

# Perspectives on the Educational Experiences of African/Caribbean Boys



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of African/Caribbean Boys

By

Nisheet Gosai

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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by Nisheet Gosai

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my deity Amba, Sai baba, my parents, sister, my supervisor and to all those participants who participated in my research study.



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## INTRODUCTION

### ESTABLISHING A RESEARCH AREA OF INTEREST

The researcher, while being born in England, moved at an early age to India and then returned to England in 1988 and entered into the London school system as a primary school student. He had previously only experienced school life in India and soon came to realize the differences that existed. Some of the teachers were very friendly and helpful and others were at times unpleasant. Even at the age of eight the researcher could differentiate the indifference felt towards him. For example, in a classroom setting one of the teachers generally ignored him but gave her attention to other students; however she became effusive in her interest in him when other visitors came into the school. This particular experience has remained embedded in the researcher's mind. Over the years the researcher has been taught by teachers of many ethnic backgrounds but has never perceived any of them as being racist.

The researcher's interest in Black cultural issues began during his A' Levels, when he realized that many of his Black classmates from year 11 were no longer present at his sixth form college. The teachers explained to him that many Black students did not attend A' Level courses because either they had found jobs or college courses. It struck him at the time that there was something slightly odd about this explanation.

When the researcher was at university he discovered the subject of Educational Studies. This discipline allowed close investigation of the way ethnicity could influence societal organisation. This meant he could study Black ethnicity in a sociological and educational context. The researcher also became aware of media representations of young Black males as a 'problematic demographic'. For example, *The Times Educational Supplement* reported Ofsted's (1999) concern over a number of years with the negative progress of Black males in school. The researcher's own experience of his Black male peers at school and such reports helped to create a research

interest in the issue. Hallam and Rhamie (2003) in 'The Influence of Home, School and Community on African-Caribbean Academic Success in the United Kingdom' point to the persistent issue of African/Caribbean underachievement:

Since the 1960s Afro-Caribbean children have been labelled and identified as underachievers (see Taylor; 1981, Tomlinson; 1983). Research in the 1980s and 1990s reflected earlier findings with pupils' continuing to make less progress on average than other pupils' (Maughan et al; 1985, Mortimore et al; 1988, Drew and Gray; 1991, Plewis and Veltman; 1994, Gillborn and Gipps; 1996, Ofsted; 1999, Strand; 1999) (Hallam and Rhamie, 2003, p101).

It was interesting for the researcher to note that more recent publications such as the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) *Ethnicity and Education. The Evidence on Minority Ethnic Pupils' aged 5-16* (2006) continued to identify the trend reported by Hallam and Rhamie that African/Caribbean boys were amongst the lowest GCSE achievers. Similarly, the London Development Agency Report (LDA), *The educational experiences and achievements of Black boys in London schools, 2000-2003* commissioned by the then London Mayor, Ken Livingstone, reaffirmed that the underachievement of Black boys was a continuing issue. The persistent nature of this problem has inspired the researcher to conduct a research study on the issues involved, but remembering his own experiences of schooling, he wanted to ensure that the Black boys themselves were able to tell their own story.

## **Aim of the study**

The aim of this study then is to investigate the experiences affecting the success and failure of Black males in English state secondary schools. It is concerned primarily with Black boys since they have been identified as one of the social groups having highly negative experiences within mainstream secondary educational institutions (Sewell, 1997; Blair, 2001; Tomlinson, 2008). For example, there is research, which suggested that the authority structure in secondary schools contributed to Black boys developing an anti-school stance, which impacted in a negative way on their educational achievement (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; 2003; Sewell, 1997; Blair, 2001). Similarly, Department of Employment statistics pointed to Black Caribbean boys (and others of Black origin) having had the highest rates of exclusion from state maintained schools (See: [www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000209/980-s3.htm](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000209/980-s3.htm) and

[www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000209/980-anx.htm](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000209/980-anx.htm)).

The study is situated within the context of two fields of educational research. The first has focussed upon secondary schooling and Black male pupils (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; 2003; Gillborn, 1995; 2008; Sewell, 1997; Blair, 2001; LDA 2003). The second field of inquiry has explored Black educational organizations (Reay and Mirza, 1997). Alongside the research in a secondary school, this study will also use comparative research findings from two 'non-school' institutions, a supplementary school and a youth organization in order to gain additional data about Black boys' experiences of secondary school. Alongside the often negative experiences of secondary school reported by the first field of inquiry, the second field offers the possibility of examining more positive engagement with and response to Black educators/youth workers in the 'non-school' sites. The study is particularly concerned with probing the reasons as to why these institutions were successful in making Black boys' educational experiences more meaningful and the implications of this for secondary schooling. It is further hoped that this comparative approach will highlight the specific impact of mainstream secondary schooling on Black boys and their responses, in relation to research findings on other social groups, for example, white working class boys, Black girls and other ethnic minority groups, who it is reported have negative experiences of schooling and low achievement. The specificity of contemporary Black boys' experiences of school life should be further enabled by the researcher's framing of the study in drawing upon key social and educational concepts-culture, identity and identity formations; masculinities; Black culture and racial stereotyping. These concepts are derived from the literature which has addressed the issue of Black underachievement in schools. Some of these concepts are contested and this will be explored in the literature review.

## **Methods**

The study adopts a multidisciplinary approach to gather original data. In order to investigate Black boys' schooling and their own accounts of their experiences both fairly and accurately, the data presented in this study are drawn from a large number of interviews: with Black boys, Black, Asian and White teachers, youth workers and Black parents. Over a course of six months, 36 participants were involved in this research study. The study used a wide range of methods, including semi-structured interviews, participant-observation and non-participant-observation (Bouma, 2000; Brewer, 2000). This personal interaction was carried out in the best social

scientific way possible (Silverman, 2001; Mc Namee, 2002; Ritchie et al, 2003). Alternative data gathering approaches, such as questionnaires or other statistical information were considered, but it was felt by the researcher that they were not appropriate to generate material that is primarily concerned with research participants' meanings of their social lives. As Thomas (1996, p.770) points out, qualitative methods enable the researcher to investigate, meaning, human value, social processes and the perceptions and traditions of social groups. Reading through the data presented in this study, the researcher feels that it is representative of these boys' descriptions and explanations of their educational lives. Further, because the researcher wanted to engage with and understand the educational experiences of Black boys through their 'eyes'/'voices' he decided that it would be useful to look beyond the school gate at other sites of education and learning. He decided therefore, to talk with and observe Black boys not only in a secondary school setting, but also in the setting of a supplementary school and a youth club. The latter was a site of informal learning. By opening out the scope for research fieldwork, the researcher hoped to capture different dimensions of the boys' experiences and to see if their perceptions on education were consistent or different according to location.

## **Terminology**

For the purposes of this study the ethnic group referred to as African/Caribbean were people who had a Black African or Caribbean ancestry only. In terms of the British census and various educational statistics this was a demographic group, an ethnic group and not a race. The term racism in this study refers to systematic discrimination both within the structures of the institution of schooling and interaction between individuals based on negative perception of assumed racial characteristics (see Gillborn, 1990; 2008; Mac an Ghaill, 1999; Taylor et al, 2009 for discussion of contemporary racism).

## **Outline of the study**

The study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One offers a review of the research literature, focusing upon the experiences and achievement of African/Caribbean boys in English state maintained schools. The second chapter provides a discussion of the rationale behind the chosen research methodology, emphasising the developmental aspects of refining the topics of research conversation. Chapter three is short, but important as it

points to difficulties encountered in translating the proposed data gathering methods into practice. The next three chapters report and analyse the data gathered in the three sites of learning - the secondary school, the supplementary school and the youth organisation. The final chapter outlines conclusions, makes recommendations for further research and offers suggestions for ways forward in the area of Black male education.

# CHAPTER ONE

## LITERATURE REVIEW: RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN/CARIBBEAN BOYS

### Introduction

The research focus for this study is “*Perspectives on the educational experiences of African/Caribbean boys.*” African/Caribbean boys’ achievement and their experience in education is the main subject of this review. A 2006 Department for Education and Skills (DFES) report on ethnicity and education showed that Black Caribbean boys had the lowest attainment at GCSE of all ethnic groups who were regular school attendees. The problem of attainment at secondary school for African/Caribbean boys has been recorded consistently since the 1970s. Recent statistical evidence from the Education and Skills 2006 report will be included to provide current information on the continuing trend of school attainment amongst Black pupils.

A common theme in the research literature, including earlier work such as Bernard Coard’s (1971) study of how the British education system failed Black boys or the government sponsored Rampton Report (1981), which recognised the existence of racism in the British education system, and the more recent work of Maud Blair (2001), is that a high proportion of Black boys find their educational experience to be negative. In this study the researcher refers to African/Caribbean boys as the ‘problematic demographic’. This is because the literature emphasizes the problems they encounter and the lack of interventions and other educational strategies to help them achieve success. In response to the schooling of Black boys over the last few decades there have been in the literature diverse explanations and emphases of what is to be done. For example, in a study commissioned by the London Development Agency, *The educational experiences and achievements of Black boys in London schools 2000-2003*, the authors of the report called for an increase in the proportion of Black Minority Ethnic teachers within the educational system, particularly



Black teachers, because there was evidence that suggested the latter had better relations with Black boys than White teachers did (see pages 11 and 15 of the recommendation section, recommendation number 32, see also Virk, 1998). Youdell (2004) provides a different focus, exploring the racialisation of London-based Black male pupils, in which she critically discusses the tension between learner identities and sub-cultural identities. Importantly, government reports especially from Ofsted have stated that Black boys in primary school achieved close to the average on entry to secondary school but by the end of year eleven they became amongst the lowest achievers (Ofsted, 1999). This was a primary reason that this review and the work presented in the study concentrates on older African/Caribbean students at secondary schools.

### **Outline of literature review**

To engage with the extensive literature on the educational experiences of Black pupils' at secondary schools, this literature review has been divided into the following sections. The first section outlines key concepts that the researcher is using to frame his understanding of Black boys' schooling experiences. The researcher begins with more general concepts from sociological and cultural studies literatures and then draws upon concepts from the educational literature. These concepts are: culture, identity and identity formations; masculinities; Black culture and racial stereotyping. The next section sets out and reflects on the question of academic achievement and British born, African Caribbean boys in schools. The researcher begins by discussing statistics from *Ethnicity and Education: The Evidence of Minority Ethnic Pupils' aged 5-16*, 2006. This leads onto an examination of current debates that simplistically compare 'Black male failure' and 'Black female success' (Mac an Ghaill, 1999; hooks, 2004). Looking at earlier work in the literature, including that from Black feminists, reveals a more complex picture. It is suggested that more recently a discourse of 'failing masculinity' has been important in influencing how educational statistics on academic achievement are explained by the media, the government and within schools. Also, it is suggested that alongside comparisons between Black males and females, it is important to look at the question of academic achievement among white pupils and other ethnic minority groups. This, then leads on to a broader discussion of the literature on Black boys and the schooling process including an examination of Black boys' responses in terms of peer group support to racism and the implementation of multi-cultural and anti-racist strategies (Nagle, 2009). In turn, the researcher explores parental and

community responses to the schooling of Black boys, within the important context of Black youth organizations and Black supplementary schools. The final section identifies key areas and issues which the literature to date generally fails to address and where this study will seek in part to address.

## **Theoretical perspectives: Key concepts**

### **Culture, Identity and Identity Formations**

The term culture is one of the most difficult and contested concepts in the social sciences and humanities, which is often defined against the concept of nature (Williams, 1963). While anthropologists have stressed shared values of a society, more elite definitions associate culture with traditional literature and arts of 'high culture' sociologists have developed understandings of culture as the lived 'experience of everyday life', speaking of mass culture or popular culture (Hall, 1997; Brah et al, 1999). Early social science work examined culture in relation to socialization, which was concerned with the learning of a society's norms and values. Giddens (1993, p60) describes socialization as: 'the process whereby the helpless infant gradually becomes a self-aware, knowledgeable person, skilled in the ways of the culture into which she or he is born'. The family, work, community and peer-groups have all been researched to understand processes of socialization but perhaps one of the most important formal agents of socializing young people into society's culture is education (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). The term culture became widely used during the 1970s, suggesting different meanings depending on context, including class culture, popular culture, youth culture, gender culture and multi-culture (Du Gay, 1997). During the 1970s and 1980s many researchers, for example in education, examined different cultures, including class, race and gender, to help explain institutional inequalities (Willis, 1977; Amos and Parmar, 1981; Fuller, 1984; Hammersley and Woods, 1984; see Arnot and Mac an Ghaill, 2006).

More recently in the social sciences, what has been called the 'cultural turn' seems to have moved away from questions of institutional inequalities to examine cultural differences (Gilroy, 1992; Mercer, 1994). For some theorists, such as Bradley (1996), this has meant a move away from social class to explore more seriously questions of gender, race and sexuality. She welcomes the higher profile for the latter but argues for the need to bring these perspectives together. Hall, (1996, p439) provides a definition of culture with this new emphasis on language, culture,

representation and difference. He writes that: 'By culture....I mean the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations and customs of any specific society. I also mean the contradictory forms of common sense which have taken root in and helped shape popular culture'. This more recent understanding of culture has placed an emphasis on identity and meaning. One of the key questions of recent research is to examine how cultural identities are produced for individuals and communities. For example, Kath Woodward (2000) entitles her edited collection: *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation*. She places her text within current rapid global and local social, political and technological change, suggesting three important questions: how are identities formed? To what extent can we shape our own identities? and, are there particular uncertainties about identity at this moment in the UK?

Jenkins (2004), who draws on the work of Barth (1969), Tajfel (1981) and Cohen, (1994) claims that identity was one of the central themes to emerge during the 1990s, with changing and new identities high on the academic and political agenda. He notes:

Everybody has something to say: anthropologists, geographers, historians, philosophers, political scientists, psychologists, sociologists. From debates about the modernity of self identity to the postmodern and postcolonial fascination with difference, from feminist deconstructions of social conventions to urgent attempts to understand the apparent resurgence of nationalism and ethnic politics, the field is crowded (p.8).

Jenkins also argues that the term identity may be misleading in that it suggests something static. Hence, he emphasises the term identification, suggesting an active process between individuals and collectivities.

Hall, the former director of the CCCS, in the University of Birmingham, is one of the most outstanding scholars in the field providing new theoretical perspectives on how social groups form contemporary identity formations (1991, 1997). He challenges conventional sociological and psychological accounts with their emphasis on a shared historical culture and the search for an authentic true self. For Hall, in current societies, cultural identities as well as having aspects in common also have differences, including around issues of class, gender as well as ethnicity. Hence, when we look at how people produce their identity, we need to examine a range of complex processes (Mirza, 2009; Brah et al, 1999).

As pointed out earlier, there has presently in the social sciences, been a shift away from looking at class divisions to a focus on cultural differences, around identities of gender, race and sexuality (Barrett and Phillips, 1992). This has also included a move to include social groups that have tended to be less visible in research terms, often because they – whites, men, heterosexuals – were groups with power, who presented themselves as the ‘norm’ (Bonnett, 2000). In relation to these social groups, Mercer (1990, p43) argues that: ‘identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experiences of doubt and uncertainty’. This doubt and uncertainty has partly developed in response to anti-racist, feminist and gay liberation politics (Rutherford, 1990).

### **Masculinities**

During the 1990s in Britain there was an increased visibility about men and masculinity as being gendered categories. However, as major male theorists pointed out, the key starting point of understanding masculinity has been developed by feminist scholars who strived to ensure the concept of gender was seen as of key importance in understanding the social world (Hearn and Morgan, 1990; Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1997). Bradley (1996, p25) defines gender in the following terms: ‘Gender refers to the varied and complex arrangements between men and women, encompassing the organisation of reproduction, the sexual divisions of labour and the cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity’. She describes how earlier feminists coined the term patriarchy to illustrate that power relations were at the centre of social arrangements between men in institutions, such as the state, law, education, workplace, marriage and family life, etc (Oakley, 1972; Cockburn, 1983; Mama, 1984). A key political argument being made is that if women’s lives are to change, then men must also change. Bradley also points out that a range of different styles of feminism, including Black, lesbian and post-structuralist feminists, contested the meaning of terms like gender and patriarchy (Carby, 1982; hooks, 1984; Wittig, 1981; Butler, 1990). So, by the 1990s when there were major debates about men and masculinity, academics had a rich vocabulary to draw upon. However, as Hearn and Kimmel (2006, p53) point out: ‘Studies of men and masculinities stand in a complex relation to women’s studies and feminism’, because male theorists often fail to acknowledge the latter work.

Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) in their book, *Men and Masculinities* provide a useful framework to make sense of the explosion of academic work in this area. They maintain that current comments in the media and the academy are often underpinned by sex role theory. For them, sociological theories are able to show the limits of this historical approach which makes the assumption that individuals are made up of a list of fixed gender attributes that can be identified. So, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill argue that:

Hence a wide range of individual men and male groups, such as effeminate boys and gays, are seen as *not having enough masculinity*, which is explained in terms of deficient levels of testosterone, inadequate role models, or overpowering mothers. In contrast Black boys and working-class boys are seen as having *too much masculinity* (pp7-8).

A main point suggested here is that masculinity cannot be simply generalized against femininity (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001). In order to make sense of men and masculinity, the concepts have to be placed in a historical and cultural context. For example, Skelton (2001, pp40-41) sets out a historical typology of changing masculinities. These include: Conservative; Men's Rights; Spiritual; Pro-feminist; Socialist and Group Specific. A key move away from sex role theory has been to acknowledge that masculinity and femininity need to be understood in the plural, in other words multiplicities of femininities and masculinities. One of the most important contributions to this field of inquiry has been the pro-feminist writer, Connell (1987, 1995, 2000). In his work he claims that we should think of masculinities not simply as different to femininities, but to look at the former in terms of power relations between men and women but also among men. He coined the term masculine hegemony, meaning that in different societies particular styles of masculinity were dominant. Other theorists have addressed the complex inter-connections between gender, race and class, stressing the multiple dimensions of masculinity (hooks, 1995; Marriott, 2000; Mutua, 2006). More recently, post-structuralist and post-modern theorists have spoken of deconstructing the individual categories and arguing that they should be thought of as existing simultaneously (Martino and Meyenn, 2001; Whitehead, 2002). So, for example, if you are thinking of a Black boy, at the same time he will have an ethnic, gender, class and sexual identity. Others, such as Mac Innes (1998, p40) argue that we need to shift away from the language of the myth of masculinity, maintaining that: 'just as there is no such thing as masculinity, neither are there any such things as masculinities'.

## **Black culture**

As Grosvenor (1997, p10) argues: ‘....the term Black is, in itself, a construction, that its use as a descriptor or classificatory concept is contested. The term “white” is similarly constructed. It is also recognised that these categories implicitly imprison individuals within the closed dialectic of “race”’. At a descriptive level the term ‘Black’ is used to refer to people of African and Caribbean ancestry and parentage. Historically, (Black) African/Caribbeans in the United Kingdom were predominantly the descendants of West Africans captured or obtained in trade from procurers in Africa. They were then shipped by European slave traders to the West Indies to English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese colonies founded from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and on their arrival they were severely exploited, being placed in the lowest strata of these societies (Sallah and Howson, 2007, p39). Attempts to understand more contemporary understandings of the meaning of the concept of Black need to acknowledge the influence of these early experiences on the way in which African/Caribbean’s have been racially exploited, marginalised and pathologised. At the same time, US racial politics and more specifically, Black movements were of major importance in developing contemporary understandings of the centrality of the development of Black resistance to inherited forms of racial exploitation. Edgar (1981, p218) writes of this, arguing that: ‘Without Black brotherhood, there would have been no sisterhood; without Black Power and Black pride there would have been no Gay Power and Gay Pride’. For hooks (1995), feminist women of colour tend to be excluded from this pivotal period in which the meaning of Black was re-imagined. Within a British context, studies were carried out, based on a political understanding of the term Black, as inclusive of people of African, Caribbean and South Asian origin (Carby, 1982; Brah and Minhas, 1985). These studies identify the systematic racism and collective resistance that Black people experienced within white dominated institutions, including workplaces, schools and public debates about immigration and welfare rights within Multi-racist Britain (Cohen and Bains, 1988; Gill et al, 1992). Over the last few decades, key cultural theorists, such as Gilroy (1987, 2000) and Hall (1992) have led debates on the changing representations of the concept of Black and Black culture. This debate is seen as the first moment in Black cultural politics, marked by the development of a common Black identity in response to the pervasiveness of being constructed as unspoken ‘others’. The second phase is marked by diversity and differentiation of the experiences of Black subjects. Hall emphasises, that: ‘What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social

experiences and cultural identities which compose the category “Black”, that is, the recognition that “Black” is an essentially politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantee in nature’ (p. 254). At the same time, for Hall the new Black subject needs to be understood not simply through the category of ethnicity but the inter-connections between the latter and other categories, including gender, class and sexuality.

Social researchers have used Hall’s analysis in carrying out studies on youth cultures and schooling cultures to explore the suggested plurality of Black identity among young people, suggesting that new Black ethnicities have developed (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Back, 1996). This work links to new theoretical perspectives on contemporary identities in post-modern societies, as outlined above. More recently, Youdell (2004) in her paper. ‘Identity traps or how Black students fail: the interactions between the biographical, sub-cultural and learner identities’, explores the complex construction of young men’s schooling, in relation to contemporary notions of ‘Black masculinity’. Similar work is being carried out within an American context, with the focus on a ‘hip-hop Black masculinity’ seen to be a major concern in the media (Brown, 2006). Many Black feminists, while acknowledging the contradictory location of men of colour within the white sex/gender order, address the regressive elements of the new Black youth culture and more particularly, the high profile of rap music and hip-hop. They suggest that the latter is seen as over valuing an intensification of white patriarchal values of aggression and competitive individualism that refuses to engage with the complex interconnection between race, gender and sexuality, thus limiting the possibilities for a wide range of Black male forms of identity to emerge (hooks, 2004; Mirza, 2009).

### **Racial Stereotyping**

Reading through the diverse writing on race, ethnicity and racism, one term that frequently appears is that of racialisation. In the early literature, Banton (1977), writing from a race-relations perspective, used the term racialization with reference to the use of the idea of race to structure people’s perceptions of different populations. In the 1980s, Reeves (1983) critically explored the term within the context of British racial discourse. From a post-structuralist position, in the 1990s, Keith (1993, p239) maintained that: ‘The process of racialisation is also of particular significance

because it is one of the principal means through which subordination is produced and reproduced in an unjust society'. However, one of the major contributions has been that of Miles (1989), who sets out to critically explore the signification of racism and accompanying concepts, including scientific theories of race and racialisation. Miles (1982) initially used the term to capture the post 1945 labour migration to Britain, exploring racial categorisation. He builds on this to suggest that: 'I use the concept of racialisation to refer to a dialectical process by which meaning is attributed to particular biological features of human beings, as a result of which individuals may be assigned a general category of persons which produces itself biologically' (1989, p76).

More specifically in relation to schooling, Grosvenor (1997) has explored the usefulness of the concept of racialisation within the historical analysis of racism and educational policy in post 1945 Britain. He draws upon the work of Miles (1989), to argue that: 'racialisation is a process through which exploitation and exclusion, physical and verbal abuse, and discrimination, can become manifest' (p9). Also, important has been the work of Gillborn (1995), who has critically identified the shift during the 1990s to processes of deracialisation of educational policy, in which the term 'race' becomes coded within various cultural references. In doing so, he anticipates the New Labour position, noting that: 'Deracialised notions of culture, language, heritage and the nation construct a policy terrain in which "race" equality is effectively removed from the agenda' (p29).

One area of seeing the term racialisation translated into practice is in relation to the historical and current stereotyping of minority ethnic communities. According to Maud Blair (2001) the general stereotypes that seemed to have been operating within British society were that 'Black men are seen as violent, aggressive, hyper-sexual, muggers and drug pushers' (Blair, 2001, p81). These stereotypes existed in the public consciousness. They were also part of the way Black boys generally saw themselves and this affected their self-esteem, self-image and self-control. Sollis (1996) argued that 'African/Caribbean boys grow up in a society that portrays Black men in a negative manner and success is only associated with being White. This results in poor self-image, leads to a lack of confidence and poor motivation whilst they are growing up as boys and when they grow into adults' (p32). The question still to be asked is: where does this poor self-image in African/Caribbean boys and men develop from? Black youth are also major consumers of the media as well as their White and Asian counterparts, but feel very much let down by it. When Rasekoala (1997)



did her research, the following comments were typical from her participants: 'The only time you see a Black person on TV, is when they are doing sports or music, or as criminals. You never see them as doctors or lawyers or doing anything important' (p28). This led to many people thinking that Black people are mainly involved in working class professions and in turn this led many African/Caribbean boys to develop negative images of themselves. For example, Annobil-Dodoo and Moore (2003) reported in *New Nation* newspaper, about a TV documentary on Channel 4 called "*Thug Life-The Crisis Facing Young Black Men*" which showed a reporter visiting Britain's inner city estates to ask Black youngsters why they were killing each other. However, because the programme failed to show positive, respectable, hard-working Black youngsters who also lived in these areas, they argued it might have led both 'Black and non-Black viewers into believing that every Black male under 20 is either a robber, drug pusher, killer-or even all three' (p10). An African/Caribbean boy named Mark Duwell, aged 14, told Annobil-Dodoo and Moore, "...Thug Life showed the bad side of Black boys", but he also goes on to say that "... it's not just Black boys that behave like that. I've seen the same round ... White people on buses getting up to the same sort of stuff. Black people are just being used as scapegoats...I've managed to keep myself out of trouble and...I want to be an ICP programmer and I want to go to University and get some qualifications in that area." Annobil-Dodoo and Moore reported other Black boys having held similar opinions too (Cited in *New Nation*, 2003, p10). The above illustrates that the media, can perpetuate negative stereotypes by not concentrating on positive Black images of successful young African/Caribbean youths in society who are highly motivated to achieve and therefore not involved in illegal activities or following the negative stereotypical role. Moreover, Annobil-Dodoo (2003) reported on how renowned and established positive Black adult role models, like fashion designer Wale Adeyemi and *Aimhigher* PR and Brand Ambassador Adam Rutherford, were encouraging those Black youngsters who followed negative stereotypes to change their behaviour and 'to get themselves involved in higher education'. They also gave their support to the 'Aimhigher programme', a government initiative which aimed to encourage people from families who did not have a history of going into higher education to consider going to University' (Annobil-Dodoo, 2003 (a), p6).

However, it is still difficult to get non-Black and Black youngsters away from a thinking pattern, which involves seeing Black people in negative stereotypes. This pattern is also linked to the way that the media is also

involved in constantly contributing towards portraying famous Black celebrities in negative stereotypical roles as well. For example:

Michael Jackson the King of Pop and then the alleged child molester of boys; Michael Jordan as the king of the basketball court and then the voracious gambler; Bill Cosby as the Model TV dad and then the repentant adulterer; Colin Powell as the model straight up soldier turned coy politician; Jesse Jackson as heir to Martin Luther King Jr and then spoiler of the Democratic Party; Irvin "Magic" Johnson as the smiling next door boy turned superstar who spilt HIV-contaminated blood on to the gym floor; and many more Ron Brown, Rodney King, OJ Simpson, Mike Tyson, Al Sharpton, Johnny Cochran, Louis Farrakhan, Clarence Thomas, Marion Barry, Coleman Young, Don King, Tupac Shakur, and Black police officers accused of harassing and raping White female subordinates in the 1997 military sex scandals, and so on. These stories of famous Black men are broadcasted across the country (Ross, 1998, p605).

Such reporting makes it even harder for African/Caribbean boys, especially at school to 'challenge teachers' low expectations of them, as they knew teachers picked up on the negative images of their race from the media. Hence, according to Rasekoala, they were treating them differently at school (Rasekoala, 1997, p28) and as a result of teachers negative treatment towards them, their self-esteem went down and the Black boys then started to copy the negative stereotypes that were portrayed against them even more which resulted in their underachievement (Sewell, 1997). As a consequence, researchers have suggested new ways should be introduced whereby pupils' self-esteem can be built up within school by teachers (Klein, 1999).

Armstrong (2003) reported in *New Nation* on some solutions to this problem by suggesting that when Black boys' self-esteem went down, they really then needed more Black teachers at schools who could inspire them to achieve in education. The former head of Ofsted, Chris Woodhead, said that when "...Black kids see men and women in positions of authority...they see they've "made it." They are role models and that is good." As a consequence Black boys would realise then, that their Black teachers have not picked up on negative stereotypes because they themselves have entered into positions of authority, overcoming many challenges and adversities to get there and as a consequence Black boys' self-esteem could then automatically be improved as well. Richard Majors made a similar point in an interview with Armstrong:

'...Community workers in Birmingham are now...helping to set up Britain's first all Black school' in order to show more Black teachers as

role models to Black pupils' who could boost their self-esteem and thereby 'drive up poor exam results among Afro-Caribbean pupils'... Schools such as Kingsdale in Southwark and St Martin-in-the field in Lambeth, both under Black leadership, shine (Armstrong, 2003, p6-7).

On the other hand, it was important to note that Armstrong also highlighted success associated with the presence of White teachers: 'Michael Wilshaw, a White head-teacher, raised attainment levels at his school where 60% of the student body were African/Caribbean'. Wilshaw also rejected the idea that Black-run schools are the solution. However, Wilshaw did emphasise that what all schools needed were more 'Black and ethnic minority teachers to help Black children succeed in school' as they were seen as positive role models to many Black pupils' (Armstrong, 2003, p6-7). In addition, Black mentors were also seen as a solution to this problem, as they also worked effectively like Black teachers by improving performances of this group in education as well as being seen as positive role models to them (Kane, 1994; Garate-Serafini et al, 2001; Majors, Wilkinson and Gulam, 2001; Tomlinson, 2008).

Although classroom issues can be resolved in terms of how negative stereotypes can be overcome in schools, nevertheless when considering the impact of negative stereotypes within society i.e. outside school, it led to even more damaging outcomes because of the development of racist attitudes. Ghouri (1996) reported:

'Police officers say some form of racist attack, be it verbal or physical, takes place every twenty-eight minutes. The real figure could be much higher as so few cases are reported with even fewer leading to prosecution. Independent monitoring organizations estimate around seventy thousand acts of racist violence and harassment occurs every year' (Ghouri, 1996, p22).

The murder of Stephen Lawrence 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1993 (and more recently that of Anthony Walker 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2005) is perhaps the most well known example of a young African/Caribbean man being murdered by racists. This case also saw the acceptance in some areas of the establishment of the idea of Institutional racism in the UK (McPherson, 1999, p2). For recent information on racist murders, see also (<http://www.irr.org.uk/2002/november/ak000008.html>) and for information on 'institutional racism' see Braham, Rattansi and Skellington (1992), D' Souza (1995), Green (2000), Mason (2000), Pilkington (2003), Solomos, (2003) and Law, Phillips and Turney (2004). A connection between the incidence of racist attacks and the continued circulation in British society of negative stereotypes

relating to Black males should not be discounted. That said, Aguiar also reported in *The Voice* newspaper that:

Fears are rising within the Black community that an entire generation of young Black men could be lost to gun violence. Vivian Michaels - whose son Sika died of gun violence caused by Black youths said: "...The Black man has turned against himself and if this doesn't stop... there will be a generation of young Black people in prison or in early graves...An argument shouldn't be solved by using a gun. Young Black men should change their thinking" (Aguiar, 2003 (a), p4).

Noting the above evidence one can claim that while such murders were not racially motivated, it is still the case that Black males appear to be fulfilling the negative stereotypes that were directed against them.

There have been attempts by Black celebrities to set a positive example and encourage young Black people to fight this issue. Aguiar and Holloway, reported in *The Voice* on two famous African/Caribbean men in the music industry. Asher D and Reggae legend Luciano, urged young Black men to give up their guns and see them as positive Black role models who were not involved in gun crime (Aguiar and Holloway, 2003, p8). Similarly Annobil-Dodoo (2003) reported in *New Nation* about an African/Caribbean male rapper from south London named MC Slim Dutty, who was also seen as a positive role model to many Black men. He had recently produced '*Blood Puddles* - a single video portraying the consequences young Black men faced when they get caught up in gun crime, drugs and gang violence'. Dutty supposed if he was regarded as a positive Black role model then Black people would listen to his lyrics and follow his advice because as he said: "The lyrics are designed to provoke thought and if they manage to stop just one person taking the life of another, then I'll feel I've achieved something very positive" (Annobil-Dodoo, 2003 (b), p5).

Negative stereotypes severely affect Black people, because they suffer the consequences of this in society. However, positive Black role models are seen as a good solution to minimise the negative effects of such stereotypes. While research has shown the impact of negative stereotypes on Black boys' achievement in schools not much has been said in the literature about how Black boys could be influenced by positive stereotypes which are present outside school and which could influence their education in a positive way. Some institutions (supplementary schools and youth organisations) might have positive portraits of Black people, which this research aims to investigate, as having too many

negative Black stereotypes might also motivate Black boys to seek positive stereotypes. The role of positive Black stereotypes outside school in influencing Black boys' education is an aspect which existing studies have paid less attention to, and which will be explored in this study. Furthermore, Black parents could also influence their children to counteract negative stereotypes against Black people, an issue which will also be explored in this study.

Having set out the different theoretical and political perspectives that have provided general frameworks to make sense of Black boys in British schooling, the next section specifically critically explores the literature on Black boys' experiences of the schooling process in mainstream secondary institutions.

### **Schooling achievement and Black boys**

The school achievement of African/Caribbean boys as indicated earlier has been an issue for many decades. A range of explanations have been offered by educational theorists as to why African/Caribbean boys have had difficulty generating the necessary degree of compliance with institutional imperatives, since they continue to be amongst the lowest achievers in the English education system. The discussion below refers to statistics from *Ethnicity and Education: The Evidence on Minority Ethnic Pupils' aged 5-16*, 2006.

Figure 1

ETHNIC GROUP	KEY STAGE 1: % EXPECTED LEVEL				KEY STAGE 2: % EXPECTED LEVEL				KEY STAGE 3: % EXPECTED LEVEL				KEY STAGE 4: % OF 15 YEAR OLDS ACHIEVING: 5+A*-C GCSEs	
	Reading	Writing	Maths	English	Maths	Science	English	Maths	Science	Maths	Science	English		
<b>White</b>	85	83	91	78	74	87	72	74	68				52	
White British	86	83	91	78	75	87	72	74	68				52	
Irish	85	83	91	82	78	88	76	76	70				58	
Traveller of Irish Heritage	31	29	50	23	23	38	26	24	23				30	
Gypsy/Roma	45	43	64	30	25	45	19	23	17				14	
Any White Other background	80	78	89	75	73	83	71	72	64				55	
<b>Mixed</b>	85	82	90	79	74	86	72	71	65				50	
White and Black Caribbean	83	79	88	76	69	84	66	65	58				40	
White and Black African	84	81	89	78	72	85	72	71	64				47	
White and Asian	89	85	92	84	80	89	80	81	75				66	
Any other mixed background	86	82	91	80	75	87	73	73	66				52	
<b>Asian</b>	81	78	86	74	69	79	68	69	57				55	
Indian	89	86	92	83	80	87	80	80	71				67	
Pakistani	77	73	83	68	61	72	58	59	46				45	
Bangladeshi	76	74	83	71	66	77	62	62	50				48	
Any other Asian Background	83	80	90	75	77	82	69	76	65				60	
<b>Black</b>	79	74	84	70	63	77	62	58	48				39	
Black Caribbean	81	75	85	70	61	78	61	57	48				36	
Black African	78	74	83	69	64	75	62	59	48				43	
Any other Black background	81	76	85	71	64	80	62	61	51				36	
<b>Chinese</b>	90	88	95	81	89	89	79	90	78				74	
<b>Any other ethnic group</b>	75	71	85	66	70	76	61	67	55				48	
Unclassified	77	73	84	71	68	81	65	67	60				47	
<b>All pupils</b>	85	82	90	77	73	86	71	73	66				52	