative studies take a similar course, the various stages are not so segmented. Design decisions are made throughout the study – at the end as well as the beginning. Although the most intensive period of data analysis usually occurs in the later stages, data analysis is an ongoing part of the research. Decisions about design and analysis may be made together. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:56)

They however acknowledge that not all qualitative design is like this, some are more structured than others.

Since my research was based on a qualitative approach, a qualitative method of data collection was employed. In this case the method of data collection is in-depth interviews and I envisaged that although design decisions were made predominantly at the early stages they are also made throughout the study. This approach is called the Constant Comparative Method. According to Glaser, this entails a number of steps. The interviewer begins by collecting data, looking for key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that become categories for focus. The interviewer then collects more data that provide many categories of focus with an eye to seeing the diversity of the dimensions under the categories. She writes about the categories she is exploring,

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attempting to describe and account for the incidents she has found in her data. This is while continually searching for new incidents and working with the data and emerging model to discover basic processes and relationships. She is in addition and at the same time engaging in sampling, coding and writing as the analysis focuses on the core categories (Glaser, 1978).

Qualitative data is therefore dynamic data and the interviewer is never distant or detached from the process, the method of collection or the analysis.

Before embarking on my main study, I felt it was useful to conduct a pilot study to test my approach, my methods, research questions and my research design.

In the pilot study I aimed to interview between five and ten achieving pupils, less than this number would not I felt be sufficient to draw any conclusions for my main research. The year 11 pupils interviewed in the pilot study had, like those identified for the main research, obtained above average grades in SATs at Key Stage 3, had received estimated grades of Cs and above in at least 5 GCSE subjects and were in top academic groups in their years.

In my pilot study I proposed to construct questions based on my own analysis of issues cited as significant in previous research and areas that I felt had not been fully explored. It was important to see whether these questions made sense to respondents, to establish possible ambiguity and indeed to add questions and areas that came from respondents themselves. Indeed after conducting and analysing my pilot in which I eventually interviewed ten pupils, areas and issues emerged that I had not previously considered. For example, significant findings from the pilot suggested that black pupils felt that, regardless of how effective their schools, their ability, motivation and family background were not sufficient to gain them educational success. They are aware that within school they had to adopt specific strategies in

their interaction with teachers, to succeed in school. That they had to learn to manoeuvre their way around school structures and teachers in order to achieve. Other areas that I had considered as important were confirmed during the pilot study. These included the importance to attainment of outside school factors such as supportive families, peer relations and particular academic idiosyncrasies of the young person.

Of equal importance to the insight into current factors that impact on black pupils' attainment, the pilot enabled me to develop and refine my own qualitative interviewing skills. That is, the pilot study demonstrated the importance of both note taking and taping of interviews to obtain a full and accurate record of the sessions and the importance of transcribing taped interviews as soon after the sessions as possible. Indeed, at every stage of negotiating access into this school and obtaining pilot data, I gained valuable information, skills and strategies that proved invaluable in conducting the main research.

For the pilot and the main research I contacted in writing a total of fifteen schools, two further education colleges and two sixth form colleges. I chose to contact fifteen schools, colleges and sixth form because I wished to include institutions that reflected the range of gender arrangements and the range of provision for pupils sixteen to eighteen years. These institutions were chosen because they contained a significant percentage of black pupils, were easily accessible to me and represented institutions with varying status and performance records. I predicted that some schools, for a number of reasons that are discussed below might be wary of giving me access to their pupils. Even though the focus of the research is ostensibly on a positive area of schooling, race and ethnicity are sensitive subjects.

3.4.1 ISSUES OF ACCESS

Gaining access to school, college or any research setting is a skilful endeavour whatever the subject area. It entails skills of negotiation, patience and the ability to give appropriate reassurances.

Year 11, the group from which my sample was predominantly taken was in addition an especially important time for pupils. This was because they were in the middle of their exams and with schools' continual eye on examination grades, league tables, progression and lesson times were anxiously guarded both by subject teachers and by head teachers and principals.

Indeed, my being a black woman may well have had an impact on schools' decisions on whether to permit me access, their reasons for this being difficult to assess.

I assumed that gaining access into the schools would present more challenges than gaining access into the colleges because of the nature of my research topic, the number of individuals and the different levels of individuals from whom permission needed to be obtained. According to Scott:

> Gaining access to research settings involves far more than simply being granted permission to begin research. It is a continuous series of negotiations and re-negotiations, with different personnel at different levels within the organisation. (Scott in, McKenzie, Powell et al., 1997:159)

Scott further added that being granted permission by the main personnel within an organisation may not reflect the interests and wishes of others within the organisation. Indeed where children are involved, teachers may have volunteered them but they may have no interest and will participate because they feel for whatever reason that they are not able to decline.

I hoped that the pupils that were put forward and those who volunteered did so as a result of interest rather than persuasion or coercion, to ensure this as far as possible I paid particular attention to issues of sensitivity and research ethics.

3.4.2 ISSUES OF SUBJECT SENSITIVITY

In relation to question of sensitivity, Lee and Renzetti suggested that the term sensitive, is often used as if it is self-explanatory but it is important to ask what it is about a topic that makes it sensitive (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). They used an explanation provided by Sieber and Stanley who defined 'socially sensitive research' as:

> "... studies in which there is a potential consequence or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class or individuals represented by the research. (Sieber & Stanley, 1988:50)

I define a study of race and achievement as 'socially sensitive research' because the achievement of black pupils in school has historically been a controversial issue. Schools are in addition under a great deal of continual scrutiny relating to their general performance and pupil achievement. Most schools, perhaps understandably, are wary of courting additional attention. Individual pupils too may be wary of raising issues that may present their school, themselves or their families in a dubious light. Or indeed that may lead to their schools being perceived in a light other than that intended or which may have damaging consequences. Here too, close attention to established ethics, enabled me to ensure that the confidence of teachers, governors, parents and respondents would not be abused, while of course protecting the reliability of my data.

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3.5 RESEARCH ETHICS

Adherence to established legal and university research ethics was an integral part of the manner in which I conducted my research and obtained data from my chosen respondents. That is, 'within an ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values and the quality of educational research' (The British Educational Research Association: Code of Ethics). In this light pupils were informed of their right to anonymity, confidentiality and my endeavour to correctly interpret their views.

Particularly relevant to my research were these questions of ethics and power relations between me, as an adult, and the young people who were my respondents. I believed it was of course important to be aware of this by pointing out that participation was optional, by explaining the procedure as clearly as possible, by explaining as much about the research as possible and of course by outlining to them the possible significance of research. However since I was dependent on teachers to volunteer young people, I was still aware that young people may have still felt obliged to participate. This may be because they were expected to comply with their teachers' requests, to be polite to visitors or for unknown personal reasons that I as a researcher may never have access to. Indeed to take this further, even though I may adopt triangulating techniques, I was not to know whether the pupils told me exactly what their views were. This however is the nature of social relations and I believe that the skills and techniques I brought to the process improved the possibility of obtaining trust and honesty from my respondents.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

3.6.1 SAMPLE SELECTION

In quantitative research an acceptable sample is one selected at random. In qualitative

research a sample is selected with different purposes. Thus, much qualitative research,

> ...set out to build a sample that includes people...selected with a different goal
> in mind: gaining deep understanding of some phenomenon experienced by a
> carefully selected group of people. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1984:56)

This approach of selecting specific people for a study acknowledges the

complexity of humans and of social phenomena. Since the aim of my research was

not just to generalise findings but to derive a deeper understanding of experience from

the perspective of the pupils selected for study, the process of systematic sampling

was not considered relevant. It seemed more appropriate to use Maykut and

Morehouse's approach, which is referred to as *Purposive sampling*. In my case the

schools and colleges pupils were used following the Maykut & Morehouse's model:

> ...based on the possibility that each participant (or setting) will expand the
> variability of the sample. Purposive sampling increases the likelihood that
> variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the
> data.... (Maykut & Morehouse, 1984:45)

On this basis I felt that pupils and the institutions that were chosen for my research

were as likely as others to provide the data that was required to arrive at an

understanding of black pupils' perceptions.

3.6.2 SAMPLE SIZE

Determining the size of the sample was perhaps a more challenging task than

selecting the sample. Maykut and Morehouse stated that, 'We cannot decide a priori

how many people or setting we must include in our study in order to fully understand

the phenomena of interest...' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1984:62). Ideally they argued,

we continue to collect data and analyse it in an ongoing process until we can uncover no new information.

> We continue to gather information until we reach the saturation point, when newly collected data is redundant with previously collected data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1984:62).

In my case although I had an idea of a minimum number of pupils, it was my aim as Maykut and Morehouse suggested, to collect data until no further issues were being raised, to collect data until I felt that saturation point had been reached, or to put it another way until I felt that the data I was receiving replicated what I had obtained before.

Other factors that I took into consideration when determining sample size were time, money and of course, access to the relevant respondents. In the case of my particular sample group I did not have indefinite access to infinite numbers of achieving young people. I have already referred to the constraints such as timetables and examinations (see pp. 134-136).

3.6.3 INTERVIEW: CHARACTERISTICS AND RATIONALE

I chose interviewing as the method for conducting my research. Mason suggested that a qualitative interviewer should ask why she has chosen a particular method (Mason, 1996). In the case of my research it was therefore important to explore why I chose interviewing, why I chose to interact with and speak to pupils above other methods that could have been chosen.

My research questions were designed to explore pupils' experiences. I was interested in pupil's experiences, their knowledge, their views, and their interpretations of events. These according to Mason, 'are meaningful properties of the social reality...' (Mason, 1996:38).

Mason further suggested that epistemological reasons for conducting interviews may include the belief that:

> ...knowledge and evidence are contextual, situational and interactional and that this requires you to take a distinctive approach to get at what you really want to know about in each interview (In this way)...You cannot separate the interview from the social interaction in which it is produced, and you should not try. (Mason, 1996:40)

Mason stressed the importance of understanding the complexities of social interaction rather than pretending those important dimensions could be controlled.

My aim was to understand and explain social meaning. In-depth interviewing seemed to lend itself more readily to this than other forms of enquiry such as, for example questionnaires, which can involve superficial questioning of large numbers of people. I was more interested in obtaining depth rather than breadth, in being able to gain qualification and clarifications to issues raised and in interacting with respondents. My aim was also to generate data that lent itself to appropriate comparison hence the same questions being asked of all respondents. However my approach enabled me to obtain data that may not have been predicted and to follow-up on specific issues discussed. So if individual pupils raised issues in addition to questions that I had contemplated, these were not ignored but were considered to examine if they should be incorporated and raised with other pupils.

Interviews are social interactions, whether structured, semi-structured or unstructured, and some kind of bias is an integral part of this. Indeed bias, not in the pejorative sense in which it is usually used, is precisely the point of this kind of social interaction that constitutes semi-structured interviewing. In my case I sought to find out the particular point of view of each pupil in my sample. That is, their particular bias. From this point of view therefore according to Mason, '...it is inappropriate to

see social interaction as "bias" which can potentially be eradicated' (Mason, 1996:41).

From this point of view one cannot separate the interview from the social interaction in which it was produced. Further to continue Mason's point, 'It is better to try to understand the complexities of the interaction, rather than to pretend that key dimensions can be controlled for' (Mason, 1996:41).

Another perspective on the depth which interviewing offers is given by Berg who defined an interview as, 'a conversation with a purpose' (Berg, 1989). The interviewer therefore has conversations with people who she feels will add to her understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Further, in illustrating the difference between qualitative interviews and other forms of interviewing Mishler stated that interviews are a form of discourse shaped and organised by asking and answering questions. He suggested that as such the interview process is a joint product of what interviewers and interviewees talk about with each other and that the record the interviewer makes, with subsequent analysis and interpretation is a representation of that discourse (Mishler, 1986).

Returning to Mason again, she says qualitative interviews are characterised by three factors:

> a relatively informal style...with the appearance of a conversation or discussion rather than a formal question and answer format; a thematic, topic centred, biographical or narrative approach, for example where the researcher does not have a structured list of questions, but does usually have a range of topics, themes or issues which s/he wishes to cover; the assumption that data are generated via the interaction, because either the interviewee or the interaction itself, are the data sources. (Mason, 1996:38)

Interviews therefore go beyond mere talk to in-depth exploration, '...to a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings.' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1984:80)

Indeed interviews make use of language, which of course is the most common medium used in social interaction. Making use of this form of communication render interviewing inclusive and accessible. It enables respondents to be brought into this familiar realm of conversation from which the interviewer can explore with them the issues under consideration, give and receive clarification until she is satisfied with the raw data obtained.

In terms of the advantage of using interviews to collect data, there are several benefits of using interviews generally and in particular the unstructured variety, as a means of collecting data. An important aspect in relation to my thesis is that interviews are immediate. That is, one does not have to wait to obtain the data. Likewise, interviewing allows the interviewer to clarify points that are not immediately clear and to ask respondents to develop points raised. This can allow the interviewer to collect more data so the quantity of the data could increase and can therefore generate more data than for example questionnaires. Interviews allow the researcher to come face to face with his/her data source. This, I think, is of particular importance when the nature of the areas being explored are potentially sensitive and inspiring confidence and trust in the respondents may be required in order to obtain detailed data. Another important aspect of interviewing is its flexibility, it does for instance allow for spot changes in data collection, for sessions to be postponed or continued at a later date.

Burgess suggested three further reasons for concentrating on interviewing as opposed to observation in the educational setting. He says that interviewing can allow the researcher access to past events, to events at which the interviewer is not present and to events where the teacher prohibits access (Burgess, 1983). These were

particularly relevant to my area of inquiry, since what was being investigated was both perceptions of the past as well as current events and situations.

3.6.4 DRAWBACKS AND CHALLENGES OF INTERVIEWS

There were however possible problems and challenges of using interviewing as a method of enquiry. As I have demonstrated a great deal of planning was required. From the outset questions and decisions needed to be made about who to interview, how to gain access to them, the duration of each session, the atmosphere one wanted to generate; for example relaxed and informal or directive and formal. The flow of the session was also important. Stimulating important, relevant and appropriate data was essential and required social, intellectual and creative skills. The personality of the interviewer as well as the obvious skills of planning can have a bearing on the data generated. Decisions had to be made about the sequence of questions, whether and to what extent prompting is necessary, Mason says, 'You will find you are asking yourself ... questions about style, scope and sequence' (Mason, 1996: 43). There were also issues of depth and breadth of questions. Being ready for the unexpected is an essential part of this process. Respondents are likely to raise issues that the interviewer has not thought of and it is important for the interviewer to be able to respond to this and explore fully the relevance or not of this to the data. Mason argued that:

> ...the social task is to orchestrate an interaction, which moves easily and painlessly between topics and questions. The intellectual task is to try and assess, on the spot, the relevance of each part of the interaction to your research questions.... (Mason, 1996:54)

She emphasised that a high degree of intellectual and social skills are required for qualitative interviewing. Other issues of importance are listening, remembering in order, for example, to pick up on points raised, the body language of interviewer and how it may be interpreted by the respondent, achieving a good balance between

talking and listening, observing and picking up verbal and non-verbal cues about the social situation. In other words, completely engaging with the respondents and the entire interaction process.

Deciding what counts as data is also an important issue, possibly another drawback of using interview as a method of data collection. According to Mason one has to ask, "...how can you be sure that you are not simply inventing data, or getting it "wrong"" (Mason, 1996:52).

To get around this, she said it is important in this context to record as fully and explicitly as possible the route by which interpretations are made. This, she said, involve questioning one's assumptions.

> You need to remember that, however 'objective' you try to be in your records, you are continually making judgements about what to write down and what to record, what you have heard and experienced, what you think it means. Your record needs to provide the fullest possible justification for your own decisions. You should remember, that this is one of the only ways in which you can produce, as data, an account of how you have experienced the interview, of what judgements you were making throughout it, and so on. (Mason, 1996:52)

Interviewing therefore is an arduous and challenging task necessitating a variety of skills and engagement throughout the process.

3.6.5 INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

In terms of the structure of the interview, common terms such as unstructured, structured and semi-structured are used to distinguish between different types of interviews. On closer examination however, it is clear that these terms are simply ideal types and not definitive definitions distinguishing one type of interview from another. For example no interview can be completely unstructured, by mapping an area for example, organising a room and getting a specific sample one is structuring the process. That is, by virtue of the fact that one is organising an interview of whatever type one is imposing an artificial structure. According to Maykut, 'The

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structure of the interview has to do primarily with the extent to which the questions to be asked of the interviewee are developed prior to the interview' (Maykut & Morehouse, 1984:81). And indeed Maykut argued that each type of interview shares a commonality which is the open-ended nature of the questions which permit exploration.

The interview approach that I proposed to take is commonly defined as semi-structured. It refers to conversations that are initiated and guided by the researcher. It refers to a purposeful interview not one completely scripted ahead of time. Research questions *were* set ahead of each session with further ones asked as opportunities arose with yet further ones stimulated by responses.

The work of Perry is another example of this approach. In his study of Harvard pupils' experiences of college, he suggested that it was important to provide pupils with the opportunity to share their perception of life without the interviewer influencing them through the use of a more structured interview (Perry, 1970). It is, however often difficult to determine whether an interviewer unwittingly influences respondents. An interviewer may impact on her respondents in imperceptible ways despite the techniques that might be used to lessen this influence.

Influencing respondents however need not be negative or need not be seen to compromise the data. Respondents who are able to relate to the interviewer and feel that they have something in common with him/her might generate responses that may not otherwise be gleaned.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis is, 'both the art and science of making sense of, interpreting or theorising data' (Schwandt, 2001: 60).

Bogdan & Bilken drew distinction between data and its opposite speculation and illustrates the credibility that systematic and rigorous collecting gives to research.

> Data are both the evidence and the clues. Gathered carefully, they serve as the stubborn facts that save the writing you will do from unfounded speculation. Data ground you to the empirical world, when systematically and rigorously collected. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:73)

Data is never self-explanatory. Fieldwork can generate a mass of largely undifferentiated data; field notes, research diary and transcript for example. The researcher therefore needs to employ a variety of procedures to make sense of, and bring clarity, to the data obtained.

Indeed although a clear distinction between data gathering and data analysis is commonly made in quantitative research, such a distinction is problematic for many qualitative researchers. For example, in qualitative research, it is assumed that the researcher's presuppositions affect the gathering of the data and that the questions posed to respondents largely determine what the researcher is going to find out. Therefore, the analysis affects the data and the data affects the analysis. It seems therefore perhaps more accurate to speak of 'modes of analysis' rather than 'data analysis' in qualitative research. These modes of analysis are different approaches to analysing and interpreting qualitative data and include hermeneutics, semiotics, grounded theory and constant comparison (Myers, 1997). Identifying the correct analytical procedure for analysing data is therefore an important part of the process of analysis.

If my analysis can be said to fall into one procedure, this would be Constant Comparison, which was devised by Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss (1990). Data in the form of field notes and interview transcripts are coded inductively and then each section is taken in turn and compared with one or more categories, then compared with other sections of the data that have been similarly categorised. As

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segments are compared, new analytical categories and relationships between categories may be uncovered.

Further, it is important to draw distinction between analysis and interpretation. Interpretation is the art of understanding and includes re-creating one's understanding in writing, while '...analysis in qualitative inquiry is recursive and begins almost at the outset of generating data.' (Schwandt, 2001: 60). Analytical tools involve sorting, organising the data to something manageable and then exploring ways to reassemble the data to interpret. Sorting and organising requires comparing, contrasting and labelling the data, choosing appropriate concepts and developing an analytical vocabulary by which the researcher fosters the aim of the research (Silverman, 1993).

During this process various important personal and professional attributes need to be employed to improve both reliability and validity of the data. These include theoretical sensitivity, which according to Strauss and Corbin is a personal quality, which means having insight, having the ability to give meaning to data and the capacity to understand and the ability to separate relevant from irrelevant. Theoretical sensitivity they argued can be derived from literature, professional experience and personal experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin also suggested that one should periodically step back and assess whether the data seems to fit reality, to adopt an attitude of scepticism and follow research procedure. These strategies although used by Strauss and Corbin specifically in relation to grounded theory are particularly important to my research considering the nature of the topic, my interest and first hand professional and personal experiences of the issues raised by the pupils.

Once the above have been clearly and carefully undertaken, the result of the data can be presented in a number of ways such as tables and graphs. Since I have employed qualitative methods of data collection, data analysis will likewise be

qualitative although in places I have given indications of numbers of pupils who have expressed a certain position. Generally, however, my results are presented in the form of narrative, which include my own narrative account and the dialogue of respondents.

3.8 THE FIELDWORK

To obtain pupils for my fieldwork, I wrote to the head teacher from the list of fifteen schools that were on my initial list. The letter briefly outlined the nature of my research and requested permission to interview pupils falling into the group previously mentioned. In each letter I informed them that I would be happy to meet with them to discuss the research in more detail and to answer any questions they might have. The schools chosen were in inner London and were included because they each had a significant proportion of black pupils. One head teacher responded to my initial letter, one deputy head teacher who had been delegated the task, one head of year 11 similarly designated the task. Each spoke at length with me on the telephone and made appointments to see me. Fortuitously I had appointments in three schools, one girls' school, one boys' school and one mixed school. In these meetings I answered questions about my thesis and my background. I also obtained further information about the profile of the schools and their pupils and was granted permission to conduct my fieldwork with pupils within these three schools.

For the twelve schools that had not replied, my initial letter was followed up by telephone calls. It proved extremely difficult to get through to the head teachers. Secretaries most usually informed me that the head teacher was busy, teaching, on the phone or in meetings. None returned my call. Eventually I obtained permission to work in four of the fifteen schools originally contacted, the fourth after repeated

telephone calls over several weeks and follow-up letters and finally going through a teacher I knew at the school.

Thus of the original fifteen schools I eventually gained permission to conduct my fieldwork in four. One of the schools, a boys' school, was used to conduct the pilot study. The other three schools were chosen from these remaining schools to conduct the main research, the criteria being one mixed, one single-sex boy and one single sex girls' school. I may well have eventually obtained permission to work in some of the other schools but the difficulty experienced in obtaining an initial discussion on the telephone suggested it would have taken a great deal of time. Since I had worked specifically to gain the three types of schools I required, I saw little point in persisting although it may have been useful to have had a choice within the categories. I was however astonished by the stonewalling I received from the majority of schools and by the gate keeping role that head teachers' secretaries seemed to have. While I fully understood the pressures that schools and pupils were under and their apparent fear of what might be construed as unnecessary scrutiny, their refusal even to entertain the ideas of a research among black pupils in their schools left a number of questions unanswered, questions relating for example to anxiety over the issue of race to how seriously schools are taking the performance of black pupils in schools and what indeed were their reservations and fears.

I found the Further Education and the Sixth Form colleges more responsive and permission was obtained to interview pupils without difficulty although of the two colleges initially chosen, only in one did I manage to set up the interviews. This was because the teacher with whom I was to liaise left for maternity leave. I therefore settled for one further education college instead of the two that had initially been proposed. Unlike schools, gaining access to the Further Education College did not

entail obtaining permission from different levels of the management hierarchy. Once I had contacted the teacher in charge of the relevant groups that I was to see, gaining access proved easy and uncomplicated. Likewise in the sixth form college there were clear paths of communication in requesting access, which was through the Principal who delegated to the head of Department who put me in contact with the relevant tutors. I was given the list of pupils to work with and allocated times to see them over a period of three weeks. In addition I was, with the permission of pupils, given the telephone numbers of those pupils who were absent on the days allocated and contacted them to make alternative arrangements.

In terms of the difficulties found in gaining access to school, I believed the mention of achievement linked with black pupils may have sounded alarm bells in the heads of schools who perhaps feared adverse findings, publicity and controversy. In all cases negotiating access entailed obtaining permission from the head teacher, perhaps senior teacher, deputy head teacher or head of year 11, governors and, of course, parents or guardians of pupils who were to participate. These although lengthening the process were essential for legal and ethical reasons. Also, once I had obtained the necessary permission, the fact that senior management had sanctioned my presence in that school or college enabled me to feel comfortable and confident that I would not encounter additional difficulties, or had to negotiate and re-negotiate once I had started my fieldwork.

Once access had been obtained into schools and colleges and pupils allocated, I initially met pupils from each school or college either within groups or individually. The purpose of this was to outline the nature of my research, to allow them the opportunity to ask questions and obtain clarification on any point of my research that they wished. Since there was a time gap between this initial briefing session and the

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start of interviews, pupils were also given the option of thinking over whether they indeed wished to participate and to further discuss this with their parents.

Participants were assured at the beginning and the end of sessions that their views would be recorded anonymously, that they could withdraw from the process at any time and indeed could ask that the whole interview or parts of it not be included in the research. As it was, once pupils had agreed to participate, no pupil withdrew or expressed any reservation or anxiety about their contributions being used.

Each interview was estimated to last between one hours and two hours. I was conscious of the fact that the interviews were to take place in schools in the pupils' time. Where possible I attempted to arrange these within school breaks but this was unrealistic considering the predicted length of each interview.

Each interview was tape-recorded but in addition I took brief notes during the interviews. Tape recording was a useful form of recording interviews since it allowed me, the interviewer to give full attention to the respondent, to pay attention to body language and importantly to listen fully to what each respondent said. This latter point was particularly important in the interviews that were not totally pre-set because as interviewer I needed to be able to follow-up on points made during the sessions. Tape recording was transcribed as soon after the sessions as possible. I learnt the particular importance of this after I had undertaken my pilot study. It was surprising how long transcription took and how leaving this task for a few days could result in lapses of memory in relation to important aspects of the interviewing process such as body language, emphasis or even the apparent tone of respondents. In addition, first hand experience of the length of time taken to transcribe tapes from the interviews during the pilot stage reinforced the importance of setting aside sufficient time to undertake this process carefully.

In addition to the interview I kept a research diary of the entire process from early contacts with schools to entry into each educational setting. This enabled me to record important issues raised during each stage of the inquiry, compare strategies that I had employed, for example to gain entry into one school, enabling me to improve my technique as I approached other institutions. In addition the research diary charted my progress and allowed me to work within the timescale that I had both set myself and indeed the timescale set by the different institutions, and to identify ways of improving my efficiency.

3.8.1 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis was applied at each stage that is gathering, analysing and interpreting. On completion of the fieldwork in each institution tapes were transcribed and linked with the notes I had taken of each session. This was repeated for the data that I had gathered in each school or college.

Once I had completed all the interviews in each of the five institutions I was faced with the tremendous task of making sense of a mass of data including field notes, interview transcript and research diary.

This process of making sense of my data began by categorising responses under their respective heading. For example responses to each question from all pupils on peer affiliation were recorded together and so on until all the responses of all my participants on all areas had been recorded together. Thereafter each area was taken in turn and compared with one or more categories, then compared with other sections of the data that had been similarly categorised. As sections were compared, new analytical categories and relationships between categories were discovered.

During this process I derived understanding from the data, which I recreated in writing. So the sorting and organising of a mass of unwieldy data produced data that

was reassembled and ready to interpret. Sorting and organising entailed making comparisons, making contrasts, labelling the data, choosing appropriate concepts and developing an analytical vocabulary. During this process various important personal and professional attributes were employed to improve both reliability and validity of the data. These included those referred to above (see pp. 145-148) such as employing insight and bringing an attitude of detachment and scepticism to the analysis of the data in order to increase reliability and validity.

Once the above had been clearly and carefully undertaken, the result of the data was presented in the form of written narrative, which included my own narrative account and the dialogue of the respondents.

3.9 CONCLUSION – SHORTCOMINGS AND SUCCESSES

The range of data that I have collected enabled me to obtain a good insight into the world of the achieving black pupil, a world that hitherto has been almost uncharted.

The schools and colleges provided a natural setting for these interviews since the focus was on educational achievement. It was clearly easier to gain access to the schools and colleges than to the pupils' homes and indeed to gain access to more pupils on the same day or days. Notable successes were the gaining of access to schools and colleges reflecting the range of provision for young people aged fifteen to eighteen and representing the gender provisions and obtaining the number of pupils I did to participate in my research.

Interviewing I felt, enabled me to address my research question by providing the *thick* descriptions that were necessary to provide the data from which analysis could be made. I was clear about how and why my particular method and data source were going to address the research question rather than assuming that they would.

And indeed about the importance of engaging with the question of how I was going to generate and assemble such knowledge and information.

The pupils proved to be articulate and forthcoming, proving both depth and range of responses and since permitted by the method inquiry I had employed, even extended the scope of data by addressing issues and areas that were not initially included in my interview schedules. I was therefore able to draw a range of conclusions, which I feel greatly added to and so advanced the debate on achievement of black pupils in schools.

In relation to shortcomings, I wonder whether the inclusion of the perspective of teachers and parents of pupils and observing the pupils in classroom settings, would have produced different conclusions to those arrived at.

A more significant question was that of ethnic origin of the black pupils. Future research might wish to separate black achievers into categories relating to factors such as country of birth, country of parental origin, length of time in Britain and reasons for them being here. That is were they economic migrants such as the majority of early immigrants were or were they newly arrived asylum seekers. Indeed future research might more closely define what is meant by the term black. For example does this mean that both parents are black or of mixed heritage. Indeed what constitutes mixed heritage? Does this also mean children whose parents are from different parts of the Caribbean, from the Caribbean and Africa, Britain or elsewhere? Are these significant to achievement and why? Further is cultural origin or ethnicity more significant that the superficiality of colour to achievement.

Further questions might relate specifically to gender differences. This research showed differences between the perspective of achieving black boys and girls in a

number of areas. Further exploration might focus on these differences and the significance of them in relation to achievement of each group.

My fieldwork has however revealed some new and significant data. Analysis of this data, which follows in Section 2, reveals that there is no single explanation for the achievement of black pupils in schools. Rather a number of factors contribute to their attainment. These factors are teachers' expectations, peer affiliation, self-concept and self-image and family.

Chapter 4

TEACHER EXPECTATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the thesis is an analysis of my research data on black pupils'
perspective of factors that affect their achievement in school. A number of factors
have been identified by the pupils as significant in their achievement; teacher
expectation, peer affiliation, self-mage/self-concept and family. Although each is
cited by black pupils as important in their performance in school, some are considered
by them to be more important than others. This section is ordered with those factors
considered by pupils to be most important, towards the latter part of the section.

The section begins with analysis of teachers' attitudes and behaviour. As we
have seen in previous Chapters, pupil teacher interaction has been shown to have an
impact on pupils' performance in schools (Sewell, 1997; Rampton, 1981; Green,
1995; Gibson & Barrow, 1986). Interaction is however a two-way process, so this
Chapter assesses the role of both teachers and pupils in the performance and
achievement of black pupils in school. It focuses on pupils' perspectives on teacher
expectation and analyses how they feel this affects their achievement. It focuses on
this area in order to highlight the important role of teachers' perception, attitude and
behaviour on the achievement of black pupils. The related area of the role of black
and white teachers in the performance of black pupils is also examined, as are
responsibilities that black pupils feel they have in this process. These areas are
examined because previous research have identified differences in the responses of
black and white teachers to black pupils and black pupils to them (Green, 1995;
Gibson & Barrow, 1986). Analysis of black pupils' perception will highlight the

issues at play in relation to race and pupil teacher interaction and black pupils' achievement.

The key questions and issues in this Chapter are therefore:

1   What are teachers' expectations of black achieving pupils?

2   How do teachers perceive black pupils as people?

3   Does a teacher's colour make a difference to the achievement of black pupils?

4   What strategies do black pupils employ to win and maintain the support of teachers?

5   What are the pupils' perception of their own roles and obligations in influencing teacher' perception and expectation of them?

This perspective is clearly a partial view of teacher expectation and its possible role in pupils' achievement since I will not be examining the perspective of teachers themselves or indeed observing them in their interaction with black pupils. The focus of this research was designed to be solely on the perspective of black pupils and hence did not include or necessitate that of their teachers or observing interaction between them. Indeed the choice of qualitative methodology and techniques was based on the premise that the perspective of pupils in my sample generated data which was both reliable and valid and did not therefore necessitate additional triangulating techniques (see pp. 123-132). Further, I have chosen to focus on the pupils' perspective because there is a gap in the literature on how black achievers perceive the factors that are at play in school in relation to their achievement (see pp. 14-22).

As was outlined in Chapter 1 (see pp. 22-78), out-of-school factors such as social class, peer affiliation, individual deficiencies such as low IQ, low self-image,

language, family structure and child rearing practices have been identified as impacting most powerfully on black pupils' performance. This impact is most usually perceived as negative (Jensen, 1972; Richmond, 1986; Beskin, 1994; Miller, 1970).

I have further argued in Chapters 1 and 2 that, in this climate, that is, where *blame* has been almost exclusively placed at the door of the black family and its children, the role of teachers, until the relatively recent *school effectiveness* debate has been seen as almost negligible (see pp. 76-78). The impact of teacher expectation on pupil performance however, has been steadily analysed with varying conclusions in relation to the achievement of all pupils and with the suggestion that teachers most commonly have low expectations of black pupils (see pp. 33-42).

Teacher expectation is often said to be important in pupil performance because it is considered that expectations can impact powerfully on achievement. Chapter 1, (see pp. 33-42) examined research that has demonstrated that teacher bias or expectation results in more favourable treatment of bright pupils. This results in more favourable learning outcomes and conversely less favourable treatment and learning outcomes for pupils considered dull. These studies have likewise shown that teacher expectation may be translated into expressed attitudes which may be recognised by pupils (Brophy, 1983; Galton & Delafield, 1981; Nash, 1976; Nehaul, 1996).

Some of these studies on teacher expectation have placed emphasis on the related concepts of labelling and self-fulfilling prophecy, suggesting that the labelling of pupils by teachers can have profound influences on how they see themselves as well as how they perform academically (Nash, 1976; Silberman, 1971). I have argued that in a racialised society race and ethnicity are the basis on which pupils are perceived and influences judgements made about them in school (see pp. 12-14).

It was also argued (see pp. 14-21) that because of the racialised nature of this society little attention has been paid to the idea of *achieving* black pupils. The literature is therefore relatively sparse in relation to their experiences in school generally and in relation to teacher expectation and its impact on them in particular. However what is clear in the general literature on teacher expectation is that pupils labelled bright trigger particular positive responses in teachers (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Nash, 1976; 2001; Brophy, 1998). This in turn cause pupils labelled bright to perform accordingly, fulfilling the *prophecy*.

In relation to the colour of teachers and its impact on the achievement of black pupils, previous literature has not been as conclusive. Studies of black teachers have tended to concentrate on the low achievement of black children and these, as I have argued (see pp. 33-42), have tended to portray black teachers as insensitive, authoritarian and conservative (Callender, 1997; Rist, 1970). Indeed Callender goes so far as to argue that many are still seemingly caught up in the slave mentality of colour gradation, hair texture and so on, using these as a means of judging black pupils (Callender, 1997). Although seeming harsh it is conceivable that some black teachers, especially ones who have little experience and reference points outside this society, may still not have shrugged off the *slave mentality* passed on as a result of many years of oppression. What is more likely however is that black teachers understand the difficulties that both they and black pupils face to succeed in this society and ironically the criticism they face in responding in their own ways to the challenges.

Generally, studies I have outlined on white teachers have been even more scathing. The studies I have examined have shown that white teachers approach their teaching from an ethnocentric perspective (see pp. 33-42). They show that they

subject black pupils, especially boys, to persistent and unfair criticism and that they are reluctant to interact with them, contributing to a relationship of conflict and an anti-school culture among black pupils. Gender differences are highlighted in the literature not only in terms of teachers' perception of black pupils and their relationship with them generally, but in relation to the differing responses of black boys and girls to teachers and to school (Nehaul, 1996; Wright, 1985; Gillborn, 1990; Mirza, 1992; Mac an Ghaill, 1988).

The argument presented in this Chapter is a complex interweaving of factors which, for clarity and analysis, is carefully dissected. These areas do not fall into precise categories as numbered above. Pupils in their responses to my questions did not neatly compartmentalise these areas. For many of them for example, whether teachers had high expectations of them was not separated from how they said teachers saw them as black people. Indeed the complexity and sometimes seemingly contradictory responses of pupils made disaggregation of their views challenging. Differences were not only found between pupils but also within pupils' perception. Whatever the complexity of these issues however, the views expressed by pupils, proved to be illuminating, highlighting issues that have not been tackled in this way before and revealing the perspective of black pupils that has hitherto been largely ignored.

The Chapter concludes that black pupils believe that their teachers' attitude, behaviour and language can impact on their performance. They point however to the complexity of the factors that are at play in interacting with their teachers.

4.2 TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS OF BLACK ACHIEVING PUPILS

This section explores black pupils' perception of their teachers' expectations of them and the effect this has on their achievement. In doing so two main themes have emerged:

- The relationship between high teacher expectation and pupils' confidence and self-image

- The opportunities to further achieve as a result of high teacher expectations

On one level, the majority of pupils in my sample said that their teachers had held high expectations of them and in general they said teacher expectation was important and played some part in their performance in school. Pupils talked of it being apparent when teachers expected them to do well and explained how it contributed to their performance.

> I can tell when a teacher thinks I can do well, when they expect me to do well and they all seem to. They push me and let me know I have the ability to succeed. It gives me confidence and a lot of self-esteem. It makes me think I can do things and I want to do things as well. (Ayo)

Likewise,

> I think the way we get taught in the top set makes me feel I can achieve anything. My teachers are positive and are always coming in to encourage us to do well. (Obe)

Evidence of pupils' high achievements across all five institutions could be seen in that all pupils were in class groups where it was expected that pupils would gain above average GCSE grades. In addition to this pupils talked of other opportunities they were given in the school by teachers, which supported their studies and gave them added confidence.

> Being in the top set, I feel the curriculum is really good. I do a lot of extra curricula activities. I do the CREST award (a Science and Technology Award). It is high GCSE pupils who tend to go in for it. The teachers put me in for that and it has helped me with not just technology and Science but with Maths as well and information systems. (Adi)

There were however, some pupils who said that despite their achievements, teachers did not see beyond their colour. Here there was distinction drawn between how teachers viewed their ability and how they viewed their performance.

> Many teachers have the attitude that black children don't achieve, not that they can't, that they don't. Usually white teachers don't expect you to achieve. (Keisha)

Pupils who said that high expectation was held of them did not consider it surprising since all of them had been achievers over at least four years in that school. They argued that teachers' expectation of them was due to the fact of *their* proven ability and achievement. They were in the top sets, had persistently scored well above average in SATs tests and now in year 11 or 12, had high predictions of GCSE grades.

Questions relating to teachers' expectation were in general, answered in a matter-of-fact way, as if this went without saying. Or for those pupils (approximately 5 per cent) who did not feel high expectation was held of them felt this was because teachers could not see beyond their colour prejudice.

What was however not as clear was the extent to which pupils considered that teachers' high expectation preceded or followed their proven achievement. Likewise, they did not place teacher' expectation of them in a vacuum but often linked and related it to their own attitudes, behaviour and responses. These points are dealt with below.

In conclusion, the fact that black achievers were predominantly of the opinion that teachers in general held high expectation of them may be seen as a positive acknowledgement of their teachers' role in their performance. It was interesting however, that black achievers felt that their performance record was the major contributory factor determining teachers' expectations. The onus they felt was squarely on them to mould their teachers' responses. This may well be the expected

dynamic of pupil-teacher relationship, black pupils being therefore no different to other pupils (Coleman, 1974). If this was the case, black pupils did not seem to believe it, viewing their teachers' high expectation of them with more scepticism than belief in its significant impact on their achievement.

What was quite apparent among the pupils from all five institutions was the majority of them qualified their conviction that their teachers held high expectations of them with how they considered teachers perceived them as black people. They spoke at greater length and with greater conviction on this point.

4.3 TEACHERS PERCEPTION OF BLACK PEOPLE

Pupils distinguished here between how their teachers perceived them as individual black pupils and how teachers regarded black people in general. The keys themes are that:

- Some teachers held negative views of black people and used this view to generalise about black pupils

- Teachers only modified their negative views of black pupils when pupils proved they were high achievers.

The majority of pupils in my sample were as convinced of their teachers' high expectation of them as they were that teachers, especially white teachers, perceived black pupils in general in a negative light. On the face of it, this seems to contradict their earlier assertion that teachers had high expectation of them. On closer examination however, it can be seen that pupils distinguished between how teachers saw them as pupils and how they related to their colour. That is, how they perceived them as black people. Indeed pupils said that teachers often found it difficult to see them as individuals, to separate them from the mass of *colour group* from which they

came or to separate their individual achievements from the low achievement they felt characterised their group.

> Some white teachers who don't know much about black people, only have more positive views of white and Asian pupils.... (Keisha)

There was a general *lack of surprise* among the pupils about how they said their teachers saw them as black people. Yet they expressed frustration and anger at the situation that they saw as pervasive in their schools and that they said characterised their school experiences. Pupils for example stated that teachers identified certain behaviour traits with black pupils, 'Loud, no manners, trouble making' (Rose). They also said that so negative and inextricably linked were some behavioural traits with blackness that even if you were white and behaved in certain ways, they were defined as black.

> If you are a white girl and you are loud, no manners, you are seen as white trash so they get treated like black children. (Rose)

Most of the boys in the single sex school were of the opinion that teachers perceived them in a variety of negative ways. They were predominantly of the opinion that they were seen as trouble makers, aggressive, less able to commit to work and intellectually inferior to their white and Asian peers. They talked of having to prove themselves to teachers, even though they were in top sets, before they were perceived as being serious about their studies and of being capable of achieving.

Some teachers were said to stereotype black boys as possible drug dealers, ignorant, rude and violent especially when they are with their friends or in groups. Pupils said this was problematic because the weaker teachers tended to defer to black boys in groups because they feared them and did not challenge them and so created a cycle of problems for the boys and for the school. Pupils said in addition that they

were often compared unfavourably with white boys and that teachers were especially negative of black boys. They expected black boys more than black girls to:

> ...behave in a certain way, teachers are not surprised if black boys behave badly. Teachers always seem a bit surprised about me. I suppose the way I carry myself is different to how they expect. (Peter)

Although these pupils were high achievers, some nevertheless said that at least when they first met teachers, there was a sense that teachers saw their colour first and as a consequence did not expect them to be achievers or to maintain this for any length of time.

Some pupils were clearly concerned about the negativity that they said they faced in school, expressing that this was sometimes used to manipulate them, at other times to motivate them to work to prove teachers wrong and at other times to, '...put us down and deflate our ego' (Ayo).

That is, pupils said they were constantly battling to put themselves outside the negative views held of them by some of their teachers and that when they achieved these teachers were surprised, keeping them tense and anxious. Others were insistent that although they knew this was a trait in some teachers they would not permit this means of control and manipulation to affect them.

> Some teachers do feel surprised that blacks are doing well but that is nothing to do with me. There are lots of ways for people to manipulate your mind and that is one of them, by letting you feel you can only do certain things. I won't let anyone manipulate me. (Simon)

A number of pupils tried to offer explanations as to why some teachers perceived black pupils in a negative way. They took the view that since teachers are part of society it is not surprising that they related to black children differently to the way they related to white children.

> In society, when black people do things wrong society focuses on it and magnifies it. This can set you on a bad path. It is the same with some teachers, they can judge you as bad when you do something small and it affects you for

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the rest of your school life because they exaggerate your bad faults. Sometimes because of these things black boys especially say, the system mucks around with me, I am going to muck around with it as well. (Ezra)

It was interesting and revealing how the majority of pupils were confident about their teachers' belief in their ability but found it difficult to speak with confidence on how their teachers saw them as people. Evidently, their teachers were only able to work positively with them when they were proven achievers. In this way, they seemed to be working or relating to disjointed pupils, not whole persons. The pupils it seemed were suggesting that if teachers related to the whole person they would have to face their views of blackness, a *blackness* that over 90 per cent of pupils considered teachers did not meet with positive views.

4.4 TEACHERS' COLOUR AND BLACK PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT: PUPILS' INTERACTION STRATEGIES

Pupils' responses in this area were particularly illuminating in that the majority of pupils drew clear distinctions between the impact on their school experiences of white and black teachers. Key themes are that:

- Pupils' were sensitive to race as an issue in school – They were cautious of discussing race and understood the complexity of this issue.

- Black achieving pupils had different expectations of their black and white teachers – They stated that black teachers should understand their position, be open with them about the difficulties they faced in society. Likewise, that they should utilise their experiences to enable them to obtain the best from school and society.

- Black pupils considered that black teachers had a greater understanding of the issues around black pupils in school and society and so tried harder to motivate them. This led to black teachers making greater demands on them.

- Black pupils had to lead and guide the relationship with their white teachers.

This area of the significance of teachers' colour and pupil achievement, was another one in which pupils seemed to contradict their position. They both discounted colour as an important focus and cited it as an important aspect of their relationship with teachers.

The explanation for this might be one of several reasons, among them the fact that whatever the view of their teachers, they *were* achieving and that they did not wish to be seen to be ungrateful. Likewise, the data showed that pupils were not altogether sure as to whether they were able to share fully with me their views on this particular sensitive subject.

> I don't really want to give you the wrong impression by what I say because sometimes if you talk about race people sometimes think you are making excuses. (Nadine)

This position seemed to be borne out by the fact that some pupils, especially the male pupils, were especially thoughtful and hesitant when the question was asked.

> You can't always tell with teachers whether they are mainly focusing on your colour. Probably on a day to day basis, this is not very important but then again with some teachers; colour is all they see. It is what they relate to most. It's hard to give a definite answer though because you can't always tell. (Marcus)

There were often lengthy pauses and seemingly furtive glances around their shoulders and uncomfortable postures.

> If teachers hear you saying that your colour matters to them, they could get offended and even turn against you. You have to be careful what you say in school. (James)

Again, there was a difference in the general position of girls and boys. A number of girls would initially state that it made no difference whether teachers were white or black but as the interview progressed made very different statements.

> Teaches can't help seeing your colour and thinking it is what determines your intelligence and behaviour. It is the way they were brought up. (Nadine)

Specifically in relation to black teachers, at one level some pupils were of the opinion that black teachers were more significant in the primary years when children were trying to find their identity. It was said that colour did not always matter as a general rule but did in some notable situations. For example, pupils spoke of feeling more comfortable at parents' evening with black teachers than white teachers because they felt black teachers understood more readily their parents expectations of teachers. At another level they cited very different responses of white and black teachers to them and distinguished between the approaches of white and black teachers. For example black teachers were felt to be more passionate about education and its importance than white teachers. Likewise they perceived black and white teachers in different ways and expressed that they had quite different expectations of black teachers to that which they had of white teachers. In addition, they linked their perception of white teachers with specific strategies that they said they had to employ in their interaction with white teachers in order to be regarded by them in a positive way. The data showed that black pupils felt that they needed to work harder to prove themselves as motivated and well behaved to white teachers than they felt they had to do with black teachers. In addition, the data showed black pupils felt that their body language and tone were more likely to be misunderstood and penalised by white than by black teachers.

In relation to their perception of black teachers, a number of pupils held very strong views. The data indicated that pupils considered black teachers to fall into two broad groups. On one hand pupils were of the view that many black teachers, knowing they were in the minority and that the odds were stacked against them, were so anxious to fit in and to secure their jobs that they often ignored the issues of colour:

> They try their best to pretend you're not there...Like they are embarrassed that you remind them that they are black...they have to face their colour. (Jamelia)

Other black teachers they said, would confidently acknowledge them, engaged them in discussions on issues around colour, education and life in the society in general and explain to them how important it was to excel beyond the achievements of whites if they were to achieve in employment.

> My head of year, who is black, is not afraid to discuss with us what is happening in the society. He doesn't just talk generally but gives us specific examples of how black people are treated in comparison with whites. It's terrible what goes on and how much harder and better we have to be. (Simon)

As a consequence of this approach taken by some of their black teachers however, some pupils stated that black teachers were more demanding, 'They are more on our backs' (Obe). Another pupil brought in the wider question of shared blackness, 'They want us (black children) to do better' (Ayo). And further the question of their disadvantaged position in the society was mentioned. 'They know it is more difficult for us blacks. They know you have to do better than white pupils so they push us more' (Veronica). Likewise the view was held that black teachers understood the implication of how they were defined and how they could overcome institutional disadvantage.

> They don't have the stereotypes of us, just of the society and they won't let you use excuses because they have been through it and they know you can beat the system. They did, so they know you can. (Jamelia)

There were differences of opinion here however. Some pupils did not feel black teachers made any difference to their achievement or that black teachers treated or related to black pupils in ways that were significantly different to white teachers. Some said the difference was superficial, "... certain things you say to a black teacher that white teachers wouldn't understand." (Rose)

The majority of black pupils however suggested that the differences between white and black teachers were much more significant and profound.

> There is a difference between black and white teachers – it is not racist but black teachers have a different way of explaining, especially if they know their culture and where they are from. These teachers connect with both groups but especially with black children. (Paul)

The majority of pupils raised this issue of *understanding*. They used phrases such as, they know where I'm coming from, they understand how hard it is for us, they know we have to be twice as good as whites to get anywhere.

> My teachers are helpful but black teachers understand more. They know that it is harder for black people to get jobs. One black teacher has said to me that people are happy when they see black children doing nothing. People think it is unusual when black children do well in school. (James)

James, who interestingly was not as satisfied with his performance as he thought his teachers were, had very strong opinion on this:

> Black teachers know where I am coming from...know where black children are coming from. Some of the black teachers as well as the white teachers don't get on with children. I think the pupils' attitudes have a lot to do with whether the teachers like them and help them with their work. If you suck up, especially if you are black, teachers are more likely to help you, white teachers really, white teachers especially, you have to suck up to them. (James)

This pupil description of *sucking up* was helping the teacher to discipline unruly pupils, telling on pupils who misbehaved, finishing work first and telling the teacher that you are finished.

The views, that black teachers tried harder, spend more time and were more of a positive influence was held by several of the respondents. In answer to why among

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the responses given were, 'White teachers probably spend as much time as they have to.' (James)

In contrast some black teachers were said to see teaching as a vocation, their mission being to help black pupils to succeed while the opposite were said to be the case for most white teachers. 'It is just a job, many of them don't connect with black pupils' (Paul). Further, the data showed that pupils felt that it was easier to talk to black teachers while it was often difficult to get close to white teachers. More, some teachers, it was said, had a reputation for picking on black children and ignoring what whites were doing. Some teachers were said however to be different, pupils were keen to point out that this was not a problem that was faced in every lesson with every teacher.

Good white teachers were said to have similar traits to good black teachers, they were said to take the time to see beyond pupils' colour, ensured they worked to their potential, motivated them and refused to accept mediocre effort and work. A majority of pupils made reference to having at least one exceptional white teacher whom they credited with contributing positively to their achievement.

> My English teacher loves his subject and takes personal pride in pupils achieving. I don't think he cares if you are black or white. He takes for granted that I am going to do well and won't take nonsense if I don't deliver. I really respect him for that. He's got me loving poetry. I've won a competition and £150.00 for a poem that I wrote because of how he taught me. (Rose)

Likewise pupils spoke of white teachers who expected both high standards of work and discipline from their pupils regardless of their colour. They did not accept excuses and were not afraid to obtain the support of parents to get the best from their pupils.

> My Geography teacher from day one didn't put up with anyone in her class who didn't work. If you don't do the work to a good standard she will get you aside and put pressure on you. If that doesn't work she'll go as far as call your parents. I know I'll do well in geography because of her. (James)

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Students stated that the majority of white teachers needed to be shown, in the case of girls, that they were not the black *girls* of their stereotype, *loud and with an attitude*. That is, black pupils needed to consciously make attempts to belie the stereotypes that they said white teachers had of them.

> White teachers and black teachers teach me as much as each other but black teachers...take a personal interest and seem genuinely interested in how I do and encourage me to do my best and try hard. Some white teachers have a negative opinion of black pupils, they think they are more trouble, so you have to show all the time that you are different. (Carl)

This latter point was taken up by a number of pupils who were of the opinion that black boys had to adopt a particular persona and manner in order to be supported in their work by teachers, especially white teachers. Likewise, they stated that teachers had a number of subtle ways of portraying their negative views of them. They cited body language such as facial expressions and eye contact or lack of it, indeed even ignoring poor behaviour and lack of effort from black pupils.

> With white teachers the initial response you give when they first meet you is important...if you show you are willing to work they will help you. But I think white teachers have a view that black children are not really interested in learning so they do not really push that hard. (Carl)

In addition there was the view that black pupils had to lead and guide the relationship with some of their teachers. Teachers needed to have demonstrated that black pupils were prepared to work and seemingly did not fit the stereotype held of them as slothful and ill disciplined.

> If you are black you have to meet the teachers more than half the way or they will not automatically do their best for you. You need to prove that you are not lazy and ignorant. (Owen)

Pupils were insistent that many white teachers consciously went out of their way to undermine and discourage black children who tried to achieve.

> When white teachers see a bright black person doing work, answering questions, getting high grades, they might still try to discourage and

undermine them because they don't want blacks to get ahead. White teachers try to hold black children back. (Ophelia)

The perception here was that that some white teachers did not play an active role in motivating black pupils but awaited the pupils' responses. This is an important area because as I have argued (see pp. 22-76), teachers have almost been absolved by researchers of responsibility for the achievement of black pupils, predominantly citing external factors for their performance, especially when their performances were poor. Black achieving pupils were now saying that even when they were proven achievers, they still did not meet positive teachers, able to impact on them as professionals without negative stereotypes of them as black people.

> Teachers live in the real world where everywhere they turn they see black people described as trouble and failures. If you are not like that in their classrooms its like they can't quite believe it. It's not always their fault. (Simon)

Instead, the data revealed that black pupils had to employ various manipulative strategies to win white teachers' attention and favour and to maintain their achievement. Pupils stated for example that they made teachers feel ineffective and inferior to other teachers by comparing them unfavourably in order to make them deliver better lessons or by being overly attentive and complimentary to win their favour. Indeed they stated that this made them place onerous responsibilities on the few black teachers they had in their attempts to *connect* with teachers to meet their academic needs.

Pupils stated however that they understood that they were not passive recipients of teacher behaviour rather, that their own attitudes and behaviour influenced teachers' perception and expectations.

4.5 PUPILS' ROLES AND OBLIGATIONS IN RELATION TO TEACHERS' PERCEPTION AND EXPECTATION

The pupils in my study seemed fully aware of the complexity of social relationships. They did not, for example, see this issue of teacher attitude and expectation as one sided, coming just from teachers who impacted on them as passive recipients. They pointed strongly to a real process of social interaction with the possibility of them as individuals impacting as powerfully on teachers as teachers were capable of impacting on them. Black achieving pupils seemed therefore to understand the dynamics of social relationships and their role in this process. They talked of relationship, stimulating affection, employing strategies that suited the personality, role and even seemingly the political position of their teachers. The key themes in this section are therefore:

- Black pupils had to develop particular strategies to win and retain the favour of their teachers.

- They had to adopt obsequious manner with their teachers to avoid being seen in a negative light.

- Black pupils sometimes had to refrain from exhibiting self-confidence to avoid being considered aggressive or as having *an attitude.*

- Pupils were aware of the political positions of their teachers and used this to their advantage. For example, teachers whom pupils felt extolled views about racial equality and oppression were held to account in terms of their classroom practice.

On the question of their role in affecting teacher expectation, a number of pupils said that their teachers' expectations were formed by the way they presented themselves and the way they related to teachers and fellow pupils. The majority of pupils sighted the importance of relating to teachers in a particular way in order to gain and maintain their favour. In addition pupils said that they did best for teachers

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they liked and the teacher with whom they had a good relationship. A positive relationship with teachers was therefore sighted as very significant in their achievement as was good behaviour because they stimulated, it was said, a good response from teachers. 'Children have to show a really positive attitude to teachers and then they will get help' (Carl).

Pupils spoke of the significance of good behaviour and considered this important for gaining the respect of teachers. They saw challenging the stereotypes they felt teachers held of black pupils as an integral part of their interaction with them and so of their school life.

> I think behaviour is really important. If you behave well you get the teachers respect, you have to show that you are not the normal stereotype of the rough black boy....Black boys have to prove that they are different to white teachers' stereotype before they are respected and get a good education... (Owen)

Pupils stated that the onus was on them to initiate a positive relationship with teachers, that is they had to set the tone for a good relationship with teachers.

> They are always cautious of black pupils at first. They meet us first with their heads full of stereotypes. You have to show them that you can achieve before they change their stereotype of you. (Keisha)

When asked how pupils showed that they *can achieve,* most said it was particularly to do with how they approached their work but even was more to do with how they presented themselves in classrooms and around the school and whether they formed friendship groups with other black children.

> It's a bit like if you are a black boy walking down a street. If you are on your own in a suit, with a look of definitely minding your own business, hands in your pocket or with one bag, like a school bag, not looking around as if you are going to rob an old lady, then you might not get stopped by the police. Your chance of being thought a mugger goes up if you are in a group of black boys. (James)

When asked to spell out what this meant on a day to day basis in school, the pupil stated that, black pupils were viewed in a positive light by teachers when they

did not go around in groups of more than two, when they did not *walk black or spoke patois*.

> It's OK if you are white and Asians and go around in groups but not if you are black. I think everyone thinks we look big and black and threatening. (James)

This link between school and the streets was often made by pupils, especially boys, as were similarities between the conduct that they had to employ to avoid soliciting unwanted attention and criticism. I was keen to discover how and when pupils developed these strategies.

> You just pick them up. It's really no different from how you have to learn to avoid being charged for something you haven't done by the police. You have to learn fast as you come into different situations. (Ayo)

Boys in particular said therefore that they needed to be careful if 'being themselves' coincided in even a small degree with teachers' negative stereotype of them. This meant there were dangers even in them being exuberant teenagers, or being extroverts.

> You sometimes have to almost be like machines for them not to think you're typical black rude and aggressive... (Paul)

Kissing up to teachers or a similar phrase was commonly used to express how black pupils said they have to relate to teachers in order not to be seen as 'typical black' and to win teachers' favour and support.

> Kissing up to teachers can get you further. It is the way black people have to be in their jobs to get on so doing it in school is good practice. When you kiss up to your boss at work you get promotion. I suppose it is nature. (Peter)

It was also said that manner, tone and voice and language that were not defined as aggressive, made a black child stand out and got the respect of teachers likewise, 'If you speak well' (Ezra).

Attitude was another term often used by pupils in relation to how they said they needed to operate around teachers both in and out of classrooms. Teachers were

said to favour those with ability and a character that they liked and not with an *attitude*. The view among a number of girls in particular was that black pupils were said to have an *attitude* and that teachers did not all define this in the same way. Indeed they might define it differently at different times to justify treating black pupils less favourably than they did other groups.

> Teachers do not like girls with an attitude and black girls cannot hide their attitude. (Felisha)

When asked what the attitude was the black girls *cannot* hide she said,

> Attitude is black self-confidence. Teachers hate black girls being self-confident. It's as if they are saying who do you think you are? You are a black girl, what do you have to be confident about? Black *attitude* gets under teachers' skin. (Felisha)

Since *attitude* was said to count a lot with teachers prejudicing teachers against them, a number of pupils said that it was important that their peers should realise this and learn how to deal with it in order not to jeopardise their future. Some pupils saw a link between race and class.

> If you are poor and lippy teachers don't care, so black children have to wake up and realise and get on with work. You have to know that you are not white, articulate and rich where mummy or daddy will put in a good word for you. (Ophelia)

Here Ophelia clearly identifies a similar verbal ability that black and white pupils may have but showed by her choice of words how black pupils are denigrated (lippy) and white middle class pupils elevated (articulate). This demonstrates an understanding of not just the nature of stratification and power relations within schools but in the wider society.

Jamelia further emphasised what she felt was the burden of colour even without the additional constraints of class:

> In this society colour is like a cloud, you have to try and lift it with manners, education and confidence or no one will give you a chance, it's an everyday battle and black kids who don't know it are stupid. (Jamelia)

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Some pupils were concerned that many black pupils did not know what they had to do to get the most out of school. A number of pupils pointed to the negative impact of black sub-cultural groups in school which they said incensed teachers and prejudiced them against black pupils, whether they were actually part of those groups or not.

> As a black person you can't afford for teaches to see you as part of a black group. I don't think any of our teachers see black children hanging together all the time as a good thing. If you are white, they think it's fine but no way if you are black, they see you together, they think trouble. (Ayo)

Although some pupils said the existence of black sub-culture was as a reaction to racism, achieving pupils stated that these sub-cultures were counter-productive because they dictated that for black pupils it is not *cool* to study. And that the opinion of the teacher does not matter even if it is beneficial. Although the achieving pupils in my study understood the reaction of these anti-school pupils, they were of the opinion that this played into the hands of those whose view of them were already poor.

> A teacher may not like you because you are black but I think you can still be teacher's favourite because their favourites are usually those girls who work hard and don't challenge the teacher. (Jamelia)

A number of pupils said teachers responded more to character and attitude than to factors such as colour. These pupils were in the minority but their views converged with those who considered colour to be important in that both groups seemed to believe in an ideal type of pupil preferred by and supported most by teachers. These pupils showed respect to teachers and worked hard.

> Teachers like a challenge and so long as you are bright and respectful to them, they don't mind if you challenge them. (Carlette)

On the issue of the political position of teachers, pupils seemed surprisingly informed about what they said were the political positions of their teachers in relation to race and expressed that they were adept at manipulating this to their advantage.

> Some of the teachers carry on as if they are sorted out about racism, especially those who belong to unions. When they talk about disadvantage, they give the impression that they understand what us blacks have to go through. Once they know you're aware that is their politics, they try to get on with black pupils even if it kills them. So in a way you can use their views to keep a check on them. (Ezra)

Black pupils were therefore clearly aware of the complex dynamics at work in the formation of teachers' perception of them and indeed the possible role that their attitude and behaviour may play in this process. They were seemimgly aware of the views and opinions that teachers brought to the interaction process, views and opinions that were sometimes independent of their own behaviour, attitudes and performance.

A number of pupils were particularly incisive in their view of the social process as it operates in school.

> There are so many different teachers and their personalities are all different. I suppose some of the teachers may be racist but you as a pupil can bring them round or at least get them to put their racism aside if you are an exceptional pupil. (Obi)

This is a revealing statement in that although the pupil was seemingly trying to exonerate racist teachers the statement is loaded with acceptance of reality that he considered faced him in school. It seems evident therefore that mediocre or under achieving black children would not possibly be able to bring a 'may be racist' teacher round.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Black pupils felt that in relating to their teacher a number of complex factors were at play. These related for example to the relative importance of self-motivation and high

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self-expectation. The general view being that although, because of their proven abilities, teachers generally had high expectation of them, the motivation they brought to the process and their own ambitions were more important than their teachers' role in motivating them and the view they had of them. In other words, black pupils felt that despite their teachers' responses to them, be they positive or negative, they did not have to acquiesce passively. Indeed they viewed teachers' high expectation of them with scepticism since they were of the opinion that teachers' primary view of them was based on their colour, so they viewed them as black people first and achieving pupils next. They were however of the view that they had the ability, motivation, ambition and support from families to redress the balance and perform well in school. In relation to the colour of their teachers, black achieving pupils had higher expectations of black teachers than they did of white teachers. Black teachers were expected to contribute more significantly to their school experiences, to adopt a different attitude to them and to take on more positive and proactive roles than white teachers. Pupils did not always feel that black teachers fulfilled their expectations. The ones meeting achieving pupils approval were considered to be those who connected with them and showed understanding and empathy to them as fellow black people. Those who did not were those who ignored their colour, its implication and consequences.

The points raised above are interesting and illuminating and some initial conclusions can be drawn from them.

This area of expectancy and its possible impact on achievement is a complex area on which to draw firm conclusions. Black pupils in my study however considered that teachers, in their amount of praise and criticism, non-verbal actions such as

attitude, eye contact, facial expression and other forms of body language, could affect their academic performance.

It was difficult however to be sure within the remit of my study, which had impacted more on the expectations of white teachers, the teachers' own experiences of them as black pupils or what the pupils had so far achieved independently or with the help of their teachers.

The labelling of pupils according to traits such as physical appearance and indicators of class, as we have seen, is not new. The perception of black achieving pupils was that some teachers did not play an active role in motivating them. Rather they considered that this process was largely dependent on them. The data revealed that teachers awaited the responses of black achieving pupils before relating to them in a positive manner. This is an important area because as I have argued, over a considerable period of time, it has seemed that some schools, thinkers and researchers, have almost absolved themselves of responsibility for the achievement of black pupils, predominantly citing external factors for their performance, especially when this performance was poor. Evidently this has changed little.

Achieving black pupils in my sample argued that despite the impact that teacher expectation could have on their performance, this was only crucial if other important aspects were absent. Indeed it was evident that achieving black pupils did not acquiesce passively in classrooms and accepted the labels that school or society attached to them. Rather they strove to overcome any adverse impact of negative views and actions.

On the question of the impact of black and white teachers, both black and white teachers are mainly products of this society and are socialised according to its racialised structures and ideology. Black teachers cannot be automatically assumed to

wield a significantly different impact on black pupils than white teachers. It is however characteristic of a racially differentiated society where black people form the minority, that the assumption is that black should naturally ally themselves with others sharing their colour regardless of other maybe more important aspects of themselves, such as class or even religion.

Arguably black people, performing the role of teacher should not be expected to be different to any other teacher. The colour should be irrelevant and a black teacher and a white teacher should similarly work to motivate, stimulate and bring out the best in pupils, regardless of their colour or background. They are after all professionals, trained in the role of teacher, able it would be assumed to separate the personal from the professional. This position does not subscribe to reality. As can be seen from the data presented above (see pp. 33-42), black pupils did expect black teachers to be different. They expected them to have a greater understanding of their position within the school structure and society and so to impact on them more positively than they believed white teachers were able or willing to.

The pupils in my study seemed therefore to welcome a situation where black teachers were different from their white counterparts, when they did not perform the role as simply that of a teacher but showed understanding of their position as black people in society and in the school. When they were able to offer advice, when they took them aside and helped them to negotiate the system and explained how and why they believed they needed to work harder than white pupils needed to do. When they used themselves as examples, showing how it was possible to succeed despite their understanding of the pressures on them in society and the school.

The black teachers that my achieving pupils valued were those who did not distance themselves from their black pupils but connected with them. As to whether

this was significant in their achievement is debatable, because although all the pupils in the study had at least one black teacher, they did not all share a view as to his or her particular significance in their achievement. The presence of a black teacher who *connected* seemed more of value therefore on a comfort level. At most it seemed of value at the level of confirming and supporting what the pupils already seemed to know about their position in the school and the society, and the need for greater effort on their part to defy the odds seemingly weighed against them as black pupils.

On the other hand the assumption might be that white teachers as part of a racialised culture with the force of the history of subjugation of black people and the consequent justification of that subjugation with racist ideology, might have low expectations of black pupils. Pupils did not seem to feel that this was always the case. The majority of them said that their white teachers held high expectations of them. Most pupils seemed to suggest however that this high expectation was as a consequence of their proven attitude and achievement over many years. In other words teachers had no choice but to now expect them to do well because they had been proving they could for at least four years.

It was in relation to the teachers' view of them as black people that pupils identified most negativism. Although these pupils were proven high achievers, the data revealed that teachers faced them with negative views of them as black people. Teachers were therefore seemingly incapable of relating to their whole person, rather they related to their achieving selves positively but negatively to their blackness.

It seems to me that there must be a role for school to work to motivate pupils, to affect their performance, whatever it is they bring to the classroom. This is not to negate the role that for example parents and pupils themselves should play, but it seems that the greatest onus should be on the school to affect the performance of

pupils. The data revealed that pupils considered that teachers were happy to work with the almost finished materials, not to begin the process and continue with it to fruition.

Their comments however beg the question as to how much of a teacher's role was perceived by the pupils to be that of motivating and stimulating good behaviour and interest in pupils. The majority of respondents indicated that very little of a teacher's role involved these. Rather, the onus was said to be on them as pupils to come fully prepared and motivated, otherwise they would not be supported by teachers, whatever the colour of their teachers.

Most significantly, the conclusion that may be drawn is that black achievers considered that they have to develop strategies to circumvent the negative views that they considered were held by mainly white teachers of them. Views that they considered mitigated their success were they not equipped to deal with them.

This was a serious indictment of schools. Black achieving pupils' perception that in order for school factors to impact positively on their achievement, they had to take total responsibility on themselves to develop strategies to circumvent negativism of teachers. They have to be manipulative, and even obsequious to predispose teachers to them.

An important question therefore for schools and teachers is, how are they going to make a shift in this perception and their relationship to black pupils, achieving and non-achieving. What implications do these credible views of achieving pupils have for initial and in-service training of teachers? What is it that a professional teacher has to do to be effective in an ethnically diverse classroom to motivate and challenge pupils to enable them to achieve, regardless of their backgrounds?

The situation according to the achieving black pupils in my sample was, they were forced to take on a disproportionate amount of responsibility for their learning in

schools and colleges. If this indeed is the situation, it does not seem to be the desirable solution to the concerns about the general performance of black pupils in schools.

Teacher expectation, the different impact of black and white teachers however, although identified by pupils as playing a role in their achievement, were said to be less significant than a number of other factors. These included a number of individual attributes and a range of out-of school factors. It is to these that we will now turn.

CHAPTER 5

PEER AFFILIATION AND ACHIEVEMENT

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This Chapter addresses the issue of peer affiliation and its effect on the performance and achievement of black pupils in school. It explores the perception of black achieving pupils in relation to peer affiliation and school performance. It considers who/what black achievers consider influence their choice of friends, who they choose as friends and to what extent they feel peer affiliation impacts on their school performance. The previous Chapter has highlighted data which demonstrated that in the view of the pupils, teachers' attitudes and expectation can affect their attainment. However the data pointed to the disproportionate responsibility that black pupils have for setting the tone and the nature of their interaction with teachers and determining the expectation that their teachers have of them. This Chapter further develops the thesis by analysing the impact that peer groups have both in school and out of school on the achievement of black pupils. The key themes revealed by the data are:

- Black pupils choice of friends were influenced by how their teachers and parents perceived their friends

- Teachers were wary of groups of black boys together, viewed them as threatening, aggressive and anti-school and so feared them

- Black pupils' attitude and behaviour contributed to teachers' view of black friendship groups

- Black achievers had different motivation for the friends they chose in school and out of school.

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Research outlined in previous Chapters have suggested that pupils' choice of peers can impact on school performance (see pp. 60-64). Among the possible reasons for this are the general importance of peer relations to adolescent development (Smith, Darling et al., 2000) and the role of peers in influencing self-evaluation, self-perception and social behaviour (Marsh & Barkley, 1996).

Generally in relation to school performance, research has likewise cited the significance of peer group in the educational performance of pupils in schools (Rushton & Turner, 1975). And specifically in relation to black pupils, research has suggested that sub-cultures play an important part in their lives and also that peer affiliation can impact on their performance in school (Sewell, 1997). Indeed, black low achieving pupils gravitated towards peer groups that exerted negative influences on their school performance and that these friends tended to be from their own ethnic groups (Rushton & Turner, 1975; Taylor, 1981; Rowley, 1968; Jalinek & Brittan, 1975; Milner, 1983; Ogbu, 1990). The pupils in my sample, in contrast to those normally highlighted, were achieving. Research studies that have focused on achieving pupils and the influence of peer on their school performance have suggested that black achieving pupils do discriminate in their choice of friends and that black peer groups do not always exert a negative influence. Likewise, that black pupils *can* get positive reinforcement from their peers (Nehaul, 1996; Channer, 1995).

My research questions have arisen from issues that have both been explored in the literature but also from questions that to my mind remain unanswered in the research available. The latter relates specifically to issues of black achievers, their choice of peers and the possible impact of their peers on their school performance. I was therefore interested to explore the relationship between peer and black pupils'

achievement in school. Since this thesis focuses on black achieving pupils' perceptions, I wanted to establish the extent to which their views provide further insight into this area where there is little consensus. Indeed, I wanted to assess their views in relation to my thesis that in a racialised society, black people in general and black pupils in this context, are viewed, assessed and treated first and foremost on the basis of their colour, with other aspects, in this case achievement, relegated to second place.

Therefore the questions that emerge from analysis of previous research and the literature and that will be addressed in this section are:

- What/who influences the choice of peers of black achieving pupils? What is the rationale for this influence?

- Who do black achieving pupils choose as friends and to what extent do black achieving pupils feel that peer affiliation impacts on the school performance?

This Chapter discusses the fieldwork data that indicated that black achieving pupils are more likely to choose friends in school who were, like themselves academic achievers, acquiescing to the pressure of teachers and to a lesser extent parents. In school, they argued that teachers exerted pressure on them to avoid friendships with fellow black pupils who were generally considered to exhibit anti-school behaviour. Achieving black pupils therefore argued that schools demanded more than hard work and academic proficiency. Black achieving pupils had to take on board how teachers perceived their friends and the conclusions that were drawn by teachers about them as a result of their friendship choice.

In their choice of friends outside school, black achievers similarly said they felt pressure from parents, who, concerned about their vulnerability in the community,

wished them to choose friends who did not attract undue attention, especially from the police.

My research findings indicated that black achieving pupils did consider that peer affiliation had some bearing on their performance in school. They were therefore careful to choose friends who enhanced rather than detracted from their academic pursuits. Peer affiliation was not however accorded the same significance as other factors such as self-image, parents and family attitudes and values, which are explored below (see pp. Chapters 4 -7).

Answers relating to the issue of peer affiliation and achievement did not therefore generate the level and depth of data as were generated for these other areas. All pupils in my sample offered their views on this and said it deserved attention but a significant minority did not feel peers were influential enough to affect their achievement in a significant way but illustrated further the impact of their colour and societal views of and responses to them. (Possible explanations for this are offered below in the section *Black Achieving Pupils Choice of Friends* (see pp. 202-204).

The majority of pupils therefore, regarded issues relating to who/what influenced their choice of friends, as especially significant and relevant to how they said they were perceived in school and so indirectly to their achievement. It is to this area that we will first turn.

5.2 INFLUENCES ON THE PEER CHOICE OF BLACK ACHIEVING PUPILS -
THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS ON PEER CHOICE

In school, black achievers' choice of friends, as the data indicated, were partly influenced by how they considered their friends would be perceived by their teachers. Both boys and girls stated that there was a tendency for teachers to hold negative

stereotypes of black friendship groups. Most black boys in my sample placed emphasis on their teachers' views as influenced by, they said, their negative stereotypes of black boys. They stated that teachers were especially likely to hold negative views of them if they went around in groups with other blacks boys and were thus likely to make poor judgements of them. It was not the same they said if black boys formed friendship groups with white boys or Asian boys.

> Teachers don't like to see black boys going around in groups. I think they
> see you as a gang. They see you as trouble and not interested in your work.
> (Ezra)

The fact that achieving pupils considered that black boys, seemingly more than other boys, were regarded as forming a gang when they were in groups, raised the question as to why this was perceived to be the case. Indeed the data indicated a matter of fact acceptance of this status quo, a burden that black pupils were said to be saddled with, despite their individual personalities, demeanour and attitudes. In taking this position black pupils, especially boys, were once again highlighting the racialised nature of the society and the difficulties individuals considered they had in subverting it.

A further element that was added to this position as stated by Ezra was the relationship between school and the wider community:

> I think people are frightened of black boys in groups. If you are in a group
> on the road white people think you are going to rob them. I suppose you can't
> expect them to see you in a different way just because you are in school. The
> thing about school is that if teachers are frightened of you, they don't teach
> you properly. (Josh)

The view that black boys are seen as threatening is not novel. It has been shown that physical traits such as size, shade of blackness and behavioural traits that are considered peculiar to black pupils, are used to justify teachers' negative attitude to them (Sewell, 1997). The view of Josh that teachers would not teach pupils if they were frightened of them was insightful and maybe one of the explanations for the low

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achievement that is so often highlighted among pupils who perhaps were and are oblivious of or uncaring of factors such as this. What was interesting about this was that achievers argued that teachers brought views like this to the classroom and to interactions with black pupils and that black achievers needed both to be mindful of this and to work to undermine this. There was therefore a perception amongst achieving boys that they needed to appease teachers or at least to 'gentle' their view of them by disassociating themselves from excessive association with blackness or what it was said to represent. A further point was the link that black achievers in my sample frequently drew between school and the wider community. (One wonders whether this link would also be drawn by white children.) The data indicated that black pupils believed they were not accorded the freedom to be themselves and to perform different roles in different parts of the society without being assessed firstly or solely on the basis of their colour. This no doubt is the nature of a racialised society where individuals cannot escape their race/colour through which the society is partly differentiated.

> If you are a black boy and you want teachers to see you as different, you have to make sure you don't hang around with a lot of other black boys. The best thing to make teachers think you are serious about your work is to hang about with Asian boys or one black boy who is like you and doing well in their work. (Lee)

This view of Asian and white boys implied that they are en masse pro school and exert positive influences on their peers. However young people of all racial and ethnic groups belong to some form of peer group that include elements of anti-school behaviour and attitude. Black achieving pupils were well aware of this but seemed to be putting forward a particular view that they felt was held of black peer groups, a view which sought not so much to elevate white and Asian youth cultures but which they felt sought to disparage black youths, especially boys.

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Boys who held this view were asked why Asian boys, who arguably could be perceived in the same way as black boys, were not seen in the same way. Black boys gave explanations both in terms of what they saw as uniquely negative views held of black people, the way black boys presented themselves and the way they responded to perceived attitudes to them.

> I think teachers are right on the surface that black boys can give the impression that they are hard and don't care about school, and that if you want to get on you should avoid these types. Teachers don't stop to ask why though. Everywhere we go people think we are up to no good. Sometimes it's easier to be up to no good. It's not so hard. Not as hard as trying to prove them wrong all the time. (James)

This seems to be a sophisticated and complex assessment of what was considered to be the situation of black pupils both within and outside school and was typical of responses given. Sophisticated because James seemed to be looking beyond what to him happened on the surface. That is, black boys giving the impression that they were *hard*. He clearly felt that there was more to it than that, that there were possible explanations which teachers did not seek to discover or to assess. He identified the pressure that black boys were under and the assumptions that were made of them. This view holds resonance of the labelling and self-fulfilling prophecy theory (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), if every one thought they were *hard*, it was easier to behave as such. This response illustrated that black achieving pupils were conversant with what they considered to be the particular issues confronting them. At the very least they were applying a rationale to it in order to make sense of and deal with the responses they felt they unwittingly incited, both in school and in the wider society.

All schools have expectations of pupils' academic and social behaviour. Teachers have concepts of *ideal pupils* and both the hidden and overt curriculum are powerful means of control within schools. Teachers are therefore on this level, not

making unique demands on or having unique expectations of black pupils. This conception of ideal is however important because as we have seen, low grades can be said to relate to creativity, aggressiveness and independence (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Black pupils, especially boys, are generally perceived by teachers to be aggressive and anti-school (Sewell, 1997). Achieving black pupils, according to the pupils in my study, were all too aware of this. As a result, black achieving boys were therefore careful not to display any of the traits they considered were usually linked to black low achieving boys. They were careful to avoid congregating in school with other black boys, even though this may be a usual or natural inclination. Black boys felt that they had to be aware and mindful of their teachers' view of their friends if they wished to retain their teachers' favour.

Black pupils stated that if it was entirely up to teachers they would *not* have the freedom to socialise with other black boys because of the negative view that were held of them as a group. They stated that to befriend groups of other black boys had an adverse effect on the perception of them by their teachers and hence on their achievement.

It was interesting too how readily boys in particular drew parallels between school and the wider society. They seemed to take it for granted that they were not only seen as a threat as individuals but were more so in groups.

Both black boys and black girls therefore painted a picture of the significance, not only of their academic performance in school but of their peer choice and peer affiliation inside school. They did not believe that they were seen and judged by the same criteria used for other pupils; as an individual, as an achieving pupil, allowed as other pupils, to express their own personalities and idiosyncrasies but were lumped together as deviants or potential deviant.

Black achieving pupils stated they were seen as representative of what might be defined a homogenous black nation. This forced them to scrutinise the attitude and behaviour of other black pupils, their relationship with each other and therefore how these might impact both on them as individuals and on teachers' view of them. Black achieving pupils therefore did not feel they could ignore the attitude and behaviour of other black pupils, pupils with whom they may have little else in common other than colour.

5.2.1 THE INFLUENCE OF PUPILS' ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR ON FRIENDSHIP CHOICE

While boys emphasised the negative perceptions of teachers and the seeming pressure from them to reject the friendship of fellow black pupils, a significant proportion of the girls interviewed emphasised what they viewed as the internalisation of negative stereotypes by fellow black girls as contributing to teachers' poor views of black friendship, even justifying teachers' negative views. This taking on of what they deemed poor behaviour traits by some black girls contributed they said, both to the negative views of teachers towards black girls and their own alienation as achievers from other black girls. This has resonance with the findings of Willis in relation to why working class pupils perpetuated their subordinate social and economic position in society (Willis,1977).

> I don't want to choose, but I get tired of being accused of acting white because I want to do well in my GCSEs so I choose black girls as friends who are like me or I chose other girls. (Nadine)

Here Nadine is emphasising the issues that have featured time and time again in this research, that is the association of certain positive behaviour traits with being white and the converse with being black (Sewell, 1997).

Another girl added the dimension of low self-image as influenced by what she considered the adverse treatment that was often meted out to black people in society

and in doing so sought to explain why black pupils may adopt adverse attitudes and behaviour patterns.

> These girls are so negative about themselves because of the society they are in. They do not link good things with being black. I don't want to be with girls like that. It will only drag me down. (Rose)

Astute achieving pupils were therefore suggesting that there was choice for black pupils despite their beliefs about negative stereotyping and in the power structure of the society which relegates black people to inferior positions. Sonya for instance was insistent, like many pupils in my sample, that the behaviour and performance of individual black people impacted on society's perception of and attitude towards black people as a whole. Hence the need for individuals to take this on board. This is arguably a dire indictment of the society which, the data suggested, pressured black pupils to take on responsibility for what society defined as their whole race.

> Black girls who live the stereotype are a disgrace. We are in a white dominated society and when they sit around doing nothing and causing trouble, they give other black girls a bad name with teachers. (Sonya)

When asked whether this meant that black people were supposed to represent each other Sonya did not think they should but said that because of racism, people felt they should.

> So we are trapped. Blackness is a uniform, we are all seen as the same. Colour is a badge. There is not one day I don't feel my colour. (Sonya)

Predictably pupils said they were embarrassed by other black pupils who they said *fitted the negative stereotype held of them.* However, there was ambivalence among some pupils in my sample in relation to the effect that other black pupils' attitude and behaviour had on them. On one level, achieving black pupils were insistent that they should not have to feel that they represented other black pupils because they happened to share the same colour. On another level they seemed all too

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aware that they could not escape being *judged* by the attitude and behaviour of other black people.

> If a black girl shows her self up in school, teachers look at you as if you have have something to do with it. They think you are black, you should be ashamed of yourself too. (Jamelia)

Some pupils spoke of the pressure black boys are under from other black boys in school to live up to a *black boy image* (Obi). Although this image often seemed non-specific and general, it included such facets as tough, challenging, uncaring of authority, more concerned about music and fashion and uncommitted to school work.

Some pupils, albeit a minority, were of the view that some black pupils in their school could be said to fit the negative stereotype held of them by teachers. That is, they stated that these pupils did not respond to negative views held by them in ways considered appropriate.

> I know it's hard to turn a blind eye and get on with your work with the way we get treated sometimes but we have no choice. It's a bit like if someone calls you a racist name on the street. You have two choices, to think of the consequence or to retaliate and find yourself in trouble. It's the same in school. Some teachers are out of order when it comes to the way they deal with black pupils. The sensible pupils are those who think of the consequences and don't respond as teachers think all black pupils do. (James)

Their views were based on their position that as black pupils, unlike white pupils, they had to exhibit exemplary behaviour and attitude at all times. They believed that black pupils were not accorded the luxury of their poor behaviour and attitude being seen as an individual idiosyncrasy but as another act which defined their group. A majority of pupils shared this view and stated that they were tired of having to prove themselves all the time, rather than exhibiting their own special personalities by being themselves. However, pupils acknowledged that there were powerful black sub-cultures operating in schools. Some pupils said they are developed as a reaction to racism. Others were critical of this view, stating that the motivations

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of pupils who belonged to these sub-cultures were far from clear or positive. These sub-cultures dictated that for black pupils it was not *cool* to study and that the opinion of the teacher was irrelevant even if it was beneficial.

> They don't know that when they carry on like that, they just confirm what the racist people think. They are hurting themselves and the rest of us because people think we are all the same. (James)

So although some pupils said they understood the anti-school responses of some black pupils, they also considered that these responses played into the hands of those whose expectations of them were already poor.

Further pupils in the anti-school sub-culture, often gave pupils who were studious and high achievers a *bad time* (Nadine). A phrase that was used time and time again in relation to this, was that achieving girls 'thought they were white', this, like the similar *acting white* meant that high ambition and university aspirations for example were attributed by these black girls themselves as white. The achieving girls said that this attitude was highly problematic because it contributed to, and further strengthened stereotypes of black pupils as indolent and incapable of high academic aspirations.

Achieving black pupils were therefore anxious not to choose friends from those who were said to exemplify these negative images both because of how they said they would be perceived by teachers and how they themselves said it would impact on their work.

The latter finding, that is black achievers not choosing friends from those who were deemed to exemplify negative images of blackness, was different to that found in previous studies. In other studies the suggestion has been that black pupils thoughtlessly and inevitably gravitated towards pupils who happened to share their colour (Rushton & Turner, 1975; Kawwa, 1968). Here we see black achievers being

both thoughtful and purposeful in their choice of friends in school, mindful of how this affected on all levels their game plan of school achievement. They were seemingly not uncritical of the forces that they felt were pressurising them in relation to friendship choice but they demonstrated a degree of pragmatism and single-mindedness, illustrated in Obe's sentiments, 'If this is what we have to face, we might as well deal with it'.

Another aspect of this question of peer choice related to the influence that parents were said to have. Black achievers in my sample identified their parents as being, like teachers, influential in their friendship choice. Again since this thesis is based exclusively on the perception of pupils' credence was of course given to their views. There was the possibility that they were misreading the attitude and views of teachers and parents, what is important however is that this was their interpretation of their reality and as such is as credible as the view of parents and teachers themselves.

The data indicated that achieving black pupils regarded their parents, as well as their teachers, as being influential in their choice of peers. However, their parents' motivation, were said by them to be entirely different to that of their teachers.

5.2.2 THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL VIEWS ON FRIENDSHIP CHOICE

Parents, like teachers, are important agents of socialisation. Parents across all cultural groups seek to influence their children, not least in relation to their choice of friends. Pupils in my sample acknowledged the wish of parents to influence their choice of friends and regarded their parents' view as more important than their teachers' view in relation to choice of friends, especially those friends who were considered to be significant outside school. Interestingly, some parents' views, as perceived by their children, were not radically different from that the pupils generally perceived their teachers to have, especially of black boys in groups. It was the rationale for these

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views that seemed to be different. That is, it was said that parents were not always happy for them to choose fellow black pupils as friends in school and particularly did not want them to congregated together in groups in schools and especially not as they walked on the streets.

The pupils' rationale for their parents' views was that generally, parents too believed that negative views are held of black people, that they were considered threatening and anti-school, that they were at risk both in the streets, from the police and in school from teachers.

> My mother says that black people have to work twice as hard, be twice as good, to get anywhere in this society. She thinks that where white children can get away with things, black children don't get a second chance. Like in school, she is always saying that black children get kicked out more than white kids because teachers think they are more violent and don't want to be in school anyway.... Outside more black kids get put away. (Jamelia)

Importantly, parents were said to steer the pupils away from potential friends who did not have similar commitment to academic achievement, regardless of their colour. According to pupils, parents believed that friends who were not hard working and serious about their work, examples given were, pupils who were loud, who spoke in Creole and Patois in school and who got in trouble in school, would distract them from their work.

The general view of parents as expressed by my respondents however was that fellow black pupils were more likely to distract them from their work than support them in their achievement. Some parents were said to take extreme views suggesting that friends should not be chosen from school at all but from their own community, such as churches or extended family.

> My mum always said if you hang around with children who do not see education as a priority, they are going to change your way of thinking. They will change you more quickly than you will change them. She thinks you are

more likely to meet a friend like yourself if you choose outside school and you are not just forced together. (Garfield)

The above view was also shared by Rose. She said that she was brought up with the view that children in schools should simply be *acquaintances* not friends because her parents had encouraged her not to call any particular person a *best friend* just because they happened to be in the same school or class.

Another boy pointed to the strategies that his mother suggested were needed if he wished to be seen in a positive way by teachers and indeed in the wider society.

> My mother thinks if you are a smart looking black boy, who speaks well and keep your head down, you are not likely to be picked on in school by teachers...a bit like outside school in the streets really....You have to know how to move around otherwise before you know it you are picked up on the street and have a criminal record. (Obi)

The juxtaposition of what occurred in school with what occurred in the wider society was a common feature of how pupils said their parents assessed their positions as black people. Pupils and seemingly their parents did not view what occurred in school in a vacuum, they were not oblivious of the impact of society on schools and of what happened in school on their positions in society. Likewise black parents were keen to pass on strategies of how their children should manage themselves and their interactions in the streets and in school.

> My father says that some black boys don't know how to handle the pressure of the society and make things bad for themselves by trying to take everyone on. He feels a lot of black boys get into trouble because of that. It's tough for black boys, unless you know how to deal with the society, you'll kind of crack up. (James)

The pupils stated that inappropriate friends, were also considered by their parents to have the potential to disappoint. Examples given were, divulge confidences with others, tell lies, get children in trouble and fall out over small things, hence adversely affecting achievement. This was especially said to be true if friends were not

themselves achievers and sought excuses to *bring bright children down to their level* (James).

Pupils stated that parents considered having friends with similar aspirations important because each could mutually encourage the other, especially in the environment where they had to prove that they did not fit negative views held of them. Pupils, especially boys, portrayed parents who were tense and frightened for them. According to pupils, their parents felt that their children, by being black, were walking an extremely precarious path where clever strategies were needed to succeed, not least of all strategies in relation to choice of friends.

Parents were clearly not a homogeneous group with respect to their perceived influence of friends. Black parents were therefore on this level no different from other parents. The question however seemed to be to what extent black parents were more fastidious than other parents, and what was motivating this seemingly additional level of concern?

It was evident from the views of pupils in my sample that their parents considered that their children did not enjoy a level playing field in society. They believed that their children were under more scrutiny than white children both in school and on the streets. Black parents seemingly wished their children to be aware of this. They believed that their children, especially boys, should avoid drawing attention to themselves especially by being in large groups with other black children.

It is conceivable that all parents have similar fears about the safety of their children. The data derived from black achieving pupils however indicated that the fear of black parents went beyond that. That on top of normal parental anxiety, there was the added dimension of how they believed their children were responded to as black people, how susceptible they apparently believed they were. According to achieving

pupils, their parents wanted to empower them on two levels. First, to be aware of how they were perceived in the society and second how they felt they needed to respond to and deal with the discrimination that they faced.

Black achieving pupils therefore had a number of factors to take into consideration when choosing their friends. They had to consider the views of teachers and parents who were both influenced by the dynamics of the society's over-emphasis and preoccupation with race. In choosing friends, black achievers may however filter these influences through their own knowledge, experiences and views and align them with their own ambitions and interests. It is to this consideration of actual friendship choice that we will now turn.

5.3 BLACK ACHIEVING PUPILS CHOICE OF FRIENDS – THE IMPACT OF PEER AFFILIATION ON SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

The peers of pupils in my sample were most likely to be achieving although all had friends who were from a range of academic levels. In view of previous comments made by achievers about how pupils defined as having anti-school attitudes behaved and perceived them as achievers, black achievers gravitated towards friends *in school* who were in high academic bands or sets like themselves. In this way they seemed to be bowing to the aspirations or indeed the pressure they felt were coming from their teachers and from their parents.

Their choices of friends outside school however were more diverse. Both boys and girls, though not exclusively, choose friends outside school who were from their own ethnic groups; friends who were like themselves black and were likely to share interests outside school, interests such as music, sports, clothes and sometimes religion and who lived in their area. None of the pupils said they chose friends outside

school on the basis of whether they were doing well in school. Many said that this was not even an issue outside school.

Their choice of predominantly black friends outside school seemed in general to be related to what one pupil called, *'the comfort zone'* (Rose). That is, pupils, especially girls suggested that it was easier to relate to other black pupils who understood them and *'where they are coming from'* (Rose).

Friends were likely to be from church, youth or sports groups. (The significance of community groups such as this in achievement is analysed in Chapter 7.) Some had friends whom they had known from primary school whom their families knew and had grown to accept or who lived in the same area or street. These were mainly but were not necessarily high achievers.

> If your friends are not achievers but they are outside school, it won't really affect your work in school. If you see them at football, you are making time for football. That won't affect your work unless you yourself let it, and if it affects your work it won't be the friends but football. (Simon)

Black achieving pupils did not therefore in general suggest that their friends outside school, whether achievers or non-achievers, detracted from their school performance. Some said that they were sometimes ribbed about their studiousness by friends, about not being able to go out with them at times because of course work or homework, called names which they considered tongue in cheek, names such as *boffin*. More often however they said they received sneaking admiration rather than *ridicule*.

Like all young people, pupils in my sample stated that their friends were extremely important. However, they were more at liberty to exercise their own judgement in their choice of friends outside school, even taking into consideration the anxiety of their parents about possible targeting of black children, especially boys, by the police.

There was however on the one hand, an element of resentment from pupils who said that they were expected to be representative of a nebulous *black nation,* both in and out of school. On the other hand, they were seemingly sufficiently motivated by their own ambitions and other factors that are discussed below (see Chapters 6 & 7) to employ choices in terms of peer affiliation to avoid disapproval of their teachers, parents and fellow black pupils and to enhance their performance in school.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This data presented in this Chapter has explored factors affecting black achievers' choice of friends and the perceived significance of peer relations on their performance in schools.

High achieving black pupils, especially boys, considered that there were pressures from various areas in relation to their choice of friends, indeed in the choice other pupils exercised in either accepting or refusing them as friends. They perceived that teachers were exerting pressure motivated by their own negative perceptions of black people, especially black boys. They stated also that their parents were doing the same motivated by how they imagined black pupils are perceived as a group. Finally, they stated that anti-school black pupils were prone to reject them because of their failure to display what they perceived to be the *ideals of blackness.*

Black achieving pupils therefore were conscious of designing a game plan within school to maintain their achievement, careful not to ignore the impact of friends either real or perceived on their achievement. This is a most striking aspect of this research and begs the question as to what is causing black achieving pupils to be so purposeful in their approach to school and in their analysis of the factors at play in school.

It may be considered undesirable for the school and for society as a whole for pupils to form friendship groups solely on the basis of their own colour and desirable for pupils to forge friendships beyond colour consideration. It seems altogether a different matter however, for pupils to be discouraged from befriending pupils of their own colour in school because of the effect they believe this will have on teachers' view of them, or because of a risk to which they feel they will put themselves in the wider community.

To be a black achiever in school evidently entails more than simple academic ability and application to work. Rather, the data indicated that black pupils needed to be aware not only how *they* are perceived by teachers, but how their potential friends were perceived by teachers and how other black pupils regarded them as a result of their friendship choices.

The data indicated that black achieving pupils considered that some of the fellow pupils' responses to what they defined as negativism of their teachers towards them, contributed to their under performance in school. Achieving black pupils were therefore mindful to choose friends who did not detract from the strategies that they regarded as vital in their bid to achieve, or whose persona did not adversely affect what appeared to be the fragile regard of their teachers.

Indeed the data in this area indicated that it may well be the sophistication referred to above, the awareness of the factors that are at play and the strategies needed to circumvent them that are among the number of explanations for the achievement of some black pupils in schools.

The data presented indicated teacher attitudes, expectations and peer affiliations were only some of a number of important and indeed interrelated factors in the attainment of black pupils. The following Chapter explores another area, that of

self-image/self concept, which the data indicated had an even more profound impact on the performance of black pupils in schools.

CHAPTER 6

SELF-CONCEPT/SELF-IMAGE AND ACHIEVEMENT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter examines the issue of self-image and achievement because historically low self-concept/poor self-image has been cited as one of a number of significant factors contributing to black low achievement in schools (see pp. 52-60). In addition, this area further develops the thesis by exploring the individual factors that affect the academic achievement of black pupils. Indeed the data indicated that high self-image is among the most important of the factors cited by pupils as contributing to their attainment in school.

I begin the analysis by briefly revisiting the focus of previous research on self–image/self-concept. Research in this area has suggested that black pupils because of a number of factors, including racism and negativism to which they are subjected as minorities in this society, are prone to low self-image and poor self-concept which adversely affect their achievement (Stone, 1981; Bagley et al., 1975; Hill, 1975).

I have restated the research work analysed in detail in previous Chapters (see Chapters 1 & 2), which have challenged the above view of the poor self-image and low self-concept of black pupils (see pp. 52-60). I have argued that although these studies are critical of the view of black boys' low self –image, they too have generally focused on low achieving black pupils (Stone, 1981; Verma, Bagley et al., 1975).

I have further argued that research work on black achievement and self-image is relatively sparse, as indeed is the perspective of black achievers themselves. The

Chapter will seek to contribute to this area with analysis of the evidence obtained from achieving pupils in my sample.

The research questions in this section therefore relate to the following areas:

- Black achievers' views of themselves in a white dominated society

- The role of parents and teachers in developing self-image

- Black achievers' knowledge of significant black figures

- Black achievers' sensitivity to their race as a result of extended exposure to British society

- The impact of self-perception on their school achievement and future ambitions.

The rationale for focusing on these areas relates closely to those issues that have been highlighted as giving clues to self-image and self-concept in previous research. They therefore enabled me to obtain a sense of how black achievers saw themselves in a racialised society where it seems the expectation is that society will inevitably impact in a negative way on their self–perception and hence on their school performance.

The themes that emerge from the data are:

- Black pupils became aware of their colour very early in their lives, through their families, their own experiences and that of members of their families.

- Black pupils were confronted very early in their lives with experiences and the environment that could impact negatively on their self-image.

- Black pupils who developed confidence and high self-image/concept were socialised by their parents to understand the racialised nature of British society. They had good knowledge of significant black figures and have successful black role models. Further, their parents identified positively with

the countries of their origin or heritage, encouraged their children to do likewise by enabling them to visit and have positive experiences in these countries.

I have concluded that black achievers were aware of the limitations that their colour placed on them in British society. As well as other issues of childhood, black achieving pupils therefore had to contend with constraints placed on them because of their race. They therefore grew up with a sense of the over-importance of their race in how they were viewed and treated and the opportunities opened to them, potentially creating the conditions for low self-image and poor self-concept. Black achievers did not however totally succumb to these pressures. The data presented in this Chapter demonstrate that family and parental input, experiences and relationships with countries of their heritage provided role models and definition of blackness that enhanced their self –image and impacted positively on their school performance.

6.2 THE SELF-IMAGE OF BLACK PUPILS

Self-concept includes individual recognition of what is salient or relevant about him/herself (Bagley et al., 1978). It is related to self-esteem, which is itself an affective dimension, which is an assessment of how an individual feels about him/herself, and evaluates her/himself in relation to others (Bagley et al., 1978). So it can be argued that individuals need a high self-image to cope with the demands of life because embedded in each child's self-image is hope for the future (Gilmore, 1982).

The self-concept theory was developed as a result of what appeared to be a crisis in inner schools among black immigrant pupils. Educationalists and researchers were seemingly grappling with the search for causes and were loathed to identify such within the society or within the educational system. If the 'problem' could be seen as

reflection of the individual and family pathology of working class black children, then the focus would be on these individuals and their families and the structure of society and the schools would be left intact and beyond criticism (Smith, 1977).

The poor self-concept, low self-image theory is based on the premise that the black child realistically perceived their status and position in a white dominated society to be poor. This is exemplified in material conditions such as poor housing in inner city decaying areas, high levels of unemployment, discrimination and racism. This realisation it has been claimed leads to self-negation, an absence of feelings of self-worth which in turn adversely affect attainment in schools (Stone, 1981) because they 'introject' the negative view of themselves and come to see themselves as failures (Verma & Bagley, 1979).

This situation is said to affect black pupils in a number of ways. For example they disassociate themselves from aspects of *blackness* exemplified for instance in their embarrassment to talk about black historical figures. Indeed in the tendency for black children to have poor cultural knowledge, to reject their ethnic identity and seemingly as a consequence to have behavioural problems in school ((Bagley, Bart et al., 1978).

Significantly living in a racialised society is said to be so damaging and destructive that although the majority of black children enter school with positive self-image their self-image scores progressively decreased as they advance up the school system (Silberman, 1970; Bell, 1985). The level of self-esteem in male West Indians is especially affected, falling below that of both female West Indians and male whites (Bagley, Bart et al., 1978). Further the longer West Indian adolescents reside in Britain, the more likely it is that they have high levels of *neurosis*, as a result of prolonged exposure to forces of racism (Hill, 1975).

This woeful picture of West Indian children in British society has however been subjected to some criticism. Rather than focusing on self-negative, sceptics have blamed the educational system for causing the educational problems of black children (Coard, 1971) and of looking at black children from a white blinkered middle class perspective which, it was claimed is inappropriate for understanding West Indian personality (Stone, 1981). Indeed the whole concept has been criticised for its vagueness and hence the inherent difficulty of measurement (Coard, 1971; Stone, 1981).

Further, this preoccupation with the apparently nebulous idea has been said to detract attention from academic goals and towards the formulation of policies for enhancing self-esteem at the expense of academic pursuits (Stone, 1981). Indeed black pupils were found to hold very positive views of themselves and were often to the contrary seen as leaders of youth culture (Sewell, 1997). Likewise, black girls rather than internalizing the negativism that confronted them in schools and colleges have been said to focus on their educational ambitions inverting the dominant racist white idea of black inferiority, feeling they were superior to whites and identifying positively with black culture (Mac an Ghaill, 1988).

Being part of a group that is objectively in an inferior position even where one as an individual, or part of a group is devalued and discriminated, therefore does not necessarily mean that one inevitably suffers from negative self-concept and poor self-image. The data collected for this thesis indicated that the strategies employed by families in addition to black achievers own propensity, enabled them to develop positive self-image.

We will now turn to an analysis of the factors that black achievers feel can assuage the impact of a discriminatory society on self-perception.

6.3 BLACK ACHIEVERS VIEWS OF THEMSELVES IN WHITE DOMINATED SOCIETY – THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS IN DEVELOPING SELF-IMAGE.

The evidence that I have presented so far in previous Chapters, indicated that black achievers were very conscious of their colour, they felt conspicuous and open to daily observation and scrutiny. They were aware that they lived in a society that assessed and evaluated them first and foremost in relation to their colour. In order to understand how the black achievers in my sample regarded themselves as sixteen and seventeen year-olds, I felt it was important to obtain a sense of how they became aware of the issue of colour and what impact this had on how they viewed themselves. The aim was to assess whether they felt that there had been significant changes in their perception of themselves from around primary school age to early secondary school and what might account for this if there was indeed a change. The rationale for this being the overwhelming conclusion in the research referred to earlier, that negative self-image/poor self-concept is an inevitable response to the objective reality of their subordinate position in society (see pp. 52-60).

Pupils were asked to describe briefly how and when they became aware of their colour relative to others. Pupils in my sample talked at length about what could be best described as a gradual realisation that race was a crucial feature of their socialisation, upbringing and their lives. That is they became aware of themselves relative to whites and became conscious that they were not like white children, that neither their parents, their teachers, their peers or the wider society regarded them in the same way as they did white children.

Pupils fell in two broad groups in relation to this gradual realisation of the importance of race and consequently their responses to it. On one hand there were

pupils who said they were always aware that colour was an issue both for themselves as individuals and in relation to the group, without being able to recall how or when they were first made aware of this. On the other hand, and in the majority of cases, pupils recalled specific times and incidents when colour seemingly took on significance for them. One typical incident that was described related to confusion over the use of black as a physical description as opposed to a social and political definition.

> I suppose I was learning colours at the time. I don't know remember how old I was. I know I was going to this nursery school.... My mum was saying something about a black person. I told her he was brown like me not black. It was the first time I remembered being told that even though I looked brown, I was black. I don't think I understood it then, or for ages after. (Jamelia)

Jamelia recalled the attempted explanations by her parents, anxious to ease the confusion. All the pupils in my sample mentioned this seemingly early emphasis on skin colour especially by parents and the feeling that they gleaned that it was important.

> My parents would say things like, remember you are a little black girl and people look at you more so you must behave properly. (Keisha)

Pupils' responses suggested that parents varied in their handling of their questions and in their anxieties about colour. Some pupils remembered anger and resentment from parents who said their lives were ruled or even ruined by colour prejudice, others recalled more matter-of fact explanations and attitudes.

> My father was always saying that he had the best qualification in his office, but he's never had promotion easily. He had to fight when white people just got it. (Owen)

On the other hand, another pupil, Ophelia said that she got the impression that racism was an inevitable part of life in Britain, a fact of life that had to be negotiated rather than feared.

> They (parents) think you just have to get on with. They always let me feel that no one was above me so I just had to get on with my life and achieve the best I can. My colour may be a problem for white people, but I won't take in on as a problem for me. It's a fact of my life. (Ophelia)

What came across in their responses was that for the majority of achieving pupils, parents and family members regularly identified their colour as an important factor that was not to be taken lightly. As well as these early sketchy recollections, pupils recalled discussions by parents, siblings and friends about colour that did not arise from their own questions. Some recalled associations of colour with problems while some pupils talked of early recollections of being self-conscious, feeling different, conspicuous, strange, of wishing they did not stick out. The latter, wanting to be like everyone else, can conceivably be said to be a sentiment common among children and young people and indeed adults. The data indicated that black pupils considered that as well as this, there was the added dimension of colour.

> Whenever we saw black people on T.V. or even sometimes in the street my mother used to say, she or he is black like us. I used to think it was strange. She used to say I shouldn't talk to strangers but then she'd say that black people we didn't know were our people. Now looking back I suppose it was to teach me to identify with black people, to see them as my own kind. (James)

This evidence indicated that although high achieving black pupils were made to feel aware of their blackness, unlike the results seemingly found in the research outlined above (see pp. 52-60), black achievers did not seem to assess themselves negatively in relation to their peers on the basis of their colour.

In relation to experiences outside the home, pupils also spoke of early memories of being made aware of their differences, of having their parents' assessment of the outside world confirmed. In school, as we have seen in previous research (see pp. 28-33; 52-60), this awareness was on a number of different levels; through their relative absence from the curriculum, from representations or lack of it, of themselves in books available to them and from their experiences of taunts and

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name-calling. Some pupils recalled hearing derogatory comments about their physical features especially colour and hair by fellow pupils as early as in nursery and infants' schools.

> There was this little girl in my infants school who used to say, *my dad don't like dark people.* Then later on when teachers would tell you off or try to correct you by saying things like, *we don't do things like that here,* I'd think they were talking about us as blacks and them as whites. I just grew up thinking there are two main groups of people in the word blacks and whites and that the whites were always trying to put us down. (Ophelia)

Despite the above none of the pupils said they had senses of wishing to be white but understood however why some pupils, in not wanting to be different, may have wished this. According to Sonya:

> I don't remember wishing for the actual colour white like they say some mixed up black children do. But I remember wishing for what it came with, which was, being like most people. (Sonya)

The conclusion that can be drawn from these early recollections is that like black children highlighted in previous research (Bagley & Coard, 1975; Hill, 1975), black achievers who grow up in what I have deemed a racialised society have, unlike white children, the added element of *their* colour to contend with. According to pupils in my sample they were not only made aware of their colour by parents and peers predominantly, but grew up with the sense especially from parents that colour mattered significantly. There was however no sense here that the young achievers recalled feeling negative about themselves at this stage. The impression gained was that they were confused, perplexed and self-conscious but not that they were overcome with self-loathing. The explanation for this may be related to the fact that pupils recalled that issues surrounding their colour, what it meant and how it was seen in the society, were introduced by parents in the security of their homes in the context of support and positive reinforcement.

There was a sense that as with other black underachievers identified in previous research (Hill, 1975; Stone, 1981; Verma & Bagley, 1975), black achievers were confronted from very early in life with the environment for the development of negative self-image/poor self-concept. In these early years however this being more it seemed, to do with interpersonal relationships than with ideas of power relation, discrimination or racism.

Black achieving pupils stated however that from an early age they were socialised by their parents to understand what parents saw as the nature of this society, and to separate themselves from the predominantly negative definitions that are inherent within it of black people.

> My dad would say things like, you're not below anybody. You are as good as or better than most people out there....(Samuel)

Pupils in my sample however recited a litany of negative views that they were told or made aware of, that are held of black people like themselves. They stated that these negative views were exemplified within institutions such as schools and that on an individual level most if not all black people had negative experiences from an early age, which related to their blackness. They therefore seemed to agree with the findings of previous research that the perception of black people can adversely affect their self-image if they were not socialised with views to counter those negative ones they believed are prevalent in the society.

> Blackness means everything that is bad. In school from a young age you just get the feeling that you are just below, not as good. If you weren't brought up to feel good about yourself then with all that is going on outside, you will think everything about you is horrible. (Rose)

I wanted to discover how black achievers avoided internalising the feeling of being *just below* and not *good enough*. As I have outlined above and in Chapter 1, previous research has suggested that black children raised in countries such as Britain, have

poor cultural knowledge which have on adverse effect on how they evaluated and perceived themselves (Hill, 1975). This is arguably because it is said that black pupils are so beleaguered by the pressure of adverse views and treatment as a result of their race, that they seek to disassociate themselves from all aspects of it where possible. This would therefore seem to include any kind of relationship with others like themselves, since if they ignore or disassociate themselves from aspects of blackness, society too might ignore their blackness.

The next section will deal with the views of pupils in my sample in relation to the so-called cultural knowledge of black significant figures and the responses to them. It deals with questions of black achievers' knowledge of significant black figures. It assesses their cultural knowledge and the impact these might have on their self-perception.

6.5 BLACK PUPILS' KNOWLEDGE OF SIGNIFICANT BLACK FIGURES

The notion of black culture often referred to in relation to black pupil's low achievement tends to generalise about black people, placing them in a homogeneous mass and so taking no account of the multiplicity of factors that constitute *real* culture. Black pupils in my sample seemed to generally understand the various nuances of culture, that it operates on various levels and are affected by factors other than, as well as those related, to colour.

> According to Lisa in reply to what she considers black culture to be,
>
> People usually think black culture is to do with loud music and designer clothes. I think though that you can have many cultures at once; you can have a school culture, a housing estate culture or a family culture, that have nothing to do with each other or your colour. And because you are black doesn't mean you have the same culture as other blacks. (Lisa)

A number of the pupils in my sample expressed similar views using as examples their own complex family backgrounds, where for example parents originated from different islands in the Caribbean, from both Africa and the Caribbean, from Africa, UK and Caribbean. Likewise they cited examples of other black people with whom they had little in common culturally although sharing the same colour. These seemingly illustrating for them the fallacy of all black people being part of and constituting a monoculture.

> My mum is a foster carer. There was this time when we had a white girl, her parents were from Scotland but she was born in England. I only realised how much we had in common when my mum started to look after this other girl from Zaire. We had the same colour as her but everything else was different; important things like food, language and sports we liked... The white girl and I shared more culture than the black girl and I did. (Nadine)

Culture was said by pupils to be important and definitions included history, food, music, festivals, view of life, especially of British society, attitude to school, attitude to work, attitude about themselves and attitude to the future. All pupils said that appreciation and knowledge of their cultural backgrounds were important in their achievement. They credited their parents and extended families for the knowledge and appreciation of their culture. For pupils in my sample, culture however they defined it, whether in a narrow or broad sense, was important to them. It seemed to relate to the concept of self-image because these pupils linked culture to valuing of themselves and to feelings of self worth.

The evidence I obtained did not support the view that black children *per se* had poor cultural knowledge. To the contrary as I have outlined some of the pupils in my sample questioned the concept of a unified simple culture and offered more complex ideas of what constituted it and how they said it related to them as individuals and to their achievement.

A related issue to that of culture is the representation of other black people in society and how black achievers felt this impacted on them. Previous researches, as we have seen above, indicated that black children are reluctant to talk of other black people and disassociate themselves from aspects of blackness (see pp. 52-60).

So far I have argued that pupils in my sample stated that their parents and extended families actively introduced the issue of colour to them, initiated discussions about its meaning and implication for them in the society. Black achievers according to the evidence, were not been brought up to avoid these hard facts of life. We have seen that initially when pupils were young while they talked of feelings of confusion, there was not however a sense that they were ashamed of or wished to disassociate themselves from their blackness (see pp. 52-60). It is however worth highlighting the fact that most of the research studies discussed above were conducted during a relatively early period of migration of black people to Britain. The attitude and view of young people in my sample now however indicated that rather than being reluctant they were confident, knowledgeable and proud. This however had not come about by accident or as a result of experiences that black achievers were having in the wider society. My evidence indicated that the self-assurance, knowledge and hence the pride in themselves came from experiences which their own families had engineered and developed. Black achievers however did not seem to see many examples of which they could be proud of blackness in British society.

> Black people are not really rich and powerful in Britain are they? If you didn't know how black people can be in other countries like America, you would think we can't achieve anything. (Veronica)

Veronica's argument is that being aware of achieving black people both at home and abroad was a significant factor in whether black children in a racialised society valued or devalued themselves. This seeming importance of awareness of

black achievers was a common view of respondents, who suggested that this was motivating for them in school.

> Going to school here you can grow up to think that black people have never done anything worth while. You are hardly ever told of what black people have achieved or are capable of, apart from getting into trouble. You have to educate yourself otherwise you will feel ashamed and inferior. (Garfield)

As well as this question of the absence of black people from their educational experiences, which was said to create conditions for negative views of themselves, pupils also stated that the absence of visible role models could also lead to negative feeling about their race and hence themselves. In general pupils stated that there were not many role models among the black community in Britain. Those who said there were some and named people like Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng and Trevor McDonald whom they could identify with, did not feel they were given enough exposure to enable them to exert positive influences on them as young black people.

> Anyway everybody, especially the newspapers, use the bad things on the front pages, good things are in the corners or left out. (Rema)

When asked about this question of black role models and their possible influence on black achievers, most pupils were more able to identify international rather than national figures. When asked for contemporary black international figures whom they were proud of, among those mentioned were: Nelson Mandella, Tiger Woods, Kofi Annan, Mohammed Ali, Jessie Jackson, the William sisters, writers such as Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Terry McMillan and a range of music artists, sports men and women.

When asked about historical figures, the majority of black achievers in my sample were confident of their knowledge and were able to name or recognise a number of characters. Among the names mentioned, with albeit sometimes sketchy knowledge and details were; Mary Seacole, Toussaint L'Overture, Martin Luther

King, Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X. Interestingly, as I have outlined earlier in this Chapter (see pp. 216), it appears that pupils did not obtain knowledge about these individuals from school but either through their own research, from their parents or extended families.

> My grandfather comes from Jamaica. From when I was young, I remember he used to tell us folk stories from Jamaica like *Anancy Stories* and ghost stories with black characters. I loved it but I used to think that he was making them up, at least that he was making up the names of the characters, like Garvey, Nanny of the Moroon and Bedward. It was only when I got older that I realised that they were real people. I also remember him using words like *red Ibo* to describe fair skinned people in Jamaica and *talawa* to describe being strong. He used to say that Timbuktu was a real place where there was a famous university in Central Africa. I didn't really believe him because I didn't hear anyone say it or hear it in school. Only now I know that these words come from Africa, that he really knew these things. This background makes me feel so proud and strong. Knowing that there is so much out there about black people that I can find. But it sometimes makes me feel angry that nobody else seems to know. (Obi)

Previous research studies have asserted that black children in British schools lack knowledge of black significant figures (see pp. 52-60). From the above, admittedly sometimes surprising evidence obtained from pupils in my sample, this ignorance according to my evidence did not appear to be the case among a majority of achieving pupils in my sample. The views expressed by pupils in my sample however perhaps confirmed that their knowledge had little to do with the general school curriculum to which they were exposed since the National Curriculum gives sparse opportunity to obtain such knowledge. This absence of knowledge relating to black people is said to lead to poor self-concept/low self-image in black children. Black achieving pupils in general agreed that knowledge of successful people of their own colour exerted a positive influence on how they viewed themselves and on their motivation to succeed.

> When you see that black people who go through the same thing as you can achieve a lot, it makes you think that you can do it too. When you think about it that black people survived slavery and other things that they went through in

places like the south in America and still achieved. I think that black people are amazing and I think if they could survive so that I can be alive, I should be able to achieve whatever I want. (Vanessa)

Achieving black pupils evidently *did* agree with the findings of previous research that representation or lack of it, of black people in the society as exemplified in public or significant figures could affect self-image (Bagley, Bart et al., 1978). The evidence obtained from the pupils in my sample indicated that they did not indeed have adequate positive representations of themselves in school or in the wider society. The absence of this, they suggested could have a negative effect. It was therefore those children who had input from their parents or extended family, who were taught about positive aspects of blackness, whatever they conceived that to be, that developed assured views of themselves and their backgrounds. Knowledge of significant black figures, from whatever culture, was therefore considered important for black children, and for their motivation to succeed. Likewise was the ability of some young people to obtain inspiration and motivation from seemingly improbable historical events, such as slavery and racial segregation in America.

In examining the above it can be concluded that there is a great deal of pressure on black children generally and achieving black children in particular. As well as contending with the normal pressures of growing up, the data suggests that they are under severe pressure to glean knowledge and information about themselves, knowledge and information not readily available in the curriculum or in the wider society.

Previous research, as we have seen above (see pp. 52-60), have argued that failure to have knowledge of and pride in those sharing ones colour, can lead to adverse consequences such as self-hate and disassociation from important aspects of self (Bagley & Bart, 1978; Hill, 1975). This adds credence to my thesis of the

racialised nature of this society where colour forms an important basis on which individuals are evaluated and ranked. It is conceivable therefore that black children regardless of their academic ability, may well, as argued in previous research (Bagley & Coard, 1975; Hill, 1975), be susceptible to the mental effects of the inevitable pressure of a racialised society.

We need therefore to examine how black achievers viewed their own management of the pressure that by all accounts impacted on them daily. The aim being to assess whether they were indeed affected by what was deemed neurosis in previous research, as a result of extended exposure to the negative forces of British society (Hill, 1975). It is to this area that we will now turn our attention.

6.6 BLACK ACHIEVERS SENSITIVITY TO RACE (AS A RESULT OF EXTENDED EXPOSURE TO BRITISH SOCIETY)

Other areas on which evidence was gathered related to the question of the damage that living in Britain was said to have on black children. As I have outlined above (see pp. 52-60), it was proported that the longer West Indian adolescents have been resident in Britain, the more likely it was that they had high levels of neurosis, as a result of prolonged exposure to forces of British racism (Hill, 1975). Living in a racialised country such as Britain was therefore said to damage the mental health of black children. From the evidence presented by young people in my sample of negativism and stereotyping that they considered they were exposed to, this claim would not be deemed surprising.

All the young people in my sample were born and brought up in Britain. On Hill's premise they were likely to be highly neurotic (Hill, 1975). The profile of the young people in my sample however provided interesting data. Although they were

all born in Britain none of the thirty-six pupils could be said to have been solely a product of the forces of this society. The majority of pupils were consciously given exposure to their heritage, history and culture either by frequent visits to countries of parents or grandparents' origin or through extensive contacts, such as newspapers, Internet, books, memories and stories from parents or grandparents.

The most intensive of the exposure was children being sent either to the Caribbean or African for part of their primary or early secondary education.

> My parents thought that the education was better in Nigeria so I was sent there from five to eleven. I grew up, not as a colour but as a person. There I learnt about Nigerian history, about our kings and queens, about African philosophers. When I came back I knew about the kind of things that happen in this country but I don't ever feel that anyone is better than me. I know about Nigerian history and about my culture. (Adi)

Most usually pupils spoke of parents giving them a sense of where they came from and instilling pride in them of their past, their culture and traditions.

> My mother grew up, with a strong view of herself, she was not brought up feeling second class like all black people in Britain because she was brought up in Jamaica. She takes me to Jamaica a lot, and I know that it is not impossible for black people to be at the top. Over there you see black people in all kinds of jobs and living in beautiful areas and houses. One of the things that impresses me about Jamaica are the houses, they are so nice. The architects are black and so clever, I don't see designs like that here. There are so many things that make me proud when I'm there.... Education is so important there. Whatever you have out there people think more of you if you have a good education and a good job. I feel sorry for black kids here who never get to know another life, never get to see other types of black people. (Felisha)

Felisha evidently had a very strong sense of belonging, not so much to England but to Jamaica and she stated that this was the most important factor in her achievement.

Another young person spoke of the additional motivation of seeing black women as achievers and feeling that personal achievement was more important than skin colour.

> I remember when I was about six I went to Grenada....I had to go to the doctor. I remember asking my mother if the doctor would be black. The doctor was a black woman. When I went back to my grandmothers' house I told her.

She laughed. Nearly everybody here is black, she said. I remember that, I don't know why. (Nadine)

Another young person had been sent to the Caribbean for one year when her parents were going through a divorce.

> I went into assembly on the first day. I was shocked. Everyone was black with a few Indians. I know it's stupid because most people there are black but the Principal, the deputy, the head of departments, teachers, everybody was black. It was like waking up in a New World. And the teachers all expect you to take your work seriously. And outside school, whether you are rich or poor, education is it. You work hard and people celebrate school achievement as if it's the most important thing in the world. I wish my mum would have let me finish my education there. I just felt like a person. You don't think every day I'm black, black, black. (Julie-Ann)

On the other hand there were other pupils who said their parents made specific efforts to develop in them a sense of themselves both in and outside the context of Britain. These young people gave the impression that although both they and their parents considered Britain to be their home, they instilled in them a knowledge, understanding and love for the country from which either they or their fore-parents originated. Young people gave examples related to food that was eaten at home, music that was listened to, stories told, sports for example cricket and as mentioned above holidays and visits. Denese for example, said that her dad lectures his children frequently that they should not forget where they were coming from. Trips to the Caribbean, she said, were not just for holiday purposes, but to remind them that they were Jamaicans, although they were born in England. Pupils were not surprised that the curriculum did not portray their culture or history and understood therefore why their parents had to do that job.

> Pupils whose parents don't give them that, lose out and can't do as well because they are lost. People in England don't really think you are English, British maybe but not English. I was brought up to think I have somewhere else as well as here. I would prefer to continue living here. I know it more but I feel lucky really. If I want to I can call more than one country my home. (Denese)

Denese did not feel that it was problematic in any way that she did not accept England as her sole country although she was born here.

Pupils whose parents were from different parts of the world used terms such as celebration, joint-heritage, more than one nationality which suggested they had a positive view of and an affinity to their dual or multiple heritage.

> My mum is from Guyana, my father was born here but his parents are from Trinidad. I have so many places I can call home. So when people make you feel that because you are black you can't connect with it here, I don't really care. I feel like I have plenty of places that I can belong to. (Michael)

The achieving pupils in my sample did not therefore give the impression of neurosis. Rather their views suggested that despite the perceived view of negativism that they are subjected to in Britain, they did not consider themselves completely alienated from this society. More, they had a sense of acceptance in the country of their parents' origin, where they had either visited or which they were taught to understand and see in a positive light. It seemed therefore that black pupils who were given a positive sense of their heritage, whatever parents and their families conceived this to be, who were taught something of their cultural past and or their families' past had a positive sense of themselves. This as we have seen above was graphically illustrated in the examples of those young people whose parents have either sent them back to Africa or the Caribbean to be educated for a period of time, who regularly took them on trips, or who have orally introduced them to life in these countries (see pp. 217-223). A sense of belonging was evidently the crucial ingredient here. Young achieving black pupils did not seem to be rejecting life in Britain despite their stated recognition of the racialsied nature of the society, rather the data suggested that they needed something to balance the negativism that they believed they faced. Only then were they able to have the necessary positive self-perception to meet the demands of British society and to achieve in schools.

6.7 THE IMPACT OF SELF-PERCEPTION ON SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT AND FUTURE AMBITIONS

As I have outlined above, previous research, most of which have concentrated on low achievement, have stated that black children raised in this culture 'introject' the negative view of themselves and come to see themselves as failures (Verma, 1975).

The evidence presented above has shown that black children are socialised by the various agents to be aware of their colour. This process like most other aspects of socialisation began at birth and continued as they grew up. As we have seen this was also not peculiar to agencies outside the home but began in the home with parents and extended families (see pp. 212-223).

Black children, raised in Britain therefore defined and regarded themselves from the outset and first and foremost as *colours*. That is, the overriding self-image that they were given was that of their blackness, a definition that came with a range of negative connotations. Young people spoke of escaping this weight of colour when they resided in or visited predominantly black societies. Indeed the view given was that they only became aware of themselves outside the definition of colour when they were not in the minority, when they were given the opportunity to be in a black society. In predominantly white society their colour seemed to cause them confusion, unease, self-consciousness and even irritation.

Achieving black pupils in my sample were therefore in some ways similar to black children identified by previous researches (Verma & Bagley et al., 1975; Gilmore, 1982; Silberman, 1978). They, like other black people in the society and like low achievers, who have most usually been the focus of attention, recognised and expressed that they were subjected to negative perception and treatment. They

considered that the *cultures* from which they were usually deemed to come were more often than not denigrated, ignored and lessened. The responses of achieving black pupils to this however was both fascinating and revealing, challenging once again the assumption of homogeneity among black people that seem to be suggested by literature and research (Hill, 1975).

Despite recognition of negativism however, black achievers did not appear to hold overtly negative views of themselves rather they were proud of themselves, of their backgrounds, their heritage and their colour. It is not within the remit of this study to conduct psychological assessments on the pupils in my sample to test the reliability of these assertions. Observations of them during the course of the interviews and analysis of their statements on various topics seem to fully support their assertions.

In relation to observation of them, the pupils were without question confident, self-assured and articulate. I was often taken aback by their clarity and their assessments of themselves and the society and their perception of their own position and that of black people generally within it.

Arguably, general observation of black young people would find pictures of unfaltering self-confidence, confidence in their appearance and the place they feel they have in this society. Similarly among my sample, I did not find reticent black pupils who were apologetic for finding themselves in Britain or who stated that they felt that they did not belong. Or who spoke longingly or pined for another home, *back home,* as the so-called first generation of black immigrants often did. Even those young people who talked positively of the Caribbean and Africa felt at home and positive about these countries, or even perhaps of living in one of these areas in the

future, still saw Britain as where they belonged and made no apology for this acceptance.

None of the black pupils in my sample expressed embarrassment of their colour or said they felt ashamed of discussing black significant figures as have been found in previous research (Bagley, Bart et al., 1978).

There were however other indications that achieving black pupils too had internalised aspects of the negativism that they themselves believed were prevalent in this society. There was some evidence among pupils in my sample that expressions of self-confidence, presentations of themselves, as secure with positive self-image and high self-concept, may not be the entire picture.

There were indications among my respondents even when they were expressing and exhibiting feelings of self-confidence and self-assurance, that they may be influenced by the limitations that are put on them as a result of their blackness. Even as they talked confidently of having ambitions of going to university and obtaining professional jobs, they expressed reservations of whether they would be able to fully realise their ambitions, because of the way they said they felt they were perceived in the wider society and because of their families' experiences.

> I know so many black people who say they are held back in their work because they are black and you see cases in the newspapers. It seems that the higher up the job, the harder it is to get on in it if you are black. I know that it won't be easy for me either. (Peter)

This view may be interpreted as a realistic one but it may also be seen as black achievers learning to develop avoidance strategies, putting limitations on their own ambitions in order to avoid the disappointment that they have learned to expect as inevitable in British society. This may therefore be said to support the finding in previous research that black children realistically perceived their position in society to

be inferior to that of white and tempered their ambitions and effort accordingly (Gilmore, 1982).

From my evidence however, a distinction has to be made between how black achievers perceived themselves as individuals and how they perceived themselves in relation to discriminatory structures in society. As individuals their self-image appeared to be positive and strong. In relation to their ambitions which did not rely solely on the input, strategies and positive reinforcement of parents and family members however but on forces in the wider society, black achievers appeared to be acquiescing or at least modifying their ambitions according to what they perceived as challenging or insurmountable obstacles in society.

> I know that in theory I can be anything I want, achieve anything but I am not the only one who has a say in it. If somebody doesn't give me a job or promotion because of my colour and the next person won't and neither will the next person, I can keep trying but in the end most people will probably give up and go for something that is easier. (Rose)

Pupils talked likewise of jobs that they said attracted a lot of black people, drawing inferences that it was the low status jobs that were easy to get into if one is black.

> My uncle works in a care home for old people. He says that most of the people there are black. I suppose this is because most white people don't want to do this type of work. It was the same when my grandparents came over here in the sixties. They came to take up the leftover jobs. (Patricia)

Black achievers were therefore suggesting that the overall position of black people had not improved significantly from the early years of immigration since they were drawing links between opportunities they considered were opened to their grandparents and those that were opened to them, especially in relation to work. One wonders therefore how even achievers can possibly maintain positive self-image and high self-concept in this environment.

On closer examination therefore, Hill's view that the longer West Indian adolescents have been resident in Britain, the more likely it is that they have high

levels of neurosis, as a result of prolonged exposure to forces of racism, may after all be plausible (Hill, 1975). In the relative protective atmosphere of their schools and colleges, black achievers may give the impression of positive self-image. However even within this environment, with their intelligence, knowledge, their confidence and their stated support of their families, they still suggested uncertainty and anxiety of how the negative forces of the wider society will eventually impact on them.

In this area more than those discussed above, there appeared to be some differences between the points made and the emphasis of boys and girls. Generally my evidence indicated that black boys were more likely to state that they were perceived negatively in society than black girls and that black girls were likely to suffer less from racial stereotyping than black boys. They therefore had more difficulty than girls developing a positive long-term view not so much of themselves but of their future and the data indicated, less optimistic about the possibility of circumventing negative views of themselves outside school.

> I know that I am as good as the next boy but I don't know if I will be able to convince people outside of that when I go to get a job. They may just think that I am the black mugger they see every time they look into a black face. If you are going for a job as a bus driver maybe but if I want a job with a top law firm, I think they might not be able to see past my colour. (Clive)

On pressing Clive about what this means, how he would deal with this, I found that his answer gave me insight into the dilemma that black achieving pupils stated they faced even before they presented themselves on the job market for example. That is, will they attempt to fulfil their ambition or will they temper it to meet the expectations and the limitations that they consider are set by the society on people of their colour?

> I said law because I wouldn't choose to be a lawyer in this country because I know the chances of making it to the top of that is too hard. You may think it is giving up before I start but you have to be realistic. What's the point of spending all you life fighting? My dad says choose your battles carefully. I'll

fight some but not one like that. I know other black people will do that and I think good for them. (Clive)

The latter statement seems to encapsulate the view of a majority of pupils in my sample. I wonder whether all young black people make choices based on extrinsic factors such as ease of getting into a job, likelihood of promotion and so on. While these may be feelings and insecurities common to a number of young people, there appears however to be an extra anxiety among black pupils that as in other areas, they have the added dimension of the perception of their colour with which to contend.

Further, Clive's assessment of the position that he saw himself facing and his way of dealing with it and indeed his view of how others might, suggested as one would expect that black pupils do not each respond in the same way to society. Black achievers were using their intellect and the opportunities offered them by their schools and their parents to make decisions about their future that they thought were right for them. On one hand it can be argued that they are being sensible and realistic but on the other hand the picture they painted of society and the limitations it placed on them as black people, more often than not products of this society, is a pessimistic one. For if black pupils believe that their talents might be wasted or poorly utilised, it is society as well as the individual that will be adversely affected, that will ultimately be lessened and impoverished.

6.8 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, pupils in my sample were evidently somewhat *burdened* by the negativism and constraints that they stated are put on them in a racialised society. This often led to a tempering of their ambitions and their motivation. The evidence presented indicates that although achieving well in school, the obstacles they faced in society might adversely affect their belief in what they could achieve and how far they

believed they could go professionally in the world outside school. Black achievers believe that both they and their families can more effectively impact on the school environment than they could on the wider society, more specifically that of the world of work.

It is further concluded that black achieving pupils were not ignorant of significant black figures. To the contrary they were knowledgeable and proud of black historical and significant figures. This knowledge having been gained from their family members, especially their parents.

In relation to the sensitivity to their race and the way they are perceived as a result of it, it is concluded that achieving black pupils believed that having significant contact and relationship with countries of their heritage, gave them confidence and self-assurance which enhanced their academic achievement. Among the reasons for this was that they were provided with inspirational role models and afforded definition of themselves which were less limiting and more positive than that which they were used to in British society.

Finally, although black achievers were knowledgeable and aware of the racialised nature of society, they did not completely acquiesce under the negative perceptions and expectations and did not completely internalise the negative views of themselves. Rather, they looked to countries like Africa and the Caribbean where they found positive examples more readily available of black achievement and where black people were defined in more positive ways.

A number of significant questions remained however in relation to this area such as, will black pupils who were achieving in schools and colleges eventually be underachievers as they leave school and college and attempt to climb the occupational ladder? Will they be forced to capitulate albeit reluctantly, under the limitations that

they believe are placed on them by the society? Will they acquiesce, even if they achieve the professional jobs of their ambitions, at the bottom of the ladder for fear of the rejections or extra challenges they might or do indeed have to face or undergo? Will they settle for the mediocre when in another society, unshackled by the boundaries set by race and colour, they might make greater strides?

Since individuals need a high self-image to cope effectively with the demands of life (Gilmore, 1982), will the positive self-image of black achievers be sustained as they confront the wider society?

These questions cannot be answered here since they are outside the remit of this thesis. There are however areas on which further research is needed. However, judging from the guarded statements of pupils in my sample, there will undoubtedly be struggles ahead for them as they leave school and college and compete with people who they feel are without the constraints that a racialised society bestows upon them as a result of their colour.

In the meantime as they manoeuvre their way through the school system, the data from the achieving pupils reveals that they placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of the families, especially their parents, in their achievement. Indeed, the data obtained from pupils indicated that their parents played the most important role in facilitating their achievement and in preparing them for the challenges of a discriminatory society. The next Chapter analyses this data on the significant role of families and parents in the achievement of black pupils in school.

CHAPTER 7

FAMILY AND ACHIEVEMENT

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter seeks to further develop the thesis by examining the impact of family structures, attitudes and values on the achievement of black pupils. I have argued in previous Chapters that factors both within school and out of school have been found to have a bearing on the performance of black achieving pupils in school (see Chapters 1 & 2) with the family usually cited as one of the most important of these factors (Channer, 1995; Sewell, 1997; Coleman, 1997; Smith in Mosteller, 1975). This may not of course be surprising since schools do not exist in a vacuum for any pupil, regardless of colour. What has been argued is that black achieving pupils believe that they were subjected to additional pressures as a result of stereotypes and negativism, indeed because of the racialised nature of the society (see pp. 161-166). The nature of the society has meant that their families have not escaped stereotyping, labelling or intense criticism (Hood, 1992; Fitzgerald & Hale, 1996; Percy, 1998). Indeed the picture that has generally been presented of the black family in Britain indicated that there is little within it to facilitate the achievement of its children (Smith in Mosteller, 1975).

Previous research has therefore concentrated on the impact of family on the low achievement of black children (Miller, 1970; Banks & Finlayson, 1973). Generally the black family is seen as culturally deprived in the broadest sense with inherent shortcomings which impact adversely on the performance of black children in school (Banks & Finlayson, 1973). For example black mothers have been portrayed as inadequate and ill equipped to meet the demands of motherhood, which include

supporting their children in school (School Council, 1970; Popenoe, 1997; Ricciuti, 1999). Likewise they are said to adopt inappropriate child rearing and disciplinary practices namely they are authoritarian and so their methods of discipline is said to conflict with that of British society in general and schools in particular (Miller, 1970). Thus the children of these families are likely to underachieve so disadvantaged are they by their families' inadequacies. Indeed so intense has been the negative portrayal and view of the black family that there has been disproportionate involvement of social services departments in it. The consequence being that black children are more likely than white children to be removed from their families and into the care of social services (Beskin, 1994), affecting further their achievement in school.

The inadequacies of black families and their children as well as exemplified in their child rearing practices, was said to be similarly reflected in the structure and organisation of their families especially in the preponderance of single parents compared with that found among white families (Ricciuti, 1999). Such arrangement was said to be damaging to children (Popenoe, 1977). The damaging effect of single parent families was said to be such that the majority of juvenile delinquents such as school dropouts were said to come from such families (Daenzer, 1989).

In addition, the general tendency has been for black families to be portrayed as exclusively working class with anti-school attitudes and values and that was said to characterise working families of all colours (Douglas, 1975). Indeed even their language forms were said to conflict with that of schools (Sewell, 1997). In relation to language, in the early days of immigration, a deficit language model concentrated on the absence of skills in Standard English among the new black immigrants to Britain (Beskin, 1994). Later, the use of Creole and Patois by children who were by then second or third generation and so products of British society was said to antagonise

teachers (Sewell, 1997). This was because these language forms were seen by teachers as languages of rebellion and defiance and as such contributed to the alienation of black pupils from teachers and served to hinder effective relationship and achievement in school (Sewell, 1997; Mac an Ghaill, 1988).

In relation to attitudes and values of black families, a similarly dire picture emerged. The value systems and attitudes of black families were said by researchers to be defined by their economic and social class positions (Bendix & Lipset, 1967). Research conducted in the early days of their migration to Britain, it can be argued continues to influence perception of them as exclusively working class. Here it was said that being black working class was the same in every way as being white working class. Thus their values and attitudes which were in the main defined as anti-school were influenced by their position in the working class (Bendix & Lipset, 1967).

Conversely however researchers have put forward the view that it is the quality of life within the home and not the class that affects achievement (Clarke, 1984). Indeed that attitudes and values, such as religious values of black families can and do have a positive effect on the self-image, attitudes and values and thus on their academic and employment achievement (Channer, 1995; MacDonald, 2001).

My research questions have therefore arisen from the above issues that have been developed in the literature but also from those areas that I felt remained unanswered in the research available. Specifically, in relation to the role of family in the achievement of black pupils for as I have shown, previous works have mainly focused on low achievement.

In this Chapter I therefore assess the pupils' views on family values in relation to social class and religion and consider the effect that pupils, in my sample,

felt that these had on their school performance. Finally I analyse the effect that family structure, parents, siblings and other members of their extended family are said to play in their performance in school. The major themes that emerge from the analysis of the data are:

- Social class was not a major factor in the value that parents of achieving black pupils placed on education

- Parents utilised their own experiences of the education system, positive and negative, to the advantage of their children

- Supportive religious communities rather than religious beliefs impacted positively on educational attainment

- Parents did not rely solely on schools to fulfil their children's academic aspirations but organised tuitions for them outside school.

The Chapter therefore concludes that social class does not significantly define the values that parents were said to have of education. Black parents of all classes were said by pupils to value education, to see it as an important means of advancement and empowerment for their children.

The picture that emerged of religious value and affiliation and achievement was however less clear–cut. The majority of pupils did not consider religious value or affiliation to be important in their achievement although they stated that support derived from religious communities provided a number of benefits to them. Pupils who were of the view that both religious values and religious communities were important pointed to a number of factors such as role models, supportive individuals and the environment that were conducive for developing positive self image as significant roles of religion.

Parents were considered by achieving black pupils to be the most significant in their achievement. Parents were said to offer a range of support mechanisms, were role models, provided formal education at home, held high expectations of them and provided valuable experiences and skills to enable their children to deal effectively with what they saw as difficult challenges facing black people in society.

7.2 FAMILY SOCIAL CLASS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Pupils were asked about their parents' occupation to obtain information of their class positions. Interestingly but perhaps not surprising, a high percentage of the parents of the achieving pupils constituting my sample were educated and were in professional jobs (See Appendix 1).

This question of class was important for two reasons. First, I have argued that previous researches, through its focus on working class families, have given the impression that black families consist of a homogenous social class group, that class group being working class (see pp. 64-76). Indeed that being working class inevitably comes with *set* attitudes and values to life in general and education in particular, these attitudes and values being in the main pathological (see pp. 64-76). Second, relatively little research seemed to countenance the possibility of the existence or even the emergence of black families, middle class or working class with attitudes that are conducive to school achievement (MacDonald, 2001).

I therefore wished to see what both groups, that is those that can be classified as working class and those who can be classified as middle class, considered to be the attitudes of their parents to their education. And to assess whether there was indeed identifiable and significant differences between them.

The majority of pupils in my sample, regardless of their objective class positions, said that their parents were supportive of their education and stated that they were to be given the major credit for their achievement in school. Indeed the views of pupils in my sample of the attitude of their parents were not distinguishable from each other by social class. In fact pupils did not consider that parents made an issue of their own social class positions, be they working class or middle class. Rather the data indicated that those parents, who had experienced the education at various levels, used their experiences and knowledge of the system to benefit their children. Those who had not, according to pupils in my sample, compensated for this seeming disadvantage with fervour and enthusiasm for education, even using their relatively hard-pressed economic positions to motivate their children to do better in school. Typically pupils of parents who were not educated and were in jobs they did not consider ones to be proud of, said these parents encouraged them and insisted that they made use of opportunities they themselves did not have or had or had not utilised.

> My dad said when he was at school he just wanted to get out and do motor mechanics. So he left school at fifteen and got a job. He said he loved the money at first but got fed up with how dirty he was all the time and how dangerous it could be. He said when I was born he was ashamed that when he came home he had to spend ages trying to get his nails and hand clean before he could hold me. He wants me and my brothers and sister to do better in school so we can have better jobs. My parents feel that education will improve your life in a lot of ways. (Kenisha)

More importantly, however, pupils in my sample stated that in all situations and in all circumstances parents subordinated what might be considered preoccupation and consciousness about social class to that of colour. In other words pupils stated that much more of their discussions with their parents related to their colour and education performance and the implication of this rather than any disadvantage or advantage that social class may or may not be said to give.

My father is a dentist and my mother is a social worker but they don't go on about it. All my uncles and aunts have good jobs and have been to university or college, so it's not seen as anything unusual. One thing though, you are just expected to do well in school and go to university. I think my brothers, my cousins and me think it's the natural step from school. (Ayo)

Of course black pupils and their families do not have to discuss class for it to impact on achievement. Arguably attitudes and values that are said to be associated with class can be said to be a consequence of class position which affords for example access to certain areas of residence, schools, extra tuition and support, indeed, confidence and self-assurance (Hall, 1978; Douglas, 1967; Halsey et al., 1980). It can be argued therefore that black middle class pupils were benefiting from their middle class position without such having to be made explicit or made an issue by their parents. Although this may well be the case it was evident among pupils in my sample that their parents were keen for them to understand that their colour more than any other aspect of themselves was used to define them in British society. It was apparent from the data therefore that class positions and the stereotypical attitudes that are said to be associated with them, were subordinated to what pupils said their parents considered the more important concerns of colour.

Pupils from both working class and middle class backgrounds stated that their parents considered educational achievement to be important with good school attendance, application, commitment to work, homework completion, good behaviour and appropriate friendship choice means to this end. The general view was that parents saw education as a necessity for them rather than a choice or an optional luxury. The main reason for this view being that as black children, they needed the advantages that they said education gave.

From as far back as I can remember my parents were always saying that the best thing they can make sure I can have is a good education. That nobody would be able to take that away from me. They think that even if people don't respect you they will have to respect your education and achievement. They

say even though people see your colour first, when you have qualifications, they force some doors open. (Rose)

Pupils' parents therefore, they stated, considered that colour was the single most important aspect of their existence in British society, much more so than their class positions. In relation to education values therefore, pupils' responses did not indicate that there was any significant difference in the attitude to education of parents from different class backgrounds. Indeed black working class pupils did not indicate that their parents in any way held anti-school values, that they were unsupported of teachers' and their children's education. To the contrary parents regardless of their class positions, according to pupils, placed high premium on education. They saw it as a means of answering the challenges and the negative perceptions of them as black people. Likewise, they considered that their educated children would be empowered economically and socially and that education would improve on the status and position of previous generations. Education was therefore not seen as an optional extra but vital rite of passage into adulthood.

Religious values of parents' have been sited in research as a factor in the achievement of black pupils (Channer, 1995). The data obtained from achievers in my sample was not however as clear cut, pointing to a complexity of relations between religious values, religious community and achievement.

7.4 FAMILY RELIGIOUS VALUES AND ACHIEVEMENT

This section deals with pupils' views of the perceived impact of religion on school performance. As we have seen there is some evidence that religion may have an impact on achievement (Channer, 1995).

The views of pupils in my sample in relation to religion and achievement fall into three main groups:

- Those who did not consider religion to be significant in their achievement but regarded it as an important community resource

- Those who considered religion had an ambiguous relationship with school performance

- Those who considered religion to be significant in their school achievement.

The majority of pupils in my sample, approximately seventy per cent, did not consider religion to be important in their lives or in their achievement but said the church was relevant as a community resource. Among this group, most pupils considered that they came from religious backgrounds and had gone to church when they were younger. Or they had close family members, mostly grand-grandparents who were religious. They also stated that their family had connections with a church that they called *their* family church. Even among this group (who did not feel that they were religious) almost all of them said they went to church at least twice yearly, and more frequently if there were weddings and christenings among their families or friends. However they did not feel this had impacted on their achievement in a significant way but that the church was an aspect of their wider community that was available to them when needed.

This group of pupils (that is those who do not consider religion to be significant in their achievement but regarded it as an important community resource) spoke of church providing a community from which they could get a range of support that was in line with their culture and heritage. They spoke of their church being important for ceremonies such as christening, marriages, and funerals and in other areas such as counselling, financial help and socialising. Or at least, that the church enabled them to give expression to forms of worship that were different to that of the white population.

I think most black people were brought up going to church and even if they don't go now they still have friends or family who are very devoted. You feel you need that really. You can't call on white churches to help you when you need help, say when someone is ill. Black churches do more for you. When my aunt was ill in hospital the people in her church, not just the pastor, visited her every day. Some of the sisters from the church helped my mum to do my aunt's washing for her and brought her food to the hospital. They kind of took it in shifts. And they helped us to take care of her kids. I suppose this kind of support can be good for schoolwork because the children could just get continue as before. They didn't have their routine disrupted too much. (Ophelia)

A number of pupils emphasised this aspect, that is the differences they perceived between what they deemed black and white churches, and the role they said the latter played in the black community.

Even though black people have been here (in Britain) for years, black churches still do things like marriage ceremonies different to whites. I used to go to Sunday school and even though I don't go now, who ever I marry it will have to be in a Pentecostal church. When I go to weddings at white churches they are so dead. I like the singing and things like that in black churches. Everything there seems to be more of an event, it sticks in your mind more. (Carlette)

Therefore even pupils who did not believe churches had a direct bearing on their achievement described a community which was available to them, to which they could turn to obtain support and help. The religious importance of church was relatively irrelevant to this group, their importance being in the existence of a supportive network that they felt could be utilised when required.

Approximately 30 per cent of pupils in my sample defined their families as religious. When this latter group was asked to say how religion influencd their achievement, about half of them struggled to isolate a direct identifiable relationship between religion and their school performance. On the whole the responses of this group (religious but unsure that religion had a direct bearing on their achievement) suggested that they did not consider there to be a direct relationship between their

religion and school performance and that if there was such it might be an ambiguous one.

On one level these pupils described their religious communities in positive ways as comprising of people with whom they said they had things in common, with whom they could socialise, who judged them in terms of adherence to different rules and for whom colour was seemingly irrelevant. Indeed where they were made to feel special because of the mere fact of membership and belonging.

> When you are saved and became a member of my church (Church of God), you feel special. You know, they preach about us being the true church, that we were special people, in a way superior to other people because we know the truth of the Bible and that we are the only ones who are going to heaven. It could give you a lot of confidence in that way. It could spill over into schoolwork but it doesn't always do that for everyone. A lot of the kids in my church are no different from the kinds of kids you find in school, good behaviour and bad behaviour, good at their work, bad at their work. I think it is the type of family you come from not just whether you go to church or not. (Rema)

When pressed, pupils in this group spoke of the role that they considered churches had in the black community generally. They spoke of it being important to them that their churches were black led, that black people were the ones setting the rules, were in positions of authority and had things in common with them as black people. However the more in depth and vociferous comments in this group related to what they said were equivocal messages, which they said, were transmitted by their churches. Messages that they said could detract or lessen rather than advance their achievement in school.

> I go to a Pentecostal church and I think they sometimes give you different messages about achievement if you listen carefully to some of the things that they say. Often they go on about not putting too much into this life because Jesus will soon return and that material things would get into the way of concentrating on the church and heaven. That is my criticism of it, you don't always know if you should really excel or just do a little and wait for the end time. (Ezra)

Pupils in this group also stated that there was an over emphasis on behaviour, giving the impression that they could not behave well unless they were made afraid of eventual consequences from God.

> That is one of the things that gets on my nerves, I don't think it's right to bring children up to think they should be good because if they don't they go to hell. I think it should come from inside. You carry that with you if it comes from inside. If it doesn't when you are away from the church you go mad and do all kinds of wild things. I know a lot of kids who go to church and they are worse than kids who don't go. (James)

In relation to aspects of their schoolwork, pupils in this group spoke of the availability of people in their church who could help them with their work if they needed it. Likewise, despite their ambivalence about the value of religion in their achievement pupils spoke of the usefulness of having people within their churches whom they considered achievers, people who they said they could look up to. People who they said provided examples of what they could achieve themselves.

All pupils in this group gave example of a number of people in the church organisation, if not in the local church they attended in other churches they knew, who were achievers by and whom they were motivated. The degree of this varied from their stated admiration because someone had succeeded after several attempts at exams or someone who had a job that was deemed to be high status and well-paid. It seemed however that most of the examples cited were people who had not necessarily succeeded the first time around in the education system but had returned to education via college and adult training programmes. This is not necessarily to be seen as a negative influence but can be said to transmit the message to pupils that black people are not, for whatever reason, able to succeed in school but need to have a second opportunity to do so.

The impact of religion for this group cannot be assessed in a vacuum however. As we have seen above in other Chapters, there is not one single cause of the success

or failure of black pupils, rather a number of interconnected factors seem to have a bearing on their performance in schools.

Black achieving pupils in this group were not socially isolated individuals with families bereft of community connection and support. Nor did they, according to the data, acquiesce uncritically under the impact of the groups within their own community whose socialising role they were subjected to. This group of pupil was critical and discriminatory in their perception and acceptance of their religion. What was perhaps valuable for these achieving black pupils however was that they had networks that their parents had introduced them to, groups that they could accept or reject wholly or partially. They were intelligent enough to utilise the aspects they considered they needed and to reject those that they considered superfluous or that did not meet their needs.

It was apparent therefore that religious achieving pupils while advocating the strong religious values of the families and the positive role it played in their lives, simultaneously expressed guarded criticism of the role of religion in society. Of more importance however was their beliefs that whatever their reservation about the religious values of their families, they considered that their religious communities provided important resources which supported their school performance. They stated that they could call upon this community for support if not directly to do with their schoolwork in ways that they considered would affect their well-being and perhaps indirectly their school performance.

The final of the three groups referred to above (those who considered religion to be significant in their school achievement) considered there to be a strong relationship between their religious beliefs, affiliation and their school performance. This group gave the most in-depth responses of the three groups, were the most

emphatic and provided a number of examples of how they considered their religious affiliation to be important in their lives generally and in relation to their school performance directly or indirectly.

Of pupils who considered themselves religious and stated that religion was important in their achievement two were practising Muslims, one was a Rastafarian, one a Seventh Day Adventist and one a Pentecostal.

In terms of direct relationship, these pupils generally spoke of religion influencing their perception of education, their behaviour, how they related to their teachers, fellow pupils, their work and how they viewed themselves. This group stated that religion gave them added confidence, self-assurance and had a positive effect on how they regarded their future. This position was similar to that made above by Rema (see pp. 245) and related here to doctrines which gave a sense of exclusivity because of the belief in being chosen by God to know the Truth or being in the group which did not simply know but practised the correct religious precepts.

Pupils also said that their religions were advantageous to them because they gave them specific guidance in relation to education.

> It provides the basis for life; it helps you to get on, to live your life.... It's the doctrines; they help you to structure your life, to believe in yourself. It gives you something to live by...Islam says you not only learn for yourself, you learn for Allah. It provides a definite structure for education as well as for life. I think the most important part of my religion is education. (Adi)

These pupils spoke too of developing skills in their religious institutions, which directly helped them in school such as public speaking skills, reading, historical and geographical information. Public speaking related to speaking in front of a congregation, both ones they knew and visitors from other churches and reading to the same but from religious books. In relation to historical and geographical information, pupils spoke mainly of knowledge they gained about places that were relevant to their

religions' histories and the location of significant places for them in relation to history but also contemporary connections. These included Israel, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia.

> You just take it for granted but from early on when you get saved you have to give testimonies, which are little speeches about how you are doing as a Christian. In Sunday school you learn about the Bible and you have do things like read out aloud, write stories and draw pictures. I found out how important Bible's knowledge is in subjects like History of Art, one of my cousins who goes to a private school is doing it and it is helping her because a lot of the themes of classical pictures are Biblical themes. (Claire)

Pupils in this group also spoke of their churches and mosques providing a feature of their lives that was permanent, consistent and supportive. They spoke of their religion providing rules of conduct that were valuable for themselves as individuals, for their communities and which they said provided them with the correct attitude to school work. They stated it was important too that their religious communities afforded opportunities to participate in activities that they might not have had opportunities to do otherwise. They described leisure and religious outings to different parts of the country and abroad.

> In the Seventh Day Adventist we collect funds for our churches all over the world so you get to know about different places and people and you feel connected to a bigger society than just to your small community. Plus you get to meet people from all over the world when they visit your conferences. Many of these people are black and they are well educated. You see a lot of achievers in our church. You know it's not unusual and if the normal schools don't meet your needs, you know there is always a Seventh Day Adventist school in this country or in another country. (Nadine)

As in the area of self-image, the argument presented by pupils was that their religious beliefs and affiliation placed them in supportive communities, which helped them to develop positive views of themselves and their communities.

> I am an orthodox Rastafarian, it sorts of pushes you to do well. For one you feel confident and special because you don't see yourself like everyone else. (Obe)

Pupils in this group stated that it was important to have people outside their families who kept an eye on them, who could help them with their work, whom they could emulate as well as compete with. Pupils in this group spoke of their religious groups making much of educational achievement, by highlighting educational successes such as GCSE passes, degree success and work achievements.

> I like it when they call peoples' names out in the notices and praise them because they are doing well in school or when they get their degree and things like that. I want to continue to do well for myself but I want to do well for my family too, especially my mum and for the church. They help you so much. You get this inner strength and confidence. Faith gives you that. (Nadine)

Pupils in this group spoke too of structures within their organisations, which they said, had both direct and indirect influence on their school performance. Pupils spoke of being given responsibilities as leaders of youth groups, of organising meetings, of singing in choirs, performing in drama groups, of learning to play musical instruments and performing in public. This recognition and applauding of their talents were therefore seen as some of a number of significant aspects of their religion that they said influenced and impacted on their well-being and on their educational achievement.

Religious values of black achievers and their families and most importantly support mechanisms within religious organisations were therefore said to be have a positive bearing on the performance of black pupils in school. Religious values transmitted confidence, was said to enhance self-image and afforded them a range of opportunities and scope to engage in activities that directly benefited their school achievement. Their families therefore had individuals who supported their efforts to socialise their children and indeed contributed to their socialisation. They belonged to a community where young people felt safe, valued and where they were seen first and foremost as special individuals. They could get to know black people who were

leaders, who had themselves performed well and who had a strong belief in both their present roles in the community and in their future. In short, religious values and religious community seemed to provide catharsis for the pressures, to which they felt they were subjected to in the wider society and indeed an escape from the constraints imposed by their colour.

Of all the factors highlighted as important to their achievement however pupils cited the role of their parents and family members as the most significant. The data revealed that black parents tended to lack confidence in the education system. They therefore did not rely solely on school for the education of their children. Rather, from an early age they provided formal education for them, provided opportunities for them to further their educational development and to prepare them to cope with, what pupils said they saw as the challenges faced by black people in British society.

7.5 THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS IN ACHIEVEMENT

We have seen in the previous Chapter on self-image and achievement that pupils in my sample considered that parents played a significant role in the knowledge they had of their culture and heritage and in how they perceived themselves (see pp. 212-223). The following discussion is therefore not to be seen in isolation from the other influences that achieving pupils felt their parents had in other areas such as self-image and peer choice. Rather they have to be seen in relationship to the powerful influences that black parents were said to have on the totality of the general socialisation and moulding of their children.

Pupils considered that their parents were the most significant factors in their achievement. This was when offered choices between teachers, school, religious beliefs, family members, siblings and peers and when compared with the views

expressed before on these. This was exemplified not just in what the pupils stated were their parents' attitude to education but in the support that pupils said their parents gave them in their school work.

A number of parents had returned to the education system in adulthood and all the parents with whom children were residing, except one mother who was at college doing a social work course, were working full-time. On the face of it, it could be argued that this may have an adverse effect on pupils whose parents may not be at home to support their children with their own schoolwork. This evidently was not the case for pupils in my sample where pupils stated that their parents made education a high priority.

The data indicated that the majority of pupils grew up in families, be they single parent or two parents, where parents created formal situations for teaching and learning, beginning in pre-school and continuing to secondary school. Pupils spoke of being taught a range of skills by parents before starting school.

Similarly, pupils stated that their parents did not rely on, or completely trust their schools to meet their educational needs. Parents were said to begin formal education of their children before compulsory schooling began. The majority of pupils in my sample said that they were taught the alphabet, to count, the times tables, to identify colours, nursery rhymes and basic spelling before they went to infants schools.

> Education did not begin for me when I went to school and I don't mean things like nursery rhymes, I mean where I had to sit down and do lessons. I can't even remember when this started. I know that I always had study time at home with either my mum or dad teaching me things. (Kenny)

A number of pupils in my sample said that their primary schools did not appreciate their parents' efforts. This did not, they said, deter parents who were convinced that this was a vital start for their children.

> My father used to make me learn the tables. When I went to infants school I knew all my times tables to twelve but my teacher asked me why I needed to know the tables. I don't really remember it but my father says that I told him and he went in to talk to her about it. He said she said something about rote learning and that I could not really understand multiplication at that age. (Ayo)

Parents it seemed therefore attempted to give black children a head start indicating, according to achieving pupils, their lack of faith and confidence in the education system.

> When we were little she (mother) used to dictate to me...She used to dictate words and I used to spell them out. I have become a good speller because of that. And I had textbooks at home that she used to buy for me and I would do work from them at home if I didn't get homework from school.... We always used to watch the news together and we would discuss it. We still do this even now. (Carlette)

Pupils also spoke of parents extending and developing work set by teachers and even of teaching them new information such as History, Maths and Geography. Pupils stated that parents set them work at home when schools did not do so or when they were dissatisfied with the amount of homework set or considered the level inappropriate. Pupils stated that parents supervised them to ensure work was done or enquired about homework, course work or school in general.

Parents of achieving pupils were therefore said by them to take an active part in their learning and progress. They supported them with encouragement and with practical help; they attended school meetings, were knowledgeable about what were required at each stage of the education system and were confident in utilising this knowledge for the children.

> My parents are the most positive influences in my education. My mum especially, she pressures me sometimes, she encourages me a lot and gives me support. She makes sure I do my work. She does not accept any excuse from

me when it comes to my schoolwork. My parents make sure that I focus mainly on my work. (James)

Where parents were not able to give help with specific topics pupils said they solicited the help of other family members, employed tutors and sent them to Saturday schools. If parents were dissatisfied with the amount of homework or lack of it, pupils said that parents contacted their schools by writing in, visiting or telephoning the school to complain.

> The school I went to didn't set homework so my parents used to go in and ask them to set me homework. My parents used to set me extra work. They used to ask me everyday about school, what I was doing and what I needed to do. (Lloyd)

Pupils spoke of the early work set by parents as giving them a head start, or giving them skills, especially topics in Maths and English, which children had not yet done in school. They talked also of the influences of their siblings. All but one of the pupils had siblings who were similarly in top sets in schools, had done well above average in their GCSEs, were at university or in professional jobs.

What was striking about the perception that pupils had of the role of parents in their educational achievement, was that they evidently fully expected the role of their parents and family members to have been more significant than the role expected of teachers and schools. Indeed all said that the most important foundation of their achievement was laid at home. 'I think you have to have the base at home to really kick off at school'. (Sonya)

Several of the pupils said that their parents particularly encouraged them because they understood it was more difficult for black people to get on in the society. 'They know that because we are black it is harder for me to get on and get a job.' (Marcus)

Support given from older siblings was cited by a number of pupils as being important in their achievement. Some said that even sibling rivalry could be a motivating factor. If older siblings were performing well, or had performed well in school or college, pupils expressed that they did not want to be the ones to let their family down.

This view about letting family members down was mentioned by a number of pupils. They spoke of not wanting to let parents down as being important in maintaining interest in schoolwork and in striving to do well.

Like parents, siblings were said to offer encouragement and to offer help with work. One pupil who had a twin brother said he had grown up with the knowledge that his brother was cleverer than he was. This he said was based on the fact his brother usually achieved better results than he did in school. Their mother however understood that this was not helpful and would insist that he was as clever as his brother. He said his mother used this way to motivate him and that it worked but more than that, he said it was his own internal drive not to allow his brother to do better than him that kept him achieving well in school. 'I am always competing with my brother, that is why I do well because he is clever, much more than me.' (Ezra)

The importance of siblings in the educational achievement of black pupils seemed to take on special significance when parents were separated and a single parent was raising children, such children comprised a significant percentage of my sample (see Appendix, 1). Pupils in these situations, that is being raised by lone parents, were especially likely to equally credit their older siblings or members of extended families, like cousins and aunts as offering educational support. Pupils talked of competitiveness, of arguments with older siblings but of their secret

admiration for them and desire to emulate them and to be like them, especially if they were at university or in what they considered to be good jobs.

Parents and siblings were also said to be supportive in presenting university as a natural choice, a natural progression from school and of having high expectations of them and of being ambitious for them. Siblings were not accorded the same significance as parents but regarded as demonstrating or exemplifying the values of parents and so reinforced important family values.

> My parents' view is that I have no choice but to go as far as I can go naturally. They think university is a natural route after school for me. Some people might see this as pressure but I don't mind this kind of pressure. I just get on with it. (Peter)

So convinced were pupils that their parents had got it right in relation to their intervention and support of their schooling that some pupils were critical of friends' parents who they said did not do likewise.

> If a child does not succeed in school, this is because the family did not bring him up right. Most of my friends don't have parents who show them a good example and they have a strange way of disciplining them, they shout all the time. My parents show me and explain to me rather than shout. (Ezra)

Pupils talked of parents leading by example, showing discipline in their own lives and by having achieved themselves or if they had not, informed pupils of their own regrets.

Pupils said their parents valued education because it was seen as a key for the future both for the pupils themselves and for their future children.

> My mum thinks education is the most important thing in my life. I don't only get that from her and from her friends but from my uncles and my cousins. My uncle says if one generation gets a good education, their children will see it as natural and so it will go on. (Julie-Ann)

Education evidently held a particularly high value for pupils whose parents had not achieved in school and who had returned to education in adulthood for a second chance. A number of pupils' parents fell into this category and this seemingly gave

them added incentive both because of the example of their parents and because it provided their parents with new skills and knowledge so were able to support them more effectively with their own work. Pupils said that paying for tutors was another example of their parent's interest in their achievements. A number of the pupils had been given private tuition some time in their school life where they had particular difficulty with a subject or subjects and the majority of pupils had attended a Saturday School. Pupils regarded this as another confirmation of their parents' commitment and support of their education. This often linked to how important they stated their parents considered education to be for black people.

There were however pupils who said their parents did not encourage them to dwell on their race but rather to focus on achievement. Ayo offered the suggestion that focusing on the negative connotations of race can be de-motivating.

> My parents say although everyone else seems to see our colour I should try and put race to the back of my mind, everybody else thinks colour is everything. They tell me not to waste my time worrying about it, just put in the effort. That is the most important thing to do. (Ayo)

This point emphasises the delicate job that the parents of black children seem to have. They evidently need to stimulate in their children an understanding of the meaning of race in this society while at the same time encouraging them to define themselves and set their own targets and goals. One of the strategies that was particularly effective according to pupils in my sample was that of leading by example, by being role models to their children.

> My parents don't just talk about me being disciplined about my studies but show by example. My mum didn't do well in school herself and she had a hard time surviving with me on her own so she went to college and now she designs and makes clothes. I really admire her. I really think she is going to do well. (Carlette)

Others spoke of growing up knowing that certain achievements were expected.

Although some people seeing that you are black think you can only achieve to a certain level, my parents have never seen it like that. They know it is hard but they keep telling all of us, you can be whatever you want to be. They kind of take it for granted that I will go to university. (Sonya)

In addition parents of achieving black pupils attempted to make them resilient and so be single minded in their pursuit of educational achievement, to defer present gratification and to learn from every class room situation.

My dad says, we should not go home with excuses. He says he knows all the excuses. He doesn't like it when we say teachers pick on us or that they don't like us because we are black. He says if you are sitting next to a white child, the teacher can't stop us from getting the same education. (Ayo)

Since parents were so clearly influential, according to their children, they were as capable of passing on positive as well as negative views of school and education. It is conceivable that parents who have run foul of the system may harbour their alienation and without intending to, instil this attitude in their children. Pupils in my sample were clearly aware of this. Some of them had parents as well as siblings who had passed on their own negative experiences of school to them. It was clearly difficult to assess what the full impact of this was or would be in the long term. Currently, pupils were sceptical and cautious of schools, felt that the odds are stacked against them and that the major and most consistent support that they had in their attainment were from their parents and family members. This was regardless of the types of school of attendance.

My parents' generation was the ones who nobody thought were going to achieve anything, because black people were supposed to be born stupid. (James)

To summarise, pupils stated that parents considered education an investment for them and their children, regarding it as a way of addressing educational ills of the past and securing their futures. Pupils did not consider that their parents placed limits on their potential as they said society did. According to their children, parents were

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treading a challenging path. On the one hand, parents did not want their children to be overly preoccupied with their colour and to use it as an excuse for poor performance. On the other hand, they evidently sought to socialise their children to understand the limitations that were placed on them by the society and the strategies that they considered they needed to employ to do well in school. This was a very different picture from that previously seen in some of the literature which mainly focused on low achieving pupils. Those as we have seen often suggested that black parents were unsophisticated and ignorant of their role in the education of their children and so ill-equipped to support them in school (see pp. 42-52).

7.6 CONCLUSION

Parents of black achieving pupils according to the data collected were both from working class and middle class backgrounds. The attitudes to education and the support given by black working class parents of achieving pupils however were indistinguishable from those of their middle class counterparts. Parents from both classes, according to pupils, valued education believing it to be the route to economic and social fulfilment for their children and thus gave education high priority.

In relation to family religious values and their impact on achievement the majority of pupils did not consider these to be significant in their school performance. They however cited as important the support that could be obtained from religious communities and said these communities were significant resources in relation to important *rites of passage*.

A number of pupils however said that both religious values and religious institutions were important in a number of ways for them and their families. These pupils said that religious values and participation gave a positive sense of themselves,

enhanced self-confidence, provided opportunities for them to perform tasks such as public speaking that had a direct positive influence on their school performance. These pupils found within their religious communities, individuals who inspired them and who provided role models of what could be achieved. Significantly religious values and religious involvement gave pupils welcome respite from the pressures and negative stereotyping they perceived characterised how they are defined in society. Pupils holding these views were vociferous in their claim of the importance of religious values and participation in their religious communities to their achievement.

Overwhelmingly however pupils said that their parents were the most significant factor in their achievement even when compared to the role played by school, their religious communities, siblings and other family members. Parents were portrayed as involving themselves in the education of their children from early primary school years. They provided concrete support for them, beginning with formal teaching and help from pre-school to secondary school. They had high expectations of their children and engaged them in regular discussions about what they saw as the discriminatory nature of the society and the role that success in education could play in their lives. Parent did not however only help with school work and supported their pupils to achieve. Parents demonstrated understanding of the nature of the society and how they said it impacted on black people and considered it their duty to pass on this understanding to their children. Parents were generally said to present the picture of a discriminatory society, where black pupils had to achieve better results than white pupils in order for them to succeed. In this way pupils considered they were empowering them to meet the demands and the challenges of the society.

In crediting parents, be they lone parent or couples, more than school for their achievement pupils were not surprised by this, they expected this to be the right balance. It seemed therefore that the experiences of their parents and families in the education system and in society as a whole have left their mark so that their own expectations of school were generally relatively low.

Even though some parents were seemingly anxious to empower their children to shrug off the negative definitions of them given by society and to subvert the low expectations held of them, their children stated that they tempered this with caution. Their caution relating to *their* parents' own low expectation of school in delivering a high standard of education to their children. Black parents of achieving pupils therefore took seriously their self-imposed role, not simply of supporting their children in school, but of formally educating them and so redressing for themselves the deficit left by the education system in the schooling of their children. Pupils therefore portrayed their families as antitheses to the more familiar picture of black families (Coleman & Taylor, 1966; Haskey, 1998; Popenoe, 1997). Parents were seen as providing them with concrete examples of their own achievements, support, encouragement and role models in society and in their communities. They expected them therefore to progress to higher education and to achieve as well or better than they have done in employment.

Black achieving pupils regarded their families as pivotal to their achievement in school. More profoundly however families, especially parents, were seen as equipping them with knowledge, experiences and skills that they considered crucial to their self-image, future ambitions and their ability as black people to negotiate the world of work and the wider society. A society, where they believed, assessment and

judgement of them are based on negative perceptions of their colour, their abilities and potential.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to identify the factors that contribute to the achievement of black pupils in British schools. Hence, it departs from the usual focus of research on black achievement, which concentrated on low achievement. This conclusion looks at the findings revealed from the data and discusses further research that is needed to answer additional questions raised in relation to black pupils' achievement.

The thesis began with an analysis of research on low achievement because such research formed the major bulk of work on the performance of black pupils in British schools. However, this research raised important issues around the preoccupation of such research on low achievement and so helped me to define my research questions. The thesis further examined the research on achievement of black pupils, which though having relatively less impact on the debate, provided evidence of the achievement of black pupils and the factors that contributed to their performance in schools. Further, the research that was analysed on achievement helped to refine my research questions and contributed to my decisions about appropriate methodology.

In attempting to provide a theoretical justification for the methods that I have used, I analysed the use of quantitative methods and argued that they were initially employed to assess and explain the performance of black pupils in schools. Quantitative methods were not appropriate for this research because it was necessary to understand the meanings and motives of my participants rather than to obtain statistical data on preset categories. I concluded that qualitative methods provided

more varied and in-depth data than that provided by quantitative research, thereby providing a rationale for my use of this method.

The analysis of research on the performance of black pupils revealed that the overwhelming conclusion of such research, provided over many years, has been that black pupils are low achievers (see pp.10-22). The explanations given included deficiencies within the black family, the peer affiliation of black pupils, their low self-image/poor self-concept, their lack of inherited intelligence and their poor behaviour. It has therefore become part of the consciousness of almost all individuals, both black and white, that black pupils within the British educational system do not achieve in schools.

Examination of much of the previous research in Chapter One (see pp. 22-78), revealed that this was because both the black family and its children were described as possessing characteristics that stood in the way of school achievement. Theorists and researchers pointed to a range of individual, family and community deficiencies. These argued that black pupils were inherently less intelligent than whites (see pp. 23-28, 42-52), that as a result of their objective inferior material positions, they were afflicted with low self-image and poor self-concept which had adverse effects on their performance in school (see pp. 52-60). As significant as the above, was the argument that the attitude and behaviour of black pupils in schools often conflicted with the academic ethos of schools, thereby creating among them anti-school ethos and adversarial relationships with their teachers (see pp. 28-42).

Further, in the research analysed in Chapter 1 on low achievement, the black family's deficiencies were said to compound the problems that black pupils brought to school. Its structure, child rearing practices, attitudes and values were shown in the research discussed to be mainly pathological (see pp. 42-52). These negative traits

therefore prejudiced teachers against them and obstructed the work of schools so badly that schools were impotent to affect the performance of black pupils (see pp. 42-52, 72-78).

As a consequence of the individual and social problems that black pupils, especially boys, were shown to take to school, and the attitudes that teachers brought to their relationship with black pupils, the evidence indicated that their teachers perceived them in negative ways (see pp. 28-42). This was said to be especially so of white teachers who, it was found in the research discussed, tended to have low expectations of black pupils (see pp. 33-42). Black teachers too were said to be susceptible to what I have defined the racialised characteristics of this society. By this is meant that since race is an important basis by which individuals are perceived, assessed and by which judgements are made about them, they too inevitably internalised the resulting negative assessments both of themselves and of black pupils. This was reflected in research, which found authoritarianism towards black pupils and racist rhetoric in their relationship and assessments of them (see pp. 39-42).

The conclusions I drew from this analysis of previous research on low achievement of black pupils was that because of the perceived deficiencies within their families and as individuals, black pupils could not and did not approach schools with the correct background or skills to support achievement. Likewise, because of the racialised nature of the society, teachers were more likely to focus on the misdemeanours of black pupils. They were more likely to single them out for punishment within school and of even more concern, to deprive them of their education by totally excluding them from school (see pp. 72-76). The latter, that is, the disproportionate exclusion rates of black pupils is further evidence of the disadvantaged position of black pupils in schools.

My research further revealed that previous research on the low achievement of black pupils, although it has formed the major focus of attention, does not form the entire picture (see Chapter 2). I have analysed research studies which, have shown that contrary to prevailing views, there *are* black achievers within the educational system (see Chapter 2). In defining achievement I have concluded that although achievement may be defined in various ways, achievement that is most valued by the education system, pupils, their families and society, is academic achievement represented by high grades.

A particularly important aspect of the research evidence that I have presented indicated that black boys and girls responded in different ways to the situation which they faced in schools. In research on low achievement, black boys were shown to respond in ways which further antagonised their teachers and impacted adversely on their achievement (see pp. 28-33). This created a vicious circle of negative views and responses, challenging behaviour, low achievement and exclusions (see pp. 72-76). Girls though in general were said to respond to the demands presented by the racialised society in ways which ultimately advanced their ambitions (see pp. 94-99). Research of black achievers likewise indicated that although, like boys, they were aware of the negative perception and low expectation held of them, black girls, more than boys, understood that education was vital to them. They were therefore more likely to have acquired appropriate tactics to circumvent negativism, survive and achieve their educational goals. Such research however indicated that although black girls were more likely to approach teachers and their education in ways which supported attainment, some black boys were as adept as girls in doing so and in attaining at a high level in schools.

Further, I have argued that the relatively recent effective school debate has

transferred the emphasis from pupils and their families by analysing the role that schools can play in black pupils' performance in school (see pp. 76-78). However, my evidence indicated that it is not clear whether this alteration in emphasis is impacting positively on the overall experience of black pupils in schools (see pp. 76-78).

The conclusion that I have drawn from research on achievement with regards to gender was that there was also a gender basis to achievement of black pupils, with girls being more likely than boys to develop strategies that negated negativism that they faced in school and so to achieve academically. Further, and importantly I have found that such findings indicated that factors both within school and out of school, affected the achievement of black pupils. These factors did not operate or impact on pupils in isolation but together contributed to their achievement. Indeed that within the diverse group usually labelled *black*, there are to be found differences in school performance. The most significant finding however is the acknowledgement in this research on achievement (see pp. 94-99), that black pupils can and do achieve in schools despite the discrimination that these and low achievement studies identified (see pp. 22-76). In addition that schools, most certainly and rightly have roles to play in the achievement of black pupils. This latter statement may seem to be a tautology but I have shown that the responsibility for the education of black pupils has not always been said either by schools or research studies to be that of school but of individual pupils and their families. This was because they, rather than schools, have largely been blamed when black pupils were said to have failed or underachieved.

It has demonstrated that despite the racialised nature of the society, as previous research on low achievement has found, where conditions exist for low self-image, alienation and low achievement (see pp. 14-22, 28-42,52-60), black achievers *are* to be found in the school system. As important, the factors that have been cited as

(inevitably) leading to their low achievement cannot be generalised to all black pupils. Indeed, my data indicated that black achievers and their families placed a high value on education. Hence, they developed strategies within school, at home and within the wider society, to circumvent the perceived racialised structures within society, the negativism of their teachers and the possible adverse effect of peer affiliation. Further, to enhance their self-image and to obtain the best from themselves and from the education system.

The findings of my own study, which has focused on the perception of achieving pupils, have revealed some new, interesting and important findings as well as raising questions and areas for future enquiry. The factors that were revealed in the data as impacting on the achievement of black pupils were closely related to those previously explored in research on low achievement. They were teachers' perceptions and expectations, teacher colour, peer affiliation, self-image/self-concept, family religious values, parental input and support. These and the input of others factors such as social class and family structure were explored. They revealed findings which in the main developed or departed from conclusions drawn in previous research on low achievement.

In the area of teacher perception and expectation, although it is concluded that this is a complex area on which to draw definitive conclusions, my data indicated that black pupils in my study considered that teachers held preconceived negative views about them as black people. That is, when they faced teachers in the classroom they stated that teachers saw their colour first and generally related to them on the basis of their negative perceptions of this.

I wanted to discover what pupils thought informed the negative views that they considered teachers held of black pupils. It was concluded that there may be a

fusion of influences. The most significant of these was the racism endemic in the society, reinforced and compounded by the historical and material conditions of black people both in British and other societies. Also of significance in informing teachers' perceptions of black pupils, according to the evidence I have presented, were teachers' own experiences of their interaction with black pupils, some of whom according to my evidence struggled to find acceptable responses to the pressures which faced them in a racialised society.

My evidence indicated that as a result of their teachers' negative view of black pupils, there was a tendency for them to have low expectations of them. This was unless faced with persistent concrete evidence over a long period of time that black pupils deviated from the mould to which they have been ascribed. In general therefore teachers were not said by pupils to play a sufficiently dynamic role in motivating them (see pp. 166-179). Rather black pupils had to enter classroom situations fully equipped with all the necessary motivational tools to achieve (see pp. 173-179). Further, my evidence indicated that black achieving pupils considered that teachers anticipated poor responses and approaches from them (see pp. 165-173). Black achieving pupils therefore had to learn early in their educational lives to develop strategies to negate and circumvent the negative views and the tendency to low expectations of them by their teachers (see pp. 173-179). This is not to say however that black achievers did not ever find teachers who approached them as they would other pupils regardless of their colour. My evidence indicated that black pupils usually found within their schools teachers both black and white that inspired and motivated them, set high standards and expected them to achieve their potential (see pp. 160-163, 166-173). Alas, the evidence presented indicated that these teachers

tended to be in the minority (see pp. 166-173). But this is a positive point on which to build and indeed on which further research might present useful evidence.

As a consequence, achieving black pupils, although they considered that teacher expectation could have a positive impact on their school performance, did not solely rely on their teachers to have high expectation of them and to motivate them in order for them to achieve. As a result of their experiences, and indeed that of family members and peers, they learnt to develop their own tactics for achievement. Among the most significant of these were self-motivation, self-belief and ambition. Indeed my evidence indicated that achieving black pupils did not acquiesce passively and accept the negative labels of schools or society. Rather, black achievers set themselves goals and strove to overcome the adverse impact of negative views of them.

The perception of the role of white teachers was not the only factor within school that achieving black pupils identified as impacting on their performance. Pupils cited the role of black teachers and indeed the colour of their teachers as a salient factor in their achievement. The question that arose was why this was the case.

Specifically in relation to black teachers, the evidence presented indicated that black achieving pupils expected black teachers to wield a significantly different influence on their schooling to that expected of white teachers (see pp. 166-173). Seemingly like other individuals in a society differentiated by race, black achieving pupils considered that there should be a natural affinity with others sharing their colour (see pp. 166-173). This was because colour was said to supersede factors such as class, gender, background, religion, heritage, family tradition and values. In this way black achievers did not see the colour of their teachers as irrelevant (see pp. 166-173). Rather my evidence indicated that black teachers who overtly acknowledged

their shared blackness, allied with black pupils by sharing their experiences and the strategies that they have employed to achieve success, were said to positively affect black pupils' school performance (see pp. 166-173). This clearly indicated an added pressure on black teachers. The evidence indicated that they did not have the luxury of being regarded as any other teacher (see pp. 166-173). For as well as this, with the normal expectations and pressures that came with being a teacher, they were expected by black pupils to take on the added role as mentors to black pupils (see pp. 166-173). The data indicated that it was not that black pupils wanted to put this extra pressure on black teachers. Rather it was apparent from the evidence, it was because black achievers lacked the balanced input of all their teachers and seemed desperate for role models, support and positive feedback in school and generally in the wider society (see pp. 166-173, 212-226). There seemed to be some tension and contradiction here however because on one level black achievers wished their teachers to relate to them as whole persons not just on the basis of their colour (see pp. 166-173). On another level because they did not generally find this in school, they required black teachers to see their colour as a basis for allegiance and thus to counterbalance the status quo (see pp. 166-185).

The data obtained in relation to teachers therefore indicated that they had a crucial role to play in motivating and supporting the aspirations of black pupils (see Chapter 4). Although in the absence of this, black achieving pupils evidently obtained this from other areas such as supportive peers and family members (see Chapter 5), this clearly cannot be substituted for the crucial role that teachers need to play.

It would therefore be illuminating to conduct enquiries into the perspectives of teachers of black pupils, both achieving and low achieving. They too are experiencing the reality of black children in schools. Both black and white teachers, at all levels of

schools hierarchies no doubt have important contributions to make on what they perceive the salient issues to be in relation to the performance of black pupils. How different or similar are their perceptions of the factors that contribute to the performance of black pupils in school? What do they think inform these factors? What role do they think that they need to play in enabling black pupils to have positive and productive experiences in schools?

In relation to the role of peer affiliation, the thesis explored critically the role of peers in the performance of black pupils in schools since previous researchers have argued that black peer groups have a negative impact on their achievement (see pp. 186-189). The evidence in this thesis indicated that high achieving black pupils, especially boys, were indeed subjected to pressures from various sources in relation to their choice of friends both in school and in the wider society (see pp. 188-201). Teachers evidently exerted pressure on them motivated by their own negative perceptions of black people (see pp. 189-194). Parents likewise sought to influence the peer affiliation of their children; motivated by their fear of how they imagined black pupils were perceived as a group and consequently their vulnerability in schools and in the streets to punishment, exclusion and arrest (see pp. 198-202). Not least, my evidence indicated that black pupils were subjected to pressure from fellow black pupils who adopted anti-school postures and who had a tendency to reject them because of their failure to behave in ways that they considered encapsulated their definition of blackness (see pp. 198-202). Herein rested another of the tensions that successful black pupils evidently faced in school. The data indicated that they were subjected to pressures from white society but equally from elements within the black community who (especially boys), had evidently taken on aspects of the negativism of them that they abhorred, often categorising positive traits with whiteness and negative

traits with blackness. Indeed in believing that whiteness and blackness are simple categories that can be easily generalised to all who happened to share their colour, regardless of others important aspects that may more appropriately define them as individuals.

Disaffected and disillusioned black pupils (especially boys), are therefore part of the reality of schools, especially in inner city areas. What are the particular issues of black boys in Britain? What is it about them, their families, the communities from which they come, the wider society of which they are mainly products that create boys who are in the main regarded, rightly or wrongly, as pariahs? How are the needs and concerns of this group of black pupils to be addressed? They clearly cannot be ignored, brushed aside or silenced. If they are, it is not just the individuals, their immediate communities and their families that will be damaged but the schools, society and the future of all these groups.

In this area of peer affiliation, as in other areas, in order to win the favour of their teachers in school and to prevent being distracted both in and out of school, black achievers had to design a game plan for achievement. For black pupils who wished to achieve in school, nothing it seemed could be left to chance; not the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, fortuitous interactions or even idiosyncrasies of youth. My study revealed that black pupils were discouraged from befriending other black pupils because of the effect they believed this would have on teachers' view of them (see pp. 189-194). And of equal importance because of the potential risk to which they felt this would put them in the community (see pp. 198-202). To be a black achiever in schools therefore entailed more than simple academic ability and application to work. Rather my data indicated that black pupils considered that they needed to be aware not only how *they* were regarded by teachers, but how their

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potential friends were viewed by teachers and how other black pupils perceived them as a result of their friendship choices.

With regards to self-image/self-concept the thesis sought to critically explore the issues around these and the possible impact of them on the achievement of black achieving pupils. Aspects of the findings in my study were found to be in line with those of other studies explored in Chapter 1 (see pp. 28-42). Specifically, black pupils were found to face a multiplicity of factors and conditions in a racially differentiated society which predisposed them to adopting negative images of themselves. My findings indicated however that despite the factors that seemed to conspire against them developing a positive self-image (see pp. 208-216, 223-226), a numbers of other factors mitigated against this in black achievers. These factors were more usually to be found outside school and indeed to be facilitated by their families who were mindful of the disadvantages to which they felt their children were exposed. My data revealed that black achievers' knowledge of significant black achievers in Britain and in other countries motivated them and enhanced their own self-image (see pp. 217-223). Most importantly their families educated them in understanding the dynamics of the society and by providing support and examples of positive black role models in their communities and elsewhere, reduced the possible adverse impact of this society on their self-image (see pp. 223-226).

Interestingly however the data indicated that it was the pupils' views of their future that self-image may be dented. Pupils believed that they were more able, with the support of their families, to confront, circumvent and so deal with negativism in schools than they might be able to do in the wider society, especially in the world of work. This, my evidence indicated, may lead to a tempering of the ambitions and the motivation of some achieving pupils as they grow older and progress up the school

and into the world of work (see pp. 227-232). This was because they saw obstacles in the wider society as more pervasive and less surmountable than they considered they were in schools (see pp. 227-232). This area of self-image, motivation and ambition in relation to work is another one on which further research is needed.

Significantly, however, black achievers did not completely acquiesce. Rather they looked to countries like Africa and the Caribbean where they considered positive examples were more readily available of black achievement and where black people were defined in more positive ways and had more avenues for self-fulfilment opened to them. In some cases they considered that their future may rest in these countries where they would possibly realise ambitions frustrated in Britain (see pp. 227-232). If this situation was to materialise in reality, it is the economy and culture of Britain that will be lessened. Having expended cost over many years in educating pupils, it would be desirable indeed imperative for achievers to contribute to British society rather than be driven out to other countries to utilise their talents and realise their ambitions.

Another area that provided focus for the thesis was social class and its relationship to educational values and hence attainment of black pupils. Previous research has tended to indicate that black pupils were exclusively working class with working class attitudes and values to education that are in the main categorised as anti-school (see pp. 64-72) My data indicated however that the parents of black achieving pupils were both of working class and middle class backgrounds. In contrast to previous conclusions however, the attitudes of the different classes to education and the support given by them to their children were not found to be significantly distinguishable by their social class positions. Parents from both classes valued education believing it to be the route to economic and social fulfilment for their children and so gave education high priority. They formally educated their

children at home and provided private tuition for them if they considered it necessary. Also they were supportive of schools, monitored schools and the work done by their children. Such parents set examples for their children with regards to their own achievement or the lessons they have learnt from their own lack of achievement. They gave their children knowledge of and access to appropriate role models and seemingly most vitally, provided them with experiences outside Britain in areas such as the Caribbean and Africa where pupils saw and experienced black people in positions of power, responsibility and in various areas of the economy, often in contrasting positions to that which they occupied in British society (see pp. 216-226). These environments and experiences were rated as highly significant by black achieving pupils, giving them confidence, impacting positively on their self-perception and their ambitions, reducing the negativism they considered they faced in British society. Indeed contributing significantly with other factors mentioned, to the possibility of achievement rather than low achievement in schools.

Previous research on the role of the black family generally in the education of their children as, I have argued, presented a picture of failure and pathology (see pp. 235-237). The criticism of the black family has related to its values, its discipline methods, its structure and so on (see pp. 42-52). The thesis therefore critically explored aspects of the family life and values of black achievers to establish how these impacted on their performance.

In relation to family religious values, my data revealed some interesting though not always clear-cut findings. Family religious values were found to have some impact on the achievement of black pupils. However, this was mainly in relation to the support that pupils received from religious communities. Religious values and religious participation gave pupils a positive sense of themselves, self-confidence and

provided them with opportunities to perform tasks such as public speaking, reading, obtaining historical and geographical knowledge that had a direct positive influence on their school performance. In addition, within their religious communities pupils found individuals who inspired them and who provided examples of what they themselves could achieve. Significantly religious values and religious involvement gave pupils seemingly welcome respite from the pressures and negative stereotyping they felt characterised their experiences in society, defining and regarding them as special, important and valued individuals.

A number of questions arise however with regards to the communities from which black pupils come and which might provide topics for future research. What do parents and the wider black community see as their roles and responsibilities in relation to education success of black children? It is arguably a futile waste of time and effort to use past histories and injustices as ways of excusing the poor performance of black pupils in school. What are therefore the current concerns and issues? How are black families and the communities from which black pupils come to impact positively on their children? How can less achieving pupils learn from the experiences of those who despite similar issues and concern manage to achieve in the education system?

I have discussed the fact of the heterogeneity of the cultures from which black people come. The different history of people from the Caribbean and Africa, their relationship to Britain, to their own countries of origin, their affinity to their culture and their class positions may singly or as a whole be impacting on their performances in school. It would be informative and illuminating for future enquiry to focus on these factors and differences in responses to schools and achievement of black pupils

from Africa, different parts of the Caribbean or indeed those who may be defined more as products of Britain than another society.

Of all the factors identified and explored as important in the achievement of black pupils in school however one of the most salient was considered to be the role of their parents. The data revealed that contrary to previous findings on low achievement, families on the whole and parents in particular, were pivotal in the achievement of black pupils in school. The overwhelming perception of pupils was that their parents were the most crucial in their achievement even when compared to the role played by school, their religious communities, peers, siblings and other family members. As well as providing practical support and guidance, the data revealed that parents provided essential skills from an early age, which empowered black achieving pupils to meet the demands and the challenges of school and indeed the wider society. They supported them directly and indirectly in their school work, provided them with role models, knowledge and information both in British society and most importantly in predominantly black societies. These provided their children with a strong sense of themselves, their past and their future and afforded them examples of what they could achieve and the value of such achievement. Indeed this consistent parental training, background and support enabled black achievers to have perceptions of avenues of self-expression and occupational fulfilment not only in British society but in countries of their parental origin.

Finally, my research indicated that there is much that could and should be done to support black achievements. My thesis demonstrates it is futile to suggest that it is the responsibility of one group such as the school, parents or the Government to ensure the achievement of black pupils. Central Government, LEAs, schools, teachers, parents and communities each have specific roles to play. If one of these

groups takes a lead and the others do not play their part, black achievers will not succeed in the education system and the rhetoric of social inclusion will remain such. Social inclusion for black pupils must be the acknowledgement that they too should and do have a stake in this society and lead to the development of strategies to enable them to realise their potential and contribute to society. Indeed as this thesis was being completed this position was emphasised in a powerful lecture given by David Gillborn. He asserted that institutional racism continues to be a barrier to the educational equality of black pupils and that if this situation is to be changed, the various 'power holders' including teachers and national policy holders, 'must face up to their responsibility of race equality'. (Gillborn, 2002:30)

A number of additional questions therefore arise as a result of this study. My research has focused on the perception of black achieving pupils; a group, which I have argued, has received relatively little attention. The credibility of their views is accepted and therefore held as reflecting accurately their sense of their reality (see pp. 123-132). In relation to society at large, which include teaching training institutions and Government bodies, questions are, how are they to make teachers and those working within the education system alter their negative view of black pupils? How is the relationship between black pupils and their teachers to be improved? Since clearly evidence such as exclusion figures, performance statistics and not least that presented in this thesis, clearly indicates that there are serious problems in the education system with regards to the experiences, treatment and outcome that black pupils obtain from it. That is unless black pupils, their families and the communities from which they come, have the know-how, initiative and resilience to shoulder a disproportionate amount of responsibilities for their own achievement, schools will continue to fail them.

While it may well be argued that the education system reflects society's prejudices and deficiencies rather than creating them, schools as a whole and teachers in particular do have a significant role to play in the achievement of all pupils and so by implication black pupils. They along with policy makers, need to acknowledge the existence of institutional racism which impacts on the lives of black pupils both in school and in the wider society and acknowledge their role in fostering educational equality.

There needs to be a tremendous shift in the consciousness and perception of black people as whole and black pupils in particular in schools. Black pupils are not to be automatically seen as the adversary saddled with inherent behavioural, cultural and intellectual problems, which are purposely utilised by them to challenge, test and undermine the reputation and achievement of schools.

Black pupils are like other pupils who may or may not enter schools as pro-school, pro-education raw materials that can be easily moulded by teachers and schools to enhance their reputations and to elevate their schools on league tables and in the eyes of the Government, Inspectorate, parents and the community.

While the ideal scenario may well be for all black pupils to enter schools with similar traits to those of pupils in my sample, that is, informed, motivated and ambitious with active and varied support in their homes and in their communities, this would seem to me to make redundant the role of teachers and schools and a completely unrealistic expectation.

Teacher training institutions, in-service training, the Inspectorate and the government need to ensure or continue to emphasise that teachers, not just the minority, are in essence professionals, with professional responsibilities and obligations to pupils, their clients. This is of course always a challenging task.

Teachers are faced with increased expectations, arguably increasingly challenging pupils, curriculum, administration and countless initiatives. Despite these however it seems to me that there must be a role for school to work to motivate pupils, to affect their performance, whatever it is they bring to the classroom. This is not to negate or lessen the crucial role and responsibilities that for example parents and pupils themselves must be encouraged or even demanded to take.

While taking account of pupil's cultural and racial heritage, if said to be appropriate, the education system needs to avoid stereotypical views of black pupils in the curriculum, in policy and practice, thereby trapping pupils within the confines of traditional often deficit theories and outmoded ideologies.

Teachers need to demand of black pupils what they demand of other pupils. They must set high standards for them, work with parents and of course consider how black pupils experience school and the wider society and how these impact on them and on their responses to and performance in school. My data indicated that black achievers adopt strategies in school to support their achievement. Teachers need to understand why these are considered to be necessary, how they operate and consider how they might systematically assist low achieving children to utilise similar strategies in school.

Only then will the situation be avoided where only the initiated and arguably relatively few black pupils, who are equipped by external factors and also take upon themselves a disproportionate amount of responsibility for their learning in schools and colleges, manage to achieve.

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Appendix 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

Pupil +	Age	Educational Institution	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Country (ies) of Origin	Religion
Ayo	16	Boys' school	Dentist (F) Social Worker (M)	Nigeria	Muslim
Obi	16	Boys' school	College Lecturer (F) Teacher	St. Lucia (F) Jamaica (M)	Catholic Christian – Baptist
Adi	16	Boys' school	Accounts Clerk (F) Office worker (M)	Nigeria	Muslim
Keisha	16	Mixed school	Midwife (M)	Jamaica	Christian
Rose	17	6th Form College	Shop Assistant (M)	Grenada *	Christian – Catholic
Peter	17	Further Education College	Bus driver (D) Care Assistant	Guyana	Christian – 7th day Adventist
Simon	16	Further Education College	Nurse	Jamaica	Christian
Ezra	16	Boys' School	Accountant (F) Marketing Manager(M)	Ghana (F)* Jamaica (M)	Christian Pentecostal
Veronica	16	Girls' School	Solicitor (M)	Trinidad	Christian – Catholic
Jamelia	17	6th Form College	Office worker (M)	Jamaica *	Christian
James	16	Boys' School	Barrister (F) Teacher (M)	Jamaica (F) Jamaica (M) *	Christian

Appendix 1 - Continued

CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

Pupil	Age	Educational Institution	Parents' Occupations	Parents' Country of Origin	Religion
Owen	17	6th Form College	Accounts manager- (F) Nurse – (M)	Jamaica Guyana	Christian
Carl	16	Boys' School	Music Producer (F) Office Worker	Grenada (F) Trinidad (M)	Christian – Catholic
Ophelia	16	Girls' School	Bank Clerk (M)	St. Kitts	Christian
Paul	16	Boys' School	Social Worker (M)	Barbados *	Christian – 7th Day Adventist
Felisha	16	Girls' School	Plumber (F) Care worker	Jamaica Barbados	Christian
Carlette	17	6th Form College	Cleaning Business	Guyana (M) Trinidad (F)	Christian – Pentecostal Christian – Catholic
Josh	16	Mixed School	Driver (F) Canteen Worker	Nigeria (F) St. Lucia (M)	Christian
Lee	16	Mixed School	Dental Nurse (M)	Jamaica *	Christian – 7th Day Adventist
Nadine	16	Girls' School	Carpenter (F) Nurse (M)	Jamaica *	Christian – 7th Day Adventist
Sonya	16	Mixed School	Tube Driver (M) Singer (F)	St. Vincent *	Christian
Garfield	16	Boys' School	Self – Employed Hairdressers (M & F)	Jamaica (F) * Zimbabwe (F)	Christian

Appendix 1 - Continued

CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

Pupil	Age	Educational Institution	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Country of Origin	Religion
Samuel	17	6th Form College	Self- Employed Care Home Owners	Nigeria	Christian Pentecostal
Lisa	16	Girls' School	Social Work pupil	Jamaica *	Christian
Rema	16	Mixed School	Builder (M) Fitness Trainer	Grenada	Christian Pentecostal
Vanessa	16	Girls' School	Chef Dress Maker	Dominica *	Christian – Catholic
Julie – Ann	17	6th Form College	Receptionist	Jamaica	Christian - Anglican
Denese	17	Further Education College	Baker (M) Nursery Nurse	Trinidad (M) Barbados (F)	Christian - Catholic
Michael	16	Boys' School	Bank Cashier Cleaner (M)	UK/Trinadad Guyana	Christians
Patricia	16	Girls' School	Warehouse Worker Care Assistant	Republic of Congo	Christians – Pentecostal
Clive	17	6th Form College	Scientist (F) College Lecturer	Anguilla * (F) Jamaica (M)	Christians
Kenisha	16	Mixed School	Motor Mechanic (F) Office Assistant	Jamaica * Jamaica	Christians – 7th Day Adventist

Appendix 1 - Continued

CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

Pupil	Age	Educational Institution	Parents' Occupation	Parents' Country of Origin	Religion
Claire	16	Girls' School	Hospital Porter (F) Care Assistant	Angola (F) Zimbabwe (M)	Pentecostal
Obe	16	Mixed School	Clothing Business (F & M)	Jamaica	Orthodox Rastafarian
Kenny	16	Mixed School	Computer Technician College Lecturer	Jamaica (F) Jamaica (M) *	Christians – Pentecostal
Marcus	16	Boys' School	Painter, Decorator (M) Child-minder	Surinam (M) * Trinidad *	Christian Catholic

Key

* One or more parent (s) born in UK – Country of origin given that of grandparents

+ All names have been changed

(F)   Father

(M)   Mother

Notes

Where only one occupation is given, the pupil is living in a single parent household.

APPENDIX 2

INSTITUTIONS' PROFILE

Boys' School
- Boys 11 – 18 comprehensive
- Located in inner London
- Over 1000 on roll
- Admission 180
- Over 80% of minority ethnic backgrounds
- Generally on or above national average examination results

Girls' School
- Girls 11-18 comprehensive
- Located in inner London
- Approximately 1700 on roll
- Admission 280
- 50 different nationalities
- Generally around or above national average examination results

Mixed School
- 11-16 comprehensive
- Located in a London suburb
- Approximately 800 pupils on roll
- Admission 140
- Over 50 different nationalities
- Generally below average external examination results

Sixth Form College
- Located in a London suburb
- Approximately 600 pupils on roll
- 80% of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds
- Offers a range of academic and vocational subjects
- Generally attains around national average examinations results, vocational subjects generally above average

Further Education College
- Located in inner London
- Offers a wide range of full and part-time courses
- Offers a range of vocational and non- vocational subjects
- Over 85% of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds
- Examinations results vary widely across subjects and between vocational and non-vocational subjects and between subjects. Vocational subjects generally above national averages.

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Questions guidelines and prompt questions

TEACHER VIEW/EXPECTATION – PUPILS BEHAVIOUR, MOTIVATION AND RESPONSES

- How do you define achievement? Do you think this is the same as your school/college defines it?

- Do you think your teachers expect you to do well in your work? How do you know this? Why do you think they expect this of you?

- Do teachers treat black boys and girls in the same way? If you think there are differences, tell me what they are

- If yes, why do you think they do treat black boys and girls differently?

- Are there black teachers in your school/college?

- If there are black teachers, how do you get on with them?

- Are there differences between black and white teachers? If you think there are, what are these differences?

- How do you think your teachers see black people? Why do you think this?

- Do you think you have anything to do with how teachers see you and behave towards you? Why? Why not?

- Tell me about teachers you think help you most to do well in your studies. Explain how you think they do this.

PEER AFFILIATION

- Do you think anyone influences your choice of friends in school? If yes, how do they do this? And why?

- How about out of school? Does anyone influence your choice of friends? Why do you think they do this?

- Who do you tend to choose as friends in school and out of school? Do you have any particular reasons for these choices?

- What ethnic group are your friends usually from? What are your reasons for this?

- Do you think that your choice of friends influence your school performance? If yes how? If no, why do you think it doesn't?

SELF CONCEPT/SELF IMAGE AND ACHIEVEMENT

- Do you remember when you first became aware of your colour? Can you tell me about it?

- Do you think there is a black culture? If yes, what do you think it is? If no, can you tell me why not?

- Can you tell me who you think some of the most important black people are in Britain and internationally, tell me what you know about them, how did you find out about them?

- Do you think knowing about them affects you in any way? If so, how? If no, can you say why.

- Where are your parents from? Tell me what you know about this/these countries. How do you know this?

- Have you ever been to this/these countries? Why did you go there?

- What did you think of it there? How did you feel when you were there? Are there any differences to the way you feel when you are in Britain? How do you explain these similarities/differences?

- What are your ambitions for the future? Do you think you'll achieve them? Why?

FAMILY ACHIEVEMENT

- What jobs do your parent/s do?

- Do you think the job (s) your parent/s do affect your attitude to education? How?

- Do you think their job affects their attitude to your education? How?

- Are you or your families religious? What religion do you belong to? How often do you participate in your religion?

- How important do you think religion is in: (a) your life (b) your family's life (c) your school work?

- Tell me what your parents think about education? How do they show this? How about other members of your family?

APPENDIX 4

Transcript Example - James's

VF: Gives J. information about the study, asks him if he has any questions and whether he is still happy to participate. James had no questions and confirmed that he was willing to participate.

VF: James what does school achievement mean for you?
James: For me it means to achieve the goals you set yourself. It means that you have high standards and high goals and that you work to achieve them. In school I suppose you are achieving if you are in one of the top sets, do your work when the teachers set it and get good marks. The best way to show you are achieving though is to get high marks in your exams.
VF: What would high marks be for you?
James: It has to be to get Bs and above in my GCSEs, preferably As and A*s if it all goes well.
VF: Do you think your school would define achievement in the same way as you do?
James: It depends what you mean by the school. The school judges it by how many As to Cs we get. They want to push the average up every year and get high on the tables but each teacher has different expectation of you according to the class and set that you are in and according to what you show them you are capable of.
VF: So there is not one definition of achievement?
James: No there can't be because everyone sets themselves different standards and teachers set standard depending on what they think you can achieve.
VF: Do you think your teachers expect you to do well in your work?
James: Do you mean me personally?
VF: Yes and how do you know that they expect you to do well or badly for that matter?
James: I suppose they must do. They know I work hard and produce the goods. Yes, definitely my teachers expect me to continue doing well. They can see how I have been over the years. But sometimes I suppose teachers must wonder whether I will deliver the actual results. Teachers can never be sure because it is up to the individual in the end.
VF: Does it matter to you whether your teachers expect you to do well or not?
James: I would say I'm pretty motivated myself and my parents push me and expect me to get on with my work and do my best but it is nice when teachers think you are good at your work. It can spur you on even more if everyone around you thinks you are on the right track to achieving you goals. Yes, it can give you encouragement and helps you but for me it's not the main thing whether teachers expect me to do well or not. I know what I need to do myself and I just get on with it, teachers aren't with you all the time.
VF: Yes, I see. I want to go on to a related area, the colour of teachers and whether you think this might have anything to do with your achievement. Are there black teachers in your school and how do you get on with them?
James: There are a few, our head of year is black and I have a black science teacher. I get on with them fine.
VF: Do you think there are differences between black and white teachers?

(James pauses for a few moments).

James: Depends what you mean.

VF: I was thinking in terms of the way they relate to pupils, to black pupils especially.

James: If teachers hear you saying that your colour matters to them, they could get offended and even turn against you. You have to be careful what you say in school. Most teachers I suppose just want to get on with their jobs.

VF: So you do not see any real difference between black and white teachers?

(James pauses)

James: There are differences. There has to be they are coming from different places and different pupils have different experiences of different teachers. It depends on what you are like yourself and what the teacher is like, their personality and the job they have in the school. Some teachers are not helpful they are just there. I find that teachers are helpful though but black teachers understand more. They know that it is harder for black people to get jobs. One black teacher has said to me that people are happy when they see black children doing nothing. People think it is unusual when black children do well in school.

VF: So you think black teachers think it is harder for black children to do well?

James: Black teachers know where I am coming from. They know where black children are coming from. They have been there themselves. But some of the black teachers as well as the white teachers don't get on with children. I think the pupils' attitudes have a lot to do with whether the teachers like them and help them with their work. If you suck up, especially if you are black, teachers are more likely to help you, white teachers especially, you have to suck up to them.

VF: Suck up? What does that mean? How do you suck up to a teacher?

James: Well you just have to get on with your work and let the teacher know you have finished and when other kids are loud you tell them to keep quiet. You kind of help the teacher and show them you are on their side and want to do well in their subject.

VF: What you are saying is very interesting James. Can you tell me a bit more about, say, your science teacher who is black and one of your white teachers?

James: I don't want you to get me wrong because most of my teachers are helpful and good.

VF: I understand but perhaps you could say a bit more about the differences between black and white teachers.

James: As I said it depends on the teachers but usually white teachers probably spend as much time as they have to with black pupils. I don't get the impression that some of them think you deserve their time. But not all of them are like that. My Geography teacher for example, from day one she didn't put up with anyone in her class who didn't work. If you don't do the work to a good standard she will get you aside and put pressure on you. If that doesn't work she'll go as far as to call your parents. I think this is good. That's what teachers are there for. I know I'll do well in geography because of her.

VF: Thanks James that's interesting. Can we talk about another area now, about the role that pupils like yourself, black pupils, have to play in how teachers see you and treat you? Do you think you have anything to do with how teachers see you and behave towards you?

James: I really think it does. It must do. If people don't treat me right. I won't treat them right. Teachers are just ordinary people. Some pupils don't respect them and make their lives hell. Some teachers are too weak they don't know how to discipline a class. They are the worse kind of teachers. They have no control so everybody loses.

If you are one of the pupils who wants to work you can't. Those who don't want to and act hard muck it up for everybody and all the teachers give them a bad name and are out to get rid of them.

VF: What do you mean by get rid of them?

James: You know, expel them, get them out of the school.

VF: Tell me a bit about pupils like that, especially black pupils. How does this affect them?

James: Some black kids have a reputation. They act loud and like they don't care what teachers think. But they're silly because they are never going to get away with anything.

VF: Why do you think that is?

James: You stand out more if you are black and people are always looking for you to cause trouble anyway, especially if you go around with other black boys. It's a bit like if you are a black boy walking down a street. If you are on your own in a suit, with a look of definitely minding your own business, hands in your pocket or with one bag, like a school bag, not looking around as if you are going to rob an old lady, then you might not get stopped by the police. Your chance of being thought of as a mugger goes up if you are in a group of black boys.

VF: Do you think this is the same for other boys?

James: No way. Although if you are a group of young boys of any colour the police think you are up to no good but they think black boys are more of a threat. Mostly, it's OK if you are white and Asian and go around in groups but not if you are black. I think everyone thinks we look big, black and threatening.

VF: Do you think teachers think black boys are more of a threat? Are they more of a threat?

James: I think teachers are right on the surface that black boys can give the impression that they are hard and don't care about school, and that if you want to get on you should avoid these types. Teachers don't stop to ask why though.

VF: Are there reasons? What are they?

James: Everywhere we go people think we are up to no good. Sometimes it's easier to be up to no good. It's not so hard. Not as hard as trying to prove them wrong all the time. There is so much pressure on black people and if you are in a boys' school like this, it is sometimes like being in the street. There seems to be a different test for you to face everyday to prove that you are not like the way people think you should be, hard and violent.

VF: So are you saying it's hard for black boys to focus and concentrate on their work?

James: It is because so few people seem to expect you to do well. You have to set your own goals and have a family who stand behind you and support you all the time and because of the pressures from outside school and inside, it can be hard to focus.

VF: How do you mean? Tell me about the pressures. Where are the pressures coming from?

James: Pressures can come from yourself but that is OK. The bad pressures are from the way everyone seems to think that because you are black it means you are a street robber or something. And when you come to school you feel the teachers are thinking badly of you because on the Crime Report they hear about black people being more likely to commit crimes. You want to say that's not me but you are black so they think you are just like that, just like the rest of them. So I know it's hard to turn a blind eye and get on with your work with the way we get treated sometimes but we have no choice. It's a bit like if someone calls you a racist name on the street. You have two

choices, to think of the consequence or to retaliate and find yourself in trouble. It's the same in school. Some teachers are out of order when it comes to the way they deal with black pupils. The sensible pupils are those who think of the consequences and don't respond as teachers think black pupils usually do.

VF: So on a day to day basis do you think this can have a negative effect on your school work?

James: It can do but I try not to let it. When you have a lot of support from home you can face a lot and my family are there to help me keep going and I am strong. I know my goals and what I want to achieve. You have to.

VF: Thank you James. Can we talk now about friendship and the possible effect of this on school achievement?

James: Ok

VF: Do you think anyone influences your choice of friends in school? If yes, how do you think they do this? And why?

James: Not really, I choose my friends.

VF: So you don't think anyone tries to influence who you choose?

James: I suppose my parents usually tell me to be careful who I choose because if you don't have the right people around you, you can get distracted from you work. Some boys can be a bad influence but I know that for myself, my parents don't have to dictate to me about it.

VF: So what do you think your parents mean when they say you must be careful of who you choose as friends?

James: Well not every boy you meet has the right idea of how to get on with things, especially if you are a black boy in this country.

VF: What do you mean by that?

James: Well, everyone sees you differently, don't they? They don't make any excuses for you. They are harder on you if you are black especially if there is a group of you.

VF: Who is?

James: Well the police for one, they don't give you a second chance if you do something wrong and even if you don't, they think that you have done. Life is not easy if you are a black boy with the general idea around that you are violent, a drug dealer or a robber.

VF: So how does this affect you in school? Your school work?

James: It puts you under pressure. You have to be able to handle the pressure from day one. My father says that some black boys don't know how to handle the pressure of society and make things bad for themselves by trying to take everyone on. He feels a lot of black boys get into trouble because of that. It's tough for black boys, unless you know how to deal with the society you'll kind of crack up. And if you are friends with boys who don't know how to handle it, you will go down with them.

VF: Tell me a bit about those boys who don't know how to handle the pressure, how does that affect their school work do you think? How does that affect them?

James: Some of the boys here (in the school) don't make it easy for themselves, they give trouble to the teacher and act as if they don't care. This kind of rubs teachers up and put them against them. I think they are only hurting themselves. They don't know that when they carry on like that, they just confirm what the racist people think. They are hurting themselves and the rest of us because people think we are all the same.

VF: So in terms of friendship, what is your opinion of boys like that?

James: Well I avoid them. I have nothing in common with them and most of them don't even like boys like me any way.

VF: Why is that?

James: Some of them think you have kind of *sold out* because for them what they think is black is not how we are.

VF: Tell me a bit more about that.

James: They kind of think black can only be just like them, speaking the way they speak, acting the way they act and if you are different they label you. They say you are a white boy and if you can't take that it's tough because it hurts you when they say that and you can want to prove that you're proud to be black just like them. So they can bring bright children down to their level if you don't stick to your goals and show them that black is not only how they see it, black doesn't have to be like them.

VF: So it seems you have to watch who you have as your friends?

James: It just happens naturally I suppose, you know that if you want to get on with your work and with the teachers you can't mess around with certain type of boys who teachers think of as trouble and a waste of time. You kind of just know.

VF: James, you have talked about the way different people see you as a black person. Can we talk about the way you see yourself? First, do you remember when you first became aware of yourself as a black person? Can you tell me about it if you can?

James: I don't remember one particular time when it dawned on me that, *yes you are a black person*. No, I can't. I just know that since I was young my mother would go on about being black. I just grew up knowing that this has to mean something. It was mentioned so much I grew up facing that I was different.

VF: Is there any particular situation that you can think of?

James: My mother would always point out black people like whenever we saw black people on T.V. or even sometimes in the street my mother used to say, she or he is black like us. I used to think it was strange. She used to say I shouldn't talk to strangers but then she'd say that black people we didn't know were our people. Now looking back I suppose it was to teach me to identify with black people, to see them as my own kind. I think she wanted me to know it was important in this society and that I should make it important to me too.

VF: So how is it important to you?

James: Well you have to look at yourself and ask yourself, people see you one way but how do you see yourself? I don't see myself in a negative way. Nobody in my family sees themselves as lower than anyone else. My parents brought us up right.

VF: How do you mean?

James: They always make sure we have something to draw on to keep us positive about ourselves.

VF: When you say ourselves, what do you mean?

James: I mean ourselves as black people.

VF: What positives do you draw on about black people? Tell me for example about important black people that you know about.

James: Do you want a list?

VF: Let me put it another way, who are the black people who you think inspire you, are role models in terms of your achievement.

James: My role models are mainly in my family. My parents are the most positive influences in my education. My mum especially, she pressures me sometimes, she encourages me a lot and gives me support. She makes sure I do my work because she is a teacher she understands what goes on in school and that it is not just the teachers responsibility to get good results, it's the pupils too. She does not accept any excuse from me when it comes to my schoolwork. My parents make sure that I focus mainly on my work. My parents' generation was the ones who nobody thought were going to achieve anything, because black people were supposed to be born stupid. My parents

were achievers in school so they have passed on good attitudes to me and I have no excuse. I know I have a lot of advantages because of that.

VF: I understand how important your family is but does anyone else outside the family, any black people in this country or else where influence you?

James: In this country you mainly hear about what white people achieve and not a lot about black people unless they are exceptional like Nelson Mandella. But I know about people that some people here don't even know about not just Marcus Garvey but Paul Bogle who fought against slavery and the Moroons who escaped from slavery. I have been to Black Lawyers events with my father, there are lots of black lawyers out there, lots of black people who are doing well but you don't usually hear a lot about these types of people.

VF: How did you know about people like Bogle?

James: Both my parents families are from Jamaica and they have a good knowledge about history of the West Indies also my family believes in self-education. For them you have to gather all the knowledge you can as well. If you depend on other people to educate you about black culture, you won't get any education. My family have books at home about a lot of things, books from their university days and books they buy now on West Indian and African history and sometime I look things up on the internet.

VF: Black Culture? Can you tell me what you mean by that please James?

James: People use that a lot, *black culture*, but that doesn't mean anything to me. How can there be a black culture when there are millions of black people from all over the place? Black people are like other people with lots of different cultures depending on where they come from, their customs and things like that. Normally when people say black culture they mean just things like just music and clothes. I think it can be a way of putting black people down.

VF: You said your parents are from Jamaica, have you even been there?

James: We go there a lot, almost every year.

VF: What did you think of it? How do you feel when you are there?

James: It does take some getting used to. It's much slower and things aren't as advanced as here, the roads are a bit dangerous and people drive mad there sometimes but it is beautiful, the beaches and things and the food. I just love all the food especially jerk chicken.

VF: Is there anything about it that strikes you, for example as a black person.

James: Well, the good thing about it is that although you feel kind of foreign and they think of you as foreign, you feel at home in another sense.

VF: How is that?

James: You don't feel that everyone is judging you all the time because you are a black person. I like that, it makes you feel that you can impress people without having to get past the colour thing and if you want role models they are there.

VF: How do you mean?

James: Well black people are in all kinds of jobs, just like white people here. They can be rich or poor, educated or not educated, real life.

VF: Do you ever see yourself living there?

James: It would be great if it was a permanent holiday (laughs) but seriously I suppose there is that option. If things don't turn out here, it's a good feeling that there is always Jamaica and I know of people, my parents' friends who have gone to work out there.

VF: James you have talked about your family and said how they feel about education and how supportive they are, can I ask you about theirs and also your attitude to religion. Are your family religious?

James: Christians I suppose but we don't go regularly. They used to send me to Sunday School when I was little but now they leave it to me and I'm not really interested in it that much.

VF: Do you and the family ever go to church?

James: Now and again if there is something special at the church I used to go to and we get invited. My gran on my mother's side is really into it and sometimes when she comes over from Jamaica, I go with her just to keep her company.

VF: Have your grandparents always lived in Jamaica?

James: No they used to live here but they moved back.

VF: I see. Do you mind if we go back to religion? Do you think religion can be a factor in school achievement? Was it, or is it a factor for you?

James: Not really. My parents and family motive me and I have my own goals. Religion is not important in my achievement. In fact sometimes I think it can hinder people. Some of the kids in my school come from really religious families and they are not better than anyone else. A lot of things get on my nerves about really religious people like Pentecostal ones. In that religion they teach you that you are only good because your religion tells you to be. That is one of the things that gets on my nerves, I don't think it's right to bring children up to think they should be good because if they don't they go to hell. I think it should come from inside. You carry that with you if it comes from inside. If it doesn't when you are away from the church you go mad and do all kinds of wild things. I know a lot of kids who go to church and they are worse than kids who don't go.

VF: Thanks James, just one more point. What are your ambitions for the future?

James: I haven't really decided what I want to as a job, I have a lot of different ideas but I haven't decided on one fully yet. I know I will go to uni. though. I will go to university and probably do one of the science subjects and then decide.

VF: You have mentioned goals a lot during this interview. Do you think you'll achieve your goals?

James: Of course, I don't see why I shouldn't. I am focused and I work hard. I know I will.

VF: James, thank you so much for this all this interesting and informative session. Thanks a lot.

APPENDIX 5

CORRESPONDENCE

Vernella E. Fuller BA (Hon) MA PGCE

13 October 1999

Dear

Re: Our Recent Telephone Conversation

I am currently a Ph.D. pupil at the Institute of Education, London University. The broad area of my thesis is *The Achievement of Black Children in Schools.*

I write formally to ask if I might interview between five and ten black achieving year 11 pupils from your school as part of my Ph.D. research. These would be pupils who have achieved grades 8 or above in SATs at Key Stage 3 and who are predicted to obtain 5 or more GCSE grades C or above in their examinations in the summer.

I would of course not wish to disrupt their work so if you are agreeable I would conduct the interviews after school, during lunch breaks or during periods that are not considered crucial to their examination work. Each interview is semi-structured and is expected to last between one and four sessions. I will of course send you the interview schedule in advance.

Should you require any further information I will be happy to provide this.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Vernella Fuller

Vernella E. Fuller BA (Hon) MA PGCE

13 March 2000

Dear ,

I write to thank you for organising the interviews with young people in year 11 as part of my Ph.D. research.

I would also ask you to kindly thank the young people personally for me. They were credits to themselves and their school.

Their manner and their approach to the sessions impressed me, I found them articulate, clear, confident and well informed and each provided me with excellent materials for my research. I wish them luck in their examinations and for the future.

As you know I will be doing a series of interviews in different schools and colleges over the following months and will begin writing up and analysing the results from the autumn term. I am of course happy to send you a copy of the final product, if you are interested.

Once again sincerest thanks.

Yours sincerely,

Vernella Fuller.

Vernella E. Fuller BA (Hon) MA PGCE

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Once again sincerest thanks.

Yours sincerely,

Vernella Fuller.