



Measured Black Voices: *A mixed-method analysis of Black British Students' Ethnic Identity Development at a mid-ranked university in the UK.*

by

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Abstract

Measured Black Voices explores how university experiences shape the ethnic-racial identity development of Black British students by employing Jean S. Phinney's Ethnic Racial Identity framework (ERID). The study focuses on late adolescence British citizens who identify as *Black*, i.e. ancestrally African or Caribbean, and questions what stages of development are most prevalent, as well as which campus experiences most affect the development of student identity. Grounded in Critical Race Theory with Indigenous Research Principles (IRP) and following the Listening Rooms method, the study draws on 13 student's experiences to examine aspects of campus life that most affect identity formation, as defined by the students themselves (Heron & Parkin, 2019). A brief historical review first contextualises Black British *Ethnic-racial Identity*, followed by an assessment of student identity status using Phinney's framework (ERID) and the Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R; $n = 13$). With university experiences as indicators of corresponding stages of development, data shown this correlated with stronger identity development and demonstrated the stage of development students were at. University experiences include but are not limited to; participation in cultural groups, EDI events, staff student interactions, social media, and systematic challenges. Student MEIM-R scores indicated which of Phinney's ERID development stages they exhibited. The study concludes with university recommendations informed by student voices and professional insights via *Round Table Analysis* (RTA). I answer the major project Research Questions (RQs): ***What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students?*** and ***What aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture and religious affinity groups or workshops, EDI events etc.) most influence Black British students' ethnic-racial identity development?***

Introduction

Hello, my name is Brianah Carter. I am an American Black woman from Charlotte, North Carolina. Having graduated with both my undergraduate bachelor's degree, and my Master's degree from predominantly white institutions¹, I know first-hand the systemic injustice that can occur for Black students in academia. I am here, in the UK, pursuing my PhD, but also to improve the experiences of other Black students. Though I am American, the experiences of Black British students are extremely similar to my own; efforts to succeed in an inequitable system are a shared experience among Black British and Black American communities. Therefore, I hope to improve understanding of Black British students by using their experiences as markers of success, centring their counternarratives as key determinants of successful identity development. More broadly, I seek to improve understanding of how best to support Black British students; ideally increasing Black British interest in higher education, fostering future development, and informing more equitable university policies. Herein, this research contributes to the field by analysing past research and drawing on student data to provide feedback on university policies using a community-oriented approach. Further, I extend and support Phinney's work, enriching the field with new knowledge, and improve the experience of future Black British university students.

To first define the terms used within my research, *race* and *ethnicity* occupy a complex place in society; they are concepts that are ignored by many yet subconsciously embraced in everyday life. *Ethnicity*, the topic of the research at hand, is comprised of various ethnic behaviours, cultural practices and cultural memories. To be "ethnic" involves both community membership and engagement in these cultural practices. In addition, ethnicity is not static; it is everchanging, fluctuating and shifting over time in response to social shifts (Ford & Harawa, 2010; Song, 2003; Suyemoto et al., 2020; Van Dijck, 2004).

Race, in comparison, refers to evident physical attributes meant to compartmentalise humanity, and has historically been used to reinforce social hierarchy (Ford & Harawa, 2010; Knapman, 2016). In a world where quality of life is often predetermined by the colour of one's skin, melanin becomes both judge and jury; one's fate is shaped by racial categorisation from birth (Moan et al., 2011). Researchers have called race a system of meaning wherein the world is categorised and "meaningfully classified," (Hall, 2017, p. 31; Suyemoto et al., 2020).

Ethnic Identity (EI) is therefore dependent on the strength of the attachment a person has to ethnicity-specific or culture-specific practices; on the salience of their ethnicity (Cheon et al., 2018; Douglass et al., 2015; Song, 2003). In comparison, *racial identity* begins with an automatic categorisation based on physical presentation, regardless of whether the person being categorised has an established cultural connection to the race in question. Further, for adolescents, ethnic and racial identity play a pivotal role in self-conception (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010).

Black British is a fluid term that encompasses people of African or Caribbean ancestry. Some sources say the term "Black British" arose after WW2 in response to increased Caribbean populations migration to the UK (Adegbite, 2023; Gilroy, 2013; Hall, 1991; Robinson, 2025). Further, research suggests that much of Black British history and culture is rooted in Afro-Caribbean migration, including the famed Windrush generation (Hunter, 2025; Phillips et al., 1998; Robinson, 2025). Comparatively, African populations were also on the rise becoming the largest Black ethnic group in the UK by 2011 (Adegbite,

¹ Commonly referred too as 'PWI' in American research, some of which referenced here. See Glossary, 'PWI'.

2023; Jivraj & Simpson, 2015). Markers of Black British groups include practice or traditions inherited from African or Caribbean backgrounds, parents that arrived with the Windrush generation, or speaking an additional heritage language or dialect (James & McKay, 2000; Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 2025). Therefore, in my research, I consider *Black British* a term that encompasses both *ethnicity* and *race*, and captures a vast ethnically diverse group, illustrating an amalgamation of values, practices, beliefs, and traditions, built upon inherited culture from previous generations (Hall, 1991; Gilroy, 2013).

Here, it's important to note, ethnic minority groups are also often categorised by society based on race *and* ethnicity simultaneously, whether distinct ethnicity-specific practices are present or not (Cornell & Hartmann, 1995; Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; Gilroy, 2013; Song, 2003). This means, it is possible for a Black British person to identify as Black and/or African, per social categorisation, and Yoruba² as their ethnicity with both identifications carrying accompanying social stigmas, experiences, stereotypes, and expectations. Society would likely categorise their ethnicity and race as *Black*. The key difference between the two being that members of an ethnic group can sometimes change the boundaries of their ethnic group membership, i.e. choosing their level of cultural connection with the ethnicity, whereas race is socially defined. For example, a member of the Romani community may choose not to take part in any cultural events/practices but is still categorised as Romani socially, even though they have little cultural connection (Ford & Harawa, 2010; Garcia, 2020; Song, 2003). However, since wider society diminishes and essentialises ethnic group members, these group members are limited in their assertion of their respective identities. Therefore, while they can blur the borders of ethnic group membership, members of many British ethnic groups are still subject to “racial assignment,” or being racially categorised opposite the dominant white group; in this case, the White English majority (Cornell & Hartmann, 1995; Cornell & Hartmann 2007; Ford & Harawa, 2010; Garcia, 2020; Song, 2003; Suyemoto et al., 2020).

That said, though this does conflate *race* and *ethnicity*, there is an analytical benefit. By doing so, I invite a deeper reflection on the complexities of the lived experiences of the students studied. I investigate how student ethnic identity is impacted by systems of higher education as well as societal and environmental expectations. Further, in highlighting the fluid boundary between *race* and *ethnicity*, I invite intersectional exploration. In addition, I specifically consider how Black British students experience the various aspects of society including other forms of marginalisation such as religion, gender, or language.

To best make this consideration, I utilise Jean S. Phinney's Ethnic-Racial Identity Development Framework (ERID)³. Elaborated further in the *Theoretical Framework* chapter, Phinney's ERID framework conceptualises ethnic-racial identity as a dynamic, developmental process shaped by meaning making, exploration of cultural expression, and social interaction. Phinney proposed that identity formation occurs in identifiable stages. Beginning with a *Diffusion* stage, where ethnicity is passively accepted, this is followed by a *Moratorium* stage, a period of exploration and critical experiences, and then concludes with a *Commitment* stage. Importantly, *Commitment* consists of two possible outcomes, two sub-stages: an *Achieved* identity or a *Foreclosed* identity. *Achieved* identities develop when one's ethnicity is most internally meaningful, self-endorsed and central to who they are after having explored their values and beliefs. *Foreclosed* identities develop when little to no exploration takes place with values or beliefs likely being adopted from authority or familial figures

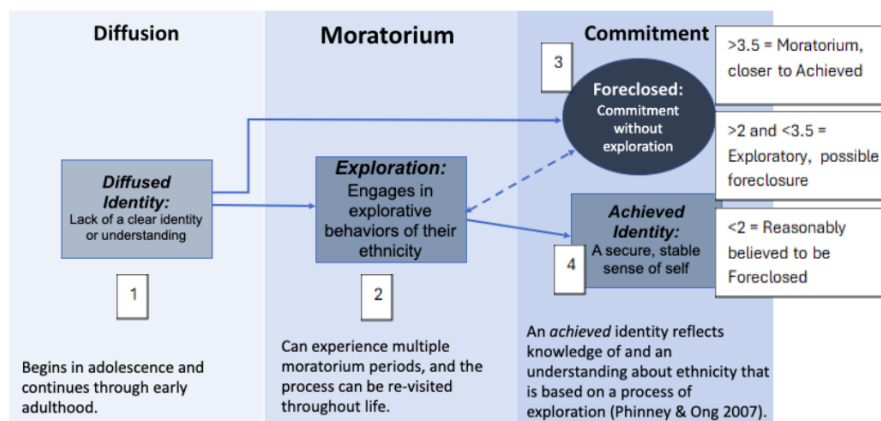
² Yoruba is one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria spanning a large portion of Southwestern Africa and over 20 million people. The Yoruba people share a common language and shared culture but have been divided politically throughout history (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica & Galinski, 1998).

³ See Figure 1.

without question. Movement through these stages is neither strictly linear, nor uniform. Individuals may revisit elements of earlier stages in response to new social contexts or stimuli. Without exploration, *Foreclosed* identities are more likely.

Central to the framework is the idea that exploration occurs in stages through participation, reflection and engagement with one's ethnic group thereby contributing to stronger identity saliency and improved psychological well-being. This means that if one is found to have developed a *Foreclosed* identity, it is possible for exploratory behaviours to later encourage an *Achieved* identity. One's ability to make this shift via exploration is depicted in Figure 1 by a dotted line between the *Moratorium* stage and the *Foreclosed* sub-stage. Here, ERID provides a developmental lens to examine Black British university experiences in identifiable stages, as well as enabling analysis of institutional affordances, social interactions to better understand how said affordances facilitate or constrain progression (Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1996b; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney, Horenczyk, et al., 2001; Phinney & Ong, 2002; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Figure 1: Phinney's ERID Framework w/ corresponding level of development.



Seeing Phinney's development framework from a critical race perspective, I seek to add insight not only to understandings of ethnic identity, but also to considerations for the development of Black British university student identities. Explicitly, I question what stage and/or sub-stage of Phinney's ERID model is most common among this sample of Black British students at a mid-ranked university in the UK, whether university affordances carry enough influence to affect the development of Black British students' ethnic identities, and if so to what extent. In short, by categorising Black British students according to stage of development using Phinney's model, I hope to add nuance and insight to a wider field of understanding. Therefore, I ask the following project Research Questions (RQ):

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for a sample of Black British students?*

- How do students define their identity?
- What experiences in university do students feel have the most influence over their development?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *What aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture, religious,*

or affinity groups or workshops, EDI events) most influence Black British students' ethnic racial identity development?

- a. Based on student opinion, would the students consider university affordances successful?
- b. Do students from different ethnic backgrounds respond differently to Black-intended activities or affordances?
- c. Do certain university affordances achieve the University's desired effect?

The major questions of the study, bolded above (RQs 1 and 2), first consider primarily what stage is most common for a sample of Black British students and then, per student opinion, whether or not a specific university affordance is successful for this sample. Sub-questions, such as RQ1a and RQ2a, seek additional contextual support for the answers to the major Research Questions of the study. For example, RQ1 asks what stage is most prevalent, and RQ1a examines what definitions of identity students held at the outset, validating the stage of development they are at and creating a standard for comparison. As this is a longitudinal study, sub questions confirm whether their definitions of identity remained the same throughout the study. In turn, I present data illustrating predominant stages of development with counternarrative data demonstrating which student experiences most impact said stage/sub-stage. Consider RQ1b and RQ2b, wherein the specific university experiences that students feel have the most influence on their development are scrutinised. First, I examine experiences in relation to the student's stages of development (RQ1) and then in relation to their ethnic membership (RQ2). Sub-questions are unpacked in further detail in the *Methodology* chapter.

Centring Black British voices, I utilised the Listening Rooms (LR) method created by Helen Parkin and Emma Heron. The Listening Rooms are a qualitative approach designed to draw rich data from structured yet conversational engagement. A "Listening Room" is a facilitated window-less, sound-proof space in which Black British students were invited to reflect collectively on their experiences. Sessions were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed. LRs prioritised safety, reciprocity and reflexivity. Participants were recruited using targeted outreach and the LRs were conducted either in-person or online, depending on availability. Each LR followed a structured format, beginning with an opening *Briefing Session* (Q&A and consent forms) and an open-ended discussion guided by prompts linked to significant themes in the research field (Research Themes; RTs). This allowed participants to shape the direction of the discussion organically. In this way, the emphasis was placed on collective critical reflection. Explained further in *The Listening Rooms Method* chapter, the methodology provided both depth and nuance, allowing participant's lived counternarratives to contextualise and enrich the quantitative findings.

Notably, because we cannot tell *why* students rated themselves in certain ways on the MEIM-R directly, I used the LR data to understand students' reasoning for their ratings. Thematic analysis of the recorded Listening Rooms discussions was conducted to analyse LR conversations, in tandem with the MEIM-R scores, for trends in development. In doing so, I sought to determine which of the aforementioned project Research Themes (RTs) were most prevalent in the identity development process, as determined by the LR conversations and participant MEIM-R scores. My research focuses on university as a time of increased development for older adolescents as supported by Phinney's ERID framework. This approach records data that indicates ethnic identity develops positively or negatively via experience and examines it through a CRT-oriented lens. University affordances, discussed in participant Listening Rooms (LRs), are then used as markers of development among students. These tandem hypotheses serve as the foundation of my research. In this, *ethnic identity* can

develop constructively in the event of exploratory experiences (Cheon et al., 2018; Garcia, 2020; Phinney, 1988). Simultaneously, according to CRT, those experiences may be absent from the university activities of the students sampled. Notably, CRT does not make assumptions regarding the positivity of an experience, whereas Phinney's work assumes there are positive experiences occurring and/or available to students. While not opposing theories, Phinney operates under different assumptions of the work than CRT. CRT provides a more nuanced take by viewing Phinney's work using CRT with IRP. As such, I seek to integrate the differing theories, merging them into one CRT-Phinney-influenced lens.

My research utilises the *Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised*, (MEIM-R), an ethnicity scale designed by Phinney, to quantify participating students' development; thereby also quantifying the stage and/or sub-stage at which their identity stands on Phinney's ERID model. Building on Phinney's past findings, I connect participant MEIM-R scores with stages of development on the ERID model (Bernell et al., 1993; Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1997; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Pairing the quantitative MEIM-R scores with the qualitative Listening Rooms data, and analysing both in tandem, I contribute an understanding of the behaviours, experiences, and university affordances that would most encourage specific types of development. Specifically, because we do not know the reason why students rated themselves certain ways on the MEIM-R, the Listening Room data was used to understand students' thinking.

Thematic analysis of the recorded Listening Rooms discussions was conducted to assess LR conversations for trends in development. In doing so, I sought to determine which of the aforementioned project Research Themes (RTs) were most prevalent in the identity development process, as determined by the LR conversations and participant MEIM-R. Using the LR data, I attributed specific student behaviours to corresponding stages on the ERID model. In short, the MEIM-R provides a snapshot that characterised the larger population of the study, and oriented the participants on the ERID model, while the Listening Rooms data provided nuance to the larger population's MEIM-R results. Ideally, the results will provide the field with the necessary information to cater to individual Black British communities and best support underserved students.

My research is backed by Critical Race Theory with Indigenous Research Principles (Caldwell & Crenshaw, 1996; Cantres, 2018; Carr-Wiggin, 2023; Hiraldo, 2010). Based on CRT and my accompanying literature review, I assume that Black students will encounter some form of prejudice in British higher education and that students enter higher education expecting such prejudice (Cabrera, 2018; Cantres, 2018; Cena et al., 2021; Foste, 2021; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017; Osbourne et al., 2022). While 32% of all British peoples do think that the UK is racist, when narrowing the study, 54% of young people aged 18-24 feel racism is still very prevalent (Ipsos Economist Survey, 2020; *Black British Voices: The Findings*, 2023). With this discrepancy in mind, this study uses CRT to further centre the view of students by validating their viewpoints as real and endemic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Hiraldo, 2010; Ipsos Economist Survey, 2020; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021). Each of the tenets of CRT will be elaborated on further but considering this connection, within this study, it's also assumed that all Black students are expected to assimilate into larger British (white) society; even to the student's detriment (Andrews, 2018; Cabrera, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013).

Usage of Indigenous Research Principles (IRP) was purposeful to ensure that the productivity and well-being of the Black British community being studied was upheld throughout the study (Williams & Shipley, 2023; *NC Tribal Communities | NC DOA*, n.d.; Pidgeon & Riley, 2021; Quinn, 2022). To be elaborated on further, citing my own background, I spent most of my childhood in close proximity to indigenous reservations and communities. While not a member of a specific indigenous community, I observed the

inequities that indigenous communities fought against, as well as the reverence many populations had for their culture. Therefore, by pairing the tenets of CRT with community-oriented IRP, this research benefits the community group that I sought to understand; attempts to decrease bias and recognises the influence of Western society on the knowledge created. In this way, I hoped to show the same reverence for my community.

Keeping this in mind, I use specific terms, while avoiding other common UK terminologies⁴. For example, the use of terms *Black* and “black.” Much of the modern-day British, African and/or Caribbean-ancestral populations refer to themselves as “black” (Blakely, 2021; BBC, n.d.). In terms of this research, it is important to note *Black*, with a capital B, is a reference to Blackness as a race, ethnicity, and a culture; just as *White*, with a capital W, is to refer to Whiteness. Comparatively, the usage of “black” and “white,” lowercase, are merely adjectives describing colour, and not a written representation of the ethnicities and races under discussion⁵. Where *Black* is used herein refers to the race, ethnicity, cultural and racialised experiences of the students sampled.

Further, though I do blend *race* and *ethnicity*, I intend to use the shared racialised experiences of students and their specific ethnic identities to better understand what university affordances best support Black British students and therefore do not need to employ the usage of over-arching terms. Highlighting university as my location of study, universities often group students based on broad racial labels i.e. “BAME;” commingling *race* and *ethnicity*. In fact, much of the European historical research, and UK-specific identity models referenced use the terms BAME and/or BME; this research will not do so (Abraham, 2020; Bunglawala, 2019; Macaulay, 2020).

In addition, a glossary of student expressions has been provided; refer to the Glossary⁶. In recognition of rapidly shifting pop culture, online trends, and fast-paced campus life, a glossary is provided to decode more recent pop culture terms that may be unknown to readers. In this way, I hope to promote clearer communication without requiring that students adjust their way of speaking to be understood. This approach respects and captures how informal language, slang, plays a large role in peer-to-peer communication, and the vibrancy of student life (Heller, 1989). Importantly, research has found that higher education needs to reconcile with bi-dialectal students, meaning students who are multilingual and/or “linguistic minority” students i.e. those who speak in a vernacular code that emerged from working class communities (Heller, 1989; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Preece, 2014; Weale, 2020). Further, it cannot be ignored that language is an aspect of culture; all language or vernaculars are in this way a part of Morning University culture (Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001). Therefore, the inclusion of a glossary is a recognition that the students within this study hail largely from urban London, come from working class backgrounds, and/or may use a style of speaking that while not common in higher education should be respected.

Centred around CRT with IRP, this research *expects* that Morning university has failed its Black students to a degree because universities *systematically* fail Black British students (Hensby et al., 2024; Gilroy, 2013; Jivraj & Simpson, 2015; Mohdin, 2024; Samuolis et al., 2001; Topham & Moller, 2010). English inequity has persevered for centuries leaving Black students, as with many marginalised ethnic populations, to grapple with being labelled as “other,” (Celaire, 2019; Jivraj & Simpson, 2015; Omer, 2020; Song, 2003).

⁴ BAME is a term used very commonly in the UK to describe Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups (BBC, n.d.). BME is also commonly used to refer to Black, and Minority Ethnic groups (BBC, n.d.).

⁵ Much of the European historical research, and UK specific identity models referenced herein employ usage of the terms *BAME* and/or *BME*.

⁶ Common Black British English terms (BBE) and phrases used within the research by the student participants are presented here to facilitate understanding and name experiences that may not have been as clearly defined by the students in their narratives.

However, to truly understand the UK's unique Black British experience, and the fight students are undertaking, one must see where it began. Therefore, I include a brief historical review in Chapter 2, beginning with early British society questioning who was worthy of the "human" label (Adhikari, 1992; Hall, 2017; Pearson & Richardson, 2019). I then move through history, examining who deserved to enjoy the spoils of human existence: freedom, food, the ability to survive, the right to exist, the right to thrive? Over time, I examined how this question evolved into 'who deserved it more?'. Through analysis of major world wars, I probed into definitions of *Black* people noting that historically rights couldn't be afforded to *Black* people without sacrificing the comfort of *White* people that relied on their malleability and servitude (Curry, 2017; Killingray, 1978; Luse, 2007; Njung, 2019; Ward, 1978). Finally, I bring the discussion forward to recent years. With White comfort being "sacrificed," society seems to have never stopped questioning; why are they deserving of equity? I define today's *Black British* identity in modern social context. One could argue that today's efforts are the same battle being fought again and again; the same question in different forms; the same diagnosis with hopes of a different cure. For this reason, the work at hand first acknowledges English history before critically analysing the counternarratives of student participants and providing recommendations; all in the hope that greater understanding is achieved.

In short, here in Chapter 1, I have briefly outlined the research taking place, frameworks, and methodology. Chapter 2 is the **Literature Review**, which focuses on the aforementioned historical review as well as a review of adjacent research, establishing the major project Research Themes⁷ (RT) based on trends in the field. Chapter 3 is the **Theoretical Framework** chapter wherein I define the backbone of this research and justify CRT and IRP's necessity, as well as the validity of Phinney's framework. In addition, I include a reflective explanation of why I chose CRT with IRP over other similarly relevant frameworks. In chapter 4, the **Methodology** is examined, establishing the Listening Rooms (LRs) method as a well-suited process for Black British students, and a fitting display of my chosen framework. Here, I consider the conceptual framing of the LR method and the necessity of considering both the LR method and the MEIM-R together, in tandem. Chapter 5 discusses the **Results** of the Listening Rooms (LRs), and the MEIM-R. The LR and MEIM-R data are analysed together to give full scope of a student's ethnic identity development. Then in Chapter 7, in the **Discussion** chapter, I discuss the implications of the research and make recommendations based on the findings. I close the project in chapter 8, the **Conclusion**, by applying research to practice, and adapting the methodology, I hold a *Round Table Analysis (RTA)*, discussing this research's findings and recommendations with university staff before ending with my final thoughts.

In sum, this project, titled to participants as **the Black Identities Project**, first explored which stages/sub-stages of ethnic identity development are most prevalent for students, then explored the ways in which university affordances affect the development of the students' ethnic identities. This research seeks to confirm whether university affordances can carry significant influence over the development of Black British students' ethnic identities or foster experiences that encourage positive movement through Phinney's developmental stages. By situating this examination within a broader social context, I underline inequities present in class, gender, and institutional structure.

This research aimed to contribute insight into the experiences that most influence the development of Black British students. To do so, this research used a qualitative Listening Rooms method to centre Black student voices. This research draws upon Critical Race Theory (CRT) with Indigenous Research Principles (IRP) to show reverence to the

⁷ Research Themes (RT): Major themes of the field; selected based on their prevalence and significance in the existing body of work in the research field (See Table 1).

community being researched and capture student experiences of the society in which development takes place. Notably, Phinney's work, and the Listening Rooms method have been applied by other universities (Johnson, 2010; Gaines et al., 2010; Habibi et al., 2021; Jacobi et al., 2022; Mills & Murray, 2017; SEDA et al., 2022). At the time of this research, I could find no other instance of the Listening Rooms method, the MEIM-R, or Phinney's ERID model being applied in the same manner. Herein, my research ideally sheds new light on the understanding of the ethnic-racial identity of Black British students in university, creating new knowledge not yet seen in Black scholarship in the UK, furthering the field.

As a result, the project contributes by analysing past research findings and providing guidance on potential student feedback-based university policy changes. Ideally, my research has further enriched the research area discussed herein, and validated Phinney's findings, improving, even marginally, the experience of Black British students at Morning University and, potentially, beyond.

Literature Review

To begin to answer the major Research Questions, RQ1 and RQ2, *what stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students*, and *what aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture, religious, affinity groups or workshops, EDI events) most influence Black British students' ethnic racial identity development*, a review of the history of Black British people in the UK helps shed light on the societal landscape that shaped the *Black British* ethnic identity. The below literature highlights major historical periods, and prominent identity development research that influences the field. Afterwards, Black British identity is elaborated on with respect to relevant literature, fully recognising the societal context Black British identities are formed in. I situate Phinney's ethnicity work among the larger research field, before delving further into Phinney's framework, past and present research. The chapter closes with a definition of *today's* Black British identity, the ethnic identity common among the Black British students within this research.

Considering the history discussed below, I use the historical and overall field review to demonstrate this research's major Research Themes (RT)⁸. As illustrations of the research field, and of the literature review discussed herein *Belonging*, *Socialisation*, *Self-Identification*, *Well-Being*, *Journey*, and *Reflection* were selected based on their pervasiveness and significance in the existing body of research. See Table 1.

Table 1: Research Themes of the Project (RTs).

Research Themes:	Selected based on their prevalence and significance in the existing body of work in the research field.
Self-Identification	defining oneself as a member of an ethnic group and/or displaying common attributes shared by an ethnic group (Bernal & Knight, 1993).
Belonging	the level of cohesion one feels with membership in an ethnic group or community (Bernal & Knight, 1993).
Socialisation	the act of intermingling with peers in a casual, academic, or professional sense (Bernal & Knight, 1993).
Well-Being	the route and fluctuating state of being happy, healthy, and comfortable (Bernell et al., 1993).
Journey	figurative, the passage of life (Oxford University, 2022).
Reflection	The process or faculty by which the mind observes and examines its own experiences and emotions; intelligent self-awareness, introspection (Oxford University, 2022).

In this way, RTs are considerations that academics seeking to understand must account for, as well as benchmarks for understanding the development of ethnic identity as related to the *Black British* experience in the UK.

Self-Identification represents how Black populations identified themselves throughout history, reconciled with what non-Black populations identified them as. *Socialisation* is shown through how Black populations interacted with larger society in relation to their identity development contrasted with the ways in which they interacted with community

⁸ Research Themes (RT): See glossary, see Table 1.

members. *Well-Being* is displayed when discussing the physical and mental violence perpetrated against Black people for simply being Black, as well as in discussing how Black British students exhibit self-care. *Journey* and *Reflection* is best shown when reviewing recent research theories and frameworks to better understand the development of Black British identities, paired with counternarrative reflection of the study participants. Last, *Belonging*, is interwoven throughout the literature review, notably in instances wherein Black British people sought belonging as part of their development, such when Black British soldiers enlisted to align themselves closer with the crown during WWI.

The below history is reviewed with the understanding that the modern Black student experience, and the UK student experience overlap via cultural memory (Ledwidge, 2023). I refer throughout the review to “the” Black British ethnic identity or experience. This is not to ignore the variety of ancestral ethnicities sampled within this study or represented by the Black British diaspora, but instead to recognise the kinships and shared knowledges by people who are racialised as black in this country. Herein, cultural memory serves as the link between the past and the present; it’s the common knowledge of social conventions that any one ethnicity can share (Ajay, 2005; Brooks et al., 2015; Moore & Johnson, 2004; Moore, 2010; Ledwidge, 2023; Song, 2003; Van Dijck, 2004). For example, for African Americans, cultural memory often includes societal norms to help black Americans navigate society easier, such as not wearing a hooded sweatshirt in certain places or always addressing law enforcement officers with ‘sir’ or ‘ma’am.’ They are society-specific “rules” or expectations created from experience and perpetuated by members of the group, often in response to the dominant group in society; in this case, White English (Laniyonu, 2021; Marchant, 2020; Song, 2003; Van Dijck, 2004). Similar to Black British, Black Americans also carry on traditions, practices, beliefs, etc. through generations. Therefore, “the” Black British identity is a term used to be reflective of the lived experiences of Black, ancestrally African people in the UK (Advance HE & University of Sheffield, 2021; Cheon et al., 2018; Lloyd, 2017; Matiluko, 2020).

Moreover, certain indigenous principles also note that part of the identity development process includes a “re-learning” of one’s history, culture, and values (Snow et al., 2015; Williams & Shipley, 2023). Within numerous ethnic populations, economic and social mobility is thought to be achieved through retaining their cultural and community ties or rather maintaining a strong cultural memory (Cheon et al., 2018; Foner, 1977; Ledwidge 2023; Song 2003). For Black, or ancestrally African, groups seeking upward social mobility, they are influenced by the lived experiences of other group members and immortalised via cultural memory (Ledwidge, 2023). Therefore, recognising that history shapes society means acknowledging ethnic identity as being influenced by what one knows of their culture or ethnicity’s history; whether taught or via cultural memory (Cheon et al., 2018; Ledwidge, 2023; Snow et al., 2015; Van Dijck, 2004). Therefore, the literature review below focuses on what societal influences are at play when conceptualising Black, African, or Caribbean identities; always remembering that British history, Black history, and the cultural memory created from such history are “intertwined and interpenetrated,” and carried on from generation to generation (Hall, 2017; Song, 2003; Van Dijck, 2004, p. 261). The below is not a history of Black people in Britain because in truth, black history and British history are one in the same. The below is British history.

Sons of Ham

The biblical term, *Sons of Ham*⁹ serves as a hallmark, a written illustration of the experience of Black British people. It was a term originally used to frame them as “other,” “different,” “worthy of scorn;” and stems from a historical narrative older than Britain itself (Adhikari, 1992, pp. 95-112; Bourne, 2014; Eltis & Engerman, 2000; Olusoga, 2018).

Science has shown that life began in Africa, and the earliest presence of black people visiting Britain predate the country, circa 210 AD. Research states the first group of black Africans were brought to British land in 1555 to act as English interpreters for traders (Fryer, 1984; Historic England, 2016; Pearson & Richardson, 2019; Olusoga, 2018; Spelthorne Borough Council, 2023). These black people did not actually know English and were first taught the language and then set to work (Olusoga, 2018; Spelthorne Borough Council, 2023). Prior to 1555, more recent discoveries such as the *Ivory Bangle Lady*, circa 208-211 AD, and the work of poet William Dunbar point to not only the presence of black people, but the mixing of black and white in a possibly gentile bloodline (Hall, 2017; Leach et al., 2010; Olusoga, 2018; Spelthorne Borough Council, 2023). In addition to the presence of black people in Scotland as early as 1504, black people were also documented in Britain in the earlier 1500’s; most notably a black man lived in London supporting himself as a musician for Henry VII, documented in 1507 (Fryer, 1984; Spelthorne Borough Council, 2023). After monetising the presence of Black British citizens, Britain later played a key role in the slave trade, and even later, a thriving Black British population in the descendants of these monotonised slave labourers (Eltis & Engerman, 2000; Fryer, 1984; Historic England, 2016; Luse, 2007).

It was the arrival of five black people, slaves who were “borrowed” as purchasing of slaves had not begun yet, that fostered a new goal: capitalise on the abundance of resources Africa held (Fryer, 1984; Olusoga, 2018). Not only Africa, but the Caribbean as well, with Barbados later becoming one of the most lucrative arenas for Britain’s chattel slavery industry (Kwoba et al., 2018; Jernegan, 1916). Some researchers state it was the interest of breaking the Portuguese monopoly on gold, ivory, and pepper that fuelled the British’s interest in the slave trade (Eltis & Engerman, 2000; Fryer, 1984; Historic England, 2016). Though Portuguese monopoly is popularised as the main cause of Britain’s interest in the slave trade; more recent research has highlighted British colonialism as the true cause of the onslaught of British control over Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia (Eltis & Engerman, 2000; Hall, 2017; Go, 2014). Further, research also suggests that it was Europe’s encounter with differences, meeting people and cultures different than their own, that fostered Britain’s colonial ideals (Eltis & Engerman, 2000; Hall, 2017; Lambert & British Library, 2017). It’s also suggested that British colonialism grew in response to perceived needs of the British economy, i.e. capital. There was capital in new expansions; new expansions meant new opportunities; new opportunities produced new resources for trade. More trade equalled more capital. (Go, 2014; Eltis & Engerman, 2000; Historic England, 2016).

*“Were this country to agree that [the slave trade] shall be abolished, it would deprive us of the benefit of fitting out annually, a great number of Ships, to a very great detriment to our manufacturers, and terminate in the **ruin of our British Settlements in the West Indies.**”*

⁹ Sons of Ham (n): a term used against black Africans, meaning “cursed,” or possibly “blackened” by their sins. Used on occasion during Middle Ages, but usage became more common with the 18th and 19th century slave trade (Adhikari, 1992). See Glossary.

- The Committee of Merchants Trading to Africa, United Kingdom, House of Lords, 1789, as cited in Eltis & Engerman, 2000, p. 123.

Britain's Burden or *The White Man's Burden* is the idea that it was the duty of the European empire, or in other cases the duty of White men, to change the world and “help” civilisations deemed less civilised (Akala, 2018; Kipling & George Mason University, n.d.; Lambert & British Library, 2017.). The “burden” that Britain faced, to educate and globalise the world, was one placed on its own proverbial back because, if not Britain's job, then whose? (Akala, 2018, pp. 115-118; Cummings, 1989; Lambert & British Library, 2017). Later historians suggested it was containment that led to the rise of Britain's “burden,” as a conceptual justification for imperial expansion (Go, 2014, pp. 73-76; Wiecek, 1977, pp. 15-20). Containment or security, illustrated as expansion of the British empire, was for the protection of *English* integrity, indicating other nations would not know of English supremacy unless taught or experienced first hand (Go, 2014). In other words, *English* integrity could only be preserved if the world saw its usefulness and saw the necessity of the English empire as a global leader (Go, 2014; Moore, 2010). British colonialism, the “burden” of the *White* man, encouraged the growth of slavery, for the institution of slavery served a greater goal: the empire (Go, 2014, pp. 73-76; Historic England, 2016).

Although there is little documentation of black people being bought and sold in Britain until 1621, by the end of the 16th century, it had become commonplace for affluent families and the gentry to own at least one or two household slaves (Fryer, 1984; Olusoga, 2018). As the number of black people in Britain rose, by the 1650's, slave ownership had moved from a status symbol of English noblemen to a common fixture in the average British household (Fryer, 1984). By the 1660's, demand for slave labour increased, and English involvement in the slave trade intensified with royal backing (Historic England, 2016; Olusoga, 2018). Cash crops like tea, coffee, and sugar compounded the need for slave labour (Historic England, 2016; Pearson & Richardson, 2019). Come 1698, London was situated as the centre of the British slave trade, and cash crops called for more and more slave labour. Over time Britain would grow to become one of the largest transporters of slave labour, responsible for about 40% of the slaves transported during the slave trade's operation (Go, 2014; Pearson & Richardson, 2019).

As a pivotal portion of the UK economy and its cultural presence, acknowledging tea is a must to understand why its popularity, as well as sugar and coffee, increased slave interest (Chrystal, 2014). Tea, coffee, and chocolate, are all food items on a long list of what the UK is known for; at least, that is the narrative taught to those outside of the UK (Chrystal, 2014; Fryer, 1984). What makes a good cup of tea? Well, that depends on who you ask, but above all, many would request sugar (Chrystal, 2014; Orwell, 1970). Sugar cane relies on warm, moist climates to thrive, while the UK has the temperate moisture needed, sugar cane was most plentiful in the Caribbean, and it is there that British sailors headed in 1680, intent on bartering for slaves to grow sugar cane (Fryer, 1984; Lambert, 2017; Olusoga, 2018).

It was considered far better to have a slave grow and prepare the sugar cane for consumption because the process of turning sugar cane into sugar was painful and dangerous (Ward, 1978). Plantation owners in the Caribbean, like John Pinney who owned between 170 and 210 slaves in the Caribbean Island of Nevis, produced rum and sugar for much of England (Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, n.d.; Lambert & British Library, 2017). Pinney's plantation manufactured upwards of 30,000 kg of sugar that was shipped back to London or Bristol and sold (Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, n.d.). Sugar cane also fatigued the land (Ward, 1978). Slave labour meant not having to expose English citizens to the pain of dripping, scalding hot sugar syrup while enjoying the spoils of that labour, with no wages or exhausted English soil necessary (Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, n.d.; Ward, 1978). To

solidify this belief, that the sweet reward of sugar was not for slaves; teeth were pulled out, faces were struck, and lashes were thrown against black bodies all to ensure a slave would not risk even the smallest taste (Olusoga, 2018; Ward, 1978). Sugarcane ensured that Caribbean planters remained extremely wealthy, and Caribbean islands persisted as some of the most lucrative land that planters could own; slaves being included with the land (Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, n.d.; Lambert, 2017). Of the millions of slaves taken from Africa, 2.3 million were sent to the British Caribbean (Lambert, 2017). European nations clashed over ownership of these islands, with places like Martinique being passed back and forth between Britain and France through the 19th century (Lambert, 2017). Rudyard Kipling's poem, "*The White Man's Burden*," summed up well Britain's mission in the Caribbean:

*"Take up the White Man's burden
Send forth the best ye breed—Go send your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild—Your new-caught, sullen peoples,"*
- Kipling, 1899, lines 1-7

One must recognise the relevance of the goods that drove the English populace to begin to devalue black lives for capital's sake, for the sake of British expansion. Tea and sugarcane was worth furthering English control, because ultimately in the eyes of the empire, Britain was blazing a trail through savage lands for the betterment of everyone, including the captured slave (Chrystal, 2014; Coates, 2012; Go, 2014; Olusoga, 2018; Ward, 1978). Research even states that slave-produced sugar was the most beneficial crop on the market. Regarding British industrialisation, without sugar and slave labour, today's British economy may not have come to be (Eltis & Engerman, 2000; Olusoga, 2018). The English slave trade, along with other European nations, from 1680 to 1788 grew to become a pillar of early capitalism and Britain's industrial growth, with the manufacturing industry resting squarely on slave labour's black shoulders (Fryer, 1984; Eltis & Engerman, 2000; Lambert, 2017; Olusoga, 2018). In the words of mercantilist Malachy Postlethwayt:

"If we have no Negroes, we can have no sugars, tobaccos, rice, rum, & consequently, the publick revenue arising from the importation of plantation-produce must be annihilated." - Fryer, 1984, p. 17.

Beginning with *Butts v Penny* in 1677, wherein black people were deemed merchandise and afforded the same rights as any other item bought and sold, Baptism and Christianity were popularised as the only "promised" route to freedom; or at least it seemed to be (Fryer, 1984; Njung, 2019; Olusoga, 2018). In the bible, it is written that Noah cursed the descendants of Ham to remain servants to the descendants of Japheth and Shem (Adhikari, 1992). Many English people reasoned that Black people must be descendants of Ham because they were meant to serve, or rather, Black people were *believed* to be meant to serve, "cursed," in a way (Adhikari, 1992, pp. 3-5; Olusoga, 2018, pp. 34-37). Because of Noah's curse, black people, or rather *Sons of Ham* fell into debauchery and savagery, in turn, losing sight of God (Adhikari, 1992). Therefore, baptism was thought to ideally save black people from servitude because it would renew their awareness of God (Adhikari, 1992). However, the citizenship of black people who'd been baptised was still scrutinised via multiple prominent legal cases (Fryer, 1984).

In comparison to other similar societies of the time, in the US, Christianity was taught to slaves with servitude being God's mission for them, i.e. Black bodies were made for service (Jernegan, 1916) However, baptism was not put forth as a route to freedom. Whereas

n the UK, slaves, believed to be “Sons of Ham,” could possibly be freed via baptism, but only in specific cases (Adhikari, 1992; Jernegan, 1916; Olusoga, 2018). Importantly, arriving in Britain was not enough as arrival did not equal freedom for slaves; it did not free the slave from *service* (Fryer, 1984; Jernegan, 1916). As such, there was a lack of clarity in English law at the time, as common law did not acknowledge black people as being any different from the rest of the population, yet slaves were also legally recognised as goods to be sold (Olusoga, 2018).

By 1729, slave owners began to worry, it became harder and harder to legally defend the ownership of their black “merchandise.” In contrast, one would be hard-pressed to find record of a law explicitly requiring black liberty once they stepped foot on British soil (Fryer, 1984; pp.68-72, 74-77). Property rights were fuzzy and blurred the lines between merchandise and personhood for slaves. Attorney General Sir Philip Yorke’s words;

“...a slave, by coming from the West Indies, either with or without his master, to Great Britain or Ireland, **doth not become free**; and that his master’s property or right in him is not hereby determined,” - Yorke & Talbot, 1729; p. 179.

were reaffirmed regardless of the popular view that baptism was a slave’s freedom (Adhikari, 1992; Fryer, 1984; Jernegan, 1916; Yorke & Talbot, 1729). Again contrastingly, in 1762, Lord Chancellor Henly stated “*as soon as a man sets foot on English ground, he is free*,” (Wiecek, 1977, pp. 87-90). Coupled with this uncertainty, the harsh treatment of slaves began to sway public opinion further in favour of liberation of black people in Britain (Fryer, 1984; Wiecek, 1977).

From the mid 1700’s to the mid 1800’s, the list of slave lives affected by the government’s unwillingness to define their legal status is extensive and tiring (Olusoga, 2018). To highlight a few particularly notable instances; there’s the case of Jonathan Strong, a young man brought from Barbados by his master who was later found so badly beaten he was hospitalised for four months. During this time his master, David Lisle, did not seek his whereabouts (Fryer, 1984). Two years later, when Lisle happened upon Strong, he orchestrated multiple kidnapping attempts to have Strong sold away (Fryer, 1984). With the help of Granville Sharp, a legal clerk, Strong survived the beatings, and the lengthy legal battles for his freedom, but the damage was done. Strong died at the age of 25 having never fully recovered from his injuries (Fryer, 1984; Olusoga, 2018). Sharp assisted another former slave, John Hylas. Hylas, also from Barbados, was set free after 8 years in England with his master. Once freed, he got married. Even though he was free, the freedom of his wife Mary was disputable. She was kidnapped to be sold away but was subsequently returned to London with Sharp’s assistance (Fryer, 1984). There is the case of Thomas Lewis, a former slave who was also seized by his former master to be sold. Sharp’s efforts did finally bring Lewis back to London; after which, Sharp implored Lord Chief Justice Mansfield to clarify slave status (Fryer, 1984). In response, Mansfield stated:

“...for, I would have all **the masters think them free**, and all **negros think they were not**, because then they would both behave better,” -Fryer, 1984; p. 120.

These incidents were not case by case. Disenfranchisement of Black folk occurred in more larger scale instances as well. In 1781, the murder of over 100 slaves, known later as the *Zong* case, was brought to court after slaves aboard the ships were systematically disposed of as ordered by the captain, Luke Collingwood (Fryer, 1984; Olusoga, 2018). The court hearing soured public opinion enough to justify the *Dolben Act of 1788* which regulated the slave trade by requiring a limit on the number of slaves that could be transported, tracking

of the sick and injured, and doctors on board each ship (Olusoga, 2018). Then in 1796 after 128 slaves were starved to death by a Liverpool slave merchant during their voyage to the UK, the English court ruled that slaves could not be treated as merchandise (Fryer, 1984).

The slave trade in Britain was abolished in 1807 after years of legal grey area (Olusoga, 2018). One would be ill-informed to believe that this solved the problem of freedom for British slaves as this law did not include the Caribbean, nor the British West Indies; only British soil (Kwoba et al., 2018). Following the 1807 act, there were major slave rebellions in the British Caribbean from 1816 in Barbados to Jamaica's Baptist war in 1823 (Akala, 2018; Ward, 1978). After which, abolition in British colonies equated to compensation of former slave owners to the tune of £20 million, £17 billion by today's standards, and Britain continued to receive slave-made cotton from the US for years to come (Akala, 2018).

Though slavery was made illegal in 1807, the weight of the crimes that had occurred resonated throughout the Black British community. Twenty years after trafficking of slaves by British citizens had been outlawed, Grace Jones was detained by Customs in the West Indies while being transported with her former master. She'd been illegally transported and held in slavery, though she was a free British subject (Fryer, 1984). Jones is just one example of the crimes that continued against Black people following abolition.

The identity of a Black person, historically, has always been decided by a White audience, with little concern for true self-definition of a black mind, first beginning with African and Caribbean slaves. British history suggests that the Black identity was not their own, but something to be decided by those that held the most power or privilege, in this case, English White people. Cultural memory ensures this is never forgotten by today's Black British students (Bagley & Young, 1988; Hall, 2005; Ledwidge, 2023; Van Dijck, 2004). Looking at English society post-abolishment, Black people would seek to establish identities in a volatile world; war and societal unrest would remain a trend well into World War II.

“A White Man’s War”

Black and *White* have historically been in a war of sorts, perpetuated by colonialism and privileged society, whether the war effort is realised by Black populations or not. Following the era of slavery, pre-WWI race relations in the UK were fragile with one clear undertone; *White* was supreme; even in times of crisis. The first World War, 1914-1918, (WWI), one of the largest global calamities in history, saw extensive African and Caribbean involvement that has been largely erased (O’Connor, 2017; Olusoga, 2018; Njung, 2019). While the collective may have forgotten, the fact remains, even at the height of societal upheaval, the interest of defining the black identity as *less than*, was never disregarded. When discussing the inclusion of black soldiers in WWI efforts, Secretary of State, Andrew Boner Law stated:

“...a large body of trained and disciplined black men would create obvious difficulties and **might seriously menace the supremacy the white.**” (Olusoga, 2018; p. 437).

From this quote, it is shown even if it meant more English citizens suffered, Black men were not considered in the war efforts. If Black men were to be included, the prestige of the White race would be damaged (Njung, 2019; Olusoga, 2018). In addition, it was thought that Black men would be less easily controlled once the war ended (Olusoga, 2018). In fact, throughout WWI, black soldiers were excluded on the basis that their African bodies could not withstand European winters; that their African brains could not comprehend European military tactics, and that their inclusion in the war efforts would threaten British rule in Africa (Njung, 2019; Olusoga, 2018). Because of this, information about any Black servicemen or even officers are sparse and hard to come by (Bourne, 2014; O’Connor, 2017). Contrastingly, research shows Black British men wanted to enlist; citing an interest in proving their loyalty and experiencing equality with whites populations (Bourne, 2014; Njung, 2019; O’Connor, 2017). Researchers highlight Walter Tull, the first Black infantry officer who was recommended for numerous medals during his military career but was never awarded such honours because military practices at the time forbade it (O’Connor, 2017). Tull is often presented as a special case, rather than an ordinary occurrence for the time, though recent research has since shown this to have been the norm (Bourne, 2014; Njung, 2019; O’Connor, 2017; Olusoga, 2018).

Throughout WWI, the Black identity was defined by a cardinal rule; Great Britain was the head of their empire (Fryer, 1984; O’Connor, 2017). Here *Black* identity, as defined by the authors of history, was one more stereotypical in nature. Physically superior, malleable, “warrior-athletes,” were benchmarks of the “Black soldier” (Njung, 2019, pp. 6-8; Olusoga, 2018, pp. 254-257). Used to sustain British rule, Black soldiers during WWI ceased identities of their own, and became physical, walking, talking tools of the oppressor (Njung, 2019; Olusoga, 2018). This created a societal contrast between the perceived identity of Black soldiers, and the typical White English soldier. English soldiers supposed the participation of black soldiers was an indirect attack on their masculinity; for the Black soldiers, it was an opportunity to prove their worth (Curry, 2017; Fryer, 1984; Olusoga, 2018). On one hand, White English men were socially emasculated should they opt not to enlist, and on the other, Black soldiers were treated as the scapegoat because they represented the eager to enlist stronger, more physically capable soldier while not being held to the same social standards as their English counterparts (Bourne, 2014; Curry, 2017, p. 33; Njung, 2019; Olusoga, 2018). For example, Black soldiers were not subject to conscription as it was not introduced to Africa or the West Indies; they volunteered for the war effort as an embodiment of their commitment to the cause (Bourne, 2014; Olusoga, 2018; Lambert &

British Library, 2017). Black soldiers were not subject to the same social scrutiny when it came to masculinity because of the prevailing views that they were warriors, and therefore, inherently masculine, and built for war (Curry, 2017, p. 33; Njung, 2019; Olusoga, 2018; Lambert & British Library, 2017).

WWI created a volatile job market in the UK; in turn, bringing a disproportionate amount of Black labour to Britain. This meant White soldiers, upon their return to Britain, were competing with Black labourers in the post-war job market while simultaneously viewing these Black labourers as physical representation of their purported inadequacy (Curry, 2017; Olusoga, 2018). Black soldiers would later be forced to answer for being outwardly perceived as intellectually inferior and physically superior to the industrialised White English man; however, for now, the Black identity was defined by interest in proving their worthiness to Mother Britain; to the empire (Bourne, 2014; Curry, 2017; Lambert & British Library, 2017; Olusoga, 2018). Black soldiers who enlisted did so with the understanding that they were members of the British empire and wanted to prove they were deserving of membership. They intended to demonstrate loyalty and competence, to be worthy enough to be as sought after as the White soldiers (Curry, 2017; Bourne, 2014; Olusoga, 2018).

In parts of the Caribbean, the situation was not much better. Black identities formed here were more focused on conveying power and upward social mobility. The Jamaican assembly and citizens were fighting back against colonial rule following WWI; a time when colonial leadership consisted of wealthy landowners and traders (Moore, 2010; Njung, 2019). These wealthy white leaders were the minority and more and more Jamaican people felt they were not fit to lead the populace (Moore, 2010; Moore & Johnson, 2004; Njung, 2019). Black aspirations for more power, land, and opportunities were often stamped out; the underlying message being that these ex-slaves and their descendants were “deviant,” and therefore unable to lead themselves (Moore, 2010, p. 89). As British soldiers returned home, levels of racial unrest came to a head. The high unemployment rates of demobilised soldiers again needed a scapegoat, someone or something to blame for lack of work for soldiers. Black populations, as well as other marginalised non-white races, such as South Asian, were chosen as sacrifice, leading to race riots, lynching, and high levels of violence from all sides (Curry, 2017; Donlon & Cultural Studies Organization, 2016; Moore & Johnson, 2004; Njung, 2019; Olusoga, 2018; Rowe, 2000).

As attacks on Black, Asian, and Indian peoples were on the rise, white women were documented as intervention to the violent attacks (Donlon & Cultural Studies Organization, 2016; Rowe, 2000). Post-WWI Britain was unaccepting and dangerous. White women reportedly intervened on minority behalf as Black, Asian and Indian people were incriminated for broader social issues (Curry, 2017; Donlon & Cultural Studies Organization, 2016). Women, both white and non-white, were also among incoming labourers who joined the work force during WWI and immediately following the War. It was because of connections of this sort, between white women and non-white labourers, White women attempted to prevent some of the violence against their neighbours, partners, co-workers, or friends that took place (Rowe, 2000). Since there was heavy opposition to Black men and White woman being romantically involved, as it was a “threat” to English womanhood, White women who went against this racism were demonised suggesting that their Whiteness did not spare them from public disdain, only abiding by social expectation would do so (Curry, 2017; Donlon & Cultural Studies Organization, 2016).

*“One of the chief reasons of popular anger
behind the present disturbances lies in the fact that the **average negro** is nearer the*

animal than is the average white man, and that there are women in Liverpool who have no self-respect.” - The Courier, 1919, as cited in Rowe, 2000, p. 60.

Nonetheless, despite these efforts, race riots persisted (Donlon & Cultural Studies Organization, 2016; Rowe, 2000). The lynching of Charles Wooten, in Liverpool, is one of the most notable racially charged attacks of this time, but it is one grim benchmark in a larger chapter on White violence (Olusoga, 2018; Rowe, 2000). Arab soldiers, who were British subjects, were attacked for seeking work on English ships and for relating with White women. Established Chinese communities were attacked. The homes of White woman who had married Black men were destroyed. Various parts of London saw violent race riots (Curry, 2017; Donlon & Cultural Studies Organization, 2016). Black and Arab men were hunted by gangs (Olusoga, 2018; Rowe, 2000). All of which occurred in response to Britain’s colour problem, (Curry, 2017; Olusoga, 2018, p. 334; Rowe 2000).

White English society, more often White men, felt a Black national presence threatened the supremacy of Whiteness, regardless of citizen status. White women were a catalyst of sorts. These women were not blamed in some cases for being with Black men or sympathising with non-white citizens; yet they were still subject to violent retaliation because it was suggested that they could end their association at any point with the marginalised, thereby avoiding public mistreatment (Curry, 2017; Donlon & Cultural Studies Organization, 2016; Moore & Johnson, 2004). However, in every case, Black men were expected to answer for daring to seek a White woman. Black men were always to blame. However, in the eyes of Black men, being with a White woman was representative of national pride; of successful assimilation, even though the White woman would be subject to the same violence (Phinney et al., 1994; Rowe, 2000). White men’s actions in response were framed as an “understandable reaction to these liaisons,” thereby excusing White men’s violent acts (Rowe, 2000, p. 62).

Revisiting the Caribbean, specifically the British colonies, the unrest continued. To maintain the perceived malleability of black residents, colonial leadership avoided instances wherein the populace would disagree, such as lowering British demands for control over cocoa production to avoid outcry and corroborate reports of calm and placated territories (Killingray, 1978, p. 143; Olusoga, 2018). This led to Caribbean leaders of the people viewing the end of WW1 as an opportunity to unite all the territories, the war itself was of little consequence. It was the hope that the “authority of the white man” would soon return from whence it came that acted as a driving factor behind the Caribbean ruler's willingness to work with colonial English governments; trade disruptions and violence aside (Killingray, 1978, pp. 141-145). Therefore, following the end of WWI, the black identity skewed based on location. Black British worked to stabilise their place in society in the UK; in the Caribbean, citizens worked to move toward a society completely free of White English influence by working in tandem with colonial leadership (Curry, 2017; Killingray, 1978; Olusoga, 2018).

In terms of defining Black identity in the UK, from 1918 to 1938 assimilation and self-identification were key. National identity, defined as *ingroup membership* based on residency or citizenship, and ethnic identity intersected to create a period of bi-cultural identity formation, i.e. both National and Ethnic Identity being fostered together (Berghahn, 1984; Phinney et al., 1994; Phinney et al., 2007). This meant that, if a Black man could identify himself as a British subject, and prove said identity, he stood a far better chance in society (Moore & Johnson, 2004; Phinney et al., 1994). Not to suggest that said Black man fared significantly better than his fellow black peers without proven citizenship, but to recognise that if one could reconcile their personal values with nationalistic expectations, they were thought to be slightly better off (Berghahn, 1984; Phinney & Baledomar, 2010;

Phinney et al., 1994). In doing so, research implies that black people were fiercely dedicated to Great Britain as the crown was closely linked to their own personal freedoms (Berghahn, 1984; Moore & Johnson, 2004).

For Black identity in the Caribbean, social mobility was still heavily controlled by the British to maintain authority (Coggins, 2018; Demie, 2019). Noting that education plays a significant role in identity formation as a tool of social reproduction, one must recognise that the way in which Britain saw fit to maintain political control and stabilise life under British rule was by refurbishing and restructuring civil services such as the education system (Cantres, 2018; Coates, 2012; Coggins, 2018). The curriculum of Caribbean schools followed a British model beginning with the 1834 Emancipation Act allowing mass schooling of ex-slaves. It wasn't until 1926 that the British Colonial office set their sights on Higher education offerings for the colonies (Cantres, 2018; Coggins, 2018; Coates, 2012).

Caribbean populations had a growing social consciousness and sought greater autonomy, but British officials did not want to encourage students to leave the islands in search of education, thereby risking even greater populations of non-white citizens coming to the UK and exacerbating racial tensions (Cantres, 2018; Coggins, 2018). The university system produced from this British ideal, while vital to Caribbean citizens, was still controlled by the British elite (Coggins, 2018; Coates, 2012). Here, the British elite directly affected the development of Caribbean populations by limiting experiences, educational opportunities and social mobility (Coggins, 2018; Coates, 2012). It was tactics such as these that continued into WWII, with the Black identity valuing self-identification and proven "worthiness," and White English populations using the Black body while discrediting the Black mind (Cantres, 2018; Coggins, 2018; Coates, 2012, p. 97; Moore & Johnson, 2004).

False Truths

By WW2, in 1939, Black British identity had advanced further into self-identification and education. Arguments of citizenship aside, Black British people regarded themselves as members of the English empire, loyal, competent, true British subjects (Aldred, 2007; Kalilombe, 1997; Moore & Johnson, 2004). While previously referenced as a justification of slavery, Christianity rose in popularity in the black community as nationalism rose. The British empire was put forth as an extension of God's kingdom; and with the Queen and God tied together, Black nationalism also rose. Idols and religious depictions in UK at the time often displayed White figures connecting religious civility, being a civil religious servant, to being looked upon kindly by the societal majority, White English (Kalilombe, 1997; Moore & Johnson, 2004). In the realm of ethnic identity, this meant definition of self was tied to the monarchy and "civility" as defined by the Church (Kalilombe, 1997; Moore & Johnson, 2004). Christian teachings of the time called that the more civil a black person could be, the closer to God they were, the higher the chance they would be accepted societally (Moore & Johnson, 2004). The church popularised education, via the Bible and traditional classroom learning; using it as a route to civility, leading many Black British people to view education as a tool for upward social mobility (Aldred, 2007; Cantres, 2018; Moore & Johnson, 2004).

Post-WW2, against the above efforts of the British elite, high levels of students from the West Indies and West Africa began to arrive in London in pursuit of further education (Cantres, 2018). Though Britain had tried to rectify this, the mass movement was partly due to the low affordances of education in the West Indies, as well as colonial influence with many students still being taught to seek Britain as their mother country, (Cantres, 2018; Coggins, 2018).

*"[I] was always encouraged to believe that one must be beholden to white people ... whatever you became, **it was due to the benevolence and goodwill of white people.**"*

- Vince Reid, , as cited in Phillips et al., 1998, pp. 13-14.

In short, Black British subjects, as well as numerous British colonies, recognised Britain as their mother country and often strove to treat it as such (Cantres, 2018). However, how Black people were seen and perceived by White English society was a different story. Black British peoples remained aliens worthy of suspicion. With these suspicions, inquiring minds wanted an answer and new avenues of knowledge began in Polygenesis, and Eugenics, which became the earliest notions of understanding black bodies (Olusoga, 2018).

The field of Eugenics and Polygenesis, first noted in the 1830s and born of an interest in proving that racial variances stemmed from indisputable physical distinctions, still impacts the black experience in the UK (Brignell, 2010; Keel, 2013). Revisiting *race* as a dictator of life at birth, Eugenics was a race-based pseudo-science that sought to define the differences between "Black" and "White," that has since been disproven and disavowed (Brignell, 2010; Keel, 2013). However, as a historical narrative, Eugenics remained notably influential regardless of validity; it was a powerful storyline that shaped how all of Europe viewed Black people at one point. For example, Eugenics can be connected to the medical failures of Black people, notably Black women. Prevailing myths around necessary amounts of anaesthesia stem from Eugenics (Lowe, 1998; Nuriddin et al., 2020; Richardson, 2014). Further, Eugenics later inspired today's *Black Eugenics Movement*, a sub-set of academia focused on repurposing eugenic science for racial improvement, like making Black people less susceptible to certain diseases proven rampant in the population (Nuriddin, 2021). While no

longer as socially relevant, the ways black people self identify should be understood within the context of a societal narrative heavily influenced by Eugenics and Polygenesis (Cohen, 2016; Lowe, 1998; Muir, 2020; Richardson, 2014).

The main ideas of Eugenics and Polygenesis dissected herein establish the connection between these pseudo-sciences and the identity of today's Black British students. While we may think these are strictly historical ideals, having reached a peak in the early 1900's, the fact remains that as recent as 2020 the BBC had to debunk the myth that racial differences are in our DNA. In so doing, the BBC illustrated the stronghold these ideas have on public awareness. The first myth on the list was the purported differences between the DNA of white people and black people (BBC News, 2020). One could be surprised that such an article would be necessary in such a modern age for the UK; however, in the words of geneticist and BBC presenter, Dr. Adam Rutherford:

“Racism is being expressed in public more openly today than at any time I can recall, and it’s our duty to contest it with facts,” - Dr. Rutherford, BBC News, 2020.

The persistence of this way of thinking comes as no surprise when recognising its origins. Considered to be the most influential work about Africa of its time, the works of John Leo Africanus read in 1600:

“No nation under heaven more prone to venerie than the ‘Negors’ who have great swarmes of harlots among them; whereupon a man may easily coniecture their manner of living”- Africanus, 1600; Africanus, 1999, p. 38

In simpler terms, Africanus declared the Negro race was chock full of degenerates, jezebels, and lustful thinking. This myth persisted well into modern day, being the dominant view of Africa for over two centuries. Many modern-day stereotypes about Black people stemmed from these polygenist early writings; large genitalia and sexual aggression being two of the most condemning. In addition, African peoples were considered “crafty, villenaous, and fraudulent, and naturally barbaric;” prevailing stereotypes of modern Black British peoples, and the building blocks for Polygenesis (Fryer, 1984, p. 134).

While purported as a means of “understanding” the differences between white and black populations, referring to Oxford dictionary, Polygenesis is defined as “*the origination of humankind from a number of different ancestors; spec. the independent origin of the different races; a hypothesis proposing such an origin,*” and “*generation or development from a number of independent origins, sources, or causes; a theory proposing this,*” but this is not the full truth (Fryer, 1984, pp. 169-170; Oxford University, 2006). In reality, this is an oversimplified definition of the pseudoscience that is responsible for the hierarchal structure of race prevalent in Britain from the 18th century well into present day (Fryer, 1984; Keel, 2013). Though Polygenesis has since fallen away as a prominent scientific field, the stereotypes and racial profiling myths that came of the movement prevail (Brignell, 2010; Keel, 2013).

Polygenesis proposed that different races were different species entirely (Cohen, 2016; Brignell, 2010; Galton, 1904; Hall, 2017; Keel, 2013; Knapman, 2016; Luse, 2007). Meaning, White Europeans and African, Black, and Asian Europeans were not of the same species, and white Europeans were deserving of individual rights because of this fact (Brignell, 2010; Galton, 1904; Knapman, 2016). In the UK, Polygenesis became a justification for racial separation and white superiority (Luse, 2007; Knapman, 2016). It served as further rationalisation of the perceived greatness of the White European. Ignoring the mountains of evidence suggesting that black and white people were of the same species,

in 1854 famed Empiricist David Hume stated in plain words; Black people “*were naturally inferior to the whites*,” (Hume, 1748, as cited in Hall, 2017, p. 98).

Inversely, it is worth noting that other polygenesists reported that difficulties adjusting to the temperature, topography, and sicknesses present in Africa and the Caribbean suggested White people were not “meant” to populate these places; meaning not all supporters of Polygenesis saw White people as genetically superior but rather as better suited in some cases (Galton, 1904; Keel, 2013). Research has since proven that there is greater variability within any one family than in different race groups. In referencing the earlier question, who deserved to enjoy the spoils of human existence, per English polygenesists, Black people as the root of evil, deserved nothing.

Eugenics was treated as a way to understand the “undesirables of man” (Brignell, 2010; Galton, 1883; Galton, 1904; Richardson, 2014). Despite possible assumptions, an English man, Francis Galton, first developed Eugenics as a concept in the 1880s (Brignell, 2010; University College Oxford, 2021; Richardson, 2014). A cousin of Charles Darwin, Francis Galton in 1883, drew inspiration from selective animal breeding practices and determined that a person’s psychological and bodily capabilities were hereditary, from their parents (Brignell, 2010; Muir, 2020). Eugenics is defined as “*the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also, with those that develop them to the utmost advantage*” (Galton, 1904, p. 1). To note, researchers explained usage of “improvement” is meant to highlight that eugenics’ goal was to identify the “best specimens” of each race, and improvements would only bring one closer to “best,” (Galton, 1904, pp. 24-25; Galton, 1908). Researchers found that Galton later stated Eugenics was “*the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally*,” (Galton, 1883; Galton, 1908, p. 321; Richardson, 2014).

Eugenics gained notoriety in the UK via famed hereditist Hans J. Eysenck (1971). With the establishment and meeting of the first International Congress of Eugenists in London in July of 1913, came the confirmation of the burgeoning authority of the Eugenics network to impact public policy (Eysenck, 1971; Lowe, 1998). Eugenics called for minority sterilisation, mandated in Europe in 1928, and in the UK, was specifically aimed at incoming Jewish immigrants (Lowe, 1998). To mention a few effects on education, Eugenics served as possible reasoning for limiting procreation among undesired social groups (Eysenck, 1971). This also led to additional concerns with quality of parenting; leading to eugenicists having a greater effect on educational policy, with children’s academic performance being used to determine viability (Galton, 1904; Lowe, 1998). Notable university academics such as at Harvard University, supported sterilisation laws and some racial science theories (Cohen, 2016). In 1912, proposed edits to the Mental Deficiency Bill included a Eugenic amendment to ban marriage and criminalise reproduction among the perceived “feeble-minded,” (Brignell, 2010, p.74; Richardson, 2014). Overall, Eugenics greatly affected education, using education assessment as scientific justification, and attempting to cull those deemed unfit, (Cohen, 2016; Brignell, 2010; Lowe, 1998).

Of course, there were opponents to Polygenesis and Eugenics, but not largely due to its inaccuracy. Instead, the suggestion of a different species went against humanity’s beginnings put forth by the Bible, the book of Genesis to be exact (Lefler, 1948; Haywood, 1910). Thomas Atkinson, the Episcopal Bishop of North Carolina in the American South, while not wildly supportive or unsupportive of slavery, cited Polygenesis as disruptive to the teachings of the Church and its divine mission, decided by God himself (Lefler, 1948; Tise & State Library of NC, 2023). Notably, his views were considered not extreme enough, but also not sufficiently anti-slavery to satisfy either side (Haywood, 1910; Tise & State Library of NC, 2023).

Nonconformist preachers took these feelings a step further when they arrived to in the West Indies in the 1820s. The concept that all souls were equal in God's eyes was being actively undone in the West Indies (Olusoga, 2018). Nonconformist missionaries emphasised maintaining a level of dignity, and a shared brotherhood that contrasted sharply with plantation hierarchies (Burrell, 2025; Elam, 2005). English plantation owners did not look kindly upon the Christian, specifically Baptist, missionaries that preached the importance of community. In their eyes, an alone, uneducated slave was an obedient slave (Burrell, 2025; Olusoga, 2018). This is not to say that the American south saw Polygenesis, Eugenics, or Christianity as a reason to end slavery. In fact, woven within this pseudo-science was reason to ensure black bodies stayed on the bottom rungs of society; logic aligned with the ideology of the "*the White Man's burdens*," particularly the supposed duty to maintain order (Elam, 2005; Fryer, 1984; Kipling, 1899). When Eysenck later conceded that differences between races may exist, the cause was thought to be environmental over genetic; unbeknownst to him, this would serve as the first admission of black abilities being influenced outwardly (Eysenck, 1971).

Looking directly at the UK and higher education's role in Eugenics, Eugenics has shared a connection to British higher education since Galton bestowed the entirety of his personal collection of works to the University College London (UCL) and funded a new position: Chair of Eugenics, in 1904 (Muir, 2020). Galton's influence maintained for years until 2020's Black Lives Matter movement when the university renamed Galton Lecture Theatre and removed mention of Galton in university infrastructures, buildings, or facilities (Muir, 2020).

To delve into a few more of the shared connections between higher education and Eugenic sciences, noted officials from Oxford, Cambridge, and Glasgow were members of the Eugenics Educational Society, a post-WWII society meant to campaign for the above-mentioned sterilisation policies and marriage restrictions (Muir, 2020). In 2018, *The London Student* reported that a secret Eugenics conference, was held in a UCL lecture theatre. The conference "hosted white supremacist academics closely associated with the American alt-right," (Muir, 2020, para. 1; Van Der Merwe, 2018). Still, it is continually reported there is not a connection between universities and eugenics, and should there be a connection, it is discussed openly amongst university administration (Muir, 2020). Steve Jones, Head of UCL Genetics Department and former president of the Galton Institute, notes,

"In some ways, the horrors of the eugenics movement are what has made biologists cautious about what they are willing to do today...In the old days those involved knew almost nothing, and were willing to do almost anything; while today we know far more but are much less confident about how we use that information." - as cited in Muir, 2020, para.

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While purported to be a route to understanding, these pseudo-sciences were treated as "proof" that *Black* was not equal. Yes, there were numerous sympathisers. Yes, for hundreds of years, abolitionists Black and White, fought for freedom. Yes, opponents of Eugenics stated clearly that race should not be blended with culture, or intellectual ability (Kenny, 2004; Lowe, 1998; Nuriddin, 2021). However, in dissecting the state of the Black identity in Britain today, there are indicators verifying that Black identity is still heavily affected by English influence, signifying the blend was inevitable.

"I heard comments about black people being intellectually inferior, been ignored whilst trying to talk to people ... and then had people deny that I experienced racism. Those things together led me, during my first year, to seriously wonder what was real or not real"

about my experience. I began to distrust my own feelings, discount them and doubt my reality...” – Kalifa Damani, Oxford University, as cited in Dodgson, 2017, para. 6.

“It isn't the sort of discrimination which people are quick to call out but constant stereotypes which are ingrained in most minds I feel have contributed to me being treated differently at times. Oxford does have a cultural bias which is against black people in the same way the whole of the UK does, but perhaps of more severity.” - Serge-Raymond Nzabandora, Oxford University, as cited in Dodgson, 2017, para. 8.

Slavery, Polygenesis, Eugenics, and the enduring racist stereotypes born of this history are all aspects that greatly influence the society in which ethnic identity development takes place. Eugenic ideals such as those referencing intelligence persevere and operate in underlying perceptions; further influencing social inequalities (Dodgson, 2017; Nuriddin et al., 2020; Richardson, 2014). Black British university students seek knowledge in spaces and among people that, in some cases, do not wish them there. The indoctrination of the young and uninformed, the reframing of history, and the perpetuating stereotypes are all born of a sordid history, a colonial “sickness” of the West (Olusoga, 2018; Kwoba et al., 2018; Ledwidge, 2023; Nuriddin et al., 2020; Richardson, 2014). This period in society, dubbed *postcolonialism*, or an age when everything takes place in the slipstream of colonialism, still bears the imprinting of the instabilities that colonisation originally set in motion (Hall, 2017). This is the landscape in which today’s Black British students form their identity.

Hallowed Halls

Going further into identity development in relation to English academia's participation in pseudo-sciences, I move to Oxford University. Oxford is the oldest university in the English empire; it predates full countries and has stood as a beacon of intelligence and scholarship for hundreds of years. Recognising Oxford as the centre of English scholarship, what is practised at Oxford is also perpetuated and replicated in British universities across the UK; Oxford is the standard, the school to imitate. That said, the treatment of Black British students at Oxford is exclusionary, tiring, and serves as a direct illustration of the Black British university student experience (Celaire, 2019; Omer, 2020; Weale, 2020).

Higher education as a field in English society was born from Oxford halls. Therefore, with relevant history now established, it's fitting to note that Oxford reflects the social environment it was fostered in. In a timeline created by the university, the integration of Black students is noticeably not included as a "Key Date," in the university's growth/development over time (University of Oxford, n.d.). The 100+ years it took, from 1920-2008, to welcome women to all of Oxford's different colleges is listed (University of Oxford, n.d.). As is the creation of the Chancellor position in 1214; and the University's research efforts with the COVID-19 vaccine in 2020 (University of Oxford, n.d.). Again, reflecting on the society that created Oxford, it is fitting that there is little mention of the presence of marginalised ethnicities. This is not to suggest that female identifying students are not also marginalised, but more to question, how inclusion of women is maintained as the only instance of exclusion for a university that spans centuries? Centuries that also held massive societal shifts in policy and public relations?

More recently, bias training and diversity specific hiring have been on the rise in Oxford medical school; however, it's reported that representation is seen as a racist ideology (Medic, 2021). In fact, it is believed that one should not need to see someone else who looks like them to believe that they are capable of achievement at the same level, meaning representation should not be justification for diversity (Advance HE, 2021; Medic, 2021). However, other UK researchers note that representation is extremely important to the well-being of students, with a number of universities enacting some sort of representation policy, such as the University of Exeter (Flett et al., 2019; Reza, 2025).

"Our reaction to such reasoning ought to be to encourage the holder to modify their beliefs and pursue their dreams regardless. The inspirational words of surgeon and Olympic figure skater Debi Thomas represent a better attitude: 'I didn't think I had to see a black woman do this to believe it's possible,'" – Sceptic Medic, Anonymous Medical Student, as cited in University of Oxford; n.d, n.p.

In considering Oxford, I highlight research about university experience specifically the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu presented the concept of *Habitus*, which is the values and customs that manage to reflect the power structures that built them without detriment to the main function (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu also presented *Field*, defined as "*a structure of objective relations which determines the possible form of interactions and of the representations the interactors can have of them,*" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 97). If viewing university as a *Habitus*, the campus climate will echo and maintain the norms set forth by the powers that built the university (Bourdieu, 1977). This does mean that the university *Habitus* can be changed using different *Fields* (Bourdieu, 1977; Gaultier & Mountford-Zimdars, 2018). Research suggested that opportunities for change can be found in any space wherein a student would learn, essentially stating that *Fields* have the potential to shift *Habitus* customs (Bourdieu, 1977; Gaultier & Mountford-Zimdars, 2018).

Learning spaces, in the sense of Bourdieu's work, are defined as social fields, wherein culture, societal inequalities, and power intermingle; in such places, learning takes place (Bourdieu, 1977; Card & Thomas, 2018). Later studies suggested that *form* and *function* were deciding factors in what constitutes a *learning space*; this does not include the suggestion that social interactions are also a major contributor to defining a *learning space*, or areas where learning takes place i.e. classrooms, and libraries. (Card & Thomas, 2018). Within *learning spaces*, there are heightened chances for increased belonging, interracial relationships, and stereotype decline; all of which would positively influence Black British student development of self (Card & Thomas, 2018; Foste, 2021). Therefore, when discussing ethnic identity research and Oxford, it should be acknowledged that the *field* has an established connection to university life as a whole, as well as experiences that contribute to identity development.

Eyes on Oxford as a representation of English society, racially motivated incidents, such as Black students and alumni being physically removed, prominent display of colonial figureheads, and racist messaging from the KKK have been documented in recent years (Omer, 2020). Oxford has taken steps to admit more black students, with the number of admitted black students increasing to 24.6% (*Ethnicity | University of Oxford*, 2022). However, once admitted, it is reported that Black students still experience instances of racism when interacting with White students; much of it being based in racist stereotypes, discussed above, about Black people (Celaire, 2019; Dodgson, 2017; News, 2022). Reasons for these racist acts are suggested to be that Black people are not associated with the prestige of higher education (Celaire, 2019). Black students who push back against racist incidents also report negative effects on their mental health and chronic physical pain such as headaches and bodily fatigue; suggesting a connection between campus experience, silent suffering, and well-being (Chandler et al., 2008; Omer, 2020). Remembering the above-mentioned history, stereotypes such as black students being unsuitable for scholarship are to be expected. Per Bourdieu's research, in this case, Oxford operates exactly as a *habitus* reflective of the society that built it would. The treatment of Black students in society is marginalising and arduous; Oxford, mirroring society, perpetuates this exclusion (Celaire, 2019; Omer, 2020; Weale, 2020).

Black African students make up 3.8% of the entire Oxford student population as of 2021 (University of Oxford, 2022; *Ethnicity | University of Oxford*, 2024). Historically, Christian Frederick Cole became the first black student to earn a degree in 1873 (University College Oxford, 2021). While there was not outright policy excluding black students, the time period of Cole's degree completion does coincide with changing policy around slave ownership in Britain (Fryer, 1984; University College Oxford, 2021). While attending, in 1879, Cole wrote about British imperialism and the inherent racism in English society:

*"Some white men of England
Have always believed
They will rule every land;
But—they are deceived."*

– Cole, 1879, as cited in University College Oxford, 2021, para. 3-5.

Cole's words illustrated his belief that there was a disconnect between how English citizens saw the English empire, and how British citizens living in English colonies saw the empire (University College Oxford, 2021).

Research shows that exclusivity, power, knowledge, and merit were, and have continued to be, codified as *White*; therefore, the effects of which were only scrutinised in White English people (Omer, 2020). For example, much of the knowledge of the presence of

Black people and their contributions have been lost to history, having been purposefully erased and/or not recorded (Bourne, 2014; Njung, 2019; Olusoga, 2018). This is not to assume the public is lacking in knowledge. Weaponised ignorance¹⁰, defined as “*a conceived absence or lack of knowledge wherein the absence of knowledge has an underlying organisational purpose,*” is a hallmark of colonialism, and is often fostered without notice (Akala, 2018; Adichie, 2009; Andrews & Khalema, 2023, p. 2; Hall, 2017). What follows is a sort of “communal, selective amnesia” that only eases the dominant population’s fears about lack of harmony or at least appears too on the surface (Akala, 2018, p. 126). In reality, this selective amnesia only creates harmony for the dominant population.

Taking into account English higher education, Oxford’s significant influence and overall effect on ethnic identity development and knowledge, research shows that oppression continues when dispersed into a larger spectrum of exclusionary practices; meaning that keeping the masses focused on distracting topics, such as other aspects of society like class issues, will in turn further oppression’s reach and negatively affect ethnic identity development (Hall, 2017). Therefore, knowing the power *knowledge* holds in society, the history of Black people in the UK, and with Oxford in mind as an example of British higher education, research suggests identity development for black students is a process heavily influenced by not only university experiences, familial and peer interactions, and experiences prior to their arrival to campus, but also notably societal influence, history, and cultural memory (Akala, 2018; Omer, 2020; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney, 1988).

¹⁰ It is not a mere lack of knowledge but a strategic choice to remain uninformed or dismissive in order to delegitimise truth or perpetuate inequality; often serves to reinforce systemic inequalities and create barriers to meaningful dialogue and inclusion (Hall, 2017).

'Let them be displaced'.

Having established influences and outward definitions of Black student identity, here I discuss the field of ethnic identity research in relation to Black British students. Where is the research field; and where is the conceptual framework for this research situated? To begin, the early stages of identity development research, specifically focused on Black people, found its basis in the black home and kinship. The social sciences were interested in Black life and the communities built by Black people, so early research zeroed in on Black families, i.e. Black households, as the home base of all financial, societal, and psychological determinants for Black people (Cross, 1981; Frazier, 1939; Semmes, 2001). While Black familial research is primarily based in the United States, drawing from the above context, one can surmise that colonialism ensured the erasure of more detailed research on black households in the UK.

Key themes of this body of American research, however, include the recognition of African influence on American Black households. Consistent with UK historical trends, this influence was not portrayed in a positive light; attributing Black people's perceived immorality to a predisposition to inadvertently seek African culture and ancestry (Frazier, 1939; Semmes, 2001). It is worth considering these findings were published in 1939 by Franklin E. Frazier, so it is not exactly timely, but Frazier's research was a building block to naming factors of Black identity from the Black mind (Frazier, 1939; Semmes, 2001). Critics of Frazier's work later recognised that his research pitted Black families against White norms then researched the families' lack of fit, though Frazier was himself a black man (Frazier, 1939; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013; Semmes, 2001).

Keeping this in mind, further research notes that African culture was lost to American Black populations because of the ways they came to be in America in the first place, suggesting that forced immigration equated to a loss in their cultural understanding (Author, 2011; Frazier, 1939; Jones, 2003). This would serve as early recognition of the shifts in ethnic identity Black populations go through when forcibly displaced; a trend that is replicated in the UK (Author, 2011; Frazier, 1939).

Later research showed that ethnic identity research about American Black people highlighted similar experiences as that of British Black people, following both World Wars. Similar to the UK, American black people responded to the war efforts of WWI and WWII in earnest with early research suggesting these Americans experienced the same influences of familial affection, community acceptance, and togetherness; and worked with the same goal of upward social mobility in mind as British Black people (Frazier, 1939; Maynard, 2009; Njung, 2019).

Looking at the differences between the two, in the US the *Black matriarch* was pinpointed as a major pillar of Black households with heavy sway over the development of Black youths, whether this be in the form of a mother or grandmother (Semmes, 2001; Stovall, 2005; White, 2022). In comparison, in the UK, Black motherhood combined with community involvement heavily affected British Black youth development with maternal assertiveness pushing community growth for the sake of practical or social need such as when Black British mothers advocated for better nurseries in post WWII London (Putnam, 1993; White, 2022).

For American Black folk, the war effort was also an opportunity to shift from rural to urban areas, in the pursuit of opportunities for upward social mobility (Frazier, 1939). This mobility reportedly presented in society as juvenile crime, poverty, and lofty goals of property ownership in American Black communities (Semmes, 2001). The same can be said

for the UK with youth violence, societal unrest and discontent rising as post-war poverty increased in Black, immigrant, and poorer communities (Bourne, 2014; Wills, 2017). It seemed the American Black home dealt with struggles to adjust; as did the British Black home with non-Black English people also blaming African and non-English heritages for society's failures (Bourne, 2014; Frazier, 1939; Semmes, 2001; Wills, 2017).

"E. Franklin Frazier asserted in 'The Negro Family in the United States' that the family is matriarchal and inherently disorganized as a result of having inherited the legacy of slavery, and as a result of the mass migration to the cities which causes further disruption," – Frazier, 1939 as cited in Semmes, 2001, p. 102.

"In taking displaced persons wholesale, we have had a bad deal. Too many are living or working in a dubious way. Some, no doubt are in the Black Market. They live on our rations – and live very well. They add to our discomfort and swell the crime wave. This cannot be tolerated. They must be rounded up and sent back." – "Let Them Be Displaced, The Daily Mirror, 1948.

Nonetheless, early identity research recognised family life, community interactions, and late adolescence as pivotal markers in the development of identity. Different facets of a young person's life were examined for the effect they have on said young person's overall development. Academic minds have pinpointed the early to late teens as a time wherein one "wakes up," and faces their race (Adichie, 2009; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990, n.p.; Phinney, Horenczyk, et al., 2001; Roberts et al., 1999). This is coupled with childhoods wherein Black children do not often see representations of black characters or experiences; leading many children to lean into the belief that their stories were not relevant or that they must include non-black (white) figures (Adichie, 2009; "Let Them Be Displaced," 1948; Hall, 1989). This is not to say Black children were left without representation but rather to recognise that it is often found within the Black home via mothers, other family members, peers, or other community members i.e. in real-time, and less so in popular culture (Bensimon, 2007; Hall, 1989; Semmes, 2001). However, see Image 1, it was Erik Erikson who discussed the influence of historical perspective on students and defined identity development as a contextual experience that occurred in stages (Cherry, 2022b).

Image 1: *Erik Erikson's Stages of Identity* (Next Chapter Parenting, n.d.).

Erikson's Stage Theory in its Final Version			
Age	Conflict	Resolution or "Virtue"	Culmination in old age
Infancy (0-1 year)	Basic trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Appreciation of interdependence and relatedness
Early childhood (1-3 years)	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Acceptance of the cycle of life, from integration to disintegration
Play age (3-6 years)	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Humor; empathy; resilience
School age (6-12 years)	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence	Humility; acceptance of the course of one's life and unfulfilled hopes
Adolescence (12-19 years)	Identity vs. Confusion	Fidelity	Sense of complexity of life; merging of sensory, logical and aesthetic perception
Early adulthood (20-25 years)	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	Sense of the complexity of relationships; value of tenderness and loving freely
Adulthood (26-64 years)	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Caritas, caring for others, and agape, empathy and concern
Old age (65-death)	Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	Existential identity; a sense of integrity strong enough to withstand physical disintegration

Erik Erikson's work serves as an excellent example of common themes represented in identity research. He based his work on one major principle; *the epigenetic principle*, which is the idea that people grow sequentially over time, and within the context of a larger community (Cherry, 2022b; Erikson, 1970). Further, research also suggested that students have a need to understand and draw value from experience, history included as a source of value (Erikson, 1970). In fact, the influence of history over a young person's views and values was also suggested to reflect the goals of society for the youth in question, meaning history is the first step in a process of affirming major societal viewpoints in students (Fisher et al., 2007; Juhasz, 1982). History taught by educational institutions and reinforced by peers and family directs the thought processes of young people (Juhasz, 1982). As a result, students will specifically limit their scope of interest to what they see as accepted, or the norm" (Erikson, 1970; Juhasz, 1982).

Therefore, Erikson's work called for stages that gauged how a person would deal with childhood conflicts, pre-pubescent thoughts and feelings, and existential crises or other more adult-oriented thoughts and feelings; specifically focusing on social interactions and events that come with age (Cherry, 2022b). Erikson stated that competency was related to motivation, and he framed the stages in the development process as becoming more competent with each new experience, coming away with a different learned skill set in each stage of life (Cherry, 2022b; Erikson, 1970). Referring to Image 1, Erikson's goal was identifying the specific route to a strong sense of self, equating this sense of self with the acquisition of the outlined "virtues" (Cherry, 2022b; Erikson, 1970; Next Chapter Parenting, n.d.).

More recent work uses Erikson's stages to determine what outcome would occur should one not complete the stage (Erikson, 1970; Mcleod, 2023). For example, early adulthood was theorised to be a period of seeking commitment, i.e. a period where individuals seek to build more connections and new relationships. Failure to achieve identity commitment during early adulthood led to loneliness and depression (Erikson 1970; Mcleod, 2023). More recent research has shown that some historical events were erased, excluded, altered etc., suggesting that the writers of history are mythmakers, restating history as they best saw fit at the time. For students, mythmakers hold the ability to direct thinking; though students could rightfully question "whose history is being spoken of?" (Erikson, 1970; Juhasz, 1982; Ledwidge, 2023). These myths are what Black British youths would draw value from; along with their communities' cultural memories (Van Dijck, 2004).

Taking stock of the historical narratives discussed above and the sway of cultural memory for Black British students, those who wrote and created historical reference materials maintain a level of control; history is told through their eyes. Historical events are dissected by the student mind for understanding; to seek meaning in historical scepticism; suggesting that meaning making is one of the driving forces behind identity (Erikson, 1970; Fisher et al., 2007). Early research even stated that the need to understand and seek ideals to abide by are innate human characteristics and would therefore always occur during the identity process; race and social class aside (Erikson, 1970; Fisher et al., 2007; Juhasz, 1982). Within this study, understanding historians as "myth makers" confirms that should students seek any historical knowledge, it can be pinpointed as that student furthering exploration of their ethnicity.

Revisiting the Black family, attachment to caregivers was highlighted as a notable determinant of the identity of a young person in the early 2000s. While children are shaped by parental views throughout their childhood, specifically, when leaving the home for university, the process of detachment and exploration outside of the home is greatly influenced by the university or education setting that the person is joining (Fisher et al., 2007; Samuolis et al., 2001). Research suggests that a student's ability to assimilate into the larger

university community, also phrased as fostering *Belonging*, can be strongly dependent on their attachments to their parents or primary caregivers (Cena et al., 2021; Samuolis et al., 2001). A positive connection with parents was also connected to positive development of self once in university (Samuolis et al., 2001). The frequency of contact between students and home caregivers was a benchmark for productive development. The caregiver, and a student's home, are treated as a secure base, grounding students as they are exposed to new information presented in classes, and from peers, per university goals (Cross, 1981; Samuolis et al., 2001; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). This is further validated in higher education research regarding student retention and a student's ability to be retained. Tinto, noted American sociologist, researched university student retention in turn fostering his widely known theory of retention (Tinto, 1987; Tucker, 1999). Herein, retention in higher education is rooted in a notion of separation from several aspects of one's life, too broad to be attributed to any one category like community.

“...Past research has somewhat underestimated the total scope of student departure within the higher educational enterprise and, at the same time, has understated the range of pathways individuals employ to earn their college degrees and the length of time they take to eventually do so.” - Tinto, 1987, p. 9.

Tinto's theory has been praised and critiqued since its reception. For instance, Tinto's work has been found to be productive but limited to traditional, full-time, residential students (Castro-Montoya et al., 2025; Metz, 2002; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tinto, 1999). Metz highlighted alternatives for Tinto's past models, as the model did not account for non-traditional students, including but not limited to, mature students, part-time students, and ethnic students, etc. In addition, further critique found that Tinto's model places uneven weight on one's ability to adapt to a specific institution's norms. In doing so, researchers have found this hinders ethnic minority students with cultural exclusion (Metz, 2002; Nuuyoma, 2025; Samoila & Vrabie, 2023). Larger themes of varied experiences, both in university and prior to attendance have persisted past Tinto's critique.

My research focuses on first- and second-generation students and Tinto's theory of retention holds that for such students the university must make a conscious effort to reach out to this student group (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tinto, 1999). The university's goal would be to build a rapport with the students as the connection between university faculty, or staff and students serves as a predictor of student persistence (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tinto, 1999; Tucker, 1999).

“Students are more likely to stay in schools that involve them as valued members of the institution. The frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff and other students have repeatedly been shown to be independent predictors of student persistence” - Tinto, 1999, pp. 5-6.

That said, Tinto's data on theory carried too much variance to credit a pattern to any one aspect of student life (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1999). In comparison, Marcia's research about Ego Identity highlights periods of “crisis” wherein one would become committed to a specific belief or ideology (Marcia, 1966; Tinto, 1987; Tucker, 1999). Therefore, this suggests that a wide variety of experiences, classified as “crises,” create a student's value system, and subsequently their sense of self (Marcia, 1966; Marcia, 1993). Herein, via Tinto it is the university's job to reach the students to ensure experiences conducive to positive identity fostering are taking place (Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1999). Marcia's work suggests that the process of committing oneself to a specific position must be filled with varied experiences to truly commit to one ideal (Balistreri et al., 1995;

Marcia, 1966). Tinto states that should a student not have specific experiences, like feeling insecure among peers or being faced with micro-aggressive behaviour, i.e. experiences that challenge them in some way; they will struggle to build community on campus because of lack of experience (Tinto, 1987; Williams et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2016). Over time, navigating these sorts of experiences becomes a learned skill. Marcia writes that without a “crisis period,” the resulting identity will lack commitment (Marcia, 1966; Marcia, 1993, p. 3). Any exhibited values or beliefs will lack ideological backing (Marcia, 1993). Though Tinto and Marcia both consider the student’s experiences to be defining benchmarks of student happiness, satisfaction and growth, they represent a trend in the research about identity development: student experiences are the core of the work.

With growing interest in this process of self-definition, methods, measurements, or tools of assessment, were necessary. The Ego-Identity Process Questionnaire was one such method. Using the questionnaire helped distinguish between the closely related *Exploration* and *Commitment* stages of Marcia’s theory (Marcia, 1966; Samuolis et al., 2001). While this method does not distinguish between different influences of identity i.e. occupational, religious, or cultural, it does quantify where one would be in the process of identity development (Samuolis et al., 2001). Other models like Ginorio and Huston’s *Possible Selves*-based model used the idea of a “possible self” to explain the interaction between the Latin population’s options for social mobility, and the identity created from that perception (Carter & The Vermont Connection, 2005; Harrison, 2018; Oyserman et al., 2006). In doing so, the framework conceptualised self-definition as a form of ongoing development in which individuals assess who they might become based on their perceived options for social mobility and social constraints (Harrison, 2018; Oyserman et al., 2006).

It’s from the above findings that ethnic-racial identity development (ERID)¹¹ research in the UK draws its foundation; beginning with understanding exactly what influences do factors such as family, beliefs, values, education, and experiences, have on ERID in black people (Teranishi, 2008). Racial slurs and micro-aggressions were highlighted as having a pointed effect on self-valuation in students of colour (Teranishi, 2008; Tinto, 1987; Williams et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2016). In fact, micro-aggressions are stressed as an ongoing issue in European society due to the negative effects they have on the self-perception of minority populations (Lufkin, 2020; Williams et al., 2020; O’Sullivan et al., 2019). This creates an adverse interaction between societal climate and minoritised communities (Teranishi, 2008; Lufkin, 2020; Williams et al., 2020). Examining further terminology to identify the markers of identity, *Black Self-Hatred* made its way into research models as a term to define anti-black behaviour exhibited by black people who developed this social etiquette because of their lived experiences (Kardiner, 1951). Evidence of *self-hatred* was divided into direct and indirect evidence (Kardiner, 1951). Direct evidence consists of statements or actions of outright distaste i.e. “I don’t like being black,” whereas indirect evidence consists of more coded statements that were very favourable to Whiteness like “I only like dating white women,” (Hernández et al., 2017; Kardiner, 1951; Scottham et al., 2010; Vandiver et al., 2001). Black people dealing with *Black self-hatred* also reportedly experienced low levels of self-actualisation, high levels of anxiety, and feelings of subservience (Phinney et al., 1997; Hernández et al., 2017; Vandiver et al., 2001).

The below frameworks specifically reference adjacent concepts present within this study, and the trends in Black student behaviour that this study is dissecting; therefore, serving as representations of the process of “becoming Black” as defined by the research field (Alexander, 1996; Kelley, 2018; Prentoulis, 2012; Ritchey, 2014; Williams et al., 2022). As ethnic-racial research progressed, new identity models drew greater research interest, with

¹¹ ERID – acronym, ethnic racial identity development; see Glossary.

many frameworks focusing on both the total marginalised population and specific racial groups. First, W.E. Cross's *Nigrescence Model* is a formative Black identity development model, and the themes presented by Cross in 1971 have since been studied, replicated, and revised repeatedly. Originally, the *Nigrescence* model began with *Pre-Encounter*, defined as "pro-white" and exhibiting focused assimilation and integration; suggesting Black people at this stage were experiencing some level of *Black Self-Hatred* (Cross, 1981; Kardiner, 1951; Ponterotto & Cross, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2001). Cross's later research recognised that *Pre-Encounter* was a much more detailed stage of development, and the model was updated to include the influence of a wider range of outside factors (Ponterotto & Cross, 2001; Ritchey, 2014; Vandiver et al., 2001).

Of the numerous studies based on Cross's work, the *Black Identity Development* model (BID) breaks down the growth of racial identity through an intersectionality lens; also beginning with *Pre-Encounter*, subconsciously favouring "white" culture over black culture, and ending with *Commitment*; ideally fully adopting a racial identity in favour of social change (Ritchey, 2014; Williams et al., 2020). In fact, the BID model specifically focuses on Black students attending predominately white institutions (PWIs), similar to the university this study focuses on, and highlights both the responsibility universities have to students to prepare them to "positively contribute to society," as well as the internal struggles of black students in largely white spaces (Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021, p. 6; Ritchey, 2014, p. 42). As established above, the exclusion exhibited in higher education is commonplace, so the BID model also makes a point to note that fostering a healthy (positive) ethnic identity is important regardless of *race* as racism and privilege are intermingled in society, and therefore inescapable (Bronner, 2011; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021; Ritchey, 2014). Specifically in the UK, the *Social Identity Approach*, the assumption that mental processes in ethnic citizens depend on their surrounding social context, is highlighted as a route to distinguishing group-level psychology beyond individual experience (Gosine, 2008; Verkuyten, 2016). Again, this theory also notes the importance of the *context* that surrounds a person, discussing the changes in influence depending on a person's societal experiences (Gosine, 2008; Verkuyten, 2016). That said, the models above produce discussions of *Well-Being*, *Belongingness*, *Self-identification*, *Socialisation*¹², retention, and comfort in relation to the Black student experience; and demonstrate commonly researched routes to an "Achieved identity," (Gosine, 2008; Marcia, 1987; Phinney, 2007; Ritchey, 2014; Tinto, 1987; Williams et al., 2020). Noting these common themes of the field, one would move to; "where are these common themes in today's research?"

¹² The following terms are italicised as they are prevalent in the research field and are therefore major Research Themes of the project. See Glossary; *Research Themes*; See Table 1.

Black British Today

In answering the question of where common identity research themes stand currently, a fast-paced society and discrimination at all levels of civil existence encourage a more dynamic understanding of Black studentship and identity development. Beginning with British society, 51% of British people are reported to support *Black Lives Matter*¹³ (BLM), an activist group and rights movement centred on black disparity (Ipsos Economist Survey, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement gained massive notoriety protesting systemic racism and police brutality (Advance HE & University of Sheffield, 2021; Black Lives Matter Movement, n.d.; Ipsos Economist Survey, 2020). Beginning in the US, BLM grew to reach the UK after nationwide protests took place during quarantine (Black Lives Matter Movement, n.d.). University students were some of the most prominent participants in BLM protests because of the inequality that is endemic in academia (Arday & Jones, 2022; Ootobo, 2020). Since its inception, BLM has called attention to over-policing, anti-blackness, and institutional racism experienced by black people in the UK and US, as well as the life and death risk this poses (Arday & Jones, 2022; Black Lives Matter Movement, n.d.; Ootobo, 2020). With 3 in 10 British people reportedly supporting BLM strongly, it suggests a British society that is cognisant of the marginal gaps in society (Ipsos Economist Survey, 2020). Interestingly, 7 in 10 young people, ages 18-24, were supporters of *BLM* (Ipsos Economist Survey, 2020). Herein, it is important to consider higher education as a source of student protest, and student concern.

Considering student needs, tuition costs, and time commitments, it is especially poignant should campus racial climate exclude minority students, and turn them away from a university (Perez, 2020; Shakir & Siddiquee, 2024). Further, the discourse surrounding minority identities is an ongoing dialogue, often citing the influence and poor layout of their respective universities, minoritised students of colour are often encouraged to assimilate into the dominant racial identity (Adichie, 2009; Bhopal, 2024; Cabrera, 2018; Mills, 2021; Shakir & Siddiquee, 2024). In cases where university services are the concern, students reportedly feel universities are lacking in diversity, inclusion, safety, representation, and affordability; instead calling for more “safe spaces,” and mental health resources (Johnson, 2019; Kelley, 2018; Mills, 2021).

In the UK, ethnic identities are formed among a different societal layout complete with its own social nuances, expectations, campus climates, etc. During a student’s time in university, further development of self-concept regarding race becomes a deciding factor in societal belonging; often without the student realising it at the time (Cabrera, 2018; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Garcia, 2020). Development of self-concept in racially diverse areas leads to more racially conscious students suggesting that as white students gain deeper consciousness, recognition of racial prejudice also grows (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Garcia, 2020; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017). Black students normally arrive to late teens-early adulthood abundantly aware of their race as a pivotal part of their *existence*, whether they have acknowledged it as a part of their *identity* yet or not (Bhopal, 2024; Cornell & Hartmann, 1995; Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017; Suyemoto et al., 2020; Volpe & Jones, 2021).

Much of the academic discourse surrounding identity development, though related to the US’s national context, zeroed in on higher education as an essential time for marginalised

¹³ Founded in 2013 after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s killer in the U.S., the Black Lives Matters movement fights for racial justice by challenging systemic racism and police brutality against Black communities. BLM encourages a global conversation, activism against Anti-Blackness, equity, and social reform.

youths (Cornell & Hartmann, 1995; Cornell & Hartmann, 2007; Dodd et al., 2021; Flett et al., 2019; United Nations (UN), 2021). Additional terminology was coined to explain the proverbial hoops that minoritised people must jump through for societal acceptance. *Racial salience* refers to race and its relevancy to self-concept at a place or point in time. (Flett et al., 2019; Scottham et al., 2008; Spina et al., 1998; Wong et al., 2012). *Social capital*, a term meant to describe unifying themes of networking, trust, social support, social relations, and community interactions, acknowledged the necessity of cultural adaptation that European society requires of its ethnic residents (Briggs, 2010; Putnam, 1993; Rees, 2022). Social capital research has traditionally examined dominant classes because such groups were thought to have greater social capital i.e. white English people (Bourdieu, 1986; Briggs, 2010; Putnam, 1993). In doing so, erosion of self-worth became the focus of the social capital conversation for Black and African populations (Bourdieu, 1986; Briggs, 2010; Reynolds, 2007). Ethnicity is then connected to the absence of social capital for ethnic minorities (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1993; Rees, 2022 Spina et al., 1998; Wong et al., 2012). Missing social capital is then used to pinpoint the crisis of confidence created when seeking upward social mobility (Briggs, 2010; Rees, 2022; Reynolds, 2007).

Coupled with social capital is the lack of historical context or understanding, specifically for black and immigrant populations who have been historically “othered” on a global scale (Bourne, 2014; Cabrera, 2018; Knapman, 2016; Spina et al., 1998; Wills, 2017). Research acknowledges that early identity work in the US was not considerate of the role of family and operated from the standpoint that Black children weren’t raised in intact households (Cross, 1981; Fryer, 1984; Frazier, 1939). As noted previously, due to slavery and prevailing stereotypes, it was assumed that the Black household was disjointed, fractured, lecherous, and unstable due to African influence. In reality, research showed that Black households bore Black children with established personal identities directly counteracting this notion (Cross, 1981; Semmes, 2001; White, 2022).

The Black family dynamic was the subject of numerous studies of Black identity. Studies set out to understand how oppressed people made meaning in an oppressive society with the goal of recognising the psychological elements of this meaning for Black citizens. Therefore, subsequent research was a dissection of Black families from the base belief that the Black family was functionally inadequate (Cross, 1981; Frazier, 1939). *Urban Black Culture* was coined to represent the cycle of values, social norms, and “deviant characteristics,” that were replicated and perpetuated by the children of the Black households that were studied (Author, 2011; Briggs, 2010; Cross, 1981; Frazier, 1939). The *Cycle of Poverty* is one of the concepts built from Frazier. It essentially describes the intermingling of scarcity, deviancy, and culture that occurs in Black spaces and Black homes (Cross, 1981; Frazier, 1939). Specifically, the behavioural patterns and values produced in prolonged conditions of poverty can become persistent as children internalise them, perpetuating the cycle (Cross, 1981; Duvoux, 2010; National Academy of Sciences & Johnson, 1995). This cycle is purported to be the reason for low self-valuation in Black children and continuing stereotypes regarding the behaviour of young Black Britain youths, (Cross, 1981; National Academy of Sciences & Johnson, 1995). More recent research has since revisited the effect of family on Black identity and found that the *Contemporary Black Family* valued Black kinship, even in areas or times of extreme poverty (Cross, 1981; Kelley, 2018; Semmes, 2001; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). All of the frameworks provide new ways to understand Black students by specifically addressing internalised factors, such as one’s learned behaviour that stems from within one’s community. With one of the more notable frameworks, Phinney’s ERID framework can be used to better understand why ethnic populations may fiercely guard their respective communities’ ideals and practices (Phinney & Ong, 2002).

It is well-known that universities want to foster high levels of *Belonging*; belongingness serves as a benchmark of student mental health. Research shows a link between high levels of *Belonging* and decreased reports of depression and suicide ideation (Cena et al., 2021; Flett et al., 2019; Hernández et al., 2017; O’Sullivan et al., 2019). In cases where Black students report low *Belonging*, lower *Well-Being* and low *Socialisation* levels are also present (Flett et al., 2019; Koenka et al., 2020; Unite Students, 2022). Black students also describe having less trust in their university, suggesting Black students are not only aware of university shortcomings but also hold on to disappointment should a university fail to foster a positive experience (Case & Hunter, 2012; Celaire, 2019; Unite Students, 2022). Tinto’s prior empirical research argued that it is the university’s job to retain the student by fostering these positive experiences (Cena et al., 2021; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tinto, 1987; Tucker, 1999). That said, it is shown to be in the best interest of both the student and the institution to encourage experiences that foster Belonging (Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 1999).

Further, Black British lives have long been devalued in the eyes of European history. A history of erasure and little to no representation was exacerbated by COVID-19, left in its wake was an increased scrutiny of racial disparities, and higher levels of negative mental health in minority communities (Arday & Jones, 2022; Gingerich, 2020; Johnson Conservative Government & Badenoch, 2021). In fact, recent reports on racism published by the British Commission seemed to pointedly omit any acknowledgement of institutional racism (Johnson Conservative Government & Badenoch, 2021; United Nations (UN), 2021). While said research does ignore the systematic barriers of racism, it is also an illustration of the Eurocentric belief of “family of man¹⁴”. It is an accurate representation of the view of anti-racism work in the UK, one fraught with accusations that disparities are a problem that Black British people have created or perpetuated, and if they just complied then the problem would go away (Johnson Conservative Government & Badenoch, 2021; Hall, 2017; London, 2017; Jiang, 2020).

In line with Eurocentric beliefs, “acceptable racism” is defined as a pseudo-list of “acceptable” micro-aggressions, that Black British students are met with as they navigate an anti-black campus climate; a list highlighting experiences that Black students are expected to accept as “casual behaviour” (Andrews, 2016; Cabrera, 2018; Marchant, 2020; Osbourne et al., 2022, p. 17). “Acceptable racism” is reportedly often present on university campuses because non-black and White English students are conditioned to see Black British students as “allowed;” allowed to be there, to attend the university, to exist in this *field* (Bourdieu, 1977; Cabrera, 2018, p. 23; Dodgson, 2017). Since Black British students are “allowed” to be in these spaces, other students view things like word choice differently in circumstances with Black British students present versus circumstances in which Black British students are not present. (Cabrera, 2018; Osbourne et al., 2022, p. 14; Williams et al., 2020) This is not to suggest that “acceptable racism” is a term used directly by Black British students; instead, it is a term put forth by empirical research completed by Osbourne et al¹⁵. Further, this is also not to suggest that the British population has not come together in response to racial crises, but rather to highlight the experiences present in the research field, and this literature.

Minoritised people face discrimination across many sectors of society, including policing, schooling, health etc., but research questions how much pride they have in the UK (Broad et al., 2018; Howarth & Andreouli, 2014; Nuriddin et al., 2020; Stewart-Hall et al., 2023; White et al., 2006). The research shows a variation in how British people express

¹⁴ Family of Man (n): meaning all people regardless of colour, social status or otherwise can come together if “they become more like us.” See Glossary.

¹⁵ Students sampled within this study describe instances of “acceptable racism” behaviour as “just what it is,” and did not name a specific term to characterise their experience.

national pride. 34% of British peoples report pride in being English. Comparatively, 25% of British minorities feel being British is something to be ashamed of and reportedly display a more ambivalent attachment to British pride (Abraham, 2020; Curtice & Scholes, 2024; Ipsos Economist Survey, 2020). Further, NatCen, a long-standing widely used academic survey, found that British people frequently reported higher levels of pride in their British identity, but that Black British citizens did not report the same levels (Curtice & Scholes, 2024). The study also found a great distrust in schools to be able to adequately teach and/or support Black British children, with 80% agreeing that racial discrimination is the biggest barrier to young Black Brits educational attainment (Marchant, 2020; Mohdin, 2023). Considering the constant discrimination and few opportunities to see positive images of themselves, it is understandable why national pride can be more difficult for young people who struggle to appreciate the strengths of their culture, their community, and develop a positive sense of identity (Adegbite, 2023; Garcia, 2020; Hall, 1997; Ledwidge, 2023; Marchant, 2020).

Research around ethnic identity includes racial discrimination, similar to the above, social interactions, cultural beliefs, new experiences, and recognises that black people are treated differently in society (Hall, 1997; National Academy of Sciences & Johnson, 1995; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Understanding this different treatment means also acknowledging the effects of long-term exposure to racial bigotry (Kenny, 2004; London, 2017; Maffini & Dillard, 2021). A recent study that investigated student experiences, micro-aggressive behaviour, and racial battle fatigue identified responses of “defensiveness, anger/frustration, confusion, helplessness, and hopelessness,” that were most prevalent when faced with racial stereotypes (Ibezim et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2016, p. 45; Stewart-Hall et al., 2023).

A separate study found that the “universal context of racism,” or the theory that minoritised groups who were impacted by racism and/or discrimination remain constantly cognisant of the influence that their race has over their experiences, is a major influence on community behaviours. This could also explain why Black British university students are reportedly better at spotting racially motivated incidents (Jones, 2003, n.p.; Ibezim et al., 2025; Marchant, 2020; Stewart-Hall et al., 2023.). These factors, plus their cultural memory weigh on the mind of the Black student, shaping their ethnic identity (Ibezim et al., 2025; Jones, 2003; Ledwidge, 2023).

While later research did find that a successful *racial identity*¹⁶, does contribute to a better psychological response when faced with race-related stressors; *ethnic identity*¹⁷ also had a positive impact on student response to discrimination (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Cheon et al., 2018; Johnson & Arbona, 2006; Martinez & Dukes, 1997). In fact, Martinez and Dukes found that *Ethnic Identity* had a positive correlation to self-esteem, self-confidence, happiness, and purpose in life in minority students (Martinez & Dukes, 1997). In adjacent work, Phinney presented three stages of *Ethnic Identity* formation specifically in minority students, Black students included. Here students begin in the stage of *Unexamined*, meaning there is no exploration of identity, followed by a stage spent as *Searchers* as they navigate some sort of turning point in life, ending with an *Achieved Identity*, i.e. a positive identity (Bernell et al., 1993; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Lee & Phinney, 2019). *Unexamined* is broken down into two sub-categories, *Diffusion* or *Foreclosure*. Martinez and Dukes further dissected the effect of ethnic identity on student *Well-Being* finding that a higher or more developed ethnic identity combats the negative effects of discrimination (Bernell et al., 1993; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Lee & Phinney, 2019).

¹⁶ Racial Identity (n): the social and political constructs that influence a commitment to a shared worldview, i.e. commitment to identity (Garcia, 2020).

¹⁷ Ethnic Identity (n): is defined as a sense of community within a group, culture, or social experience.

In addition to racial identity, ego identity was also considered in relation to *ethnic identity*. Remembering Erikson's trailblazing work, see Image 1, Erikson's Ego Identity involved the development of self while "mastering a crisis or problem," (Marcia, 1966; Protinsky, 1975, n.p.). In discussions around ego identity, the consolidation of identity is pinpointed as the end of childhood and the beginning of young adulthood (Alexander, 1996; Marcia, 1966; Marcia, 1993). Research shows that there is greater development of identity later in university suggesting fourth year students have more developed identities than first year students (Alexander, 1996; Protinsky, 1975).

Phinney's *Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure* (MEIM), wherein ethnic identity is broken down into eight aspects that each contribute to the achievement of a fully formed identity, is often used by recent identity researchers (Gaines et al., 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Phinney & Baldelomar, 2010; Yoon, 2011). Referencing Image 2, participants being measured expressed varying levels of identification with these statements; each statement representing the factors that create ethnic identity. Though known by many terms, these eight aspects; *Commitment, Exploration of self, Ethnic behaviours, Ingroup Behaviours, Values and Beliefs, Racial Salience, and Nationality* have since remained major topics within ethnic identity work (Habibi et al., 2021; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Phinney & Baldelomar, 2010; Roberts et al., 1999).

Image 2: *Phinney's Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure; participant self-categorisation statements* (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Table 1
Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure—Revised (MEIM—R)

Item no.	Item
1	I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
2	I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
3	I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
4	I have often done things that will help me understand my ethnic background better.
5	I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic group.
6	I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

Key findings of the MEIM suggest divergent routes to an *Achieved* identity, depending on the student's ethnicity (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013). In studying White, Black, Asian, and Indian students, the MEIM shown that European-American students rated themselves lower, suggesting that ethnic identity was less explored for them overall; like a fish in water, the students had never interrogated or thought about the water around them (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Cena et al., 2021; Harris, 1993; Roberts et al., 1999). Phinney expanded on this research, and cited family and community, as well as culture and social relations as markers with substantial influence in relation to *ethnic identity* (Ajay, 2005; Cena et al., 2021; Phinney & Baldelomar, 2010). When used to assess minority well-being, the MEIM found that *ethnic identity* is vital to psychological well-being in minority students (Cena et al., 2021; Foner, 1977; Roberts et al., 1999). This study was largely based on observed cultural characteristics. Similar to previous studies, this was done by measuring levels of identity achievement, ethnic behaviours, and belonging on campus (Foner, 1977; Hall, 2005; Roberts et al., 1999). In further dissecting the relevance of *Belonging*, specifically ingroup belonging, to *ethnic identity*, research suggests that students who are faced with someone who threatens development of identity will react

defensively and develop stronger ingroup bias (Cabrera, 2018; Phinney et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 1999). This has been specifically recorded in White and non-black students (Phinney et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 1999). In contrast, a more developed ethnic identity is shown to have a greater influence over behaviour of minority students with many seeking higher intergroup considerations because of it (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney et al., 2007; Phinney, Horenczyk, et al., 2001). To be further explained, the MEIM's most recent version, the MEIM-R, is used within this research to situate student identities within Phinney's ERID model.

Research theories, such as *Developmental Systems Theory* and the *Social Influence Approach* often influence the studies that produce findings like the above. *Developmental Theory*, created by Richard M. Lerner, is the concept that a student begins with a lack of awareness and through *Exploration* ends with a fully established identity with Lerner discussing the interactive relations between environment levels, and treating identity as more of an ongoing adaption (Lerner & Wells, 1999). Looking at the *Social Influence Approach*, culture is treated as a category for grouping relevant student experiences together, regarding culture as a process in itself (Phinney & Baldelomar, 2010). *Developmental Theory*, and *Social Identity Theory*¹⁸, can also be considered foundational theories of the field (Ajay, 2005; Berndt, 1988; Roberts et al., 1999).

In addition to measurement tools and theories meant to define the development of *ethnic identity*, research recognised the intermingling of other aspects of identity with ethnicity. Briefly touched on above, national identity was one such recognition, as well as gender, ego, or religious identity, and socio-economic status (Cantres, 2018; Hall, 1989; Hall, 2005; Marcia, 1993). The *Cross-Culture Identity Status Model*, helmed by Jean Phinney and Oscar Baldelomar, suggested that the process of ethnic identity formation differs based on both one's individual needs as well as prospects and restrictions offered within their cultural context (Phinney & Baldelomar, 2010). Recognising the differences in cultural practice when it comes to gender and religion, this model accounted for those who did not follow routes expected of their culture (Phinney & Baldelomar, 2010). This model represents a trend in the research, wherein a specific community is scrutinised to understand what extent the community's cultural practices influence ethnic identity (Putnam, 1993; Phinney & Baldelomar, 2010; Prentoulis, 2012). Taking it a step further, identity research highlighted the growth of identity as the end of childhood, suggesting it is older adolescence and young adulthood where concept of self is strongest and most prevalent, regardless of the community or culture one hails from (Huang & Stormshak, 2011; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Marcia, 1993; Samuolis et al., 2001).

Bringing together historical relevancy, identity research, and cultural relevancy, more modern work turns to the Black British community. Recently, Black populations were surveyed in landmark research around Black identity in the UK (Black British Voices: The Findings, 2023; Mohdin, 2021). In addition to a survey that will run throughout the summer, Dr. Semple and her research team will be conducting interviews with Black British professionals. The goal would be to chart Black identity and create space for marginalised peoples who previously held little power over their history (Mohdin, 2021).

“The narrative of being black in Britain has been written and rewritten by so many different people, but what we’ve yet to hear and see is a commentary built on good data that draws on themes that matter to Black people today.” - Dr Maggie Semple OBE, the founder of I-Cubed Ltd and lead ambassador for the Black British Voices Project as cited in Mohdin, 2021, para. 3.

¹⁸ Social Identity Theory (n): or the concept surrounding the link between self-esteem and group belonging. See Glossary.

This recent work recognises that, historically, the answer to the question; ‘*who are you?*’ was often defined by varying power structures or people, but often not by a Black British person. This is the definition of *Black British* (Adegbite, 2023; Alexander, 1996; Prentoulis, 2012; Robinson, 2025). To be *Black* is to recognise one’s connection to the African and Caribbean diaspora, including the trauma that Black people have been subject to throughout history. To be *British*, is to see one’s newfound home, adopting British norms and assimilating into British society; especially for those with little to no memory of their family’s country of origin. To be *Black British*, is a recognition that both connections can exist, be fostered, and will persevere (Demie, 2019; Katsha, 2023; Maynard, 2009; Wallace, 2016).

“My aversions to calling myself British lied in the role Britain played in colonisation and slavery. Could I truly be proud of being British knowing what this country has done to Black people? And even today, the treatment of Black people in the UK needs a lot of work.” – Habiba Katsha, *Huffington Post UK*; Katsha, 2023, para. 5.

At the intersection of Black, and British, is a history lesson. In the UK, Black people have continually pushed back. First, breaking free from literal shackles, climbing into human rights, and still onward to equitable treatment. While there is work being done to enhance understanding of Black identity, one must remember the steps taken for the Black community to create their own identity; an identity formed of two halves that feels this past trauma, while continuously seeking equitable understanding. As more research about the Black British identity is put forth, the answer to the question; ‘who are you,’ will be free of definitions put forth by those responsible for upholding the colonial ideals of the past, and instead be defined by the words of Black British people. The Research Themes (RTs), *Belonging*, *Socialisation*, *Self-Identification*, *Well-Being*, *Journey*, and *Reflection* illustrate major aspects of the ethnic-racial identity processes for Black British students. However, until Black British identity is defined entirely by those who live it, the RTs discussed herein serve only as an evolving response to history, resistance, and self-definition, marking both an unresolved question and a self-determined reclaimed answer.

Theoretical Framework

Due to the amount of specific research surrounding the UK higher education system and identity development, much of the support for this study was drawn from past American research and operates within specific definitions of “ethnicity” and “race.” Herein, I begin with the backbone of this research, comprised of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Indigenous research principles (IRP). I define the connection between CRT, IRP, and my research philosophy to better illustrate the overlap of ideals within both fields of marginalised research as well as deepen understanding of my research’s philosophy, approach, strategy, and analysis. Specifically, I explain the connection between my theoretical framings and the data analysis process. CRT provided my research with a broad framework of expectations about race in society, but it lacked more precise markers needed to measure development of this sort. As such, CRT was paired with another research framework, IRP, which did have such tools. I then delve deeper into Phinney’s Ethnic Racial Identity Development framework (ERID). I explain further how CRT and IRP and ERID are well suited tools of analysis together. Further, Phinney’s ERID framework is then used within this study as a gauge of “successful¹⁹” ethnic-racial identity development based on lived experiences using an ethnicity-based measurement scale (MEIM-R). I then situate Phinney’s research within the larger field of discussion i.e. Black Scholarship in the UK. Here, I connect key issues in sociological research about British students back to the necessity of the research. In doing so, I seek to answer the following research questions (RQ):

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students?*

- a. How do students define their identity?
- b. What experiences in university do students feel have the most influence over their development?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *What aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture, religious, affinity groups or workshops, EDI events) most influence Black British students’ ethnic racial identity development?*

- a. Based on student opinion, would the students consider university affordances successful?
- b. Do students from different ethnic backgrounds respond differently to Black-intended activities or affordances?
- c. Do certain university affordances achieve the University’s desired effect?

First, in RQ1, I ask what ERID stage or sub-stage is most prevalent in Black British students to glean where significant portions of Black British students could be at. Sub-

¹⁹ Success as determined by Phinney’s ERID is defined as reaching a point in development where one is secure, ethnicity is highly salient, and one is self-defined i.e. reaching ‘success,’ (Phinney & New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services, 2017; Phinney, 2010).

questions are used here to add nuance to this understanding of developmental stages, I ask RQ1a, how have students defined their identity, contrasting it with Phinney's research definitions of identity. In RQ1b, students are asked to specifically name instances that they feel have the most influence. Herein, the line of questioning shown in RQ1 is specific to locating where the student's development lies, and their self-defining thoughts on specific aspects of development taking place.

RQ2 seeks to answer what specific affordance universities can provide to foster the development outlined in RQ1. Treating it as a formulaic approach, RQ2 is meant to provide a tangible research-to-practice affordance that can encourage positive development. Sub-questions RQ2a and RQ2b are the true "test" for the affordance sought in RQ2. For a university affordance to be deemed successful, students sampled must say so. For RQ2a and RQ2b, minding IRP, Black British student voices are the deciding factors of a good affordance. This is done to avoid relying on past empirical research, or theories, and remain focused solely on the counternarratives of the students as valid and true. Bringing understanding full circle, RQ2c is meant to highlight *already present* university affordances that encourage the desired development, assessing the affordances based on data from RQ1 and RQ2, RQ2a, and RQ2b.

Successful ethnic-racial identity development is then illustrated by participant counternarratives provided during the Listening Rooms. Student MEIM-R scores were used to quantitatively determine what stage of development they are at and then contrasted with students' counternarratives (LR responses). Herein, I pair student voices from the LR counternarratives, with their MEIM-R score-determined corresponding stages of development. In short, in pairing MEIM-R scores and counternarrative data, I take student counternarratives as their explanation of their corresponding MEIM-R.

It should be highlighted that any universities' administrative or policy shortcomings discussed here are not isolated and instead illustrate a much larger laundry list of everyday occurrences that can add to a Black student's emotional distress, and subsequently their identity development, during university (Arday & Jones, 2022; Baker, 2002; Fleary, 2023; Maynard, 2009; Osbourne et al., 2022). Contextually, it should be noted that *Black studies*, or the study of *Blackness* and inequity, is an area filled with Black students looking for representation in Western academia, and critiquing core pedagogy from university curricula (Andrews, 2018). In fact, past research found that through the lens of *Blackness* one can renounce Eurocentric ideals of knowledge presented by a flawed system, academia (Andrews, 2018; Andrews, 2019; Birmingham City University, n.d.; Mills, 2021).

Keeping this in mind, I chose to use the terms *ethnicity* and *race* purposefully within the research. I use the term *ethnicity* in exploring ethnic identity development, but I cannot do so without considering racial identity. I want to see how participating students see themselves, but I cannot ignore that how they see themselves occurs within a racist society. Therefore, I utilised the terms "Ethnic" and "Racial" in a broader sense best defined by Cokley:

"When researchers are interested in how individuals see themselves relative to their cultural beliefs, values, and behaviours, ethnic identity is the more appropriate construct to study ... however, when researchers are more interested in how individuals construct their identities in response to an oppressive and highly racialized society, racial identity is the more appropriate construct to study." – Cokley, 2007, p. 225.

Ethnic identity development is defined by the processes one takes to *Commitment*, or the final stage of developmental procedure (Phinney, 1988; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Suyemoto et al., 2020). Many researchers have used ethnic identity and racial identity interchangeably, however, it is important to note that I consider *both* identities, as well as the ways in which they overlap (Cokley, 2005; Cokley, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2014; Suyemoto et al., 2020). I blend both *ethnicity* and *race* together as pivotal aspects of one's overall identity. In this way, I considered ethnic identity two-fold as a societal label i.e. *ethnicity (race)*, and as a practice i.e. engagement with cultural membership such as participation in ethnicity-specific behaviours/events/etc., in short, being *ethnic*. Herein, I utilised CRT, IRP, and Phinney's framework as each discusses ethnicity-specific behaviours and can be used to define how students go about building their identity in relation to racialised experiences, ethnic community behaviours, and university purpose. CRT, with IRP acknowledge the student's ethnicity and their race, treating both as equal pillars of their ethnic-racial identity.

Critical Race Theory

The main goal of CRT is to ensure race is recognised as significant to the ways in which marginalised people are structured, treated, and maintained in society in the United States (Caldwell & Crenshaw, 1996; Hiraldo, 2010; Treviño et al., 2008). However, its principles are applicable to marginal populations outside of the US because although the physical locations are different, race remains a critical component of Black and Brown experiences regardless of region (Brayboy, 2005; Treviño et al., 2008; Warmington, 2019). Table 2 connects the main tenets of CRT with Indigenous Research Principles (IRP), which I describe later in this chapter.

Table 2: Tenets of Critical Race Theory and Indigenous Principles (Caldwell & Crenshaw 1996; Capper, 2015; Castagno & Lee, 2007; Edwards et al., 2023).

Critical Race Theory	Indigenous Research Principles
Permanence of Racism	Relationality
Whiteness as Property	Responsivity
Intersectionality	Respect
Interest Convergence	Reciprocity
Counter Narratives	Reflexivity
Critique of Liberalism	Responsibility

Viewing Table 2, the first tenet of CRT is *Permanence of Racism*, meaning the theory begins with recognition of the endemic nature of race and how inescapable it is in society (Capper, 2015). This contrasts with the belief that racism is infrequent, individualised, or occurs in isolated incidents (Capper, 2015; Cabrera, 2018; London, 2017). In fact, CRT requires one to not only recognise race as prevalent but also to remain vigilant of the fact that racism is happening at all times and being perpetually reproduced; systematically, individually, institutionally etc. (Capper, 2015; Caldwell & Crenshaw, 1996; Pierson-Brown, 2022).

The second tenet is *Whiteness as Property*, or an acknowledgement of aspects of White identity that are rooted in exclusion of non-white people and defines White people as perpetrators of the cycle (Caldwell & Crenshaw, 1996; Tate, 1997).

“The right to exclude was the central principle, too, of whiteness as identity, for mainly whiteness has been characterized, not by an inherent unifying characteristic, but by

the exclusion of others deemed to be “not white.” The possessors of whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness; whiteness became an exclusive club whose membership was closely and grudgingly guarded” - Harris, 1993, as cited in Capper, 2015, p. 1736.

As *Whiteness as Property* defines Whiteness as a reflexive affordance of rights/privileges, the third tenet unpacks the experience of marginalised peoples experiencing a society built on the first two inequities (Capper, 2015; Harris, 1993; Williams et al., 2020). Also called *Counter storytelling*, the counternarratives of marginalised people serve to challenge societal “truths,” or narratives that have been adopted by the majority without basis (Bayeck, 2021, n.p.; Capper, 2015). Researchers must often consider which narratives are best suited to accurately frame the public discourse, whatever that may be (Capper, 2015; Caldwell & Crenshaw, 1996; Case & Hunter, 2012; Gosine, 2008).

As a researcher, I am guided by an intense agreement with the tenets of CRT and have experienced life as the *other*, both as a woman and as a Black person. A few hard truths have formed and led my decision-making process in pursuing this research; groups that are marginalised by society must continually prove themselves. These are the *Counternarratives* that I bring into the research. I chose CRT because I know no other experience but an unequitable one and therefore sought a framework that operated from such standpoint. I have lived only the experiences of a Black woman. Based on these experiences, the tenets of CRT represent the belief on which this research is built because the goal of the research is improving understanding of Black students. Herein, my personal counternarrative, similar to a number of Black voices, justifies the necessity of CRT, and counter storytelling.

The fourth tenet of CRT is *Interest Convergence* meaning that when equitable change is made, it only occurs because there is also a benefit to White people (Capper, 2015; Castagno & Lee, 2007; Pierson-Brown, 2022; Warmington, 2019). This is not to suggest that CRT would then define any minority victories in equity as moot, but rather to stress that though these triumphs are important steps it does not negate the active conflict of race (Pierson-Brown, 2022). The first tenet, the *Permanence of Racism* ensures there is no *post-racial* territory, meaning these minority victories are in actuality a part of a never-ending crusade for equity (Pierson-Brown, 2022; Warmington, 2019).

In England specifically, CRT is a rejection of the widely known, more Eurocentric Marxist theory which categorises racism as *individual* to be understood in terms of racial prejudice, (Warmington, 2019). However, though the societal context of the UK and the US are different, the racial unrest of both represents the global community because no matter the country, race is consistently a pillar of its social structure. Framing racism as individual bias fails to capture the structural and institutional racism also found in both the British and American education systems (Fleay & Torezani, 2018; Gillborn, 2008). Further, research has shown that CRT’s rejection of individualised models favours deeper structural and societal analyses. For this reason, and given the history discussed in the first section, it is unsurprising that race maintains continued relevance in both the US and the UK, and minority triumphs are only *allowed* when accompanied by White benefit (Fleay & Torezani, 2018; Gillborn, 2008; Olusoga, 2018; Warmington, 2019).

That said, CRT deems tactics that don’t acknowledge the context and experiences of people of colour as idealistic or even ignorant. For instance, being from the US, one often hears the phrase, “I don’t see colour.” This is a common phrase used to claim colour blindness in response to racial unrest and is meant to convey that one is accepting of others,

completely ignoring what race the person is (Prentoulis, 2012). However, to ignore race means to also ignore experiences, standards, cultural beliefs and morals related to said race. For Black British people, their experiences involving race often have lasting effects on their beliefs, values, and opinions and should be taken into account when considering a person (Andrews & Khalema, 2023; Ibezim et al., 2025; Pierson-Brown, 2022; Prentoulis, 2012).

Keeping this in mind, the fifth tenet of CRT is a critique of colour blindness; a *Critique of Liberalism*. Within education, this means questioning “race blind policies,” like treating every student the same, regardless of need (Capper, 2015; Suyemoto et al., 2020; Warmington, 2019). In short, CRT’s *Critique of Liberalism* raises the question; can you truly call yourself a friend, ally, supporter, etc. if you are actively ignoring a major portion of your peer’s identity or experience by ‘not seeing colour’? CRT states one cannot be anti-racist and colour blind; they are contradictory (Caldwell & Crenshaw, 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Fleay & Torezani, 2018; Pierson-Brown, 2022).

The final tenet of CRT is *Intersectionality*. Within CRT, *Intersectionality* is the degree to which CRT scholars address race *and* its intersections with other identities such as national, like my American identity, or social class, gender, and sexuality (Capper, 2015; Mirza, 2015). Intersectional activism in England has changed forms over the years. Throughout history, Black radicals disagreed with White Marxists, who were more focused on class issues, and liberals that were cautiously committed to equity (Cole, 2017; Routledge, 2012; Warmington, 2019). In contrast, English CRT antagonists complain that it is a theory unfairly rooted in “Blackness,” centring the Black experience (Cole, 2019; Warmington, 2019). This led to differentiations in CRT, like *BritCrit*, which sought to bring together the “better” aspects of CRT in the US and traditional British anti-racist strategies (Cole, 2017; Cole, 2019, n.p.; Hylton & Politics, 2011). *BritCrit* is one of numerous other similar theories such as *LatinxCrit* representing those in the Latin community, and *Tribal Crit*, represented in this research via IRPs, to speak for the experiences of Indigenous groups (Cole, 2019; Hylton & Politics, 2011; Warmington, 2019).

With CRT tenets and IRP defined, I dive into why I chose CRT over other options. CRT’s emphasises *race* as both a social and political force, and CRT tenets are primed to address both *ethnic* and *racial* systemic barriers and experiences that shape one’s identity. Though there are other frameworks that are equally crucial in understanding how identity development evolves, CRT anchors my discussion and reflects my efforts to critically engage the structural realities that influence identity formation. Specifically, the framework of CRT recognises that *race* and *ethnicity* are more than just any one specific attribute or label, they are social contracts that impact all aspects of life. Further, for my data analysis, I integrated CRT and IRP as both emphasise the importance of context, and the deconstruction of power structures that shape identity, as well as the deconstruction of research practices not productive for the community studied. Benefiting the Black student, and the larger Black community, sits at the core of my professional journey so I purposefully sought frameworks that accurately maintain this goal.

Referring to Table 2, I list the tenets of CRT, and Indigenous Research Principles (IRP), with the frameworks taken in tandem. The integration of CRT and IRP provided an ethical grounding for my work, focused heavily on the lived realities of Black British students. The frameworks collectively affirm that identity is formed while in constant negotiation with power, belonging, and inequity. In this way, I make clear the contemporary systems that shape and constrain Black self-definition.

CRT with Indigenous Principles

Referring to Tables 2 and 3, this research utilises Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a research framework coupled with the major principles of Indigenous research (IRP)²⁰. While it is now clear why I chose CRT, here I explain why IRP was purposefully chosen.

I, as the researcher, am influenced by fluctuating views prevalent in society and should be conscious of this. However, given what is known about society, the researcher must also be sensitive and respectful of the community being studied. CRT serves to reflect and recognise the hard truths of the research; IRP serves to offer reverence by ensuring the Black voice is respected by the work at hand. Laid out in Table 3, each of the Indigenous Research Principles (IRP) are defined.

Table 3: *Principles of Indigenous Research* (Carr-Wiggin, 2023).

Relationality	“All creation” i.e. mankind, animals, the earth, etc. is interdependent and interconnected in varying ways,
Reciprocity	On the basis of equal exchange, calls that research engages with different avenues to knowledge other than our own.
Reflexivity	Requires that researchers continually reflect on their positions within societal power structures.
Respect	Research that is designed to best ensure that subsequent research/knowledge created is considerate of differences between one another.
Reverence	the metaphysical plane is treated as an important place of knowledge accessed via customary traditional practices.
Responsivity	shifting beliefs or values quickly, based on societal shifts.
Responsibility	the task of the researcher to resist methodologies that silence the community and contribute to the overall health of the community.

Indigenous methodologies utilise *Critical Race Practice*, meaning a focus on exposing structural inequalities and assimilation tactics (Brayboy, 2005; Chilisa & Mertens, 2021). In doing so, researchers state that uncovering the “real and immediate need” of indigenous communities is satisfying but don’t always get to the root of the problem or reach a true solution (Brayboy, 2005, pp. 425-446; Kruk-Buchowska, 2018; Smith, 2006). Instead,

²⁰ Here, CRT is centred on minority race experiences, and Tribal principles focused more on the well-being of the community. They are used together to uplift the minority community, centring their experience.

*Tribal*CRT scholars state that one cannot truly achieve equity for Indigenous people without including community in the research because Indigenous beliefs and ideologies require community participation in a sort of *Relational* act (Brayboy, 2005; Kruk-Buchowska, 2018; Smith, 2006).

See Table 3, CRT's *Interest Convergence* situated within IRP in higher education is best shown in areas wherein university policy and Indigeneity overlap i.e. *Reciprocity*. *Interest Convergence* refers to the observation that laws/policies change when said laws adequately align with the interests of the dominant power; the dominant power being the White majority. In turn, this suggests that failure to realise the goals of marginalised groups, illustrates a passive intention to uphold the society's current inequitable state (Capper, 2015; Johnson, 2015; Pierson-Brown, 2022). Researchers found that even policy that appears to move toward eradicating racism is underpinned by White self-interest and would not have come to pass otherwise (Hiraldo, 2010; Johnson, 2015; Stovall, 2005).

For instance, in the US several university and professional sport mascots are named after indigenous populations native to America; one of the most notable being the Washington Redskins²¹, a professional American football team²² located in Washington, D.C. A long-standing argument for these names is an "appreciation" for the communities they represent, though terms like "Redskin" was once considered derogatory before being reclaimed by the indigenous community. In 2020, the National Football League (NFL) announced a name change, the Washington Commanders, after the Native American Guardians Association (NAGA) sued the NFL and the Redskins suggesting that a monetary loss was necessary for the NFL to finally make the change, though the team name has been around since 1932 (Calf, 2025).

*"The name 'Redskins' carries deep cultural, historical, and emotional significance, honouring the bravery, resilience, and warrior spirit associated with Native American culture... **Commanders is a fitting name for oppressors.**"* – Calf, 2025, para. 7.

Further illustrating, in a study involving an American university of similar population size as Morning university, Midwestern University, researchers sought sites of *interest convergence* via student experience. This university was chosen for study because of its large indigenous population and its location in predominantly white Mid-western America, home to a number of government-recognised Indigenous reserves. In response to student outcry about indigenous mascots on campus, Midwestern University did adopt *some* policies to address the students concerns, but the enacted policies failed to meet the needs of the student; only the university (Castagno & Lee, 2007).

*"The policy consists of weak language that 'discourages' rather than 'prohibits' the use of Native mascots on campus and the sale of athletic wear with Native logos. What does it mean for an institution to simply 'discourage' such behaviour? Unfortunately, **the policy evades this question and leaves the issue open to different interpretations.** What is clear, at least, is that **in discouraging behaviour, the institution has no responsibility or accountability to demand any real change.**"* – Castagno & Lee, 2007, pp. 6-7.

²¹ Redskin (n) – a previously offensive word for a Native-American or a member of one of the groups of people who were living in North and South America when European colonists arrived (Cambridge University, 2024).

²² Noting the prevalence of sports in British society, and the racism experienced by British athletes, the example used here is purposefully done to highlight the treatment of the indigenous population in an area of focus in British society (Castagno & Lee, 2007; Pugmire & Robson, 2023).

The policy goes on to state “*that the Athletic Board will not schedule games with teams that have Indian mascots unless the team is a traditional rival or a conference member,*” (Castagno & Lee, 2007, p. 6). That said, *interest convergence* tenets were used by researchers to highlight that Midwestern University was willing to make a change, but only to a certain extent; similar to the NFL, it was only up to the point that the university stood to lose something such as revenue from a conference sports game that the policy was adjusted (Castagno & Lee, 2007). Here, *interest convergence* is a tool used by indigenous and western researchers alike, citing that regardless of the minoritised community, the needs of a larger entity like a university or government, will be a deciding factor in policy change (Castagno & Lee, 2007; Calf, 2025; Johnson, 2013).

Looking at UK university policies and student criticality with Oxford as a leader in higher education, consider the Rhodes Must Fall movement, wherein students called for the removal of a statue of imperialist Cecil Rhodes²³. Rhodes Must Fall is a case study to better recognise what marginalised students could grapple with when attending a university, what events can mobilise university students, the significance of trust between students and university administration, and the importance of student reflection to an equitable university. Ultimately, the university opted to keep the statue (Advance HE & University of Sheffield, 2021; Kwoba et al., 2018; Omer, 2020; Rawlinson, 2023). Other notable instances of university administration taking the same steps as Oxford include Goldsmith’s university with their Deptford Town Hall statues, and student efforts to rename facilities named after colonist Cyril Radcliffe at Warwick university (Advance HE & University of Sheffield, 2021; Kwoba et al., 2018). Like Oxford, both Warwick and Goldsmiths opted to allow the statues and facilities to remain as is.

In comparison, Warwick University enrolls a similar number of students as Morning University, many of them also being from varying parts of the UK, also with a higher concentration from urban areas. Goldsmith’s, on the other hand, is half the size of Morning University, suggesting the size of the student populace does not necessarily affect university response to unrest. That said, within this research, students are catalysts of change, with autonomy over their perceived realities to critically analyse their university and its performance, herein subsequently feeding their identity development. Usage of IRP is meant to reflect the notion that universities should need no reasoning for policy changes other than improving student experience.

TribalCrit (TCRT), briefly mentioned above, is a differentiation of CRT, and here *intersectionality* is presented in the theoretical framework as the intersection between modernisation, privilege, and religion without being outright stated (Caldwell & Crenshaw, 1996; Hunt, 2014; Olsen, 2018). When looking through a TCRT lens, other intersectional identities like gender and race are acknowledged as fundamental, with intersecting factors such as kinship, sexuality, and class implicitly considered as part of larger Indigenous traditions. This means that Indigenous methods do not consider intersectional experiences in the same way as Western research. In Indigenous method, *Intersectionality* is more so an aspect of the field that has always been present without a label until recent years (Smith, 1999). Interlocking social factors were already recognised by Indigenous communities before

²³ Oxford remains a leader in race relations in higher education, and is currently reviewing their next submission for the University’s Race Equality Charter (Oxford University, 2023).

it became prominent in Western theory (Hunt, 2014; Smith, 1999)²⁴. In response, researchers utilise an intersectional approach, dealing with Indigeneity alongside power, and gender identity at an axis (Crenshaw, 1988; Olsen, 2018; Smith, 1999).

“A number of people said that Indigenous knowledge and worldviews already include ways of expressing the interconnectedness of all things and various forms of knowledge, so intersectionality was not a new concept to them....Underlying these sentiments was the reality that as Indigenous people grounded in Indigenous knowledge, ‘we know intersectionality even if it’s not named as intersectionality.’ Intersectionality was seen as ‘a new word for something we’ve always known, been, done.’” – Hunt, 2014, p. 3.

The purpose of this research is to assist other marginalised students, and Black British students to more critically engage with their knowledge. By encouraging them to reflect on their university encounters in the same ways as Indigenous researchers, I enable them to critically engage with the counternarratives of Black British students, recognising their experiences as intersectional and fundamental to their identity.

Illustrating the necessary student criticality, in 2020 an open letter was penned to the UK government, the Office for Students, funding groups, and Advance HE. This letter was signed by over 380 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students, and staff and stated:

*“We are aware of and welcome efforts by the sector to address racial harassment and narrow the gap in degree outcomes between white students and those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. However, **while these and other racial inequalities remain, statements that Black Lives Matter can at best be regarded as tokenistic and superficial,**” - Advance HE & University of Sheffield, 2021; Perry et al., 2020, p. 5.*

This statement suggests that one can only begin to solve a problem when all aspects of the problem are fully understood. In the above statement, one must understand first what *experiences* Black students are having, what experiences minority students *want* to have, the effect of such, and *then* what must be done for the desired effect. In my research’s case, the desired effect is a positive *Achieved* Black identity (Bernell et al., 1993; Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1992; Phinney, 1996a; Phinney, Horenczyk, et al., 2001).

Additionally, Indigenous Research Principles (IRP) guide my work hand in hand with CRT, further reflecting my experience. For context, in North Carolina where I am from, the Indigenous population is abundant and significant to the community. In fact, North Carolina is home to the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River, and the ninth largest in the country (*NC Tribal Communities | NC DOA*, n.d.). My great-grandmother was Lumbee. Indigenous culture is woven into the area my mother’s family is from; from Indigenous businesses, to restaurants, to live shows to education. My childhood was spent wandering the University of North Carolina Pembroke’s campus because my grandmother worked as a cleaner for 18 years, a university originally founded to teach Lumbee children that now provides 4-year scholarships to competitive Indigenous students (*NC Tribal Communities | NC DOA*, n.d.). Herein, it is fitting that research reflective of a Black researcher considers all sides of my experience. I chose IRP to pair with CRT because IRP aligns more with my goal of

²⁴ Within indigenous methodologies, intersectionality is presented implicitly as the intersection between genders. While a number of frameworks do address intersectional experiences, it is done so as from an already assumed way of living/believing (Hunt, 2014).

honouring the Black British students I study and also felt more salient to my identity. Using IRP ensures that my efforts do not impose dominant cultural norms over the work or the students but instead adds further value to the student's counternarratives as legitimate knowledge.

I chose CRT and IRP over other frameworks that deal with cultural identity, representation, because CRT with IRP is best suited to critically interrogate Morning University as both the source of campus community, *Belongingness* etc, and as a systemic power structure. In comparing to other frameworks, I wanted to streamline the focus to be on lived experiences within an institutional context. CRT directly addresses racism, micro-aggressive behaviour, and institutional inequity. IRP emphasises the creation of knowledge and validation of participants' preferred modes of cultural expression.

Comparatively, Hall's cultural studies approach also provides relevant theoretical framing for identity construction but CRT with IRP is more active, and justice-oriented. Hall's perspective centres identity as negotiated and meaning-driven, whereas because the goal of the research is to improve the Black British experience, CRT is more focused on systemic analysis and lived experiences balancing academic critique with community centred roots. This encourages evidence-based insight grounded in participant realities, such as using LR data to add context to MEIM-R scores (Hall, 1996; Hall, 1997; Hall, 2016).

Therefore, Indigenous Research Principles (IRP) prioritise community knowledge, and honours lived experiences while acknowledging specific histories, languages, cultures etc. For analysis' sake, I adopted a holistic view of the data, understanding the surface level information but also deeper connections between cultural context and ethnic-racial identity. In doing so, this allowed me to maintain a sense of mutuality, ensuring participant counternarratives are respected and valued, and necessary community reverence takes place.

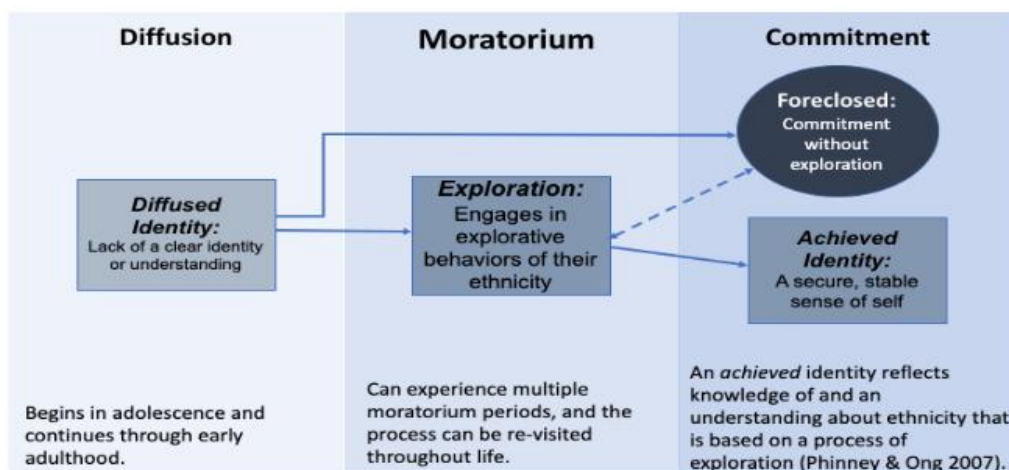
Phinney's ERID Framework

Phinney's Ethnic Racial Identity Development (ERID) model states that one's *ethnic identity* begins with *self-identification*. This connection can be identified via open-ended questions or an "appropriately inclusive" list (Phinney & Ong, 2007, p. 274). Within Phinney's work, an "appropriately inclusive list" is a pointed consideration for the groups being studied. For example, it would be appropriate to include religion as a survey response option for Black British people from London because 48% of Black British people identify as Christian, but it could be considered inappropriate and/or presumptive to include religion when studying White English from London because reports have found Christianity representation shrinking amongst this group specifically (Bickley et al., 2020; Malik, 2022; Office for National Statistics, 2018). An "appropriately inclusive" list is carefully curated to be reflective of a researched population, such that a researcher has completed necessary contextual work to research a community.

Keeping this in mind, one can also identify with numerous labels, can have overlapping labels, and can shift identification of labels throughout their lives, especially for individuals with more than one ethnicity (Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Therefore, in this case, the open-ended questions would be the LR Prompts (LRP) provided during the Listening Rooms, and the "appropriately inclusive" list would be the MEIM-R, edited for the purpose of this work to include statements about Morning University.

Outside stimuli influence the choices of labels with which one identifies (Phinney, 1992; Study Smarter UK, 2023). These stimuli range from opinions of others, opinions of family or parents, social interactions/events, and how one is perceived by others, as well as larger society (Phinney, 1996b; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Study Smarter UK, 2023). The *ethnic identity* process ideally, as defined by Phinney, will result in a positive *Achieved* identity, meaning an identity that reflects a deep knowledge of one's ethnicity, and positive opinion/outlook on ethnic group membership, coupled with an understanding about said ethnicity in a larger societal scope *and* is based on a process of *Exploration*, with lived experiences (Phinney, 1992). Figure 1 illustrates Phinney's Ethnic-Racial Identity Model in an easily understood format.

Figure 1: Phinney's Ethnic-Racial Identity Model



To explain each stage, the process begins with *Diffusion*, meaning a distinct lack of identity. Following *Diffusion*, ideally one would then be expected to enter the *Moratorium* stage being involved in a range of activities, such as participation in cultural practices or attendance to cultural events and interacting with members of their ethnic group. *Moratorium* is most common throughout adolescence into early adulthood because this is commonly considered a chapter of change; with most people experiencing puberty, lifestyle changes, new environments and new interactions in succession (Phinney et al., 1994; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Roberts et al., 1999). The next stage, *Commitment*, diverges creating two substages, *Foreclosed* or *Achieved*. The *Foreclosed* sub-stage displays individuals with a clear gap in understanding of the implications of their attachment i.e. the meaning of identifying with their ethnicity, and how their identity will intermingle with society. Individuals in the *Achieved* sub-stage embrace cultural practices and view their ethnic identity as highly salient to their self-definition.

It is important to note that while the process is more common during this period, it is an enduring process that can continue, with repeated cycles of *Exploration* leading to *Commitment* throughout one's life (Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Baledomar, 2010). In fact, the more exploration, the less susceptible one is to influence when presented with new values, and the less likely they will enter a *Foreclosed* stage; instead, exhibiting higher levels of *Belonging* due to membership in their ethnic group (Phinney, 1988; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Because of the relation between exploration and personal values, ethnic identity is considered a significant contributor to well-being meaning that people develop affirmative self-attitudes from belonging to groups that hold meaning for them (Phinney, 1988; Phinney, Horenczyk, et al., 2001; Lee & Phinney, 2019).

Moratorium is represented as the juncture between either an *Achieved* or *Foreclosed* identity, both of which represent commitment to an identity. One moves from *Diffusion* to *Moratorium* via experiences with others, race-related or otherwise. However, reaching the *Commitment* stage does not suggest development of a positive *Achieved* identity, merely that one has attached themselves to a value or worldview that feels more salient for them at the time (Bernell et al., 1993; Cokley, 2005; Phinney, 1988). Since *Commitment* is merely the title for the stage of reaching a formed identity, whether it be *Achieved* or *Foreclosed*, this is illustrated by the dotted line connecting *Foreclosed* to *Moratorium*; showing the notion that understanding of one's identity can end with a foreclosure, but that it is possible for one to re-visit the *Moratorium* stage and move from *Foreclosed* to *Exploration* and back into *Commitment*, entering the *Commitment* stage with a now explored, ideally positive, *Achieved* identity (Cokley, 2005; Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Ong, 2007). This also illustrates that one cannot move into a positive, *Achieved* identity without a *Moratorium* period (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Since *Exploration* is a period of experiences and heavy interaction, and ethnic identity is defined by self-categorisation, commitment, attachment, behavioural participation, group thoughts, ethnic values, beliefs, and the salience of group membership; one would need a *Moratorium* period to explore these aspects of identity (Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1992; Phinney, 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Without this exploration, a *Foreclosed* identity is created. In short, entering the *Commitment* stage having explored creates an *Achieved* identity, without exploring creates a *Foreclosed* identity.

This research relied on students seeking opportunities that will encourage development of a positive *Achieved* identity, or at least, avoid the fostering of a *Foreclosed* identity. Specific identified markers of behaviour suggest a student is having experiences that encourage the development of an *Achieved* identity. Specifically in researching minority

populations, research found that while a large portion of identity development was based in ethnicity and race, a significant portion of development is intertwined with gender, sexuality, disability and class (Ajay, 2005; Phinney, 1996b; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Factoring in individual experience and varying comfort levels with new, unfamiliar experiences suggests that the level at which one would engage in events that could foster positive development varies widely from person to person. In comparison, Phinney describes opportunities that foster positive development to be one where an individual is encouraged to become deeply involved in learning about their ethnicity. That said, within this research, participants will be provided resources to attend university events related to ethnicity, as well as social events inviting students to interact with diverse peers. Morning University events maintain accessibility, inclusivity, and usability standards for all university-affiliated events (Ajay, 2005; Phinney et al., 2001; University of Morning, 2023). Therefore, participants of the study are actively engaged in activities or events that would encourage a deeper understanding of their ethnicity, while acknowledging any other large influences of their identity, creating the environment necessary for development (Phinney et al., 2001). Henceforth, RQ1 asks:

What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students?

Phinney's ERID framework is considered a process-based approach that seeks to understand the steps to identity development with researchers moulding the approach as needed (Phinney et al., 2001; Phinney & Ong, 2007). For example, past researchers have further defined Phinney's ERID framework by breaking down the final stage, *Commitment*, into two stages, titled *Affirmation* and *Resolution*, to further detail the identity process. In doing so, researchers considered participants' comfort level with the social significance of their identity as a limitation of the framework (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). In this study, it is expected that Black British identities carry some sort of significance to society at all times, whether the Black person is comfortable with this significance. However, the ability to decide to be (un)comfortable with one's social significance is not considered because Black British citizens do not hold the necessary power to adjust their significance for their comfort's sake (Alexander, 1996; Phinney, 1996a; Maynard, 2009; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). Though considered a limitation, the inability to gauge subjective significance is a content-based limitation and is not a hindrance in this case.

In fact, context-based research is particularly relevant for the Black British community as illustration of the effects of an inequitable society (Bayeck, 2021). When discussing "context effects" of context-based research, research highlighted four major characteristics of this sort of evidence:

*"(1) we use contextual measures that are readily available; (2) different measures of context generate different results; (3) people's perceptions of their environment do not resemble governmental units; and (4) **people define their environments differently**" – C.*

Wong; Wong et al., 2012, p. 1018.

Situating contextual research in this field, can be both subjective and objective, depending on the context of the group being studied (Bayeck, 2021; Kenny, 2004; Wong et al., 2012). The same can be said for psychological experiences, the subjects may not recognise the impact their environment had on their recall of experiences. In fact, further

research has shown that incidences where negative emotions, like *Fear*, are felt the brain tends to compartmentalise people who were apart of the incident as outgroup members and thereby threats or “pollutants,” (Kenny, 2004; Wong et al., 2012). This tendency explains why equity can feel to non-Black individuals as if they are the victims in racially motivated incidents. They are fearful and being made to feel afraid by an “outsider.”

Researchers have sought to understand subjective experience, framing it as context, and measuring its effect on thoughts, values, and beliefs. Here, *context* is defined as the environment in which a person *believes* they live in (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Merriam, 1923; Shih et al., 2007). This pseudo-environment that one lives in can stand in contrast with their physical environment and often dictates what sort of social response will occur. In this way, racial contexts are social constructs with “objective attributes of a physical reality,” meaning *race* is socially constructed with physical evidence validating any misconceptions, stereotypes, beliefs, or contexts as physical as well (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Shih et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2012, p. 1155).

Further, research found that it is individual perception and evaluations of *race* that contribute to both environmental racial transgressions and individual contexts in tandem (Brown et al., 1989; Shih et al., 2007; Wong et al., 2012). This means that individual psychological events, like feelings of fear or perceived threat, is contextual, based on the perceptions of the person experiencing the phenomenon. In short, *context* is the translation of perceived experiences into the physical environment as a means for understanding one’s environment (Shih et al., 2007; Sprott & Allport, 1955; Rose et al., 1967). That said, Black British people are therefore situated as actors in other’s pseudo-environments while actively forming *contexts* of their own. Due to society’s physical evidence of *race*, Black British people have the most power over their own subjective experience as creators of their *context*. Herein, Phinney’s work further solidifies subjective significance, and further *context*, as a strength of ethnic identity research because it re-centres ethnic minds as creators instead of actors within a physical environment in which they have little control (Brown et al., 1989; Phinney et al., 2007; Sprott & Allport, 1955; Wong et al., 2012).

It is worth noting that research has also shown that context-based evidence is subject to the bias of the researcher. However, bias has also been shown to be less of a limitation of the work, rather an expectation wherein researchers reconfigure bias to better serve the work at hand (Arocho et al., n.d.; Gullion, 2024; McLeod, 2024). For example, confirmation bias, defined as “*the tendency to emphasise evidence that supports a hypothesis and ignore evidence to the contrary*,” can be counteracted by the researcher by considering wide variations of data and supporting studies and then using specific qualitative approaches that presents the full breadth of the data researched (Littell, 2008, p. 52; McLeod, 2024). *Bias* is framed as an unavoidable aspect of research that researchers must take active steps to counteract, with these aforementioned steps being reflective of the needs of the groups being studied (Arocho et al., n.d.; Gullion, 2024; Littell, 2008).

Using the past work of Phinney, bias is often something present in the selection. Specifically, when selecting participants, Phinney notes in several studies that there was a concern for bias in perceived meaning of the research (Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney et al., 2007). In fact, in studying four separate ethnic groups, White, African American, Latin, and Asian American, using the MEIM, Phinney purposefully sought to counter response bias in participants by wording half of the MEIM prompts negatively, half positively, and then inverting the results for analysis. In doing so,

any negative or positive connotations felt by participants could still be analysed accurately (Roberts et al., 1999).

Keeping this in mind, ethnic identity research purposefully considers biases that could come into play (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Accounting for Ego identity, Gender identity, Occupational identity, Religious identity, and political orientation, assisted researchers in considering what personal biases might be present in studying White, African American, Asian American, and Latin American ethnic groups (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Phinney & Tarver, 1988). In doing so, Phinney and Alipuria found it best to consider what makes up other aspects of the students' identity to glean what level of bias to prepare for, and to better understand the motive of some student responses. For instance, when considering socio-economic status, researchers noted parent occupation and their educational aspirations; drawing a connection between the student's educational goals and the economic status of the homes that supported the student. The study found that there was little differentiation in the student's educational goals, though the 196 students studied came from widely differentiated socioeconomic backgrounds. This study also found that ethnic identity held greater importance for minority study participants than the White participants, but all of the ethnic groups rated sexual identity and occupational identity as the most important (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). In addition, Phinney and Alipuria built upon Phinney's ethnicity research in finding that *ethnic identity* ranks differently even among different ethnic groups, beginning with considering aspects of personhood that not only present bias but that would be held most salient for all ethnic groups (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney, 1996a; Phinney & Tarver, 1988).

Herein, Phinney's ERID framework has been applied to a number of ethnic minority groups. In doing so, past research provided a clear route for the study at hand. Usage of the Listening Rooms method to counteract researcher bias, employment of CRT and IRP for the purpose of community respect, and participant choice in LR modality and partner, were done to maintain the integrity of Phinney's ERID framework as outlined above.

Ethnic Racial Identity and CRT

Phinney's Ethnic Racial Identity Development (ERID) model has an established strong empirical base with minoritised young people in the US, specifically mid-late adolescents (Phinney et al., 1994; Phinney, 1996a; Phinney & Tarver, 1988). Phinney's framework is used with the understanding that it is paired with CRT and Indigenous research principles (IRP) to ensure the social context of development is considered. It's important to note, as explained, that ethnic identity is often racialised with members of an ethnic group having experiences shaped by society's broader racial context.

Mentioned previously, though Phinney focuses on ethnicity, *ethnic identity* is often racialised; *ethnicity* and *race* are often conflated. However, this conflation is inevitable and methodically beneficial. By definition, *race*²⁵ and *ethnicity*²⁶ are distinct, but in Western society, where most of the supporting adjacent literature was produced, *race* and *ethnicity* collapse into one another (Cantres, 2018; Cokley, 2007; Johnson & Arbona, 2006). A person's ethnic identity is often racialised in society such as an African student identifying ethnically as Kenyan but being commonly racialised as *Black*. Further, Phinney's research uses the term '*ethnic-racial identity*,' an acknowledgment of how interwoven *race* and *ethnicity* are, of the inability for non-white people to separate their ethnic self-concept from racialisation by society (Cheon et al., 2018; Phinney, 1996b; Schwartz et al., 2014; Yip, 2013). In further defining how ethnic identities becomes racialised, one must consider how the development of identity is shaped by systems of racial power. For example, consider a south-Asian British student who identifies as Tamil or Bengali, but experiences anti-Muslim or Anti-Brown sentiments in their daily lives. Experiences such as these make it difficult to study ethnic identity development without considering the influencing power of race (Cheon et al., 2018; Verkuyten, 2016; Yip, 2013).

Phinney's model considers the internal processes of development, but usage of CRT allows me to explore the external conditions of development such as exclusion or stereotypes. For instance, the ideologies of Critical Race Theory (CRT) call for acknowledgement of the *Permanence of Race*, and *Counter-storytelling*; both of which are represented in Phinney's model via *Exploration* (Capper, 2015; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Phinney, 1996b; Phinney & Tarver, 1988). Further, noting the introduction of the *Ethnic Racial Identity and CRT* section, Phinney's framework closely aligns with CRT's understandings of identity, as shaped by larger society. When combined with CRT, Phinney's ERID research can pinpoint how the stage/sub-stages of development are influenced by oppressive systems; especially important when assessing a public system such as higher education. Herein, CRT emphasises the importance of marginalised voices while Phinney's model contextualises one's identity journey within real world counternarratives. Together, these frameworks foster a more inclusive investigation of identity. Though *ethnicity* and *race* can be conflated, usage of CRT i.e. *counternarratives*, *intersectionality*, etc. unpacks the ways in which students experience their ethnic identity in a society that first responds to their *race*.

²⁵ Race (n): a socially created categorisation based on physical differences; rooted historically in systems of power.

²⁶ Ethnicity (n): cultural membership, shared cultural practices, behaviours, values, systems, and traditions; shared ancestry.

The ERID framework outlines that minoritised communities have specific community behaviours, stories, experiences, practices, and expectations, not because they exist in an unequal society, rather that minoritised communities hold their already present communities' practices closer and in higher regard in response to an unequal society (Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1996a; Stovall, 2005). CRT critiques assimilationist approaches and provides a framework to understand minoritised communities' resistance. In short, though CRT focuses on race, and Phinney on ethnicity, they are not mutually exclusive. Instead, CRT enriches Phinney's work by grounding it in sociopolitical truths.

Noting this research focuses on late adolescent Black youths, Phinney finds that several factors can have a major effect on identity for minority youths specifically (Bernell et al., 1993; Phinney, 1988; Phinney & Tarver, 1988). One of the larger themes of Phinney's work is *Exploration*. Defined within Phinney's research as *the act of seeking familiarities and information relevant to one's ethnic identity* (Phinney & Ong, 2007, pp. 271-281). *Exploration* could look like reading about or talking to other members of one's ethnic group, the sharing of stories or cultural practices, or participation in cultural events (Phinney & Ong, 2007). It was found that *Exploration* was vital to the process of ethnic identity formation, meaning within Phinney's work, *Exploration* in some form is inescapable (Phinney, 1988; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001). This suggests that ethnic experiences are unavoidable with Phinney's process gauging both the context of the experiences and one's reaction to these experiences to define one's stage of development (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Phinney & Tarver, 1988; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001). Within CRT, the principal *Whiteness as Property* serves to define culture specific behaviours as pseudo-properties, because they do not necessarily carry societal benefit as Whiteness does, but are more for minority groups to shield from the pervasiveness of Whiteness:

“CRT challenges the universality of White experience/judgment as the authoritative standard that binds people of colour and normatively measures, directs, controls and regulates the terms of proper thought, expression, presentation and behaviour. As represented by legal scholars, CRT challenges the dominant discourses on racism...”²⁷ - Tate, 1997, pp. 197-198.

In terms of the Black experience, Phinney found that Black students recognise levels of prejudice that White students did not (Phinney & Tarver, 1988; Phinney et al., 1997). This is not to suggest the White students did not also report varying levels of identity formation but more so to recognise how each student's experience defines how they approach ethnicity. A lack of *Exploration* is exacerbated by the *Permanence of Race*, and *Counternarratives* that contradict the less-developed student's experience (Hiraldo, 2010; Stovall, 2005). The *Prevalence of Race* is also used in terms of this research to define the continued influence of race that my research philosophy was born from. In turn, the less-developed student will struggle to address differing opinions to their own or limit their knowledge should they disagree (Hiraldo, 2010; Phinney, 1988; Phinney et al., 1997; Phinney & Tarver, 1988). Reflective of CRT, Phinney's ERID model encourages *Exploration* of ethnicity without

²⁷ CRT as a framework heavily implies a Black/White binary. However, it is worth noting all non-Anglo/non-European groups in addition to ethnically non-white groups such as Jewish and Roma populations, experience varying levels of the inequity outlined by the CRT framework (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Pierson-Brown, 2022; Phinney & Tarver, 1988).

ignoring the racially charged societal context that the *Exploration* takes place in; in turn critiquing this context's effect (Phinney, 1988; Phinney et al., 1997).

Critical Self-Reflection is also a major theme of this research, to recognise self-esteem, and the saliency of race. *Critical Self-reflection* plays a major role in ethnic identity development because an underlying aspect of *Exploration* is reflecting on the experience, and one's response to the experience (Hiraldo, 2010; Harcourt, 2000; Phinney & Tarver, 1988). Phinney's theory would expect students to critically examine their response, and the effect said experience had on them. Noting that a positive ethnic identity often equates to improved well-being, and that increased self-esteem levels can also affect and be affected by ethnic identity development (Phinney & Tarver, 1988; Phinney, 1996a; Phinney, 1996b).

In fact, past research has found that in some cases American Black late adolescent students report higher levels of self-esteem than their White peers; a result that was surprising because it was previously thought negative stereotypes about an ethnic group would equate to lower self-esteem levels among group members (Cross, 1981; Hernández et al., 2017; Phinney et al., 1997; O'Sullivan et al., 2019). This past research instead suggested that membership in ethnic groups considered "lower" in social hierarchy had less footing on group member self-esteem and much more weight in the opinions, values etc. one has about their ethnic group, that in turn affects self-esteem (Phinney et al., 1997; Phinney et al., 2007). Meaning should an ethnic person have positive feelings, i.e. acceptance and *Belonging*, within their ethnic group, they are more likely to in turn feel positively about their self-esteem and identity as a member of the group. Inversely, with negative experiences involving acceptance, such as instances of group exclusion, negative feelings about their identity in the group would also arise. In terms of racialised experiences, studies found that students reflecting on their experiences can help understand how the aforementioned experiences are continually influencing these actions (Phinney et al., 1997; Phinney et al., 2007)²⁸. Therefore, Phinney's theory suggests through critical reflection, one would be able to pinpoint experiences that have affected their feelings of group membership and subsequently their self-esteem.

In short, though the research at hand blurs the line between *race* and *ethnicity* in analysis, applying CRT with IRP to Phinney's work enables a grounded, socially aware understanding of Black British student development. Specifically, CRT with IRP provides a more dynamic view of how development is affected by power, systematic inequity, and social interaction. In turn, providing a sharper picture of the experiences students face in a racialised higher education system.

²⁸ Critical Theory Approach pairs the potential for study of Black students, with a subjective approach creating a functionalist, or top-down method. Functionalism, also known as the 'Top-Down' method, defined individuals as products of both societal constructions and wider socialisation (Study Smarter UK, 2023; Phinney et al., 2007).

Phinney's Ethnicity Research and Black Scholarship in the UK

Though Phinney's ethnic-racial framework is often situated in a US context, there is validity in utilising the framework in the UK as well. Similar to the US, and relevant to this research, the UK is also home to several different ethnic minorities, first-generation citizens, and similar political and national identity make-ups. Researchers note there is an active conversation about *ethnic identity*, self-categorisation, and its relation to psychological well-being (Briggs, 2010; Routledge, 2012; Waterman, 1982).

As ethnic identity research grows, Phinney's work has been dissected in a UK context. One such study analysed other forms of identity like race, religion, and class in relation to ethnic identity specifically examining how distinct interrelations between each identity are (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013). Analysis showed that there is a distinctive interconnection between Phinney's *Moratorium* stage and *Commitment* stage, suggesting that the process of coming to terms with group memberships also means addressing a number of other facets of identity; such as a second generation person reconciling their ethnic identity as it relates to their national identity (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2021). Further, Gaines' research showed that specific identities like religious identity have stronger correlations than others, suggesting that moving from *Exploration* to *Commitment* may involve less mediating from other identities to reach an *Achieved* identity. In short, Gaines et al. suggested that in the UK, while moving from *Exploration* to *Commitment*, one may find less to reconcile between *ethnic identity* and religious identity than between *ethnic identity* and other forms of identity like gender or national identity (Gaines et al., 2013; Waterman, 1982). Further, the necessary reconciliation will carry more brevity depending on the saliency of the individual's religious identity (Habibi et al., 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2018; Nguyen, 2020). As Gaines noted, this suggests that areas of attention will vary widely but specific identities will tend to connect.

“Those areas in a person's life in which important decisions must be made, and which therefore are likely to be a major focus of attention” – Waterman, 1982 as cited in Gaines, 2013, p. 342.

However, Gaines did note one such weakness of the study was the ratio of ethnic minority and ethnic majority participants in the study, as this was not significant enough to draw meaningful comparisons between mean MEIM scores. There is room for further research in each specific participating ethnic minority group and the possibility of adjoining ethnic minority identities unique to each group (Gaines et al., 2013; Office for National Statistics, 2018). This is particularly poignant considering that Gaines highlighted Black populations as being underrepresented in the data (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013).

Further, Phinney's work was also tested as a fitting measure of global ethnic identity (Bernell et al., 1993; Gaines et al., 2010; Phinney, 1992). To be elaborated on further, the MEIM-R or *Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised*, was tested on the grounds that Phinney's work categorises participants by treating the *Moratorium* and *Commitment* stages of the identity process as a continuation; treating identity work as a constant ongoing process quantified at any given point in time (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines, et al., 2013; Phinney, 1992). In this way, Phinney's ethnic frameworks and the MEIM-R are treated bi-

dimensionally with a focus on *Exploration* as a rational component and *Commitment* as an effect of which (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013). Gaines' research showed that in the UK Phinney's work was actually best suited for a three-factor analysis wherein there is a proven correlation between cognitive, behavioural, and affective components of identity with a noted distinction between each (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013; Phinney, 1992; Phinney et al., 1994). This suggests that behavioural representations of ethnic identity, i.e. community-specific practices like code-switching²⁹, should be treated as "part and parcel" of ethnic identity in the UK (Gaines et al., 2010; Phinney et al., 1994; Phinney et al., 1997). Noting that this study included several minority ethnic groups in the UK, researchers highlighted low participation from White English people as a limitation of the research; meaning researchers were unable to draw meaningful conclusions about all ethnic groups (Gaines et al., 2010; Phinney et al., 1997).

That said, Phinney's ethnic-racial identity framework has been tested among various ethnic groups in the UK and demonstrates a distinct correlation between exploratory and commitment stages of identity development (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013; Phinney, 1996b; Phinney & Baledomar, 2010). Gaines' further research showed that *Commitment* emerges as an effect of *Moratorium*, underscoring the necessity of a period of searching for British ethnic populations (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013; Phinney, Horenczyk, et al., 2001). While this cause-and-effect relationship has been documented in America, my research interrogates Phinney's work, and adjacent work like Gaines, within the context of the UK. In doing so, I highlight and justify the inclusion of Black British student voices. Crucially, contextual lived experiences mould much of the *Moratorium* stage, and Phinney's ERID framework proves useful in analysing a UK setting (Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1996b; Phinney & Baledomar, 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Moreover, through Phinney's definition of exploratory behaviours, one would view Black scholarship as an avenue reflective of Phinney's work.

"Rooting Black Studies in the wider communities of knowledge should transform the work that we do. Including Black communities into the process of education cannot be done in a tokenistic gesture and is not just about the curriculum. It means making meaningful links with communities of practice and placing the work in the university in the service of liberation." –Andrews, 2019, pp. 701-707.

The research outlined here reflects the existence of Black British people in a non-equitable society, perpetuated by an influence of societal messaging via mass media, popular culture representation, and overall community-specific goals. Here, Phinney's identity work outlines that minoritised ethnic groups require critical reflection, and involvement with other Black academics as displayed among Black academics in the UK (Andrews & Palmer, 2016). Notably, higher education also seeks students with varying backgrounds, weaving Black studies into the university in the hopes that doing so will foster equitable change for students (Andrews, 2018; Andrews & Palmer, 2016). However, some university communities are not always prepared to accept students with diverse backgrounds than the majority (Andrews, 2016; Andrews, 2018; Andrews, 2019; Andrews & Palmer, 2016; Labaree, 2021).

Highlighting a major area of exploratory behaviours in the UK, Black scholarship in the UK is a prevalent research field in recent years. Noting the increased focus on the

²⁹ Code-Switching – (n, v): Changing one's language, style of communication, or manner of speak depending on the audience/listener (Heller, 1989). See Glossary.

Windrush generation, and the acknowledgement of Britain's sordid treatment of Black and Brown bodies in history, it does not necessarily come as a surprise that research interest continues to grow (BBC News, 2021; Phillips et al., 1998). Much of the existing research is rooted in an American perception, whereas the study of Black British experiences, particularly around identity development, remains an emergent area of scholarship (Dogra & Karnik, 2004; Mai, 2005). This is not to suggest that the work at hand is the first or only analysis of identity development but more to acknowledge that any gaps in necessary background research are filled with findings often from the US (Chandler et al., 2008).

Black Scholarship encompasses academic inquiries, research, and knowledges focused on Black people in the UK (Andrews, 2016; Andrews, 2018; Andrews, 2019). The term Black Scholarship can include but is not limited to diaspora studies, Black cultural studies, Black British Studies, African history, Caribbean history, and culture-oriented research (Alexander, 1996; Andrews, 2018; Andrews & Palmer, 2016; Bourne, 2014). Noted past research has emphasised the necessity of Black scholarship initiatives and the importance of critical analysis of Black exclusion from academia (Andrews & Palmer, 2016; Demie, 2019; Marchant, 2020). However, Black scholarship is at risk with recent reports condemning the closure of a number of courses that were specifically aimed at addressing racial disparities (Mohdin, 2024). Representation among staff, micro-aggressive behaviour among students, and exclusion of ethnic knowledge from the curriculum are heavily researched as a crisis of Black scholarship, of British academia (Andrews, 2018; Obo, 2020).

To tighten the discussion, Black scholarship in the UK has increased steadily with more research centring Black voices and interrogating Black experiences across education and society (Advance HE & University of Sheffield, 2021; Arday, 2018; Arday, 2019; Obo, 2020; Thelamour et al., 2019; Watkins et al., 2007; Weale, 2020). However, the body of work does not in itself directly determine identity conclusions for students. Instead, the body of work creates resources and spaces wherein students can draw on their own experiences as processes of exploration (Advance HE & University of Sheffield, 2021; Arday, 2019; Arday, 2021; Weale, 2020; Wallace, 2016). For instance, Birmingham City University and The Black Curriculum (2024) provided opportunities for Black students to directly engage with history, perspectives, and values excluded from mainstream education (The Black Curriculum, 2024). Similarly, scholar Bhopal (2024) highlighted the persistence of racial inequalities in higher education, in turn prompting critical reflection and discourse with students using Black scholarship as the exploratory materials of the study. Black academics like Jason Arday provided timely insight on Black experience, inequity, and critical insight on racialised society, notably highlighting Black Scholarship as an interrogation of the Black British experience (Arday, 2018; Arday, 2019; Arday, 2021; Arday & Jones, 2022). Operating under Phinney's framework, these forms of scholarship and institutional initiatives are understood as an expansion of the explorative landscape available to Black British students. By directly engaging with this knowledge, students may progress through exploration towards *Commitment*, thereby fostering an *Achieved* ethnic-racial identity.

Herein, I build on Phinney's framework and the Listening Rooms method. Both of which have been used in UK higher education research, such as the Queen Mary University of London where they generated valuable qualitative data on perceptions of student services (Queen Mary University of London, n.d.). However, to my knowledge, these tools have not been previously applied in combination to examine ethnic-racial identity development (ERID) of Black British students. My research makes a unique contribution by applying

Phinney's model to dialogue about Black British student experiences and using the Listening Rooms method to capture their voices. In doing so, I generated new knowledge within Black scholarship in the UK and extended the field's understanding of how identity is explored and achieved in higher education contexts.

Methodology

The methodology I use reflects the philosophy of this investigation. As a Black woman, this research is personally significant to me as both an inquisitor and a living example of the Black student experience. In the past, I was in the same place as the students I study; an undergraduate Black student attending a university with a much different population than my home community. At the time of this research, I remain a Black student attending a predominantly white institution, albeit at the doctoral level. Therefore, this research utilises Critical Race Theory (CRT), listed in Table 2 and 3, with Indigenous Research Principles (IRP) as research frameworks to back the Listening Rooms Method. I, as the primary researcher and, on a larger scale, society, am influenced by societal views and commonalities directed by race, culture, gender, policy, and caste that are, in turn, also being affected by historically constituted power structures (Bayeck, 2021; Caldwell & Crenshaw, 1996; Ryan, 2018). Using a thematic analysis will establish which university affordances successfully encourage development of a positive ethnic identity, framing the Research Themes (RTs) as both as points of discussion and as bench markers representative of fostered identity development (Cokley, 2005; De Vaus, 2001).

The research employed the Listening Rooms method and the Multi-group Ethnicity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R; see Image 3) to analyse Black British student identity at the time of the study. The MEIM-R was administered to 13 ancestrally Black, ethnically diverse Morning University students. The MEIM-R is comprised of a *Belonging, Acceptance, and Community* sub-scale (BAC), an *Ethnic Identity* sub-scale (EI), and a *University Satisfaction* sub-scale (UIC) reached by calculating the average score of the total MEIM-R and each sub-scale respectively (Gaines et al., 2013; Phinney, 1997; Phinney, 2010).

Image 3: Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised. p. 78.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

- 1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
- 2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
- 3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
- 4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
- 5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
- 6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
- 7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
- 8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
- 9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
- 10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
- 11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
- 12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

13- My ethnicity is

- (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
- (2) Black or African American
- (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
- (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
- (5) American Indian/Native American
- (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
- (7) Other (write in): _____

14- My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

15- My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

While the BAC subscale of the MEIM-R has been used in researching depression symptomatology and health-related quality of life in a youth obesity study, there has not been an analysis of Black British university students, older adolescents, and *ethnic identity* using the MEIM-R (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013; Lim et al., 2016; Phinney, 1997). Data collection consisted of the Listening Rooms, Listening Room 1 (LR 1) and Listening Room 2 (LR 2), as well as computing each student participant's MEIM-R scores and sub-scores from each Listening Room. Per Phinney's MEIM-R, the closer a student is to a score of 4, the more likely they have reached, or will reach by continuing exploratory behaviours, an *Achieved* identity. Each Listening Room was held with two or three student participants. Outlined in the Student Participant Profiles, student pseudonyms are listed with research relevant details such as student society involvement and student ethnicity.

I ask the following:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students?*

- a. How do students define their identity?
- b. What experiences in university do students feel have the most influence over their development?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *What aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture, religious, affinity groups or workshops, EDI events) most influence Black British student's ethnic racial identity development?*

- a. Based on student opinion, would the students consider university affordances successful?
- b. Do students from different ethnic backgrounds respond differently to Black-intended activities or affordances?
- c. Do certain university affordances achieve the University's desired effect?

Taking this critique further, I posed the following RQs, specifically RQ1b and RQ2a: **What experiences in university do students feel have the most influence over their development; and based on student opinion, would the students consider university affordances successful?** to encourage the students to critically reflect on the journey to Uni, to grasp their social experience prior to university, to analyse their community's role in their experience, its relevance to their time actually attending Uni, and the ways in which these experiences either helped or harmed them. Therefore to fully grasp the rippling effect a student's choice in university can have on their lives and how they later approached society, LR discussion prompts consisted of why did they choose this university, what aspects were most influential in this decision, and what aspects of the campus community have most influenced their development.

I first present my positionality as lead researcher and how my positionality is reflected in the research. Specifically, I discuss my personal reasons for choosing the Listening Rooms Method, as well as how this is reflected in my analysis of LR data. Then I explore key connections between higher education (HE) and the development of Black student personhood, thereby re-producing the Research Themes (RT) of the research, *Self-Identification, Belonging, Socialisation, Well-Being, Journey, and Reflection*. I continue the Listening Rooms analysis by defining challenges, limitations, and setbacks of the method.

Further, this research scrutinises the interrelationships between social context, university experience, and community-specific behaviours to define the steps Black British students might take in the development of their identities. Therefore, after discussing the importance of specific methodologies for othered communities, I move into elaborating on the Listening Rooms method and the Multi-Ethnic Identity Model (MEIM-R), clarifying why the Listening Rooms Method and MEIM-R are most suitable for the topic at hand.

The method defined here acknowledges the varying aspects of society involved and uplifts the experiences of the marginalised students that I seek to understand. My hope is that I can assist other marginalised students, Black British students, to more critically engage with their knowledge thereby fostering an educational experience more reflective of their needs. One can only begin to solve a problem when all aspects of the problem are understood fully. In this case, one must understand first what experiences Black British students are encountering, what effect they carry, and then what must be adjusted in pursuit of the desired effect. In this case, the desired effect is a positive, i.e. *Achieved* Black British identity.

Positionality

Race, as a construct, permeates every fibre of society; therefore, it stands to reason that major aspects of one's identity would be based in race, ethnicity, and one's experiences of identifying with their specific racial group (Cabrera, 2018). The time a young person spends in university can be one of the most volatile periods of their formative years. Therefore, to consider the positionality of this research is to recognise the producer as well as the meaning behind usage of specific research processes. The topic of this study, the true heart of the research, are the counternarratives of first to second generation Black British university students who have UK citizenship. This research sought to understand Black British student development, not only to further the field of study, but also as an ode to this researcher's peers; both past and present. In short, I aim to further shine a light on specific ethnic minority groups and better understand ethnic-racial identity development because this was and is still my lived experience.

I am an American Black woman, a first-generation student, raised in the American south, from one of the poorest counties in the country. I produce this research with recognition of the position I am in, in relation to the students I study. Yes, Black British students and I share much in cultural identity, in cultural solidarity, but it would be naive to assume that I would receive automatic acceptance into the Black British community. In fact, I feel it'd be a disservice to the many faces of the Black diaspora. Our experiences are similar but not exactly the same and I highlight this failed assumption because I once resided in the very same seats as these students. Feelings of exclusion, excitement to see others who look like you, apprehension in stepping into decidedly White spaces, and relief when returning home to familiar ground are feelings that carry a special poignancy as both a lived reality and a marker of identity affecting experiences.

Noting that the goal of the research is student understanding, I provided a glossary of student expressions featuring common Black British English terms (BBE) and phrases used during the Listening Rooms by the student participants, as well as terminology necessary to understand this work. This is solely to facilitate insight, recognising language as an extension of culture, and to ensure that the impact of experiences/narratives that weren't explained in terms understandable to the reader is not lost. In recognition of student-speak (slang), the glossary can also define terms that may be familiar to students but not to this research's audience.

Here, it is important to note that CRT with IRP interrogates how power structures are reinforced, and privileges participant's preferred mode of communication. In this way, student slang is not simply "casual language," but an assertion of community *Belonging* and cultural identity, and a respect for the ways students choose to communicate. Including a glossary was a purposeful decision to bridge the gaps between students and staff and to avoid misalignment between Morning University (institutional) "Whiteness" and student communication. Herein, I provided the glossary as a resource and cultural corroboration. This is not to assume that all Black British students use, relate to, or need this language to feel represented, but rather an acknowledgement that students are free to communicate as they wish in the LR space. Firmly noted, slang is fluid, community-specific and spans generations. To truly reflect the research, the glossary must be both comprehensive and malleable, a cultural dictionary.

As my research is also in reflection of my experience, BAME and BME will not be used to refer to any racial groups. It is not actually a term that I became familiar with until my arrival in the UK. In British higher education research and policy, BAME and/or BME are common terms deployed to aggregate Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups into a single umbrella term (BBC, n.d.). While widespread, this practice risks flattening the very differences it claims to recognise, obscuring the specific experiences of Black British students. Much of the existing literature adopts these homogenising terms, making it difficult to trace how *race* and *ethnicity* interact in shaping identity development within any one group. My research challenges this approach, giving voice to different Black British ethnic groups, and recognising the diversity among participants. Bringing race and ethnicity into the dialogue, rather than collapsing them into umbrella terms, my analysis allows for a more precise and nuanced understanding of identity development. Further, my research considers the purposeful melding of *race* and *ethnicity* (ethnic-racial) as a strength of analysis allowing richer assessment of student identity development. I cannot establish that usage of the term BAME and/or BME would provide a similar strength to the research.

Additionally, recognising the timeliness of this research, recently the UK government found that ethnic minority groups were three times as likely to find BAME “unhelpful,” (Bunglawala, 2019; Final Report on Progress to Address COVID-19 Health Inequalities, 2021). Speaking directly to higher academia, scholars have expressed the term’s failures.

*“My experience as a Chinese person varies from a Vietnamese, Japanese, Thai, Indian, Bangladeshi person. So, data-driven representation should represent that. Rather than just labelling us all as **BAME**.”* - Viv Yau, Co-Founder of besea.n (BBC, n.d., para 6).

“Not all of us emanate from the Punjab or Gujarat or Bangladesh or made a prolonged stopover in East Africa. Not all of our parents arrived in the UK in the 1960s or 1970s. Not all of us live in a large, dense community, or speak its language – or even wish to.” - Sheena Kalayil, Author and tutor, University Language Centre at the University of Manchester (BBC, n.d., para 5).

*“I mean, it was a white term, if we're being honest, White people made it, so they don't have to say '**black**', because they feel weird saying black for some reason.”* Tosin Attah, International Student, Lagos, Nigeria (Fakim & Macaulay, 2020).

Essentially, the goal of my research is to better understand Black British students’ ethnic racial identity development, in turn, furthering knowledge on ethnic identity development in the UK. By unravelling the term BAME, and narrowing the focus on Black British students, I address intersectional differences and produce a more targeted investigation into student knowledge.

In further respect of the groups being studied, the use of the terms *Black* and *black*, *White* and *white*, have also been considered. Note, research shows modern day ancestrally African and Caribbean populations do consider themselves “black” (Blakely, 2021; Ibezim et al., 2025; Robinson, 2025). Therefore, *Black*, capitalised, is a reference to Blackness as a socially organised race, as a cultural identity to be experienced; just as *White*, with a capital W, refers to Whiteness. Blackness and Whiteness, in terms of this research, are meant to encompass the varied, often societally influenced, meanings of said race. Defined in the Theoretical Framework chapter, this research employs Critical Race Theory (CRT) with Indigenous Research Principles (IRP), which stipulates the recognition of Whiteness as a

property, a privilege, and an expectation of inclusion; whereas Blackness would be characterised as hyper-visibility, assimilation, and bi-cultural experiences (Arday, 2019; Caldwell & Crenshaw, 1996; Robinson, 2025). In comparison, usage of “*black*” and “*white*,” not capitalised, are more explanations, and less a written representation of all that encompasses nuanced group membership. This is also done in recognition of underlying disparity. It is worth noting that it is frowned upon not to capitalise Asian or African, but Black and White do not have the same discrepancy, though they are races (Bunglawala, 2019; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Robinson, 2025). Noted above, the UK government is taking steps to recognise this usage of inappropriate language and the damage it does to larger societal goals. Therefore, since my aim is to further shine a light on specific ethnic minority groups; proper recognition is a necessity for the improvement of society at large (Bunglawala, 2019; Fakim & Macaulay, 2020; Hensby et al., 2024).

All the above tactics serve as illustrations of this research’s positionality. The goal of this research is to widen understanding of ethnic-racial identity development of British Black students. The decision to use CRT with Indigenous Research Principles (IRP), the choice of the Listening Rooms as a methodology, the removal of terms used for erasure, and the resolve to provide a glossary to ensure understanding, were all made with the intention of honouring the Black students before myself and paving a more equitable way for those who come after me; as a justice to the Black community that made me, and every Black student, British or otherwise.

The Listening Rooms Method

This research uses the Listening Rooms (LR) method, implemented through a clearly structured, multi-stage process designed to ensure ethical integrity, participant comfort, and analytical rigor. Importantly, the lead researcher is not present throughout the recorded discussion. First, participants were recruited through targeted university communications and affinity networks. Eligibility criteria were listed on the materials and specified that participants must be 1st or 2nd generation Black British students, must be at least in their second term of 1st, or 2nd, or 3rd year, holding home-fee status who identify as ancestrally African or Caribbean. Interested students received an introductory email detailing the purpose of the study, and confidentiality procedures, before being prompted to provide three days/times that worked best with their schedule.

On the day of the LR, participants arrived and first completed the *Briefing Session*. During the *Briefing Session*, participants completed the MEIM-R and categorisation questions i.e. gender, race, course, age etc. and were invited to ask any lingering questions before I exited the Listening Room space. Online LRs were available for participants who requested them and were held using Microsoft Teams. If the LR was online, participants were sent the MEIM-R and *Briefing* categorisation questions 24 hours in advance. Then, I confirmed they were completed and that participants had no further questions before leaving the virtual Teams space. Cameras remained off in the Teams LR if the students wished. For both online and in-person LRs, participants received open-ended reflective discussion prompts centred around the Research Themes (RTs). Afterward, LR recordings were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed alongside MEIM-R scores to triangulate developmental stage indicators with lived experiences. Participants received a ‘Thank You’ email, providing a calendar of University Affordances and a timeline for completion of the second Listening Room. Through these sequential steps, the Listening Rooms method combines procedural clarity with dialogic flexibility ensuring depth of insight.

The Listening Rooms method is best suited for this specific study because it illustrates the tenets of CRT as the theoretical foundation of this research, its methodological stipulations avoid a number of common pitfalls in qualitative research upholding IRP, and most importantly, it best suits the ethnic group being studied; Black British students. Here, I define first what the Listening Rooms (LR) method is, before clearly outlining why I chose the Listening Rooms as the most suitable method for the research in comparison to other forms of data collection. I then explain why the LRs are most appropriate to frame the tenets of CRT, illustrate IRP in the context of the Black British student experience, and interpret the results of the MEIM-R critically.

In the Listening Rooms, participants were given prompts designed to encourage an open dialogue around six key themes: *Self-Identification*, *Belonging*, *Socialisation*, *Well-Being*, *Journey*, and *Reflection*. See Table 1, these Research Themes (RT) were identified through a thorough review of existing identity development research, as well as existing understandings of the Black student experience. I selected the Research Themes (RT), organising my data collection around these themes, because they were consistently significant factors in understanding how students were navigating university. I ground the Listening Rooms in these research-backed themes, and each Listening Room prompt question is purposefully written to encourage personal narratives, reflection, and intersectional self-

exploration, related to these themes. I intended to align ongoing academic conversations, with a fine-tuned exploration of ethnic-racial identity development for Black British students attending a mid-ranked university (Morning University).

Table 1: Research Themes of the Project

Research Themes:	Selected based on their prevalence and significance in the existing body of work in the research field.
Self-Identification	defining oneself as a member of an ethnic group and/or displaying common attributes shared by an ethnic group (Bernal & Knight, 1993).
Belonging	the level of cohesion one feels with membership in an ethnic group or community (Bernal & Knight, 1993).
Socialisation	the act of intermingling with peers in a casual, academic, or professional sense (Bernal & Knight, 1993).
Well-Being	the route and fluctuating state of being happy, healthy, and comfortable (Bernell et al., 1993).
Journey	figurative, the passage of life (Oxford University, 2022).
Reflection	The process or faculty by which the mind observes and examines its own experiences and emotions; intelligent self-awareness, introspection (Oxford University, 2022).

Participants were given the same definitions in the Listening Room materials to ensure that their knowledge of the project definitions was consistent. See Image 4.1, and 4.2, each theme was written with the definition, and then corresponding discussion prompt for each theme was listed. Participants were free to move through the Research Themes (RTs) and prompts at their own pace and were not required to answer every single one as the prompts were meant as a guide for an organic conversation.

Image 4.1 and 4.2: Listening Room 1 and Listening Room 2 discussion prompts.

A. Self-Identification (n): *defining one's self as a member of an ethnic group and/or displaying common attributes shared by an ethnic group (Bernal & Knight, 1993).*

1. How do you define your ethnicity?
2. How do you experience your ethnicity?
3. Do you enjoy participating in culturally-relevant activities? Why or why not?
4. What does culture mean for you while living at home? While at university?

B. Journey (n): *figurative, the passage of life (Oxford University, 2022).*

1. How has your family contributed to your understanding of your ethnic identity?
2. What about your home community?
3. Why did you choose the University of Kent?
4. Has your time in university thus far contributed to your understanding of your ethnic identity?

Listening Room 1

A. Journey (n): *figurative, the passage of life (Oxford University, 2022).*

1. What strengths or weakness have you seen in culturally relevant activities organized by the University of Kent?
2. Did you enjoy participating in culturally relevant activities? Why or why not?
3. Regarding your community, have you had any culturally relevant experiences while visiting home and/or since leaving Kent?
4. Were there been any societies or opportunities you avoided? If so, why?

B. Self-Identification (n): *defining one's self as a member of an ethnic group and/or displaying common attributes shared by an ethnic group (Bernal & Knight, 1993).*

1. Has your understanding of your ethnic identity changed/shifted? How?
2. Do you still agree with your decision to attend the University of Kent? Explain your reasoning.
3. Has your attendance at Kent contributed to your understanding of your ethnic identity?

Listening Room 2

The Listening Rooms Method was first put forth by Helen Parkin and Emma Heron as an opportunity for “hard listening,” and to encourage more “open and genuine” conversation from those participating (Storey & Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence, 2022, n.p.). Research has shown that this approach maximises interaction by eliminating interventions from the researcher or the Room environment (Heron & Parkin, 2019; Jacobi et al., 2022). The Listening Rooms consist of a soundproof room or space, free from distractions by covering the windows, doors, or areas that could present outside interferences with the recorded conversation taking place. In doing so, Heron and Parkin suggest there is a heightened focus on the conversation itself (Heron & Parkin, 2019; Heron & Parkin, 2023; SEDA et al., 2022). The interviewer, in this case myself, is not present in the room during the recorded conversation between participants as a route to combat research bias during data collection (Heron & Parkin, 2019; SEDA et al., 2022). Participants are in control of the flow, speed, and context of the discussion. In absence of the interviewer, participants receive a series of prompts/questions that guide their conversation. Herein, the prompts of the LR are centred around the Research Themes (RT), see Table 1.

To be elaborated on further, the Listening Room prompts centre around *Self-Identification, Belonging, Socialisation, Well-Being, Journey, and Reflection*. Following completion of the LRs, a *Round Table Analysis* (RTA) is completed wherein university administrators, staff, and/or those with the ability to affect policy change are invited to review the data in a group setting (Heron & Parkin, 2019; Heron & Parkin, 2022). The goal of the *Analysis* is a collaborative thematic discussion with attendees being tasked with using LR data to produce recommendations for improvement (Heron & Parkin, 2019; SEDA et al., 2022). Operating this study slightly different as a PhD student, this research’s RTA consists of RTs, findings of the LRs, and my subsequent recommendations being reviewed by invited professionals for viability. See chapter *Round Table Analysis: Research to Practice*.

Focusing in on past research that has utilised LRs, the method uses commonplace peer to peer contact, and pre-existing relationships, as a catalyst for discussion in a pseudo-interview (Heron & Parkin, 2019; Heron & Parkin, 2023; Jacobi et al., 2022). To avoid the pitfalls of researcher bias and maintain impartiality of the data, student participants do not speak directly to the lead researcher during the recorded LR discussion. Capitalising on the comfort shared between two participants, previous research shown that genuine student voice data can be subject to bias and influence during the data collection process (Heron & Parkin, 2019; Jacobi et al., 2022). Avoiding interviewee/interviewer biases when able, the lead researcher acts as a ‘fly on the wall,’ and data is later interrogated in the *Round Table Analysis (RTA)*. Earlier case studies found that in doing so, changemakers were also more apt to take actionable steps because there was greater transparency in the data, and they played an active role in solution production (Heron & Parkin, 2022; Jacobi et al., 2022; Storey & Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence, 2022). In these studies, data that could be missed while using other qualitative methods adds clarifying detail to the lived experience of students, signifying to participants the importance of their voice while giving changemakers a clearer picture of student experience (Heron & Parkin, 2019; Heron & Parkin, 2022; Heron & Parkin, 2023; Storey & Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence, 2022).

The Listening Rooms method is based on Nancy Kline’s Values of Equity. As shown in Image 5, Nancy Kline originated the “Thinking Environment,” which is an observation-based questioning approach beginning with the idea that “*the quality of everything we do*

depends on the quality of the thinking we do first," (Kline, 1999, as cited in Culture at Work & Wilson, 2021, n.p.). Kline found that the biggest determinant of someone's quality of thinking was how they were treated by those around them. In turn, Kline identified several determinants of treatment that would affect or influence quality of thinking (Culture at Work & Wilson, 2021; Kline, 1999). It is these determinants that the Listening Rooms are based on.

Image 5: Nancy Kline's Thinking Equals (Culture at Work & Wilson, 2021; Kline, 1999, n. p.).

Value (Nancy Kline's)	Listening Rooms	Round Table Analysis
Respect	Automatic via friendship	Briefing at start of session
Equality	Both people in the room have equal right to share their view	All transcripts have equal attention All in room given chance to speak irrespective of status
Ease	Friendship Safe environment (+ cake)	Limited data to read & informal environment
Diversity	Anyone welcome in the room	Welcoming of diverse points of view
Appreciation	Prompt cards	Framing
Encouragement	'No wrong answers' & friendship	Positives over negatives

For instance, Kline defined *Ease* as the way in which one would gauge treatment. The presence of *Ease* in a Thinking Environment meant there was a sense of freedom in interactions, with little internal rush or urgency to conclude interactions (Kline, 1999; Kline, 2020). In the Listening Rooms this is reflected in Heron and Parkin's choice to utilise pre-existing relationships as "safe environments;" to create *Ease*. In addition, a "safe environment" with *Equality* is created by blocking out distractions that could affect the discussion taking place, ensuring both people have equal opportunity to voice their opinion in the space. The Thinking Environment's main goal, later illustrated in the Listening Rooms Method, is to invite pointed interaction by providing a certain level of safety while regarding those being studied as "thinking equals," (Kline, 2019; Kline, 2020; Kline, 1999). Here, the Listening Rooms Method exhibits these goals of safety by using the peer-ship of the participants. Per Image 5, "Thinking Equals" are established by the participants as they would have already established their peer as equal due to the pre-existing relationship and/or known shared student commonalities.

To discuss the Listening Rooms method, one should also consider how university students are currently being studied. Research suggests that much of the knowledge collected around student experience is survey-based with university policies being reflective of the subsequent analysis and publication of these surveys (Arocho et al., n.d.; Heron, 2019; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2021; Smith, 1999). For instance, in the US there is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), published in The College Student Report, that annually collects data at hundreds of four-year institutions, specifically about first-year and third/fourth-year student participation in institution provided programs that are meant to further their university progression (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2021).

Here, university-offered opportunities that students most take part in are summarised and aggregated. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain skill-wise from attending university.

Advance HE spearheads the UK Engagement Survey which pursues an understanding of “how, and on what level, students across UK higher education engage with both their studies and their institution,” (UK Engagement Survey 2022 | Advance HE, 2021; Advance HE, 2020; Advance HE, 2021). There is also HEPI in the UK, or the Higher Education Policy Institute, who partners with Advance HE to publish the Student Academic Experience Survey; in addition to HEPI’s ongoing data collection and dissemination efforts (Stephenson, 2023). This survey reaches thousands of university students across the UK and is referenced often as one of the most comprehensive snapshots of university student experience in the field (Stephenson, 2023).

Though the surveys above reach a wide audience, the data collected is more a snapshot and can lack depth in participant response. For example, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of surveys specific to Black British populations grew. Cambridge University and popular TV show *The Voice* lead the Black British Voices survey that found that 98% of those surveyed experienced compromised self-expression and identity when trying to “fit into the workplace.” Community-specific behaviours like adaptive speech³⁰ or hairstyles were reported; with appearance and cultural background being cited as reasons for lack of advancement or progress (Advance HE & University of Sheffield, 2021; Black British Voices: The Findings, 2023; UK Engagement Survey 2022 | Advance HE, 2023). YouGov, a British research and analytics group, found that 74% of Black British respondents have had someone ask, “where you’re really from?” An additional 64% have had a racial slur directed at them, while 65% have witnessed someone telling a joke featuring a racial stereotype about their own race (Abraham, 2020). Although these surveys are highly informative and necessary, they do not offer information on the effect of these experiences on Black British people. What are the effects of these racialised experiences? What sort of internal backlash is felt by Black British citizens subject to these experiences? Unfortunately, survey data is unable to offer such nuance.

To home in on that nuance, researchers rely on qualitative methods using counter narratives to provide clearer understanding. This is not to say that qualitative methods have been the perfect route to researching the Black community, but rather to unpack why qualitative research is put forth as a more fitting research technique for Black people. Interview-based research is reportedly useful in exploring complex phenomena by capturing individuals’ “first-hand experiences, meaning-making, and perspectives,” (Bayeck, 2021; Kline, 1999; Phoenix et al., 2018, para. 3; Walton et al., 2022). Ideally, when an individual interview is completed well, research-wise, the result is rich, complex data (Walton et al., 2022). Past studies completed using interview-based methodologies found that interviews tend to facilitate more natural conversation and offer the opportunity to build a greater rapport with participants by asking further questions based on the dialogue (Edwards et al., 2023; Mizock et al., 2011). This is particularly helpful when discussing oppressive experiences as participants build trust with the interviewer and are likely more comfortable

³⁰ Adaptive Speech – Strategic modification of language as means of navigating certain spaces. Example: Code-Switching.

discussing potentially distressing topics (Edwards et al., 2023; Mizock et al., 2011; Walton et al., 2022).

In terms of Black people, comfort is of particular importance, especially comfort with the interviewer (Walton et al., 2022). Research found that individual interviews completed with Black participants could unwittingly focus on unsavoury behaviour and sensationalise Black peoples lived experiences through a White viewpoint (London, 2017; Walton et al., 2022). Even in cases where the interviewer was also a Black person, research found that Black researchers would try to “join in the participants’ stories by filling in their words to enhance a sense of shared experience and understanding,” (Mizock et al., 2011; London, 2017, n.p.). Its key to recognise that this critique has not been as heavily recorded in White researchers interviewing White participants (Arocho et al., n.d.; Mizock et al., 2011).

Here, one must also recognise that matching participant and interviewer race can increase comfort levels and satisfaction, but it does not guarantee the quality of the data produced or the level of rapport created (Jackson et al., 1991; Mizock et al., 2011; Young, 2004). In fact, academics Mizock, Harkins & Morant attempted to further understand the relationship between interview and participant by building a full interview process with Black interviewers paired with Black participants and White with White. Mizock, Harkings, and Morant found that it’s actually a combination of both the researcher and participant’s race that affects data produced during the interview (Mizock et al., 2011; Young, 2004). That said, this suggested that the researcher’s race has a consequential effect on the data and, if used strategically, can be used to validate participant experiences (Mizock et al., 2011).

Looking at the pitfalls of qualitative interviews, the research design process often requires the research approach to be planned well before the interviews themselves are executed; thereby sometimes being unable to address unexpected societal contexts, such as changes in government policies etc., that may be present in the community being studied (Bayeck, 2021; Mizock et al., 2011; Young, 2004). Noting the typical interview format, the Listening Rooms enable peer-to-peer discussion allowing participants to elaborate further on intricate and often-silenced authenticities about belonging, systemic inclusivity, and campus communities unique to students. These counternarratives move toward a more nuanced exploration of ethnic identities, as well as racial identities. I treat this empirical knowledge as genuine confirmation that challenges the western dominant norms shaping university life.

The Listening Rooms method operationalises CRT and IRP by nurturing specific types of dialogic spaces to provide qualitative insight. Specifically in challenging such norms, the Listening Rooms fulfil CRT framework expectations by acting as a critique of liberal research, and IRP by privileging participant voices and cultural terminologies. CRT specifically questions systemic racism and how it affects the Black British student experience, while IRP ensures that participant counternarratives are centred, such with providing a glossary for “casual language.” I balance the depth of participant narratives with a validated methodology in pursuit of greater understanding.

Further, researchers and noted sociologist Fricker outline that when considering experiences using counternarratives, one must be considerate of the power relations that can come into play (Arday, 2021; Case & Hunter, 2012; Fricker, 2007a). Here, Fricker notes *passive* and *active* power, identity prejudices, and subsequent effects on the counternarratives discovered (Fricker, 2007a; Gaultier & Mountford-Zimdars, 2018). Fricker writes with a recognition that all individuals are simultaneously operating within a power system, and unknowingly, using their own powers to maintain the system as the current social system is

built in such a way that individuals are vehicles for the power structure; whether consciously aware or not (Arday, 2019; Arday, 2021; Briggs, 2010; Fricker, 2007a). Any one person's power is dependent on the social system but is also dependent on other social players to validate said powers; like a university lecturer holding power over students, this power only extends as far as the student's or other social players value academia (Briggs, 2010; Cole, 2017; Shih et al., 2007). Without this corresponding value, though the university lecturer may still hold some power in the social system, their ability to affect the behaviour of students is greatly decreased. In this way, social power acts as:

“a practically, socially, situated capacity to control others’ actions, where this capacity may be exercised (actively or passively) by particularly social agents, or alternatively, it may operate purely structurally” – Fricker, 2007, p. 9.

Therefore, with counternarratives being a pillar of student voice within this research, one must consider identity prejudices that come into play as a part of this power structure. Fricker further notes that specifically when considering the narratives of a marginalised ethnic group, one must be considerate of the ways in which interviewer identity power can bloat or collapse the credibility of the interviewee (Arday, 2019; Arday, 2021; Briggs, 2010; Cole, 2017; Fricker, 2007a; Shih et al., 2007). Fricker goes on to outline *The Acceptance Principle* wherein a person is entitled to accept narratives as true unless there are “stronger reasons not to do so,” (Fricker, 2007a, p. 65). This suggests personal biases and societal influence could have a greater effect on the data than the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Herein, Fricker discusses methodologies that encourage readers to “critically filter” narratives instead of engaging in epistemic objectification (Fricker, 2007a). This suggests that conventional interview methods could present opportunities for listeners and interviewers to view the counternarratives shared as non-believable or not legitimate (Edwards et al., 2023; Fricker, 2007a; Walton et al., 2022).

Further, conventional interview methods are often drawn from Western practices. In using Western methodologies, research inadvertently reproduces preconceived notions about “legitimate research.” In turn, asserting western dominant ideals and research practices as “universally applicable,” though research has also shown western dominant methodologies are in dire need of decolonisation (Edwards et al., 2023; Quinn, 2022; Smith, 2006, p. 2; Simonds & Christopher, 2013). That said, while individual interviews do provide significant contextual data, the process is still wrought with inequity that EDI-conscious researchers must navigate in addition to a greater degree of flexibility; changing as the community being studied does (Bayeck, 2021; Mizock et al., 2011; Simonds & Christopher, 2013; Walton et al., 2022). Though Edwards et al. is not directly discussing LRs but instead LR-adjacent methods, to avoid the pitfalls of the traditional interviewer-interviewee method, the Listening Rooms method centres the conversation between community members (Edwards et al., 2023; Evans et al., 2009). With Black British students being of the same community, there is less fear of disparagement (Edwards et al., 2023).

Most research data of this kind is gathered through in-depth interviews with open-ended questions, so this study does fall in line with other research completed in the same vein (Evans et al., 2009; Heron & Parkin, 2019; Igwe & Odii, 2020; Jackson et al., 1991). However, it is noted that the researcher's subjective opinion could be an issue and is therefore a shortcoming of this qualitative method. This is avoided in the LRs' design; by removing the lead researcher from the recorded discussion, there is less risk of the researcher overstepping

participant comfort in discussing their values and private lives (Igwe & Odii, 2020; Jackson et al., 1991). This does present a conflict in that the Listening Room prompts must be clear and concise to avoid any confusion because the researcher will not be physically present in the discussion space to clarify (Heron & Parkin, 2019). Therefore, the operationalisation process was imperative. A few steps taken to illustrate my efforts to observe and consult, as operationalisation calls for, include the necessity of a glossary of terms that participants use, pilot studies of both the first LR and second LR after completing the academic year, Morning university staff consultation on recommendations for participants using the *Round Table Analysis* (RTA), and a provided event calendar for participants for study purposes (Igwe & Odii, 2020). Image 6 shows the provided events calendar that was updated throughout the year and was available to all participants throughout the study. Images 4.1 and 4.2 show the layout of the LR prompts and Table 4 lists the changes made to questions for LR participants.

Image 6: The Black Identities Project Calendar

Autumn Term

University Events (Canterbury)

- Ewa Beauty Exhibition Opening Night - 4 October, 5 pm - 7 pm
- BAME Students Coffee Social - 6 October 10 am - 12 pm
- Centre for Sexuality, Race and Gender Justice - Relmaginging Equalities Law from the Grassroots 6-Octor - 4 pm
- Film Screening: Brother - 9 October, 7 pm - 9 pm
- Inspirational Speakers: Nubia Assata and Alim Kamara - 11 Oct, B - Jack History Month: African Painting 11 October 2 pm - 3 pm
- FIET Cyan Dan - 12 October, 10 pm - 3 am
- Black at Kent: Staff/Student Social - 16 October, 4 pm - 6 pm
- BHM Afrobeats n' Brunch - 17 October 1:30 pm - 4 pm
- History with a Flex: Inspirational Talk with Pauline Campbell 18 October: 1.30 pm - 3 pm - 5 pm
- Toluwa Atidade: Black Girl Detox Workshop - 18 October, 5 pm
- Black-History Month: Film Screening - 26 October, 5 pm - 7 pm
- Black-Owned Student Business Market - 26 October, 12 pm - 4 pm
- BAC Beatbox Academy presents: Pied Piper 6 Dec - 10 Dec.

University Events (Medway)

- BHM: Movie Night - 10 October 7:30 pm - 10 pm
- ACS x Music Society: Black Artists Through the Decade - 17 October 7:30 pm - 11:55 pm
- Crafternoon Celebration: Black History and Culture - 12 October

Table 4: Listening Room Prompts; Pre-/Post-Pilot LR. page 37

Prompt	Edit Made
Self-Identification (Bernal & Knight, 1993)	
• How do you define your ethnicity?	Same
• Are there any ethnicity-specific experiences that you have had?	Same
• Do you enjoy participating in culturally-relevant activities? Why or why not?	Same
• What does culture mean for you while living at home? While at university?	Same
Journey (Oxford University, 2022)	
• How has your family contributed to your understanding of your ethnic identity?	Same
• Has a community member influenced your ethnic identity?	Wording condensed
• Why did you choose Morning University?	Same
• Has university life influenced your ethnic identity?	Simplified phrasing
Belonging (Bernal & Knight, 1993)	
• Experiences increasing belonging from home to university?	Simplified wording
• What makes you feel you belong on campus?	Same
• Confidence in stating ethnicity in university/social settings?	Same
Socializing (Bernal & Knight, 1993)	
• Which societies have you joined? Why?	Simplified
• Most enjoyable society? Why?	Same
• Societies opted out of? Why?	Same
• When do you feel confident socializing?	Same
• Social comfort home vs. university?	Same
Well-Being (Bernell et al., 1993)	
• Effect of university on your well-being?	Same
• Campus support systems?	Same
• Most/least supportive university experiences?	Simplified wording
• Family support frequency?	Same
Reflection (Oxford University, 2022)	
• Advice to younger self (age 17)?	Same
• Changes to support Black British students?	Same
• Any final thoughts?	Same

Focus groups, a method often used to study large groups like British university students and the Black British community, are facilitated group discussions with the goal of bringing people of similar characteristics together to gain understanding (Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Office for Health Improvement and Disparity, 2020; Smithson, 2000). Similar to interviews, this method promotes discussion and is heavily influenced by the facilitator, or interviewer's approach (Office for Health Improvement and Disparity, 2020; Smithson, 2000; Walton et al., 2022). Focus groups were first used in product research to gauge the needs of the consumer and then to test the validity of the subsequent products (Office for Health Improvement and Disparity, 2020; Smithson, 2000). However, in recent years, focus groups have also been utilised by the social sciences to tackle a number of social concerns (Smithson, 2000; Watkins et al., 2007). In studying Black communities, focus groups have been used to better understand several topics related to minoritised experiences (Hughes et al., 1993; Smithson, 2000; Williams et al., 2020; Watkins et al., 2007).

In fact, in 2007 focus groups were used to study the stress levels of Black male university students, and research found that the students had a number of shared experiences that were unique to their time at their predominantly white institutions, or PWI (Watkins et al., 2007). Two focus groups were completed, one at a PWI and one at an HBCU, or historically Black college/university. In the PWI group, students reported their largest stressor to be "college life" and relating to a different community. Researchers noted the heightened social support that the participants engaged in when their commonalities were realised. In the HBCU group, students reported their greatest stressor to be balancing financial success and school, in addition to common university stressors (Watkins et al., 2007). Interestingly enough, the PWI group reported grappling with money obligations similar to the HBCU group but confirmed they do not devote the same time to "worry" about their aforementioned

stressors. Here, focus groups are an excellent example of productive discussion in a homogenous group. Had the two groups been heterogenous, considering the student experience at two different universities, there is no guarantee the study would have been as productive (Carter, 2006; Cross et al., 1992; Watkins et al., 2007). Further research also shown that Black students at PWIs experience greater levels of isolation and cultural incongruence, but peer connection with other Black students helps mitigate these stressors (Carter, 2006; Cross et al., 1992; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Though focus groups do facilitate productive discussion, the groups themselves must be purposefully curated; otherwise, the goal of the research will be lost (Hughes & DuMont, 1993). For example, research suggests composing a specific group of strangers because acquainted group members are more likely to focus on a much narrower scope of discussion. For this reason, researchers suggest using focus groups as a tool for homogenous groups over heterogenous groups, such as grouping together a group of middle-class White women together instead of among a more diverse group (Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Smithson, 2000). The goal in building the focus group is finding participants with characteristics in common, specifically to reduce instances of discontent, but not so many commonalities that participants lapse into narrow discussion (Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Smithson, 2000). For instance, bringing together a group of women, with no other common characteristics outside of gender, can result in social status differences, like socio economic status, which can deter rich data creation. In fact, past studies found that heterogenous focus groups are more likely to yield biased data than homogenous groups (Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021; Smithson, 2000; Williams et al., 2020). The same can be said for the number of members in a focus group, and the number of groups needed to reach research goals. Because of the group-layout, the focus group process must balance the needs of the group with research standards, but also with outside influences (Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021; Smithson, 2000; Williams et al., 2020). In short, focus groups are a valuable research tool that focuses heavily on shared discussion, with the interactions in these discussions being unwittingly subject to the pitfalls of society. Inadvertently, this can be a downfall of focus groups; an inability to insulate participants from outside bias.

Here, it is important to note that CRT is a framework for action. I draw upon CRT to translate theory to practice by aligning central ideologies. As noted above, CRT suggests racialised experiences are inevitable; the Listening Rooms provides the gradation of racialised experiences in ways that survey data, interviews, and focus groups cannot. The Listening Rooms is a dialogic data approach wherein participants engage in open conversation, and within these conversations, CRT tenets assert the validity of the lived experiences of minoritised groups and prioritise these experiences by giving participants the opportunity to speak freely. In turn, creating a safe and culturally approachable dialogue. As such, the Listening Rooms method is not only suitable to study dialogue, but specifically inequality and the ways in which it is produced.

The Listening Rooms method, while fairly new, is the best fit to study Black students for several reasons, including that the method considers participant fit, location of study, and common community-specific behaviours. Beginning with participant fit, conversational methods, like the Listening Rooms, have been found to produce data that is inherently linked to said marginalised group's worldview (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Kovach, 2020; Martin et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2020). Research data is shaped by participant's worldviews, and conversation methodologies tend to privilege meaning-making for participants, over simple

data extraction (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Further, validity of the research relies on the participants lived racial reality so the method should uplift their lived worldview (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Williams, 2020). Black people have been cited as having community-specific beliefs, values and stories (Gosine, 2008). Referencing communities with similar practices, several indigenous methodologies are also rooted in the core values and shared stories of the indigenous people that the methodologies encapsulate (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Edwards et al., 2023; Kovach, 2020).

As a Black academic in a Western university, I must consider a methodology that is reflective of narratives experienced by Black British students because that is the centre of my research. My personal experience with indigenous populations aside, indigenous communities have long uplifted research practices that also encourage reverence of the community (Chilisa & Mertens, 2021). For instance, researchers working with the Māori people coined the term *Kaupapa Māori* or ‘a Māori way,’ to describe a research approach based in thinking critically, critique of Pākehā (non-Māori) formations, and explanations of Māori, thereby confirming the prominence of Māori self-valuation (Katoa LTD, 2021). Indigenous research practices, like Kaupapa Māori, outline a deeper respect of the interactions taking place, and greater consideration for the societal context that participants live in (Chilisa & Mertens, 2021; Edwards et al., 2023; Katoa LTD, 2021; Kovach, 2020). Since the Listening Rooms rely solely on participant discussion, this more accurately reflects the narratives of Black British students while lessening risk of non-Black British influence.

In analysing Listening Room data, the Listening Rooms method put forth by Parkin and Heron uses a *Round Table Analysis* (RTA) to analyse the data produced from the Listening Rooms. During Heron and Parkin’s Round Table Analysis, university administrators were invited to review LR data with each attending administrator proposing recommendations based on review of the data. Within my research, recognising my student status, my *Round Table Analysis* (RTA) consisted of invited university professionals from various avenues at Morning University and students. During the RTA, attendees received summarised participant information to review, data snapshots of the LRs, and my recommendations.

Based on Heron and Parkin’s analysis, administrative attendees were asked to “*co-create findings and recommendations on the understanding that these are realistic, achievable, and within their sphere of influence in order to generate real, positive change,*” (Parkin & Heron, 2023, pp. 3-4). Thereby, Parkin and Heron placed the data analysis solely in the hands of those with a documented *need* to understand the data as well a documented *route* to application of their analysis, applying research to practice in real time. Any themes of the RTA discussion were put forth by the attendees. Comparatively, given that this the present study is produced by a PhD student without professional access to Morning University administration, I pursued a thematic analysis, instead holding the *Round Table Analysis* as a review of recommendations I produced from the analysis. As such the RTA was treated as a source of feedback, critical discussion, and professional confirmation of the data-driven knowledge I produced.

Moving to location of the study, past research discusses Phinney’s Ethnic-Racial Identity model heavily in an American context. In instances where specific communities were researched using ERID theory, the data was also set within an American National identity (Phinney, Horenczyk, et al., 2001; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Roberts et al., 1999). For example, when Phinney’s ERID theory was applied to Vietnamese and European American

students and parents to understand life satisfaction and family obligation, the study was specific to minoritised American communities and considered heavily the nuance of American society and American history's effect on Vietnamese culture (Phinney & Ong, 2002). Conversely, here I apply Phinney's theory within a UK national identity, and Phinney's theory is privy to the social constraints created by the UK's unique history, just like the US study. Herein, for the inclusion of relevant English history and supporting literature for this research; see *Literature Review* chapter (Phinney, Horenczyk, et al., 2001; Phinney & Ong, 2002; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Location of study is considered as national context and can have an effect on the experiences of the participants, Black British people. In the UK, as established in the aforementioned Literature Review chapter, the identity of the Black citizen is an amalgamation of media representation, pop culture, historical influence, societal influence, varying community traditions and values, and social interactions; it is both Black and British with both labels playing an integral part in identification of self (Alexander, 1996; Hart et al., 1995; Goffman, 1959; Phinney et al., 1997). Researchers have even suggested Black British citizens operate between two cultures that are unassimilable to one another, treating British and Black as separate pseudo-identities coming together (Alexander, 1996). However, in doing so, *Black British* people are then categorised as alien, foreign, or incompatible with British society (Alexander, 1996; Fryer, 1984; Prentoulis, 2012). By situating Black people as the "Other," they can then be easier painted as a threat to wider society (Alexander, 1996; Prentoulis, 2012; Sprott & Allport, 1955). The British media has played a vital role in the misrepresentation of Black communities and the Black identity, encouraging negative biases about Black British people (Alexander, 1996; Arday, 2021; Prentoulis, 2012). Therefore, when considering the location of this study, one should seek methods that capture participant experience on their own terms while acknowledging the national context associated with the participant's experience (Kline, 2019; Phinney & Ong, 2002; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Phinney & Baledomar, 2010). By centring the participant's recorded discussions, and disallowing researcher inference, the Black British student can reclaim the narrative around their identity.

Similarly, previous studies have examined the reaction a Black person may have in having the opportunity to delve into their view of self. One such study examined how Black women explored identity using blogging as an outlet for their discourse. The term "Blogging while Black," meant to describe the online discourse about racial experiences in the US, was applied to the UK (Gabriel, 2016). The study found that while online avenues will not necessarily change a Black woman's identity, it has been shown to be an extrinsic opportunity for self-expression (Gabriel, 2016). Black women blogging filled a gap in information on racial advocacy, as well as, strengthening their connection to self by sharing their experience with an, ideally, like-minded audience (Gabriel, 2016). It is also shown that when sharing their thoughts in a space they are comfortable, in this case their personal blogs, Black women will seek to undo negative connotations about the Black community (Gabriel, 2016). This act alone is shown to be an experience that would further encourage an *Achieved* ethnic identity (Heron & Parkin, 2019; Hooks, 2014; Thompson-McCandles, 1992). Comparing to the Listening Rooms, I re-create a comfortable space, like the blog, with the expectation that the subsequent experiences shared would be an opportunity to encourage positive development; further solidifying the validity of the Listening Rooms (Hooks, 2014; Walton et al., 2022). Therefore, with Phinney's work establishing the value of ethnic identity for understanding student experience, I use Heron and Parkin's LR methodology as a tool to glean cultural

knowledge and foster an *Achieved* ethnic-racial identity. To re-state, herein lies my methodological contribution; an extension of established methodology for the purpose of understanding, extending beyond the national context that the methodology was created in.

Procedures

This is a longitudinal study spanning October 2023 to February 2025 at Morning University, and utilised quantitative and qualitative measures to summarily plot student development through the academic year. The Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R), shown in Image 3, was administered during the *Briefing Session* to quantify the current state of the participants' development. The entirety of the *Briefing Session* consisted of signing the participant consent form, students providing necessary contact and ethnicity information, and completion of the MEIM-R. In addition to the MEIM-R sub-scales, EI and BAC, I added university affordance prompts, 13a, 13b, and 13c (*UIC*; see Image 3 for MEIM-R). Phinney and Ong note the MEIM-R does not cover all aspects of ethnic identity for certain groups of people and suggests "studies of ethnic identity should include additional measures for other aspects of ethnic identity" (Phinney & Ong, 2007, p. 278). As such, I added items specifically aimed at university attendance in relation to the RTs, *Belonging*, *Communication*, *Socialisation*, and *Well-being*.

Image 3: Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure – Revised, p. 78

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

- 1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
- 2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
- 3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
- 4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
- 5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
- 6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
- 7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
- 8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
- 9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
- 10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
- 11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
- 12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.
- 13- My ethnicity is
 - (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
 - (2) Black or African American
 - (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
 - (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
 - (5) American Indian/Native American
 - (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
 - (7) Other (write in): _____
- 14- My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)
- 15- My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

The time allotment of each full LR was adjusted from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. This is because though the *Briefing Session* is short, it did take at least 10 – 15 minutes and could take longer if the students had a good rapport. Such was the case during the pilot LRs, and this did affect the pre-determined time allotment of the LRs. Changing it to 90 minutes

allowed students to better plan around their participation and offered extra time should anything unexpected arise.

Many students come into university with pre-existing connections to their ethnicities due to family, cultural traditions, and relevant peer to peer experiences. The MEIM-R³¹ is a measurement tool used here to establish where participants fall on Phinney's ERID model. The MEIM uses a scale of 1-4, with 1 being strongly disagree, and 4 being strongly agree, to assign participants to corresponding stages of development in the ERID model (Phinney, 1997; Yip, 2013). The range of the MEIM-R is the lowest a student can score, 16, and the highest, 64. Should a student score high on the MEIM scale, this suggests that the student has an *Achieved* ethnic identity; whereas a low score on the MEIM-R scale would indicate a *Diffused* identity (Phinney, 1997). To differentiate between the two, certain questions on the scale pertain to Ethnic Identity (EI), Belonging and Affirmation (BAC) and University Satisfaction (UIC). Total Score is determined to be the mean of the student's Likert responses, of the total scale, and total sub-scale for specific EI, UIC, or BAC questions³².

It is important to note in terms of this research, the acronym MEIM-R specifically refers to the MEIM-R or the *Multi-group Ethnic Identity Model – Revised* (Phinney & New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services, 2017). Since its inception, the MEIM-R has been updated and amended as new knowledge is found. Being the most recent version, the MEIM-R is best suited for the LRs method because of the “thoughts, feelings, and behaviours” that the measure is meant to dissect (Douglass et al., 2015, n.p.; Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013; Phinney, 2010). The MEIM-R has been altered previously for prior work and researchers found it to be a tool that lends itself well to group-specific needs (Phinney, 1997). For instance, the original MEIM consisted of 12 items, and in one such study was expanded to 36 items so that it could better fit the needs of the study (Gaines et al., 2013; Phinney, 1997; Phinney, 2010).

As shown in Figure 1, Phinney's Ethnic Identity Model involves a movement from *Exploration* to either a *Foreclosed* or *Achieved* Black British identity. In previous assessments of the MEIM-R scoring 4, or close to 4, suggested a **lower** level of ethnic identity, with a 1 suggesting a **higher** level of ethnic identity. Within this research, I inverted the scale based on Pilot Listening Room feedback. During this study's initial Pilot Listening Rooms, student feedback expressed an assumption that 1 was the lowest rating to give on the MEIM-R prompts instead of the highest and having to go back and adjust their responses due to the mix-up. Acknowledging this confusion, I inverted the scale so that 4 was now the highest possible rating, and 1 was the lowest to avoid any further misunderstanding. Using an edited version of the MEIM-R with a Likert scale of 1-4, 4 represented *Strongly Agree*, and 1 represented *Strongly Disagree*, indicating lower engagement with one's ethnic background. Students rating a 1, *Strongly Disagree*, indicated limited exploration of the ethnic group, a conflict of identity, and low personal focus on ethnic identity as whole.

The MEIM-R was completed during the *Briefing Sessions* of Listening Rooms 1 and 2. For those who completed the Listening Room online, the MEIM-R was completed online through an online survey powered by Jotform before being uploaded to Morning University Microsoft servers. The data from the paper MEIM-Rs were converted electronically by manual recording into Microsoft Excel. The data was then imported into NVivo 15 and

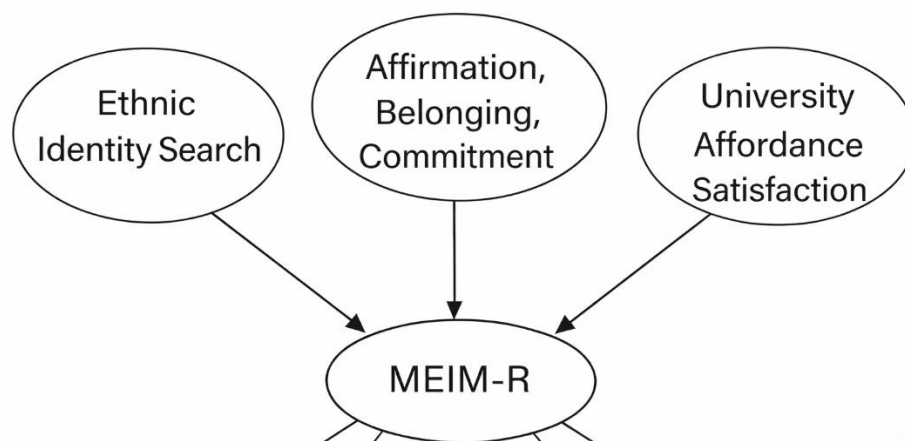
³¹ Within this research, when referencing the MEIM, it is specifically referencing the most recent version of the MEIM, the MEIM-R (Revised) (Phinney & New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services, 2017). See Image 3.

³² The preferred scoring for the MEIM is the mean of the item scores, the mean of all 12 items for a total score. Items following Item 12 are used for identification and more specific understanding of Morning University.

scrutinised for any errors in data entry. A total of 13 participants consented to participate in the study. A review of the data during this process indicated that any missing data was the result of incomplete participant information. 1 person declined to list their ethnicity as anything other than simply writing “Black.” This is not to suggest that this answer was not sufficient, but more so to note that 1 participant did not provide further information on their ethnicity. 9 people declined to participate in the second Listening Room. An additional 3 people did not complete their second Listening Room with the same partner that they completed the first Listening Room with. This left a total of 6 completed Listening Room 1s with 13 participants, and 2 completed Listening Room 2s with 5 participants.

In past research, the MEIM found that EI was more often positively associated with psychosocial outcomes; though for Black American youths specifically, the MEIM also found a connection between EI and risky health behaviours like self-doubt (Baker, 2002; Flett et al., 2019; Mills & Murray, 2017; Maynard, 2009; Nguyen, 2020). Therefore, in the research at hand, the structure conceived by Phinney and Ong (2007) was adjusted to include three-factors.

Figure 2: Research Model; Tri-Factor



See Figure 2, the three-factor model fit the intended goal of the research better than a single-factor model using just the *ethnic identity* scale or the average MEIM-R scores because it allowed inclusion of a specific university sub-scale (UIC). Here it should be noted again that the MEIM-R has been found productive as a multi-factor model, and corroborated by the results of past research studies; also providing support for theories of ethnic identity development (Brown et al., 2014; Gaines et al., 2013; Phinney & Ong, 2007; Yoon, 2011).

Though both bi-factor and tri-factor models have been shown to be strong model fits in research of this nature, shown in Figure 2, this research uses a tri-factor model similar to past research. Studies that specifically used confirmatory analysis found that increasing the number of factors, and subsequently further dividing the MEIM-R measured sub-scales, provided a more nuanced understanding and better fit (Gaines et al., 2010; Gaines et al., 2013; Habibi et al., 2021; Lee & Yoo, 2004; Roberts et al., 1999). Explicitly, Roberts et al. found that *ethnic identity*, though previously measured as one factor on the MEIM-R, could be measured using two distinct, intercorrelated factors within the measure. In aggregating EI, ethnic identity is assessed by the seven-item achievement scale, including four exploration items (activities to learn about the person’s group) and three commitment items (a clear

understanding of the person's ethnicity). This in turn, treats the sub-scales of the MEIM-R as separate but connected factors (Roberts et al., 1999). Further, research shown that the MEIM-R has an unstable factor structure that has been shown useful with as many as 36 factors assessed (Lee & Yoo, 2004; Roberts et al., 1999). Herein, the MEIM-R best fit measuring participant identity because the model was flexible to adding new sub-scales/factors, such as the UIC scale, while maintaining the ability to analyse using the scale as a whole, or sub-scales comparatively (Gaines et al., 2013; Lee & Yoo, 2004; Yoon, 2011). Therefore, with added factors having been documented as having no effect on the feasibility of the MEIM-R as a measurement tool, the University Satisfaction (UIC) sub-scale was added solely for the purpose of this research (Gaines et al. 2013; Yap et al., 2014). A pseudo-three-factor model is used with one general identity factor (overall development), 2 specific factors (EI and BAC), and one added factor (UIC).

Going into detail of MEIM-R sub-scales, there were not strong correlations between sub-scales, instead the multi-factor structure of the MEIM-R provided varied evidence. However, investigators should continue evaluating correlation between sub-scales to identify any data that could strengthen sub-scale relationships in their individual study samples, and caution when attempting to draw conclusions concerning differences between groups. Importantly, these findings about Ethnic-Racial identity development for the MEIM-R are indicative of failing to account for the full scope of ethnic identity and how best to measure it as much of the sub-scores correlated only to an extent and outside influences could not be excluded as means for said correlation. For this reason, much work remains to be done in streamlining the MEIM-R to further fit ethnic identity research. Further, this is why the MEIM-R data is taken in tandem with LR data, to provide a clearer picture of ethnic identity development.

Comparing Image 3 and the below, Statements 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10 on the MEIM-R, are the *Ethnic Identity*-focused questions and ask students about specific experiences that would have an effect on their identity, such as ethnicity/race-based societies or attendance at cultural events.

1. - *I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.*
2. *I am active in organisations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.*
4. *I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.*
8. - *In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group*
10. *I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.*

Questions 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 below highlight *Belonging* (BAC) by asking students to reflect on their feelings as they pertain to the student's ethnicity, such as feeling happiness when participating in cultural events.

3. *I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.*
5. *I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.*

6. *I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.*
7. *I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.*
9. *I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.*

Review Image 3, to create a sub-score unique to Morning University, the original MEIM-R questions were changed for this research as well. Three sub-questions about university affordances were added to the original 12-item measure, labelled 13a, 13b, and 13c. Phinney's most recent revision outlines that questions 13, 14, 15 were "*used only for purposes of identification and categorisation by ethnicity*," (Johnson, 2010; Phinney, 1997; Phinney, 2010, n.p.). Therefore, since in the MEIM-R, the final few questions are for identification and categorisation, and participants provided identifying information during study registration, it was not needed in this avenue (Phinney, 1997; Phinney & New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services, 2017).

13 - *My ethnicity is (use numbers below)*

- (1) *Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others*
- (2) *Black or African American*
- (3) *Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others*
- (4) *White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic*
- (5) *American Indian/Native American*
- (6) *Mixed; Parents are from two different groups*
- (7) *Other (write in): _____*

14- *My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)*

15- *My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)*

-MEIM Revised, 2010 (Phinney, 2010).

Questions 13, 14, 15, (see above) from the MEIM were replaced with questions, 13a, 13b, and 13c (see below), to gather student experiences in relation to their attendance at Morning university.

13. *Through my attendance at Morning University:*

- a. *I have the opportunity to talk with other people about my ethnic group. ____*
- b. *I participate in cultural events and affordances offered by my university, such as holiday observations, ethnic group specific offerings, or customs. ____*
- c. *I feel my university makes a conscious effort to encourage pride in my ethnic group. ____*

The specific goal of including such questions was to answer RQ1b and RQ2a and RQ2b:

RQ1b: *What experiences in university do students feel carry the most influence over their development?*

RQ2a: *Do certain university affordances achieve the University's desired effect?*

RQ2b: *Do students from different ethnic backgrounds respond differently to Black-intended activities or affordances?*

Citing that it is common for marginalised groups to practice certain cultural customs, the MEIM is used as a tool to measure commonplace experiences that the participants have *already* had before university to quantify these past experiences' effect on their development thus far (Phinney, 1996b; Phinney, 1997; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Yip, 2013). In doing so, the MEIM allows for considering EI and *Belonging* separately as opposed to relying solely on the total score (Mills & Murray, 2017). In addition, during the *Briefing session*, students were asked to self-identify their ethnicity so their choice in identification can be contrasted with the MEIM scores. Phinney found a connection between EI and *Belonging* when research shown that students who scored lower on *Ethnic identity* also reported lower scores in *Belonging* and *Affirmation* (BAC) (Phinney, 1997). For instance, in terms of the Black identities studied here, past research using the MEIM found ethnic students who self-identified as a specific ethnicity for familial reasons i.e. due to being raised among their similarly ethnic communities scored higher in *Belonging* than those who attributed their ethnicity to being "from" the country without mentioning specific cultural ties (Phinney, 1996b; Phinney & Ong, 2007). In fact, students who identified their ethnicity as simply just their country of origin, without community cultural ties, also scored low in *Belonging* and EI, suggesting there is a correlation to how one defines their ethnicity and their ability to assimilate into the community. However, although behaviours are used as markers of EI, they are distinct, meaning one can have a strong sense of *Belonging* without participating in ethnic behaviours (Phinney, 1996b; Phinney, 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Therefore, the LRs contextualise the experiences that led to a student scoring low in *Belonging*. (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Referencing the above MEIM-R questions regarding university affordances, it is possible for a student to score low on *Ethnic Identity* and high in *Belonging*. In doing so, the scores could suggest a student lacking in exploratory opportunities but experiencing high levels of *Belonging* because of their participation in university affordances.

The MEIM-R is also used because there is prior knowledge about analysing ERID data, using the MEIM, from previous researchers. The MEIM has been validated in relation to ERID theory via a number of studies linked to student experience. One such study, spearheaded by Tiffany Yip at Fordham University found that the MEIM distinguished easily between ethnic salience and *Commitment*, meaning the measure was able to differentiate between identifying as Black without *Exploration* and an explored positive *Achieved* Black Identity (Yip, 2013). In addition, Yip's study found positive correlations between *Commitment*, *Exploration* and overall identity saliency showing that the MEIM can accurately categorise participant's identity stages, as well as saliency at any given stage (Yip, 2013). In addition, the layout of the study requires participants to complete the MEIM two times, once at the beginning of the study and once after completion of the academic year

during the second LR i.e. “LR one” and “LR two”. In doing so, the MEIM is suitable to discern the differences between the participant’s stage of development, prior to partaking in university events that would encourage exploratory interests in their ethnicity. In both LR1 and LR2, research suggests socialisation, social context, and level of self-understanding will shift greatly and the MEIM can accurately pinpoint those shifts³³ (Phinney, 1996).

Revisiting the major Research Themes (RT), it is important to consider the nuance of these topics in relation to Black people. Research has found a clear connection in subjective *Well-Being* and *Ethnic Identity* in minority groups (Habibi et al., 2021; Maynard, 2009; Mills & Murray, 2017; Phinney et al., 2001). Adding to the MEIM’s viability for this study, research has shown the MEIM is not race-specific, meaning it can be applied across varying ethnicities (Habibi et al., 2021; Mills & Murray, 2017; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Roberts et al., 1999). Based on past research linking EI and *Well-Being*, the MEIM can gauge subjective well-being in relation to identity when used in tandem with a well-being measure or scale³⁴. Therefore, the application of the MEIM suits this study because while not race specific, it is able to correlate *Well-being* with EI with the added University affordance questioning, a connection can be drawn between EI, *Belonging*, and University actions (Mills & Murray, 2017; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001).

To calculate MEIM scores for the most recent version of the MEIM, the MEIM-R, the mean of the item scores is used. Specifically, one can also either use the mean of the specific set of questions for EI or the set of questions for *Belonging*, *Acceptance*, and *Community* (BAC) (Phinney, 1992; Phinney, 2010). Since the MEIM uses a scale of 1-4, the range of MEIM responses always falls between 1 and 4 (Phinney, 1992). Adding these responses together would provide the mean of the MEIM. The highest possible MEAN score on the MEIM, responding with a 4 to every prompt is 4 and would heavily indicate an *Achieved* identity. Inversely, the lowest possible mean score, responding with only 1 to all the prompts, suggests a high *Foreclosed* identity, uninterested in any ethnic or cultural experiences.

³³ Research has shown that ethnic identity changes in response to outside stimuli, and can change significantly over time (Phinney et al., 2001). That in mind, adjusting for individual belief systems takes into account feelings of belonging and acceptance (Maynard, 2009; Phinney et al., 2001).

³⁴ The ethnic communities of Phinney’s work share a set of well-being norms and a “race” as a shared skin tone (Phinney, 1996a; Schwartz et al., 2014). However, this definition does not completely fit Black British people because it does not consider the social reality of the UK. The MEIM-R is used to better understand well-being of the Black British student.

Listening Room Process

Here, considering the various student relationships that participated in this study, I present the Listening Rooms as a thematic discussion, accompanied by profiles of each participating student, and analysed in terms of the most prevalent Research Themes (RT) of Black British student identity formation research. Pilot Listening Rooms were completed prior to the start of LR 1 to test process, LR facilities, and participant understanding of prompts. Listening Room 1 took place from October 2023 – January 2024. Listening Room 2 took place from October 2024 – February 2025. LR 2 concluded once all participants had either completed the second LR or declined to return. During the Listening Rooms, participants received a list of pre-determined prompts organised by the aforementioned Research Themes (RT), specifically *Self-Identification*, *Belonging*, *Socialisation*, *Well-Being*, *Journey*, and *Reflection*. In this way, I can examine whether each student in the Listening Room individually fulfil Phinney’s ERID Theory, further justify the MEIM-R, provide context to the student’s experiences, and glean new knowledge about university experiences that most affect Black British students. In doing so, I establish which university affordances encourage the ideal outcome, an *Achieved* Black British Identity, while also outlining any suggested refinements needed to encourage this outcome in all circumstances, (De Vaus, 2001). In short, Phinney’s ERID theory states students will move from an initial stage into an advanced stage of development, and LR participants serve as conditional examples of said theory applied in real situations, based on the RTs (De Vaus, 2001; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Williams et al., 2020).

Each participant profile lists the student participant experiences and modality of the Listening Room. Each participant’s MEIM scores from LR 1, and sub-scores, are listed in Table 5 (below). The Participant Profiles table immediately follow Table 5 (below) listing the participant’s gender, age, etc is (See also: *Appendix*).

Table 5: Listening Room 1 Participant Pseudonym, MEIM-R Score and Sub-Scores

First Name	University Satisfaction Sub-Score (UIC)	Belonging Sub-Score (BAC)	Ethnic Identity Sub-Score (EI)	MEIM-Identity Mean Score (Total Average)
D. Bio	3.40	3.00	3.20	3.20
Y. Ban	3.40	3.40	3.20	3.33
E. Igw	2.80	3.60	3.00	3.13
H. Saro	2.60	3.60	3.00	3.07
O. Mil	1.66	4.00	3.60	3.40
K. Pop	2.30	3.60	2.20	2.93
M. Ele	3.00	3.80	2.00	3.10 (0.6)
C. Wal	1.33	2.00	2.40	2.13

I. Sil	1.00	3.20	1.80	2.30
F. Mul	1.60	3.40	2.80	2.80
J. Gor	2.60	4.20	2.80	3.33

Participant Profiles

Student	S	Age	Ethnicity	Degree	Home	Involvement
Alpha	F	21	Caribbean – Haitian	Criminology	London	Participation in 3-5 race-based societies/academic work.
Beta	F	21	Nigerian Somali	Sociology	London	1-2 race-based societies.
D. Bio	F	19	Ghanian	Psychology	Southeast London	Morning Gospel Choir, Black Intellectual Society, People of Colour Arts Society
Y. Ban	F	18	Nigerian	Drama Theatre	London	Black Intellectual Society, ACS
E. Igw	F	18	Jamaican	Sociology Criminology	Southeast London	None
H. Saro	F	18	Togo	Sociology Criminology	Southeast London	None
O. Mil	M	22	Nigerian	Accounting/ Finance	London	Morning Television Society
K. Pop	M	20	Jamaican	Film	Canterbury	MMA Society
M. Ele	M	20	Ethiopian	Architecture	London	Yes – did not specify which
C. Wal	F	23	Nigerian	Mechanical Engineering	Coventry	None
I. Sil	F	20	Caribbean and Black	International Business	Canterbury	None
F. Mul	M	21	Nigerian	Biomedical Engineering	Ireland via London	None
J. Gor	F	21	African	Conservation Biology	Canterbury	Mindfulness Society
U. Kno	F	19	Black	Biology	London	Archery Society, ACS

In all of the Listening Rooms (LRs) I escorted both students into the Listening Room facilities and observed as they completed the consent form before I left the facility. As the student's main goal is to socialise, I provided snacks and beverages to facilitate conversation. Libations were set out beforehand and I chose a nearby workspace, outside of the Listening Room, to wait for the students to finish. The meeting day and time of the LR differed based on student availability. Scheduling was used in pairing the students who did not bring a peer into the study. Students were paired semi-randomly based on schedule availability, meaning if

students were free to participate on Tuesday afternoons, then they completed the LR with other students also available on Tuesday afternoons on a first-come-first-serve basis. After the LRs completion, I asked the students to exit the facility and notify me that they have finished, so as to avoid any interruptions should the students need to conclude a thought or conversation before exiting the LR.

Listening Room facilities were purposefully chosen. The physical rooms that the student discussion were held in are soundproof and only accessible through the purchase of a Morning University membership permit. This was done to ensure that students have as much freedom as possible to speak. I am the only person with access to the physical room during the Listening Room discussion using my membership permit to enter. The windows and doors are covered. Since the room itself is outfitted to be soundproof, once I left the room, I could not hear what was being said during the discussion themselves. That said, this did present a challenge. If a student needed to ask a question or use the bathroom; the recording and timer had to be stopped, and the student had to be let back into the room. To try to alleviate any interruptions, during the *Briefing Session*, I told them what they would need to do should they need to exit the room once the recording began. Also, during the *Briefing Session*, I offered additional refreshments, and explained the needs of the study, as well as answering any questions participants had.

The *Briefing Session* consisted of completing the consent form and the MEIM-R questionnaire. During the *Briefing Session*, I went over each point in the consent form individually and explained what each aspect of the LR session would consist of. I explained to the students what their expected obligations were throughout the study, i.e. completing two LRs; one during the 2023-24 academic year, and one during the 2024-25 academic year. I provided the names and contact information of my research supervisors, and Morning University Student Well-Being services should they need to contact either regarding the project. Following completion of the *Briefing Session*, it was up to the student to start the 60-minute timer after I stepped out of the LR facility.

Once the LR was complete, student participants received a follow-up email with the resources they received during the *Briefing Session*, and a link to an online version to the events and affordances calendar; see Image 6. Students were also free to provide feedback to me as the researcher via the final portion of the LRs. The last page of the LR discussion prompts offered participants an opportunity to make ongoing suggestions for the study, and ask follow-up questions etc, as well as share feedback about the method overall.

To conclude, the Listening Room method and the MEIM-R when viewed using a CRT lens, is a feasible route to understanding of minoritised populations, in this case, Black British students. Though the method does have its limits, these limits do not outweigh the necessity of the work at hand. Running a Pilot of the methodology, helped to address challenges with student understanding of LR prompts, time constraints of the LR themselves, and participant outreach. In short, a combined approach of LR + MEIM-R data, balances a measurable analysis offering a thorough understanding of university experiences and how they influence ethnic-racial identity development.

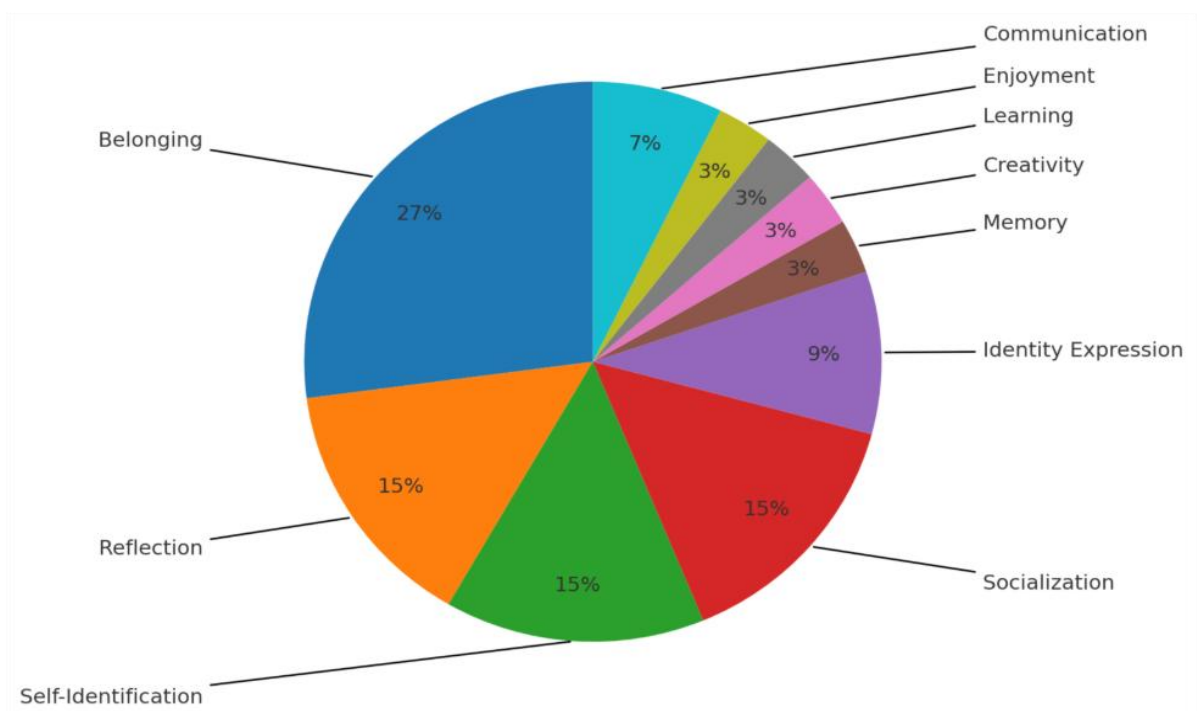
Route to Analysis

The data was analysed using a *reflexive thematic analysis* thereby rooting the data in participants' own expressions and reflections. Codes were reviewed and more clearly defined to ensure alignment with the Research Questions (RQ) and student counternarratives.

Coding Framework and Core Themes

The final coding framework consisted of six primary Research Themes (RT); each being allocated a code. The research themes were organised in NVivo 15 and visualised; see Graph 1. As the focus of the research was University Affordances, Listening Room discussions were also coded based on mentions of university affordances. Each theme was weighted based on frequency and richness of the discussion.

Graph 1: Listening Room Discussion themes by rate of occurrence.



These proportions helped guide analytical focus:

Theme: Self-Identification

- Naming One's Identity/Ethnicity
- Heritage, Roots, and Community
- Hyphenated Identity/Multiple ethnicities

Theme: Belonging

- Feeling Seen
- Feeling a sense of community on Campus
- Cultural Affirmation

Theme: Socialisation

- Peers and Peer interactions
- Conversations and common topics
- Communicate (*Communication*)

Theme: Well-Being

- Wellness, and participant definition of “Wellness”
- The practice of self-care
- Continued/sustained wellness

Theme: Journey

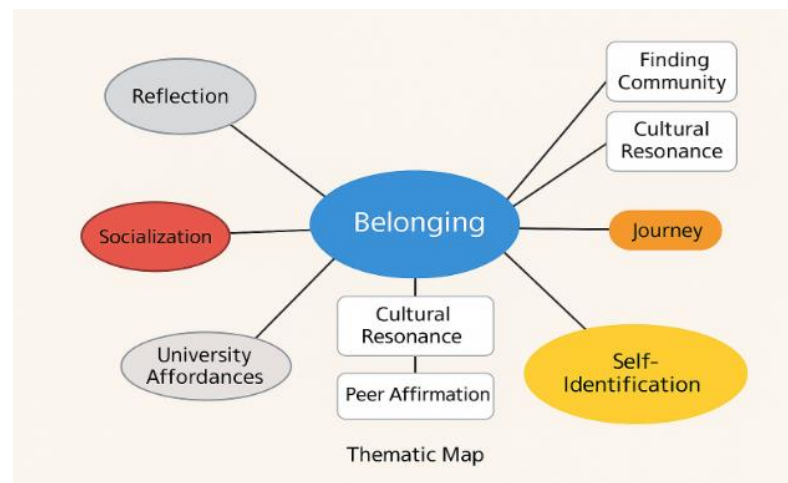
- Family and ethnicity
- Commute and cultural participation.
- Home definition-fostering and shared values

Theme: Reflection

- Internal Dialogue
- Navigating Labels
- Revisiting Past Assumptions/Thoughts/Feelings

Subscale: University Affordances

- Safe Spaces
- Inclusive Curriculum
- Academic/Support Services

Figure 3: Thematic Map

The above thematic map represents the conceptual relationships among the 6 research themes derived from this project's literature review and dissected via *reflexive thematic analysis*. *Belonging*, being in the middle, reflects its significance across participant discussions. Each surrounding circle corresponds to another theme, with bench markers of said theme branching out from the circle, such as *Cultural Resonance* and *Peer Affirmation*. The size of each circle also highlights its significance in the dataset, allowing quick grasp of both theme definitions and the interconnectedness of the research themes.

Analytical Use

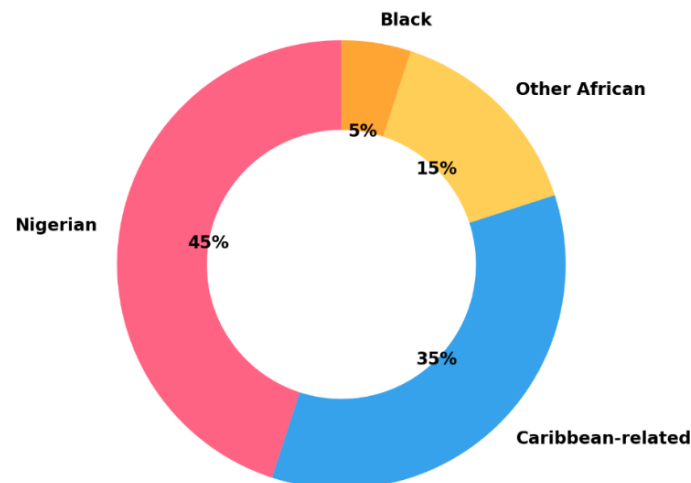
The Research Themes (RT) were used as the foundation for structuring a deeper narrative while conducting the analysis. Themes such as *Belonging* and *Self-Identification* were revisited repeatedly based on participant narratives. For example, see Graphs 4 and 5. Students often discussed friends, and campus involvement, two major facets of *Belonging*. In this way, themes were not fixed categories with rigid stipulations, but rather fluid containers shaped by the provided social context and participant experiences.

Note: NVivo v12 was used for digital coding. Full codebook available upon request.

Participants

The Black students within this study are those born of migrant parentage from ancestrally Caribbean or African countries, Togo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Nigeria³⁵. The present study examined 13 participants aged 18–22 who completed the first of two MEIM-Rs during Listening Room 1, Time 1 (T1) $T1 = 1$, and then completed a second MEIM-R during Listening Room 2, Time 2 (T2) $T2 = 2$. All of the participants identified as two separate ancestrally Black ethnicities, i.e. bi-racial, listed under Black, 5% (see Graph 2). 15% of participants were labelled as “Other African” as most of the participant sample were Nigerian or from the Caribbean. 9 women (66%) and 4 men (33%) participated in the study. The age range of the participants was evenly distributed with the mean age of participants being 18-22 ($M = 19; 19.92$). Most of the participants also reported growing up in London, being fairly close to the campus this study takes place at, Morning University (58%).

Graph 2: Black British Participant Ethnicity Rates; Listening Rooms



This research specifically focuses on first, second, or third generation students. Citing the Windrush generation, “immigrant,” was defined as those unable to “prove” their legal citizenship, even though they had arrived from British colonies (BBC News, 2021, n.p.). With over 57,000 immigrants arriving prior to 1971, many of them children at time of arrival; I seek to include 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generation students whose parents and/or grandparents arrived to the UK, either by parental decision or based on familial need (BBC News, 2021; Jivraj & Simpson, 2015; Hunter, 2025; Phillips et al., 1998).

In more recent years, immigration has been a major source of increasing diversity with the non-native population in the UK increasing steadily since 2001 (Jivraj & Simpson, 2015; Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 2025). The students born of these populations could face continued enquiry from the Home Office based on their descent, coupled with a push to assimilate into larger British society (BBC News, 2021). For

³⁵ This is the range of countries represented by the completed Listening Rooms.

the purpose of this study, students not of African or Caribbean migrant descent, meaning 1st – 3rd generation, or those who came to the UK only for their undergraduate studies, were not asked to participate in the study. More specifically, the criteria of this study are second-term-1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year undergraduate Morning University students with UK citizenship who identify as Black or other Ancestral-Black ethnicities. Here, noted in Participant Profiles, the term *Home* is used to designate where students are from, as all of them had UK citizenship.

This research examines identity developing experiences while attending a mid-ranked diverse higher education institution located in Southeast, England. For this research's impartiality, the university studied is referred to as Morning University. The students participating are Morning University students and are represented across several ethnic groupings with representation of each group based largely on student interest and voluntary participation in the project. In terms of the aforementioned ethnic groups in relation to Morning's University's campus community, consider past research that found that students would be expected to "physically as well as socially dissociate from the communities of the past," (Museus, 2013; Tinto, 1993, p. 95). Comparatively, more recent work notes that this assumption overstates student ability to succeed in university because it does not also acknowledge the duty of universities to cultivate student success (Bensimon, 2007; Canute, 2016; Museus, 2013; Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 1993). Consideration was also given to the population of the UK, specifically the area where Morning University is located. With 37% of London's population being immigrant communities, these ethnic groups do reflect the societal environment that Morning University is in³⁶ (The Migration Observatory, 2021).

³⁶ Morning University's location is in Southeast England. Southeast England has the largest percentage of people born outside of Britain, second only to London (Business in the Community, 2023).

Pilot Study

Prior to the start of full data collection, the Pilot Listening Rooms (PLRs) were an opportunity to test the outlined methodologies, and most importantly, ensure the intended method could answer the project RQs. The Pilot Rooms assisted in ensuring the research goals of the data translated accordingly³⁷. Piloting the Listening Rooms also ensured there were proper protocols and appropriate levels of consideration for student well-being throughout the study since the pilot student participants were charged with discussing potentially triggering topics like family, race-based incidents, exclusion etc³⁸. Therefore, two Morning University students were chosen to complete the Pilot Listening Room (PLRs) and would complete two Rooms following the same schedule as student participants; albeit about 2-4 weeks ahead of the LRs. As stated above, the criteria of this study are second-term-1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year undergraduate Morning University students with UK citizenship who identify as Black or other Ancestrally Black ethnicities.

Names and identifying information of the Pilot participants have been changed for anonymity. Both of the Pilot students fit the study criteria, with Alpha and Beta both holding home status. Though both participants identify as Black, their specific ethnicities are extremely different. In addition, the students have a pre-existing relationship so there were no anticipated concerns with participant comfort.

Alpha and Beta completed the initial *Briefing Session* before beginning the recorded Listening Room procedure. Following the Pilot study, Alpha and Beta were asked for feedback regarding the Listening Rooms experience. They expressed the following sentiments about the design of the research study and the goal of the research.

*“I really liked this; it was nice to just chat with [Alpha]. **Honestly, it’s not often anyone even asks what’s up with us but this...this was nice.**”* – Beta

*“I think it’s really unique, innit? **I mean sometimes it feels like the Uni is always asking [for] something but like never really listening so you know, you chat with your friends instead. Here, I’m like just chatting with [Beta] but it’s really like an important subject.**”* – Alpha

Based on the findings of the Pilot Listening Room, the application of Phinney’s framework and the below outlined adjustments, full participant recruitment began following the completion of the PLR. Based on feedback received from Alpha and Beta, a number of adjustments were made to the study.

First was the registration process. Prior to the Pilot, I prepared a web landing platform for interested participants to scan a QR code and be redirected to a registration webpage. Here they could submit their information i.e. name, and email, signalling their interest. Following the Pilot study, Beta expressed how high their comfort levels were once they

³⁷ The US and the UK have very different educational landscapes. These differences operate at all levels of academia and higher education is no exception. Though the US does attract a higher number of international students, the perceived quality of the education in the UK and the happenings experienced by students studying in the UK, international or otherwise, is distinct from the US (Mai, 2005).

³⁸ In the UK, with lower tuition costs, students from varied socio-economic backgrounds attend university (Mai, 2005; Orkodashvili, 2007). This is in comparison to the private vs public university system in the US which can often lead to more homogenous student populations. In the UK, university is socially framed as an opportunity to further career goals but is not necessarily considered a requirement for professional success post secondary school (Mai, 2005).

realised they would be speaking with a peer so an option for students to specifically state if they already have a friend they'd like to complete the study with or if they'd need/prefer to be paired with another participant was added to the online registration webpage. In doing so, I was able to more easily pair the students whose schedule aligns. Further, the webpage was also adjusted to allow students to choose between completing the rooms online, or in-person in Morning University Listening facilities.

Additional changes took place between LR 1 and LR 2 as well, based on Pilot input, see Table 4. Email communications with Alpha and Beta averaged about a 2–3-day response time. Using Alpha and Beta's email response times as an expectation, additional time was allotted when scheduling the Listening Rooms, to give an extra few days for students to review the scheduled date, time, and location of the Listening Room. Once the study started, this 2–3-day response time did have a lasting effect³⁹.

Alpha and Beta also offered feedback on the intended recruitment materials. Though they were not recruited in the same way study participants were, they did scan the information and assisted with clarity. Beta suggested rewording of a couple of the dissemination materials for public outreach's sake. These changes assisted in "*making sure students see it.*" Again, noting I am not your typical Morning University student, Alpha and Beta found recruitment for the project to be wanting. They felt the flyers were a bit lacklustre, failing to catch passing students' eye. In response to this, additional flyers and leaflets were created that clearly displayed the incentives of participation and the opportunity to chat with a peer of their choice with much brighter colourways. Both Pilot participants felt the materials needed to be more "student-facing" and should highlight these social components of the study as they would draw the most interest. The Pilot participants also recommended a much larger participation push than originally intended.

"Students, you know, we're busy. And we get so many emails every day, I miss so many things. You're going to have to really put it in front of us, or we're just not going to catch it." – Beta

In response to this, updated recruitment materials were distributed in all on-campus residence receptions, and the Accommodations office. Flyers and leaflets were handed out at student society events held by the Residential Life team, and Morning University's Student Union. Recruitment efforts also focused on affinity group-based society events. This included but not limited to; the on-campus Women's Network, the African Caribbean Society, the Black Intellectuals Society, East African Society, the Caribbean Union, the Nigerian Society, and the Somali Society.

In addition, Morning University does have a nearby satellite campus, referred to within this research as the *Evening Campus*. Morning University offers a free shuttle for students who live on/near the Evening campus because there is a significant portion of the population that would need to commute to Morning University's main campus for classes⁴⁰. Though students do commute, there is still a thriving student union and campus social scene that I utilised when publicising the research. It is also worth noting here that of the Morning

³⁹ Reported: 8, July, 2024, the predetermined research timeline was delayed by about 8.5 weeks. This risked the layout of the study, and further evaluation took place to determine next steps.

⁴⁰ To note, the Evening Campus has a separate student union organisation and would therefore require further study regarding student activities but the Evening Campus's location is shown to be more diverse than Morning University. However, studies also showed that students in the UK and in the US do not share the same definition of "multi-cultural," so the level of diversity is objective (Dogra & Karnik, 2004).

University student population, a comparable number of Black British students utilise the Evening Campus further requiring the need for equal outreach at both locations. For this reason, a matching recruitment plan was undertaken at the Evening Campus with flyers being distributed at the Student Union, library, academic buildings, and major university shuttle bus stops.

Referring to Beta and Alpha's notes about scheduling needs of students and considering that this research will attract all Morning University Black British students, both from the Evening campus and the Morning campus, students were free to choose between using University-supported video conferencing on Microsoft Teams or meeting with their chosen peer at Morning University main campus to allot for those commuting between campuses. In doing so, the consent form that participants sign for this study was also updated to note that should a student choose to meet online, their face would be recorded during the video conferencing. Though the changes are minor, the importance of student input to ensure the right audience was being reached remained imperative. In this way, the Pilot LR was successful in support of the study.

Listening Room Analysis

This study, given that it is produced by a PhD student without professional access to Morning University administration, pursued a thematic analysis. The *Round Table Analysis* (RTA) was held as a review of recommendations I produced from analysis, a source of feedback, critical discussion, and professional confirmation of the knowledge produced. In comparison, methodology creators Parkin and Heron utilised a *Round Table Analysis* to analyse the data produced from the first-held Listening Rooms. University administrative staff were invited to review LR data. Each administrator who attended Parkin and Heron's RTA received the LR data and proposed their own recommendations. In short, administrator attendees were asked by Parkin and Heron to “*co-create findings and recommendations on the understanding that these are realistic, achievable, and within their sphere of influence in order to generate real, positive change,*” (Parkin & Heron, 2023, p. 4). Thereby, Parkin and Heron created a direct link between the data and those positioned to act on the findings, as well as a clear pathway to practice in close to real time. Any RTs of the research were put forth by the administrative attendees. Inversely, I produced recommendations directly, based on the data/literature discussed herein, instead utilising the RTA as a place of validation and change.

Listening Room discussions were audio recorded in soundproof Morning University facilities and transcribed using a combination of researcher editing and Otter.AI wherein a transcript was generated based on LR audio recordings and that was corrected after I listened to each LR discussion, cross referencing it with the generated transcripts. Data was then analysed using NVivo 15 to determine trends, themes, outliers, and points of focus in the data. The *Round Table Analysis* (RTA) consisted of those within my immediate professional network with the ability to apply research recommendations to their own student support practices. That said, though this does shift the reach of the LR data, it still ensures that the information produced is placed in the hands of those who can possibly affect change and/or use its findings to improve the experiences of the Morning University Black British students. The *Round Table Analysis* (RTA) was held following the complete transcription, and analysis of the LR data. Attendees of the RTA were given a data summary of the LRs, highlighting illustration of RTs, and detailed recommendations with justification, as well as a snapshot of the Participant Profile information (See Participant Profiles). Attendees were then asked to gauge the validity of the recommendations given their professional experience and interactions with the student community. In short, answering the question, would these recommendations work? Attendees hailed from various university departments, all of which centred around student support, student well-being, and university academics, as necessitated by research recommendations. Attendees were not privy to any prior knowledge outside of being aware of the project's existence prior to the RTA.

It should be noted that students remained at the centre of the research, though university administration analysis was not completed in the same manner as Parkin and Heron's study. Parkin and Heron found that students most enjoyed the method because it helped them to feel more comfortable and therefore, more likely to be “open to telling the truth,” as if the researchers “really cared” about the results (Parkin & Heron, 2023, p. 7). Herein, based on the feedback from participants, these feelings are accurately replicated in Morning University participants.

“The person I was talking to, I got along with well and we connected on a lot of topics. I was very comfortable and I believe it is a great way of getting information, like if both participants are willing to be open” - O. Mil

“It was a great conversation, there was a bit of waffle. Sorry, but it did help to realise certain things about how we behave on campus and maybe what we should do more of.” - H. Saro

For the abovementioned reasons, and taking into account the previously mentioned challenges, the Listening Rooms method is best suited for this specific study because it best suits the ethnic group being studied, Black British students. Citing the above reasons, the Listening Rooms method is a well-suited pursuit of the experiences of Black students in the university realm, while being malleable to the inquiry of a Black student researcher, such as with the *Round Table Analysis*. Employing the Listening Rooms method, participants guide the conversation by sharing narratives on their own terms. There is consideration for their experience and ongoing efforts to observe, and counteract, if necessary, my subjective opinion to ensure a data set uninfluenced by anyone, besides the students themselves. (Edwards et al., 2023; Igwe & Odii, 2020; Phinney et al., 2001; Ward, 2023).

Listening Room Limitations

The Listening Rooms methodology does not come without limitation and did present some challenges in relationship pairings. When the research study began in earnest, it became immediately known there were many interested Black student participants, but not many with an intended partner in mind. Noting SEDA, or Systematic Education Dialogue Analysis, found the Listening Method to be heavily based on the “friendship” aspect, I found this to be the most notable hurdle for completing the study (Heron & Parkin, n.d; Heron & Parkin, 2019; Reynolds, 2007; SEDA et al., 2022). It raised the question whether students who do not have a preexisting relationship, but have the same identifications, can be paired together for the Listening Room, such as two Jamaican students or two Psychology students? Would the students still provide a rich data set when they do not have a “relationship” with the other student? Would the comfort level of the student participants suffer because of this? Would allowing non-friend pairings fall too far outside of the Listening Rooms methodology?

To contrast, adjacent interview-based research found that peer-to-peer would either strengthen participant’s connectedness to the larger university community as they have the opportunity to meet and converse with another Black student on campus, or it could be a challenge should the students feel less inclined to share their experiences because they do not know their partner at a level wherein they would be comfortable doing so (Berndt, 1988; Jacobi et al., 2022; Thelamour et al., 2019). However, Thelamour’s work also noted that the deciding factor for some students were their family and friends from their home communities; likely where they were most comfortable. In addition, Thelamour found that even if the student does not have a pre-existing relationship with another person of the same ethnicity; community-specific experiences could be enough to endear them to one another (Thelamour et al., 2019). The research is based in *Social Belongingness Theory* which focuses on:

*“...the importance of context toward the feelings of closeness with others. **Strong bonds with family and friends can shape how individuals engage with others in new social settings** by shaping how individuals perceive the environment and behave accordingly.”* – Thelamour et. al, 2019, pp. 271-272.

In short, this suggests that the student comfort level or willingness to share will be based on their prior experiences, other friends on campus, and their home communities (Owens, 2019; Reynolds, 2007; Thelamour et al., 2019). That said, interactions in the Listening Room could be hard for a student who is less socially active than others and they may struggle to participate in the Room. Whereas a highly involved Black student with a strong connection to family or friends should have no problem engaging in the Listening Room (Canute, 2016; Owens, 2019; Thelamour et al., 2019). This further justifies changing the introductory participant registration webpage to allow students to choose whether they would like to be paired with an unknown student, or if they’d prefer to complete the Room with a peer of their choice. In doing so, this presented a new avenue for data with some of the Listening Rooms having students who have a pre-existing relationship and some without⁴¹.

⁴¹ Those without pre-existing relationships that completed the study did not complete LR 1 with the same partner as LR 2.

Identifying information has been anonymised. Any student pairs that did not have a pre-existing relationship were paired solely on availability of the student when scheduling the Rooms themselves, creating a semi-random placement. Students were exclusively paired based on being available at the same time.

While extremely productive quantitatively, there are also challenges to this format in the form of missed data opportunities, low engagement, and lower authenticity in responses⁴². LR 1 presented challenges in understanding students during the recorded discussion playback and understanding student speak. All LR 1 discussions were completed in university sound-proof facilities, but the recordings themselves were recorded using my personal device. There were two LRs where the students sat too far from the recording device so the recording volume was very low making it harder to understand. Further, being American and apart of a different social generation than the students meant that any slang students used was defined by a third-party source. Though I have no reason for such concern, there was additional effort put into ensuring that the most accurate definitions for any Black British slang (BBE⁴³) was used.

As outlined in *Methodology; Procedures*, participants received a send-off email with the provided Events calendar, see Image 6, listing University Affordances that have been shown to encourage positive identity development. The calendar was updated regularly throughout the study. In the send-off email, participants were suggested to attend events specified in the calendar. However, they were also informed that this was not a requirement for participation in the study as participants who chose not to attend any of the events were also relevant to the data.

Speaking to participants with low engagement with the campus community, students have been shown to exhibit increased authenticity, comfort, and belongingness when among friends (Berndt, 1988; Canute, 2016; Heron, 2019; Phinney et al., 2001; Reynolds, 2007). Therefore, in using the Listening Rooms method, participant data would ideally be more organic, especially for those who would normally maintain a less authentic presence in unfamiliar spaces. In terms of missed opportunities, surveying as a methodology is crucial to grasp large, more generalised sorts of data but cannot delve deeper into reasoning behind a survey response and is not a fit here. However, citing less engaged participants, there is suggestion that because they exhibit low engagement, they would perhaps be more comfortable completing a survey or active discussion (Canute, 2016; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Jackson et al., 1991).

In addition, the LRs are also limited by time in surveying large populations. It's not impossible but matching, scheduling, and monitoring 10,000 participants and 5,000 partnered discussions would be an even greater challenge. For example, seeking to gauge the effect of American police brutality on the global community, past investigators used survey research to scale this effect. Survey results suggested that American inequity has a transnational effect highlighting Black Americans' interactions with police and their effect on the attitudes of Black British people (Laniyonu, 2021). Initial survey results showed that Black British people are more likely to have a negative view of the police because officers are statistically more likely to stop and search Black citizens. Further survey results showed an increase in negative perceptions when participants were asked to also consider highly publicised killings

⁴² It is worth noting that qualitative data is often examined using interviews, or focus groups suggesting that a survey format is not best suited for qualitative response (Heron, 2019). In instances where interviews are conducted over a survey, issues of authenticity arise (Heron, 2019).

⁴³ BBE (n) – Black British English. See Glossary.

of Black Americans (Laniyonu, 2018; Laniyonu, 2021; Tura et al., 2025)⁴⁴. Black British people have research illustrated scepticism for police but statistically, their disproportionate number of negative or charged experiences reinforce experiential bias towards distrust (Home Office, 2024). Further, racial ideologies and policing culture also maintain these inequalities for Black Brits (Home Office, 2024; Tura et al., 2025; Wicks, 2024). It was found that non-White British ethnic minorities also have lower trust in police overall suggesting that negative views of police can stem from racialised experiences and systemic factors (Bradford et al., 2015; Tura et al., 2025).

However, Laniyonu's research also showed there are limits to the extent Black British people identify with Black Americans. Survey results indicated that Black British citizens born in the UK have a lower affinity for police officers than that of African British people, or African citizens not born in the UK (Laniyonu, 2018; Laniyonu, 2021). Research suggests that migrant populations, such as African British, tend to have higher trust in police than home-born UK citizens (1st, 2nd, 3rd), (Bradford et al., 2015; Laniyonu, 2018). Here, the missed opportunity lies in better understanding why Black British and African British individuals differ in their view of police officers. In turn, this suggests, that open-ended questions are the best opportunity to define Black thought by using detailed accounts. The Listening Room method was chosen based on this differentiation.

When faced with the issue of friend pairs for students, this also presents a concern of uneven sampling and the nature of the pre-existing relationship between the students. Ideally, the study needs to represent major portions of Morning University's Black student population. Morning reported 35.34% Black, Asian and Ethnic students (University of Morning, 2020b). However, it is unclear what the exact number was because this number did include non-black individuals. Further breakdowns of each specific ethnicity's population were not available. It is also worth noting data for Caribbean students were not divided by island and/or country therefore, it is unclear which part of the Caribbean has the largest representation. However, Morning University promotional materials reported which countries were most highly represented by the student population as a whole. The largest Black, Caribbean and/or African groups on campus were Nigerian, Kenyan, Mauritian, and Caribbean (University of Morning, n.d.). That said, if the participants of the study are of the above ethnicities, this could skew the data in one of two ways. First, either this presents an opportunity where two students of two different ethnic groups are presented, such as a Haitian student and a Nigerian student completing the Listening Room. Or, two students of the same ethnicity may participate together because of their pre-existing relationship or shared community, such as two Kenyan students. While the latter is ideal, this could lead to a larger representation of one ethnicity over another. Instead of attempting to remedy the uneven sampling, I incorporate this aspect into the research conversation. Should one ethnic group be greatly represented over another; especially if said group represents greater portions of the Black student population, this offers as an opportunity to delve further. It would also present an opening to question why students from one ethnic group opted to participate over groups that did not.

⁴⁴ When examining the rates of race-based violence with police, in the UK, 64% Black youths report feelings of distrust toward the police (Marchant, 2020). An additional 54% do not trust the police, while 55% worry about being falsely accused of a crime (Marchant, 2020). Here the US is used to highlight the effect that American highly publicised racial violence has on the viewpoints of Black British people (Laniyonu, 2018; Laniyonu, 2021).

The research study methodology, the Listening Rooms (LRs), lends well to this line of questioning. Because there are two Listening Rooms occurring, following the first Listening Room (LR 1), there was room to adjust the discussion prompts to further explore what encouraged students' participation in the study. Referring back to the project Research Questions (RQs), exploring this uneven representation could contribute to answering RQ1 *“what stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for Black British students?”* and RQ2 *what aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture and religious affinity groups or workshops, EDI events etc.) most influence Black British student's ethnic-racial identity development.”* There was room to wonder if students finding a community of those with the same ethnicity as themselves had significant impact on their involvement in the campus environment and their experience.

The LR prompts served to foster discussions that could potentially answer the RQs. For instance, LR participants were asked *“What makes you feel like you belong to the campus community”* to prompt discussion that could involve specific university affordances, as well as which development-oriented experiences they had while at university. LR participants were asked *“if you could change one thing about the university to feel more supported as a Black British student, what would it be,”* to encourage reflection on what students felt was missing among university affordances.

As noted above, friend pairs also presented a challenge in the participation requirements needed for a Listening Room since a major aspect of the method is the student *chooses* who they bring into the LR with them. During the data collection process, I often met students willing and interested but without a friend to bring to the Listening Room. There were also cases of students and their invited peers who were unable to find a meeting time that fit both of their schedules. I found that unfortunately, like the “friendships” being capitalised on this research, the LRs were bound by the perils of everyday student life. In fact, over the course of the research, the concern of being unable to supplement a peer to complete the LR with them became a recurrent issue and raised questions about how best to define the pre-existing relationships between the students⁴⁵.

In relation to the student/peer pre-existing relationships, past research found that students responded positively to peers based on the shared experience of transitioning to university, with other identifying factors such as race and gender acting as an added commonality on top of the shared student status (Berndt, 1988; Canute, 2016; Owen, 2019). Due to being in shared spaces, student peers develop friendships based on being in shared environments and enjoyment of specific peers' company suggesting that friendship or acquaintanceship between peers can be fostered in a number of social settings on campus (Owens, 2019; Reynolds, 2007). Citing these shared spaces, prior research found that being in close proximity contributed greatly to the formation of relationships, but maintenance of the relationship required high levels of continued communication (Canute, 2016; Thelamour et al., 2019). Looking at friends made specifically during university, relationships fostered in later adolescence have been found to be better maintained than friendships fostered in early adolescence (Canute, 2016; Owens, 2019; Thelamour et al., 2019). This period of new

⁴⁵ In cases wherein a student was interested in participating, but did not have a friend/peer they'd like to complete the study with, the unpaired student would receive an email stating that a Listening Room would be scheduled once a student to pair them with joined the study. Once another student joined, the two were appropriately paired.

relationships is significant because these relationships are the way incoming university students create *Belonging* in the absence of their home community relationships (Owens, 2019; Reynolds, 2007). Research suggests that this the transition from peer, or acquaintance, to friend is a key portion of student development as it signifies social adjustment to the campus community and meaning-making for the student⁴⁶ (Hernández et al., 2017; Owens, 2019; O’Sullivan et al., 2019). Therefore, to acknowledge the ever-shifting relationships students are managing, and to simultaneously grow their peer/friend relationships, students were allowed to choose between a peer or a friend (pre-existing relationship).

In short, both peers and friends signify development within the university (Brown et al., 1989; Canute, 2016; Hernández et al., 2017; Owens, 2019; Thelamour et al., 2019). Shifting into *Results*, I pose the sub question (RQ2a) “***Based on student opinion, would the students consider university affordances successful?***” to encourage the student to pinpoint both peers, friends, and experiences that have played a role in their development.

⁴⁶ Students can be tasked with maintaining University relationships and home community relationships simultaneously, with research reporting the loss of home relationships due to time and availability as a commonality (Owens, 2019).

Results

The results of this study will illustrate where the connections between Black British university education, higher education as a field, and salience of identity lie. To do so, one must recognise Blackness as more than cultural expression or a race; but also, as a source of knowledge discredited by the racist society that built it (Andrews, 2019). Further, past and present research has long determined that there is inherent inequity built into the current system Black British students step into (Andrews, 2019; Arday, 2019; Hensby et al., 2024; Jivraj & Simpson, 2015). Outlined in the Participant Profiles, each student participant is listed. The results, discussed according to the Research Themes (RTs), further demonstrate the ways in which race and ethnicity are woven into the fabric of society.

Through a thorough review of supporting literature, outlined in the Literature Review chapter, I sought to address project Research Questions (RQs):

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students?*

- a. How do students define their identity?
- b. What experiences in university do students feel have the most influence over their development?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *What aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture, religious, affinity groups or workshops, EDI events) most influence Black British student's ethnic racial identity development?*

- a. Based on student opinion, would the students consider university affordances successful?
- b. Do students from different ethnic backgrounds respond differently to Black-intended activities or affordances?
- c. Do certain university affordances achieve the University's desired effect?

To answer the above questions, I pursued the following: 1) evaluate instances of self-definition using the MEIM-R in older adolescent Black British university students, 2) assess potential influences over development across university experiences, social interactions, and prior community-specific involvements, 3) analysis of oppressive systems based on age, gender, race, and income situated in a British context using Critical Race Theory (CRT) with Indigenous Research Principles (IRP), and 4), analyse how the experiences of Black university students relate to Phinney's Ethnic-Racial Identity development model (ERID), thereby suggesting what stage of development was most prominent in student participants.

Research Themes (RT) of *Self-Identification, Belonging, Socialisation, Well-Being, Journey, and Reflection* are highly relevant in existing research on identity development and the Black British student experience. I selected the themes based on their continued presence in scholarly discussions and supporting research, as well as their relevance in explaining how Black British students navigate university life. By establishing my research in these instituted themes, I build upon prior studies, further exploring the nuance of ethnic-racial identity development within a specific mid-ranked university. As such, the present study first presents the MEIM-R results; specifically, correlations between MEIM-R total scores and sub-scores,

Belonging (BAC), *Ethnic Identity* (EI), and *University Affordance satisfaction* (UIC), as well as psychosocial interactions associated with identity development. MEIM-R scores compiled during Listening Room 1 (LR 1) and Listening Room 2 (LR 2) are presented and compared, when possible, to show the participants' developmental changes over time after engaging in psychosocial interactions and interacting with university affordances. Psychosocial interactions⁴⁷ include peer-to-peer interactions, staff/student socialising, family conflicts and conversations, and internal conflict exacerbated by outside stimuli. Then, RTs are presented in relation to the qualitative data results from LR 1 and LR 2. Herein, it's important to recognise that LR results and MEIM-R results are presented jointly in relation to ethnic-racial identity development. This means to best gauge the student's development, one must consider the participants' MEIM-R *together* with LR discussions, using both, interwoven, to build a nuanced understanding of development.

The present research is constrained by its smaller, majority female sample, location, and time period. Data was collected at two separate points in time only (1 room per academic year). Casual researcher/participant interactions were limited to interactions with participants for research purposes or in connection with attendance at the university affordances being researched. Participants' exploratory behaviours were only examined during a set period of time, one academic year at Morning University, and then reflected upon in the following academic year.

⁴⁷ Psychosocial Interactions: the dynamic relationship between society and one's sense of self, specifically in how social structures, social interactions etc. influence concept of self (Cross, 1981).

MEIM-R Score Results

The present study examined 13 participants, $N = 13$, aged 18–22 who completed the first of two MEIM-Rs during Listening Room 1, Time 1 (T1), and then completed a second MEIM-R during Listening Room 2, Time 2 (T2); see Tables 5 and 6. 4 participants completed the second MEIM-R and completed the study, with one participant only partially completing the MEIM. Nine participants declined to complete the second Listening Room.

Table 5: Listening Room 1 Participant Pseudonyms, MEIM-R Score and Sub-Scores.

First Name	University Satisfaction Sub-Score (UIC)	Belonging Sub-Score (BAC)	Ethnic Identity Sub-Score (EI)	MEIM-Identity Mean Score (Total Average)
D. Bio	3.40	3.00	3.20	3.20
Y. Ban	3.40	3.40	3.20	3.33
E. Igw	2.80	3.60	3.00	3.13
H. Saro	2.60	3.60	3.00	3.07
O. Mil	1.66	4.00	3.60	3.40
K. Pop	2.30	3.60	2.20	2.93
M. Ele	3.00	3.80	2.00	3.10 (0.6)
C. Wal	1.33	2.00	2.40	2.13
I. Sil	1.00	3.20	1.80	2.30
F. Mul	1.60	3.40	2.80	2.80
J. Gor	2.60	4.20	2.80	3.33

Table 6: Listening Room 2 Participant Pseudonym, MEIM-R Score and Sub-scores.

First Name	University Satisfaction Sub-Score (UIC)	Belonging Sub-Score (BAC)	Ethnic Identity Sub-Score (EI)	MEIM-Identity Mean Score (Total Average)
D. Bio	3	3.2	3.4	3.3
E. Igw	2.33	3.9	3.2	3.4
H. Saro	2	3.8	3.2	3.2
K. Pop	2.30	3.60	2.20	2.93
I. Sil	1.00	3.20	1.80	2.30

******Incomplete MEIM-R

As noted previously, my research uses an edited version of the MEIM-R inverting the Likert scale so 4 represented *Strongly Agree* and 1 represented *Strongly Disagree*. As such, 1 indicated lower engagement with one's ethnic background, and 4 higher engagement. Here, MEIM-R data was used for quantifying ethnic identity of the participants, whereas the LRs themselves provided contextual grounding for the MEIM-R scores. Notably, because MEIM scores alone could not explain *why* students scored a specific way, I conducted a thematic analysis of LR discussions alongside MEIM-R scores, to identify development trends and to determine which RTs were more prominent in students' identity development.

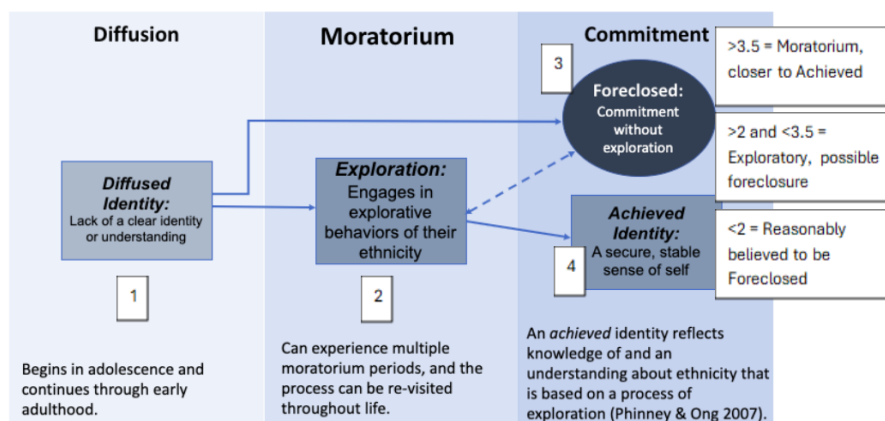
The majority of participants scored between 2.5 and 3.5 on the MEIM-R. Refer to Tables 5 and 6 for MEIM-R scores, the scores suggest that the students had spent time exploring their ethnicities, albeit at varying levels.

Table 7: MEIM Score Rubric

Rubric Criteria:

- **Ethnic Identity Score (EI):**
 - $\leq 2.00 \rightarrow$ Low Exploratory Activity
 - **2.01 - 2.99** $\rightarrow$ Moderate Exploratory Activity
 - $\geq 3.00 \rightarrow$ High Exploratory Activity
- **Belonging Score (BAC):**
 - $\leq 2.00 \rightarrow$ Below Average
 - **3.00 - 3.49** $\rightarrow$ Average Belonging
 - $\geq 3.50 \rightarrow$ Above Average
- **University Identification Score (UIC):**
 - $\leq 3.00 \rightarrow$ Mildly Satisfied
 - **3.01 - 3.49** $\rightarrow$ Satisfied
 - $\geq 3.50 \rightarrow$ Greatly Satisfied

As shown in Table 7, a score of 3.5 or higher on EI suggests a student is closer to an *Achieved* identity and/or had experiences high in *Exploratory* behaviours. 16% of student participants scored 3.5 or above suggesting their experiences thus far served their identity development well. A portion of participants scored below a 2.5 suggesting that though they are in an *Exploratory* phase, the result may not be an *Achieved* identity but instead a *Foreclosed* identity. As reflected in Table 7, this is because scoring below 2.5 suggests less ethnic identity-specific exploratory behaviours are taking place. Past research has shown that less exploration would suggest a resignation to one's current definition of identity, or lower interest in exploratory behaviours overall; both being benchmarks of a *Foreclosed* identity (Bernell et al., 1993; Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1992; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001).

Figure 1: Phinney's ERID Framework w/ corresponding level of development.

For the purpose of analysis, each stage of Phinney's ERID framework was assigned a corresponding number, accounting for each stage of development, see Tables 5, 6, and Figure 1. This was done to quantify where in the flow of development, each participant falls. The

variable y reflects an individual's ethnic identity development stage, which is assessed through their exploratory behaviours and commitment to their ethnic group illustrated in their MEIM-R ratings. See Figure 1. Higher MEIM-R scores indicate greater engagement in exploratory behaviours and a more advanced stage of ethnic identity development, therefore corresponding to a higher stage of development. That said, a MEIM-R score of 4 reflects a high likelihood of an *Achieved* identity as the participant **strongly agrees** with all prompts regarding identity development. Further, any score under 4 would not be considered *Achieved* as the participants have not fully agreed with all the MEIM-R prompts and do not reflect a “*stabilised sense of self*,” (Phinney, 1988, p. 503; Phinney, 1992, pp. 170-172). Participants’ true stage of development can be approximated using the MEIM-R, and more precisely pinpointed using the Listening Rooms recordings. In addition, although there is a correlation between each sub-scale/factor of the MEIM-R, there is no strong evidence of a zero-order correlation as none of the factor correlations are statistically significant.

By combining MEIM scores with Listening Room reflections, I interpreted participants’ current identity development stages, and their development trajectories. For example, when looking at specific scores, referring to LR 1, participant D. Bio disagreed with the statement “*I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me*,” scoring it 2. Participant D also rated the statements “*In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group*,” and Morning university-specific statement “*I feel my university makes a conscious effort to encourage pride in my ethnic group*,” a 2. D. Bio is a student reporting less participation in events that foster positive EI. D. Bio also reports low levels of *Belonging*, but they seem to treat it as a fact of attendance, as if they’ve come to accept it as fact. Their LR comments reinforced MEIM-R scores, describing a lack of institutional support and little personal interest in ethnicity-oriented affordances. This is illustrated in participant D’s disagreement with Morning University’s efforts to encourage ethnic group pride because it was not originally offered when they arrived:

“They [Morning University] should have done that you know back in the day. Now, like ‘**disadvantaged**’ comes like every year. Either you want to do it and like help, or not. So, this was a bit more difficult because I didn’t really have support for myself when I started uni, but like people have needed it for awhile” – D. Bio

Contrastingly, participant Y. Ban responded **Agree** to the statements, ranking them all 3. Y. Ban’s MEIM-R responses suggest a student likely in an exploratory phase of Phinney’s model, noting that they responded **Strongly Agree (4)** to the statement; “*I have spent time trying to find out more about ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.*” Participant D and Y’s cumulative responses suggest that both students are likely in a *Moratorium* phase, but it cannot be determined whether both students will reach an *Achieved* identity. In fact, participant D’s responses suggest it is likely a *Foreclosed* identity could be reached because they specified that they do not feel there have been conscious efforts by the university and that they do not personally seek opportunities to discuss their ethnicity. Coupled with **strongly agreeing** with the statement “*I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to*,” this implies participant D would likely reach an identity contented with group membership, being uninterested in new knowledge about said ethnicity. Participant Y. Ban’s responses suggest a student happy with group membership, having enthusiastically participated in ethnically significant events, experiences, and discussions about said ethnicity, both individually and on a university level. Participant Y. Ban would be highly likely to reach

an *Achieved* identity because of their engagement in exploratory behaviours, having a happiness with group membership coupled with an interest in more ethnicity-specific experiences.

Ethnic Identity Sub-Scale Results

Built into the MEIM-R are sub-scales to quantify markers of identity development, and specific indications of development; in this section, only sub-questions quantifying *Ethnic Identity* (EI) are discussed and any other scores mentioned are in relation to EI. To calculate the sub-score of EI, the mean of questions 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10 was used. The sub-scores generated can answer RQ1: ***What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for Black British students;*** by connecting quantified EI, using levels of *active exploration*⁴⁸ as indicators (y = Stage of Development). Refer to Table 5 for LR Time 1 specific participant EI scores and Table 6 for LR Time 2. Here, the EI sub-score indicates the amount of exploration the student participants underwent during the Moratorium phase, defined as *active exploration*, and what effect this exploration had in terms of their EI. Refer to Table 7, participants scoring 2 or below are considered “low activity⁴⁹.” Participants scoring between 2 and 3, suggest a “moderate level⁵⁰” of exploration and participants who scored between 3 and 4, categorised as “high activity” signify participants who have had or purposefully sought experiences productive for their EI i.e. engaging in *active exploration*. *Active exploration* includes cultural traditions and events, social interactions with members of one’s ethnic group, speaking one’s native tongue, reflecting on ethnicity-adjacent interactions, or interacting with cultural by-products such as food, music, or goods. Most importantly, the interactions are *active*, i.e. participants robustly seeking ethnicity-specific related experiences that, in turn, foster development; whether consciously or subconsciously.

That said, participants’ EI scores ranged from 2 to 3.8, with only one participant scoring below 2. Instead, the majority of the participants scored between 2 and 3, “moderate activity.” Further, a significant portion of participants scored over 3, signalling high levels of *active exploration* and purposeful focus on the participant’s involvement in their ethnicity’s community. Notably though, only about half of this 41% *stated* a purposeful interest in ethnic engagement in their EI scale ratings. Comparatively, only one participant scored below 2 on the *Ethnic Identity* scale, confirming that 91%, most of the participants began the study with at least some component of EI present, and some form of *active exploration* taking place.

Phinney’s Ethnic Identity framework specifies that exploration of ethnic identity begins in adolescence (Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1996a; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Roberts et al., 1999). Noting that the age of participants ranged from 18 to 22 and 91% of participants scored high enough on the MEIM-R to suggest the presence of an ethnic identity, it is likely that participant exploration began prior to their arrival to Morning university. 46% of participants were 1st or 2nd year students, first years having been at the university at least 6 months at the time of study. The remaining 53% were 3rd year students. Therefore, one must assume prior development-related experiences for 46% of participants as they’d only been at

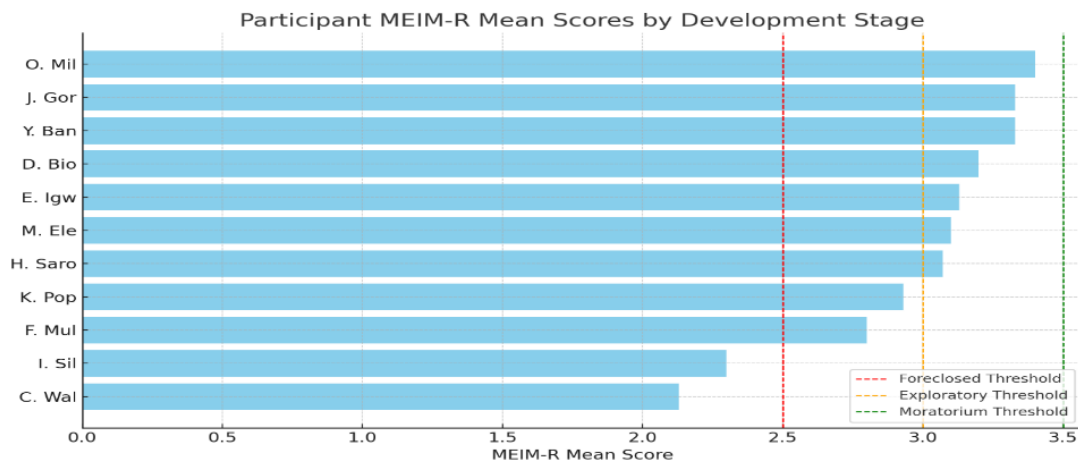
⁴⁸ Active Exploration of ethnic identity generally begins in late adolescence and is characterised by interactions with ethnic group community members, family, and friends accompanied by a greater ability to express one’s thoughts and feelings about ethnic group membership (Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001; Yip, 2013).

⁴⁹ Refer to Table 7, Low Activity is indicated by low levels of interest/engagement in ethnicity-relevant activities or experiences. This does not necessarily mean the participant is underdeveloped; it could also mean they have not sought a conscious involvement in their identity development.

⁵⁰ Moderate Exploration indicates that exploratory behaviours are taking place but said exploration is not a major focal point of the participant’s life and/or critical examination of exploratory behaviours is little to none. See Table 7.

Morning University for 6 months to one year. Whereas, 3rd year students had significantly more time to engage in exploratory behaviours at Morning university, making it much harder to determine if they began university with remnants of a budding ethnic identity.

Graph 3: MEIM-R scores; corresponding likely stage of development



See Graph 3, there is a correlation between EI sub-scores and ERID stages of development⁵¹. Moving participants through Phinney's model, it is not a perfectly linear association. Instead, this indicates data trended in the same direction, but there are other factors influencing development, i.e. influencing which stage of development the participant is at, and the relationship between the two is not deterministic. EI sub-scores could be used to predict changes in stages of development, but the strength and direction of the relationship between the two is uncertain and provides only a moderate level of confidence.

There was a weak positive correlation between *EI* and *BAC* sub-scores ($r = .0139, p < .681$). While both do trend positively in the same direction, the correlation is not strong enough to draw a significant conclusion. It can only be gleaned that high levels of *EI* and high levels of *Belonging* (*BAC*) can both be predicted and/or expected but this research's participant group size may not be large enough to confirm further meaningful conclusions. This was expected as prior research reported that high levels of *Belonging* is a marker of established *Ethnic Identity*, but not a guarantee of the identity's positive development (Gaines et al., 2010; Habibi et al., 2021; Phinney, 1997; Phinney, Romero, et al., 2001).

There was also a weak positive correlation between *EI* and *UIC* ($r = .304, p < .363$). However, the correlation is not strong enough and could have been due to chance. Though past research has highlighted the connection between *Ethnic Identity*, and satisfaction with university performance, this connection is not corroborated by the participants of this study (Black Students Talk Team et al., 2021; Cena et al., 2021; Luthra & Flashman, 2017; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021). *Ethnic Identity* had the strongest correlation with MEIM-R average scores, with sub-scores, *Belonging* and *UIC* being only moderately to weakly correlated. Therefore, while higher levels of *EI* do not necessarily guarantee the presence of *Belonging* or *University Satisfaction*, it does confirm that identity development is taking place.

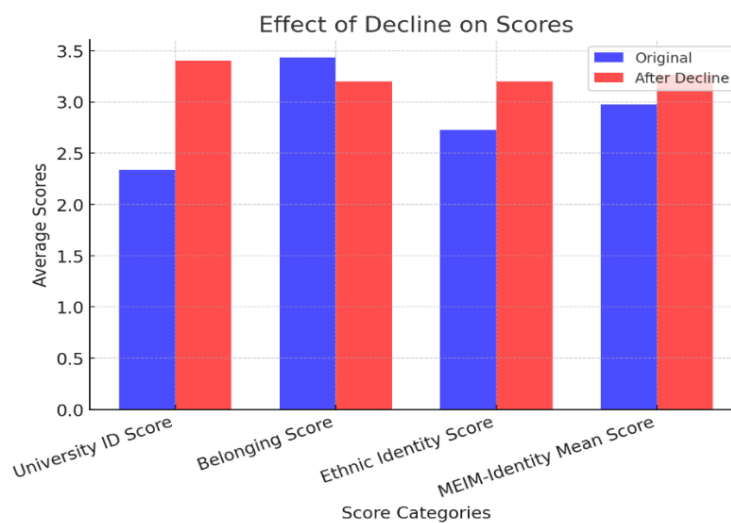
Moving to the second MEIM-R, data from LR 1 and LR 2 indicated that returning participants (4 returning) showed measurable growth in *EI*. Both sets of MEIM-R scores, T1 and T2, are significant, but there are stronger correlations found between sub-scales from

⁵¹ MEIM-R mean scores are used to match up what phase of development they are in; correlated with other MEIM-R sub-scores.

MEIM-R 1 than MEIM-R 2. This could be due to the lower number of participants in the second LR. However, scores from MEIM-R 1 and 2 confirm movement through Phinney's development stages, and that outside influences can have an equal or greater effect on development than that of university affordances.

From LR 1 and LR 2 *EI* scores, shown in Graph 4, participants who completed both LRs increased by an average of 0.46%; further confirming movement through Phinney's development stages. MEIM-R EI scores indicated that participants began the study with meaningful experiences related to their ethnic identity, i.e. development was already in progress upon their arrival to Morning University. This suggests that they had developed some sense of ethnic identity before their arrival, while also possessing the key factors necessary for continued EI growth at this university.

Graph 4: Participant decline rates; Listening Room 1 vs Listening Room 2



This is not necessarily a surprise in the data findings as past identity research found that development of EI starts in early adolescence, but it should be noted that the findings validated participants' prior development (Phinney, 1988; Phinney, 1992; Phinney et al., 1997; Roberts et al., 1999). Of the participants who returned for LR 2, 66% showed an increase in sub-scores suggesting that the experiences they discussed in the LR discussions had a positive effect on their EI development. This cannot be confirmed for the non-returning participants but the above correlations, and sub-scores of participants who did return suggest that there are Morning University experiences occurring that affect student EI development significantly enough to be reflected in the data.

Belonging (BAC) Sub-score Results

This section only discusses Belonging sub-scores and is used to answer RQ2b; ***Do students from different ethnic backgrounds respond differently to Black-intended activities or affordances?*** Belonging sub-scores are calculated using the mean of questions 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 to determine what level of Belonging students were experiencing at the time of the Listening Rooms. This sub-score is vital in establishing a baseline of growth for the student participants, specifically, where was their level of *Belonging* on campus at the start of the research study, followed by how their level of *Belonging* has changed by the conclusion of the study. Refer to Table 7, participants who scored 2 or below are considered to have “below average Belongingness,” as they fall below the average of the sample group. Participants who scored 3 or higher would be considered “average.” Those who scored 3.5 or higher would be considered “above average Belongingness.”

In terms of ethnicity, certain ethnicities showed increased levels of *Belonging*. As shown in Graph 2, 35% of participants self-identified as Caribbean, specifically Jamaican. Of this 35%, all participants who completed the study showed an increase in feelings of Belonging from LR 1 to LR 2. 45% of participants self-identified as African, specifically Togo, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Ghanaian, Ivorian, and 5% self-identified as bi-racial, categorised under “Black” (Caribbean, African and/or bi-racial White British). Of African participants who completed the study, all participants showed an increase in *Belonging* as well. For this reason, in response to RQ2b, it can be deduced that Morning University affordances do foster *Belonging* in both Caribbean and African ethnic groups, but the exact nature of *how* this *Belonging* is fostered can only be gleaned from the ethnic groups who completed the study; Ghanaian, Togo, and Jamaican. Data here suggests a slight but noted difference between African and Caribbean groups’ response to university affordances.

Mean Belonging scores, $x = 3.25$, showed that most participants were categorised as “average.” However, there is a weak positive correlation illustrating a positive relationship between the two. Though this also suggests there are other influences that could affect the data. Further, results from LR 1 suggest most participants began the study with “average” levels of *Belonging* that increased between LR 1 and LR 2 with LR 2 mean scores being $x = 3.33$. In fact, all LR 2 participants showed an increase in Belonging. BAC scores of returning participants increased by an average of 0.26% between LR 1 and LR 2. LR 2 participants also shown an increase in overall MEIM-R scores of an average of 0.20%. However, one LR 2 participant showed a greater increase of 0.5% versus the 0.02% and 0.01% increase of the other participants respectively, skewing the data.

This study took place over the course of one academic year, wherein all study participants were enrolled as full-time students. While the change in BAC sub-scores and overall MEIM-R scores suggests that university experiences may have influenced their development and feelings of belonging, the small sample size of LR 2 limits any further definitive conclusions. Additionally, it cannot be determined which specific aspects of the university experience contributed to these changes; that is why the LR data is necessary. The standard deviation of BAC sub-scores from LR 1 to LR 2 suggest a potential positive correlation, and data supports that exploratory experiences occurred. However, MEIM-R sub-scores alone do not provide enough detail to identify the nature of these experiences.

As mentioned above, prior research does connect EI and *Belonging* including the notion that *Belonging* feeds development of a positive EI (Cena et al., 2021; Hernández et al., 2017; Luthra & Flashman, 2017; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021; O’Sullivan et al., 2019). Here the MEIM-R scores suggest a mutually beneficial relationship wherein EI development encourages feelings of *Belonging*, and feelings of *Belonging* feed EI development. Past researchers connected identity and Belongingness and found that Caribbean students in South London drew on prior “*acquired bodies of knowledge and dispositions to improve their social and academic performance, and, in so doing, challenged the widespread stigmatisation and homogenisation of black identities in school,*” (Treviño et al., 2008; Wallace, 2016, p. 913). Here, research outlines Black British students as assertive of their racial identity by using Black cultural expression for societal representation and mobility.

Referring to MEIM-R 1, participant scores primarily pointed to participants having established levels of *Belonging*⁵² at the start of the study with 83% of participants scoring between 3 and 4, the remaining 17% scoring between 2 and 3, and one of the participants scoring 2 or below. In fact, while 53% of participants were 3rd year students, the remainder of participants were 1st and/or 2nd year students. Considering that 1st/2nd year students had not spent as much time at Morning University as 3rd years, it can be concluded that their prior experiences, before their university attendance, positively contributed to *Belonging* levels.

By LR 2, 100% of participants scored between 3 and 4, with one participant nearing a perfect 4. Notably, of the 83% of participants, 40% of responders were of Caribbean descent. Contrastingly, 100% of participants who scored below 3 were of African descent. The results suggest differences in *Belonging* based on ethnicity, possibly suggesting that the university may be designed to better serve Caribbean-descent students than African descent students. However, 58% of LR 1 participants declined to return to complete LR 2 so it is unclear whether the differences in *Belonging* levels was a trend for Caribbean or African populations exclusively. Of the participants that did complete LR 2, only 33% were of Caribbean descent; and was not enough to draw a strong conclusion.

Participants with “below average *Belonging*” could illustrate trends in student involvement. Here, approximately 8% of participants were notated as “below average,” Interestingly, the same participants also reported little to no involvement in on-campus Morning University student societies during LR 1. However, the same 8% of participants declined to participate in LR 2 so it is unclear what data trends would have been established about “below average *Belonging*” had they chosen otherwise. That said, given that the participants reported low *Belonging*, and therefore a lower connection to the university community, declining to further participate in the study could be expected to an extent.

⁵²Belonging, defined in terms of MEIM-R - the feeling of relatedness or connection to others/one’s community. In this sample, based on LR responses, Black British student communities consist of family, their home areas, friends, on-campus, and off-campus immediately surrounding Morning University (Gaines et al., 2013; Hernández et al., 2017).

University Satisfaction and Categorisation (UIC) Sub-Score

In earlier MEIM-R studies, researchers have adjusted factors for their purposes. For my project, I created a subscale named the *University Identification and Categorisation score* (UIC) to assess university satisfaction in relation to affordances that support positive ethnic identity development. Here, within this research, UIC sub-scores refer to the created Morning University sub-questions. See Table 7. Noting that 66%, over half, of the study participants scored below 3, these participants will be categorised as “Mildly satisfied.” Those scoring above 3 are referred to as “Satisfied” on average. None of the participants scored over 3.5; any who had would have been categorised as “Great Satisfaction” with Morning University affordances. In addition, between LR 1 and LR 2, UIC scores fluctuated. Of the participants whose scores decreased, they did so at an average of .3%. Any increases were an average of 0.36%. That said, during LR 2 100% of participants scored at least “mildly satisfied” or above.

In considering UIC scores in relation to other sub-scales of the MEIM-R, of the students who scored as “Mildly satisfied,” 58% also scored as having average or above-average belonging. There is a positive correlation between UIC scores and BAC sub-scores suggesting that if one increases, like Belonging, the other, University satisfaction, likely will as well ($r = 0.301, p = 0.368$). However, the correlation between UIC and BAC is weaker in comparison with overall MEIM-R, which had the strongest correlation with belonging ($r = 0.762, p = 0.006$). This means, that though participants did not report “Highly satisfied” levels, the greater the satisfaction, the greater their overall development. This confirms it is plausible that increasing student involvement in university affordances could encourage positive development, but it cannot be confirmed whether student’s increased participation between LR 1 and LR 2 would be guaranteed to replicate this increase.

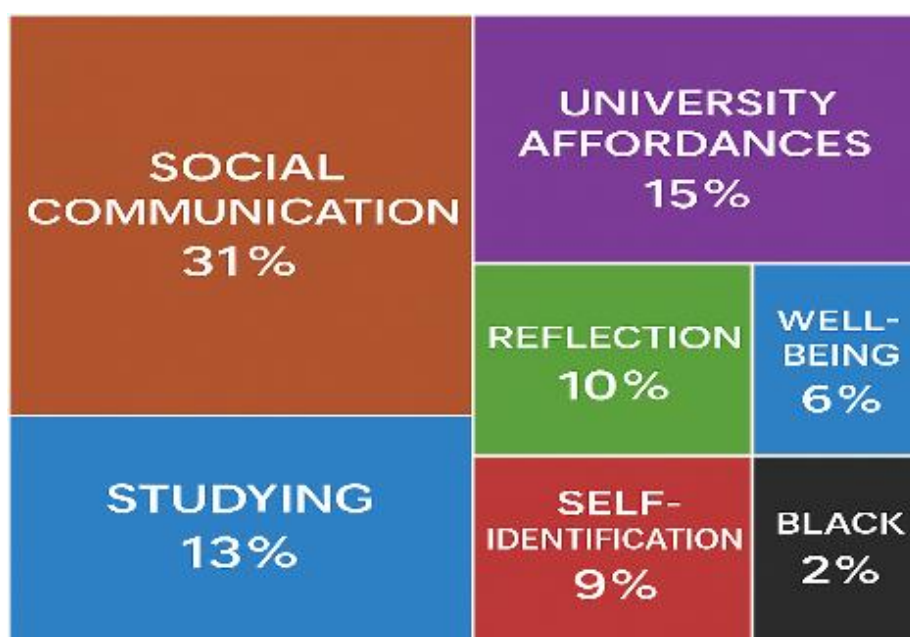
Further, considering LR 2 ratings, for participants who were “Mildly satisfied” with the performance of university affordances, this did not necessarily lower their BAC levels; or negate the ability for them to increase their university satisfaction, as shown by LR 2 UIC scores. For instance, though participant H. Saro scored 3.6 on the BAC subscale, signalling extremely high levels of Belonging, they scored 2.6 on the UIC scale, suggesting a polarising effect on student *Belonging* i.e. the greater dissatisfaction, the greater Belonging the student feels. Further, during LR 2 Saro’s *Belonging* score increased 0.4%, whereas their UIC score decreased 0.6%. Thereby suggesting that though Saro’s satisfaction with university affordances decreased, their *Belonging* levels increased. This is not to portray such polarising effects as a steadfast conclusion, as H. Saro was only one participant, but rather to highlight that *Belonging* can be felt and encouraged in spite of satisfaction with the university. However, in general, UIC and BAC are positively correlated. Even with a positive correlation, there may be exceptions to the rule, such as H. Saro. In review of H. Saro’s ethnic identity scores, though their scores did increase from LR 1 and to LR 2, the increase was not enough to suggest their EI was statistically significant enough to illustrate any correlations or draw any other conclusions.

Listening Room 1

As detailed in *Procedures*, Listening Room 1 took place from October 2023 – January 2024. Refer to Participant Profiles. As explained, LR 1 also included a *Briefing session* wherein participants would complete the MEIM-R as well as questions regarding contact information, their ethnicity, year in university, society involvement etc. This information was used to define the level of involvement students had with university affordances at the time of study. As seen in Graph 1⁵³, the most discussed RT of LR 1 was *Belonging*, with *Reflection*, *Socialisation*, and *Self-Identification* being the second most discussed topics. The least discussed topics of the research ranged, divided only by very small margins.

Additionally, *Communication* (See Graph 1) was not an initial Research Theme (RT) of the study, but in analysis of the LR data, references to *Communication* appeared in 7% of LR 1 and 31% in LR 2; see Graph 1 and Graph 5. The prominence of *Socialisation*-oriented conversations warranted further examining *Socialisation*'s influence over Black British student experience. Further, my research is anchored in CRT with IRPs, and inclusion of *Socialisation* speaks to the IRP of *Responsivity*⁵⁴. Therefore, *Communication* as a *Narrative Research Theme* (NRT) reflects a detailed, nuanced understanding of the type of *Socialisation* most prevalent for students regarding university affordances, upholding IRP by adding RTs most responsive to my findings, Black British student counternarratives.

Graph 5: Listening Room 2 Discussion themes rate of occurrence.



Beginning first with *Socialisation*, and further *Communication* (NRT), discussions of the ways in which participants were communicating with one another and the larger

⁵³ Graph 1 created using NVivo15 with using the rate of occurrence for keywords. The following keywords also occurred: *Community*, *Music*, *White people*, *Language*, and *Comfort*. Though relevant to participant experience, these themes represent pieces under larger Research Themes (RT) discussed in the Methodology chapter.

⁵⁴ Responsivity – shifting beliefs or values quickly, based on societal shifts. See Table 3.

university community accounted for a significant number of conversations for both LR 1 and LR 2. The most represented topics in relation to *Socialisation* were *Communication* when studying, communication of university policies, and communicating while living in university accommodations. Specifically, participants spoke about feeling a certain disconnect with family due to being unable to speak their culture's native tongue (African, and Caribbean ethnicities). Participants cited similar feelings of exclusion when relating to their flatmates in comparison with relating to friends and family at home. Participants cited "nice" feelings when communicating with someone with a similar background to theirs. All of which is indicative of the types of *Socialisations* common for Black British students to experience. In this way, *Socialisation* in relation to the Black British experience presents as communication barriers, with previous generations often streaming indirectly closer to ethnic cultural practices. Communication barriers also affect peer-to-peer *Socialisation*, such as when White British students, with limited awareness, change the ways in which Black British students communicate with them because of a negative conversation or encounter.

As outlined in *Belonging (BAC) Sub-Score Results*, most participants reported feeling a general sense of *Belonging* to their ethnic group. The LR discussions provided deeper insight into how that *Belonging* is fostered within Morning University. Students identified specific university affordances including activities, societies, classrooms, and peer-to-peer interactions as experiences that foster *Belonging*. The narratives provided during the LRs allowed for pointed comparisons, such as a participant with "Below Average" *Belonging* levels who described Morning affordances only in terms of attendance or obligation being compared with a student with "Above Average" *Belonging* levels who actively participates in university affordances. Such comparisons illustrate how *Belonging* is not a static RT. It is dynamic, negotiated through the experiences described in the LRs.

Further, *Belonging* accounted for 7% of LR 1 topics with participants describing their feelings of *Belonging* when attending ethnicity-affiliated society events. Participants outlined maintaining a sort of solidarity with ethnicity-oriented societies, even though the societies held events they felt were unsuccessful. Participants explained that they do not wish to "bad mouth" any society, especially one specific for Black students, but also admitted that the society event in question was not "good." Other topics related to *Belonging* discussed by students include arriving on campus and being happy to see other Black students but realising that the presence of other Black students did not guarantee that there was an "active" Black community. Mentions of *Belonging* were evenly spread across each of the completed LR 1s with percentage of occurrence ranging from 10.7% to 5.9% (6%) for each LR. There were not enough participants of any one ethnicity to determine if the differences in rate of occurrence were specific to a certain ethnicity.

Interestingly enough, *University Affordances* were mentioned in 15% of LR 2 discussions, but when including data that overlapped Research Themes (RTs) i.e. a participant statement that can be coded as both *Belonging* and *University Affordance*-related, the rate increased. This suggests that participants associated *University Affordances* with not only feelings of *Belonging*, but also *Socialisation*, *Well-Being* and *Journey*. However, there were LR outliers, such as one room having an 18.89% (19%) *University Affordance* rate of occurrence versus a different room only showing a rate of occurrence of 4.2% for the same topic. With *University Affordances* having a much wider range of occurrence, it suggests that student definition of university affordances, or instances wherein university support services are expected and/or necessary, can vary widely. In this case, the variation would be too wide

to determine specific situations wherein participants would all rely on specific university affordances in the same way.

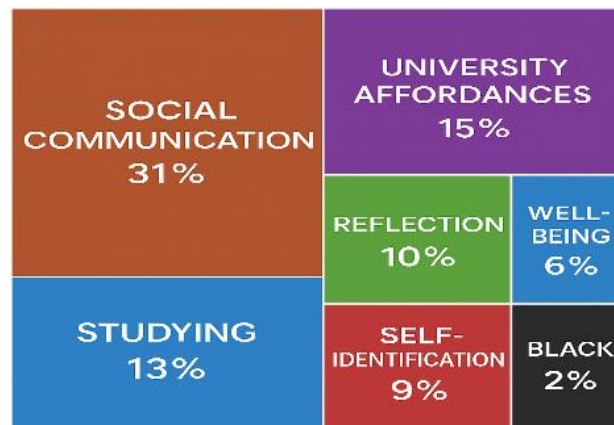
For instance, participants discussed their coursework and academics, however, some participants reported avoiding *University Affordances* and instead turning to family or flatmates when stressed from schoolwork, in turn connecting their interaction with *University Affordances* to *Journey* (their home communities) or *Belonging* (interacting with flatmates/friends). Whereas another participant used University academic support services when struggling academically and found them wanting due to their personal preferred methods of Communication (*Socialisation*) i.e. preferring in-person meetings over online meetings, which affected the participant's views on the success of the *Affordance* altogether.

That said, in considering MEIM-R ratings, participants who were shown to participate in high levels of exploratory behaviours also spoke about *University Affordances* on average 13.38% more than participants who did not show high levels of exploratory behaviour. While this does not guarantee that students high in exploratory behaviours will engage more with *University Affordances*, it does support a connection between said *Affordances* and more identity-fostering behaviours. Though it cannot be determined how an individual will relate to *University Affordances*, taking MEIM-R scores into account together with LR discussions can gauge what populations of students will likely engage with university affordances i.e. universities can determine which sorts of students would attend events, such as expecting students with high exploratory behaviours to attend a culture festival over students with much lower interest in exploratory behaviours, who may prefer something far lower intensity, if at all.

Listening Room 2

Listening Room 2 took place from October 2024 – February 2025. LR 2 concluded once all participants had either completed the second LR or declined to return. At the time of LR 2, the academic year was also underway and concluding in June 2025. Listening Room data herein refers to the completed LRs of 4 returning participants. As such, the findings of LR 2 data can only be applied to the experiences of participants as Black British students, and cannot stand as evidence for whole group, or ethnic group-wide conclusions.

Knowing that some participants could have departed Morning University, LR 2 specifically asked what culturally relevant experiences they had, given what new knowledge they took from LR 1. As in LR 1, definitions of the Research Themes (RT) were provided in LR materials in terms of the work at hand. Described earlier in *Methodology*, LR 2 was more an opportunity for participant critical reflection to illustrate any development of identity that took place during the previous academic year.

Graph 5: Listening Room 2 Discussion themes rate of occurrence.

Refer to Graph 5, *Social Communication* had the greatest rate of occurrence at 31%, with *Studying* (coursework) and *University Affordances* closely following at 13% and 15% respectively. The most represented topics of discussion were classroom/in-class interactions, specifically with lecturers, Opening Day and on-campus social interactions, social media, (University-run/affiliated social media accounts), and society participation. In addition, participants also considered their gender, and the specific type of *Socialisation* taking place i.e. the ways in which they interact with others being influenced by social structures, or university policy. Participants also spoke heavily about coursework and scheduling. Though LR 2 began at the same time, one year later, as LR 1, returning participants discussed the intensity of coursework they currently had compared with the amount of much easier work that they had previously during LR 1.

The least discussed RT of LR 2 was *Self-Identification* at 9%, and *Well-being* at 6%. *Well-being* was also the lowest discussed theme of LR 1. This suggests a possible sustained lower interest in *Well-Being* for Black British students, though I would recommend including more participants to confirm the possibility. In instances where participants discussed topics related to *Self-Identification* or *Well-Being*, it was in regard to cultural identifiers such as language, religion, or food.

In terms of *Well-Being*, it was overwhelmingly about hair and social perception of Black British students' looks. Students discussed feeling that if their hair was not "polished," they would be perceived negatively. In turn this took a notable toll on their confidence in White spaces. Students outlined the stress of maintaining a "polished," in their words, "acceptable" look and being disheartened when they realised the steps they felt they **had** to take. The topic of hair and social perception was also mentioned in LR 1 regarding Morning University's lack of materials that fit over Black British natural hair in the biology department. Though it cannot be concluded that Black British students have lower engagement with *Well-Being*, the re-emergence of the same topics, Black hair care and physical presentation, does suggest that specific aspects of *Well-Being* are very important to the students, though not necessarily encompassing the entire topic of *Well-Being*. Specifically, *Well-Being* for participants is defined by individual mental health as well as safety from racist interactions, and affirmations of identity.

That said, the largest challenge of LR 2 was the lower number of participants. LR 2 presented a number of possibilities but did not have enough participants to sustain any conclusions about the students' specific ethnicities, gender, or year of study. Refer to Graphs 1 and 5, *Socialisation* occurrence rates are strongly represented across LR 1 and LR 2, though

differing significantly. However, it cannot be determined if the rate of occurrences are outliers unique to LR 2 because of the lack of returning participants.

Refer to Participant Profiles in the Appendix, and Tables 5 and 6, when looking at MEIM-R scores, it could be expected that participants would reflect more positively on their time at Morning University, given that the academic year was well underway and all participants were completing at least their first year of study. However, MEIM-R UIC scores do not necessarily illustrate any positive statements about *University Affordances*. Statements regarding *University Affordances* were 62% negative on average, but MEIM-R UIC scores did slightly improve between LR 1 and LR 2, thereby suggesting that participants were engaging in more critical reflection of Morning affordances, but their satisfaction with university affordances did not improve upon reflection. Therefore, LR 2 data, without taking into account MEIM-R scores, cannot confirm positive ethnic-identity development in participants because they did not give positive accounts of the affordances, and therefore did not give positive accounts of exploratory behaviours of this nature.

LR 1 and LR 2 presented rich counternarrative data about which topics were most prevalent for students. Based on the rates of occurrence shown here, and prior relevant research, this research maintains that fostering feelings of *Belonging* remains the most opportune opening for Morning University to encourage positive development of ethnic identity. Looking at the RQs, specifically, RQ2a and RQ2c:

- a. *Based on student opinion, would the students consider university affordances successful?*
- c. *Do certain university affordances achieve the University's desired effect?*

Per LR 1 and LR 2, data suggests the presence of university affordances that do not achieve the desired effect. Data shows that participants were reflecting critically on Morning affordances, students were participating in the affordances but found them wanting in some way. Some were successful, some were not.

To be elaborated on further, the specific affordances that most disabled development varied from student to student but the largest disabler to trend among participants was Academic university affordances. Conversely, the affordance that most enabled development was society involvement, and peer-to-peer interactions (social time in university-provided settings). Therefore, RQ2a can be answered as **Yes**, while 38% of participating Black British students at Morning University would consider them unsuccessful, a remaining 61% were neutral or positive. See Table 8.

Table 8: University Affordance Development Fostering

Experience/Affordance	The below either encourages development of identity or hinders, slows, or alters development in a way that negatively affects identity.
University Staff Assistance/Rapport	Disabling – any non-positive interaction will be a detriment. LR data shows more non-positive interactions.
Peer-to-Peer interactions	Enabling
Socialisation	Enabling

Well-Being (self-care/self-perception)	Ambiguous – Likely disabling but LR data confirms it would need to also take into account student self-perception.
Religion	Ambiguous – depending on the student’s Journey with religion.
Familial/Home Community support	Enabling
Social media	Greatly Ambiguous – if used productively, an important resource for exploration. If used incorrectly, off-putting to students.
Society Involvement	Greatly Enabling

This is not to say that any one affordance is wholly unsuccessful but rather that it is very likely the majority of the participants attending university affordances would either be indifferent or find the event positive if they had attended. To answer RQ2c, Morning university’s desired goal⁵⁵ focuses on creating a valued student experience. While I imagine Morning University administration would like to say they are doing so, 62% of participating students would say otherwise. Therefore, the answer would be **No**, not for everyone.

⁵⁵ Morning Union is a registered charity with a mission to “stand up for students, help them have the best time at Morning and prepare them for life after Morning.” Its vision is to provide “the best student experiences on the planet (University of Morning & Advance HE – Equality in Education 2019, n.p.).

Research Themes (RT)

Building on the supporting literature and data collection, each of the below discussed Research Themes (RT) are examined in terms of both MEIM-R scoring data and participant discussions from the LRs. Using both student counternarratives and the MEIM-R scores ensures a well-rounded understanding of the Black students' experiences attending Morning University. Comparison of the prevalence of each RT during the discussions is shown in Graphs 1 and 5. Refer to Image 4.1 and 4.2, conversational prompts were provided to participants that pertained to each RT. Four to six conversational prompts were provided per RT. LR 1 and LR 2 conversational prompts were slightly different, and both sets of prompts were edited based on feedback from Pilot LR 1 and LR 2 completed with the same student pair, see Table 4.

The below results discuss each RT, detailing LR data and connecting it to MEIM-R results. Regarding *Self-Identification* as a major theme of this research and in recognition of the multiple aspects of self that make up one's identity, *Self-identification* is woven throughout the explanation of all the remaining RTs. Herein, experiences discussed by participants are examined first in relation to this research's structural RTs, then the aforementioned participants' experiences are used to clarify where the participants' identity, or development of such likely stands.

Belonging and Socialisation

Participants reported significant overlap in feelings of *Belonging* and opportunities to socialise with community members. Therefore, in discussing LR results, *Belonging* and *Socialisation* as Research Themes (RTs) are presented together, *Socialisation* being correlated with *Belonging*. The two themes were originally separate pillars of the research but after analysing the Pilot LR, LR 1, and LR 2 data, the themes are intertwined. Social interactions being often present in instances that encouraged or discouraged increased feelings of *Belonging*. In short, student participants associated *Socialisation* with feelings of *Belonging*, and as such, they are associated here as well.

Focusing in on the *Belonging* and *Socialisation* prompts, data shows that participants spoke often about feelings of *Belonging*, especially within the campus community, friend groups and among societies. Consequently, participants sought other Black students as a sort of jumping off point to further socialising with the university community. This suggests that the presence of other Black British students can increase *Belonging* because participants often *expected* a very small population. This is primarily to note what Black British students' pre-existing expectations of their university experience were and what actually came to pass. In brief, participants expected to see few fellow Black students and subsequently, looked for their peers in various university settings like classrooms, lecture halls, society events, etc. even though they knew it was unlikely they would come across a Black peer.

*"...And I've read a few books, but it's just I find it super interesting that when black people move into another environment that **we really have to question** if there's going to be like, a community of black people in that area."* – Y. Ban

*"I genuinely, I genuinely feel like we said, **we don't see black people here a lot**. When we see [them] there's a big group or they're in third year."* – E. Igw

*"...Just like the first day [I] kind of felt like everyone had made their friendship groups already. People knew each other. **Then it was it was hard for me to like, settle in with my course and people in my course.**"* – D. Bio

Herein, participant responses show that feelings of *Belonging* were often tied to social interactions. Though causation cannot be determined, there is a clear correlation between student feelings of *Belonging* and their interest and/or willingness to socialise.

That said, location also plays a large role in the students' expectations of Black faces. For students from nearby London, this expectation came about because they were "used to" or acclimated to a certain level of diversity. This is not to say that existing in a more diverse city meant non-Black peers were immediately less discriminatory but rather to recognise that the route to *Belonging* looked different prior to Black British students' arrival to Morning university, and the students noticed the similarities and differences between the two experiences.

*"I've never had in London like a racist or nothing but obviously there's definitely something about other people being like scared of me. You're walking cross the roads, I was looking. **Someone definitely looked back at me. They stopped and were like 'Let me go***

*faster.’ And I was laughing. Like other things, if I understand why they think that way, it’s not that I’m like, I guess upset, but I think yeah, that’s crazy.*⁵⁶ – O. Mil

“So, you’re kind of popular just walking in and you just play⁵⁷ instantly popular. Everyone asked questions. It was quite normal for me. But as I got through the years, more people became more curious and we started getting strangers being like ‘oh, can I touch your hair?’ like that? Experiences like that. Yes, I was taken aback but with me I don’t really feel like a big reaction is warranted from me. I generally go to teachers, officials, to try and deal with that because when you take it the other people, they don’t really seem to understand.” – K. Pop

These responses suggest that students’ routes to building *Belonging* are affected by setting; as well as the way in which the surrounding community of one’s particular location socialises. A significant portion of Morning University’s student population comes from London so it does stand to reason that the reactions to a Black student in London could mirror the reactions Morning University students could also have. However, this does mean the student’s home community is a major deciding factor in where the student’s expectations of the University will fall. More so, this suggests that regardless of the level of diversity in a student’s home community their expectations of *Socialisation* will likely be rooted in finding commonalities with their peers; one of those commonalities being Blackness.

In addition, *Belonging* scores also positively correlated with participants’ overall MEIM-R scores suggesting a direct link between *Belonging* and overall development of one’s ethnic identity. This means, a student’s level of *Belonging* is indicative of what their level of development could likely be. In fact, 41% of participants that scored between 3 and 4 on the BAC sub-scale suggested that they’d had or *sought* experiences productive for their ethnic identity. Interestingly, of the remaining 59% of participants who did not score between 3 and 4, majority (89%) also did not score between 3 or 4 on the EI sub-scale suggesting that though exploration of EI is a contributor of *Belonging*, exploratory behaviours are not necessarily an indicator of *Belonging*’s presence.

Looking at Table 5, this does support why LR 1 student MEIM-R scores are majority Average or Above Average in *Belonging*, with lower scores for University Satisfaction. Students are building *Belonging* via *Socialisation* where they can, but these building blocks i.e. exploratory behaviours, are often not found within the University community, at least not initially, and therefore cannot always be attributed to *University Satisfaction*. For instance, when students arrived at university, some found their social expectations unmet, describing an atmosphere of “killed silence;” feeling discouraged in open expression of their thoughts and feelings. As participants shared below, the contrast between anticipated and actual social experiences marked a shift in how Black students were approaching Morning University spaces.

*“And then when I came to Uni, it was also very strange because you come in and you plan on sitting next to a black person. And that’d be the slide⁵⁸. Kill. silence.*⁵⁹ – K. Pop

⁵⁶ “That’s Crazy,” (adj.): often used to describe what one does not understand or feels another’s actions are not how something or someone should be and/or act (“Urban Dictionary: That’s Crazy,” n.d.). See Glossary.

⁵⁷ Play (v): to cause people to think you’re one thing but really another; to give the false impression that you’re interested in something or someone (“Urban Dictionary: Play,” n.d.).

⁵⁸ Slide (v): To let go of some type of problem; to excuse an insult.

⁵⁹ Kill. Silence (n): the solemnity of silence has become too loud, often in response to incidents wherein one feels a response is warranted, but not given or able.

*“Based on my experience, I don't really see where the black community is, it's like, **invisible**. So, yeah, it shouldn't be, you know, it shouldn't be. Somehow, we should see, you should see activities that aren't just like bum shakes⁶⁰, you know? It doesn't mean like, **if you have a lot of black people at the uni, doesn't mean that there is a proper black community**. – C. Wal*

*“I'm not gonna lie, like, pre-pandemic, whenever there was like an event I'd be like happy to go for them. You know, sometimes. I find these are like my type of events. But now since the pandemic; **I feel there like that there hasn't been as many**. Even the ones that we have had; I have been up; I used it up⁶¹. – M. Ele*

Further, despite participants outlining Morning university's strong academic offerings, they also emphasised that lectures only occupied a few hours of their week/timetables. This meant significant portions of their time were spent navigating unspoken social pressures and hypervisibility.

*“So, its like, sure, even [though] the university has, like amazing, like, you know, teachers and stuff like that, I mean, I don't know about your time. If you actually look at your timetable, like let's say what, two-hour lecture or whatever or something like that. You have like 3 or 4 this week. That means like **what 22 hours of the day left that you're like essentialising the way the people look at us**. That's like overload⁶² bro.” – F. Mul*

LR prompts asked, “*What makes you feel like you belong to the campus community,*” participants reported wanting events that bring together Black students. It was stated participants felt apprehensive approaching an event or class alone so if there was a large group of Black students present; it encouraged the participant to attend. However, the number of Black or White students was not always enough to guarantee a student's attendance. Instead, it was the *nature* of the university affordances that could be the deciding factor in attendance for some. Should an event be too heavily focused on more popularised aspects of Black Britishness like music, or dance, or specific events in Black History, it was reported that this could potentially lose Black British student attendees. Participants equated this to being made to feel that “Black Britishness” is only hip hop and trauma, as if that is all they have to offer. Specifically, students highlighted a greater focus on slavery and the inequitable treatment of Black people, and less of a focus on the “good stuff” about Black history. Here, it's important to note that Black history is a broad category of knowledge. This is not suggest that Black British students do not want to learn Black history, but rather to highlight that they feel Black history related events at Morning University narrowly present slavery, and other traumatic historical events.

*“...like finally like they're trying to put in the extra effort to do so. And I don't care. **I don't want to do if it's someone talking about slavery**.” – H. Saro.*

*“To me, I guess I've seen so many ACS events, but we haven't gone to them. **I don't think there's anything that ACS can teach me now**. Like they had the reggae thing before, I'm like just thinking, **'why am I here?'**” – E. Igw*

⁶⁰ Bum Shaking (v): to move the backside, the arse, the rear end, the sit upon, the butt etc. rhythmically

⁶¹ Used Up (adj.) used more figuratively to describe a situation where you've exhausted something or there's nothing remaining of value to be procured.

⁶² Overload (adj.): The point at which one is no longer able to retain or produce new information due to a period of strenuous mental activity.

In referencing *Belonging* and the above-mentioned ACS society, D. Bio offered the below explanation when discussing a past African-Caribbean Society (ACS) event; ACS being one of the ethnicity-based societies offered at Morning University, governed by the Morning University student union:

*“I feel like it's kind of setting the tone for how ACS would be the rest of the year. I don't want to badmouth them because you know, maybe they're trying but it's like the events that we've been to. **It's not like, engaging, if that makes sense**...they didn't have the audience's attention. People were walking out, people talking over the presenters.” – D. Bio*

Participants seemed to prefer university events that were well organized with expectations for the behaviour of the attendees, and that some sort of new knowledge could be taken away from them. They specifically compared the above-mentioned ACS event with a later, unrelated event held by the Dementia society that participants felt was better organised. Participants also noted membership of specific sport societies like the Rowing society as encouraging them to become involved in other societies as well. They noted that participants *wanted* to attend the events/games and *expected* an engaging presentation from societies on campus, but interest waned when they could not glean any new knowledge from an event. Looking at the events that participants found to be more successful, like the Dementia society, they highlighted events with more social interaction, and opportunities to connect with a wider network of peers and friends:

*The Black Intellectuals, the one where they had the Black creatives visit. Yeah, like that. I enjoyed that...and yeah, the podcast...Definitely. **That's the society we see the most black people and get to connect the most.**” – Y. Ban*

*After joining the Rowing society, the people told me like try joining the Netball society. That's it. [I] came to that too, and it was chill. So, I haven't been majorly in any like talking, like social society. I couldn't pick one like best to be honest. **But like I did get to have the actual hanging out with my society experience.** – C. Wal*

LR prompts asked “do you feel confident stating your ethnicity for university needs (administrative documents, tests, classes, timetables etc.), in social settings with peers? Why or why not?” Participants reported similar feelings stating that they had no problems declaring their ethnicity because it cannot be ignored, and non-Black students would ask anyway; often before learning about other aspects of participants’ personhood like hobbies or coursework. However, in this same vein, participants reported feeling like the university knows Black British students have different needs academically and doesn’t necessarily take these needs into consideration as, in the participants’ eyes, a university should. Moreover, participants noted several instances related to class, coursework, university services, and university facilities wherein they felt unsupported because of prior knowledge or an aspect of themselves they could not change, like their hair (and associated time constraints).

*“‘Oh, if you have Afro textured hair, you have braids,’ caters for various people. Let's say you can't participate. And then their excuses. ‘Oh, we don't have the right equipment for your type of hair’ like it's actually crazy. **You get so much money and you're telling me you can't go have equipment for Afro textured hair**” – H. Saro*

*“I like math, like *omitted Morning University Dept* is tiny, like it's a tiny, tiny class. And I'm literally like one and then all boys. And just it's just **like the first day kind of felt like***

everyone had made their friendship groups already. People knew each other. Then there's me, and like it stayed that way." – Y. Ban

The above quotes illustrate how adversely affected their levels of *Belonging* within the university community were. Contrasting this with MEIM-R scores, BAC sub-scores show 100% of participants began the study with at least "Average" levels of *Belonging*, and 33% scoring "Above Average;" thereby suggesting that participants found *Belonging* encouraging experiences on campus. However, participant UIC scores also show lower satisfaction levels so participant *Belonging* cannot be attributed to university affordances as participants did not report strong enough levels of satisfaction to suggest such. That said, participants seemed to work around lower satisfaction with the university within the communities they'd built on campus almost from the moment they arrived on campus.

Highlighting the connection to *Self-Identification*, participants noted specific *Belonging* building experiences in class that helped to define their identity by connecting the coursework to their own identifying experiences. Supporting literature suggests that participants of this study were not the first to grapple with national identity; instead, national identity in minoritised populations has been researched from an intersectional standpoint heavily. Past research found that these populations grapple, either positively or negatively, with their national identity as one reconciles with the part their region played in history (Hylton & Politics, 2011; Levinson & Hooley, 2013; Marcia, 1993; Phinney et al., 1994; Phinney & Ong, 2002). Interestingly enough, participants reported their identity changing while noticing peers, whose identities are also changing, responding differently to new knowledge about one's cultural history.

"But it's like they have a big love for Britain. And for me that's been collected all my life. Obviously, I've gone back and read quite a bit about the history about Britain, specifically Nigeria, because if we go back, and this is specifically what I do, if we go back and look about, I don't know how you can love that. It's like the Caribbean." – K. Pop

"All my work, like I did all that with stuff about Andy Murray⁶³ and all that kind of stuff. It's like once you learn about your life, kind of from scratch. Yeah. I just think people now got to a point where they don't really identify themselves as like their parents because we learn different." – O. Mil

Participant responses suggest new knowledge as one advances through university propels ethnic identity development, encouraging one to define their identity based on what they learned. In fact, the above students' reflections showcase a complex negotiation between their British identity and their ancestral ties. Participant K. Pop touched on the disconnect between their parents' deep admiration for Britain and their own critical understanding of Britain's history, particularly regarding Nigeria. K. Pop's comment reveals tension in their identity: they feel more disconnected because of what they'd learned about colonial history. This subsequently impacted their understanding of their British identity. For the participants, Britain cannot be "loved" unconditionally, given their knowledge of Britain's legacy of exploitation and oppression from its colonial past.

Further, participants offer insight into how this generational divide affected their sense of selves. Citing O. Mil, students such as the 1st to 2nd to 3rd generation students

⁶³ Andy Murray - an allusion to a British cultural figure; noted British tennis player, highly decorated and well known sports figure.

researched here, have trouble identifying with the worldview or values of their parents. Researchers Phinney and Ong also documented this phenomenon previously in studying nationalistic feelings in Vietnamese American populations (Phinney & Ong, 2002). Black students within this research describe carving out a new identity shaped by their education, experiences, and a more nuanced understanding of British society (Author, 2011; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). Referencing Andy Murray⁶⁴, a noted British figure, suggests that their relationship to Britain is shaped by both their ancestry and British pride, as well as how they'd come to view themselves within Britain's social narrative.

Herein, students negotiate dual influences of identity: their parents' love for Britain, and their own critical exploration of Britain's past. This could represent a shift among Black British students, shifting away from the older generation's attachment to the country. This process of "learning different" suggests a departure from inherited beliefs, as all of the participants self-identify as British, but on their own terms i.e. terms more attuned to history and less bound to community nostalgia.

*"...and when I came, I went for like, applicant day. Like the open day thing. When I was doing like the work, I didn't realise that I was actually the only black person in that room either because I just felt comfortable. It was just something I needed to get used too because I was like looking at Tiktoks the night before [and] **some people were saying there's bare⁶⁵ black people in Morning anyway** so like I knew I'd like to connect with like someone."* – I. Sil

*"It's just like, nice to be around people and celebrate our cultures...yeah, **it's just nice to be around your community**, like with music and I think a lot about traditional weddings. Yeah....It's different."* – D. Bio

Participants went on to state society events wherein students can take away new knowledge while socialising with other Black students without disruption of the flow of the event as the most enjoyable for them. As with the Black Intellectuals (BIS) event mentioned above; enjoying the openness of the event and noting the overall variety of the events held by the society, participants then compare this with the ACS.

*"They made it open to anybody, they're like, oh, people come check out my society...but I didn't buy ACS membership last year because it wasn't like nothing to do or anything really motivating you too; **the officers never say anything**."* – Y. Ban

*"Yeah, you gotta join societies because I learned a lot from them. And I'm actually I guess, like 'it's a good thing' where you have to join a society like join the [Black] Intellectuals. **I haven't officially joined, but like I feel always welcome**. Like people do wish there'd be like a lesson, one or two."* – I. Sil

That said, this would suggest that *Moratorium* (exploratory stage) is the most prevalent stage of development for participants as 91% of participants were shown to have arrived at Morning with exploratory experiences. Of this 91%, 86% were categorised as "High activity," engaging in significant amounts of exploratory behaviours; see Table 7. This would suggest participants are engaging in the necessary behaviours to reach an *Achieved* identity.

⁶⁴ See footnote no. 65

⁶⁵ Bare (adj.): a lot of, or very; an exclamation used in disbelief.

Participants reported strong ties to their ancestral homes that translated to their time at Morning university. Here, there seems to be a disconnect between *Belonging*, *Socialisation* and *University Satisfaction* for participants. While students felt a strong connection to their cultural backgrounds, even engaging in ethnicity-specific university activities, participants did not report that these university activities encouraged meaningful social connections or contributed to positive academic and/or social behaviours, nor did MEIM-R ratings reflect such. Therefore, while student identities and social behaviours are influenced by their ancestral communities, the university's environment, and university ethnic societies; student involvement in university affordances may not always enable the kind of interactions or encourage the feelings of *Belonging* they seek. For example, participants reported avoidance of certain ethnic societies, and interactions with academic staff were found to be less than satisfactory. Conversely, participants also reported more positive social interactions outside of university affordances, such as in their respective home communities, and interactions with specific societies. Ultimately, it can be concluded that university participation, academic experiences, and social interactions do play a significant role in the development of Black students' ethnic-racial identities. However, the outcomes of these aforementioned experiences, whether positive or negative, are extremely dependent on the specific university context and the nature of the opportunities for interaction.

This creates an interesting dynamic wherein participants do not approve of the state of *University Affordances* currently while also aware of the societal response to their Blackness, on and off campus, and among members of their own community. Through this recognition, participants report feelings of resignation, indifference, fear, or anxiousness. Therefore, in gleaning University experience's effect on student *Belonging*, though participants do not report positive feelings associated with the above discussed affordances, the experiences do contribute to their development of self as they navigate a white-dominated society. Though Phinney's past work suggests development in a white-dominated society would not likely produce a positive *Achieved* identity; it can be argued that developing in a white-dominated society could present more ethnicity-motivated interactions; thereby strengthening one's sense of self over time via deeper understanding of one's ethnicity and sustained resilience (Bernell et al., 1993; Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Hall, 1996; Phinney, 1988; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990).

“I mean, I felt I was scared of being rejected from my international students, more so maybe to black people. I grew up in places like London and because I grew up in like West London, which is more like whitewashed, I was good about them [white people] in a sense. I sound so bad. That sounds so bad.” – C. Wal

“And then in my head, I'm thinking of all the societies and associations...Like what are we going to talk about. What I want to talk about, like as a black student struggling is what I want to say but can't like afford to say like ‘Oh, can't do this.’” – M. Ele

In terms of reflecting on their past experiences, a number of students cited mode and style of *Communication* to be closely tied to *Belonging* and *Socialisation* and could be a huge determinant of their level of engagement with a society, class, or event. This includes engagement with family and friends in their home communities.

Well-Being

The relationship between student well-being and university support structures is complex and often moulded by issues of representation, and accessibility. Universities have invested in a range of services specifically for supporting students' mental health and well-being. To understand the nuance of how students engage with these resources, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, it is important to consider how ethnic-racial identity and cultural understanding influence their experiences. Acknowledging the importance of such support, the below explores university well-being services and supporting literature, interweaving it with the ways in which student are impacted by such services; it is this connection that it is related to the results of LR 1 and LR 2 data.

In this research, *Well-Being*, as defined by Morning University, refers to “*the state of being happy, healthy, and comfortable*,” (Morning Union, 2023, n. p.). Morning University seeks to support student well-being via a number of avenues including but not limited to: Professional and Emotional support workshops, academic services, a dedicated Morning University Well-being service (MUWS), multiple online Wellness hubs spearheaded by the Student Union, Emergency support services, student-led support groups, and well-being oriented social affordances (social running, gardening, colouring/art, etc.). In order to utilise a number of these services, students must register online ahead of time, excluding counselling as students do not need to register to meet a counsellor. Morning University’s well-being policies are best represented by the below quote listed on the webpage for MUWS:

*“Taking a holistic approach to our wellbeing means looking after our whole selves. Things can easily get out of balance, especially during uncertain times. Wellbeing approaches allow us to endure life's challenges and stresses, giving us greater capacity to flourish and grow. **Wellbeing is being your own best friend and we are here to help you do that.**”* – MUWS, Morning University.

Noting that Morning University has a set policy in place, discussion herein about *Well-being* further considers relevant literature or actions of other universities. Universities in the UK have acknowledged that increasing attendance costs and vigorous academic expectations have had a negative effect on British students (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Sprott & Allport, 1955). Universities recognise that students from certain social groups, specifically those often associated with “widening participation” programs, experience higher levels of stress (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016). Research has also shown that this sort of increased stress can negatively impact academic performance, subsequently resulting in lower levels of achievement (Baker, 2002; Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Gaultier & Mountford-Zimdars, 2018; Maynard, 2009). Further, stress has been found to impair learning by affecting students' ability to focus and recall information (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; O’Sullivan et al., 2019). Here, it should be noted that the issue of university student stress is not limited to the UK; it has also been documented in the US, Sweden, Australia, and Canada (Baker, 2002; Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Johnson & Arbona, 2006; Watkins et al., 2007). As research on student well-being continues to grow, there is a heightened focus on understanding the specific well-being needs of different student groups.

For instance, more recent research distinguishes *Hedonic Well-being*, which is happiness and life satisfaction, and *Eudaemonic Well-being* which is more focused on life functions and living life to its full capacity. Importantly, past researchers clearly established a link between well-being and mental health stating mental health to be the “*foundation for well-being*,” (Herrman et al., 2005; Watkins et al., 2007, n.p.). Further, the UK Office for National Statistics emphasises other well-being indicators such as economic and environmental factors, social capital, and trust in public services (Dodd et al., 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2024). The office also highlights that since well-being looks different for different groups; the needs of university students are unique in that university students are considered to be “transitioning” into adulthood. Doing so comes with new responsibilities, new thoughts, new feelings, and importantly, new identities (Dodd et al., 2021; Kingsley, 2025; Morning University, 2023b; Office for National Statistics, 2024; Watkins et al., 2007).

Therefore, when reflecting on their *Well-Being*, mental health, social media, religion, social lives, familial influence, and costs of university were cited as the most influential on overall student well-being based on LR 1 and 2 responses. One such participant, Y. Ban, explained that religion helps them maintain a positive well-being, specifically through using a Christian phone app encouraging their more familiar religious practices, and leaving them in a more positive mental “place⁶⁶”.

“I use a good model that sends whatever message every day, literally Bible quotations every single day...I did this one quite like basically every day first year. There weren’t really any issues really... That’s familiar to you. So, I was in a place that’s familiar to me, like that comes natural.” – Y Ban.

*“We’re both Christians. Yeah, yeah. So honestly, like when I first moved here, the first couple sermons were like about things that I personally don’t care about, like how to be a good Christian, and stuff like that. Now I like *National Christian Organisation*. Like its a good model, they do whatever message every day, with like literally Bible quotations every single day.”* – E. Igw

This suggests that religion, their daily prayers and regular church visits, connect them to a level of comfort reminiscent of home. For Y. Ban, usage of the app became a natural part of their day, a part of prayer, and this led to a closer connection with family in their home community. Research shows that in many Black communities, religion and the church play a significant role as a civic space (Burrell, 2025; Mitchell & Mitchell, 2024; Nguyen, 2020). Churches in Black communities have been recorded as central spaces for local programs, mental health services, and a gathering space for both private and public community meetings (Aldred, 2007; Mitchell & Mitchell, 2024). In addition, among Black British older adolescents, 40% responded “Always” when asked whether their religion/faith play a major role in their lives? (*Black British Voices: The Findings*, 2023). In relation to well-being “Black Majority Churches” or BMCs have been found to contribute heavily to “community cohesion” wherein members of the community are encouraged to interact with each other for the betterment of the community (Aldred, 2007, p. 3). In doing so, BMCs were found to be a source of hope to “hard-pressed” people (Aldred, 2007, p. 4). All of which suggests it is likely that Black British people who are religious connect their personal well-being to their religion (Aldred, 2007; Burrell, 2025; Mitchell & Mitchell, 2024). That said, this is not to

⁶⁶ See Glossary entry; Place (n).

suggest an expectation that half of all Black British Uni students would likely be practicing Christians, but rather to establish that the presence of participant religion suggests *Well-Being* processes were taking place.

LR prompts asked “*How often do you look to your family for support; if at all?*”:

*“I’ve come from like a big family right, like it’s a family of seven, and we’re all so loud. My house can be very noisy. **So, when I was going to uni, I was really happy to just have my own space and just enjoy the peace and quiet I have now.** So, it’s like [me] that really affects my communication with family and my parents. Like I wouldn’t reach out to them for like, the whole week.” – D. Bio*

*“There’s not much for me to consult them about, but we just talked about our days, and my family just came back from Nigeria actually. The communication was a bit harder because the connection...yeah, when I would remember I could reach out to them. **They do appreciate it, but I’m just like you got to reach out to me.**” – C. Wal*

*“**I don’t really look to my family for support**, to be honest, I mean, maybe once or twice.” – M. Ele*

In comparison, other participants report an overall weaker connection to home, less of a familial influence, and did not mention religion as a major aspect of their connection with family. Participants further noted that while important, family was often not a resource for decreasing stress even commenting on pointedly limiting the receiving of advice from family members. However, the influence of family varied among participants with some reporting a deeper connection with family; deep enough to define how they have self-identified. For instance, participants stated the following:

*“Yeah, community for me, it’s just like family always. I really like connected to Nigeria and my fam, like **I see myself more as Nigerian and then British personally.**” – H. Saro*

*“Definitely, my mom, my family. **Like before she used to be like mama dog but now, she’s with it. Like we have good communication.** We can speak about things and stuff like that. That’s what I like. After that, because before was a thing that I was never telling her stuff before. And I’m always telling my sister, but now it makes sense.” – O. Mil*

Here they acknowledge that it is due to familial connection that they identify as Nigerian and see themselves as more Nigerian than British though they are home students. They acknowledge that they define themselves as family-oriented because of their relationship with their family, specifically their mum and sister.

LR prompts asked; “*What aspects of your university experience have you found to be the most supportive of your well-being? Least supportive?*” Participants reported coursework to be one of the largest issues for their Well-Being.

*“I think maybe because it’s like a big amount of assignments or something you have to do at the end of the year. Yeah, it just distracts me. I don’t want to do anything like, have no motivation to cook, all that. **I don’t want to go outside and socialise. I don’t even want to go outside, like I don’t want to do nothing. Like it’s just so bad.**” – E. Igw*

This is not necessarily a surprise of the research. Most of the participants, 66%, scored “Mildly Satisfied” on their UIC sub-scores suggesting a level of discontent with some aspect

of the university, classes possibly being one of them. Past research has also found that ordinary life aggravations, meaning things students expect to come across on a daily basis like class and coursework, are of bigger detriment to well-being than larger, traumatic life events (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Smith et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2020). Further, first-year students have been shown to have higher levels of stress than the general university population (Topham & Moller, 2010; Tinto, 1999). Researchers also noted that in the UK specifically, one-third of first-year undergraduate students showed signs of developing psychological health problems (Samoila & Vrabie, 2023; Topham & Moller, 2010). Therefore, the fact that participants reported lower levels of well-being associated with university attendance is unsurprising but rather confirming of established knowledge.

The same can be said for monetary costs of university attendance considering that the British government has recently raised the cost of attendance (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Shearing & Standley, 2024).

“It had some financial stress. Yeah, they were really supportive in the JobShop consultation. They were, they’re also very supportive to help me financially, because I think I still find that it just wasn’t enough to cover my rent. So, I took a picture of my finances on my bank statement and went there.” – M. Ele

For context, Morning university offers students use of on-campus careers services, including but not limited to CV editing, mock employment interviews, budgeting workshops, professional skill workshops, and seminars. The reference ‘Career Services’ includes the Careers and Employability (C&E) department, the Morning University Well-Being Service (MUWS), and the University Student Union, as the Union manages the Job Shop.

It is important to recognise that while costs of attendance were found to significantly impact participant well-being, the findings from this research cannot directly address or alleviate the issue of cost. Therefore, financial stressors are recognised rather for their effect on the students’ mental health and their development. Participants did connect financial stress with other university affordances that had a positive effect on their well-being.

“Yeah, I mean, in terms of financial support, the school is really good. But it takes a while to get the money, I think so. I don’t think you’d ever solve that really though. Yeah. Also, there’s another student learning advisory, MUKS. They’re also really helpful. I’ve met one of them and they’re really keen⁶⁷ on, you know, helping students with submissions and stuff like that. It actually helped me with extensions and giving me like extra timelines.” – O. Mil

The service that participant O. Mil is referencing, the Morning University Knowledge Service (MUKS)⁶⁸, is meant to assist students with assessments and exams, assignment completion, apprenticeships, and study skills; essentially acting as “support services” for coursework/professional skills. During the course of this research, MUKS was renamed as the Morning University for Student Success and Skills Team (MUSSS⁶⁹) and now offers extended hours of service. LR participants reported not only feeling less stressed because of

⁶⁷ Keen (adj.): eager to do something, used to describe someone who is ready and willing for anything, anywhere, any time.

⁶⁸ MUKS – Morning University Knowledge Service, a pseudonym for Morning Uni’s student professional/academic support service.

⁶⁹ MUSSS – Morning University Student Success and Skills, a pseudonym for Morning Uni’s re-named academic support service.

academic support MUSSS, but also that it is common for students to take advantage of this service.

*“You can so if you’re to be free like go, that’s what I’m saying. I might expect like them to read it. So maybe I’ll have in my mind Monday. Because if I’m doing it by Friday then I’m doing some in my seminar on Thursday. And like you have to book it. **I have to make sure to book a slot or like by the time I can, the essay will basically be done anyway.**”* – F. Mul

Of course, should a student be unable to schedule an appointment with MUSSS, as F. Mul describes, this does not stop them from completing coursework as they are aware it is a service with high demand.

Overall, given the above responses from participants, and noting that there was an increase in UIC sub-scores between LR 1 and LR 2, Morning university students seem to seek staff with a true interest in support and understanding. Participant H. Saro’s words from LR 2 best sum up what students are feeling regarding their well-being, university affordances, and their identification of self.

*“I also feel like, even if it’s not obviously like more of a money issue, I feel like even if we can’t have, like, academic advisors that are black or lecturers that are black and these like mentors and things like that, its because the **thinking is wrong. I don’t mind talking to a white person. Maybe sometimes it’s nice to know that I’m speaking to someone that maybe can understand me a bit more, someone that I feel like can actually get where I’m coming from when I’m talking. But it’s like, I don’t even try, especially when it comes to well being, because it’s like, there might be a well being, like an office or whatever, but it is a white lady. And in my mind is that I don’t know how comfortable I would be to tell this white lady everything. Yes, I don’t know you. You have to mellow it down exactly. And then it’s like they have so many resources. But then it just feels like this stuff, in a way, because I’m not seeing any representation that they cater for somebody else.**”* – H. Saro

H. Saro’s quote is a personal and sincere reflection that highlights the barrier created due to lack of racial representation in university staff. In addition to this barrier, students report that their primary sources of stress stem from financial challenges/cost and academic demands. Academic services are widely utilised as a student support service, and past research has shown it to be an effective support structure for students (Baker, 2002; O’Sullivan et al., 2019; Stephenson, 2023; Topham & Moller, 2010). Further, participating Morning University students find that academic services greatly reduce negative feelings of stress, with “good” university performance representing 0.38% of the recorded LR data.

As reflected in student testimonies like H. Saro’s, the absence of diverse staff in well-being roles creates a barrier to access rooted in emotional safety and trust. In some cases, students may not feel comfortable opening up/reaching out to staff who they feel cannot fully understand and/or empathise with their lived experiences. However, per LR responses, they continue to access academic support, even with the absence of racial representation because academic success is essential. This suggests a rational negotiation rather than true inclusivity. The effectiveness of academic services underlines the capability of well-being services if they were designed with the same cultural awareness (Oyserman et al., 2006; Shakir & Siddiquee, 2024; Morning University, 2025b).

That said, LR 1 and LR 2 data suggests that Morning University student’s *Well-Being* is most influenced by academic support, and community support (family, friends, and/or

religion). Past research also confirms the importance of such means for students. Therefore, when considering their *Ethnic Identity* in terms of *Well-being*, one would also need to consider such resources necessary to development of a positive ethnic identity, as they have been shown to be a source of exploratory behaviours necessary for development (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Phinney, 1996b; Phinney et al., 1997; Topham & Moller, 2010).

Reflection and Journey

Within this section, the framework of this research, CRT with Indigenous Research Principles (IRP), focuses heavily on critical reflection. Research Theme (RT) “Reflection” is defined as “*the process or faculty by which the mind observes and examines its own experiences and emotions; intelligent self-awareness, introspection,*” (Oxford University, 2022, n.p.). “Journey” is more figurative and defined as “*the passage of life,*” (Oxford University, 2022, n.p.). Participants received printed definitions of the terms during LR 1 and LR 2 to ensure that the terminology was understood amongst this research. Participant *Reflections* are instances wherein participants critically ponder their experience. *Journey* defines the experiences participants have prior to their arrival at Morning University i.e. their “journey” to university, and through completion. The two terms share significant overlap as participant experiences on their “journey” contribute to the way in which they “reflect” on said experiences.

Grounded in CRT with IRP, *Reflection* and *Journey* as RTs represent an overlap in prominence in the research field and the needs of the study. One must acknowledge that ethnic identity development occurs in an inequitable society, meaning though participants’ reflections may not be positive, there are still opportunities for development drawn from the negative. Further, critical *Reflection*, and how a student came to arrive on campus (*Journey*) have often been highlighted for further scrutiny because it is an opportunity for evaluation, assessment of experience. (Gullion, 2024; Harcourt, 2000; Heron & Parkin, 2019; McLeod, 2024; White et al., 2006). Therefore, inclusion of *Reflection* and *Journey* as RTs is not only a reflection of major subjects in the field but also illustrates CRT with IRP in practice.

The below section discusses *Reflection* and *Journey* in tandem, first acknowledging background literature and the principles of research, then reviewing participant LR responses in relation to the MEIM-R data. Here, the changes in sub-scores on the MEIM-R between LR 1 and LR 2 are particularly significant as they represent quantifiable development that has occurred on participant journeys. I define major highlights of participant reflections before situating them in a Morning University and larger societal context. I then close with defining any new forms of knowledge-making that participants outlined.

In fact, participant reflection is a reiterative cycle; a recurring action of university event attendance followed by reflection. Following completion of LR 1, participants received a “Thank you” email that also contained a university social calendar and encouraged students to attend some of the mentioned university events, see Image 6. It is important to note; participants were *encouraged* to attend university affordances (i.e. social calendar events including but not limited to; society events, mixers, guest speakers etc.), but not *required* so

as to maintain participant impartiality, since university event attendance was not required for their participation. The provided social calendar was pulled from the Morning University Student Union website. Prior research found that “*conceptual resources are essential for reshaping both understanding and action and this is an iterative and cyclical process—reflection-action and action-reflection,*” (Burke & Crozier, 2013, p. 4).

Additionally, the ability to define one’s journey and reflect upon one’s experience is in itself a development-orientated act. Doing so has been shown to contribute to new forms of knowledge making (White et al., 2006). LR prompts asked: “*How has your home community contributed to your understanding of your ethnic identity?*” One such participant responded:

“Like the UK, I’m just trying to survive. We just had to kind of fit in, like I speak English. When I was at school, I spoke English, so I lost my language. Just in terms of food. I understand a lot about it, my, my food, like my ethnic food, but that’s about it. From my side, I was born in Ethiopia. So, I have this strong understanding of my ethnicity, but its like British too.” – M. Ele

M. Ele encompasses well what participants defined their “journeys” as. In many cases, it seemed that participants had grown “used” to living in an inequitable world, their experience being both British, and ancestrally and culturally African. Their discussion reflects a resignation to this.

“I went to a mostly white school. So, I feel like I never had the chance to try and, you know, fit in with my culture and learn more about my culture, just because of my environment. And how I finished well, just trying to fit in I guess.” – C. Wal

*“Kinda like when I was like I didn’t want to speak to as many people in secondary school. I loved this one guy’s like subject and there’s a kid who’d try and bait you into like, attacking him. There’s one guy who came up to me and making jokes like he was going to say it [the N-word]. He like kept saying that until he actually said ***** [the N-word] and he’s like, oh, you can’t tell him [the teacher] on me because I didn’t actually say the word.”* – K. Pop

Participants described instances where they felt inclined not to express concern over a racially charged incident to avoid causing further discontent. The same participant when reflecting on how their time in school affected them stated:

“No, I don’t want to be, I’ve never really wanted to be in that kind of situation. But one thing I’ll say, in the film society where I’ve kind of like kind of joined now recently, you can notice its predominantly white and that’s very clear. All the shoots I’ve gone too. So, it’s kind of a thing. I’m trying to navigate that because like I want to like, do well.” – K. Pop

Here, it is important to note that my research did not take into account the ethnic demographic of societies and therefore cannot confirm or deny the ethnic membership of Morning University’s film society. That said, with the majority of Morning students being ethnically white and/or European, statistically there would be more White students than Black students in many societies. Participants went on to recount specific instances at Morning University, or the surrounding area, where their race was justification for inequitable treatment.

*“Bus. Drivers. **Some of them are racist.** Like you'll pull up and they'll shut the door. When they open them now, I ask them ‘Oh, yeah. Do you go to this bus stop’ because that’s when you hear that **‘I wasn’t gonna’**.” – D. Bio*

For context, Morning University can be reached by students who do not live on campus via the local bus service that operates throughout the county. Two routes are dedicated to servicing the local universities, Morning University included. Students can buy special discounted UniRider tickets with the presentation of a student ID and many students rely on the bus to get to and from campus. Participants go on to say:

*“If you're, like, living on campus, you're getting one like a couple times a week. But like, the energy goes, **the route takes everything like that.** It's like, if you're interested in going [to campus] yeah, again, the busses. Whenever you want to like, get a different bus, or whatever, something goes wrong. You're thinking ‘am I going to get back home?’ **‘Is that worth it?’** Because once it hits around eight, that's when the busses going to come in every 30 minutes. And then after nine, it's every hour, and then bus at 10, the next one I'm getting is 11.” – Y. Ban*

Participants explained that on top of cases of bus driver mistreatment, the bus times and reliability also presented an issue. This is not to suggest that Morning University can directly alter the bus schedule, or drivers, but rather to highlight that when participants reflected on their time at university, the bus system presented undue duress; in some cases, more undue duress than their White peers would have had to face. Based on the data, it seemed that students may be discouraged from evening activities due to bus schedule constraints.

When asking participants to reflect on their choice of Morning University, knowing what they know now, participants maintained that they are happy with their decision. Their reasoning is not necessarily because Morning was their first choice of universities, but because choosing Morning University met their needs in some way, such as an interest in a specific course, or a “safe” option best fitting their course interests.

*“Yea its simple to just think I'll just go because like **to give myself a fighting chance.** I chose Morning because I would just be like looking at Unis, cause I study drama and theatre, so I was looking at like good Unis that provide that. That actually care about like the arts. Many can provide but it won't be like a good course or, course quality before. **And then Morning came up and I don't know I just picked it.**” – K. Pop*

*“I think I wouldn't like my first choice, Birmingham, but I feel like that would have even probably been worse. In terms of like, if there's anyone obviously who looks like me. **Yeah, it's the same for me like [Uni name] was like a safe midpoint. as well.**” – U. Kno*

That said, participants showed an increase in all MEIM-R sub-scores, suggesting that the above university experiences had the desired effect, developmentally beneficial experiences. However, in some cases it cannot be determined whether a student can reach an *Achieved* identity at all because they have not been shown to engage in the necessary behaviours of an *Achieved* identity. MEIM-R ratings can only *advise* based on the behaviours participants have shown to date. See Tables 5 and 6, which encompasses participants whose MEIM-R scores are close to 2.5 with 33% of participants scoring in this way. Interestingly,

⁷⁰ Gonna (adv): a shortened version of ‘going to;’ i.e. will do something in the future.

participants who scored closer to 2.5 were all 3rd year students, whereas students who scored above 2.5 were disproportionately 1st and 2nd years with over 50% of >2.5 participants being so. Therefore, in this group of students, one would suggest that they would reach a *Foreclosed* identity because they are nearing the end of university and do not display the necessary exploratory behaviours of an *Achieved* identity. Of course, this is not to say that they cannot or will be unlikely to ever reach an *Achieved* identity; but rather to recognise that an *Achieved* identity may develop after adolescence (22+) and significant exploratory action.

Communication: Narrative research theme

Though *Communication* was not a pillar of the research at the start of the study, the ways in which a university communicates with students had a notable effect on student experience. To be elaborated on further, *Communication* was a trending topic, presenting in 7% of LR 1 discussions (Graph 1) and 31% of LR 2 discussions; refer to Graph 5. The level of conversation around *Communication* was prevalent and is therefore presented here, first being situated in the larger English higher education scheme and then dissected based on student responses. Noting the backbone of the research, CRT with IRPs, *Communication* is shown here as a demonstration of IRP *Responsivity*, meaning “shifting beliefs or values quickly, based on societal shifts.” Responding quickly to the voice of the participants, *Communication* is recognised as a *Narrative Research Theme*⁷¹ (NRT), i.e. a Research Theme drawn from the counternarratives of the participants.

Universities in the UK have taken a specific interest in how students are communicated to. This includes but is not limited to email, flyers, peer-to-peer, faculty/staff to students, academic interactions, outreach fairs, university affordances, and choices in promotional language. For example, in 2010 the University of Manchester produced an executive summary outlining student discontent with university communications (University of Manchester & Waddington, 2010). The summary boiled down student concerns to two major themes: the channels used to communicate with students, and the lack of effective communication, with the students defining effective communication as “inclusive of the cultural and social needs of the students,” (University of Manchester & Waddington, 2010, n.p.). The report indicated that students have an affinity for specific forms of communications like email. However, the report also cited the findings of the 2008 Student Communications Focus Group, finding that though students prefer email, they also routinely ignore incoming messages (Martin et al., 2001; University of Manchester & Waddington, 2010).

Using Manchester as an example, to add nuance to the participants’ experiences, LR prompts asked what aspects of university communications most stood out to them in regard to

⁷¹ Narrative Research Theme (n): emerged from participant data; constructed by participant LR data.

support. Here, *Communication* as a NRT reflects the emphasis on the ways in which participants communicated with Morning University, and how the University communicated with them. LR 1 first defined the current state of communication taking place between the University and the students. LR 2 then examined ongoing communications. For context, Morning University policy dictates that students have up to three weeks after the start-of-term to add, drop, or shift classes. Academic Advisors are assigned to all admitted students and are meant to provide personalised one-to-one support, “*provide structured academic advice at key points in the year, help you prepare for exams, and write your references and guide you on career decisions,*” (University of Morning, 2025b, n.p.).

One participant explained that they feel the process of scheduling for Academic Advising is overly automated, with students being asked to submit coursework and communicate with advisors largely online resulting in a lack of rapport in-person with their assigned advisor.

*“But when you actually get to uni, like **half the advisors automated up the process that comes from it so even though I still feel like I haven't like, done enough; I guess I did?**”* – D. Bio

*“Because I'm terrible at like, approaching people. I'm not gonna hide this stuff, I'm not gonna hide that. So like I talked to my advisor. He's just like, ‘how do you get the confidence to be around other people then?’ **Like I just met you? Dead**⁷².”* – C. Wal

Here it should be noted that participants reported that this sort of interaction with Academic Advising can leave students feeling as if they do not have a strong rapport with their advisor, though this advisor is a major resource for their academic success. Y. Ban remarked that they feel there is more flexibility for students to let go of stressful or overly-time-consuming coursework during the term's initial three week add/drop period but recognises many students do not, themselves included, take advantage of this. As a result, students reportedly rely on Academic Advisors to guide them in managing time-consuming course loads (Johnson, 2019; University of Morning, 2025b). A similar situation reportedly occurs between students and lecturers.

*“Like my lecturer or whatever. I did like decide to deal with all that, like what I needed help with. But like, if I'm at lecture chatting with them, and there's a person before me, sometimes I'm getting delayed. If like let's say worst case scenario I can't chat, like I hope. I try to catch them the next hour like maybe, **but then there's still more people.**”* – U. Kno

Participants report short time frames immediately following class where they can briefly address the lecturer. However, due to the number of students who may need assistance, sometimes students are not able to speak with the lecturer at that time. Here, it is important to note, this is not necessarily a shortcoming of the university affordances, but rather a disconnect between staff actions and student need. Lecturers at Morning University are required to make themselves available outside of class time to address student concerns – to a certain extent and within reason (University of Morning, n.d.). It is not an uncommon university practice to direct students to consult with lecturers during the lecturer's pre-determined “office hours.” However, LR participants report either being unable to visit office

⁷² Dead (adj.): Often used to describe something that is disappointing or doesn't meet expectations.

hours due to their availability or not having enough time to consult with lecturers following class. Herein lies the issue; lecturers feel all students have adequate time to consult with them as they have followed university policy and offered office hours. Students feel unable to consult with lecturers unless they can visit them during office hours; should a student not have the availability to visit lecturer office hours, the opportunity to consult is lost. Therefore, ideally, lecturers should make themselves available based on class majority availability in a specific course, but students must also capitalise on every opportunity to speak with lecturers. Otherwise, it is likely students will feel slighted or rushed to speak with the lecturer, as described above by U. Kno. Citing C. Wal's quote, having a rapport with staff/lecturers also affects how the student will interact. Though this does put aside the scheduling needs of lecturers, basing "office hour" time slots on student availability may begin to encourage a rapport as students will feel the lecturer "knows" more about them/their needs.

Moving away from classes, between LR 1 and LR 2 University satisfaction (UIC) sub-scores did increase for all participants by at least 0.25%. Students reportedly did enjoy events held for Black History Month and sought more affordances in the same vein.

*"But then I kind of feel like this is where it comes to like a university leaving this stuff like ACS. You're the African Caribbean society. **So, if you guys want to do something for Black History Month, go ahead, but we don't.** We don't have the time for that. When you leave it on to them, it's just like whatever. But then like ACS is vibes⁷³ so." – D. Bio*

For clarity, this is not to confirm that Morning University only held events for Black History Month if spearheaded by ACS, but this does confirm a significant disconnect between students being *aware* that there are other university affordances specific to what they seek; there is a clear break in communicating these affordances.

Participants noted specific Morning University affordances where they felt highly aware of their "Blackness." Y. Ban, below highlights communicating with peers who seem to "have it all figured out." Participants remarked about "extra effort," as if they must go above and beyond to have the same understanding as some of their peers. These LR responses suggest that Black students are attuned to others' social perceptions, workload, expectations, etc.

See D. Bio's quote below, during class the lecturer had the class complete an activity where students explained their background discussing family, education, and where they are from. D. Bio noted an instance where they felt that the lecturer was adjusting their approach, possibly out of a sense that the students' experiences did not align with the "norm" of the classroom. However, participants notice when either peers or lecturers make such adjustments and can tell when their peers or lecturers are trying to "correct" or adapt their approach. These responses indicate the following: Black students pick up on differences in experiences among their peers, "extra efforts" do not go unnoticed, and any social adjustments made seemingly because a Black British person is present, such as with D. Bio's lecturer, are felt. Though the students report feeling a lack of social "leverage," this has not stopped the students from seeking out ethnic societies or cultural events, or academic challenges and opportunities.

“We all had like similar, like similar responses, and then obviously we had the white middle-class students with different ones [responses]. Then it was like he [lecturer] was trying to make it out to seem like he would have got the same answer from the minorities. But looking at [his] position, especially like where we are, and especially when he told us about his personal life, it's like it doesn't sound like we would have yeah? Unless he just wasn't trying to make himself look bad.” – D. Bio

*“Like, I love my friends but like if I'm put out by a course and I'm like just trying to find peace wherever. Some people don't have time for that because that would just be that easy. But like for us. **Why don't we have that much more leverage as a start?**” – Y. Ban*

Here, “leverage” is best defined as cases wherein some students attend university being more financially, professionally, or socially prepared, i.e. what level of social capital⁷⁴ the students attending carry into university (Rees, 2022; Reynolds, 2007; Rose et al., 1967). *Social Capital* is defined as the scope and type of one's associations with others and the shared positions and manners between people that in turn, foster a functioning society (Ress, 2022). Research shows that lower social capital is especially prevalent in lower socio-economic communities, and minoritised communities (Bourdieu, 1986; Rees, 2022; Social Mobility Commission, 2023; Wallace, 2016). Routes to increased social mobility include increasing social capital via professional opportunities, education, and location i.e. rural versus urban areas (Bourdieu, 1986; Social Mobility Commission, 2023). Those from Central London, and those with university educated parents have been shown to exhibit higher levels of social capital. Conversely, those from the surrounding areas of London, Manchester, and Yorkshire have lower levels of capital (Social Mobility Commission, 2023; Wallace, 2016). Interestingly, in terms of socio-advantage, most of London falls in the highest quintile, but most of London also scores in the lowest quintile for childhood disadvantage (Mahmud, 2021; Social Mobility Commission, 2023). That said, research shows that more diverse populations tend to display lower social capital than mainstream populations (Foner, 1977). For Black British students specifically, research showed they would likely address lower social capital by increasing their own responsiveness, and performance (Bell, 1990; Briggs, 2010).

Research has shown that the process of communicating with universities is parallel to communication styles of student home communities (Reynolds, 2007). In fact, for Black British students, home communities serve as vital sources of “*reciprocal trust, social support, and social connectedness*,” all of which are essential for building capital (Reynolds, 2007, p. 385). However, when Black British students transition to university, they may find that the support systems they rely on in their home communities are not replicated in their academic environment. This results in a lack of alignment between their home communication styles, with which they are familiar, and the institutional culture. A disconnect of this type can lead to feelings of isolation, as students may struggle to build a level of trust and connection with university staff and peers that is similar to their home communities (Haynes, 2018; Hotchkins & Dancy, 2017). Compounded by lower social capital on-campus networks and support systems, necessary for navigating academic and social challenges, may be less accessible. This lack of support, therefore, contributes to the difficulties associated with integrating into university life. For example, participants reported feeling a lack of support from Morning

⁷⁴ Research around Social Capital in the UK often centres around 4 major sources of capital; “*personal relationships, social network support, civic engagement, and trust and cooperative norms*,” (Ress, 2022, n.p.).

University due to scheduling conflicts. The University scheduling conflicts were compounded by student's social capital levels:

*“Well, I can't really say I'm like 100% confident that like, the support offers can really get you from point zero to somewhere. **I think you really do need to know so much work by yourself.** Like that it can be like secondary support. **I think you will really be lost if you considered them** because when I booked for the academic advising session, I think I booked the first week of March and I was given a date like the end of March. **So how can this be a helpful support system?** You see...” – J. Gor*

In such incidents where students communicated through email, students felt the interactions were helpful but seemed to want more face-to-face interaction in lieu of email communications.

*“To start, you won't get like this in-person support. **Usually, you have to email someone who you've never seen or met,** but once you're introduced, I guess it's better.” – M. Ele*

Nonetheless, students further stated that efforts for university staff to communicate opportunities to students fell short in some areas, highlighting that Morning staff in some cases relied on the student's Blackness to justify possible professional opportunities.

*“She [university staff member] sorted out my CV and she even gave me this internship thing [informational guide] for like **10,000 Black students.** My viewpoint was different then because when I saw that, I was like ‘why are you giving me this?’ I was offended, like just help me with my CV. **Thank you for helping me but don't give me this.**” – F. Mul*

This resulted in instances where communication between the university and students felt “mismatched.” Here, students shut down and were unwilling to entertain further communications because they felt the staff member “just didn't mesh⁷⁵.” This could be because the student felt the internship was only suggested because the student was Black, but that can only be confirmed by knowing what other internships the staff member also suggested, besides the one regarding 10,000 Black students and who was also offered the information.

If communications were electronic, such as with social media, participants showed a split reaction. When it came to society and university events, students turned to social media and discussed how useful platforms like Instagram and TikTok were. Specific ethnicity-related societies were highlighted as being “easy to find” on Instagram, which translated to participants being more willing to attend because of the ease. However, participants also reported avoiding certain societies because of how they were portrayed on social media.

*“I mean, also, I feel like it's my fault. I didn't put myself into these spaces. I didn't put myself into spaces where I could grow and know more about my ethnicity. **Like, I wanted to avoid ACS and the Nigerian society.** ... I just feel like you see on social media, like the way they kind of portrayed ACS, it's more as kind of like a party experience. So, I didn't want to put myself in that kind of space. Especially I think, also, **like this is a mostly white school and white area.**” – C. Wal*

⁷⁵ Mesh (adj): to mix, get along, or understand

Still, further participants discussed having no social media at all or avoided it because of its detriment to their well-being. This suggests that social media could serve as a viable communication tool for students but would not be fitting for outreach to every single Black British student because every single Black British student uses social media differently. Further, it shows that social media has a notable effect on university affordance perception; if done well, students are engaged and enticed to attend society events. If done poorly, certain students could be turned away because of what they've perceived a particular society to be.

Looking at overall student reception of Morning University communications, staff communications seem to be fuelled by what staff feel Black students need, though Black students report staff missing the mark. Social media is helpful in connecting Black British students to university affordances, but it's not a perfect system and some students are turned away from affordances because of perception or lack of social media presence. Email communications feel impersonal to students, and participants cite a preference for face-to-face communication upon first interactions with university staff. Online systems that rely on electronic communications like Academic Advising suffer from a lower rapport with students who have *only* communicated electronically. In-person interactions are at the whim of tight course scheduling and little one-to-one time for students; thereby, requiring the student to seek specific time outside of class to speak with the lecturer.

That said, this suggests that the way in which Morning University is communicating with students is being heard to an extent. Students are aware of university affordances and interact with university support staff, online and in-person. Students feel strongly about *Communication* avenues. The content and route of communicated messaging from the University seems to be where students saw fault in communication lines. In short, participants *see* the emails, society Instagram accounts, online academic portals, and engage in staff interactions, but quickly move to avoid communications that do not fit their need for support. In other words, by better understanding existing support structures that Black British students utilise, Morning University could provide more effective communication, and more fitting communication avenues from university services i.e. affordances that better meet the students' communication needs and experiences. This approach could ultimately lead to greater success in helping these students feel supported and integrated because it speaks to communication types and practices that they are more familiar with.

This NRT serves to better define the nuance of their experiences in comparison to their White peers. Here, I conclude that there were significant experiences that Black British students attribute their behaviours to. Such as socialising in Morning University's surrounding town because of the bus system or being quieter in class/among classmates so as not to encourage non-Black students or lecturers to single them out in some way. In addition, the participants' current year of study helped clarify their reasoning based on how long they had been at Morning University. Of course, these instances are details in the participants' larger *Journey*, but it should be acknowledged that these are the sort of experiences that have the most effect. This is further confirmed when considering MEIM-R scores, wherein 58% of participants showed "High exploratory behaviours" and would therefore be considered in a *Moratorium* phase; meaning exploration *is* taking place. The above counternarratives *are* the exploratory behaviours. The results presented here suggest Black British students in *Moratorium* phases, with development taking place, but little of the development being strongly tied to university affordances.

Discussion

Noting that supporting research has drawn a connection between university curriculum and the experiences of Black British students, the below discussion first explicitly answers the RQs then deliberates the limitations of the MEIM-R and Listening Rooms in terms of this study, critically reflecting on how the shortcomings are illustrated in the data (Phinney et al., 2001). I explain how CRT and IRP provide the foundation for evidence-based insight into Black British students' biggest influences. Then I continue with the presentation and justification of Morning University academic recommendations, and campus community recommendations. The chapter closes with an evaluation of the aforementioned recommendations via *Round Table Analysis* (RTA). Herein, as noted previously, *ethnic identity* is discussed in terms of consistent shared experiences. Meaning as noted in the *Introduction* chapter, this research recognises that the experiences of Black British students will differ from person to person, but *ethnic-racial identity* discussed here specifically encompasses the collective commonalities of the different experiences. To reiterate, within this research the term *Black British*⁷⁶ is an acknowledgement of both the *race* and *ethnicity* of ancestrally African, and Caribbean British citizens who identify as Black.

The results can be used to derive several likely conclusions about the Black British university student experience in the UK. The framework of this research is Critical Race Theory (CRT) with Indigenous Research Principles (IRP) to ensure an ongoing recognition of the importance of the knowledge created. It cannot be ignored that common academic research practices are solidly Western; ignoring or erasing academics that do not fit within these Western practices as earlier described when discussing Black Scholarship (Adewumi & Mitton, 2021; Andrews, 2018; Andrews & Palmer, 2016; Eltis & Engerman, 2000; Olusoga, 2018). The resulting loss of knowledge is something higher education grapples with often, and per this research's framework must be acknowledged when analysing data.

“...what is generally understood as knowledge in the universities of our world represents a very small proportion of the global treasury of knowledge...The epistemologies of most peoples of the world, whether indigenous, or excluded on the basis of race, gender, or sexuality are missing” - Adewumi & Mitton, 2021; Hall and Tandon, 2017, p 7.

Therefore, in analysing the results of this study and considering the supporting literature, one must also acknowledge the contributing link between a student's sense of belonging, well-being, development etc. and the *Whiteness* of the university. Recognising this, the MEIM-R results and the data collected from the Listening Rooms are discussed here *together*. In doing so, ideally racism and inequity cannot be glossed over by Western ideals of knowledge production.

I seek to answer the following:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students?*

⁷⁶ Black British refers to individuals in the United Kingdom who identify as Black and are of African or African-Caribbean heritage. The term acknowledges both their racial identity and their British nationality. It is not solely a descriptor of ethnicity but also a socio-political identity shaped by lived experiences of racialisation.

- a. How do students define their identity?
- b. What experiences in university do students feel have the most influence over their development?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *What aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture, religious, affinity groups or workshops, EDI events) most influence Black British student's ethnic racial identity development?*

- a. Based on student opinion, would the students consider university affordances successful?
- b. Do students from different ethnic backgrounds respond differently to Black-intended activities or affordances?
- c. Do certain university affordances achieve the University's desired effect?

The Black voices discussed herein reflect not only *Blackness* but also *Blackness while...*; *Blackness while learning*, *Blackness while socialising*, *Blackness while existing* in higher education (Andrews, 2019; Arday, 2019; Arday, 2021). To define *Blackness while* attending university, being Black while pursuing higher education means one can expect racialised experiences as we live in a racialised society. The nature, positive or negative of, and the frequency of any racialised experiences depend on a number of factors including location and socioeconomic status (Maynard, 2009; Williams, 2020; Williams et al., 2020). Therefore, community-specific behaviours exhibited by Black people often reflect an interest in forming a “secure attachment” with those who can help them navigate the world around them for the sake of self-preservation such as family or friends, peers, professors, classmates, or university staff (Maynard, 2009). In cases where professional attachments have no interest or wish to be engaged with Black students, the students have been shown to internalise this rejection (Smith et al., 2016).

Further affecting a Black British student's ability to form attachments with those around them is their own self-perceptions. Such self-perceptions are influenced by outward societal messaging. For example, specific physical features have been shown to be viewed negatively amongst some subsets of the Black community because they are traits rejected by larger society (Maynard, 2009; Williams et al., 2020). This includes but is not limited to: skin tone, hair texture, and nose size (Andrews, 2019; Maynard, 2009; Smith et al., 2016). Further, during LR 1, participants stated:

*“Don't make anyone make you feel like you're less than anything. Yeah, for example, even that we're talking about natural hair and stuff. Like a little black girl. **They'll be like, oh, well, your natural hair is very childish. Yeah. And it's just weird.**”* – E. Igw

*“**Who are you to then judge her if there's not a specific standard guide you know what I mean, because that [guide] already used to say 'straight.'**”* – E. Igw

*“**They're should never have time to chop up anyone else's hair because they don't know how long it will be taking for them to even get their hair slicked and especially that.**”*

– H. Saro

LR 1 data showed that discussions around Black hair occurred in 6% of the conversations, mostly between female participants. Participants discuss the extra efforts they must undergo to have “Acceptable hair;” i.e. “straight” hair. LR 1 participants’ on-going efforts to maintain an “acceptable” appearance fall in line with Phinney and Maynard’s identity findings. Past research shown that Black people exhibit dissociation as a way to protect their ego and self-identity, such as LR 1 participants admitting to being willing to follow a guide provided by society, and taking extra time to ensure their hair is “slick,” smooth as possible; in short, being malleable to societal expectations about their appearance (Curry, 2017; Williams et al., 2020). With perceived societal worth being partly based on one’s appearance, styling one’s hair is then a form of protection; protection from negative social perceptions, negative professional experiences, and a shield from social stereotypes (Williams et al., 2020; Williams, 2020).

However, in being willing to adhere readily to societal standards, Black people can expose themselves to identity insecurity and low self-esteem. This can lead to Black students internalising an identity heavily influenced by survival in society that will likely prove detrimental once they depart the university (Maynard, 2009; Phinney et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2020). Further, referring to H. Saro’s, and E. Igwe’s comments above, their experience is not one that could be understood by everyone, and that younger children (“*little black girls*”), should be spared social and inner shame if their hair does not meet the unseen societal standard. Accounting for Phinney and Maynard’s work, LR data suggests that it is possible for Black British students to develop a positive personal view of “natural hair,” even as they actively take steps to adhere to social standards, in many cases, for the purpose of upward social mobility. Tying one’s appearance to identity of self, LR data indicates that a positive view of one’s hair can equate to a more positive ethnic identity (Maynard, 2009; Phinney et al., 2001; Phinney et al., 2007).

MEIM-R Limitations and Challenges

During the research study, challenges specific to usage of the MEIM-R did come to light. These challenges with the MEIM-R were related to participant understanding, the number of student participants for LR 2, and calculations of MEIM-R scores after completion of the Listening Rooms. Note before Listening Room 1 began, participants took part in a *Briefing session* wherein I explained the consent form and MEIM-R. At which point, participants signed the consent form and completed the MEIM-R before I would then exit the Listening Room space. Markedly, the number of participants, while sufficient to draw certain conclusions about student experience as all participants were students, the number of participants from any one ethnic group was sufficient to make meaningful comparisons between larger regional categories i.e. Africa and/or the Caribbean but was insufficient for more detailed comparisons such as between the Bahamas and Trinidad (Gaines et al., 2013; Williams, 2016). In addition, it must be accounted for that the MEIM-R was created in a US context; where members of marginalised ethnic groups have been shown to have different viewpoints in key social experiences such as religion, sexuality, and gender relations from those in the UK (Arday & Jones, 2022; Chandler et al., 2008; Gaines et al., 2013). That said, the representation of participant ethnicities spread across the study, with 54% of participants being ancestrally African and 38% being Caribbean. One participant declined to list their specific ethnicity and is only considered Black (7%).

In addition, the initial *Briefing Sessions* did carry some limitations in participant understanding. First, a couple of participants felt the identification questions (university year, phone number, ethnicity etc.) “needed a bit of clarity.” Participants questioned why when asked to list their ethnicity, they were also asked to explain why they identified as a specific ethnicity (see below).

My ethnicity is _____ because

– *Briefing Session*, Participant registration.

Participants questioned why definitions of Research Themes (RTs) were provided. They explained this was because they felt they understood the definition of *Socialisation* well enough, even asking “*have you had to actually explain it someone?*” In cases where participants were unsure as the LR was occurring, participants opted not to stop the LR timer and leave the LR space to clarify. In doing so, reliance on the discussions during the LRs increased as it was the only route to gauge participant understanding. The aforementioned instances of uncertainty were all discussed during the LR between participants and not reported directly to me. Going forward, I recommend providing key terms, but I also recommend a more explicit route to seeking clarification once the LRs actually begin. A device students can use to page the researcher back to the room quickly would help. It seems in providing the RT definitions I provided information participants did not need as much as they needed the ability to summon me quickly.

During Listening Room 1, participants expressed interest in why I chose to include the MEIM-R, and why participants were also completing a survey if they were doing

interviews. Participants were engaged in why I made the methodological choices I did. Here, the *Briefing session* helped, as this was when participants asked these questions, or challenged any of the work. After my explanation, during LR 1 participants stated, “I don’t know how I’d do it,” conveying confusion about how one tackles the work of surveying using the MEIM-R and conducting LRs. Though participants understood *why* the MEIM-R was utilised, they did not understand why one would want to utilise the MEIM-R given the work that it required of the researcher. That said, only 25% of participants asked further questions regarding the MEIM-R’s purpose during LR 1. During LR 2, 100% of participants displayed more clarity in terms of the MEIM-R and even asked to know what their ratings amounted to during the LR 2 *Briefing session*. One participant also asked to see their previous MEIM-R to ensure the scores “matched”⁷⁷.

⁷⁷ Students expressed wanting to see their previous old scores to ensure their scores accurately reflected what they intended for their experience to portray. In using “match”, students meant correlating.

Listening Rooms: Limitations and Challenges

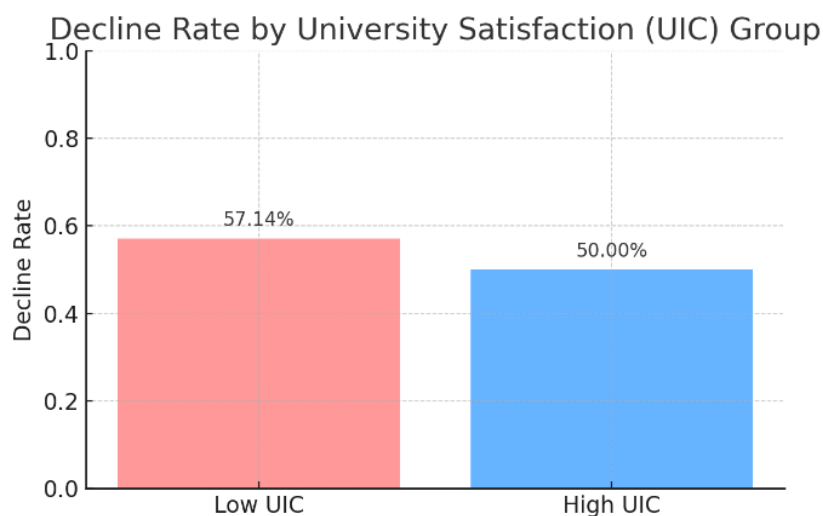
The methodology of this study calls for revisiting the students two times over the course of the study; referred to as Listening Room 1 and Listening Room 2 (LR 1 and LR 2). This is purposeful to compare the progress and/or rate of development students undergo during their attendance at Morning University. Refer to Tables 5 and 6, MEIM-R scores, LR 1 and LR 2 data are listed. Treating LR 1 as a baseline of development set the stage for what development-related experiences were influencing the student at the start of the study. In doing so, the methodology acknowledges that though the study focuses on university affordances as conduits of development, there are several routes to development that students may simultaneously be engaging in.

During Listening Room 1 (LR 1), participants trended between “Average Belonging” levels and “Above Average” *Belonging* levels as shown by the BAC sub-score of the MEIM-R. Only one study participant did not score Average and/or Above Average. Thereby suggesting that participants came into LR 1 with significant development-related experiences. This is especially notable when considering the LR 1 participant BAC scores in relation to their UIC scores. In fact, only 3 LR 1 participants scored above 3 in satisfaction with Morning University affordances. Participants during Listening Room 1 also displayed corresponding saliency levels of *Ethnic Identity* (EI), suggesting that the presence of exploratory behaviours here are behaviours they displayed off-campus, and/or prior to their participation in the study and/or arrival at the university.

Going into LR 2, 9 study participants declined to participate. Participants declining further participation was the largest hurdle and most significant challenge of LR 2 and data for LR 2 was profoundly affected. The remaining returning participants showed an increase in all MEIM-R sub-scores. Shown in Graph 4, participant decline rates are illustrated.

Contrastingly, see Graph 6, the students that reported lower University Satisfaction, were on average 7% more likely to decline participation though this was not statistically significant.

Graph 6: Participant decline rates by UIC scores



For this reason, return LR 2 participants were not paired with the same partners that they completed LR 1 with. This was partially due to personal reasons unrelated to the research between two participants, and partially due to availability constraints. Though this did present a sort of challenge in scheduling the LR pairs, once the schedule was set the students did report enjoying the experience, and being glad to interact with peers.

*“This was actually great, being able to express yourself like [in] a safe and like comfortable space; it was great. Yeah, **this was like actually fun to do with you.**”* – K. Pop

In addition, LR 2 also validated trends in University Satisfaction (UIC), with returning participants showing moderate to high levels of overall ethnic identity development and an increase in BAC and UIC scores.

Considering the positive responses and development noted with returning participants, it is a significant loss to have been unable to report on the remaining participants. 35% of declining participants reported it was due to work or employment constraints because they were no longer based at Morning University. 8% reported it was due to having taken a break from university coursework altogether; also, no longer being at Morning, having moved home or elsewhere to commute. This research recognises that university students are inherently mobile, as they graduate, transfer and move through older adolescence; but my application of the LRs required a group that could visit the LRs more than once.

The Listening Room method is reliant on the participants' participation. The richness of the LR discussions depended upon both students' willingness to engage thoughtfully, and on the context of the discussion. While LR 2 counternarrative data is less, confirmatively, participants reported the Rooms to be an exciting and insightful method.

*“The whole experience felt very comfortable, I felt like free to share anything I wanted. **It was nice to hear someone else's point of view, my girl [was] amazing!**”* – D. Bio

*“I enjoyed the Listening Room; it was a great discussion. We connected on a lot of topics, and like it's a **great way to of getting information if like both people are open, you know?**”* – O. Mil

Though the method produces rich data reflective of the students' personal thoughts and opinions, the method must remain malleable to the needs of the participants. Of course, this research being grounded in CRT and IRP expects that the method *should* be moulded around the community being studied, in this case, citing the low return for LR 2, it can be to the detriment of the completion of the work. LR 2's lower participant numbers left a significant gap in the produced data of this research. The lower return rate contrasted with participant opinions above so it cannot be deduced why participants' enjoyment did not cement their return to the study. However, though participant response was lower, LR 2 counternarratives and MEIM-R results did provide some valuable insight into development over time, especially with regard to *Belonging* and *University Satisfaction*. Going forward, I recommend more sustained outreach to participants between Listening Rooms. While the participants and I had a great rapport, it was not maintained between Listening Rooms. Participants received emails regarding university affordances on a quarterly basis, but more pointed interactions may have endeared participants to return for LR 2.

In addition, there were challenges unique to my application of the method. Specifically, during data collection and analysis, some challenges prevented clearer understandings. For instance, using the university-provided platforms to record the online LR

conversations, for an online modality, meant that if students were to speak quietly, or quickly, the transcribing device did not always catch everything that was said correctly. This presented slight confusion as I reviewed and corrected the transcriptions, such as when something a participant said was misunderstood, I only had the low-volume recording to utilise to make sense of what the student was saying.

The physical location of the LRs was also at the whim of the university schedule, meaning if there was an event, conference, or even construction or administrative work, the physical location was closed and completion of LRs would stall unless the participants agreed to participate online. This was witnessed a number of times throughout the study with the physical location being closed for up to 3 weeks at a time.

For the above reasons, the Listening Rooms should only be applied longitudinally for groups using a dedicated facility open for participant return to the facility at will. Ideally this will focus on groups remaining in the location of study for a minimum of 2 years. That said, future researchers' usage of the Listening Rooms should consider the group being studied and what their mobility looks like for the duration of the study; specifically, whether longitudinal application of the LRs is most supportive of the group being studied. Other universities using the Listening Rooms method are right to pull participants from groups of students that will likely remain at the university for a significant amount of time (Heron & Parkin, n.d.; Jacobi et al., 2022; Sheffield Hallam University, 2019; Ward, 2023). It would also be useful to begin the study with a dedicated LR space to avoid delays due to closure, such as this research's experience with Morning University.

In conclusion, as a tool for understanding *Ethnic-racial Identity*, and the university student experience I maintain that the Listening Rooms method is not only a valid route to do so but also a route reflective of a critical approach to equitable research. Future researchers can adjust the method based on the needs of the specific community they are researching; wherein lies this method's greatest strength: robust data with as little researcher influence or bias as possible.

Research Questions (RQ) and Data Analysis

Below I summarily answer each Research Question. I unpack them here to directly tie my research findings with the goals of the study. Further, to truly enrich the research field as I hope to, I highlight the value and budding innovation in my findings by explicitly laying out the answer to each RQ. Beginning first with RQ1:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students?*

In short, the answer is *Moratorium* as 53% of LR 1 participants and 25% of LR 2 participants shown MEIM-R scores that depicted exploratory behaviours to be most prevailing for them. Phinney's research expects that students in this age bracket would engage in significant exploration, so this is not a large surprise of the data. However, an interesting note, 1 LR 2 participant scored extremely high, 0.01% away from a *Committed* identity, see Figure 1. Given their LR statements, they attended university society events, utilised university academic resources, and sustained cultural ties with their Caribbean roots. Herein, my research would suggest they would reach the substage of *Achieved*. Though they are an outlier, they are illustration of movement through the stages.

To add nuance, I ask the following sub-Research Questions (RQs):

- a. *How do students define their identity?*
- b. *What experiences in university do students feel have the most influence over their development?*

To respond, I reference LR 1 feedback shared by participants post Listening Room.

*"Hearing about what we could relate on, being Black, and things we didn't take into account was insightful. Being able to voice things that I cared about and wanted to discuss gave me a sense of clarity. I guess I was missing that. *laughter* That's what I am man, missing things and seeing them. That's all it's about innit'" – E. Igw*

In answering RQ1a, this research best establishes that **students have a fluid definition of identity**, of their *Journey*. In some cases, students define their identity using those around them, aspects of society, and of their lives to build their identities. Above, E. Igw explains that much of their time in university has been a discovery; with them learning new things every day. E. Igw went on to explain they were appreciative of their friends and felt they *had* good friends because they *were* a good friend. They described a sort of reciprocal relationship that was inevitable because of their participation. Herein, the participants within this study carry a fluid definition of identity, detailed more from the student's specific background and less based on a textbook or standardised definitions. Noting that the most prevalent stage of development is *Moratorium*, a stage for exploration of ethnic identity, it is fitting the definitions of identity rely more on the individual student. In short, students exhibit a *Black British identity* responsive to surrounding society, exploratory experiences, peer-to-peer interactions, and latest information.

Looking at RQ1b, the experiences found to have the most influence over Black British student's development are those related to *Belonging* and *Socialisation*, including but not limited to **society event meetings, social outings on campus, event fairs, networking events etc.** MEIM-R scores and LR data both supported an elevated interest in *Belonging*, especially among friend groups and societies. Note based on the MEIM-R participant scores, results signified that almost half of the participant group pursued experiences productive for their ethnic identity which encouraged *Belonging*. In turn, this indicates that a significant portion of participants are influenced by affordances of this type. Further, data shows that participants are increasing *Belonging* levels via *Socialisation*, but UIC scores could not confirm that incidents of increased belongingness i.e. exploratory behaviours, are occurring at university affordances, at least not initially, and therefore cannot always be attributed to any one affordance alone. Therefore, to answer RQ1b, students are more influenced by experiences affecting their level of *Belonging* and involving some sort of *Socialisation*.

Continuing with RQ2:

What aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture and religious affinity groups or workshops, EDI events etc.) most influence Black British student's ethnic-racial identity development?

The short answer is *all* university affordances carry some sort of influence but **social media, university societies (religion and sports as the most common societies,)**, and **classroom/academic services** have the greatest influence. Based on the LR and MEIM-R data, students find the most enabling university affordance to be **university societies**, and most disabling to be **social media**; see Table 8 below.

Table 8: University Affordance Development Fostering

Experience/Affordance	The below either encourages development of identity or hinders, slows, or alters development in a way that negatively affects identity.
University Staff Assistance/Rapport	Disabling – any non-positive interaction will be a detriment. LR data shows more non-positive interactions.
Peer-to-Peer interactions	Enabling
Socialisation	Enabling
Well-Being (self care/self perception)	Ambiguous – Likely disabling but LR data confirms it would need to also take into account student self perception
Religion	Ambiguous – depending on the student's <i>Journey</i> with religion.
Familial/Home Community support	Enabling
Social media	Greatly Ambiguous – if used productively, an important resource for exploration. If used incorrectly, can be off putting to students.
Society Involvement	Greatly Enabling

Affordances that are most/least influential will vary slightly depending on the individual, such as a female psychology student having slightly different influential affordances, like

lower society involvement and greater social media presence, than a male sports medicine student with greater society involvement and less social media. That said, as noted in the *Results* chapter, the overlap in each student's experiences is the highlight of the Listening Rooms data. Though many the participants are different ethnicities, and the details of their largest influences will vary, there are trends present along each of the Research Themes (RTs).

To further analyse, I ask the following sub-questions:

- a. *Based on student voice, would the students consider or deem them successful?*
- b. *Do students from different ethnic backgrounds respond differently to Black-intended activities or affordances?*
- c. *Do certain university affordances achieve the University's desired effect?*

Considering the university affordances discussed during the LRs, and the MEIM-R University Satisfaction (UIC) scores, the participants would consider the affordances **mildly successful**, suggesting a neutral to mildly positive level of success, fostering mild satisfaction. 66% of study participants scored below 3, scoring "Mildly satisfied," see Tables 5, 6, and 7. Some participant scores decreased at an average of 0.3%. Increases were an average of 0.36%. The data shown does not suggest high levels of satisfaction but does confirm participants do see some level of success in the university affordances they've experienced.

Summarising RQ2b, **the number and variation of different ethnicities participating was not significant enough to draw any meaningful conclusions**. Herein, there lies an opportunity for further research on a larger scale to provide enough representation of a specific ethnicity to reach a true conclusion. Notably, the number of participants was sufficient enough to conclude some deductions about student experience as all participants were students and Black British. Further, the number of participants from larger regional categories was also adequate enough to make meaningful contrasts between i.e. Africa and/or the Caribbean but was insufficient for more detailed comparisons (Bayeck, 2021; Gaines et al., 2013).

Bringing the research full circle, I apply theoretical framework CRT with IRP, in response to RQ2c. In short, **yes, certain university affordances do achieve Morning University's desired effect**. However, I call upon D. Bio's LR comments that described their enjoyment of Black History Month, and H. Saro's LR comments that explained their immediate disinterest should a university affordance focus on more traumatic aspects of Black Britishness. The affordances that most meet the university's goals are ones where student's interests and university outreach overlap. However, the university must tread a careful line, being informative without zeroing in on any one aspect of *Blackness* or Black history, while maintaining a fun and productive atmosphere. Maintaining IRP *Relationality*, LR data illustrates a trend; Black British students at Morning university find that university affordances that achieve the university's desired effect are ones with a wide breadth. There is no one affordance, but an array, *intersectional* affordances ideally attract a wide range of students.

In data analysis to answer the above RQs, CRT with IRP informed the coding process and understanding of RTs. LR data was first coded inductively, to encourage any emergent themes to arise from participant counter narratives. This fits well with IRP expectation of

privileging participant voices. From there, RTs were interpreted through a CRT lens, focusing especially on racialised interactions, institutional goals, and inequalities. For instance, when analysing campus culture discussions, CRT highlights micro-aggressive behaviour while IRP emphasised the cultural significance of the ways in which participants tell their stories. See Tables 1, 2, and 3.

In conclusion, the results of the LRs and MEIM-R suggest that university plays a defining role in shaping student's ethnic-racial identity. The university campus acts as a social landscape that carries enough influence to affect exploratory behaviours and mirror larger society. As larger society can affect the development of citizens, as they are immersed in it, the same can be said for students being immersed in Morning University. In this way, universities reshape Black British identities through intersectional experiences, connections, and social engagement.

University Satisfaction and Further Recommendations

Morning University affordances include but are not limited to career fairs, society events, classes, academic skills workshops, seminars, society events, university outreach activities, and invited guest lectures. *University Affordances* are shown to encourage positive interactions between diverse student groups, and positive development of ethnic-racial identity (Bernell et al., 1993; Gaines et al., 2013; Phinney, 1992; Phinney, 2010). In fact, Phinney found that positive development is fostered partially because the populations interacting are different from one another; in this case, being White and Black people (Phinney & Baledomar, 2010). Therefore, in seeking to understand development in relation to university affordances, the below University satisfaction (UIC) questions were included in the MEIM-R for the purpose of this research:

13. *Through my attendance at Morning University:*

- a. *I have opportunity to talk with other people about my ethnic group.* ____
- b. *I participate in cultural events and affordances offered by my university, such as holiday observations, ethnic group specific offering, or customs.* ____
- c. *I feel my university makes a conscious effort to encourage pride in my ethnic group.* ____

The LR discussion prompts did not include a prompt specifically for university satisfaction and instead drew from the major themes of the research using participants' organic commentary about university affordances. Meaning to maintain the integrity of the study, students were encouraged to attend university affordances but were not required to do so as there is knowledge to be gathered from a student's choice not to attend/participate as well. Any comments from participants regarding satisfaction with university affordances were in response to the Research Theme (RT) prompts provided. In addition, at the end of LR 1 and LR 2, participants were asked to give feedback about the methodology, the Listening Rooms, as a method of data collection, and their overall experience.

In reviewing data-led recommendations, university culture is heavily considered, as it was with the *Glossary*. Morning University's culture is reflected in its policies, expectations, and interests for students. The nature of a university's culture can affirm or dismantle a student's sense of *Belonging*, and ethnic-racial identity. When universities make an effort to enact EDI policies, it contributes to spaces wherein students can feel validated, empowered to express their identity as they see fit. Inversely, in cases where university culture is benchmarked by systemic barriers, students can feel alienated and may struggle to foster a positive ethnic identity. Therefore, one can conclude equitable solutions that would be applicable to society can also be applied here.

That said, participants were shown discussing university affordances throughout both LR 1 and LR 2 having done so across 38% of all participant conversations. Refer to Graphs 1 and 5 and Tables 5 and 6, though the MEIM-R scores did suggest lower levels of university satisfaction during LR 1 and LR 2, participants reported much of their reasoning centred around classes, society events, and academic support. Herein, this research concludes that Morning University's culture is productive but has room for improvement and should continue to be fostered.

Therefore, based on the above data, I propose the following for Morning University: **a society event-type requirement, regular society executive board assessment, a shift in academic advising modality, and increasing incoming student inductions for specific student groups.** Although my findings are grounded in the context of Morning University, the above-mentioned recommendations are broadly relevant across higher education. The society event recommendation can be adapted to other universities in the UK. Specifically, society event requirements would encourage cross-cultural interactions and encourage growth of any identity-affirming societies that may need dedicated space. For instance, with targeted incoming student inductions, institutions can implement more tailored programming, and foster Belonging from the moment a Black British student arrives on campus. In establishing regular society assessments, universities can also better maintain equity and society alignment with institutional EDI goals. Further, in revising academic advising to a more holistic modality, universities can help advisors assist with the unique challenges that Black British students face.

Below, I first delve deeper into my academic recommendations for Morning University, and then recommendations for the larger campus community. In adopting the below recommendations, Morning University, and any other university in the UK interested in supporting a Black British student population, can foster *Belonging*, improve *Well-Being*, and create a campus community where diverse student populations don't just co-exist; they thrive. Importantly, in applying these recommendations, I emphasise that student satisfaction and ethnic-racial identity development are not unique to Morning University but reflect broader dynamics across higher education.

Academic Recommendations

Beginning first with academic affordances, as matriculation is the main goal of university attendance, I recommend **shifting requirements for academic advising modalities.** Morning University would see more successful interaction between Black British students and academic advising staff if there was a stipulation for academic advising meetings to have at least one in-person meeting per term. Ideally, this requirement would be more aimed at initial meetings at the start of the academic year between academic staff and students. This recommendation is based on participant reports of staff interactions lacking a true rapport; and students therefore feeling unsupported because the advisor is not familiar enough with the student. Coupled with this, some participants reported that family support only goes so far.

“I remember like within the first week, every day was just more and more. ‘Do this, that too, then you put out a resume and like silence. Yeah. As I see things like, obviously like my parents are kind of like, oh, just what can we do that has to do with it, to like to help you.

*We’ve got just what we have. You’ll figure it out. I did figure it out. **But I see the fact that there should be at least something.**” – J. Gor*

*“A lot of people have been entitled to it [academic support] and they didn't even know. I was so lucky that I got it early on, that email, because if they didn't send me **that I wouldn't have never known.**” – C. Wal*

The same can be said for increasing in-person interactions for specific ethnic groups therefore I recommend **student inductions held as a heavily publicised event in the early days of student arrival on campus**. In this case, an induction is an event wherein incoming students are inducted into their student status via their attendance at the event. Inductions share some similarities with student orientations, but inductions are more for introducing the student to the campus community, whereas orientations are focused on providing attendees with information they require to meet university needs such as course expectations.

Further, I specifically highlight Morning University's recent incoming students from September 2024. During this time, the university held a Black Student Induction and Mature Student Induction aimed at students in these community groups who had just arrived at the university and weren't sure where to start. As a part of these inductions, unrelated to the research at hand, I spearheaded both induction presentations. I saw first-hand that though the inductions did not see significant attendance, the current Morning University students that attended reported that they'd wish they'd had an event of this sort when they started university. Newly arrived Morning University students reported overall interest in campus resources, such as where to go for IT questions etc., society involvement tips, and a guide to local businesses in the area.

Therefore, it is already known that Morning University is capable of holding such an event; this research recommends it be held as a headlining event of Welcome Week, also called 'Freshers Week'⁷⁸. In this case, given the number of Black British students at Morning University, I would anticipate the University holding a *BME* and/or *BAME* induction to widen the scope of student attendees, but nonetheless, the ability is there. Recognising the extent of Morning University's abilities, a number of student groups could benefit from a heavily publicised student induction aimed at the needs of their student group specifically. Relevant ethnic societies would be in attendance, as well as fellow Black British students, academic/departmental resources, and student well-being departments. Citing C. Wal's quote below, LR participants reported being glad to have had incoming flatmates to keep them involved, otherwise they would have “kept to themselves.” This induction would be for the students who risk “keeping to themselves,” as it is a way to keep them involved from arrival.

*“There's like, if I only had like, just me and not my flatmates you know, I would feel like ‘oh my god’ and just keep to myself. But then, they like [flatmates], made the transition easier because I was like, ‘Thank you God’ because if you knew, like if I didn't find them. I was lucky that there were people that I knew prior **because I didn't meet anyone coming to care.**” – C. Wal*

To explicitly state, a Black student induction is necessary because it addresses needs specific to the Black students, outside the scope of a general induction. Inductions provide an explicit space to be transparent to students about any racialised barriers they could face at Morning University, such as bias or stereotyping, specifically signposting the strategies and support available. The induction would be a place to build camaraderie ahead of a student's

⁷⁸ Freshers Week (n): Induction week; the first week after a first-year student arrives at university. A week normally spent celebrating and socialising.

first day of class. Additionally, in pursuing usage of these support services, the university facilitates connecting students with Black staff, mentors, societies, and specialised services purposefully created for their success and well-being. Finally, an induction reinforces Black British perspectives' value. In doing so, Morning University can ensure that Black students have the general information all students receive, also have support resources tailored to their needs, and that they *feel* a level of care from the university.

That said, scheduling the student inductions during Freshers Week positions the event to be most useful for students without established connections with flatmates or who lack social connections, such as C. Wal's description. Ideally, attempting to capture students early on in the academic term ensures students have a sustained connection/rapport with campus support services, and societies.

Further, comparing LR 1 statements with LR 2 statements regarding academic/university support at the start of the year, students seek university welcome events that support Black students, and turn away from instances that make the student attendees feel otherised among their non-Black British peers.

*"We walked around and I just seen a bunch of like, visually, people but **like no Black people**. And as I went, I went to the cheerleading like table, I was like, 'Oh my God' when I saw I'm the only one that goes. I had to process"⁷⁹. Yeah, maybe more will find out. **Maybe we should start one**".* – E. Igw (LR1)

*"**We were only two black girls there right**. And then he was like, 'Oh, why did you choose Morning?' Why not ask anyone else? And I get called Fresh"⁸⁰. Yea. And then I just like, gave my reason, like, its close to home, but, you know, not too far. Then he asked me, like, '**oh yeah, 'Where are you originally from?' 'When I was at London?' But then he just automatically assumed, I'm from South London**"⁸¹. Oh yeah, yeah. Like I was just like, 'Whoa. Okay, I gave them South London.' **I just felt like it made me very, like, cautious. Like, okay, cool. Like that's what people see when they look at me.**"* – E. Igw (LR 2)

Therefore, in tandem with requiring in-person Academic advising meetings whenever possible at the start of the academic year, I also recommend **Student inductions held as a heavily publicised event in the early days of student arrival on campus**. This is not to confirm that Black British students would be the only student group to benefit. Ideally, the induction layout can be applied to any student group with a specific need. In doing so, incoming Black British students would reportedly be more comfortable interacting with university staff, more willing to engage with campus services, and more informed about the availability of said services and/or societies.

⁷⁹ "Had to process" (v); phrase, to compute, to think over.

⁸⁰ Fresh (adj): To get "smart" with another person. To have an attitude.

⁸¹ South London has been previously generalised as "ghetto" but this ignores the dynamic racial, cultural, and societal influences at play. Though faced with crime and economic deprivation in some cases, South London is a resilient, culturally diverse community (Mahmud, 2021; Patel, 2016).

Campus Community Recommendations

In addition to recommendations specific to academic/academic-adjacent university services, I offer the following recommendations for the larger campus community and services outside of academic support; **a dedicated bookable society event space, added society event requirements, and improvements to bursary online platforms.** The below recommendations are centred around university affordances, departments, involvements, and societies unconnected to academics. This includes but is not limited to; financial aid/support, student employment, accommodations, society involvement, and campus physical resources like the on-campus gym or library. Recommendations here are considered to have notable influence on exploratory experiences. As such, the below recommendations take into account that students have both on-campus and off-campus experiences also influencing their exploration. Considering the location of Morning University, it is reasonable to consider recommendations situated in the surrounding town as well as on campus.

First, LR 1 participants specifically reported a want for a meeting space:

“So, there is no place to gather, and you know, where you can like meet. So, if you if you want to go to, you know, to meet some peoples to have fun, you may go to a different place like leave campus instead, you know.” – H. Saro

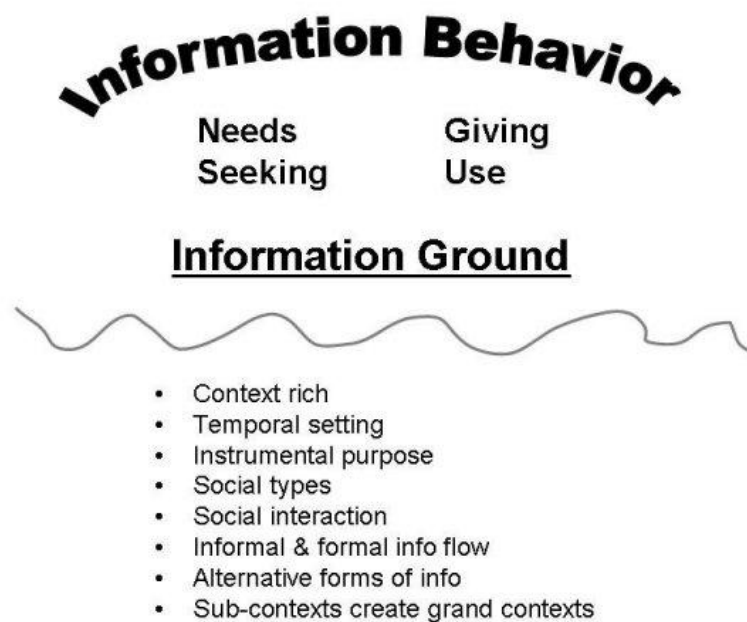
Specifically, participants outlined a space for society events, and student fraternisation, when not being used for society events. I recommend Morning University provide a space with laptop connectivity, and presentation materials (projector, microphones, speakers, additional chairs, podium, accessible entrances, necessary wiring/tech etc.) available ongoing in the provided space. The space would be able to be booked by societies recognised by the Morning University Student Union only. This ensures that the space is dedicated solely to societies producing the sort of events that students within this research have requested. In addition, the space will be centrally located, if possible, towards the centre of campus. Ideally, the Morning University society space should be located close to other largely utilised student spaces such as the campus food shop, the library, the Morning University student union home office, and campus theatre. This is for the convenience of students visiting the society space. Students should be able to easily weave the society event space into their utilisation of other aforementioned campus resources (Bourdieu, 1977; Brooks et al., 2015; Burke & Crozier, 2013; Campos et al., 2021).

Further, a number of universities and past researchers highlight the importance of a dedicated meeting space for student organisations. The dedicated meeting space would be outfitted to host a number of events with tables and chairs for lectures, projection and audio/visual/stereo systems, and plenty of open space where furniture can be removed for more room. This is not to say this space will host every single type of society, but rather that a flexible space that is highly adaptable would benefit a significant number of societies. First, a dedicated space has been shown to foster *Belonging* in students as they feel the university has a more welcoming atmosphere (Burke & Crozier, 2013; Fisher et al., 2007; Johnson, 2019; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021). Further, well designed student spaces encourage the sort of interactions that foster *Belonging*. Highlighting the UIC scores of this study, a “thoughtfully

designed” student space has been shown to encourage active student participation and can promote inclusivity among students (Fisher et al., 2007; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021).

Referring back to the flexibility of the intended space, while not booked for a specific society, it would be arranged in a way that welcomes student engagement, such as a large window to bring in plenty of light. The University of Westminster found that physical spaces of this nature promoted “profound on-campus engagement,” (Healey, 2022, n. p.). In fact, society event spaces have been found to be extremely beneficial for students in terms of learning, engaging with other students, and productivity. Previous research highlighted “information grounds,” wherein students go *“for a particular reason such as to eat, get a haircut, get exercise..., but end up sharing information just because other people are there and you start talking,”* (Fisher et. al., 2006, p. 9; Healey, 2022; Jiang, 2020; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; Phinney & Baledomar, 2010). In fact, the most productive information grounds were found to be campus restaurants, church, and student workplaces. Bus stops, the campus library, the student gym, and coffee shops/cafes were also reported by students as their self-defined “information grounds,” (Fisher et. al, 2006, p. 9). At Morning University, the university library is home to a café, and silent study spaces, serving as an active information ground. I recommend creating similar information-ground spaces, oriented toward social engagement and society support. It is important to note that research here specifically highlighted the organic nature of the social interactions taking place at “information grounds,” and the perceived homogeneity of interacting in a student information ground with other students. Refer to Figure 4 wherein 7 characteristics of an “information ground” are listed (Fisher et. al., 2006). I specifically highlight “context rich,” “instrumental purpose,” and “social interaction” as these would ideally be illustrated in Morning University’s society space (Crook & Mitchell, 2012, n. p.; Burke & Crozier, 2013).

Figure 4: *Characteristics of Information Grounds*



In terms of fostering “Context Rich” information grounds, I recommend society stipulations that require a certain number of informative student events, social events, and

knowledge/information that attendees *can take with them*. Comparing LR statements, participants stated:

*“It’s like if I go, I wouldn’t even know if I contributed anything, but I wouldn’t say that’s new, just coming to uni. **I haven’t contributed anything yet.** To me, I’d like to evolve and learn though like of course. Sure. What was in my head, I’m thinking like, ‘**What’s the point of this?**’ Going to university was for me to learn more, but like if I go, am I?” – Y. Ban*

*“But I didn’t take any part in their activities yet. Because there’ll be these thoughts ‘Yeah, but I thought that there will be people who are basically from you know, the place I came from.’ I tried the Car society, but like it was **bare dead. just bare awkward vibes.** I was ready after the first hour, bruv. So, I gave up on that a bit.” – M. Ele*

The recommended stipulations would require that at least 1-2 society events per term offer a skill-based aspect, i.e. the event must increase the skills, knowledge, or confidence of the student attendees. Past research noted that in social spaces of this nature, students “*all work to enforce the identity of being a student upon young people, separating them from those who are not a part of this institutional framework,*” (Brooks et al., 2015; Hopkins, 2013, p. 188).

One such study focused on campus spaces and law student socialisation at McGill University. Researchers found that by holding specific knowledge/skill-based events, such as inviting prominent lawyers/guest speakers to the university, the space changed the student attendees; positively affecting their development by “*by making prominent and giving legitimacy to the figure of the powerful, corporate lawyer,*” (Brooks et al., 2015, p. 476). Morning University societies are uniquely situated to be a place of cross-cultural connection and should therefore be utilised for students to draw value from the university; in this case, student attendees can expect to “contribute” as Y. Ban mentions above and ideally, leave the event having increased their knowledge in a specific area.

Noted above in the Results chapter, LR participants reported certain societies had been successful in holding events that were productive and educational, the Black Intellectuals Society, Dementia Society etc. In addition, Morning University observes Black History Month with a wide range of events, including but not limited to, guest speakers, networking events, student markets, social parties, craft events/fairs etc. Therefore, this society requirement is not to confirm that Morning University societies are failing to provide these opportunities to students, but rather to ensure that a standard of experience is maintained so *all* students experience more productive society events. In doing so, the university can more confidently confirm student development, and students will feel more encouraged to engage productively with one another, and the larger area surrounding Morning University. Ideally, creating more opportunities for positive development in the process.

Finally, based on student feedback:

*“Maybe one thing they could do is **update that bursary tracker thing on the internet** because I feel like a lot of people have been needing it and they didn’t even know, because I didn’t know. Like, **I was so lucky that I got an email because if they didn’t send me that I wouldn’t have never known.**” – E. Igw*

At the time of this research, the Morning University bursary system, titled the Morning University Financial Support Package (MUFSP), is only available to first year students by completing an online application wherein students populate their family’s household income,

and their address (including residency status and ‘homelessness’). There is a number of criteria that a student must meet to receive a support package; see below:

- *You must have been household income assessed by Student Finance England (SFE) and be eligible for SFE funding.*
- *You must be registered on a full-time undergraduate degree programme at Morning University, paying the maximum tuition fee.*
- *You must be ordinarily resident in England.*
- *You are from a household where the annual income is £30,000* or less per year.*
- *You must also meet one of the following criteria:*
 - *your household is located in an area that traditionally has had low levels of participation in higher education.*
 - *your household is located in an area that traditionally has had high proportion of children aged 0 to 15 living in income deprived areas across England (IDACI Q1).*
 - *your household is located in an area of high deprivation in England as defined by the Government (IMD Q1 or Q2).*
 - *you are in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance.*
 - *you are 21 or over on the 30th of September 2025.*
- *You are exempt from the household income criteria and additional postcode criteria if any of the following apply:*
 - *you are a Care Leaver under 25.*
 - *you are a young, independent student under 20.*
 - *you are a carer.*
 - *You are estranged from your parents.*
 - *you were in a Foyer or ‘homeless’ starting your course.*
- *You are not eligible for the MUFSP if you already hold an undergraduate degree and/or are studying towards a postgraduate qualification.*

(University of Morning, 2025)

Morning University has a unique opportunity here to take in direct student feedback. For context, the Bursary tracker that E. Igw is referencing is available to MUFSP recipients who have been approved for the funds and is used to track when students can expect to receive the funds. It should be noted here that at the time of this research, bursary approval for the upcoming academic year had begun (University of Morning, 2025). As such, I recommend that the university update the tracker, intending for students arriving for the 26/27 academic year to be the inaugural class for a new tracker system. The goal of the updated tracking system would be easier navigation, timelier communications to students,

and providing resources directly on the tracker for appeals, questions, etc. Though the tracker is one small aspect of student funding, taking in student feedback directly would reaffirm the university's commitment to student involvement, improvements to student experience, and centring student voice.

In conclusion, the above mostly focuses on students' prior experiences and makes the following recommendations: **a full update of the bursary tracker, society stipulations for skill-related events, and a dedicated society meeting space.** These recommendations were based on the experiences of LR 1 and LR 2 participants. In addition to the above recommendations, I highly encourage the university to **closely monitor society social media accounts.** I encourage this rather than stating it as a recommendation, because the authenticity of student-led societies on social media should be maintained, but the university should still strive for a specific experience for students. Referring to the frameworks of this research, CRT with IRP requires that I uphold a *Responsibility*, i.e. "*the task of the researcher to resist methodologies that silence the community, and contribute to the overall health of the community,*" (Carr-Wiggin, 2023, n. p.). Calling for changes to the social media accounts run by students would silence the community I seek to understand. Instead, I encourage the university to adopt the above recommendations with a closer watch on how university societies are presented to their student audience.

*"I think that's the thing that **social media has really made worse.** People compare themselves to other people. A lot of people, a lot of people struggle and people are really struggling. But if you really think about it in Africa, my own country in Africa, Nigeria, in London, people are struggling. So, I don't know. **I feel like we need to change our minds** of the people, but I don't really know how that's gonna⁸² happen. – F. Mul*

Preferably, in doing the above Morning University can expect to ensure experiences that foster positive identity development for Black British students become the norm, and the larger campus community is improved because of it.

⁸² Gonna (adv): euphemism, shortened 'going to' see. See 'Gonna' in Glossary.

Round Table Analysis: Research to Practice

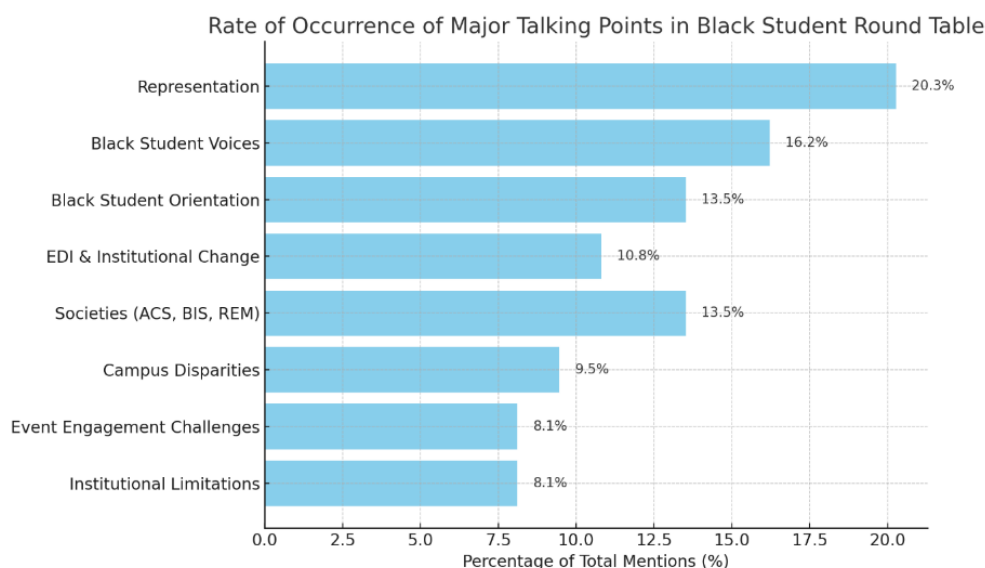
The data discussed above illustrates the student experience of Black British students at Morning University. Though the research conducted was for my PhD, the Listening Rooms method does include a further analysis of the research, a *Round Table Analysis* (RTA) wherein university changemakers, those with the power to affect policy are invited to review the data and make their own recommendations. Herein as I do not have access to university administration, those in my professional network were instead invited to review the data and provide insight on the above-mentioned recommendations. Ideally, the analysis would allow for a research basis to make any necessary policy changes etc. Given my position as a PhD student, my *Round Table Analysis* (RTA) focused on professionals within my academic network, and therefore did not include higher level university administration, such as a chancellor. In addition, referring to the frameworks and principles of the research, the RTA served as an opportunity to enrich the community being studied, while critiquing systemic inequities as CRT with IRP requires. In addition to the presence of my research supervisor, the professional titles of RTA participants, names redacted, are as follows:

- Lecturer
- Morning University Student Union president (Student-elected)
- President of the Black Intellectuals Society (Student-elected)
- Student Success and Attainment Manager

Similar to the Listening Rooms, the RTA was audio recorded and professionals were given a data sheet summarising the results of the MEIM-R, the Listening Rooms, recommendations for Morning University, and the methodology and frameworks. All of the invited professionals operate on Morning University's main campus, and have ongoing, sustained interaction with the campus community, whether as a student or staff member. The analysis occurred following the completion of the Listening Rooms and professionals were not compensated in any way for their participation/input. Professionals were not made aware of who would be in attendance prior to the analysis. Participation was at the sole discretion of the invited professionals. University recommendations were created before the RTA and are based solely on student data.

Major Themes of the Round Table

Similar to the Listening Rooms, the Round Table (RTA) yielded some data regarding the major topics of this research, some challenges from the professionals, and some surprises in experiences. Refer to Graph 7.

Graph 7: Round Table of Analysis Discussion topic rate of occurrence.

The biggest topic of discussion was *Representation*⁸³, brought on when discussing how best to further foster feelings of *Belonging*. RTA attendees felt *Representation* could be helpful to encourage a rapport with students because they would be working with someone who may better understand their experiences as a Black student. RTA attendees went on to outline that Black staff representation at Morning University is not high, but it is growing. Further, the university has established a BAME staff network. The network aims to:

“...create an inclusive and supportive environment where students from racially and ethnically marginalised backgrounds are seen, heard, and valued at Morning University and Morning Student's Union” - Morning University BAME Network, n.p.

Attendees also specified that Morning University is financially transitioning at the moment, dealing with significant staff turnover and uncertainty. They felt this could potentially hinder improving representation of Black professionals. This is especially poignant when considering Morning University's past publishing of the Black Speak Report⁸⁴. The Black Speak Report centred on Black student voices and the Black experience at Morning. The report aimed to first understand what students go through and then make recommendations based on anthropological observations and interactions. The report's findings also discussed the importance of representation to the success of Black students. RTA attendees felt this report was exceedingly important but also admitted that the data illustrated from the LRs is not necessarily new knowledge. In fact, the Morning Black Speak Report discussed increased representation, and student *Belonging* in relation to students' social interactions, similar to LR participants' recounting of class and interactions with peers. The report suggested increased staff training to support diverse students, increased society events from cultural societies, revision of student complaint management systems, and a diversified curriculum (University of Morning, 2024).

⁸³ Representation (n): used in the context of Black British students in Higher Education. Refers to the visible presence of Black people, Black histories, and Black experiences. Considered across curriculum, staffing, leadership, and campus community (Adewumi & Mitton, 2021; Gaines et al., 2010; Phinney, 1988).

⁸⁴ Anonymised published report title.

Further, RTA attendees highlighted the Student Induction recommendation. Attendees also confirmed that the university does intend to hold a Black student orientation going into the upcoming academic year. Validating the recommendation, RTA attendees stated:

“The Black Student induction...that's something that was a really good practice to take forwards. We're going to have it as a cross-institutional event [Morning and Evening campus]...you know, networking, nice food, an opportunity to build community. We are being allowed to include it as part of Welcome Week timetables this academic year too.” – RTA Attendee, Student Success

Keeping with the mentioning of Morning University's Evening campus, as noted previously, the Evening campus has a larger Black population than Morning University main campus. Knowing this, RTA attendees acknowledged that much of the students' needs are met by business/services nearer to Evening Campus, hence the decreased need for Black students living near Evening campus to visit Morning University's surrounding area. Therefore, it would be a pointed effort to offer the same services and encourage Black students to visit Morning more often.

“[Evening] should be treated as its own study...it's so much of a different vibe completely than [Morning]. You know, they go get food in Evening, they get their hair done there.” – RTA Attendee, Morning Union president.

Attendees felt that recommendations referencing university societies should be mirrored at the Evening campus knowing that there are more Black students to reach at that campus, and that the Evening campus has its own Student Union, library, residence halls etc.

In addition, there was significant reference to a third-party internal research report, called the Queensly⁸⁵ report (Kingsley, 2025). The Queensly report, an independent third-party consultancy research report, was published internally and referenced during the RTA. RTA attendees explained that the Queensly report highlighted representation, society involvement, and student inductions in addition to recommendations for residence halls and university staff as routes to improve the Black student experience, similar to the recommendations discussed herein (Kingsley, 2025).

“At Morning, teachers don't know my name. They sometimes address me by my English name, and I won't respond—it makes me feel they don't care enough to respect my name and me as an individual.” – Queensly Report research participant

The report encouraged the university's creation of the upcoming Black student orientation, and RTA attendees acknowledged that the report positioned the university to make significant changes. Further, after review of the Queensly report, the report provided several further recommendations, such as improving student class timetabling such that long or inconsistent schedules do not disproportionately affect working students, and mandatory EDI training for university staff (Kingsley, 2025). Notably, the Queensly report recommends to:

“Utilise disaggregated data from the Black Speak Report research to monitor progress on key indicators like the ethnicity awarding gap and student satisfaction.”

⁸⁵ Anonymised report title. At time of research, 29 April, RTA attendees could not provide access to the report. Accessed May 2025.

Establish a dashboard for real-time monitoring of outcomes, accessible to staff and students.” – Queensly Report, 2025

There is a notable focus on continued assessment of progress, and student satisfaction levels. As examined within this research, student satisfaction with the university can also indicate greater/lower *Belonging* levels with greater satisfaction levels being connected to student engagement, and student matriculation (Ibezim et al., 2025; Johnson, 2019; Kingsley, 2025; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2021).

When considering the input of the Round Table professionals, one would feel validated in knowing the recommendations put forth in this research, and in the Queensly report, are being discussed in other forms by university changemakers. See below:

*“I think it's going to be making sure that anything we run is attractive to students and **doesn't feel like a tick box exercise, because I think that's the worst possible thing**, and that could have resulted in lower engagement in previous times.” – RTA Attendee, Morning Union president*

*“However, **this work cannot be approached as a gesture of goodwill or framed as ‘going above and beyond’ for Black students**. There must be no expectation for gratitude. The measures outlined in this report are not acts of generosity—**they are long-overdue steps to level a playing field that has been grossly unfair for far too long**.” – Queensly Report, 2025*

To know that this research is not only validated by surrounding literature but also by those on the “ground floor,” by those directly affecting student ethnic identity, and by third unbiased parties chosen by the university, suggests a confirmation of the necessary work at hand. Further, it cements the need for improvements in higher education for Black British students that go beyond simple fulfilment of standards.

That said, the *Round Table Analysis* (RTA) further validated the data within this research, the recommendations put forth, and the challenges Black British students face. The Black Speak report, and upcoming Black student orientation are proof of the strides being made at Morning University; partially due to the Queensly report (Kingsley, 2025). Nevertheless, RTA attendees feel there is more work to be done in supporting students; specifically, in terms of representation, institution follow-up, and the disparities between the Morning and Evening campuses. Though there is a collective desire for better, more culturally responsive university actions/policies, RTA attendees stressed that profound change will only occur with authentic cooperation with students. Summed up in the following quote, in short, “*we need to have a lead from the students.*” Only from there will institutional change occur at its most productive.

Conclusion

The research presented here, *Measured Black Voices*, illustrated the experiences of Black British students attending a mid-ranked university, Morning University. The participant population is specifically ancestrally African and/or Caribbean British 1st to 3rd generation students with home status. As a Black-American student, it was my personal experiences in university that inspired initial interest in understanding and outlining Black student experiences. In an effort to define student voice as a pillar of the research, I chose the Listening Rooms methodology, created by Heron and Parkin. The Listening Rooms methodology uses organic discussion between student friends and peers, guided by questions and/or prompts, to create rich qualitative data (Heron & Parkin, 2019; Heron & Parkin, 2023). In utilising conversations between research participants, the counternarratives produced discuss student experiences, university success and failures, and social interaction on a number of levels. As such, this research sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): *What stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students?*

- a. How do students define their identity?
- b. What experiences in university do students feel have the most influence over their development?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): *What aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture, religious, affinity groups or workshops, EDI events) most influence Black British student's ethnic racial identity development?*

- a. Based on student opinion, would the students consider university affordances successful?
- b. Do students from different ethnic backgrounds respond differently to Black-intended activities or affordances?
- c. Do certain university affordances achieve the University's desired effect?

Paired with the Listening Rooms methodology, to quantify a student's ethnic-racial identity, the MEIM-R was used. The *Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure; Revised* created and edited by Phinney has been shown to be an accurate tool for measuring overall salience of *Ethnic Identity* (EI), progression of such identity development, and *Belonging, Affirmation, and Commitment* levels (BAC). Within this research, the MEIM-R was used to measure mean overall scores as well as BAC as a sub-scale, ethnic-racial identity (EI) as a sub-scale, and University Satisfaction (UIC) as a sub-scale.

Acknowledging the social experiences of the students, the theoretical framework of this research was Phinney's Ethnic Racial Identity Model (ERID), see Figure 1, and was applied alongside CRT with Indigenous Research Principles.(IRP). The model focuses on ethnic-racial identity development in adolescents and young adults, examining how such development occurs in relation to external social influences. Various social influences have been found to affect students' identity development, including university attendance. Herein, the MEIM-R was applied to the ERID to measure stages of ethnic-racial identity

development in Black British students attending Morning University. See Tables 5, 6, and 7 where student MEIM-R scores were attributed to levels of development on the ERID (See also: Figure 1).

CRT with IRP was chosen to back the research as a recognition of the racialised society that student identities develop within, and to maintain respect for the community being researched. In addition, in maintaining respect for cultural norms, practices, beliefs, values, and expectations, Indigenous Research Principles (IRP) require recognition of research bias, enrichment of the community being studied, participant authenticity, comfort, and ongoing reflection. See Table 3, IRP calls for moving away from methodologies that silence indigenous communities, or in this case, Black British communities. Being 1st to 3rd generation ancestrally African and/or Caribbean, and therefore likely reflective of the Windrush generation, IRP requires the protection of the community and upholds the goals of the research; understanding the Black British student experience to make recommendations for improvement of university affordances that most positively support ethnic-racial identity development.

Final Thoughts

Overall, my research first establishes the historical background of the Black British student experience via a synopsis of societal inequities in relation to the *Black British Identity*. Then today's definitions of Black British identity were brought to the forefront as the heart of the research, bringing the summarisation of history full circle by recognising how today's Black British person continues to move through an inequitable world. The ethnic-racial identity of Black British students remained at the centre of the work by using the Listening Rooms method, with CRT and IRP. The frameworks, and methodology were specifically laid out to best present student voices, more explicitly Black British student voices. Data collected found a clear connection between student *Belonging* levels and campus community involvement, and university satisfaction. This research recommends that Morning University can best support Black British students by **improving the avenues of development within the university i.e. society stipulations for events, improved user interface of student support services such as the Bursary and Career services, and continued assessment of student society leadership.**

Further, the opinions of students are illustrated in their corresponding MEIM-R scores. Highlighting the correlation between ethnic identity and university satisfaction, the more satisfied a student is with their university affordances, the more likely they are to interact with other students via university affordances, thereby positively affecting their ethnic identity. Answering RQ1, *what stage or sub-stage of ethnic-racial identity development is most prevalent for British students*, data showed that *Moratorium* is the most prevalent stage of development for Black British students. While the participant group was not large enough to generalise past this correlation, participants' data did confirm it is possible for Morning University to take steps to positively affect ethnic-racial identity in its Black British students. In addition, this answers RQ2; *what aspects of the campus environment and/or the university experience (i.e. systemic roadblocks, culture and religious affinity groups or workshops, EDI events etc.) most influence Black British students' ethnic-racial identity development?* Student development most discussed by students as "positive" was student societies, (specifically religious organisations and sports societies), classroom/academic services, and social media (See Table 8). In short, student societies, academic support, and social media most influence the development of Black British students' ethnic racial identity at a mid-ranked university.

Going forward, the methodology utilised here would serve additional communities well, both on and off Morning University's campus. Further questions can be asked regarding development of ethnic identity, and different ethnic groups' interaction with other students. Additionally, the data can be broken down by gender to provide a more nuanced look at the differences in experience. Though this research was unable to disaggregate the ethnic groups beyond a certain point, should future research welcome enough participants from various ethnic groups, it would be possible to glean subtle differences between different ethnic groups in relation to identity development. Personally, I would like to bring the research to publication, focusing on the Listening Rooms as an upcoming qualitative methodology. Morning University prepares yearly reports focused on routes to Student Success. Preferably, I would be included in yearly *Access and Participation Plans* like Morning's and would ideally be able to develop an original framework centred around student, acting as a consultant.

In conclusion, this research served to further understanding of ethnic-racial identity development. I adapted the MEIM-R, combining it with the Listening Rooms methodological approach, framed through CRT with IRP. In doing so, I move beyond examining ethnic identity development as a static survey and instead situated the development process within the lived realities of Black British students. I introduce the *University Satisfaction* sub-scale (UIC), integrating thematic analysis of student LR narratives, aligned with major field Research Themes (RT). I contributed these methodological innovations to highlight university affordances that would most foster positive identity development. I did so while also providing a model for future EI research that captures both the quantifiable and narrative elements of ethnic-racial identity development.

The recommendations I have provided are drawn from my research. They highlight approaches that can be adapted across universities outside of Morning University. These recommendations can be used to strengthen ethnic-racial identity development and foster more inclusive university campuses. In utilising such recommendations, universities can ensure that diverse populations, like the Black British students I have studied, are represented academically, socially, and professionally. In this way, other institutions in the UK can move toward a more equitable and culturally responsive learning environment.

Granted there is additional work to be done, but one could argue that it would be expected. Because society remains inequitable, understanding of Black British identity and Black scholarship must continue to grow; at the very least, to be a catalyst for additional collective societal improvements. Until then, my hope is that the research field maintains momentum, fosters new knowledge and most importantly, welcomes new Black minds, ready to take up the task of continuing the necessary work at hand.

Glossary

- Bare (adj.): a lot of, or very; an exclamation used in disbelief.
- Bum-shaking (v): to move the backside, the arse, the rear end, the sit upon, the butt etc. rhythmically.
- Code-switching (v): the practice of alternating between two or more styles of speaking or varieties of language in conversation for a purpose.
- CRT: Critical Race Theory.
- Dead (adj.): Often used to describe something that's disappointing or doesn't meet expectations.
- ERID: Ethnic-Racial Identity Development.
- Family of Man (n): all people, regardless of colour, can come together as long as they (the "other") adjusts to fit in and/or be accepted by us.
- Fresh (adj.): To get "smart" with another person. To have an attitude.
- Freshers Week (n): the first week after a first-year student arrives at university. A week normally spent celebrating and socialising.
- Frontin' (v): To put up a facade or make appearances, typically to impress or in some way deceive to maintain image. From 'to front'.
- Gonna (adv): a shortened version of 'going to;' i.e. will do something in the future.
- "Had to process" (v); phrase, to compute, to think over.
- HBCU: Historically Black College/University. Term common in the US, and coined when Black scholars were excluded from already established universities, so they started their own universities.
- IRP: Indigenous Research Principles.
- Keen (adj.): eager to do something, used to describe someone who is ready and willing for anything, anywhere, any time.
- Kill Silence (n): the solemnity of silence has become too loud, often in response to incidents wherein one feels a response is warranted, but not given or able.
- Mesh (adj.): to mix, get along, or understand.
- MEIM-R: Multi-Ethnic Identity Model – Revised.
- MUKS: Morning University Knowledge Service, a pseudonym for Morning Uni's student professional/academic support service.
- MUSSS: Morning University Student Success and Skills, a pseudonym for Morning Uni's re-name academic support service.

- Narrative Research Theme (NRT): emerged from participant data; constructed by participant LR data.
- Place (n): a state of mind; an imagined area that fulfils a desired emotion or feeling.
- LR 1: Listening Room 1.
- LR 2: Listening Room 2.
- Overload (adj.): The point at which one is no longer able to retain or produce new information due to a period of strenuous mental activity.
- Play (v): to cause people to think you're one thing but really another; to give the false impression that you're interested in something or someone (“Urban Dictionary: Play,” n.d.).
- PWI: Predominately White Institution. Common in the US, used to describe universities that have a largely, mostly white student population, lacking diversity.
- RQ: Research Question, the major question(s) of the project.
- Representation (n): used in the context of Black British students in Higher Education. Refers to the visible presence of Black people, Black histories, and Black experiences. Considered across curriculum, staffing, leadership, and campus community (Adewumi & Mitton, 2021; Gaines et al., 2010; Phinney, 1988).
- Research Themes (RT): *Belonging, Socialisation, Self-Identification, Well-Being, Journey, and Reflection* - Overall themes of the research field, gleaned during thorough review of relevant literature, adjacent work, and parallel themes. Inclusion of RTs reflects major trends of Ethnic Identity Development research. See also Table 1.
- RTA: (RTA), Round Table Analysis.
- Slide (v): To let go of some type of problem; to excuse an insult.
- “That’s Crazy,” (adj.): often used to describe what one does not understand or feels another’s actions are not how something or someone should be and/or act.
- Uni (n): Shortened version of university, can be used interchangeably.
- Used up (adj.): used more figuratively to describe a situation where you’ve exhausted something or there's nothing remaining of value to be procured.
- Vibes (n, adj.): Refers to the overall atmosphere or energy of an event or person.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Participant Profiles

Rubric:

Pilot Participants

Returning Participants

Online Modality

Student	S	Age	Ethnicity	Degree	Home	Involvement
Alpha	F	21	Caribbean – Haitian	Criminology	London	Participation in 3-5 race-based societies/academic work.
Beta	F	21	Nigerian-Somali	Sociology	London	1-2 race-based societies.
D. Bio	F	19	Ghanian	Psychology	Southeast London	Morning Gospel Choir, Black Intellectual Society, People of Colour Arts Society
Y. Ban	F	18	Nigerian	Drama Theatre	London	Black Intellectual Society, ACS
E. Igw	F	18	Jamaican	Sociology Criminology	Southeast London	None
H. Saro	F	18	Togo	Sociology Criminology	Southeast London	None
O. Mil	M	22	Nigerian	Accounting/ Finance	London	Morning Television Society
K. Pop	M	20	Jamaican	Film	Canterbury	MMA Society
M. Ele	M	20	Ethiopian	Architecture	London	Yes – did not specify which
C. Wal	F	23	Nigerian	Mechanical Engineering	Coventry	None
I. Sil	F	20	Caribbean and Black	International Business	Canterbury	None
F. Mul	M	21	Nigerian	Biomedical Engineering	Ireland via London	None

J. Gor	F	21	African	Conservation Biology	Canterbury	Mindfulness Society
U. Kno	F	19	Black	Biology	London	Archery Society, ACS

Appendix 2: Ethics Form – Amended

If academic staff or students answer ‘yes’ to any of the questions in Section IV A) of the Ethics Review Checklist, a full ethics application must be made to the CSHE Research Ethics Advisory Group (REAG). Complete this form and send it to the Chair of the REAG along with supporting documentation: a copy of the full research proposal; any participant information sheets and consent forms; any surveys, interview schedules; any advertising material or proposed website wording. **It is important to note that you must not commence any research with human participants until full approval has been given by the CSHE REAG - you will be notified via email when this has been granted.**

Overview
Name of Applicant(s)
Brianah Carter
Contact Details (Please include your UoK address, email and telephone number)
Woolf College, The Pavilion, Giles Lane, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7BQ. Email: bc515@kent.ac.uk Tel: 07459962725.
Title of Project
A critical analysis of Black British student Identity Development at a mid-ranked English university.
Lay Summary (Please provide a brief summary of the study)
The research study will examine the dynamic between the Black British university student experience and the identity development process that late adolescents go through. The aim of the study is to identify how universities can best support Black British students to foster a positive self-view and achieve a <i>positive</i> ethnic identity. Broadly speaking factors to be considered that contribute to positive development are <i>belonging</i>, <i>socialization</i>, and the <i>journey</i> into the campus community. Specifically, I will investigate students’ experiences of university affordances recommended for identity development, such as university sponsored events, fairs, workshops, and socials. I will also seek to understand social interactions between Black British students and their peers, as well as the larger campus community including, staff, faculty, and university administration. The students’ gender and cultural connections are also to be considered. By studying the lived experience of 24 students, I will scrutinize challenges, discomfort, or attainments they have had while attending the University of Kent and attempting to involve themselves in university activities. Each participant will participate in a series of two Listening Rooms with a friend/peer. These Listening Rooms will consist of a recorded discussion between two students. Each student will participate in a Room during the autumn term and a follow-up in spring/summer to autumn term dependent on completion of the first Listening Room. The Listening Room process will begin with a <i>Briefing Session</i> wherein students will complete an initial questionnaire based on the validated Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) and sign necessary consent forms. Then I will provide prompts to guide the students’ discussion, will exit the Listening Room and will not interfere in the flow of the discussion. Students will reflect on their university experience so far, where their identity development currently stands, and the perceived influences on that development via the provided discussion prompts. At the end of the first Listening Room, students will receive guidance about recommended

activities that are expected to foster positive ethnic identity development and asked to take part in these activities before the second Listening Room. To note, the Listening Room will be offered to students both in-person and online, based on the student's request, needs, or availability. Online meetings will be scheduled and recorded by Microsoft Teams and connected to the student's University email.

During the second Listening Room, students will discuss which activities and affordances they have engaged with and the impact on their *belonging*, feelings of inclusion, and achieving positive ethnic identities. Extant literature demonstrates that Black British students, specifically those who identify as African or Caribbean, experience university as members of a marginalized group. With this marginalization, Black British university students' experiences are often heavily influenced by social interactions and university-sponsored events, and are therefore shaped by these happenings. Affordances such as the Black 365 event series, invited inspirational speakers, and ethnic minority societies such as the African Caribbean Society are a few examples of the university activities in question. I will explore to what extent involvement in these activities affect the identity of the students born of the Windrush generation i.e. 1st to 3rd generation African or Caribbean students with UK citizenship.

Following the rise of the Black Lives Matters movement and the COVID-19 pandemic, Black British student voice has been pushed to the forefront of EDI work in UK universities. Black British students make up 8% of the UK total university population, though percentages vary considerably across universities depending upon history and geographical context. Nearby London has the highest representation of Black British students at 17% of the undergraduate population. Universities with the highest enrolments of Black British students are those found in more urban areas, like London and less "research intensive" universities. As a mid-ranked university with a reasonable commuting distance to London, the Black population at the University of Kent can serve as representation of how best to encourage the growth of positive identity development for Black British students across the UK as Kent Uni does reflect the sort of university that Black British students are more likely to attend.

Name of Supervisor(s) (If applicable)

Kathleen M Quinlan, and Dr. Barbara Adewumi

Risks and ethical issues

Please list the principal criteria for inclusion and exclusion

Includes undergraduate home students who self-identity as Black Caribbean or African (e.g. Kenyan, Nigerian, Ghanaian, South African, Mauritian, or a smaller represented African community etc.) and who have completed at least one term at the University of Kent. Because students must have completed one term, only second-term 1st year, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year students will be included. Students must have UK citizenship.

How long will each research participant be in the study in total, from when they give informed consent until their last contact with the researcher/s?

11 months

What are the potential risks and burdens for research participants and how will you minimise them? (Describe any risks and burdens that could occur as a result of participation in the research, such as pain, discomfort, distress, intrusion, inconvenience or changes to lifestyle. Describe what steps would be taken to minimise risks and burdens as far as possible)

Participants will be invited to pair with another student and reflect on their involvement in university activities, and could possibly reveal events of racial discomfort, discrimination, harassment, or anti-black behaviour. Considering the subject matter, participants may be reminded of instances involving discrimination, exclusion, or personal disappointment. It will be stressed that should the discussion incite too many negative feelings they can stop or withdraw from the study at any point.

The students will participate in the Listening Rooms with a **peer of their choice** which will help minimize the stress of the discussion. The Listening Rooms will also present a time burden both in attendance of the Rooms themselves and in attending recommended activities. Should the time constraints pose an issue to their academic performance or overall well-being, students would be advised to leave the study. Participants can also choose to not raise further discussion on any of the provided prompts if they do not wish to. This will be stated during the *Briefing Session* prior to beginning the Listening Rooms. In addition, Student Support and Well-being resources will be shared with students after each Listening Room, as well as recommended in University activities and opportunities shared with the students.

Please describe what measures you have in place in the event of any unexpected outcomes or adverse effects to participants arising from involvement in the project

Participants will be reminded in writing via the *Initial Questionnaire* as well as by the researcher before the Listening Room begins that participation can be withdrawn at any time. In addition, this study will offer follow up Student and Well-Being references should there be any adverse feelings following the completion of the study. There will also be resources to report racial or sexual harassment should a student need to report an incident. These resources will be shared with students at the start of Listening Rooms during the *Briefing Session*.

Will interviews/questionnaires or group discussions include topics that might be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting, or is it possible that criminal or other disclosures requiring action could occur during the study?

Listening Room may discuss topics that are sensitive or upsetting, but not more than students might ordinarily discuss with a friend. The prompts are not designed to focus on negative experiences, per se, and students will have autonomy in choosing how to respond to prompts. It is highly unlikely that criminal disclosures or otherwise will occur during the study.

If yes, please describe the procedures in place to deal with these issues

Students will have **their chosen peer** in the conversation. In addition, the Student Well-Being department will be prepared to meet with any participants following completion of the Listening Rooms. Prior to the beginning of the research, Student Well-being will be briefed on the context of the study.

What is the potential benefit to research participants?

Participants will have an opportunity to reflect on their experiences, which will promote their own self-understanding. They will also be referred to relevant resources and activities that they might not otherwise have been aware of that existing evidence suggests is likely to be advantageous to them.

The results of the Listening Rooms will illustrate Black British student experiences at a mid-ranked university, defining what these experiences entail and establishing the positive and negative effects of engaging with the University of Kent campus community. Data collected from the Listening Rooms will assist the University in better understanding the steps needed to promote positive ethnic identity among Black students. In turn, these findings can assist University administration in developing and recommending activities that promote positive identity development, belonging, and a more equitable experience.

What are the potential risks to the researchers themselves?

None.

Will there be any risks to the University? (Consider issues such as reputational risk; research that may give rise to contentious or controversial findings; could the funder be considered controversial or have the potential to cause reputational risk to the University?) The purpose here is not to hinder risky research but to ensure that you have considered possible outcomes.

No

Will any intervention or procedure, which would normally be considered a part of routine care, be withheld from the research participants, e.g. disruption of a student's access to their normal educational entitlement and curriculum? (If yes, give details and justification)

No.

Recruitment and informed consent

How and by whom will potential participants, records or samples be identified?

Lead Researcher will issue an open call to all second-term 1st year, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year British-born African or Caribbean students. Potential participants will correspond directly with the lead researcher and no lists of potential participants will be transferred to the researcher.

Will this involve reviewing or screening identifiable personal information of potential participants or any other person? (If 'yes', give details)

No.

Has prior consent been obtained or will it be obtained for access to identifiable personal information?

N/A

Will you obtain informed consent from or on behalf of research participants? (If 'yes' please give details. If you are not planning to gain consent, please explain why not).

Yes.

Will you record informed consent in writing? (If 'no', how will it be recorded?)

Yes.

How long will you allow potential participants to decide whether or not to take part?

Participants will have 2-3 weeks before the first Listening Room and 7-8 months before the second.

What arrangements have been made for persons who might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information given in English, or have special communication needs? (eg, translation, use of interpreters?)

Participants will be English speakers from the UK who are studying at higher education level in English.

If no arrangements will be made, explain the reasons (eg, resource constraints)

Confidentiality

In this section personal data means any data relating to a participant who could potentially be identified. It includes pseudonymised data capable of being linked to a participant through a unique code number.

If you will be undertaking any of the following activities at any stage (including in the identification of potential participants) please give details and explain the safeguarding measures you will employ

- Electronic transfer by magnetic or optical media, email or computer networks
- Sharing of personal data outside the European Economic Area
- Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers
- Publication of direct quotations from respondents
- Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals, either directly or indirectly
- Use of audio/visual recording devices
- Storage of personal data on any of the following:
 - Manual files
 - University computers
 - Home or other personal computers
 - Private company computers
 - Laptop computers
 - Servers at the University or elsewhere

- Use of email for electronic transfer
- Publication of direct quotations from participants.
- Use of Audio/Video recording devices
- Storage of Personal Data on: Laptop/Personal Computers, Servers at the University or Elsewhere, and Password-Protected External Hard Drive.

How will you ensure the confidentiality of personal data? (eg, anonymisation or pseudonymisation of data)

Listening Room recordings and transcripts and initial questionnaires will be password protected on Lead Researcher's personal laptop computer. Listening Room online Recordings will be created using Microsoft Teams, only accessible by the student, via their email, and the Lead Researcher.

Who will have access to participants' personal data during the study?

Lead Researcher – Brianah Carter and my supervisors

How long will personal data be stored or accessed after the study has ended? (If longer than 12 months, please justify)

31 months. Following completion of the Listening Rooms, additional time will needed to bring the thesis to publication.

Please note: as a requirement of many funders, where practical, researchers must develop a data management and sharing plan to enable the data to be made available for re-use, eg, for secondary research, and so sufficient metadata must be conserved to enable this while maintaining confidentiality commitments and the security of data.

Incentives and payments

Will research participants receive any payments, reimbursement of expenses or any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research? (If 'yes', please give details)

Yes, participants will receive employability points for their participation. During the *Briefing session*, it will be explained how to claim these points, and the contact details to do so. Snacks will also be available in the Listening Rooms. If the study is approved for the Psychology Research Participation Scheme, psychology students will also receive research participation scheme credits.

Will individual researchers receive any personal payment over and above normal salary, or any other benefits or incentives, for taking part in this research? (If 'yes', please give details)

No

Does the Principal Investigator or any other investigator/collaborator have any direct personal involvement (e.g. financial, shareholding, personal relationship, etc) in the organisations sponsoring or funding the research that may give rise to a possible conflict of interest? (If 'yes', please give details)

No

Data Protection and GDPR compliance

What data do you need to collect (e.g. is this the minimum necessary for the research purposes?)

Lead researcher will collect data on the students' experience while attending the University of Kent following completion of the first year. Personal data, including their student status (what term they are in), ethnic background, their gender, and any campus involvement (society membership etc.) will be collected. This is the minimum required for the study.

Does it infringe on any personal rights?

No.

Have you included a privacy notice in participant information including a link to the University-level privacy notice?

No.

What would happen if the data was leaked?

As the data will be stored on the Lead Researcher's personal device, I will immediately report loss of data to the University's Information Compliance and Information Services team.

Online Listening Rooms will be downloaded from Microsoft Teams after the meeting's conclusion on the Lead Researchers personal device. After which, the meeting will only be accessible on the Lead Researcher's

University-serviced OneDrive. I would report loss of data to the Ethics Committee of CSHE and University Information Services.

The Listening Room in-person recordings should not hold any identifiable data (only their conversations), as that will be captured on the initial questionnaire which will be held in a locked cabinet and on a password protected device and will be separated from the files with Listening Room transcripts. Thus, I anticipate the risk to be minimal. The online Listening Rooms will hold identifying face data. Therefore this will be stored on a password protected device, and on password-protected Microsoft servers, offered by the University, only accessible by the Lead Researcher.

What measures have been put in place to mitigate risks to individuals?

Listening Room online and in-person recordings and the transcripts will be password-protected and stored on my password-protected personal device that will remain in my care throughout the study.

Online recorded data will be saved on University-provided Microsoft OneDrive accounts.

What processing option will you use (e.g. 'task in the public interest' / consent, etc.) and will an exemption apply to your research (e.g. processing for archiving purposes and for scientific or historical research and statistical purposes)?

N/A

How do you plan to store, access and work with, the data you collect?

Data will be stored securely only on the Lead Researcher's personal device, or University-protected OneDrive and all files will be password-protected. Any direct reference/quotation will be anonymised. Data will not be shared or made available to any other entity.

Will there be any third party involvement in processing the data?

No

Will the data be transferred outside of the European Economic Area?

No

Can you fully anonymise the data and still achieve the same results?

The data will be fully pseudonymised. The researcher needs to know who the students are to match up one Listening Room conversation with another. When writing up the research should there be a quotation or reference it will be anonymised, concealing the identity of the students. The identity and location of the University will be kept anonymous.

What will you do with the data once you've finished with it?

Following the doctoral submission and/or publication of the research, original Listening Room recordings will be permanently deleted.

Publication and dissemination

How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the study? If you do not plan to report or disseminate the results please give your justification

Research findings will be submitted as part of the doctoral project for Lead Researcher. Findings will also be submitted for publication to relevant academic journals and presented at both internal and external events.

Will you inform participants of the results? (Please give details of how you will inform participants or justify if not doing so)

Participants will be informed if research findings are accepted for publication outside of doctoral submission.

Management of the research

Other key investigators/collaborators. (Please include all grant co-applicants, protocol authors and other key members of the Chief Investigator's team, including non-doctoral student researchers)

None

Has this or a similar application been previously rejected by a research Ethics Committee in the UK or another country? (If yes, please give details of rejected application and explain in the summary of main issues how the reasons for the unfavourable opinion have been addressed in this application)

No

How long do you expect the study to last?

Planned start date: Oct 2023	Planned end date: Sept 2025	Total duration: 22 months
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Where will the research take place?

Listening Rooms will be facilitated by Lead Research, Brianah Carter, using Centre for the Study of Higher Education facilities, University of Kent Listening Room facilities, University of Kent sound-proof facilities, and University of Kent-provided Microsoft services.

Does your research involve you travelling overseas?

No

If yes, please read, complete and attach to this proposal the University of Kent's Overseas Travel Risk Assessment Form (available here:

[https://www.kent.ac.uk/safety/hs/pages/travel-work-overseas/Travel'work Overseas Oct09 RevNov10.pdf](https://www.kent.ac.uk/safety/hs/pages/travel-work-overseas/Travel%20work%20Overseas%20Oct09%20RevNov10.pdf)).

Insurance/indemnity

Does UoK's insurer need to be notified about your project before insurance cover can be provided?

No

Children

Do you plan to include any participants who are children under 16? (If no, go to next section)

No

Please specify the potential age range of children under 16 who will be included and give reasons for carrying out the research with this age group

Please describe the arrangements for seeking informed consent from a person with parental responsibility and/or from children able to give consent for themselves

If you intend to provide children under 16 with information about the research and seek their consent or agreement, please outline how this process will vary according to their age and level of understanding

Participants unable to consent for themselves

Do you plan to include any participants who are adults unable to consent for themselves through physical or mental incapacity? (If yes, the research must be reviewed by an NHS REC or SCREC)

No

Is the research related to the 'impairing condition' that causes the lack of capacity, or to the treatment of those with that condition?	
☐ Yes	If 'yes' proceed to next question
☒ No	If 'no' the study should proceed without involving those who do not have the capacity to consent to participation
Could the research be undertaken as effectively with people who do have the capacity to consent to participate?	
☒ Yes	If 'yes' then the study should exclude those without the capacity to consent to participation
☐ No	If 'no' then the inclusion of people without capacity in the study can be justified
Is it possible that the capacity of participants could fluctuate during the research? (If yes, the research must be reviewed by an NHS REC or SCREC)	
No	
Who inside or outside the research team will decide whether or not the participants have the capacity to give consent? What training/experience will they have to enable them to reach this decision?	
N/A	
What will be the criteria for withdrawal of participants?	
Participation in the Listening Rooms is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any point during the study.	

Declaration	
To be signed by the Chief Investigator - I agree to comply, and will ensure that all researchers involved with the study comply with all relevant legislation, accepted ethical practice, University of Kent policies and appropriate professional ethical guidelines during the conduct of this research project - If any significant changes are made to the design of the research I will notify the CSHE Research Ethics and Advisory Group (REAG) and understand that further review may be required before I can proceed to implement the change(s) - I agree that I will notify the CSHE REAG of any unexpected adverse events that may occur during my research - I agree to notify the CSHE REAG of any complaints I receive in connection with this research project	
Signed: Brianah Carter	Date: 12.09.2023 Amended: 28.01.2024

What to do next
Send your completed form, along with all supporting documentation, to the Chair of the CSHE Research Ethics Committee. Current chair (July 2016 -) is Dr Tom Parkinson (t.parkinson@kent.ac.uk).

Checklist
Please ensure you have included the following with your application (where relevant):

• Full research proposal (current project) • Participant information sheet • Consent form • Covering letter (if relevant) • Any questionnaires/interview schedules/topic guides to be used • Any approved instruments/measures to be used • Any advertising material to be used to recruit participants • Confirmation that project is covered by UoK insurance policies (if necessary)	☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
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This form is modelled on that used by the Social Sciences Faculty Research Ethics Advisory Group.

If you need advice on how to complete this form or have queries about ethical issues, please contact your supervisor, the Director of Research or the Chair of the CSHE REAG. There are useful resources in the CSHE shared folders, in the library and on the Research Services webpages.

Appendix 3: Consent Form – Amended

Working Title of Project: ***From Listening to Knowing:*** Black British Students' ethnic identity development through CRT and IRP at a mid-ranked university in the UK.

Information Sheet

What is this study about? We are conducting a research study that aims to identify how universities can best support Black British students to foster a positive self-view and achieve a positive ethnic identity. Broadly speaking, factors to positive development are *belonging*, *socialisation*, and the *journey* into the campus community. This study will also seek to understand social interactions between Black British students and their peers, as well as the larger campus community including, staff, faculty, and university administration so we will ask some questions about your home, family, and social life. In this questionnaire, you will rate your level of agreeance with a series of statements relating to family, your specific ethnic group, your social life, and your experience in university.

What am I asked to do? You are invited to participate by completing a *Briefing Session*, and two *Listening Room* recorded discussions. You will bring a friend/peer to the *Listening Room* who also meets the criteria for participation and talk together about the discussion prompts related to this project. The first meeting will be about 90 minutes total. The second meeting will be 60-90 minutes. After the first session, I will recommend a number of activities for you to engage in over the rest of the year. How much time you spend on these activities is your decision. We'll debrief your experiences of those in the second *Listening Room*. Should you opt for an online Listening Room, you would need access to a computer with webcam capabilities.

Do I need to take part? No, your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose which prompts in the *Listening Room* you respond to. If you are uncomfortable discussing any of the points,

you and your friend can skip that prompt or question. You can withdraw from the study at any point before 1 August 2024 without any consequence.

What are the risks and benefits? Your participation is voluntary. You may benefit from reflecting on your participation in university activities or conversing with a friend during the *Listening Rooms*. You can also receive employability points for your participation. You may find some of the questions uncomfortable if they involve discussing moments of racial discomfort, discrimination, harassment, or anti-black behaviour exhibited by peers, staff, or the wider community. If it is too uncomfortable, you can skip that question.

Who is conducting the study? Brianah Carter is the principal researcher and Professor Kathleen Quinlan and Dr. Barbara Adewumi are the supervisors monitoring the research. Professor Quinlan can be contacted at K.M.Quinlan@kent.ac.uk. She is Director of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NQ. Phone No: +44 (0)1227 824579. Dr. Adewumi can be contacted at b.adewumi-282@kent.ac.uk. She is a Senior Research Fellow, also at the University of Kent.

Will it be anonymous? Yes. Any identifying information stated during the *Listening Rooms* will be removed. Data will be stored on my personal password-protected device. Data will be held in accordance with the University of Kent's privacy policy and the EU GDPR 2020:

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/governance/downloads/policies-procedures/Data%20Protection%20Policy.pdf>.

At the end of the study and no later than September 2025, your name, ID and email will be permanently deleted. Your university will be anonymised in this file. Aggregated analyses and the verbatim anonymised response to the open-ended questions will be shared with the PhD supervisors named above and used in Brianah Carter's doctoral submission. These anonymised, aggregated analyses also will be presented at academic conferences and published in journals or books. You are free to withdraw from this study at any point before 1 August 2024 by informing the researcher of your intention.

What if I have questions or concerns? If you have any questions or want further information, please contact Brianah Carter at bc515@kent.ac.uk or Professor Quinlan at K.M.Quinlan@kent.ac.uk. If you have any serious concerns about the ethical conduct of this study please inform the Chair of the Centre of Study for Higher Education, University of Kent Ethics panel in writing (via the CSHE Departmental Office - contact heprogsadmin@kent.ac.uk).

Please check your understanding of the following:

- I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time before 1 August 2024 or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind. Should I choose to withdraw, any relevant materials will be deleted.
- I understand that participation involves active participation in 2 separate *Listening Room* Discussions that will be recorded, and attendance at recommended university activities during the 2023-24 academic year.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded and/or video recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that, under freedom of information legalisation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information at any point during the study.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study before it begins.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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