

**‘Education is the only way you make it out’:
A Qualitative Study into Black African and
White British Educational Attainment**

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*I declare that the research contained herein
was granted approval by the SPAIS Ethics
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
Context	6
<i>The educational state of play</i>	6
<i>Existing explanations</i>	7
<i>White working-class attainment</i>	12
Methodology	15
Data Analysis and Discussion	21
<i>Transmission of norms, values and aspirations</i>	21
<i>The role of the wider community</i>	24
<i>Rationalisation and alternative explanations</i>	29
Conclusion	33
Bibliography	36
Appendix 1: Interview transcript	42

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Introduction

Class has long been central to the sociology of education, with most academics utilising a Bourdieusian framework to explain why students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are consistently outperformed by peers from higher class backgrounds (Reay, 2004). The attainment breakdown becomes significantly more complicated when ethnicity is considered: most ethnic minority groups outperform White British students, and this advantage being most pronounced among students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Strand, 2021). The attainment of white working-class students has gained traction as a political issue, with Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson describing the failures of the state to ensure better outcomes as a 'national disgrace' (Tes, 2025). Despite this, there is a lack of qualitative research into white working-class students in Britain, a gap this dissertation aims to address.

In contrast, sociologists have established some causal explanations for working-class ethnic minority students' relative overperformance. Modood (2004) uses the concept of 'ethnic capital', a unique form of social capital rooted in shared educational norms and values that are transmitted across generations and work to increase the educational drive of the students who possess it. Empirical research into this form of capital indicates that it is effective in improving the attainment of South Asian students in Britain (Iqbal and Modood, 2023; Shah et al., 2010). But there are many other ethnic groups who perform strongly compared to White British students of the same SES. One such group is Black African students, who have steadily increased their average attainment over time, surpassing White British students and, notably, Black Caribbean students as well. Thus, this dissertation presents the findings of a research project which aimed to answer two questions based on gaps in the existing literature. How applicable is the concept of ethnic capital to Black African students in Britain? And what are the attitudes of white working-class students towards ethnic disparities in attainment?

To do this, interviews with ten working-class students (five Black African and five White British) are drawn upon. It is argued that the processes which enable working-class South Asian students' strong educational performances can broadly be applied to working-class Black African students, with the exception of one notable difference — Black African communities address racism with significantly more transparency than South Asian communities, which adds another layer of motivation for academic success. For the second question, it is suggested that white working-class students are largely indifferent towards ethnic disparities in attainment. Additionally, they are able to rationalise the reasons behind their group's relative underperformance and hold no resentment towards their ethnic minority peers.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. The research is first situated within existing sociological literature concerning attainment disparities. Next, the methodology section outlines the qualitative approach taken, highlighting its suitability for answering the research questions at hand. The findings are then presented in three parts. The first part describes 'the transmission of norms, values and aspirations', the second explains 'the role of the wider community', and the third describes white students' 'rationalisation and alternative explanations'. The dissertation concludes by reflecting on the implications of the findings and the opportunities for further research that they bring about.

Context

The educational state of play

Attainment disparities between students from different class backgrounds are well-documented and have been a primary concern for policymakers (House of Commons, 2017, 2023). In 2023, FSM-eligible students made up 22.6 per cent of the GCSE cohort, achieving an average attainment 8 score 14.8 points lower than non-FSM students (Department for Education (DfE), 2024). By converting average attainment scores to months of learning, the Education Policy Institute (2024) reports that, in the same year, economically disadvantaged students (defined as those eligible for free school meals (FSM) within the past six years) were, on average, 19.2 months behind their non-disadvantaged peers at GCSE level. This represents the largest gap since 2011. Moving to ethnicity, the DfE's results publication reveals that most ethnic minority groups achieve above-average attainment 8 scores and outperform the White British (45.1) group. The Chinese (65.5) and Indian (59.4) groups have the highest scores, while the Black Caribbean (40.0), Irish Traveller (26.8) and Gypsy/Roma (20.3) students are the only ethnic-minority groups who score below the average (46.3). While useful at a broad level, this data lacks the nuance required for an adequate evaluation of the intersection between social class and ethnicity. Indeed, Strand's (2021) analysis of the Second Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, using more nuanced variables to determine socio-economic status (SES), demonstrates the complicated relationship between these factors.

On first glance, the story seems familiar — low-SES students tend to score worse than average- and high-SES students, and most ethnic-minority groups outscore the White British group. Strand finds just two cases of underachievement by an ethnic-minority group relative to White British students of the same SES and sex: high-SES Black African and Caribbean boys, and high-SES Pakistani girls. What is of particular interest here is the variation in ethnic attainment disparities by SES.

Low- and average-SES White British and Black Caribbean students score significantly lower than the overall mean, and only at high-SES do these groups score above it. Most low-SES ethnic-minority groups, with the exception of Indian, Chinese and Bangladeshi students (who are the highest scoring groups at low-SES), score below the overall mean but are much closer and exceed it at average- and high-SES. Generally, the ethnic-minority groups outscore the White British group to the greatest extent at low-SES, with this SES level being the only instance where the Black Caribbean group scores close to the White British group. As noted, the ethnic-minority groups continue to outscore the White British group of the same SES and sex at average- and high-SES, but the differences are much narrower at these levels.

Among many interesting findings, the key takeaways for this dissertation are as follows: first, class disadvantage affects all ethnic groups but seems to be less impactful on ethnic-minority groups compared to the White British group; second, the Black African group performs well overall (and especially compared to the Black Caribbean group) but scores best at low-SES when compared to students of the same SES and sex; third, White British students are outperformed by most ethnic-minority groups at all SES levels, but the disparity is most substantial at low-SES.

Existing explanations

Class disparities in attainment are a well-researched area in the sociology of education, with dominant explanations utilising a Bourdieusian framework (Reay, 2004), which goes beyond solely economic factors to explain power imbalances by highlighting the additional effects of unequally distributed social and cultural capital. Despite scepticism regarding the effectiveness (or even existence) of Bourdieu's consideration of ethnicity in his work (Go, 2013), his framework has nonetheless been applied to racialised discussions of class disparities in attainment (for example: Reay et al., 2007; Rollock, 2007; Rollock et al., 2015).

One relevant example here is Wallace's (2017) development of 'black cultural capital'. The definition and application of this term, as will be seen, is contested, but is operationalised by Wallace as the 'dominant tastes and expressions adopted and adjusted by the black middle classes to signal class status and racial identity simultaneously' (p. 908). In his ethnography, Wallace finds that black middle-class students draw on bodies of knowledge — for instance, a deep understanding of black British history — which combine their racial identities with dominant forms of cultural capital. Such knowledge is intentionally transmitted by black middle-class parents to their children, and the students then strategically deploy it to develop positive relations with school authorities, challenging stereotypes about black students by teachers, who are perceived as 'gatekeepers to success' (p.916). Importantly, Wallace notes that, while useful for black middle-class students, the deployment of black cultural capital can come at the detriment of black working-class students: this occurs when teachers make comparisons between black students without considering differences in their class position. Some black middle-class students are 'willing to accept white middle-class ideology and differentiate themselves from the black working classes' (p. 919). However, many students resist differentiation from their black working-class peers and work to be as inclusive as possible. In Wallace's words, the students' 'multi-class heritage and black identities make them acutely aware of racist classism in schools' (p.919).

A contrasting finding can be observed in Prudence Carter's (2005) work on black cultural capital. Based on an ethnography of poor black students in New York, she distinguishes between dominant and non-dominant forms of cultural capital. The latter form is defined as 'those resources used by lower status individuals to gain "authentic" cultural status positions within their respective communities' (p.50). Unlike Wallace, Carter contends that black cultural capital is a non-dominant form of cultural capital utilised by black students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to order social relations, rather than a form of dominant cultural capital exclusively used by the black middle-classes to boost educational

attainment. Both definitions are useful: Wallace's study considers how black middle-class students adopt the necessary dispositions to succeed in the British education system while maintaining their racial identity, while Carter's work makes clear that cultural capital is also held and utilised by the black working classes, in its non-dominant form, to assess individuals' status in their local environments.

As evidenced, extending Bourdieusian concepts to help explain ethnic disparities in attainment is analytically useful. However, Modood (2004) points out that such explanations only describe how 'the dominant class reproduces its domination' rather than how 'subordinate groups can achieve upward mobility' (p.97). Wallace's notion of black allyship across class boundaries may be valuable here, but his broader work does not adequately address working-class black students' experiences. Carter's version of black cultural capital does concern the black working classes but offers little analysis of its effects on attainment, instead focusing on how it influences status. Furthermore, American-based explanations for minority attainment — such as Ogbu's (1998) distinction between voluntary/involuntary migrants or Zhou and Portes' (1993) notion of 'segmented assimilation' — are inadequate on their own for an analysis of black students because of the differing contexts of black immigration to the United States and black immigration to Britain.

Clearly, alternative explanations are needed for the seemingly counterintuitive overachievement of ethnic-minority working-class students in Britain. The phenomenon is counterintuitive because a plethora of research suggests ethnic-minority groups, especially black students, are adversely affected by racist practices in the British education system. Studies show that black students are frequently labelled as undesirable learners or perceived as threatening by teachers, facing both implicit bias and overt racial discrimination (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Reay, 2007; Runnymede, 2020; Rollock, 2007; Rollock et al., 2015). Additionally, institutional racism manifests in the form of an ethnocentric curriculum and disproportionate disciplinary measures and

surveillance (Gillborn, 2008; Runnymede, 2020) — for example, the over policing of Muslim students as a result of the Prevent strategy (Bruchhaus and Abbas, 2025). Following a Bourdieusian line of inquiry, it may be assumed that the effects of racism and classism experienced by low-SES ethnic-minority students would compound, leading to worse academic attainment compared to low-SES White British students. And yet, as highlighted above, the opposite is true.

To explain this, Modood (2004) introduces the concept of ‘ethnic capital’, describing a unique form of social capital whereby ethnic minorities leverage their networks to help them navigate the education system effectively. It is suggested that ethnic capital can ameliorate the disadvantage associated with a lower SES. In the case of Asian students, Modood offers the following account for how this may occur: first, a student’s family and wider community members, seeking upward social mobility and viewing education as the principal means to achieve this, place a large emphasis on the importance of education; second, this view is passed on to the student and is internalised; third, the student’s social network provide them with the necessary resources (where possible) to succeed and hold enough authority over them to ensure they continue to prioritise educational achievement. Underpinning this concept are two key dimensions — intergenerational closure and norms enforcement (Zhou, 2005; Shah et al., 2010). The former refers to ‘the presence of dense co-ethnic networks in immigrant communities’, where similar norms and values are shared. This ‘creates a protective barrier for second-generation youth in inner-city neighbourhoods’ (Shah et al., 2010, p.1112). In other words, this may be described as a network, made up of groups of parents, children and other local community members, who share similar goals. The latter dimension describes how the dominant norms of the network are enforced, namely the prioritisation of education and the provision of resources which are necessary to achieve this.

Norms enforcement does not come from parents alone. As Zhou (2005) illustrates through an ethnographic study in New York, various local actors, such as

shopkeepers, religious figures or neighbours, may concern themselves with the attainment of students in the community. This community involvement reinforces the high expectations set by parents. For working-class families, this is especially beneficial because they may lack the cultural capital to help with homework or navigate school systems directly. Instead, assistance comes in the form of encouragement, boosting students' educational drive.

The mechanisms of ethnic capital have also been empirically demonstrated in a British context by research into South Asian students. Studies by Shah et al. (2010) and Iqbal and Modood (2023) suggest that these families share a commitment to educational success as the engine for social mobility, regardless of parents' own academic history. Stronger attainment is also considered a pathway to gaining status and respect in the community. Importantly, the studies show that even parents who do not fully understand the British education system still play a vital role by communicating that education is the key to improving economic outcomes. In this way, the concept of ethnic capital can compensate for working-class families' lack of economic and cultural capital.

Shah et al.'s research also highlights two ways religion affects South Asian students' educational experiences. First, the mosque acts as a space for the enforcement of educational norms and the generation of social capital. Notably, parents are able to discuss their children's academic performances in such spaces, which adds another layer of pressure for students. Second, Islam itself is beneficial for students, acting as a 'driver for educational achievement' (p.1122). The researchers describe how the norms and values of Islam are compatible with educational success: 'Islam had come to shape their attitudes and values, orienting them strongly towards normative patterns of study and work' (p.1122). Thus, academic achievement is viewed as an indicator of being a 'good Muslim' rather than as simply an individual trait.

As evidenced, existing empirical research into ethnic capital has successfully displayed the explanatory power of the framework outlined by Modood (2004). However, this research has primarily focused on Asian students (Iqbal and Modood, 2023; Shah et al., 2010; Zhou, 2005). The statistics outlined above show that Black African students also attain at a greater level than would be intuitively assumed, especially at low-SES. Therefore, the first objective of this research project is to observe whether and to what extent the concept of ethnic capital applies to working-class black students in Britain.

White working-class attainment

Another area the existing literature fails to address adequately is an understanding of the attitudes of White British students towards ethnic disparities in attainment. Gillborn and Kirton (2000), interviewing white working-class boys in an underfunded, poorly performing school, find the boys do not view their structural disadvantage through a class lens, but rather consider their underperformance to be a racial issue. They draw on community-level discourses surrounding race — for example, that ethnic-minority families gain priority housing, are benefits scroungers, or steal jobs. They transpose this directly onto their school experience, claiming that ethnic-minority students receive more positive attention from teachers and that their school is underfunded because they do not have enough Asian students. The researchers are clear about the school: ‘the white working-class boys of Cityville are condemned to low teaching groups through the operation of class-bias and socio-economic structures of oppression: they are not victims of racism’ (p.285). But the boys’ misinterpretation of their academic plight remains sociologically interesting because it helps create a dangerous cycle — the white working-class boys face structural disadvantage in the form of classism, but misread their oppression, instead viewing the situation through a racial lens; using racist community discourses, they actively participate in racial discrimination towards their non-white peers, perceiving this as justified due to their own alleged

racial subjugation. Thus, all students in the school become victims of structural disadvantage.

Over twenty-five years later, the topic of white working-class underachievement remains politically loaded. Last year, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson stated that disadvantaged white students had been ‘betrayed’ and ‘left behind’, branding the situation as a ‘national disgrace’ (Tes, 2025). While improving the outcomes of working-class White British students is clearly a legitimate concern, the existing narrative has predominantly been shaped by wider political rhetoric surrounding immigration and statistical commentary, rather than qualitative research into the lived experiences of this student group. This is especially important given some media outlets’ choice to pursue a narrative of reverse racism in the education system. For instance, The Telegraph (2025) writes, ‘looking at the data, it’s hard not to conclude that white working class boys are victims of the racial and sexual politics that have infected our entire education sector’. As demonstrated above, such narratives can be damaging in two main ways: first, the false claim of reverse racism takes the focus away from the long-term issue of class disadvantage in the education system; second, such narratives can perpetuate racism towards ethnic-minority groups who may be perceived as the ‘reason’ for white working-class underachievement.

The following sections aim to help resolve key gaps in the existing literature concerning class and ethnic disparities in attainment. The concept of ‘ethnic capital’ has been effectively deployed to explain the seemingly counterintuitive overperformance of low-SES East Asian and South Asian students. The first aim of this research project is to observe whether ethnic capital can similarly explain low-SES black students’ apparent overperformance. The second aim is to assess the attitudes of the much spoken of ‘problem group’ — working-class White British students — towards ethnic disparities in attainments.

Methodology

The project involved online interviews with ten secondary school students between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. Volunteer and snowball sampling were conducted to recruit participants. An advertisement was placed in an online monthly newsletter distributed by The Brilliant Club, a charity I am an ambassador for. The charity focuses on social mobility through education, working mainly with students who are less financially advantaged, typically in poorer areas with higher ethnic minority populations. The monthly newsletter is only distributed to students who take part in one of the charity's programmes, increasing the likelihood that students who signed up for the study met the representative requirements — all students had to be working-class and around half had to be from an ethnic minority background. Initially, the project was intended to research the experiences of a range of ethnic minority students, but, given that all the ethnic-minority participants identified as black, the focus shifted to black experiences specifically. Four students contacted me in response to the advertisement. After their interviews, they were asked if they knew anyone who might be interested in the study. Six further participants were recruited this way.

Informal, semi-structured interviews were deemed the most appropriate method of study. Hochschild (2009) notes that interviews provide insights into how participants make connections between the factors that influence their behaviours — this was useful for an analysis of the intersection between students' social class and ethnicity. It can also be easier for children to recall their experiences in an informal, relaxed environment, and many children appreciate the agency they are afforded during the interview process (Cohen et al., 2018). Interviews were deemed especially necessary for answering the second research question, concerning the attitudes of white working-class students towards ethnic disparities in attainment, because, while the attainment of this group has been of interest in a quantitative sense (DfE, 2024; Strand, 2021), there is little in-depth qualitative research into their experiences of the education system.

The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NSSEC) (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2023) was utilised to group participants by social class. Participants were asked eight questions, as per the ONS's guidance, regarding their parents' occupations. This allowed them to be placed into one of two groups: working class (occupation levels L1 – L6) or middle class (L7 – L14). Participants were also asked to self-identify their class position. All their NSSEC classifications matched their self-identified positions — all ten participants were classified as, and identified with, being working-class. They were also asked to self-identify their ethnic group from the ONS's (2021) 'list of ethnic groups'. All participants strongly identified with a single ethnic group on the list, and none felt the need to elaborate on their ethnicity (in terms of the ONS categories) even when prompted. Overall, five students identified as White British and another five as Black African.

During recruitment, participants were offered an incentive in the form of a gift card. This was offered for two reasons: first, to increase the likelihood of finding participants; second, and more importantly, to reduce the effects of a potential sampling bias. When researching education, particularly underachievement, there is a risk that only students with specific motives or agendas, such as a particular interest in social science research, will sign up (Cohen et al., 2018). It is likely that such students would be proactively involved in their school community or achieve higher grades than average. The risk then, was a sample of participants who painted an overly positive picture of the education system. The gift card helped mitigate this by providing an incentive beyond mere interest, with the idea of encouraging worse-performing students to participate. This worked to some extent — the cohort had a relatively diverse range of grades. However, all the students were comfortably passing all their GCSEs/A-levels, meaning a key segment of the student population, those who are on track to fail in at least one GCSE/A-level, was not represented. Of course, given the size of the sample, this project does not intend to make generalisations about any of the groups of study, but the possibility of different findings if using a sample including worse-performing students should

be noted. Nonetheless, the sample was adequate for the research questions at hand. For the second question especially, I make no attempt to offer a universal overview of white working-class students' attitudes; rather, I intend to open a dialogue on a much-understudied topic.

Another important note regarding the sample is the absence of Black Caribbean students. This group is unique in that it is one of the only groups that performs worse than White British students at all SES levels (Strand, 2021). Strand reflects on this seemingly strange phenomenon: 'why does the achievement of Black Caribbean students more closely match that of White British students, particularly at low SES, rather than matching other ethnic minority groups?' The findings of this project, which demonstrate the unique forms of capital available to working-class Black African students to boost attainment, only add to the abnormality, since, on first glance, it might be assumed that Black Caribbeans would also have access to these forms of capital. Certainly, this question is of interest to educationalists, but, given the narrow sample, this project only reflects on the capitals available to Black African students (referred to in the findings section as 'black' students).

As discussed, the interviews were intended to be very informal, in an effort to create a relaxing environment where participants felt they could be honest. As such, there was no set question list, but rather three broad topics that could be brought up naturally. First, we discussed participants' general experiences in school, before moving on to how they felt their social class and ethnicity may have affected this experience. Then, participants were asked about their family lives, namely the role their families play in their school experience. Finally, they were shown DfE GCSE attainment statistics and asked to reflect on why there may be certain disparities. These statistics are easily understandable for most students, but they were also described in detail for participants. This interview structure allowed for flexible conversations, in which participants were able to describe in detail the areas that they felt most affected their educational experience.

A range of ethical considerations were required for the research project. Special care must be taken when working with vulnerable groups such as children (British Sociological Association, 2017). Participants received an information sheet describing the purpose and procedure of the project, as well as details of their rights as research participants. They also received one of two possible consent forms based on their age. As per DfE (2026) guidance, parents of participants under the age of sixteen were required to give consent on their behalf. Parents of participants over the age of sixteen were also encouraged to read the information provided, but, in these cases, the consent forms were signed by the participants themselves. At the start of the interviews, verbal consent was also gained after a second description of the participants' rights, with a particular emphasis placed on their right to withdraw at any point without reason. Most participants had a guardian present at the beginning of the interview, allowing any ethical concerns to be addressed. Interviews were recorded and transcribed manually — the data was stored on a password-protected laptop and will be deleted after the completion of my degree.

Research relating to sensitive topics always requires caution, but particular care must be taken when this research involves children (Cohen et al., 2018). In this case, possible sensitive areas included racism, classism or negative familial experiences. Participants were reminded at regular intervals that they need not answer any question they do not feel comfortable answering and that they had the right to withdraw at any point. Additionally, such topics were only introduced after participants reached a (perceived) level of comfort in the interview. This was achieved by building both general rapport and reflecting on my own experiences in the education system (further details below). Participants were also reminded that their identity would remain anonymous, as any identifying information would be pseudonymised.

An additional methodological concern related to how my position as a researcher may have affected participants' responses. The interviews included discussions of

sensitive topics such as racism or classism. As noted in the previous section, the white working-class students in Gillborn and Kirton's study attributed part of their educational underperformance to ethnic inequity, claiming the actions of internal school actors and wider institutions disproportionately benefitted Asian students. When discussing the concept of 'reverse racism' with white students, it is possible they may have been less open or dishonest in their answers because they were speaking to a non-white, visibly South Asian researcher. To combat this, participants were continually reminded that there were no wrong answers and were encouraged to be as honest as possible. Furthermore, while I did not share commonality on ethnic grounds with white participants, I did share class commonality with all of them. After the ethics overview, I began the interviews by describing my experience as a working-class, South Asian student, both within the classroom and at home. All students found at least one point of comparison in their own lives, allowing us to relate to each other and subsequently build a line of rapport. Indeed, with most participants, I was able to reflect on the specific shared experience of taking part in a Brilliant Club programme, which I did during secondary school.

Given the above, this project can be considered closer to insider research than outsider research. With this in mind, I tried to remain as objective as possible with the participants and was careful not to assume any shared meanings by seeking clarification through follow-up questions. However, while my insider position was beneficial in helping participants relate to me, there was also a risk that they would modify their answers to please me, especially given that I was likely perceived as a representative of an organisation (The Brilliant Club) that aids them at school. I directly addressed this issue during the interviews, explaining to participants that they should not tailor their responses to suit what they believe I want to hear, but rather provide as honest an account as possible.

While it is impossible to determine conclusively whether these strategies were successful in bringing out honest and open answers from participants, certain cues

suggested they were, at least in part. Participants were enthusiastic in their storytelling and appeared to openly offer information about their experiences, with little prompting needed to gain further detail. Also, they were almost all keen to ask me questions about A-levels and university life, which, while largely insignificant for answering the research questions, suggests they felt comfortable and free to speak openly. Furthermore, as the findings section explains, the white participants were able to identify consistent alternative explanations outside of racism for their group's relative underperformance. This consistency would be much less likely if the participants were dishonest in their answers.

Thematic analysis was utilised to interpret the data, allowing for an analysis beyond the surface-level and towards a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives (Terry and Hayfield, 2021). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, I began by familiarising myself with the data before moving on to the coding process. Here, I took an abductive approach, combining inductive and deductive codes as necessitated by the research questions. For the first question, concerning the applicability of ethnic capital to working-class black students, I leaned towards a deductive approach, creating a codebook based on existing literature. But, given that research into this form of capital is yet to cover the experiences of working-class black students in Britain, I was careful to allow for additional codes if required. For the second question, regarding the attitudes of white working-class students, I started with deductive codes based on Gillborn and Kirton's research but quickly found that the data was largely unapplicable to most codes. Thus, I leaned more towards inductive coding in answering this research question. The codes were then grouped into key themes, which are discussed in the following section.

Findings

The first half of this chapter assesses the applicability of Modood's (2004) causal explanation for working-class Asian students' relative overachievement in Britain to working-class black students. The interviews suggested that many of the processes that enable working-class Asian students' success are also present for working-class black students, including the key dimensions underpinning the concept — intergenerational closure and norm enforcement. Then, a key difference in the experiences of black students compared to South Asian students is identified. This concerns the transparency with which communities choose to address racism. Finally, the attitudes of white working-class students are assessed and compared to the attitudes of the students discussed in Gillborn and Kirton's research.

Transmission of norms, values and aspirations

Modood's (2004) explanation of ethnic capital begins with parents viewing education as a vehicle for upward social mobility. The black participants all described the emphasis their parents placed on their education from a young age:

‘When I was young, they [her parents] really only prioritised me getting my education, just, you know, going to primary school, secondary, they'll make sure I'm just learning and on top of my education’. (Isabelle, black, 15)

‘That's just how, especially in Nigeria, education is, there was no, there was no other, there was no other pathway. Like there was, but nobody knew about that. Everybody knew it was either education or you stay in the village your whole life. Education, they [his parents] just believe education is the only way you make it out’. (Anthony, black, 17)

As observed in the cases of South Asian students (Iqbal and Modood, 2023; Shah et al., 2010), the parents of the black participants were seen to prioritise the education of their children because it was perceived as the primary means of

creating a better life or, as Anthony describes, ‘making it out’. In the quote above, Anthony recognises his parents’ background and how it has influenced their parental priorities. When elaborating on this, he reflected on his family’s lack of economic capital, explaining that his parents ‘made it out’ of their village in Nigeria and, in turn, he wants to ‘make it out’ of the deprived area in London where he and his family live. While not all of the black participants sought to ‘make it out’ in terms of their area, they were all extremely keen to make clear that their parents were heavily involved in their educational experiences from the start, with the ultimate goal being success in the labour market.

Importantly, parents’ belief in the importance of education is not enough on its own to boost attainment — the children must also internalise this belief (Modood, 2004). Black participants’ parents often took direct steps in ensuring internalisation, best highlighted through Kirsty and Ryan’s testimonies:

‘When it comes to a lot of black students, their parents drill this into their brains that like, the reason why they came to the country is mainly because they want a better life or a better education for their children’. (Kirsty, black, 16)

‘And they drill it into our brains. And, you know, that kind of gives a lot of students the motivation to do well’. (Ryan, black, 16)

The use of the word ‘drill’ highlights the consistent effort the participants’ parents made, by drawing on their personal experiences, to highlight the importance of education. Similar to the Pakistani students in Iqbal and Modood’s (2023) study, black participants were aware of the sacrifices their parents made to provide them with better life chances. For some participants, this was most clearly exemplified in the difficulties their parents faced immigrating to the UK, while others pointed to working long hours and managing tight budgets. Also echoing Iqbal and Modood’s (2023) findings, participants often expressed their appreciation for the sacrifices their parents made and the continued support they received throughout their

educational careers. They sought to 'repay' their parents for their efforts through educational success, developing ambitious educational goals and coupling this with a strong educational drive. It was clear that the participants internalised their parents' belief in the importance of education. This reflects the completion of the second stage of Modood's (2004) explanation of ethnic capital: norms and beliefs which were beneficial to the participants' education were successfully transmitted across generations.

However, the resulting aspirations often came with a great deal of pressure. This pressure was sometimes imposed directly by family members, but was also subtly felt due to the participants' desire to 'repay' their parents. Interestingly, even white students were able to identify this:

'For the minority groups, a lot of their parents will have struggled like in the past or in their family and so I think like, it's pressure on them to do well so they have a better opportunity at life'. (Daisy, white, 15)

'If I didn't have that urge to revise from my parents or that like, that constant like pressure to revise, I feel like maybe I would have like turned out differently compared to what I am now'. (Samuel, black, 17)

Both Daisy and Samuel highlight the pressure faced by ethnic-minority students to succeed academically in order to improve their chances of upward social mobility. The black participants were largely positive about this pressure and its effect on their motivation, as shown through Samuel's reflection. This is an example of how ethnic capital can help compensate for a lack of economic or cultural capital: the pressure students feel from their communities to perform academically drives them to work harder and, in turn, improve their attainment.

This is not to say that pressure was considered straightforwardly beneficial in all cases. Zhou (2005), based on research into American East Asian students, notes that too much pressure on students can lead to 'intense intergenerational conflict, rebellious behaviour, withdrawal from school, and alienation from the networks that

are supposed to help' (p.153). While the black participants generally found the pressure they experienced to be motivating, some felt it limited their freedom in terms of what they could study:

[On studying a humanities subject at A-level] 'I really wanted to do it. You don't understand. I wanted to do it so bad, but I just didn't want to disappoint my dad. I feel like it was, from him, it was more or less like the guilt tripping, like, oh, like this is something that I put in so much work and effort for you to do triple science and all that stuff'. (Kirsty, black, 16)

Kirsty wanted to study a humanities subject at A-level, but her father persuaded her to do a more science- and maths-based subject because he felt it would provide her with greater job prospects in the future. She describes how he directly referenced the sacrifices he made to afford her the opportunities she had available and suggested that she would be wasting them by studying a subject that does not maximise returns for her career. Having eventually taken Chemistry at A-level, she laments her lack of agency in the choice. This highlights how ethnic capital can have negative emotional effects on students, even while promoting greater attainment. In this case, the very factors that motivate Kirsty to perform well in school — the pursuit of upward social mobility and the notion of parental sacrifice — were, ironically, used by her father to justify his approach over hers.

The role of the wider community

The third part of Modood's (2004) causal explanation concerns the provision of resources that enable the realisation of students' educational ambitions. Along with parents, educational norms are 'suitably reinforced by significant relatives and other community members' (p.95). Two key dimensions are relevant here — intergenerational closure and norms enforcement. As noted in the first section, the former refers to networks of families in usually deprived areas who share similar norms and values, while the latter describes how these norms and values are enforced, typically not just through students' parents but also through wider

community members. These two dimensions could be clearly observed in the cases of the black participants:

‘Whenever I go to church camp, for example, not even just my parents will say, people like my pastors or the people at church every week will say you need to work hard at school’. (Luke, black, 16)

Here, Luke describes a typical case of (usually older) members of the wider community sharing certain norms and values surrounding education, and making efforts to enforce them for all young people, not just their own children. The participants were quick to highlight the pastor, whose words, as a person of authority in the church, had a particularly strong effect on not just the students, but, more importantly, the parents. Many black participants’ parents would use the pastor’s words to motivate their children: ‘My mum would joke around with me. Like she would say that if I don’t do my work, she will tell the pastor’ (Isabelle, black, 15). Isabelle’s mother harnesses the pastor’s authority here to reinforce her child’s work ethic. Crucially, the ‘threat’ of telling the pastor is not perceived as hostile, but rather as playful encouragement, maintaining positive relations between everyone involved.

Religion is a notable aspect of the experiences of both South Asian students and black students. As Shah et al. (2010) find, Islam plays a large role in Muslim students’ achievement in that it acts as a moral driver to fulfil familial obligations, namely relating to education. Unlike the students in Shah et al.’s study, the black participants did not mention their Christian beliefs directly as a motivator for their educational drive. However, many described the encouragement they received from church members and noted the importance of the church building as a community space. For Asian Muslim students, the mosque provides a third space for parents to discuss matters concerning their children, an idea identified in Shah et al. (2010) and also by one of the white participants, Justin (16). He described how many of the students in his school attended the same mosque, where their

parents would gather to discuss their children's attainment: '...like a parents evening but at a mosque. My friends make a lot of jokes about it but like, they are obviously a little bit nervous about it too you know'. Similar to the situation described by Justin, many black participants noted the church as a space for the community to discuss their educational performance:

'Me and my friend, we go to the same church. So our parents talk to each other after mass about like our grades and our actions in school. It's hard because if one of us does better than the other on say a test, then our parents will know about it and make us work on that subject'. (Kirsty, black, 16)

The experience of parents discussing their children's performance was common among the black participants, usually occurring in formal spaces like churches, but also in passing in local areas. Here, Kirsty clearly identifies the effects of intergenerational closure in this area. The participants' family networks create an environment of shared norms, which is reinforced through consistent monitoring by each parent and other members of the community (norms enforcement). This leads to an understanding between the students that they must perform well academically or risk scrutiny not just from their parents, but the entire local network. These comparisons across the community are beneficial for the attainment of the students within it because they help maintain the students' motivation over time.

Another finding from Shah et al.'s (2010) study into ethnic capital is the ability of students to generate social capital themselves. The black participants mentioned feeling drawn to other students who may be of the same background as them:

'People who are born to immigrant parents, when a bunch of people from those countries come to a new country, I feel like they're more united in the sense that, oh, you're from the same place I came from, but we're both in

this new country now. We can be friends or something. I don't care what he's done, now you're my friend'. (Anthony, black, 17)

'In this country, I don't really see white people gassing up another white person like we do. (Luke, black, 16)

Here, Anthony explains the effort he makes to socialise with people who are from the same country/region as his parents are from, with the idea of helping each other navigate an education system which, for him, sometimes feels culturally alien. This finding echoes Wallace's finding of solidarity among black/African students across class boundaries — Anthony is clear that he is not interested in the behaviour of his prospective friend ('I don't care what he's done') but rather is happy to create a bond solely on the basis that their ethnic backgrounds are similar. Furthermore, Luke highlights how black students celebrate and motivate each other, framing academic success as a collective win for the community, instead of for the individual. He identifies this form of support as a culturally specific resource, which enables black students to boost their status through educational achievement. In this way, the students enforce the norms highlighted earlier themselves. Importantly, this support appears to be present for all students who have the same ethnic background as the participants — this may be especially valuable for working-class members of the community, acting as a shield from the typical effects associated with class disadvantage. Overall, this evidence suggests the same key dimensions which enable success for working-class Asian students are present for working-class black students as well.

Thus far, this section has identified the ways that the concept of ethnic capital can be applied to working-class black students. It has been suggested that many of the resources available to South Asian students, as identified in empirical research (Iqbal and Modood, 2023; Shah et al., 2010), are also available to black students, which helps boost their educational attainment. A key difference though, concerns motivations: South Asian students' educational drive comes from strong familial

pressure, and a desire to repay their parents' sacrifices, gain status for their families or validation from the community, all with the aim of achieving upward social mobility. The evidence above suggests that working-class black students share many of the same motivations. However, the results also highlighted an additional source of motivation, stemming from the notion that black people must work much harder to succeed in Britain.

'Especially in this country as well, when it comes to black people, it is a little bit harder to get certain jobs or to get certain places, you have to put in twice as much work. That's what my parents always told me anyway'. (Kirsty, black, 16)

'The pastors that are there at church will let us know, like, as a black person, you have to work twice as hard as a lot of people, a lot of other people in this country, because, well, they say that this country wasn't necessarily made for people like us, which is why we need to put in as, well, a greater amount of effort to do well to succeed'. (Ryan, black, 16)

Here, Kirsty and Ryan highlight the structural constraints they face as black people. They are made aware by their parents and members of the wider community of the systemic obstacles they face in the education system and the labour market. While these understandings are bleak, the participants do not react by disengaging with their education; rather, their work ethics are heightened, resulting in greater educational drive. This dynamic may seem to mirror the findings of Fuller's (1984) and Mirza's (1992) research, where black girls worked hard in school to outperform their peers as a form of resistance to racist discrimination by teachers. However, the black participants in the current research project made no suggestion that they wanted to prove anyone wrong. Indeed, most participants had forged strong relations with school authorities and felt a strong sense of belonging to their institutions. They were very aware of the systemic challenges they face as black students, but did not see their strong educational performances as a (direct)

challenge to institutional racism or a form of resistance. Racism is perceived more as a barrier to the goal of social mobility, and so, to overcome it, they believe they must work harder.

As noted, this represents a difference in the experiences of black students compared to South Asian students. This is not to say that South Asian students do not experience racism or are not aware of it. Rather, existing literature concerning ethnic capital suggests that, while South Asian families often mobilise capital to navigate around structural constraints, they may not address the specificities of racism so overtly. In contrast, the black participants' communities take a much more direct approach in addressing it. This honesty prepares them to face systems that are 'not necessarily made' for them with extra determination. It is clear that working-class South Asian and black students harness ethnic capital in similar ways. The most notable difference is in the transparency with which they address racism towards their communities.

The attitudes of white students: rationalisation and alternative explanations

Contrary to the findings of Gillborn and Kirton (2000), the white working-class students did not take issue with their ethnic group's worse average attainment relative to most other ethnic groups. While the white students in Gillborn and Kirton's sample blamed racism for their underachievement — through both direct discrimination from teachers and a perceived structural disadvantage — rather than their class position, the white participants being discussed here opted for alternative explanations. One suggestion was that white students show more complacency compared to ethnic minority students because of racial power imbalances in wider society. As Lily and Sam explained:

'Maybe white people are like just throwing away the opportunities they have and like that they take for granted. And like white people don't need to get, because it's like a bit racist that the white people maybe don't need to try as hard to get better jobs, if that makes sense'. (Lily, white, 15)

‘I don't think, let's say, British White [students] have as much pressure on them at schools. If you don't do that really well on your GCSEs, so that's a, let's say someone, a Chinese man with like mediocre results. Someone might not pick him [for a job]. Could have the same situation with a white student but they might get picked’. (Sam, white, 16)

Here, as in Gillborn and Kirton's study, the students racialise the problem of educational disadvantage. However, instead of reflecting on internal racism towards white students, they suggest that wider societal racism towards ethnic minorities results in white students not working as hard in school as their ethnic minority peers because they feel they will be successful in securing a high-quality job regardless. They directly acknowledge the advantages they possess in the labour market, suggesting that this leads to academic complacency compared to their ethnic minority peers. This directly contrasts with the views of black students discussed previously. Lily states that ‘white people don't need to try as hard’, while Ryan says that black students need to ‘work twice as hard’. The reactions of both social groups are products of racism but affect students in opposite ways: ethnic minority students must increase their work ethic to navigate systemic obstacles, while white students need not work as urgently because they are beneficiaries of structural inequalities in the labour market.

That said, the more common explanation, and the one that participants felt was most impactful, for ethnic disparities in attainment was not a lack of care on the part of white students, but rather an identification of the extra effort ethnic-minority students put in. As described previously, many working-class South Asian and black students possess ethnic capital, which enables them to overcome the disadvantages associated with their class position. The white participants picked up on many of the tenets of this form of capital, namely the key dimensions of intergenerational closure and norms enforcement. For example, Justin, reflecting on how ethnic minority families transmit particular norms, said:

‘...and there's definitely like a stereotype there with, you know, parents and wider families of other ethnicities where, you know, this stereotype that says, you know, they are quite strict and push the children to do better in their schoolwork’ (Justin, white, 15).

Justin alludes to the concept of norms enforcement, suggesting that ethnic minority families are stricter than most, particularly in terms of educational norms. What is interesting here is Justin’s use of ‘wider families’ rather than just ‘parents’. In his interview, when referring to himself or his white peers’ home lives, he would typically only use parents. But when describing ethnic minority families, he made specific reference to wider family members. While he implicitly locates norm enforcement for white families within the parental unit, he notes the difference for ethnic minority families — norms are enforced by a wider network, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles or other members of the community. The effects of ethnic capital have been demonstrated in empirical research previously, and the fact that white participants in this research are able to identify the key concepts simply through interaction at school further highlights its explanatory power.

More pointedly, the above explanations by white participants are crucial for understanding their overall attitudes towards ethnic disparities in attainment. Generally, their responses were either indifferent or somewhat positive.

‘I don’t think there is any resentment or like problems with people who aren't white because they do better. Because they may have to do that so they can get a job’. (Daisy, white, 15)

‘Seeing other people perform is, to me, always going to be a pretty good thing. I think most of the people will be alright with this [the attainment statistics] as well’. (Matthew, white, 16)

Unlike the students in Gillborn and Kirton’s study, the participants did not see ethnic minority students as a threat to their opportunities. Here, rather than feeling resentment towards their non-white peers, Daisy and Matthew view ethnic minority

groups' strong educational attainment as a logical response to structural disadvantages faced in wider society. Additionally, the participants were particularly quick to dispel any notions of 'reverse racism' in schools. They did not feel their whiteness resulted in any form of systemic bias or direct discrimination. Indeed, their responses indicate that racism towards ethnic minority students remains an ongoing problem needing intervention. The participants displayed an impressive knowledge of how racism may extend beyond internal, overt discrimination into wider, deeper forms of institutional prejudice. This knowledge enabled them to identify the reasons why ethnic disparities may exist, countering harmful narratives surrounding working-class white experiences of the education system.

Conclusion

The higher attainment of most ethnic-minority groups compared to their white peers, especially among working-class students, seems counterintuitive. Empirical research into Modood's concept of 'ethnic capital' has demonstrated, in the case of South Asians in Britain, that this unique form of social capital works to help ameliorate the disadvantages that are typically associated with a lower class position. This dissertation argues that many of the same processes that enable this success for South Asian students — namely, the key dimensions of intergenerational closure and norms enforcement (Zhou, 2005) — are present for working-class Black African students.

In-depth interviews with current secondary-school students showed that the factors that drive Black African students are broadly similar to those of South Asian students. The participants' parents had the long-term goal of upward social mobility for themselves and their children. They viewed education as the primary means to achieve this goal, with academic success considered a pathway to strong labour market outcomes. The participants internalised the educational norms that their parents transmitted, in part because of their parents' direct references to the 'sacrifices' they made to provide the participants with the opportunities available to them. Actors outside the immediate parental unit, such as extended family and community members, were seen to play a role in reinforcing these norms. Typically, this reinforcement occurred in formal third spaces that the participants routinely attended, namely church buildings. The ultimate result of these processes was increased educational drive for the participants, which helped compensate for the lack of economic and cultural capital they had available. One main difference was identified between the student groups. Black communities were noticeably more transparent about the racism they face than South Asian communities. This transparency was useful in that it functioned as an additional source of motivation for the participants.

Theoretically, these findings disrupt the typical Bourdieusian framework that has dominated the sociology of education (Reay, 2004) because they suggest ethnicity can mediate the effects of social class in education, especially those effects which occur as a result of a lack of cultural capital. Practically, the findings are also relevant. They indicate that Black African students have available to them a 'reservoir of ethnic capital' that could be 'more effectively harnessed if educationalists were better informed of the 'at home' contribution of the parents' (Iqbal and Modood, 2023, p.2095). The identification of the processes described in the findings section could foster stronger relations between families, schools and the state.

Additionally, the state may benefit from a wider publicisation of how such communities operate. Firstly, it may help dispel harmful stereotypes about black British families, such as the notion that black parents care less about the behaviour of their children or that black children lack positive familial role models. In particular, the observation of black students celebrating each other's academic successes can combat pervasive stereotypes about groups of young black men, who are often portrayed in the media as threatening or criminally-adjacent (YMCA, 2020). Secondly, the actions of South Asian and Black African communities regarding education may serve as excellent examples of good practice (Iqbal and Modood, 2023). It is possible that groups with worse average attainment, namely working-class White British and Black Caribbean students, may benefit from adapting some of the practices of these groups. Given the state's interest in improving outcomes for working-class White British students, it may seek to use the processes of ethnic capital as a blueprint for closing attainment gaps generally. That being said, it is important that the state does not go too far in presenting certain ethnic groups as 'model minorities', as this may have an adverse effect on groups with worse average attainment.

This dissertation also discussed the attitudes of white working-class students towards ethnic disparities in attainment. The participants did not display any

resentment when reflecting on these disparities. Instead, they understood that ethnic minority students' strong educational attainment may be necessary due to biases in the labour market. They also considered the effects of racism at a structural level and were able to identify some of the key tenets of ethnic capital, which helped them to rationalise the disparities being discussed. This is a valuable finding in that it offers counter-evidence for the claim by some media sources of 'reverse racism' in the education system, which was primarily based on quantitative evidence. Countering this narrative using qualitative data based on the lived experiences of working-class White British students is important for two reasons. First, it helps narrow the focus for how outcomes for White British students might be improved — likely through an assessment of class-based disadvantage, as Gillborn and Kirton (2000) state. Second, it highlights that racism within the education system towards ethnic minorities remains an issue to be tackled, despite their strong attainment.

It should of course be recognised that the small sample size reduces the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, further research into the experiences of underperforming students may yield different findings, especially when compared with those of high-performing students. The findings of this project also bring about questions concerning the attainment of Black Caribbean students. Why do Black African students perform so much stronger academically? Do Black Caribbean students hold ethnic capital, and if so, to what extent are they able to actualise it? Ogbu (1978) suggests that minority groups that have been established for a longer time in a country may be less optimistic about their educational outcomes compared to groups that are more recently established. However, as Strand (2021) notes, Indian and Pakistani populations also migrated in large numbers at the same time Black Caribbean populations began to, and their performances are much stronger. Clearly, research into why Black Caribbean students perform poorly compared to Black African students is necessary, especially given the fact that they likely experience racism in similar ways (as simply

'black' students). Despite these limitations and opportunities for further scope, this dissertation helps fill important gaps in the existing body of literature. It offers a concrete explanation, rooted in sociological theory, for why working-class Black African students perform strongly compared to their white peers in similar class positions. It also takes an important step in that it offers a qualitative analysis of the attitudes of white working-class students — a group whose attainment garners significant political interest and yet has only been examined quantitatively.

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Appendix A: interview transcript

R: Good. Okay. What about you? Do you think your ethnicity has played a big role in your education?

P: Yes, definitely, because I thought not, not... not in the outside world, but the way my parents were brought up, they actually lean towards education.

I: Yeah, I get you.

P: Yeah, I feel like that's down to where they're from, their ethnicity, their ethnic background. Because I don't, especially the way they approach certain aspects of education. Yeah, I feel like it played a big part in how I developed.

I: Okay, okay, so expand on that a bit. What do you mean how they approach certain aspects?

P: For example, there'll be students who go to school, they may mess about and they may miss information that they're being taught in class, but they end up missing it forever because like they don't go home like then. They don't go home and check up on what they've done in class. There's no one urging them to do that. When it's me, my parents check my books every day I come back from school. They'll see what I've learned and they'll go research what I've learned and look now to come and recap that topic with me to see what I know, to see if I understand it properly.

R: I see.

P: Especially my dad. He used to do that. He used to, every time I come home, he'd open my bag, read what I'd done in school. And yeah, basically just me through each topic, just in case he thought I didn't understand it or something. So yeah, just in case he thought I missed something. Yeah, he'd do that all the time. He stopped doing this around like year, year 10, Year 11, though, because obviously GCSEs, so there's not really much you learn after that, but yeah, but before that, that's what he was doing.

R: Wow, that's very interesting. I thought my parents were on it with education. That's really something. Good. And your parents, are they immigrants?

P: Um... No, no, they're not immigrants, they. Are they? Actually, I don't know. I don't know.

R: Were they born here?

P: No, they were not born here, you know.

R: Yeah, okay, so they're probably immigrants.

P: Ah okay

R: So, do you think, why do you think they take it so seriously?

P: Because I think it's like the background they came from. That's just how, especially in Nigeria, education is, there was no, there was no other, there was no other pathway. Like there was, but nobody knew about that. Everybody knew it was either education or you stay in the village your whole life. Education, they just believe education was the only way you make it out. Yeah. So they never really expanded anything else. But now, as you came to like the modern day, technology, the internet started happening. Now, there's plenty of ways to get famous or get money and stuff. So it's not only about education anymore, but back then, we didn't have technology like this. So Education was the main way. So yeah, and I feel like they still have those certain beliefs. So I don't think that they're going to change. They're not going to change the way they think. So yeah, I feel like that's why they were so harsh on me when it came to education.

R: Yeah, and do you think it helped? Do you think it was worth it?

P: Yeah, I think it was because even though, even though there are, there are other ways to become successful, I feel like education is like the basis. The basis is where if nothing else is going well for you, you're educated. So you can, you

can pick yourself, you can pick yourself up, you can start, you can build yourself from nothing to something just from education. Like if nothing else is going for you, but if it's vice versa. All the other options that you can take to get successful, like, is not guaranteed. I feel like education is guaranteed success. Obviously, you need to put in the work, but you've got the foundation. Yeah, so I feel like with education, there's not much stopping you after that. At least a basic wage. At least a basic wage.

R: Cool. Clearly very heavily instilled in you, isn't it? Good. Your experiences in that regard, the way your parents place a heavy emphasis on education, how do you think that compares to other people that you know?

P: To, to, to what? Sorry.

R: To other people that you know.

P: Other people I know, to be honest, me as a kid, I was shocked when my friends had told me their parents don't really care about what they do in school. I was shocked. It's like, obviously, me thinking the way the way it was, it was so harshly put on me compared to them. I'm thinking they have an easy life. They have an easy life. They can relax when they get home. That's what I've been thinking. So a lot of people, I think, their parents are just, they're just happy to provide for their child until they get to that age where they have to start fending for themselves. And I think they just believe there'll be something that you can do. Yeah, they don't really, they want to let them decide what their own career path is. I feel like they just gave their child more freedom to navigate themselves in the world. Instead of forcing or trying to guide them to where they want their child to be.

R: Yeah, go on.

P: Well, where I'm where I'm from in London, there is certain like, demographics, yeah, and I think I think you can tell just by the way they act in school which, which demographics like you know, don't really... don't really take education as

seriously. You can tell by the way they act in school. Like if it were... if it were like based on attendance or something, especially attendance. Attendance because some people don't even bother coming to school. And when I when I asked them why, they told me... they told me they just couldn't be bothered and they told me their parents don't mind.

R: Interesting. So which demographic are you talking about?

P: I'd say, I'd say... I'd say a lot of Jamaicans, a lot of Jamaicans, their parents don't really, don't really... force education on them as much. Not all of them, but there's a large majority. I don't think... I don't think their parents were very harsh on them about education. Not saying they should have been, I'm just saying that's what I noticed.

R: Yeah, fair enough. Cool. Okay, cool. That was interesting. Usually I do that bit on family at the end, but it's quite fun to do it at the start, actually. Might be a better way of doing it. I want to ask now, did you do many extracurricular activities growing up?

P: Um... well, sports, that was the main one. I did a lot of sports, but football was my main one. But I did football, rugby, tennis, all sorts of sports, to be honest, I got involved in, but football was always my main one. But apart from that, I don't really remember any extracurricular activities I was doing.

R: Yeah, I mean, those are fair enough, and we will probably come back to that later in some way. Okay great, now I want to talk to you about some data. Don't worry it's nothing overly complicated and I'm going to explain everything in detail. It won't be like a school exercise or anything, but it is some really interesting stuff to talk about. I'm going to share my screen with you. Hopefully it works.

P: Mmh.

R: You're on your phone, I take it?

P: Yeah, I'm on my phone.

R: I mean, don't worry, you don't need to see it that clearly. In fact, I don't even need to share it. I just do it because it's helpful. Can you see it?

P: Yeah, I can see it.

R: Awesome. So no need to dive into it yourself, I'm going to explain it all to you. This is from the government website. This is what's called, it's an analysis of what's called the attainment 8 scores. Attainment 8 scores are concerned with GCSEs, right. So they take an average of 8 GCSEs that students have done and they score them up basically. And for now, all I want you to focus on is this all bit here, right? So all, and there are two bars, 34.8, 49.6. Okay, so what we're concerned with here, this dark blue line, right, the ones who are doing better, those are students who are not eligible for free school meals, okay? And the light blue line is students who are eligible for free school meals. And we can see there's a bit of a gap. So my first question for you, and, to be clear, all I'm asking you to do is think about your experiences at school, think about your life, and then tell me what you think, right. There are no right or wrong answers here. So my first question is pretty simple. Why do you think this gap exists?

P: Well... well, people on free school meals, obviously they don't have that much like support when it comes to education. Like for example, people who are like, I don't know, like their parents are more wealthy, they can afford stuff like tuition. Say their parents don't have time to always teach their child. Like... like the basics that they're doing in school, say if their child is getting stuck. Like the wealthier parents can afford tuition, but the slightly poorer parents, they still have to work and they can't afford to work and support their son. They can't really balance their time like that, which would have been helped by a tutor, but they can't afford it.