

**What informs success for African-  
Caribbean Black-British girls and  
their mothers in the final year of  
primary school?**

**Success through resistance**

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### **For Daddy, 25 /12/34 - 20/12/15 & Mommy, Romans 8:38**

*No in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor principalities neither the present nor the future has any powers. Neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*

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And Martha Kay, always.....

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how the understanding of success, held by eight African Caribbean Black British girls in their final year of primary school, supports them to navigate a route to it. Key findings are that, for these girls, success was framed by the societal discourse of meritocracy and despite the contradictions, education was regarded by them as the primary route to success. The strategies the girls use to negotiate a route to success highlight how their relationships; with friends, teachers and their mothers are important to these negotiations. This thesis highlights the gendered, and racialised nature of the society in which African Caribbean Black British girls live. The findings indicate how these African Caribbean Black British girls engage a repertoire of resources to; impact positively on their relationships with their teachers, negotiate meaningful relationships between themselves and their contemporaries and to negotiate a route to success in a hostile environment

The girls' friendships, with other African Caribbean Black British children, are central to their survival in the hostile environment of the school. The mothers support their daughters by monitoring their homework and friendships with other children, particularly African Caribbean Black British children. In addition to monitoring homework and friendships, the mothers also restrict their daughters' use of Creolized Caribbean Dialect. Upon choosing secondary schooling, some mothers choose to bus their girls to schools outside of the city catchment area to attend predominantly White schools. Despite their concerns about their daughters' friendships and use of Creolized Caribbean dialect, the mothers encourage their daughters to develop a positive African Caribbean Black British identity in their quest for success. These nuanced negotiations reflect the intersectional positions occupied by these girls and complicate the ideas underlying what success means to them. The conclusions drawn from this analysis confirm the importance of mothers and community in the girls' orientations towards success and emphasise the areas that schools can address in supporting African Caribbean Black British girls in their move to secondary school.

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# 1 Chapter Research Aim and Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to provide analysis concerning how success is informed for African Caribbean Black British girls in their final year at primary school. I am keen to understand how success is articulated through their perceptions of the impacts of race and gender oppression. Finally, I want to understand how these girls negotiate a route to success in a context within which they, and the African Caribbean communities of which they are apart, are devalued. The following questions guided my research:

- 1. How do African Caribbean Black British girls in a city in the East Midlands understand success as they make the transition to secondary school?*
- 2. When African Caribbean Black British girls in the last year of primary school are confronted with racism and sexism do they maintain a belief in the possibility of their success and if so how is this articulated?*
- 3. In contexts of education, how do the girls' friendships impact upon their negotiations towards success?*
- 4. What do the girls' mothers do to; support their daughter quests for success, to mediate the identities of these African Caribbean Black British girls and how they prepare themselves to achieve success?*

To develop this study of African Caribbean Black-girls in their final year of primary school, the research methods I engaged included; participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews as well as ethnographic conversations with the girls' mothers and other people in their households. My research was undertaken across multiple areas to provide a rich 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of their lives. This research undertaking led to a more meaningful and intricate understanding of how the girls understood and represented their world. The study took place not only their homes and social settings but also other educational areas such as after-school clubs and community events. I was also invited to; attend church events, to go shopping or to the cinema and important social occasions such as birthday parties. The study allowed, for the development of a multidimensional and

ultimately more intimate portrait of their lives and experiences to emerge (Nayak 2003). I shall now provide an outline of the rationale for this study and summarised some of the underpinning issues in my biography that affected the research process.

## **1.1 Rationale**

The experiences of African Caribbean Black British girls in the final year of primary school have received little attention in British research on education. As a result, little is known about how these girls experience school or indeed make sense of the imperative for success as they transition to the secondary level. Even less is known about how they address the particular challenges they face resulting from their gender and its intersection with race and other aspects of their identities. By drawing on data gathered from 8 African Caribbean Black British girls in their last year at primary school, this research explores how they organised and understood their relationships with their teachers, their friends and their mothers to achieve success.

The idea that equality of opportunity exists and that to access it African Caribbean Black British girls have only to study diligently is challenged in this thesis. This view of meritocracy is premised on individualism, competition, personal responsibility, free choice, the exercise of agency and strategic aspirations. The belief in the overriding salience of meritocracy is a major component of what Shiner and Madood (2006) describe as the migrant mentality. Indeed the girls in this study various time referred to the homelands of their parents and grandparents suggesting that they want to be successful to vindicate the efforts of their parents and grandparents who had migrated to Britain. However, in addition to the migrant mentality, the convergence of dominant Whiteness is also salient.

As Gilborn (2008) has argued, Whiteness and the systems it perpetuates maintains dominant ideologies. These ideologies concern who should and does receive power and privilege. The privileges of Whiteness are maintained in cultures through; power dynamics within language, religion, class and race relations Shiner and Madood (2006). The privilege of Whiteness is entwined with the notion of meritocracy. Influenced by this ethos, particularly through their schooling, African Caribbean Black British girls and their parents come to expect that the educational, social and material successes they seek will be realised. However, the path to such realisation is contingent on many social, institutional and structural factors beyond an individual's control. In this formula, success is remarkably precarious when we take into

account how race and gender operate in their lives. It is the contention of this thesis that African Caribbean Black British girls in school face a particular conundrum. This dilemma relates to how they might attain success, in a school environment that devalues them, while simultaneously developing a positive sense of themselves as African Caribbean Black British girls. This study contributes to the canon of literature regarding the effects of gender and race on the manner in which African Caribbean Black British girls define and negotiate a route towards the success promised by meritocratic education in 21st century Britain.

## **1.2 Introduction**

The thesis looks at how eight African Caribbean Black British girls, in a city in the East Midlands of Britain, marshal their resources to negotiate a route to success. I argue that the girls' desire for, and understanding of success, led to them to take pragmatic approaches to negotiating school processes and relationships. By describing their everyday experiences, this study contributes to an understanding of how African Caribbean Black British girls' perceptions of, and negotiations towards, success are shaped in gendered and racialised practices. This thesis looks at the salient aspects of their relationships with school-based authority figures, their friends and their mothers, through a Black feminist lens. Viewing the girls' experiences through a Black feminist lens assists me to consider the way that discourses of gender and race are important to their practices.

In this opening chapter, I begin by telling 'a' truth of my interest in the notion of success. I will then turn my attention to the part my biography has played in shaping this study. This discussion will continue with an outline of my use of the term African Caribbean Black British to denote the participants in this research and conclude with a description of the structure of the rest of the thesis.

## **1.3 Exploring Success: Auto/Biographical Beginnings**

I had expected that finding the answer to the question in the title "**What informs success for African Caribbean Black British Girls and their mothers in the final year of primary school?**" was going to be rather less difficult than it has proven to be. Unpacking what made this question important and worth exploring, has led me to question my assumptions. The assumptions I had made about race, success, gender, meritocracy and my mother's various motivations have, over the course of this research, been fragmented, causing me to review my experiences through different lenses. The changed lens has left me with a deeper appreciation

of my parents while generating rather more questions than I had at the start and as I will show some answers.

This research has been something of a “back to the future” journey. A journey filled with insights into my political development, as well as insights into the changing sameness of racism in 21st century Britain (Gilroy 1993). Claiming and naming ourselves, setting ourselves apart from, while remaining integral to, the categories of Black and female has been, for me at least, an ongoing debate. It seems that this, my internal debate, has resonance with the girls in this study.

As Miller (1995) suggests through her concept of the ‘autobiography of the question’, it is important to note the part that a researcher’s biography plays in the development of research and writing (see also Coffey, 1999; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). My autobiographical beginnings are best summarised thus;

“Books are written from particular standpoints...it is important for readers to understand where we are coming from, in terms of who we are as much as in terms of what we think”. (Epstein and Johnson 1998: 7)

For my mother and indeed my family, academia, in the form of educational qualifications, represented the best route out of poverty. Though there was always the recognition that education was only one part of being successful, being able to anticipate and manage the challenges of unfairness and poor treatment was equally important. My mother would counter our complaints concerning school and teachers from both my primary and secondary years with, “They have what you want, you have to kiss arse before you can kick it”. What I have come to understand, is that my mother was trying to tell us that one has to understand and be involved in the system before one can transcend it. Her advice, as I learned it was to lay low, take all the learning we could from teachers and then change the situation when we were in better, more powerful, positions. Fuller (1980) Gillborn (1988) Graham, (2007) have each argued that African-Caribbean Black British children, those born in the Britain emerged into families that experienced racism and also developed strategies to deal the everyday macro and microaggressions of racism. My mum’s approach, the one she tried to impart to us her children, was of constant vigilance.

My parents were concerned about their children’s experiences in schools. As migrants, they had ventured to Britain with the intention of working for five years and then planned to return

to the island of their birth to spend or invest wealth they had created. The poignant experience for many, including my parents, was that they earned meagre wages and this made the return journey difficult. Further, many families, like my own, balanced their hardships, with the opportunities and education available for their children. For many, the decision was, that Britain could offer greater opportunities than the Caribbean (Mirza 1992). The legacy of empire meant that many migrant people believe the British education system to be of higher value than the system and the qualifications available in the Caribbean. However as Mirza (1992) has argued, these same parents were not so equipped for was the racism suffered by their children at the hand's of racist teachers and the system of education they maintained. Discrimination was not only experienced in school. The law and legal processes were also a challenge; justice was hard to come by.

#### **1.4 George Lindo: A Political Awakening**

The African Caribbean community in Bradford never exceeded six thousand. The differences amongst the individuals in that community were not only, age, class and gender, there were also island differences. Like the Caribbean characters in Selvon's fictional "Lonely Londoners" (1956) my mother noted that she had to come all the way to England to meet a Bajan, (from Barbados) and stated that she had never heard of Dominica before coming here. The distinctions between individuals and communities in her native Jamaican were, in Britain, swept away. Suddenly she and her unchosen contemporaries were all West Indian. Suddenly, for my mother, people with whom she felt no connection were living in the same shared house and using her bathroom.

The George Lindo campaign was the first campaign I was aware of and the first miscarriage of justice I heard my parents speak of, where race and racism were central to the cause for the campaign. My father was, I thought, on nodding terms with pretty much anyone who was Black and would "nod" back. However, I later discovered he would, "nod on" to Jamaicans, people with whom he had worked and people with whom he had made the initial 1961 journey to Bradford. George Lindo's parents were such people. 1978 was an interesting if difficult time. In 1978 a factory worker, George Lindo, was framed, by the Bradford Police force, for robbing a betting shop. He was taken to court and received a prison sentence, and a community campaign ensued. George was freed on appeal, and the Bradford Police force was successfully sued by his family (Howe 2000).

In 1978, in Bradford, campaigning for the freedom of a wrongly incarcerated Black man was not the norm. It was, however, part of the continuity of community political activism that included Saturday Schools, community associations, island specific organisations and church. In my bit of Bradford, what counted as politics, what counted as activism at the time paid little heed to the work women did in the community. The churches, the Saturday schools, the island associations, all primarily led by men, had a predominately female following/congregation. These gendered responsibilities set Brah's (1996) suggestion firmly within my analytical lens. Brah suggests that Black feminisms in Britain represent struggles over the political frameworks for analysis and begs the question of what can legitimately be analysed, what is an appropriate focus?

Each of the community led initiatives sought to assert the place and nature of the African Caribbean community in the city. From each set, at public meetings and in private conversations the view was expressed that, "this community lacks leadership and unity". My mother presented an alternative view. It was not; she argued that we lack leadership, we had, she suggested, "too many Moses' and not enough Israelites," everyone wanted to be the boss. My mother managed to negotiate a fine line between being disparaging of her African Caribbean migrant contemporaries, while yet being proud and affirming of her own identity as an African Caribbean woman.

The campaigning was beset with contradictions. Sections of the community believed that George was guilty, parts believed him to be innocent but were fearful that his release would cause the police, in search of the culprit, to harass them. There were sections of the community who thought, arguing for his release would be both futile and ultimately detrimental. The community saw the exercise as futile because they believed African Caribbean Black people were not justly handled by the local constabulary. The perceived detriment related to making ourselves visible and so attracting negative, unwarranted, attention from agencies promoting law and order. Our relationship with the police was as contradictory as our relationship with education, we were all intrinsically afraid, indeed distrustful of the police, despite our belief in the efficacy of British law and order.

My mother had a strange relationship with the campaign. While she wanted George to be freed, she was rather afraid that her involvement would lead to her being targeted, that campaigning may impact upon her at work somehow. However, despite her contradictory

view that, campaigning brought her too close to the people in the community, she was an active campaigner because she believed that what had happened to George just wasn't right.

My limited, though very vocal, participation in the "Free George Lindo" campaign, started me thinking. I began to wonder why it was that while the men were in the foreground, making speeches and hitting the headlines with the demand for justice, women, African Caribbean women, were the ones ensuring the campaign ran smoothly. Making placards, organising transport, rallying the numbers to attend demonstrations, picketing the courts and the town hall was all, largely, the work of women and their children. I wondered who decided that the campaign roles should be carved up in this way. The activism and placard making that I witnessed got me to thinking, what does success mean and has implications for the notion of success I brought to the research for the thesis. The campaign was successful, George Lindo was freed on appeal. The campaign's success also saw the successful launch of a different kind of politics in the community.

The 1980's saw a more radical Black woman's consciousness develop. This consciousness was one in which Black women could legitimately state that we too had needs and aspirations. We could, and indeed began to articulate our gendered needs alongside and not subsumed to those of our Black brothers (Carby 1982). In my world, we were fighting for our political space. This battle took place on many fronts; the fight was against; White men, particularly those in the local authority, White women who wanted to subsume our struggle to theirs and Black men who were bemused that we were no longer content to make the food and leave them to their serious deliberations.

As I grew and began to wonder what shaped the world(s) I inhabited, my friends became increasingly important. I noted that as with my own family, my friends' mothers were well qualified and had responsible jobs for the greater part, in the NHS while their fathers were factory or bus workers. Also, in the early 1980s youth unemployment began to be a concern. Of course, the concerns regarding youth unemployment in the African Caribbean Black British communities coalesced around African Caribbean Black British young men, and their worklessness, a fate my mother and indeed father wanted to avoid for their boys. Similarly, when in 2002, Dianne Abbot MP commented on the silent catastrophe of bad education affecting Black boys in secondary school, she said that these boys are doing well at the primary level but that in secondary school there is a marked decline. The research into Black boys' educational failure has more latterly concluded that Black students, both girls and boys,



tended to start off their school and educational careers well and show themselves to be able students. For these students, their achievements declined as they progressed through the education system (Wright, Standen and Patel 2010, Gillborn 2008). I did wonder what is it that that the girls in the African Caribbean Black British community, have or know or understand that supports their success.

The contrast between my father's work and my mother's career left me wondering what success meant to them. I wondered why it was that the women in my friends' families were professionally qualified while the fathers were not. I questioned whether they had achieved the success they envisaged for themselves as wide-eyed Jamaican immigrants cut adrift in the hostile motherland. I now know that my parents' ideas of success changed over time. While young, success was not difficult for my parents to articulate. They saw themselves returning to Jamaica after a five-year sojourn, having made enough money to buy a house and pay for the necessities of life. It was after they had retired and I had become a mother myself, I took brave and asked them what success meant and if they felt they had been successful. I was surprised by their answers. For my mother success meant living right with God and for my father having his children grow up to avoid jail, have stable homes and raising their children as opposed to having them raised by social services, were his markers.

For me, success has been rather elusive, never quite being what I thought it would be. Despite the list of qualifications and work experiences I have accumulated, I am, as an adult, always feeling I just missed it, that I am on the cusp of being revealed to be a fraud an interloper. I, perhaps unwisely, took my parents injunction to heart, where, as stated earlier I was told that we have to be twice as good as our White counterparts to be half as well regarded. Like my mother, I have taken some courses and hold currently two masters degrees and few diplomas and certificates. I was elected to the council in the city in which I currently reside. I am the first ever African Caribbean woman to hold office as a city Councilor. Unlike my counterparts, I am always asked to provide identification before being allowed into city hall or other council premises. I wondered about why this should be and have decided it may be because I do not look like a Councilor. African Caribbean, Black, British and female are not contiguous with the office of Councilor. Despite my range of qualifications and my elected position, I did not, do not feel successful. My negotiations with success are a work in progress. I wonder what it is like for girls now, African Caribbean Black and British like me. My experience as a mother with circles of friends who are themselves mothers to African

Caribbean Black British children, tells me that the advice from my parents about needing to be twice as good as my counterparts and needing to understand the system before being able to transcend it remains relevant. I wondered how it is now for African Caribbean Black British girls; I wondered what school is like for them, what do they think success is about and what do they do to get it?

## **1.5 African Caribbean Black British – Categories and Ideas**

The terminology of race, ethnicity, and culture is a continuing debate and will, and I am sure change. Ethnicity is now most often self-classified. Both ethnicity and culture are dynamic (Hall 1990, 1994) it seems unlikely that an enduring taxonomy can be achieved. The nearest to an agreed classification in Britain are the categories used by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, the most recent being in the 2012 census. This is a pragmatic classification that balances ease of data collection against a need to produce data on the population. It is of limited use as a measure of sociocultural differences.

In my undertaking of this study, I choose to use 'African-Caribbean Black British' to denote people of African heritage who were born in the Caribbean or whose parents or grandparents were born in the Caribbean. Black British refers to British people of African origins or heritage, including those of African-Caribbean background, and may include individuals with mixed ancestry. The term has been extensively used since the 1950s, mainly to identify people from former British colonies in the West Indies and Africa. These people are residents of the United Kingdom and consider themselves British. The term Black has historically had many applications as a racial and political label (Wright 2009) and may be used in the wider socio-political context to denote a broader range of non-European populations in Britain, though this is controversial.

I use this term to differentiate individuals of African origin located in the Caribbean from people of Indian origin in the Caribbean – Indo-Caribbeans. The experiences of Indo-Caribbeans' is extensively discussed by Dabydeen (1987). However, the notion of 'African-Caribbean has been, largely inconsistently applied by researchers in Britain. (Agyemang et al., 2005). For some researchers, the term is used to refer to people who are Black and of Caribbean descent, while for others, the term relates to individuals of African and of Caribbean descent. Inhering to this lack of clarity are difficulties when exploring research findings on 'African-Caribbean' communities in Britain. As Hall (1990) suggests, identities

change as discourses about ethnic relations change. In the 1970s African-Caribbean Black British women and men were described as 'West Indian'. This designation was made despite individuals' preference for being identified by their island or country of origin. Later in the 1970's and 1980's these same people became categorised as 'Afro-Caribbean's'. Indeed, all three phrases are often still used interchangeably.

The categories that have been developed in Britain can be argued as a method of identifying people from the Caribbean. However, these categories are not transferable. Recently British census categories have engaged the Black Caribbean as a category. In Britain African-Caribbean children may have one White parent; as a result, adolescents may define themselves as 'mixed heritage' but yet be categorized as Black Caribbean. The researcher, Bhopal (2004), amongst others has called for discussion regarding the concepts and ideologies underpinning in research on 'race', and discussed "African Caribbean" as follows:

"Afro-Caribbean/African Caribbean: A person of African ancestral origins whose family settled in the Caribbean before emigrating and who self-identifies, or is identified, as Afro-Caribbean (regarding racial classifications, this population approximates to the group known as Negroid (or similar terms.)". (Bhopal, 2004: 443).

Although Bhopal (2004) was seeking to engage in a debate concerning this in addition to other definitions, her categories illustrate the challenges of developing ethnic divisions. Bhopal's (2004) designations rely on earlier racial group ideas which could, to some, be offensive. As a result, I choose to use the definition I have outlined above. It may indeed be argued that research, focused on African-Caribbean Black British girls is essentialist. The essentialist argument could be maintained because the category I have chosen continues to reflect fixed stereotypes boundaries for this group. The growing literature on diasporic identities, particular Caribbean diasporic identities. This literature explores social and cultural heterogeneity within African-Caribbean people and groups. Further, this literature recognises the difficulties of researching specific racial group (Christian 2000, Reynolds 2007). Indeed, in my sample, I ultimately selected girls who wanted to take part in the research and identified themselves as African-Caribbean Black British, and this research cohort included two mixed-heritage girls. The category I have chosen to denote the divisions of my research should be regarded as provisional rather than absolute.

## 1.6 Outline of the Thesis

In this chapter, I have provided an introduction to the thesis. Chapter 2 provides insight into the theoretical framework I bring to this study. In particular, I use chapter two to consider how the Black feminist frameworks I adopt will enable me to place the experiences of girls in this study at the heart of the analysis. In building my argument concerning the importance of Black feminisms, I shall highlight how the theory of intersectionality adds depth to both my enquiry and analysis. In chapter three I explore how the methodological and theoretical frameworks are extended to the tools I used to develop the data derived from the research participants. In doing so, I describe the reasoning behind the choices I made in collecting data for this project. Chapters' four, five, and six concern analyses of the data. To initiate each chapter, I offer a short literature review to provide the context within which my analysis sits. In chapter four, I explore the girls' understandings of success and consider how the girls' agency helps them to find success as possible for themselves. I describe how they defined and understood success, noting the implications of this framing.

This chapter suggests the girls have a growing recognition that being African Caribbean Black British and female can affect their prospects irrespective of their academic endeavours and the meritocratic discourse to which they adhere. How the girls' resistance practices support their sense of purpose with regards to their educational success is the focus of chapter five. In this chapter, I argue that the girls' relationships with school authority figures suggest the delicate negotiations of their African Caribbean Black British identities and presents resistance as a route to success. In particular, the chapter considers how the girls negotiate their needs for autonomy with the recognition that their teachers are the gateway to the success they desire for their futures.

It is because the girls' friendships appear to suggest a growing importance of their Black British identities I consider their friendships throughout the study though with greater emphasis in chapters 4 and 5. While bonds may appear as private aspects of individuals' lives, they present an interesting lens upon the individual's public and social world. I explore how these relationships help the girls to resist the challenges presented by race, and gender in their school lives and their quests for success. The girls' friendships are a site of comfort, for them and concern for their mothers. In chapter six I focus, particularly on the girls' mothers. In this chapter, I consider how the mothers' practices of resistance support the girls through the transition to secondary school. I argue that the support from their mothers involves them

learning how to negotiate the challenges, provided by race and gender pragmatically. Despite evidence of lack of success in their wider communities, the girls continued to espouse a belief in their success. The girls appeared to recognise the need to be selective in their battles and pragmatic in their relationships to do so. Through their relationships and their approach to education, the girls appear to embrace their mothers' desire that they acquire education as the key to their success in the future. In chapter seven, I explore the implications of my study and note future directions for my research.

## 2 Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework: The lens to interrogate my data

Black feminist thought and theory provide the core of the framework I use to develop a better understanding of and offer illumination to, the experiences of under-researched African Caribbean Black British girls. The discussion will begin with an insight to the tenets of Black feminist thought and theory. I employ Black feminist thought (Crenshaw, 1989, Collins, 1989; 2000) to create a guiding framework to ensure the experiences of Black girls can be privileged and analysed. By placing Black women's experiences at the centre of analysis, Black feminist theories offer critical insight into paradigms and epistemologies of the prevailing male White worldview. Exploring the world through a conceptual lens which emphasises dimensions of power within the simultaneity of race, class, and gender oppression as a Black feminist theory does creates new possibilities for empowering Black feminist knowledge (Collins 2004, Crenshaw 1989).

Black feminist theories allow us to understand better how power works in the social landscape of domination and resistance. Black feminism further impacts and interacts with marginalised groups whose knowledge is subjugated (Collins 2000). Black feminist theories expose the power marginalised, and weakened groups have by identifying them as agents of knowledge, portraying Black women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting oppression (Collins 2004, hooks 1994). Black feminist theories insist that the changed consciousness of individuals allows them to reclaim and own the power they do have despite their location in the matrix of domination (hooks 1994)

The discussion will continue and offer a consideration of the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989). The theory of intersectionality embraces the simultaneity of race, class and gender oppression. Intersectionality allows me to explore how power and oppression, mainly understood through the constructs of gender and race, work together to impact upon their perceptions of their social worlds to prepare them for the possibility of success. Intersectionality means that individuals' multiple social identities must be considered in conjunction. This collaboration allows for a better understanding of both subjective experience and the perception of individuals. The theory of intersectionality sits well within the framework I develop because it upholds the perspective that each individual in society is

comprised of an intersection of identities tied to societal structures of oppression and domination. Further, within the theory of intersectionality rests the understanding that, at the nexus of these intersecting oppressions lies creativity and resistance (Collins 2009). Black feminist thought builds upon the concept of intersectionality by highlighting the specific knowledge and collective experiences that Black women and girls possess as a result of their intersecting identities. I am drawn to Black feminist analyses because it emphasises the sources of resistance that a Black female consciousness, an awareness of the status of Black females about systems of power in the U.K, affords

Agency is also drawn into the core of my theoretical framework. In my reading of agency, I am particularly drawn to Giddens (1984) who argued that individuals, are agents of social transformation and can change their worlds over time. Black feminist theories emphasise the enduring relationship between, oppression and Black women's activism. This interplay presents the matrix of domination (Collins 2000) as being responsive to human agency. How differing notions of agency implicate the individual as colluding or not in their victimisation could become lost in the analysis without a clear Black feminist conceptualisation of power and oppression

The discussion will move on to consider resistance, which can be understood through a reading of agency (Mirza 2006, Yuval-Davis, 2009.) It is because practices of resistance are so important to the ways I have tried to reflect the girls' experiences that I have chosen to make resistance an important aspect of my analytical toolkit. Black feminist theorists, (Collins 2004, hooks 1994, Mirza 2009) argue that oppression is experienced and resisted on three levels. The first level is that of personal biography; the second relates to the group level of the social and cultural contexts created by race, class, and gender. The final tier operates systemically within and through social institutions. It is because all three levels are sites of domination, which Black feminist theory reveals the sources of power influencing each and so can expose them as potential sites of resistance (Young 2000).

Once I have discussed resistance, I will conclude the discussion by looking at how discourse is used in my work. I borrow ideas concerning the importance of discourse from Foucault (1977) and Foucault and Gordon (1980). In particular, I am drawn to the notion of power that Foucault uses power operates discursively and structurally to exclude particular knowledge and experiences (Foucault, 1977). I further use the ideas of discourse to inform my understanding of neoliberalist meritocracy and how these ideas are captured and continued by

the girls in this research. The discourse of meritocracy which is embedded in neoliberalism is engaged to offer insight to the girls and their mother's experiences and motivations with regards to success I acknowledge that Foucault's ideas of power and the notion of discourse lay outside of Black feminism. However, it is because discourse and Foucault allow me to explore how the girls in this research impact on and are influenced by the taken for granted ideas inherent in nature of the structures of domination that I bring them into my analysis. In bringing these ideas into my analysis, I am heartened by the work of Huckaby (2013). Huckaby (2013) argues that the tensions created by the juxtaposition of Black Feminism and Foucault's post-structuralism further enable the criterion of experience to be considered when theorising power

## **2.1 Black feminisms**

Black feminist Standpoint theories grew from the Black liberation movements (Weathers, 1995) and the exclusion of Black women's experiences in earlier feminist movements. Black feminist theories emerged as the result of Black women arguing that their lived experiences, ways of thinking and ways of being were not present in established interpretations of feminism. hooks (2000) made this point by arguing that White privileged feminist movements have not included representation from diverse backgrounds and focused solely on gender. The absence of a diversity of voices and experiences within feminist debates was taken by theorists such as hooks (2000) Mirza (2006) and Collin (2000) to illustrate the lack of clarity regarding the experiences at the intersection of sex, race, and class oppression or a disinclination to take these experiences as matter as of genuine concern. Black feminist theories explore the intersections of what it means to be framed within a multiplicity of identity categories. Jamilia (2004) suggests that

“At root, Black feminism is a struggle against the pervasive oppression that defines Western culture. (...) it functions to resist disempowering ideologies and devaluing institutions. It merges theory and action to affirm Black women's legitimacy as producers of intellectual work and reject assertions that attack our ability to contribute to these traditions”. (p.557)



Black Feminist theory seeks to empower Black women to combat the social injustices they experience as a result of living at the intersection of multiple oppressions (Collins, 2000, The Combahee River Collective, 1995; hooks, 2000; Morgan, 1999). Collins (2000) noted that Black Feminist Theory is also practical, women are empowered by adopting the epistemological approach based on the empirical realities of Black women as embodied subjects, and this approach acknowledges Black women as creators of knowledge.

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Collins (2000a) argued that

“Living as a Black woman requires wisdom because knowledge about the dynamics of intersecting oppressions has been essential to U.S. Black women’s survival. African-American women give such wisdom high credence in assessing knowledge” (p. 257).

Black Feminist Theory’s epistemological approach of capturing lived experiences works toward reflecting the diversity that exists amongst Black women. In addition to Black Feminist Theory holding the importance of lived experiences as a core tenet, simultaneously, this theory encompasses an element that illuminates Black women’s shared experiences which brings strength to collective empowerment for Black women. Black Feminist Theory does not suggest that there is one single viewpoint amongst Black women, there are various collective standpoints that each reflect the contours of Black Feminist Thought. Collins (2000) argued

“At the same time, while common experiences may predispose Black women to develop a distinctive group consciousness, they guarantee neither that such a consciousness will develop among all women nor that it will be articulated as such by the group” (p. 25).

This Black feminist theoretical concept also does not aim to eclipse the diversity existing amongst Black women but rather complements that multiplicity. Black women create specific knowledge that only Black women experience since they live it (Collins, 2000). Black women's intersecting oppressions draw them together through a common thread so they can band together to challenge oppressive practices and move toward empowerment which fosters ownership and accountability in their lives. The fact that using Black feminist theory does not require that the diversity amongst Black women is eclipsed is particularly salient and comes to the fore, in my discussion about how the girls maintain a belief in the possibility of success (see page 123). The girls are discussing the relative success of their own mothers. Each daughter in the discussion is able to point to whilst simultaneously discounting their mothers' success to make space for their own agency to be placed at the forefront of the possibilities that they will be successful too. In that chapter Rakaya and Leonie consider their mothers' careers and describe how they would be able to triumph despite the adversities their mothers had experienced.

## **2.2 Intersectionality, a Black Feminist conceptualisation**

As previously established my purpose is to understand what informs the African Caribbean Black British girls' notions of success and how they navigate a route to it. To achieve a more in-depth understanding of the girls' experiences I want to understand how gender, race in particular impact upon their negotiations towards success. To forestall the potential for an incomplete analysis, I shall expand the discussions of intersectionality begun in the previous section. The theory of intersectionality examines the social divisions, identifications and power relations that structure people's lives, particularly those people deemed to be marginalised (Yuval-Davis, 2006)

As deployed by Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, (2013) intersectionality helps reveal how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories. Exploring intersectionality from the perspectives outlined by Collins (2000) and Mirza (2006) as examples, I agree that, women's lives cannot be reduced to singular categories, and so analysis cannot maintain the primary importance of any one social category for understanding people's needs and experiences. Intersectionality does not promote an additive approach, examining the impact of gender, 'race,' sexuality, age and

class collectively for example, as the sum of their independent effects (Hancock, 2007). Rather, intersectionality conceptualizes social categories as interacting with and co-developing one another to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place.

Intersectionality allows me to explore how power and oppression, mainly understood through the constructs of gender and race particularly, work together to impact upon their perceptions of their social worlds to prepare them for the possibility of success. Intersectionality means that individuals' multiple social identities must be considered in conjunction. This collaboration allows for a better understanding of both subjective experience and the perception of individuals. In this study, each girl's mother views themselves as working class. However as Rollock et al. (2012) noted, African and Caribbean people in Britain tend to identify as working class irrespective of their income and as such there tended to be a flattening out of class-specific differences leading to a relative invisibility of class distinctions. Given the size of the research cohort, whilst of course class is an important identity category and has, at times, been referred to, I have not featured it, class, as a significant part of the analysis. I have instead privileged specific processes involved in the practices the girls enter into as they negotiate a route to success, primarily gender and race. Analysis of the girl's practices according to class is beyond the scope of this study, but it would constitute necessary further research.

Identities are not readily made for people to "un-problematically slip into" (Hall 1990), nor are they permanent or fixed (Gilroy 2000, Shah 2006) but instead they are in a constantly evolving process of becoming, rather than simply being (Hall 1996). Identity, the process of becoming, is a struggle. This fight for identity and personal understanding is centred between the exterior world and our interior selves, between self and the other (Hall 1990).

The external influences of wider society are where identities, raced and gendered identities, for example, are given new meanings. Children gain knowledge of self, their environment and their race, their gender and what is deemed acceptable or appropriate through invention and the reinvention. Giddens (1991) describes this invention and reinvention as a form of self-observation and self-interrogation where the individual continuously practices reflexivity of the self. Intersectionality, a theory birthed through Black feminism (Collins 2009) was first articulated by Crenshaw (1989) and seeks to address the complicated and compounding nature of oppression rooted in race and gender. For ease of understanding, Crenshaw draws

on the image of intersecting roads, where race, gender and class, to name but three structures of domination, meet. The theory of intersectionality is useful, to highlight and understand the complex spaces within which the girls negotiated success. These spaces are informed by a range of structural as well as psychological differences.

The experience, of being gendered, varies widely depending on race, ethnicity, religion, social class, or sexual orientation. The result, as Razack (2000) has argued, is that we are each constrained differently and unequally, by the same systems. Of course, this speaks centrally to the tensions inhering to agency and shall be discussed later in this chapter.

While the term, intersectionality, has gained acceptance in academic thought, Davis (2008) noted that controversies have emerged about whether intersectionality should be conceptualised as; “*a crossroads*” (Crenshaw, 1989), “*as axes of difference*” (Yuval-Davis, 2006), or as “*a dynamic process*” (Staunaes, 2003). For me, the analogy of a crossroads, provided by Crenshaw offers an understanding of how the different systems of oppression come together to form the nexus. The impact of being at that nexus is the starting point for a fuller analysis of the experience. Crenshaw’s, converging routes metaphor, allows me to consider how structures, politics and representations impact on and are implicated in the lives of the individual.

My view of the theory of intersectionality accords with Collins (2000, pg44) where she argues that

“Viewing gender within a logic of intersectionality redefines it as a constellation of historically situated practices and ideas” (Collins 2004: 44)

In keeping with Collins (2004), I argue that an intersectional analysis means evaluating how particular identities are weighted or given importance by individuals at particular moments and in specific contexts. In this way, I use intersectionality to increase my understanding of how different identities work together to create or avoid a response from others that advantages or disadvantages an individual or group.

Intersectionality, as proposed by Crenshaw, is not the only possible way to consider the interconnectedness of oppression. The concept of interlocking rather than intersecting oppressions (hooks 1994), can be used to show how different social locations and oppressions

are constructed through interactions with other people. Razack & Fellows (1998) define interlocking oppression as how systems of oppression come to exist in and through one another. The logic of interlocking oppressions, suggests, not only inter-connection but interdependence. By this analysis, racial exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and class hierarchies. Interlocking oppression conceptualises the intricacy of social locations concerning one another and the process of how one's identity is constructed against those of 'Others'.

Debates surrounding intersectionality reflect theorists' unease with both how and with whom intersectionality can be used. Yuval-Davis (2009) argues the danger in conflating or separating the different levels of analysis within the intersectionality approach. She also questions which and how many, social divisions should be incorporated into the analysis of the intersectionality process. For me, race and gender constitute two major social divisions and like Yuval- Davis (2009) I consider that adding additional social divisions has to be context specific and more particularly, should be informed by what insights further divisions may bring to the analysis.

Within this research, intersectionality is a way to conceptualise how oppressions are socially constructed and affect different bodies in distinct ways. This perspective provided a means to conceptualise and value the complexity of ways of knowing that research participants drew on as a result of the oppression they experience in their everyday lives. This variety of lenses was then reflected in the stories they shared about the school, their ideas of success, their relationships with friends and their mothers. The power of intersectionality in my thesis is highlighted on page 110, in the discussion of agency and making the right choices. This discussion explores how power influences the girls' experiences and expectations differently but are still informs their choices and worldviews

### **2.3 Intersectionality and power**

As highlighted throughout this discussion, power is a central concept in intersectionality. Intersectionality highlights how power operates discursively and structurally to exclude particular knowledge and experiences (Foucault, 1977). Within intersectionality power also operates within and to define subject positions and categories, race and gender positions, for

example, are constructed and shaped by processes and systems of power. These processes operate together to shape experiences of privilege and disempowerment between and among groups (Collins, 2000). The relational nature of power is also an essential feature within the theory of intersectionality. Indeed Collins (2000) Hooks (2000) and Phoenix (2010) have each argued that women can simultaneously experience both power and oppression in varying contexts and at varying times. These relationships include experiences of having the power over others, but also that of power that involves people working together as collective actors (Guinier & Torres, 2003). In recognizing the shifting intersections in which power operates, this research uses intersectionality to move beyond “Oppression Olympics” Martinez (1993), which sees groups compete for the title of ‘most oppressed’ to gain political support or economic advantage. Intersectionality thus rejects an additive model of oppression that leaves the systems that create power differentials unchanged (Hancock, 2007). The focus then is not just about domination or marginalisation, but on the intersecting processes by which power and inequity are produced, reproduced and resisted (Dhamoon, 2011).

I shall focus on an intersectional analysis of the mothers' **school choices** and the processes behind their decisions in chapter six section 6.10. The mothers' reflections on the impacts of race, gender, and to some extent class, highlight the need for a more nuanced view of them, their actions and the manoeuvres through networks of power that they make to ensure their daughter's success. While identity and intersectionality are useful for broadening the analysis of the girls' individual experiences, so too is the notion of agency for exploring the context, experiences and pressures the girls come under.

## **2.4 Black feminisms and agency**

Black feminist theories emphasise the enduring relationship between, oppression and Black women's activism. This interplay presents the matrix of domination (Collins 2000) as being responsive to human agency. This theoretical viewpoint shows the world as a dynamic place where the desired outcome is not merely to survive or to fit in or to cope, but instead, it becomes a place where we feel ownership and accountability (hooks 1994, Collins 2000). Black feminist theory suggests that groups and individuals are imbued with the power to act, no matter how bleak the situation may appear to be.

The Black feminist notion that structures can be responsive to human agency is reinforced by Giddens (1984) who argues that while agency is linked to structure through his theory of structuration human action is performed within a social structure that has its own set of norms. He argues that human agents act with intentionality. Despite social structures pre-existing, these structures are not permanent. Social structures permit social action and social action in turn influences structures, a system he calls the duality of structure.

Viewing some of their analysis through the lens of Black feminist theory and applying that to the lives of the girls and mothers in this research illuminates the idea that in the girls' experiences norms and rules exist and that they, as African Caribbean Black British girls, are either conscious or unconscious of these. As will be discussed in chapter 5, Janessa is clear that the use of Creolized Caribbean Dialect is viewed as challenging, she is not sure why the use of CCD is considered challenging, but she recognises that its use presents her with opportunities to counter her teachers' use of power and sanction. The girls do not live in a vacuum isolated from the wider society. Their actions and experiences can to a certain extent change their overall experience of schooling and success, while conversely, the school's structure and the norms in place can also influence the girls' actions. I use the pairing of structure and agency to understand the structures that are influencing the decisions and actions the girls' make and take. I am also interested in understanding how they engage with these structural norms to construct or reconstruct their social worlds.

Most usually, agency is viewed within a have or have not binary. Only arguing that people have more or less agency does not pay attention to the processes and reasons behind their decisions. Durham (2008) argues that such have or have not interpretations of agency can disguise the critical social issues influencing the lives of the women she was researching. In her example, Botswanan young women's unwillingness to vote was interpreted as them having no agency. However, the author found that the young women did not vote because they could see no benefit, for themselves, in voting for and more importantly the policies the politicians were intent upon pursuing had not considered the women's needs. She argued that such an interpretation come from specific ideas that young people only have agency if they behave in specific ways. Such descriptions are often made as if agents operate in a vacuum and are detached from the environment or culture.

In Durham's (2008) example, focusing on young peoples' failure to vote as non-agency, does not permit ways of examining and explaining what else might be happening. I shall explore

this notion first in chapter 4 where Kimarie, Peterlyn and Leonie discuss their view of education as the route to success and a further, perhaps more nuanced example in, chapter 6. In chapter 6, some of the mothers choose to actively engage with their daughters' homework, while others, particularly the White mothers, choose not to. On the face of it, these choices appear counter-intuitive and would seem to be an example of non-agency. As shall be discussed, this case of agency has to pay attention to the reasons behind it and the discourses informing it to come to some understanding of the mothers' decisions. Thus applying an analysis that interprets power through the binaries of have or have not, fails to consider the other ways in which the girls and for my study, their mothers' act.

In general, humans are said to have agency when their actions have a potential to free them from one form of oppression or another (Durham 2008). These debates on imbue agency with connotations of liberation and individualism (Durham 2008, Ortnner 1996). The continuous interpretation of agency as a fight against oppressive structures presents agency as something that is possessed; one either has agency or does not have agency. Following this line of reasoning women are often seen as having agency when they resist inequality and fight structures that are said to keep them in subordinate positions. The definition of agency as merely acting or resisting would seem to suggest that human agents act freely, merely making decisions to act or not act. For me, this does not make sense. I shall in chapter 6 section 6.4, consider how the discourse on homework highlights the power relations in the girls' homes. I shall later in that chapter at section 6.10 examine the experiences of the girls' mothers and how some of their apparently counter-intuitive decisions about whether to send their daughters to predominantly middle class dominated White county schools or ethnically more balanced working class dominant city schools secondary schools their daughters should attend present Black feminist theoretical insight to their agentic practices

If, as with Black feminist theorisation, agency is paired with a more fluid and pluralistic interpretation of power, then interpretations of agency do not necessarily have to follow the have or have not logic which simply looks at whether or not agents subvert norms. Mohanty (1992), Spivak (2010) Phoenix (2013) argue for a framing of agency as a process. This new analytical focus on agency places the subjects at the centre.

I am concerned that just defining agency as the ability to subvert norms and resist power is somewhat inadequate when interrogating the lives of girls whose goals and desires are, in part, shaped by different sets of rules (George 2007). The feminist notion of agency as the



capacity to subvert norms cannot account for girls who choose to participate in practices that would be considered oppressive. Continuing to attend school with the expectation that success will be the reward for their hard work, is one significant example. Agency in this formulation is not only the capability for progressive change but also the capacity to suffer, endure and persist as Abu Lughod (1990) has argued. I am suggesting that agency is historically bound culturally situated and is impacted upon by other abilities and desires because agents' motivations are always complex and often contradictory (Ahern 2001). This gives me a notion of agency that enables me to consider the girls' practices of agentic resistance as complex and situational. Sometimes the girls will succumb to the constraints of customs and norms and expectations that others have created. At other times they will follow their interests and do other than accept the norms unchallenged.

Throughout this thesis, I want to show that, for African Caribbean Black British girls in their final year at primary school, the production of agency is somewhat fraught. The societal discourses surrounding and constructing these girls as difficult (Grant 1992) and loud (Wright 1992) also have an impact. In the primary school setting the girls' agency can be considered not necessarily in how they escape power, but more in how they manoeuvre themselves within networks of power. I discuss this in greater depth in chapter 4 in the section where the girls discuss setting goals at section 4.3. As agentic beings, the girls actively engage with the culture and power in the spaces in which they find themselves. The spaces in which the girls find themselves are in turn imbued with the norms and expectations inscribed through discourse. As the girls manoeuvre themselves through networks of power, they do what is best for them at a particular moment, but these decisions are also based on where they see themselves in the future. I will continue this discussion of agency in section 4.3 of chapter 4 where I will be looking at how the girls use their agency to work through the potential structural limitations to their success. I shall build on the discussion from chapter 4 in chapter 5, where I explore the girls' relationships with teachers chapter 5 section 5.3. Whether the girls construct their teachers as allies or adversaries, they, the girls, have to manoeuvre delicately within the power they have to ensure positive relationships and outcomes for themselves, I will extend this thought in chapter five at section 5.2. As previously discussed a Black feminist approach to agency, with a more fluid and pluralistic interpretation of power, allows for us to place subjects at the centre analysis. An appreciation of the notion of intersectionality I bring to the research will help to inform agency and pull together how power is revealed in the analysis.

## 2.5 Black Feminisms and Resistance

Resistance is a central organising theme within Black feminist writing, (Collins 2009, Mirza 2006, hooks 2000). Exploring the girls' resistances from a Black feminist standpoint will illuminate both the power and the role of larger school and broader community structures in influencing their experiences. The notion of resistance unravels the complex ways in which these African Caribbean Black British girls mediate their lived experiences and power within the structures of domination and constraint (Giroux, 1983).

Black feminist thought, as counter-hegemonic knowledge, considers how power is organised and operates. It further considers how relations of domination and subordination are normalised, and how they make the disempowered participate in the reproduction of their disempowerment. This is particularly important in exploring how the girls in this study come to an understanding of success and negotiate a route to it. This discussion will be extended in chapter four, "the girls' understandings of success."

Resistance is most often portrayed as a means by which marginalised people can challenge or subvert societal discourses (Mac an Ghail 1988, Willis 1977). I accept that resistance is socially constructed, and so provides a dynamic, rather than solitary, activity. Resisters, the targets of their resistance and the individuals observing the acts of resistance all participate in its construction. As Foucault (1980) and Leblanc (1999) have identified, the resisters remain within the social system they contest. This is particularly relevant as girls in this study, despite their resistance, will have to remain captured within the schooling system for at least a further five years. Traditionally, theories of resistance, particularly those concerning school and working-class pupils, have been based on the conception that class motivations provide the catalyst for anti-school behaviours (Apple 2006, Willis 1977). Research on the schooling experiences of African Caribbean Black British girls has found that these girls are not anti-school (Fuller 1980, Wright & Weekes 2003 Mirza 1992, 2006). This position erodes the utility of an oppositional identity (Ogbu 1983) or exclusively class focus of resistance. Race and gender also need to be taken into consideration (Solomos 1991, Mirza 1992). This, in turn, requires a more nuanced understanding of resistance. I shall explore my considerations of resistance in chapter 4 at section 4.6 where I consider how the girls' exaggerated sense of their agency will help them to overcome the structural constraints to their success

Girls' resistances to authority in classrooms often go unrecognised. Osler & Vincent's (2003) work suggests that girls' tend to internalise any problems and withdraw, as opposed to expressing themselves more overtly through behavioural conflict. This response serves to increase the invisibility of girls' problems within schools. Withdrawal in my view can be regarded as a particularly gendered type of resistance as it, effectively challenges but, does not bring the girls into a confrontation with authority (Osler and Vincent 2003).

My understanding of resistance is influenced by the ideas developed by Collins (2009) and Mirza (2009). Collins argues that oppression and resistance are linked and shape each other within a matrix of domination. This relationship is more complicated than a model of permanent oppressors and perpetual victims. In a context permeated by intersecting oppression, no group is eternally powerless. However, no group can achieve power without oppressing others. Black feminist theorisations allow insight into the relationships between power and oppression enables us to consider that just as that dynamic is complex, so must resistance aimed at fostering empowerment, demonstrate a similar complexity. As Collins (2000) and Mirza (2004, 2006) have argued resistance or change results from human agency'. This contention is supported by Raby (2006) where she argues that theorists have tended to focus on exploring the ways in which girls exhibit resistance. This concept relates to agency because it is concerned with girls' power to resist and transform. The author goes on to contend that resistance is not easily identifiable and takes on different forms. Resistance can be subtle and often covert acts as well as larger more pronounced oppositional actions against structural forces. Among girls, acts of resistance tend to be confined to the day to day interactions with peers and those in positions of authority.

In her exploratory work, Raby illuminated covert forms of resistance that have micro- and macro-level influence. The author provided an example of covert resistance in which a student obeys her teacher, although she does not like the teacher, in order to advance to the next grade level. This insight leads well to that developed by Mirza (2009) Mirza's (2009) analysis of resistance proposes that through a focus on what people do every day in their time and space, it is possible to view each localised disruption as being a resistant act. In chapter 5, I expand a Black feminist notion of resistance through the girls' performances of their Caribbean identities. Their uses of silence and kiss teeth, for example, will form the focal point of the analysis of the Caribbean resources they bring to their relationships in school in chapter 5 at section 5.7.

Resistance can take many forms and can be explored through; self-definition, I explore the notion of self-definition as resistance in chapter 4 section 4.4 where the girls setting goals to ensure their success is the focus of the discussion. The symbolic importance of these activities may have been profound for the person carrying them out, but the act itself outside its context would pass unmarked, invisible to the outsider. Everyday resistance is not necessarily recognised by targets but is apparent to the culturally aware observer. This will be discussed further in chapter 5 section 5.9 in the section where I discuss friendships as providing the girls with a knowing audience.

Collins (2000) argues that change as a result of human agency, as previously, discussed is possible and is manifest when people become aware of their oppression. In addition to an awareness of their oppression, the individual and groups have to refuse to accept the dominant image of themselves and begin to question the reality of their lives. Collins (2000, 2009) argues that essential to domination is the suppression of the ‘free mind’. As a result of the inherent suppression, the “power of a free mind” is an important though an infinitely nuanced area of resistance. Some resistance research serves to blame the disempowered for the outcomes of their resistance practices. This is highlighted in research that has focused on oppositional student behaviours as a form of personally empowering, although ultimately self-defeating, resistance (Ogbu 2008). Oppositional resistance is argued as helping to recreate the oppressive conditions from which it originated. As a result of this, it fails to recognise, the existence of other, more subtle forms of resistance that might lead to social change (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal 2001). There are opportunities to re-conceptualise resistance to including those who use academic achievement as a means of countering negative portrayals, exceeding society’s limited expectations, and defying the process of their subordination (Mirza 2006). The act of persisting and succeeding in education can be seen as a strategic response to racism and a means of resisting disempowerment and marginalisation (Wright 2009). This kind of resistance has been described as; accommodation without assimilation (Gibson, 1988) conformist resistance (Fordham, 1996), resistance within accommodation (Gillborn, 1997, Mac an Ghail 1988), positive resistance (Valenzuela, 1999), or resilient resistance (Yosso, 2002)

African-Caribbean Black British girls encounter particular educational perceptions and obstacles (Archer et al. 2007). These constraints are concerned predominantly, as Oesterreich (2007) argues, with manners and behaviours. The issues of manners behaviour and

subversion of acceptable femininities permeate the discourse surrounding African Caribbean Black British female pupils. Weekes (2003) and Reynolds (2005) contend that race gender and class combine to shape the educational experiences of African-Caribbean Black British girls. These girls are viewed as loud and their assertion of “loud”, active and visible subject positions can in themselves be regarded as resistance to the forms of submissive, passive and quiet femininities that are more usually rewarded within schools (Archer 2007) I continue this discussion in chapter 6. The challenge with making this argument is to both recognise that young African-Caribbean Black British girls are positioned, by groups more powerful than them as loud, but in actuality “loud” is only one aspect of their presentations of self. In chapter six at section 6.7 in the discussion of “too much friend and company will drag her down”, I shall extend and explore the nuances in the analysis outlined here.

Like girls from other ethnic and racialised positions, there is a myriad of ways of being. How the girls might counter and resist the negative perceptions of them can be explored through a Black feminist lens. Eggleston and Miranda (2009) argued that the girls in their study used silence agentially to avoid being stereotyped within the difficult schooling environment. Similarly Fordham (1993), Davidson (1996) the African American girls in their study used asserted their agency through silence which was used as a strategy by some academically successful African American female students to remove and disassociate themselves, from the loud stereotype that characterised descriptions of African American women (Leadbeater, 2007, Morris 2007). In my work, silence, as a practice of resistance is explored in chapter five about the girls and how they manage their relationships with teachers to achieve success.

In her discussion of young Black women Mirza (1992) forcefully argues that unlike Willis’ Lads (1977), young Black women do not reproduce their inequalities through their cultural values’. The girls’ active engagement with achievement through being academically successful is presented as an emergent form of resistance, which disrupts the traditional, opposition to education formulation. Continuing the theme of success as a form of resistance for African American women Terhune (2008) argued that the women in her study achieve success by “performing” the role of the professional, successful woman. This performance included ensuring speech, dress and conduct were entirely beyond the stereotyped expectations of the “loud” and angry Black woman. Similar performance patterns were outlined by Shorter-Gooden (2004), in her discussion of role flexing as a method by which Black women in her study were able to be successful in their chosen professional fields.

These considerations of silence, performing and role flexing are each captured as being particularly pertinent to African American women and girls. It is because the literature concerning African Caribbean Black British girls and their resistance practices are so sparse that I have to take research concerning women and adapt the ideas to consider the experiences of girls.

Role-flexing, Shorter-Gooden (2004) argues, involves adapting; speech, behaviour, dress, or presentation to better fit with the dominant group. Role flexing relies on the woman's abilities to construct an ad hoc identity that enables their success. Shorter-Gooden adds further nuance to her analysis by arguing that, through role flexing, African American women can make choices from a repertoire of presentation options. Role flexing for the women in Shorter –Gooden's study allows them to figuratively armour themselves to meet the challenges of racism and sexism in the world beyond their family groups. In keeping with Shorter-Gooden (2004), Bell and Nkomo (1998) refer to this resourcefulness, a form of gendered racial socialisation, as "armouring" Bell and Nkomo's (1998) concept of armouring suggests an intergenerational form of interaction between African American mothers and daughters. The authors argue that this armouring is necessary because African American girls will have to engage with communities outside of their own through working outside of the family and community confines. Given the persistence of structural oppression, it is, important to consider the role of mothers in shaping girls' abilities to meet the challenges of racialised gendered oppression. African-Caribbean Black British mothering strategies as discussed by Reynolds (2007) reveal how resistance is developed and transmitted through families characterised by a history of colonialism and slavery, and the racialised experiences emerging from these histories. In chapter six I shall be discussing the mothers' perceptions of Creolised Caribbean Dialect and shall argue that their views reflect both socialisation and armouring and can be explored through notions of discourse within a Black feminist lens.

Given African Caribbean Black British girls' positioning in relation to larger intersecting systems of power organised around race and gender, one might expect these girls to internalise messages regarding their socially devalued status, and that this internalising may impact upon their notion of the possibility of their success. Neither they nor their families and communities are passive in this process. As Collins (2000) points out, to maintain a positive self-image in light of persistent oppressive forces, Black women depend on self-valuation as a source of appraisal. African-Caribbean women as mothers, pass on self-valuation as a

source of appraisal to their daughters, perhaps in an explicit way creating positive self-concepts for daughters in a society that marginalises Black women on account of their race and gender. Collins (2000) argues that Black women's survival is dependent upon their ability to teach their daughters how to navigate the intersecting oppressions faced in adulthood. I shall return to elaborate on the ideas of role flexing and armouring in chapter six where I discuss mother-work as a factor supporting the girls' success.

Robinson and Ward (1991) suggest that African American girls navigate unhelpful views concerning their femininity in schools by being assertive, building upon and adhering to academic expectations. The study by Robinson and Ward demonstrates how girls negotiate a sophisticated rendition of femininity by resisting, questioning, and embracing and rejecting femininities. Robinson and Ward's (1991) work does not present an easy conception of resistance as it suggests that to act into expectations can be resistance and so too can acting outside of expectations also be resistance. Agency of which resistance is an aspect,(Raby 2006) is not a binary but rather has to be viewed in context

## **2.6 Foucault and Black Feminist theory an illuminating juxtaposition**

Crenshaw, (1991) Villaverde, (2008) argue there is a need, when addressing the experiences of oppressed women, to pay attention to their complex identities and social locations, identities which are situated on the vulnerable side of too many binaries. Foucault's work allows for this kind of analytical attentiveness

The need to be attentive to the complexity of identities is the result of pre-existing sociohistorical contexts that see race and gender as separate and distinct signifiers of "otherness". Foucault's work attends to the ways power/knowledge constructs bodies and relegates some forms of knowledge in the margins (Huckaby 2013). Foucault offers a theory that constructs power as relational, dynamic and dispersed. However for power to be strong according to Foucault, it must be effective on the levels of desire, knowledge, and production (Foucault, 1980). That power is theorised by Foucault as operating on many levels, offers Foucault as a resource to Black feminism in theorising issues of agency as well as, marginalization, and difference (Davidson et al 2010). Such resourcing is however not one-sided, Black feminism challenges exceptions, and contradictions (Davidson et al., 2010), For Collins (2000) the focus on multiple histories and experiences serves to undermine a presumed norm that seek to define and measure deviance.

For Foucault (1997) relations of power are sites for reversals and inversions; Foucault states:

I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other ...these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all. For example, the fact that I may be older than you, and that you may initially have been intimidated, may be turned around during the course of our conversation, and I may end up being intimidated before someone precisely because he is younger than I am. These power relations are thus mobile, reversible, and unstable. (p.292)

Even for Foucault, power does not cancel itself out, where he theorises changes in relations of power, he speaks of relations of power reversing and inverting themselves. Foucault's relations of power, in which one attempts to act upon the potential actions of others with the intent to control their future actions provides an understanding of power as an embodied quality. I use Foucault as a theoretical perspective to explore how people in subjugated positions engage in relations of power. Foucault does enable researchers to theorise the constitution of the self within relations of power, and the creation of space for reversals within these relations. However as Huckaby (2013) argues Foucault's work, in order to make vulnerability to oppression intelligible, over-protects power.

It may be argued that Foucault's over protection of power makes a Foucauldian analysis incommensurable with feminisms (Huckaby 2013). The critique of Foucault not being compatible with feminism has merit. Foucault's work rarely attends to gender (Butler, 1990; McNeil, 1993). Ramazanoğlu (1993) suggests that his theory as it pertains to power, knowledge, the self, and sexuality, challenges feminist politics based on a conception of men having power over women. Further, hooks (2000) points out that beyond feminism,

“power is commonly equated with domination and control over people and things” (p. 84).

Black feminists present additional criticisms against Foucault's post-structuralism, which include an inattention to the role of power and domination in the construction of difference. While an attention to difference and diversity may be promising, accommodating “too many ‘others’” in a discourse without a centre results in further ignorance of historically marginalized groups in the competition for knowledge claims (McKay et al., 1991). Furthermore, authority, subjectivity, and tradition were dismantled by poststructuralism at a



time when marginalized groups were “asserting authorship, tradition, and subjectivity” (McKay et al., 1991, p. 24). However, the uncritical regard for experience as a criterion of meaning (Collins 2000) also presents challenges. Peroich (2010) argues that is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. In this sense, experience explains nothing and offers no evidence on which to base truth. Instead, experience is “that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. Thus, experience discursively produces identities, and both experiences and the identities they produce are historical.

Theoretically exclusively relying on experience as evidence of truth or as an explanation, however, is itself challenging for marginalized groups. It is because distinguishable groups are not natural occurrences; they are historical, created discursively through multiple forms of discrimination, marginalization, and oppression (Collins 2000) that relying exclusively on knowledge claims based exclusively on the criterion of experience is easy to challenge (Davidson et al 2010). Claims of truth based on experience can result in differences seem natural, this would of necessity include privilege and the role of privilege in history. Within such naturalization, the practices, ideas and representations at work are left invisible and the resulting experiences of an identifiable marginalized group natural. Thus marginalized peoples are discursively more vulnerable to and privileged groups likely unaware of the processes at work. Relying on experiences to support claims to truth or indeed to challenge dominant forms of knowledge can serve to reify the perspectives that function to privilege dominant groups and disadvantage marginalized ones.

An uncritical reliance on experiences that challenge or show exceptions to dominant assumptions as Black feminism does are themselves problematic. Perpich, (2010) and Spivak (2009) argues that an unfettered reliance on experience serves to reify the conditions of marginalization not just for dominant and privileged groups but also for marginalized people. Borrowing and adapting ideas from Foucault By releases Black feminism from the confines of gender and race make use of them to theorize, understand and make visible relations of power and relations of vulnerability. This analysis is highlighted in my work in the discussion concerning success and merit in chapter 4 at section 4.2. It is my contention that juxtaposing experience and theory changes theory, complicates experiences, and makes analysis possible.

## 2.7 Discourse within my theoretical lens

Discourse is particularly vital in exposing how power is wielded in a society negatively structured by race and gender oppression. Black feminist theorisations recognise that while the structures exist so too does the capacity for resistance. How marginalised groups, such as the girls in this research, are affected by and resist discourse is captured by Foucault (2002). Foucault's ideas concerning discourse are captured as “*practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*” (Foucault 2002p. 54). This quote highlights the understanding of discourse as a practice and points out two further features: its constitutive nature and its tendency to bring about regularity. He points to the systematic nature of discourse by describing it as composed of some statements. Distancing himself from exclusively linguistic approaches to discourse, he describes statements as “neither entirely linguistic nor exclusively material” (Foucault, 2002, p. 97). In this account, language can be seen as the medium that contains and constructs statements, but it is not enough to constitute it. For Foucault a statement is further characterised by combining structure and content, it is composed of a constellation of signs which together provide meaning, or in Foucault’s words

“a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they ‘make sense’” (Foucault, 2002, p. 97).

Statements can thus be regarded as a systematic constellation of signs that can be read by humans. Foucault considered discourse, as a constellation of statements, governed by “rules of formation” (Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Discourse can be described as the relationship between “rules” and “statements” (ibid: 42). Foucault himself acknowledged that his use of the term ‘discourse’ varied

“.....treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements”. (Foucault, 2002, p. 90)

This suggests that his analytical emphasis shifted between the structural and the content aspects of discourse. Following this, Mills (2004) points out that it is necessary to distinguish between discourse “as whole”, including a set of procedures for the production of particular discourse, and particular discourses as groups of statements. This is a useful distinction for this study which looks at the features of a particular discourse as a group of statements, rather than focusing on the “rules of formation”. Rather than concentrating on how the discourse(s)

on success is made possible by specific rules, the thesis examines the neoliberal discourse of meritocracy and how these are interpreted through the girls' lives and experiences. This discussion will be continued in chapter four and the exploration of the girls' understanding of success, and I contend that the discourse of meritocracy is particularly implicated in the girls' negotiations concerning what success means and what, in particular, it means to them. According to Foucault, the discourse was to be realised through practice, and (almost) all social practice is informed by discourse. (Foucault, 2002). This is compelling: it allows me to look at how discourse is influential in the girls' everyday contexts. By asserting that discourse systematically structures meaning, Foucault highlighted its relevance in producing social reality.

The idea that I am trying to convey is that discourses shape the social, this, in turn, suggests discourse is closely related to power and Black feminist analysis expose the power relations operating within the discourses impacting on the girls' experiences.

## **2.8 Meritocracy and the ideal pupil**

Structural inequalities in educational outcomes are rationalised and legitimated through the liberal rhetoric of a meritocratic school system. Within ideas of the meritocratic school system, individual merit is regarded as the primary determinant for educational success (Augoustinos et al., 2005; Fasset & Warren, 2007). By combining notions of meritocracy and deficit thinking about racial group membership, structural inequalities within the educational system and the broader society are ignored (Archer 2008). Educational success or indeed failure is viewed as being determined by individual effort on the one hand and shortcomings of specific groups of pupils and parents on the other. In addition to neoliberal notions of the ideal pupil, the concepts and application have been understood as arising from the interaction between pupils and teachers (Youdell 1993; Laws and Davies 2000). In this formulation, pupils are regarded as active and reflexive agentic beings. Ideas behind the construction of the ideal pupil are closely tied to the methods of pedagogy current in the classroom (Ivinson and Duveen 2006).

The ideal pupil is characterised by high levels of gendered self-regulation and exhibiting characteristics of independence, autonomy, rationality and humour (Walkerdine, 1990). This can be combined with dominant discourses about gender and race, which have been shown to

influence teachers' and children's perceptions of the characteristics that constitute an acceptable or 'good pupil' (Connolly 2002, Renold and Allen 2005). The ideal female pupil, in line with Walkerdine's (1990) analysis of girls in child-centered classrooms, is seen to be equipped with highly developed social skills to create a congenial environment in the classroom both regarding the physical environment, and the social atmosphere. Natalie and Kimarie above can be argued to be attempting to position themselves as the ideal pupil as discussed in chapter 5 section 5.2. This position is effectively denied to them due to the discourses of race and gender within which their actions are viewed

In one model of pedagogy, the competence modes, the ideal pupil is regarded by their teachers as being both a creative self-actualising pupil, who has the freedom to negotiate independently of authority. In performance driven pedagogic modes, the ideal pupil is one whose agency is constricted to and defined by teacher-imposed structures. In the performance orientated pedagogic modes the ideal pupils learning orientation is focussed upon external goals, such as tests (Iverson and Daveen 2006). In this latter context, the labelling of pupils about the ideal pupil concept is central to the relationship between teachers and pupils and between pupils themselves. As Laws and Davies (2000) argue, there is seen to be something 'wrong' with a pupil who has behavioural problems. The labelling of pupils is closely followed by blaming; it is seen to be the fault of pupils if they do not conform to the classroom standards of the ideal pupil.

## **2.9 Concluding Theory**

In this chapter, I have accounted for the theory used to interrogate and analyse the findings of my research. My primary focus is on the experiences the girls have shared with me either through interview, observation, journal entries or in their photographs. Black feminist theory is located in an understanding of the nature of power and how Black women's and girls' difference' is systematically organised through social relations. I use intersectionality to broaden the analysis and explore how the girls' micro experiences reflect and are informed by the macrostructures through which they live and experience the world. Discourse, as explored in this chapter, shall allow me to focus on the structural location of this group of girls in concrete and historically specific social relations. My use of agency allows me to consider

how a plural notion of both power and structure allows for a broader understanding of the choices the girls make concerning their negotiations towards success.

Using theory as I have outlined above will allow for the exploration of the complexities of African Caribbean Black British girls' marginality through Black feminist lens that is imbued an understanding of power. Power in my analysis is dissected using the tools of intersectionality, agency and discourse. In my analysis, I use these tools to theorise race, gender, and other social divisions as lived realities. I need now to consider the methods I have used to develop the data for this thesis and the methodological underpinnings that I bring to this work to ensure my Black feminist approach is consistent

### 3 Chapter 3 Methodology, methods and analysis

The way this study was conducted was heavily influenced by Black feminist theory and the methodological literature on research involving children. While these bodies of work did not provide ready-made solutions to the challenges I faced, they did provide a useful resource for thinking about and negotiating these challenges. One of the greatest difficulties I faced lay in the apparent tension between claims that children have a right to be included in research, and the identification of particular concerns about the potential for exploitation and harm. I resolved these tensions as best I could by reflecting on the relative strengths and limitations of Black feminist theory and the general methodological literature. My reflections resulted in a qualitative approach that sought to promote meaningful dialogue with a sample of African Caribbean Black British girls and their mothers, while taking account of their potential vulnerabilities. The ethical guidance produced by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) was particularly valuable in this regard and helped me translate my reflections into practical ways of working, although it too required some interpretation.

The following discussion of my methodology begins by introducing the distinct epistemological position associated with Black feminist theory. It then goes on to discuss particular methodological challenges that have been identified when conducting research with children. Having identified some of the key challenges presented by the study, the discussion considers how they were addressed. The discussion of the methods used highlights the importance of reflexivity in the research process and offers some insight into the ethical challenges inherent in research with African Caribbean Black British girls. The girls and their mothers will also be introduced to the reader.

#### **3.1 Black feminist epistemology**

Epistemology can be understood in terms of two related questions: what is knowledge and how is knowledge possible? (Bryman 1984). Answers to these questions often have a normative quality because they are not simply concerned with the description of beliefs, but seek to realise desired values, such as “justification”, “truth”, and “reliability” (Harding 1987,

Collins 2009). The realisation of these values, gives the beliefs under consideration the status of “knowledge”.

I took my epistemological starting point from Black feminist theories. These theories advocate a “standpoint” epistemology, which tacitly accepts that impartial or objective research is not possible (Collins 2009). The relationship between knowledge and power (who can know it and how) is a central preoccupation of feminist standpoint epistemology (Haraway 1979) as well as Black feminist epistemology (Collins 2009). Black feminist theorists, such as Collins (2000) and hooks (1994) emphasise that the relationship between the knower and the known is socially mediated. Feminist and Black feminist standpoint epistemologies share a concern that the subject of knowledge should be placed on the same critical plane as the object of knowledge, In this way, Black feminist standpoint epistemology promotes a theory of the subject as the product of intellectual and political struggle. It treats women as subjects who have a capacity to know and views knowledge as the historical product of an intellectual and political struggle to develop and maintain critical practice and oppositional politics.

Collins (2009) describes a set of principles for assessing knowledge claims that comprise a Black feminist epistemology. These are “lived experience as a criterion of meaning” (p.275); “the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims.” (p, 279); “the ethics of caring” (p.281); and the ethics of personal accountability” (p.284). These principles, she argues, are actioned through an interactive ‘call-and-response’ dialogue, which challenges the construction of professional “expertise” and encourages all participants to exchange wisdoms. Experience and knowledge are simultaneously seen as partial yet valid. These principles require the researcher ‘to step into the shoes of the persons being studied’ and build participatory and empowering relationships with them. Whilst this is an admirable aspiration it is fraught with contradictions.

I was drawn to Black feminism because I felt it made sense of my lived experience and reflected some of the core concerns that underpinned my approach to research. The emphasis on Black women’s self-definition (hooks, 1981, 1989; Collins, 2000) sat comfortably with my view that African Caribbean Black British girls possess valid knowledge and are able to

theorise, and critique their daily lives. The way Black feminisms situate research as a personal, intellectual and political endeavor (Williams, 1998; Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2006) was entirely consistent with my thinking. Black feminist research seeks to empower and create spaces for oppressed women and girls to tell their stories, noting that these stories have been under-utilized in mainstream educational research (Dillard, 2006). By focusing on the way African Caribbean Black British girls make sense of their last year in primary school, I considered my research to be a humanizing endeavor that to counter their invisibility in currently available research literature.

Black feminist epistemology proved to be a valuable resource that guided and informed the research. As the study progressed, however, I became increasingly aware of limitations and difficulties associated with this position. While Black feminist epistemology enabled me to articulate a clear case for putting African Caribbean Black British girls at the centre of the study, it was less attuned to the potential for exploitation and harm. Despite the emphasis on the “ethics of caring”, I found little detail on how I might protect the potential vulnerabilities of the girls and their mothers. This issue is arguably underplayed by Black feminist epistemology because it too readily assumes there is a naturally occurring affinity between Black women (see Young, 1997). Certainly, my experience was that developing rapport with the girls and their mothers required significant investment (see below).

I also came to feel there was a potential tension or contradiction between Black feminisms’ emphasis on the importance of lived experience and its broader theoretical precepts. One of the core tenets of Black feminist epistemology holds that, in order to grasp Black women’s experience, we must begin from the material realities of their everyday experience (Collins, 2009). From this starting point, it is argued that researchers can then examine how this experience is organized from outside itself by broader social processes. In other words, Black feminisms advocate that oppression should be interrogated as a complex of social relations and processes that lie outside the individual, yet express themselves through her, and can only be understood in relationship to the organization of society as a whole ( Letherby 2003, Lykes et al 2012). Although I agree with this position, I am also struck by the way it privileges the position of the researcher and sets them apart from the object of the research.



## 3.2 Research involving children

The methodological literature on research involving children pivots around the themes of inclusion, exploitation and harm. Children have traditionally been marginalised from research because of methodological concerns that they are an unreliable source of data and ethical concerns that they are vulnerable to exploitation by researchers (Christensen and James, 2008). This created a situation where children were frequently the objects of study, but their voices and understandings were rarely included in research (James and Prout 1997) and adult caretakers often spoke on behalf of their children (Punch 2002; Hogan 2005; Christensen and James 2008). Such arrangements have been challenged by the rise of a rights-based or rights-respecting approach associated with the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Although the Convention does not specifically mention research, Beazley et al (2009: 370) argue that its articles can be interpreted in a way that supports the idea that children have the ‘right to be properly researched’. This right, they argue, means that children’s perspectives and opinions must be integral to the research (Beazley et al. 2009).

The Convention also identifies the right to protection, prompting the development of guidelines for research with children that are premised on their vulnerability and emphasise the need for consent, competence, and confidentiality (Arditti 2015; Carter 2009). Some authors have been critical of the emphasis on protection, arguing that it serves to marginalise children from research (Thompson, 1992; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). Arditti (2015) notes that children’s need for protection can lead to “overprotection which can conversely silence vulnerable participants” by limiting their agency (p. 1568), while Darbyshire et al (2005) claim that the way children are disempowered in research processes is grounded in a philosophy of exclusion and control.

The case for actively including children in research involves claims that are, in some ways, similar to those developed in support of Black feminist epistemologies. Both sets of claims identify competence and expertise beyond the researcher. Advocates of child-focused

research emphasise children's competence (Clavering & McLaughlin, 2010; Alderson & Morrow 20011). has been concerned to highlight the childhood image of the competent child' (Reynaert et al. 2009), and argue that attempts to understand children's lives on their own terms challenge limiting assumptions about their agency and abilities (Alderson & Morrow 2011; Morrow & Richards, 1996; Darbyshire, et al 2005). The direct involvement of children is also said to challenge established power differentials that could affect the framing of the research (Nairn and Clarke, 2012) by promoting greater awareness of what they can contribute to the process(Carter, 2009 Harley, Morrow 2011). The literature on researching children provided a clear rationale for my focus on African Caribbean Black British girls, but also highlighted possible tensions with the need to ensure they were protected. While I was sympathetic with rights-based arguments that children should be included in research, I was also wary of where criticisms of the emphasis on protection might lead. I took seriously the potential vulnerability of the girls who participated in the study as well as the rights of their mother's as legal guardians and caregivers.

### **3.3 Methods, ethics and informed consent**

The aim of the study, as well as my sympathy for Black feminist standpoint epistemology and child-rights perspectives all, led in the direction of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods such as observations and interviews, for example, all the researcher to get closer to the participants than quantitative methods do. The methods were influenced by both my overarching research and the broader questions. I wanted to understand what "success" means for African-Caribbean Black-British girls and their mothers during their final year of primary school. This meant asking how the girls negotiate and orient themselves towards success and how this shapes their relationships with friends, teachers and parents. Black feminist epistemology encouraged me to focus on the girls' understandings of their lives and experiences (Collins 2009), while the emphasis of child-rights' perspectives on understanding children's lives on their terms supported a similar focus. A qualitative approach was deemed to be most suitable because it would allow me to 'get right inside' the setting (Mason 2002) and observe first-hand how the girls' and their mothers' understandings of success are lived and negotiated. Data were generated through repeat interviews with a small sample of African Caribbean Black British girls and their mothers (daughters and mothers were interviewed separately), participant observation, diaries and photography, and a group discussion.

Neither Black feminist epistemology nor child-rights perspectives were especially helpful in working out the practicalities of how to do the research. Both seemed somewhat removed from the immediate challenges of how to identify participants and generate data in a way that resolved the tension between inclusion and exploitation. I managed these tensions as best I could without ever fully resolving them. The ethical guidelines produced by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) provided a valuable template, albeit one that had to be interpreted and translated. Among the issues addressed by the guidelines are consent, transparency, the right to withdraw, incentives, harm from participating in the research, privacy, and disclosure.

The BERA Guidelines (2004) assert that educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for the person and democratic values. This is evident in a general expectation that researchers will obtain participants' voluntary informed consent to be involved in the study at the outset and that they must remain sensitive and open to the possibility that participants may wish to withdraw consent (see also Cocks, 2006). Voluntary informed consent is a standard requirement for ethical practice in social research (Crow et al. 2006; Calvey 2008) and seemed straightforward enough when I first read about it, but putting it into practice proved to be more complicated, contingent, and ambivalent than I anticipated.

On the advice of friends, some of whom were teachers, I began by trying to recruit research participants through schools. I wrote to nine primary schools, wrote again two weeks later, and followed up with a telephone call. My calls were fielded by secretaries and receptionists, who told me that my request should be put to the head teacher, while reminding me that head teachers are very busy. I did receive one reply – a polite, but flat, refusal. The teacher concerned said she was personally interested in my research, but felt her school was not a suitable venue because it did not have many African Caribbean pupils and even fewer girls in the final year. I did not pursue this approach any further. Friends also suggested that I should put an advertising flyer around at local community-focused events and promote the need for research participants through the women's centre. I pursued each of these options with varying degrees of success. The change in approach led to me to broaden the focus of the research. Thinking about the role of mothers drew my attention to the link between children's

schooling and motherwork Mirza 1992, Cooper 2007). Hence I broadened the focus of the study to include mothers on the grounds that they are a key influence on their daughter's experience of school.

I was given permission to distribute an A5 flyer appealing for research participants at two community events. My appeal, (see appendix 1) was for families with African Caribbean daughters moving into their final year of primary school. A similar flyer was distributed through the Women and girls centre (see appendix 2). Interested parties were asked to contact me to find out more about the research. Mothers and daughters were invited to a short early evening meeting to ask any questions. Four parents with daughters in the target age-range came forward and agreed for their daughter to participate. From here I engaged in snowball sampling, working with those who had agreed to take part in the study to identify other potential participants (Patton 1990). This approach was less challenging than I anticipated. The mothers spoke to friends and colleagues, and the girls also spoke to friends, offering a brief explanation of what the research was about and inviting them to contact me for further details. I then asked the girls to suggest other potential participants. These various approaches identified 15 girls and their mothers who expressed a willingness to take part in the research.

Contact details for each set of participants were duly noted, and I rang each to arrange a preliminary meeting. Telephone numbers for three of the families were incorrect. Once I had established that the numbers were not in use, I decided not to contact these families further as I did not want to pressure them. Interview dates were scheduled with the remaining contacts and followed up in writing. When I went to the girls' homes as arranged, three of them had decided not to be involved in the research after all. They said they were moving, were too busy, or could not see what the research would do for them. After the first interview, another one of the girls asked her mother to tell me she did not want to take part any further, as her friend had decided not to be part of the research. While I was frustrated and disappointed by these decisions, I acknowledged that consent means being able to say "yes" or "no", that children have the right to consult others and to change their minds (Hills, 2005). I accepted the girls' decision not to participate and did not try to persuade them to reconsider. Nor did I offer incentives to any potential participants. If consent is to be truly informed I reasoned it must be given without duress. In essence, the eight girls and their mothers who took part in the study selected themselves.

The issue of informed consent was complicated by the design of the study and the dynamics between the girls and their mothers. Participation had to be negotiated with both parties, sometimes jointly and sometimes separately. The girls were protected by their mothers, and the mothers were the gateway I had to traverse to gain access to the girls. Negotiations around informed consent were further complicated by the age of the girls. Nairn and Clarke (2012) suggest that the power imbalances involved in such research can be addressed by ensuring that the children understand the purpose of the study. While I did my utmost to meet Alderson and Morrows' (2004) injunction to have transparent discussions about the research with participants, the challenges involved led me to reflect critically on whether the consent I attained was informed. Having gone through this process, I feel I have gained a more realistic appreciation of what ethical research practice involves.

I have come to accept, as Gallagher (2010) argues, that the consent provided by the girls and mothers who participated in my study has to be understood within the context of constraints, obligations and expectations over which I had limited control. The BERA (2004) guidelines suggest that necessary steps should be taken to ensure that all participants in research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, how the research will be used, as well as how and to whom the research will be reported. While these are important principles, they arguably take little account of the messy, compromised position of research participants, especially children, in community settings. My experience reflected Graham et al. 's (2007) claim that neither researchers nor their participants can hope for anything more than a partial, contextual and incomplete understanding of what they are doing. It was not entirely possible to ensure that participants completely understood what the project entailed because my understanding of the project was not fully formed at the outset and evolved over time. Nor can I claim to have fully appreciated all the possible consequences of participation in the study, or the potential impact of the results.

The potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding was ever present. Alderson and Morrow (2004) argue that consent requires time and a quiet space to talk, led by people who are "skillful and confident about sharing information, overcoming language barriers, using words and responding to children's cues and body language" (p. 103). The context in which I

was working and my own skillset meant this was a difficult challenge - I was a lone research student limited by both experience and resources. All I felt able to do was explain what the research project was about and check that participants appeared to genuinely understand the description. This was something I did repeatedly, confirming that the person I was talking knew what I was doing, why I was doing it, and that they were willing to cooperate. The girls generally, though perhaps unthinkingly, answered in the affirmative. Goredema-Braid, (2010) notes that problems of misunderstanding are especially relevant in research with children as they are routinely expected to listen, affirm understanding in school settings where there might be a level of stigma attached to admitting they do not understand and require further explanation. The way in which silence may signify something other than understanding (namely resistance) is one of the key findings of my study (see Chapter 5). It was only on reflection that I considered whether the girls might have used silence to bring uncomfortable conversations with me to an end.

My concerns about informed consent coalesced around the question of who can give consent for a child to be involved in research and whether the girls had the capacity to consent for themselves. Whilst the BERA (2004) guidelines focus on age and intellectual capability, this concentration on individual capacity neglects the social nature of consent-giving (Alderson and Morrow, 2004). Alderson's (2004) claim that children's relationships with their parents are likely to influence decisions about whether consent is given or withheld is particularly pertinent to my study because of the way I recruited them. Most of the girls were contacted through community events and open evenings at the local women's centre. The girls did not go to the community events alone and all communication in this initial phase was conducted through their mothers. Given my substantive interest in the girls' agentic behaviours in negotiating a route to success (see Chapter 4), it is an uncomfortable irony that consent to take part in the study had to be obtained from their adult guardians in the first instance (Balen et al, 2006; Heath et al., 2007).

This tension is reflected in the BERA (2004) guidance. While stipulating that consent cannot be given by anyone other than the research participant, the guidance also advises that researchers following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child will take account of the rights and duties of legal guardians, which may mean gaining their consent for

the child to be involved. Even with the consent of the girls' mothers, it was possible that their participation was based on a general desire to please or a fear of what might happen if they were not seen to be co-operating (see Heath et al 2007)

Price (1996) warns that it is better to compromise the research than compromise the participants. In so far as the research posed a risk to participants it seemed to lie in what happened to the data. I followed Alderson and Morrow's (2004) advice and explained to the girls and their mothers, at the outset, that confidentiality and anonymity provided an important back drop to the conversations we would have. I have been careful to uphold this commitment, ensuring that data are stored safely and securely, referring to participants by pseudonyms only, and maintaining confidentiality. Explaining the finer details of ethical practice ran the risk of overloading participants, leading to boredom or confusion (Crow et al 2006). This was particularly the case when working with the girls who appeared to want to know more about me - my heritage, whether I had children, and where I lived - rather than the abstract details of the project's possible outcomes and the limits to confidentiality. I think the girls understood confidentiality as keeping a secret, but my explanation of the circumstances under which confidentiality could be breached were not so easily understood. In effect I told the girls that what they say to me will not remain between me, them, and the recording equipment if maintaining confidentiality would be harmful to them. I cannot be certain that the girls interpreted harm in a similar way to myself.

Neither the girls nor their mothers appeared to be concerned about having their responses anonymised. BERA (2004) guidelines suggest that participants' identity should not be revealed unless individuals choose to be identified. I was concerned that the girls and women involved in my study might rethink their stance, by which time the research would be published, and there would be no opportunity to change the content. I decided to anonymise responses to ensure that confidentiality was not compromised. The BERA (2004) guidance was useful in directing the write-up of the research, but was less helpful in negotiating the boundaries between the girls and their mothers. The mothers were, at times, keen to hear the interview recordings of their children. Ostensibly they wanted to help me understand what their girls were trying to say. To maintain the daughters' trust I took extracts from interviews with other girls and discussed these.

Translating ethical guidelines into practice was much more complicated than I anticipated, but I found encouragement in the literature. I was reassured by Gallagher's (2009) advice that 'ethics may be better thought of as practical wisdom shaped through an ongoing process of critical reflection, rather than a set of universal prescriptions for action' (p11). Rather than engaging in box-ticking exercise, I followed Parker's (2005) injunction to consider ethics throughout the research process, which put the focus on conduct and how relationships, or ethical encounters, are managed. A similar point is made by Christensen and Prout (2002) who highlight ethical symmetry as a means of overcoming the challenges of power and status when researching with children. The key to this approach, they argue, is ensuring a 'dialogue with children throughout the research process' (2002, p. 478). I sought to promote such a dialogue by being consistently respectful of the views and experiences the girls discussed even when they appeared to be fanciful. The emphasis on dialogue also means that consent is 'always-in-process and unfinished' rather than being taken with 'non-ambiguous permission' as a 'singular practice' (Renold et al, 2008, 427 and 429).

I tried to maintain a position where the girls' consent was verbally repeated and just as easily withdrawn although I was also reassured by Heath et al's (2007) observation that children are far more interested in doing the research than discussing it in abstract. I tried to attend to participants' non-verbal communication as well as their verbal communication. Sometimes the girls would go to, or remain in, their rooms when I arrived and I took this to mean that they did not want to engage with me or the research on that occasion. I did not force or pursue contact with them at such times. Allowing the girls to decide whether to engage with me or not was a principle I maintained even when I began to feel panicky about the possibility of another "fruitless" evening of data development. I found the notion of informed consent as an invisible act to be simultaneously calming and unsettling in these situations (Alderson and Morrow, 2004). On-going participation and engagement can be taken to imply consent and I was, at least, able to maintain the participation of the girls and their mothers for the duration of the study.



### 3.4 Generating data

How best to generate data is both a methodological and ethical decision. My aim was to adopt methods that would effectively engage children and were ethically sound. While I had a definite preference for a qualitative approach from the outset, I was less clear about the precise method to use. One question that I had to address was whether research with children requires different methods from research with adults. Punch (2002) notes that ‘innovative’ methods such as drawing or photography have become popular in research with children, partly because of assumptions that children enjoy these activities, are competent at them, and lack the attention span required by ‘traditional’ methods such as interviews. The notion that research with children automatically requires different methods has been widely critiqued (Thomson 2007), however, and Alderson (2008) is particularly critical of approaches that infantilise children or imply they are incapable of understanding or influencing the research process. Punch (2002: 338) maintains that:

... it is misleading to talk about ‘child’ and ‘adult’ research methods since the suitability of particular methods depends as much on the research context as on the research subject’s stage in the life course. The choice of methods not only depends on the age, competence, experience, preference and social status of the research subjects but also on the cultural environment and the physical setting, as well as the research questions and the competencies of the researcher.

Similar claims are made Christensen and James (2008), Qvortrup (2008), and Clark and Moss (2011). The literature on research with children alerted me to the need to find a balanced approach, which neither patronised the girls by belittling their competence nor treated them as adults and confronted them with issues they had never considered. I settled on a mixture of traditional and more innovative methods, using unstructured observations and semi-structured interviews alongside journals, photography and a focus group discussion. I also made reflective field notes throughout the period and these too form part of the data development process. The methods I chose were selected for two primary reasons: I wanted the methods to be child-friendly and I wanted to experience, as well as capture a snapshot of, their

environments. Of the methods I used, observation, interviews and groups discussions proved to be most successful.

The fieldwork period lasted for eight months, covering most of the school year, and I was in regular, monthly, contact with the girls and their mothers during this period. Seven of the girls were interviewed four times at regular intervals and the eighth was interviewed three times. Their mothers were interviewed twice. The number of observation sessions varied from one to five, averaging out at two-and-a-half. The group discussion was conducted towards the end of the fieldwork. I also “bumped into” several participants in the city as we were going about our daily lives.

The combination of methods I used enabled me to study the girls’ social worlds and develop an ‘intimate familiarity’ with the ‘social meanings’ that shaped their experience participants (Brewer 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The different methods played a complementary role in this enterprise: observations guided me in framing and reframing some of the questions that I wanted to ask during the interviews, while the interviews helped me to interpret the significance of what I observed. The focus on the girls’ understandings of the social world were helped by studying their actions and accounts in their everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher. Repeated contact over an extended period of time proved useful because it promoted a deeper understanding of the girls and their motivations. I was able to observe how the girls’ practices evolved and changed over time (Murchison 2010), reflecting Geertz’s (1973) emphasis on the importance of ‘thick description’ of multiple, inter-related happenings and meanings in qualitative research. While this approach is strong in terms of its validity, generalizability was not, and did not have to be, the goal. Qualitative research can generate informative data on the basis of small, non-probability samples (Percy et al., 2015).

### **3.5 Unstructured observation**

Observation fulfilled a dual function in this study, providing a means of managing my relationships with the girls and their mothers as well as generating valuable data. According

to Dahlberg and Moss (2004) the “ethics of an encounter” requires respect for the other and an emphasis on developing meaningful relationships with participants. Observation helped to build such relationships as I was often included in discussions, instructed to “hold the baby”, asked to drive mothers and daughter to events or shopping, and invited to attend church with them. This type of contact promoted trust and rapport, which encouraged continued participation in the research. I also hoped it would help the girls and their mothers relax in presence, reducing the impact I had on what they said and did. These processes were reflected in my field notes:

“My role as a researcher is blurred in the homes, where the mothers and I seem to be in a new relationship, somewhere between an acquaintance and a friend. The recording equipment and prepared interview questions, bring formality, but this seems to disappear as the interviews develop. I’m often treated more as a ‘fellow’ mother, and a confidante, sometimes playing the listening role of a counsellor, hearing personal details of their lives that have no place in my research”. (Field notes January 2010)

I used the method of unstructured observation to try to get to know the girls and their families. I wanted to sensitise myself to their language and perspectives and gain access their cultures of communication (Christensen and James 2000). I wanted to learn directly from participants and become familiar with aspects of their everyday lives (Creswell, 1998). This, as Collins (2000) and Coloma (2008) note is a particular tenet of Black feminist research. I was attracted to unstructured observation because it involved me being present in the activities of the participants, while retaining a theoretical lens. Being an observer, I felt, would allow me to listen to them in their unguarded moments, to see how they made sense of their lives and consider how school impacted upon their relationships at home.

Unstructured observations delivered some of what I hoped and provided important insights into my research question. I was able to see directly some of what the girls’ mothers do to support their daughters and help them mediate their identities as African Caribbean Black British girls. This included intimate and intense moments when family members were shouting at, disagreeing with, reassuring, and displaying affection to one another. It is

difficult to see how else I could have captured these moments. As well as revealing key dynamics in the girls' interactions, observation alerted me to things I might otherwise have missed. Although I did not go into the observation without some idea of what I was interested in, I did change and add questions into the semi-structured interview based on my observations. This flexibility allowed me to include aspects that I might otherwise have overlooked. Silence, being silenced and using silence came to the fore during the unstructured observations and helped frame an important section of the study (see Chapter 5 section 5.7).

Although observation was valuable it was not straightforward. I was unprepared for the messiness of the process and had naïvely assumed that everything would fall neatly into place. I had, at first, not considered the possibilities of real life interruptions spoiling my research. Sometimes the girls were too busy to have me in their homes as agreed or were reluctant to interact with me and stayed in their rooms with the door firmly closed. Sometimes they busied themselves with friends. Although I was irritated by these multiple interruptions I came to accept them as a significant part of the complex reality of other peoples' lives and an important part of understanding the girls' experiences (Irwin and Johnson (2005). Even when I was able to complete the observation as planned, I often asked myself whether the interactions I observed were reflective of the family's typical behaviours.

It is well established that the presence of an observer can skew interactions (Guba 2000) and this potentially compromises the validity of the technique. At first, I tried to make notes while conducting the observation, but this invariably attracted attention and research participants would ask what I was writing. I quickly abandoned this approach and wrote up my impressions after the visit. The notes described what had happened, how participants appeared to experience the session, what their mood had been, how they had responded to my cues, and whether their behaviours and demeanour had changed over the course of the session or between sessions. Writing field notes after the event meant I was less incongruous, but my presence may still have altered the family dynamics. Ideally, I would have liked to have carried out more frequent observation, but one of the major drawbacks of this method is that it is time-consuming and resource-intensive (Margolin et al., 1998). The limited number of observations I was able to complete meant I was not able to test the reliability of the

technique and establish whether there was high or low occurrence of behaviours (Gardener 2000).

As well as the methodological challenges, unstructured observation presented some potential ethical problems. Part of the strength of the method is that it provides access to intimate, unguarded moments, but this raises questions about the right to privacy. Flewitt (2005) argues that researchers must protect participants' privacy, respect their right to confidentiality, and avoid intrusions into their personal affairs. Under UK law the Data Protection Act (1998) dictates that data about individuals must only be used for agreed, specified purposes and should be proportionate to the purpose for which it was gathered. During data collection and analysis decisions about what to include and what to exclude also relate to researchers' understandings of privacy and respect. The trusting relationships built up during longitudinal research might mean that the researcher becomes familiar with private details that should not be disclosed. If the girls or their mothers talked about issues outside the research aims, I turned off any recording equipment, erased personal details, or did not transcribe what was said. All of these decisions were documented in the field notes.

### **3.6 Interviews**

When I first thought about the methods I would use I took it for granted that interviews would form a prominent part of the process. I saw them as a relatively straightforward method that was ideally suited to the aim of exploring participants' experiences and their associated meanings (Bryman, 2015). The interviews proved to be a potent technique for generating data and, coupled with the unstructured observations, enabled me to develop and refine my understanding of the environment in which the girls and their mothers were operating. As with the observations, however, the interviews proved more difficult than I anticipated and I came away from the study with a more realistic understanding of what the method demands as well as a greater appreciation of its strengths and weaknesses.

The girls and their mothers were interviewed individually in their homes as well as in settings outside the home. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and an hour-and-a-half. While

the observation process felt awkward at first, my initial experience of the interviews was that they were no less artificial. The interviews involved me talking to children who were, apart from our initial contact, strangers. Each time I entered the girls' homes I was aware that the interview would intrude on her time or some other intention she may have had for her evening. The sense that I was imposing was reinforced by the way the business of family life continued around us. Dogs barked, babies cried, and televisions blared, and all were preserved on the recording of the interviews.

The practicalities of interviewing proved challenging. I anticipated that the interviews would be fairly structured, but this was not quite how they worked. Interviewing children I found to be very different from interviewing adults. I had to allow the interviews to be conducted at the pace the girls and their mothers were happy with, but which often felt slow and frustratingly repetitive to me. All of the interviews were audio recorded. For a time, at the beginning of each interview, the recorder was somewhat intrusive and the call and response dialogue advocated by Collins (2009) proved hard to come by. The girls would stare at the recorder, asking at regular intervals, "is it working", and make asides as though somehow behind its back. The girls, who were articulate and bright when not being recorded, were, initially at least, somewhat inhibited by the presence of the recording equipment. This took various forms: monosyllabic/inaudible whispered responses, twisting in the chair, playing with their hair or fingers.

At other times it was difficult to keep the interviews on track. Conversations meandered, leaving me increasingly anxious that I was not getting any useful data at all. I stuck to the task, however, asking open-ended questions, inviting additional comments, and leaving space for elaborated responses in keeping with Collins' (2009) emphasis on the need for dialogue in assessing knowledge claims. Just as I came to accept interruptions to the observations, I came to see the meanderings of the interviews as an inevitable and potentially useful part of the commitment to participants' meanings and lived-experience. The "dross", in other words, was integral to capturing authentic data (Irwin and Johnson 2005).

What the girls and mothers said during the interviews appeared to reflect a web of influences, including their social position, their perceptions of whether the answers they gave might

incriminate them in some way, what I might do with the answers they gave and the fact that they were being asked these questions by a particular person in a particular setting. . As I conducted the interviews I came to see that I was not simply collecting or soaking up data, but was actively involved in constructing knowledge (Fontana & Frey, 2000). As Webb et al. (1966) note, interviews can intrude into the social setting they seek to describe, creating attitudes in the process. Asking the questions I asked, in the way I asked them, may have encouraged participants to state opinions they did not hold to (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Silverman, 2000). While some may have wanted to please me, there were times, particularly early on, when I felt that my contact with the mothers inhibited the interviews with the girls. The question of “what are you going to do with my information” was rarely spoken out loud, but it had to be addressed and readdressed throughout the interviews and observations. Sometimes, when I asked questions about involvement in bullying behavior or talking back to teachers, the girls responded by saying “I’d better not say” or “don’t tell me, mum!” I was left wondering what the girls thought I might do with their answers and felt disappointed that, despite my best efforts to explain the importance of confidentiality, the girls were uncertain whether their information was safe with me. I wanted the girls to think of me as friendly, someone who was able to maintain their confidences and be non-judgmental. While I think they did see me in this way for much of the time, there were occasions when what they saw was a middle-aged woman asking them about their business.

Developing trust with participants was harder than I anticipated and led me to reappraise some of the claims associated with standpoint epistemologies. Young (1997) challenges feminist frameworks that imply there is an automatic relationship of symmetry between self and other. Similarly, as the research progressed, I came to see assumptions of symmetry between myself and the girls as a form of wishful thinking. My status as a researcher, my age, my social positioning, and my relationship with their mothers separated me from the girls and put me in a position of power. It is also worth noting that some of the mothers of the black girls were white (see below) and Black feminist epistemology appears to be largely silent on this dynamic. None of which is to say that rapport and trust were entirely absent. Nor is it to deny that my position as a Black woman was a source of shared understanding and experience, creating a sense of affinity and facilitating opportunities that may not otherwise have been forthcoming. From a standpoint perspective, moreover, the notion that I was actively involved in the production of the research is a potential strength, rather than a

weakness. Inter-subjectivity and the coproduction of knowledge are important elements of standpoint epistemologies (Hesse-Biber, 2013), but ultimately the validity of my research depended on the rigorous application of robust method (Bryman, 2015). This meant listening to and picking up on what the girls and their mothers said, maintaining confidentiality, and asking questions in ways that did not lead participants in a particular direction or pressure them into giving a certain type of answer (ibid). The richness and variety of the data gives me confidence that my method was sound.

### **3.7 Focus group**

My experience of the focus group reflected Wolcott's (2005) claim that this method combines the strengths of depth interviewing and participant observation. I planned to administer three focus groups – at the beginning, middle, and end of the fieldwork. This proved impossible because the girls were busy, forgot, and, in some cases, had been grounded. One focus group was administered at the end of the girls' final year at primary school. I brought all the participants together in the local women and girls centre and used it as an opportunity to restate the primary research questions and to gauge reactions to some of the emerging themes from my initial reading of the transcripts and field notes. Having all of the girls together provided a valuable data collection opportunity. My role was to offer discussion prompts and help the girls focus on their notions of success, their concerns and expectations about the transition to secondary school. The focus group supported and validated the emerging themes from the earlier work with the individual girls and their families. This proved to be valuable because, as George (2007) suggests, the process of dialogue and negotiation in focus groups provides information about the degree of consensus that would be hard to get using any other method. The focus group indicated that, despite going to different schools, the girls shared similar experiences, ideas and concerns.

The principle disadvantage of focus groups is their susceptibility to bias due to group pressure, the influence of dominant participants and/or the role of the facilitator (Cameron 2004). There were certainly times when I struggled to control the discussion and the process did become rather “messy”, but the potential for bias was mitigated by the use of alternative research methods. The focus group inevitably raises questions about the expectation of privacy because what participants say is necessarily shared with others in the group. I sought



to manage this risk through the process of informed consent and by carefully limiting the topics that were addressed. Relying on a single group was potentially problematic because it made it difficult to assess the dynamic associated with the particular combination of people involved (Morgan 1996).

### **3.8 What didn't work - photographs and journals**

I asked each of the girls to take photographs of things and people they would be leaving when they went to secondary school. The results were patchy. Some of the girls happily posed in front of their cameras with friends, teachers and pieces of equipment they would miss, but there was a lack of depth. I also asked the girls to keep a journal, noting interesting events as well as their thoughts and feelings about school and the impending move to secondary school. I hoped the diaries would reflect Collins' (2009) ethical system for knowledge validation based on values of personal expressiveness, emotion and empathy. Three of the girls used the diary often. Another made four relevant entries, each of which was made the day before we were scheduled to meet. The rest of the girls felt that writing a diary was a chore and some asked if they could stop doing it. I agreed they could if they wanted to.

### **3.9 Analysing the data**

My analytic approach reflected Janesick's (2000) observation that analysis occurs through a process of crystallisation prior to, during, and after data collection. The use of multiple methods accentuated the element of crystallisation as it facilitated a deeper, multilayered, albeit partial, understanding of the topic. As discussed by George (2007) and Reinharz (1992) the analytic process of bringing structure to the data drew on my autobiography, using the "self" as a resource to help make sense of others' lives.

My principal analytic commitment was to do justice to lived experience of research participants. The analysis presented in the following chapters is grounded in the data I generated by spending time with, and talking to, African Caribbean Black British girls and their mothers, but also seeks to locate their immediate lived experience within a broader context. Once the analytic themes had been identified from the data, and in accordance with

Black feminist epistemology, I moved outside the micro experiences described by the girls and mothers to explore how their perceptions and expectations had been shaped by broader social processes and institutional arrangements. This broader analysis focused on the ways gender, age and race shaped participants' experiences and illuminated the ways their expectations for success created space for resistance to the presumption of their failure.

The digital recordings of the interviews and the focus groups were transcribed by me. Transcribing the recordings as I went along was useful as it helped me identify themes and ideas, noting commonalities and differences in the girls' responses. At the beginning of the research, I heard and read in the transcriptions, that the girls' considered success to be exclusively concerned with academic attainment. This is what I expected to find. As the process of doing the research progressed I relaxed and was better able to hear what the participants were saying. I noted that their thoughts and perspectives were more complex than I initially thought. The notions of success outlined in two of the girls' diaries reflected ideas of happiness as well as friendship. Once I spotted these additional notions of success, I returned to the other interviews and transcripts to reconsider how success was expressed. Through this process of rethinking, I noted that the girls' ideas of success were not fixed, but shifted over time. I brought this fluidity to my analysis.

The formal analysis was an iterative process that involved moving between different sources of data to identify themes, sub-themes and categories of meaning (Bryman, 2015). I began by looking at my research notes and highlighted possible themes around which I could organise the girls' stories. After reviewing the notes and photographs, tagging relevant points, I turned to the interviews. I listened to the recordings and read the transcripts, coding them and looking for discernible patterns. This produced four major themes (Success, Teachers, Friends, and Mothers) around which I grouped the data. I drew conceptual maps and developed lists of the number of times issues were raised under the major headings. Interrogating the themes led to the identification of sub-themes. I returned to the digital recordings, listened to each complete account again, and tagged relevant points. It was reassuring to hear the analytic themes being articulated by the girls and their mothers. I went back to my field notes to assess the importance of the themes. This allowed me to identify links between what I observed and what was said in the interviews.

The process of linking the emerging analytic themes to the broader literature occurred concurrently and continued once the formal data-analysis had come to an end. Where the data converged, I was able to apply a Black feminist perspective, but the data did not always converge. Tensions and contradictions were evident and meant I had to return to the data in an effort to understand what was going on. This process helped me make sense of changes over time and differences between participants. It also meant I stopped looking for a singular “right” answer and started looking at the multiple ways the girls and their mothers made success mean something for them in the context of their lives. I repeated this process for each of the ideas that would later form the chapters of my thesis.

### **3.10 Black feminisms and reflexivity**

Throughout the process of generating and analysing data I was struck by just how diverse participants’ opinions were. I was also concerned about my ability to capture underlying themes, while adequately reflecting the diversity of thought and experience. Black feminist standpoint perspectives were helpful in this endeavor although they also carried certain risks. Viewing the data through a Black feminist lens alerted me to important themes that centred on reading participants everyday experiences as strategies of survival (Oesterreich 2007). The literature on the way silence features in African American girls’ reactions to perceptions of their transgressive femininities was particularly helpful in alerting me to the ways the girls in my study used silence to help them get through school, while also experiencing the act of being-silenced as a weapon that was used against them (Morris 2007, Fordham 1996). A Black feminist standpoint also enabled me to develop an appreciative account that acknowledged the work the mothers did to support and ensure the survival of their daughters without portraying these women as superhuman. I was able to recognise and identify with the thinking that emerged from the analysis. Listening to, and re-reading, the interviews reminded me of my childhood-self approaching the transition to secondary school with excitement and expectation. It also resonated with my adult-self, the mother of young black girl.

Identification with research participants is a potential strength, but also potential weakness of standpoint epistemologies. Over-identification can produce blind-spots and lead to misinterpretation rooted in mistaken assumptions (Bryman, 2015). I tried to be alert to these

dangers by recognising the dual function that reflexivity can serve. Initially, I thought I was supposed to be the model of objectivity – disinterested in and distant from what I might find - but Oakley (1981) and Phillips and Earl (2010) showed me that what the researcher brings to the process can have a significant impact on the study, informing its methodological and theoretical foundations. As a guide to sociological practice, reflexivity means trying to be aware of how you, the researcher, shape the study. It might also mean being able to use the “self” as a resource to understand others. According to Hess-Biber (2013) the task of the researcher is to work out how their values, beliefs and constructs interact with and influence the research process and the results that are produced. While reflexivity can be a valuable resource, it carries a shadow. Skeggs (2004) is critical of the way researchers cling to the panacea of ‘reflexivity’ as if the challenges of privilege and power can be dissolved by inserting themselves into the account and claiming that reflexivity was practiced. In effect, Skeggs exhorts us to be reflexive about our reflexivity. This means attending to separations as well as connections, appreciating what we are not as well as what we are, and acknowledging what we do not know or understand as well as what we do.

My identity as a researcher shifted over the course of the study. I let go of the notion that I was supposed to be “objective” and tried to be reflexive. This involved acknowledging my role in the generation and production of the research. I thought deeply about what it was that had led me to my chosen topic (see Chapter 1 for the autobiography of the question). I acknowledged that the study was inevitably informed by my experiences of school as well as my understandings and values (see Pring, 2000; Smith, 2007; and Usher, 1996). I also became more confident about recognising parallels and areas of commonality between myself and the research participants, noting how our identities and lived experience had been shaped by powerful hierarchies of race and gender (see Collins 2009). I remained wary of the risks of over-identification, however, and wanted to ensure that the research was methodologically rigorous. Whilst I considered myself to be familiar with much of what the girls and women described, I tried to be open to new ideas and ways of thinking. This was particularly important in allowing the data to complicate my understanding of what “success” meant for the girls, alerting me to more immediate concerns than achieving qualifications and getting a good job.

At times I had to make a conscious effort to ensure that I followed the data. I initially paid little attention to the role of fathers, which is odd given the close relationship I have with my

own father. On reflection, I think I was not attuned to the role of fathers because men were not the focus of my research. Discussions with the girls and their mothers often revolved around men in the community, however, and this prompted me to revisit my observations of the men and boys in the girls' lives to achieve a more rounded analysis. Similarly, I was not expecting to consider migration because I assumed that the girls were not touched by that experience, but migration was a regular referenced alongside the experiences and expectations of community elders.

Ultimately, it is my contention that Black feminisms are bound by the context in which they are developed. As such, they helped to generate a contextual understanding of the lives and perceptions of the girls and mothers in my study. While Black feminist perspectives were invaluable in highlighting how the lived experience of the girls was shaped by broader social processes and arrangements, the specificity of their experiences could only be established through the careful application of rigorous method.

### **3.11 The power in research**

I came to this study with considerable experience as a youth and community worker and a preexisting commitment to empowerment that I was keen to translate into my research practice. The emphasis in the literature on research that recognises children as purposive and dynamic actors in their own lives sat comfortably with my concerns (Christensen and Prout, 2002; and Crivello et al., 2009). My commitment to empowerment did inform my practice and was evident in my desire to take the girls' perspectives seriously and ensure that I reflected them as accurately as possible. Having become more familiar with the literature, however, I can now see that my practical commitment to empowerment was limited and partial.

Several authors emphasise the importance of giving children the opportunity to be involved in setting research agendas and strategies (Alderson and Goodey, 1996; Morrow and Richards, 1996). As Hill et al (2005) explain, children's voices can be central in research, but these initiatives are often instigated by adults and undertaken to serve their needs (Nairn & Clarke 2012). Christensen and James (2008) make a similar point when they call for greater

reflexivity, arguing that opening up spaces for children to speak is not sufficient for their voices to be heard. These authors pose the question of whether research, without the necessary reflexivity, replaces one form of exploitation with another. This question struck a chord, encouraging me to reflect critically on my own practice and consider how it may have disempowered participants. The girls who provided the focus of study did get to talk and be listened to, and I discussed my findings with them to check I had understood them properly, but they had little role in shaping the aims of the study, developing questions, or deciding how data would be generated, analysed and written up. While I was keen to ensure that the girls' voices featured prominently in the results of the research, I was much less concerned about involving them in the production process.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can identify an uncomfortable incongruence between my stated values and actual practice. This incongruence was evident in the use of diaries as a way of generating data. The idea behind the diary was to give the girls an opportunity to vent about their life at school or home. I felt it would be good for them to have a written record of their final year to look back at and that the diary would help me to achieve my academic goals. I told myself I wanted to give the girls the opportunity to reflect on their lives and saw my role as that of a facilitator. There was an almost ingrained assumption on my part that the girls would enjoy and benefit from the diary writing process. Alderson's (2008) criticisms of research that infantilises or implies that children are incapable of understanding or indeed influencing the research process seems pertinent here. My promotion of research diaries suggests I harboured doubts about the girls' capacity to discuss and describe their experiences without a prop. This realisation is, even in retrospect, difficult to rationalise because I was otherwise impressed by the quality of dialogue and insight offered by the girls during the observations and interviews.

When thinking about how I might have done things differently it is important to consider the requirements of the Doctoral Programme. The programme involved a series of submission dates and to successfully complete the programme I had to ensure that the research was conducted in accordance with rigorous academic standards. My desire to complete the research successfully had a significant impact on my decision making and took precedence at times. The Doctoral Programme is fairly flexible, however, and does not preclude a greater focus on empowerment. If I was to do the process over again, I like to think that I would take

the time to discuss and negotiate both the methods and alternative ways of disseminating the results with research participants.

### **3.12 The girls and their mothers**

The girls were all born in the East Midlands and lived in or around one of the region's county towns with their mothers. Although the aim of the research is, in part, to commonalities and shared experiences, it is important that the analysis is set in the context of each of the girl's lives. The following descriptions are based on my personal observations and interactions with them.

### 3.13 Table of Research Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>siblings</b>	<b>Heritage Mother</b>	<b>Heritage Father</b>	<b>Mother's work</b>	<b>Mother's education</b>	<b>Mother's name</b>	<b>Father living in household</b>
Tamisha	10	St Johns	1 brother, aged 6 months	Black British (Jamaican)	Jamaican	Mother	BA (Hons)	Charmaine	N
Kimarie	11	Sacred Heart	1 sister, aged 18yrs	Guyanese	Guyanese	Care manager	NNEB	Maureen	N
Helen	11	St Johns	2 brothers, aged 16 and 2	Antiguan	Antiguan	Occupationa l Health Therapist	DipHe	June	N



Peterlyn	10	Sacred Heart	3 brothers, 1 sister, aged 8, 6, 4, 2	Dual Heritage	Black British (St Kitts)	Mother	GCSE	Michelle	Y
Natalie	10	The Hall	3 sisters, aged 17, 6, 3	Black British (Antiguan)	Black British (Antiguan)	Nursery Nurse	NNEB	Andrea	N
Janessa	11	Alderman Hinsley	1 brother, aged 24	White British	Black British (Guyanese)	Sales assistant	None	Maria	Y
Rakaya	10	Sacred Heart	1 brother, 1 sister, aged 14, 9	Black British (Antiguan)	Black British (Jamaican)	Teaching Assistant	O levels	Paulette	N

Leonie	10	Braunstone Frith Primary	2 brothers, aged 3, 4 weeks	White British	Black British (Guyanese)	Mother	None	Louise	N
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### **3.13.1 Tamisha (daughter) and Charmaine (mother)**

Tamisha attends St John's Primary School which, despite being on the border of the inner city is populated by a high-income section of the community with children travelling from across the city to attend. St John's is an average size primary school with three classes in each year. The school is affiliated to the Church of England. The majority of children are White British living with two-parent households whose parents are in steady employment. The school has an "outstanding" Ofsted rating with approximately 89 per cent of pupils reaching the expected level of development' in the two years preceding this research.

At the end of her final year at primary school, Tamisha achieved level 3 in her Standard Assessment Tests for English, Mathematics Science. Tamisha considered herself to be an average pupil and as academically "nothing special". She presented as a motivated learner and had clear, though changing, goals for her education and life beyond school. Across the research period, Tamisha suggested that her relationships with teachers were deteriorating and had been since the end of year 4. Once school and any further education were completed, Tamisha hoped to spend some time in America before returning to her hometown to become a broadcast journalist.

While not lacking in self-esteem, Tamisha described herself as fat and expressed the wish that she was not so tall. Tamisha was often mistaken for three or four years older than her age. Being tall made Tamisha feel self-conscious, and she chooses to withdraw from, rather than engage in, school sports and after-school activities. In our interactions, Tamisha presented as a thoughtful and considered child whose expectations of fairness and fair treatment were often dimmed by her experiences. At the time of the research, Tamisha had one six-month old brother and was coming to terms with being the eldest, rather than only, child. Tamisha was also getting used to the idea of sharing family time with her mother's new partner. Tamisha considered herself to be a good friend but felt her friends did not treat her with the same level of consideration with which she treated them. Tamisha's friendship cohort is mixed by gender and race. Tamisha described her best friends both in and out of school as the Black girls.

Tamisha's mother, Charmaine, is 32 years old and is a British born African Caribbean woman of Jamaican parents. Tamisha's father is African Caribbean Jamaican and does not live with the family. Charmaine, who was pleased to pay neither rent nor mortgage, had recently moved back to her mother's home. Charmaine felt she needed support with the new baby, wanted better financial stability and felt this was best achieved by living with her mother. Charmaine had recently established a relationship with Marley but felt it unwise to live with him until she had a "better grip" on her finances. Throughout our interaction, Charmaine appeared to be ambitious for herself and Tamisha, while simultaneously being disappointed that she was no further forward with her career than before she attended university.

Charmaine had a degree in education studies and had been involved in several different forms of employment. The most recent, before the birth of her second child, was as a teaching assistant. Charmaine felt herself to be overqualified for this role and was reviewing her options with the intention of further study once the baby was old enough. While considering herself to be an able mother, Charmaine said she often felt overwhelmed with the expectations of motherhood and speculated that she might have "baby blues" as "nothing seems to be going right for me nowadays".

### **3.13.2 Kimarie (daughter) and Maureen (mother)**

Kimarie is the younger of two children in her family. She presented as a happy child with an easy laugh and a quirky sense of humour. Kimarie said she had "loads" of friends at school and in the wider community. Kimarie, and her older sister, Shanice aged 18, were regular church attendees. Shanice was a Sunday school leader and had recently completed college with a view to attending university to study Business and Administration. Kimarie said she was proud of her sister and wanted to be like her in the future. Kimarie attends Sacred Heart Catholic primary school, which is a two class entry community school located in an area of economic deprivation. Four-fifths (40 per cent) of children in the school are eligible for free school meals and. Most of these pupils were from minority ethnic backgrounds. Although she

was not Catholic, Maureen felt it important for her daughter to attend a school that promoted a religious ethos.

Kimarie considered herself to be popular in school though felt this popularity was detrimental at times as it meant she had to defend her friends if they found themselves in difficult situations. Kimarie noted that no one defends her and she is often left on her “ones” when things get tough. Kimarie had a mixed cohort of friends, and her best friends were predominantly Black girls out of school and a mixture of Indian, white and Black girls in school.

Kimarie presented as being keen to learn and had a particular interest in geography. When we first met, Kimarie showed me the globe in her room, pointing out the islands in the Caribbean. She was at pains to note that Guyana, where her mother was born, was on the coast of South America, rather than an island in the Caribbean-sea. Kimarie considered herself to be an able child and indicated that she had few real challenges with school work. At the end of her final year at primary school, Kimarie achieved Level 4 in her English SATs, Level 2 in Mathematics and Level 3 in Science. Despite being confident in her academic abilities, Kimarie felt herself to be popular with her contemporaries but not her teacher. She was also unsettled by the emphasis her mother placed on study and the development of study skills. Once school and university were completed, Kimarie indicated that she wanted to run her own business, perhaps a travel business.

Kimarie’s mother, Maureen, was aged 49 and came to Britain when she was 14. She was born in Guyana and identifies as African-Caribbean. Kimarie’s father was also born in Guyana. Maureen is responsible for the mortgage on the terraced home that she shares with her two daughters. Maureen has been paying the mortgage for the past eight years and lamented that the children’s father had gone to London to make money to support the family but had not returned. Maureen had been employed in the care industry for most of her working life, describing how in her previous role she had to wipe ageing bums as a care assistant and was currently wiping young noses as a nursery deputy manager. Maureen indicated that she did

not like her job, and described her brothers and sister as her greatest support. Maureen and her family attend the same church she attended as a child, and she felt spirituality and knowledge of God are necessary for keeping herself and her children in tune with what is essential. Maureen worried about Kimarie's education and considered her daughter to be "bright" but "lazy". Maureen said she does not know how best to help Kimarie achieve her potential.

### **3.13.3 Helen (daughter) and June (mother)**

Helen is the middle child in her family. She has an older brother, Joshua, aged 16, and a younger brother, Simeon, aged 2. At the time of the research, Helen was adjusting to her changed status as the middle child rather than the baby of the family. Helen presented herself as a hard-working, sociable individual. She considered herself to be an able pupil and said she used to enjoy school, but had come to like it less and less during the final year of primary school. Helen felt picked on by teachers and experienced a sense of isolation despite having a consistent group of friends.

Although Helen said she was popular amongst her friends, she felt she had to be careful because "friends can be tricky". Helen was particularly concerned to choose friends whom her mother and wider family approved of. Helen's friendship groups appeared to be mixed and included Indian as well as white girls. Helen retained the title of "best friend" to her female cousins. Helen attends church often and particularly likes to attend church conventions where she and the other children come together with less adult supervision

Helen's older brother, Joshua, was looking to take a college course to become a bricklayer. Helen said that, like Joshua, she wanted to get a job that would pay very well in the end. While noting that working with your brain was not the only kind of work people could do to make money, Helen was certain that she would want to go to college and university as this was the only way she could fulfil her ambition of becoming a teacher. At the end of her last year at primary school Helen achieved Level 3 in English and Mathematics, and Level 2 in Science. While Helen was pleased with these outcomes, her mother was not quite so pleased.

Helen lives with her mother, June, and her brothers on a small estate in the East of the city. They live in a semi-detached three bedroomed house bought under the council's right to buy initiative. Anti-social behaviour orders are common on the estate and there had recently been a spate of residential burglaries. June commented that she was concerned about the deterioration of the area and worried that her children had to grow up in an area with a high crime rate.

June was 44 years old at the time of the research and identifies as African-Caribbean. She was born in Antigua, as was Helen's father. June had recently established a relationship with Sammie, the father of Helen's younger brother, Simeon. June described her relationship with Sammie as getting along just fine. June had been employed in the NHS for most of her working life and said she did not like or enjoy her work, but did it to ensure she could put food on the table and keep a roof over her children's heads. June recently trained as an Occupational Therapist at her own expense. She was planning to return to full-time work as an Occupational Therapist when baby Simeon was old enough to go to nursery and tell her if he was not being treated well by nursery staff. June appeared to be alert to the threat of poor treatment, both for herself and her children. She described how she wanted to be able to support her children in whatever they choose to do, so long as their choices were positive. June felt her life had not been easy and attributed this to messing around in school and having to go back to education later in life. June was keen to shield Helen from a similar fate.

#### **3.13.4 Peterlyn (daughter) and Michelle (mother)**

Peterlyn is the oldest child in her family. She has three brothers, Imikah aged 8, Isajah aged 6, Deejah aged 4, and a sister, Zulaykah, aged 2. Peterlyn is tall for her age and consistently presented herself as thoughtful and hard working. Peterlyn was eager to please others, particularly her mother, and seemed to accept that being the eldest child in the family brought added responsibilities and chores. After much thought, Peterlyn described herself as an "okay" pupil. She considered her relationships with her teachers to be "fine" and felt able to

get along with her peers and avoid conflicts. Peterlyn considered herself an “okay” pupil because, by her own description, she was neither the cleverest nor the least “bright” in her class. Peterlyn’s SAT’s results suggest this is a realistic appraisal. She gained Level 3 in English and Science, and Level 2 in Mathematics. Peterlyn’s favourite subjects were art, drama, and ICT.

During her final year at primary school, Peterlyn was particularly proud of her ability to cook a meal for herself and her siblings, and was pleased to be given the responsibility of helping her mother with her siblings. Peterlyn was a sociable, popular girl, who had many friends in and outside of school. She appeared to reserve the title of “best friend” for girls from a similar ethnic background as herself. Peterlyn said she does not like all of the children who like her, but liked that she was liked. Peterlyn and her mother regularly visit her maternal grandmother who lived in sheltered accommodation due to dementia. Peterlyn attended a local gymnastics club and enjoyed achieving the badges that this brought her. Peterlyn felt she had outgrown primary school and was looking forward to secondary school and the chance to attend college and university afterwards. Peterlyn wanted to be a midwife.

Peterlyn’s mother, Michelle, was 28 years old and described herself as having had a difficult past, noting that her teenage years had been especially difficult for her mother. Michelle said she regretted putting her mother through this difficult time. Michelle is dual heritage. Her mother is white British and her father is African Caribbean, born in St Kitts. Michelle is mother to Peterlyn and her four siblings. The children’s father was born in Britain to parents who were originally from St Kitts. Michelle lives with her partner and children in a three bedroomed house rented from a housing association. She is particularly concerned about the cramped living conditions in which the family lives. Their home is located in a challenging inner city area, where recorded antisocial behaviour and domestic burglaries are commonplace. Michelle expressed concerns about the deterioration of the area and worried that her children had to grow up in an area with a high crime rate. Michelle was keen to support her daughter’s education and commented that she spent at least half an hour a night listening to each of her children read. Michelle described herself as a homemaker and said she did not



work because raising her children was more important than making money. Michelle described her father as her greatest support and commented that she wanted to be there for her children as long as they needed her to be. Michelle did not remain in education beyond the age of compulsory schooling and was keen to ensure that her children did not share this fate.

### **3.13.5 Natalie (daughter) and Andrea (mother)**

Natalie lives with her mother and three sisters: Raynique aged 17, Kamaya aged 6, and Kamala aged 3. Natalie's father never lived in the family home and had been incarcerated two years earlier. Aunties, uncles, and maternal grandparents appeared to provide a supportive network of extended family members. The maternal grandparents visited Natalie's home regularly.

Natalie seemed keen to please the adults around her and appeared to feel the pressure of being the second child. She wanted to emulate her elder sister's academic achievements and presented herself as being rather put upon at both home and school. Natalie had a keen eye for fairness and was concerned about treating others fairly so they would be fair to her. This understanding of fairness appeared to have been instilled at home and extended into Natalie's school life. Although she was of average height for her age, Natalie had been diagnosed as obese and seemed to be self-conscious about her weight. Natalie was sociable, but did not consider herself to be popular with her peers. Natalie commented that she sometimes found it hard to "get on with the other girls" and preferred to "keep herself to herself".

Natalie felt herself to be a weak learner and indicated that she was "not too good" at school, finding many aspects of the curriculum difficult. Natalie's SATs results suggested this was a realistic assessment: she attained Level 3 in English and Level 2 in Mathematics and Science. Natalie's favourite subjects were drama and cooking. Natalie felt ready to leave primary school and attributed this to having few friends and feeling herself to be on the outside of everything that was going on there. At the end of her schooling, Natalie wanted to train chefs

and recognised that this would mean having to become a chef herself, before learning to teach others.

Both Natalie's parents were born in Britain to Antiguan parents. Her mother, Andrea, was 44 years old at the time of the research and lived with her four children in a three bedroomed privately rented house on the edge of the city in one of the shire villages. This left the family somewhat isolated from the wider African Caribbean community, which was predominantly located close to the inner city. Andrea expressed concern about the standard of living she could provide her children with. Although she was pleased to live in an area with a low recorded crime rate, Andrea was concerned to hear that drug use, particularly use of solvents and amphetamines, was increasing in the area. Andrea stated that she was still "smarting" from the end of the relationship with her children's father and was not interested in "beginning something new, with someone new, anytime soon".

Andrea had recently completed an NVQ3 in childcare and was employed full-time in a privately run nursery as an assistant nursery officer. Andrea was finding this "hard going" and felt she did not have enough time with her children. Andrea described her eldest daughter, Raynique, as her greatest support and noted that she was also Natalie's greatest support. Andrea wanted her children to have an easier life than she had had. Andrea commented that the only way her children could achieve what she wanted for them was through education and she was keen to help them gain every educational advantage they could.

### **3.13.6 Janessa (daughter) and Maria (mother)**

Janessa is the younger of two children in her family. Her brother Aiden is aged 24 and has a different father. Janessa is dual heritage, while Aiden is white. Janessa is of average height and weight, and like her mother is proud of her long brown hair and her skin, which she says is easily tanned. While coping with the challenges of puberty, Janessa comments that she wants to stay slim as she would like to be a backing dancer one day. Janessa consistently presented herself as a confident child who had an opinion on everything. Janessa appeared to

be strong minded and would correct her mother if she felt her mother was saying or doing something that she or her father would disapprove of. Janessa did not feel she was a gifted pupil and said she struggled with most of her lessons at school, particularly mathematics. Her SAT's results reflect this, with a Level 2 in English and Mathematics, and a level 3 in Science.

Janessa described herself as confident and outgoing. She had many friends and considered herself to be a leader in her friendship group. Neither Janessa nor her family attended church. Janessa's father lived in the family home, but was mostly absent when I attended. Jessica's mother, Maria, commented that he was either out looking for work or fishing when I visited. Janessa felt ready to leave primary school and viewed secondary school as a necessary though unexciting prospect. Janessa was uncertain what job she would like to do when she finished her education, but felt she might work in a supermarket until she decided what she would like to do in the longer term.

Maria was 41 years old at the time of the research and is white British. Her partner, and Janessa's father, is British born of Guyanese parents. Maria is mother to Janessa and Aiden. She lives with her children and partner in a three bedroomed house rented from the city council. The family live on the newer of two adjacent estates. Maria grew up on the estate and the family home is a couple of streets away from where her mother lives. Maria appeared to be reasonably happy in her relationship with Janessa's father. Although she had "thrown him out" a few times because he was not contributing financially to the household, she took him back in because he had nowhere else to go and she did not want him to start a relationship with anyone else. The estate that the family lived on is inhabited predominantly by white people, albeit with a recent increase in residents from Eastern European. Under-employment is a particular feature of life on the estate. Maria had no qualifications from school, but did not feel this had prevented her from doing anything she wanted to do. Maria was employed at the local supermarket and was pleased that she could manage her household and go on holiday if she wanted to. Maria described her partner's extended family of sisters

as her greatest support and looked to them for advice about how best to manage her daughter's hair and care for her skin.

### **3.13.7 Rakaya (daughter) and Paulette (mother)**

Rakaya is the middle child in her family. She has an older brother, Royce, aged 14 and a younger sister, Iramay, aged 9. Rakaya and Iramay have the same father Royce has a different father Rakaya's father was a heavy crack user and was regularly arrested by the police. He no longer lived in the family home. Rakaya was of average height and weight and consistently presented herself as hard working with an easy sense of humour. Rakaya was keen to please her mother and maternal grandmother who lived close by. In her final year at primary school, Rakaya was proud of her ability to make her way to her grandmother's home by herself and enjoyed being given the responsibility of looking after her younger sister. Rakaya was a sociable girl with many friends, but commented that her friends liked to do naughty things. She also said she sometimes did naughty things with them and that this naughtiness upset her mother. Rakaya indicated that she was not very good at school lessons and found many aspects of the curriculum difficult. Her favourite subjects were art and ICT. Rakaya's SAT's results suggest she may be academically more able than she thinks: English Level 4, Mathematics Level 4, and Science Level 3. Rakaya sometimes attended the seventh day Adventists church with her mother but did not consider herself to be a regular member of the church. Rakaya felt she had outgrown primary school, but was anxious about the challenges she anticipated at secondary school and her chances of going to college and university afterwards. Rakaya wanted to become a teacher.

Rakaya's mother, Paulette, was 39 years old at the time of the research and was working as a teaching assistant in a secondary school in the city. Paulette was born in Britain to Antiguan parents. Rakaya's father was also born in Britain, but to Jamaican parents. Paulette lives with her three children in a semi-detached, three bedroomed property. Paulette said it was a struggle to pay the mortgage each month. The family home is located to the west of the inner city on the edge of a renowned, and soon to be demolished, council estate. Paulette commented that she was concerned by the deterioration of the area, noting that it had been

considered “posh” compared to the areas her friends lived in when she had grown up there as a child. Paulette was in an on-off, but mostly off, relationship with Rakaya’s father. She lamented his current condition and the demise of their relationship. Paulette noted that she would be financially better off on benefits as the pay for a teaching assistant was “not great”, but continued in the role for the sake of the children and to pay the mortgage. Paulette felt that it was good for her children to see her working as it would encourage them to work when they are older. Paulette said she did not like her work, but did it to ensure she could put food on the table and keep a roof over her children’s heads. Paulette described her sisters as her greatest support. She felt Rakaya was talented but had the potential to waste her talent by not working hard enough and by being unfocused. Paulette was keen to ensure that her children made the most of their education because she saw it as the only way they could ensure a good life for themselves.

### **3.13.8 Leonie (daughter) and Louise (mother)**

Leonie is the eldest of three children in her family. She has two brothers: Andrew, aged 3 years, and Jamie, aged one month. Leonie said she was happier at home now she had her brothers to fuss over and seemed to be a confident child. Leonie would often take the lead in her household, with her mother often deferring to her in discussions. Leonie considered herself to be a bright, though not gifted, child. She said she struggled with Mathematics and ITC, but enjoyed English. Leonie said her SATs results had come as a surprise to her: English Level 5, Mathematics Level 3, and Science level 3. These results suggest that Leonie may underestimate her academic abilities. Leonie considered herself to be confident and outgoing, and was at a loss to understand why she had comparatively few friends. Neither she nor her family attended church. Leonie’s father had died in a tragic accident, and his absence appeared to affect Leonie. Although she did not enjoy her lessons and felt picked on by her teachers, Leonie was not ready to leave primary school. Secondary school was a daunting prospect, but Leonie was looking forward to attending college and university afterwards. She wanted to become a lawyer.

Leonie is dual heritage, with a white British mother and a father who was born in Britain to Guyanese parents. Leonie's mother, Louise, was 29 years old at the time of the research and lived with her three children and the father of her youngest child. The family lived in a semi-detached rented home on the council estate that Louise had grown-up on. This estate is located in one of the more challenging areas on the outskirts of the city and has a high rate of unemployment as well as high levels of recorded antisocial behaviour. Louise expressed concern about the area and said several times that she was uncertain how best to support her daughter's education. Louise felt Leonie had already outstripped her ability in mathematics. Louise also said that she used to listen to Leonie read every day, but noted that Leonie was becoming less inclined to read out loud as she became more proficient. Louise did say that Leonie asks for help when she needs it, but rarely asks. Louise described herself as a homemaker and said she did not work because she could not find a job that allowed her to look after her children. Louise described her parents as her greatest support and said she was glad her partner was now living with them because he could help with chores and look after the baby when she went out of an evening.

### **3.14 Conclusion**

When I used to read research in my life before the PhD I paid little attention to the methods. I took the data for granted and assumed that the process of producing and making sense of it was so straightforward that it was not worth much attention. Engaging in the process myself has taught me that it is much harder than I ever imagined. There are no ready-made research-kits that can be taken off the shelf and applied to the matter at hand. The guides and templates that do exist are useful, but have to be interpreted, translated and adapted. Although the mysteries of the research process led me to a crisis of confidence, the difficulties I experienced were, in some ways, reassuring. The struggle reminded of something my father used to say to me when I was a girl: "Good doesn't come easy, Deborah". The methodological literature provided further reassurances that the difficulties I was facing were not simply a case of me getting it wrong. Research, I have learnt, is a much messier and more

creative process than I thought. I drew particular inspiration from Black feminist epistemologies and child-rights' perspectives. Neither provided everything I needed and, as the research progressed, I identified significant gaps and tensions in both. I resolved these problems as best I could by trying to take the best from standpoint epistemologies and more traditional research guides. The richness of the data and the quality of the insights they provided are the best indication I have that my research was good enough.

## **Chapter 4. The Girls' Understanding of Success**

In chapter 2, I established discourse, intersectionality, and agency as theories I used to enhance the Black feminist epistemological standpoint discussed in chapter 3. In this chapter, the first of three empirical chapters, I want to focus on the how the girls' lived experiences help them to frame and make sense of the imperative for success. I want to use this chapter to consider what supports the girls to negotiate the normative discourses of meritocracy, enabling them to maintain their beliefs about the possibilities of their success. I will begin the chapter with a short literature review to explore how the African Caribbean Black British girls in primary school have been constructed and theorised. Further, the literature review will consider how their aspirations and the desire for academic success have previously been considered.

The literature review will be followed by a consideration of the data. I shall then discuss how the girls' understandings of success are imbued with the normative discourses of meritocracy and hard work leading to success. However, as I shall argue, the girls' intersectional positioning makes their normative views of success more complex. Throughout the chapter, I shall build upon a Black feminist understanding of resistance to consider how the girls maintain a belief in the possibility of success for themselves despite the comparative lack of success of the adults around them.

### **4 Chapter 4 the girls understandings of success**

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consider how their aspirations and the desire for academic success have previously been considered.

A consideration of the data will follow the literature review. I shall then discuss the ways in which the girls' understandings of success are imbued with the normative discourses of meritocracy and hard work leading to success. However, as I shall argue, the girls' intersectional positioning makes their normative views of success more complex. Throughout the chapter, I shall build upon a Black feminist understanding of resistance to consider how the girls maintain a belief in the possibility of success for themselves despite the comparative lack of success of the adults around them.

#### **4.1 Literature Review**

For the girls in this study, notions of success are informed by a myriad of social as well as institutional discourses. There appears to be an absence of research which focusses upon the hope's, aspirations and orientations towards success, held by African Caribbean Black British girls in their last year at primary school. My work will make a particular contribution in this area. While few other research studies have focused specifically on African Caribbean Black British girls in their final year of primary school and fewer yet have considered year six African Caribbean Black British girls expectations of their success, there have been a number of research studies that can help to set the context in which my work sits.

This literature review will begin with a consideration of issues regarding attainment. There is little contention in arguing that African Caribbean Black British girls are attaining 5 GCSE's grades A to C to a greater extent than their male counterparts (DES 2006, Mirza 2009, Wright et al. 2010, and Strand 2014). What the literature appears to be presenting as unproven is whether these girls academic success is comparable to that of their White female counterparts. I use the first part of the literature review to highlight this debate. In the second part of the review, I look at research that has considered aspirations as contributing to orientations towards success. I conclude this short review of the literature with an exploration of success and the challenges it presents to girls who are "Othered."

Historically, the educational experiences of African Caribbean Black British female students, have received little research attention (Smith 1982, Mirza 1992). As a result, what we know about these female students is fragmented. The girls in my study are on the cusp of the transition to secondary school. At the secondary school level, African Caribbean Black British girls have a host of contradictory depictions to weave a path through. Similarly, these African Caribbean Black British girls have been theorised as being loud, (Lamb and Brown 2008) aggressive (Mac an Ghail 1988) challenging (Wright 2008). These depictions suggest African Caribbean Black British girls femininities are not viewed positively within the secondary school arena.

In England, ethnic minority students are 24.5% of the population in primary and secondary schools (DFE 2011). Within that minority Indian make up 2.6%, Pakistani 4.2%, Bangladeshi 1.7%, Black African 3.2%, Black Caribbean 1.4% and mixed heritage 4.6%, thus of the minority ethnic student population in England 9.2% can be argued to fall within students the category African Caribbean Black British as outlined in chapter 1 of this thesis. There has been concern over the educational achievement of students from African Caribbean Black British backgrounds since the 1970's because as a group these children are argued as 'underachieving in our education system' (DES 1985, 3).

The achievement gaps in relation to ethnicity have been again highlighted in a recent report from the Department of Education. The report authored by Strand (2014) is the most recent, and it considered a national snapshot of the attainment at age 16. The author's findings indicate that the performance of Black Caribbean (48.6%) and Black African (57.9%) groups is below that of their White British peers (58.2%), while the achievement of Bangladeshi (59.7%) and Indian (74.4%) students is higher. These findings were established using the threshold of achieving five or more GCSE passes at A/ -C grades including English and mathematics, the on-going evidence of under-attainment is somewhat contradictory. Wilson, Burgess, and Briggs (2011) report that Black Caribbean students continued to experience lower attainment at age 16 than their White British contemporaries. Conversely, Kingdon and Cassen (2010) using NPD data from 2003 suggest that African Caribbean Black British students are equally as likely as their White British counterparts to be low achievers.

Since the late 1980's it is argued that girls in England have out-performed boys at age 16, scoring on average 10% points higher than boys in terms of the proportion achieving five or more A/C grades at GCSE (DCSF 2007). The achievement gap in relation to gender is further highlighted in a review from the Department for Education. The results show that 54.6% of boys achieved 5 + A/C including English and mathematics compared to 61.9% of girls (DFE 2011). Strand (2013) noted lowest levels of achievement and progress amongst Black Caribbean students with whom he compared low achieving White pupils in receipt of free school meals and concluded that these pupils achievement was as low as their African Caribbean Black British contemporaries. However the report also evidenced that Black African and Black Caribbean girls were making significantly more progress than boys.

White British girls achieved GCSE grades A to C, better than boys, but this gender gap in favour of girls was significantly larger among Bangladeshi and African Caribbean Black British students. Strands (2014) analysis in a like for like comparison between low SES African Caribbean Black British girls and their White contemporaries' girls indicates that African Caribbean Black British girls joined the other minority groups in scoring significantly higher than White British girls. This comparison suggested that White British low SES girls the continued to be the lowest scoring group.

Strand (2014) concluded that all ethnic groups achieved as well or better than their White British peers, except Black Caribbean boys. In conclusion Strand noted that African Caribbean Black British girls' academic achievements were comparable to their White British peers. These insights serve to contrast African Caribbean Black British boys' negative experiences of schooling with African Caribbean Black British girls' positive experiences. These contentions, whilst in no way offering a nuanced representation of their experiences, do serve to over emphasize African Caribbean Black British girls' academic achievements as successful. At the same time as being educationally successful, research also suggests that within the secondary school setting African-Caribbean Black British girls, whilst not in crisis, are considered to challenge teachers and school authority. These girls are subject to a regime of disciplinary interventions (Wright 2004).

At the level of primary school, very little is known about African Caribbean Black British girls' subjectivities or how they view success. SAT results at age 11, suggest a nuanced

picture where African Caribbean Black British girls are achieving at levels similar to their White working class contemporaries ( Leicester CYPS briefing 2013) Whilst a more disturbing picture arises for African Caribbean Black British middle class girls who, whilst statistically and indeed numerically less significant are achieving on a par with their working class contemporaries but not with their White middle class female peers ( Leicester CYPS briefing 2013). Whilst research has suggested that academic achievement is viewed as an important facet of success over the life course (Mirza 2009, Wright et al 2010, and Rollock 2007). It might be useful to expand the consideration of success and encompass aspiration as aspirations are concerned with young people's plans, Hope's for and orientation towards the future. The most extensive qualitative evidence on young people's aspirations can be found in Archer et al, (2010) longitudinal study of 53 young people from six schools in London. Despite the fact that these young people were in their final year of secondary school, the work is still useful for my purpose as it adds insight to the ways in which young people develop their aspirations.

The authors identify the types of occupational aspirations young people discuss whilst acknowledging that their aspirations change over time. The young peoples' motivational discourses are drawn from wider society and the regime of values that make some things important whilst devaluing others. The young people in this study valued wealth, but were concerned to have enough money to manage the lifestyles they chose rather than too much money to be considered rich. They were motivated by their desires to impress their friends and families. Whilst some of the young people in the study imagined themselves running their own businesses, sustainable paid employment was the expectation of the majority.

Sinclair, McKendrick and Scott (2010) examined the educational and occupational aspirations of 307 young people in two socially deprived schools in Glasgow, Kintrea. St Clair and Houston (2011) developed a mixed method study exploring educational and occupational aspirations of young people at the ages of 13 and 15 in three schools from London, Glasgow and Nottingham. Both studies provide evidence challenging claims that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds lack aspiration. Sinclair et al. (2010) Lupton et al (2011) and Kintrea et al. (2011) found that the majority of young people in their samples had concrete occupational aims and aspired for their success in the future. Success for the

young people in their research was framed around the jobs they saw for themselves in the future. While Archer et al. (2010) study further suggested that that the young people had both aims for the future and a tendency to defer their decisions to a later point in their school career.

Other studies, Brown et al (2011), reported that the plans young people mentioned for their futures could be described as “realistic” in the sense that they were aware that they would most likely not become a successful sportsperson or film star. Kintrea et al.’s study argued that aspirations became more realistic between the ages of 13 and 15. This finding makes investigating the understandings of success held by African Caribbean Black British girls in their last year at primary school all the more interesting as it will enable a small exploration of both their aspirations and whether such aspirations could be considered realistic. However, an important finding by both Kintrea et al. (2011) and Sinclair et al. (2010) was that the working class White British young people in their studies held “high aspirations”. The authors suggest that despite the odds being stacked against them, young people in deprived circumstances maintained their motivation, high aspirations and willingness to work. Further, unlike the young men in Willis (1977) study, there was no sign that these young people were part of a deviant ‘moral underclass’.

Despite the recognition that young people held “high aspirations”, Kintrea et al. (2011) and Sinclair et al. (2010) suggested some discrepancy between young people’s “ideal” and their “expected”/“realistic” occupations. This discrepancy led Kintrea et al. to suggest that “realistic aspirations” may “reflect perceived individual and structural constraints” (p.14). Additionally, several authors observed that the young people lowered their aspirations over time, abandoning aspirations for professional occupations. Brown (2011) argues that this lowering is the result of young people’s expectations of their grades and their awareness of barriers to professions.

To make sense of the same phenomena, Archer et al. (2010) argue, that this was indicative of an unconscious process wherein the young people increasingly learnt “their (gendered, classed, racialized) place” (p.85), feeling that middle-class destinations were “too risky, unattainable and or undesirable”. From this literature it may be argued that aspirations are socially indicative and indeed socially constructed phenomena.

Whilst aspirations are important, so too are the values informing them, Harris (2004) and Archer (2008) argue that we are taught, through society, to value and aspire to a normative notion of success, success which is argued as arising through academic achievement and leading inevitably to social mobility. Whilst as both Harris (2004) and Archer (2008) argue, this characterization of success is rather simplistic, it serves to belie the contradictory ways in which success is experienced. Further, this characterization all but closes the door on the opportunities for success arising out of anything but academic excellence. The simplicity of this formulation omits the subjective intersection of race and gender in favour of the ostensibly, objective, standard assessments tests which focus upon the attainment of grades A - C GCSE's. Academic success is not as straight forward as the acquisitions of qualifications would suggest.

Where race and gender have been considered simultaneously, Archer (2008) in her work argues that the societal discourse of success is made precarious for pupils who are "othered". This "othering" is particularly pertinent for racial minority children. Archer further argues that in her study of secondary schools there were competing versions of 'successes shaped by racialized, gendered and classed discourses. For ease of understanding Archer organised these discourses into four different 'types' of relationships to educational success. Archer identifies 'Traditional' academic success, 'Good enough' success, 'Value added' success and 'Desired-denied and potential' success. These characterisations suggest that the only racialized minority group consistently associated with this notion of achievement and success tends to be British Chinese and Indian girls and boys. They further suggest that African Caribbean Black British girls are most often associated with good enough success.

As Archer (2008), and Mirza (2009) argue, African Caribbean Black British girls are characterised by teachers as having unrealistically high aspirations and ambitions and that these girls subscribed to notions of success as arising through personal effort and transformation. This individualised personal commitment to success belies the structural impediments to individual transformation. However despite being characterised as having unrealistically high aspirations and ambitions for their success, the societal discourse surrounding African Caribbean Black British girls suggest that they are simultaneously successful in relation to education. However, whilst these girls are hailed as successful in

comparison to their failing male counterparts. The social, emotional and cultural resources African Caribbean Black British girls' engage to negotiate a path between being viewed as challenging and yet academically successful serves to highlight the multiple intersections of race and gender that influence their negotiations towards understandings of success. A Black feminist understanding of resistance may illuminate the nuanced ways in which African Caribbean Black British girls resistances inform and enhance their negotiations towards success.

The notion of being 'challenging' was frequently linked to the embodied practice of being 'too loud'. In particular, Black femininity was identified as problematically loud (visibly and audibly) and hence was seen as challenging within classrooms and schools (Morris 2007). In contrast, African American feminist theorists and young women explained their 'loudness' very differently – arguing that it is either a desirable and valued aspect of their racialized femininities (Evans 2002) or that it is a reaction to, and product of, the injustices that they experience at school (Anyon 1983). Throughout the literature loudness is characterised as a desirable and valued aspect of their Black femininity (Collins 2004, hooks 1996). These performances constituted an important site for the generation of visibility for resisting gendered, racialized derogatory discourses. These behaviours whilst bringing the girls into conflict with schools, could also offer the girls use embodied subject positions to achieve success.

African American girls, in Fordham's study, had additional levels of complexity within their constructions of identity and success. Not only is gender a factor, but so also is race, where there is pressure to conform to a White, male standard for "goodness", as well as to a stereotypical appropriate standard for being Black. This is achieved through a combination of faith in meritocratic ideals (Madood & Shiner 2007, Mirza 2009) as well as the expectation of economic independence. It is further compounded the prevalence of relative economic autonomy between the women and men in the community. These lived experiences lead young African Caribbean Black British girls construct positive strategies for their survival and success in the negative climate of the educational system (Mirza 2006, 2009).

To understand the ways in which success and resistance inform each other, for African Caribbean Black British girls', I am drawn to Bottrell (2008). Whilst discussing Native

Australian girl gangs and street cultures, Bottrell's work argues that girls' resistance was tied to their notions of success. Bottrell (2008) found that the girls' in her study believed they were viewed by mainstream, White Australian, society as never likely to be successful in terms of their academic achievement or in terms of how they are viewed and valued in society. The recognition of their social marginality defined the girls' views of success in pragmatic terms such as; returning to school, achieving success by one's self, being happy and providing enhanced opportunities for the children they did not yet have.

Hence, for Bottrell's girls', notions of success are derived via validation from their community as opposed to 'mainstream' success. However what Bottrell's work does not consider is how the girls' aspirations to a normative notion of success impact upon their pragmatic re-visioning of success. Whilst offering insight to the experiences of at risk girls, Bottrell's work is specific to native Australian girls whose histories of colonisation and marginalisation are different to the girls in my British study. So too are the lives and experiences of African American girls in works previously cited different to those of the girls in this current study particularly and to the lives of African Caribbean Black British girls generally. However I cite these sources to draw parallels with and explore similarities to the girls in this study. I shall now turn to the data to explore what impacts upon the girls understanding of success

## **4.2 Discourse of Merit.**

In this discussion, I want to explore how the girls make sense of success. To do this, I shall begin with a consideration of the influence of the meritocratic discourse in their configuration of success. I shall then expand their notions of meritocracy and discuss how the girls, exaggerated, sense of their agency leads them to the belief that success and failure are the results of good or poor choices. However as outlined in chapter 2, section 2.8, the discourse of meritocracy is riven with contradictions, I shall conclude the data analysis for this section with discussions that consider how the girls' practices of resistance help them to maintain the belief in the possibility of their success despite the evidence of their experience.



For the girls, messages concerning success appear to have been conveyed in contradictory discourses, which seemed to surface in two versions. Through merit in one version and working through the potential structural limitations in the second. In version one, meritocracy is predicated on the notion that their playing field is even, and that failure or success is entirely the result of individual action. Success, as demonstrated through material wealth, was an aspiration, the challenges presented by race and gender were tellingly present in the girls' negotiations. In the second more subdued version, 'success' was linked to recognising and working through the potential structural limitations. While I have been able to tease out the different versions of success, they appear in the girls' discussions simultaneously and often contradictorily. Within both versions of success, working hard and setting personal goals were considered to be important routes to achieving success.

In chapter 2, I began a consideration of discourse. I want in this section to consider how the girls negotiate the discourse of meritocracy with their agentic potential. In this section, I will consider how the girls both accept and reconstruct the meritocratic discourse. While the girls found success to be different things at different times over the course of the research, they each confirmed that a good education was the key to the success they saw for themselves.

All of the girls suggested that success was available to them because they worked hard and were thus deserving of success. In this section, I shall consider the data developed with Leonie, Rakaya and Peterlyn, in their deliberations of the success they want for themselves. Rakaya, Leonie and Peterlyn articulated the ideas and challenges each girl expressed about success very well. It is because these three girls articulated the issues and simultaneously highlighted the contradictions that I analyse their data for this section of the chapter. Later in the section in the discussion of the right choices I will consider the responses and insights from Kimarie, Leonie, Rakaya, and Peterlyn. I do this to provide a flavour of the group of girls lived experiences as they negotiate a route to success. As shall be discussed below their experiences reflect the ways the discourses of success through meritocracy played into each other but were at times contradictory.

Leonie: Really, I want to be happy and have a good life. I wanted to be a doctor or someone big, but really that's not true life is it? I can do anything sort of anything I want to can't I...but its best to get my education. (April 2010)

Leonie appears to have accepted the meritocratic discourse of success being an individual effort. At the same time, she appears to be contradicting herself. At the same time as expressing her desire to be “a doctor or someone big”, Leonie qualifies those desires as being not true life, she appears to pragmatically accept that while desirable, the middle-class status of Dr., is not attainable and that education is what her agency could affect. In Leonie’s description a good education would not lead to her becoming a Dr, but rather education would stand-alone. Thus, it may be argued that she is revising down her expectations to reflect what is most expedient for her progress towards secondary school. Leonie appears to be negotiating the disjuncture between the powers of societal discourses of meritocracy leading to the success of the most gifted with her intersectional status. This contradictory challenge is taken up by Rakaya in the focus group at the end of the data development process of this thesis, where she extends the ideas and qualifies them with her own experiences and expectations.

Rakaya        I will get a good life cause I work hard and anyway I can start in a small job and get a better one. I just have to try and know what I want. Sometimes though I don’t want to have to try, I just want to, do nothing sort of and it just comes. It’s not fair is it, why can’t everyone just be rich? (Focus group July 2010)

Rakaya is responding to my question of the kind of job she would like once she has finished school. Here, Rakaya can be argued to be articulating the discourse of meritocracy, seeing her success as inevitable through her hard work. In addition to suggesting she will work her way up the employment ladder, indicated by her saying she will “get a small job” to start with”, Rakaya also appears to be expressing her confusion with the discourse. Rakaya appears to be confused because she is not wealthy and so despite her own best intentions she will have to try hard unlike adults who are wealthy. Rakaya’s experience appears to disrupt her belief in the discourse of merit and ability leading inevitably to success. Rakaya seems to be suggesting the rich people, do not have to try as hard as she will have to achieve the successes she wants.

Rakaya appears to be trying to reconcile the meritocracy with the lack of fairness implied by her comments about being rich. Recognising the potential for merit and fairness to ensure she can move from a small job to a better one over time reflects one thought and, her disappointment that rich people will not have to work as hard as she does because of their wealth is another. Like Leonie above, Rakaya's comments appear to point to a tension that working class children face as they deal with the juxtaposition of the discourses of merit and those of marginalisation and racialisation (though here Rakaya's discussion appears to be featuring class).

The belief in the meritocratic discourse is extended by Peterlyn. Peterlyn indicated that she recognised her success depended on working hard and getting good results, she, more than the others, emphasised her willpower and positive choices. As she put it;

Peterlyn        My mum n dad they say that I have to work hard, because when you work hard you can get everything you need, I've got to put my head on it cause that's when I can make things happen if I want them to..... (Parts of discussion omitted for brevity) I want a good car and holidays when I grow up. (November 2009)

In this excerpt, Peterlyn appears to have taken on board the meritocratic discourse of hard work leading to success. She, in keeping with the other girls, appears to believe that through individual effort and willpower, and their strong belief in education, they could attain their goals. Conversely, as Peterlyn suggests in her "...I've got to put my head on it..." comment, she like Leonie and Rakaya before her appears to have recognised that their intentions could be thwarted. This intention of working diligently seems to arise from their implicit understanding that they were not playing on a level playing field. In their considerations, Peterlyn, Rakaya and Leonie appear to be not merely captured by the discourse of meritocracy, but rather demonstrating their capacity to; mobilise, negotiate, contest the logics and demands underpinning it. In so doing they each appear to be constructing the meritocratic discourse to be true for them while simultaneously identifying possibilities for thinking and acting 'otherwise' for themselves (Foucault, 1985).

The tension between the importance of individual agency, and promoting certain choices as better than others, could be observed in a number of the girls' discursive practices. The

importance the girls placed on making positive choices and success being the result of their own agentic decisions to work hard was reinforced to the girls in their own homes. I observed in Kimarie's home, for example, a framed picture of Marcus Garvey imploring "Up you mighty race." In one of our casual conversations, I asked Kimarie what this meant to her. While at first dismissive, Kimarie suggested it was just a picture her mother liked, after some consideration, Kimarie indicated that it, the picture was there to remind her family that they could do anything they wanted.

From this discussion, I would suggest that many discourses were involved in Kimarie's understanding of success. On the one hand, Kimarie appeared to take on the discourse of merit and achievement being a personal, indeed individualised battle, while simultaneously reflecting upon the structural challenges presented by discourses of race and, being able to counter the expectation of laziness and failure inherent with in societal expectation of African Caribbean people. Similarly, a magnet on the fridge in Peterlyn's home depicted the following slogan 'You are who you choose to be' and 'The choices we don't make are as important as the ones we do make'.

When taken together, these slogans seem to suggest a call to the girls to actively envisage and plan their futures. Simultaneously these pictures, slogans and motifs seemed to underpin discussions in the home and in wider settings such as I had observed when gathering data in one of their church outings for example. In this setting, I noted in my field notes that the sermon appeared to call for a rejection of the stereotypical ascriptions of a 'fatalistic' Black culture in favour of hope, aspiration and of course a focus on God's plans for their individual lives. The discourse of fatalism and the intrinsic inabilities of African Caribbean individuals and their families is often entwined with the impossibility of African Caribbean Black British success. These discourses are commonly implied in policy documents and espoused by the teachers (Archer 2010). The sermon referred to, though ultimately rejected this refrain and was met with knowledgeable nodding from the assembled and choruses of approving "Amen".

I listened to this sermon when accompanying Kimarie and her family to church one Sunday. Given my intersectional location, it is a refrain with which I am familiar. As a researcher, I listened to the sermons additional purpose not only to save my soul but also to consider the

discourses, the “truths” to which it referred. My observation, made in my field notes at the end of service was that the counter discourse espousing need to adopt the ‘right’ attitudes to realise innate talents and achieve ‘success’ was conveyed to the girls in various ways on a regular basis. In Kimarie’s church going experiences the personal and the political merge to subvert the societal discourse of the fatalism and the impossibility of success for African Caribbean people.

The girls’ experiences on the margins of mainstream success discourses indicate their insider outsider status (Collins 2000). Where the intersection of race and gender was explored through the lens of the normative success they envisaged for themselves; their views were disrupted. These disruptions led the girls to re-inscribe their notions of success to adapt to their changing perspectives. At times they saw success as being their right while at other times they appeared to reflect that their right to success would not be fulfilled without their consistent effort and judicious choices.

The discourse on success and meritocracy the girls have to negotiate a path through is characterised by tensions and contradictions. Peterlyn’s exposition above, of the potential for success, to be the result of individual effort, while simultaneously recognising that effort alone is not enough to ensure the success she wants for herself, demonstrates these tensions well. While official discourses tend to ‘submerge’ local pieces of knowledge (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). These tensions add weight to the contention that discourse provides opportunities for resistance as discussed in chapter two.

So far in this discussion, I have tried to demonstrate that the expectations attached to success, expectations when filtered through the girls’ experiences, present them with tensions. The girls’ constructions of success have had little to say about the strategies for managing the tensions they experience. I now want to consider how the girls call upon and enact practices of agency and resistance to manage the contradictions race and gender revealed in the system of meritocracy to which they adhere. To do this, I shall turn to the girls’ experiences of school and education.

### 4.3 Agency: Making the Right Choices

To continue the discussion concerning the girls' understanding of success, I shall shift the focus to consider the girls' views of the "right path" (Botterell 2008) to success. I shall focus on Leonie, Rakaya, Kimarie and Peterlyn in this section because while the girls say different things, their experiences appear to be similarly contradictory and each appears to have an exaggerated sense of the abilities of their agency. The girls each believed a good education was the key to success. The girls seemed to think it was their responsibility to exercise the "good" choices available to them. This suggests that the girls have a view that their exercise of agency would result in the success they wanted for themselves. However coupled with this was also the burgeoning realisation that their hoped for success was contingent on many social and structural factors beyond their control. This realisation appeared to make the formula by which they understood success remarkably precarious.

The girls' accounts of agency and the potential for them to be as successful as they individually choose appears to point to the duality of the structure (Giddens 1983) When Leonie describes her family it is clear that she is still coming to terms with the trauma of her father's passing. Leonie's father died in tragic circumstances, and she lives with her single White mother who is financially supported by her parents. When describing factors that might impact upon the likelihood of her success, Leonie speaks of hard work, courage and determination rather than luck.

Deborah: How much education do you think you will go for in the end? What do you think will help you reach this level?

Leonie: I want to be a lawyer and I think it will take me a lot to reach where I want, but I will work hard, I will make it. I will just have to work hard to achieve what I want, I think.

Deborah: If something was to stop you, what do you think it could be?

Leonie: I don't know, boys and that I guess.

While the Leonie's model of success remains tied to the dominant meritocratic narrative of hard work and individual effort bringing the desired results, in the extract above we begin to see a fundamental element of the girls' model of success, the link between resisting and succeeding. As discussed in the theory chapter resistance can take many forms. In Leonie's case, the resistance relates to her actively deciding to withstand the temptations of relationships with boys and succeeding in school. According to Leonie, if she continues to try her hardest and avoid boyfriends there is no stopping her from her dreams of becoming a lawyer.

Rakaya provides another example of this pattern. She has, and her family have experienced the debilitating effects of drug misuse by her father. Rakaya's mother often struggles to find the money to meet all of the family's needs. A teacher 'asked what might prevent her from reaching her dream of becoming a teacher, she states:

Rakaya            Sometimes it happens that friends who you chat with, they can make your education to go down. You know, there are other people who have bad behaviours like being naughty at school. These are some of the things that could kill my future if I let them. (February 2010)

The girls express what appears to be an exaggerated sense of individual agency over their educational trajectories. When asked about potential barriers to achieving success the girls focused more squarely on their capacities to subvert succumbing to peer pressure, lacking focus or discipline, and as both Leonie and Kimarie suggest, "...getting carried away with boyfriends". Despite the immense structural limitations they face, all respondents describe highly ambitious career goals and express a somewhat optimistic, if exaggerated, sense of agency regarding their chances of achieving these goals. These optimistic expectations also lead to trade-offs between current education and friendships and future boyfriend relationships. These tradeoffs, while the point to agency as the capacity to endure as discussed in chapter 2 they appear impracticable when viewed from the experiences of school the challenges they meet and their mothers own success trajectories. I shall continue the discussion of the girls' friendships in chapter 5 and the girls' mothers' education trajectories in the coming sections of this chapter 4.

The girls were each certain that qualifications they achieved through school would provide a route to a good college course or A-levels, which in turn would lead to university, on to a well-paid job and the good life with wealth in tow. Kimarie expressed the thought well:

Deborah:                   And what do you think it means to be successful?

Kimarie:                   Being happy I suppose....and you mean successful. When successful? Like how well you do in school and things like that? When you go to secondary school say if you got an A star and A plus and a B and then when you go to college you do you're A- Levels and stuff like that and you get really good marks in that, and then go University you get really good degrees and then you make a good living and stuff like that.  
(September 2009)

Kimarie's vision of her future success, in keeping with Harris's (2004) analysis, aims high. Her vision embraces the belief that she can and is expected to do anything she puts her mind to. In this scenario, Kimarie Helens to create her own chances, and achieving accredited qualifications is the catalyst for this. By portraying success as the outcome of an individual decision to reach a 'goal' Kimarie, in keeping with the other girls, evoked the discourse of the meritocratic logic which suggests that people's social positions are a reflection of their abilities and effort. The way in which success is described by Kimarie in this statement appears to be underpinned by a notion that while she may possess innate ability (or, at least, 'potential'), this ability has the potential to remain unrealised due to a lack of 'aspirational' dispositions.

What is striking is the emphasis on the decision to become 'successful', in particular through attitudes and behaviours. This suggests a demand for the girls to transform themselves based on 'ideal' (White, middle-class) notions of educational 'success' (Archer, 2008). This suggests that for some of the girls particularly Kimarie in this instance but Peterlyn and Leonie later in the section, her agency is impacted upon by other capacities and desires because as shown above her agentic' motivations are informed by more than one focus (Ahern 2001).

The view that education was the route to success was echoed by Peterlyn:



- Deborah        So you like school?
- Peterlyn        Not so much
- Deborah        Why go then, I know you said your mum makes you go but what about you, would you still go if you didn't have to?
- Peterlyn        My friends are there, what else would I do? It's boring at home on your own..... and if am there with the others I end up having to do everything like am the slave or something.....You have to go school don't ya, to be successful and all like that. Like if you don't go then you don't get your education so then how can you get a good job if you don't have a good education? (April 2010)

Here I can argue, as discussed in chapter 2, that for these girls agency is a process, their motivations for schooling and education are not straightforward. They each see the prize of their persistence at school as the good education that will lead to their success, however educational success is not their only motivation. Like Kimarie and the other girls in this study, Peterlyn appears to buy into the assumptions generated by the meritocratic discursive frame. In the excerpt, Peterlyn argues that no one can expect to get a good job without a good education and so she, because she wants these things for herself, is prepared to go to school. Peterlyn's argument reflects the causal composition of the discursive frame: the logic is that the consequences of success are determined by individual effort. Within this causal narrative, success is the entitlement of anyone who makes the right choices. Leonie too sees education as allowing her to have the life she envisages for herself. Interestingly, Leonie's response resonates with considerations of class.

- Leonie        because I'm gonna be a lawyer, that's why I go to school. Just because people think everyone who goes to there is thick or something, doesn't mean that you're rubbish. It's about knowing what you want isn't it? I don't want just to have babies and stay at home or go the bingo. I want to help people by being a lawyer so that's what I'm gonna do (*July 2010*)

The background to the discussion from which the excerpt is taken is that we were talking about the secondary school she had chosen to attend. The school is acknowledged as a failing school. Leonie presents the assumption that irrespective of the setting or the expectations, she can create herself. Leonie's discussion suggests, however unknowingly, that her ideas are part of a wider discourse of individual responsibility. The ideas behind individual responsibility feed into the normative meritocratic discourse discussed in chapter 2. In this discourse, success is a project wherein the individual is their own raw material. In that meritocratic discourse personal agency will allow, Leonie in this case, to transcend her environment by strength of will alone. In addition to a sideswipe at her mother's lack of employment "...go the bingo..." Leonie appears to buy into her place in the meritocratic discursive frame.

The girls in this section of the discussion appear to be engaging in the form of agency that will, in the longer term, see them achieve the relative choice and security offered by academic credentials. Secondly, there was the determination to ensure their identities by developing a concept of themselves as capable of confounding the challenges besetting their community elders (Warmington 2015). The girls seem to feel able to do this by making different, and to their minds, better, considered choices than their elders. The findings in this section would suggest that the girls through the socialisation process appear to be influenced by the existing social structures, while at the same time, via their activities behaviours, feel they have the abilities to alter those social structures. This would suggest that social structures are the medium of human activities as well as the result of those activities. The girls are 'active agents' who are both constrained by and also construct their social world and their ideas about success.

#### **4.4 Working Through the Potential Structural Limitations**

The context to the forthcoming discussion is that I had asked the girls what they would need to do or have or know about to be successful. The girls as noted previously stated that they would need a good education, however, as is to be discussed in this section they also suggested that they would need to have goals to aim for. For these girls, working hard and setting goals were often discussed in the same thought. From our conversations, I present a sample below of the girls' understandings of goals. The other girls, those not named in the extracts below, stated similar ideas to the ones captured:

Rakaya	deciding what you want
Kimarie	trying stuff and choosing the best thing to get what you want
Leonie	Knowing what you're gonna do to get stuff you try hard to get
Helen	when you get things you thought you couldn't but you really, really tried and then you got it
Peterlyn	Knowing what you want and going for it

At first reading, it can be argued that the girls' notion of success is informed by the discourse of merit and hard work as well as their perception that effort and hard work are necessary for its achievement. I would argue that this resonates with the girls' notions of their power to affect their trajectories, but by inculcating subtle norms of autonomy and self-realisation. These norms autonomy and self-realisation, appear to emphasise freedom, choice, and individuality. In setting goals, the girls appear to actively position themselves to manoeuvre through networks of power relying upon their agency to do so. In doing so they appear to believe they enjoy choice, autonomy, and through the choices, they make their success. Further, it may be argued that the girls are making choices to define their goals as active agents (Giddens1984). I shall return to this consideration of agency in the forthcoming chapter when I explore the girls' relationships with their teachers.

The girls' understanding of goals suggests their aspirations are produced through discourses, in this instance the neoliberal discourse of hard work and individual responsibility. This discourse appears for these girls to make some ways of thinking possible and others impossible (Foucault, 1972). As indicated Leonie previously in her sideswipe at her mothers' bingo habits appears to be using the neoliberal discourse of the importance of hard work to the achievement of success to position herself and to judge others, in this case, her mother. Rakaya in her comment that she would have been a teacher.

Thus, for the girls, I am arguing that their goals are the result of active work, but are also shaped by relations of power and by discourses within schooling, family, and peer settings (Mendick 2014). Thus, as I argue, the girls' goal setting practices allow them to position themselves as successful or potentially so. The girls place their potential success in contrast to their mothers, for example, who made wrong or incomplete choices. This, in turn, helps them

to make sense around success, failure and their capacities to influence their trajectories. However, despite actively setting goals and working hard, the complications in the girls' meritocratic view of the inevitability of their success were revealed when they each at different points reflected that sometimes effort and hard work do not result in the anticipated pay offs. Their view that hard work and personal responsibilities will lead to the success they desire was undermined in relation to their assessment of themselves as learners. Each of the girls indicated they had difficulty with particular curriculum subjects. In the following section, I will focus on Janessa, Natalie and Rakaya as their articulate responses are reflective of the challenges and dilemmas described by the other girls in the study.

#### **4.5 Hard Work Doesn't Always Payoff: Enacting Resistance**

Janessa and Natalie suggested that math was particularly difficult for them, while Rakaya indicated that ICT and spelling tests were difficult for her. Each girl found difficulty in a different subject area, and they each conjectured upon the difficulty and their inability to convince the teacher that they were, in fact, trying as hard as they could.

Janessa        I proper hate maths I do. Even when I try really, really hard I can't do it. It gives me a headache, trying so hard sometimes..... And it makes me feel sick I can't stand it.

Deborah        Why do you reckon that is

Janessa        I don't know it's just hard, everyone thinks math's is hard I don't know why we got to do it for.... for shopping and stuff but god not all of it.....I am a bit thick in math's even my mum was..... I try and it sort of doesn't work out.....Miss Remmington says I am not trying but I am, what does she know anyway about if I am trying ..... It doesn't matter. (April 2010)

Janessa's challenges with maths present a snap shot of how the girls have to find ways to resist their teachers' suggestion that they are not trying hard enough. This is particularly poignant for the girls in this study as, on the one hand, they accept that hard work and personal effort will lead to success; simultaneously they are faced with teachers who, despite the girls' protestations to the contrary, continue to undermine their belief in their learning

abilities. In the context of the African Caribbean Black British communities in Leicester and the lack of the normative success promised through education, this is particularly telling.

Janessa attends a school on a council estate in the inner city. Like the estate where she lives, Janessa's school is made up of predominantly, though not exclusively, White working class children. The school's teacher cohort is exclusively White, the teaching assistants and the lunchtime supervisors are more reflective of the school population. Teachers' beliefs and perceptions of their pupils, especially their African Caribbean Black British pupils' matter (Rollock 2007). The relationships between White middle-class teachers and African Caribbean Black British pupils provides a discursive text through which to explore resistance. I shall return to this discussion of resistance in the following chapter where I shall discuss race, gender and power in their relationships with their teachers.

For Janessa, her White female teacher's view of her ability, or lack of, has the potential to create a powerful self-fulfilling prophecy, both directly and indirectly affecting her school performance. Teachers' views of African Caribbean Black British students are often shaped by negative stereotypes that indicate African Caribbean Black British girls as loud and challenging (Mirza 1992, Wright 2009, 1987). The negative perceptions Janessa feels are held of her by her White female teacher, serve to lower their expectations of Janessa's academic abilities which, in turn, undermines Janessa's belief in both the usefulness of her relationship with her teacher and the utility of hard work.

In keeping with each of the girls Natalie and Rakaya, in addition to commenting on their lack of prowess in particular curricular areas, each retreated to questioning their academic abilities. These girls questioned their abilities by calling themselves, "thick", and "stupid" and "dumb" at various points while describing how, despite their best efforts, they are at times unable to understand aspects of their academic work.

Natalie            I'm not so good at maths. I'm getting better but sometimes I don't get it. My sister helps me and tells me how to do it. And when she's with me I can cause she makes it easy and then when she goes and says I should do two by myself. It's harder when I'm on my own. I look and look and look but it won't stick I'm a bit thick sometimes (Natalie April 2010)

Rakaya commented similarly;

Rakaya        It (ICT) makes me all confused when I remember one thing and I really know it, how to do it, I forget how to do something else and she (mum) just goes mad with me. So maybe it's me, am stupid for true (February 2010)

It may be argued that the girls in this study respond to their academic challenges in similar ways to the girls in Reay's (2006) study. Though for these girls their identities as girls interests with race to inform their experience. Reay concluded that as working class girls grow up, they lose confidence in their academic abilities. This loss of confidence sees them grow to expect less from life and reduce their career goals. Girls anticipate failing at tasks with which they are unfamiliar, tasks that are difficult or perceived to require high ability. When they fail, girls appear to internalise their failure, attributing it to themselves. Rakaya continues the discussion of hard work not delivering the outcomes promised. While Rakaya was discussing ICT, the refrain concerning the futility of trying hard at lessons she finds difficult is extended.

Rakaya        ICT I hate it, the teacher was horrid. Even the other teachers don't like him they say so but make it like they are joking. The only thing I did right was to make a website but I don't know how I did that. We weren't allowed to keep it up so what was that all about. Then we made movies, but mine didn't move much and when we had to make the background I just got lost and couldn't work it out...I tried I really did (July 2010)

As the girls imagine success for themselves, they appear to negotiate risk and uncertainty by focusing on their innate abilities to achieve their desires. Their view of the utility of hard work was shaken concerning themselves as learners, which, in turn, led them to doubt their capabilities. The girls appear to blame themselves and highlight their academic deficiencies. Their view that hard work will lead to the success they desire was undermined in relation to their assessment of themselves as learners.

It can be argued from the comments that both Janessa and Rakaya have reacted to their powerless status in the pupil teacher school relationship. Their reaction appears to contest the teachers' authority and indeed capabilities to pronounce upon their academic endeavours at all. These contestations can be seen in Janessa's dismissive "Miss Remmington says I am not trying, but I am, what does she know anyway about if I am trying". Further, Rakaya describes her male ICT teacher as horrid and backs this assertion with the suggestion that his colleagues "think he is horrid" too. It appears that the powerlessness embedded within their inability to convince their teachers that they had indeed been making extra efforts with the lessons they find difficult, results in two responses. First, they indicate a helplessness as they feel incapable of doing the work to the standards anticipated. Secondly and almost immediately they each appear to rebalance the power imbalance by questioning their teachers' abilities. Thus, they attempt to rebalance the power exchange from the interactions with teachers even in the teachers' absence. I shall extend the analysis of the girls and their relationships with teachers in the following chapter.

For Rakaya particularly, and the other girls generally, the notion of goal setting to achieve success has to be set in the context of their view of the failure. As indicated previously, the success the girls envisage for themselves includes a good job, holidays abroad and material possessions, all of which they see as being available to them as the result of a good education. However for six of eight of the girls despite their mothers' good education the possessions and holidays remain largely absent. Further, the girls appeared to be aware of the general lack of success of their fathers.

Rakaya's father had developed debilitating crack cocaine use, Leonie's father had passed away leaving her mother to cope alone, Helen's father had established an alternative family, Kimarie's father was unemployed and living away from the family home, and Natalie's father had been incarcerated some months prior to our interactions. Tamisha's birth father had been deported to the Caribbean. For Peterlyn and Janessa, their fathers lived in the household but were unfortunately unemployed or under employed at the time the research took place. Thus it may safely be argued the family the men of the home contributed financially very little to the continuation of the home.

For the girls, failure was gendered (male), racialised and embodied in their fathers. Success was not however gendered female as the girls could see the ethnic penalty in action. For the girls, they could see that their mothers were over qualified for their employment. This presented failure as a more tangible proposition than the success they had previously described. The legacy of British racism has devalued and demonised, African Caribbean Black British men and has shaped and continues to shape recurrent familiar practices. These family practices infuse the consciousness of being African Caribbean Black British and female in Britain in the 21st century (Gilroy 1997, Gillborn 2004). For Rakaya, in particular, the complex nature of race, gender and success were evidenced in her considerations of her father's lack of success

Rakaya        Successful, my dad? (Laughs) not really. I love him yeah and all things like that...I think my dad's happy cause he isn't bothered about much. To be successful you have to want something innit? And he sort of doesn't be bothered much about anything.

Deborah        You'll have to explain that to me again

Rakaya        I mean he's happy in his life isn't it, so that's good for him and he's not doing much, well not much, he's a waste man

At different points in our discussions the girls return to considerations of their fathers and the other men in their communities the comments were largely unflattering. Rakaya describes her father as a "waste man". This indicates that not only is he not successful, he has in her eyes wasted his potential. In 20th century Britain where prescribed gender roles denote the expectations of fathers and fatherhood.

Rakaya's "*you've got to want something innit*" expands the complexity of her negotiations and resistances and squarely frames her views of success being achievable by strength of will alone (Renold & Ringrose, 2008; Ringrose, 2011). This coupled with their views of their mothers' relative lack of success provides some context to their goal setting endeavours which appear to confirm their optimistic belief in their agentic abilities to avoid their mothers'



trajectories. Further, as discussed previously for Rakaya's and Janessa's considerations of their teachers' abilities, as well as their views of their mothers' lack of success, resistance can be understood as constructed through thoughts as well as actions, this helps them to negotiate a path through the complex discourses held by society about them as an African Caribbean Black British girl and the ideas they maintain about themselves and the wider Black community.

#### **4.6 Maintaining a Belief in the Possibility of Success; Negotiating A Route through the Contradictions**

Natalie        You know, it's like that, some people don't really like it, when you're Black and stuff like that.

Deborah        How does that make a difference, do you think?

Natalie        I don't know, especially though my mum says that and it makes sense sometimes

Deborah        Sometimes like when?

Natalie        Sort of, (pause) when we need to get another job or something and she has to stay cause no one else wants give her a new job. (Natalie 20<sup>th</sup> May 2010)

Helen reflected similarly with the suggestion that:

Helen        Well my mum says if she was born now or was born in another family (White) or something then she would have got her education sooner (July 2010)

In keeping with some of the other girls, Natalie had identified having a good job as success. The effects of race and gender on the opportunities accessible to and envisaged by the girls in this study are, embedded within structures (Archer and Francis 2007). For Natalie, the structures she identifies are overtly racialised. However, she cannot separate race from gender as her example is of her mother and embodied by her mother's work experiences. Natalie describes the impact of race and gender on her mothers' ability to demonstrate success by achieving a good job and projects this, negatively, on her vision of her own abilities to be successful.

Whilst Natalie passively names “people” as “not liking it if you are Black”, that passive voice speaks directly to her own experience of overt racism at school well as her mother’s experience of employment. Natalie had previously described incidents where she had been bullied at her new school. Natalie had offered a number of ideas concerning why she felt she might have been bullied each of her suggestions had centered upon how physically different she was from her school contemporaries. These physical differences included body shape and height however each time Natalie reflected that her skin colour may be a problem too.

For Natalie, the simultaneous experiences of being Black and female have led her mother to employment as a nursery assistant, a job she dislikes and is over-qualified for. For these girls the impact of the ethnic penalty (Hasmath, 2012), is evidenced through their mothers working and educational careers. I do not want here to make wild claims concerning the girls levels of political awareness and sophistication as it cannot be overlooked that I, the researcher, was asking these girls on the cusp of transition to secondary school what they considered success to be. Their responses may well reflect the inequalities of power inherent in that data generating process. However, the girls’ views on the success or otherwise of their mothers can be interpreted as reflecting the recognition that their ostensible lack of success does not necessarily mean the girls’ felt themselves to be consigned to a similar trajectory. Their aspirations and expectations for success continue to articulate hope that they would be able to overcome the negatively gendered and racialized experiences of their own mothers.

It may be argued, using a Black feminist lens, that success for the girls reflects the complex and on-going struggle to resist oppression. Collins (2006) has argued that resistance results from human agency and that the need for activism will persist as long as oppression persists. This suggests that age indeed youthfulness cannot insulate the girls from the need for activism, to struggle against the oppression they face. Like Peterlyn, Kimarie, Rakaya and Natalie, Tamisha indicated her belief in the potential for educational qualifications to enhance her life chances and lead ultimately to a good job.

Deborah        Yeah I guess so, but so what does successful in school look like then?

Tamisha        I don’t know I suppose you mean doing homework and that, on time? Yeah, that’s it, it’s your qualifications and that and your job and that cause you have to get the qualifications and then you can get a good job (September 2009)

For Tamisha, schooling success confirmed the possibilities of post-school employment opportunities. For these girls, employment outside of the home was desirable. They saw themselves as being endowed with economic capacity. For these girls', whose mothers are African Caribbean, who are the first generation of children from migrant Caribbean labour, the drive towards better qualifications to achieve better income is in keeping with the migrant mentality discussed by Mirza (2006) and Shiner (2004).

Rakaya I'm going to go to university

Deborah Oh yes, what you going to do there do you think?

Rakaya Don't know really....

Deborah mmmh (pause) why go then?

Rakaya cause you have to go to get the qualifications and that (26<sup>th</sup> January 2010)

Rakaya, like Tamisha, ties school, university and qualifications together to convey a notion of success. Even though Rakaya was not entirely certain of the advantage university might give her, she was clear that a university education was an important facet of the success she envisaged. These African Caribbean Black British girls, appear to have aspirations for university level education they see university education not only as available to them but indeed essential if they are to achieve the success they want for themselves. Simultaneously, some of the girls they have to process the experiences of their mothers, who, despite their university educations have not achieved the success the girls consider university should lead to. How the girls begin to navigate a route through their family experiences of relative lack of success with and their expectations of success for themselves brings a Black feminist understanding of resistance into focus.

Deborah What about your mum, would you be successful like her

Rakaya I suppose a bit .....yeah but I'd have been a teacher. What she does, my mum says she gets all the work and not much money, so I'd be a teacher cause they make more money than my mum (Rakaya 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2010) (Rakaya's mother is a teaching assistant).

Rakaya's comment appears to suggest that her mother, lacking in ambition, chose to remain a teaching assistant. While Rakaya guardedly accepts that her mother has indeed achieved

some measure of success, the success she observes in not in the terms she, Rakaya, had identified previously. Earlier in the discussion, Rakaya had indicated that she was proud of her mother as she worked in a school and everyone thought her working in a school was good. Despite this, Rakaya still sees her mother's lack of financial reward for her good job as a cause for concern

*Leonie*           It's about knowing what you want isn't it? I don't want just to have babies and stay at home or go the bingo.

Like Rakaya above, Leonie considers that her own mother's circumstances were at least in part the result of her – her mother's- injudicious choices, and not being clear about what was necessary for success. This comment directly echoes the comment made by Rakaya about her father whom as discussed earlier she described as happy. Leonie implies that her mother chose to undermine her potential by having babies and spending her leisure hours at bingo. Tamisha is as ambivalent of her mother's success as Rakaya. While she reluctantly accepts that her mother has in some ways been successful, she simultaneously dismisses this as her mother's success does not go far enough. Without the material goods by which success may be evidenced, (in Tamisha's case this relates to matching handbag shoes and pretty car), both girls appear to considers their mother's success to be at best partial.

*Tamisha*           Nah she's not a success not like a proper successful somebody with, nice bags with matching shoes pretty car and stuff like that. (*Tamisha 11<sup>th</sup> September 2009*)

Deborah           So is your mum successful then?

Helen             You mean my mum? Erm well not really....cause we never got no money.

Deborah           But her job, that's a good job isn't it

Helen             So what if it's a good job, we got no money (Helen 8<sup>th</sup> January 2010)

Like Tamisha above, Helen pins success and money together. While she might consider her mother's job as an Occupational therapist, to be good, she does not equate that good job with the type of success she envisages for herself. Indeed the families continued poverty despite June's good job, speaks loudest in Helen's considerations. A similar suggestion was articulated by Tamisha. While Tamisha recognised the virtue of university, she was reluctant

to characterise her mother's university experience as a success. This reluctance stemmed in part from the benefits her mother had promised never having materialised. Tamisha had previously commented that when her mother went to university, she, had been promised that at the end they would be able to afford very many additional treats. After the end of her time at university, Charmaine had two babies and was currently seeking employment.

Deborah        How do you feel about your mum's success, cause she's been to university?

Tamisha        That don't say one

Deborah        How you mean?

Tamisha        She still can't afford for us to go to holidays in nice places. You know where we are going this year? Ingoldmills, in a caravan. She said we'd go Jamaica. And now Marley is here we never do anything.

Tamisha's was palpably indignant at the prospect of an Ingoldmills caravan holiday. The trappings of success upon the completion of the university course she had been promised had not materialised. The pattern, of being over qualified for the posts in which they are employed (Heath and Cheung 2006; Strand 2009), is repeated in, Kimarie, Rakaya, Helen and Tamisha mother's experiences. The challenges with the traditional conceptions of success are exposed in the girls' accounts of their mothers' success. Despite actually having achieved various qualifications and having attended university the anticipated victory of success is considered empty. For these girls, their families' experiences of success had not equated to the expected financial rewards.

While I would contend that race and gender are inextricable, the girls were unable to articulate how together race and gender influenced their intentions and the lives of the people around them. To explore this further, I shall focus on Tamisha, Natalie and Helen's responses because their discussions illuminate the specificity of personal and political impacts of race and gender for African Caribbean Black British women, particularly their mothers.

Tamisha        But like it's harder for girls innit? I mean like, say, people don't want you to be their boss, if you've got babies n that.

Deborah        What makes you think that?

Tamisha        Like for my mum, she should have got a good job shouldn't she but she didn't did she?

The success that Tamisha discussed highlighted her focus on race and gender to impact negatively on careers and success intentions. The example she uses is her mother's. Tamisha saw that a successful career would be inhibited by having to fulfil parental obligations. Tamisha recognises that if she, like her mother, becomes a parent, she will be unfairly encumbered by structural and normative inequities, which are both ingrained and widely accepted (Harris 2004). Home and childcare are still expected to be the women's responsibilities. They also define tensions between professional and personal goals for success as a problem for women but not so much for men. This tension is matched by her reflection on her mother's experience of hard work, her mother having been to university not having the desired payoffs.

In the theory chapter, chapter 2, I outline the approach to discourse useful for this thesis. The notion that power and resistance are bonded together is important here. For the girls in relation to their mother success and the potential for their negotiations towards success, there are moments of contestation. These moments of contestation concern whether they had indeed made poor choices, or whether their mothers simply did not want success for themselves to the degree that their daughters now do. The girls' contestations, grappling with the ideas of success, their mothers and trying to find a way through the contradictions, remained constructed within, and in relation to, the dominant discourses, in this case, the discourse of meritocracy.

As discussed by Collins (2000), everyday acts of resistance do not challenge power structures from the top down. They infiltrate the systems in which they function, creating fissures in the smooth façade, working together to make larger breaks and create new possibilities. While perhaps not deliberate, Rakaya and the other girls in their expectations attending university and use that education as a route to success appear to be trying to defy the evidence of their family experiences. This notion of doing what others, would not anticipate, is engaging in resistance. Rakaya's stated intention for a university place both subverts the discourse of failure and has the potential to afford an emancipatory effect (hooks 1994). It may further be argued that human agency makes change, through struggle, possible. However for this

change through struggle to take place, people have to become aware that they are indeed oppressed. For change to be possible people have also to refuse to accept the dominant, often insidiously negative, images of themselves and in so doing they must question the reality of their lives (Collins 2000). Rakaya and the others girls intent upon a university education at the completion of secondary school appear to have begun to refuse the dominant images of themselves as destined for only a partial success, like their mothers and are thus engaging in an important though infinitely nuanced area of resistance

Perhaps not consciously engaging in an ideological struggle, Rakaya, Tamisha and Leonie's imagined intentions for their future, places them within the meritocratic discourse. These girls implicit negation of their mothers' success and their exaggerated sense of agency, serve to place them within the meritocratic discourse. Placing themselves within the meritocratic discourse, to their minds, enables them to resist the partial successes of their mothers. Further, this placing allows these girls to override the societal discourse that presents African Caribbean Black British women as welfare dependent and lacking ambition (Weekes 2004, Mirza 1992).

However, rather than being ultimately self-defeating, the resistance these girls engage allows for them to exceed the anticipated limited expectations and, defy the process of their subordination. Indeed as Yosso (2002), makes the case, the girls' expectations for their academic success and future can be seen as persisting and succeeding in education. This intended persistence can perhaps be seen as a strategic response to racism and a means of using education as a weapon to resist disempowerment, marginalisation, and subordination within society. It can be argued that they are individually motivated by a sense that social change is possible for them to escape the oppressive structures impacting their life chances.

Like Collins (2000), hooks (1994), Kaynard (2010) I argue that the very act of defining success for themselves suggests that the girls are enacting a resistance that interrupts the expectations of their failure. Collins (2000) argues that the hegemonic domain of power is significant because of its ability to shape consciousness. The hegemonic domain of power shapes consciousness by manipulating ideas, images, symbols, and ideologies. For Black women, the struggle for self-definition "reclaiming the power of the free mind," is a centrally important area of resistance. The hegemonic domain can be argued therefore to be, a critical

site for crafting counter-hegemonic knowledge that fosters changed consciousness. Collins (2000) has argued that where these processes occur is not the point, whether it is school, university, church or within the family.

The power of the resistance is in reclaiming these spaces for "*thinking and doing not what is expected of us*" (pg. 285). Janeway (1980) makes similar claims when she suggests that the power to disbelieve is used to resist the values, understandings, and beliefs of the dominant culture. I argue that the girls' re-visioning of success in light of their mothers' experiences suggests that doubting the prescribed codes is evident in the girls' discussions of traditional success and in their re-inscription of it.

"By disbelieving, one will be led toward doubting prescribed codes of behaviour, and as one begins to act in ways that deviate from the norm in any degree, it becomes clear that in fact there is not just one right way to handle or understand events" (Janeway 1980 pg. 167).

The intersecting structures of domination can be argued to be strengthened through the acquiescence of its victims. The acquiescence of the victims who, in accepting the dominant, tough negative, image of themselves, as failures, become paralyzed by a sense of helplessness (Collins 2000, Mirza 2010). The girls' in this study, aspiring to success is an example of them exercising a nuanced resistance through the power of self-definition. The girls' experiences and families nurture the conditions wherein the dissonance between daily experiences and the dominant images of Black womanhood become visible. To be able to open ideologies to be demystified the victims need to be able to see the contradictions for themselves. This new view presents the girls with opportunities to define their paths and what success means, for themselves. As Collins (2000), Phoenix (2002) Mirza (1992), argue, Black women's lives are a mosaic of negotiations, each negotiation seeks to alleviate the contradictions they note which separate their own internally defined images as African Caribbean Black British girls, with their objectification as the 'Other'. This struggle for self-definition is in my view captured in the girls' high expectations for themselves and their aspirations that are central to their ideas of success.



## **4.7 In conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored the shifting ways in which the girls make meaning from the normative notions of success. In doing this, I have highlighted some of the tensions presented by race and gender while they try to make success fit their lives and the experiences of people around them. The girls were able to reflect upon the possibilities of race and gender impacting upon success and used their mothers' experiences as examples of this. The girls assured themselves that; working hard, setting and achieving goals, having something to aim for were particular ways they might achieve success. Their views were contradicted by their experiences as learners. Despite this, the girls continued to believe that the types of success they sought would be available to them as a result of a good education.

While some of the girls recognised that their mothers had good qualifications, they also acknowledged that the trappings of success had not materialised. However, despite the contradictions of evidence, the girls maintained a view that with hard work and consistent effort they could achieve the success they sought for themselves. I shall now turn to consider the girls' learning and their relationships with teachers. I do this to explore how the girls continued to negotiate a route to success and make sense of their experiences of race and gender in the school and learning context.

## **5 Chapter 5 Relationships as a route to success**

As established in the previous chapter, the girls recognise education as a gateway to success and their teachers as important gate keepers. The school environment hosts; teachers, non-teaching adults, as well as other children. Each of the relationships, those between the girls, their teachers, their friends and non-teaching adults in the setting, inform the girls' experiences of school and how they navigate a route to success.

In this chapter, I will explore how the girls' relationships with their peers and the adults in the school setting help them to navigate a route to success. Before turning to the data, I shall offer a short review of the literature concerning how African Caribbean Black British girls are viewed in primary school. The literature review will begin with a consideration of how African Caribbean Black British primary school-age girls' have been theorised. This will be done through a discussion of literature that considers these girls relationships with the notion of the ideal pupil and how their teachers interact with them.

The review will move on to a consideration of resistance and the importance of friendships for African Caribbean Black British girls. British based literature concerning the experiences of African Caribbean girls is somewhat sparse, I will engage some literature from the America to fill some of the space in the literature available in the UK. It is my contention that amongst other things, the girls' friendships offer a site and resource of resistance in the hostile environment of the school. My literature review will continue with a discussion of resistance and the place of silence in that repertoire. Findings from my research suggest that the girls in this study use their Caribbean silences as a form of resistance to what they consider unfair treatment from teachers. As shall be discussed the girls engage their home based Caribbean resources of; silence, cut eye, kiss teeth as well as their friendships with other African Caribbean Black British girls, to resist unfair treatment.

### **5.1 Literature Review**

The concept of the 'ideal pupil' was first used by Becker (1952) and centred on pupils being quiet and staying out of trouble. For the ideal pupil, not 'misbehaving' being a somewhat more passive pupil and doing what they are told facilitates good relationships with their

teachers. From the insight of the teachers, pupils from higher and middle social -economic groupings were considered far closer to this standard than those from the low SES group (Hempel 2009). Despite this, this ideal remained the standard for a teacher's judgement of the quality of children as pupils. Becker (1952) and Archer (2007) suggest that for children outside of the middle-class norm, the construct of the ideal pupil constrains their access to success.

Nowhere is the ideal pupil constructed to include characteristics associated with African Caribbean British girls. In the secondary school setting, African Caribbean Black British girls are not flatteringly described. African Caribbean girls are described as; unfeminine (Weekes 2003), too loud (Fuller 1980), confrontational (Lamb & Brown 2008), unabashed about flaunting their sexuality (Collins 2005) and willing to talk back (Wright 2010). Further literature tells us that these girls are considered to be, at best, average pupils/ slow learners (Gillborn et al 2012) who have higher aspirations than their talents can achieve (Archer 2010). As Laws and Davies (2000) argue, pupils who do not conform to classroom standards of the ideal are labelled and blamed for being "wrong". This labelling has an impact on their schooling experiences. Connolly (2002) found that in primary school the African Caribbean Black British girls in his study girls were discursively constructed by their teachers as disruptive and by their peers as unfeminine and were so were excluded from playground games concerning boyfriends.

The girls in Connolly's study responded to their exclusion by, carving out alternative spaces. Within their spaces, the girls, unlike their White counterparts, established non-romantic relationships with boys on their terms. Not all of the girls responded in this way; some sought to continue to struggle, largely unsuccessfully, to gain status within the heteronormative discourse on boyfriends. Connolly's work has to be contrasted with Ali (2003) who found the African Caribbean Black British girls in her study to be popular so much so that the other children in the setting sought to model themselves on these same girls.

Grant (1992) also found that African Caribbean Black British primary school girls were considered disruptive. Their disruptiveness centred upon them being talkative and keen to share their opinions. Mac an Ghaill (1988) found that they were considered similarly at

secondary school. However, for Mac an Ghaill, the girls' disruption centred upon their perceived non-conformity, their apparently ethnic specific friendship groups and their apparent lack of engagement with teachers and learning. This construction had negative implications for their relationships with their teachers. Whilst Mac an Ghaill's research concerns girls in secondary school, I suggest that Connolly (2002) and Grants (1992) work indicates a continuity of treatment from primary into secondary schooling. Indeed the girls in my study have reported a range of negative (as well as positive) interactions with their teachers. As will be discussed in the forthcoming chapter, as a result of the treatment they deemed unfair, the girls' relationships with their teachers were at time strained.

In Grant (1992) the girls' disruptive behaviours were attributed to the gendered expectation that girls would "chatter" and be "silly or quarrelsome". However, because the girls were African Caribbean Black British, these gendered disruptions were also considered evidence of defiance or challenge to teacher authority. For Grant (1992) Connolly (2002) and Mac an Ghaill (1988), these discourses were woven into the dominant processes of the school which saw African Caribbean Black British girls being publicly singled out for discipline by teachers to a greater extent than other girls. As a result of being perceived as disruptive, Grant argues that teachers appeared to encourage the girls' social competence, - manners and social skills- at the expense of their academic skills. For Grants (1992) and Connolly (2002), discourses of the girls' athleticism, their aggressiveness as well as their disruptiveness, underscored the teachers' perceptions of them. These findings are supported by Wright (1993) who conjectured that teachers' negative perceptions had a potentially detrimental impact on African Caribbean Black British girls' academic orientations and outcomes.

Connolly found that the racialised adult discourses around the children had significant impacts on their developing identities. Connolly (2002) and Wright (1993) agree that race is implicated in the discourse both in school and in the wider communities. Participants in Wrights study expressed their acute awareness of the impact of race, racism, and this awareness led them having a negative view of their relationships with their teachers. In keeping with Weekes (2003), Rollock (2007) and Cork (2005), Wright (1993) suggests that this awareness of race and racism was reflected in the children's friendship choices as well

as their relationships with their teachers. These findings appear to be replicated in my study and are highlighted through the girls chosen friendships and their practices of resistance in the school setting.

The academic outcomes for the girls in Grant and Connolly's studies are not known. This lack of research does not allow for an immediate correlation between the girls' school experiences, relationships with teachers and academic outcomes at year 6. Strand's work (2013, 2014) fills this research gap. He indicates that despite their comparative academic ability concerning the failures of African Caribbean boys, African Caribbean Black British girls' achievement in year 6 SAT's marginally lag behind those of their White female contemporaries.

As they move into adolescence, friendships and relationships with peers take on an increasingly important place girls lives (George 2007, Osler & Vincent, 2003). During this period, the influence of peers and friends significantly affects the ways that girls view themselves, the choices they make, and their behaviours (George 2007). Female friendships are of significance because as Shain (2003) in agreement with Collins (2000) argues, friendships between them operate as sites of empowerment and resistance from oppression. Indeed Reynolds (2007) argues that in primary school the African Caribbean respondents in her study noted they had friendships with children from other racial groupings. However as they progressed in their secondary school careers, their friendship groups became less diverse.

This increasing exclusivity could be the result of the young peoples' friendships being a safe space able to provide a source of liberation and respite from the onslaught of racial and gendered oppression (Collins 2000 Reynold 2007). Consequently, friendships amongst African Caribbean Black British girls can serve as a place where they can relax, tell stories, gain strength, empower themselves and maintain harmony in their lives (Collins 2000, George 2007). As Collins (2000) explained, "*In the comfort of daily conversations, through serious conversations and humour, African-American females as sisters and friends affirm one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist*" (p. 102). This perspective shows how friendships sites, are ripe for the negotiation of and rebellion against oppression in the lives of the participants (hooks 1990). Within their friendships, Black women and girls are

argued as moving society's dialogue of oppression to the periphery and creating a new, centred type of dialogue about themselves. This view is supported by Nehaul (1996) and Channer (1995). Nehaul (1996) focused on achieving, rather than failing African Caribbean Black British pupils in primary schools.

Nehaul (1996) and Channer (1995) argued that African Caribbean Black British pupils received extra status and positive reinforcement from their in-school friendships. Consequently, these pupils developed increased pride and confidence in their ability and this had a positive impact on their achievements. Not alone in these findings, Ricciuti (1999) and Smyth, E., & McCoy, S (2009) in their American studies found that high achieving pupils, especially African American girls usually chose high achieving pupils as friends. These friends characteristically had a strong belief in self and resistance to negative influences. There is little research detailing the specific friendships experiences of African Caribbean Black British primary school age girls. George (2007) provides a noteworthy exception.

George's (2007) work focused on girls and their friendships, rather than exploring how the girls' friendships helped their academic endeavours. The author investigates the nuances involved in girls' friendships from the last two years of primary school through the first and second years of secondary school. George convincingly accounted for shifting friendship positions occupied by girls as they negotiate the transition from primary to secondary school. George argued the way the girl's police one another is crucial to their ability to perform as students. The policing George noted, related to modes and standards of behaviour, accessing and remaining in preferred friendships circles and supporting and affirming each other in the school setting. This analysis offered a hitherto absent insight to the complexity of and power hierarchies within girls' friendships.

George (2007) has suggested that African Caribbean Black British girls in their final year of primary school held friendships across ethnic and racial boundaries, but these friendships appeared to taper off as the girls progressed into their first secondary schooling year. The author suggests this tapering is

“unsurprising that Black girls, with their different history and heritage rooted in past racism, as well as different futures dictated by institutional racism, will make friends with girls who share similar backgrounds” (George 2007 pg. 129)

Similar considerations of identity and identity development are highlighted in Connolly’s (1992) work. The author considers how primary school children aged 8 and 9 actively draw upon ideas, themes and discourses circulating within wider society as they negotiate their identity in day-to-day life and social interaction. Connolly’s work considers how discourses concerning race are taken up and reworked by the children. While Connolly’s work was not exclusively concerned with African Caribbean Black British girls, the insights from the text do suggest that for the African Caribbean Black British girls in his study, the racialization of social relations outside the school impacts upon their classroom and playground life.

For Connolly, the discourse of ‘race’ impact upon children’s gender identities. Play in the lunch and free-times the girls had in school appeared to focus upon adult themes and love and being attractive to boys. African Caribbean Black British girls in the study appeared to be excluded from these themes. For the African Caribbean Black British girls in his study Connolly concludes that while they were excluded from the discourse about ‘boyfriends’, this exclusion open spaces for them to establish relationships with groups of boys on their terms. This renegotiation enabled them to enact a variety of strategies to negotiate their symbolic and social place in the school.

Ali’s work (2003) focused on notions of femininity in the context of primary school. The research was conducted at three sites with girls in years 4 to 6. The research included four African Caribbean Black British girls. This group of four African Caribbean Black British girls were very popular. Indeed the author describes them as highly influential because; of their abilities to dance, their extensive knowledge of music and their high profile with the boys. Their high profile was achieved due to their ability to dance and their success in dance competitions. This in contrast to the African Caribbean Black British girls in Connolly’s study who were described as being excluded from the discourse on boyfriends.

Ali acknowledges that this may in some way be seen as stereotypical, she downplays this possibility and notes that these girls were exemplary. The exemplary nature of the girls in this group reflected that they were spread throughout the class regarding their levels of educational attainment. Their embodied state, which included their racialised identifications, was also a source of capital for them (Ali 2003). This work has resonance with both Connolly (2002), George (2007). Each of the authors notes an automatic level of credibility and authenticity accruing to the African Caribbean Black British girls (and boys) in their study because of their peers' perceptions of them as being cool and knowledgeable of the adult worlds.

The findings from each of the studies outlined above have resonance with Wright (1992). Wright, in her research concerning race relations in the primary school, found that the children in her study were alive to the challenges of racism in their schooling contexts. The children suggested that racism, which they identified as being treated differently, was evident in their experiences in the classroom. The children felt that they were ignored in favour of White children when they sought to answer the general question in class. They felt this was the case despite following the “hands up and wait to be asked” protocols.

In keeping with the African Caribbean Black British girls in Connolly's study, the girls in Wright's work felt themselves to be excluded from the normative discussion of boys and boyfriends. However, for the girls in this study, Wright suggested that their primary challenge related to race rather than to gender. Wright's work highlighted the finding that, despite being popular amongst their peers, in keeping with the African Caribbean Black British girls in Ali (2003) study the gender of the group of African Caribbean Black British children became subsumed within their presence as challenging African-Caribbean students.

Self-confidence and independence were found to be features of the support the girls achieved through these friendships (George 2007). Thus the friendships developed by these girls help them to both to fit into and simultaneously resist systems of racial oppression. For African Caribbean Black British girls' school reflects one of the many hostile environments they have to traverse as they negotiate a route to success. The term hostile environment captures the subjective understandings of the landscapes of risk the girls face based on the intersections of race, and gender (Collins 2005).



The term "resistance within accommodation" has been used by feminist researchers, (Amos and Parmar, 1981; Fuller, 1982; Anyon, 1983), to suggest that young women strategically employ a wide range of sophisticated strategies of survival. For these authors, resistances were often located in pupils' wider racialised and gendered positions. Forms of speech, dress, and ways of walking are often indicative of displaced contestations or resistances. Not all resistance manifests itself as outward defiance or rebelliousness, although these overt displays may be the most obvious acts of opposition (Giroux, 1993). Students may also passively resist, this is to suggest that the embodied actions pupils engage in by minimising their engagement with school activities and school ideology, for example, can be categorised as resistance.

The girls are not passive agents in the school context. Resistance can also be viewed as students' struggle for individual and collective identity. Student resistance, in this case, symbolizes the students' struggle to reject powerlessness and assert their agency and voice (Oesterich 2007). Fordham (1996) was particularly poignant in her descriptions of the tensions African American girls faced between "acting too White" in their attempts to access dominant discourses around school success. She conceptualised academic achievement as also a form of resistance; in this case, the girls were resisting the dominant discourse concerning the lower abilities of and opportunities for Black students.

However, by succeeding in this form of resistance and getting good grades, the girls risked losing the support and "fictive kinship" of the African American Black community. Race, gender and class were the focus of the work undertaken by Eggleston and Miranda (2009) in their exploration of how African American girls make meaning of their experiences in predominantly White schools. The girls in the research suggested that while at school, they were expected to be something other than themselves. This finding accords with separation of home and school identities noted by Henry (1998, 2005). The girls suggested that they had to guard their behaviours, conduct themselves differently when they were in a mixed (gender) setting to their behaviours when they were in the majority. The authors did argue that the girls used silence to avoid being stereotyped within the oppressive schooling environment. Fordham (1993), Davidson (1996) argues that silence is a strategy adopted by some academically successful African American female students.

Silence, is used by these girls, to remove and disassociate themselves, from the loud stereotype that characterises descriptions of African American women (Leadbeater, 2007, Morris 2007). Indeed Fordham (1993) documented that the high achieving girls African American girls often used deliberate silence to deflect hostility. The girls in Fordham's study considered that anger that might be directed at them if they were both highly visible and academically successful. Silence was used as, "a controlled response to their evolving, ambiguous status as academically successful" (p.17).

Silence and loudness are dichotomous, depictions of how African American female students and some of their African Caribbean Black British counterparts conduct their school lives. For African Caribbean Black British girls, being silenced, being required to be silent, are consistent features in their schooling experiences (Wright 1992, Mac an Gaille 1988, Fuller 1980, Evans 1988, Osler 2006). For the girls in this study, despite putting up resistance to being sanctioned, because they are perceived as loud and aggressive, they must continue to function within the system that devalues them. It is my contention that the silence(s) enacted by Black girls and young women can be understood in a multitude of ways. Rodriguez (2011) places the silences of minority pupils in American school in the context of speech. Rodriguez argues that teachers and other practitioners need to comprehend the multiple meanings of silence in classrooms particularly when racism is being discussed.

Silence, rather than being antithetical to the liberation of oppressed groups, can operate as a discourse and as a means of resistance to hegemonic power, particularly the forms of power structuring the lives of contemporary African Caribbean Black British girls required to attend school. Through a focus on what people do every day in their time and space, it is possible to view each localised disruption as being a resistant act. This characterisation implies the possibilities of negotiation and adaption for the individuals involved (Osterriche 2007). The abilities to negotiate and adapt are particularly salient in the context of the hostile environment of school as the girls are legally obliged to attend, despite the inequalities they experience. For African Caribbean Black British girls, school reflects one of the many hostile environments they have to traverse as they negotiate a route to success. The term hostile environment, captures the subjective understanding of the landscape of risk the girls face based on the spaces they occupy at the intersection of race and gender (Collins 2005). I

shall now turn my attention to the girls' practices of resistance within the hostile environment of school. I shall explore how they simultaneously fit into and resist the environment within which they are captured.

## **5.2 The Importance of Teacher Dispositions**

The girls had to be in the classrooms and school environment mainly on their own, without the support of their mothers, their siblings and in some cases, without the support of other African Caribbean Black British children. These girls had to work out ways to negotiate positive relationships with their teachers and other school authority figures. In chapter two, I initiated a discussion of power as being circulatory rather than being top down. I want in this section to explore the girls' view of power and how this view influences their agency. How the girls perceive their teachers and the power their teachers have to influence their outcomes influences their views of their relationships. While developing the data I asked the girls what their views were generally about the teachers in their schools. There were a lot of common, positive comments regarding moods and their teachers' characteristics. For example, Janessa and Helen liked their teachers' jovial nature and, though denounced as corny, appeared to appreciate the times when their teacher made jokes in the classroom.

Janessa        Yeah she's, ok when she's ok I like it when she just gets on and talks about random stuff or like when she tries to get us to do a rap or something, then she's just funny (Janessa, April 2010)

The girls' perceptions of their teachers were contingent on their interpersonal, one on one, dealings with them. At times, the girls' one to one interactions with their teachers were described positively while at others, sometimes in the same discussion the teacher and their relationships were described negatively. I want in this section to look at the discussion with Rakaya Kimarie and Natalie because they reflect the tone of the experiences discussed by the other girls. Further, Natalie and Kimarie in particular ably expressed the ongoing negotiations within the relationships between themselves and their teachers. Rakaya thought that, in general, her teachers were, helpful:

Rakaya            My teacher is really good, very energetic and happy with us, except when she's not....then it's like she's got a bad day on with you and she just gets at you all the time and everything goes wrong and then you have to watch out. (Rakaya November 2009).

Inconsistent teacher dispositions appeared to impact on the girl's perceptions of their relationships with their teacher. In keeping with Janessa's "She is ok when she is ok" comment above, Rakaya's observation appears to highlight how she is often cautious about what she may experience in the classroom, this I think to speak clearly to how power circulates in the relationships between the girls and their teachers. For the girls, when their teacher "has a bad day on with you" they appear to have to actively use their resources and abilities in their relations with their teachers. As can be seen in Rakaya's response, despite her agency, actively using her resources "everything goes wrong" This highlights the importance of the teacher's disposition towards the girls and the struggle for the girls to assert their agency in the school setting. A similar sentiment, concerning caution and teacher dispositions, is continued by Kimarie who suggests:

Kimarie            She likes to go on like she's being nice but really she just wants to get it all over with, you just got to hope for the best. You just go in school the day and sometimes you just got to keep yourself down cause she all mardy for something (Kimarie, April 2010).

Like Rakaya, Kimarie appears to be explaining how she recognises the times and spaces where the power in the relationship between herself and her teacher is significantly weighted towards the teacher. In such circumstances, Kimarie can assess what course of action, or in action, "you just got to keep yourself down," would be the most apposite given the teacher's mood. In this Kimarie is outlining that she would not want to stick out and attract her teacher's attention. Kimarie is suggesting that when her teacher is having a bad day, she, the teacher is likely to find some reason to sanction Kimarie. Keeping herself down suggests that Kimarie does not want to attract her teacher attention. It further suggests chosen behaviour.

Kimarie noted that when her teacher was, in her view, mardy “you just had to keep yourself down” The consequences of doing otherwise include.

Kimarie        Or you would get a card or something. Or like she’s just watch you all the time and you get telled off for not putting up your hand or for chewing or anything. Them times, you just got to be ready (Kimarie April 2010)

Kimarie, like Rakaya previously, appears to suggest that she has vigilant and guard her behaviours against her teacher’s opprobrium. The vigilance that Kimarie and Rakaya note is not simply ensuring their behaviours and in keeping with their teachers’ expectations but also to guard against their teacher's sanctions and unwarranted discipline. Teacher behaviour is not monitored in the same manner as student behaviour. Each of the girls acknowledged that they had at different times received behaviour cards. These cards monitor their behaviours during the lesson and their free times. It is expected that teachers complete the card at the end of each lesson, sometimes in dialogue with the recipient, sometimes not. These behaviour cards are part of the teacher’s resources reinforcing what is the asymmetrical power relationship between teachers and students.

In his consideration of the exercise of power Foucault (1979) suggests the need to question how power is exercised between and amongst groups and individuals. Foucault illustrates the ways in which discourses and thoughts inform each other. In Foucault’s formula thoughts are framed by discourse so too are behaviours and actions. In this way the normativity and a way of relating to oneself is constructed. For Foucault, modern institutions, such as prisons operate centrally in the reproduction of discourses related to criminality. It can also be argued that schools operate similarly, this observation has additional implications for the how power between children and adults is exercised.

However, even though Foucault focusses on the part school play in the creation and maintenance of docility in pupils, it does not mean that children conform totally to adult norms. Power does not operate exclusively in the hands of one group over another. It is the case rather that individuals simultaneously undergo and exercising this power. This concepts illustrated well in classrooms suggests a teacher’s classroom control is rarely complete. As with adults, children and young people are agents, children position and reposition themselves in the light of others expectations and evaluations (Connolly, 1998).

More specifically, power can be seen in how the girls actively and continuously create or construct their identities in response to their environment, their circumstances, and their lived-experiences, and is highlighted in Kimarie's comment of "just keep yourself down". In the scenarios' under discussion, power can be argued to be relational because it produces reality.

Thus, at a micro-level, the patterns and practices of power have developed the social relations between the girls and their teachers. As can be seen in the discussions above it would appear that Kimarie from her insight and chosen behaviours is actively and constructing her identities as a pupil in response to her environment and her teacher's dispositions. In the coming discussion, I am returning to a consideration of power and perceptions the power roles in discourse of relationships in school. Constructing identities in response to the power relation in the classroom is a theme continued by Natalie:

Natalie        Be respectful and try and look like you're taking it in and you are glad of what they [teachers] are trying to tell us. A lot of people in my class are not like that. They think they [teachers] are boring you and you can just do nothing. I think that we have to give them something for what they do for us (Natalie July 2010).

Natalie's comment was in keeping with the suggestions made by the other girls. This comment illustrates what 'well behaved' classroom behaviour looks like in their eyes and is articulated by Natalie. This exemplifies the role she thinks pupils should take in the classroom. She thought that responsibility fell to her, as a pupil, to be responsive, to the work teachers do. She also suggested that she thought many students fell short of this expectation.

Natalie's comments above identify one aspect of the role of a pupil, that of respect for the teacher, and she illustrates how this should be acted out. Natalie suggests you need to be seen to be attentive and appreciative. Natalie criticises her fellow pupils who, in her eyes, do not always act the pupil role as she understands it. These examples of teacher disposition, concerning being helpful, funny or bad-tempered, exert an effect on the girls' behaviour providing a strong practical-evaluative dimension to agency. The girls' evaluative

judgements of their teacher demeanour and dispositions help shape their responses. Foucault (1979) suggested that one of the most powerful ways for social orders to shape the dispositions of their members is to embody principles of social practice by emphasising the seemingly innocuous details of dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners for example.

The power of pedagogic discourse and reason lies precisely in the way it exhorts the essential while seeming to demand the insignificant. In obtaining the respect for forms of respect which constitute the most visible and, at the same time, the best hidden (because most “natural”) manifestations of submission to the established order (Apple 2009). In the example above, the concession of respect described by Natalie to be one that upholds the asymmetrical relationship between teacher and pupil, where you “try and look like you're taking it in”. This suggests that Natalie, and arguably other socialised and rationalised pupils, are doing what is expected of them by their teacher in that they are respectful and thus learning. It further appears that Natalie is attempting to position herself as the ideal pupil.

For Natalie and Kimarie, for example, their positional identities can be understood as identifying themselves in relation to the other. The freedom a person has to position herself in relation to others is constrained by wider discourses on gender or race for example. The girls' subject positions are reproduced on a daily basis through interactions between themselves and other pupils in the setting and between teachers and themselves as pupils. The ideal pupil is characterised by high levels of gendered self-regulation and exhibiting characteristics of independence, autonomy, rationality and humour (Walkerdine, 1990). This can be combined with dominant discourses about gender and race, which have been shown to influence teachers' and children's perceptions of the characteristics that constitute an acceptable or ‘good pupil’ (Connolly 2002, Renold and Allen 2005). The ideal female pupil, in line with Walkerdine's (1990) analysis of girls in child-centred classrooms, is seen to be equipped with highly developed social skills to create a congenial environment in the classroom both regarding the physical environment, and the social atmosphere. Natalie and Kimarie above can be argued to be attempting to position themselves as the ideal pupil. This position is effectively denied to them due to the discourses of race and gender within which their actions are viewed.

Natalie seems to suggest that pupils need to work at letting the teacher teach and be responsive to their offerings. Allen (2003) argues that, although teachers may claim authority, it is lent or conceded by pupils, only as long as recognition of their official (teacher) standing lasts. Natalie and Kimarie comments recognize that their behaviours can influence the environment for example, “like you're taking it in, and you are glad of what they (teachers) are trying to tell us” and “You just go in school the day and sometimes you just got to keep yourself down”. Their comments illustrate that these students recognise these adults as teachers, with the inherent possibilities to mobilise their power and positions to control. The discussion, in this section, suggests teacher dispositions do matter. This agency, which is rooted in the nature of relationships, has a strong practical evaluative orientation. The discussion above begins to illustrate how teacher-pupil relationships shape the opportunities for the achievement of agency by the girls.

### **5.3 Teacher as Ally**

Natalie, Peterlyn and Leonie, pointed to different times across their primary school careers where they believed their teacher to have been on their side. In school, Natalie felt she was treated fairly by her teacher and that she was given much positive feedback regarding her work and classroom interactions.

Natalie           " for most of the time Mrs. James (her class teacher), was happy to help you if you went to her to get help or if you needed help and she'd see that you needed help she was willing to help. " (Natalie July 2010)

Natalie made particular mention of Mrs. James, and her support, as nurturing her academic and her athletic skills:

Natalie           "she always encourages me and just tells me I can do it even when I think I can't. " (Natalie May 2010)

Natalie had joined the school late after friendship cohorts had been established. Despite Natalie's reluctance, her teacher had encouraged her to join sports based after school clubs as a route to making friends. Gillborn (2006), notes that teachers continue to hold the perception that Black students, particularly boys, are athletically gifted. For Black students,



participation in sports offers an opportunity to connect with teachers and to develop supportive relationships that facilitate the achievement of their educational goals. In Natalie's case, Mrs. James also supported her academic efforts by offering her help she, needed in the classroom. As Natalie explained;

Natalie "she always looked out for me when I was new at school, and always made sure that I was doing my work and if I needed help, she told me to come to her and talk to her. She was really nice." (Natalie May 2010)

African Caribbean Black British girls tend not to be constructed as athletes and as such are not subject to the same athletic expectations as their male counterparts. Such gendered constructions of students are linked to the emphasis on male sports (Skelton, 2000), usually headed by male teachers. Natalie's teacher helped her to make friends in the closed environment of the school. The price of this support was participation in after school sports clubs, despite her disinterest and belief that she was lacking in sporting prowess. Natalie indicated in our discussions, that even though she did not like sport because she wanted the teacher to like her, she joined the sports activities the teacher had suggested. As will be discussed, each of the girls who indicated their teachers were sometimes allies, make great efforts to please their teacher and keep their teachers onside. However, when that teacher's support is withdrawn, as shall be discussed later, Natalie is left isolated and confused.

Teacher discourses concerning the girls in this study specifically inform their practices of educational control. Educational control exercised via institutional pedagogical and curricular practices. Control is further compounded via their evaluation systems and social relations. In the process of exercising agency, accommodating or being resistant to these practice, girls in this study develop identities and ideas about themselves that have the potential to reproduce or challenge the discourses to which teachers hold as true. This can be exemplified in the ways the girls sometimes constructed their teachers as allies.

Peterlyn She was like really nice, fair on me. ....Well, she didn't tell me off so much and like she helped with my work when I couldn't do it and all stuff like that..... she was bare sad for me, you get me, when she, she found out of my dad and stuff. Like you know cause he's not so great and like she

didn't mind..... And when I was getting picked on, she let me stay inside. Even when after I was told to get out and go away to the other field, she made em change their mind and let me go in cause I was upset. ....It was like she did her best to boost me and make me feel good and clever and that.....and when I put my hand up she always asked me, she made me feel boosted, kind 'o' special I think really. So then, you know, like if when I come in school and don't look right, she'd be like, "what's goin' on" and she'd sit me down. And then I don't have to do anything till I'm ready and she dint tell me off or anything. (March 2010)

When discussing their teachers as allies, the teachers were described as “favourite”. As can be discussed in chapter 2, power in these interactions between teacher as an ally and the girls sees them subject to power that is both exercised from outside and by the individual itself. Most commonly the girls recounted that their teacher had recognised they were struggling, not exclusively with classroom work and needed individual attention. The above excerpt from Peterlyn supports Natalie’s description of her teacher as nice and suggests that like Natalie, her favourite teacher was less likely than their others to reprimand Peterlyn for her behaviours.

In Peterlyn’s experience, fairness was related to being issued with fewer reprimands and her teacher’s recognition that home and personal issues might impact on her engagements with classroom activities. Where Peterlyn and Leonie, in the second extract, discuss the positive relationship with their teachers, their views are arrived at through the prism of fairness. Importantly, the girls also suggest that their favourite teacher listened to their perspectives even when other teachers, or ancillary staff, would have given them behaviour sanctions.

Constructing their teachers as allies’ serves to maintain the veracity of the meritocratic discourse to divert attention away from the wider socio-political and economic challenges facing the girls in their quests for success. This illustrates, the benign and neutral nature of official discourses, which mediate the girls’ ways of thinking about the power imbalances in the relationships between themselves and their teachers. At the start of the twenty-first century, the discourse that teachers are key to educational success and reform remains

pervasive. Evidence of this taken-for-granted assumption can be found in education policy reform documents from a wide variety sources at the local and national level. In emphasising the idea that successful education reform is dependent upon improving teachers, these official documents contribute to constructing the discourse of the centrality of the teacher. The girls appear to be accepting this discourse.

Leonie too described situations where she felt that her teacher has been on her side and was concerned with her as a whole person not just as someone whose behaviours need to be addressed.

Leonie            “She was like honest you know? Like she said that’s good or that’s bad or anything and you could really believe her. I liked her most because she’s a kind person, where, say if you do somethin’ or if you accidentally say something they don’t like, and she wouldn’t just tell you off or put a sad face....(on the behaviour chart). ... She was nice, proper nice, to me. (July 29th 2010)

However, while Peterlyn and Leonie are positive about the support they receive from their favourite teacher, their views of the support they receive are balanced by the expectations of being reprimanded unfairly by others. This positive relationship led Peterlyn to confide details about her life outside of school, i.e. her father, to her teacher. Peterlyn felt that sharing such confidences led to a better learning relationship in class and her, Peterlyn, being picked to answer questions when she put her hand up. African Caribbean Black British girls face a particular task, that of defining their identities in a society by which they are devalued (hooks 1991).

Whilst girls from other grouping may face similar challenges, it is these girls intersectional positioning that makes their experiences of attempting to determine their identities within a racially gendered devaluing context, unique. The schooling context, in which these girls develop their identities as they seek success, is both racist and sexist. The support they receive is bound by the context. It is noteworthy that Peterlyn commented that her favourite teacher “didn’t mind” this in relation to the issues regarding her father. This suggests that Peterlyn had anticipated a negative reaction to her personal circumstances.

Similarly Leonie's excerpt suggests that her favourite teacher would not be as quick as the others to sanction or reprimand her behaviours. As a result of her perception that her favourite teacher treated her fairly Leonie suggests that she would choose to improve her behaviour, almost as a reward for her fairness.

Collins (2004) argued that for African American women their intimacy with and knowledge of White power structures places them as insiders to those structures. Whilst their class, gender, race and the discourses through which they as African American women are constructed places them as outsiders to those same structures simultaneously. While their outside-within position may appear to place Peterlyn and Leonie at the disadvantage of inequitable discipline, it can also offer them a unique vantage point. They have developed a particular view of those who make and define the rules. Following Collins (2000) analysis it can be argued that Peterlyn and Leonie's intersectional positioning allows them a unique perspective, one in which they observe and understand the difference between the two worlds. These African Caribbean Black British girls' survival in school, in many instances depends on their ability to understand that there is a major difference between the margin and the centre. I argue that for Leonie, Peterlyn and their choices of favourite teacher, this concept is being learned during their early educational experiences.

#### **5.4 Teaching Assistants as Allies**

Rakaya and Kimarie gave accounts of ways in which the teaching assistants had supported their academic and personal endeavours. Rakaya explained that Ms. Cook who would spend lunch breaks with her, going over material that Rakaya had found difficult. As Rakaya explained,

Rakaya            "if she was on library duty at lunchtime and I had that lunch, we would sit down and talk about what we were reading in literacy and she would help me go over it and help me understand exactly what it was on about "

(Rakaya 26th January 2010)

Rakaya described Ms. Cook as a helpful and kind teacher on whom she could rely to have her best interest at heart. Ms. Cook was described by Rakaya as, a Black woman who helps the teacher and other children in the class who cannot concentrate or hear properly. For Rakaya, Ms. Cook's support went beyond course material to include advice on choice of secondary school, and the benefits of working hard at school. Rakaya noted that Ms. Cook encouraged her to work hard in year six as a way of preparing for the challenges of secondary school. This help was relevant because Rakaya felt her class teacher was often too busy to listen to her or help her in the ways she needed to be helped. Like Rakaya, Kimarie was full of praise for aid and support she had received from the teaching assistants.

Kimarie        Mrs. Sabat is always nice to me, she like a good person to me. She listens and if I get telled off or something she will always give me a hug and say nice stuff to me about what's happened. I can talk to her about a lot of stuff. When I have played (the piano) at church no one else is bothered for me. But Mrs. Sabat lets me tell her all about it. And even sometimes she asks me about things, she's really nice I'm gonna miss her the most I think  
(Kimarie 14th July 2010)

The support that Rakaya and Kimarie received from their class teaching assistants complemented the efforts of their mothers by orienting them towards academic achievement while still at primary school. By encouraging Rakaya to work hard and supporting Kimarie by listening to tales of her out of school piano activities, the teaching assistants helped each of them to think concretely about their skills and abilities.

As "institutional agents" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) who have access to information that may not be accessible to parents, or about which parents may be unaware, these teaching assistants did what parents were perhaps unable to do. The relationships with the teaching assistants outlined above reflect the complex school terrain the girls have to negotiate on their route to success. While the teaching assistants do have less power than classroom teachers, the girls appear to be more comfortable seeking and achieving support from these

assistants than they are with their teachers. In the scenario's' outlined above Ms. Cook and Mrs. Sabat are respectively African Caribbean Black British and Indian British. Ms. Cook being African Caribbean Black British and Mrs. Sabat being British Indian may have some bearing on the girls and seeking support.

The relationships with the teaching assistants do not occur in a vacuum but can rather be viewed as motivated by the girls' expectations of them and their roles. These roles are in turn influenced by the culturally assumed organisational requirements of the school. The teaching assistants' specialist knowledge lays not only in their professional standing but also as adults who have themselves had to negotiate similar race and gendered structures as the girls, and their specialist knowledge is located in their lived experiences.

In keeping with Kimarie and Rakaya, Tamisha and Janessa also held classroom assistants in high regard. For Tamisha and Janessa, these teaching assistants were perceived not simply as allies but explicitly as allies for racial minority pupils. Tamisha and Janessa both referred to SENCO teachers who worked with Black pupils and were well-liked by them. When asked about which of her teachers she like best and why, Janessa went on to remember that she and a couple of other girls, whom she described as Black, had gone on a field trip to Rothley. The SENCO who took them stood out in her memory although she never had a class with him. As she pointed out:

Janessa            "I don't think he taught me or anything like that, but he pretty much was cool with all the Black kids and that."

Janessa's perception of this teacher as helpful to Black students facilitated a rapport with him that was different from the way she claims to have interacted with other, White, teachers who were not "cool" with Black students. Janessa used this teacher's interactions with her racial group, to demonstrate how different he was, in comparison to the other, White, teachers. In the context of the primary school where she said relationships between Black students and teachers were often strained, this teacher's relationship with Black students set him apart. Similarly, Tamisha's description of Ms. Palmer, her classroom assistant suggests that like Janessa, her perception of teachers was influenced by their relationships with racial minority students and the efforts they made to expand curricula

materials to support Black students' racial identities, and the development of their educational goals. Describing Ms. Palmer as "very nice", Tamisha explained:

Tamisha        "She is actually a great teacher; it was great with her. She allowed you to be yourself, she allowed you do stuff in class when you were ready and didn't try to force you into things you didn't like, but that was when I was in year 2 and 3. I worked for her because she liked me and she would stick up for me when any one said I was naughty or stuff like that. My thing for her is, she allowed you to be yourself and talk about, where your parents are from or what it was like to go Jamaica, when we answered questions and stuff like..... that but then I had to change classes and she left cause she had a baby. (Tamisha July 2010)

This excerpt is based on Tamisha's recollection of her teacher, and this recollection is taken from some three years previous to our discussion. However, what remains significant is that Tamisha has chosen to romanticise (if that is what she has done) her former teacher in this way. This suggests that Ms. Palmer did indeed have a positive impact on Tamisha and that Tamisha attributes this impact to Ms. Palmer's racial origins. Ms. Palmer' was an African Caribbean Black female. Tamisha saw Ms. Palmer as an advocate for her as a Black pupil, not only because of her attempt to make the curriculum more inclusive by allowing students to choose topics that reflect their culture, but also because she organised Black History celebrations at the school. To Tamisha, what set teachers like Ms. Palmer apart from others is the effort she made to ensure that the interests and cultural heritage of Black students were represented in the school. The example above from Tamisha, regarding Ms. Palmer provides an insight into the often hidden actions by students, which enable classroom encounters to become possible learning experiences.

Tamisha's description of Ms. Palmer identified a common feature that some of the girls in this study look for in teachers, namely, support of students' cultural and racial identities, their development of a sense of self, and their goals. Teachers or teaching assistants who were perceived as allies were well-liked by the girls and were often named as favourite.

Favourite and well-liked teachers left a positive impression on the girls and were described regarding the level of interest they showed in students. Additionally, what they did to encourage and support the girls to be successful made them stand out from others. The girls' discussions suggest that the support they received made a difference to them and contributed to their feeling of success at school.

The achievement of agency in the above discussions would be based on the maintenance of the status quo. This relates to the girls seeking support from the less powerful classroom assistants. Seeking support from the teaching assistants has the effect of reducing the tensions the girls' experience. The girls' tensions are reduced by offering them an outlet and support for their academic and personal development assisting in granting permission to this teacher to enact her role. However, if we follow Nespor, (2013) we might consider what political concessions have already been made by these girls and their mothers to achieve agency in these situations. This will be drawn out further in chapter 6.

## **5.5 Teaching Assistant as Adversary**

Peterlyn and Natalie's accounts of their encounters with teaching assistants were emotionally charged. In response to my question of do you like any of the teachers or staff, Peterlyn's response was somewhat of a surprise

Peterlyn        I used to but not anymore. Like the first year they was all nice to me and I thought they was all good fun and lovely but then after that when I saw that they just make things up....they keep giving me red cards, red card, red card red card for everything. Even Miss Clover the TA, even she wants to be giving me cards for nothing. (November 2009)

While Peterlyn was able to pinpoint the time when she stopped liking school teachers and staff her antipathy was directed predominantly towards her classroom TA. Peterlyn appeared to concede that the teachers, were in control and so described their controls and attempts to maintain order in the setting as, understandable. In particular, since she stated that what she liked about school were friends, breaks between lessons, and the lunch breaks. She even liked some of the subjects, particularly Grammar Spelling and Punctuation but



lost interest in them because, she says, of conflicts with the TA in the first instance and the teacher after.

Peterlyn: I come to school every day, in the morning I might have been a couple of minutes late, and I'd get a red card straight the way. It's not my fault I'm late, I can't tell the bus to hurry up. And even when I explain Miss Clover isn't interested and tells of me to my teacher who tells of me to my mum and it all comes on top. (April 2010)

Peterlyn was deeply disappointed with the teaching assistant whom she described as being just like a teacher, and this was later described as being unfair and hasty in their disciplinary measures. This disappointment was crystallised in an incident that she described unprompted: Her mother was called to the school after Peterlyn had slapped another child and causing a commotion. According to Peterlyn, the teachers had tried to calm her down, but eventually, the TA had threatened to call her mother, and despite Peterlyn protestations, her mother had been called. Peterlyn felt that calling her mother to the school had been unnecessary. Peterlyn further felt that the TA's explanation of the need to call her mother was disloyal.

Peterlyn: If she had to I thought my teacher would but not her, she was supposed to be on my side. (April 2010)

Peterlyn was sanctioned at school by having to stay in the classroom for three consecutive lunchtimes, and Peterlyn's mother was asked to take her home for the day to help her calm down. The lunchtime detentions started the following day and the incident was not discussed afterwards with the teachers. Peterlyn firmly believed that she had been unfairly treated at school and perhaps wrongly, attributes that unfair treatment as having been instigated by the TA.

Natalie shared Peterlyn disappointment with her TA and especially with the way in which along with the teachers had, in her opinion, ignored their plights of being bullied and ostracised. However, for Natalie, it was not school that had been her primary concern to date, but rather her family relations. Before I asked Natalie any questions in our discussion, she

poured herself some juice that I had offered, from the jug of juice her mother had prepared for me and complained that just that morning, the juice had run out. Despite her requests, no more juice had been provided for her for at least three days. She wanted to mention it at the outset as a vital piece of information about herself and her viewpoint.

Natalie: They say I am greedy but I'm not..... She (teaching assistant) said to me that I need to go out and make friends with them. She doesn't know that I have tried, a lot!! Sometimes they are nice, but then somethings happens and they say things like, Oh you don't need to run too cause we're are running to be away from you. And then she says well life's not fair. But mine is, my mum and aunties, they're fair, my sisters they can be fair even my friends can be fair so I don't see what she's was on about with that (July 2010)

Natalie expressed criticism towards the authoritative attitude of the TA. Natalie stated that despite her teacher being largely indifferent to her, she had been most disappointed with the TA's suggestion that it was unhealthy for her Natalie to constantly seek reassurance and the company of adults as she should try harder to get along with the other girls and boys in her class. When Natalie attempted to correct the TA's assumptions and put her voice to the discussion, she had received an indoor detention. Having experienced the consequences of her choice had made her well aware of her position as a pupil at a school she was later to describe as bad. Describing her life at the time of the interview, she presents herself as an active agent, as a person who 'tried to push things through', 'only made a fuss when it was necessary, and discussed the situation with teachers only when there was no other option

The forms of agency used by Peterlyn and Natalie, are framed by the institutional support withheld by TA. Both Peterlyn and Natalie had anticipated that the TA's would have been more supportive of them. As a result of the lack of support, both Natalie and Helen positioned the TA as their adversaries. The starting points of these girls and the ways in which they were getting by varied concerning the extent to which they had control over their situations. Neither Peterlyn nor Natalie saw themselves as having much control in the scenarios described. Natalie and Peterlyn both reasoned that their behaviours and responses to their TA's at school were a reaction to being treated unfairly. However, in the case of these girls, the agency they describe enabled them to regain some of the power they felt they had lost in

the scenario. Even though this was rather destructive as it meant curtailing positive relationships they felt they had with the TA for them the solution out of difficult circumstances was a product of their individual actions. Peterlyn and Natalie each presented a subjective sense of competence that they felt helped them to better understand their place and the roles of TA's in their schools. This, in turn, appears to have encouraged them to make an effort to make greater investments in their peer friendships.

## 5.6 Teacher as Adversary

Across the year, each of the girls in this study commented that their teachers, expectations had of them had changed. It can be argued, as Hall et al. (2004) do, that SAT's and the schools need to ensure positive outcomes for their pupils SAT results may impact upon pupil teacher relationships in year 6. For teachers, SATs preparation while indeed a rather joyless activity, demands effort, and the suppression of counter-identities and desires. Whether it is the onset of SAT's or the girls' development from childhood to the challenges of early adolescence that can account for their' perceptions, the girls did not experience this change positively.

The girls felt themselves to be under, unwarranted, attack from teachers and needed to manage these failing relationships. Natalie express the common thread:

Natalie            I don't like getting shouted at, because of what some people do. I think without some people, like Kirsty and Lola it wouldn't be so noisy and stuff and I wouldn't get the blame for it. Just cause they're on my table and not paying attention I get the blame and get told off it's not fair..... (Pauses and erms. removed) and any way Mrs. James doesn't like me much anymore.

Deborah            Why's that, what makes you think that

Natalie            Well really she doesn't listen to me or talk to me like when I first came. Now, it's like she just ignores me unless she can't help it. I can't go and tell her my problems anymore. So, like, I am sitting on my table getting on with literacy or something and they, just

didn't want to work properly, so they just start talking or messing about. If Mrs. James or someone, does something that they don't like, they want to get her back and they do something wrong so that she gets mad. But like she just gets mad at me and won't listen even when it was me telling them to be quiet and I'm right and didn't do anything(*April 2010*)

As discussed previously Natalie has a particular view of the relationship between teachers and pupil. Natalie feels that pupils should behave respectfully and engage with teachers to demonstrate this respectfulness. For Natalie, being abandoned by her teacher leaves her feeling bemused and isolated.

The teacher, of whom Natalie speaks, had previously been her main source of support. Natalie's account indicates that she continues to attempt to be seen as the pupil in whom the teacher can find support. This support is offered as a contrast to pupils, who continued to talk, despite teacher sanction. This offer of support, is not only rejected but met with a sanction rather than thanks. Of course it could also be argued that Natalie was indeed trying to undermine her teacher's classroom authority. Further, if her teacher had continued to allow Natalie to dictate her peers behaviour, it may be argued that the both classroom discipline and lesson focus would be lost. However, it is the girls' perceptions of incidents relationships and activities that are important in this research. I began this discussion in chapter two where I considered the networks of power the girls have to maneuver through, the scenario above outlines how delicately the girls in this study have to operate to negotiate their teacher relationships and the networks of power they encounter in doing so

It is because, in keeping with the Black feminist theory I bring to this work, the girls' views experiences and expectations are central to the analysis of this study, that I will continue with the analysis and take Natalie's version of events as reflective of the reality as she sees it. Previously, Natalie had commented that her relationship with her teacher was one in which she felt rewarded by her teacher, for her assistance in maintaining classroom discipline. As the year has progressed Natalie felt those rewards were removed leaving her feeling both exposed and isolated. Exposed in so far as she had lost her teachers support and isolated as

having enjoyed teacher support she had not built firm friendships with her classroom peers. The withdrawal of teacher support left her once again open to harassment.

Each of the girls, particularly Tamisha, Peterlyn and Rakaya, commented upon the deteriorating relationship with their teachers. In addition to feeling abandoned, the girls commented that they were singled out for a telling off, when they felt themselves to be innocent. In keeping with Natalie's scenario above, they each commented that, their attempts to help the teacher to bring order to classroom interactions, were specific points of conflict. Rakaya's account, below, portrays the bewilderment and loneliness she felt.

Rakaya            I used to proper like, Mrs. Overton, she was really nice, used to be kind to me.....Now, she can't be bothered with me. Even like when I am trying to be nice with her and helpful, sort of telling everyone to be good and to watch the (interactive) board and that. Even when I am doing that she finds something to moan about.....Mum says, she thinks I should sort of, get on with it, cause am gonna be gone soon

Deborah           And what do you think,

Rakaya           I suppose, I don't know what I have done (April 2010)

Like Natalie above, Rakaya's attempts to maintain a good relationship with her teacher were equated with her being challenging. This is particularly poignant as Rakaya intended to be supportive. Rakaya's account suggests, she experienced both the pain of her support being refused and the disjunction of finding her friendly advances "being nice to her" rebuffed. It is the girls' intersectional positions that come together to effectively deny them the possibility of being the ideal pupil and having to deal with being devalued (Archer 2007). The assertion of the girls being "loud" and visible, in contrast to the forms of submissive, passive and quiet femininities that are more usually rewarded within schools (Archer et al. 2007), leaves them open to censure in the classroom. The tensions between how she, Rakaya, identified her motivations and her

teacher's interpretation, indicates that for this African Caribbean Black British girl, rather than being loud, a withdrawal was the best course of action.

In the above extracts, both Natalie and Rakaya indicate that they had tried to be of assistance to their teachers. Kynard (2010) argued that teachers were keen to engage African American girls as helpers, to run errands and keep order in the class in the teacher's absence as African American girls were considered more mature than their White counterparts. This point is supported by Morris (2007), Connolly (2002) and Grant (1992), who argued that the African American and African Caribbean Black British girls in their studies were treated differently in classrooms in comparison to their White counterparts with emphasis being placed upon promoting social rather than academic skills of Black girls. It can be argued that both Rakaya and Natalie were captured within their respective teacher's contradictory views.

Where previously it appears that some of the girls were rewarded for being teachers helpers, now, as year six pupils their teachers are less comfortable with them acting into this role. The teachers, by the girls' accounts, appear to interpret the girls' actions differently to their intentions. Not only were their motives wrongly perceived by the teacher, also, neither teacher explained what the girls had done wrong thus the teachers appeared to dismiss these girls' need of emotional support. This view of Black women's resilience is characteristic of the super Black women construct Reynolds (1997) discussed. Helen described similar challenges, where she feels opportunities for praise are denied, whilst opportunities for sanctions are taken up.

Helen she just watches me, she dunt see what anyone else done, only me.....and we're doing this craft work project where we have to build Pompeii and I brought in loads of boxes and she never even said thank you or anything. But then Sammy Rose brought in two little crush up cornflakes box and she went on like it was the whole world....they got on the floor and they was stepped on so I tries to get em back on the table cause the glue was everywhere. And they're all messing about and Ben starts kicking it to Khalid and Sammy Rose was getting upset so I told em to stop and then

she tells em as well and then she tells me off for shouting and everyone was being all noisy cause the boxes was on the floor and it was like football but she only told me off (January 2010)

Rakaya, Natalie and Helen's, accounts of schooling and their interactions with teachers iterate three themes; the girls each indicate their desire to support their teacher, the girl's efforts at support were unwelcomed, the girls' attempts at support were considered to be evidence of their poor behaviour. Finally, in circumstances in which the girls and their peers were in conflict, and as such in need of teacher arbitration, their need for emotional support was discounted. I am not here trying to argue that the girls had no response, other than pain and bewilderment. I am suggesting that the resistances they enacted as a result of the treatments from their teachers', were both nuanced and easy to discount.

## **5.7 Silence as Resistance**

As discussed in chapter four, the girls' agency supported how they saw success as possible for themselves despite its absence in their wider communities. As Foucault (1982) has pointed out, acknowledging the omnipresence of power is not to present it as a fatality that cannot be overcome as where there is power, there is resistance. By investigating seemingly mundane daily practices by which the people can reshape their environment will reveal forms of resistance in their activities. In this section of the chapter, I will pick up the threads of a Black feminist understanding of resistance established in chapter two. I shall focus particularly on the practices of resistance shaped by the girls' upbringing in Caribbean households. This will be used to illuminate how the girls' everyday resources support their practices of resistance. Despite engendering powerful and hidden mechanisms of change everyday forms of resistance are not unproblematic.

For six of the girls in this study, race and gender identities come together to shape their silences both at home and at school. The girls for whom silence was a strategic response, were the girls whose mothers are African Caribbean Black British. At interview Helen indicated that she did not like or appreciate how some of her teachers responded to her.

Helen She just goes on. Like I know what she says yeah and stuff then she goes on and I already know what she means.....Me and Karayah are talking yeah, and I know we are talking but everyone else is talking, so it doesn't matter and stuff right and so then yeah it all goes quiet and that's 'cause she (the teacher) is tapping her table and looking..... And so then you have to shut up cos it's nearly break and she likes to keep people in at break. So then she just looks at us and starts going on, Saying like how we should concentrate and how we will have to go to Mr. Marshall cos we are rude and how she doesn't appreciate rude children and all like that

Deborah What does she mean by rude?

Helen Not listening and stuff I suppose, I don't know really

Deborah Is that rude?

Helen Yes.

Deborah Why, what makes that rude do you think?

Helen Cos she says so.

Deborah And what do you say?

Helen: I heard her so I was listening and I was listening and so why was she looking at me so I don't think that was rude. It's not really but she just goes on about stuff ...but Mr. Marshall doesn't say anything any way so that doesn't matter either, he's just long.

Deborah: So then what happen?

Helen: I just look away, out the window or something ... and Karayah makes me laugh so I have to not look at her cos that will really make her go on.....So then I get fed up I stare out of the window or draw a picture, being quiet and not getting telled off.....So then she wants me to talk and I don't want to and then she gets all mardy cause I'm not talking to her or anyone. (October 2009)



As Oesterreich (2007) suggests, African American girls encounter specific educational obstacles; these obstacles are around manners and behaviour. I would suggest both that Helen is encountering similar obstacles. Helen's description of the events suggests that her teacher is seeking to over-determine her responses. Helen does not see that her behaviour can be characterised as rude. She feels this because she has been listening, contrary to her teacher's assumptions.

Helen's suggestion that her teacher "goes on" indicates that the teacher's explaining energies are misplaced. Further Helen feels herself to be under scrutiny and identifies the price of a missing break, be too great, so she makes the conscious decision to stop talking. Having stopped talking, the teacher, in Helen's view, wants to chastise her for behaviour she, Helen, has already corrected. Helen thus feels herself to be in a difficult position. Looking for support, Helen attempts to enlist her friend Karayah, but Karayah (the only other Black girl on Helen's table) deals with her feelings of discomfort by laughing. Here, then, at the point where the two girls are feeling uncomfortable and that they are unnecessarily told off, is where Helen can disrupt (Mirza 1992) the authority of her teacher's gaze with her (Helen's own) silence. The silence is intended to disrupt the teacher's "going on" and sits well with the Black feminist suggestion that resistance, activism offers the possibilities to nurture self-valuation and respect (Collins 2000)

Helen, as with the other girls, seems to be giving voice to the idea that she cannot win. Helen describes a series of events in which both participation and withdrawal lead to her getting into trouble. Helen notes that; if she participates in classroom activities, she is ignored, but told off for disturbing the class which leaves her frustrated, so she withdraws to avoid being told off. Leblanc (1999) argues that resisters remain within the social system they contest. This is particularly relevant for Helen and the cohort of girls participating in this study. Helen's withdrawal, i.e. staring out of the window, looking away, drawing a picture, is characteristic of girls' resistances. Osler and Vincent (2003) noted that the girls in their research tended to internalise problems.

Helen's view that her teacher "goes on" can be regarded as a problem. Helen, chose to withdraw by staring out of the window. Withdrawal is not the only characteristic of Helen's resistance to her teacher's authority. Helen's animated expressions while

recounting the story, indicate the physicality of her silence. Helen's physical twitches - pursed mouth, flat eyes and slow head turning dismissal of the idea of her teacher telling her off - inflect the narration. The physicality accompanying the silence must be drawn on to account for silence as resistance. These are, perhaps, relatively safe forms of resistance, particularly attractive to historically disempowered groups. They are minor, almost un-nameable, and therefore unpunishable. As such they serve to maintain the self-esteem of the non-speaker, without risking punishment. However, for these girls punishment, of a sort, was the consequence.

Other girls in this study, including Tamisha, have suggested that the teacher describes them as having an attitude as a result of their silences. The teacher's reaction places the behaviours firmly within the framework of resistance, as it conforms to the suggestion made by Dominelli and Payne (2001) that resistance and domination have a cyclical relationship, domination leads to resistance which leads to further exercise of power provoking further resistance. The issue of (none) silence was also discussed by Helen, concerning school. Helen identified talk as being central to classroom dynamics and discussed it in the context of several related themes, including boredom, 'naughtiness', discipline, control and punishment:

**Deborah:** Well then, tell me Helen, what type of girl do you think you are?

**Helen:** Well yeah sort of really I can be a bit naughty and stuff sometimes not just me, like I was talking yeah and so was everyone else yeah so it weren't sort of just me and well I get told about it all the time and it's not only me. It's too boring sometimes, all the time just working and working. It makes me fed up and my friends are fed up and it's just long. (November 2009)

Helen, like Natalie in the previous section, describes how she feels she is picked out and unfairly silenced in a context where many other voices are heard, but not responded to. Helen uses this space to express how being denied the autonomy to make decisions, such as how much work to do, is both disempowering and counterproductive. Issues of control and authority are also a feature of the girls' home lives. For the girls who use silence as a strategy at school, silence is also a strategy to resist their mothers' parental authority at

home. However, at home, the silences enacted receives different, more knowing responses:

June: Sometimes she just needs to hold she mouth, it's like when I say to her say like, 'you can't talk to me like that' and she wants to put up her hand on her hip and give me attitude, running off her mouth. (October 2009)

The notion of 'holding your mouth' relates to knowing something needs to be said but choosing to let the moment pass, to claim an alternative moment to speak, to account for or justify actions. Reference to 'running off her mouth', by contrast, refers to unbridled and ill-considered talk. The kinds of that represent a challenge and will ultimately result in a poor outcome for the speaker or truth-telling as outlined in George (2007). In other words, June is highlighting the importance of silence, of considering the consequences of talk and of knowing when to talk and when not to. Additionally, June points to the significance of non-verbal communication, making it clear that the hand on hip, head snaking physicality of Helen's inflexions represents both challenge and resistance to her mothering authority.

In this sense, silence does not simply relate to literal silence (i.e. not speaking) but extends to non-verbal communication (body language) and general demeanour. In this instance, June was indicating her cultural knowledge of how silence, i.e. the absence of words, can be used to subvert authority. Indeed as Figueroa and Patrick (2002) contend language in the African Caribbean diaspora is embodied gestural and emotional as well as cerebral and abstract.

Deborah: So what does that mean then?

June When she decide and fold up she mouth? She can really make you want to do her something. She want to get on with herself like she is some big woman in my house, my house only have one big woman and that's me. I have to tell her what she think she playing and, and who she thinks she be, trying on her temper on me. No sah, not at all none of that at all. She can stomp all the stomping she want to stomp it don't matter me at all she can stomp then she still have to do. That is what she have to know ... and she

know she have to stomp quiet, quiet round me cause she still have to do what it is I tell her to do, and it don't make one, if she like it or don't like it. Only one of we is to call mum, and it's not she. About she don't want to! (October 2009)

The reference to 'folding up her mouth' describes the way in which being ostentatiously, silent is used to end all interaction. June notes that this kind of silence can provoke her to violence - 'makes you want to do her something' – but she says she resists the urge because she, June, is the one with the power in the relationship and Helen has to accept that. Helen's tacit acceptance of her subordinate position is reflected in the description of her quiet stomping as a mark of her disapproval. In this piece, even the stomping is silenced. "About she don't want to" refers to Helen's refusal to undertake a task set for her by her mother and her mother discounting the refusal.

Tamisha attends the same schools as Helen. While they are in the same year they are not in the same class, and while knowing of each other they do not describe each other, as friends. In the following piece, Tamisha, describes a series of tactics she uses to avoid conflict with a teacher whom she feels is not best disposed towards her:

Tamisha: Miss Graham I don't think she like me

Deborah: How, how so, what makes you think that?

Tamisha: She doesn't leave me any space for my words, when I talk to her she wants me to finish before I have finished. She like tries to turn away and do other stuff before I have told her what is the problem. And then if I tell her the problem she just says that I am big enough to deal with it and then goes off. I feel like she erm sort of kind of, of laughs at me not like in a good way. (October 2009)

The suggestion in this discussion is that Tamisha believes her teacher to be using her power as both adult and teacher to silence her, by turning away and not letting Tamisha complete the explanation of her problems. There is too an implied criticism of Tamisha's size, Tamisha is tall well build and experiencing the discomforts of the changes of puberty arriving early. Thus Tamisha's recollection of her teacher's reference to her,

Tamisha being “big enough” is particularly poignant. Tamisha feels aggrieved at her teacher’s dismissal of her problems and feels herself to be unheard.

Tamisha: One time she had told me and Shardee and Elijah to be quiet, and we were quiet but we were working on the project and we are quiet. And then she said all stuff about how we was naughty and she did not want my naughty behaviour in her class and I should apologise to her and the class for disturbing them or go to Mr. Marshall. And I got all hot and wanted to cry ... and then she looked at me proper looked at me and I was so mad and then I shut up.

Deborah: So you went quiet?

Tamisha: Nah, I shutted up cause I didn’t want to go to Mr. Marshall. We just looked at her and Shardee held my hand under the table and then Miss Graham said if we understood what the project was about. But I didn’t want to talk to her about nothing. I wanted her to leave us alone so we could do our work. I put my head on the desk and asked Shardee to take me to medical. Shardee was scared cause she didn’t want to go to Mr. Marshall. So we just sat down and did work. (October 2009)

That Miss Graham silences the three children (all Black) with the threat of going to Mr. Marshall, the head teacher, shows she is willing to escalate an already confrontational situation. Tamisha tries to remove herself from the situation by going to the school's sick bay. This route was denied her by Shardee who would not come with her to the medical room. Tamisha can be seen to be using her silence to suppress her rage as hooks (1994) described. The discussion with Tamisha about the above incident continued.

Tamisha: Then Miss Graham got all sort of friendly and wanted to help us and wanted us to show her what we had been doing but I just looked at her and didn’t want her to touch anything and leave us alone. And so I looked at the field and tried to do my work. ... And then she smiled at us ... I cut my eye after her so she could see.

Cut eye, is culturally loaded, for children to cut eye at an adult shows both annoyance and resistance to authority, and in the home setting, would lead to further censure. Tamisha uses the inflected silence of facial movement, blank facial expression and rolling eyes to indicate her disappointment with her teacher. However, Tamisha shows that she overtly “cut her eye” at her teacher and did not try to hide her disdain. This suggests that Tamisha, despite feeling the need to withdraw, was able to disrupt her teacher's authority and claim a moment to exert her autonomy in a difficult situation. Silence was the medium she used to do so. That the girls deliberately draw upon aspects of their Caribbean identities to enact resistance and to distance themselves from their White middle-class female teacher is interesting because doing so suggests that the power in the interaction is not necessarily fixed.

Through their use of Caribbean forms of silence, they were each able to redefine the situation and present themselves as unbowed by the encounter. Silences were not only Caribbean resource the girls have and can rely upon to enact resistance. Speech, the creolised Caribbean dialect is also a resource. I want now briefly to consider Janessa’s use of this resource as a counter to her teachers, sanction. However Janessa whose mother is White, is the only one of the girls in this study cohort who used creolised Caribbean dialect in this way.

## **5.8 Countering Sanction Using Creolized Caribbean Dialect**

Janessa’s discussion indicates both how she views her Caribbean identity and how she feels she is perceived by her White female middle-class teacher. The discussion below relates to how Janessa switches between lexical codes to assert her autonomy and resist her teacher’s unwanted censure

Deborah        So how do you avoid....what do you have to do

Janessa        I can’t say, it depends innit, like if its Miss Johnson or something, just tell her just cool out, I say to her like I say to her sort of just cool man, Miss Johnson, don't bother my peace yeah. She’s is soft, she just be’s mad and pretends she’s not and then you get told off for something else. So she gets you, even if she does go on like she’s your nice friend.

- Deborah      You have your teacher like that?
- Janessa      All telling her, you mean? Yeah course, all the (Black) girls in year six have her out like that. She don't know what to do when you start
- Deborah      Start on her like that, like that what?
- Janessa      You know, make her know.....get all Jamaican on her head!
- Deborah      I don't get it
- Janessa      She can't cope, and she's a bit sort of well a bit kind of, kind of, simple.

**(July 24<sup>th</sup> 2010)**

At the culmination of this extract Janessa, states that she gets all Jamaican on her teachers head. Jamaican in this regard is taken as a symbol of opposition. Janessa's account of the interaction suggests that Janessa believes herself to have a Caribbean identity to draw upon to withstand her teacher's unwarranted attacks.

By drawing on creolised Caribbean dialect Janessa presents herself within the framework of challenge and resistance using her Caribbean dialect, and the implicit discourse of African Caribbean Black British girls being a challenge to authority in schools, to interrupt the interaction between herself and her teacher. Through her use of Caribbean dialect, she was able to redefine the situation and present herself, symbolically at least, as victorious. In this interaction, it can be argued that Janessa regards power to be relational rather than absolute. Up to this point in our discussion, Janessa had been speaking in pretty much standard Leicester English. However, when Janessa gets to the point of telling her teacher to "cool man" and "don't bother my peace", her demeanour changed.

In my field notes for the session and Janessa's house, I noted that while describing her interaction with her teacher, Janessa enacted the event loudly enough for her mother, Marie, to hear. Marie had been hovering in the doorway between the kitchen and sitting room and sat in the opposite chair smiling and encouraging Janessa to describe the incident laughing loud at Janessa's rendition of a Caribbean accent. Later, once our interview was concluded, I asked Marie what she had found funny about the incident Janessa had recounted. Marie said that she loved it "when Jen does the talk, it's so

funny” (Field notes July 24th, 2010). I shall return to a discussion of mothers and their daughters’ use of creolised Caribbean dialect in the following chapter.

I am arguing here that the data suggests a relationship between language use, social context and resistance. Janessa is, for the purposes of the discussion, presenting her oppositional behaviour as “Jamaican”. Unlike the other girls in this discussion, Janessa chose to overtly articulate her opposition to her teacher sanction. Janessa had already noted that her teacher, Ms. Johnson, finds the Black girls in year six challenging. By using a creolised Caribbean dialect through which to mediate her communications, Janessa is knowingly seeking to present herself as equally challenging. Janessa uses creolised Caribbean dialect in a way that signals rather than reflects identity (Sebba 2004)

The complex rendition of identity and resistance that Janessa produces has resonance for each of the girls in this study. Both the nuanced Caribbean silences, used by the other girls in this discussion and the Caribbean dialect used by Janessa can be viewed as emblematic of a resistance and demonstrate the dialectical nature of race and identity. I shall return to the issue of creolized Caribbean dialect in the following chapter. For now, I want to discuss Caribbean inflected non-silences and how the use of these practices present the girls with an opportunity to enhance their friendships as well as interrupt the flow of power between themselves and the adult they believe to be sanctioning them unfairly.

## **5.9 Relationships with Friends: A Knowing Audience**

Discipline and censure are consistent themes in the girls’ final primary school year experiences. The discipline the girls experienced, issued not only from teachers but also from ancillary support staff. The girl’s inflected silence responses to ancillary staff appeared to be more overt than, those used for teachers. The girls rejected their lunchtime supervisors as,

Tamisha        “wanna be teachers”

Janessa        “Proper dumb”



Kimarie “Unfair”

Peterlyn “Mean and they never listen”

The girls appeared to view the lunchtime supervisors as having less authority than their class teachers. African Caribbean Black British girls in primary school are, in discourse, constructed as angry and disruptive (Connolly 2002, Wright 1993, and Grant 1992). This negative perception may have some influence upon their relationships with lunchtime supervisors.

Peterlyn, Tamisha, Kimarie, Helen and Leonie recounted a series of tales involving their lunchtime supervisors. The account below offers a lens on how the girls use their friendships as a place of support.

Peterlyn I was trying to help Pierce, because she had fell in the mud and it was all over her trousers and then what happened was, Mrs. Cox (lunchtime supervisor) said “stay back, stay back”, but and so well I didn’t for a few seconds. And then she was really getting on my nerves, so well I just walked away……. You know, well, how the teachers always say, if you are getting into an argument just walk away? So I did. And then she starts shouting me, “Brookline, Brookline”, and my name isn’t Brookline its Peterlyn. She can’t talk to me like that, she not the boss, she’s not even a teacher. And so I didn’t respond, so she goes into her bag and pulls out a yellow card, writes my name on it and tells of the teacher. And my mum gets called. So then I couldn’t go out my next first break time and I got in trouble at home. My mum doesn’t like to have to go up the school for anything much. (February 2010)

Pierce’s name had appeared in our discussions and on many Peterlyn’s Facebook entries. I asked Peterlyn why she had come so readily to Pierce’s aid and risked the sanctions she later received. In addition to her throw away comment of,

Peterlyn “I don’t know really, she would have help me too, I think”

Peterlyn also commented that Pierce was, in her view, a “nice, kind girl” and “the dinner ladies pick on us”. In this response Peterlyn appears to be straddling two roles, her description of Pierce as “nice” suggests, she views Pierce as exhibiting displays of behaviours that align with accepted standards of behaviour for girls. Behaviours anticipated from girls is premised upon docility and diffidence (Collins 2004) Th3 behaviours see girls expected to be in authentic in their relationships. Girls are encouraged to hide their emotion and keep their opinions to themselves in an attempt to continue a public image of being pleasantly respectable (Brown and Gilligan 1993). Peterlyn takes it upon herself to at least try, to defend Peirce, whom she feels, because of her displays of femininity would not be able to defend herself against the lunchtime supervisors aggressions.

Peterlyn appeared aware of the dimension of race and indeed racism in her response. The “us”, to whom she referred to as being picked on by the dinner ladies were African Caribbean Black British girls like herself and Pierce. Peterlyn’s description of Pierce as nice and kind is somewhat at odds with Peterlyn’s description of herself. Peterlyn considers herself to be “kind, to people who are kind” to her. From her description of herself, in contrast to Pierce, Peterlyn appears to be aligning herself with the description of Black girls as defying traditional standards of femininity. She, Peterlyn aligns herself as being assertive, independently able to express her emotions and feelings in ways that will not get her into trouble. Wright (1992)

In the field notes, from this interview, I noted both Peterlyn’s indignation and her responses to the lunchtime supervisor. Peterlyn was still cross when explaining why she did not respond to the instruction to, “stay back” and her later, calling Peterlyn’s name incorrectly. I noted that Peterlyn described how she had, shown the lunchtime supervisor her back, to end the instruction. This interruption helped Peterlyn to avoid becoming embroiled in an overt argument. It also enabled Peterlyn to resist the lunchtime supervisor’s rejection of her help and support. I recognize, not every instance of recalcitrant behaviour can be deemed resistance. I am choosing to interpret Peterlyn’s behaviour as resistant because of Peterlyn’s earnestly held belief that the supervisors actions were due to Peterlyn’s race and her lack of power in the situation.

Peterlyn, perhaps wrongly, did not consider that “White and not too young” lunchtime supervisor would have been aware of the implications of her, Caribbean coded actions. Peterlyn was certain that Pierce wanted her help and would have been aware of the “disrespect” of giving your back. In this, Peterlyn’s actions had a culturally knowing and accepting audience in Pierce. The use of Caribbean inflected silences is continued by Kimarie.

## 5.10 Kiss Teeth

Kimarie described an interaction with her lunchtime supervisor in surprisingly similar terms.

Deborah        So do you fight a lot, sorry I meant, often

Kimarie        Not really, I try not to get myself involved in all that. You get sent to the head straight the way, I don’t want my mum to have to come up.....It’s like, sometimes though, you just can’t get away. Like when the me and Collette get called names or something, and we go to the dinner lady, like Mrs. Bullough, she just doesn’t listen, we try to tell her that what’s going on and it’s like, she says like, we just got to get away and sort it out. So then we sort it out yeah, so like if you know sometimes you have to tell people so they know what you’re about.....you know, so they don’t think that they can just pick on you all the time like it’s alright to, an I just had to kiss my teeth and give (Miss) Bullough cause she’s too stupid sometimes and sometime-ish (September 2009)

Kimarie notes, “Sometimes you have to tell people, so they know what you’re about”. In this phrase, Kimarie is indicating that you have to be able to verbally defend yourself. The verbal defense that she and her friend Collette find themselves, in many ways reflect discussion developed by Simmons (2002). While Simmons was discussing African American girls, her findings find echoes in Kimarie’s responses. Simmons (2002) argues that African American girls are more likely to speak their minds and be resistant, this finding has echoes in Kimarie’s description, of “having to tell people”. This truthfulness, argues Simmons (2002), goes hand in hand with comfort, with one's own negative

emotions. Simmons frames such “truth-telling” as a way of resisting being silenced and ignored. In keeping with Simmons findings, Kimarie appears to talk about valuing even overt verbal aggression and her abilities to use her silences to assert her rejection of the supervisor’s power. In this regard then Kimarie and her friend Collette’s abilities for verbal defense are central to their resistance and an important resource to draw on in their friendship.

For Kimarie, in her discussion of her and Collette’s relationship with lunchtime supervisors the *dénouement*, to the interaction, was to kiss her teeth and again, walk away. Both of the African Caribbean Black British girls in this study enacted Caribbean forms of silence in the presence of their African Caribbean Black British friend. Further, the girls could have expected their resistances to have passed unnoticed, but to have been understood by the friends who were present and witness to the interaction.

Kimarie’s use of the embodied and particularly Caribbean gesture, of kissing her teeth, was strategically public, evoked in full sight and full hearing, of Collette and the lunchtime supervisor. Its use would have been understood, in solidarity by Collette but not necessarily the supervisor. As Figueroa and Patrick (2002) note, kiss-teeth, coming from a child to an adult in the Caribbean context, would lead to reprimand or punishment and would be perceived as

“Act of insubordination: between servants and masters; civilians and police, military, or judges; workers and employers. A low-status person, kissing their teeth upon receiving an order from a high-status person, is understood to commit an act of defiance, disobedience or even revolt”...  
(Pg. 12)

However it is perhaps because kiss teeth lacks lexical content, being a sound rather than a word that is un-reportable and therefore deniable, that Kimarie engaged it as part of her resistance to unfair treatment to interrupt the supervisor’s expressions of power and authority. The girls, in this study, utilised awareness of race and of being the minority within their school, to imbue their friendships with solidarity in the face of inequitable sanctioning. In negotiating the raced nature of relationships within the larger school

discourses of racism, the girls used an understanding of fairness and unfairness in the treatment of themselves and their friend to begin to unpick the challenges in the and encounters.

In conclusion, in this chapter, I have discussed the girls' relationships with their teacher and other adults in the school setting. The girls appear to recognise the importance of the teacher in helping them to achieve the success they want and so are keen to sustain productive relationships with them. While the girls' relationships with their teachers were not entirely negative, the girls lived with the expectation of being reprimanded. Indeed the girls noted that their favourite teacher was less likely than the others to sanction their behaviours. The girls used silence as a practice of resistance to help them negotiate their relationships with their teachers. However, the girls appeared to be more audible and obvious in their resistance to the lunchtime supervisors. This audibility may be influenced by the limited power they feel the lunchtime supervisors have in contrast to the authority and responsibility their teachers wield. Throughout the discussion, I have shown the importance of their friendships with other African Caribbean Black British girls. These friendships appear to offer support, solidarity and a home place wherein the girls can feel free to be themselves and support each other in the hostile terrain of school.

## 6 Chapter 6 Mother-work Resistance and Agency

In the coming discussion, I shall consider how the mothers in this study use their agency to support and enhance their daughters' education and assist them to resist messages of their academic inability. I will explore supplementary schooling, extra tuition and choosing secondary schools as enactments of agency. Further, in the discussion, I shall consider how the mothers' fears for their daughters' success coalesce around their friendships and their burgeoning identities. The discussion will conclude with an analysis of the mothers' school choice practices and explore how race and gender are particularly implicated in their choices.

Black feminist theorisation, (Reynolds 2007, Mirza 1992, 2006), suggests that African Caribbean Black British mothering practices are configured to ensure that the children can survive and thrive in a hostile environment. This is particularly salient to the lives and experiences of the girls in this study I shall now turn to review the literature concerning how theorists have considered mother-work as a strategy for survival.

### 6.1 Literature Review

African Caribbean Black British women's mothering practices are situated at the intersection of structural systems of oppression impacting on their lives. There is some agreement that African Caribbean Black British mothers focus upon education as the key to success and survival in a society structured by race and gender oppression (Mirza 2006, 2010 Cork 2005, Mirza (2006) argues that African Caribbean Black British girls are driven towards success through education by an educational urgency. This educational urgency is evidence by Mirza as them having a desire to succeed against the odds.

This urgency is argued as being driven by a desire for educational credentials and centrally motivated by the mother figure who has a particular orientation to mothering. This orientation is argued as being due to Black women's unique position in society. The unique position for these mothers is the need to ensure their child's survival in a hostile environment. Black women are responsible for socialising their daughters to live in a society structured by class and is wrought with sexism and racism.

For the girls in Mirza's (1992) and George (2007) study, staying home and rearing children isolated from the economic necessities of paid employment were not part of their expectations. Mirza's research participants expected to work just as their mothers had. The notion of the unique orientation to motherhood is extended by Collins (1997) and Reynolds (2007) when they each claim that African American and African Caribbean Black British mothers, aware as they are of the racism in their own lives, teach their daughters that strength is needed for survival. Reynolds (2007) Phoenix (1991) each argue that African Caribbean Black British mothers are likely to teach their children what they know about the challenges of a racist world and equip them with the tools required to fight and resist the oppressive conditions as part of their mothering role.

In chapter 2, I discussed role flexing and armouring as socialisation strategies that support a Black feminist understanding of resistance. These approaches, armouring and role flexing are resources the mothers instill in their girls to support them to thrive in a hostile environment. There is however little information regarding either how this focus is manifested in or highlighted through, the specific contributions they make to their daughters' journey through primary school.

## **6.2 Mother-Work and Schooling**

Historically state schools have offered African Caribbean Black British children inferior educational opportunities compared to their White, particularly middle class, counterparts (Coard 1971 Gillborn 2006, Rollock 2007). Educational inequalities in schools make it difficult for their children to have the quality education needed to achieve success in wider society (Wright et al. 2009). African Caribbean Black British parents have not been silent in their quest for their children's success. Rather, these parents particularly the mothers have struggled for voice, power, and accountability within the educational system. Their struggles for educational equality have been expressed through individual advocacy on behalf of their children and politically empowering educational activism. One form of this activism is supplementary schooling.

Supplementary schools, according to Mirza and Reay (2000), were set up by the Black community, and are for the most part self-funding and run by women (Mirza and Reay 2000)

These schools have a history in Britain, dating back to the 1950's. For Mirza and Reay (2000) these schools, with their focus on Black, female centred, collective action present both a response to mainstream educational exclusion and signal the presence of a covert social movement for educational change. (Coard 1971, Reay & Mirza 200, Wright 2009) For Chavannes and Reeves (2011), supplementary schools developed by African Caribbean Black British communities are a political reflection of parents' concerns for their children's education. Supplementary schools hold within them the contradictions of African Caribbean Black British parents angsts, fears of their children's failure within the state system and the need for positive identity-affirming resources and activities with which to celebrate the continuing Black presence in Britain. Strand (2007), in his evaluation of the pupils' views of supplementary schooling, found them to be community based organisations that provide additional learning activities such as literacy, numeracy, ICT, homework support or a culturally relevant curriculum. Culture faith Strand (2007) suggested that overall, pupils were very positive about supplementary schools, indeed more positive than they were about mainstream school. There was, however, no evidence that supplementary schooling had a positive effect on grades or individual careers outcomes.

The popular discourse regarding the engagement of African Caribbean Black British parents in the education of their children has been that they are largely disinterested. This perception has arisen as a result of teachers' reflections that African Caribbean parents do not attend parent-teachers meeting or engage in parent-teacher associations (Wright 2009, Gillborn 2007)

Common-sense understandings of school practices have historically painted parents of color as inattentive and non-participatory actors in public school settings. These understandings are based on White middle-class forms of school participation in which 'good parents' are seen as people who serve the needs of the school and harmoniously work with educators to provide what teachers and administrators request from them. (Chapman & Bhopal 2013p. 563)

However as Wright et al. (2009) and Ramie (2007) argue these same parents advocate in support of education as of a passport to independence, validity, and social mobility. This view



is reflected by Phoenix (2009) where she argued that African Caribbean Black British families have pursued education to escape poverty and achieve goals. What this advocacy looks like is nuanced. Monitoring their children's education is cited as a strategy which African Caribbean Black British mothers have used to resist and respond to racism (Reynolds 2007, Wright 2009). The monitoring that mother work undertakes is anchored in specific racialised concepts of power identity and survival. They monitor their children's education; their school work, their friendships and their conduct in public spaces. The mothers own experiences of schooling and education greatly influence how they engage with monitoring their children's education and indeed how they support their children to survive in an environment perceived as hostile. Of course as Reynolds (2007) has argued, monitoring children's friendships and school work are not unique strategies engaged exclusively by African Caribbean mothers. However, as shall be explored in this chapter, how race and gender intersect is unique for these mothers.

### **6.3 Motherwork and Advocacy**

In the commonsense discourse of parental involvement in a child's education, parental involvement most frequently references behaviours such as spending time in classrooms, attending parent-teacher meetings, attending other school functions, and other structured, observable tasks that, broadly defined, support the school curriculum (Phoenix and Wollette 1991). In the field of education, the intersectionality of female, White, and middle-class social constructions dominate how parents are viewed as 'good' or otherwise. These social constructions present African Caribbean Black British women and working-class White women, who cannot adhere to these often unspoken expectations, as uninvolved parents (Reynolds 2007).

School practices have historically presented the parents of African Caribbean Black British children as non-participatory actors who are difficult to engage within the state school settings (Chapman and Bhopal 2013) Racist implementations of policy and teachers deficit paradigm of race, present the parents of African Caribbean Black British children as oppositional. Despite the negative characterisation, these mothers continue to be involved in their children's education. Their actions in pursuit of their children's education can be viewed

as following schooling options and opposing enactments of school policies and practices that marginalise their children.

The mothers advocating on behalf of their children are viewed as oppositional or, overly ambitious for their academically limited children (Rhamie 2007, Cork 2005).

Consequently, the value they placed on educational success was a key factor in the expectations they had of their own children. They wanted their children to have the same opportunities as White children, and would pursue this at all costs. For example, if their children did not understand a piece of homework, Black mothers were not shy in visiting the school and asking teachers for advice. Furthermore, if they felt that their children could improve their grades, they were also keen to speak to the teachers to discuss how their children's grades could be improved. Educational success was a key factor in the positioning of Black children and their mothers at school. (Chapman et al 2013 pg. 578)

The mothers' struggle to ensure that their children are treated fairly and able to access educational opportunities are central to their advocacy practices. In the African American context, Cooper (2007) argued that the mothers in her research considered that being successful in education can make or break their children's future. For example, African American mothers felt that focusing on education would distract their daughters from having babies before they are ready to provide for themselves. These same mothers stressed their desire to ensure that their kids do well and confront fewer barriers than they had themselves encountered. The mothers also asserted that quality schooling for their children was an attempt to make sure their children gained knowledge and qualifications to be successful in society. Cork (2005) echoing Coopers American work, suggested that for Black British mothers, their major concerns about schooling are related to low rates of student attainment, poor facilities, safety and discipline problems. For these women, educational advocacy revolved around these concerns.

Wright et al. (2009) make useful contributions to the notion of educational advocacy in the context of African Caribbean Black British parenting. Advocacy includes preparing the families children to fit in broader adult society as well as their racial communities. In the

American context, Collins (2000) outlines four areas associated with racial socialisation and advocacy: cultural socialisation includes; preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism. Cultural socialisation refers to practices that teach children about their racial heritage and history to promote cultural and racial pride. Thus these authors appear to suggest that advocacy is not exclusively tied to a school building or environment. Rather the authors suggest that parents' promotion of awareness of discrimination and preparation for coping with racial bias is also as a critical component their advocacy. Role flexing and armouring can be argued to fall within the scope of mother work advocacy.

Bell and Nkomo (1998) taking a life histories methodology found that armouring for African American girls was comprised of two processes; 1) being respectable and 2) developing courage. Being respectable emphasised the importance of a girl being in charge of her sexuality and fell within a heteronormative framework. The respondents noted that their parents urged them to refrain from sexualised relationships with boys and encouraged them to conduct themselves in ways that would demonstrate their sexual respectability. Developing courage was discussed as relating to a girls ability to go forth into the White world to actualise her dreams. In the Bell and Nkomo (1998) study, developing courage was argued as being particularly relevant to the quest for success. One participant put it thus;

“ My parents gave me the feeling that I could do whatever I wanted in the world, as long as I put forth the effort I was told by my mother that I was a person of the world and I was entitled to everything the world had to offer ” (pg. 292)

Bell notes that the women whose parents espoused this perspective highlighted that they chose to expose their daughters to the arts, historical monuments and fine restaurants within White America. Bell and Nkomo (1998) discuss this selective exposure as parents presenting their girls with opportunities to glean deeper insights about the social norms behaviours and attitudes operating in the White world. This form of armouring is theorised by the authors as giving the women interviewed the courage to comfortably move back and forth between two cultures

A similar approach to armouring, role flexing, is discussed by Shorter-Gooden (2004). Shorter-Gooden defines role flexing as African American girls being taught to alter their

outward behaviour or presentation. Further role flexing involves avoiding diminishing contact with certain people and situations; fighting back and directly challenging the source of the problem. Shorter–Gooden’s findings were arrived at using a structured interview approach with 101 African American women aged from 14 to 77.

In Shorter-Gooden's work, role flexing is discussed as both proving them wrong and hypervigilance. Proving them wrong was discussed by a number of respondents as having to disprove stereotypes and having to prove themselves. The need to both prove and disprove was argued as the motivation for them to selectively alter their looks or behaviour, one respondent noted with regards to role flexing that:

“I always felt I had to speak better and try to know a little something about everything so they wouldn’t think of me as being inferior.” Shorter – Gooden pg. 419

Role flexing was also associated with a parental injunction for caution and hypervigilance on the part of the respondents about their behaviour, about how they were perceived, and about the environment that they encountered. One respondent wrote,

“I am more cautious about my perception by others in the workplace, I observe extra care in my approach in order to avoid negative responses.” (pg. 419)

The authors also noted that in some instances role flexing seemed to become internalised, and the respondents’ person’s mental health well-being was affected. Role flexing, specifically refers to changing outer behaviours or character traits is argued by some as giving up their sense of self to be more acceptable to the dominant group. In the UK part of the study by Chapman and Bhopal (2013), the authors argue that the urgency with which the parents undertook their advocacy role was impacted not only by their gender but also by their status as immigrants. Women were at the forefront of their children’s education. This notion of an immigrant mentality discussed previously by Shiner (2004) and Mirza (2006) and ‘doing better than the others’ was a theme that recurred from their 13 research participants. Being positioned as ‘outsider’ to schooling processes placed greater pressure on women (and in turn their children), and consequently, there was a need to succeed. For each of the parents, the

success they envisaged for their children was related to gaining a good education which would, in turn, support them to achieve greater social mobility and ultimately better choices when entering the labour market. Further for these women, education was seen as a mechanism to ensure a route out of poverty. In some sense, they wanted their children to ‘do better’ than them and achieve greater success. I shall now turn to the data and consider how mother-work supports the girls in their quests for success in their final year of primary school.

#### **6.4 Agency and Homework**

In chapter two I began a discussion of agency I now want to explore how agency plays out in relation to education outside of school. In support of their daughters' education not only were the mothers willing to sacrifice the family income to purchase tutor support they also emphasised the importance of homework. Homework was viewed negatively by the girls, and they considered it to be; an additional chore, more school work that takes up their time. Moreover, the girls did not consider homework to be particularly valuable because what they produced was rarely marked. The mothers' view of homework was, perhaps unsurprisingly, rather different. For some of the mothers, homework reflected an opportunity to engage in their daughters' school work and to support them to produce work that demonstrated their abilities. To begin, I shall explore Rakaya, Helen and Kimarie's experience of homework support. Their experiences and concerns serve as an example of the experiences of the other girls in this research.

Rakaya        My mum loves my homework more than me. And then, when I got homework to do, she wants me to do it straight the way, like the same night and it doesn't have to be back till like Wednesday after the weekend. She makes me do spellings when we are in the car and puts them on the stupid fridge when I get it wrong. *(July 2010 Focus group)*

In keeping with some of the other mothers in this study, Rakaya argues that her mother gave positive messages about the importance of hard work and education as a route to success. However, these messages were tempered by the implicit distrust of the quality of teaching her daughter received from school. In my fieldwork notes, I observed that

Paulette, Rakaya's mother, regularly commented that she did not believe the teachers stretched her daughter enough.

According to Paulette, often the teachers would accept work that she considered substandard, as having met the stated learning objective. Paulette's expectations of her daughter's abilities appear to exceed those of her, Rakaya's, teacher. As a result, Rakaya complains that her mother is more exacting in the quality of work she expects Rakaya to produce. In addition to early homework completion, Rakaya explained that the level supervision she receives for her work when done at home was by far greater than the classroom supervision. Rakaya explained that her mother wanted to see her work plan as well as the work completed. Work plans were not a requirement of her school work.

Rakaya            She makes me do it again and again. When I'm in class I can just do one and Mrs. Overton says it's good. (March 2010)

Paulette appears to be dissatisfied with the quality of the education in the school her child attends. Relying on her capabilities, Paulette takes action to ensure her daughter becomes a more confident learner this action is to actively engage in her homework and use her educational skill, Paulette is a teaching assistant, to demonstrate the quality standards she expects her daughter to achieve.

Educational discourse in contemporary Britain positions homework and parental involvement as beneficial to a child educational outcomes. Homework which is of course regarded as a natural and normal part of the state education blurs the borders surrounding home and school life (Apple 2013). As demonstrated in the extracts from Paulette and Rakaya above, homework can also be a site of tension. The tensions highlighted by homework relation to the mixed expectations and priorities due to conflicting priorities. In the homework scenario, parents are anxious to assist in achieving success for their children and the children are reluctant to be helped. Parents' control of their children can serve to undermine their daughters' growing autonomy. The parents' concern about their daughter's future heightens the climate of pressure to succeed. The theme of extra scrutiny of homework is continued by Helen. For Helen's mother, setting additional work is the route to offer what she feels is much-needed support.

- Deborah      You get help with your homework sometimes don't you?
- Helen        yes
- Deborah      What kinds of help do you get
- Helen        Well my cousins sometimes read over, like on the weekend or when we go round theirs, read over what I've done and show me the spellings or stuff like that that need going over again
- Deborah      They do your work for you?
- Helen        (laughs) course not, my mum would kill me if she thought that. (laughs more) I have to do my own work.....pause. Sometimes if my homework doesn't take long enough my mum finds more for me. Or she will make me read something in the paper and write it what's it about sort of in my own words just to see if I understand. (January 2010)

For Helen, school work appears to be a family activity. She states that her cousins will read over her work for her and point out items that require correction. More tellingly, Helen has to bring her homework with her when she goes to visit. This suggests not only that the family emphasise the importance of school work but that Helen's mother insists that homework be made a priority. It appears that June, Helen's mother, in keeping with Paulette Rakaya's mother, is not convinced by the standards of work her daughter's teachers consider acceptable for her child. This is suggested in Helen's comment about if the homework does not take long enough her mother finds more work for her to do. At a later stage in our discussion, Helen laughingly explains that she has learned to subvert her mother's zealous attention to homework by ensuring she extends the time between starting and finishing her work, irrespective of the ease or otherwise of the work at hand.

Kimarie extends the discussion concerning homework and the importance of completing homework to her mother's standards. Kimarie explained that her mother Maureen was "a bit over the top" when it came to supervising homework. She pointed out that in her house the rule is for "school work before going outside." Each of the girls, whose

mothers were keen to engage in their child's education, described a similar homework routine.

Kimarie        She's right there behind me, no, yes really right on my shoulder watching me all the time. I don't even get time to look up for what to put next. And then she's like 'Don't just rush through it so you can go watch telly'. But like sometimes I'm just tired and I want to do nothing for a bit.  
(November 2009)

For the mothers, prioritising school work with the aim of developing good study habits was a particular way to ensure their daughters' success. In keeping with the parents identified in Strand's (2008) study, these women were undermining the myth of Black parents' lack of interest in and support for their children's education. This is a further way in which the mothers, in this study, helped their girls to resist the messages they receive regarding their lack of academic ability.

As Collins (2000) has argued, the path to empowerment lies in the power of a free mind. These areas of influence rely on constructing independent and oppositional identities. As such, they embrace a view of the world that marks Black experiences as important to the creation of a critical Black consciousness and the development of political strategies. It can be argued that the women in this study are actively demonstrating their agency as well as engaging in a critical resistance to the notion that their children are destined for academic failure. However, their girls also have agency, demonstrate a level of resistance to their mothers' acts. In keeping with the practices discussed in chapter four, the girls' everyday resistances to their mothers' actions of additional homework would be easy to discount.

Helen        yeah but if you do it too fast she thinks it's easy and gives you more I'm not a fan of that so I drag it out

The mothers in the above extracts can be argued to be using their agency to engage in their children's education. Many of the mothers established their home based timetables and



routines to support their girls to do their homework. They made sure time and space was available to their children to do their homework in. These mothers made sure they were on hand to support or offer encouragement in case they were needed. June, Helen's mother explained.

*June*            When she gets in (from school) and I get back from work and get the stuff into the microwave and on the stove, then that's when it's time to start looking at the homework. So we're normally, I'm in the kitchen with the door open and she'll be in the sitting room that way if she needs my help I can just come over and look that kind of thing. (April 2010)

Other parents Maureen, Kimarie's mother, for example, did not participate actively in doing the homework set for their daughter. Maureen constantly and to her mind encouragingly monitored that the homework was done to an acceptable standard. For Maureen, this involved checking that her daughter had completed her homework. For Paulette Rakaya's mother, monitoring it included determining the answers given to set questions were correct. Both Maureen and Paulette reviewed the homework when it was returned by their daughter's teacher. Homework is shown in the preceding excerpts as a mother supervised requirement. These excerpts suggest homework as a natural requirement and appear to be embedded in the discourse of their children's academic achievement.

Maureen in keeping with Paulette and June, appear to uncritically accept homework as a natural and normal part of their daughters' education process. The parents, particularly Maureen, discursively construct their daughters as not yet being autonomous. Consequently, they construct their involvement in their daughter homework in terms of dependence and on adult guidance. I shall extend this theme in the mothers' choices of secondary school in a later section of this chapter 6.

The goal for the mothers is to make their daughters successful, but this success has to be in line with the mothers' wishes. Separating the social aspects of homework and the pedagogical aspects of homework in the examples given, is difficult. The negotiations exemplified above, reflect both how they are doing in school and the girls urge for

greater autonomy. For the other girls in this research, a challenge for them to complete homework with no mother involvement, even if they are academically able to do so. This is because the mothers take up subject positions enshrining both responsibility and authority for homework and ensuring it is completed.

Despite the discourse of African Caribbean Black British parents' non-engagement with school (Wright 2009), the mothers in this research appear to be presenting themselves as exemplary parents in relation to the societal discourse on parental involvement. Each of the mothers are both active and interested in their daughters' academic progress. They assertively complete the role system has assigned to them, to see that homework is done. The challenge though, is their daughters, fight against and refuse to accept this. Each girl positions herself as being able to complete homework tasks unaided and, consequently, position their mothers' monitoring support as unnecessary. This leads to the ways of governing that Foucault (1991), identifies as coming through individuals regulated choices. However, this is where we can find the locus of the conflict and so too resistance

Conflict, in the extracts above, is highlighted by Kimarie's apparent disbelief that her mother would be as interested in her homework as to stand behind her and Helen's comment that to avoid further work she extends the time between starting and completing set pieces of work "drag it out". Both forms of resistance could be seen as a wish for independence and autonomy. However, since this independence might subvert the mothers' wishes for their daughters' success it the girls' desires for independence are subverted by their mothers' homework routines, routines to which the mothers' expectations are central. Finally, homework issues for these girls are predominantly concerned with managing time and assignments in accordance with their mother's expectations. All of this is done with the inherent regard the dominant discourses and the socially present teacher. Thus it may safely be argued that homework involves parental regulation of children as well as the school's regulation of family life. Homework is regarded as natural and as an integral part of mother and daughter relationships.

It can also be argued that the mother's engagement with their daughters' homework suggest a view of agency and parental involvement in education that is easy to overlook. Thus the complex ways in which the mother sought to mediate and respond to homework

the interaction between their own lived experiences and structures of domination and constraint can be hidden from view because the actions take place in the home sphere. Indeed this suggestion was made by both Cooper (2007) in the American context and Bhopal (2014) in the British context when they argued that the work Black mothers do to support their children's education is largely invisible and thus easy for the school to overlook. It is my view that the mother in this study, using the example of homework supervision, can make intentional agentic decisions about how they engage with their children and with school. The issue here is not whether these displays of agency achieve the desired outcomes but rather how the mothers' agency in the context of their daughters' education contributes to their daughters' success.

## **6.5 Non Engagement as Agency**

Not all the mothers engaged in the explicit actions described above, sometimes circumstances meant they varied their responses.

Louise            I'm trying to let her know that, that's for her to do her responsibility, not mine. Not so much, you know, I've done school, I've done school already. No, that's yours, you're responsible that will show in your report. (February 2010)

I asked Louise about her role in Leonie's homework, and she was firm in the view that homework was her daughter's responsibility alongside the teacher. After describing that she neither assists, nor observes, nor monitors her daughter's homework, Louise stated, "That's the teacher's job. That's the teacher's job." Marie, the other White mother in this study, was concerned that her intervention in homework could end up with her doing the homework for her child and so may hinder her daughters learning. Marie, Janessa's mother, continued the discussion thus;

Marie            I had it easy, I wasn't that bothered at school. I was the baby so my sister did my homework for me. So, when I got older I didn't have a clue how to do it on my own. (March 2010)

On being asked how this influenced the helps Janessa with homework, Marie commented, “I’m not doing her homework!” Like Louise, Marie stated that, the best way she could support her daughter’s academic endeavours, was to not help with homework at all.

Louise            I tell my daughter, you’re gonna have to leave that blank. The situation is not to hand in homework that is well done but that you don’t understand. I don’t want that. I understood, but you’re going to leave that blank, and tomorrow, please ask your teacher to explain it to you again. (February 2010)

Louise and Marie felt that homework could be an opportunity to teach their daughters to ask questions when they don’t know don’t understand or are stuck with homework.

Marie            So I did let her no, you know, like, no matter how old you are, you could have a problem, you have to ask. You know? Even mum sometimes, don’t know something, I have to ask. (March 2010)

Rather than disinterest, I argue that at times the mothers chose not to take action to encourage their daughters’ self-reliance and agency as learners. This lack of action reflects these mothers’ intention to develop self-sufficiency in their daughters and of what would best help them to be successful. Marie and Louise, the two White mothers in this study, indicated that homework was their daughters’ responsibility, and so chose to not intervene in any aspect of their daughter’s homework.

Both mothers had commented that their abilities to support their daughters’ academic endeavours were limited. Marie made it clear that she had not been an active student while at school and thus felt challenged by the work Janessa was bringing home. Louise in an aside comment indicated that she was afraid to get the work wrong and so look stupid in her daughter's eyes. Louise, Leonie’s mother, validates her decision to keep out of Leonie’s homework, which she claims to neither monitor nor, otherwise supervise. For Louise, homework is part of child’s contract with the teacher and school.

In the main, the mothers, other than Louise and Marie, did not take an intransigent approach to their daughters with homework. They each, at different times in our research, argued that they created an environment for their daughters do homework in ensured the resources for the successful completion of home work, were available. Maureen Kimarie's mother and Michelle, Peterlyn's mother, explained their philosophies:

Maureen      I don't think that homework is something that they should, you know, necessarily do on their own. But, you don't want her to be dependent on you, so the way I help, is just to, you know encourage her a bit. I don't do it for her, I show her once then try to leave her to do it herself and to ask for help when she's stuck or if I have to pull up something off the internet, but I don't do it for her. (*December 2009*)

Like Maureen, Michelle also describes stepping back to allow her daughter to work independently:

Michelle      But she, she kind of is getting to the point where she's trying to be more independent. So...she'll say, 'if I need help, I'll come and get help'" (*February 2010*)

The mothers' rationales seemed to be influenced by a belief that their daughters should develop responsibility, as well as the need to engender confidence in their child's ability to do their homework. However, exercising agency to support their child's education, the mothers in this study their beliefs and expectations around schooling were particularly salient. The following discussion, concerning supplementary schooling highlights the contradictions in the experiences of the women and girls in this study

## **6.6 Extra Tuition**

Support with homework was not the only way in which some of the mothers in this study helped their daughters' academic abilities. Extra tuition provided a focus for their learning to be enhanced. As discussed previously, see chapter 4, the girls expressed some challenges with learning specific subjects. They described classroom situations where they felt unable to complete work to the standards required. Their lack of abilities in

specific subject areas coupled with what they perceive as their teacher's lack of support had the effect of making them reconsider the inevitability that their hard work would lead to success. Each of the mothers sought to address the challenge of their daughter's education by both affirming their daughter's confidence in their learning abilities, while yet augmenting the teaching they felt was failing their girls. The augmentation the mothers engage in is reflected not only in their attention to their daughter's school and home work but also saw them using their limited family income to pay for extra tutor support.

The help their daughters, each of the mothers except the two White British mothers, enrolled their daughters in supplementary school, for a time. I will explore how the girls and their mothers view supplementary school as a vehicle for supporting their educational difficulties. I will do this by exploring the ideas and experiences outlined by Kimarie, Natalie and Peterlyn.

Kimarie        I went to supplementary school my mum sent me, it was ok well, it was nice really. We watched a few programmes and talked about them and then we went to a trip. There was about 8 of us. ....I think I was in year 3 or 4. It was ok I suppose, but the teacher, we had to call him Isaac. He couldn't do it. He was shouting and got really upset, I mean we didn't do anything wrong, we was just talking and when we wasn't working we talked and he didn't like it. It was like he didn't know what to do.....he was nice though, I think he was erm, (name) brother. I think he was gonna be a proper teacher (July 2010).

Saturday school represents not only the community's desire to assist their children to meet the challenges within the British school system, but it is also part of a broader agenda, that of claiming and creation of a Black selfhood within Britain (Mirza & Reay 2000). Though for Kimarie, there appears to be some doubt about whether the teachers at her Saturday school were indeed proper teachers. The idea that Isaac could have been a proper teacher was undermined by him being the brother of a girl she knew, his insistence that he should be called by his first name and his apparent inability to control or reprimand the pupils in his charge. The girls' discussions of Saturday school appear to

reflect a tension both regarding what counts as a proper teacher and what counts as proper education.

Natalie        I was going to the Melbourne Centre for a while but didn't like it too much...we did a bit of dancing and a bit of drama and stuff like that. We stopped going cause mum said it wasn't helping with math's and stuff like that. (May 2010)

Natalie's mother had enrolled her daughter in a Saturday school that she thought would be focused on maths and science. However, the multiple purposes fulfilled by Saturday school left her dissatisfied.

Andrea        "should be dealing with the basics, I mean dancing and drumming are all well and good, but the point should be, to learn something ainnit", (March 2010)

Maureen, Kimarie's mother expressed similar concerns,

Maureen        "Saturday school was good in the 1980's, but things have changed. Knowing Black history stuff and how to find the Guyana on a map is fine yes, but really what I wanted help with the three r's. They never really got around to that so it was pretty much a waste of my good Saturday morning (September 2009)

For Andrea and Maureen, the particular concern was to support their daughters' education. Their lack of engagement with Saturday school highlights the tensions in Saturday school activities as they attempt to reflect both a pro-Black consciousness and to enhance academic attainment. Maureen's view suggests a functional approach to education. Rather than broaden the girls' understandings of the world she prefers that organised educational initiatives should reflect the school based curriculum. This view is continued by Michelle, Peterlyn's mother who states about Saturday school;

Michelle        I sent her to some Black heroes and carnival workshops the other year. She liked it, well she said she did..... Really I was glad to get her out from under for a while especially on a Saturday. I didn't rate it much....I mean she can wuk up all she wants when she's older, for now she really could do with

math's and science help it's all too much for me and am worried she's falling behind.(March 2010)

As suggested by Michelle's description, Saturday school was a distraction for Peterlyn. It helped get her, Peterlyn, out of the house on a Saturday morning. However, Michelle was unconvinced of the need for Black heroes' or carnival workshops which she dismisses as "wuk up". Each of the mothers appeared to affirm the place of drumming dancing and cultural celebrations in their child's educational repertoire. They also appear to dismiss the link between drumming and dancing and "proper" learning. It can be argued that the mothers' agentic actions, of removing their daughters from Saturday school reflects their need to build their daughter's self-reliance in the development of their Black identities. These withdrawal actions represented a coherent enactment of these parents' philosophy of engendering self-sufficiency in their children and of what would best assist them in their quest for success. Some of the mothers particularly Andrea, Maureen and Paulette articulated the view that cultural identity development was their responsibility not for school or teachers or for supplementary education. This led them to choose to not engage with Saturday school.

Paulette        I want her to know that school is for education and it's my responsibility not schools to teach her about how being Black is a hurdle, not an obstacle and not to let it reflect on her behaviour and her attitude to learning and things like that (October 2009)

The current discourse about education places it within the discursive frame of meritocracy where in individual effort and judicious choices will lead to success or otherwise. In their quests for their daughters' success, the mothers have little time to question the efficacy of the current purposes of schooling and education. Rather than questioning what education is about, these mothers see it as their duty to ensure their daughter achieves the necessary education to be successful.

The mothers' implicitly rely on common sense" belief that what matters most in education is academic achievement in a small number of curricular domains, particularly



language, science and mathematics. Reliance upon discourses of common sense often serves the interests of some groups better than those of others. This common sense view of education is exactly how the reproduction of social inequality through education works. What makes the situation even more complicated is that those in disadvantaged positions often tend to support the status quo in the (often mistaken) expectation that they will eventually also acquire the benefits currently available to those in more privileged positions evidence. How they go about trying to attract the benefits for their daughter is the focus of the discussion to come.

The mothers rejected supplementary school for their daughters, and this rejection did not mean they had dismissed the idea of supplementary education altogether. Indeed, each of the African Caribbean Black British mothers had moved from free Saturday school provision into educational support provided at a cost. The two White working class mothers in this study stated that they did not know of Saturday school and had not sought extra tuition support for their daughters.

Louise            “I never heard Saturday school was round here, is it still going? Everything changes so quick.... Yeah but it’s hard with this one and the little on to get out you know, to take her to things like  
  
That..... She’s doing fine, she’s really brainy I wouldn’t pay for extra classes that would be like punishing her, she’s brainy already (May 2010),

In this discussion Louise, in addition to her lack of knowledge about the availability of Saturday schooling suggests that her daughter would not benefit from extra tuition support because she is already an able student. It appears that Louise expects her daughter to be successful because of her talent rather than through having her talents nurtured in the environment of extra tuition support. Louise makes a passing comment concerning the difficulty she would have taken her daughter Leonie to extra class given her parenting commitments to her younger child. Marie commented similarly;

Marie            I haven't taken her to Saturday school or anything like that. No reason, just haven't. It's like there's not enough days in the week to get it all in..... What's Saturday school any way (June 2010)

For Natalie's mother support came in the form of Explore Learning, Andrea rationalised her choice of Explore Learning as a decision to pay for support because payment leaves her more in control of content and quality of the service she receives..

Andrea            *Like it's just Black people trying a thing ainnit. What I want is for they (tutors) have to listen when I tell them what her work is like*" (March 2010).

Andrea, while sacrificing her family income to pay for her daughters learning, such sacrifices are regarded as an aspect of mother-work (Cooper 2007), appears to be rejecting Saturday school as a community resource, choosing rather to enroll her in "Explore Learning. Andrea with her dismissive, "Black people trying a thing", appears to accept and recycle negative messages regarding African Caribbean communities aptitude, abilities, and societal place (King 1989). However, this apparent belief is belied by the fact that Andrea utilised. Saturday school, as the first point, to address her daughters' academic challenges. However, her rejection of the Saturday school route, in favour of "Explore Learning" suggests that the dynamic of collective action formally driving the Saturday school movement in Leicester has to be regarded alongside the increased competition for education credentials driven by the desire for success and social mobility (Cork 2005).

For these women viewing their behaviours through a Black feminist lens suggests they have agentially engaged in their daughters' education and this engagement is supported by the ideas underlying mother-work (Collins 2000). For example, Andrea's rejection of Saturday school for her child is perhaps driven by her desire to enhance Natalie's math's abilities and her need to have her views heard by educators. Andrea feels that this need is best fulfilled when money is involved in the interaction. More tellingly, Andrea's reflection suggests that the African Caribbean women involved in the Saturday school

had not achieved the kinds success and social mobility, she would want for her own daughter. For Kimarie’s mother, Maureen, her church friends provided tuition support, while for Peterlyn, additional tuition was purchased from a firm of tutors whom she described as mainly Asian, she had found in a classified advert in the local paper.

The tone and tenor of the mothers’ voices when discussing their daughter’s education reflected an ever-present apprehension among parents of young African- Caribbean Black British girls that their daughters might become what Maureen described as, “a statistic of the streets.” This fear is also reflected in how the girls’ mothers monitor their daughters’ friendships.

### **6.7 Too Much Friend And Company Will Drag Her Down”**

In chapter 2, I began a discussion on resistance and Black feminist epistemology, I extend that discussion here to exploring the complications inherent in the Black feminist stand point position. While each of the mothers in this study acknowledged that peer groups could be a source of support, they were also concerned that inappropriate friendships could be damaging. The girls’ in this study whose mothers were, African Caribbean Black British, indicated that their mothers’ took a number of approaches to managing their relations with friends. The data gathered from the two girls whose mothers were White British suggests that their experiences were similar to each other though rather different to the other girls. For the girls whose mothers were African Caribbean Black British, advice, as described below, reflected one way the mothers sought to influence their daughters’ selection of friends.

Maureen        " too much friend and company will carry you down," to Kimarie

Paulette        "choose your friends wisely," to Rakaya,

Andrea         "not everyone who says they’re your friend, is your friend" to Natalie,

The implications of the mothers’ advice around friendships are the notion that the choice of friends should be in keeping with parents’ values and more importantly, should not divert them from the expectations that their mothers have set for them. Paulette’s advice

to Rakaya, concerning the value of true friendships, can be viewed in the context monitoring friendships as discussed by Cooper (2007).

For Rakaya, in the past, her particular focus upon developing friendships with other African Caribbean girls had led her into trouble with school authorities. As a result of this Rakaya had restricted her friendships to girls from other racial minority groups, as well as boys in her class. This friendship restriction had the effect of separating Rakaya from what Paulette considered, bad influences.

Paulette        You just can't say can you. I mean it's easier if you're Indian innit. But they don't like us do they, cos of Amin chucking em out and stuff like that (laughs). I mean they've got money and businesses and that. So if their kids leave school with nothing, it doesn't matter, they've got their families to fall back on haven't they. And like the Polish kids she's friendly with, they're still White even if they aren't English, they can get by can't they. She's only got me and I've got nothing, no money nothing. It's gonna be a struggle for her, like for me... (June 2010)

In this discussion, Paulette comments on her fears, that her daughter will share the same relative lack of success as herself. Paulette connects this lack of success to being African Caribbean Black British. African Caribbean Black British, in Paulette's eyes, brings with it an automatic assumption of poverty and lack of success. In her considerations of the racial and economic hierarchies in Leicester, Paulette is suggesting that being African Caribbean Black British, rather than African Indian or White like Rakaya's Polish contemporaries, can have detrimental impacts. Paulette's laments that Rakaya's Indian friends would be able to expect support from their families and this support would ensure their success. Paulette is further troubled by the idea that, Rakaya's Polish friends can expect their Whiteness to provide them with access to privileges denied to African Caribbean Black British girls. However, despite their various privileges, Paulette's note to Rakaya, suggests her need for caution when dealing with children from other racial groups. This need for caution is framed around their abilities to thrive in a context where her child would be relegated to expecting the same, unsatisfactory, life outcomes as herself.

The notion of friendships and monitoring their daughters' friendships choices, falling within the Black feminist mother work of educational advocacy, is continued by Andrea to Natalie. Andrea chose to move out of the inner city and at the time of the study lived in rented accommodation in an out of city, predominantly White middle-class suburb. This choice meant that her children were schooled largely isolated from the wider African Caribbean Black British communities in Leicester. Despite this apparent choice, Andrea retains a skeptical eye, a measure of distrust, of the racial groups with whom Natalie comes into contact. From the tenor of our conversation, I took Andrea's injunction to relate specifically to racial groups and friendships.

Andrea's skepticism regarding Natalie's friendship choices is captured by her phrase, "not everyone who says they're your friend, is your friend." In this Andrea is suggesting that Natalie explores what support her friendships offer. Natalie's difficulties in her primary school were compounded by episodes of both bullying and isolation. Natalie sought to address these challenges by choosing friends from other year groups. However, once those girls had transferred to secondary school, Natalie was left isolated with no "best friends" to rely on. Andrea was concerned that the school friends Natalie subsequently chose, were not supportive of her daughter when she was bullied about her weight or bullied for being the lone African Caribbean girl in school where the majority of the pupils are White British. But she still chose to send her to an outer city school.

Maureen, Kimarie's mother, was at pains to encourage her daughter self-reliance, suggesting that Kimarie should, "choose her friends wisely." In this Maureen is counselling her daughter to choose friends who can help her, enhance her chances of success, rather than present her with additional challenges to address. In our discussions, Maureen was concerned that Kimarie was becoming a little too vocal. In addition to suggesting that Kimarie's increased assertiveness was the result of her changing hormones, Maureen also commented that she was afraid her daughter was becoming involved with girls who would lead her into trouble. Upon investigation, it emerged that the girls who Maureen was the most concerned about were the other African Caribbean Black British girls at school with whom her daughter came into contact. For Maureen,

the context within which Kimarie should choose her friends wisely has to be viewed alongside her fear for her daughter's survival and school success.

Maureen      You know how it is, some of them girls have no behaviour. It's all make-up, short skirts and boys. You see them in town, a head full of weave and a mouth full of attitude and she's just fixated with them. They will drag her down. She has cousin and all kinds of family but no, she don't want them, she's looking at dem bad breed gyal like they have something for her. (April 2010 field notes).

In this extract, I suggest that Maureen is extending the notion of monitoring her daughter's friendships from friendships with other racial groups to concern about other African Caribbean Black British girls. The "them girls" that Maureen spoke of were Kimarie's African Caribbean Black British contemporaries. Maureen was particularly keen that her daughter should not be like the girls she describes. Her description of them having "no behaviour" suggests that the girls, do not know how to conduct themselves in public. Their lack of acceptable conduct is, in Maureen's mind, exacerbated by their age inappropriate hair styles, their provocative clothing and sexualised interest in friendships with boys. The girls that Maureen describes closely reflect the societal view of African Caribbean Black British girls as discussed by Weekes (2005), where she argues that media representations of African Caribbean girls impact upon their views of themselves. These media driven images of African Caribbean Black British girls leave then no positive reflections of themselves. For Maureen, Kimarie's safety could be assured if she would maintain friendships of which her mother approves, particularly with family members. For Maureen, Kimarie's mum, June, Helen's mum and Charmaine Tamisha's mum. Their concerns for their daughters' same race friendships, coalesce around the issues of language and creolised Caribbean dialect.

## **6.8 Mothers Concerns about Creolised Caribbean Dialect.**

In the previous extract, Maureen had disparagingly described, girls hanging around in town as having "a head full of weave and a mouth full of attitude" In particular the evidence of attitude was reflected in her concerns regarding the use of Creolised

Caribbean Dialect (CCD). The African Caribbean Black British mothers interviewed in this study felt that CCD use marked out the user as being too knowledgeable of the adult world. Further, the mothers were concerned that for the teachers in the school their girls CCD use would provide a marker which confirms the stereotype of African Caribbean girls being; loud, oppositional and uninterested in education.

June                                      You mean fa Helen talkin patois? No way! What would she know about that? Better she keep that in she mouth yeah. You don't see how they looking for her already? And then she to go throw that in their face on top, must be she looking for what she would get. (May 2010)

This comment occurred in an impromptu meeting with June. I had bumped into her in town, and after some slight awkwardness, she invited me to have lunch with her. We settled on coffee and as the discussion flowed I posed a question about children speaking patois at school. At first, June appeared to be incredulous at my question. Once the gist of the question had been considered, June simply dismissed the possibility of CCD use. June appeared to me to become irritated by the idea that her daughter would use CCD at school. Eventually, June's irritation and concern became a fear that CCD use would make her child appear defiant and thus justify any bad treatment Helen's teachers considered appropriate. Indeed, June's comment that "must be she looking for what she would get" suggests that Helen would have brought on herself any unfavourable treatment she experienced as a result of her CCD use. Here I am suggesting that June is concerned to protect her daughter from unfavourable treatment and so would encourage her to desist from using CCD. This is indicated in June's comment "better she keep that in she mouth yeah."

Paulette was similarly dismissive about the possibility of CCD use being valid for Rakaya. However while June considered CCD use would lead to her daughter incurring her teachers wrath, Paulette was more concerned that CCD use may lead to a diminution in her daughter's academic abilities.

Paulette                                      Sometimes in the house or such. I don't know that I really approve to be fair. I mean it's all hard enough isn't it. All the spelling and stuff

like that she's got to learn the correct ways the right spelling and the right way to say words..... and then well how will she know, no that's not for school. I mean I can't barely do it myself so I'd have a job on teaching her. And anyway, what for how's that gonna be good for her ...It wouldn't work, just wouldn't work they'd know she was putting it on, pretending like. (*July 2010*)

Whilst CCD use was described in this way by Maureen, Paulette and June, it was Charmaine whose views encapsulated the mothers concerns.

Deborah        d'you teach Tamisha patois?

Charmaine      Teach her? Nah, I can't stand to hear it, my Tissie (TC) talking all, like that. There's just no point, it makes her sound thick. After when she has got the three r's and stuff like that under her belt and she is big enough to know when is right to get on like she is all ghetto yeah, then fine. But right now no chance, she just needs to get in and get on. (*December 2009*)

When asked about Tamisha's use of Creolised Caribbean Dialect, Charmaine was keen to emphasise Tamisha's youthfulness, and this is suggested by Charmaine calling Tamisha Tissie (TC), her house/family name. This confirms the suggestions made by Figueroa & Patrick (2001), who suggest creolised Caribbean dialect is reserved for the adult world and further confirms Sebba (1993) who argues that London Jamaican (CCD) is a speech style adopted by young people in their teens and marks their separation from the adults around them. However, Charmaine's view of CCD and its place in the quest for her daughter's success is characterised by her emphatic suggestion that Tamisha, should "get in and get on." Charmaine saw the need for her daughter to be a part of the system and make the best use of what it has to offer.

In keeping with Maureen, Paulette and June, Charmaine articulates, through her use of "ghetto" concerning CCD and her child, the idea that for her CCD use is linked to what she would consider the baser under educated members of the African Caribbean Black British communities in Leicester. For their children to achieve the success promised by meritocracy, they have to ensure that their daughters do not use CCD and so can avoid



being considered undereducated. This perception of CCD marking the separation between the “educated and the uneducated” is discussed by Figueroa & Patrick (2002) who argue that in the Caribbean standard English is the language of business and commerce. In the Caribbean, individuals have to be able to communicate effectively in both standard English and Caribbean dialect. Charmaine’s the relegation of CCD to “ghetto” was in contradiction to how we, she and I, throughout the interview process had been using CCD. We had been dipping between CCD and standard Leicester English.

Deborah        Yeah but you do drop a little twang now and again how come that then?

Charmaine     you got’s to have a little ghetto or you’ll get walked on...laughs

Deborah        Like? Laughs

Charmaine     Ya can’t be getting on all stush and foolie, like ya jus have one speed....you have to drop it now and again yes, or them girls would have your arse. (December 2009)

In this piece, Charmaine, like Maureen, June and Paulette, was keen to convey the need to be able to shift their language “jus have one speed”. For Charmaine, this is indicated by her description of the exclusive use of standard English as reflecting a Black woman who was “stoosh” dislocated from her community and “foolie,” innocent of the ways of the world. This is not what she wants for her daughter. Charmaine proposes that if her daughter were to be viewed as unable to communicate in both standards as well as CCD, “them girls would have your arse,” become the focus for derision and be ostracised from the community of girls. Thus for the girls as well as their mothers, the use of CCD is something of a tight rope.

The mothers wanted that their daughters, like themselves, be able to role flex,” (Shorter-Gooden 2004) and CCD is a focus for role flexing. The ability to “shift,” both in conduct and language, to achieve the success they sought was also a feature of the monitoring the mothers undertook concerning their daughter's friendships with other African Caribbean Black British girls. For some of the mothers, their daughters’ friendships with particular kinds of African Caribbean Black British girls were views as potentially detrimental. The

girls whose friendships would be considered problematic were those African Caribbean Black British girls previously, disparagingly, referred to by Maureen, Kimarie's mothers as having "a head full of weave and a mouth full of attitude. Tamisha, in the following extract, continues the refrain outlined by Maureen regarding types of inappropriate friendships, ones which at best need close monitoring as for Charmaine at least, friendships that need to be curtailed.

## 6.9 Friendships and Diversity

Tamisha indicated an instance when her mother became aware that her friend's daughter, African Caribbean Black British girl aged 13 was skipping school.

Tamisha        *"(child's name) is ok really, she's really popular. On Saturday's she gets to go to town by herself and stuff like that. I want to go to but my mum says not, cause ( child's name) says she's sick to not go school and then she hangs about in town", (November 2009)*

Tamisha informed me that, once the child's behaviours became known, Charmaine, did not invite the child back to her home. Tamisha noted her mother then told her "not to bother with (child) anymore". Tamisha explained that her mother wanted her to make friends with everyone, particularly "nice and good girls". The girls that Charmaine felt were good were the ones who, according to Tamisha, were academically able and whose parents had good jobs and good cars. In addition to the passing comment that, none of her friends were the type's good girl her mother approved of, as those types of girl were White or Indian, Tamisha plaintively commented that these girls didn't want to be friends with her. Here then, I suggest, we can see Charmaine wanting to enhance Tamisha's interaction with affluent White and Indian girls as route to the networks which might ensure her success. However, this made school circumstances particularly difficult for Tamisha as she felt herself to be excluded from these friendship circles. Tamisha believed that they had nothing in common. Tamisha suggested these girls did not want to befriend her and so not only did not invite her to their parties but also largely rejected her advances.

While perhaps not so explicit, Paulette too appears to warn her daughter away from close friendships with African Caribbean Black British girls. Rakaya's description of the girls in her year group highlights some of the challenges she has faced because of meeting her mother's request to limit the intimacy of contact with them. In a discussion with Paulette concerning her daughter's friendships, Paulette had commented that Rakaya needs to be with people who can "help her up" I took this comment to refer to Paulette's focus on social mobility for her daughter. This comment and the field notes concerning Rakaya help to provide context for the following interview discussion.

Deborah        So that means you prefer boys as your friend

Rakaya        erm well no, not like that exactly, it's sort of just that the girls were a lot for fighting and arguing all the time and that's just not me. I don't like all that kicking off stuff, so I just like, play football, or you know keep with Kadeena (Italian - Bengali) and Amajit (Indian). Like the other girls and that, they sort of like think, I think, I am posh or something. Like I'm too nice and am stuck up but I'm not. I just can't be bothered with them. (May 2010)

The other girls, to whom Rakaya refers, are the other African Caribbean Black British girls in her year group. Rakaya indicates that it is her refusal to conform to the norms established by the African Caribbean Black British girls in her year group that has set her apart from them, causing her to be excluded from their playground activities. This and her mothers' warning about selecting the right kinds of friends, may well have influenced her decision not to be "bothered with them." Rakaya, in a previous interview, had described how the girls in the year were very fashion conscious. Rakaya implicated her choice of shop, as a marker of her relative affluence, suggesting that this accounted for the other girls' reluctance to be her friend. By making conscious decisions to limit her school friendships to two girls neither of whom were African Caribbean Black British, Rakaya's friendship helped her to distance herself from the African Caribbean Black British girls in her school year. This distancing also led to her feeling targeted by them. However, Rakaya also indicated that her proper best friends were not at school. Rakaya's proper best friends were at home or part of the carnival dance troop she participated in.

The girls whom Rakaya identified as her proper best friends were two African Caribbean girls Black British girls.

Rakaya, explained that her experiences of previous years particularly years three and four as trying to fit in and be friendly, more friendly with the other African Caribbean Black British girls in her year group. These girls were not in her classroom cohort. She felt that her efforts had been misplaced because “*they didn’t like me anyway*” Rakaya, explained that she had, in the previous years, attempted to be friends with a group of African Caribbean Black British girls. The group of five girls also included three White British girls who Rakaya described as, “even worser as the Black girls.”

The group that Rakaya identifies as the Black girls actually comprised more White than African Caribbean Black British girls. Rakaya’s description of the White girls in the group being “even worser than the Black girls” indicates her surprise that the White girls in the group she had characterised as African Caribbean, were worse than the Black girls. For Rakaya, "worsen" related to being mean to other people, limiting the numbers who could participate in their playground activities and saying mean things about people they didn’t know. The assumption that African Caribbean girls are challenging permeates this discussion and compounds Rakaya’s surprise, gendered and racialised expectations are at the centre of this surprise.

Rakaya seems to have expected that perhaps because they were White girls, they would somehow have been less involved in the bullying actions of the others. When probed about the possible reasons for wanting to be a part of the group with whom she now has little contact, Rakaya gave many different explanations including; boredom, wanting to be liked and wanting to be friends with popular people. Rakaya lamented, of the group of girls with whom she now had little contact, which it was “really sad that they, were just naughty for nothing.” Further probing revealed that they had consistently targeted a series of smaller Indian, girls, making them run away or walk in the mud.

Rakaya’s, and Tamisha’s experiences and their mothers' expectations for them of friendship with the other African Caribbean Black British girls, appears to highlight a series of tensions in the Black feminist view of friendships between Black girls. Through

involving herself in complex processes of engaging with and distancing herself from her African Caribbean Black British peers, Rakaya's mother appears to want Rakaya to portray herself as better, less challenging, than her African Caribbean Black British peers. In doing so, she further entangles herself in the tensions of identity and acceptability amongst African Caribbean Black British girls. While it remains true that those friendships between Black females represent an important home-place, (Collins 2000) as these friendship groups allow the young women and girls to speak with freedom and to tell stories that reinforce their identities, particularly in a society that magnifies their differences. These tensions appeared not to impact on Janessa to the same extent as the others.

Janessa        My mum ain't really that bothered who friends am with so long as they are nice to me. Cause like some people can be horrible can't they? (Focus group July 2010).

This view suggests that for Janessa's mother the primary concern in her daughters' friendships were for her to be friendly with people who were caring of and nice to her. Alternatively, both Marie may have to some extent Louise, the two White mothers in the study may well have been inhibited from or reluctant to voice any racialised friendship concerns to me as being African Caribbean Black British and female I am indeed part of the group about whom they may be concerned.

The challenges identified by Rakaya, regarding her friendships with African Caribbean Black British girls are somewhat echoed by Leonie. Though for Leonie, the limit on friendships with African Caribbean Black British girls appears to be self, rather than mother, imposed. Unlike the other participants in the study for whom race was a known, if softly spoken context, Leonie was by turns explicit and dismissive about the impacts of race and racism on her friendship choices, as well as her ultimate chances of success. For example, Leonie noted that she would like to have friendships with "coloured" girls, but they were often "too mean" or "too difficult to know". However later in our discussion, Leonie suggest that her friendships with African Caribbean girls were limited because "they don't like me." The tensions Leonie experiences in trying to pursue friendships with African Caribbean Black British girls offers a lens on her experiences of race and

racism. Leonie gives an example of her perception of the impact of her African Caribbean Black British identity on her life, Leonie states:

Leonie            “I actually go out and try to make new friends and that stuff, people sort of look at me like oh yeah, you’re not nice or something. Or, oh you're this type of mean person because lots of coloured girls are mean but I’m, erm not, am I? I mean like, so what if my uncle (dad’s brother) went jail. So people sort of see him like that, and they are like oh she's going to end up like that too, I'm like no I'm not... like everyone looks at you” ( Focus group).

Race was the lens that Leonie used to contextualise most situations she described during the study. Though she presented herself as simultaneously concerned and dismissive of race, she was for the greater part more willing to acknowledge that race and racism were significant factors in her friendships choices. Connelly (2002) argued that the children in his study were impacted upon by the adult discourses of race both at school and their wider social landscape.

This finding finds credibility in my research interactions with Leonie. Within the UK, as Gilroy (2006) argues African Caribbean Black British women and men are viewed as pathological, constant representations of behaviour deemed as intrinsic cultural patterns in African Caribbean Black British life – being loud, being challenging, poor academic attainment, intellectual inferiority each paint a bleak picture. The discourse of pathology and African Caribbean Black British girls being challenging or fear of being challenged by them pervade Leonie’s views. While this view is negative, it does to some extent reflect the Black feminist theoretical position outlined in chapter two. Where to survive Black women have become watchers become familiar with the language and manners of those with power, sometimes adopting that language to gain some illusory protection for themselves (Lorde 1984).

In the case of Leonie, it may be argued that “watching” has indeed generated a dual consciousness. Consciousness in which she, in keeping with the other girls has become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor. This simultaneity enables

Rakaya and Tamisha in different ways to maintain independent self-definitions. Tamisha and Rakaya's apparent rejection of African Caribbean Black British girlfriends enables them to set themselves apart from the controlling images through which society seeks to define them. All three of the girls in this part of the discussion, are aware of how African Caribbean Black British girls are constructed, and through their friendship choices seek to reject these definitions. The mothers' concerns regarding their daughters' friendships appear to reflect a number of simultaneous concerns.

The mothers' concerns appear to see then attempting to support their daughters to negotiate a number of contradictory hurdles. The mothers are urging their daughters to be mindful of friendships with girls from other racial groupings because those friends enjoy advantages closed to their own. Paulette, her discussion noted previously highlights this very well. Simultaneously the mothers appear to be urging their daughters to steer clear of friendships particular groups of African Caribbean Black British girls, as these girls have the potential to act into the stereotype of African Caribbean Black British girls. Acting into the stereotype of African Caribbean Black British girls has the potential to impact negatively on the success they envisage for their daughters. Resisting the possibility of being captured with in the negative and controlling images of Black women (Collins 2000) saw the mothers encouraging their daughters to eschew relationships with their African Caribbean Black British peers. For Maureen and June, the solution appeared to be found in urging their daughters to maintain friendships with family members. Helen succinctly commented that her mother thinks that:

Helen       “ like that cause too many friends is not good, she thinks they make you lazy, you should stick with the family cause friends let you down” (focus group July 2010)

The idea that friends could stand between Helen and her mother's aspirations for her and therefore should be avoided is the central message that Helen got from her mother. The distinction that June, Helen's mother made between friends and family, highlight the importance of family as a source of support. The fact that Helen had only one close friend, her cousin, reflects the influence of her mothers' opinion on how she chose friends. In discussion with Maureen, Charmaine, June, and Paulette I had asked what it

was about the friendships between their girls and other African Caribbean girls that gave them concern. Their responses reflected the notion that too many of these friendships would;

Charmaine     “lead her into trouble”

June            “make her get on all bright and bumptious with her little-self”

Maureen        “are too inward facing”

However, it was Paulette, Rakaya’s mother whose comment was the most telling.

Paulette        “I don’t want her to be one of the crowd, to be one of many, I want her to stand out, to have the things you know. It’s like she’d be one of the crowd and I want more for her” (July 2010 field notes)

The mothers were aware of racism in society and discussed ways in which their friendships with other African Caribbean Black British women had, and continued to be a source of support. However, in relation to their daughters’ friendships, the mothers were more ambivalent. The mothers’ comments concerning their daughters’ friendships, could be taken to suggest that the mothers’ disapproval reflects a tacit understanding of the stereotypes of African Caribbean Black British girls and a desire that their girls should be able to resist those stereotyped expectations of their femininities and race. In supporting their daughters to resist this view of themselves, the mothers were keen their girls should not be seen as challenging or loud. For the mothers, the desire was, to ensure that their daughters stand out in school and were not mistreated in the way they, as mothers educated in Britain, knew teachers could mistreat African Caribbean Black British girls.

This would suggest that the mothers’ involvement in their daughters’ friendships choices is part of their broader educational success agenda (Cooper 2007). The girls, apart from Janessa and Peterlyn, appear to have been aware that their mothers wanted them to have bright, clever friends who could support their home or school work. The girls’ mothers



appear to want to prepare their daughters for the challenges ahead. This agency can take a number of forms, I want here to discuss the mothers' choice of secondary school for their daughters to attend as a form of agency.

### **6.10 Choosing Secondary School: Preparing Their Daughters for the Struggles Ahead**

Andrea        Would I send her to private school? I would yes. Of course, I would if I had the money..... You see them in all their lovely uniform and hats walking along all organised (Field notes December 2009)

As established in, chapter two, intersectionality is a key tool in the analysis I bring to this research. In this section of the chapter, I bring an intersectional analytical view to the mothers and how they arrive at their choices for their daughters' secondary schooling. Race and gender considerations play out particularly poignantly in the school choices made by some of the mothers in this study. The girls' choices of and desires for secondary school were influenced by concerns with; being liked, being popular, and being able to fit in with their chosen friendships groups. For the girls, educational attainment was a secondary though important consideration. For the mothers, the choice of secondary school reflected wider concerns.

Michelle       they say the catholic schools are good, get good results in the exams. The ones here are improving, you know getting better and the kids' grades are improving too. That's good, isn't it? I don't want no improving school like she's some experiment. What if it stops, what if it stops (improving) and starts going backwards. What will they have to say about that then, when she's there? It's hard enough for her already, what kind of job can she get with no education? Much less to experiment with her education and hope it keeps improving (November 2009)

Michelle was concerned that her daughter should receive a good education. Michelle's desire for her daughters post school success, in this case, indicated in Michelle's phrase "what kind of job can she get with no education" was a major factor influencing the secondary school choices. Further, the mother's choices of the school appeared to reflect a recognition that the girls needed to be ready for the real world. The world the girls needed to be made ready for was one in which, race and gender inequalities would be foregrounded. The theme of the need for a good school is continued by June, however, the criteria by which June judges whether the school is good or not includes the number of African Caribbean Black British children in attendance. For June, her concern for her daughter's friendships, are weighed against the search for success in her school choices.

In making this balance, for June, the need for good educational outcomes was prioritised over the need for companionship. Indeed as discussed below, June dismissed her daughters' friendships as "bad influences" For June, the numbers of other African Caribbean Black British children attending the school suggested whether the school was well resourced, indicated the attainment levels and suggested whether or not there were challenges of indiscipline. These criteria were bundled together and had a direct influence on the school she chose for her daughter.

June            I need a school where she will get a good education and come out with something And seeing as how Leicester lets people down all the time I just don't want that for her. They treat their own bad so what chance has mine got in a bad school. I'm sending her to Beauchamp..... Maybe it will be good for her, no bad influences and such like, she will have to just get on with her work. Too much friends and stuff like that and she just won't do any work.....yes I know there's hardly no Black kids, but that's just how it is, she has us. (October 2009)

June recognises the need for compromise regarding what she can expect a school to deliver. In passing June acknowledges that her daughter might be isolated in the school, she has chosen but sets this against the desire for her to be away from bad influences. In her desire for her child to achieve a good education, June balances the possibility of

Helen being isolated with the recognition that her family is a resource and also that isolation will limit the possibilities for Helen to be influenced negatively. Race is particularly salient in the decisions June makes about the school for her daughter.

The bad influences June describes are characterised by other African Caribbean Black British girls, particularly those who have no interest in education. June's comment about bad influences signals a particular concern informing her school choice, the characters in the wider community from whom she wants to distinguish herself and her family. The notion of the bad influences sits well with Maureen's description of girls with "a mouth full of attitude" (noted earlier) from whom she wants to distinguish her child. Indeed, the school which June has chosen, being in the county, where more affluent and indeed more White middle-class families live offers some measure of exclusivity if compared to the inner city schools she rejects. A similar refrain is echoed in Maureen's decision to send her child to an out of city school.

Maureen      This is such an important year for her isn't it? She wants to be with her friends yes, and she wants to be all independent yes I can see with that, but she's not ready...ok maybe I'm not ready. The (secondary) school round here has a really bad reputation, full o dem bad breed kids.....no manners no behaviour (February 2010)

Maureen argues that she was concerned not to make the wrong choice of school because the range of inner city secondary schools in Leicester is somewhat narrow. Leicester is often held up as a beacon of multicultural integrations. However, for African Caribbean Black British young people, the city is one in which they are five times more likely than their White counterparts to be subject to police stop and search. Research suggests that of every thousand African Caribbean young people in the city 68 will have been subject to some form of police enquiry (Stop Search Reference Group data March 2012). The Local Education Authority had in 2007 been placed in special measures.

The education attainment levels of the city's children, particularly the city's racial minority children, was severely lagging behind those of racial minorities in comparable cities across the country. Indeed for racial minority children such as Indian girls, their

attainment, was lower than the national averages would have anticipated for their racial category (Leicester City Council 2014). A similarly dismal picture of African Caribbean educational attainment is painted. While the outcomes are marginally better for African Caribbean girls than their male counterparts, 38% as contrast to 33% for boys in the attainment of 5 A-C grade GCSE's, (Leicester city council 2014)

Evidence Even though the mothers recognised, as Whitty (2001) suggests, that certain school choices still bring a significantly greater chance of success than others, the choices available to the mothers and families of the girls in this study, were circumscribed. As outlined below, Maureen's secondary school choices were informed by a number of conflicting issues. We had at this point been discussing the conduct of the mainly White working class children at the secondary school in Maureen's neighbourhood. Such behaviours were consider in appropriate for her child to be around.

Maureen and jumping out the window too, back chat, fighting, cops, up the school every day, that would be bad and not too bad if the results were any good, they're just not..... But what's for the best? I've brought her up to know what's right and what isn't and she does know. And sometimes she just doesn't want to know. (Parts of discussion omitted) .....The schools here are rubbish not even factory work she could get because the factories are all shut..... And the county schools are stuck up, awful really awful, but what do you do....? (February 2010)

Charmaine continues the refrain concerning the purpose of schooling and the value of education.

Charmaine yeah, you know I can, well we can, take care of that identity and know thyself business... Isn't that what we are for? No I'm not so worried about her getting all Whitey-fied, am worried about her education... She could a Black till midnight if there's nothing in her head how's that gonna help her get a job (March 2010)

As discussed below, Charmaine believes she has the skills necessary to help her daughter develop a positive Black identity. Indeed Charmaine argues that identity development is a particular function of the family. This is indicated by her emphasis; we can take care of that, in relation to my question. Her comment that Tamisha “could a Black till midnight”, does not refer to her skin tone, but rather is spoken in relation to her understanding and articulation of her Black identity. Charmaine’s comment above appears to suggest that the purpose of education in school is to ensure her daughter achieves the qualifications that will help her get a job. Whilst Charmaine does not deny the possibility of a positive Black identity she is keen to see that task undertaken by the family. In this way, Charmaine seeks to support her daughter to resist racism through a better education and to resist being viewed negatively through being able to role flex and share aspects of her identity in specific contexts.

However, for the African Caribbean Black British mothers, their intersectional positioning appears to inform their s choices of school and highlights decisions that were both contradictory and somewhat counter intuitive. Whilst the mothers wanted their daughters to be happy in the chosen school and so hoped they would make friends easily, and they were reluctant to send their daughters to the same school as their current friends as they assumed friends would be a negative influence on their daughters’ education. They were particularly concerned that their daughters should not attend a secondary school in which the African Caribbean Black British pupil cohort was significant in numbers. I return to a discussion with Paulette concerning her fears for her daughter’s success.

Paulette            “I don’t want her to be one of the crowd, to be one of many, I want her to stand out, to have the things you know. It’s like she’d be one of the crowd and I want more for her” (September 2009)

Here Paulette appears to be echoing the concerns expressed by Maureen and June suggesting that if her daughter were in a school with a significant number of African Caribbean Black British pupils, then the potential for her to be mistreated would be increased. Andrea, Natalie’s mother, commented similarly concerning her decision to

move her family out of the inner city and the choices she made concerning the secondary school choices this move opened to her.

Andrea        yeah it's a good mix, you know better sort of balance for her she won't get lost in it all. She's not the most confident child....really she needs to be where she will get the best attention and yeah I do think a county school gives her, they will try harder with her being the only one and stuff like that because they will think they are racist if not (laughs).

The mothers in this study took part in the research at a particular moment in their lives when they were concerned with the activities involved in choosing secondary schools for daughters. Their practices, and what they said, involved negotiating, sometimes competing, discourses derived from their situation, their upbringing, the norms presented by their peers and others around them; the resources available to them; and the actions of wider public institutions and state agencies, in particular, the education system. The question of being a mother, bringing up and overseeing the education of children, involves the encounter between the intimate psychological levels of the individual with wider public discourses. This encounter takes place and is shaped by the material, both in the form of resources available and the nature of placed and localised interactions.

What emerged from the data development process is that issues of race and gender particularly fear that their daughters would be captured by the gender stereotypes lay at the heart of the way these mothers approached the question of which secondary school to send their daughters to. From Andrea's account above there is the suggestion that for her, in keeping with Maureen, Paulette and June considerations around schooling were highly racialized, and that discourses of race and class were intertwined. Though perhaps surprisingly the discourses drawn upon were those where in African Caribbean Black British pupils were viewed negatively. Ball (2003) argues that throughout the processes of schooling and choice, particularly for middle-class families is a clear understanding of the separation's between "us" and "others". This understanding imbues a sense of "other" families as not "normal", as not intelligible regarding our values, attitudes and

behaviour'. The mothers in this study appear to be carrying similar views forward and seeking to separate themselves and their daughters from negatively racialized perceptions of what African Caribbean Black British girls are like.

Charmaine, June, Paulette and Andrea each commented that in their schooling experiences, where there were too many Black kids in a school, there was poor discipline a lower teacher expectation, lower standards of education and lower levels of attainment. Thus their choices of school for their girls reflected their desires for their girls to be educated in a racially mixed environment, one in which their daughters were in the racial minority. Race, the presence or absence of African Caribbean Black British pupils in the chosen secondary school was not the only criteria for choosing their daughters' secondary school. Louise and Maria were particularly concerned that their daughters should attend the only all girls' secondary school in the city.

While Louise and Maria commented that the bus fares would be cheaper as a reason for their choice of girl only schooling, this was accompanied by the suggestion that the standards of education would be better at a girls only school. The rationale for this suggested in the belief that, in a girl only school, their girls would not have to cope with the distraction of boys. Without being distracted by boys, their girls would be more likely to concentrate on studies rather than relationships. Further, she may be aware of the research that says girls do better in single sex schools because they aren't competing with boys for teacher's attention and time.

The challenge in choosing secondary schools for their daughters reflects their desires for a school in which their child is safe, in which her abilities and talents are recognized and valued, a school where she is happy and able to learn the skills vital to her success in later life. While of course it can be safely argued that the desires previously recounted are pertinent to all parents, for the African Caribbean Black British girls in this study, mothers apostrophe choices of the school reflect the ways in which they use their knowledge of the world to support their daughters. The mothers were clear that the standards of education are reduced in schools in which there is a significant number of African Caribbean Black British children in the pupil cohort.

The mothers approach, to the choosing schools for their daughters cannot be understood outside of the context of their role as mothers bringing up of African Caribbean Black British girls to negotiate success in an environment that anticipates the failure, rather than the success of their girls. Further as Collins (1994) Cooper (2007) Phoenix and Tizzard (1993) argue, the work of mothering Black children is anchored in racialized conceptions of survival power and identity. That search for survival, power and identity are intertwined with their own lived experiences of oppression as well as their desire for their children to prosper in a society which is hostile to them. For the mothers in this study, the secondary schools they choose for their daughters' can be argued to be borne pragmatism. That is to suggest they pragmatically reflect their belief that in a society of racial and class hierarchies, middle-class White children would automatically receive the kinds of educational advantage they, as African Caribbean Black British mothers wanted for their own. To access this advantage, these mothers chose to send their daughters to schools in which they were likely to be racially isolated.

It might at first appear counter intuitive, reluctance to send their daughters to a school with large numbers of African Caribbean Black British children can be argued as affirming their value of education rather than rejecting the value of their African Caribbean Black British identities. As noted in chapter 4 and in this chapter 6, focusing on friendships, the mothers in this study were very concerned about the girls with whom their daughters were friendly. While the mothers were clear about the importance of friendships and other social relationships for their daughters, they were concerned that their daughter's same race friendships could have negative impacts.

In conclusion in this chapter, I have explored the ways in which the girls' mothers support their daughters' academic development. The mothers provided moral and motivational support for their girls by speaking words of encouragement to their learning efforts and served as a model for why their daughters should value education. The mothers' concerns regarding the possibilities of their daughters' failure coalesce around the stereotype of Black girls who are viewed as loud and challenging. One way of doing this was to seek to limit the numbers of African Caribbean Black British friends their daughters have. To avoid fulfilling the potential failure, the mothers seek to monitor their



daughters' friendships. This monitoring sees them advising their daughters to extend the range of girls with whom they are friends, while contradictorily advising caution and distrust of other communities. The mothers' contradictory messages extend to their choice of secondary school for their daughters. For some of the mothers ensuring their daughter's educational advantage sees them send their daughters to a school where they are in the minority. I suggest that the mothers do not want the negative stigma attached to Black communities generally and loud Black girls particularly to attach to their daughters. By monitoring their daughters' friendships and sending their daughters to middle-class schools outside their catchment area the mothers believe they can enable their daughters to achieve an educational advantage.

## 7 Chapter 7 Conclusions and forward thinking

By asking the question “ **What informs success for African Caribbean Black British Girls and their mothers in the final year at primary school**”, this thesis set out to develop a critical understanding of the ways in which success is; informed, articulated and negotiated for and by African Caribbean Black British girls in their last year in primary school in Leicester. My starting position was to accept that, due to structural oppressions, of racism and sexism, African Caribbean Black British girls in contemporary Britain face a particular conundrum. This conundrum relates to how they might attain success, in a school environment that devalues them, while simultaneously developing a positive sense of themselves as African Caribbean Black British girls.

Generally, the literature on this subject specifically in the context of African Caribbean girls in their final year at primary school is sparse. As a result of the concern to support African Caribbean Black British girls to achieve their fullest intra and post school potential this research was important. The study sought to answer four questions;

- 1 How do African Caribbean Black British girls in a city in the East Midlands understand success as they make the transition to secondary school?
2. When African Caribbean Black British working class girls are confronted with racism and sexism do they maintain a belief in the possibility of their success and if so how is this articulated?
- 3 In contexts of education, how do the girls’ friendships impact upon their negotiations towards success?
- 4 What do the girls’ mothers do to; support their daughter quests for success, to mediate the identities of these African Caribbean Black British girls and how they prepare themselves to achieve success

This concluding chapter provides a summary of the findings and their interpretations as well as a discussion of the limitations and the implications of the study for policy, research and practice. The first section, which summarises the findings, is followed by a section which outlines

several limitations to the study. Following on from the limitations, the third section reflects the theoretical and methodological approach adopted in this study. The fourth section highlights the contributions to knowledge provided by the research. The fifth and final section discusses implications for research, policy and practice arising from the study.

## **7.1 Empirical Findings**

The main empirical findings are chapter specific and were summarised within the respective empirical chapters; 4) the girls understanding of success, 5) Relationships as a route to success 6) Mother-work resistance and agency. This section will synthesise the empirical findings to answer the study's four research questions.

### **7.2 How do African Caribbean Black British girls in a city in the East Midlands understand success as they make the transition to secondary school?**

This research suggests that these African Caribbean Black British girls hold normative notions of success. The girls understanding of success were informed by their expectation of happiness and material wealth. However, the girls indicated that neither happiness nor material wealth could be achieved without a good education, as education was the key to success. The girls considered that the success they wanted for themselves would only be achieved if they worked hard at school and made positive, choices. In this regard, the discourse through which their notions of success were articulated was that of meritocracy. The girls' notions of meritocracy appeared contradictory, they each believed that failure or success were entirely the result of individual action while yet acknowledging the potential for structural challenges to influence their chances of success.

While accepting the potential for structural inequalities to impact on their chances of success, the girls exaggerated sense of agency saw them simultaneously acknowledge and reject the possibilities of failure. The girls were resolute in their desires for success and considered good choices, personal determination and extra effort would make success available to them. The girls the burgeoning realisation that their hoped for success was contingent on many

social and structural factors beyond their control appeared to make the formula by which they understood success remarkably precarious.

The girls in this study were personally ambitious and aimed high and believed that they created their chances. The accredited credentials of GCSE and Advanced level qualifications were thought of as being the catalyst for the successful good life they envisaged for themselves. For these girls agency was a process. They each saw the prize of their persistence at school as the good education that would lead to their success. The girls' commitment to persistence in pursuit of the good education, was encapsulated in their goal setting. Through setting goals, for example, the girls were actively positioning themselves to manoeuvre through networks of power relying upon their own agency to do so. In doing so they believed they enjoyed choice, autonomy, and through their choices as active agents, would be able to make their success.

However, despite actively setting goals and working hard, the complications in the girls' meritocratic view of the inevitability of their success were revealed when they each at different points reflected that, sometimes effort and hard work do not result in the anticipated pay offs. This was particularly poignant as, of the eight girls in this study, 5 had mothers who had higher or university level qualification, and despite their qualifications, the mothers of these five girls had not yet achieved success in the terms their daughters recognised as success. Their mothers' experiences offered the girls a route into understanding the world and how it is structured to their exclusion. Their view that hard work and personal responsibilities will lead to the success they desire was further undermined about their assessment of themselves as learners and was further evidenced in their mothers' experiences. In while continuing to believe in the efficacy of hard work the girl enacted practices of resistance which I argue had the impact of insulating them from the challenges of a schooling system that devalued their race and their femininities.

### **7.3 When African Caribbean Black British girls in their last year of primary school are confronted with racism and sexism, do they maintain a belief in the possibility of their success and if so how is this articulated?**

This question required insight from the first to provide context to the responses. This research suggests that the African Caribbean Black British girls in this study experienced race and gender oppression as unremarkable features of their daily lives at school. While the girls did not explicitly cite racism or sexism as issues affecting their lives, they appeared to view the actions of their teachers and other adults in school through the prisms of fairness. For the girls, there was a recognition that they were not treated fairly by their teachers or their lunchtime supervisors. The girls appeared to recognise instances where they were treated unfairly and enacted practices of resistance to counter the unfairness they experienced. The girls in this study appeared to be certain that they would indeed be successful.

While to some extent they recognised race and gender oppression as having impacted negatively on their mothers, they did not appear to consider that these same structural oppressions would impact upon them. In addition to hard work, personal effort and making good choices the girls' relationships with friends and adults in the school setting helped them to manoeuvre through networks of power (Foucault 1980). In addition to their friends, the girls had to manage relationships with their teachers and other adults in the school setting. The girls recognised their teachers as the gatekeepers to the success they envisaged for themselves. The girls noted that there had been some deterioration in their relationships with their teachers over the years they had attended primary school. The girls each felt they were unnecessarily picked on or disciplined by their teachers. Tellingly the girls also believed that particularly when their teacher was having a bad day, they were more likely to receive a reprimand or behaviour sanction. In these circumstances, the girls believed that their agentic actions could impact on or alter the outcome of negative interactions. The girls suggest that their relationships with their teachers had deteriorated and so, to negotiate this deterioration, they have to both observe and manage their classroom behaviours. The girls recognise their teachers have the power in the classroom and have the capacity to mobilise their power and positions to control.

The girls, when confronted by racism and sexism, maintain a belief in their possibilities of their success by developing and enhancing their relationships in the school setting. At different time the girls noted that there were time when they believed their teachers to have been their allies, this was at times when they thought their teacher had been fair with them or shown interest in their activities outside of school. At the times when the girls though their teachers were their allies, they noted that the teacher was less likely to reprimand them. However, what is telling is that the girls expected to be reprimanded and this as I have argued speaks to their view of the deteriorating relationship between themselves and their teachers.

Constructing their teachers as allies' serves to maintain the veracity of the meritocratic discourse to divert attention away from the wider socio-political and economic challenges facing the girls in their quests for success. At different times and in different spaces both teachers and teaching assistants were constructed as allies. The teaching assistants the girls chose to construct in this way, were African Caribbean British or Asian. These assistants supported the individual girl's development of a sense of self as well as their goals and left a positive impression on the girls.

In circumstances where the relationships between the girls and their teachers deteriorated, the girls constructed their teachers, and some teaching assistants as adversaries. In their relationships with their teachers the particular challenges were identified as being where they, the girls tried to be of assistance in maintaining classroom order and this assistance was misconstrued as a challenge to their teacher's authority. To counter what they, the girls, saw as unwarranted discipline, some of the girls enacted resistance practices brought from their home context into school, "silence", "cut eye", "kiss teeth", are examples of their resistance practices. These practices of resistance are nuanced, difficult to detect and therefore difficult to sanction.

#### **7.4 In contexts of education, how do the girls' friendships impact upon their negotiations towards success**

The research findings suggest a complex picture. The school setting was a rather challenging environment for the girls. The girls had not only to negotiate a route to success for themselves, but they had to do this in the face of deteriorating relationships with their teachers and a climate of unfairness in the application of behaviour sanctions by lunchtime supervisors. The girls appeared to use their friendships to support their resistances to negative treatment from these sources. The girls' friendships while not ethnically exclusive, did feature race and gender matching in best friend choices. These friendships presented the girls with an opportunity to re-inscribe the stereotyped discourses about them and further offered the girls a knowing audience, in the face of micro aggressions. The girls were largely positive about their relationships with each other; this was not the case for their mothers. The girls' mothers were concerned that their daughters' friendships with other African Caribbean Black British girls could have negative impacts upon their daughters' quests for success.

Discipline and censure are consistent themes in the girls' final primary school year experiences. Sometimes the sanctions are regarded as unfair and unwarranted. At the times when the girls considered their treatment to be unfair it appears that they enacted practices of resistance such as kiss teeth, cut eye and silence these enactments were often issues under the knowing gaze of their friends. Thus for the girls in this study their African Caribbean Black British friends offered a culturally knowing audience.

In negotiating the raced nature of relationships within the larger school discourses of racism, the girls used an understanding of fairness and unfairness in the treatment of themselves and their friend to begin to unpick the challenges in the and encounters. The girls in this study showed some preference for friendships with children from their own racial/ ethnic grouping. These friendships appear to offer support, solidarity and a home place where in the girls can feel free to be themselves. However for the mothers, their fears for their daughters' success coalesce around their friendships and their burgeoning identities.

To assuage their fears somewhat the mothers took a number of approaches to managing their daughters' relations with friends. They did this by offering advice, sanctioning and disapproving of the African Caribbean girls who would not enhance their daughters' success.

**What do the girls' mothers do to; support their daughter quests for success, to mediate the identities of these African Caribbean Black British girls and how they prepare themselves to achieve success.**

Rather than being disengaged from the process of their daughters education, the mothers in this thesis were central to and affirming of their daughters abilities. This was particularly evident in their supervision and support of their daughters' homework. For some of the mothers this support meant; ensuring the development of good study skills, reading and checking and ensuring homework was completed to standards they had set. For other mothers this meant what might be regarded as non-engagement. Though some mothers did not supervise homework to the same extent as others they did seek to ensure that their daughters made the teacher was aware that their daughters were struggling and needed help. What this thesis has highlighted is that because homework is conducted away from school, the support the girls get from their mothers to ensure homework is completed is easy to overlook.

For some of the mothers assistance with school work extended to extra-curricular tuition. Sometimes this tuition took place in community settings whilst at others the support was bought and paid for and took place in settings such as explore learning. However what has been evidenced in this work is that the mothers in the desires for their daughters' success were not passive or disinterested. The mothers utilized the resources they had, including financial resources, in support of their daughter's education.

Some of the mothers in this study were fearful that the stereotypes attached to African Caribbean Black British girls, stereotypes which position these girls as loud and brash for example, would be attached to their daughters. To avoid such stereotyping the mothers socialized their daughters to be able to switch and role flex. Allowing them to learn when displays of their cultural heritage would be appropriate and when they would need to conduct themselves in keeping with their peers and contemporaries. In addition to monitoring their



daughters' friendships with other African Caribbean Black British girls, some of the mothers chose to voluntarily bus their daughters to schools where their daughters would be in the racial minority. The evidence from this thesis suggests issues of race and gender, particularly fears that their daughters would be captured by the gender stereotypes lay at the heart of the way these mothers approached the question of which secondary school to send their daughters to.

## **7.5 Limitations of the study**

Several limitations have to be taken into account when evaluating the claims made in this study. Most of these limitations arise from the constraints of a PhD project. Given limited resources in terms of time and researcher capacity, whilst the study was carried out in multiple settings the time necessary to understand the families and the context in which they live, can be argued as lacking. Moreover, the time spent in the field, the number of participants interviewed and instances observed were limited. This requires the acknowledgement of certain limitations in relation to the generalisability and transferability of the findings.

First of all, a question arises with regard to the extent to which the findings are transferrable to other geographical contexts. By limiting the study to Leicester the findings were inevitably influenced by the particular institutional circumstances as well as the socio-economic, cultural, and historical specificities of the locality and family composition of the participants. A further limitation to this study was the limited time available for conducting research in the field. A full immersion over a lengthy period of time, as it is advocated by some ethnographers. Whilst this was not an ethnographic study, I did borrow some techniques from ethnography.

The analysis had to be based on data gathered by selecting a cross-section of opportunities in the girls' lives. Consequently, this completed work cannot claim to have examined all possible nuances the girls' negotiations to success took. However, by carefully analyzing their words, their actions and their families at home and in community settings in order to secure a wide range of activities and views, the study can present an evidence-based picture of the girls their mothers their resistances their agency and the discourses guiding their

practices. My inability to engage schools in this research limited the scope of my findings that the study has to be seen as taking a snapshot of the girls' perceptions and their mothers concerns at a particular point in time. Seeing that discourse as undergoing constant change, it can be assumed that the form the discourse takes would be different at a later point in time.

Having no access to the girls in their school setting also meant that the research had a limited focus on the discourses of success that could be found outside of school. This also means that the discourses the girls were immersed in their lives inside school could not be investigated further. However by examining everyday discourse in families and other community settings I believe I have enriched the understanding of how the girls negotiated the school discourse. Assuming that discourses vary according to the context in which they are expressed, different ways of speaking about success might have been identified. Moreover, my presence as a researcher has probably influenced what was said in the setting to which I was given access. I tried to make this transparent by including many direct quotes and lay open my methodological and theoretical approach.

A further limitation of this study relates to the difficulties in understanding and accurately reproducing what was said. Due to the fact that the author herself African Caribbean Black British, though two or three generations older than the research participants it has to be assumed that not everything that was said in the settings to which I was allowed access was fully understood. Furthermore, there might have been some limitations regarding the interpretation of certain expressions used. In one instance there were difficulties with transcribing the group discussion fully, and despite my ardent efforts the exact wording of the discussion could not be fully reconstructed.

## **7.6 Theoretical and Methodological Approach**

Throughout this thesis, I engaged the theory of intersectionality. In my work intersectionality is a lens used to explore my data, it is a methodological stand point and it also informs the ethical position I brought to this work. The importance of the intersectional approach is demonstrated in this study. Intersectionality has allowed me to foreground and acknowledge the often negative ways in which African Caribbean Black British girls are positioned in British society. My use of Black feminism, agency,

resistance and discourse as theoretical constructs, has help this work to deal with the complexity of intersectionality. The theoretical ideas used in this study have allowed for the complexity eight African-Caribbean Black British girls lives to be explored. The exploration of tier lives has their complexity and heterogeneity intersects with their understanding of and negotiations towards success. By being involved in the lives of the girls in this study and allowing their perspectives to shape the research, the spaces shared provide unique insights into the underlying meaning of and challenges with success.

Further this study offers insight to the challenges and their sources of support in the face of institutional and systemic oppressive power relations. As a result of the time spent with these girls and their families I believe I have developed additional understandings of the ways in which the intersection of race and gender in their primary school experiences influences the approaches they take as they endeavour to use education as a tool for individual success. Contrary to earlier resistance theories that focused on the self-defeating oppositional anti-school behaviours (Willis 1977, Sewell 1997) there exists a wide range of resistance strategies, “some of which are subtle and silent” (Mirza 2006) and therefore often go unnoticed. Armed with a more nuanced conception of resistance, we can now understand that the negotiations towards success for these girls is self-conscious and strategic employment of subtle and therefore often invisible forms resistance.

I have argued that resistant responses are a useful tool for the conceptualization of the ways in which the educational system itself is responsible for the oppositional behaviours and self-defeating resistance of certain students. However, insofar as these theories remained focused on overt manifestations of resistance they failed to perceive, much less account for, the variety of subtle forms of resistance that I have described in this study. The girls in this study have been taught by their mothers that they are expected not only to have to work, but to work hard to support their future families. Therefore, despite an awareness of experiences in schools that many African Caribbean Black British pupils have endured historically, education is still valued for its role in the future economic stability of the family and as a means of resisting the subordinate position occupied by most African Caribbean Black British people in contemporary society.

Although this study included only African Caribbean girls, therefore, conclusions about the differential responses of male students are not possible. Although the small sample size of the study prevents generalization, this study supports previous research that identified the support of family as a critical factor in the educational success African Caribbean Black British children (Wright et al 2009, Mirza 1992, 2006). Furthermore, although the stories of these girls illustrated the complex influence of their relationships with members of school staff, the identification of positive relationships as encouraging purposeful orientations to academic achievement appears to be clear.

## **7.7 Contribution to Knowledge**

In relation to success there is little research that has theorised the relationships between education success race and gender. There is of course an increase in literature on girls in education. However this growth in literature has largely omitted the lives and experiences of African Caribbean Black British girls in education. As a result of the omission this study examined success within the cultural and social context of the lives of African-Caribbean Black British girls. This is where my original contribution to this area lays.

Since the 1990s there have been a number of studies on African Caribbean Black British young people and education. These have focused mainly on secondary school age pupils (Mirza 1992, Sewell 1997, Rollock 2007, Wright et al 2009, Vincent et al 2012). Notable exceptions have been Grant (1992), Connolly (2002) Wright (1993) and George (2007) whose research focused was on primary school age children. I embarked on this research because there was very few published studies concerning young African-Caribbean Black British girls and their experiences in the transition to secondary school.

My literature reviews, developed at the beginning of each empirical chapter, revealed that while research on gender identities and education is available, it is the particular experiences of African Caribbean Black British girls that have been neglected. I have drawn attention to the gaps in the literature by drawing attention to the gaps, I have been able to indicate how my own research builds on the existing studies.

## **7.8 Practice implications arising from this research**

In this section, I offer insight to the landscape for the practice implications arising from my research. I begin with a short discussion of the challenges for practice before moving the discussion forward to discuss the kinds of support that could be implemented by schools, mothers in their quests to support the success of African Caribbean Black British girls. The discussion concludes with insights to initiatives that could be of benefit to girls as they negotiate a route to success as they transition to secondary school.

## **7.9 The changing policy landscape**

Gutman & Ackerman (2008) Gutman & Schroom (2012) and Gutman Schroom & Abates (2011) suggest that for adolescents, educational expectations can be used as a predictor of their future attainment. Research to enquire whether this is the case for children in primary school is unfortunately not available. However recent policy initiatives, such as “Quality choice and aspiration” established by DfES (2009) a national initiative, saw universities send teachers to primary schools to 'raise aspirations of pupils. Similarly, the recently concluded Aiming Higher government initiative established in 2004, sought to enhance aspiration, felt to be missing, in Black and White working class children. Such initiatives whilst laudable do not appear to be secured in evidence of their abilities to achieve their staged aims nor do they reach sufficient numbers of their school age targets. Other initiatives such as “Unleashing Aspiration (DfBIS 2009) have similar aims. The outcomes of these kinds of initiatives, whilst sincere in their intentions have not led to the anticipated lasting benefits. It may well be because policy interventions aiming to raise aspirations are unable to cite clear evidence that there is a causal connection between attitudes and outcomes (Carter – Wall and Whitfield 2012, Cummings et al 2012). For the girls in my research it can be argued that their negotiations towards success are influenced by a number of competing factors, factors that it is doubtful can be addressed by a single time limited initiative.

As discussed in this research, success for the girls and their mothers is complex and influenced by home school and social environment. This research has illuminated the importance of social and cultural influences on girls and their families orientations towards success. It is my contention that the solutions to these challenges have also to address the home school and social environment. Thinking through how these factors interact at the level of structural processes of primary education or on families' decision-

making in terms of choosing secondary schools for example means devising interventions that take these issues into account to assure quality interaction with the system for diverse pupil populations. Given the evidence of sociocultural challenges, a new framework for taking the findings from this research would include organizational, structural, and educational interventions:

## **7.10 Schools**

Education initiatives should seek to raise girls' own understandings of the ways in which larger structural contexts may influence life outcomes. As Wright et al (2009) suggest, even the smallest insight into an understanding of structural inequality might assist those pupils who can only see their status as linked to their own and their parents' individual inadequacies. This is particularly important given my findings that, at primary school, African Caribbean Black British girls and their mothers access resources for supporting themselves. Thus I argue that it is because the girls and their mothers create their own possibilities that they need to have an accurate picture of resources and constraints available to them.

The complexity of the relationship between home and school in the girls' orientations towards success was tentatively demonstrated in my research. Initiatives that target both family and school simultaneously might be fruitful. In my research the girls' expressed the view that there had been an increase in the disciplinary measure to which they had been subjected across their final year at primary school. School-based initiatives would need to target issues of discipline and sanction. The key to successful interventions may lie in the school's ability to engage and involve the family before and after disciplinary action is dispensed. There is some encouraging evidence that such interventions have been tried (McDonald et al., 2012) but as Connelly, Sullivan and Jerrim, (2014) have argued, more rigorous evaluations would be needed before the efficacy of such interventions can be accounted for. I do though have some optimism in the willingness of British teachers to participate in initiatives designed to address expectations and influence behaviours in the school setting as similar approach is discussed by Cameron, (1998); Flecknoe, (2000). However, for such an approach to be effective, the initiative should try to work across the child's school and home worlds. The approach would be more effective if teachers awareness of and abilities to constructively challenge girls

resistance practices became part of their training regime. This twin approach would enable good home school relationships to be established and nurtured.

## **7.11 Mothers**

The parents of African Caribbean Black British school pupils are generally thought to be uninterested in their child's education this has been discussed by Bhopal and Chapman (2013). What this suggestion neglects is the seemingly common sense responses is an understanding of the ways in which mothers' own experiences education and employment influence how they help shape their child's academic future. Most often, mothers want the best for their daughters' futures, but because of their own social location, they may be unsure how to shape it themselves.

Studies consistently show that mothers are the primary source of educational support for their children. Yet, as I have suggested most mothers report that their support comes either from themselves or their immediate social circles of friends and family members. These resources are often inadequate because these networks of people may lack the types of information girls need. Initiatives that provide, education, and resources to mothers could not only help inform mothers about the possibilities of success for their daughters, but also connect them to people and resources they need to help their daughters plan for success

Unsurprisingly, some of the mothers in this study had a strong belief that education would shape their daughter's access to success in the future. Some of the mothers indicated they had difficulty supporting their daughters to complete assigned homework. Whilst simultaneously some mothers mistrusted teachers and school curriculum. This contradiction implies that an improvement in the communication between mothers and schools would be one way to help mothers better help their daughters. Schools may be able to engender more purposeful relationships with parents by offering programs that provide parents with practical resources, how to help your daughter with homework, for example

African Caribbean Black British mothers, in this study, often had to negotiate the disconnection between their unresolved dreams and current lives. The practical support that enables mothers to recognize and pursue their own interests can introduce them to new people and opportunities that they can share with their daughters. The African Caribbean Black British girls, in this research given the racialised and gendered barriers to success, are likely to grow up with limited exposure to educational and occupational

“success”. If mothers are their daughters’ primary source of information and support, then they must be assisted in helping their daughters’ prepare for success.

It can safely be argued that more opportunities are available to African Caribbean Black British girls today than ever before. However, these opportunities, such as they are, are increasingly becoming a personal responsibility. To assist African Caribbean Black British girls to negotiate a route to success we can start by shaping their critical consciousness. We might do this by acknowledging the unique gender barriers these girls face, creating a language for their experiences that helps them see the impact of the larger social structure on their individual lives, and teaching them to recognize and resist how racism operates in our society. For girls such as the ones in this study, the practice of support must integrate an understanding of their experiences and values, resources and barriers that include caring, family, community, and individualistic ambitions

## **7.12 Girls**

Qualitative studies with the girls as researchers, that consider African Caribbean Black British girls’ experiences should be undertaken so that we can learn about the meanings they attached to success, choices, and their futures. In the East Midlands, we know very little about African Caribbean Black British girls beyond basic education and health statistics. Qualitative studies may help us understand how African Caribbean Black British girls are meeting the challenges societal, economic, and cultural changes impacting upon impact them.

Finally, it might be useful to consider the timing of long term initiatives. The development stage girls are at aged eleven whilst not uniform is affected by their family systems. Sacker, Schoon and Bartley (2002) have shown that the effects of family disadvantage on a child’s potential for success in education are apparent from aged 7 and more so aged 11. Work initiatives that not only introduce girls at a young age, to people and opportunities outside of their social networks but also enable women from similar backgrounds to discuss gender and racial barriers would not only help them to resist structural inequalities but also support them to develop activities that change their social and economic outlook.

African Caribbean Black British girls, particularly those in primary schools have limited access to economic and social mobility possibilities. Thus I am arguing for a dual approach to programs of work that take girls out of their communities and are enacted within communities. These programs of work would seek to introduce the girls to cultural



and educational opportunities within their own community thereby exposing them to possibilities for exploring success in addition to those their families can provide. Providing African Caribbean Black British girls with such experiences also expands their opportunities. Mentoring and similar support work initiatives are popular. However, mentoring programs that match mentors ethnicity gender class background and experiences, mentors that have an understanding of the girls' backgrounds could be even more successful. Dialogue with girls that unravel the sexist, classist, and racist nature of these relationships could help them to understand systemic inequalities and violence against women.

## 8 Appendices

### 8.1 Letter inviting participation

Dear

I am writing to invite you to become part of an important research project. Deborah Sangster is currently a student at Goldsmiths University in London. Deborah is keen to investigate “**factors that support success amongst African Caribbean girls in transition**”.

The transition phase is the final year of primary school. This is a critical period in the lives of children and young people and is key to their success in secondary schooling. I am keen to interview girls in their transition year. The research will be conducted between September 2009 and August 2010. Your daughter, if you agree for her to participate, will be interviewed on 4 occasions over the course of the year. Additionally I will come and spend time in your home to see how the final year at primary school is treating you all. I may also want to interview you and other key person in your daughter’s life, to find out what you think leads to success.

I am aware that your daughter is in the correct age band and attends The Community After-school at Bradgate Fern Primary school. I will be contacting you shortly by phone to tell you more about the research and find invite you and your child to participate.

If you would like more detail about the research before you hear from me please ring or email me directly:-

Mob: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Email: cccccccccc

Landline: cccccccccc

Yours

## 8.2 Interview questions

### 8.2.1 Education, Schooling and teachers

- How would you describe your school? What is the best thing about your
- At school what makes you happy, what would you change if you could?
- What is your school like for girls / for Black girls?
- What are your teachers like?
- Who is your favourite teacher and why
- Who is your least favourite teacher and why
- What kind of support do you get from your teachers is it the kind of support you want, what could they do differently.
- What secondary school do you want to go to and why do you want to go to this school
- What does your mum/ wider family do to help with your education
- What is the approach to studying/school work in your household?
- What are your best subjects at school?
- What were your least favourite subjects at school?
- Are you involved in any sports or clubs after school clubs at school? What encouragement did / do you to participate extra activities, if any?
- What does success, being successful, mean to you?
- What kind of job do you want to do, why
- What could get in the way that might stop you getting the success you want for yourself?

## **8.2.2 Friends and Friendships**

- Who are your friends how did you meet them what are they like.
- What kinds of things do you do with your friends
- Do you have a best friend(s) what are they like, what made you choose them
- What is the best / least good thing about the friends you have?
- What do your parent(s) think about your friends? Who do they encourage you to hang about with?
- Do your parents set any limits on your friendships
- What does success mean to your friends, what school will they go to

## **8.2.3 Mothers**

- What was your time at primary school like
- How do you get on with your daughter school and the teacher's
- What is your daughter like at home,
- How is your daughter at school do you think
- What is your daughters greatest challenge
- What does success mean to you
- How did you choose the secondary school your daughter is to attend

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***“Until the lion tells his own story, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter***

***The lone and level sands stretch far away.***