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What is broken: an exploration of the factors affecting the attainment of BME students

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What is Broken: An Exploration of The Factors Affecting The Attainment of BME Students

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that the work contained within this thesis has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted, in whole or in part, for any other degree or professional qualification.

Jaswinder Sekhon

ABSTRACT

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a period of mass immigration to the UK from former colonies. One of the outcomes of this inward migration was that the children of immigrants entered the UK higher education (HE) systems in order to maximise their life opportunities. Despite their entrance in HE, there is a body of evidence showing that an educational attainment gap at degree level exists between BME students and their White counterparts, even when at the point of entry BME students and their counterparts have nearly identical entry grades, hence showing they are equally equipped. The shortfall between the performance of BME and White students has implications for the sector and society per se.

So that a better understanding for the rationale of the degree attainment gap could be gained, adding to the quantitative research demonstrating this gap, 20 qualitative research interviews amongst first and second generation university attendees were completed. To support this work, a case based study approach at Coventry University was undertaken which enabled a deeper understanding of the reasons for specific attainment.

The research findings reveal that a number of factors have an influence. The factors are external, namely previous experience at school and the route taken to reach HE, course aspects in relation to the one that is chosen and teaching staff. Internal factors centre on attitudes and aspirations, peers and the individual's knowledge of HE. The final area to emerge is a middle ground, the image of the institution and its ability to make students feel welcome.

Educationalists can do little to influence external factors; however, institutions must take action, through curricular changes, course materials and attitudes of tutors, to minimise their negative impact upon attainment. Attainment statistics demonstrate that the gap has started to reduce; however, it still needs addressing further as degree attainment has the ability to impact individuals' lives and their employment opportunities. Institutional actions can improve the attainment of all HE students.

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List of Abbreviations

A-level	Advanced Level
BME	Black Minority Ethnic
CU	Coventry University
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit
ERHC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HND	Higher National Diploma
HRP	Household Reference Person
LLN	Lifelong Learning Network
SEC	Socio-Economic Classification
STE	Science, Technology and Engineering
TLA	Teaching, Learning and Assessment
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

1.   INTRODUCTION

In adding to the body of knowledge, this thesis deals with the degree attainment gap that exists between BME and White students in the UK's higher educational sector. This degree attainment gap became prominent during the early 1990s. Undergraduate degree attainment in the UK is most commonly measured by the class of degree achieved; first class honours being the highest awarded, followed by upper second class, both of which are recognised as a "good" degree (HESA, 2014). At a national level, 78% of White students were awarded a good degree, compared to 66% of BME students, an attainment gap of 12% (HESA, 2014). This attainment gap is concerning because it is safe to assume that at the point of entry into the higher education sector, the same entry grade would have been required for BME and White students. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), in the light of the existing equality framework, have a legislative imperative to address this degree attainment gap and a moral responsibility to ensure all students are enabled to achieve their full academic potential. Furthermore, comparatively more attention has been paid to attainment gaps elsewhere, as the following quote from the Guardian newspaper testifies:

> *"People will focus above all on the gaps between state and independent school pupils. But that would be a shame as there are much bigger gaps by ethnic background,' said Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute and a former special adviser to the universities minister, David Willetts. 'Universities need to think very carefully about how they can best support their students with different ethnic backgrounds, as many are underperforming against their classmates."* (Adams, 2014)

The preceding quote evidences the current political interest in the field of differential degree attainment. In recognising the persisting degree attainment gap, there is a need for further research and understanding in the field.

Whilst much empirical quantitative evidence demonstrates the existence of an attainment gap, comparatively less attention has been paid to factors that affect attainment from students' perspectives. From this standpoint, the thesis research title is '*What is broken: An exploration of the factors affecting the attainment of BME students*'. In addressing the research title, there are three interrelated objectives, namely to:

1.   Develop a new model that helps to understand the influencing factors upon BME attainment from students' perspectives.

2.   Provide an analysis of the HE experience of BME students at Coventry University (CU), by adopting a case study approach.

3.   Contribute strategic and other recommendations aimed at improving BME attainment.

In meeting of the three primary aims, I will report all findings from the students' perspectives, to gain an insight into their HE experience and which influential factors the students believe to be affecting attainment. In cases where students do not state influential factors, these will be deduced from the entirety of the interaction with the student. To begin, information was gained to assess whether students have been previously satisfied with their prior attainment. This starting knowledge enabled me to analyse data around this corollary factor. To provide an analysis of their HE experience, I discuss a broad range of aspects related to attending university, thus allowing deduction of the factors influencing students' attainment.

Students' HE experience at CU could be partially attributed to the decision and reasons for applying to Coventry University. In dealing with this I intend to report the reasons why BME students chose CU: their background – on a personal and academic level; the extent to which each student is involved in university life; and, facilities within the university they may use. Furthermore their decision to attend CU may contribute to attainment; providing further confirmation of the inter-relationship between the aims. Subsequent to analysis of data collected concerning the preceding areas, I intend to produce apt recommendations aimed at improving BME attainment. A semi-structured approach during data collection will enable flexibility to explore relevant issues in greater depth by channelling discussions. These aims will provide a contribution to the debate around BME attainment.

In order to address the aims of the research statement I gained qualitative data at a specified higher education institute; in this thesis Coventry University is chosen as the locus of this data. It is reasonable to assume that the factors influencing attainment may well be generic to all HE students; however, due to discernible characteristics originating from an ethnic group and as the abbreviation "BME" suggests, these students form part of a minority group in the UK, therefore from this starting point they are different from

the majority. It follows that with such distinct differences and the corollary this brings, influential factors on attainment probably affect BME students differently and/or more prominently, with the effects being more profound. Data constituting this study was qualitative and collected during 2010 and 2011, with the sample being BME student participants at Coventry University.

The rationale for embarking on this research journey is both personal and professional. Having participated in the British educational system and originating from an ethnic minority background, there are experiences I reflect on, questioning whether I could have attained more highly. My parents arrived as immigrants in the UK during the mid-1960s, and throughout my informative years placed an emphasis on participating in HE, predominately because of their own experiences and lack of opportunities. At a professional level, I have a teaching background having taught in further education for twenty years and at higher education level for seven years. Through daily contact with students I observed specific groups, largely centred on ethnicity. Within these different minority groups I noted specific behaviours, norms and differences and I developed an interest in how these behaviours could affect attainment. As a result of assessing and evaluating performances of BME students, the issue of differential attainment became a concern, one I wished to research to ensure fairness for all students, with fairness based on notions of justice. As part of completing a PGCE I was involved in exploring and developing teaching and learning methods, with the goal of enabling students' engagement and, hence, all-important attainment. Prior to this I graduated with a Sociology degree, developing an interest in phenomenological perspectives. My focus resides explicitly on extracting individual student views and opinions regarding aspects of HE in relation to attainment.

1.1   Background and Importance of Recognising the Issue

Differential attainment requires addressing firstly due to the sense of injustice I feel for the BME students. In a society where equal opportunities are grounded in formal legislation and morality, it follows universities too have a responsibility to ensure all individuals are provided with fair opportunities that do not discriminate any students or student groups. Secondly, it is also noted that a good honours degree is

advantageous to maximise opportunities in the UK's job market with the benefit of social mobility. This viewpoint is supported by the following conclusion taken from a report by the then Department for Education and Skills (2007):

> "…*these results potentially have quite serious implications. A number of studies have found that attaining a "good" degree carries a premium in the labour market, and that this premium has increased over time as HE has expanded.*" (DfES, 2007)

This quote accentuates that good attainment is increasing in importance. However, from my sociological background I call into question whether all students, provided with the same opportunity, can achieve a first or upper second class degree. A functionalist perspective leads us to believe that those who work the hardest reap the greatest rewards, i.e. meritocracy; furthermore one of the aims of education is to allocate the most suitable individuals to specific roles (Parsons, 1961). Contrastingly, the Marxist viewpoint is that the function of education is to recreate inequalities i.e. sustain capitalism; if all individuals achieve equally well, inequalities would cease at an education level. The prevailing conflicting perspectives acknowledge that equality is not achievable.

As part of this thesis, reference is made to research from the USA and other societies. Many of these studies are relevant to the UK for two main reasons: (a) they are all located in multi-cultural societies; and (b), significant differential attainment in these societies has been observed. It is also important to demonstrate awareness of the international perspective and that the degree attainment gap is not simply an issue unique to the UK. At this stage there is merit in drawing attention to the fact that I use the words **attainment** and **achievement** interchangeably, this is because they appear naturally within a sentence. Additionally, tangential literature based on schools has been referenced. This adoption was deemed relevant and appropriate because within all educational institutions learning takes place within a given climate, influencing attainment and possibly shaping future attainment. And as Richardson (2008) states, '…deleterious effects of discriminatory attitudes are cumulative through the lifespan'.

Whilst the majority of Richardson's research in the field of differential attainment has been at HE level, his preceding quote acknowledges that a student, and presumably their attainment, is affected by behaviours towards them throughout the entirety of their education experiences. Notwithstanding this, the primary focus of my research is the UK's HE system, with a central sample point.

1.2   Why Coventry University?

The grounding of this thesis is within the Disparities in Student Attainment (DISA) project, funded by the Higher Education Academy, which in 2010 required a PhD student to support the work. The overarching goal of the DISA project was to explore influences on BME attainment at the University of Wolverhampton and Coventry University. At the time of commencement of this PhD, Coventry University was engaged in various initiatives centred on BME attainment, such as the Summit Programme, and demonstrating a significant commitment to understanding the issues and improving its systems and practices to help reduce the attainment gap.

The headline participation and attainment figures at Coventry University reveal that for the first time, over half of all students at CU are classified as non-White, 59% (this figure includes the category 'not known' and 'non-UK domicile'), specifically 41% of students are White. Of the BME/non-White students, 58% achieve a good degree, compared to 77% of the White students. Proportionately, BME good degree attainment does not reflect their participation rate. Participation figures at Coventry University, when compared to the national figures, reflect a similar pattern, but BME students at Coventry University are not performing as well when compared nationally. On examination of these statistics, the existence of a degree attainment gap is confirmed, and with continuously increasing numbers of BME students, this makes Coventry University a suitable base for my research.

Furthermore, I focus on one single institution, Coventry University, hence making my research a case study. There are three main reasons for this:

1. Other than the participation and attainment figures, Coventry University is typical of its sort of institution, "sort" meaning a post-1992 university, located in a town/city/civic whose surrounding population includes relatively high BME immigrant numbers (figures presented in Chapter Two).
2. I am employed at Coventry University, which allows for easier access to BME participants, relevant data and I have first-hand experience of the environment.
3. With the increasing enrolment of BME students at Coventry University it is imperative that the institution addresses the differential attainment gap issue as so many lives are affected.

1.3   Contribution of the Research

I intend for this research to contribute by helping to reduce the attainment gap between BME and White students. Much research in the field appears to be captivated by differential attainment; however, rather than focusing research at the outcome of differential attainment I feel it would be more beneficial to start by addressing the issue from its root cause and deepen our understanding of the factors that affect individual student's attainment. Hence, prior to addressing the degree attainment gap, we must first acknowledge the factors affecting BME attainment; as mentioned previously, these may be similar for all HE students but perceived differently by students of BME origins.

Much empirical quantitative evidence exists supporting the position that an attainment gap exists at degree level between BME and White students; the volume of quantitative research presenting statistics outweighs qualitative work. My research reports the qualitative views and perspectives of BME students at one HEI, concerning their HE experience and the factors that BME students perceive as influential on their attainment. Hence, it focuses on the student voice and is not policy driven. It has the intention of letting the data speak for itself, with the desire to change/develop practice.

After participating at the Faculty of Business, Environment and Society's Annual Conference 2013, the area within which I teach at Coventry University, and having received recognition for my PhD poster (see Appendix 1), I was surprised by the magnitude of interest, questions and lack of awareness of the attainment gap. My contribution includes, therefore, elevating the importance of recognising the issue and the shortcomings associated with addressing it. Research based at an institutional level is compelling because the educational institution, through its systems, personnel and practices, may be preventing higher BME attainment. As well as the practical contribution, this thesis develops a framework that can be tested on a quantitative empirical basis, thus providing a platform for developing generalisable academic theory, at a later stage.

As the final consequence of this research, it is envisaged that a greater number of BME students achieve first or upper second class degrees, with the ultimate desire to benefit all students in terms of higher attainment. I fully appreciate that it is not possible or realistic to ensure that all students are achieving first

class honours degrees and thus the pragmatic intention of this thesis is to provide a platform on which to develop policies/procedures to ensure the attainment gap is addressed.

1.4   Thesis Audience

The intended audience for this thesis is mainly those personnel in HE, tutors and support staff, who have daily contact with BME students. With increased awareness of the degree attainment gap and of the factors that influence attainment, the findings from this thesis can help inform tutor practice. Tutors may be able to confront unconscious classifications they may hold, making it possible to modify their actions and behaviours. Furthermore, related HE issues covered in this thesis may result in compassion and care being extended for those students not achieving as highly as others.

For support staff, knowledge of influential factors, as identified by the BME students, empowers them to interact and support different students according to their needs. The analyses in this thesis may offer insights for designing more effective pedagogy. But, in order to develop effective teaching practices it is important to possess an understanding of in-situ educational experience, via an examination of students' perspectives. As emphasised earlier, this thesis is foremost concerned with the constitution of the student perspectives; therefore this thesis could be of interest to those who wish to understand other HE related issues from the students' point-of-view.

Researchers in the field of differential attainment may find this thesis helps to address some of the shortcomings previously identified and recommendations made by the multitudinous small-scale survey research that populates the field (Gunn & Steel, 2012). This thesis may also appeal to those educators outside of HE thus having practical value for educationalists; learning is a longitudinal experience, not isolated to one institution.

Finally, this thesis may resonate with those interested in the wider contexts of social science. This is namely the concept of ethnicity and interpreting social phenomena with the employment of phenomenology. Those who are concerned about BME welfare, particularly with the increasing numbers

of BME students in HE, may benefit from reading this thesis. Understanding students' perspectives in education has a broader sociological value.

1.5   Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is presented in a further seven chapters. Taking a structured approach, the following chapters focus on:

Chapter Two: *Background: Ethnic Groups and Higher Education*. This chapter's emphasis is on the concept of ethnicity, how the UK became a multi-cultural society and the BME groups used in this research. Following this, there is a discussion centred on the background of the UK's HE system and an outline of changes that have taken place.

Chapter Three: *Literature Review: Existing Explanations for Differential Attainment*. The purpose of this is to review the current literature in the field of differential attainment, and then identify the rationale for the gap. These factors are then grouped to underpin the remainder of the discussion that is presented in this thesis.

Chapter Four: *Participation and Attainment: The Evidence.* At this stage the reader can expect to encounter some of the quantitative data that demonstrates the existence of a degree attainment gap. It also explores why the two concepts of participation and attainment are often discussed conjointly and presents data, which compares Coventry University to a national profile.

Chapter Five: Conceptual Framework. This chapter draws together the existing research and develops a conceptual framework. This framework then supports the remainder of the research.

Chapter Six: *Methodology and Research Methods*. Sets out the theoretical and practical basis on which the research was conducted. Specifically it addresses six levels: research design; methodological position; stance of thesis; ethical considerations; data collection; and data analysis.

Chapter Seven*: Analyses and Discussion.* At this stage the research findings are presented. This is followed by a discussion situating these arguments relative to the existing research in the field.

Chapter Eight: *Relationship to the Initial Conceptual Framework and New Emergent Theory.* This last but one chapter makes the link to the original theory and presents new emergent theory.

Chapter Nine: *Thesis Conclusions and Recommendations.* The final chapter presents the conclusion and recommendation. The chapter also puts forward some thoughts for future research.

2. BACKGROUND: ETHNIC GROUPS and HIGHER EDUCATION

The introductory chapter set out the general context of this thesis and its structure. This chapter discusses the two main concepts of this research, those of ethnicity and higher education. Prior to exploring what informs attainment, it is important to clarify for the reader the meaning of ethnicity and provide a "de-cluttering" of ethnic groups. Previous research suggests that one of the salient reasons why the issue of differential attainment has arisen is simply because of the different calibre of students, differences existing in numerous characteristics, from demographics to ability. Specifically this chapter discusses: ethnic minority groups in the UK; how the UK became a multi-cultural society; the monitoring and importance of accurately recording ethnicity for reliable statistics of related performance; and the extent to which there is integration of BME groups in the UK.

2.1 Concept of Ethnicity

This research focuses on specific BME groups within the UK population, namely the immigrants of the Windrush Generation (see Section 2.2) and other inward migration. Comparisons of academic success based on ethnic differences will be in accordance with the definition of "ethnicity" and the classification of people into different ethnic groups (Singh, 2010). Ethnicity has been defined by Bulmer (1996: 35) as:

> *"…a collectivity within a larger population having a real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and a cultural focus upon one or more symbolic elements which define the group's identity, such as kinship, religion, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance."*

Ethnicity is often a defining characteristic for the majority of individuals and is largely an observable one (Khattab et al., 2011). Individuals of a shared ethnicity are referred to as ethnic groups because they are often grouped or referred to in their entirety. Bulmer's (1996) definition refers to separate and distinct groups of people with much in common. Ethnicity has many constituent parts, namely nationality, geographical area, and religion, as well as the individual's acceptance and presentation of a particular

ethnic identity (Aldous, 2006). With increasing immigration, the level to which individuals abide by these common ethnic practices may be threatened or difficult to follow, because descending from a common geographical area does not result in groups of people who are identical or have many similarities. Furthermore, grouping individuals according to crude geographical definitions of ethnicity may not be a satisfactory classification because variations exist between persons within one area. A more useful perspective may be social capital.

Social capital highlights the importance of culture and social class factors that can affect the qualities individuals possess as part of their human capital resources, beyond their ethnic group (Coleman, 1988). Individuals of a shared ethnicity normally share a common culture; culture embraces a common language, shared norms and values, dress-code, diet and celebrations amongst numerous other aspects. However, again not all individuals of a shared ethnicity will abide or conform to these cultural beliefs equally. For instance, orthodox Sikhs can be observed wearing the traditional turban, not cutting their hair, and practising symbolic and regional traits; not all Sikhs abide to these norms, but still classify themselves as Sikhs. Ethnicity, although used for classification monitoring purposes, incorporates cultural commonality, and shared values and believes; although these are not followed equally (Aldous, 2006). Cultural beliefs, whether followed strictly or not, can be influential and impact a child's upbringing (Tassoni, 2007). Cultural beliefs include rules on interactions between specific groups, such as when the young interact with the older members of society. For example, eye contact is viewed as disrespectful in many Asian cultures; the significance of interaction will be discussed later in this research.

By examining BME participation rates in HE (see Chapter Four) it is possible to argue that specific cultures seem to place a greater emphasis on the value of education than others. Korean and Chinese young people do especially well in education because of their cultural beliefs and the emphasis placed on education by their parents, who are often of relatively low socio-economic status (Schneider and Lee, 1990; Caplan, Choy and Whitmore, 1991). Other aspects of culture also seem to contribute to educational success, such as family honour amongst many Asian communities (Dale, 2010). The assumption is that a child succeeding in education and consequently employment keeps the family in a relatively high status position of community standing (Blair and Qian, 1998). Lastly, culture can include behavioural traits that

constitute family roles as well as methods of communication and include values such as the relative importance of education for girls and boys (Nagel, 1994).

Table 2.1 highlights the relationship between the key areas of ethnicity, culture and race. As shown by Bornia (2006) each of the three has different characteristics, but the boundary between ethnicity and culture is porous. For example, a characteristic of ethnicity includes a shared history, whilst within culture there are shared traditions. Both ethnicity and culture are passed down from one generation to the next, and it may be possible for traditions to become part of a shared history.

Table 2.1: A Summary of Characteristics: Ethnicity, Culture and Race

	Characteristics	**Determined by**
Ethnicity	Refers to aspects of shared history, language and culture, a group identity defined from within.	Group identity, and social pressures from the group linked with a psychological need to belong.
Culture	Ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge, behaviour, attitude, and traditions shared by a group.	Social experiences and education through upbringing and choice.
Race	Visible physical appearance.	Genetic ancestry.

(Adapted from Bornia, 2006)

Given that the nature of these characteristics is inherent, it is logical that the various areas and regions of the world from which people emigrate and the cultures that they bring affect their behaviours in their new host country. The transportation of cultures extends to many aspects of their new lives, including education systems, and has an influence on their children's education/attainment (Aldous, 2006). Ethnicity is associated with race because individuals follow the culture of their genetic ancestry, demonstrating these characteristics are inter-connected (Aspinall, 2012). Some people treat race, ethnicity and nationality as part of the same domain, supporting Brubaker et al.'s (2004) position that they are best treated together.

2.2   Immigration

The UK has gone from being a mono-cultural society to a multi-racial and multi-cultural one, largely as a result of post-war immigration to Britain (Goodhart, 2013). The great migration from a diverse number of countries during the last third of the twentieth century has been one of the most striking developments of recent social history in the UK. Inward immigration has brought many new experiences both for the immigrants and the residents of the host society, notwithstanding that immigration settlers can be traced back a number of centuries, even to before the days of the Norman conquests.

Over the centuries, the UK has experienced several relatively small periods of immigration, when compared to the size of the population, such as Irish immigration in the UK. These periods of immigration were broadly 1851 to 1881 and 1951 to 1971; the former coincided with the period of the Irish Famine (Migration Watch UK, 2015). However, it was not until after the Second World War that this previous "trickle" of immigration became a large-scale flow. The first major wave of immigration was post-colonial, from 1948 to the early 1990s. British employers sought workers from the Caribbean and Africa, and from the Pakistan and Indian subcontinents, the groups which constitute my sample. Immigration increased from these countries throughout the 1950s and 1960s in order to help fill certain jobs. As workers from the host country occupied other roles, the roles filled by the migrants were mainly manual and unskilled. Although the immigration was largely for economic gain, some migrants came for education reasons. Together, the Home Office estimates that the period 1955 (following the British Nationality Act 1948) to 1962 accounted for approximately 472,000 migrants (Migration Watch UK, 2015).

The majority of new immigrants settled in industrial towns and cities where the job opportunities for unskilled work were the greatest, for example the foundries in the West Midlands and the mills in Lancashire (Goodhart, 2013). The Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962 and the Immigration Act 1971 were passed to restrict further numbers of immigrants, although family members of those already settled in the UK were allowed to come in.

The second main phase of immigration started with the Labour government in 1997 and continues to the present day, the source of immigrants being partly from the European Union (EU). The net

immigration of non-British citizens increased the population by four million 15 years (ONS, 2015). Since then, the Coalition government has attempted to reduce immigration; however, managing immigration has become more challenging as free movement within the EU has increased, and, most importantly in this case, the UK's HEIs are partly dependent on international students.

Coventry has a long history of immigration starting with the settlement of Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century. Similarly to the national pattern, there was larger scale immigration in the 1950s with the arrival of migrants from South Asia and the Caribbean (Nesbitt, 2000). Migration from these regions has since been steadily ongoing throughout the latter half of the twentieth century resulting in a well-established BME population in Coventry (Ward, 2008). In recent years, however, the nature of migration to Coventry has changed; a change partly due to a sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers to the UK towards the end of the 1990s and the arrival of accession state migrant workers as a result of EU expansion in 2004 (Ward, 2008).

2.3　Ethnic Groups in the UK

The ethnic make-up of the UK population aged 18–24 years, derived from the 2011 census, can be seen in Table 2.2. Justification for including solely the age range of 18–24 years being that the majority (~83%) of HE students in the UK falls into this age category. The following ethnic group classifications are used in ethnic monitoring forms for census collecting data; all ethnic group classifications are included for comparability purposes.

Table 2.2: Number of 18–24 Year Olds by Ethnicity 2011, England and Wales

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Source: 2011 – Office for National Statistics

Table 2.2 shows that within the age groups of 18–24 years, the ethnic groups of Asian/Asian British – Indian and Asian/Asian British – Pakistani are the largest ones, reflecting the general pattern that Asian/Asian British forms the largest ethnic group in the UK in 2011. Hence, it is possible to assume these ethnic groups would be more highly represented in HE than the other BME groups. British census estimates show that the British Asian community has increased to 2,799,700 including people of mixed White British and Asian descent. Overall, the percentage of ethnic minorities in the UK has increased between the time period of the 2001–2011 census. The purpose of this is to able to comment on the proportional representation of BME groups in HE, which is looked at in further detail in Chapter Four.

2.3.1   Ethnic Groups in Coventry

Table 2.3 shows the percentages of 18–19 year olds and 20–24 year olds by ethnicity in Coventry as reported in the census, 2011.

Table 2.3: Number of 18–24 Year Olds by Ethnicity 2011, Coventry

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Source: 2011 – Office for National Statistics

Comparing the percentages of 18–24 year olds, nationally and in Coventry, it can be seen that there is a much larger Asian/Asian British population in Coventry, particularly the Indian group; 9.2% in Coventry compared to 2.9% nationally. This might lead towards partially explaining the high numbers of Asian/Asian British – Indian students at Coventry University (see Section 4.3). The Asian/Asian British categories of Pakistani and Bangladeshi in Coventry are similarly represented nationally and in Coventry.

Black/Black British categories show smaller differences in percentages nationally and in Coventry. The percentage of the population identifying themselves as African stands at 4.3 per cent in Coventry, compared to 2.1 per cent nationally. The Caribbean population remain similarly represented in Coventry and nationally.

2.3.2   Monitoring Ethnic Diversity

One of the most marked changes in managing race equality in Britain has been the increase in ethnicity monitoring (Aspinall, 2012). In the mid-1990s this comprised simple surveys; however, as Jenkins (1996) argued, this classification is at the heart of modern bureaucratic strategies, social control and performance. Whilst monitoring ethnic diversity is not a legal requirement, the majority of institutions do monitor diversity in the light of the Equality Act 2010; an Act which lists certain characteristics as protected, including race, religion or belief, making it illegal to discriminate on these grounds (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2014). With the monitoring of these protected characteristics, it makes it easier for institutions to highlight differences between groups in terms of representation, needs and satisfaction.

The reporting of ethnic diversity is conducted through a systematic approach to monitoring for equal opportunity purposes, usually through the completion of a form at the point of application. More specifically, students applying from the UK to a UK HEI provide their ethnicity and other demographic characteristics through UCAS. However, the accuracy of the data is reliant on how individuals choose to classify themselves, for example Finney and Simpson (2009) reported that some Asian respondents had ticked "British" as it was the first box they had seen and wished to confirm their British nationality. Ethnic classifications additionally vary, which is demonstrated with an example. Table 2.4 showcases a sample of a monitoring diversity form used by Coventry University, whereas Tables 2.2 and 2.3 show classifications for ethnicity used by the UK government for collecting census data.

Table 2.4: An Example of Ethnic Group Classifications Used at Coventry University

C Asian/Asian British/Asian English/Asian Scottish/Asian Welsh	
	Asian
	Bangladeshi
	Any other Asian background (please specify)
D Black/Black British/Black English/Black Scottish/Black Welsh	
	Caribbean
	African
	Any other Black background (please specify)
E Chinese/Chinese British/Chinese English/Chinese Scottish/Chinese Welsh	
	Chinese

On comparing the tables, it can be seen that ethnic group classifications used for monitoring purposes vary. Tables 2.2 and 2.3 used for the collection of census data group Asians and those defining themselves as Asian British, presumably grouping Asians born overseas and in the UK. Table 2.4 similarly groups Asians and Asian British, but also allows an individual to define themselves as Asian English, Asian Scottish and Asian Welsh, although this distinction is not recorded.. Furthermore, in Tables 2.2 and 2.3 the ethnic group Chinese is incorporated within the Asian classification, whereas Table 2.4 classifies the Chinese a standalone category. The purpose of comparing two separate ethnic diversity forms highlights that there is no uniform way of defining ethnicity and inaccurate recording of ethnicity can occur.

The differing classification systems have implications for researchers. If ethnic monitoring is inaccurate or inconsistent, it is not possible to accurately report differential educational attainment, or any other issue on the basis of ethnicity. The majority of students are not reluctant to complete diversity monitoring forms; several did mention a lack of categories specified for them. Further differences exist between ethnic group classifications, as the above differ from those used by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). HESA, similarly to the UK Government Census classifications, includes the ethnic group Chinese within the classification of Asian and Asian British; however, in the Coventry University

classifications Chinese is not included within Asian or Asian British, possibly because many Chinese people would not describe themselves as such.

Terms such as a "British Asian" may be misunderstood. For example, people may be unsure as to whether the term includes all Indian, Bangladeshi and even Chinese British citizens born in the country of residence. Or whether the term refers to their current nationality. It is taken this category includes Indians, who are relatively highly successful and well represented in HE, and also Bangladeshis, who are less well represented in HE with lower success levels (Singh, 2010). In fact, the term "British Asian" incorporates immigrants or their descendants from South Asia or the Indian subcontinent only (Finney and Simpson, 2009). Some members of minority groups have argued that the terminology is too broad and/or opaque to have traction. For example, there are marked structural differences between Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Also, with the changing social climate, third generation Asians are choosing to define themselves adversely.

The importance of accurate ethnic minority monitoring in HE is demonstrated by Jones and Elias (2005) who studied the participation of ethnic minorities in science and found that whilst Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi communities are least well represented in Science, Technology and Engineering in HE, (hereafter STE), Black Africans are well represented in STE. Although it is a singular study, it does provide substance to the argument that accurate definitions and classifications are needed for ethnic groupings so that a clearer understanding can be provided. Thus, a broad "Black" or "Asian" category is insufficient to capture useful data accurately. Drawing insight from Jones and Elias (2005), amongst Asian groups, the Indian population is well represented in STE, whilst the opposite is true for the Bangladeshi population.

Detailed and correct categorisation is important for accuracy, particularly when reporting performance in relation to ethnic categories; individuals may be recording their diversity differently across institutions, crossing classifications because the boundaries have changed, leading to confusion and unreliability of data. A universal comprehensive ethnic monitoring system could avoid this and some have called for a universal classification system with detailed explanations of what each distinct category incorporates, or an 'open response' (Aspinall, 2012). Open response meaning each individual chooses to record their own ethnicity intrinsically allowing for self-identity, rather than being provided with options

(ONS, 2011). Categories should be used that match respondents' own preferred ethnic descriptions (ONS, 2003: 11). Therefore, before comparisons can be made between ethic attainments, there is a need to ensure that ethnicity is defined accurately at the granular level. Aspinall (2012) contended that it is imperative to remember, though, that census classifications cannot capture the full ethnic diversity of Britain, particularly in the light of population mixing, defined as the movement and migration of individuals across many societies. Furthermore Singh and Cousin (2009) caution that 'categories' do not tell us anything about the experience of the individuals and it is understanding the individuals that is significant for improving educational attainment.

2.4   Integration

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the notion of immigration and later the ethnic group classifications and the issues associated with them. I now turn my attention to a discussion of cultural integration. This topic of discussion is important in the context of this research because it helps to provide an understanding of the degree to which cultures have integrated into the country of immigration, or host society, in which they now participate in terms of education and employment. The present assumption is that integration influences participation and attainment in these areas. Integration, being an abstract concept, is difficult to measure or define; however, in this case integration is taken as becoming part of British everyday life and conversation of the residential area, even country, where one lives (Goodhart, 2013).

The original, or first generation of, commonwealth immigrants integrated relatively quickly into their industrial urban lives and made a powerful impact on British popular culture (Drayton)[1]; as a result of this, Britain was transformed into a multi-cultural nation. Not only did the immigrants look different and dress differently, they followed different norms and shared different values from those of mainstream Britain. They set up shops, partially to meet their own community's requirements, and so indirectly reviving the culture of the British corner-shop, visible in Coventry. Due to their differences they were sometimes confronted by racism from the dominant indigenous White British population. This racism could be in the form of

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[1] Author of this work is Richard Drayton, Caribbean and South Asian Migration to the United Kingdom since 1945, precise details and source unknown.

harassment, violence or discrimination, in employment, in education, or more generally through fear on the streets, disrespect in the labour market and the condescension of the education system (Drayton)[2.] In educational terms, ethnic minority children of migrants were often placed into lower educational streams, normally because of their language difficulties rather than their academic ability (Verhoeven, 1987).

In Coventry, like other towns and cities which received immigrants, the immigrants settled in specific areas that were normally economically based. In Coventry large numbers of commonwealth immigrants settled in certain wards, mainly those north of the City Centre, in particular the Foleshill area (Nesbitt, 2000). It is in this area that most of the specifically Asian retail businesses were first located and still exist, as are places of worship. In 1963 the Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara in Harnall Lane West and the Ramgarhia Sikh Temple in Foleshill Road were established. A viable reason for immigrants settling in specific areas of a town/city was because of relatively cheaper housing; however, with the progression of time, financial changes and aspirations, groups of immigrants moved out to more desirable areas with new immigrants occupying these lower cost housing. This social engineering can be witnessed in other towns that attracted immigrants.

The relatively larger Indian population in Coventry, on the face of it, appear well integrated. By the end of 1980s with Indian Sikhs assuming a higher profile, the city's Sikh presence was more widely acknowledged. In 1991, for the first time, illuminations were put up by the city council along the Foleshill Road to mark a Sikh religious anniversary. In 1999, celebration of the tercentenary of the founding of the Khalsa (the community of initiated Sikhs) included a two-day festival in Coventry's Memorial Park (Nesbitt, 2000).

BME groups may appear integrated but it is difficult to state with certainty whether integration has fully occurred. Full integration depends in part on the willingness and beliefs of the BME communities and acceptance by those in the host country. To a large degree, based from perceptions of the media, some minority communities live in the same neighbourhoods quite unselfconsciously. Whereas in some former industrial mill towns in the north of England a high degree of segregation, chosen by both sides, is visible

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[2] Author of this work is Richard Drayton, Caribbean and South Asian Migration to the United Kingdom since 1945, precise details and source unknown.

(Goodhart, 2013). Segregated BME groups display stronger values to their original culture and a conformance towards traditions. Many of the first Indians to arrive are well integrated, following British norms and values and defining themselves as British. It is usually the more successful minority groups that have become more integrated. However, integration does not need to be absolute. British Indian Sikhs tend to be quite residentially segregated but integrated at work, thus not jeopardising their life chances (Goodhart, 2013).

Although there is little doubt that a great degree of integration has taken place, there is still nevertheless, to some degree, prima facie racism. This is evidenced by the increased membership of particular political parties and individual policies. For example, the British National Party (BNP) was on the fringes of British politics but gained prominence in the European and local government elections in 2010. Factors cited in the rise of the BNP included the continuation of European immigration to the UK from the 1990s to the present day. Whilst the share of the vote for the BNP is now negligible there has been the growth of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) with its narrow focus of stemming immigration from the EU and elsewhere. Thus, it can be reasonably argued that discrimination and discussion around the subject have become more discreet, rather than being overt. For example, signs displaying "No Blacks" in guest houses in the late 1960s demonstrating direct discrimination have disappeared; however, some would argue indirect discrimination is more apparent, operating through institutional policies and practices. As will be evidenced later in this thesis, an identified antecedent of differential results is the culture of the HE institution. Anecdotally at least, this raises the question as to whether universities, through their policies and practices, are indirectly disadvantaging BME students.

If BME students are facing racism, the impact can be profound because it affects individual life chances, even affecting whole communities. Some evidence of racism can be seen through unemployment figures in the UK. Between 2012 and 2013, unemployment figures remained constant for White ethnic groups at 8% and 7% respectively; meanwhile, amongst ethnic minority groups the figures rose from 13% to 14%. The rise was particularly noticeable amongst Black ethnic minorities (up from 16% to 17%) and Pakistani/Bangladeshi ethnic groups (from 17% to 19%) (Chalabi, 2014).

Since the post-colonial immigration of the 1960s, Britain has developed race relations legislation to provide equality, equal opportunities, and rights and equal access to public resources. Equality does, however, have a 'felt' as well as a formal dimension (Goodhart, 2013). All UK institutions, including educational ones, are required to have their own statutory policies ensuring equality of opportunity for all on various grounds, including race and ethnicity. During the 1990s, a considerable debate on the topic of differential educational attainment of ethnic groups emerged, along with the recording and monitoring of ethnicities. It was hoped that this would assist all institutions to become internally aware of diversity. Much of the debate on differential educational attainment at that time focused on the 'school effect' (Smith and Tomlinson, 1989; Foster, 1990) because there were increasing numbers of BME HE graduates, with differences in degree attainment first becoming noted, thus helping to fuel the HE differential attainment debate.

With the election of Barack Obama, the first Black president of the US, many believed it to be the beginning of a post-racial society (Walker, 2014), that is society going beyond racial preference, discrimination and prejudice. Whilst little research has been conducted into post-racialism and HE, that which has been undertaken challenges the view that either race or racism has been transcended. Research with Black students in HE evidenced that not only was race an integral part of their conceptualisation of the world to the extent that they could not detach from it, but that their everyday experience rendered it impossible to do so, either physically or mentally, with both White and Black students consistently reporting that Black students seemed to be being neglected by their tutors (Trice, 2012).

2.4.1 Fitting in/Assimilation

An additional concept to integration is assimilation, defined as the process where minorities have abandoned their own identities and traditions or cultures whilst becoming dispersed into British society (Bauer et al., 2001). The Irish community are generally viewed as assimilated, having largely shed their ethnic culture completely. Whether assimilation is necessary to succeed is discussed in Chapter Seven. It is generally believed that any lack of assimilation can result in communities becoming isolated (Bauer et al., 2001).

Not all ethnic groups settle easily into a new country or equally well within the dominant culture of their chosen country of migration. This is evidenced by the immigration of the ethnic group of Somalians, as reported in BBC documentary *Gain or Drain?* (2014), who wish to preserve their culture and, as a consequence, some in their local host community believe they fail to integrate/assimilate. Compatibility between ancestral values and the dominant value orientations of the society in which the immigrant resides may not be congruent, or it could lead to conflict which might affect employment and education opportunities (Ogbu, 1993). However, again as with the case for integration, the process of assimilation need not be absolute. Ogbu (1993) adduced that the minorities who do relatively well are actually those closest to their ancestral practice in socialisation. For example, immigrant Blacks from Africa and the Caribbean are more likely to succeed than African- Americans born in the US, when moving to a new country. Thus, it can be derived that differences in minority status play a part in explaining differential achievement and have implications for cognitive and academic behaviours. The status of voluntary or involuntary minorities is important and thus is explored in the next section.

The preceding sections highlight that it can be difficult to classify individuals into consistent ethnic groups, the host society having created definitions for them and put in place practices to avoid being discriminatory. On the contrary, effort is also required on the part of those who form ethnic groups to integrate, or assimilate, exhibiting a complex relationship. Despite efforts by some BME groups to integrate and assimilate, one finding persistently appears: that of differential academic attainment.

2.4.2 Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities

Based on the migration status of individuals, Ogbu (1993) adduced a classification, namely that migrants are either voluntary minorities or involuntary minorities. Voluntary minorities are people who have moved 'voluntarily' believing that immigration would lead to more economic well-being with greater opportunities, for example, those from the Indian subcontinent who migrated to the UK during the 1950s and 1960s. Initially, they may occupy the lowest rung of the social class/occupational ladder, filling jobs that the indigenous population believed to be demeaning, and lack political power and prestige. However, this objective position does not reflect their entire status because subjectively these immigrants may not see their position in the same way as those belonging to the dominant culture of the host country. They may

not comprehend the invidious definitions their hosts attach to their positions, both economically and socially, or may just choose to ignore them as their now menial positions are superior to their prior positions in their home country. Ogbu (1993) contended that as 'strangers' they can operate psychologically outside the established definitions of social status and relations. Furthermore, they may experience discrimination and pillory but do not have the time to internalise their meanings or the effects of such treatment. The voluntary immigrant's reference groups are not the high achievers within the dominant group but their peers "back home". This is evidenced in UK universities. The first generation born in the UK attended relatively less prestigious universities and polytechnics, but their families gained prestige both in the UK and in their homeland because their child had achieved a university degree, thus demonstrating evidence of their own self-improvement and greater prospects for their children (Goodhart, 2013). Ogbu concluded that their voluntary status is usually motivated by a desire to succeed and accumulate wealth, not a desire to compete for equal status with the elite members of the host society.

The second classification Ogbu (1993) proposed was involuntary minorities. These are those individuals who were brought into any other country and its society, a historical example being slavery in the US or forced labour, or the children of immigrants, the second generation born in the host country. Members of this group do not always believe that the host country offers opportunity. Unlike the voluntary minorities, they lack the positive dual frame of reference because they do not have "homeland peers" to compare themselves to. The only comparisons they make are to the main dominant group of their country of residence and view themselves as disadvantaged. These attitudes of the involuntary immigrants can be seen amongst some first and second generation Black groups, both in the UK and US education system as portrayed in the media, who feel it was not their choice to be here, have small chances of success and that the dominant country's climate is working against them.

2.4.3 Cultural Differences

To understand further why "voluntary and involuntary" immigrant groups perform differently Ogbu (1993) looked deeper into the cultural differences which exist between them. He believed some cultural differences are universal in the sense that every child makes a transition from their home culture to the culture of the educational system, regardless of social class or ethnicity. This transition involves adjusting

to new behavioural norms, social settings, new language and ways of communicating, as well as to new styles of thinking (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz, 1979). It is generally believed that the greater the congruence between a student's home and campus cultures the more likely a student is to persist in HE (Museus, 2007). Additionally, as will be demonstrated later in this research, there is evidence to support the supposition that where communication and language used at home is closer to that of the educational institute, and in cases where the mother has a strong educational background, the higher the educational performance (Rothon, 2008).

Each BME group undoubtedly has its own culture and identity – ways of thinking, behaving, values, norms and beliefs – before entering the education system controlled by another population of their host country. So why are some BMEs outperforming others, and why are some groups better able to function and achieve in the host country? In dealing with the aforementioned questions, Gibson (1988) provided an example from his research of the Indian Punjabis in Valleyside, California. In India, prior to emigrating, Punjabi Sikhs followed strong traditions – wore turbans, had arranged marriages and practised many Sikh beliefs. In California they still maintain these beliefs and practices but also attempt to learn and internalise aspects of their new culture that they believe are needed in order to enhance their chances of success, that is achieve the goals for which they emigrated. Hence, their cultural frame of reference permits them to cross cultural and language boundaries. As Gibson postulated, they do not perceive or interpret learning selected aspects of the American culture as a threat to their cultural identity.

From personal observation and participating within the UK's Sikh community, this pattern can be witnessed. Many other Indian sub-cultures still maintain strong identities/strong communities with some "ambitious" sub-groups who learn, accept and internalise the British culture, to a certain degree (route to success) to perform better and improve their life chances. The reverse also holds true; those groups that do not accept the new culture perform less well. For example, amongst the Kashmiri Pakistanis, many abide completely by their homeland culture without internalising any aspect of the culture of their host country, the UK, resulting in limited progression economically or socially in the UK (Goodhart, 2013).

Taken together, those who hold their different cultural attributes prior to coming into contact with institutions controlled by the dominant group in the host country, as in, they operate within a cultural

framework of reference that existed before emigration, do not see it as oppositional but as a need to internalise the aspects of the dominant culture, which will enable them to succeed. Those immigrants who succeed consider not knowing how to behave or participate in their new country of residence as a barrier to overcome; such behaviours enhance their attainment, without fear of losing their own culture.

The final type of cultural difference that Ogbu (1993) identified is what he refers to as secondary cultural differences. These differences arise not because an immigrant group's culture lacks content but because there are qualitative differences resulting from the nature of the relationship between the dominant and the minority's culture. Differences between the cultures most probably arose after the two groups came into continuous contact with the corollary of keeping the minority group in a subordinate position. As a consequence, the minority group put in place strategies and behaviours as part of a coping mechanism, which often become a part of boundary-maintaining, such as alternative norms. For this reason these minorities may have little or no desire to overcome the cultural differences as it would threaten their identity. Therefore, those with secondary cultural differences have a cultural framework of reference, but it is in opposition to that of the dominant culture because it was developed in the context of conflict, its purpose being to protect collective identity. This would not enable these individuals to achieve highly educationally or occupationally in their new society.

Whilst there is little doubt that cultural differences exist, the difference can in some groups lead to cultural inversion, resulting in a regressive form of cultural development. Cultural inversion is discussed in the following section given the prevalent role it can play amongst some in certain ethnic groups (Bhopal, 2014).

2.4.4 Cultural Inversion

As intimated at the end of the previous section, one aspect of the oppositional cultural frame is "culture inversion". Cultural inversion refers to the various ways in which minorities express their opposition to the culture of their host society, through actions such as specific language, forms of behaviour, and even symbols (Dalby, 1972). The assumption at this stage being that cultural inversion could be preventing high educational attainment.

In demonstrating cultural inversion, Holt (1972) researched the use of words, in particular "nigger or negro". When either of the words is used by Whites in America to refer to African-Americans, it has a negative connotation because of historical reasons, but when used by African-Americans towards each other, can mean a term of endearment. Other "White behaviours" are also avoided, for example, being on time, which is a behaviour that may continue into adulthood, and the use of "proper" English is not regarded as part of the Black culture. Although partially tangential to the preceding point, another reason why some students may not achieve academically or in any other way is because 'crossing the cultural boundary' is seen as a threat to their sense of social identity and as inappropriate behaviour by other members of their ethnic group. Others have referred to these types of invasive behaviours as defensive behaviours (Crozier in Bhopal and Maylor, 2014).

Contrastingly, many first generation immigrants are of the view that they are treated better within the UK education system. For most, education is of a higher standard compared to their country of origin; it is free at the point of consumption and resources are supplied. As Gibson (1983) contended, even when some groups of immigrants experience prejudice and discrimination, as was the case for Punjabi Indians in California (see Section 2.4.3), they rationalised it with the belief that they were guests in a foreign country and must tolerate it. Gibson (1983: 149) commented:

> *"Punjabis rarely blame the educational system, or teachers, for a child's difficulties. Responsibility for learning rests, in the Punjabi view, with the individual. Punjabis are not naive about institutional and social barriers to success. They simply persevere, seeking ways to overcome obstacles in their path. Punjabi children are taught to do their best and to hold themselves accountable for their failure. If children fool around, squandering educational opportunities, they bear the consequence."*

The above examples of Black students and Sikh students demonstrate how the different cultures react to the host culture, one group reacting with their alternative behaviours resisting to be integrated, blaming the system, whilst the other group conform and adduce responsibility upon themselves. Emanating from the Sikh students' example that Gibson (1983) provided is the notion that internalisation is an important aspect for success or failure. Thus, those groups who succeed academically and subsequently occupationally can be said to accept, internalise and follow rules, acquiring job-related skills and proficiency in the language, yet remaining close to their heritage/ethnicity. Furthermore the students of Sikh ethnicity

were told to succeed; they appeared to follow the advice of parents, teachers and other educational personnel for academic success (Gibson, 1988).

2.4.5 Conclusion

It is difficult to predict which BME groups will perform better and the reasons for this are complicated and multi-fold. The evidence does indicate that a degree of integration into the host country is required, along with some assimilation. Some aspects of the new culture must be internalised at the cost of original culture; however, remaining close, loyal and respectful to the culture of socialisation. Whilst some BME groups appear to manage these concepts of integration and assimilation, other groups find it more difficult and appear not to "bother", or put in alternative methods of coping. How these concepts and minority statuses can affect academic attainment and behaviour will be discussed throughout this research. Next, the higher education system in which increasing numbers of BME students are partaking but not attaining as highly as their White counterparts is discussed.

2.5   What is Higher Education?

Prior to the discussion of HE, it is worth outlining the structure of secondary education in the UK given that this leads to access to HE. On completing compulsory education, students in the UK take GCSE examinations and progress to further education (hereafter FE). Generally, FE incorporates all non-advanced courses taken after the period of compulsory education (Department of Education, 2015) and are offered at sixth form colleges, FE colleges or within schools. FE education is post-compulsory and can be at any level from basic skills training to A-level (referred to Level 3). Attainment at level 3 usually determines access to HE; all UK HEIs accept A-levels completed at level 3, with some accepting vocational qualifications. Vocational qualifications are work-related courses designed to accommodate the needs of employers. After level 3, students in the UK can access HE, usually through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (hereafter UCAS), with the level 3 qualification being awarded tariff points. The UCAS tariff allows applicants to HEIs to see whether their achievements meet the qualification requirements for a particular course (UCAS, 2015).

Higher education in England is optional education and according to the funding agency (HEFCE, 2015) for English HE, the purposes of HE are to:

- Enable people to develop their capabilities and fulfil their potential, both personally and at work.

- Advance knowledge and understanding through teaching and research.

- Contribute to an economically successful and culturally diverse nation.

HE is provided by many different types of institutions, discussed in the following sections. The provision of HE aims to make a valuable contribution to the UK's economic and social development, allowing individual success and better futures (HEFCE, 2015). UK universities offer a range of courses and qualifications with the most common being first degree courses, also known as Bachelor's degrees, that normally take three years to complete, when studied full-time. First degrees are sometimes offered as a sandwich course, which comprises one additional year of a work placement. Attainment is measured as first class degree, upper second (or 2:1), lower second (or 2:2), third, pass or fail. Other qualifications offered in HEIs in the UK include the Foundation Degree, Higher National Diplomas (hereafter HND) and post-graduate courses.

Over the years the UK's higher education sector has been through a number of structural changes which were largely designed to increase participation rates, whilst at the same time ensuring that the provision remained affordable for the state and students. The sector has grown to one where nearly half of all those in the 18–21 year group participate, and it is expected that this will increase as the UK's population increases. In addition to the expanding participation amongst UK-domiciled students, there are also international developments that need to be taken into consideration. Prior to looking at changes in HE it would be beneficial to outline the structure of the UK educational system, for the reader. The following sections track these changes and their impact.

2.5.1   The Robbins Report

The watershed moment was the Robbins Report in 1963, which was the first to recommend a set of changes to the UK higher education sector. The purpose of the recommendations was to expand the

number of places so that the UK could compete globally in terms of making sure that its population was adequately qualified. The fundamental purpose of the Robbins Report was to move the sector away from one that was perceived as being elitist to one that was more inclusive. The Robbins review predicated that by 1980, ~350,000 students would be enrolled on a university course, but the reality was that twice as many were enrolled.

To increase numbers, a fundamental outcome of the Robbins Report was the creation of seventeen new "glass-plated" universities such as Warwick, Sussex, York and others which were designed to be contemporary, in their architecture and outlook. In addition to the creation of new universities, there were the Colleges of Advanced Technology that were given university status, which had the immediate effect of re-classifying those students into higher education. The creation of the new universities and re-classification resulted in 48 universities in the UK.

As well as the creation of new universities, another consequence of the Robbins Report was the establishment of polytechnics during the 1960s with their focus on vocational type courses. The degree awards were validated by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), whilst sub-degrees were validated by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC). It was intended that there should be a distinction between the traditional and newly created universities of the 1960s and the newly constituted polytechnics. This distinction became known as the "binary divide". The traditional and newly created universities of the 1960s would be research-intensive, whilst the polytechnics would be vocationally orientated.

2.5.2 Further Education and Higher Education Act 1992

Through the 1970s and 1980s there were tweaks to the funding model but the next major change did not take place until 1992. The 1992 Further Education and Higher Education Act resulted in the former polytechnics gaining university status with their own degree-awarding powers. The outcome of this was that a greater number of students were now classified as studying in a university, and thus at the time it resulted in ~20% of 18–19 year olds entering HE.

As mention earlier, up to this point there was a distinction between the various types of institution, those being universities, polytechnics and teacher training colleges. Although, at a later stage, the teacher training colleges tended to become part of a larger faculty, within a university. Furthermore, some of the traditional teacher training colleges such as Edge Hill expanded their course offerings.

2.5.3 The Browne Review

Between the Further Education and Higher Education Act 1992 and the Browne Review in 2009, some structural changes had occurred in the HE sector. These largely revolved around the funding models alongside fees, coupled with the desire to increase participation rates to nearer 50%, as stated in the 1997 Labour Party election manifesto.

The Browne Review of 2009 was a comprehensive review of the affordability of running an expanded HE sector and whether the UK sector was sustainable, despite the increase in tuition fees to £3,000 in 2006. The recommendation of the review was that a maximum fee of £9,000 should be set to provide the extra funding for the sector, with universities free to charge up to this. The outcome of the new fee structure was little variation in fees between the HE providers. Whilst there was scope for universities to charge a fee up to £9,000, the fee structure resulted in most charging near the maximum of £9,000 per year tuition fee.

Once the recommendations from the Browne Review were presented, two schools of thought emerged. One school presented the argument that the proposed fee structure did not go far enough. This discussion was often led by the Russell Group universities, a group of universities with an emphasis on research. The other discussion, led by the National Union of Students, proposed that the new fee structure would deter potential students from entering HE. However, as UCAS applications data shows, by 2015 applicants were at a level prior to the increase in tuition fees to £9,000.

In addition to the Browne Review, there was an announcement in September 2013 that resulted in removing the recruitment cap from 2015 in terms of the number of students a university could recruit. This means that universities are now in a more competitive market and, because they and competitors, are able to recruit as many students as they wish for their courses, whereas prior to this they were constrained by

their HEFCE funding contract, although "trading up" could happen if students achieved better than expected A-level results.

Taken together, the various changes have resulted in the sector expanding significantly, via the re-classification of institutions and the participation rates increasing. At the time the changes were introduced, it had been assumed that at each stage there would be a reduction in those entering HE. However, the changes seem to have had little effect in terms of participation rates (see Chapter Four). Indeed, despite the pause in 2012 when the new £9,000 fee regime was introduced, year-on-year there has been an increase in applicants with applications comparable with a rate prior to 2012 (see UCAS). Based on the rise in the UK population, it is entirely reasonable to assume that demand will continue to expand, the exact pattern depending on the structure and demographics of the population.

2.5.4   Profile of Applicants

Whilst the HE sector has altered and there has been an increase in those applying for a university place, the profile of the applicants has changed. Prior to the Robbins Report in 1963, it is fair to assume that applicants and those gaining a place were predominantly White Males, who in due course would enter one of the professions or other "high" profile career.

As mentioned in Section 2.3, approximately 86% of the population classify themselves as White and therefore if all other factors were equal it would be expected that applicants would also conform to such a pattern. However, for 2014 entry to HE via UCAS, only 75% of UK- domiciled applicants fell into the White ethnic category, whilst in 2006 this was 79%. Whilst applicants from the White ethnic group have reduced, applicants from the group classifying themselves as Asian have remained stable, and applicants from the ethnic group Black have increased from 5.5% to 8.1%.

2.5.5   Overseas Partner Colleges

In addition to their established UK operations, universities are increasingly taking their offering to overseas markets, thus negating the need for students to come to the UK for their degree course. HESA

(2014) reported that there are approximately 600,000 students studying overseas for a UK-based degree course. Those students are based at partner institutions with Asia accounting for a third of all students.

In recent years, because of the locally attractive taxation benefits and other factors, there has been an expansion in the number of UK universities with overseas campuses. For example, there are currently branch campuses in the Far East and Middle East. Expansion in these areas is likely to continue. As an example of this likely expansion, the stated strategic objective of the Malaysia government is to attract 200,000 students to the region.

HESA data from 2014 shows that the Far East (China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore) accounts for approximately a third of all overseas provision, with students studying wholly overseas for their award. The development of overseas partnerships and campuses has two main impacts. Firstly, it has enabled students to access courses which tend to be of a lower cost than if studying in the UK, and secondly, it might have had the effect of inward immigration of students.

2.5.6   Overseas Students in UK

Overseas students are increasingly more visible around university campuses in the UK, although it was not until 1980 that the UK started to charge overseas students the full cost of their education. Until 1980, the fee for UK and overseas (with subsidies) students had been the same. It may be that universities are welcoming increasing numbers of overseas students due to the higher rate fees they pay, particularly in light of the marketisation of HE. The 2015 HESA statistics reveal that during the 2013/14 academic year there were 435,000 non-UK-domiciled students in UK HEIs. The largest group came from Asia, representing 44% of all those from outside of the UK studying in the UK, with the next largest group being "Other European" at 29%.

Despite the expansion of overseas students in the UK in recent years, it has been against a backdrop where the value of the pound sterling has made it less attractive. For example, because of currency fluctuations in recent times, it became 15% more expensive for Indian students to study in the UK. In addition to currency movements, the government has put in place immigration policies that restrict the ability for non-EU students to remain in the country after graduation.

2.5.7　Summary

Since the early recommendations of the Robbins Report in 1963, the UK HE sector has moved from one of elite participation to one which is more inclusive, albeit if the student meets the entry criteria. At the current time, 2014–15, the sector has more than two million students (HESA), with almost 50% of the UK's young population participating. In recent times there has been the emergence of "for-profit" universities, which has increased capacity.

In conjunction with expansion in the UK, there has been the increase in overseas activities with students both coming to the UK to study as well as following a course at an overseas branch campus or partner institutions.

Higher education universities in England are internationalised in the twenty-first century. They are characterised by ethnic and cultural diversity (Caruana, 2014) making it imperative that interculturalisation is understood when delivering a learning experience that prepares young people for living and working in a global world. The diversity of the student body in universities is providing a rich source of lived experience in multiculturalism.

2.6　Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the background concepts of this research, that of ethnicity and higher education. The literature demonstrates the various meanings of ethnicity and the complexity of becoming part of a new host society, and has ascertained that the BME population has increased and is predicted to continue to increase. Simultaneously the number of BME students in UK HEIs has also increased (see Chapter Four), hence the need to look at their performance in HE. This chapter also reveals why and how the UK HE system has changed from being elitist to one which represents the majority of groups in society.

Adding to the work presented in this chapter, the next chapter examines the literature dealing with BME attainment in education, particularly in the HE sector.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW: EXISTING EXPLANATIONS FOR DIFFERENTIAL ATTAINMENT

The previous chapter dealt with the concept of ethnicity and the structure and changes within the UK's HE sector. This chapter turns its attention to the literature pertinent to the field of BME attainment. The BME attainment, gap at HE level, is a relatively new research area when compared to the research field of attainment at school level, as Singh (2011) notes the cause for this statistically significant attainment gap is yet to be fully understood. For this reason I include some school and further education literature as much can be learned from their successes in reducing the attainment differences in terms of ethnicity. The purpose of the literature review was foremost to inform myself of existing research and explanations in the field of differential attainment at HE level. With the knowledge of where, when and how prior research was conducted, I was able to locate/ground my research in the wider landscape of research on attainment and identify gaps in its understanding.

After completing a thorough and comprehensive search using databases available at Coventry University, the most suitable articles were selected by reading the abstracts that were relevant and supported with reliable research. In terms of dates, I did not set parameters, retrieving articles related/linked to BME HE attainment as they appeared. I did note a greater abundance of literature in the field between 2000 and 2011.

I reviewed existing theories and explanations given for the gap in degree attainment between BME and White students and, in conjunction, examined national statistical data. I grouped the theories and existing explanations into broad theoretical perspectives, these being individual level and structural level explanations. The remainder of this chapter is structured in accordance with these two categories. I do not claim to have covered the whole range of influencing factors; however, a wide range was considered. Some personal judgement was involved, as with any selection process, but I attempted to keep an impartial, open mind and cover a wide range of theories and explanations.

Initially Section 3.1 debates whether simply belonging to a BME category, the status of immigration and studying in a country other than one's home country or country of origin is causing some differential attainment. I then move on to examining individual level explanations, followed by structural level explanations, and latterly I discuss concerns/gaps within the research field.

3.1   Individual Level Explanations

It could be argued that attainment is the individual's own responsibility; the individual student needs to exert effort and commitment towards their studies. As individuals, however, we live within our families, peers, culture and surrounding environment, which together influence individual academic attainment, in addition to affecting many other aspects of our lives.

The individual under consideration in this research is the BME student; as the abbreviation suggests, he or she belongs to a minority group and is participating in HE in a different country from that of their ethnic origin. The BME student has "arrived" in the UK. This initial difference, which is their immigration status, when compared to White students could first and foremost be influencing their academic attainment. Minority status and cultural frames of reference were explored in Section 2.4.2. According to Ogbu (1993) these two factors can affect cognitive and academic behaviours of minorities. On the one hand Ogbu believes that the host society and its education institutes can contribute to the low cognitive and academic performance of immigrants; on the other hand, the lower achievement of immigrants may be due to how they respond to their treatment. As discussed previously, voluntary and involuntary immigrants respond differently to discrimination, with voluntary minorities responding in a way that does not discourage them from hard work and examination success, aware of the fact they are better off than if they had remained "back home" in their country of origin. They may interpret discrimination as justifiable, due to factors such as not having a comprehensive command of the local language well or lack of education. Therefore, these minorities tend to believe that education offers the best route to success.

Involuntary minorities do not have a positive dual of reference to compare themselves to; they perceive their position to be "worse" compared to the people in the dominant culture and see themselves in a situation they cannot escape. Discrimination against them is interpreted as permanent and

institutionalised. However, all immigrants, irrespective of whether they view themselves as involuntary or not, have the same paradoxical situation as that of other minorities. They are aware that to get ahead one needs a good education and to abide by the new country's values, but they do not see this as achievable in terms of chances available to them (Ogbu, 1993).

Simply being a BME student along with immigration status, as Ogbu believes, are considered to be influential on attainment. Connor et al.'s (2004) research found clear evidence that there is a difference in academic attainment between BME and White students. They attributed a range of factors as influential on BME attainment in the UK HE system, mainly individual attributes including student aspirations and expectations, and the perceived value of HE. However, these individual attributes are undoubtedly shaped by external societal factors, such as smaller communities, experiences and immigration status. Connor et al. called for a need to better understand the influences on attainment and the reasons why higher participation rates exist amongst BME groups.

3.1.1   Socio-economic Classification

Socio-economic classification (hereafter SEC) is defined as the sociological and economic measure of the household in relation to others (ONS, 2014). Many studies have linked students' SEC to academic achievement (Owen et al., 2000; Johnson et al., 2001; Rothon, 2007). The current system used by the UK government, the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification[3], is commonly measured by the Household Reference Person (hereafter HRP). HRP is the person responsible for the household accommodation that determines the SEC, of the family or household. The widespread belief being that the higher the family's SEC the greater the interest in education and achievement, with the parents more able to invest better quality social capital, increasing their children's chances of success (Bourdieu, 1984; Owen et al., 2000; Connor et al., 2004; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Rothon, 2007). Therefore, those students

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[3] The National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) replaced both SC and SEG. The two socio-economic classifications were widely used in the UK in official statistics and academic research: Social Class based on Occupation (SC, formerly Registrar General's Social Class) and Socio-economic Groups (SEG).

from higher SECs attain more highly in terms of education at all levels: primary, secondary and post-secondary. Thus, intrinsically, success becomes inter-generational.

For example, extensive research on the educational experience of Latino students in the USA has concentrated on their personal and background characteristics (Hernandaz et al., 1994; Savage and Egerton, 1997; King, 2003). This research concluded that it is the lack of financial resources amongst these Latino families that is the most profound factor affecting the students' educational opportunities and attainment. Had these Latino students and their families possessed more money, lived in improved conditions and belonged to a higher socio-economic group, their academic attainment could have been improved (Hernandaz et al., 1994; King, 2003). More recent research amongst Latinos still shows that these BME students continue to struggle to achieve equal attainment (Marin, 2012) indicating that their under-attainment is contingent on lacking the dominant forms of cultural capital and that their habitus is at odds with the prevailing habitus of the institution. "Habitus" is defined as the cognitive structure of an individual which determines how we see external structures; habitus consist of beliefs, interests and our understanding of the world around us as created by family and culture (Bourdieu, 1984).

Although these studies were conducted in the USA they demonstrate that SEC and background play an important part in determining attainment. Likewise in the UK, background, in particular deprivation and financial resources, has been reported as attributable to attainment (Owen et al., 2000; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007). Owen et al. (2000), similarly to Hernandaz et al. (1994) and King (2003), contend that the position held in the SEC system was influential, more specifically that those students with fathers in non-manual jobs with higher incomes achieved higher academically.

It is widely known from media coverage that those in the lower SEC in the UK are financially worse off. The location of students in these SECs varies significantly by ethnic group (Modood et al., 1997). Rothon (2007), when investigating the BME attainment gap, reported some ethnic groups were over-represented in the lower classifications, particularly in those further down the class structure. Academic attainment, at all levels, appears to mirror this structure, i.e. White students dominate the higher social classes and achieve higher grades, with BMEs more heavily loaded towards the lower classes and their attainment being lower also. Bhattacharyya et al. (2003) reviewed data from primary and secondary schools. The data

showed that the patterns of under-achievement are broadly similar to those in HE. Indian and Chinese pupils are more likely to achieve the expected levels whereas Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black students perform less well. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation (2012) seconded this pattern between social class and attainment, stating that evidence does indicate that students from poorer backgrounds, within all ethnic groups, leave school with substantially lower levels of achievement, with the percentage of students achieving the benchmark at GCSE level decreasing quite significantly as we move down the class structure.

Collins et al.'s (2013) work demonstrated further that attainment is linked to deprivation. They aimed to discover the extent to which academic achievement varied between students from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Their findings echo those of previous researchers, namely that academic achievement mirrors the socio-economic group hierarchy: the higher the social class, the higher the attainment. Collins et al.'s research was conducted in Birmingham, a city where the geographical distribution of deprivation is closely paralleled by the distribution of BMEs across the city; a point which further demonstrates that BME groups are more common in lower socio-economic groups. The sample of school-aged boys from the more deprived areas and deriving from a BME background performed less well than their White peers from more affluent areas. Although this research is based at school level, it shows the significance of socio-economic background.

Given the preceding narrative it is evidential that social class is an important factor in explaining educational attainment. As BME groups are highly concentrated towards the bottom of the social structure (Goldsmith, 2004; Rothon, 2007), it might be expected that many of the inequalities in attainment can be explained by this differential distribution, i.e. the attainment gap is therefore present due to social class as opposed to ethnicity. However, whilst socio-economic factors explain a large portion of the difference in attainment, there remain statistically significant differences in attainment between ethnic groups that are not accounted for by factors such as social class.

The accuracy of ascribing BME families to social classes has been questioned. Owen et al. (2000) found students with fathers in non-manual jobs achieved more highly; however, these assigned social classes may not be accurate. On closer examination of the social class schemas, the way social class is measured may not be appropriate for measuring occupational status of the first-generation immigrants to

the UK (Rothon, 2007). On arriving in the UK the qualifications these immigrants had obtained in their home countries were often not recognised by employers. Where Indians came from skilled jobs in their home countries, they were now placed in lower socio-economic categories after arriving in the UK, therefore, their positions in the SEC system were not comparable with those of White families.

Moreover, socio-economic classifications may not work in the same way for all ethnic groups in England and Wales, and specific ethnic effects that result in socio-economic status might be having a differentiating impact (Rothon, 2007). Although occupations belong to lower social class, actual social class may be higher with values and attitudes similar to those families from the higher classes. Rothon (2007) argues that measuring the socio-economic status of BME families for the purpose of studying educational attainment differences could be problematic for a number of reasons. One of these reasons being the variety of family structures: extended families can still be found amongst Indian subcontinent families (Dale, 2008). SEC is currently measured by the HRP; with several generations within one household and the accuracy of this can be called into questioned. Amongst Afro-Caribbean families in England and Wales, 59% are lone-parent families with the family usually headed by the mother (Runnymede Trust, 2014). Their socio-economic status being determined by one income alone, not allowing for fair comparisons (Rothon, 2007). A final concern being that accuracy and honestly may be issues for some when answering social class queries, for example those who have never worked. High unemployment rates exist amongst some BME groups, such as Bangladeshi females, for whom it may be ethnically and culturally unacceptable to participate in employment outside the home. Individuals such as those in this group, or their children, may be reluctant to reveal their low socio-economic status.

On the premise that socio-economic classifications have been recorded accurately, on further analysis of Rothon's (2007) study it can be seen that differences exist between the academic performances of students of a similar socio-economic grouping within one ethnic group (Asian-Indian); although social class appears to affect all ethnic groups in the same way, i.e. those positioned in the SEC performing academically lower. In all socio-economic classifications Asian-Indians perform above average and Asian-Bangladeshi and Asian-Pakistani students perform at a lower level. This suggests that it is not social class alone that can explain academic differences; alternative explanations play a part in accounting for the

differences between ethnic groups. It must be noted that many of these econometric analyses were based on additive models and did not explore the possibility of interactions between the effects of ethnicity and those of other variables (Richardson, 2008).

For Black students social class has previously offered less of an explanation, with differences remaining even with controls for social class. Various other explanations have been offered, for instance lack of role models, cultural differences, residential patterns and greater levels of contact with disenchanted youth (Portes and Zhou, 2001). Furthermore, poorer socio-economic areas offer poorer schooling (Johnson et al., 2001).

A later study by Rothon (2008) using one class schema re-assessed the importance of social class in explaining achievement differentials amongst BME students in Britain. Again, she found social class background to be a key factor for all groups along with significant differences between ethnic groups, even when students derived from the same social class background. When disparities within ethnic groups were examined, Rothon found that the effect of moving just one place down the social class system was similar: attainment lowered. In support of this, Broecke and Nicholls (2007) reported that with increased levels of deprivation comes a decrease in the probability of obtaining a higher degree. Walpole (2008) also demonstrated the effects of socio-economic factors in HE; his research highlighted how social class affects the outcomes for African-American students from a national longitudinal database in US. The research concluded that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds have less contact with academic staff, study less and have lower grades than their better-off White peers.

At Coventry University there are high numbers of international students, many of whom are the first generation to HE in the UK. Determining the SEC of this group of students can be difficult for reasons including incomparable qualifications and differing schemas. Additionally their social capital and the reception in the immigrant's country of choice can make a difference to these students' achievements (Schmid, 2001).

3.1.2 Social Capital Theory

The concept of social capital has been one of the most successful exports of sociology. It has been used for a range of applications and applied to many different problems, accompanied by confusion over its meaning. The original theoretical development of the concept by Bourdieu (1980) centred on the individual. Bourdieu contends that social capital is the benefits accruing to individuals by virtue of their ties with others, the families and communities within which an individual lives. Social capital accrued usually reflects social class and social capital of any significance can seldom be acquired, for example without the investment of some material resources and the possession of some cultural knowledge. At this point it is useful to note the distinction Bourdieu makes between social capital and cultural capital, cultural capital being the formal education credentials that an individual possesses and the more intangible complexity of values and knowledge of cultural forms.

A number of researchers examining attainment at HE level cite social capital or cultural capital as influential. For example, Cheng and Starks (2002), linking social class and social capital, stated that those from lower social classes may experience discrimination due to their circumstances and with little social capital from disadvantaged parents, might perform poorly leading to poor employability prospects and hence poverty. Torres (2009) examined the effect of social class and cultural capital for Black students once they entered HE and reported that poorer Black students struggled to fit in due to suffering dually from classism and racism.

These studies suggest that the relationship between social class and ethnicity needs clarity. More recently, the Summit Programme (2011) reported that some staff generally believed some students did better than others due to social inequalities, predominantly linked to social, economic or cultural capital. Others (see Gorard et al., 2006; Vignoles et al., 2008) contend that the effects of social and cultural capital are deeper in terms of educational decisions, not solely affecting attainment alone but determining the decision to participate in HE, choice of institution, and subsequent failures and successes.

3.1.3 Influence of Family

3.1.3.1 Family Well-being

Some previous researchers have recognised the influence of family on HE participation and attainment, the majority calling for further research into the area to establish the extent of such factors (Rumbaut, 1997; Owen et al., 2000; Connor et al., 2004). The general assumption being that the better the family well-being, the higher the expectations from offspring, with increased levels of encouragement, all resulting in higher attainment (Owen et al., 2000). More specifically, in the case of this research, the expectation to attend HE and the influence of the family is greatest amongst BME students, the family influencing course choice and institution choice (Lesley, 2005). Well-being is a ubiquitous term, occurring frequently and widely in public discourse. Observations for well-being are multiple, including those on individual members, dyadic relationships, and the family as a whole (Thompson & Walker, 1982; Work and Family Researchers Network, 2015).

Almost twenty years ago, Rumbaut (1997) demonstrated the importance of family well-being in relation to children's academic achievements. Children from the same families maintained the same pattern of test scores over time, reflecting their family well-being as a constant factor. Rumbaut's study included secondary education aged children from various BME backgrounds enabling differences to be recorded. He found that the Asian students performed highest in the tests, followed by the Europeans and lastly the Hispanic students. Explanations for this outcome included a number of family characteristics, one being the social class, measured by the proxy income as reflected by the father's profession. This was positively related to the Asian and European students performing better, perhaps because the greater income and prestige that comes with holding such occupations served as a positive example for the children of these families (see Section 3.1.1). A mother's influence based on occupation seemed to have a lesser effect. However, social class variables did not appear to affect the results of Hispanic students; therefore the differences that existed amongst the other ethnic groups may reflect a more family-centred orientation rather than predominantly social class (Aldous, 2006).

Rumbaut (1997) focused further on the Hispanic students, reporting that despite Hispanic parents talking more to their children about education, based on their own experience and the realisation that education is important for social capital development, their child's performance was still relatively low, thus hinting at an ethnic effect. The particular ethnic group viewed as limiting the effects of family well-being. An alternative explanation could be that Hispanics' educational expectations were lower than those of the other two ethnic groups. With closer examination of the family variables that appear to be influencing the children's test results, some influencing factors applied to all three ethnic groups, for example, the importance of higher education within the family, aspirations to achieve and expectations. Regardless of ethnicity and controlling for background factors, children whose parents had higher education aspirations did better in reading and mathematics providing a good grounding for future success and learning. Modood (2005) provided further evidence of parental expectations as an influential factor on attainment. He believed that, amongst certain BME groups, the parental values and motivational drive for self-improvement that they have for themselves and their children might mitigate the damaging effects of belonging to a lower socio-economic group for many ethnic groups through a culture of high expectations.

The amount of time spent on homework had a positive correlation with good test results. Although all parents spoke to their children, Rumbaut (1997) found that Asian fathers spoke less to their children, but the Asian children did appear to benefit from conversations more with their mothers; assumingly, the conversations with mothers to be of a better standard. Immigrant parents may be viewed by their children as lacking knowledge generally and of the education system specifically, having not experienced it themselves, resulting in them asking their parents fewer questions or not listening attentively. This could also work the other way with the parent realising this vacuum and listening more to their child rather than giving advice (Aldous, 2006). Families may strongly encourage participation but lack the resources and skills to advise, and a failure to interpret feedback (Goldsmith, 2004). Where students continue living at home, remain within the community and speak the language at home, the amount of parental support appears to be a significant contributory factor to under-achievement (Collins et al., 2013).

3.1.3.2 Parents' Education

Along with general family well-being, the parents' level of education and achievement has been reported as directly influencing children's achievements (Coltrane, 2000). In essence, the higher the attainment of the parents, the greater the educational expectations of their children. A shortcoming of the work is that it does not report whether these higher expectations translated into improved attainment. A further dimension of the parents' levels of education is that the more years a mother has spent in education, the more of an influence this has on a child's attainment than the father's educational experience, as demonstrated by Rumbaut (1997). If this holds true, the mother's level of education and influence is more tenacious. Rothon (2008) argued in favour of taking into account the mother's occupation and position within the social class schemas. The current measure for social class, the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification, does consider all those employed within one household; whereas the HRP is taken as the person with the highest income, where incomes are equal the oldest person is taken as the HRP.

3.1.3.3 Family Structure

A further aspect of the influence of family is family structure. A number of studies have focused on absent fathers in minority communities, believing that this results in a lack of support and absence of a role model and authority figure, all of which can contribute to under-achievement. For example, England and Folbre (2002) reported that the level of father involvement may be influenced by socio-economic status, race, culture and ethnicity with the culture defining the father's role. The possibility of ethnic and racial differences in fathering is supported by Toth and Xu (1999) who argued that racial and cultural or ideological differences in father involvement need to be explicated.

Shears (2007) conducted a self-reporting study on fathering activities across African-American, European-American and Latino fathers to examine possible differences. Shears concluded that there are differences in fathering activities across the three ethnic groups examined, when factors such as income, education, age and socio-economic conditions of families were controlled. The African-American fathers were far more likely to monitor and supervise activities and were more strict and authoritarian than European-American fathers; whereas the European-American and Latino fathers would monitor and also

be more apt to interact and spend time with their children. This study could be relevant to any society; furthermore it illustrates well that cultural differences exist between fathering styles. An explanation for these differences could be the distinct historical experiences these individuals may have endured and cultural identity.

Similar research does exist in the UK, albeit on a smaller scale. The majority of the UK research focuses more generally on the role of fathers and absent fathers, particularly in Black families, and holist development of the children, not solely effects on educational attainment (see Bradshaw, 1999; Reynolds, 2009). A study by Flouri and Buchanan (2004), focusing on the effects of the roles of fathers on HE attainment, concluded that the individual long-term contributions that mothers and fathers make to their children's schooling were continuous and most influential throughout a child's time in education: father involvement and mother involvement at the age of seven independently predicted educational attainment by age 20. The father's involvement was not more important for educational attainment when mother involvement was low rather than high. Not growing up in an intact two-parent family did not weaken the association between father's or mother's involvement and educational outcomes, concluding that early father involvement can be counteractive to other risk factors that might lead to later low-attainment levels.

Literatures focusing on family structure talk more about parenting style and child development. I did not view them as relevant or applicable to degree attainment, hence my limited research in the area. Family structure is worth acknowledging as effects from parenting style and child development could continue throughout education and life.

3.1.3.4 Conclusion

In summary, the previous studies show that families influence educational performance in a number of ways, but uncertainty exists over their precise impact. Many influential factors highlighted can be seen at work within the UK. Generally all children, whether from the dominant ethnic group or minority ethnic groups, perform better academically if they have aspirations and are supported and encouraged by their families. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude at this preliminary stage that all parents, through their daily child-rearing interactions and aspirations, can encourage the educational success of their children, regardless of

their ethnicity or social class. However, where encouragement is high, e.g. amongst particular ethnic groups, this raises the question, 'why is it that these students are still not attaining highly?'

3.1.4   Individual Prior Attainment and Subject Choice

Prior attainment, achievement before entering HE, has been believed to be a contributing factor towards attainment. Prior attainment as an important factor in predicting degree outcome was noticed in the report titled 'The Class of '99' (Purcell et al., 2005). Other research has shown prior attainment to be influential on education (Owen et al., 2000; Smith and Naylor, 2001; Shiner and Modood 2002; Connor et al., 2004; Lesley, 2005; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008). Prior attainment being measured by tariff points (see Section 2.5).

More specifically, prior attainment refers to achievement at level 3 before entering HE; in the UK students complete the traditional A-level qualifications or take a vocational route. Some researchers have argued that half the disparity in degree attainment is due to prior attainment (see Lesley, 2005; Richardson, 2008/2010; Fielding et al., 2008); whilst other studies show there is statistical evidence that even with controls in place for prior attainment, assessments, and teaching and learning, differences between BME and White student attainment persist.

In principle, students from different ethnic groups differ in terms of other demographic characteristics or vary in their representation, for instance there may be higher numbers of BME students on particular courses. Nonetheless, when the effect of entry qualifications was statistically controlled, Richardson (2008) reported the chances of BME students achieving the equivalent, i.e. a good degree, to their White counterparts increased, thus confirming the ratio that half the disparity in attainment did appear attributable to differences in their entry qualifications. However, if prior attainment provides approximately 50% of the explanation for differential attainment amongst HE students, it still implies that other factors are at play. There still remains a large percentage not accounted for leading some researchers to suggest that, in part, BME students are subject to some form of discriminatory practice in relation to teaching, student support and assessment (Osler, 1999; Leslie, 2005; Rothon, 2007).

Connor et al. (2004) noted that in addition to an individual's aspirations and expectations, prior attainment and entry route were key factors in determining attainment, specifically that BME students entered HE with lower entry qualifications. Furthermore, they reported, through surveys with students, that those of Indian ethnicity were more likely to take the traditional A-level route and were better qualified; thus prior attainment being the most important influence on choosing subjects at HE level. Similarly, Broecke and Nicholls (2007) demonstrated that prior attainment has a significant effect on degree attainment. They discovered that students with higher UCAS points, those having completed A-levels and those with a mix of A-level and conventional qualifications, achieved more highly than those with no A-levels, again arguing that those students entering with academic rather than vocational level 3 qualifications perform better at HE level. Mirroring these findings, the Summit Programme (2011), alongside social inequalities, reported that staff identified inadequate academic backgrounds and "non-traditional" qualifications as a causal factor in low attainment, believing students with these prior qualifications possessed inadequate knowledge on which to build, therefore fell behind in HE.

Subject choice has previously been purported to affect the level of degree attainment. Smith and Naylor (2001) found that students of BME origin tended to specialise in subjects where it is more difficult to graduate with a good degree. For example, fewer ethnic minority students study languages, where 68% of White students achieve a good degree compared to only 4.5% of ethnic minority graduates. Leslie (2005) sustained this belief by arguing that BME students prefer, and are over-represented in, the more challenging subjects, such as law, therefore becoming a contributor to the low attainment anomaly. Recent BME participation figures at Coventry University are discussed in Chapter Five to ascertain whether this trend continues. Further studies have found that some White advantage still remains, even when these two factors are taken into account.

This section of the thesis shows that numerous leading researchers in the field propose prior attainment is an influential factor upon BME attainment in HE. The majority of these studies used statistical analysis of UCAS data sets and compared this to degree outcome data from HESA based on home-domicile students. Some researchers adduce half the disparity in degree attainment to prior attainment.

Hence, although qualifications and subject choice do much to explain differences in outcomes, White students still outperform BME counterparts therefore requiring further explanation.

3.1.5 Ethnicity Effect Theory

Quantitative statistics (see Chapter Four) reveal that specific BME groups are more prominent in HE than others. Connor et al. (2004) found that being a member of a particular ethnic group affects the decision to attend HE significantly and BME students were more encouraged to participate in HE, indicating possible higher aspirations amongst some ethnic groups. Through observation, I believe this to be the case; I do not believe that high BME participation is coincidental because clusters of certain BME groups are visible at Coventry University. Connor et al. did go on to report that whilst participation in HE was increasing, it was not in a uniform manner: individuals from certain ethnicities were more likely to participate in HE but their attainment was not equal to that of their White counterparts. Specifically, Connor et al. reported that students of Indian and Chinese origin had increased chances of entering degree level education by the age of 19, all other variables being equal.

Previous research does acknowledge that it cannot be ethnicity alone that influences the decision to enter HE and subsequent attainment (linked to reasons for participating). The effects of ethnicity appear to be interrelated with other factors. Goodhart (2013) postulates that the experience of parents, for instance they themselves not being educated in the UK, plus the effects of socio-economic factors are significant, through wanting their children to grab opportunities which were unavailable to them. Connor et al. (2004), as with Goodhart, link high BME participation to the perceived benefits accrued from HE, believing they are a more significant driver for BME students than they are for their White counterparts. Whatever the reasons to participate, ethnicity related or not, it must be recognised that BME participation is relatively high. Consequently, with increased BME participation in HE, there is a compelling need to ensure that BMEs are given opportunities to achieve and to reap from the benefits associated with HE.

BME students participate in order to achieve these aspirations and achieve highly, making the two aspects, participation and attainment, inseparable (see Section 4.1). More specifically, in relation to attainment, Broecke and Nicholls (2007) evaluated ethnicity and degree attainment by conducting analyses

using HESA data including only UK-domiciled students. The outcome of the analysis was that, even with controls in place for factors including subject area, prior attainment, gender, type of level 3 qualification and index of multiple deprivation, there remained some 'unexplained difference' with regards degree attainment, presumably an ethnic effect. Richardson (2008) similarly, whilst investigating the inter-relationships amongst the effects of ethnicity, age, gender, entry qualifications, mode of study, subject and institute choice, comparing students from all ethnic groups, concluded that all the other variables interacted with the effect of ethnicity. In more recent times, Griffins et al.'s (2012) qualitative study construed how individual habitus (disposition formed by an individual's history) is strongly influenced by ethnicity and culture, and the value parents place on education, making ethnicity a recurrent influencing theme.

Belonging to an ethnic minority group may bring with it other problems, for example visible differences, such as following cultural rules of dress. It could be that BME students, being "new" to the country to which they migrated, are unsure of what to expect along with unfamiliarity with the UK HE system. BME students have been found to be more uncertain about what to expect in HE, making expectations a contributory factor towards attainment (Summit Programme, 2011).

The aforementioned studies position the argument that participation and attainment are subject to ethnicity effects. The majority of these studies used large sets of data for analyses, constituting secondary analysis of HESA data, national statistics, surveys and interviews, along with larger ethnic group categories. The majority of studies suggested that most of the differences can be ascribed to these "other" factors, recommending a more technical analysis to control these to estimate the "pure" effect of ethnicity. This research presented in this thesis will not involve a technical quantitative analysis; on the contrary it will analyse qualitative data from students of named ethnic groups. By looking into the students' family background and journey into HE, I will attempt to identify factors affecting their attainment and ethnicity, as an influential factor might be emergent.

3.1.6 Peer Groups

Peer groups and associations with those of a similar age group have long been cited as important to all adolescents, affecting, amongst other things, educational attainment (Handel, 2006). Research has shown that peer groups can wield a greater deal of influence than families can over the way students view education (Duncan et al., 2001; Goldsmith, 2004; Browne, 2011). This is supported by Horvat and Lewis (2003) who found that positive peer associations were significantly linked with academic achievement. Students who associate with friends that value education and are committed to academic pursuits becoming important reference points create attachments to their educational establishment and conform to the ideals associated with it, presumably improving their attainment (Horvat and Lewis, 2003). Furthermore, it is possible that certain peers, close friends and acquaintances yield more influence than others (Goldsmith, 2004).

Some researchers view peer pressure as positive, as demonstrated by Horvat and Lewis (2003); peer pressure can, however, be negative. Negative peer pressure has served to discourage students from conforming to behaviours that could positively affect their attainment (Goldsmith, 2004); whereas those adolescents who associate with positive peers are more likely to take into consideration the negative reactions of these peers when considering engaging in behaviours that do not promote academic success (Wentzel and Caldwell, 1997; Nichols and White, 2001).

A qualitative study by Matute-Bianchi (1986) demonstrated the effects of negative peer pressure amongst HE aged students in an American college. Matute-Bianchi examined peer pressure, behaviours and attitudes amongst students of differing immigrant backgrounds, namely those of Japanese and Mexican descent. Matute-Bianchi reported that amongst the Japanese students none were having trouble in the college, emphasising the point that their parents encouraged them to identify themselves as students and not as members of an ethnic group. In contrast, the Mexican students were less successful academically and had joined together with other members of their ethnic group to form a subordinate status in the college population. The educational attainment was higher amongst the Japanese students confirming that identifying with their educational institute, as opposed to their ethnic peer group, was a positive contributory

factor on attainment. Within their ethnic sub-group, the Japanese students presumably possessed positive peer associations, hence promoting their academic success.

Goldsmith's (2004) work on Latino students in the USA researched peer associations in greater depth; however, similar issues to those he raised can be observed in UK educational institutions. Firstly, Goldsmith believed that students within institutions that contain relatively high numbers of minorities and who largely only associate within these groups tend to form their own norms, their level of attainment becoming accepted as good. Peer effects create a normative climate, thus students become more optimistic when they compare themselves with low-achieving peers; those of similar ethnicities perform similarly, measuring against each other (Rothon, 2007).

Students and parents may lack the adequate skills and resources for interpreting school feedback and consequently the students over-estimate their chances of being successful. Peers also influence students' beliefs because they serve as a comparison group when they develop aspirations and expectations. Aspirations of peers appeared to be significant contributory factors to under-achievement (Collins et al., 2013), thus schools with minorities might be reinforcing students' over-optimistic assessments of their achievements.

The research literature establishes that peers are important and influential; this may further be evidenced by the fact that clusters of ethnic minority students can be found at "new" universities, possibly clusters exist because BME students wish to attend universities with those of similar ethnicity (Owen et al., 2000; Connor et al., 2004). BME students stick to friendships within their own ethnic group; Davies and Garrett (2012) goes further stating that predominantly BME friendship were naturally occurring. Peer relationships are complex, but positive associations affect attainment positively, with the reverse also holding true with negative peer relationships having a detrimental effect on attainment.

3.2   Structural Level Explanations

This section reviews studies that suggest academic attainment is influenced structurally, i.e. as a result of being part of an educational institution which through its various practices, personnel and environment may be influencing its students' attainment, or simply that the type of institution is influential (Goldsmith, 2004; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007). Placing Coventry University into a typology would be that of a post-1992 university, located in a town/city whose surrounding population includes relatively high BME immigrant numbers.

3.2.1   Culture and Climate of the Educational Institution

Much research has been conducted, at various levels of education, reporting that the culture and climate of the educational institution needs to be welcoming to the students and needs to foster a sense of integration and belonging to ensure students succeed. Freiberg and Stein (1999:11) stated that 'school climate is the heart and soul of a school'. It is the school climate that either facilitates or constrains classroom and student learning (Shields, 1991). Furthermore, Lee and Bryk (1989) found that a safe and orderly school climate is associated with more equitable academic achievement between White students and non-White students. Freiberg (1999) maintained that each educational institution, through its structure, including type of institute, size and demographic make-up of the students, will have its own unique climate and culture, all factors that can influence the academic and social development of students.

At a more direct contact level, the methods of teaching, delivery and assessing work at the institution influence achievement (Berry and Locke, 2011; Richardson, 2013). The Summit Programme (2011), based on fifteen HEIs, focused on the importance of the curriculum, with a particular emphasis on particular learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) practices. Staff across the HEIs reported some assessments, produced at institutional level, privileged some students; for instance, the way essay titles are written, whilst students from all ethnicities criticised some LTA practices, including inadequate feedback, deadlines and uninspiring teaching.

BME students are more likely to report a lack of support from the institution or encouragement from lecturers, and course- or facility-related issues (Summit Programme, 2011). Others have highlighted the concern that BME students suffer from stereotypes by tutors at the institute or ethnic bias (Dhanda, 2010; Singh, 2011), discussed further in the following section.

These structural/institutional aspects undoubtedly impact on a student's whole HE experience, with the failure to feel a sense of belonging and feel welcomed to the institution (Coleman, 1990; Carbonaro, 2005). If a student does not feel integrated they might be less motivated to succeed academically. Further, BME students are more likely to experience dis-association due to a lack of cultural diversity or activities that incorporate all students (Davies and Garrett, 2012). Attachment and commitment have been significantly associated with academic achievement; those students who care about and are cared for by personnel at their educational institute were more likely to develop affective ties and display socially acceptable behaviour (Freiberg, 1999). Students who experience a supporting and inviting environment tend to achieve higher grades.

BME students, being a minority, will have a distinct home culture to that of the mainstream institution; therefore BME students start HE at a disadvantage. Museus (2007) believed that the greater the congruence between a student's home and campus cultures the more likely a student is to persist in HE (Museus 2007). BME home cultures could, however, be weakened with progressive generations.

With the visibly high presence of BME students at post-1992 institutions, it is fair to suggest climate and culture should be inclusive, reflective and welcoming. It is reasonable to assume these post-1992 institutes, which have high mixed groups, would provide opportunities for ethnic minority students, but, on the contrary, figures suggest they are less successful at enabling such students to obtain good degrees (Richardson, 2013). The contingent nature of this phenomenon suggests that attainment is at least partly attributable to variations in students' academic environments rather than inherent or constitutional characteristics within the students themselves, as White students are still more likely to achieve a good degree regardless of age, gender, entry qualifications, mode of study, subject or institute.

Besides the many aspects of institutional culture, the social milieu of the institution could be affecting BME attainment (Anderson, 1982; Welsh, 2000). "Social milieu" refers to the background characteristics of the students, teachers and administrators, including ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and teachers' experience and training, all factors which have been believed to shape students' values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours regarding educational achievement and attainment (Goldsmith, 2004). The limited representation of staff from BME backgrounds (Owen et al., 2000), particularly at HEIs with a high percentage of BME students, becomes an imperative issue. Adversely, the Summit Programme (2011) reported very few staff believed their institution was racist, hence not making the attainment gap attributable to the institution. The majority of the staff from the fifteen HEIs involved did, however, believe structural and institutional practices privilege some students.

3.2.2   Teaching and Tutors' Beliefs

As mentioned in Section 3.2.1, teaching and teacher beliefs could be contributing to the attainment gap through the TLA practices, beliefs held by teaching staff about BME students and, consequently, through interactions with BME students. Farewell (2008) argued that approaches to teaching and learning, including assessment, might be preventing some students from reaching their full potential and that their quality of learning needs to be enhanced. Similarly the Summit Programme was largely based on assessing the effects of TLAs (Stevenson, 2012; Singh, 2011).

Tutors have previously been recognised as contributing to the attainment gap (Song, 2006; Dhanda, 2010; Singh, 2011), though Song (2006) does not specify in what way. Many would argue that teaching is based on both explicit and implicit personal values and beliefs. According to Horowitz (1994), to better understand a teacher's role, his or her belief system may be conceived as snap-shots of behaviours, which in turn influence students, both behaviourally and academically. Letendre and Akiba's (2001) research found that teachers could foster students' patience, responsible social behaviour, sense of right and wrong, individuality and innate ability, or not. Misleading beliefs about the role of education and home culture, in addition to the relationships between teachers and students, have prevented the success of minority students in the American educational system (Grant and Sleeter, 1986). Teachers' beliefs are

essential, not only because they shape the way teachers perceive and understand realities but also because they are intertwined with content knowledge and teaching principles (Romanowski, 1997).

Teachers/tutors have admitted to having lower expectations from BME students and having made decisions on students' academic potentials based on false or stereotyped information (Taylor, 1979; Ferguson, 1998; Dhanda, 2010). The likely negative impact of labelling has been extensively researched in schools (see Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). It could be that academic staff have limited knowledge and experience about diverse backgrounds. This discrepancy between what staff know and the actual background of students may hinder the teacher's ability to effectively reach diverse students (Haberman, 2002). However, if a teacher understands diversity and those from diverse backgrounds in terms of poverty, culture and language, he or she would make a difference in teaching these students.

A study by Dhanda (2010), which focuses on the different experience BME students have of HE at Wolverhampton University, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to ascertain the variation in BME student performance at modular level, reported that the students had mixed feelings about the quality of support they received from tutors, forging the connection between support and their attainment. Additionally, Dhanda reported that BME students perceived the White students to be contacting tutors more frequently. Further, the students associate the quality of their performance with the perceived ability of the tutor to make a module interesting, making attainment attributable to teaching and assessment.

The beliefs that teachers hold can therefore serve as an organising framework that establishes the teachers'/tutors' patterns of meanings, determines views and guides teaching, and as a consequence, learning (Romanowski, 1997). Rubie-Davies (2007) found that teachers with high expectations of students spent more time planning for their learning, provided more detailed feedback and addressed them with higher-order questions. It is important teaching staff at all levels of education know and have knowledge of their students, including their cultural backgrounds, and hold accurate beliefs which do not prevent the students from reaching their full potential. This is increasingly important because the percentage of BME students in HE has increased and continues to do so, and with this comes different social and cultural issues. BME students may need more support with their differing backgrounds, family commitments and English being a second language as opposed to receiving less support, as implied by some studies. As

reported by the Summit Programme (2011), BME students reported individual tutor time as insufficient, choosing to rely on friends.

Finally, some studies (see Modood and Shiner, 1994; Leslie, 2005; Broecke and Nicholls 2007; Rothon, 2007) have raised the possibility of racism in HE, a concerning concept as a teacher's role is to enable the success and achievements of all students. Osler (1999) considered whether BME students were in fact more likely to encounter discriminatory teaching and assessment practices, or more subtle exclusionary attitudes and behaviours on part of the teacher; a concerning, non-conducive notion. In summary, the diverse, and sometimes contentious, literature reviewed in this section highlights that the area of tutor beliefs requires further research, supporting Dhanda (2010) who argued the issue of teacher bias has received less attention in HE.

3.2.3 Welcome and Belonging/Student Integration

As mentioned in Section 3.2.1, the climate and culture of the educational institution can affect the students' ability to integrate and feel welcome, as well as having a sense of belonging (Carbonaro, 2005). Welcome and a sense of belonging to the educational institute being the extent to which students feel accepted, respected and supported at their institution of choice (Goodenow and Grady, 1993). Numerous studies have reported that a student's inability to make a connection to their educational institution and experience a sense of belonging influences their academic achievement (Ma, 2003; Rothon, 2007; Thomas, 2012; Summit Programme, 2011). Thus, an increased sense of belonging results in increased student integration and engagement, with the outcome of a more positive attitude, thus improving attainment. Thomas (2012) reinforced the notion that student engagement is vital for success in HE with BME students as part of the Summit Programme (2011). Thomas repeatedly referred to a failure of institutes to integrate them effectively, hence they failed to develop a sense of belonging, along with a general lack of support.

This theory of integration and feeling welcome, and that a sense of belonging improves academic attainment, has been evidenced across all levels of education. Johnson et al. (2001) noted that the efforts students put towards their education are partially characterised by the attachment and commitment they feel towards the institution of study: the more 'attached' they feel, the greater the effort.

Other studies have suggested an association between extra-curricular activities and attainment. Guest and Schneider (2003) found that participation in extra-curricular activities was associated with increased levels of achievement. Participation in sporting extra-curricular activities, in particular, was discovered to have positively affected grades (Broh, 2002). Although the research conducted by Guest and Schneider was at secondary school level, the findings are applicable to higher education students given that many students are involved in student union/clubs formed around the interests of sport, religions and faiths. Hence, according to this argument, those students who feel more embedded in their establishment exert more effort, possibly as a result of positive feeling towards their school or university. Conversely, it is possible to argue that student participation in extra-curricular activities diverts time and energy away from valuable academic time or activities, such as seminars, designed to increase a student's achievement (Scheiber and Chambers, 2002). As there are different types of activities, not all forms of participation are equal and students therefore do not gain the same advantages (Broh, 2002).

In HE, from observation and anecdotally at least, for some students participation in activities other than the course of study can become a passion, becoming more important than coursework. The realisation that fellow students share their passion can become the student's main reason for attending university. Nevertheless, based on the research evidence provided by Scheiber and Chambers (2002) and Broh (2002), involvement in clubs and non-academic activities should not be discouraged, as they can foster a sense of belonging or alternative achievement and self-pride.

Research conducted by Davies and Garrett (2012) at the University of Chester, which has a relatively low BME population, highlighted specific BME issues through a qualitative exploration of the experiences of seven undergraduate students. Although a small-scale study, it is considered that the data collected provided a vital addition to basic statistical data and an important representation of the subjective experiences of the participating students. Students reported transient and long-term feelings of isolation and lack of belonging, possibly due to the low BME student population. The impact of the White demographic was particularly pronounced in relation to the experiences of international students. Furthermore, in relation to their academic experience, some participants felt that BME issues were not naturally integrated in their course, which could be objectively beneficial to all. Some BME students

communicated feeling awkward when ethnicity was discussed, accentuating their feeling of isolation and detracting from a sense of belonging (Davies and Garrett, 2012).

3.2.4 Conclusion

This review of structural level explanations highlights important and sometimes controversial aspects of the HE experience for BME students. Some researchers have gone so far as to suggest the existence of institutional racism (Connor et al., 2004; Leslie, 2005). However, wishing to maintain an open, emergent stance on my research findings, I attempt to refrain from strong/biased opinions to avoid colouring my judgements, particularly when interpreting my data. Despite these literatures showing that structural aspects and experiences within HE can be influential on attainment and provide different experiences of HE for White and BME students, they are not sufficient to explain the dramatic differences in their attainment.

3.3   Arriving at Areas for Research

Subsequent to conducting this literature review, there is clear justification in progressing with my research. Research has been conducted in the field, much of it quantitative, during the 2000s, establishing the existence of the attainment gap at degree level. The literature review reveals substantial associations do exist between individual level and structural level factors and academic attainment; however, no one single influencing factor or a fixed combination is sufficient to provide a convincing explanation for observed differences in attainment. The "answer" remains unclear and requires further investigation.

In order to establish my areas for research, I primarily identified fields for further investigation as recommended by the previous literature and identified by the gaps and questions raised by these literatures. The next step was to group the literature sections into broader themes based on similarity. I arrived at five themes, which form the framework for my research. Justification for the proposed five themes is additionally demonstrated with the mapping of key studies (see Chapter Five). The five emergent themes are:

1.   Socio-economic factors

2.	Course choice/prior attainment

3.	Culture and ethnicity

4.	Institutional culture

5.	Peer group influences

The themes listed here eventually became my five concepts informing my conceptual framework as they incorporate the explanations (influential factors on attainment) from the literature. They provided a grounded basis on which to structure my research.

## 3.4	Conclusion

Chapter Three shows that various explanations and theories have been proposed for lower BME degree attainment, some would argue "under-attainment" which this chapter has explored. The suggested explanations and theories are varied and diverse; furthermore, it is safe to assume that one influential factor alone cannot provide explanations for differential attainment, and that there are several counteracting factors which affect attainment.

Whilst the debate about BME attainment in HE is relatively recent, research into differential attainment at school and further education level has been more prominent, with considerable research and policy debated since the 1960s. Prior to presenting and exploring the five concepts construed into a conceptual framework, it is useful to present evidence of the attainment gap to showcase the focus of literatures in Chapter Three and the need for this research. Thus, Chapter Four presents participation and attainment statistics, nationally and comparatively at Coventry University, to demonstrate the differential degree attainment between BME and White students in HE.

4. PARTICIPATION and ATTAINMENT: THE EVIDENCE

The previous chapter reviewed the existing literature associated with the field of differential attainment. Prior to presenting the conceptual framework construed from this literature, I explore the statistical data for participation and attainment in HE, as both national and specific statistics are provided for my case study, Coventry University. Before the gap in differential attainment can be addressed, it is important to know where the gap exists, between which groups it exists and which ethnic groups are most likely to participate in HE in order to enable support to be focused correctly. Firstly, in this chapter I explain the reasons why participation and attainment are frequently considered together, followed by a discussion of widening participation initiatives to illustrate the encouragement of participation. The remainder of the chapter presents attainment statistics ranging from GCSE level through to degree attainment for the specific BME groups considered in my sample. The purpose of looking at attainment at different educational levels, albeit briefly, is to highlight any emergent patterns and draw attention to whether the educational institute could be a contributory factor on attainment.

4.1 Participation and Attainment

Participation and attainment are often viewed as synonymous, evidenced by the volume of existing literatures referring to the two concepts together. As part of debating attainment, participation is inevitably referred to as well. This connection is logical as attainment is, after all, a consequence of participation and students participate in order to attain, achieve and reap the benefits of their university education (Connor et al., 2004). Hence, it follows that the attitudes, decisions and reasons to participate influence educational performance once in HE. Secondly, the two concepts require joint consideration because if wider participation is being encouraged amongst BME groups then logically there is a responsibility to ensure they achieve to their full potential, additionally making participation and attainment specific BME issues.

Moreover, it is valuable to observe participation and attainment figures congruently, as lower attainment amongst BME groups could simply be a consequence of high BME participation in HE. However, this may not be the case because an examination of participation and attainment figures amongst BME groups reveals that attainment proportionate to participation rates is low. To illuminate the preceding point, the subject area of Law at Coventry University during the academic year 2013–14 had 185 White students, of which 35 (16%) achieved a good degree, whilst in the same subject area there were 95 Asian/Asian British – Indian students, of which 10 (11%) achieved a good degree.

It should be noted that attainment is increasing amongst some BME groups. In the subject areas of biological sciences with a higher percentage of the BME group, Asian/Asian British – Indian achieved a good degree. Of the 215 Asian/Asian British – Indian students enrolled on a biological sciences course during the year 2013–14, 35 (23%) achieved a good degree. Whereas of the 835 White students enrolled on a biological science course in the year 2013–14, 140 (17%) achieved a good degree, and amongst the Black or Black African students, only 10 (5%) of the 190 students achieved a good degree.

4.2   Widening Participation

Widening participation is a generic term that has been used to refer to a range of different target groups (Moore et al., 2013). The aim of most widening participation initiatives is to increase HE participation amongst certain groups; key target groups have included young people from lower socio-economic groups, disabled learners, mature learners and those from ethnic minority groups. Since the 1990s, BMEs have taken advantage of widening participation initiatives (ECU/HEA, 2008), some of which are discussed in this chapter.

In general terms, since the 1960s there has been a significant increase in student numbers from 400,000 during the 1960s (Wyness, 2010) to more than two million in 2014 (including non-UK domiciled students); this is more than a five-fold increase in the number of participants since 1960s. The expansion of the HE sector since 2000 has witnessed a significant increase in the number of students studying at either the undergraduate or postgraduate level. Since 2000 there has been a 20% increase in the number of student full-time equivalents (FTEs) from 1.948m to 2.340m (HESA). It should be noted that the HESA

statistics take into consideration all students, but when it comes to UK-only-domiciled HE students, there are just under two million in total.

Generically, just over half (~56%) of UK HE students are on a course following the traditional undergraduate first degree course of study. When it comes to age groups, almost half (45%) were aged 18 or under at the point of entry for an undergraduate degree with a further 17% aged 19 or under, which reflects the standard progression from their previous mode of study to the next level. Interestingly, 13% were aged 30 or over at the point of entry, thus demonstrating that there is a degree of life-long engagement in HE. Alternatively this may be due to re-training to gain new skills for a changing work place.

Whilst the number of students has shown a significant increase, a sharper increase is visible in the ethnic composition of the student body. Chowdry et al. (2010) highlighted the fact that participation at high status universities or Russell Group universities (as defined by quality of research output) remains lower for BMEs in comparison to their White counterparts.

4.2.1   Widening Participation Initiatives

The idea of the widening access participation agenda in HE is not simply a one-off old policy, but instead there have been ongoing incentives to provide access to all, not only BMEs. Since the 1960s there have been debates centred on increasing participation in higher education, which lagged behind numerous other countries forming part of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (hereafter OECD) (Wyness, 2010). Indeed, the purpose of the Robbins Report of 1963 was to increase participation levels and make them more comparable with other OECD countries (as discussed in Section 2.5.1). The consequence of Robbins was the creation of new universities and the Colleges of Advanced Technology being granted university status (see Chapter Two).

Following Robbins and the development of new universities, participation rates still lagged behind those in other OECD countries and this led to further reforms/expansion of the sector (Greenaway and Haynes, 2003). The catalyst for the expansion was to increase participation so as to move university education from the being elitist to becoming more accessible to the masses. The 1992 Further Education

and Higher Education Act resulted in 48 former polytechnics being granted university status. In addition to the new universities, HEFCE was created to oversee the funding for the sector.

Further reviews followed including Dearing in 1998 which recommended that students should contribute something to the cost of their education. The most affluent would need to pay for their university education whilst those from the lowest socio-economic groups were exempt from the proposed new fees to facilitate their participation in HE. There was also the abolition of the grant system which was replaced by loans that were income dependent. The income-dependent component was intended to provide access by enabling those from the lowest economic groups to fund their education. Attempts to increase the presence of BME students in HE was a focus of the last Labour government's HE policies (Dearing, 1997).

The purpose of the Higher Education Act in 2004 was to further expand participation, because although participation rates had increased there was still a gap amongst those from different social backgrounds (Wyness, 2010). The working classes also included high numbers of BME families and thus the opportunity to further increase participation amongst this group. The change saw the introduction of grants for the lowest income students, but at the same time upfront fees were removed.

Most recently, the Browne Review resulted in the increase in tuition fees, with speculation mounting that in the future there may be the removal of the maximum fee structure, in its entirety, raising concerns as to how this will affect participation rates. A review of the leading press, and anecdotally, seems to indicate that the Russell Group universities are pushing this agenda, and that it has support in certain sections of the coalition government.

Alongside these government-led initiatives a number of targeted national programmes have been introduced to increase HE participation. An example being Aimhigher: a HEFCE-funded scheme which focuses on building relationships between universities and schools to encourage young learners from relatively deprived geographical areas to enter HE. Aimhigher has run school/university partnerships in 42 areas across England which facilitated interactive relationships between associates, the university students and school learners (HEA, 2015). For instance, Aimhigher taking the approach of training primary school staff to enable them to provide understanding of progression routes and working with parents to improve

their understanding. Long term effects of partnerships such as this can be difficult to access but feedback from teachers does show that students improved skills, such as speaking, listening and teamwork, and children identified a wider range of career options.

The Sutton Trust develops and evaluates programmes to address educational inequality (The Sutton Trust, 2008b). The Sutton Trust is particularly concerned with offering educational opportunities and ensuring young people are given the chance to prosper, regardless of their family background, school or neighbourhood. It offers summer camps, campus visits and ambassador programmes, all examples of access activities proven to be effective. It also recommends school staff need to be given time, expertise and incentives to encourage and inform regarding HE. Again, evaluation showed increased levels of motivation, self-esteem and confidence amongst students and an improvement in assessed attainment. A further local partnership model LLN (2010) highlighted the importance of regular communication, sharing knowledge and transparency for decision making.

HE providers working with primary school aged children was a key recommendation of the National Council for Education Excellence to help improve achievements and aspirations for young people (DIUS, 2008). Evidence from those running university outreach programmes highlighted that young people's attitudes are often more likely to change around key transition points, such as the move from primary to secondary education.

In summary, together the various initiatives have had the intention of widening participation amongst all groups, with the cost of education being passed to the student. Thus, the challenge has been the need to expand the sector whilst balancing the cost of delivery. Since the 1960s participation rates for all have increased and this is probably due to additional factors, not solely because of government initiatives. Whilst widening participation initiatives have been largely successful, universities have been less successful in ensuring these learners are well supported and attending highly during their time at university. If HEIs are encouraging targeted groups to participate then it is reasonable to assume that they additionally have a responsibility to grant them equal attainment to that of their counterparts. From a Wolverhampton project, it was found that the widening participation agenda to attract non-traditional students was not

backed by additional support structures once the students were enrolled. Unlike schools and FE institutions, HE institutions have not developed explicit diversity policies that recognise the different needs of BME students (Tolley and Rundle, 2006).

4.2.2   BME Participation

Inequalities in HE participation are evident throughout the student population and include differences in terms of ethnicity, with particular ethnic groups more highly represented in HE (Gorard et al., 2006). Widening participation has been successful amongst BME students with relatively high participation rates; it is, in fact, one of the success stories of HE in the UK, as demonstrated by figures in this chapter (HESA, 2014).

Connor et al. (2004), one of the leading observers of the participation rates for British Asian/Asians and for Black British/Black likewise, noted that it is well documented that some groups are clearly better represented in HE, for instance Indians, Chinese, Asian other, Black Africans and other (non-White, including mixed) groups. Whilst other groups – Black other, Bangladeshi and Pakistani – are under-represented when compared to their position in the population group, 16–24 year olds. This pattern continues, as Table 4.1 in the following section shows.

Proportionately, it could be that those present in HE in higher numbers are the larger BME groups in society (see Chapter Two); however, as suggested previously, Whites are not proportionately represented in HE to the White population as a whole, suggesting HE participation is subject to an ethnicity effect. There is clearly an increase in the participation rates amongst BME students. The census shows that Whites are the majority ethnic group and present 86% of the UK population. Assuming this pattern to be consistent, the composition of those entering from a White ethnic group should be 86% of the intake, with BMEs being 14%. But, this is not the case. Intuitively this leads to the conclusion that ethnic minorities are over represented as a proportion of society in HE, and there must be an underlying reason(s) for a participation rate that is ahead of the dominant ethnic group.

The differences lie not only within the ethnic groups but in various other areas across the HE sector. In aggregate terms, BME students are better represented at undergraduate level than postgraduate level,

concentrated at the new post-1992 universities and in certain subjects (see Table 5.3). BME students are more likely to study in larger towns and cities and are more likely to complete a degree course as opposed to other qualifications. This leaves ethnic minorities as a rarity in the older universities, specialist colleges, the Open University and those in mainly rural regions. At Coventry University, and other towns and cities which boast larger ethnic communities, the proportion of BME students is significantly larger compared to other institutions.

4.3   Participation Figures – Nationally and at Coventry University

Overall, generically, the composition of ethnic minorities participating in higher education continues to increase from 18.6% for 2012 entry to 20.1% in 2013, for all undergraduate entry. Whilst participation has increased there are substantial differences in ethnic minorities by subject area. According to HESA, the lowest participation is in the category of veterinary science (3.5%) with the highest participation in the area of Law (32%). Table 4.1 reports participation rates in HE for the ethnic groups included in this research, nationally and at Coventry University, for the year 2013–2014.

Table 4.1: Student Participation Figures by Ethnicity, 2013–14, UK and Coventry University (CU)

BME Group	BME Participation UK %	BME Participation CU %	Variance UK v CU
White	82	61	+21%
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	3	-1%
Black or Black British – African	5	14	-9%
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	8	-5%
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	3	6	-3%
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	2	-1%
Other (including mixed)	5	6	-1%

Table 4.1 shows that White students represent that largest participant group in HE, nationally. As only the BME groups of my sample are included in Table 4.1 and percentages adjusted accordingly, it appears at first glance that the White student population at Coventry University stands at 61%; however, of the total student population at CU (incorporating all BME groups) all percentages are lower, with the White student population standing at 41%. Table 4.1 does show that in comparison to the national profile, the representation of White students is lower at CU. Thus, Coventry University has a larger proportion of BME students and therefore this may result in a requirement to develop policies to reflect the much more diverse student body.

The reflection of the higher BME rates at Coventry University, in comparison to the national body of students, may be because of the regional make-up of the West Midlands, with Coventry and Birmingham both having significant BME communities and so acting as a feeder to Coventry University.

4.4 What Are the Attainment Inequalities in Education?

The previous section explored the participation rates within the higher education system. Although BME participation rates are proportionately higher compared to UK population figures, their attainment is lower. In this section I begin with an exploration of attainment at GCSE level, progressing onto attainment at A-levels or equivalent qualification, before moving onto looking at differences in degree attainment.

4.4.1 What Are the Inequalities – GCSE Attainment?

Differences in educational attainment between ethnic groups, prior to entering HE, exist but are contrastingly different from the attainment differences in HE, most markedly that some BME groups outperform White students. Descriptive analysis using the benchmark of attaining five and above GCSEs at grades A* to C as the outcome measure shows a clear pattern and a hierarchy of attainment (Bryant, 2014). At GCSE level the differences are significant, with twice as many Indian males attaining the benchmark than Bangladeshi males. For both genders, Indians perform highest, higher than the achievements of Whites, Blacks, Pakistanis and Bangladeshi; Blacks, Pakistani and Bangladeshi feature at the bottom of the attainment spectrum.

In terms of SEC in 2012, only 31% of pupils from poorer backgrounds achieved five good GCSEs including English and mathematics, compared to 59% of children from wealthier homes. This attainment gap has been an enduring feature of the education system, and the situation has only marginally improved in the recent past (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2012). It is not within the scope of this research to assess differences in GCSE attainment in any greater depth, hence the following section focuses on ethnicity alone. Table 4.2 shows attainment at GCSE level, grades A* to C, for the ethnic groups included in my sample.

Table 4.2: Percentage of Pupils Achieving Five or More GCSEs at Grade A* to C or Equivalent by BME Group
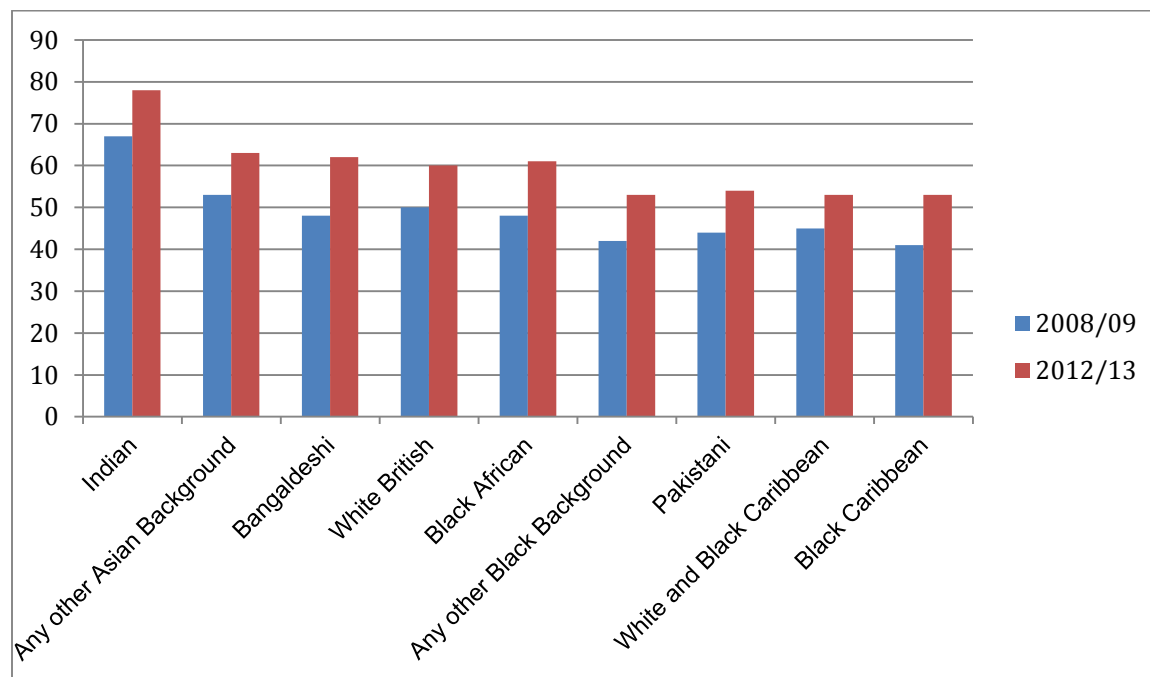
Table 4.2 shows that attainment at GCSE level has increased for all included groups in this research from 2008–09 to 2012–13, but variances between different ethnic groups continue (Department for Education, 2015). Although Table 4.2 does not include the ethnic group Chinese, the percentage of Chinese pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C or equivalent is 17.5 percentage points above the national average, making them the highest attaining BME group at GCSE level. Students from

the BME group Black Caribbean remain the lowest performing group, although they have shown the largest improvement. The percentage of Black pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C or equivalent is 2.5 percentage points below the national average. This gap has narrowed by 1.7 percentage points since 2011–12 (but over the longer term has narrowed by 3.7 percentage points since 2008–09). Students from any Asian or mixed background continue to perform above the national average, those from an Asian background by 3.6 percentage points and students from any mixed background by 2.0 percentage points. Pupils from any White background performed broadly in line with the national average.

At GCSE level education BME students attain highly, above the nationally expected level. Interestingly, those students whose parents are in the higher social classes (professional and managerial positions) are most likely to achieve grades A* to C compared to any other class combination. The second highest achieving students are those where both parents have intermediate occupations. This trend continues; where grades are lower, the lower the social class. Consequently, both ethnic origin and social class are influential on attainment.

4.4.2   What Are the Inequalities – A-level Attainment?

A-levels are the traditional route at level 3 education into HE and vocational qualifications have become an accepted alternative into HE (see Section 2.5). BME students are more likely to take the traditional A-level route into HE (Connor et al., 2004), which might explain some of lower attainment at degree level because the assumption is that that A-levels are the more difficult route. Attainment at A-level is more equal between BME and White students than at degree level, although some differentiation does start at this level (Adams, 2014). Hence it follows where students are entering HE with lower entry qualifications, can we expect them to catch up in HE? The question, to some extent, is rhetorical, because clearly in order to achieve results HEIs should be supporting the attainment of all students, providing tailored support particularly in the light of BME students sometimes being the largest group present in HE.

However, even where BME students enter HE with similar qualifications they still obtain lower degree classification (Adams, 2014). Where BME and White students achieve similarly at A-level, Adams reported that 72% of White students who have grades BBB at A-level went on to gain a first or upper second

class degree, compared with only 56% of Asian students and 53% of Black students. More markedly, even those BME students who enter HE with high attainment at A-level do not appear to have the same chances of achieving a good degree. This is evidenced by BME students at Russell Group universities, where an attainment gap likewise exists between BME and White students, albeit smaller.

4.4.3   What Are the Inequalities – Degree Attainment?

Whilst there has been an increase in the proportion of good degrees, since I started my research in 2008, BME students are less likely to be obtaining these good degrees and even less likely to obtain first class honours degrees; although there are noticeable variations between the ethnic categories themselves. Generally, all minority ethnic groups achieve lower classes of degrees, on average, compared to their White counterparts. Black and particularly Black African students achieved the lowest (Connor et al., 2003). Table 4.3 shows degree classifications achieved against the overall distribution of students at Coventry University, 2013–14.

Table 4.3: Degree Classification Attainment Against Participation Rates, 2013–14, Coventry University (CU)

BME Group	BME Good Degree CU %	BME Participation CU Rate %
White	67	61
Black or Black British – Caribbean	3	3
Black or Black British – African	9	14
Asian or Asian British – Indian	9	8
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	5	6
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	2
Other (including mixed)	5	6

Table 4.3 shows that of the groups there is a difference in good degree classification (2:1 or above) at Coventry University overall against the distribution of students. The evidence from the data is that White students proportionately outperform BME students. For example, 14% of the student body is Black or Black

British (African), but when degrees are awarded less than 10% achieves a good degree. In the case of White students, for study group comparative purposes, 61% are represented by White students whilst 67% of this group achieve a good degree. It is safe to assume, given the number of students involved, if the good degree classifications were normal then they would be proportionate with the body of students. Proportionately higher numbers of BME students achieve lower classification degrees at Coventry University than BME students nationally.

4.5   Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the increase of BME participation and presents the statistical quantifiable evidence of an attainment gap between BME and White students in UK universities. Statistics presented in this chapter show that specific groups of BME students outperform White students at GCSE level, and that some differential attainment exists at level 3, but ultimately BME groups are graduating with poorer degrees; their chances of obtaining a good degree are proportionately lower. This raises the concern that if these BME groups can perform highly in primary and secondary educational institutions, could the HEI be preventing higher attainment at degree level? Although some statistics are derived from different years the general overall attainment pattern remains similar. These figures raise concerns that HEIs in England are failing to support Black and Asian undergraduate students, despite improved efforts to encourage them to participate.

5.   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To highlight the issue of varying educational attainment levels, Chapter Four presented participation rates and degree attainment figures. Emerging from the discussion so far is the position that differential attainment is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon with the ability to have a significant impact on the lives of individuals. Furthermore, given the multi-faceted nature of the research presented in this thesis, there are issues which need to be addressed, hence the need for further research into the area.

This chapter presents a conceptual framework, informed by previous research. Reviewing previous literature helps to develop sharper and more insightful research questions about the topic (Cooper, 1984). The benefits of establishing a conceptual framework are discussed, followed by a discussion of each of the identified concepts.

5.1   The Role of Prior Theory

In the view of some protagonists of Grounded Theory, the absence of a prior theoretical framework and hypothesis is crucial to the iterative nature of qualitative research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A prior theoretical framework is deemed inappropriate because it imposes categories and ideas, and qualitative research does not seek scientific explanations or pose specific questions or hypotheses to be tested at the outset of the research. Phenomenological research allows for a radical alternative to approaches that reduce phenomena to discrete variables in order to predict and explain (Langdridge, 2007). In phenomenological research a researcher frames a question, often based on a review of previous literature that seeks to explore some experience or an aspect of that experience. Langdridge (2007) proposed that the researcher must still have an agenda for research to give direction and focus, employing open-ended research questions and amending them as needed during the process. In contrast to the "pure" Grounded Theory approach, such research requires the construction of a conceptual framework. For these reasons, although this a phenomenological study, a conceptual framework was devised to guide and inform the

research. The resulting conceptual framework consists of a loose structure with five broad areas that inform educational attainment.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that the construction of a conceptual framework is effectively the proposition of a preliminary theory therefore prior theory plays a role, in the same manner that my conceptual framework was informed by prior theory. The phenomenological researcher does not classify him/herself as a theorist due to the fact that linkage from theory is based on reflection of existential literature (Goulding, 2002). However, as some reflection of previous literature that has informed the conceptual framework is unavoidable, prior theory does play a part both from which it is possible to say that inductive theory can be generated.

This research is based at one institution, and hence has elements of a case study, and some form of theory development is essential as part of the research design phase. As Yin (1994:28) notes, 'the simple goal is to have a sufficient blueprint for your study, and this requires theoretical propositions'. Then, the complete research design will provide surprisingly strong guidance in determining what data to collect and the strategies for analysing the data. Case study research can have elements of both theory building and theory testing but there is debate regarding how much theory building or induction, compared to theory testing or deduction, should occur (Carson et al., 2001). Generally, Grounded Theory suggests a combination of an inductive/deductive approach when informing researching, collecting data and during data analysis (Charmaz, 2006), a possibility in this research enabled with the use of a conceptual framework. Further, there is a rich stock of pre-existing knowledge available to be built on which provides explanations for the attainment gap therefore the research presented in this thesis is not entirely exploratory.

Theory development does not only facilitate data collection but also determines the way in which generalisations can be made. A common case study flaw is to conceive statistical generalisations as the method of generalising the results, but the cases are not 'sampling units'. The appropriate method for this is 'analytic generalisation' in which a previously developed theory is used as a template against which to compare the empirical results of the case study. If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory,

replication may be claimed (Yin, 1994). In the case of this research, the conceptual framework could be the template against which the findings could be compared, confirming or disconfirming this preliminary theory.

Furthermore, in terms of theory, phenomenological interpretivists begin with the individual and set out to understand their interpretation of the world, whereby theory is emergent and it should be 'grounded' in data generated by the research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Theory should not precede but instead should follow: investigators work directly with the experience and understanding to build theory, thus theory becomes sets of meaning which yield insight and understanding to people's behaviour (Cohen et al., 2011).

5.2   Justification for Further Research

After mapping the root literatures, Table 5.2 shows the context within which the researches were conducted, their identified key causes of differential attainment, the number of times each research has been citied and recommended areas for further research. As can be seen from table 5.2 all these studies called for further investigation into the issue of differential attainment. Studies by Broecke and Nicholls (2007), Connor et al. (2004) and Lesley (2005) frankly state that further research is needed in order to close the attainment gap, with Broecke and Nicholls (2007) acknowledging that considerable costs are attached to degree attainment.

In response to Connor et al. (2004) I aim to understand better the influence of each participant's family within my selected, narrower range of BME categories. Goldsmith (2004) and Lesley (2005) both target further research and actions at institutional level, Goldsmith calling for educational staff to address how they lower beliefs. In my research I will deduce how participants perceive beliefs held by tutors, whether they report any forms of discrimination and the student/teacher relationship (Lesley, 2005). Lastly, in response to Owen et al. (2000) my research is based at one institution in the city of Coventry, using only limited BME groups to uncover differences between them, employing Coventry University's ethnic diversity monitoring system. I cannot influence or improve socio-economic or family situations as recommended by Rothon (2007), wider societal actions are required. My ultimate goal of conducting this research is of closing the attainment gap between BME and White students.

In terms of methodology all these main studies were quantitative using statistical analysis of UK home domicile student, with the exception of Connors et al. (2004) who additionally conducted some interviews, hence the justification for qualitative. These main studies had broader contexts with a national spread of institutions rather than a deep, focused study within one specific institution. There has been more institutional level research into BME attainment in response to calls from HEA and ECU in 2008, nonetheless there is a need for current research increasingly to go beyond the currently available statistics in greater depth to provide robust interpretation of students' perspectives. The majority of literatures recommend specially commissioned qualitative research into the experiences of particular student groups which could provide valuable intelligence into why an attainment gap is present. Lastly, subsequent to conducting a literature review, the amount of research into BME attainment at HE level is not sufficient, in the light of increasing BME student numbers in HE in the UK. The limited amount of data available was of immediate concern when compared to research at school level.

Table 5.1: Mapping the Causes of Differential Attainment

Study	Determinants of Educational Attainment					Effect on Attainment	Research Strategies
	Socio-economic Factors	Course Choice/Prior Attainment	Culture and Ethnicity	Institutional Culture	Peer Group Influences		
Owen et al. (2000)	Position held in the social class schema. Those with fathers in non-manual jobs achieving higher. Family demographic background.	Black students are more likely to have qualifications below A level on entry to HE. Level of GCSE achievement steadily improved across all ethnic groups during the1990s.	Family background has a strong influence upon attainment across ethnic groups.	Limited representation of ethnic groups amongst staff in UK HE institutions.	BME students more likely to be studying at 'new' universities.	Minority ethnic groups are relatively well represented in HE, with variations. Still wide gaps in attainment between ethnic groups. A greater percentage of White students achieve a first or upper second degree.	Quantitative analysis. Data sources used for measuring minority ethnic achievement: census data, sample surveys, administrative records.
Connor et al. (2004)	Ethnicity immigration status/family. Aspirations and expectations of the value of HE is a driver.	Minority ethnic degree entrants have lower entry qualifications. Fewer take the traditional A level route.	Minority ethnic participation is not uniform. Greater parental and family influence and support amongst minority ethnic families. Influence of ethnicity to enter HE is powerful.	Less satisfied with institute and course choice. Institutional racism.	Clustering of minority groups.	BMEs clustered mostly at post-92 universities. All minority ethnic groups do not do as well in degree performance as White students.	Data reviews, surveys, interviews with target groups. Telephone interviews, face-to-face (some in-depth) interviews. Qualitative (topics include activities, finances), quantitative analysis of existing statistical data.

	Determinants of Educational Attainment						
Study	**Socio-economic Factors**	**Course Choice/Prior Attainment**	**Culture and Ethnicity**	**Institutional Culture**	**Peer Group Influences**	**Effect on Attainment**	**Research Strategies**
Goldsmith (2004)	Black and Latino students are more likely to come from low socio-economic status families.	Previous achievement. More likely to attend inferior schools.	Certain beliefs, educational aspirations and attitudes towards school high compared to whites. Parents lack the adequate skills and resources for interpreting school feedback.	School/institute type. School's racial and ethnic mix of students and teachers.	Peers comparing themselves to low-achieving peers becomes the norm. Their beliefs improve in the presence of minority peers.	Black and Latino students achieve less than White students.	Multilevel-model analysis/data from National Educational Longitudinal Study. Focus on beliefs, belief variable study. Concrete attitudinal measures based on experience. Racial backgrounds coded 2 sets of models, first used 5 beliefs – dependent variable, 2nd used maths/reading test scores.
Leslie (2005)	Social background, age, marital status, location.	Ethnic minorities are less qualified upon entry to HE. Qualifications and subject choice do much to explain differences.	Subject/institution choice.	Institutional racism, a suspicion of unfairness. Discrimination in the HE sector as found in the UK labour market. Individual institutions have discretion as to whether an offer is made.	Nothing noted	People from UK's minority ethnic communities achieve less good degree results than whites. Despite subject choice and qualifications being taken into consideration, whites still achieve good degrees.	UCAS admission data based on applications by ethnic groups, qualifications upon entry of home domicile students.

	Determinants of Educational Attainment						
Study	**Socio-economic Factors**	**Course Choice/Prior Attainment**	**Culture and Ethnicity**	**Institutional Culture**	**Peer Group Influences**	**Effect on Attainment**	**Research Strategies**
Broecke and Nicholls (2007)	Parental attributes/ income; those students with more financial support may not need to work and therefore have more resources. Index of multiple deprivation.	Minority ethnic students have lower entry qualifications on average and fewer take an A level route. Subject choice. Parents' level of education.	Ethnic effect remains with controls for other variables. English not being the first language.	The type of prior institution of study. Certain institutions may not equip individuals to attain highly. Ethnic bias within the HE system.	Nothing noted	Although participation of students from minority ethnic communities is higher in HE, their attainment is lower. Those with academic qualifications perform better in HE.	Quantitative dependent variables (degree classifications). Ordered logistic regression. English domiciled students. Analysis of large sets of HESA data. Broad ethnic groups categories.
Rothon (2007)	Some Black and minority ethnic groups are heavily concentrated towards the bottom of the class structure. Questionable whether social class works in the same way for all groups. Social class schemas are not appropriate/ accurate measure. Poorer performance might be due to lower occupational background.	Good GCSE results. Mother's education.	Family structures vary by ethnicity. Parents' expectations – motivational drive for self-improvement.	Context of institute and neighbourhood, lack of role models. Cultural differences, lack of role models. Teacher racism. Institutional racism, lack of connection to institute.	Those of similar ethnicity perform similarly – from measure. Residential patterns may impact attainment levels. Peer contact with disenchanted youth.	Some minority ethnic groups outperform at GCSE but obtain poorer degrees.	Consideration of quantitative data: GCSE achievements (LEA). Combined 7 datasets. 3 measures for social class.

Table 5.2: Leading Prior Research on Differential Attainment

Study	Context	Causes	Number of Citations	Areas for Further Research
Broecke and Nicholls (2007)	Qualifiers of 2004–05, HESA data, UK.	Ethnicity.	59	To close attainment gap between White and ethnic minority students, as considerable costs are attached to this attainment.
Connor et al. (2004)	UK domiciled students flowing in, through and out of HE in England.	Background variables, ethnicity.	193	To close attainment gap. Better understanding of parental influence. Improve statistical measures of HE students, particularly ethnicity sub-groups.
Goldsmith (2004)	Black-White and Latino-White achievement gaps in US high schools.	School's racial mix, peers' and students' optimism.	158	Educational staff need to address how they lower student beliefs; segregated-minority schools can be improved by employing minority staff.
Leslie (2005)	HE graduates in UK.	Less qualified upon entry.	27	Close gap, widening access initiatives by government, Race Relations Act 2001: eliminate discrimination and promote equal opportunities and good race relations.
Owen et al. (2000)	National census data of 16–19 years in the UK.	Family background. Lower entry qualifications upon entry to HE.	120	More segregation of data in terms of geography, time periods. Greater detail for smaller geographical areas and more statistically robust information on minority ethnic groups.
Rothon (2007)	Sociological analysis of British class structure for both genders.	Combined social class. Material circumstances.	55	Improved socio-economic/family situations.

5.3 The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in this chapter is derived from a review of the relevant literature. Analysis of the literature showed that a number of core themes appear to be the main factors dominating the rationale for differing attainment, and it is these core themes, which comprise the concepts, that will be discussed during this chapter. From the literature it is possible to identify five key recurrent influential factors on attainment; the process of identifying these was initially undertaken by grouping the literatures into broad themes, then mapping details from some of the key studies to each theme to reinforce their identification (see Table 5.1 for the mapping). Table 5.1 shows that six key literatures similarly refer to five influential factors, in some form. These studies were identified as key literatures as they are referred to more often than others examining BME attainment. Further, as evidenced by the citation rates, they are relatively large-scale research studies and consequently it was concluded that that these studies were the most suitable base point for this research.

Prior to this mapping process I had highlighted influential factors on BME attainment across numerous research studies. I concluded that broad similar influential factors were recurrently mentioned and a pattern began to emerge, particularly amongst these literatures, which was another justification for their choice as key. I then took the step of noting these recurrent influential factors as headings, the five constituting socio-economic factors, course choice/prior attainment, culture and ethnicity, institutional culture and peer group influences. The next step involved returning to only the key literatures, reading each of their highlighted influential factors and noting how each research believed the factor noted as a heading was influential upon BME attainment. I continued to repeat this step until influential factors of each key literature were recorded against the five headings previously identified as recurrent, hence conducting a mapping process.

This mapping process allowed me to see the main influential reasons given for differential attainment, and that researchers similarly view the majority of these areas as influential, validating the identification of each factor. From these broad areas of influential factors, the conceptual framework (see Figure 5.1) was devised upon which to base my research. This framework proposed that differential attainment is centred on five main factors that influence the educational outcomes of BME students. The influencing factors are hereafter referred to as concepts upon being positioned in the conceptual

framework. All five concepts have been previously supported yet remain broad enough areas to explore in depth for other influential factors on the BME participants attainment. They provided me with a valid base from which to start my research.

Figure 5.1: The Conceptual Framework
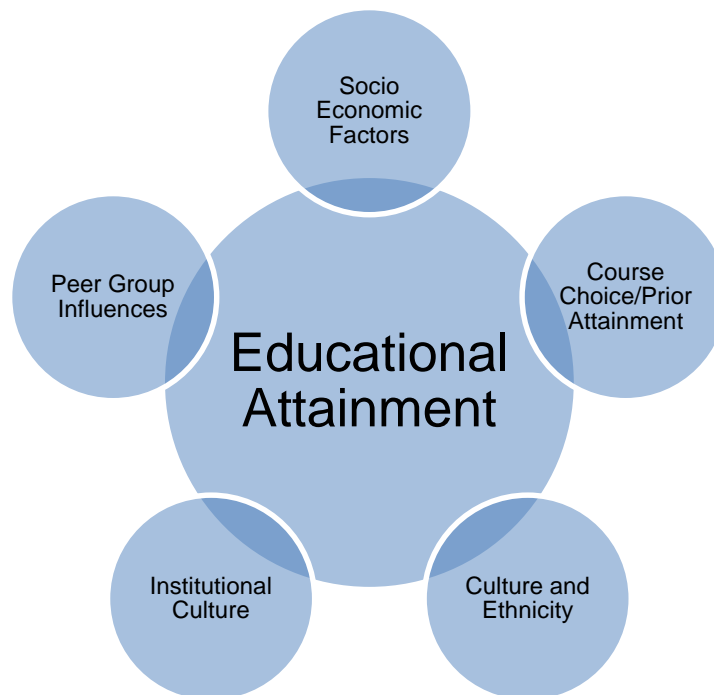
Figure 5.1 visualises the five primary concepts presented in the conceptual framework. Each of the five concepts is proposed as being influential on attainment and has been placed equidistant from attainment because no one concept is proposed as being more influential. Likewise each concept is presented independently, with a degree of autonomy. The points of contact represent the influence; in figure 5.1 each concept overlaps equally although in reality the figure would be unique for each student, with the concepts overlapping at differing levels and because they overlap there might be some seepage via attainment into other concepts. For instance, some students are more likely to be influenced by the actions of their peers than others. The attainment circle is presented as the largest, as attainment needs to be large enough to accommodate the multitude of factors it is influenced by and furthermore attainment has the potential to affect whole lives.

The five concepts were selected independently of each other and are not presented as related; however, overlapping is possible. For instance, socio-economic factors may influence prior attainment but this will not always be the case. Research findings may reveal overlapping and interrelationships which will be discussed in Chapter Seven. Furthermore, this being a qualitative research study employing aspects of Grounded Theory in which a prior theory is not recommended, the desire was to present only a limited framework to keep the focus more emergent. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued for the absence of any form of a framework for qualitative research; however, I felt it was a necessary step to devise some form of structure on which to base and develop this research. Thus, my research does not employ a "pure" grounded approach allowing for this limited structure.

Reviewing previous literature provided a guide to the influential factors on BME attainment. It is inevitable that all researchers have been previously informed by existing literature, hence sparking the researcher's initial interest. Logic indicates that it is not entirely possible to attempt research without any preconceived assumptions, because without the initial idea there would be a complete lack of guidance. A further reason for my conceptual framework was that I needed discussion areas upon which to create a discussion guide: the tool employed to gather data from BME students. During the construction of the conceptual framework I attempted to keep the influential areas broad and avoided reducing phenomena to discrete variables, ensuring each concept was broad enough to allow participants to discuss and develop the conceptual subject from various perspectives. Influential categories were not imposed upon the participants therefore taking a semi-structured approach (see Chapter Six).

There are numerous reasons, or causes that have been advanced, for differential attainment yet an attainment gap remains hence the aim of this research to provide deepening of understanding from the 'root', namely how the students themselves perceive their grades and attainment. Apart from the clear benefits it hopes to bring BME students of, for example, higher grades and better life prospects, institutions will benefit by developing protocols to ensure that BME students succeed in their studies (Stevenson, 2012). This discussion is required as there is a need to evaluate the model within the setting of the student body, because they are impacted by any policies or practices to address wider issues of BME's educational attainment. Each of the five concepts associated with this thesis are discussed in the following section.

5.4 Concepts of Differential Attainment

This section reports on the concepts that are deemed to have an impact on differential education attainment. Five concepts are proposed, together which constitute the Conceptual Framework (see Figure 5.1).

5.4.1 Socio-economic Factor

It is a long-held view that socio-economic factors are influential in numerous ways on an individual's life, not solely in terms of educational attainment (Rothon, 2007). Socio-economic refers to similar social status, jobs and economic status amongst groups of people (Haralamabos, 2013). The effects of socio-economic factors range from influencing the residential area where an individual lives, the type of school attended, employment opportunities and, consequently, wealth (Goldthorpe, 1980). Even from these few mentioned influences of socio-economic factors, it is feasible to deduce their possibility of affecting attainment.

From a sociological perspective, the effects of socio-economic factors have narrowed over time across the UK population, as there has been greater social mobility (Goldthorpe, 1986). During the 1950s, it was almost unheard of that someone from the working classes would attend university; however with government initiatives such as Widening Participation and earlier initiatives, equal opportunity legislation and the growing desire for young people to be trained/remain in education, higher education has become, in theory at least, accessible for all (HEA). Table 5.1 shows strong support exists for socio-economic factors being influential upon attainment. Owen et al. (2000) reported the position held in the social class schema is influential upon attainment, in particular that students with fathers in non-manual positions achieve more highly than those with fathers in manual jobs. Broecke and Nicholls (2007) similarly proposed that parental income and educational levels, which would determine occupation, are influential on attainment. Goldsmith (2004) and Leslie (2005) proposed that simply belonging to a lower social class influences BME attainment. Other research supports socio-economic factors as being influential on attainment (for example see Johnson et al., 2001; Coltrane, 2000; King, 2003; Rothon, 2007; Bowden and Doughney, 2011).

Although these numerous studies, and others, propose socio-economic factors as influential on educational attainment, the broad concept is suggested as opposed to the exact relationship between

socio-economic factors and attainment. As can be seen from the literatures socio-economic factors incorporate many facets, for instance parents occupation and the position held in the social class schema. Literatures establish these and many other facets as influential, but fail to explain how; how does the position held in the social class schema held effect attainment, particularly as the position is an abstract notion rather than observable? Owen et al. (2000) stated the fathers occupation is influential, but in which ways? Do those from families where the father holds a non-manual job possess differing values, financial resources all which in turn effect attainment? We know that BME students more often derive form lower socio-economic groups, but if they are participating in HE in greater proportions regardless of socio-economic position than their White counterparts, then the effects of socio-economic class may not be effecting attainment either. Are these BME families positioned in the lower socio-economic groups actually living in relative deprivation? The measure for deprivation is much broader than simply financial.

These questions highlight that ethnicity interrelates with social class and there is a need for a more in-depth understanding. Additional factors are interacting with socio-economic factors. By talking to BME students about their backgrounds and families I am hoping to make a judgment about their socio-economic groups and levels of social capital they possess. With progressive generations I generally believe the quality of social capital communicated is changing, in most cases with a corresponding change in socio-economic group.

5.4.2   Course Choice and Prior Attainment

Course choice and prior attainment have been collectively identified as a concept influential on attainment due to them being recurrently identified (see Table 5.1); in particular Leslie (2005) reported that BME students are more likely to be associated with certain courses. Generally, previous literatures argue that a student's choice of course influences their final grade. For example, Jones and Elias (2005) reported that higher numbers of BME students were more likely to enroll on science and technology based courses, relatively difficult subject areas, therefore proposing that it might not be ethnicity affecting grades but the relative difficulty of subject choice. Similarly, Leslie proposed that the particular course studied influenced the attainment of BME students, but at the same time argued that BME students preferred such courses. Table 5.3 shows the distribution of students by ethnicity included in my sample, by subject area at Coventry University.

Table 5.3: Distribution of Students by Ethnicity and Subject Area at Coventry University, 2013-14

	% White	% Black or Black British – Caribbean	% Black or Black British – African	% Asian or Asian British – Indian	% Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	% Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	% Other (including mixed)
Subjects Allied to Medicine	73	2	10	6	4	1	3
Biological Sciences	24	5	14	10	7	1	8
Agriculture and Related Subjects	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
Physical Sciences	67	1	13	5	6	1	7
Mathematical Sciences	63	2	8	14	6	2	4
Computer Science	50	2	16	13	10	3	5
Engineering and Technology	66	2	13	7	6	1	6
Architecture, Building and Planning	60	3	14	10	5	2	5
Social Studies	51	6	21	8	5	2	6
Law	29	2	29	15	15	4	6
Business and Administrative Studies	57	3	17	9	6	2	5
Mass Communications and Documentation	59	7	18	6	2	2	6
Languages	64	4	10	6	6	1	9
Historical and Phil Studies	81	3	3	3	-	3	6
Creative Arts and Design	77	4	5	5	2	1	6
Education	73	-	8	8	4	-	8

Jones and Elias (2005) and Leslie (2005) previously reported that the proportionate over-representation of BME students taking the more challenging subjects is thus possibly partly contributing to their attainment. Table 5.3 shows the subject areas of law, biological sciences, computer science and math's have a high percentage of BME students at Coventry University, confirming the findings of Jones and Elias and Lesley that BME students' are still more likely to study these relatively harder subjects. However, it is not always the case that their attainment is a result of the difficult subject choice (see section 4.1); a higher proportion of BME students attained a good degree in subjects allied to biological sciences.

On comparison of BME participation in the different subject areas, Coventry University figures reflect a similar pattern to national figures. Generally BME participation is higher in most subject areas at CU, with BME participation rates higher still in the subject areas of law, biological sciences, computer science and math's. Reasons exist as to why BME students make specific subject choices; from

personal experience over a number of years as an educationalist, these include the influence and expectations of family because certain subjects command higher respect, in tandem with a disregard for certain subjects.

Prior to entering HE, all students will have spent numerous years in education working towards achieving the qualifications that enable them access to HE, validating the proposition that prior attainment is influential. The key literatures all present the idea that prior attainment is influential on attainment, namely that BME students have lower entry qualifications on entry to HE (Owen et al., 2000; Connor et al., 2004; Leslie, 2005; Goldsmith, 2004; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007). I am interested in finding out what proportion of my sample took the traditional A-level route or the vocational route and whether a pattern related to ethnicity is highlighted i.e. are students of a certain ethnicity more likely to take a particular route. Additionally are those students who followed the traditional A-level route into HE more likely to be satisfied with their previous attainment?

5.4.3   Culture and Ethnicity

Culture, from a functionalist perspective, can be defined as a classification system that separates individuals based on norms, values and lifestyles (Haralambos, 2013) whereas ethnicity refers to shared characteristics within a particular collectivity of people (see Chapter Two); the two concepts being related as generally members of one ethnic group abide by the rules of one culture. Culture and ethnicity were identified as being influential on attainment because much previous research recognises specific effects associated with belonging to specific ethnic groups; for instance the low attainment of Bangladeshi children at GCSE level (Department of Education, 2015). Likewise a gap in degree attainment has been recognised with BME groups less likely to achieve a good degree, indicating that specific BME issues are at play. It is important to address these incidences and those similar in case any forms of discrimination exist in the light of legislation.

Undoubtedly, belonging to a given ethnic group and having been brought up with the specific norms, values and lifestyle of its culture will influence and shape an individual and their identity (Tassoni, 2007). The majority of the key literatures report that BME parents are more supportive than White parents and that educational aspirations and support are stronger in ethnic households (Connor et al., 2004; Owen et al., 2000; Goldsmith, 2004). Furthermore, in most cases ethnicity is a visible,

unchangeable demographic characteristic, hence noticed by others and possibly influencing how others react to an individual as evidenced by Broecke and Nicholls (2007) who reported ethnic bias in the UK HE system. Ethnic bias in this case refers to tutors noticing student ethnicity and treating them unfavourably as a result of their ethnicity. Broecke and Nicholls also observed that even with controls in place for other factors including subject area, prior attainment, type of level 3 qualification and index of multiple deprivation, an ethnicity effect remains.

Culture and ethnicity can initially interplay with other factors, for instance whether a young person participates in HE, amongst particular cultures education is more highly valued than it is by those belonging to the dominant culture of the host country (the UK). This is evidenced by high participation rates amongst certain BME groups (see Chapter Four), assuming a link between belonging to a particular BME group and HE participation. These higher levels of motivation to partake in HE are most probably not coincidental, but related to being from a minority ethnic group (Connor et al., 2004). The reasons for high participation amongst some BME groups could be positive, for instance valuing education, together with negative reasons such as fear of discrimination in employment (Singh, 2014). Gibson (1988) further demonstrated the motivation of certain ethnic groups to succeed with research amongst Sikhs in California, USA, reporting that they saw education as a means to better their lives, that they were undeterred by racism and continued to work hard and achieve their aspirations. The behaviours displayed by the Sikhs in California were additionally linked to immigrant status (see Section 2.4).

I am interested in discovering whether the effects of ethnicity remain the same as stated in these previous studies, amongst this latest generation of BME students. Also, what reasons the current BME students give for their continued participation in HE, does the influence of the family run into effecting attainment? Furthermore amongst my chosen BME groups, what the differences in participation and attainment? Does an ethnicity effect exist when choosing an academic course choice or institution?

Simultaneously I placed the literature section of 'Influence of Family' within the concept of culture and ethnicity because the influence of the family has been evidenced to be more specific to BME students in previous literature (Connor et al., 2004); moreover I believe this to be true from observing the participation figures, high numbers of BME students from lower classes participate in HE. Again by

talking to the BME students I hope to deduce the extent and ways in which their families influence their decisions.

5.4.4 Institutional Culture

Institutional culture has been identified as an influential concept on attainment because the environment within which learning happens inevitably impacts individuals. The key literatures refer to various aspects constituting institutional culture; for instance, Goldsmith (2004) refers to the ethnic mix of staff and students at an institute, presumably seeing others of similar ethnicity makes for a more welcoming environment. Broecke and Nicholls (2007), Lesley (2005) and Rothon (2007) more seriously report ethnic bias and racism within the UK HE system, either from teaching staff or indirectly through institutional processes.

As mentioned previously, a number of the literatures highlight that particular ethnic groups outperform others at GCSE and A level; however Goodhart (2013) found that after entering HE these ethnic groups' degree attainment is comparatively lower than other groups thus suggesting that institutional factors are at play rather than academic ability. Additionally, much previous support exists for the theory that institutional culture needs to be welcoming, integrating students and hence performing better academically (for example see Coleman, 1990; Ma, 2003; Welsh, Jenkins and Greene, 2001; Johnson et al., 2001).

Predictably, all individuals need to feel a sense of belonging and welcome at an institution for emotive reasons and to induce them to perform highly. There are many aspects to the institutional culture which can result in or prevent these feelings, including environment, academic and support staff, policies and procedures, and the structure and layout; even the images displayed can all influence how an individual feels and behaves. Interestingly, and rather surprisingly, Fielding et al., (2008) observed that institutions with a high proportion of BME students experience a lower student satisfaction rating than those with proportionally fewer BME students. Intuitively, given the possible outcome, it would be reasonable to assume that institutions with a high presence of BME students would make a greater effort to integrate them.

The ways in which academic or support personnel operate constitute how students perceive institutional culture. This, for example, can be the friendly nature of employees which can presumably

affect how welcome a student feels in the institution and the approachability of academic staff to ask for help, which, in turn, can improve attainment. Connor et al. (2004) reported tutors having low expectations from BME students and that a 'White focus' tended to lead to a degree of alienation amongst the BME students; a worrying notion which would no doubt suppress attainment because tutors grade assignments. Further, supporting Connor et al., a more recent study by Farwell (2008) reported a culture of 'alienation, bullying and harassment'.

A lack of positive role models in the institute of study for BME students has also previously been cited as an institutional obstacle (Owen et al., 2000; Goldsmith, 2004; Rothon, 2007) further evidenced by the fact that the majority of HE staff and senior management are White middle class (Bhopal and Maylor, 2014). Teaching, the delivery of knowledge and assignments which ultimately result in the attainment level, is determined by the institution and undoubtedly influences attainment. On the whole, most institutions report high attendance amongst BME students with White students being the poorest attendees (Stevenson and Whelan, 2013); we would expect, all other factors being equal, students' achievements to reflect this in higher performance. It may be that better attendance is masking the gap, because an argument often made is that attendance influences attainment, when there is some evidence that even with higher attendance levels there may still be a gap in attainment. This leads to conclude that BME under-attainment must be examined much more in terms of structural and institutional processes and discrimination. The practices, processes and strategies that can lead to disadvantage must be highlighted and addressed. It is important to remember, however, that specific BME issues may be preventing integration and adaptation to the institutional culture.

This research is focused within Coventry University and one aim is to conclude whether the institute is a contributory factor upon the participant's attainment. The type of institution could be an influential factor. How welcoming do students find Coventry University? Which factors are making BME students experience a sense of belonging at Coventry University? Which structural features will appear more prominently in discussions? Will the BME students mention ethnicity at all? Identification with ethnicity maybe altering with progressive generations.

5.4.5   Peer Group Influences

Having identified peer group influences as a concept, Table 5.1 shows that only a few of the key literatures support peer group influences as influential; however, where peer group influences are identified they are stated, in my opinion, convincingly as influential. Furthermore, BME students are grouped within all researches: all researchers referring to them as a united entity. Connor et al. (2004) reported the fact that BME groups are clustered at certain universities; presumably BME students choosing to attend these post 1992 universities to remain close to home or through wishing to study in the presence of others of similar ethnicity, which could be due to any number of factors, for example, feeling welcome and having common interests.

For the purpose of this research, I have decided to keep peer group influences as a fifth concept. Firstly because sociologists have put forward empirical evidence for decades that peers can yield significant pressure on young people, often more than families do (Handel, 2006); secondly being from a sociology background myself and from my educational experience, I have observed peer groups on campuses that are largely formed around similar ethnic backgrounds. A peer group can affect attainment and how hard a student does or does not work, amongst other factors. It is common for those in a peer group to establish and share their own norms and values (Browne, 2011). In my research I hope to expand existing research and what we know about peer groups currently; previous research establishes peers are influential but fails to state more precisely how. Additional questions I wish to answer include - why do BME students form friendships with others from similar ethnic backgrounds? Are peer groups formed around ethnicity more likely to have a negative or positive influence? Are specific relationships of more significance?

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has justified why a testable hypothesis was not proposed and why a loose conceptual framework was presented. The construction of a conceptual framework was deemed necessary as much previous research exists in this field therefore my research is not entirely exploratory and is undoubtedly influenced by preconceived ideas. Secondly, the conceptual framework proved crucial to guide this research.

The evidence on BME student attainment or under-attainment suggests that it is a complex and multi-causal phenomena. My conceptual framework attempts to bind pre-existing influential factors together. Five factors are proposed as being influential on BME attainment. Based on an analysis of the existing definitions, the concepts identified in this conceptual framework are broadly 'cross-representative' and should assist in researching these areas in depth, and support research into other areas.

With tools to clearly identify how and why certain determinants affect students' attainment and to what degree, institutions can begin to address the issue, improving students' grades and future prospects. One of the issues faced by researchers when exploring the determinants is the diversity of meaning and definitions attached to the determinants. Definitions in this research are based on assessments of previous work; in this research, during data collection, limited definitions will be provided with 'areas' brought up for discussion which will be student-led.

Whilst this chapter has presented the conceptual framework for this research, the following chapter will discuss the theoretical position adopted, methodology and the precise methods of data collection and analysis.

6.   METHODOLOGY and RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter discusses the methodological framework and the methods employed. During the construction of this thesis, a number of research approaches were available and initially considered. This chapter starts with setting out the research design, methodology and theoretical philosophical stance adopted, data collection and the steps involved in data analysis.

Research has been defined as:

> *"…the systematic and objective identification, collection, analysis, dissemination and use of information for the purpose of improving decision making related to the identification and solution of problems…"* (Malhotra, 2004: 7)

This chapter consists of six sections: 6.1 explores the research design, 6.2 the methodological position, 6.3 the stance adopted by this thesis, 6.4 ethical considerations, 6.5 data collection and 6.6 data analysis.

6.1   Research Design

A research design is the logic that links the data and evidence to be collected to the approaches deployed for analysing that data in order to advance our knowledge and understanding of the phenomena explored by the study. Every research study needs an implicit or explicit research design. Colloquially, a research design is an action plan for getting from here to there, with "here" being the initial set of questions to be answered (or at least explored in greater depth) and "there" as the conclusions derived from that exploration (Yin, 1994). Between here and there are a number of major steps, including the collection and analysis of data. For ease of clarity, the steps are laid out in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Overview of Research Design

| Identify potential areas of interest for research. | → | Examine quantitative data; identify the key issues. | → | Conduct literature review; identify concepts. |

| Evaluate/amend discussion guide; complete 20 in-depth interviews. | ← | Devise discussion guide; undertake pilot. | ← | Develop conceptual framework. |

| Analyse findings; compare to initial literature review. | → | Evaluate and make recommendations. | ⇢ | Develop strategies to address gap. |

There has been plentiful empirical evidence that an attainment gap exists between the degree performance of BME and White students, accompanied by calls for further research to understand the reasons why and to implement appropriate actions. On deciding to embark on research in my area of interest, I set about examining the statistical evidence and the key issues. Having conducted a literature review, a conceptual framework informed by the main issues was devised (see Chapter Five) and a range of tasks was identified in order to progress the work (see Table 6.1).

Following on from the conceptual framework, a discussion guide was devised and an initial pilot interview conducted, the purpose of which was to inform the researcher whether relevant questions were being asked, whether understanding of the participants and their views was being gained and to ensure that the desired information was being received. Once the pilot study was evaluated, the discussion guide was adapted and refined (see Appendix 6 and 7) and a further 19 in-depth interviews were conducted. Results were analysed employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (hereafter IPA) techniques. Conclusions were drawn as a result of the analysis with recommendations, which will hopefully be pivotal in the development of strategies at Coventry University to address the attainment gap.

The documentary and related tasks required to be completed prior to research are detailed in Table 6.1. In line with Coventry University's policies, ethical approval was gained before the

development of these documents. Additionally, the development of these initial documents was supported through consultations with members of my supervisory team.

Table 6.1: Paperwork Pro forma

Document	Explanation	Appendices
Introductory Email Message	Used during the initial stages of the recruitment process, sent out to final year BME students at Coventry University, inviting all prospective participants.	(see Appendix 2).
Participant Information Sheet	Provided a description of the research to volunteering participants. Designed to provide individuals with a detailed overview of the study, highlighting particular areas such as confidentiality matters and how to make a complaint.	(see Appendix 3).
Informed Consent Form 1	This was the preliminary consent form of this study for participants agreeing to be part of research.	(see Appendix 4).
Informed Consent Form 2	Initially an incentive was offered to recruit participants; this form was signed to confirm receipt of a voucher.	(see Appendix 5).

All research was based at and focused around Coventry University. The use of just one institution gave the research an element of case study design. The rationale for opting for Coventry University was twofold. Firstly, as an educational institution it met the conditions required for testing the conceptual framework; Coventry University was in a position where it could help confirm or extend the previous theories given its ethnic mix of students, statistical evidence of differential attainment and its commitment to addressing this gap. Secondly, on a practical level, being the researcher's host institution, Coventry University facilitated relatively easy access to BME students and attainment data.

6.2 Methodological Position

There are many reasons why a methodology for research should be considered: the main one being to enable the reader to understand the philosophy underpinning the choices and decisions made during the research and when stating a research position (Carson et al., 2001). Taking a philosophical viewpoint also helps to add a deeper and wider perspective to research, so that individual research projects can demonstrate a clear purpose within the wider context.

Methodology, broadly speaking, refers to the technique used by the researcher to discover the reality of a particular phenomenon (Perry et al., 1999). By choosing a methodology, a researcher selects the use of certain 'rules and procedures', with different connotations for conducting the research; for example, the way in which communications will be made and conclusions drawn. In this thesis, the methodology resides in the phenomenological paradigm. To distinguish between methodology and method, methodology deals with the logic of enquiry and how knowledge is generated, whereas method is the technique(s) used to collect and analyse the data when researching any group or social setting (Blaikie, 2000). Mills (1959: 57) noted:

> *"Methods are the procedure used by men [sic] trying to understand or explain something. Methodology is the study of methods; it offers theories about what men are doing when they are at work at their studies. Since there are many methods, methodology tends necessarily to be rather general in character and, accordingly does not usually – although of course it may – provide specific procedures for man at study. Epistemology is still more general than methodology, for its practitioners are occupied with the grounds and limits, in brief, the character, of knowledge."*

The precise methods implemented and the rationale underpinning the choices made are discussed in Section 6.3. In the following section the theory underpinning the methodology is discussed, which will help conceptualise the research and the tactics used for this thesis.

6.2.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, or things and experiences in our world as they appear and the way they are perceived by people, as they appear to consciousness (Langdridge, 2007: 10). In the case of this thesis, the phenomena under consideration are the factors in the HE experience in one context, Coventry University, which influence attainment as experienced by BME students. Along with other qualitative perspectives and in contrast to quantitative positivist approaches, this entails:

- A focus on human experience.

- A concern with meaning and how it arises.

- Recognising the role of the researcher in the co-construction of the topic under investigation and being built on an understanding of the way in which all experience must be understood in context, be it historical, cultural or otherwise (Langdridge, 2007).

The discipline of phenomenology is characterised by its individual domain of study, namely the significance of individual views and experiences, the context within which it happens and its method of obtaining primary unique results, i.e. research at the micro level, which is explained as 'getting back to the things themselves, experience should be examined in the way in which it occurs' (Husserl (1927) in Smith et al., 2013: 1).

In phenomenology, the subject is central: the person thinks, acts and perceives. Whilst the object is the thing being perceived, the object is not necessarily a material thing (Husserl, 1927). However, we live unthinkingly in the natural attitude and as a consequence, much is hidden from view and much is to be revealed though phenomenological methods, that is, to make individual participants critically aware of their natural attitude and acquire a greater critical understanding of their experience in HE. I attempted to make the participants conscious of what they are experiencing in HE and understand together how they perceive this experience. By raising their awareness and deriving meaning from the participants, I aimed to uncover influential factors upon their attainment in the daily educational setting within which they unconsciously function day-to-day. I did not, however, indicate to participants that there was an attainment gap between BME and White students.

In turn, to operate as a phenomenologist requires the researcher to attempt to suspend previous ontological preconceptions and instead access common-sense reasoning, with language becoming the central medium for the transmission of knowledge which is the polar end of the positivism spectrum. Husserl (1927) used the term *epoche,* also known as bracketing, to refer to the process by which we attempt to abstain from our presuppositions and preconceived ideas about things under investigation. Husserl further argued that human existence is characterised by natural attitudes because this is the most basic way of experiencing the world, with taken-for-granted assumptions.

In terms of methodology, Husserl's (1927) belief of being able to completely isolate natural attitudes is relevant because the initial semi-structured questions were based upon what the researcher believed may influence attainment. The semi-structured, in-depth interview schedule was, in turn, employed for data collection. In exploring the experience of HE together, participants becoming conscious of aspects within the HE experience of which they were previously unaware. Treating students as individuals and not members of groups values each individual experience as being of importance and worthy of examination in detail, hence the research only requires a small number of

participants (Smith et al., 2013). Each script produced formed the central focus of analysis (see Sections 6.5 and 6.6).

Phenomenology has been criticised; firstly, for its inability to generalise (however, this is not the main aim of this thesis), and secondly, for the issue of perception. The way in which meaning is accrued depends on the person perceiving the meaning. The context in which they are perceived, for instance if the context of a classroom evokes negative feelings, will, in turn, influence perceptions of the phenomena. A final criticism is whether we can reach *epoche* − fully suspending preconceived conceptions − due to the grounded and embodied nature of our being, in this case the researcher, in the world (Ashworth, 2003a, b).

6.2.2 Epistemology

The term epistemology is derived from the Greek word epistêmê and came into its own with Descartes. Epistêmê is the Greek term for knowledge and is their label for philosophy, or how we come to know[4]. Essentially, epistemology is concerned with the specific method that can be used to gain a better understanding. The terms epistemology and methodology are closely aligned, with the former being the philosophy and the latter involving the practice.

Whereas ontology focuses on the possibility of gaining direct access to the real world and the existence of objective knowledge (positivism) (Blaikie, 2000: 8), in qualitative research there cannot be a separation between pursuing knowledge and producing knowledge due to its subjective nature (Singh, 2004). It is important to recognise that every researcher brings some set of epistemological assumptions into the research process and that these assumptions influence how data is interpreted and understood, particularly in a qualitative phenomenological perspective where the role of the researcher involves the co-construction of knowledge. Direct access is not present; knowledge of the perceived world is made meaningful in its own terms and understood through appropriate interpretivist procedures (Carson et al., 2001).

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[4] Collins dictionary (1997:250) defines epistemology as "The theory of knowledge, esp. the critical study of its validity, methods and scope".

The overarching aim of phenomenological research is to generate and study rich descriptions of an individual's experiences, in this case the experience of HE, to enable others to understand them in new in-depth ways and use this knowledge to make a difference to world in which they live. Thus, in this research, attempts are employed to deduce qualitative individual meaning, to explore factors within HE, and beyond that to influence an individual student's attainment.

6.2.3   Hermeneutics and Idiography

IPA is firstly informed by the phenomenological theoretical perspective. But is underpinned by two further theoretical perspectives, namely hermeneutics and idiography. Hermeneutics is defined as 'the theory of interpretation' (Smith et al., 2013); IPA is concerned with examining how the phenomena appear. The researcher, upon analysis, facilitates making sense of this appearance, i.e. applying the theory of interpretation. Further, the researcher interprets the general meaning in the contexts within which they occur (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). The hermeneutic implication for IPA being that theoretical insights need to be clear about the method and purpose of interpretation, with honesty as to what degree it is possible to uncover original meanings.

Idiography is the third theoretical influence on IPA, being a commitment to the particular and detail. As this research employs only 20 participants, it is possible to obtain detailed in-depth, systematic meaning through analysis employing the process of IPA; further the research is focused at one institute alone. Thus, idiography 'does not askew generalisations, but rather prescribes a different way of establishing those generalisations' (Harre', 1979).

6.2.4   Interpretivism

The traditional approach to phenomenology is descriptive phenomenology. However, interpretation is vital to move beyond the data and for pragmatic concerns (Langdridge, 2007). We may wish to produce empirical findings that might contribute to social change; therefore an interpretive stance is adopted in this work.

6.2.5   Positivism

Positivist ontology adopts the position that the world is external to the researcher and objective with its epistemology based on the belief that observers are independent and science value-free.

Positivists generally believe that the causal relationships of social phenomena can be explained scientifically, resulting in laws and facts. They concentrate on explanation and their thought is governed by explicitly stated theories and hypotheses. The research topic is an external object rather than being created through the process of research itself. The researcher attempts to remain emotionally detached so as to not influence results/outcomes, thus maintaining the data's objectivity. Positivist social research results usually rely on quantitative data, enabling statistical processing (Carson et al., 2001). This contrasts with a phenomenological perspective where the researcher is internal to the social world, therefore subjective and possessing values which can emotionally influence data and its analysis. Theories and hypotheses are not usually presented.

Historically the natural sciences have demanded greater respect due to their reliability and ability to define concrete constructs and methodologies. Natural scientists have been reluctant to accept social sciences into their domain, belittling them as inferior. This is ultimately a philosophical viewpoint, but it has become important in terms of research methods in that quantitative methods are usually held as being more 'scientific' (Travers, 2001). During the 1960s, many researchers recognised that positivist-orientated methods could not provide solutions to the various social conundrums that led to unrest in mainland Europe. Lather (1986) argues that positivist methodologies are flawed because they are limited in their ability to understand the complexity of human behaviour or experience. Therefore, a purely positivist approach is untenable for the measurement of a fluid or dynamic construct, and phenomenological approaches have gained increasing respect and interest in the social sciences since the 1960s, developing different varieties and stretching over several disciplines (Langdridge, 2007).

Some have challenged the notion that social sciences cannot employ the positivist philosophy when studying social phenomena. One advocate for this was Emile Durkheim (1897) who employed quantitative methods in his study of suicide, making causal connections between variables in the same way natural science does. Durkheim's study posed a challenge for quantitative researchers in two ways. Firstly, the study argues that sociology should deal with 'macro' processes or phenomena as opposed to 'micro' social settings, which make only a limited contribution to the understanding of society; secondly, it suggests sociology should not be concerned with 'common-sense knowledge' (Travers, 2001). From this point of view, there is little value in qualitative methods – which focus on specific views.

In sum, social science research based on rigour, validity, cause and effect, precision of measurement and pursuing theory testing, eventually theory building, has led to the wide acceptance of the use of a variety of scientific approaches (Carson et al., 2001). Qualitative studies can gain equal respect if the research is supported with good quality data, with a clear documented methodology and alternative notions of validity (see Section 6.3.1). Similar to a quantitative approach, qualitative research still needs rigour. Looking at Grounded Theory in its purer forms it is very rigorous, but there are other forms of rigour rather than scientific rigour.

6.3   Stance of the Thesis

Whilst the previous section stated the theoretical perspective, the principles of which underlie this research, this section reflects on the stance of the thesis from a personal perspective. As with the research, the obvious question to be asked is why I wish to discuss differential attainment. Having personally experienced compulsory education and HE in the UK, as an Asian female I believe I could have achieved higher academic grades. On reflection, my attainment does not represent my effort; however, effort is a subjective term and my definition of 'hard' work may not have been enough. In turn, this could have been due to ignorance of expectations or of the education system. Further, as a first generation Asian female in the UK education system, I recall feelings of not 'fitting in'. Any one or more of these factors could have been contributory to my attainment. Later I experienced competition in the employment market and therefore appreciate the importance of achievement in education in order to succeed later in life.

From these experiences in education and employment and from what I have learned, that high attainment has a premium, I would to like to see BME students achieve highly for equality, and learn what factors actually affect the attainment of BME students. Further, I am aware of the issues that growing up in two cultures can bring: ethnicity was a defining characteristic in my life (see Chapter 1).

Having taught in further and higher education for most of my adult life, I have a regard for my chosen career area and individuals within it. I wish to promote ethical values within education, and to enable all students to achieve within an ever-increasing competitive society. My personal experiences, feelings, questions of the education system and desire to promote equality in education will no doubt impact on my research. This being a qualitative research study combined with the subjective nature of

the topic, it is almost impossible to separate one's own influence in the production of knowledge, hence imploring research reflexivity (Langdridge, 2007). Reflexivity involved considering how my own position could have influenced the research, for instance imposing meanings and influences on the research stance adopted (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013).

Whilst undertaking the research process I was conscious and reflective of the influences I may have, initially avoiding the use of leading questions in the discussion guide. During interactions with participants I attempted to avoid influencing responses by considering language used and my non-verbal responses, and by trying to remain neutral and simply show understanding in terms of questions posed to get students' views.

Coming from an ethnic minority myself, I felt comfortable discussing race and cultural issues, as I could relate to the students' experiences. During the process of interpretation, I again attempted to bracket preconceived ideas held of influential factors regarding BME attainment to enable access to knowledge held by participants via verbal communication/language; however, it is doubtful whether natural attitudes can be completely isolated (Langdridge, 2007). Interpretation is at the judgement of the researcher, hence the moment interpretation takes place, the researcher's assumptions, beliefs, experiences and context will all have an impact on the research process (Denzin, 2001). A social action element and subjectivity is always present during interpretation; subjectivity, to a certain extent, is, however, not only inevitable in phenomenological research but desirable, as covered in the following paragraph.

The research paradigm adopted was that of phenomenology; it was the theoretical position that intrigued me most during my Undergraduate sociology degree. Adopting a phenomenological research paradigm intrinsically influenced my approach and hence decisions during the research (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Furthermore, integrating my values, interests and experiences in education was important in enabling me to undertake this research. Phenomenology seemed the most appropriate theoretical position to adopt as I set out to study the student within an HE setting with a desire for subjectivity, as it was this subjectivity which would allow me to understand the students, derive meaning and also allow the student to relate to me. Employing a phenomenological approach can, however, run the risk that the researcher's own preconceptions, experiences and motivations for conducting the work dominate the process and result in an idiosyncratic analysis. At all stages of the research process, I

was wary of imposing my own position and therefore aimed to let the data speak for itself with the participants being the central foci of the work, constantly reflecting upon them, their actions, ethically attempting to stay close to their meanings. Getting over-involved is a downside of some qualitative research: there is a balance to be struck.

With regards to ethical considerations in the positioning and engaging with participants, none were informed of the BME attainment gap, instead the title of the research being communicated, what influenced their academic performance in the one context (see section 6.4.1 for justification). As the researcher I was careful not to provide 'leads' or any preconceptions from conceptual framework, focusing on the use of just 'language'.

6.3.1   Questions Asked: Validity and Reliability

Most research findings tend to be a reflection of the quality of inputs, hence there is a need for transparency showcasing the processes of the research. Not only is it important to follow and demonstrate rigorous processes, but these must be both valid and reliable (Keynon, 2004). A major criticism of the analysis of qualitative data stems from the subjective nature of qualitative research (Harwood and Garry, 2003). Keynon (2004: 431) notes:

> *"The very concepts of reliability and validity were developed for the mathematical and natural sciences. Additionally, the comprehensive and rigorous conventions connected with quantitative research cannot be superimposed on to qualitative research due to the interviewees' human elements. Therefore, can qualitative research be reliable if the findings cannot be replicated or indeed findings are artificial due to the complexity of the phenomena being researched?"*

This does not mean the concepts of validity and reliability need not be considered in qualitative research. In qualitative approaches, data validity can be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved and the participants approached (Winter, 2000). There is a need to replace the positivist's notions of validity in qualitative research with the notion of authenticity, suggesting that 'understanding' is a more suitable term than 'validity' (Maxwell, 1992). Researchers are part of the world that they are researching, therefore they cannot be completely objective; other peoples' perspectives are equally as valid as our own. Validity, therefore, attaches to accounts, not data or methods (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Thus, rigour, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, can be achieved by careful audit trails.

The emphasis with qualitative research is on internal validity, with external validity being irrelevant in many qualitative cases (Winter, 2000). This is because it does not seek to generalise but only represent the phenomenon being investigated, fairly and fully.

Reliability and validity were achieved for this research by four key factors:

- Participant validation: all were BME students at Coventry University as based on details obtained from the Coventry University registry database and only from the specified ethnic groups.

- Verifying that the data was a true reflection of the participant's responses: notes and transcripts checked against digital audio-recordings.

- Time in the field, the "true" picture gained of Coventry University, could be plausible influences.

- Ensuring all procedures were and are clear to the audience (see Appendices). In order for the research to be repeated in other contexts or extended, there must be documented procedures to follow. Details of all paperwork used are provided, and an attempt made to share all research thoughts.

The researcher ultimately decides the questions to be asked but as with any research there will remain questions that are unasked, as any research framework which can only encompass so much. The unasked questions will only impact validity, that is become errors of omission, if there are too many of them, irrespective of whether the research adopts a qualitative or quantitative approach. Discussion areas which were broad enough to umbrella/prompt other themes were chosen in order to avoid this. Whilst the subjective nature of this research most probably makes it impossible to replicate, that is not to say generalisation is not achievable and nor does it prevent further similar studies on factors affecting BME attainment.

6.3.2   Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

In line with the theoretical perspective of phenomenology informing this research, IPA was chosen as the method of analysis. IPA is employed by phenomenologists in that it involves an in-depth

examination of the participants' experiences and their personal perceptions (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). IPA was deemed suitable for permitting the interpretation element and acknowledging the role I was to play. IPA is a heuristic tool, meaning it allows for the interpretative element as a consequence of the researcher's engagement with the text (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). I wished to move beyond the presented text to deduce its meaning. IPA enables this; it aims to uncover, and to interpret how people perceive an experience and what particular experiences mean to them (Langdridge, 2007). The focus of this research was to uncover how the BME student perceives the experience of higher education, what this experience means to them personally; meaning is given to the collected data, from which influential factors upon their attainment are identified.

IPA was further deemed suitable because as a researcher and with only 20 participants I am interested in detail, getting an in-depth insight into the HE experiences of a limited number of students. Therefore, despite my limited sample, valuable in-depth meaning can be derived which may be relevant to other students.

IPA offered a friendly way to organise the data with clear steps to follow. As a qualitative researcher I inevitably play a role during the whole process of data analysis and initially I make sense of the data by placing it into categories and ascribing themes, playing an interpretive role of giving meaning to responses. Finally, IPA allows exploration of the data without any pre-determined headings and I was aiming to look for new influential factors.

The process of analysis has been informed by the work of Langdridge (2007). Langdridge provided a comprehensive dialogue of a set of qualitative methods, those informed by phenomenological philosophy. IPA is informed by Grounded Theory, as IPA studies are more commonly inductive, grounded in the data rather than in pre-existing theory (Langdridge, 2007). I did not, however, use "pure" Grounded Theory, but an adapted version which can be described as a content analysis with no pre-defined themes or codes (see section 6.2 for justification). Furthermore, both IPA and Grounded Theory studies are idiographic, focusing on a single case, suiting this research. I acknowledge there may have been better suited methods, however IPA was "good enough" Figure 6.2 outlines the steps involved in IPA.

Figure 6.2: Stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
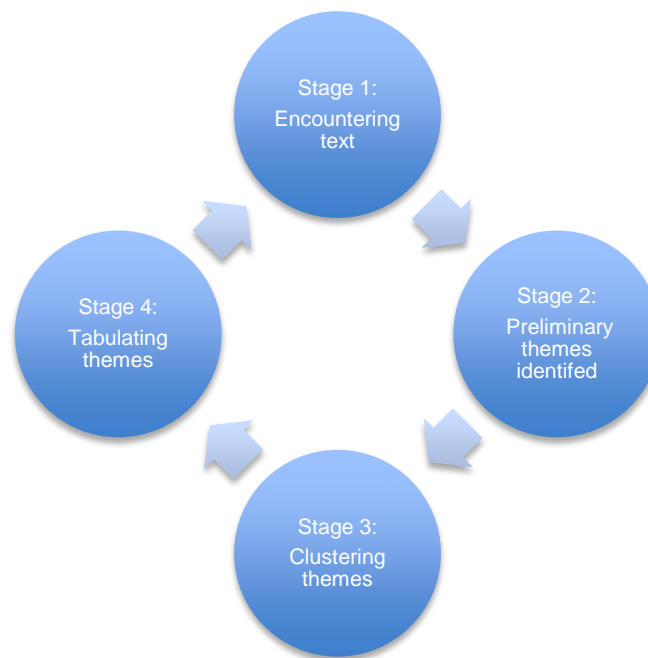
6.4   Ethical Issues

This section outlines the ethical considerations underpinning the research and organisation of the study. It draws particular attention to the positioning of the research topic and informing participants. Official ethical clearance in order to conduct the study was applied for and granted from Coventry University's Ethics Committee, June 2010 (see Appendix 8).

6.4.1   Positioning of the Research

The main ethical concern was for the participants' well-being, followed by the care for the institution, Coventry University. By analogy to the researcher's stance (see Section 6.3), this research was developed on the understanding that it should seek development in the topic area whilst preventing harm. As a consequence, every care was taken to avoid deceiving or harming the participants at any stages of the research.

The topic of differential attainment, or any form of differentiation, can be sensitive provoking feelings of injustice, which became the periphery for the subsequent research process. Awareness of the sensitive nature of the topic for participants from the outset of the research, not wishing participants to feel a sense of disadvantage or being discriminated against, carried a huge burden; the potential knowledge of which bringing with it enormous consequences.

To underpin this research, I provided information on a need-to-know basis. Prior to the interview, all participants were provided with a participant information sheet. At the start of each interview participants were informed verbally about the objectives of the work, provided information about the researcher and reminded that they could withdraw at any point during the research process. An opportunity to ask preliminary questions of the researcher was provided. Re-iterating an earlier point, participants were not informed of an attainment gap as this could have clouded their judgment of what affects their own personal attainment and wider feelings of attainment.

During discussions of previous educational experience some negative feelings were at times evoked where the participant became aware of conditions that could have influenced their life, and feelings of being 'hard done by', thus, the participant could have experienced discomfort or distress. Given this, it was important to make sure that the participant felt safe, secure and confident. At times the researcher needed to reassure the participant when they made comments in relation to their experiences education, ensuring a guarded response. In these circumstances it was important to demonstrate a sense of rapport, focusing on what was being communicated and not influence the responses, and to probe sensitively.

Owing to the fact that students were disclosing their personal views and due to the sensitive nature and context of this research, it was pivotal as part of the process to assure participants that all information provided would be anonymised to prevent negative disclosure and kept confidential. During data collection and subsequent analysis, all participants and their views and opinions were respected and valued equally.

6.4.2 Data Management and Confidentiality

Prior to embarking on the interview stage, each participant signed a consent form which was assigned a participant code and stored in a sealed envelope, with only the researcher having access. A list of participant names was kept separate to the forms. It was important to know the participants' first names and to address them and thank them personally; surnames were omitted during the recording of interviews. All interviews were digitally recorded on a Dictaphone, but only after informing and gaining consent from the participants, and each recording was saved into a personal folder and

stored as an MP3 file. The computer and file were password protected, in compliance with Coventry University's code of practice[5].

6.5   Data Collection

The main form of data collection was qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews and the justification for their use is provided in Section 6.5.4. These were conducted on a one-to-one basis in turn with each of the 20 participants. Additional informal data collection in the form of a reflective diary recording the tones and attitudes of the participants was carried out. Discussion of data collection gives context to the research and its findings, analysis, and presentation of findings.

6.5.1   Overview of the Data Collection

The data collection was conducted between October 2010 and December 2011. Twenty BME students took part in the study. The number of interviews conducted was determined by the principle of 'fitness for purpose'. A case study might continue to add samples until theoretical saturation is reached (Axline, 1964); however, these interviews ceased upon a point of saturation, i.e. a point is reached where no new data/points are being raised, all were repeated given the limited number of BME groups represented.

6.5.2   Sampling Technique

A sample is the selection of members from a population from whom inferences are made about that population and, ideally, a sample would make a complete and exhaustive representation of the population with all the relevant features of the population being included (McDaniel and Gates, 2002). Irrespective of the underlying research philosophy, the selection of a sample is important as a researcher is unable to study the totality of the population (Tashakkori and Teddie, 1998). Langdridge (2007: 58) comments that:

> "*The sample is purposive because you purposely set out to recruit only those people who share the experience being investigated. Researchers seek out a fairly homogenous sample, since it is not really possible to garner a random sample or indeed a representative sample. Of course, the nature of the sample in*

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[5] Once the research has been completed and outputs achieved the data will be destroyed.

any study will depend on the topic being investigated, the interests of the researcher and the constraints of the study."

The primary method of sampling in phenomenology is maximum variation sampling, where the researcher seeks out participants who have a common experience but vary on a range of demographic or other characteristics (Polkinghorne, 1989). In the case of this thesis, this sampling technique was employed to a degree; the BME participants constituting the sample shared a common experience, that of under-attainment when compared to their White counterparts and belonging to a BME group. Variations were looked for in other demographic ways to avoid all research being based on one type of student, for example, 20 female Asian participants all on a computer science degree.

IPA is less likely to wholly employ maximum variation sampling because participants are recruited for a specific purpose thus allowing the researcher to make claims about them and their particular experience. A homogenous sample is required that shares the experience at the heart of the research and does not vary significantly (Langdridge, 2007). As mentioned above, some variation in the sample was opted for as the title of this thesis refers to BME, inferring to more than one ethnic group. Further, a largely homogenous sample reinforces the idiographic nature and the claim not to generalise from this research, (Langdridge, 2007). As Patton (1990: 185) comments:

"*The validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher rather than with sample size."*

The sample consisted of 20 completed interviews. There is no fixed rule regarding the number that should be completed because a small sample may provide as much rich information as a large sample (Travers, 2001), despite issues concerning generalisability (Parasuraman et al., 2004). Phenomenologists find it more valuable to work with smaller samples, as their concern and interest is of individual meanings, and working with smaller samples enables greater in-depth interpretation (Smith et al., 2013).

All 20 participants were, at the time of research, students at Coventry University and were either in their second or third year of study. I contacted the registry department at Coventry University which, in turn, supplied a comprehensive list of BME students including name, course and faculty. The registry department was able to distinguish BME students from the major group, i.e. due to students having completed ethnic minority monitoring forms and recording other demographic data. The researcher

randomly selected students from the supplied email list. Some screening was then undertaken to ensure that students who were interviewed represented various faculties, ethnic groups and gender. These selected students were each emailed a standard message, giving a brief outline of the research and inviting them to partake. The characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 6.2.

6.5.3   Participants

Table 6.2 sets out the participants in the research and lists them according to chronological order of interview, followed by their interpretation of which ethnic group they belong to (these reflect categories used by Coventry University), followed by gender and age. Further, characteristics related to the demographic characteristic ethnicity, and focus of the research, are shown: where the student lives during their time as a student at Coventry University, the route taken into HE, which course participants initially enrolled onto, and finally whether the participant has been satisfied with previous attainment to date; all relevant details for this research.

Participant Number	Ethnic Class	Gender	Age	Route into HE/Degree or Foundation	Course	Satisfied with Previous Grades
1	Asian or Asian British – Indian	Male	22	A Levels/Foundation	IT	No
2	Black or Black British – African	Female	21	BTEC/Degree	Business Marketing	Yes/No
3	Black African	Female	25+	Access/Degree	Nursing	No
4	African Nigerian	Male	20	Qualifications in home country / Degree	Business	Yes
5	Pakistani British	Male	20	A Levels/Foundation	Business	Yes
6	Black African	Female	22	AS Levels/Foundation	Business	Yes
7	Black African	Male	23	Qualifications in home country / degree	Business and Finance	Yes
8	Pakistani British	Male	24	A Levels over 3-years/Degree	Graduate Diploma in Psychology	No
9	Sikh British	Male	20	BTEC/Degree	Creative Computing	No
10	Black African Tanzanian	Female	23	Access Course/Foundation	Business	1st year – Yes 2nd year – No
11	Sikh British	Female	22	A Levels/Foundation	Illustrating and Graphics	No
12	Sikh British	Female	21	A Level/Foundation	Advertising and Business	Yes
13	Sikh British	Male	22	A Levels/Foundation	Marketing	Yes
14	Sikh British	Female	21	A Levels/Degree	Business	Yes (hesitant)
15	Mixed British Caribbean	Female	20	BTEC/Degree	Marketing and Advertising	Yes
16	Pakistani British	Female	20	BTEC/Degree	Business and Marketing	Yes (hesitant)
17	Black Nigerian	Female	22	Qualification in home country/Foundation	Not known	Yes
18	Black Nigerian	Female	N/A	Qualification in home country/Foundation	Not known	No
19	Sikh British	Male	25	BTEC/Foundation	Advertising and Marketing	No
20	Portuguese Indian	Female	21	A Levels and BTEC/Degree	Business and Marketing	Yes

6.5.4 In-depth Interviews

Parasuraman et al., (2004) note that there are a number of qualitative research options available; in-depth interviews were deemed most appropriate for this research. Tashakkori and Teddie (1998: 102) state that:

> *"…interview is a powerful method of data collection…it provides one-to-one interaction between you and the individuals you are studying…resulting in copious information about the issues."*

Interviews present an opportunity to engage with participants in an open way, allowing probing and expressing experiences. Interviews are generally classified according to their type: structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Langdridge, 2007). The structured interview is not generally considered an appropriate form of data collection for phenomenological research because it is a guided questionnaire which is not designed to elicit meanings, and the closed responses deny exploration; it is only through exploration of events and views that understanding of meaning emerges (Langdridge, 2007). The in-depth interview approach allows for greater depth of information and greater probing of sample members' views than may be possible within a focus group, which may not allow students to provide full explanations (Parasuraman et al., 2004). There is a danger that within a focus group a given sample member's views may be influenced by others within the group.

The semi-structured interview is not the only option available to qualitative researchers. Unstructured interviews also offer potential for exploring people's meanings, perhaps even more so than the semi-structured interview (Langdridge, 2007). Unstructured interviews are, however, more difficult to manage due to the lack of an interview schedule. The unstructured interview gives the researcher little guidance during the interview, often just the researchers own agenda concerning the topic of interest and maybe a few notes. Normally, a question is asked to frame the discussion and focus attention on the topic then the interviewee's views are explored. The interviewer may pick up on a point made and/or ask further questions as required. More relaxed and informal than any other form of interview, there is a real possibility of rapport and this rapport will result in honest and rich answers. As with all research methods, the unstructured interview has its disadvantages. Amongst them is the difficulty of engaging in a natural conversation with a research agenda in mind.

A semi-structured approach was adopted and is the most common type of interview used in phenomenological research, as indeed in all qualitative research. The semi-structured interview offered consistency and flexibility; consistency is maintained through the use of a research guide/interview schedule which allows the same series of questions and prompts to be used with all interviewees. As the same question may elicit a different response from different interviewees, which the interviewer may wish to explore, a semi-structured interview allows for this flexibility. Langdridge (2007) proposes that the interviewer should pursue the questions in light of the conversation; some questions may be answered earlier or topics that had not occurred to the researcher may occur, which should be followed up.

The semi-structured interview is not without its drawbacks. Along with issues associated generally with interviews, for example, they can be time-consuming and there is a danger of interviewer introduced bias (Tashakkori and Teddie, 1998). This is due to the nature of the interview, namely it is more conversational. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 36):

> "…*an interview is a conversation…it is influenced by the personal characteristics of the interviewer, including race, class, ethnicity and gender.*"

Owing to the nature of the phenomenon being researched, semi-structured interviews were chosen as a mechanism for helping to understand the construct and attribute. Ultimately this provided me with the data needed for this thesis.

6.5.5   Conduct of Interviews

Interviews were conducted on campus at Coventry University, which meant all data were collected in surroundings familiar to the participants, in a classroom. All participants had experienced the environment at Coventry University for at least a year.

Careful consideration was given to the construction of the discussion guide. The five concepts which required further exploration were considered, along with the phenomenological aim of discovering individual and unique influential factors from the participant's perspective. A careful balance was sought between the five concepts which formed the overarching structure to the interview, whilst at the same time allowing for flexibility. Every attempt was made to structure the interview logically, for instance, course and year of study were established before the main interview, 'starter' questions which set the

scene and required little thought were also used; this is often referred to as a "funnelling technique", starting with general story-telling questions prior to questions based on theory (Langdridge, 2007).

Questions, or discussion areas, were kept neutral and language adjusted to that similar of interviewees and kept open to encourage more informative answers. These questions were again funnelled from the more general to the more specific; this allowed the interviewee to focus on their concerns rather than the interviewer's, at least to begin with. The starting question is used to invite the participant to tell the story of their experience (Carson et al., 2001); in this way the participant does not have to think too deeply, hence not making them apprehensive about the 'trial'. Depending on how talkative the interviewee was, the more specific questions were not always needed, the participant having answered them in the initial questions. Hence, the interview's focus was inductive. Some probe questions about the research issues were prepared in case participants failed to raise specific HE aspects. Probe questions usually start 'how?' and never request a closed answer. Probe questions were worded using the language of the interviewee. According to Yin (1994) probe questions form the major part of the prepared interview protocol which is used to provide a reliable framework for later cross-case analysis of data.

One discussion guide was used across all participant interviews. It is generally assumed that questions are not exactly the same for all participants, but they should be the same in terms of the main research agenda (Carson et al., 2001). The aim, in every case, was to develop rapport, to maximise joint exploration of the interviewee's view concerning the topic. A good rapport is essential for allowing challenging questions. The discussion guide was simply, as the name suggests, a guide to ensure the researcher had a focal point to keep on track, and ensure efficiency, given the common constraints of time and money (Langdridge 2007).

An interview protocol was conducted after each interview, recording information around specific tones of voice, specific behaviours, levels of engagement of participants, how the dialogue developed and the atmosphere. Most of this contextual detail can be lost through digital recordings and in transcripts. Limited notes were taken during the interview process because I endeavoured to give my full attention to the participants to ensure they felt valued and listened to.

6.5.6   Recording of Data

The interviews were audio-recorded on a Dictaphone after gaining consent from the participants, enabling them to be listened to repeatedly for analysis purposes. Each interview was listened to, transcribed or notes taken under each discussion area. Although the majority of interviews were transcribed, careful consideration was given to whether it was necessary to transcribe interview data for analysis. On the one hand transcriptions can provide important detail and an accurate verbatim record of the interview; on the other hand they omit non-verbal aspects, situation before or after interview. Practically, they are very time-consuming and costly; an alternative is to write the analysis of the data directly from recording (Cohen et al., 2011). Also accuracy of transcripts is not guaranteed as it is not uncommon for speech to be heard incorrectly or for words to be confused (Alvesson, 2011).

6.6   Data Analysis

After conducting 20 in-depth interviews, the challenging part was to make sense of this data. The most decisive and demanding work effort was to categorise, interpret and creatively use the interview material. Interview accounts offer a solid ground for knowledge development, providing primary data based on the research question directly from the sample. To analyse qualitative data the purpose is to make sense of it in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Alvesson, 2011). Alvesson emphasises the need for procedures, diligent and detailed sorting and categorisation, at the same time recognising that this leads to the researcher being caught in a time- and energy-consuming activity at the expense of creativity and critical thinking. All is, however, a necessary and vital process. Only through conducting these procedures does the researcher get first an overview and order of the material, see patterns emerging, eventually leading to theoretical results firmly empirically grounded in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

There is no one single correct way to analyse and present qualitative data. However it is done, it should abide by the issue of 'fit for purpose'. This determined the analysis technique employed on this research data. With rapid development in qualitative research techniques, an increased number of options of data analysis techniques were available, those considered are briefly discussed in Section 6.6.2. IPA was deemed the most 'fit for purpose', justification for which can be found in Section 6.3.2. Further, the data analysis process in qualitative research is iterative as opposed to a single-stage

process, meaning the process was conducted several times. Finally, data analysis in this qualitative research study was inductive, moving from smaller units of information to uncover the bigger picture, as opposed to deductive (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013).

6.6.1 Analytical Process

The data were explored as jointly constructed due to the subjective nature of phenomenological research; it represents the student's experience of HE through the interpretations of the researcher. The process of analysis used is IPA, as IPA studies are more commonly inductive and grounded in the data rather than in pre-existing theory (Langdridge, 2007). The aim of an IPA study is the exploration of a participant's view of the topic under investigation, in this case, their experience of HE. IPA has conjointly been compared to thematic analysis in that common themes are identified; however, with IPA, themes emerge from the data as opposed to searching for pre-determined themes as is the case with thematic analysis. Comparisons were constantly made between the data. The four steps outlined in Figure 6.2 stages of IPA were taken and emerging themes and patterns have been the key to my analytical strategy.

The approach taken to the data is summarised below:

- What is being said? What are the words indicative of?

- How is the data communicated? (Tone)

- What is the student trying to communicate? (Attitude)

Whilst data analysis is mainly focused on the spoken language it was perceived that the way in which a message was communicated was also deeply informative, namely the tone of voice, the underlining attitude and the ambience of the interview communicated the majority of the message. Indeed, Mehrabian (1981) observed that non-verbal communication can communicate 90% of a message. Observations directly after the interviews were also recorded and analysed. It is difficult to entirely account for the terms of reference within the data analysis; broadly the data has been scrutinised for meaning, assumptions and attitudes.

6.6.2 Alternative Analytical Processes

With an increasing number of qualitative data analysis methods available, the choice was a critical decision because the opted-for method influences the focus of the analysis and the results (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). It is noted that there are two main ways to interpret qualitative data.

The first method is to have no presumptions about themes or categories; by reading through the interview material, themes or issues that recur in the data will be discovered, i.e. categories emerge, become visible, from data sentences which may have been previously unconsidered.

A second alternative approach involves using pre-set themes which are chosen in advance, based around the concepts identified previously, namely thematic analysis. The themes decided on would be based on the concepts identified by the conceptual framework which, in turn, were informed by the literature review. The themes are chosen before the collected data is categorised; additionally, a coded framework can be constructed and notes are recorded from the interview data against these themes and codes. If necessary these main themes/codes originally identified are broken into subcategories, then data re-sorted into these smaller, more defined categories, allowing for greater differentiation and discrimination.

Thematic analysis is beneficial in that it informs the researcher of topics originally identified in the conceptual framework, (Alvesson, 2011). However, pre-determined themes and codes shape and influence results, i.e. the influential factors. At the outset of this research thematic analysis was considered; however, upon adopting a phenomenological stance, which involves bracketing preconceived ideas during interpretation and attributing meaning to the participants' experiences to discover further emergent influential factors, I decided thematic analysis is at odds with phenomenology.

Having dismissed thematic analysis, I opted for the first method stated above: to have no presumptions of themes when reading the data. Within this approach, I was still presented with various options. The first 'no presumptions' data analysis considered was pure content analysis. Content analysis strives to make replicable and valid inferences from data to their context (Krippendorf, 1980: 21) and 'objective, systematic and quantitative descriptions of the manifest content of communication' (Berelson, 1952: 489). Within a phenomenological study, however, it is difficult to remain objective and systematic as the researcher is constantly involved: data is co-created. Furthermore, my focus was on

individual unique meanings not quantifying descriptions. A pure content analysis approach did not appear to allow going beyond the content, i.e. the words presented on the page, into meaning.

Narrative analysis was closer to the type of technique being searched for as participants' interpretations of how they view their social world and their stories are focused upon. However, this technique does not acknowledge the role researcher interactions can play in the production of data.

Key word analysis, as suggested by its title, involves identifying key words within all texts to which meaning is applied. This method was dismissed as messages are missed. It is not only the spoken word which is valuable but also how it is said and the meaning behind it. In some ways, key word analysis is employed as frequency of words is mentioned and quotes selected to demonstrate meanings. Alongside some key word analysis, a form of constant comparison is used too, as themes are developed to ultimately generate theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I compared the experiences of different BME students and made generalisations based upon comparisons.

Finally, discourse analysis was considered, which involves looking at the content. However, discourse involves psychology elements by studying the whole of the interaction, language more specifically, by turn-taking in the conversation of which I lacked experience and confidence.

In summary, I looked for a type of analysis that went further than simply studying the content, one which incurred meaning from the text. IPA is the leading form of analysis employed, this being a type of content analysis, engaging some elements of key word analysis and constant comparisons.

6.6.3   Stages of Data Analysis

Figure 6.1 provides an overview of the process. IPA proceeds through a systematic series of analysis including assigning themes and categorisation until theories emerge that explain the phenomena being studied (Alvesson, 2011). Four stages were involved, each of which are discussed next.

Stage one: Read and re-read transcripts – IPA analysis revolves around the reading and re-reading of the text (Smith et al., 2013). Stage one involved the researcher reading and becoming familiar with the data. Transcripts and notes from each of the 20 interviews were read several times and comments/notes added to these where warranted. These comments included researcher interpretations

of meanings and emotions, body language and tone of the interview, behaviours and associations. The aim of stage one was to figure out what was going on in the interview; this stage was repeated in order to maximise the likelihood of capturing the correct meaning (Langdridge, 2007). Further, IPA, being informed by hermeneutic theory, requires the data to be considered as a whole (Crotty, 1998).

Stage two: Preliminary themes identified – during this stage attempts were made to identify themes that best captured the essential message of each interview. Key points from each interview, marked with comments from stage one, were identified and assigned a theme. Story-telling quotes were taken from each interview and an underlying theme was prescribed to each quote; ascribing themes is subject to interpretation, the themes ascribed were those most credible in the given context of an HE classroom environment (see Appendix 10), with attempts made to eliminate presumptions about categories or themes. Quotes which were ascribed a theme ranged from short phrases to a few lines. Themes attached to the transcript would often have short memos accompanying them in which tone and attitude were described and the premise for that particular theme and any links to other themes. Every effort was made to ensure rigorous themes, limited codes were used.

In line with the phenomenological perspective, I attempted to suspend previous ontological preconceptions to enable access to common-sense knowledge and in order to avoid making judgements whilst reading the text, a process referred to as *epoche* (see Section 6.2.1). The challenge was to let things be experienced as if for the first time, by becoming aware of our presumptions and then examining the object of consciousness from different perspectives. The ability to see phenomena from various perspectives is crucial in uncovering the essence, or the fundamental structure, of the phenomena (Langdridge, 2007).

Table 6.3: An example of ascribing themes to key points and story-telling quotes, as identified in stage one.

Participant 1	Themes
'Didn't get enough points.'	Felt a failure before entering HE.
'Put up with lectures.'	Accepting, blasé
'Forms don't bother me.'	No interest.
'I'm from Coventry, it's home. University is only a step. Not bothered if it's welcoming.'	Identifies with home town. *(3)*
'Should – at teacher conferences, try and keep in touch/teaching process.'	Interested in the institute, suggested improvements.
Used 'bothered' 3 times.	Non-committal.
One main influencing factor – *'Lack of interest.'*	No motivation or engagement.

(Taken from Appendix 10)

Stage three: Grouping/clustering preliminary themes – these preliminary themes from all the interviews were grouped into broader themes. After assigning each quote a theme, patterns emerged and connections within and between themes became evident. These were clustered based on similarities into broader themes resulting in final themes/explanations. These broader, and final, themes were accepted as the influencing factors on BME attainment.

Stage four: Tabulating themes – these broader themes were the 'emerging' influential factors. The 13 broader themes are presented in the Clustering Themes table (see Appendix 11) with evidence from selected interviews which captured the essence of the participant experiencing a phenomenon. Whilst every effort was made to build exclusive/exhaustive themes, sometimes sections of data fitted into two or more themes. A final iteration was conducted upon my supervisor's advice to further group the themes into 'neater' categories (see Figure 7.1) based on similarity. Classification of data is at the discretion and interpretation of the researcher. The IPA analysis approach is a cyclical iterative process with data analysis helping to generate themes which are then used to increase understanding by returning to the data for further analysis (Malhotra, Bentz and Shapiro, 1998), and hence on-going.

Table 6.4: An example of the broader themes tabulated

1. Previous attainment/school shapes students
Felt a failure before entering HE.
Achieved a merit at BTEC.
School encouraged, teacher suggested foundation degree at university.

(Taken from Appendix 11)

6.6.4 Issues Arising

The analysis of qualitative data presents several challenges. Firstly, selecting and ordering interview data involves some researcher bias; during the analysis process the researcher is interpreting and giving meaning to the data, making it subject to personal bias. Although attempts are made to bracket presuppositions (Husserl, 1927) when faced with data, the researcher will have been undoubtedly informed by previous literature generating the initial interest in the subject area. The issue of researcher bias and interpretations is further problematic since the data is all couched in 'social events' and the researcher lives in the natural world. Researcher interpretations involve a double hermeneutic process (Giddens, 1976) – double hermeneutic translating as the researcher interprets the data from participants who have already interpreted their world, then relates it back to researcher. Hence the reporting and analysis should strive to catch the different definitions of the situation from the different participants.

Qualitative data does pose interpretation problems; however, it cannot be assumed that quantitative data is more reliable at producing true meanings of the social world. The questionnaire researcher attempts to determine what is going on in the social world by the 'x' in a small box. Some question the extent of meaning that can be derived from a relatively small symbol. Qualitative research allows for richer, in-depth explanations. However, a final critic/issue the researcher needs to consider is that statements made during interview may not be 100% reality/truth, i.e. is it valid knowledge? Nevertheless, all data must be interpreted to say anything, so it is a building block and an arbitrator of truth (Alvesson, 2011). Only through robust sorting and analysing techniques, together with an awareness of these criticisms, can the qualitative researcher produce credible research.

6.7   Conclusion

Chapter Six has discussed the theoretical framework that informed and shaped this research, the methods of data collection and the data analysis technique employed. The research is mainly influenced by a phenomenological methodology, with theoretical aspects of hermeneutic and idiography, in light of exploring the BME participants' views and meanings of influential factors upon their attainment. The phenomenological methodology gave the opportunity to concentrate on students' individual 'voices', bringing 'evidence' to life, by drawing from detailed analysis of individual student views. In Chapter Seven, the results of the analysis are presented and discussed.

7.   ANALYSIS OF DATA and DISCUSSION

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical and methodological concerns underlining this this research. This chapter presents an analysis of the findings, beginning with the analysis of emergent themes from the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis technique (hereafter IPA). The justification for adopting this analytical approach is discussed in Chapter Six, Review of Research Methods and Methodology. This is followed by a discussion of the emergent themes and concluded with a discussion of these themes with reference to the conceptual framework.

To reiterate, the overall focus of this research is to uncover influential factors on BME students' attainment at Coventry University. There is strong empirical evidence to show that an attainment gap does exist in good degree attainment between BME and White students, with the definition for good degree being an upper second or first classification academic result. At Coventry University, figures for 2009–2010 revealed that 79% of White students obtained a good degree, compared to 54% of BME students. This analysis reports the influential factors on BME attainment of this research at Coventry University.

7.1   The Final Influential Factors on BME Attainment

The collected data were analysed using IPA. The Clustering Themes table (see Appendix 11) reveals all influential themes, which emerged on completion of the four stages of this specific type of analysis. Each emerging theme is supported by quotes from participants, in italics, or notes made from specific interviews are provided as illustrative supporting evidence. The thirteen emerging themes were further iterated into the factors (see Figure 7.1) to ease understanding.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

INTERNAL FACTORS

1. **Previous Experience**
School
Route/Prior Attainment

Middle Ground

1. **Self/Individual**
Attitude, Aspirations
Lack of Self-belief/
Confidence
Self-awareness

Feeling Welcome

2. **Product**
Course Aspects

2. **Others**
Peers on Course
Encouragement

Image of
Institution

3. **Others**
Teaching Staff

3. **Knowledge**
A lack of HE knowledge
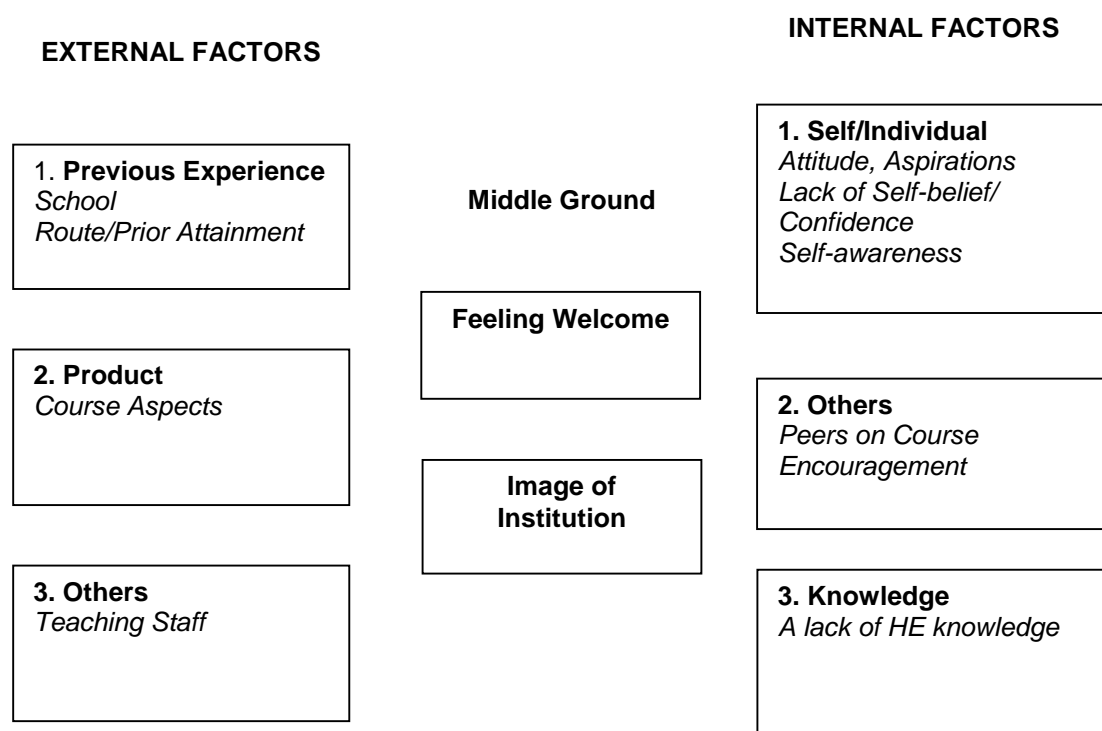
Figure 7.1 has been devised to gain a clearer insight into the final factors that influence BME attainment at Coventry University. This final iteration was deemed necessary in order to group the thirteen emerging influencing themes according to similarities. These final groupings were informed by the focus of this thesis: the individual participant or the phenomenological self. By examining the thirteen emerging themes it was observed that numerous themes related to the phenomenological self, those internal to the individual, whereas other themes were external to the BME participant and two further themes related to the HE institution. External factors, as can be seen in Figure 7.1, are divided into three sets, each, in turn, comprising sub-categories informed by the emerging themes (Table 6.5). Internal factors are also divided into three sets based on a similar premise and lastly two themes are placed in between internal and external factors – in the middle ground – as they both relate to the institute used as a case study for this thesis. This section discusses these three classifications. In the first part of the analysis, external influencing factors on the BME participants' attainment are analysed, of which three external influences were identified.

7.2   External Factors

7.2.1   Previous Experience

7.2.1.1 School

The first influential external factor on attainment was the student's previous experience of education. Previous experience appeared to have shaped the participant's attitude and their current commitment to their studies, which impacted on their attainment. Previous experience will have shaped perceptions and views of education whilst additionally affecting confidence levels of students entering HE, discussed next. Attitudes indicating experience as an influential factor were deduced from tone of voice and the overriding attitude throughout the interview, whilst several participants verbally mentioned their experiences at school. Predictably those who had a positive experience in education previously were more positive about current educational experience and achieving more highly. Experience provided both an epistemological principle, as only through experience it is possible to understand a phenomena in a meaningful way, and an ontological claim; we are who we are because of the sum total of our experience.

It is not entirely surprising that previous experience shapes a student's attitude towards work, as students entering higher education will have spent numerous years in education, achieving and obtaining the required qualifications to gain access to university. Other aspects are also influenced by previous experience in education, such as confidence in ability and the development of study skills (see Section 7.2.2), which are required at a particular level of ability in order to perform at a pre-eminent level in HE. Some students may have been pushed, praised or encouraged more than others, as was the case amongst participants of this research, which collectively are factors affecting attainment. Specifically for a BME student, whether they were part of a minority at school, their ability to speak English and their particular cultural background will have all influenced their formative years in education. Participant 8 lacked confidence in his abilities at school because of the low expectations school and teachers had of him:

> *I had 2 career options – sport and education, parents said it was up to me, but I wanted to please them, everyone was surprised I entered HE – school didn't encourage me, had low expectations from me but I passed (all GCSE's at grades C, one A). I messed around at school. (P8)*

After one parents evening – my Dad was so disappointed, he didn't say anything – I knew I was disappointing him – motivated me. (P8)

Participant 19 believes his school had low expectations of him:

(Did school/college encourage you?) Can't remember, me – no, everyone – yes. Heard this fact all through school and college, they go 'I have potential but I'm too lazy' (true?) yes. (P19)

The participants quoted above lacked encouragement at school and expectations of them were low; however, all secured a place in HE showing a level of ability. Pertinent to previous experience in education, their expectations of current education at Coventry University were low. Participant 19, an unmotivated and unengaged student, expressed dissatisfaction with numerous aspects of HE and participant 8 suffered from low expectations of teachers. He continued into HE with low expectations of himself:

I know my dissertation is better than a 2:2, lecturer wouldn't help – thought I left it too late, so he didn't bother with me; his expectations 'it'll be rubbish'. (P8)

Both participants expressed dissatisfaction with their current attainment. Lack of encouragement and expectations previously influenced their educational experience and continues to do so *per se*, as both participants continue to achieve low grades on entering HE. Participants exhibiting an awareness of this lack of encouragement and the attitude of teachers at school consequently entered HE with less confidence in their academic abilities.

Furthermore, the school experience can conceivably shape the perceived views of the costs and benefits of higher education. Participant 14 attended a religious school that communicated the benefits of entering HE. She was highly encouraged and motivated at school and continued with this attitude into HE, achieving highly:

…encouraged from a young age, parents had a great influence on my studies, did want me to do great because they didn't go to university; had a lot of influence on the decision. (School) did encourage us to go higher level of study, better at getting a graduate job, rather than basic pay job. Family and school were supportive. (P14)

School experience did influence attainment amongst the participants of this research. Participant 16 enjoyed one subject area more than others, attributing this positive experience to achieving a high grade:

Teachers were like, I don't know, some of them, like my RE teacher, I got an A* in that, she was Asian as well, she was on that level and used to talk to us. We'd sit in the front row of that class but other teachers were just normal, just teach us, wouldn't explain or say you can do it – just say do it. If you can't do it, could ask for help but had to ask – not really special or properly supported – I was just an average, medium student. (P16)

Participant 16 was influenced by her teachers. She believes she achieved highly in RE and her BTEC due to the support provided and the passion her teachers had for their subjects. Race is mentioned in both quotes, indicating that demographic differences are noticed. The participant also holds a perception of the type of student she is, which is plausibly derived from her experience at school. The belief that teachers influenced her attainment and the perception of the type of student she is would have most likely continued to affect this participant's attainment in HE.

Providing support and having a positive influence as a teacher, or in a position as a role model, serves to have a positive influence on an individual student's perception of themselves. Participants of this research attached labels to themselves to describe what type of student they are, which, in turn, influences their attainment. Individual educational institutes provide differing levels of support, teaching and pastoral care, all of which serve to mould their students.

7.2.1.2 Route/Prior Attainment

A further aspect of previous experience is the specific route taken into HE. All participants communicated which educational route into HE they had taken and a relationship was observed between the route taken and attainment. Most obvious was the relationship of those participants who had taken the vocational route at level three. The majority of these students enrolled immediately onto a degree course, whereas those who took the traditional A-level route were more likely to enrol initially onto a one-year foundation course, establishing that the vocational route improved their chances of immediate enrolment onto a degree programme. Additionally, the participants who had taken the vocational route and enrolled onto a degree programme where more likely to be pleased with their previous attainment. The majority of Asian/Asian British participants chose the A-level route, and all, with the exception of one, started on the foundation course on entering Coventry University indicating that these participants did not perform well or achieve the desired points at A-level. The fact that the majority of Asian/Asian British participants took the A-level route could indicate a preference for the

traditional qualification as opposed to the vocational qualification. The attainment gap, therefore, started at entry level into HE with this trend continuing into HE with prior attainment affecting current attainment.

A link between route into HE, prior attainment and current attainment is not solely academic. As mentioned in Section 7.2.1.1, prior schooling and levels of encouragement, which determine prior attainment, shape several individual traits. For instance, levels of self-confidence and the ability to use higher-order study skills. These additional aspects influence and shape attainment initially and continue to do so into HE.

7.2.2 Product

7.2.2.1 Course Aspects

The product, which refers to the participant's course of study, was not allowing participants to achieve. Participants referred recurrently to their course of study during the interview stage, their primary reason for participating in HE and a direct measure of their attainment, thus compellingly linking attainment to their course. Each course encompassed specific aspects or features which were acting as barriers, particularly when students and courses were mismatched. Participant 1 demonstrates this by believing his attainment is disappointing because of the type of coursework on his course:

> *Personally do better in written work (not much in computer course). Chose wrong subject therefore choose modules (now) that involve writing…..chose wrong course. Realised in first year – wrong course choice.* (P1)

Participant 1 believes his attainment could have been higher on an alternative course that offered a different type of assessment. This quote also demonstrates the importance of advice and knowledge before enrolment, allowing students to make an informed decision (see Section 7.3.3).

Participant 9 also believes his attainment could have been better had he enrolled on an alternative course:

> *….if I'd done pure media, could have done better – best at; my idea to apply for this course.* (P9)

Participant 9 implies his understanding and attainment are limited due to his choice of course. For the majority of participants English was neither their first language nor the language or dialect of

their culture being spoken at home. Language used in assessments is generally targeted for the mainstream of any given country, further disadvantaging BME students.

Alongside language, the types of assessment maybe preventing students from achieving; as mentioned earlier some students may not have developed higher-order study skills. Group work as a type of assessment was not popular. Participant 20, quoted below, is a highly motivated student and believed that group work was not enabling her to achieve highly:

> *(Coursework) all written, yes practical don't like group work, don't like relying on other people for our grade. Me and my friend had to do all the work and all the others slacked but got the grade – not fair…group work let me down.* (P20)

> *…group work let me down. If I got 3% been on a 1st. Killed me I knew how I could have done harder on group work – got that % elsewhere.* (P20)

Participant 19 also disliked group work. He believes he should have a choice as it is his course:

> *Loath group work, got 5 group work assignments doesn't make sense to me, I'm paying for something I'm not happy with, annoyed about this…– get dim-witted people in my group.* (P19)

The preceding commentary above displays ownership of their course; additionally, from observation, students form groups for coursework based around friendships which tend to be based on similar academic ability. Where friendships are based around ethnicity, in the majority of cases attainment is inhibited due to experiencing similar difficulties such as language, communication and presentation styles.

The majority of participants mentioned that 'talked' lectures and written work were not engaging. A preference was indicated for interaction and practical work during lectures, along with an opportunity to communicate. Participants 12 and 20 both demonstrate this point:

> *Lecture on Monday morning just stood and explained slides in own words; concentrate so much drift away, lose concentration. Prefer more workshops – lecture and seminar – do group activities; chance to interact with other members of lecture.* (P12)

> *Like interaction, like (pick on you) makes it…you express your ideas, makes me more confident as well when I'm put on the spot but I enjoy it. If they didn't I'd just be sitting in the corner.* (P20)

Participant 15, like many others, would prefer more practical assessments:

Mainly assessed by essays, written work, wish it was more practical than written. Writing essays is time consuming and confusing. One coursework – made an advert, edited, filmed, etc. was fun then write up – that was nothing – 1000 words; got about 50/60, did just as well but was more enjoyable. (P15)

A greater number of participants established that feedback on graded assignments was helpful; however, a preference for more informative feedback enabling them to improve their grade with the next assessment was communicated. Participant 15, quoted next, expressed displeasure with feedback, additionally suggesting an improvement that could help her attainment:

When coursework is given back there are notes written on it, sometimes the notes don't make sense…got coversheet, just ticks on mark sheet. We put it through Turn It In, so we could go and read a report online that would be good. (P15)

Participant 20 was equally dissatisfied with assignment feedback; she believed it was too vague and comprised general comments that apply to all students. She also made the interesting point that on approaching lecturers to expand on the feedback, they are reluctant to do so, presupposing they had provided feedback:

(Satisfied with feedback?) No, doesn't tell you how to improve, informative – no. It's just 'very good', 'excellent approach', it doesn't say…what we needed to improve on but some of them say we've given feedback but when we read it…it's just like go over marking scheme, 'good, very good' – that's it. Not how would I use the feedback and put it into other work (vague). (P20)

The aforementioned features of a student's course, including modules delivered (discussed in Section 7.5.2.2), type of coursework, language, feedback and the methods of assessment were conjointly influential on the participant's attainment. This demonstrates that coursework aspects are imperative contributing factors to attainment and urgently require consideration when aiming to increase BME attainment.

7.2.3   Others

7.2.3.1 Teaching Staff

Other individuals influenced the participants' attainment. In this section, 'others' constitute academic staff at Coventry University. Typically the higher the levels of support, the ease with which tutors could be communicated with and frequent contact, the greater the satisfaction with attainment amongst the participants. Participants referred to tutors in a variety of discussion areas, with most referring to them at least once during their interviews. The frequency with which tutors were mentioned suggests the student/tutor relationship is of considerable importance. Tutors are viewed as part of the culture of the institute: students associate them as part of Coventry University. Although institutional culture was originally identified in the conceptual framework, 'relationships with tutors' as a theme emerged more prominently. The following commentaries showcase a positive and supportive relationship, in terms of academic studies:

> *See him after placement for updates. Helpful, guidance on what to include in portfolio; don't discuss personal issues…have a positive relationship with some tutors; some good, some not so good.* (P3)

> *Some lecturers are approachable, some aren't. When I do approach – explain the work and are helpful to level of understanding.* (P6)

> *OK, no personal relationship with any tutor…not regularly see any tutor – either not available, or 'I'm too busy'.* (P6)

> *Yes help is available if wanted, depends on lecturer. Some are funny about it and not approachable; when I have approached them they are very helpful…pretty much positive relationship, don't have much to do with them, talk about work, that's it…* (P9)

These quotes demonstrate that tutor support is beneficial; however, a good relationship was dependent on the tutor with participants reporting some tutors to be more approachable and helpful than others i.e. having a positive relationship with some tutors and not others. This logically raises the question why are some tutors more approachable than others? If students sense tutor support as valuable, then the only reasonable conclusion is that it should be more forthcoming. Tutors, like all individuals, hold prejudices which could include those based on ethnicity and ability. Teaching staff may

therefore be acting according to these stereotypes; participants believed staff held these prejudices, as demonstrated by the quote below (participant 10):

> *Some don't have time for students, have time for some students, those who get good grades, they are closer to good students, should see all students as one...we all came here to learn, we are all after one thing.* (P10)

This aforementioned also evidences that the participants believed that tutors categorise students, presumably based on stereotypes. Participant 10 reports witnessing tutors spending more time with 'good' students, consequently those more in need of help could be missing out. It follows tutors may be subconsciously spending more time with 'good' students. As the quote above demonstrates, we place individuals into categories subconsciously; making tutors aware of student's perceptions could enable tutors to address this concern.

The previous quotes simultaneously suggest that the effort was on the part of the participants to seek out the tutor, not vice versa, plus the relationship and support was only on academic terms as opposed to pastoral. Again, if tutors were made aware of the fact students find this relationship supportive, it may prompt them to maintain the relationship and help improve attainment, further. All the previously quoted participants mentioned that personal issues were not discussed; however, there is evidence to suggest that pastoral care can improve students' ability all round. When the student/tutor relationship is maintained, it is effective at providing support, as participant 12 shows:

> *Yes see her 2 times a year – should be every term. Tells you what is needed to achieve a 1st, 2:1, what grades to achieve, layout of assignments. See her more often, keeps you motivated.* (P12)

Even participants who came across as unmotivated and detached from university life believed and saw the value of tutors, i.e. others, supporting them. Participant 19, quoted next, suggested that a relationship with a tutor would have benefited him. Participant 19 was unmotivated and did not feel a sense of belonging to or welcome at Coventry University, despite this he could see the value of others, in this case through tutorials, particularly one-to-one. He had not initially attended tutorials, but if they had continued into subsequent years it is predicted they would have served to motivate him, contributing to his academic achievements and increased engagement. He also makes the point of 'getting along' with his tutor:

(Had a 1:1 tutor) in first year yes but never went, we had tutorials at 9 o'clock, wasn't a morning person back then. This year I would have gone, do need tutorials in 2nd and 3rd year – especially in 3rd year need them more, see students that are stressed out – need help with work and they're not getting it. Went to a couple of tutorials in 1st year liked my tutor at that time, he was a laugh/good. In a group of 4 (would be good 1:1) – would help more, I don't know if uni does it. (P19)

This participant could have been more engaged if he had continued to have tutorials with this tutor, with whom he had a good relationship. Also, had tutorials been on a 1:1 basis, rather than in a group, individual attention could have been permitted. The same applied to another unmotivated and non-engaged participant, participant 1, who did not attend tutorials but could see the benefits, in particular having a relationship with a tutor. He also demonstrated that demographic characteristics are important:

(Prefer) younger lecturers – although not as experienced, understand where we're coming from, help us look at it... (had 1:1 tutor) for project only. Tutor support was available in 1st and 2nd year, but not involved in university therefore didn't want it. Just because (someone is your) tutor, doesn't mean they are helpful. 'Personality clash'. (P1)

It is evident from the above that 'others' (tutors/academic staff) and good relationships with tutors are of importance to students, additionally that tutors are approachable and that this relationship is maintained. An effective tutor/student relationship, particularly 1:1, as part of a wider support system should become a necessary and inherent feature as it provides support and guidance which, in turn, inevitably influences attainment positively.

7.3   Internal Factors

7.3.1   The Self/Individual

Danziger (1997) in Holloway et al., (2007) observed that it is remarkably difficult to define 'self'. The self has many facets, such as self-concept, the physical being and thoughts and feelings a person experiences. The phenomenological self is constantly making meaning out of experience; participants attempted to make sense of their experience in HE and their attainment, often focusing on the self as the cause. Our sense of self is derived from our knowledge and membership of social categories such as race and social class, hence assuming that all participants' sense of self is determined by their BME status and culture.

Knowledge, including that of our culture, creates and informs our thoughts, along with shaping our self-concept. In this research participants referred to themselves recurrently in various ways, each discussed in this section; the overriding theme being that the majority hold the 'self' accountable for their attainment and expressed that improving their educational attainment was their own responsibility. The tendency to take individual responsibility could be a reflection of culture, therefore a specific BME issue.

A participant's tendency to hold themselves accountable for attainment was detected throughout the interviews, through use of language, tone of voice and overall attitude and feel of the interview. Their sense of self and their feelings and emotions were uncovered to be influencing attainment. Generally, participants experiencing feelings of negativity were less likely to be pleased with their attainment, these feelings being reflected in their studies.

7.3.1.1 Attitude

Attitude is conveyed and interpreted as a feeling or opinion on a topic, in this case HE. The first generation (to the UK) participants portrayed a more positive attitude throughout their interviews, expressing satisfaction with many aspects of their HE experience. They strongly believed their attainment was their sole responsibility; even where participants failed to mention this verbally, this ideal was detected through observation, tone and attitude. As a consequence of their positive attitude the first generation exerted greater effort towards their studies. The second generation participants (parents were immigrants to the UK) were more often negative and demonstrated a sense of blasé, and feelings of negativity and a lack of interest. This second generation was also more likely to blame factors external to the self for their attainment. An accepting/blasé attitude was particularly apparent amongst unmotivated participants; a sense of resignation was detected. Participant 1, a second generation Indian student who lived at home, appeared to have this attitude of acceptance/blasé. His use of language communicates a lack of interest and a lack of engagement in the institution:

> *No main campus, spread out in town. I'm from Coventry, it's home. University is only a step. Not bothered if it's welcoming.* (P1)

> *(Belonging/welcome?) No, come in to work, attend lectures (now) get degree and go; can go home when I want.* (P1)

Participant 5, a second generation Pakistani student who also lived at home, used the word 'alright' several times, and it is assumed that the word 'alright' is non-committal. Moreover, the tone of voice with which he spoke contributed to his attitude of acceptance, blasé and a lack of interest:

Alright, better compared to some of my mates.

(Satisfied with Coventry University?) Alright, it's a bit far – expensive to commute…

(Belonging/Welcome?) Alright, wasn't first choice (3rd choice) – attended Cov due to change in family situation; didn't attend open day. (P5)

These participants, who communicated acceptance/blasé, had several common factors. All were second generation in/to the UK; all lived at home and were not pleased with their prior attainment having entered HE via the A-level route or took longer than two years at level 3; none were high achievers on entry to HE; all (except one) having to complete a one-year foundation course and the majority were not pleased with their previous attainment. A combination of these aspects was presumably impacting the participants' feelings of acceptance/blasé and lack of interest and continuing to feel this way is leading to disengagement and poorer attainment.

Records were made of the overriding feel of each of the 20 interviews. These feelings are not solely decided on the basis of the words spoken, but also on tone of voice and attitude. These are summarised in Figure 7.2 below.
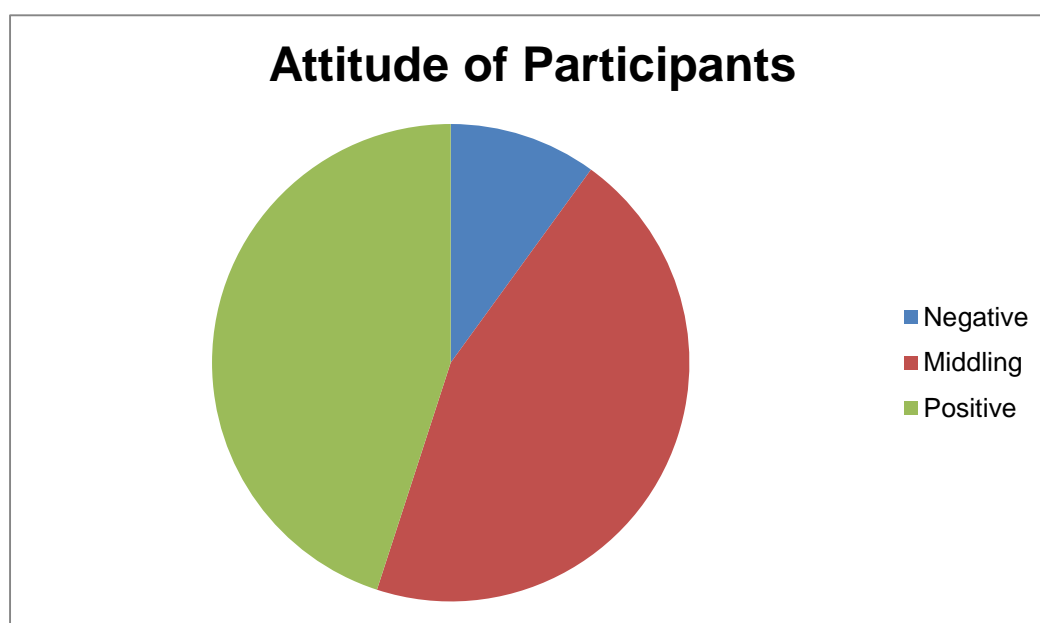
Figure 7.2 gives a brief insight into the attitudes of the BME participants at Coventry University. Relatively few participants communicated a largely negative attitude, with the majority having a middling or positive attitude. Of those participants holding a middling attitude, most were not pleased with their attainment to date; of those participants who had a positive attitude, the majority were pleased with their previous attainment. Rather predictably those participants who had a negative attitude were not pleased with attainment.

From these results it can be assumed attitude and satisfaction with attainment are connected: for those participants who held a positive attitude, it could have been due to positive results, with the reverse holding true. A relatively high number of participants held a middling attitude, these being the students experiencing feelings of acceptance/blasé and a lack of interest. These feelings of acceptance/blasé and a lack of interest appeared to be affecting other aspects of university life for these participants. For instance, none participated in extra-curricular activities or expressed a strong sense of belonging and welcoming, as well as failing to identify with the institute. Where participants expressed a feeling of acceptance/blasé and showed a lack of interest in aspects of university life, this was affecting their commitment and belonging to Coventry University, and their effort towards their academic achievement.

7.3.1.2 Aspirations

Aspirations and goals were the reasons most frequently provided for entering HE, indicating that these participants considered themselves (or 'the self') as a reason and their own personal desire to succeed. Aspirations demonstrate an internal motivating factor. For the first generation students, they had come to the UK to better themselves with education, as demonstrated by the following quotes:

> *Motivated, from background – seen parents suffer/ grandparents – not well off, see why I need to do well…here (not for friends) for myself; will face the world alone.* (P7)

> *To get a better job, more successful future, need qualifications, expand knowledge going to university.* (P12)

> *I don't want to fail, get a good job, make money; mum – feel if I don't do as good, have a lot to live up to, little sister is getting A*'s.* (P15)

> *I came to the uni to get a degree, get a good job because in our country if you don't have a good degree you can't find jobs.* (P17)

These participants considered obtaining their degrees as part of their success; all had been previously encouraged in education by their families and/or school. Aspirations appear to increase as encouragement increases, therefore making encouragement a pertinent issue.

7.3.1.3 Lack of Self-belief/Confidence

Another internal influencing aspect/theme was a lack of confidence and a lack of self-belief. Several participants visibly lacked confidence. I observed the participants lack of confidence during discussions with them regarding their communications with their tutors; I also noted some participants had a lack of self-belief in their academic ability. A failure to communicate effectively could be resulting in missing information and advice that, in turn, could improve their attainment. Feelings of 'not being able' or 'bright' were communicated within the interview process as a whole; those students who believed they were not capable had negative or middling attitudes. Participant 15 did not feel confident enough to approach lecturers despite requiring support with research, preferring to use alternative channels for communicating:

> *No wouldn't approach them with a problem, would email them. Have to use all journals [name of module withheld for the purpose of anonymity] don't know a thing*

about journals – time consuming to read, one form of text…don't use journals.
Wouldn't approach – just nervous, new people, would email them or ask a (reliable)
course mate. (P15)

Participant 16 lacked self-belief, expressing she was not good enough for other universities. Furthermore, this quote also demonstrates the image she holds of Coventry University:

Didn't want to go far I don't see any point to it, really, unless it's a really good uni
like Oxford, but I'm not on that level, kind of thing. (P16)

Whilst the preceding comments sheds some light on levels of confidence, other participants felt they were not getting the grades they deserved. Participants 14 and 17, both motivated and engaged students, perceived their effort and commitment towards their studies were not reflected in their grades, as a result disclosing a sense of injustice:

I was a bit surprised with some of them because I did think I would get higher but
it was my first year and I look back at them and I am trying to improve them this
year, try and work harder, if anything I missed out on, revision start earlier, rather
focusing more this year does count to your final year grade. (P14)

Just one test, good grade, not better than I expected thought I'd get 80 something,
but got 75% (higher expectations?); so much effort I put into it, I expected more.
Yes, last year's, even though kept having problems – high/low grades, it was
frustrating but came out with high grades. (P17)

Participants 14 and 17 had self-belief in their hard work and ability; however, both were disappointed by their attainment at times. A continuation of effort not reflecting grades could serve to demotivate students and lower their confidence. Both participants indicated trying harder next time, attributing the responsibility of improved attainment on themselves, avoiding making it an institutional factor, specifically assessment and grading.

Participant 13 appeared to lack confidence throughout his interview; although his lack of confidence is difficult to capture verbally, a substantiating quote is provided to support the latent evidence with participant 13 commenting:

Came to Cov because of grades, not enough UCAS points so had to do a
foundation course, enjoyed this year so decided to stay in Cov. Like convenience
of uni, have home comforts, same friendship groups – didn't have to branch out.
(P13)

This commentary is informative. The participant studies at Coventry University not out of choice but due to lower than expected prior attainment at entry level to HE, hence having to complete a foundation course. This poor prior attainment combined with the additional foundation year would have undoubtedly contributed further to a lack of confidence in his academic ability, ultimately impacting on his attainment. Furthermore, he mentioned he is comfortable living at home, with the same friendship group, not having to 'branch out' to meet new people, all collectively pointing to a lack of confidence.

Levels of confidence in academic ability and a lack of self-belief were resonant in affecting attainment. Amongst participants with high levels of confidence, this appeared to reduce when not achieving highly. Confidence extends to the ability to communicate effectively, further impacting attainment.

7.3.1.4 Awareness of How Grades can be Improved/Self-Responsibility

A large number of the participants communicated knowledge of the factors which require addressing to improve their attainment. Table 7.1 summarises the factors participants believe are accountable for their attainment.

Table 7.1: Perceptions of Factors Influencing Grades and Attainment

Participant	One Influencing Factor	Broad Category
1	*Lack of interest, boring, hard, lots of work. Course should be more exciting.*	*Course Aspects*
2	*Teachers were supportive in the second year, give information; library is too small or crowded – more space would motivate me to stay here and study; William Morris building closing, computer rooms booked...distractions at home – cleaning, etc. Being shown other coursework helped, some lecturers just give guidance.*	*Lecturers* *Facilities at Institution* *Other responsibilities*
3	*Grades down to personal commitment – (own) family.*	*Individual responsibility*
4	*My drive, lots of resources available to help you get a first class degree as long as you put your mind to it. Got people looking up to me.*	*Individual responsibility*
5	*Friendship groups, if you hang around with someone who is lazy – do same as them. If they work motivates you.*	*Peer group*
6	*Research, lots of research, academic research (need training).*	*Study skills*
7	*Poor time planning. All teachers teach well, homogenous – teach same way therefore it is on the individual.*	*Individual responsibility (organisation/ planning)*
8	*Living at home – didn't like studying at home...go to Birmingham City library, get private room...family demands (even though they) know not to interrupt me, want me to do well.* *Part-time job – does take time, but worked since I was 15...(but) open to distractions living on own.* *Could have got better grades if I'd done a few things differently. Not a question of ability, now I put my head down and can get good grades.*	*Accommodation – living at home* *Employment* *Individual responsibility*
9	*Loads of stuff (activities) outside (University), my mark improved in the second year because I did so bad in the first year, pulled socks up.*	*Additional interests* *Previous grades*
10	*...fees not paid on time, some confusion, was not going to continue studying, missed home, no family here. Parents didn't always give money, work provides me with extra money.*	*Lack of family support* *Finances*
11	*Different modules/course run changed. Asked us at end of 2nd year which we prefer.*	*Institutional/course issues*
12	*If you don't know anyone on your course, you don't attend...think you'll be singled out. 3nd year I know everyone from last year so I attend.* *Down to my commitment, if you want good grades, you'll study hard to achieve them.*	*Peers/friendships on course* *Individual responsibility* *Aspiration to do well*
13	*Myself, I want to do well, all down to me, even with*	*Aspiration to do well*

	nagging, it's my concentration and determination.	
14	*(Commuting) has had a little bit of an effect...takes up quite a lot of your time, wastes time...even though you can read on the train; if I lived out would have been much more help, made me...more local, could come to uni every day.*	Travel time (lives at home)
	It's ok for me I am motivated and a hard worker I would come in get up in the morning, for others it might be difficult get distracted.	Individual work, staying on task
	I do lots outside of uni – at the moment doesn't interfere with work, do work first, equal both sides, doesn't affect grades.	Additional interests
15	*I don't want to fail, get a good job, make money; mum – feel if I don't do as good, have a lot to live up to, little sister is getting A*'s. Mum not a role model, we see things differently just pressure. If I don't step up.*	Aspirations
16	*The teachers, it is quite independent but there's still like, 'you need to…' you know, when you think about placement, jobs, yes I really need to do something because they're approachable – help me at this stage of work, they talk to you.*	Tutor support
17	*Distractions, like friends, parties. If you are not careful know you can just fall, I think basically we all need to know how to balance our social life with our academic life, what I didn't do then was to balance it, I was easily distracted (down to individual).* *(Need guidance? How to manage time, like a study timetable)* *X (tutor) did that for us. It was really helpful; tutor made us plan/timetable extra hours, what we do at home, Sundays – no reading, just sleeping, church, had a timetable plan.*	Outside distractions/individual responsibility Tutor guidance and support
18	*Last year – friends and parties.*	Outside distractions
19	*To do with myself – not an academic person, I like reading but not academic books/journals.*	Individual responsibility
	Yes if I did feel more welcome I probably would try harder.	Belonging to institute
	When I started my second year I was working...end up missing uni.	Employment
	I'm still not putting in as much effort as I should. I know I should…but I'm not. Yes more effort equal higher grades.	Individual effort
	Certain facts like the group work thing I should be able to choose whether I do it or not, cos I'm paying for it.	Type of coursework
20	*Cos I'm motivated and I'm really competitive as bad as it sounds, I have to go home and beat friends' grades, that's the only thing that challenges me – if I have to prove someone wrong – motivated.*	Individual motivation Competition (with peers)

The overwhelming evidence from the quotes in Table 7.1 is that most participants believe they themselves are responsible for improving attainment; improving their attainment is an individual/self-responsibility. This self-attribution is, however, ambiguous, as students attribute responsibility to themselves but lack awareness of institutional factors.

7.3.2   Others

7.3.2.1 Peers on Course

In this section 'others' refers to those individuals the participant chooses to associate with. Peers and friendships with those of a similar age group have long been believed to be influential on attainment. Findings of this research confirmed that peers groups are influential; specifically that certain groups of peers yielded more of an influence. I found that peers and friendships on the participant's course of study were most likely to be influential on attainment. Those participants with mixed friendship groups, based on ethnicity and gender, were more motivated, engaged and achieving more highly. In addition their identity was based around student life and Coventry University, and not their ethnicity. The following quotes from participants all had mixed peer groups focused around their courses; all were positive and pleased with their attainment:

> *Friends on and off course, if you don't know anyone on your course, you don't attend, for example for my 2nd year modules I don't know anyone so I don't attend, think you'll be singled out. 3rd year I know everyone from last year so I attend.* (P12)

> *3rd year found my niche, enjoying more – the course mainly. Social aspect – get to know everyone more.* (P11)

> *Friends say – meant to do good, if I fail I let down too many people, have a mix of friends – good group.* (P15)

> *I have friends from outside (from Coventry) and at university. Yes would go with friends (if they said let's go into town). Yes they do influence me, but my current group of friends aren't like that – good attenders.* (P13)

> *Friends, moved when I moved for uni so not many friends in Wolverhampton, at uni and on my course have got quite a few friends, we help each other, supportive in that way.* (P14)

> *Cos I'm motivated and I'm really competitive as bad as it sounds, I have to go home and beat friends' grades, that's the only thing that challenges me.* (P20)

Peer pressure can also undoubtedly be negative. Two participants mentioned that they did the influencing: both were not engaged in their academic studies, were demotivated and possessed negative attitudes. It is therefore assumed that negative students assert negative peer pressure:

It would be me telling my friends. Influencing them, but I'm not stupid – if I had a test the next day...yes skip lectures for friends, not because I'm told but…I can't be bothered. No friends on the course, if I did I'd attend more. (P1)

These commentaries contribute to establishing that friendships on a participant's own course were more influential on attainment than peer groups as a whole. Those participants whose friendships were focused within their course of study retained better attendance at lectures, visibly supported each other and communicated satisfaction with their previous attainment. They appeared to have positive peer associations.

7.3.2.2 Encouragement/Positive Influences

Encouragement and positive influences from others affected the participant's attainment; others constituting parents, wider family and school teachers. The majority of BME participants mentioned 'encouragement' within the context of achieving and entering HE, and as the figures show a higher percentage of BMEs, in comparison to their White counterparts, enter HE with encouragement being a contributing factor (see Chapter Four). Evidentially, those who were encouraged were more likely to be pleased with their previous attainment, were more motivated and more engaged in their studies and thus achieved more highly. Participant 17 had both parents attend HE, was herself expected to enter HE and was pleased with her attainment to date:

...yes, encouraged from a young age. Father really believes in education..."no child of his will come without a degree", we all have to get… (P17)

Participant 13 was motivated to enter HE as a result of his family's encouragement and their life experiences. Neither parents nor siblings had attended HE and, as a result of their own experiences, encouraged the participant, hoping to improve his life opportunities:

...support of family. All teachers encourage, lots of encouragement from school. Mum – yes lots. Pushed and brothers – we messed up. (P13)

As well as family encouragement, school encouragement was revealed to be of significance. Participant 9 was encouraged at school, which presumably contributed to him achieving highly at school level. However, his high achievement did not continue at HE level. He communicated a lack of encouragement at university, which is probably contributing to his dissatisfaction with grades:

BTEC Media, achieved a DDM, at 6th form in Cov…didn't know what to expect – amount of work, were helped at school, here no-one to do work, at school was pushed and helped, no one to push at university, just told to do it...(P9)

School encouragement as influential is further demonstrated in the following quote. Participant 20 was not encouraged at school and believes she did not achieve highly at A-level pertinent to this, directly attributing this low achievement to not being pushed and encouraged:

Didn't get enough points, I don't know what happened…no one stressed how important A levels were, that's because I didn't put enough effort into A levels; I didn't have that kind of person telling me what to do, I did my own thing. (P20)

Participant 20, knowing that her achievement was influenced by a lack of encouragement, has increased her attainment in HE making use of a 1:1 tutor who provides guidance and sets targets. As a Coventry University student, participant 20 is highly motivated, engaged and now pleased with her attainment.

Having positive influences served to motivate students to work hard and achieve highly. Participant 16 viewed one particular teacher as a positive influence, attributing her high achieved subject grade to this positive influence:

My BTEC tutor was very, like, don't know, he was white, down to everyone's level, he had a funny side and very serious side to him and that was good, he had passion for what he done, he loved marketing that's what got me into it (again he was like a role model to you)? Yes teachers like that really help you and I done well in RE and BTEC because of those teachers I suppose. (P16)

Lastly, those who had a parent attend HE were more likely to be satisfied with previous attainment. The scarcity of comments referring to positive influences in HE was noted, highlighting a serious concern. Positive influences in previous education and amongst family were referred to solely. Amongst participants who communicated being encouraged and/or had a family member participate in HE, attainment was higher, leading me to propose that both encouragement and positive influences are influential on attainment.

7.3.3　Knowledge

7.3.3.1 Lack of Knowledge of HE

Several participants indicated or exhibited having limited knowledge of what studying at HE level would entail, a factor not conducive to learning. This limited knowledge of HE manifested as influential on their attainment in HE. Lack of knowledge of HE could be the direct consequence of a number of factors: schools not informing UCAS applicants, non-attendance of open days or limited research and advice. A deprivation of this knowledge and a lack of preparedness for HE would presumably make the transition to university difficult, hence affecting attainment. This lack of knowledge, particularly amongst Asian/Asian British participants, could also be due to the parents not having participated in HE or spent time with their children talking about education. Participants 9 and 12 both demonstrate that they lacked knowledge of studying in HE:

> 1st year not too good – didn't know what to expect – amount of work, were helped at school, here no-one to do work, at school was pushed and helped, no one to push at university, just told to do it. (P9)

In the above quote, participant 9 additionally demonstrates that with encouragement and support he was achieving more highly. Participant 12, quoted below, highlights a lack of advice and support from school when applying to enter HE:

> (School encourage?) Didn't touch on it, gave us a prospectus to push us, didn't talk about it. Appointments to help fill out UCAS application and a deadline to do it by, no support in between, don't bother with you, either you do it or you don't. (P12)

Participant 1 informed me that he had made the wrong course choice. It is assumed that with advice and knowledge of courses, this participant, and other students, could have made informed decisions enabling them to achieve more highly:

> Chose the wrong course. Realised in 1st year – wrong course choice…trying harder this year, didn't try 1st and 2nd year, didn't like it. (P1)

On further prompting as to why participant 1 had chosen the particular course, he replied:

> Did IT at school, easy at A level, no other interests, good future in IT – read somewhere. (P1)

It can be assumed, based on findings of this research, that participants would have achieved more highly if they had prior knowledge of what studying at HE level entailed, understood the grading system of degree classifications and had detailed knowledge of their courses, including modules and types of assessments. Students at Coventry University are not always aware of how degrees are awarded and classified; this is evidenced by discussions with students during seminars and tutorials. Those students with parents who are graduates, and from higher socio-economic backgrounds, appear to have a better knowledge generally of HE and degree classifications.

7.4   Middle Ground/Institutional

Two of the thirteen emergent influential themes not grouped into either external or internal factors were belonging and welcome, and the image held of the institution. It became apparent that both these factors related to the institution, but at the same time were open to differential interpretation by the individual student. Given this, both themes have been placed in between external and internal.

7.4.1   Belonging and Welcome

It is paramount that students feel a sense of belonging and welcome at their educational institution, firstly to entice them to engage and secondly in order to achieve highly. All participants were invited to discuss whether or not they felt welcome at Coventry University; the discussion area of involvement in extra-curricular activities has been incorporated into this area to assess how involved students are at Coventry University, as several participants linked the two areas in their responses.

Of the twenty participants only two definitely replied 'no', communicating that they don't feel welcome at Coventry University. Both students had characteristics in common: both were Asian British – Indian, lived at home and were not involved in any extra-curricular activity or other areas of university life, plus neither had been satisfied with previous attainment. Their lack of a sense of belonging or welcome could be due to a combination of these characteristics; however, these characteristics could be counteracting each other, for instance continuing to live at home may be preventing involvement in other aspects of university life. It is important to mention that external factors, which are beyond the scope of my research, may be influencing commitment and performance of some participants.

> *No, come in to work, attend lectures, get degree and go, I can go home when I want, if I moved out, I'd be more involved, on campus.* (P1)

No, the second I get off the train I'm depressed...dullest place ever (city)…hate this university...doesn't feel welcoming, if you go down the corridor feels like you're in a hospital – don't like it. Maybe because I'm a lot older than other students – I don't know it's annoying, not happy here. Do hang around, been to The Hub...don't like the food, extortionate for students, quality of food is disgusting. (P19)

This commentary from participant 19 is highly informative and 'rich'; it encompasses a number of issues and spectates an overall feeling of unhappiness, which seems to pervade everything. The participant strongly expresses not feeling welcome at the university, which appears to influence his view on other aspects of the institute, along with his attainment. Additionally, he indicates he is older than fellow students and as a result of his age may not feel he belongs in an educational institute.

Positively, a much greater proportion of participants responded 'yes', expressing they felt a sense of belonging and welcome at Coventry University, although several students did hesitate prior to responding. More than half of those who responded 'yes' were, or had been, involved in extra-curricular activities, such as Student Union societies. Others expressed a desire to be involved in extra-curricular activities, but were subject to time constraints (one student commuted from Wolverhampton). The issue of opportunity was highlighted; a tenable number of participants mentioning extra-curricular activities were not available to them, a further relatively smaller group communicating they did not wish to get involved.

Participant 8 links 'belonging and welcome' to lecturers, belonging to an extra-curricular society and the number of university faculties:

Yes, it's alright. Hear some complaints about lecturers from friends "lecturers don't like me" – try not to believe it. Yes because I'm a member of a society, but then no, doesn't feel like college "together"...too many faculties... (P8)

The quote below demonstrates that living at home can deter participation from extra-curricular activities and that participation is not encouraged; although participant 9 does feel welcome at the institute:

Not member of any society, nothing, don't look into it, no one encouraged me to. I am from Coventry, just being in town, extension of school life (part of clubs outside of university). (P9)

I'd love to (be a member of society) but I really don't know exactly where to go, what to do. (P17)

Participant 12 clearly feels a sense of belonging to Coventry University, without participating in extra-curricular activities. She does express a wish to represent Coventry University in other ways:

> *Yes, when I hear Coventry University anywhere I feel that's part of me, feel part of it. Seeing the logo everywhere makes me feel part of it…member of Facebook, Coventry University group... No student unions, never have been, don't feel the need to, would like to help with uni...open day, student ambassador.* (P12)

The following participants express feeling a sense of belonging and welcome due to seeing others of a similar BME backgrounds to themselves:

> *Yes (belonging) lots of ethnic minorities here, embrace different cultures. (P2)*

> *Yes, lots of African students, good mix made me feel welcome, it really helps when there are people from back home in a new place.* (P4)

Participant 15 feels welcome for alternative reasons and also states why she no longer partakes in Student Union societies:

> *Yes (feel welcome), being able to call lecturers by their first name sort of helps....openness, can email teacher...most of the time lecturers get back to you straight away. Was last year, member of African/Caribbean society but this year prices have gone up, I refuse to pay £10, was £5 last year; you get cheaper into some events. (P15)*

The preceding commentaries provide insight into various reasons why a student may or may not feel a sense of belonging and welcome to their educational institute. Participants were less likely to experience a sense of belonging and welcome if they continued to live at home. This is particularly the case if HE is an extension of their previous life, continuing to pursue interests and friendships detached from the university in their home town. Students are able to experience a sense of belonging and welcome due to various factors, from relationships with lecturers to seeing others of similar cultural backgrounds. Those individuals who did participate in extra-curricular activities were marginally more likely to experience a sense of belonging and welcome; several students expressed not having the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities, which affected their sense of belonging. A higher percentage of participants who felt a sense of belonging and welcome to the institute expressed being pleased with their attainment, forging this influential factor to be addressed.

7.4.2   Image of Institution

How the institution is perceived impacts the academic performance of some participants. The impact was seen in terms of the effort they exerted towards their academic studies or attempting to be a part of that institution, such as, representing their institute in sport or as student ambassadors. Some participants verbally communicated their perceptions of Coventry University; however, in cases where they did not, it was simple to derive an understanding of their perception from the overall interview.

Participants 12 and 20 both held a positive image of Coventry University, are motivated students, engaged and pleased with their attainment:

> *When I hear Cov Uni anywhere I feel that's part of me, feel part of it. Seeing the logo everywhere makes me feel part of it, on taxis… Member of Facebook Cov Uni group…don't know many people from Cov, people I know come here from Birmingham.* (P12)

> *The support I get, if I went to a different university I wouldn't get the support I get at Cov that's why I'm doing really well…for my E-marketing, it was a dissertation for me and I went to see my tutor, spent so much time explaining to me, email, got email back straight away. That's why I carried on, didn't quit. I did well in his module. When I see the logo…I'm proud – Coventry – I go there.* (P20)

These participants may be motivated, engaged and achieving highly as a result of holding a positive image of their institute of study; or the reverse may hold true, namely the participant's motivation and engagement is resulting in a positive image of Coventry University.

Several shared their negative perceptions of Coventry University, as not very highly respected, comparing Coventry University to other educational establishments (named):

> *Hate this university to the core, don't know what it is, just doesn't look nice. Doesn't feel welcoming, if you go down the corridor feels like you're in a hospital – don't like it. Maybe because I'm a lot older than other students – I don't know, it's annoying. Not happy here…If I was in top 20 unis then I probably would (referred to league tables). Cov is 57th, don't have high expectations of uni.* (P19)

> *(Feel proud/welcome when you see the Coventry University logo?) – No! (laughs).* (P19)

> *I wanted to go to Birmingham, didn't want to go far, I don't see any point to it, really unless it's a really good uni like Oxford, but I'm not on that level, kind of thing.* (P16)

Two of these quotes demonstrate an interest and knowledge of league tables. As a result of their negative image, these participants appeared to exert less effort and have lower confidence in their abilities.

Even the image of the library could be a reflection of the culture of learning. Participant 19 continues:

> *Especially the library is not very nice – needs to be more quiet; even in the booths could hear people talking, there needs to be more computers and they need to be a lot quicker especially at this time when everyone is doing revision and need air con in there, some people are sweating. (Librarians helpful) – no, don't like, very rude and blunt, don't like me. Don't feel obliged to ask them for help seem arrogant. Not rocket science to find a book.* (P19)

> *Poor facilities, paper, printing, print in town for dissertation, not enough computers or not working.* (P2)

Together, these quotes show how participants were disappointed with the facilities, which can discourage students from hard work and achieving highly. The image participants held of Coventry University did influence attainment. Those who held a positive image of the institute were more motivated and engaged in more areas of university life, including their academic courses. The opposite is also true: holding a negative image of the institute can deter students from further engagement.

7.4.3 Why Coventry University?

Coventry University was the sole institution used in this research, hence the importance attached to assessing whether attainment was subject to an institutional effect. An antecedent aim of this research was to provide an analysis of the HE experience of BME students at Coventry University. All participants were asked why they chose Coventry University, as this choice could be influencing their academic performance; various reasons were given, these have been grouped into broad categories.

The most popular reason given for choosing Coventry University was because the student wished to continue living at home, reflecting the high number of local students of Coventry. A number of participants stayed at home for employment or personal reasons:

> *I wanted to stay at home, had a job.....(*P1)

Because its (Coventry University) close to home (Birmingham), can continue boxing.....have a job.....(P8)

Because I live in Coventry, nearest which offered adult nursing. (P3)

Participant 3, has her own home and family in Coventry, therefore other institutes were not an option.

The second most popular response to this question was, 'because of the course':

The course here interested me more – opportunities I can get from this course – placement, stuff like that interested me more. Looked at doing a journalism course (first).....(P15)

Type of course made me chose Coventry – advantage and personal skills modules – helped influence my decision. (P14)

Because of the course and I live in Coventry, I didn't want to move out just because of the costs.....(P20)

Participant 19 and 13 chose Coventry University because of the foundation course; one is satisfied with Coventry University, whilst the other is not satisfied:

.....I wanted to stay at home, I got conned into it, they (Coventry University) made it (Foundation Degree) sound so much better than it is basically, it was like a re-sit of maths and English.....If I'd worked harder I would never have come here.....(P19)

Came to Cov because of my grades, not enough UCAS points – so had to do a foundation course, enjoyed that year so decided to stay in Coventry. I like the convenience of uni, have home comforts, same friendship groups – didn't have to branch out, friends on the foundation course, felt good. (P13)

The third most popular reason was based around recommendations, mainly from international students:

My sister came here, I saw Coventry University at her graduation and thought "wow".....(P2)

Its outstanding, go round the world, top university in the UK, I was encouraged to come here (by visitor from Coventry University in students home country). (P7)

Recommended by a friend. (P4)

Fourth most popular reason identified the facilities:

Lots of facilities available – had been voted the most modern university – to help you with your studies. (P14)

The following quotes give a brief insight into perceptions about Coventry University. Participant 16, remarked that Coventry University was not worth moving away for:

*.....I don't see any point to it (moving out) really, unless it's a really good uni like Oxford, but I'm not on that level.....(*P16)

As did participant 19:

If I was in one of the top 20 uni's then I probably would (referred to league tables), Coventry is 57th, don't have high expectations of uni. (P19).

The following responses appeared once each 'liked it at open day', 'couldn't get into first choice' and 'knew people in Coventry':

I couldn't get into X, didn't have enough points, didn't like X (second choice).....(P12)

First choice – didn't get the points to get in. (P8)

Coventry University attracts students from the City, particularly those descending from Asian ethnicity; the student population reflects the local community which is diverse culturally. All participants' of Asian origin lived at home in Coventry. Several participants shared their view of 'not being good enough' for other universities, providing an insight of the image they hold of Coventry University, also numerous participants applied because Coventry University offers a foundation course.

In contrast, the second most popular reason given for applying to Coventry University was because of the courses on offer; Coventry University offers a diverse range of courses, in this case a number of participants had applied for a course combining subjects; several participants mentioned additional modules attracted them, such as employability skills. The third most popular reason for applying to Coventry University was due to recommendation; this reflects the reputation of the university and student experience, also the importance of feedback from students. Several participants recalled visits to their sixth forms and schools, nationally and internationally, from Coventry University representatives. A result of the visit was that it influenced their decision to apply to Coventry University.

7.4.4   Satisfaction with Coventry University

All participants were asked to discuss levels of satisfaction with Coventry University; 55% of participants gave a definite 'yes' upon being questioned regarding being satisfied with Coventry

University; 100% of the first generation Black African participants expressed being pleased, whilst 66% of the British Asian Indian and Asian Pakistani expressed satisfaction.

Participants expressed being satisfied with Coventry University for diverse reasons; support on their course:

> *Yes, the support I get, if I went to a different university I wouldn't get the support I get at Coventry that's why I'm doing really well – I think.....sometimes I don't grasp things quickly.....for my E-marketing.....I went to see my tutor, spent so much time explaining to me, e-mail, got an e-mail back straight away; that's why I carried on, didn't quit.....*(P20).

> *Yes, don't get a chance to re-sit at other universities, Coventry allow you to re-sit and pass, don't pay. Everybody know everyone, it's a small town.* (P18)

Satisfied due to tutors and teaching:

> *I like the communication between teachers and students, like the fact you have your tutors.* (P17)

Satisfied because of students of similar BME backgrounds :

> *Yes, lots of African students, good mix, made me feel welcome, really helps when there are people from back home in a new place – can relate to them.* (P4)

And a combination of people, the university and the town:

> *Yes, friendly lecturers and people, good environment. Coventry is a quiet place, I like it.....*(P10)

> *Yes, some of the facilities are like, computers that kind of stuff.....but then again you can improve that. People wise, environment wise it's really good; socially like in Coventry its really boring.....*(P16)

These quotes demonstrate students associate satisfaction with Coventry University for a range of reasons, support and communication with tutors was echoed and the BME diversity made several participants feel welcome. The remaining British students, Asian and Black, responded with a mixture of positive and negative, being satisfied one year and not another; three of these participants lived at home in Coventry.

Participant 11, an art and design student, who lived at home:

> *Each year has been different, didn't enjoy first year or second year; third year I found my niche, enjoying it more – the course mainly, social aspect – get to know everyone more.....depends on students effort they put in themselves; would have been better if I'd been more involved.* (P11)

Participant 5, an Advertising and Marketing student, who lived at home in Birmingham:

> *It's alright, it's a bit far – expensive to commute, I am here all the time though (commuting) doesn't affect my attendance.* (P5)

This participant may be satisfied due to spending time at university, as opposed to participant 9 below, who attends university only for lectures:

> *Guess so.....come for lectures then go home, no need for me to spend time here. I hang around with friends I've known before, some are from Coventry university.....majority of friends are from Coventry City.....*(P9)

Two participants responded directly 'not satisfied'; both lived at home:

> *No main campus, (Coventry University) spread out in town. I'm from Coventry, its home, university is only a step, not bothered if its welcoming.* (P1)

> *Hate this university to the core, don't know what it is, just doesn't look nice. Doesn't feel welcoming, if you go down the corridor feels like a hospital – don't like it. Maybe because I'm older that other students.....not happy here.* (P19)

Both these students are not highly motivated or engaged either in their studies or extra-curricular activities around the university; both live at home and spent little time on campus. 47% of participants, who replied 'yes satisfied' with Coventry University, were satisfied with previous grades, just over half of whom lived at home.

7.5   Discussion of Findings

The preceding sections have exhibited how participants were influenced by each of the contestable number of factors illustrated in Figure 7.1, with commentaries provided as supporting evidence. The three broader classifications of external factors, internal factors and those in the middle ground, linked to the institute, were analysed and evidenced as influential on BME attainment. Section 7.5 discusses each of these three classifications. It emerged from the analysis, however, that influencing factors on attainment are perceived differently: cultural issues emerged from the data. The discussion is therefore shaped around first generation students in the UK (hereafter, referred to as only first generation), and second generation students in the UK (hereafter, second generation).

7.5.1 Revisiting the Thesis

To reiterate, the analysis revealed the factors influencing BME participants' attainment and that the majority were satisfied with their attainment. The topic of BME attainment is particularly important because of the gap that exists between the degree attainment of BME and White students. This gap cannot be addressed without prior knowledge of what influences BME attainment, and secondly this requires addressing due to increased enrolment rates of BME students, amongst other groups, at UK HEIs.

In response, and in an attempt to explore the research topic, a phenomenological approach was adopted, alongside interpretivism to draw on students' experiences, relying extensively on the IPA method. The research was informed by a conceptual framework, deemed necessary to guide research; however, data collected was interpreted emergently. The result was an interpretation of key influences on students' attainment that has emerged recursively from the collected data and previous literature in the field.

On closer examination of the findings, an immediate observable is that the first generation participants were more likely to express satisfaction with previous attainment at Coventry University whereas second generation participants, on the whole, were more likely to communicate dissatisfaction and question their HE experience. National figures produced on BME attainment group all BME students, regardless of which generation they belong to, within HE: they fail to discriminate between the generations. The findings of this research propose this is an imperative distinction to note, as major differences exist between students of different generations. Questions such as: "Are the first generation emotively pleased? Are the expectations of home grown students higher? Are universities failing to raise the expectations of first generation, allowing them to be satisfied with lower attainment?" all crucially require addressing.

7.5.1.1 Reflections on the Research Question

At the outset of this thesis, the initial research statement was 'Why the Educational Performance Gap between BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) Students and White Students, and how can it be reduced; the Case of Coventry University', which focused on discovering causes of the attainment gap between BME and White students. However, as research progressed, I realised it was not possible to

search for reasons for the gap, as this would require a separate study involving White students to gain a deeper understanding. Due to resource availability and time limitations, it was deemed not possible to conduct two separate research studies. After deliberation, the research statement posed was *'What is broken: An exploration of the factors affecting the attainment of BME students'* I felt that this question allowed me to look at what factors initially influence BME students in isolation rather than raising the issue of differential attainment prior to being in a position to address the attainment gap. The research statement and its intermediate aims were addressed adequately by analysing data collected in the foregoing chapter and detailing factors affecting BME students; however, addressing the aims has in fact produced more rich qualitative data, deepening the aims.

An immediate observation of the findings is that there is no straightforward answer to this research question; the findings show the answer is complex with a multitude of influencing and intertwined factors which affect attainment. Participant responses did not directly provide the answer to what affects attainment, nor did I directly ask this. A number of areas within HE were discussed with the hope of revealing the influential factors through gaining an insight into the students' views in conjunction with noting tones, attitudes and ambience of the communication and physical observations.

In order to address the research question, an informing conceptual framework was devised, shaped by previous research. By basing the discussion around the five concepts of the framework, it allowed for delving into the whole HE experience. A secondary aim was to measure how the five concepts influenced motivation and engagement; however, this required systematic employing of scales and quantitative analysis, whereas the focus of this research is views, experiences and feelings – a phenomenological approach. Consequently, to avoid triangulation by incorporating quantitative data, the research was concentrated to a deeper extent on the participant's individual meanings and interpreting their beliefs of factors influencing their attainment. This variation turned out to be meaningful as the influencing factors were in contrast to those assumed to be influential by the participants. Participants believed particular factors were influencing their attainment, whereas through data analysis, the researcher is led to believe contrasting influencing factors are at play, unknown to the participant.

Moreover, as the analytical process proceeded, it was found that the question of: "What influences attainment?" gave rise to the contingent question: "What generation/background?" The latter question is more analytical than descriptive, encouraging attention on the factors that shape how HE is

experienced, moving beyond factors which influence attainment as an end unto itself. This provided the research with an opportunity to move from simply identifying factors that affect attainment towards attempting to understand how these factors are perceived. This shift was possible and facilitated by the varied sample of participants and richness of the data. Through the analytical process it came to the researcher's attention that whilst influential factors remained constant, as both groups achieve less highly in degrees than their White counterparts, they were perceived disparately according to the participant's background, especially their 'generation' to the UK.

The previous section presented my results, although much replicates previous findings, attentively looking forward any small research makes a contribution to the issue of differential BME attainment. In the following section, the main discussion is presented focusing on the three overriding categories of influencing factors, with reference to first generation and second generation. These three central categories emerged from the analysis and a commentary is presented on each below:

1.   External Factors

2.   Internal Factors

3.   Middle Ground or Institutional factors.

Brief conclusions are drawn following each discussion followed by related recommendations; these, however, need to be taken together with section **9.6**, 'Directions for Future Research' and **9.7**, 'Concluding Remarks.' This section should additionally be considered in conjunction with the analysis sections. Taken together they present the theoretical argument of the thesis, subsequent to which recommendations for policy implications are presented for educational practice at teaching and assessment level, which are advocated as a conclusion and contribution of this research.

7.5.2   External Factors

7.5.2.1 Previous Experience

External factors (external to the phenomenological self) influenced how the experience of HE was perceived; participants indirectly unveiled that previous experiences had shaped their attitudes to education. For the psychologist Gregory (in McLeod, 2007), our perceptions are hypotheses based on

past experiences and stored information. We try to make sense of what we see and experience the now, based on those perceptions. Prior to entering higher education, students' experiences will have varied at school including what expectations teachers had of them, and whether they were encouraged and praised, factors which can influence a student's ability to learn (Song, 2006).

The first generation participants all expressed satisfaction, at times overtly, with variable aspects of HE and their previous attainment. On closer examination of their previous experience, it appeared they had a motive to work hard. The first generation compared their current experience to their peer counterparts back in their home countries (i.e. their reference group), compared to whom their educational experience and opportunities are greatly improved. Whereas the second generation students hold reference groups in the UK who presumably have had the same previous school experience. Consequently, the first generation appear grateful for their current education and display a positive attitude. These findings confirm Ogbu's theoretical position (1993) that voluntary immigrants, the first generation who chose to study in the UK, even if faced by hostility, remain positive and undeterred from hard work, embracing opportunities and expressing satisfaction based on the knowledge that their experience is better than having remained in the education system back home.

Furthermore, Ogbu (1993) contends the host society and institute contributes to academic behaviours and attainment of immigrants; the voluntary immigrant participants do arrive with the correct attitudes and academic behaviours, providing further support for Ogbu's theory, with which they should be achieving highly; where they fail to achieve highly even with these correct attitudes points to the knowledge that the educational institute is affecting their attainment. Secondly, they refrain from negative reacts and continue to behave impeccably.

Second generation participants had also been affected by previous experience, albeit conversely. This group constituted the minority at their UK schools, whereas the first generation of students had been part of the majority in their schools in their home countries. These second generation are involuntary migrants and have a dual reference group, comparing their situation with peers of similar ethnicity in their country of ethnic origin and peers in their mainstream. My findings provided further confirmations for Ogbu's theory, that the second generation, not observing that they are at an advantage to peers from their country of origin, believed they were disadvantaged on comparisons to their White peers. In any context, cultural and ethnic differences are noticed. The BME students formed part of a

minority, a fact observed by teachers (Critical Race Theory in Ladson-Billing, 2012; Goodhart, 2013). Goodhart further noted some minorities have historically suffered from the low expectations of teachers. Several second generation participants had suffered from lower teacher expectations; their tone and attitude often changed when discussing school, with a lack of encouragement having led them to be negative. First generation as a non-minority group presumably would not have experienced these low expectations, having experienced higher expectations, being pushed and encouraged, therefore believing in their ability.

Study skills and levels of ability are developed throughout an individual's duration in education. Variations amongst students are apparent due to skills required when completing previous qualifications. How well study skills have been developed will intrinsically influence attainment in HE. Particular study skills are required to enable higher order thinking for learning in HE (Song, 2006) coupled with attitude towards studies formed through the educational experience. From observation, first generation students, despite possessing a positive attitude and a hardworking ethic, do not display many of these higher order skills. They may lack awareness of expectations of assignments probably as a result of differing previous educational experience. Second generation participants who had not experienced previous education positively appeared to have failed to develop these higher order skills.

Prior attainment is believed to be influential on attainment (Owen et al., 2000; Connor et al., 2004; Lesley, 2005; Richardson et al., 2011). Richardson et al. suggested from statistical analysis that half of the attainment gap for BME students was due to variations in prior attainment; although it is not possible to confirm this from outcomes of this research I can confirm that prior attainment is influential on BME attainment and, additionally, that the types of qualifications completed prior to entering HE are a relatively good determinant of performance in HE, confirming academic route into HE is influential (Smith and Naylor, 2001; Connor et al., 2004; Lesley, 2005). Connor et al. further observed that BME students generally enter HE with lower qualifications, with specific BME groups more likely to take the traditional A-level route; those taking the A-level route performing more highly in HE. Findings did confirm that Indian participants more commonly completed traditional A-levels, however those students who took the vocational route were more satisfied with their current attainment in HE and more often enrolled straight onto a degree course. The majority of students who took the A-level route were not pleased with their relatively low attainment at A-level and had to complete a foundation year. This partly

conflicts with Connor et al.'s (2004) theory that students who completed A-levels performed better in HE, as these students who completed a vocational qualification were more satisfied. The findings of this thesis also go some way towards confirming Connor et al.'s finding that Indians/Asians are more likely to take the A-level route.

They more commonly expressed dissatisfaction with attainment in HE than those having taken the vocational route. All participants who took the A-level route initially enrolled onto the foundation year prior to advancing to a degree course; a plausible explanation could be the experience of which appeared to demotivate and influence their attitude and experience, in turn expressing dissatisfaction with attainment in HE. Hence, it did not follow that those students who completed A-levels achieved more highly (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007). Of the second generation participants, those who had completed a vocational qualification at level three expressed greater satisfaction with their attainment and remained more positive. It is therefore the academic background which is of significance, i.e. non-traditional qualifications (Summit Programme, 2011).

Further justification that previous experience is an influential factor lies within Bourdieu's (1986) cultural theory. Bourdieu proposes that schooling has its own power to shape consciousness over and above the power of the family; schooling having an active role in legitimating family acquired habits, such as the value of hard work and respect for others. Additionally, school plays a prominent role in shaping education and occupational outcomes over and above the role played by peers and parents (Tramonte and Williams, 2010).

Findings from my research lead me to propose that it is the whole of prior experience as opposed to prior attainment alone that affects attainment. For both first and second generation participants, previous experience is influencing their current attainment and attitude towards their studies. The differing previous experiences are resulting in positivity amongst those who constitute the first generation of HE students; however, even after emerging with positive attitudes from their previous experience, predictably they should currently be achieving highly, pinpointing institutional barriers to attainment. Albeit the first generation participants have experienced a very differing education, with limited preparation for their UK experience, many are failing to develop the required study skills of a UK university. Amongst second generation participants previous experience served to ingrain study habits and attitude towards education. Absence of required study skills and understanding will predictably have

a detrimental effect on attainment. At an institutional level, the place of current education, little can be done to influence previous experience with the cause being to improve current attainment. Coventry University needs to ensure all students currently have a positive experience in education, with the focus being removed from ethnicity, and equip students with the study skills required to attain highly. Richardson et al. (2011) concluded '*one might indeed argue that the underachievement of adults from ethnic minorities in HE is a legacy of their underachievement as children in secondary education*'. Prior experiences at secondary schools have left BME students not only with poorer entry qualifications, in some cases, but also with less effective forms of study behaviour.

7.5.2.2 Product

Course aspects are pertinent to attainment and must inevitably be considered when aiming to increase attainment. It is ultimately attainment at course level that determines final degree outcome. Previously course choice has been identified as a contributing factor to the attainment gap (Purcell et al., 2005; Lesley, 2005; Richardson, 2008); however, findings from this research are not able to confirm this, as limited courses were represented, only that course aspects influence attainment (Summit Programme, 2011). In spite of course aspects being relevant to all students in HE, BME students, both first and second generation, may perceive them differently as this section discusses. Assorted course aspects were raised, most alarmingly the desire of having enrolled on a different course, indicating a lack of knowledge and advice on part of families (Connor et al., 2004). It follows that if a participant is reluctantly completing a course, to which they are not suited academically, the participant will be unable to perform highly. Misconstrued course choice affected first generation, some expressed being offered limited choices, whilst amongst the second generation the actual course being a secondary determinate to attending Coventry University, the intention of continuing to live at home being the main intention, an issue more specific to BME students.

Types of coursework was recurrently mentioned, a factor which can influence all students. The wording of assignments follows converse grammatical rules to those of many ethnic dialects (Preece, 2009), leading to a lack of clarity of assignment briefs (Cureton and Cousin[6]). Group work was not popular, especially with highly motivated students, with several participants indicating that having to rely

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[6] Date unknown but download as a PDF from http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2013/abstracts/0078.pdf 3rd September 2015.

on others to complete tasks affected their attainment. However, in development terms, learning to work as part of a team is a vital employability skill, hence the reason teamwork is incorporated into coursework. Further, BME students tend to form groups with those of similar ethnicity (Davies and Garrett, 2012), which can result in compounding weaknesses such as language barriers, further reducing attainment. Written coursework was not engaging, and can serve to limit motivation and therefore attainment. A NUS survey (2011) reported that BME students' were inadequately prepared for the more traditional forms of academic assessment; there is a growing body of statistical evidence suggesting that BME students' feel less satisfied with their experience of assessment when compare to their White counterparts (Surridge, 2008; NUS, 2011).

The BME participants did not have English as their first language. Where participants did speak English they spoke slight variations, therefore, again at a disadvantage, as all coursework, interactions and feedback are in English with their language abilities not on a par with those of their White counterparts. The BME students' level of language may reduce their confidence to interact with lecturers, resulting in limited guidance, advice and feedback which could help improve future attainment (Esmail, 2012).

Anonymous marking is used at Coventry University, however this is not a robust procedure, as Richardson et al.'s (2011) study confirmed, it is important this is adhered to due to the presence of unintended bias in tutor marking. Feedback was perceived to be useful, particularly where it suggested improvements for future attainment. It is questionable whether feedback was utilised fully, as Goldsmith (2004) noted parents and students may lack skills to interpret feedback and overestimate chances of success. However, detailed feedback is required, not general comments that apply to all. In-depth explanations are required to ensure improvements can be made and methods put in place to check students' understanding, particularly in cases where language is preventing achievement. Course teaching and learning materials will undoubtedly be produced in the country of the HE institute. BME students are therefore at a disadvantage at the outset of their journey in HE, compared to their White counterparts who will also be closer culturally to the institute (Song, 2006).

Participants were mostly satisfied with lectures, again a pertinent issue with lectures being the setting where knowledge is transferred. A recurrent theme communicated was a preference for active tasks as opposed to 'talked' lectures plus an opportunity for more individual interaction to allow clarify

of understanding, which would foreseeably improve attainment. Dhanda (2010) similarly reported students found lectures dull at Wolverhampton University, confirming dull lectures as a common issue (Summit Programme, 2011). With lectures more engaging, attendance may improve along with student satisfaction, and if coursework was more interesting, students may be more motivated and exert more effort. Activities and interactions during lectures also enable students not only to learn more effectively but also to get to know fellow students in the group improving integration, all with the desired aim ultimately to improve attainment. Like Richardson (2013) my findings confirm that aspects of teaching and assessments are both influential on attainment.

Drawing conclusions from the above discussion, it is important to ensure that students are provided with adequate knowledge for the course for which they applied and the types of assessments that will enable them to succeed. Alternative forms of assessments matched to a student's capabilities would enable higher attainment as all coursework is not suitable for all students. Individual support which allows for clarification of understanding would inevitably improve attainment; the knowledge of a supportive tutor may also eradicate the confidence barrier. Tutor time is a limited resource but institutions need to balance resources against the priority of addressing the attainment gap, allowing time for individual tutorials if the issue of BME attainment is paramount. Communication, student engagement and academic writing were considered as the main influential factors on BME attainment in research at Kingston University (May et al., 2012). Inclusivity should be aimed for, within a curriculum that reflects diversity, further discussed in Section 7.5.4.1. Coursework could be made relevant to BME students, for instance, BME representation in case studies, as some participants implied if they were more engaged with course factors they may be more motivated.

7.5.2.3 Others

Relationships and communications with others, in this case referring to academic tutors, influenced the participant's attainment. Both first and second generation participants appeared to be affected similarly by tutors alike; it is worth considering how tutors perceive BME students, whether BME students are grouped or whether different ethnicities are noticed. I have observed a tendency for tutors to group students based on ethnicity. Stevenson (2012) reported tutors view UK and non-UK domicile students as synonymous, as part of the Summit Programme.

Availability of time to communicate, approachability and the ability to communicate effectively with tutors were all influential factors. Tutor contact is beneficial in a number of ways, for example vital course and assessment information is communicated during tutorials, current attainment discussed, targets to improve attainment set and encouragement to achieve can be provided. Additionally, participants felt cared for through the tutorial process; however, the aforementioned support is only achieved through effective communication. The BME student may possess several barriers to effective communication, aside from language differences, which can reduce confidence and understanding; a cultural barrier may exist in terms of non-verbal communication. Repeatedly the issue of confidence arose: many lacking the confidence to approach lecturers and BME students not being well equipped, due to their social background, to communicate (Esmail, 2012).

Recognising the importance of these others, and the associated issues they bring, it is possible for the academic tutors, to address the relationship; however, tutors themselves may be contributing to the gap (Song, 2006). After all, teaching is based on explicit and implicit personal values and beliefs (Horowitz, 1994). For communication to occur it requires approachability; tutors need to be viewed as approachable, particularly where the student already lacks confidence. The majority of participants had placed tutors into categories of approachable/non-approachable and, likewise, tutors, as do all individuals, hold beliefs, possibly placing students into categories. Differences are noticed, in fact differences are noticed prior to similarities, as a society we focus on diversity first – gender, age, ethnicity (Critical Race Theory in Ladson-Billing, 2012; Goodhart, 2013). Noticing these differences could be impacting the way tutors communicate. These prejudices are often held and acted on subconsciously, with the individual being unaware of stereotypes held (Romanowski, 1997; Singh, 2011). They become part of our cognitive architecture, making it difficult to change and being applied in an automatic and reflexive manner (Holloway et al., 2007). Singh proposed that BME students experienced feelings of being undervalued and suffered from lower expectations by staff, coining the term 'folk pedagogies'.

Historically tutors have admitted to having lower expectations from students of ethnic minorities and making decisions on students' academic potentials based on stereotyped information (Taylor, 1979; Ferguson 1998). In some cases staff may have limited knowledge and experience about diverse cultures. This lack of understanding may hinder the teacher's ability to effectively reach the diverse students; after all, the majority of the UK Professoriate is White male, 76.1%, compared to 0.9% from

BME backgrounds (Bhopal and Jackson, 2013). Several participants identified the importance for tutors to know them, having a connection to their lives and backgrounds and being able to adapt to their needs. Simply knowing students' names and building a rapport with them promotes approachability.

Though participants found their relationships with tutors positive on academic terms, several emphasised that personal issues were not discussed, these findings being in line with the Summit Programme (2011) which reported personal issues were not discussed. All the Asian/Asian British participants in my research lived at home, continuing to live amongst their families means they can adopt family commitments which inevitably impact on studies; hence a possible requirement for these participants to discuss personal issues, contributing to the relationship further.

In order to challenge and counteract stereotypes, knowledge of students needs to be gained, including understanding diversity thus enabling more effective communication and hence support (Haberman, 2002). Davies and Garrett (2012) reported that most students felt a diverse student/staff representation was important as a means of sharing experiences and gaining knowledge of other cultures.

Despite having a good relationship with tutors is not a specific BME issue, BME students may relate better to tutors from similar backgrounds, possessing knowledge and experience of particular cultural issues. Participants were aware of personal and demographic characteristics of the tutors; as one participant mentioned, personalities do clash, therefore an option might be to allow students to select a tutor after a few weeks. Indeed, as evidenced from personal/teaching experience as a female Asian British tutor, several female students from the same ethnic group have discussed home issues. As one colleague informed me recently, getting to know the students surprisingly challenges the labels we attach to them, reducing prejudices.

Access to tutors was an issue: contact was not maintained in the majority of cases. If students are able to access tutors, or are provided with tutorial times which are compulsory, they are ensured regular contact. Once a relationship is established on a 1:1 basis with a tutor, it could be beneficial for the student to have the same tutor throughout their time at Coventry University. The benefits of tutor support were observed in the Summit Programme; the students' lack of readiness was compounded by a lack of support from tutors to help build their academic skills, develop their confidence and help them

understand the social values of the institution. Amongst the array of explanations for BME under-attainment, explanations must be sought elsewhere, perhaps in teacher/student relationships (Woolf et al., 2013).

In relation to distance learning, the attainment gap does not appear to be attenuated. Notwithstanding this, the absence of paralinguistic information that is available in face-to-face communication might mean that online environments provide less-effective support to underperforming learners, further affecting BME attainment. However, personal characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity might be less salient in online environments. Online, rather than face-to-face, tuition had little or no effect on relative attainment (Richardson, 2013).

These others, academic tutors, through their teaching, learning and assessment (hereafter TLA) practices, play a vital role in enabling/facilitating a student's attainment. Therefore it is important that positive student/tutor relationships are maintained and that tutors are aware of the impact they could be having on attainment, particularly as BME students are more likely to encounter discriminatory TLAs in subtle ways (Osler, 1999; Berry and Locke, 2011; Singh, 2011) of which the tutor may not be aware. Students involved in the Summit Programme HEI's located responsibility with the institution more particularly with academic staff. While some believed they were not prepared, but considered it the responsibility of the university to support them.

7.5.3   Internal Factors

7.5.3.1 The Self

Participants placed a relatively large degree of responsibility on themselves to improve attainment. Specifically they voiced an awareness and knowledge of factors that would improve their grades. There is an absence of clarity as to where this knowledge is derived from; however, psychological studies have indicated that upbringing and culture can influence sense of responsibility. Other than an individual's culture, previous experiences such as schooling could have contributed to this belief of holding oneself accountable (see 7.5.2.1). Holding these beliefs, together with specific personal individual traits, served influential on attainment. Cureton and Cousin[7] referred to factors

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[7] Date unknown but download as a PDF from http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2013/abstracts/0078.pdf 3rd September 2015.

related to the individual student as psychosocial barriers, which included student expectations and their aspirations. Furthermore, the phenomenological self is constantly and actively making meaning out of experience (Tajfel, 1978, in Holloway et al., 2007).

The first individual personal trait of attitude emerged as influential on the overall HE experience; feelings of apathy on the part of the participant were at risk of running into various areas of HE. The first generation participants demonstrated a more positive attitude with corresponding hard work and they experienced HE positively. They reported being pleased with attainment more often, possibly providing an insight into their home culture, pointing to an ethnicity effect. However, attainment amongst the first generation remains low despite a positive attitude (they could be satisfied with what they have achieved, which is high compared to peers back home). In a number of cases, these participants realised this over time and displayed a more middling attitude on reflecting on their attainment.

The second generation participants displayed a less positive attitude towards their HE experience, more middling. As discussed in Section 7.5.2.1 one possible explanation may be their previous experience of education, with the first generation reporting a positive current experience of education when compared to their overall experience, whereas the attitude of second generation participants is a result of a similar experience to their school experience, particularly when remaining to live at home. Those participants who lived on campus were more immersed in university life, whereas living at home appeared to be limiting integration, therefore physically moving away from the family home aided integration and improved attitude towards the institute and studies. Their previous experience of education combined with having to complete a foundation year, both shaping their attitude to education, whereas those new to the UK are comparing their now positive experience to that of their home country.

Aspirations were the reason most often given for entering HE. Both first and second generation participants equally provided this response, demonstrating that all individuals, despite background, have a wish to succeed and an internal motivating factor. Aspirations have previously been identified as influential on attainment (Connor et al., 2004). The first generation students had come to the UK to better themselves with education, amongst the second generation participants the majority of their parents were immigrants to the UK, who emigrated for similar reasons: hope and aspirations for improved life chances not only for themselves but also their children (Goodhart, 2013). A greater

proportion of the first generation appeared more aspirational and exerted greater effort towards their studies; a plausible reason being they had taken bigger steps. Amongst the second generation the majority could see the value of improving their life chances, assumed as a result of social capital, aspirations and expectations provided by their immigrant parents (Connor et al., 2004).

Confidence levels were an attributing factor to success. An individual's confidence levels and lack of self-belief could be more specific to all BME students as many are further removed from their cultures on attending an HE institute of another country. Language issues can cause lower confidence levels and accents, observed particularly during presentations, reducing the confidence of BME students. Previous research addressing the widening participation gap by Preece (2009) focused specifically on the use of academic language and identity formation of HE students (see Section 7.5.2.2). Preece observed that BME undergraduates' experience with 'posh'/academic English in discussions with their lecturers and fellow students can leave them feeling alienated, because their language capabilities do not match. A continuation of not achieving, despite one's best efforts, may ultimately result in further reducing confidence. Lacking the confidence to ask questions and being afraid of embarrassing oneself is resulting in the self-affecting attainment, through self-silencing, exposing their condition and self-censorship (Stevenson, 2012),

Knowledge, or an assumption of knowing how one's own grades can be improved, is not specifically a BME issue; however, previous research has indicated that certain BME groups place the onus of achievement on themselves (Gibson, 1988). Additionally, the situation in which knowledge about the self is produced contributes to how selves are understood, for instance Ogbu (1993) reported that the first generation students were brought up to believe and take responsibility for their own achievements and attitudes towards education. The second generations were also more likely to blame factors external to the self for their attainment.

Despite what participants attribute their attainment to, an attainment gap remains between BME and White students. Principally, even amongst participants with positive attitudes, high aspirations and good levels of confidence, who were of the view that they were achieving, attainment remains lower. This raises the question, is the host nation failing to raise expectations? It follows that if these students, in particular first generation, enter HE with the correct self-personal traits and there are limited internal barriers to attainment, the cause lies elsewhere. In a position where positive students, namely first

generation, are not achieving, evidently the cause can be attributed to external factors: the course, the institution and a student's experience within it. In cases where students lack the correct personal traits, little can be done to change individuals; therefore actions must address attainment at institutional level. Although participants communicated being aware of how their grades could be improved, surely there are factors they are unaware of, such as institutional culture and tutor perceptions, all of which, according to this literature, affect attainment.

7.5.3.2 Others

Peers, the others the participants choose to associate with, and family were influential on attainment. In terms of peers I found that particular peers on a participant's course of study were most influential on attainment. Those participants satisfied with previous attainment appeared to have positive peer associations (Horvat and Lewis, 2003). Participants who associated with friends who valued education became themselves more committed to academic pursuits, creating attachments to their educational establishment (Horvat and Lewis, 2003).

Furthermore, these participants appeared to share common norms of achieving highly and discussed coursework, with the result of motivating and encouraging all individuals within their given peer group (Goldsmith, 2004). Nichols and White (2001) observed meaningful relationships result in better academic achievement; additionally, motivation and life skills, and seeing peers achieve the higher grades, can serve to motivate. Participant 20 demonstrated this point, seeing others achieve increased her competitiveness. Reiteratively, those participants who expressed being associated with positive peers were more likely to take into consideration the negative reactions of their peers when considering engaging in behaviours which do not promote academic success (Nichols and White, 2001; Wentzel and Caldwell, 1997). Associations with peers could, however, be creating a normative climate, where under-attainment is viewed as acceptable (Goldsmith, 2004). Moreover, negative peer pressure has served to discourage students from conforming to behaviours that could positively affect their attainment, as was the case with participant 1.

The participants' families were influential on attainment. As proposed previously, influence of family is strong in BME households (Rumbant, 1997; Connor et al., 2004; Modood, 2005; Aldous, 2006): high BME participation rates are not coincidental. In particular it is likely that the strong positive 'parental

support'/ commitment to education' effect is mitigating some negative effects, such as being in a lower socio-economic class, Explaining why despite having lower socio-economic class profiles on average, BME groups are more likely to full time degree courses. (Connor et al., 2004).

Findings from this research confirm the strong influence of BME families. All participants were invited to discuss their family background, with all communicating that partaking in HE was encouraged and expected of them. School encouragement (previous experience) was additionally beneficial. The majority of participants who revealed encouragement by their families or school were motivated, engaged and achieved more highly. Based on the sample for this research, BME parents, educated or not, can encourage success, regardless of social background; it is the experience and family well-being not the education of parents that is important. This extends Rumbant's (1997) theory that with better family well-being comes higher expectations from children. BME parents who have attended HE encourage their children to follow in their footsteps acting as role models, being positive influences; parents who were non-attenders of HE equally encourage due to their own life experiences and hoping to better their children's life experiences. More highly educated parents did have greater expectations from their children (Coltrane, 2000; Rothon, 2008). As Ogbu (1993) reported, Sikh students in California whose parents were immigrants encouraged their children directly as a result of their own life experiences. The Sikh students in Ogbu's study expected some form of hostility but were being constantly reminded of the benefits of education by their parents, and so tolerated the hostility shown towards them and continued to succeed. Likewise, deprivation experienced by families can serve to encourage children to partake in HE (Modood, 2005).

Friendships with peers and family have an important supporting role in the academic domain as well as social; they can provide informal support and bolster a sense of belonging (Moore et al., 2013). The role of the BME family is generally viewed as positive; however, as I found with participant 19, similar to findings reported by the Summit Programme (2011) attainment might be limited by familial expectations, particularly as all the Asian students lived at home amongst their communities and continued with family responsibilities, a specific cultural and ethnic issue. Amongst first generation students, whose families and peers remain in their home country, they can continue to be influential, Larimore and McClellan (2005) observed that many minority students' social and family support, and connections to homeland and culture, are highly significant.

Encouragement and positivity raise aspirations, confidence and self-belief (See Section 7.5.3.1). In turn, an increase in confidence and self-belief generates improvement, such as increased motivation and ability to communicate with tutors, which can lead to better guidance and eventually improved grades (see Figure 7.3). However, in some cases where participants were encouraged and had aspirations and self-belief, they were not always achieving highly. This conjointly points towards some institutional barriers that are preventing BME attainment.

Figure 7.3: Possible Effects of Encouragement from Others
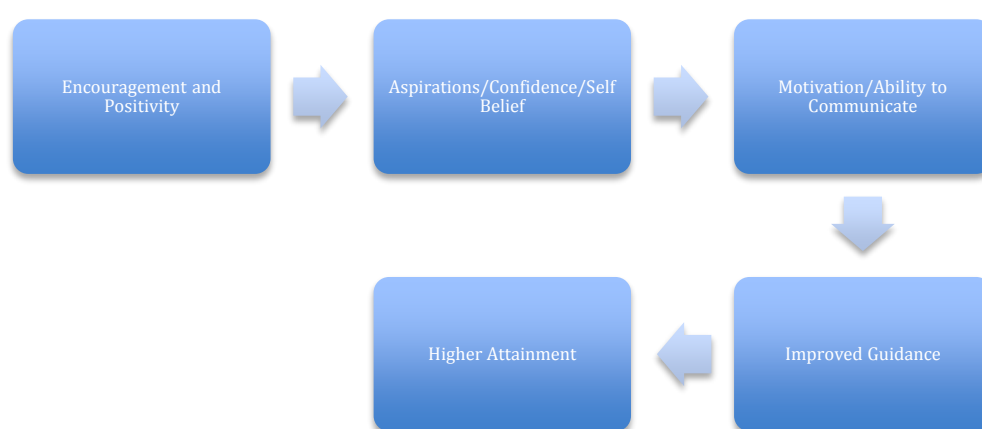
As was the case amongst a few participants, a lack of encouragement can, in a contradictory way, serve to influence, resulting in an individual's determination to succeed: a reverse psychology (see Figure 7.4). Whatever the direction of influence, participants were strongly aware of encouragement, making it a resonant issue that should be continued into HE.

Figure 7.4: Two-way Relationship between Encouragement and Determination

Encouragement   ⟷   Determination to succeed

Coventry University needs to encourage friendships between the students on an academic course, possibly through teambuilding and bonding exercises, in particular promoting mixed groups, removing the focus of ethnicity. Students who identified with the institute performed better than those students who identified with others of similar ethnicity (Matute-Bianchi, 1986). Students showed awareness of the grades and achievements of others; where possible, within the bounds of data

protection, these achievements should be shared and celebrated as they serve to motivate others. Academic staff ought to encourage students either in one-to-one tutorials or through assignment feedback. Negative comments need to be counteracted with positive ones: informing and encouraging comments that will enable students to achieve higher grades. Interestingly, as Bowden and Doughney (2010) contend, males are more likely to be influenced by teachers and parents than females, especially if from a non-English speaking household.

7.5.3.3 Knowledge

Few participants appeared to have the knowledge of what HE would entail (Connor et al., 2004; Summit Programme, 2011); several participants implicated wrong course choices and unlevelled expectations of assessments and tutors. Predictably, if students enrolled onto courses aware of expectations and readiness for types of learning, then attainment would increase.

Open days are offered by Coventry University allowing potential students to visit and gain knowledge of the institute, its facilities and services available and course information. Additionally, students can gain a sense of the institutional environment and atmosphere. My findings found that attending an open day positively influences university and course choice. It is difficult to attune whether attending an open day improves attainment; however, one participant changed her application on attending open day, initially having applied for a different course. During open day she gained knowledge of courses, deciding an alternative would suit her better.

Several students demonstrated the value of prior exposure to Coventry University and word of mouth. Several participants had visited Coventry University other than on an open day and indicated applying for a course at Coventry University as a result of that visit. Others had applied specifically because of the course indicating the university's prospectus, website and other literature are used. Additional modules appear to have influenced the decision in some cases, for example, employability skills and advantage courses.

The majority of those who did not attend an open day at Coventry University lived at home in Coventry or in a surrounding town or city. This fact leads to the assumption that attending Coventry University was a pre-empted decision that, regardless of course specifications and observations

possible during an open day, the participant had chosen Coventry University on the basis of continuing to live at home.

An inter-institutional approach is recommended as attitudes to learning are not formed in isolation at one given institute; besides, schools could be perpetuating inequalities in attainment (Apple, 2013). Schools are key mechanisms in determining what is socially valued as 'legitimate knowledge' and which particular groups are granted status whilst others remain unrecognised or minimised (Apple, 2013: 21). First and foremost, students must be advised and given knowledge of their courses, module and assessment details, enabling them to make informed decisions; the correct decision for them which may be congruent with them achieving highly. Furthermore, like all students, they need clarity in terms of grading, marking criteria and degree classifications, again giving them the knowledge of what they are aiming towards. My findings confirm that if students are aware, high attainment is important at school, and are encouraged, it improves attainment at HE.

In summary, findings of my research reflect that attending an open day provides knowledge and is academically beneficial to students; however, it is difficult to establish a direct link between open day attendance and attainment, although an indirect connection is visible. Students gain valuable knowledge that enables them to make informed decisions which, in turn, improve attainment. By not attending an open day students could be missing information and entering an environment which may not be conducive to their learning. In cases where students are first generation and come to the UK to attend universities, several implied that visiting lecturers had provided them with knowledge. Amongst second generation students, offers could be made on the premise of having been invited to and attended an open day. Coventry University can do more to ensure potential future students are provided with this vital information allowing them to make an informed decision. Unequivocally knowledge is valuable and attainment would increase with students having knowledge of HE.

7.5.4   Middle Ground/Case Study

7.5.4.1 Feeling Welcome

It has long been believed that an institute's culture and whether students feel a sense of belonging and welcome to that institute can promote or reduce students' academic achievement (Freiberg and Stein, 1999; Shields, 1991; Lee and Bryk, 1989; Coleman 1990, Ma, 2003). The

institutional culture constitutes not just the environment but the unwritten beliefs, values and attitudes of the establishment and forms of interactions (Welsh, Jenkins and Greene, 2001). A multitude of institutional features including type, size and demographic makeup are factors which can influence how students feel, most importantly academically. Different institutes have different cultures which are usually observed and adopted by students. Generally those participants who were perceived as having adopted the culture and hence experienced a sense of belonging and welcome to Coventry University were more satisfied with attainment. In cases where students feel isolated at their educational institute and not welcome, this alienation will undoubtedly affect their attainment (Davies and Garrett, 2012).

Belonging and welcome to an institute has a major influence on how students feel in relation to the effort they exert towards their studies (e.g. attending lectures) and the resulting attainment (Johnson et al., 2001). My research found that students were less likely to feel a sense of belonging and welcome if they continue living at home, particularly if they continue with their previous life only outside of university in their home town. Students with additional responsibilities, such as own home, family, employment, were less likely to have a sense of belonging due to time constraints. Commuting and time spent traveling was impacting integration. Students experience HE in different ways which can impact their identity and vital sense of belonging (Davies and Garrett, 2012; Collins et al., 2013). It is possible to continue living at home and have a life at university but not to the same depth, as was the case for participants 11 and 12.

Several participants expressed feeling welcome as a result of seeing others, students and staff of a similar ethnicity, implying ethnicity as significant. A relevant term here is social milieu (Anderson, 1982), being the background characteristics of the students, teachers and administrators including ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and experience and training. Goldsmith (2004) observed that similar factors shaped a student's values, beliefs and attitudes towards educational achievement and attainment; all aspects contributing to an overall sense of belonging.

The tutorial systems aided in increasing a sense of belonging and welcome. Those participants who care for and are cared for by personnel are more likely to develop ties and display socially acceptable behaviour (Carbonaro, 2005). Carbonaro likewise found that attachment and commitment were significantly associated with academic achievement; students with well-defined educational goals, which can be agreed during tutorials, investing greater effort, increasing their chances of success.

Of the second generation, the majority were the first amongst their families to attend HE, therefore their inability to feel welcome may be due to evolving from a lower socio-economic background (Torres, 2009); they may feel they don't fit into the university and that HE is for those from higher socio-economic groups. Moreover, participants who currently shared not feeling a sense of belonging or welcome to the institute, Coventry University, expressed a wish to belong/feel welcome, therefore assuming its importance to students. Several offered suggestions in terms of how university services could be improved, and this offer of ideas and suggestions was viewed as an interest in the institution (see Section 7.5.4). The high percentage of participants who felt a sense of belonging expressed being more pleased with previous attainment and that the 'feel' of the institution was an influencing factor.

It is further believed integration is more likely where the student's home culture is closer to the culture of the educational institute (Museus, 2007). First generation participants all grew up in their home countries therefore their home culture is at odds with the institutional culture. Amongst second generation participants, their home culture may be closer to that of the educational institute as a result of being one generation removed. Students who are able to successfully make the transition from school to HE as well as become integrated into campus life are more likely not only to remain in college but also to excel academically (Tinto, 1993).

Concluding from these findings it is important students feel welcome with a sense of belonging at their educational institution. Institutes may be, however, failing to integrate BME students (Summit Programme, 2011). It was reported by the Summit Programme that BME students did not feel a sense of belonging, with universities failing to integrate them effectively. Coventry University can ensure students experience feeling welcome and a sense of belonging in numerous ways, for example, systems and procedures should not be preventing full integration or causing indirect discrimination through ways such as use of language in literature. Students should be able to communicate any number of issues with a range of personnel and a diverse range of extra-curricular activities on offer. Through the tutorial system it is important to promote and check a student's sense of belonging and welcome to Coventry University. The environment needs to be reflective of all students, gain student feedback and act on the student voice.

7.5.4.2 Image of Institution

Brand, as with many products, is a consorting issue to students, in this case the image of their HE institution. All first generation viewed Coventry University as highly prestige, holding a positive image of the institute therefore assumingly responding with hard work. Several second generation participants viewed the institute as relatively lower in prestige terms whilst others implied not being 'good enough' for other institutions. Generally the better the image, the greater the respect, stimulating how hard students are expected to work hard. Grades on entry have been known to influence image of an institution and effort: the higher the entry criteria the harder students are expected to work (Moogan, 2011). In recent years, 2010 onwards, entry criteria have increased with the corresponding grades in my teaching area improving. The issue of support was mentioned; in cases where Coventry University was perceived as supportive by participants, they additionally depicted a positive image of the institute. It has been found that students who attend a supporting and inviting environment achieve higher grades (Freiberg, 1999).

Many participants held perceptions of Coventry University and showed an awareness of league table positions in comparison to other institutions. The image of Coventry University has improved in recent times with improved facilities and recent building developments, which should further improve the image of the institute, as facilities were reported as a reflection of the institution. In recent times, Coventry University, as an institute, has made significant leaps in HE league tables, being voted the 'Modern University of the Year 2014' and was shortlisted for this year's University of the Year award in The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2014 (Coventry University, 2014), a fact promoted by the institution (see Section 8.2.2). Image is therefore of significance to students.

All personnel, academic and non-academic, are a reflection of Coventry University; therefore it is imperative all are viewed as friendly and approachable, assisting and equipping students to achieve. One participant felt he could not approach the librarians, albeit a minor issue in the scale of attainment, but nevertheless a factor which could be impacting his access to knowledge and improved attainment. Social media, which is popular amongst the student population, needs to be utilised fully, keeping in touch and communicating with students, helping them view Coventry University more positively. Limited previous literature exists on image and attainment, making it an emergent factor. The Summit Programme (2011) reported students were highly critical of the fact that institutions presented an image

of diversity in their marketing, calling it 'deceptive'; deceptive because the students felt a lack of inter-ethnic integration although diversity is promoted as part of image in marketing literature.

7.6   CONCLUSION

The preceding sections prove a comprehensive discussion of the emergent factors on attainment, offering brief conclusions and recommendations with each emergent factor discussed in relation to pre-existing research in the area. Discussions, where appropriate, have been based around first and second generation students, which aided in showcasing the impact of the relevant influential factors and highlighting the important differences and similarities. The employment of a mixed sample of both first and second generation participants happened to be an accidental occurrence, but one that further enriched the research.

The emergent factors are considered in relation to the original conceptual framework in Chapter 8, section 8.1 further demonstrating where previous theory has been confirmed, disconfirmed or expanded. The influential factors have been reported fully and honestly. On supervisory advice, a common pattern or connection between the influential factors was sought. Employing a phenomenological stance and reflecting on the whole interviews, a distinct relationship between all emergent factors is ethnicity (see Chapter 8, section 8.2.1). Prior to a discussion of the emergent factors in relation to the conceptual framework and the presentation of the emergent theory, Table 7.2 maps similarities and differences of the influencing factors on both first and second generation.

Table 7.2: Mapping of Influential Factors on Attainment of First and Second Generation

Influencing Factor	First Generation	Second Generation	All Students
External Factor 1: Previous Experience	Differing school experience in home country.	School experience in the UK.	Perception of education.
		Being part of a minority group at school.	Development of study skills.
			Levels of encouragement/expectations.
	Greater perceived benefits of education.		Role models.
			Route, previous qualification.
			Labels 'good/bad' student.
External Factor 2: Product/Course	Limited course choice.	Course is a secondary determinant, staying at home.	Mismatched course to ability. Language/types of coursework. Failing to 'branch out'/learning from peers. Feedback/clarity of understanding.
External Factor 3: Others			Confidence to communicate/verbal and non-verbal barriers. Stereotypes held by tutors/grouping of students. Labels 'good/bad' student. Levels of support and encouragement offered.
Internal Factor 1: The Self	Voluntary migrant.	Involuntary migrant.	Identity/shaped with own culture.
	Positive attitude.	Middling attitude.	
			Self-responsibility to improve attainment.

Influencing Factor	First Generation	Second Generation	All Students
			Attitude affects other areas of university life – effort, integration.
Internal Factor 2: Others			Friendship with similar peers, failing to 'branch out'/ learn from peers.
			Family encouragement due to own life experiences.
Internal Factor 3: Knowledge			Lack of knowledge of types of assessments, grading, module information.
			Making wrong course choice.
Middle Ground: Belonging and welcome		Living at home may be limiting integration into university life.	Is environment reflective of all cultures?
			Relationships with tutors.
			Involvement in extra-curricular activities.
Middle Ground: Image of university	Good image. Promotes hard work.	More likely to fault facilities.	

In the majority of cases both generations appear similarly influenced by the emergent influential factors. The first generation commenced their journey into HE with a positive attitude; however, this was still not enabling high attainment, they were less critical of institutional issues and facilities, with very little deterring them from working hard. It is important to distinguish between first and second generation students, as they originate from distinct cultures and backgrounds. The first generation are voluntary immigrants, they have chosen to emigrate to the UK for education and their reference point remains back in their country of origin, who are comparatively worse off; this is predictably their reason for remaining positive (see Chapter Two). As a result, the first generation may fail to report hostility, even if experienced, and more readily expect differences to be noticed. In contrast, the second generation are involuntary immigrants, they did not chose this educational system and compare themselves to the majority of the host country (Ogbu, 1993). Regardless of generation or specific ethnicity group, as Table 7.2 demonstrates, both are affected equally on most parts, despite originating from very differing cultures. The preceding table shows support for the findings from the Summit Programme (Stevenson, 2012), that in the majority of cases both first and second generation students are viewed as synonymous.

8. RELATIONSHIP TO THE INITIAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK and NEW EMERGENT THEORY

8.1 Relationship to the Initial Framework

The previous chapter presented the findings of this research followed by a discussion of these findings in relation to pre-existing theories in the field of the BME attainment gap. This chapter presents an analysis of the findings, the emergent themes, with reference to the original conceptual framework. Five concepts were originally identified and the conceptual framework (see Figure 5.1) construed informed by previous literature in the field, the purpose of which was to guide the research. Consequent to analysis, 13 emergent influencing themes arose (see Appendix 11) and these were further iterated into Figure 7.1. On comparing the two figures, some of the new emerging factors appear to "fit" into the five original concepts. Table 8.1 illustrates mapping of the original conceptual framework to the new emergent model, each of which are discussed within the next section. Lastly, within this chapter, the emergent theory is presented.

Table 8.1 maps the original five concepts identified in Figure 5.1 (The Conceptual Framework) against the new emergent model shown in Figure 7.1 (Influential Factors on BME Attainment).

Table 8.1: Mapping Original Conceptual Framework to the New Emergent Model

Original Concept (Figure 5.1)	Emerging Theme	Commentary/ How Original Concept has been Expanded
1. Socio-economic Factors	Internal Factor 1. Self/Individual *Attitude, Aspirations, Lack of Self-belief/Confidence*	• Had a more positive attitude and higher levels of confidence where parents/families had attended HE and held higher status occupations.
	Internal Factor 3. Others	• Encouragement provided due to family's education and experience.
2. Course Choice/Prior Attainment	External Factor 2. Product *Course Aspects* External Factor 1. Previous Experience	• Specific aspects of the course affected attainment, not course choice alone e.g. types of assessments. • Expanded not just previous attainment, PA does influence but the whole of previous experience affects…..
3. Culture and Ethnicity	Internal Factor 1. Self/Individual *Attitude, Aspirations, Lack of Self-belief/Confidence* All influencing factors	• Culture and ethnicity influenced attitude towards work, beliefs, self-responsibility to achieve, aspirations to better themselves compared to others of similar culture in home country. • Confidence levels e.g. language when communicating.
4. Institutional Culture	External Factor 3. Others *Teaching Staff*	• In particular relationships with teaching staff were influential, tutors viewed as part of the institutional culture; tutors reinforce rules of institute. Procedures etc. not observed.
	Middle Ground Feeling Welcome	• Institutional culture largely determines how welcome a student feels; image is partly created from the culture of the institution.
5. Peer Group Influences	Internal Factor 2. Others *Peers on Course*	• More specifically peers on own course served to be more influential on attainment, rather than general peers and friendships. • Others not just peers, encouragement and positive influences from family and school.

8.1.1 Socio-economic Factors

As can be seen from Table 8.1, two of the emergent factors, 'The Self' and 'Others', are presented as an elaboration of the concept socio-economic factors: on close consideration both are aspects of socio-economic factors. Facets of Self, i.e. attitude, aspirations, lack of self-belief/confidence are shaped by an individual's social background and economic factors and how much encouragement others around provide. As proved in this thesis, aspirations ran higher amongst first generation, showing a link between wanting to succeed and their socio-economic background. In cases where participants had been highly encouraged, they exhibited a more positive attitude and confidence; encouragement having previously been linked to increasing the life chances of their children compared to themselves.

Educational attainment has long been associated and continues to be strongly associated with socio-economic factors (Connor et al., 2004; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; The Sutton Trust, 2008b). My findings confirm this, albeit indirectly. Bowden and Doughney (2011) previously reported that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to enroll on a university degree programme (all the first generation in this research had come from educated families, parents had a degree). However, contradicting Bowden and Doughney's findings, amongst the second generation, the majority derived from lower socio-economic backgrounds, measured by parents' non-attendance in higher education and occupations (parents are first generation of immigrants). These second generation students do enter HE due to their socio-economic position; however, not directly as a result of their specific socio-economic group but as a result of the experience, or effect, of being part of a lower socio-economic group: the socio-economic conditions affecting the individual's aspirations and attitudes. Also entering HE due to the parents encouraging their children to attend HE for the same reasons. Encouragement from others is further proved to play a part in HE participation, as those from lower socio-economic groups live in poorer areas, with poorer schools (Johnson et al., 2001).

Connor et al. (2004) posited the effects of socio-economic factors are counteracted by ethnicity: my findings confirm this to be true. Further evidence that socio-economic factors have an indirect effect is because all ethnic groups/individuals are not affected in the same way; White working class males are not inspired by their social conditions to achieve as a result of belonging to a lower socio-economic group, demonstrating an ethnic effect. A large proportion of BME families also belong to lower socio-economic groups; however, higher numbers of BME students enter HE and are motivated to succeed.

Class, even belonging to a lower socio-economic group, and poverty are more influential amongst BME families (Summit Programme, 2011), an area recommended for further research. It appears that for particular BME groups, being from a lower socio-economic class is compensated for in other ways.

Amongst the second generation, many of these parents emigrated for better life chances and aspirations not available to parents (Goodhart, 2013), probably explaining why a relatively high percentage of BME students from lower socio-economic groups enter HE, when compared to their White counterparts. A generation ago, universities in the UK were almost entirely White; more recently, in 2013, almost 20% of students were from minority backgrounds, a high proportion from their relative age group 18–24 years (Goodhart, 2013). Hence, deriving from a certain BME group increases the chances of an individual attending HE, rather than which socio-economic group they belong to.

In relation to attainment, those participants who were more satisfied with attainment had higher-educated parents and mentioned being encouraged by their families; encouragement being communicated by spending time together, discussing the importance and value of education (Sullivan, 2001). The parents' level of education being another characteristic of socio-economic factors (Bowden and Doughney, 2011). According to Rothon (2008), parents' education reaps benefits, in particular the more years a mother spent in education having a significant influence on a child's education, assuming these parents expect their children to attend HE and are more able to provide encouragement. All first generation had one or both parents attend HE and expressed satisfaction with previous attainment, and all were highly motivated and engaged, confirming Rothon's findings. My findings are further consistent with James (2002) who reported that parental education levels are perhaps the most reliable indicator of education aspirations, and that the level of parental education was a key predictor of student academic achievement.

Providing encouragement and raising aspirations shows that parents are spending time communicating with their children i.e. passing on social capital. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have shown explicit connection between educational attainment achievement and social capital, which is confirmed as influential on BME attainment. The high participation rates of BME students in HE from lower socio-economic groups indicates that the value of education is being communicated by parents when spending time with their children, thus a form of social capital investment (Cheng and Starks, 2002; Torres, 2009; Singh, 2011).

Higher levels of parents' education are influential on motivation levels and attainment through encouragement; however, even in cases where parents were not highly educated they can still directly influences a child's achievements and expectations from them (Coltrane, 2000), either due to their own achievements or life chances. In cases where parents originated from lower socio-economic groups, in comparative terms, this social capital might be limited or of a good quality if the BME family is of a higher social class (inaccurately measured). For example, where levels of parental education are higher, i.e. belonging to a higher social group, it might lead to higher quality of social capital being transmitted, as evidenced by this thesis whereby those students with higher educated (and achieving) parents were more satisfied with their previous attainment.

Hence whilst all parents can encourage, more highly educated parents are more effective at enriching their children through face-to-face interaction, teaching them vital social and communication skills, having important effects on their development, both economically and socially (Guryan, Hurst and Kearney, 2008). BME students most likely to achieve highly are those who have learned how to interact and communicate confidently with tutors at university (Esmail, 2012). Socio-economic factors influence in additional ways; Torres (2009) reported that poorer students struggle to fit in at university and suffer from racism and classism. Family and background, hence social capital, contributes significantly to the outcome of self as do interactions within our environment.

This thesis found that belonging to a high or low socio-economic group was not of significance because all BME parents encouraged and communicated success to varying degrees. A further logic that socio-economic factors can not solely be held attributable relates to accuracy of measurement (Rothon, 2008). Rothon (2008) argued that social class could not be measured similarly for BME and White families, and, moreover, that class effect mitigates the effects of ethnicity. Therefore, some BME families will be of a higher social class, possessing these values and attitudes. However, educational attainment does mirror the social class classification system with those deriving from higher socio-economic groups achieving higher grades and attainment lowering as we proceed down the socio-economic groupings. Social class appears to sustain this attainment pattern, not due to class differences in intelligence but due to other aspects of belonging to a particular class which are affecting attainment. These other factors associated with specific social class groups include differing levels of expectations, aspirations, a lack of deferred gratification and economic issues (Bryant, 2014). However,

Indian students from lower social classes perform highly at GCSE (see Chapter Four), indicating an ethnicity effect is at play and a possible institutional effect at HE level.

The research presented in this thesis provides support for theories (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Savage and Egerton, 1997; Modood et al., 1997; King, 2003; Hernandez et al., 1994; Rothon, 2007; Owen et al., 2000; Johnson et al., 2001; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Summit Programme, 2011) surrounding socio-economic factors and levels of social capital as being influential on attainment. Socio-economic factors do affect BME groups, but their effects being less significant and different with other influencing factors intercepting. The value of education is discussed in both BME families of various socio-economic status. Time spent with children, particularly if parents are educated, proved to positively influence attainment, possibly due to the transmitting of key skills, resulting in more able and confident students.

It is predicted that a combination of these characteristics, parents having attended HE, benefits of education communicated i.e. social capital, encouragement and knowledge of the culture of the host country (cultural capital) are likely to result in higher attainment amongst BME students, thus reducing the attainment gap. Longitudinally, this supposition will be tested with the next generation, with the children of the current second generation whose parents attended HE in UK, having the aforementioned advantages.

8.1.2   Course Choice/Prior Attainment

The original concept of course choice was not an emergent influential factor on attainment in the case of this research; however, a limited range of courses was represented. Discussions did place emphasis around influences on course choice. In the majority of cases, course choice was the participant's own decision, with family influence given as a close second reason. Emergent themes related to the concept of course choice was course aspects, namely the type of coursework, use of language, feedback and the imperative concern of having enrolled on the correct course (see Section 7.5.2.2). My findings here lead me to propose that the academic course influences attainment through its various aspects, not the actual course choice in the case of this research. The attainment gap, in terms of the proportion of good grades, has been found to vary across different subject areas, but this could be due to TLAs in particular subject areas (Richardson, 2013). Quantitative evidence confirms

that a preference for "harder" subjects by the BME students still exists; however, the specific course choice is not always responsible for attainment. Course choice further revealed the influence of family; whereas families, in some cases, influenced institution choice.

From my research it appears that as long as participants were entering HE, families, parents in particular, were less concerned with which course was being studied. Additionally, it became evident that obtaining a degree was the upmost concern as all participants that initially enrolled on a foundation course progressed onto a degree course. Achieving a degree is of importance, a BME issue. In response to Connor et al. (2004), who called for better monitoring of BMEs on foundation courses, I found the majority of my BME participants started on the foundation year. Those students who did initially start on a foundation year were less satisfied with their attainment, indicating a possible negative experience as part of the foundation year. This may be because having to complete a foundation year is in itself due to low prior attainment.

The most popular reason for course choice was 'enjoyed the subject at school', communicated by numerous participants. This raises the question, if the participant presupposes interest and engagement in the subject area, their attainment should reflect this? Family influence featured as the second-most popular reason for choosing a course; families were continually interested in education, indicating that education is discussed within the home environment. However, where parents of lower socio-economic backgrounds had not attended HE, it could be argued they lacked knowledge of studying in HE, leaving these parents less able to advise their children, simply being told of the importance of education to improve life chances. Several participants expressed making the wrong decision, indicating a lack of support and guidance at school (see Section 7.5.3.2). Amongst the first generation, several participants mentioned having a limited choice of course; however, despite not enrolling on their initial course of choice, they expressed satisfaction with their courses and attainment.

Previously it has been proposed that approximately half of the disparity in degree attainment is due to prior attainment (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Richardson et al., 2011). Although this thesis cannot confirm this, prior attainment was originally identified as a concept and emerged as influential on attainment, therefore previously discussed (see Section 7.2.1.2). However, it is not just prior attainment that is proposed as influential on attainment but the whole of the previous experience, with prior attainment being reconceptualised to previous experience. The previous experience

enabled/determined the prior attainment. The entirety of the previous experience shapes an individual's level of confidence towards achievement, determines study skills and instils effective behaviours conducive to learning and achieving, influencing not just ability but soft skills, conducive to successful careers. It is reasonable to assume that prior attainment and experience is reflective of ability; however, negative experiences, such as discrimination and a lack of encouragement, can result in lower attainment.

8.1.3   Culture and Ethnicity

Culture and ethnicity as a concept were not a specific emergent factor as all participants were considered as individuals. During the process of interpretation, demographic characteristics were not considered with the solitary aim being to deduce factors influencing attainment. Secondly, owing to the focus of the research, a presumed knowledge existed that all participants were of BME origin. On completing my analysis, however, and deliberating on all my emergent factors, ethnicity is the common connecting concept (see Appendix 12). For instance, culture and ethnicity can shape an individual's aspirations, beliefs and attitudes, for example, to work hard, accepting hostility and self-responsibility. Culture and ethnicity caused additional indirect effects on educational attainment due to factors such as remaining to live at home, presumably causing additional responsibility. On a par with this research, Collins et al. (2013) believed the majority of their influential factors were related to ethnicity – support of parents, community, aspirations of peers, and language at home. Davies and Garrett (2012) reported that students were aware of ethnicity sensing ethnicity was noticed by others and that tutors adjust the way they speak to BME students.

High levels of BME participation in HE are not coincidental. Relatively higher proportions of BME students continue into HE: almost 20% of the BME population, particularly Indian and Black African groups (Goodhart, 2013). Many BME students are expected to attend HE from a young age. Bowden and Doughney (2010) noted in their study that preference for higher education is significantly stronger in households where English is not the first language. As previously acknowledged, parents in ethnic cultural groups are more likely to encourage participation in higher education. This was confirmed by this research as several participants mentioned parents not having the opportunity to participate in HE and it being assumed BME students would enter HE and take opportunities not available to their parents (Connor et al., 2004).

BME parental encouragement to enter HE is generally viewed as positive; however, as one participant demonstrated, he felt pressured into continuing education. It could be argued that this encouragement, and expectation, is not allowing individuals to pursue their own dreams, although it is not possible to generalise from this one case. This is a recurrent observation within teaching and communicating with BME students; a factor further observed by examining achievements/destinations of those from BME backgrounds. Some note the influence of Asian parents and the pressure to uphold honour can be too strong (Dale, 2008).

Participating in education entails making the transition between home culture and the culture of the educational establishment because all students have a separate home culture, which has to be internalised to succeed (Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz, 1979). This transition may be more difficult for BME students as the home culture of non-BME students is closer to that of the educational institutions. Non-BME students are advantaged in other ways, for example the majority of teaching staff will have similar backgrounds, language spoken is the same as at home and books and other learning materials are published in their language. Consequently, these non-BME students are at an advantage when in education, maybe thus achieving higher grades. Contradicting this advantage, Gibson (1988) noted aspects of the new culture of the host country should be learned and internalised, as the Sikhs did in Valleyside, California who attained highly. This ethnic group, recent immigrants therefore first generation, expected differences to be noticed; however, despite experiencing hostility continued to work hard. Perhaps they had aspirations to better themselves compared to their peers in their home country, additionally the Sikh children held themselves accountable for any failure (Gibson, 1988). Gibson believed that parents who taught their children to tolerate some hostility, as expected in a new country, would succeed. In light of this argument, the first generation participants of this research reported no negativity, maybe expecting some hostility. All negative comments were made by the second generation.

Specific issues attached to BME participants were uncovered in this research. All Asian/Asian British participants lived at home: some chose to live at home whilst others were expected to remain at home by their families, additionally mentioning that living at home was restricting opportunities available to them. Living in the family home may itself be due to definitive cultural and ethnic norms/beliefs, for example one specific culture views being in debt as taboo and continuing to reside at home saves

money. Connor et al. (2004) reported that those from ethnic groups were less likely to rely on borrowing and loans and that young Indians are most likely to be supported by their parents. Further explanations for BME students continuing to live at home included responsibilities within the family and cultural requirements; several participants mentioned restrictions placed on them by their families when it came to 'going out'. Amongst some cultures it is viewed as ethically and ethnically unacceptable to allow children freedom before marriage. Where BME students do continue living at home, there is a possibility they are more influenced by their families. According to Bowles and Gintis (2002), race appears to play a significant role in intergenerational transmission of economic success: experiences such as discrimination, conformist behaviour, social learning and interactions, and the acceptance of norms across the two cultures. Children will learn from how the family deals with these issues, in the majority of cases these ethics were probably conformed to throughout school/pre-higher education.

A desire or a requirement to continue to live at home limits choice of HE institutions. High numbers of BME participants live at home in Coventry or in surrounding areas; applying to limited institutions can, in turn, limit course choices, the opportunity to complete a work placement, the chance of attending prestigious universities and ultimately limit long-term opportunities. Several participants communicated their desire to complete a work placement; however, due to restrictions placed by families to move away, were unable to gain presumably valuable work experience. Mattoon (2003) argued thus the continuing spatial mismatch hypothesis in access with respect to more lucrative employment opportunities and health services for lower income populations is likewise reflected in their access to a suburban public university. A significant percentage of participants commuted from a town or city in the surrounding areas to Coventry and believed that their journey was impacting their time to study, allowing this research to confirm that continuing to live at home can be detrimental on attainment and opportunities available to them. On the other hand, contradicting this point, all first generation lived in student accommodation and yet only half expressed being pleased with their previous attainment, leading to the deduction that accommodation/residence is not a significant contributing factor to the attainment gap; whereas, deriving from a BME background is of significance.

Within the institution, culture and ethnicity may be preventing a sense of belonging, as communicated by several participants. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic differences can cause a lack

of connection and identification to the institution, leading to an inability to view tutors, or other staff, as positive role models or the paucity of co-ethnic staff in the educational institution (Mac and Ghaill, 1991).

To conclude this section, the theory of ethnicity effect (see Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Singh, 2011; Richardson, 2008; Griffin et al., 2012) is strongly supported by the findings of this thesis, but during interpretation of data and bracketing demographic characteristics, neither occurred to me as influential on attainment. It was only on close consideration of all the emergent factors that I noted culture, ethnicity in particular, overrides all the emergent influential factors. Even with controls in place for other variables, the ethnicity effect remains. Broecke and Nicholls (2007) and Richardson (2008) similarly reported the effects of gender, age, mode of study and subject all interrelated to ethnicity. Culture, but more so ethnicity, was highly influential on attainment.

More recently Vincent et al. (2012) reported an ethnic effect, because irrespective of class and gender, Black Caribbean heritage children were still disadvantaged in a range of ways. However, not only are students possibly disadvantaged by their culture and ethnicity, but individuals may choose to live by these identities and individual habitus formed by ethnicity. In the words of Griffin et al. (2012) it was important 'to be a good Nigerian'. I can confirm Griffin et al.'s theory of individual habitus being a strong influence upon an individual's life, as for many participants habitus was shaped entirely by their ethnic background, being a 'good Nigerian' meant valuing education, having high expectations placed upon them and providing further evidence for the ethnicity effect. Furthermore, outside of education, the home culture and residential patterns may impact attainment, for example, ethnic groups tend to live in close proximity with the possibility of greater levels of contact with disenchanted youth which can lead to negative engagement with education resulting in poor attainment (Portes and Zhou, 2001).

8.1.3.1 Identity

Identity was a useful contention of culture and ethnicity, plus informative round attainment. Participants appeared to identify with their culture and ethnicity, the educational institute and/or their hometown. These categories are by no means clear-cut, as overlapping does occur; for instance, those participants who identify with their home town may do so because of their local (ethnic) community. The majority of participants demonstrated a sense of identity, some a stronger sense of identity than others. Generally those participants who identified with Coventry University were more motivated and engaged,

and more likely to be pleased with their previous attainment. The table below summarises identities of

a number of the participants.

Table 8.2: Identity of Participants

Participant	Coventry University	Own Ethnic Group	Home Town
P1			*I'm from Coventry, it's home. University is only a step. Not bothered if it's welcoming.*
P2		*Yes, lots of different ethnic minorities here...East African society, not joined for the university, but to be with others of own culture.*	
P4		*Yes, lots of African students, good mix, made me feel welcome; really helps when there are people from back home in a new place – can relate to them.*	
P6	*Yes (feel welcome). Enjoy studying in Cov, good environment. Friend recommended Cov Uni.*		
P7	*Everything is welcoming – lecturers – well trained, make you feel welcome.*	*Students are very friendly, tolerant of other cultures, makes you feel welcome.*	
P9		*Met a couple of Sikhs.*	*Hang around with friends I've known before. Majority of friends are from Cov city. I am from Cov, just being in town, extension of school life.*
P10	*Feel very welcome, more than I expected. (Uses support departments and extra-curricular activities.)*		
P11	*Yes, been here so long, feel like I live here; in hometown. Belonging, yes improved. Part-time job at the university.*		*From Coventry – live at home (for 4 years), have a life outside and in university. Hang around with friends on different courses. Go home after lectures, others go to halls and stuff.*
P12	*When I hear Cov uni anywhere I feel that's part of me, feel part of it.*		

	(Would like to become a student ambassador.)		
P13	*Decided to stay in Cov. Like convenience of uni, have home comforts, same friendship groups – didn't have to branch out.*		
P14		*Do lots outside of uni. (Religion).*	
P15		*Mixed British/Caribbean, no option for me, always 'other', felt really excluded. Not the best thing – put down as 'other'.*	
P16		*I don't want to be forced to pray, but if your friend can do it, why can't I do it.*	
P20	*Gone to uni, gone and got grades not really fussed about career prospects, getting the grades, more important education than work. I prefer education.*		

Table 8.2 shows that the majority of participants appeared to identify with their own ethnic group, the presence of other students from the same ethnic group resulting in attachment to the institute. Informatively, individual participants who identified with Coventry University possessed more positive attitudes, were more motivated and engaged in their studies, and with their HE experience.

The aforementioned discussion leads to the conclusion, in the first instance, that BME students identified with their ethnicity, and secondly with their home town and the educational institution, thus this thesis further suggests the important role of ethnicity. In addition, identity to the educational institution also needs to be strong for high attainment. Ethnicity and culture are of importance to individuals and identity with ethnicity continues its prominent part in HE and beyond. HEIs must, therefore, ensure cultural identity can be maintained. The fact that higher numbers of BME students continue into HE is infused with cultural reasons. Culture and ethnicity continue to be influential during students' time in HE, with friendships being formed around this shared concept; however, this could be preventing the learning of new skills, communicating with people from other cultures and developing English skills.

Outside of education the majority of BME students continue to live at home therefore are more likely to be influenced by family issues, impacting on time to study and eventually attainment. Those BME students who make a smoother transition in education and achieve more highly are those who detach, in some degree, from their home culture, respecting and accepting the two cultures, that of their ethnicity at home and the culture of the educational institute (Museus, 2007). A life at university is important as opposed to university being an extension of home and school life by continuing to live at home.

8.1.4 Institutional Culture

Institutional culture as a whole was not an emergent factor on attainment in the case of this research. Smaller, more specific, aspects of the culture of the institute were highlighted, namely, 'others' i.e. academic staff and 'feeling welcome'.

Academic staff or tutors appeared more prominently than other aspects of institutional culture, with participants referring to them recurrently on invitation to discuss the educational institution. Tutors were viewed as part of the institutional culture: tutors reinforce rules of institute. These 'others' are discussed in Section 7.5.2.3. Several participants linked attachment to relationships with lecturers indicating the issue is of concern. The majority of the Asian BME participants were from lower socio-economic backgrounds, causing a distinction between them and lecturers.

The participants' sense of belonging and welcome to Coventry University was influential on their attainment (see Section 7.5.4.1 for discussion). This finding echoes Johnson et al. (2001), Ma (2003) and the Summit Programme (2011) who contended that students who are integrated are more likely to be satisfied with their attainment. Students were able to feel integrated for a variety of reasons, for example seeing others from similar ethnic backgrounds being the most popular reason. Where students felt they did not fit in culturally they experienced feelings of a lack of belonging (Davies and Garrett, 2012).

To summarise, participants communicated an improved sense of belonging and welcome based on numerous aspects, from relationships with tutors to seeing other students from similar backgrounds. A focal point was involvement with Coventry University, in particular extra-curricular activities. Several participants communicated an improved sense of belonging and welcome on being

involved with institutional activities. Secondly, participants involved in these activities demonstrated higher motivation and engagement; however, there was possibility to experience a sense of belonging and welcome without participating in extra-curricular activities. Demographic aspects of the institution can influence students. Findings of this research found that the majority of participants expressed feeling welcome and a sense of belonging at Coventry University. The culture of an institute or how it is perceived influences a student's sense of belonging and welcome, effort and attainment.

8.1.5   Peer Group Influences

Peers, those of a similar age group, have long been believed to be influential on attainment (Duncan et al., 2001; Goldsmith, 2004; Rothon, 2007); the concept of peer groups influencing BME attainment was thus originally identified. This thesis expanded this theory by concluding specific peers and friendships were more influential on attainment, as opposed to all peers generally. Those on a student's own course yield greater influence on attainment, particularly mixed peer friendship groups; mixed in terms of gender and ethnicity, as the common identity is neither of these characteristics, but the academic course.

Wider peer groups remain of significant influence. An imminent observation around campuses is that students form friendships with peers of similar BME backgrounds, resulting in limited integration and contact with other groups. Remaining completely within a BME friendship group can have a negative influence on attainment and effects of assimilation (Goodhart, 2013).

Cultural differences between the BME participants were noticed on discussion of peers. Several second generation, mainly Asian, participants who lived at home mentioned they would have been more distracted from their studies having moved away from home, providing an important insight into cultural influences on these BME students. The majority of these Asian participants mentioned not having much freedom living at home, therefore implying that moving away to attend university provides not only educational opportunities but social opportunities with the result being that peers probably influence attendance, commitment to studies and attainment. Conversely, some non-Asian participants mentioned they would have been more distracted having remained at home.

Associations solely based on ethnicity, i.e. friendships with those of a similar ethnic background, seemed to prevent higher levels of integration to the institution. Identity with the institution, Coventry

University, is required and friendships needed not solely based on ethnicity, as lower levels of attainment/expectations can become the norm; ethnic groups may share/compare low achievement (Goldsmith, 2004). Mixed peer groups need to be encouraged, based around the common denominator of their academic course. A peer group within which the course is a shared interest encourages each individual student to value education and have concern for what others may think of them academically. Indeed, as Matute-Bianchi (1986) noted, those who identify with the institutional factors, as opposed to the ethnic factors, achieve more highly.

This brief discussion on peer group influences leads me to conclude that wider peer groups are influential; however, it remains difficult to say whether the Asian participants would attain more highly moving away from university or by continuing to live at home. Moving closer or living on campus would allow for integration into university life, improving attachments and maybe commitment to studies, something also viewed by many Asian students as an opportunity to improve their social life, which can be restricted living at home. Finally, peer associations need to be positive for optimum attainment. In particular it was observed from my research that having friendships with peers on an individual's course of study was more likely to be positive than general peer groups formed on similar BME backgrounds.

8.2   Emergent Theory

Figure 7.1 (see Section 7.1) is the new model demonstrating the influential factors on BME attainment as found in this thesis. Upon mapping the influential factors in 7.1 to those in 5.1 (see Table 8.1), it can be seen that along with extending pre-existing theories, new influential factors emerged constituting the new theory. These emergent influential factors on attainment, the appended theory from this thesis, are ethnicity, the image of the institute, knowledge of studying in HE and the whole of the previous experience. The variation of these themes indicates a multi-disciplinary and inter-institutional approach is necessary. Each of these emergent influential factors is discussed in turn in the following sections.

8.2.1   Main Influential Factor – Ethnicity

This thesis concludes that ethnicity has an overriding influence on all other influential factors on BME degree attainment. Ethnicity directly and indirectly influences the degree attainment of BME

students in HEIs. The Ethnicity Effect Diagram (see Appendix 12) demonstrates/maps the interrelationship between each emergent influential factor and ethnicity.

Ethnicity indirectly influences external factors, often determining geographical residential patterns with many BMEs choosing to live within communities of similar ethnicity: the geographical area determining the school attended. The transition from home culture to school has been evidenced as influential, some assimilation paramount. It should be noted that many BME home cultures are now closer to that of the host country, with English being a language spoken at home. Successful BME groups show signs of assimilation, yet simultaneously remaining close to their own culture, maintaining their own identity. Proficiency of language affects the ability and confidence levels of BME students to communicate with others within the HEI and the ability to successfully complete an academic course. Additional cultural aspects, such as dress, can further affect the BME students' levels of confidence and how others react to them. Individual social identities are defined, along with a multitude of other characteristics, by ethnicity (Holloway, 2007). Ethnicity indirectly shapes the HE experience and attainment as individuals live their lives through membership to their ethnic group.

More directly ethnicity impacts the achievements of an individual by shaping their norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and aspirations to succeed. For instance, in some cultures females may not have been encouraged to hold aspirations, in turn, influencing their self-belief. Friendships are largely determined by ethnicity, with peers evidenced as influential on attainment. Davies and Garrett (2012) reported that BME friendships occur naturally. Finally, possessing knowledge of what studying in HE entails was proven to be beneficial towards good attainment with BME parents possibly being unable to provide knowledge and advice due to a lack of opportunities and cultural restrictions, due to situations associated with membership of a particular ethnic group.

The finding that ethnicity is the main influential factor on degree attainment confirms Broecke and Nicholls' (2007) research. They reported that even after allowing for a range of factors which may affect results, the fact that students belong to an ethnic minority (with the exception of mixed and other Black groups) was still having a statistically negative and significant effect on attainment. A more recent study conducted by Davies and Garrett (2012) similarly reported the influence of ethnicity. Students were acutely aware of their ethnicity with ethnicity affecting their sense of belonging at their educational institution, and students reporting that others noticed ethnicity.

Furthermore, this thesis highlighted that even with different, contrasting cultural backgrounds, the ethnicity effect remained. Fundamental to this thesis was the combined sample of first and second generation students to the UK. Previous research was deficient in having a combined sample of UK and non-UK domicile students; however, the combination proved valuable as a salient outcome was achieved. Table 7.2 (see Section 7.6) summarises ways in which the first and second generation are affected by each of the emergent influential factors. It was prominent that both generations are almost identically affected, with a few exceptions, namely previous experience and attitude. Those students who were the first generation of students in the UK having grown up in their home countries and possessing positive attitudes conducive towards learning were still not attaining highly, thus evidencing an ethnic effect. This finding shows that their minority status affected their cognitive and academic behaviours, confirming Ogbu's (1993) findings, also that voluntary minority groups are still more positive. The combination of first and second generation students confirms that along with widely differing variables, ethnicity plays an overriding part in all BME attainment.

Drawing conclusions from the background of this thesis (see Chapter Two), it is imperative that this hugely influencing characteristic is captured accurately; as Section 2.1 shows, defining ethnicity can be subjective. If we want to report differences on grounds of ethnicity, its recording needs to be accurate. Further, the term BME is synonymous with immigration; immigration, the reason why groups are minorities. Integration is important, with a degree of some segregation. Statistics show (see Chapter Four) that BME groups that succeed are integrated with a degree of segregation, possessing strong cultural identities but can equally internalise aspects of the host society without feeling threatened – a prerequisite for success.

8.2.1.1 *Influence of Family*

Influence of the family amongst the BME students was strong and a specific BME issue. High participation rates, high aspirations, advising which course to study and the progression rates from a foundation year to a full degree course, all factors which indicate family influence. Supporting the findings of Connor et al. (2004) this thesis found that the second-most common reason for entering HE was family encouragement, as was the case with Ivy (2010), who similarly found evidence that the decision to enter HE is in part determined by the ethnicity and influence of family. The influence of the family was strong, despite which social class families belonged to, assuming good family well-being

amongst BME families in lower classes. The influence of family is an aspect of socio-economic factors and a more-specific relevant BME issue, as not all those from lower socio-economic groups enter HE, showing that the influence of the family is a contributory factor amongst particular BME groups. All BME families of this thesis had high aspirations and expectations of their children to partake in HE. Family influence was, however, less effective at positively influencing attainment.

As stated in Section 8.1.1.1, one reason why family influence may be less effective at influencing attainment, again connected to socio-economic factors, is, for example, the inability of parents to give effective advice due to their lack of HE experience and limited social capital. Students with parents who had attended HE were more highly motivated and engaged. Indeed, those students with higher expectations placed on them were satisfied with their attainment, which seems to further demonstrate the influence of the family, a non-specific BME issue. Finally, specific ethnic issues, such as choosing HEIs close to home, continuing to live at home within the family and community, and the influence of family in these decisions, is keeping attainment low (Collins et al., 2013).

8.2.2 Image of the Institute

One of the findings of this thesis is that image appears to be becoming increasingly important, both at an individual and institutional level. The image students' hold of their university is formed as a result of many criteria, and individuals hold these criteria or premises in mind of what constitutes acceptability (Arpan et al., 2003). The criteria creating the image of an HE institution could include its commitment to academic excellence, whether students form close friendships, feeling proud, its national image, cultural commitment, adequate facilities, academic performance and homogeneity of the student population (Arpan et al., 2003).

Promotion of the university's image seems to have increased. On a personal level, when I first joined Coventry University in 2008 image was not promoted to the degree it is at present. One of the reasons for this increase is probably the changing funding model for the sector. In this thesis, I found that the image students hold of their educational institute affected attainment through how welcome they felt and the effort they felt the institute was worthy of. Furthermore, image also affected the satisfaction levels of students with the institute (Perez, 2002), and as Loudon and Della-Bitta (2008) stated, an established and long-held belief, brand image considerably influences consumer behaviour.

Students are now viewed, and view themselves, as consumers in the light of tuition fees, another emergent finding of this thesis (Tight, 2013).

Currently in 2014–15 it appears that Coventry University, at every available opportunity, promotes its improved standing with a view to improving its image, in particular promoting having been voted "Modern University of the Year 2014". This accolade appears on the university's website, email signatures, posters inside and outside the university buildings and billboards around the city, and in the local media. Arpan et al. (2003) contended that this media coverage has been found to affect participant ratings of a university. Without doubt the position in the HE league tables is of importance to Coventry University, as having moved from being ranked in the mid-80s during the early part of the 2000s to now being ranked as the Top Modern University – a further fact promoted by the university. Presumably, the objective of this promotional work is to attract "good" high-calibre students in the future. Although image promotion targets all potential students, it must be remembered that a higher proportion of BME students enter HE, particularly institutions such as Coventry University. Hence it is logical to assume that issues relevant to BMEs should be promoted, in the light of high numbers of BME students who pay tuition fees.

Taking into account the changing fee funding structure, it has become increasingly important within the HE sector for universities to have a distinct image to maintain a competitive position in order to attract students to pay the tuition fees (Parameswaran and Glowacka, 1995). The "business case" for increasing diversity and enhancing BME attainment should be utilised; the BME population in the UK is increasing (Wohland et al., 2010) and competitive HEIs' students will make choices based on quality of provision, value for money and graduate outcomes. This emergent finding leads me to conclude this section with the supposition that it is important for future and current students to hold a "positive" image of their HE institute. This positive image will partly influence the attainment of current students, resulting in news that will filter to other prospective students. All students do, however, expect a certain level of service for which they are paying, one expectation being a "good" degree.

On the part of the institution, it is important to promote the right image and that this is delivered by the institution. Previous research has reported that BME students are 63% over-represented in promotional materials with student satisfaction statistics not reflecting this image of "happy" BME students (Robinson et al., 2006). Given the promotional image of "happy" BME students, institutions

should morally be translating this image into reality; if inclusivity and equality of opportunity are promoted, these issues need to be at the heart of "what is a university for"; through this enhancing social justice and social mobility (Summit Programme, 2011).

8.2.3 Knowledge

Knowledge of HE and what studying in HE entails would benefit students and improve attainment. Having knowledge of the course modules, the types of assessment, the environment, community and expectations would prepare all students and enable them to make the correct course choice. This is evidenced by the fact that those students who possessed some of the aforementioned knowledge were more satisfied with their attainment, with the corollary of this being that they knew what to expect and thus performed better. Knowledge of HE would result in better equipped students and furthermore previous experience can prepare students for HE (see Section 7.5.3.3). During their previous experience there is a possibility of students having gained the appropriate higher-ordered study skills, levelling expectations and been given knowledge which collectively as factors can help students perform better.

Clear evidence exists that high-quality information, advice and guidance facilitates effective transition between stages of education, and a smooth transition from school to post-16 education is key to entering HE (The Sutton Trust, 2008b). Moreover, possessing knowledge improves the students' levels of confidence and aspirations (Sanders and Higham, 2012). The Bridge Group (2011), however, argued that prospective HE students do not just need knowledge and information but flexible and personalised support provided with outreach programmes working with young people, which would allow them to judge the appropriateness of HE provision to their individual circumstances.

From my research, it emerged that schools are failing to prepare students for HE. Students lacked relevant study skills, such as the ability to use resources for research and independent learning, a supposition supported by Chapel (2009). The Summit Programme (2011) reported that BME students do attribute their attainment to a lack of preparedness for HE and subsequent academic development, including lack of family advice and prior schooling. Further, this lack of preparedness is being compounded by a lack of support from tutors to help build the necessary academic skills to enable BME

students to understand the social mores of the institution (Stevenson, 2012) thus compounding the impact on attainment.

8.2.4 Previous Experience

Previous experience (discussed in Prior Attainment, Section 7.5.2.1) collectively influences attainment in HE. It is during this previous experience that the individual's attitude to learning, ability and levels of study skills and confidence are formed, and the time where the above mentioned knowledge is provided. Davies and Garrett (2012) reported that previous experience had impacted on the students' ability to feel a sense of belonging at their HEI and their ability to make friends, particularly in cases where the BME students had previously attended a school with a high BME presence.

Previous experience does not simply consist of experience in school and TLAs, but includes the wider experiences of families, communities and socio-economic factors, which HEIs can do little to influence. HEIs can, however, provide knowledge and maintain links with schools, as widening participation initiatives such as the Sutton Trust and Aimhigher have been effective at proving knowledge and preparing students for HE (see Chapter Four).

All students enter HE shaped by their previous experience. Referring to Richardson's (2008) quote in Section 1.1, '…deleterious effects of discriminatory attitudes are cumulative through the lifespan' – previous experience, be it positive or negative, will continuously determine the nature of the individual.

8.3 Conclusion

The preceding sections map the original conceptual framework to the new model of emerging influential factors. The function of this was to highlight where the original concepts have been extended. Generally, all the original five concepts and previous findings are largely confirmed as influential with variations. Not all emerging factors have been incorporated in this way, with those not incorporated constituting the gap between the original proposed conceptual framework (Figure 5.1) and the new emergent model (see Figure 7.1), constituting the additional new theory. A connecting factor across all the emergent influential factors being ethnicity; it is the implications of this outcome for practice and future reference which will be contributory.

In the following chapter, final conclusions are drawn and the theoretical and practical contributions of this thesis presented supported by recommendations drawn from the findings of this thesis. Firstly, recommendations and areas for further research. With knowledge of factors that affect BME attainment, procedures and actions can be put into place by HEIs, which are urgently required to address factors that influence BME attainment. However, the effectiveness of actions will ultimately depend on getting tutors to recognise the importance and implications of not addressing the attainment gap.

9. THESIS CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis set out to make a theoretical and practical contribution surrounding the educational attainment of BMEs. During the last 40 years, participation of students from BME backgrounds in higher education in the UK has increased to the point where their participation rates, proportionate to population figures, have overtaken those for White students. At Coventry University, for the first time over half of all students originate from a BME background (2013–14). Nevertheless, high participation amongst BMEs is not fully reflected in their subsequent academic attainment, when compared with their White peers. My initial contribution highlights and strengthens the importance of keeping the issue in people's minds in the light of increasing BME numbers in HE.

The variety of influencing factors presented in this thesis shows that academic attainment is subject to complex interrelations, not solely within the education system but across much broader and interacting historical, cultural, institutional and social aspects (Connor et al., 2004; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007). Immigration status affects academic behaviours and attitudes, and hence attainment, and how reactions from those in the host countries were perceived (see Chapter Two). Despite the BME attainment issue having been on the research agenda for over 15 years, longer in the case of differential school performance, no solution has been found, i.e. an attainment gap remains. For this reason, smaller contributions such as this single institutional study are of significance. Revisiting the introductory chapter, the objectives of this thesis were to:

1. Develop a new model that helps to understand the influencing factors upon BME attainment from students' perspectives.

2. Provide an analysis of the HE experience of BME students at Coventry University (CU), by adopting a case study approach.

3. Contribute strategic and other recommendations aimed at improving BME attainment.

9.1   Summary of Research

An initial conceptual framework was constructed following a review of leading literatures in the field of BME attainment. The conceptual framework proved purposeful in framing and shaping this thesis. Research relative to each of the original five concepts pre-existed, all calling for further research, the pre-cursor for embarking on this thesis. The primary aim of this research was to delve deeper into and understand influences upon attainment from the students' perspectives in greater depth at a micro level. For this reason, the research was focused at one institution typical of its sort (see Section 1.2), Coventry University, with the outcome being to recommend strategic changes to increase BME attainment and enhance their HE experience.

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was adopted to complement the existing empirical quantitative survey work in the field. Specifically, this thesis, through an interpretive phenomenological analysis, serves to provide comprehensive qualitative views from the individual students' perspectives having worked with them for over a decade. My personal educational experience and ethnic background placed me in a strong position to derive the best possible in-depth and meaningful responses. Further, through this educational and ethnic lens, I was able to stay close to the meanings participants attached due to our shared cultural worlds; this lens also helps ensure my interpretations are valid. Therefore, although I suspended my own views to obtain the students' meanings, my background and views inevitably shaped my research project, from the questions I asked, how students responded verbally to me, through to deriving meaning. Conducting my research also enabled me to check my current understanding of the influences on attainment. As a result of an in-depth, honest and comprehensive analysis, various factors are reported as influential on BME attainment at Coventry University.

Figure 7.1 (see Section 7.1) is presented as a device for understanding influencing factors as opposed to being a model of their working. The influential factors were trilateral: internal, external and structural/institutional. External factors are those external to the phenomenological self, previous experience, the product which is causal to attainment and others and those individuals external to the individual's personal acquaintances. Internal factors consist of the self, others which those individuals have formed a bond with and who have influenced/shaped the individual and knowledge. A discussion of each can be found in Section 7.5. It was difficult to predict which was of greatest influence

chronologically; however, a future quantitative survey measuring and quantifying the effect of each could determine factors most influential on attainment.

A distinct overriding factor to all emerging influential factors was ethnicity, discovered through a phenomenological perspective of this thesis. The significance of in-depth interpretation was demonstrated as students did not report attainment was due to their ethnicity. Ethnicity as an influential factor was deduced through interpretation.

9.2 Development of New Integrated Theoretical Model

The preceding discussions show that some of the factors that influence education attainment have been presented before. Findings of this thesis largely confirm previous theories; as such, I claim to be making a significant contribution. Significant because I am reinstating these factors as influential and proving the validity of previous theories; more predominantly, as similar influential factors have repeatedly arisen in my thesis, indicating their severity. The re-emergence of similar influential factors highlights that they still require addressing. However, the deficiency in the preceding bodies of work is that the factors have not been previously identified as a group, in a single study. This distinction is important because without an integrated framework, BME attainment issues may be dealt with in a singular manner. Thus, by developing the new model (see Figure 7.1 in Section 7.1) previous deficiency in addressing the attainment may be addressed. These emergent influential factors on attainment, the appended theory from this thesis, are external factors; a middle ground related to institutional factors; and, internal factors, each of which are discussed in the following sections.

9.2.1 External Factors

In establishing external factors, three main areas have emerged from this research: previous experience, product and others (teaching staff). Previous experience (discussed in Prior Attainment, Section 7.5.2.1) collectively influences attainment in HE. It is during this previous experience that the individual's attitude to learning, ability and levels of study skills and confidence are formed, and the time where the previously mentioned knowledge is provided.

Prior experience is important because it determines the root that is taken to reach a university and so impacting the attainment gap (Richardson 2008; 2010). Indeed, my finding supports the position

that approximately half the disparity in degree attainment is due to prior attainment (see Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Richardson et al., 2011). Although the work in this thesis does not prove this position beyond all reasonable doubt, it does show that prior experience is influential.

It should be noted that previous experience does not simply consist of experience in school and TLAs, but includes the wider experiences of families, communities and socio-economic factors, which HEIs can do little to influence. HEIs can, however, provide knowledge and maintain links with schools, as widening participation initiatives such as the Sutton Trust and Aimhigher have been effective at proving knowledge and preparing students for HE (see Chapter Four).

An emergent contribution is the role of teacher beliefs. In previous research, Singh (2011) noted the degree of segregation and prejudicial attitudes. Supporting other researchers (see Anderson, 1982; Welsh, 2000; Goldsmith, 2004) there appears to be a need for social understanding which may reduce discriminatory practices (see Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008; Singh, 2011).

9.2.2 Middle Ground

This consists of being made to feel welcome and the image of the institution. One of the key findings of this thesis is that image is important, both at an individual and institutional level. The image students' hold of their university is formed as a result of many criteria, and individuals hold these criteria or premises in their mind in terms of what constitutes acceptability (Arpan et al., 2003). Furthermore, image also affects the satisfaction levels of students with the institute (Perez, 2002; Arpan et al., 2003), and as Loudon and Della-Bitta (2008) stated, an established and long-held belief, brand image considerably influences consumer behaviour.

The findings support previous research that suggests a sense of welcome is important. Adding to previous studies (see Broh, 2002; Guest and Schneider, 2003) welcome is important and in particular being a part of extra-curricular activities.

9.2.3 Internal Factors

When dealing with internal factors, there are three distinction dimensions that influence BME attainment: self, others (peers and encouragement), and knowledge.

This study supports the role of family in determining attainment and, in particular, similarly to Connor et al. (2004), encouragement. However, whilst the role is positive for some it is counter-productive for others, and this might be linked to their socio-economic circumstances. For example, parents being unable to provide effective advice which may be linked to social capital. As Collins et al. (2013) contended, a specific ethnic issue such as choosing to study close to home and continuing to live at home within the family and community is keeping attainment at a lower level.

Emergent in this thesis and supporting the work of others (see Horvat and Lewis, 2003) is the important part played by peers, in particular positively mixed peer associations on the course of study are important. Positive peer association is important to enable individual students to become committed. This supports the earlier work on Matute-Bianchi (1986), who noted that those who identify with the institutional factors, as opposed to the ethnic factors, achieve more highly.

9.3 Practical Case Study Contribution

Research for this thesis was based at one single institution, Coventry University. An initial objective was to provide an analysis of the HE experience of BME students at Coventry University. Firstly, it emerged that BME students are applying to CU because of the wish to remain living at home, a more probable specific BME factor particularly in cases where students are restricted to move away. There is an ethnic effect in choosing Coventry University.

Marginally over 50% of BME students had a positive experience at Coventry University. Students can sense having a positive experience for various subjective reasons (see Section 7.4.1). It did not necessarily follow that those students expressed satisfaction with Coventry University due to being pleased with their previous performance, but this was the case for the majority. To sense a positive experience it is important to be involved in university life; continuing to live at home can prevent this with university attendance becoming an extension of school life. Specific BME issues are preventing fuller involvement at university, such as commuting which limits time to get involved, family responsibility and limited choices of activities – although it is possible. However, I sensed that university life was not important to some BME students; they were at university for a purpose. Even so the BME student experience at Coventry University could be improved, but the experience is mostly attributable to external wider issues in society. Coventry University could tailor activities to specific groups with their

needs in mind, such as commuters with limited time, by including them in lecture time. It is almost imperative with the BME student population being such a large group that their study and recreational needs are tailored to and encouraged.

The reality is that a degree attainment gap does exist between BME and White students at Coventry University, and that taken as a whole, the gap is larger at CU compared with national figures. The gap, though, is not uniform. In some subject areas, BME students perform as well or better than White students; although this varies between the ethnic groups.

On the whole Coventry University is ethnically diverse, providing opportunities and equipping students with higher qualifications and associated skills. As an HEI, Coventry University is also educating students from abroad, equipping them to compete from wherever they choose to work. It remains debatable as to whether we are fully equipping students with skills if we are not enabling their highest possible attainment.

The majority of HEIs are now known as universities, although "types" still exist, such as "redbrick". Students continue to typecast Coventry University. The funding model for HE started to change in the 1990s and 2000s, predictably due to increased participation and in unison with economic changes, with, however, limited effects on participation, which is ever increasing and being encouraged. UK HEIs, including CU, are further encouraging overseas students, i.e. first generation students; therefore HEIs need to cater services for them particularly in the light of relatively high tuition fees and marketisation.

9.4   Recommendations and Policy Implications

Addressing the new emergent factors (see Section 8.2), limited recommendations can be made in terms of the image promotion of Coventry University. Suggesting recommendations in relation to image promotion is outside the scope of teaching. In terms of previous experience, again only limited recommendations can be proposed as it is not possible to control the wider aspects of previous experience. I would recommend that knowledge of what studying in HE entails should be readily supplied to prospective students during their time in prior education.

Early intervention is required during previous educational experience of school, college or equivalent further education provider, complementing a proposal from a recent HEFCE project that advised we need to look at the whole student journey. Providing knowledge early would help maximise the impact and it should be an ongoing progress (The Bridge Group, 2011). Furthermore, students need to become familiar with the culture and expectations of an HE institution. Institutions at all levels of education need to work in partnership to communicate knowledge and in order for prospective students to succeed in HE, equipping them with the necessary conducive study skills ready to enable high attainment in HE. Actions such as these could help prevent an attainment gap from forming in HE (Chapel, 2009). Opportunities need to be provided to learners in schools and colleges that are embedded into a wider careers-related curriculum (Hooley et al., 2012).

Of course, it is not possible to control precisely what knowledge is communicated during this previous experience; this would depend on the widening participation initiatives employed, the ethos of the institution and levels of support or discrimination. Providing knowledge cannot be the sole responsibility of the university, but there are recommendations that Coventry University could implement in targeted subject areas. Specific themes emerged not only from the analysis and discussion but from the whole of the research constituting this thesis, and it is to these themes that attention can be productively directed. These three headlines form the contribution to the field from this thesis:

1.   Produce More Distinguished Data.

2.   Whose Problem is Differential Attainment?

3.   Teaching and Learning Related Recommendations in the Light of the Degree Attainment Gap.

    i.   Curricular Changes

    ii.   Tutor Pedagogy

    iii.   Improved Integration

9.4.1   Produce More Distinguished Data

All HEIs collect degree attainment statistics and demographic statistics annually as an HESA requirement. Currently, Coventry University produces degree attainment data differentiated by faculty, under-graduate or post-graduate status, broad ethnicity categories, age and gender each academic

year. From looking at the 2013–14 statistics produced by Coventry University, I can safely assume, and as was emergent from the data, that we are collecting crude data, accrued into broad categories which do not tell us much. Ethnicity alone is not a useful category; it is not just ethnicity which is a significant factor but individual cultures: being a "Sikh" is of importance. The current categories of ethnicity are too broad; they assume all those who tick the same ethnicity box are similar (see Chapter Two). However, individuals within one ethnic category differ; there remain other broad and more-refined differences which are not accounted for by the current classifications. Individuals within one ethnic classification all live by cultural rules but follow their cultural rules diversely, which, in turn, predict an individual's values and attitudes. Differences between Asian attainment in one social class illustrates that other factors, such as culture, are at play.

Hence, I state we are currently collecting the wrong data. Ethnicity is a complex construct, much richer than a simple tick in a box. The current ethnic group classifications each include a multitude of societies of separate distinct cultures. This data would be more meaningful if recorded using further distinctions including categorising by subject; sub-dividing ethnic groups into smaller cultural groups, for example Indian – Sikh; noting distinctions between migrant statuses, which this thesis has shown make a difference to attainment; and generation to the UK, which affects cultural capital, again influencing attainment.

More subtle information is needed. At the moment it is too broad to address: not all actions will be suited to all Asians as many variations exist within these categories. Unless we collect more information about ethnicity the data is meaningless and actions cannot be targeted. Collated degree attainment data at Coventry University needs to be more refined to draw real comparisons, not generalisations.

Alongside more-refined ethnicity data, I propose collating degree attainment statistics distinguishing between generations to the UK. Research during this thesis shows they follow very different trajectories. The production and monitoring of intra-generational degree attainment figures for any one named ethnic group would provide detailed, meaningful information to which targeted micro-level actions could more easily be implemented. Arguably, this would be easier amongst particular BME groups, namely where immigration was initially on a larger scale and has since reduced proportionality. Currently, Coventry University produces degree attainment figures for UK domicile and non-UK domicile

students; however, the value of this is questionable, particularly if, as suggested by the Summit Programme (2011), tutors view all BME students synonymously: UK domicile and non-UK domicile constituting BME students. In view of this, it is proposed that intra-generational data would be a more valuable measure of degree attainment (generation to the UK).

Indeed, an accurate comparison between White and specific BME attainment would be achieved in cases where groups of students of different ethnicities had other similar characteristics, such as having grown up in the UK, with parents from the UK having attended UK schools therefore having language advantages, and having participated in HE, i.e. similar social/cultural capital. In practice, possessing these similar characteristics, intra-generational data could highlight the existence of an ethnicity effect, if the attainment differences remain. It is possible to produce this data with progressive generations in the UK amongst some ethnic groups, starting by pinpointing the specific time in years. A realistic prediction being that with progressive generations the effects of culture could diminish, as traditions can realistically be 'watered down' (Crozier in Bhopal and Maylor, 2014).

9.4.2 Whose Problem is Differential Attainment?

Differential attainment between BME and White students was noticed from statistical analysis of degree attainment data collated and examined alongside data collated for monitoring of demographic characteristics purposes, in this case ethnicity (Singh, 2010). The issue of differential attainment was not initially raised by BME groups.

A "good" degree has been defined as an upper second or first class degree (HEFCE, 2015) and this is generally the universal accepted meaning within the HE sector. However, as literature in this thesis shows, definitions are a subjective measure: what constitutes a good degree in one society may not hold true in another society. Literature exists in support of the argument for the importance of considering the cultural context in definitions (Inglehart, 2006) and the availability of resources and social surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) in shaping core values regarding what is viewed as valuable in life. Moreover, is holding a good degree necessary to live a fulfilled life? With billions of people in the world, a vast range of subjectivity and narratives exists about what constitutes good or worthy within and across societies (Bonn and Tafarodi, 2013). Furthermore, the commonalities and differences on the issue are subject to individual and cultural variation. Bonn and Tafarodi (2013)

reported that one particular ethnic group was more oriented towards spiritual, moral and beneficent concerns in envisioning a good life; whereas another ethnic group emphasised practical, prudential and socially defined goods; whilst yet another BME group showed more preference for personally defined internal goods. Hernandez-Martinez et al. (2008) reported that students' aspirations were culturally mediated, their notions of "success" depending on their ethnicity and culture. The differences between these BME groups demonstrating the definition of good is predisposed as socially constructed.

In some societies, particularly BME where families have emigrated to another country, simply achieving a degree regardless of classification may be a massive achievement in itself. Having arrived in the UK, being only the first or second generation in a new country and needing to learn a new language, getting to university is a success and huge personal achievement. In the light of this tremendous achievement of university attendance, it is understandable that the significance of achieving a good degree classification is of lesser importance. To illustrate, to BME parents, a good degree might mean a degree achieved in certain subjects, achieved at any level of classification, to enable making a living; the subject being of greater significance than the classification. Much depends on cultural expectations and beliefs, for example which subjects are deemed respectful in any one given BME group. In some instances, high achievers might be viewed as a threat. BME parents might see a girl who achieved a first as over qualified to be their daughter-in-law (Dale, 2008). Even the university attended might be insignificant, as long a degree is obtained. Cultures determine their own measures of respectability; to some, the fact that their son or daughter lived at home gaining specific culturally respected skills, as opposed to solely academic skills, might be more important than which university was attended.

Lower degree attainment is not a paramount issue in the Asian community. Amongst social groupings within certain BME communities I have observed, degree achievement is discussed; "low" or "poor" degree attainment has rarely arisen as a topic of discussion. Hence, I conclude that differential attainment is not a BME problem but an institutional and academic problem, and possibly a White problem? Achieving a degree itself is of more significance to BME groups.

9.4.3   Teaching and Learning Related Recommendations in the Light of the Degree Attainment Gap

9.4.3.1 Curricular Changes

Ethnicity is preventing higher levels of attainment; institutions of the host community undoubtedly portray their dominant culture through policies, practices, national curriculums and assignment design. Additionally, it can be difficult for those BME students who are further removed from the host culture to relate to certain aspects. However, as Tierney (1999) suggested, this should not require "cultural suicide" on the part of the BME students in order to be successful in the host country. BME students should not feel the need to "dump" their culture and ethnicity at the institution's door, an act that would portray the message that the various minority cultures are valueless and non-contributory to attainment. Differing cultures possess different strengths and sets of skills which could be equally conducive to attainment. A form of "cultural integrity" is called for that allows students to become successfully acclimatised to the culture of their campus whilst remaining a part of their traditional culture.

Institutions should be adopting what these diverse cultures can offer to enable better attainment (Singh, 2014). Aspects of the various cultures should be incorporated into the curriculum, enabling the BME student to better relate to assessments. Integration of aspects of culture being a form of globalisation as proposed by Bhopal and Maylor (2014) and the Summit Programme (2011), with BME students being more able to relate to the curriculum, we will be enabling them to attain higher. Globalisation is particularly useful in the light of first generation students to the UK who return to their home country after completing their degree, having gained culturally relevant knowledge. However, it must be remembered these first generation students come to the UK to gain an English degree; therefore a culturally balanced curriculum is required. A multicultural curriculum with progressive critical pedagogical strategies has been previously proposed; Sharma (in Turney et al., 2002) suggested such an approach would reject the 'universality of knowledge and culture'.

However, a more globalised curriculum may not be so relevant for BME students who compose the second and subsequent generations to the UK, of which a relatively large percentage participate in UK HEIs, such as Coventry University. Courses need to be additionally tailored for these subsequent British/home BME students, to ensure equality. Whereas a globalised curriculum refers to a curriculum

which reflects other countries, a glocalised curriculum would involve incorporating locally gained skills, making use of local knowledge, contributing to overall attainment. A glocalised curriculum would allow local BME students to relate more to the curriculum and possibly feel more valued and respected.

Originating from a BME background must not be viewed as a deficiency; different cultures are enriched differently and should be equally valued. The different skills each culture has to offer need to be embraced, not supressed. For instance, a BME student may possess enhanced communication skills from working in the family grocery shop from a young age; the ability to speak more than one language; and knowledge of the economic dealings of the local community, all skills which can be incorporated into learning and achievement. Singh (2014) coined the term 'capital exchange', calling for these diverse skills to be seen as bargaining tools enabling high attainment. Singh demonstrates with the metaphorical example, 'a pocket full of Indian rupees is worthless at a UK HEI, requiring to be exchanged for pounds to be made valuable'. However, a penalty is paid; the analogy being the valuable rupee is not valuable in the host country, it cannot be spent and thus those students who arrive with the rupees are in deficit.

Learning and assessment materials need to make aspects of the BME students' cultures integral and more meaningful to BME students, a post-racial curriculum. A curriculum which is inclusive of all and part of the mainstream provision (Thomas, 2012); a curriculum which allows all students to identify and engage with the assessment materials and to achieve with their specific skill set. The type of coursework needs to be suitable, relevant, using appropriate wording, with maybe a choice of assessments being offered. Thomas (2012) further highlighted that student engagement in the academic sphere is vital for success. Finally, Hocking (2008) believed that an inclusive curriculum is central to delivering 'equity and fairness'; considering the time of Hocking's research and the repetition of reporting the value of an inclusive curriculum confirms the significance of this finding and the concerning notion that this has not happened. Aspects of globalisation and glocalisation resulting in an inclusive curriculum, where all BME students' backgrounds and cultures are acknowledged, could improve BME attainment.

9.4.3.2 Tutor Pedagogy

Collectively, the findings from this thesis indicate a change of tutor pedagogy is required. A change in tutor pedagogy could contribute towards improved BME attainment, Singh and Cousin (2009) point to the dangers of missing obvious flaws in pedagogical practice. Tutors directly or indirectly observe ethnicity, and students showed an awareness of being categorised into stereotypes and not having the confidence to approach tutors. There is a real possibility that tutors may be subconsciously altering their behaviour towards BME students during communications; Davies and Garrett (2012) reported BME students noticed a sense of awkwardness on part of the tutors when communicating with them. Woolf et al. (2013) attributed attainment to the teacher/student relationship recommending further research into the area.

Without the intention of criticising tutors but within the interests of improving the tutor-student relationships further, I am not implying that racism exists; however, holding certain stereotypes and categorising students can undoubtedly prevent achievement and needs to be challenged. Obama discussed "post-racialism" (Walker, 2014), a society where racism has ceased to be a negatively preventing issue. However, marked differences continue to exist between those of different ethnicities and races in education and employment, suggesting that race does still play a part. Tangential to this thesis, the widespread riots of August 2011 that started in London are arguably a further indication of a sense of injustice amongst BMEs, as are the number of young Muslims being radicalised (Bhui, 2014). Bhopal and Maylor (2014) argued that the educational experience and achievements of BME students demonstrate the continuation of racism and racial discrimination within the education system and implicitly challenged the notion of post-racism. Yet, as a result of an Ofsted recommendation, some schools have ceased to collect data centring on ethnicity. Although race is foregrounded, it is also recognised that the inter-sectionalist of oppression, class and gender with "race" is essential if we are to achieve equality of opportunity in education (Bhopal and Maylor, 2014). Universities minister David Willetts in 2014 recently recognised in the Times Higher Education that 'students with different ethnic backgrounds … are under-performing compared to their classmates'. Yet, despite national recognition, prejudices and possible unconscious bias are not being considered (Willetts, in Adams 2014).

Recommendations centre on reflection on the part of the tutors; becoming aware of their subconscious attitudes, "taken-for-granted" beliefs and BME stereotypes is the first step towards

challenging them. Tutors need to recognise the impact they are having on academic outcomes. Some of these recommendations echoing those made at the University of Wolverhampton (Pinnock, 2008) from an equality and diversity survey, which highlighted the need to develop active staff-training programmes relating to equality and diversity issues. A key recommendation made by HEA and ECU (2008) was for more coherence between principles and practice of equality and diversity. Both these reports, by the University of Wolverhampton and ECU/HEA, called for improved equality and diversity practices in 2008. Again the same issue has arisen in my thesis in 2015, highlighting the significance of improved equality and diversity practices.

To lastly justify the significance of this recommendation, that tutor pedagogy is influential, I provide research by Sewell (2009) who researched the attainment of Black boys at school level. Whilst reporting that institutional racism played a significant role in influencing the attainment of these Black boys, Sewell further reported that other complex factors resulted in the teachers internalising negative attitudes, identities and behaviours concerning these Black students, which Sewell believed could be corrected through pedagogical strategies and through a framework of love and positive consistent interventions. This recommendation by Sewell of care and consistent interventions is significant to the emergent finding in this thesis that personal tutors are beneficial. Namely, the importance of incorporating a human element into the educational experience, by way of care, commitment of staff and meaningful relationships, is called for (Museus, 2007).

9.4.3.3 Improved Integration

It was important to students that they felt integrated at their institution. Wright and Ashwin (2011) contended that understanding life at university is imperative and that students need to feel integrated and part of their institution in order to attain highly. Ideologically, and morally, feelings of isolation and differentiation have important implications for the development of strategy and policy. Predictably, the extent to which integration is felt by BME students would increase if institutions develop a curriculum framework that takes into consideration the needs of BMEs as well. Focusing on a student's culture can increase their chances of having a positive experience (Stevenson, 2012). Stevenson believed that improving the first-year experience of BME students and those from lower-income families could potentially narrow disparities in degree attainment.

Integration can be further increased by institutions reflecting the student population diversity through their environment and ethos. Institutions reflecting diversity, enhancing integration, are particularly important as many BME participants continue to live at home amongst their communities, and as a result may not take all steps to integrate themselves and therefore struggle to "fit in" at their educational institution. Cortes (2011) highlighted the importance of a campus climate that values and validates the culture of the students. In his study based at an American HEI, Cortes reported the Hispanic students wanted to feel valued and that they belonged to their HEI, particularly encouraging supportive academic peer groups of similar ethnicity, since some ethnic group students are more likely to be raised in an extended family environment and the peer groups provide a similar network of support and responsibility. HEIs should be encouraging integration and celebrating diversity. In cases where students experience a lack of integration, more common amongst first generation students, by sharing this common experience they can minimise cultural marginalisation (Wright and Ashwin, 2011). Integration is required at an in-depth level as opposed to a surface level of images and posters displayed, with cultural aspects ingrained into the whole of the HE experience, including a curriculum and assessments with relevance to the BME student.

With the increased BME student population at Coventry University now larger than the White student population, presumably the institution should, as a prerequisite, reflect its student body and ensure integration. A failure on the part of institutions to recognise this cosmopolitanisation, together with a lack of support mechanisms for integration to occur, would prevent adaptation, and consequently attainment, of the students (Caruana, 2014). Once again, a culturally balanced curriculum is called for, because as was emergent, some detachment from the home culture is necessary to fully benefit from the HE experience in the host country, respecting and accepting the two cultures (Gibson, 1988).

Integration is vital as feelings of isolation breed hostility (Bhui, 2014). In a wider social context, Bhui (2014) believed that poor social capital, including fear in neighbourhoods and perceived discrimination, results in a lack of integration into local communities, resulting in some BME groups becoming isolated within communities. Recent media stories show young Muslims excluding themselves from these communities, becoming radicalised; one explanation being a lack of integration (Bhui, 2014). The same concept can be applied at an institutional level, with students who lack a sense of integration feeling isolated, possibly hostile, ultimately impacting attainment.

9.5   Research Limitations

This thesis makes a contribution to the body of knowledge, but there are a number of limitations associated with the approach taken to complete the work. Since the start of the thesis, the landscape of HE has altered with a move towards greater fees. Conjointly, the profile of Coventry University has altered, particularly its standing in the league tables: the 2015 Guardian League table placing CU in the Top 20. Both changes may have had the effect of attracting a different type of student. This group of students may have different expectations and prior experiences before entering a university. From a thesis perspective it means that the reasons and expectations of students may have altered, but examining these is not in the realms of this thesis.

In undertaking this research, a case study approach with Coventry University was used. Whilst a case study based approach can be insightful, the major limitations are that applicability of the findings is restricted to other institutions that have similar profiles. If resources had been available, then the sample would have included BME students from other universities thus further validating the findings.

This thesis examined BME attainment of a good degree. The limitation is that whilst a good degree as a term was explained, the actual meaning is relative. For example, where the student's family background is non-university attendance, a good degree might be viewed as a lower second (2:2), whilst others may view a good degree as an upper second (2:1). In hindsight, a question I should have asked participants is what they understood by a "good degree". A further classification issue involved the BME groupings, which differ between organisations and institutions. The groups captured by Coventry University are not directly comparable with those in the census data. The lack of universal ethnic monitoring classifications can cause comparative difficulties; however, although they are not directly comparable they are, nevertheless, indicative in terms of expectations.

9.5.1   Race, Ethnicity and Culture – Contested Categories?

Within my research I use several BME categories, representing the different ethnic groups. I validated these by using 'creditable' categories used by other researches, such as the 2011 Census for England and Wales, and referencing them. Categories used by other researches are still, however, subjective, as discussed later in this section. Upon reflection, I realise that I accepted these categories as given and failed to question their construct and boundaries. Although, I did acknowledge that the

accuracy of these categories is subject to how the individual chooses to define themselves and the subjective nature of the group classification. Additionally, I acknowledged that ethnic categories are too broad and don't really highlight differences between people. The use of pre-defined categories provides advantages, as do labels, widely; their use helped recruit my sample, organise my research and formed a base from which to make sense of my data. Hence, categories and labels are useful when trying to make sense of things, such as exploring trends to patterns of behaviour, for example, immigration. Their usefulness does not, however, prevent them from being problematic. Who decides these categories? From the offset, they are highly subjective. Is it really possible to group millions of individuals with one assumed demographic characteristic in common into one category? Does it mean they are similar? The category hides all the other ways in which these individuals are different, denoting these categories as vague. They tell us very little about these individuals, except the broad similarities associated with how they live their lives (ethnicity determines cultural rules followed) and possibly the colour of their skin.

Regardless, race and ethnicity categories do exist in our society and will continue to do so, but it is important to acknowledge that they are socially constructed and that limited similarities exist between the individuals grouped within each one. The label may in fact shape our behaviour as expectations are attached to them. The race equality writer Gilroy believes we need to move beyond these categories.

This thesis presented some definitions of race, ethnicity and culture in Chapter 2 Section 2.1 by Bornia (2006). The definitions in the table 2.1 highlight how these overlap and I conclude they are best taken together. In fact, the categories of race and ethnicity are barely distinguishable. We use definitions for ethnicity as those for race; we talk about human differences interchangeably – race, culture or ethnicity. For instance, we talk about Blacks and Africans interchangeably, even though there are many Blacks who are not African. We discuss population differences using the terms 'Whites, Indians, Asians, Blacks' – the language of the local pub translated into a scientific idiom. 'White' comes from skin colour, whereas 'Indian' comes from nationality/geographical area and the term Asian equates people to a continent. Three different categories treated as equivalent. As presented in the American Journal of Public Health in the 1980s and 1990s, less than 2% of the articles considered race and ethnicity to be two separate entities. Let me first consider the term 'race', from which ethnicity and culture presumably are born.

The significance of distinction by race can be questioned. Many advocates of racial science despaired of race being established as a real physical entity. Every 'scientific' measure of race has been proved to be changeable and not exclusive to anyone race category (Malik, 2011). Racial differences do not possess any scientific basis to their classifications, i.e. they lack consistency, are not mutually exclusive and, in themselves, are not complete classification systems able to absorb new entities with no alterations. Unlike age and gender, race and ethnicity are much less objective and therefore difficult to conceptualise. Concepts of race and ethnicity have evolved over time and no good consensus of their definitions exists. However, the concepts of race and ethnicity are important for medical reasons, in cases where biological and genetic make-up determine contingency to diseases. In the US, definitions of race and ethnicity are based on a historical context and perceived biological homogeneity of external features and phenotypes, such as skin colour and shape of eyes, i.e. race is determined by visual appearance, presumed biology and history. (Lin and Kelsey, 2000).

There are, however, no scientific or steadfast rules as to what constitutes a race; people can belong to many races at any one time. Social changes have required new forms of identity, for example in the US the formation of the category Native Hawaiian was created by splitting 'Asian and Pacific Island' following immigration. Race is seldom defined in research and is used in an uncritical way to represent ill-defined social and cultural factors (Malik, 2011). In this sense, race is a social category with biological consequences; migration, mixed parentage, assimilation, voluntary embrace of a new religion, culture or nationality are some of the factors that impact on the characteristic of a group and alter its genetic profile. Nevertheless, the way in which we customarily group people is not arbitrary from a biological perspective. Group members do show greater biological similarities, such as those from south Asia having higher chances of developing heart disease and diabetes. Race and ethnicity may be surrogates for biological relatedness (Malik, 2011).

By placing people into race categories are we creating distinctions and then treating groups of people according to how other groups of people feel certain races deserve to be treated? Indeed, the signs and symbols of racial difference are made apparent to your senses (Gilroy, 1998).

"*The human sensorium has had to be educated.*" (Gilroy, 1998: 840)

Since the years of slavery in the US, people were led to be believe, and educated in a way to believe, that Black people were of no value, their lives had no value, and they had to look after and serve the White people. This belief that Black people are in some way inferior has been transported through the decades/centuries, ingrained in people's minds, albeit diluted, together with the tales of slavery. Difficulties in changing long-standing attitudes are well documented. Visualisations and perceptions have changed over time, pointing to the subjectivity of race definitions. However, the category of race continues to exist worldwide and societies continue to differentiate people according to this visible characteristic; our understanding of it in the modern time has, however, become more techno-scientific.

While race has some biological stability, the term ethnicity can be fluid. How an individual chooses to define their ethnicity can be determined by their environment, migration status, marriage, the way the question is phased and what the data will be used for. It seems incomprehensible that only one category is used to capture all elements of race and ethnicity – biological inheritance, cultural traditions, genetic heritage, way of life (Yin and Kelsey, 2000). Yin and Kelsey (2000) proposed that ethnicity should be assessed using a variety of questions to determine one's ethnicity, similar to a quantitative scale. They recommended a psychology scale 'the orthogonal cultural identification theory' which measures the degree of identification with various cultures, yet simultaneously allows identification to be considered independently from the degree of identification with another culture. The various questions posed to determine ethnicity are based on a range of factors of the individual's life including health, diet, traditions and languages.

I have questioned the concepts of race and ethnicity, but what about culture – the beliefs, values, knowledge, behaviour, attitude and traditions shared by a group? Those individuals who define themselves as a particular ethnicity, presumably sharing one culture, with culture being one of the defining ethnic characteristics. However, as mentioned previously, members of one ethnic group may choose to follow cultural rules adversely. People of one ethnicity may choose to live by the rules of another culture. For example, British Indians who are second or third generation in the UK may choose to follow parts of the British/English culture making them culturally diverse with multi-ethnic identities (Yin and Kelsey, 2000). These British Indians may have adopted the culture of their host country. Thus by assessing only an individual's racial and ethnic origin (taken as one) and no other ethnicities and

cultures which the individual may identify with, researchers may be wasting their time conducting fruitless research relying on a broad definition of the individual, invalidating their results (Lin and Kelsey, 2000).

Besides, as a phenomenological researcher, why should we accept the tenacious definitions of race? The category of race should not be theorised or accepted, simply from sight. After all, meanings are socially construed. What about the meanings the individuals given to themselves? Do they feel part of one race? What does race even mean to individuals? Any phenomenological study is valued for its deriving of meaning, hence by accepting and employing race, ethnicity and culture definitions have I invalidated my research? In theory yes, but practically my research would not have been possible without the use of categories; as mentioned previously, labels help us make sense of the world.

Race, as per the definition by Bornia (2006), enables us to categorise groups of people based on physical appearance. In the modern time, aspects of race are now being conjured by new technologies of self and species, and advances in biology. Gilroy (1998) called for the denature and deontologisation of race. With the consideration of race imagery, categorising race has become more attuned to phenomenology, i.e. what we see associated with those of a similar race. We associate certain objects and rituals with specific races and together with others socially construct/categorise individuals based on more than one premise. This is relevant to second generations in the UK. BMEs grown up in this country are visually similar (except in skin colour) to the UK population – they speak the same language, wear the same clothes. Classifying them as 'their race of origin' means very little. The classification of British tells us a lot more about them. Not only does this classification highlight that race is not an important category (Indian or English due to similarities) but that other classifications are more useful – that of nationality. Similarly, within the category of ethnic group, individuals may culturally belong to one ethnic group but live their lives following norms and values of another culture.

To conclude, race, and hence ethnicity, are not natural divisions in human society but socially defined. They nevertheless provide a useful means of categorising groups of people to show different degrees of biological relatedness and make research possible. The current measure and definitions of race and ethnicity are debatable. In order to produce more accurate and robust definitions, measures need to consider further aspects including cultural, social, biological and environmental. Over time, with immigration, ethnic groups have broadened. Rather than members of one ethnicity sharing a culture,

other cultural ways of life have been adopted – invalidating the term ethnicity. One possibility for future definitions could be to allow self-classification on the part of the individual; although this would predictably make it difficult to draw comparisons, eventually categories would emerge. Ethnic group categories need to grow, along with the way they are defined.

9.5.2 Is Employing *Epoché* Positivist?

Phenomenologists such as Husserl suggest that *epoché* is an attempt to bracket pre-conceived assumptions and approach data as if nothing is known about it, allowing the data to speak for itself, hence results are emergent. However, this seems very positivist and objective. Is it really possible to bracket pre-conceived ideas? After all, phenomenological studies are subjective and the researcher is involved with the study and its participants; results are directly deduced by the researcher.

Bracketing is used as a method of demonstrating validity after initiating a phenomenological study. It is defined as a methodological device of phenomenological enquiry that requires the deliberate putting aside of one's own beliefs, and what one already knows, about the phenomenon under investigation (Chan et al, 2013). In this sense, the researcher's own experience should not influence the participant's understanding of the phenomenon; data reflects only the participant's views. Although bracketing is a well-suited method in human experience it appears at odds with phenomenology. However, some believe bracketing is necessary. Freeman (2011) argued that meaning and understanding cannot be conceived as fixed. We need to understand how the meaning is generated and to discover this meaning, one needs an attitude open enough to let unexpected meanings emerge. Hence bracketing is necessary to allow the researcher to put aside pre-conceived knowledge and let new meanings arise. There is no single set method for undertaking bracketing; furthermore, how the research uses bracketing in practice is rarely demonstrated explicitly.

It is questionable whether bracketing is possible, particularly in a subject the researcher already knows a lot about. Arguably, bracketing is more achievable in descriptive phenomenology compared to hermeneutic phenomenology where it is acknowledged that pre-understanding cannot be eliminated or bracketed (Koch, 1995). Giorgi (2011) argued that IPA, my chosen method of analysis, provides no step in executing bracketing; I did, however, attempt to bracket during the data analysis stage in order to fully discover participants' views. On reflection, bracketing during my data analysis was positive and

effective; yet, as discussed further on, research suggests that if I had employed bracketing as a continuous process, richer more emergent data could have arisen. Chan et al (2013) suggest the concept of bracketing is adopted upon initiating the research proposal and not merely in data collection and, as I did, during the analytical process. Hamill and Sinclair (2010) go further by suggesting the literature review is delayed until after data collection and analysis so that researchers are not informed before phrasing, and shaping, research questions. In practice, this may prevent projects being agreed or authorised, with questions regarding the justification for the research being asked.

By only adopting bracketing and attempting to be objective during data analysis, I was subjective during all other stages – literature review, data collection and the write-up. Some might question whether this attempt at a positivist action was actually possible. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research. As Crotty (1996) points out, it is not humanly possible for the qualitative researcher to be totally objective. Additionally, if the researcher is unaware of his/her own preconceptions and beliefs, it is impossible for them to put these issues aside; it follows that being aware of our own beliefs becomes a prerequisite. Our knowledge should not hinder the ability to research the topic thoroughly when we unconsciously bring assumptions about the topic into the research process, i.e. bias should not occur. The qualitative researcher needs to admit his/her believes and knowledge in order to put them aside.

Hence, on reflection, I did behave in a positivist way during one stage of my research – data analysis. This was deemed effective as it produced rich results. However, on deeper reflection, and by reviewing further literature in the field of qualitative research and bracketing, to be fully effective I could have employed bracketing throughout my research project. As Smith et al. (2009) assert, 'the concept of bracketing should be in the researcher's mind throughout the research process and not merely restricted to data collection and data analysis, starting before the literature review'. After all, all research project stages are subsequently related. I conducted a literature review prior to framing my discussion guide; during data collection I was subjective, showing empathy and relating to the student's experience, a process which I feel enabled the participants to open up to me and express ideas fully. I attempted to bracket during data analysis, which upon reflection helped produce some good data, but I now know that I could have improved this/used bracketing more successfully. One way in which bracketing could have been used more effectively was with the use of reflexivity, i.e. by recording

potential influences throughout the research process with the use of a reflexive diary and then bracketing these thoughts.

In conclusion, results are produced by the qualitative researcher during data analysis, who may distort and filter information, a constraint which possibly affects the validity of the phenomenon, hence the call for bracketing during data analysis. (Sale, 2007). Admittedly so, complete bracketing during hermeneutic phenomenology is not possible due to its subjective nature. I should have used reflexivity throughout and recorded pre-conceived beliefs in a diary additionally to bracketing in data analysis. Prior to starting my research, I could have recorded in a reflexive diary 'what new information' might be generated. In my defence, I did ask myself this and recognised that new information could be generated, hence I started with an open mind. Along with the suggestion by Polit and Beck (2010) that Colaizzi's data analysis methods are the only phenomenological analysis that call for the validation of results by returning to the participants – to check they have been correctly interpreted – it is up to the researcher how much bracketing to adopt, and how much s/he can influence the research. Rather than bracketing completely, I had an open mind.

9.6   Directions for Future Research

The theories and recommendations set out in this thesis make a contribution to the field of BME degree attainment, but there are directions for future research which are also related to the limitations. Specific directions for future research include:

1.   Develop a set of hypotheses to provide more general findings. Adopting this approach will enable the next researcher to assess whether the findings presented in this thesis show a degree of causality, i.e. the effect of one or more constructs on an output construct. Such an approach will also allow future researchers to examine the degree of weighting of constructs to enable suitable strategy to be developed.

2.   This thesis is grounded in examining the experience of BME students, thus it is suggested that future research is conducted into how the degree attainment of non-BMEs is informed (this could be related to the previous point). A study of this type will enable a generalist view to be developed.

3.   The purpose of this thesis was to examine BMEs and further study could add to the findings set out in this thesis by exploring in more detail specific sub-categories. This may enable more culturally specific issues to emerge.

4.   Future researchers may want to examine the role of social capital and the degree to which it influences good degree attainment. This notion of social capital could be the extent to which families place greatest emphasis on the attainment of a good degree. This examination could also focus on the softer skills.

5.   A longitudinal study will allow a deeper understanding of whether the attainment gap has continued on a long-term basis, thus overcoming the shortcoming of the cross-sectional research presented in this thesis. It may be worth examining this after any policy changes have been implemented as a consequence of this research.

Whilst the preceding are suggestions, they are not designed to be exhaustive but should provide the basis of future research.

9.6.1   Future Research Agenda

Earlier sections of this thesis have shown that BME participation within the UK's higher education sector has increased significantly because of a host of reasons, including changing central government policy. It is also evident from the existing data that a gap remains between the attainment levels of BME and their counterparts, although the gap is narrowing. In dealing with the rationale for the gap, this thesis contributes to academic theory and practice by identifying the factors that lead to the educational attainment of BME students. In doing so, this thesis adopts a case study approach. While a case based approach is effective in providing a detailed examination, it is not without its limitations, which necessitate a future research agenda.

The basis of the data for this thesis was that the students were interviewed at a given moment in time, effectively meaning that the research was cross-sectional. Within sociological research there is great merit in cross-sectional research with many such studies making worthy contributions. In the case of this thesis, every attempt was made to mitigate bias and other undue influences, but these could not be entirely eradicated. One of the ways that the future research agenda could mitigate the limitations

of cross-sectional research would be to adopt a longitudinal panel approach. The development of panel based research would permit the examination of changes in social phenomenon (Menard, 1991).

A longitudinal panel approach would have a number of benefits, one of which would be that it would allow the researcher to track how BME students' performance is influenced as their experience of being a student develops. This would mean that the same subjects would be included in the sample in the same way that the same subjects are included in medical research to examine the impact of various medications. From a sociological research perspective, it would mean that because behaviour could be tracked, practitioners could develop policies to reduce the attainment gap.

In the case of the research presented in this thesis, behaviourally a first year student is likely to evolve, and, thus, as they evolve, influential behaviours can be tracked. As a first year entry student, when becoming acclimatised to university education, different factors may be at play than those during the final year. A panel approach in tandem with regular interviews would enable the researcher to monitor how the various influence evolve in terms of importance or become less important over time. By fully capturing the evolution of these influences, practitioners will be able to put in place policies to ensure engagement and reduce the attainment gap. As a research agenda, this approach will be important because there is evidence that, despite various approaches, the fact remains that BME students lag behind their White peers in degree attainment. Thus, by understanding longitudinal behaviour it may help the development of more specific interventionist strategies. Together, to inform practice, a longitudinal approach would enable the development of the required level of detail and the chance to reduce the 'one size fits all' approach. It is safe to assume that a more sophisticated approach to policy development would lead to improved BME attainment levels and long-term life opportunities.

This thesis adopted a case study approach with a post '92 university. As part of the future research agenda, it would be beneficial to also include students from across the sector to establish a more rounded understanding of the range of influences. For example, there may be a different set of influences for a 'recruiting' versus a 'selecting' university.

9.6.1.1 Institutional Research

The focus of this section on the future research agenda thus far has been the students and they how their influences can be understood – adding to the earlier discussion on research directions.

As part of the widening agenda, there is a need to understand the barriers in place to BME students studying at the elite Russell Group universities. Indeed, the Prime Minister (David Cameron) commented that there were more Black males in the 18-25 age group in prison than there were studying at the elite Russell Group universities, referring to this as 'under the surface racism' (BBC, 2016). As part of the future research agenda, it would be important to understand whether the barrier to the elitist universities exists because the aforementioned ethic group is not applying due to a lack of confidence as to whether they would be accepted, or whether the barrier is that during part of the application process, they are rejected. If they are rejected, is it, for example, after an interview or are they not offered a place without meeting the recruitment team. The rejection, for example, may be because of the range of subjects studies at A-level and because the university may discount vocational qualifications.

As the research agenda develops there is a need to understand institutional behaviours that are leading to the attainment gap. Indeed, it is not the students that award themselves their degree classification but the institution; the concern may be the lack of BME staff. We know from recent statistics that proportionately there is an under-representation of BME staff at the higher levels of academia (HESA, 2014; Johnson, 2015), and arguably there is a degree of exclusion (Pilkington, 2013). Indeed, the issue may be that while there is no direct attempt to create a specific White culture at the senior level, there may be subconscious behaviour where senior staff are recruited in their own culture. It may well be that if greater BME representation is evident at the senior levels then the awards gap might be reduced. In dealing with this under-representation it should be noted that BME staff are not a homogenous group, and thus variations should be recognised. For example, a group may be classified as Indian but there are deeply engrained religious and cultural sub-categories which will influence behaviour.

In dealing with the preceding point it may well be about moving the institution rather than the student (Bouattia, 2015), thus it is about moving the university's culture. If this issue of the institution can be better understood then it may help to address the gap within the UK's elite universities where proportionately there is an under-representation of BME students (Boliver, 2013) and, as posited earlier, BMEs in senior positions.

Given the lack of BME representation at the higher levels of UK universities, i.e. professorial level and above, it may be that if there was greater representation at university board level then there may be a better voice for BMEs. Also, as a result of a lack of BME representation at the higher levels, there may be scope to undertake an examination of whether BMEs are perceived to be treated fairly. The idea of fairness is rooted in notions of justice. The findings could be informative in providing directions to practitioners to develop policies that are deemed to be fair for BMEs in tandem with equal opportunities for all. The idea of fairness may reveal that while policies are fair, they may not be perceived to be fair. Thus, this may be a barrier to BMEs applying for senior roles, as once either at interview or in post they may feel that they would not be treated fairly. There may be a degree of dissonance in that BMEs see other BMEs in senior positions treated harshly and feel that if they were successful with their application, they too would be treated the same. Notwithstanding the fact that White colleagues may be treated the same, but they do not see that because of the effect of cognitive dissonance.

9.6.1.2 International Research Perspective

A central premise of this thesis is that a BME student is influenced by the culture to which they are exposed at home, as well as the culture of the country in which they reside. Thus, as part of the future research agenda it would be interesting to compare whether the same cultural forces are at play from where the BME student's family migrated.

As part of the future research agenda, research is encouraged that introduces an international dimension. Hofstede (1980; 2001) and others suggest that there are cultural differences and that these are deeply embedded within the local community and evolve slowly over time. In developing the future research agenda, it would be beneficial to understand which cultural factors impact BMEs' educational attainment within other countries.

This approach would allow for the areas of commonality to be identified and the examination of the extent to which the local culture plays a moderating role in BME educational attainment. For example, Ogbu (1993) posits that an individual is influenced by the culture from which they migrated and that this continues to play a part in the new country. Thus, it would be worthwhile to examine the extent to which this position holds true, and whether there are variances in aspects of culture between

the country from which the original took place and the new country. To complete this type of study, co-researchers from overseas institutions would be recruited. By developing this larger study, it would be possible to overlay Hofstede's (1980; 2001) cultural typology and enable the establishment of cultural variances.

On a final note, BME students are still relatively new into the HE system. Over time, they will probably become more familiar with the unknown and, as a consequence, perform better, in a similar way to how BME children in schools are now in subsequent generations and are attaining more highly than their previous generations.

9.7   Concluding Remarks

The phenomenon of attainment is a complex, dynamic and ever-changing issue, which has the ability to impact individuals' lives, most of whom start their journey into HE with aspirations of achieving highly and improving their employment opportunities (Employability Unit, Coventry University). This thesis has demonstrated its complexity by showing that attainment is due to a combination of factors and that ethnicity influences BME students' degree attainment in HE. The various influential factors have been presented, all of which interact with each other and further with ethnicity, collectively affecting attainment. Statistics have demonstrated empirical evidence that BMEs under-perform in HE and that there remains an attainment gap between BME and White students.

Influential factors are not specific to BME students; all students within an HEI are affected by generic issues, such as previous experience and TLAs; therefore any recommendations should be aimed at all students. In fact, equal opportunities initiatives aimed at promoting equality on the grounds of ethnicity could be counter-productive and result in segregation and the paradoxical promotion of differential treatment. However, groups that are characteristically different from the outset will probably be most-profoundly affected. For example, certain factors are more specific to BME students, such as living at home therefore family influence may be greater, the cultural restrictions of taking out loans and gender expectations which intersect with ethnicity. Therefore, this different starting point combined with the specific BME issues affecting attainment can result in universal factors having a more prominent effect. Hence, although influential factors affect all HE students, the effects are most probably ethnically determined.

Similar recent research in the field of BME attainment has cited ethnicity as influential on attainment. Richardson (2013) reported that differences in BME attainment are not due to ethnicity per se but a proxy of factors conflated to ethnicity. In some ways the findings are support by this thesis because the ethnicity effect is indirect (influencing other factors, which, in turn, influence attainment), for instance cultural restrictions to remain living at home, which accompanies additional responsibilities, community ties and ethnic differences causing a lack of confidence when communicating with White middle-class tutors. Rodgers (2013) also maintained that attainment should not be related entirely to ethnicity as there are omitted variables; although they are, in some way, strongly correlated to ethnicity. Davies and Elias (2003) and Dhanda (2010) identified some of these hard to quantify variables as unmet expectations about HE: the "wrong" course choice, financial difficulties, poor teaching quality, feeling isolated or hostility. It is highly likely these omitted variables have a greater impact on BME students than they do on their White counterparts, all identified in this thesis.

The effects of ethnicity are universal; as demonstrated in this thesis and as Richardson (2013) postulated, there is evidence of similar attainment patterns amongst ethnic groups in other countries. With immigration, in most countries there is a dominant ethnic group together with minority groups, and the structural inequalities impair the educational achievements and aspirations of the individuals from the minority groups (Ogbu, 1978). Ethnicity and migrant status influencing the ability to achieve within a diverse group to one's own ethnicity.

Partially attributing the attainment gap to ethnicity is feasible in the light of previous literatures. The attainment gap is only partly explained by entry qualifications (Smith and Naylor, 2001; Connor et al., 2004; Lesley, 2005; Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008); differences in social class (Owen et al., 2000; Rothon, 2007), which are in the most counteracted by ethnicity; and structural level explanations (Osler, 1999; Rothon, 2007; Singh, 2009; Berry and Locke, 2011; Richardson, 2013), although tutor beliefs appear strongly as do peer group influences (Goldsmith, 2004; Davies and Garrett, (2012), which appear to be determined by ethnicity. Broecke and Nicholls (2007) initially proposed that even with controls in place for other variables, the ethnicity effect remains. This thesis along with other research in the field again showcases ethnicity as the main influential factor. This raises the question, why, then, is ethnicity not paraded as the influential factor and addressed? Why are

individuals and institutions not accepting and addressing ethnicity? Is accepting ethnicity controversial? Are HEIs afraid to expose their condition and ask questions, instead opting for self-silencing?

Statistical evidence does show that the attainment gap has narrowed, predictably partially due to improved social capital and the length of residence in the UK of certain ethnic groups, both indicating the benefits of a measure for performance by generations. Subsequent generations in the UK are aiding themselves, advantaging themselves by gaining cultural capital which should improve their attainment. Indeed, recording attainment by generations will show whether the effects of ethnicity are reducing. With intra-generational data, real differences will be revealed as will whether ethnicity is the influencing factor upon attainment. A more diverse curriculum, with elements of glocalised and globalised content, which all students of a particular geographical area can relate to and which utilises an individual's skills and aids integration, together with a change in tutor pedagogy, should all, taken together, improve BME attainment and consequently reduce the BME/White student degree attainment gap.

It must be remembered that higher education institutions do not operate in isolation and the issues which require addressing are much wider; attitudes to education start earlier, before a student enters HE, a reason why knowledge must be provided during this previous experience. Image is important, particularly as, for example, at the time of starting this thesis there was a cap in terms of numbers of students universities could recruit (to limit the cost of lending for tuition and living fees), which consequently increased competition between the different institutions (McGettigan, 2013); however, central government policy removed the cap for September 2015 entry.

Since embarking on this research, funding of HEIs has changed with universities relying on tuition fees as opposed to state funding, a change introduced by the coalition government in the light of the recession in 2008 (see Chapter Two). Some view this as a factor of financialisation within HE, which, as emerged in this thesis, is having an effect of students' expectations. Tight (2013) argued that students felt they had a right to achieve a "good" degree because they are paying for the service, a commercial imperative; they are now consumers who expect a good return on their investment. This changed perspective shifts the focus of the BME attainment debate; we need to strengthen BME students' consumer rights first and foremost. Longitudinally, information on repayments of loans made by graduates from different institutions and courses could raise further questions of the financialisation of HE, for instance the creditworthiness and value for money, particularly where students fail to attain

highly (McGettigan, 2013). This being an area for future research; for the foreseeable future further research is recommended on the commodification of HE and how the financial stance affects motivation amongst students.

It is not solely funding of HE that has changed but the entire role of universities, with radical changes in their services. Universities were public non-profit-making institutions; however, their persona has shifted to corporate enterprises with students being the customers. This raises the question why should these now profit-making institutions be motivated and driven towards other interests, such as the BME attainment gap. It is, after all, neither a political nor legal issue. In cases where universities are taking an interest, there is no way of telling whether this portrayed interest is genuine or to appear caring to the public; institutions may really just be ticking boxes, a Fordism approach. Furthermore, why should institutions address differential attainment if BME groups do not see it as an issue? The HE market might respond on its own to the BME attainment gap debate, realising the unfairness involved. Recently the HE sector has been biting the bullet with regards political interest, with several MPs placing the BME attainment gap on the political agenda. With White students becoming the minority at some new universities, it is possible the issue will get more attention.

Subsequent to completing my thesis, I feel it is pertinent the BME attainment gap issue is addressed to ensure equality for all living and competing within an already competitive society, particularly as graduates are leaving HE with debts. Equality has been achieved, in fact, exceeded, in terms of participating in HE; however, real equality will only be achieved when it is achieved in terms of academic attainment and future successes, for instance in employment. Enabling BME students to achieve and attain to their full potential is allowing BME students equal opportunities. More fundamentally, it is ethically dubious to promote the idea of widening participation if such groups cannot be guaranteed equitable outcomes (Bhopal and Maylor, 2014). University students, as do all individuals, require a socially just higher education system within which they are treated fairly, provided with equality to participate, attain highly and integrate fully into a system reflective of them (Bhopal and Maylor, 2014).

With the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations, my thesis can make a significant contribution to gradually reducing the BME and White student attainment gap in HE, albeit at one institution, Coventry University, and at a modular level to begin. Differences in attainment may take generations to disintegrate, but they are worth monitoring given the high premium possessing a

good degree carries. My final thought, regardless of all the research, efforts and implemented actions, is will differences in attainment consistently remain as long as there are human differences? Will some groups always do better? And why do we measure performance per group and not individually? Are certain ethnic groups, therefore, responsible for their own success, the group behaviour influencing individuals within their own distinct ethnic group?

Individualism-collectivism theories explain variations in behaviour by core values that exist outside the individual, their group's culture determining the core values and behaviour of the individual. The ethnic groups' experience, such as patterns of immigration, further influencing the individuals' behaviours and values shows that collectivism is at play (Cooper and Denner, 1998). Drawing on an earlier example of collectivism, the Sikhs in Valleyside, California, amongst whom large numbers attain highly, should we be targeting groups within society, i.e. communities and not individual students to achieve results? After all, it is not possible to theorise without the wider social context (Summit Programme, 2011) because each ethnic group has its own history, immigration patterns and motives.

If we are successful and enable all BME students to achieve a 2.1 or first class degree, surely society would discover other grounds on which to discriminate against BMEs, maintaining differences between groups of people. After all, we live in a capitalist, meritocratic system which requires us to sort individuals based on ability in a hierarchal order, awarding those at the top. Success is framed in a utilitarian way; students are informed they need a good degree for graduate employment, to be successful and happy (Harvey, 2015). Therefore, are we "barking up the wrong tree" by assuming equal degree attainment will make a difference; with the majority of graduates holding a good degree, employers will probably expect differences and achievements in some other way. Are we, in fact, drawing attention to the issue? BME students might be satisfied with their degree attainment, with their attainment in a new country (Gillborn, 2009).

9.7.1   A Reflexive Account of Findings

Through the completion of my PhD research I report that ethnicity is the main influencing factor on BME student attainment at Coventry University, a contention which may be, and is very probably, true for other universities. The fact that ethnicity is a highly influential factor upon BME attainment in UK HEIs may expose ethnicity as being influential within a wider context – other educational institutions

and in employment, for example – with the effect of ethnicity being even wider in other areas of life. In 2016, this is alarming and unacceptable in our ever-increasingly culturally diverse nation where numerous equality legislations exist.

As shown in this thesis, it is not ethnicity alone that is influential; ethnicity interacts with other influential factors; however it is ethnicity that has the profound effect upon attainment. One additional influential factor upon attainment was others, namely tutors. In conjunction with this I discussed unconscious bias. Others, specifically non-BME individuals, may lack awareness of the way they are behaving and interacting with BME students due to preconceptions or hidden stereotypes they may possess i.e. tutors act in an unconscious towards BME students. In this way tutors are allowing ethnic to influence interactions with the BME students and hence attainment. These others are acting/reacting in an unfavourable way towards those from BME backgrounds – they are being neglected, which some would classify as a form of covert racism. I do not have sufficient evidence to say the behaviour of others towards BME students are a form of racism, however on reflection I would label this behaviour as a form of indirect racism in cases where reactions from negatively held stereotypes influence the individual BME student. This discovery made me realise that I probably held my own unconscious biases towards groups of students – something that I can address in my future practice.

On reflection, presenting ethnicity as the main influencing factor was not uncomfortable, reflexive being defined as becoming conscious of how one operated during the research - did I hold assumptions and did these influence my research and practice? (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). I do, however, feel uncomfortable about raising discussions surrounding ethnicity with those 'above' me; others in positions of authority in the work place and non-BME staff I do not know well. Although as a researcher I am confident in my findings – I maintain their reliability and validity – there remains a small fear of others 'mocking' me: 'here we go', 'playing the race card', 'it's easy for you to blame it on ethnicity'. Why should White middle-class tutors (of either gender or any age) believe ethnicity is a major influencing factor on attainment?

As findings were emergent, I was not aware that ethnicity would arise. I did hold assumptions about ethnicity, however I did not let them bias my research forming an equal rapport with participants from distinct BME backgrounds. The fact that I am from a BME background aided my research in that it made participants feel comfortable; being from similar BME backgrounds allowed exploration. I did

not know as much as I thought I did about the influence of ethnicity and the extent of its effect. My research experience has increased my commitment to further understand this complex relationship between ethnicity and attainment.

I had an objective and a subjective stance to presenting covert racism. Objective in that this issue arose out of my data with my attempts of bracketing during data analysis (see Section 9.5.2). Subjective because personally the issue engaged and enhanced my interest in the subject area of BME attainment, and because covert racism could have unknowingly influenced my attainment in HE. I am aware that the topic of ethnicity could possibly provoke feelings and that revealing ethnicity may raise more challenges, however I want staff at Coventry University who have contact with, and therefore influence, BME students to read this work and become aware of these issues. After all, the first step in addressing the issue of differential BME attainment is awareness; in particular, awareness of negative stereotypes held which are indirectly affecting attainment – the effect of which is racist. Ultimately my research and findings can contribute towards the consultation and implementation of changes in the field of BME attainment.

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Appendix 1: Poster presented at BES Annual Conference 2013

Appendix 2: Introductory Email Message

I got your details from registry, and I hope you don't mind me contacting you.

I am a PhD student researching black and ethnic minority attainment – why we get the grades we do and what effects what we achieve, such as living at home, having a job, etc.

As you may know, we need high grades to get a good job! Hopefully by doing this research and discovering what effects attainment – we can improve it.

I teach at Coventry, and would be EXTREMELY grateful if you could spare me 15-20 minutes of your time for an informal chat.

Looking forward to your reply,

Jaswinder

Appendix 3

<div align="center">

Participant Information Sheet

</div>

Study title:
Why the Educational Performance Gap between BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) Students and White Students, and how can it be reduced; the case at Coventry University.

What is the purpose of this study?
Previous research has shown that British students from ethnic minorities (BME) are one of the groups that under perform at University. A significant number do not complete their degrees and many of those who do complete obtain relatively poor grades; the issue of non-completion is an important one. The aim of this research is to try and find out why this is the case and see if more effective ways can be developed within Coventry University to address this issue of differential attainment.

The study is the focus of a PhD research programme being undertaken at Coventry University, UK. My Director of Studies is Professor David Morris.

How will students be recruited?
Management Information Unit has sent me a list of e-mail addresses/contact details of final year students, across the faculties. I will send a group message to all and wait for responses.

Why have I been approached?
Coventry University are concerned that certain BME groups do not perform as well as other groups of students. You have been approached because the University wishes to discover why this is the case; the views of final year students are required, because you will have an idea of what has influenced your grades to date.

Do I have to take part?
You do not have to take part in this research and if you do initially decide to, but then change your mind, you may withdraw from the research. If you wish to withdraw you can contact me on the number or e-mail address provided below and any data will be destroyed. There are no consequences for withdrawing from the study.

What will happen to me if I take part?
You will attend ONE in-depth informal interview to help identify issues that you think have affected your achievement to date. The interview will be one-to-one, conducted by me, and last no more than one hour. I will book a classroom at the University where this will take place. You will be asked three or four short questions based around 6 different areas, such as family and institutional support. Depending on your response I may raise particular points; I am interested in general overall support – the system of tutoring and institutional support, and you will not be allowed to name individual tutors. I wish to record all interviews, for which I will obtain your permission before we commence. It will be recorded digitally and then converted into MP3 format to enable easy and safe storage. The purpose of this is so that I can use the expressed ideas for my PhD research; the information will not be used for anything else.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
There are no possible disadvantages or risks by taking part in this research. The information you provide and any resulting strategies will hopefully benefit all students.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?
Yes. Data will be stored securely in a locked location; access to all computer files will be password protected. None of the information you give, notes taken or recordings will be used outside of the project without your permission, and no-one outside of me and my supervisory team will have access to the data. Written details that would lead others to be able to identify you (such as name, student ID or particular detailed information about your university course) will not be released.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results will be written up and presented as part of my PhD thesis, and conclusions drawn from them. The research files produced will be destroyed after the completion of my PhD.
Who should I contact if I have any queries?
Should you have any questions about the research, please contact:
Jaswinder Sekhon
aa5957@coventry.ac.uk
Contact telephone number:
_____

Making a Complaint
If you take part and are unhappy with any aspect of this research then you should contact my Director of Studies -
Professor David Morris
d.morris@coventry.ac.uk
If you still have concerns and wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research then you should write to:
 Professor Ian M Marshall
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Coventry University
Priory Street
Coventry
CV1 5FB
In your letter please provide as much detail about the research as possible, the name of the Researcher and indicate in detail the nature of your complaint.

Appendix 4

<p style="text-align:center">Informed Consent Form 1</p>

Study Title

Why the Educational Performance Gap between BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) Students and White Students, and how can it be reduced; the case at Coventry University.

Summary Information about Research

Previous research has shown that British students from the ethnic minorities (BME) under-perform at University. Quite a few do not complete their degrees and many of the ones who do complete don't get very good grades. This research is trying to find out why this is the case and see if we can find more effective ways to teach our students.

Please tick

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any point.

3. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in confidence.

4. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded.

5. By signing below I agree to take part in the research.

Name of participant: ....

Signature of participant: ....

Date: ....

Name of researcher: ....

Signature of researcher: ....

Date: ....

Appendix 5

<div align="center">

Informed Consent Form 2

</div>

Study Title

Why the Educational Performance Gap between BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) Students and White Students, and how can it be reduced; the case at Coventry University.

Summary Information about Research

Previous research has shown that British students from the ethnic minorities (BME) under-perform at University. Quite a few do not complete their degrees and many of the ones who do complete don't get very good grades. This research is trying to find out why this is the case and see if we can find more effective ways to teach our students.

Please tick

1. I confirm that I have received a voucher from _____, as a form of gratification for participating in the above study.

2. I understand that my acceptance of this voucher does not affect my right to withdraw from this study.

3. I agree that the information provided during the interview can be used for the above study.

Name of participant: ....

Signature of participant: ....

Date: ....

Name of researcher: ....

Signature of researcher: ....

Date: ....

Appendix 6: Research Discussion Guide
RESEARCH DISCUSSION GUIDE/TOPICS

1.   **General Introduction**

1.1   Welcome the student and thank them for their participation. [*Get permission to record the interview and point out this is only for your purpose*]

1.2   Establish which Faculty and course they are studying.

2.   **Journey to date**

2.1   Discuss their academic journey, experience to date [*probe for any major points – but do not cover later point*]

2.2   Discuss the general back ground of the student [*try and establish their social class/background – previous history of University attendance*]

2.3   Establish prior achievement/routes to HE [*explore fully their academic achievement at point of entry – what goals did they have*, v*ocational, A-levels*]

3.   **Identity**

3.1   Pick up points arising from 2.2 [*parents/sibling university attendance, why they entered HE*]

3.2   Discuss how they would classify themselves on ethnic minority form, reasons why [*show form if required*]

4.   **Belonging**

4.1   Discuss 'belonging' to university, feel belonged in which aspects of university life, areas around the university

4.2   Discuss if they felt any of these factors [*Identity and belonging*] affected their performance to date/how? [*Probe for detail, did participation in extra-curricular activities, membership of societies...*]

5.   **Prior Achievement**

5.1   How did they choose their current course [*who had the input, did they attend an open day*]

5.2   Why did they choose Coventry University?

5.3   How satisfied have they been with course/institute?

5.4   Do they feel either of these choices has influence their grades to date, how?

6.   **Support from the Institution**

6.1   How has Coventry University supported them [*student unions, pastoral care, mentoring, academic writing, other departments*]

6.2   Do you have academic/personal tutoring

6.3   Relationship with tutor [*positive, supportive*]

6.4   What is the one most influencing factor affecting performance to date?

6.5   Depending on points raised above, discuss if and what further support would have been beneficial.

7.   **Role Models/Peer Groups**

Explore the roles of the following, in terms of their education and/or educational attainment:

7.1 Family [*full y explore how and why – what exactly have they done to support, influence*]. Find out about the family structure [*probe, but not too much because may be single parent, etc.*]

7.2 Role of school [*probe to understand the school's role in shaping educational attainment*]

7.3 Role of any peer groups [*discuss from perspective of school, social and University – what exactly have they done, probe as much as possible*]

Thank the student for their participation and close.

Appendix 7: Revised Research Discussion Guide
RESEARCH DISCUSSION GUIDE/TOPICS

5.   General Introduction

1.1   Welcome the student and thank them for their participation. [*Get permission to record the interview and point out this is only for your purpose*]

1.2   Establish which Faculty and course they are studying.

6.   Journey to date

2.1   Discuss their academic journey, experience to date [*probe for any major points – but do not cover later point*]

2.2   Discuss the general back ground of the student [*try and establish their social class/background – previous history of University attendance*]

2.3   Establish prior achievement/routes to HE [*explore fully their academic achievement at point of entry – what goals did they have, vocational, A-levels*]

7.   Identity

7.1   Pick up points arising from 2.2 [*parents/sibling university attendance, why they entered HE*]

3.2   Discuss how they would classify themselves on ethnic minority form, reasons why [*show form if required*]

8.   Belonging

4.1   Discuss 'belonging' to university, feel belonged in which aspects of university life, areas around the university

4.2   Discuss if they felt any of these factors [*Identity and belonging*] affected their performance to date/how? [*Probe for detail, did participation in extra-curricular activities, membership of societies...*]

5.   Prior Achievement

5.2   How did they choose their current course [*who had the input, did they attend an open day*]

5.2   Why did they choose Coventry University?

5.3   How satisfied have they been with course/institute?

5.4   Do they feel either of these choices has influence their grades to date, how?

6.   Support from the Institution

6.1   How has Coventry University supported them [*student unions, pastoral care, mentoring, academic writing, other departments*]

6.2   Do you have academic/personal tutoring

6.3   Relationship with tutor [*positive, supportive*]

6.4   What is the one most influencing factor affecting performance to date?

6.5   Depending on points raised above, discuss if and what further support would have been beneficial.

7.   Role Models/Peer Groups

Explore the roles of the following, in terms of their education and/or educational attainment:

7.1   Family [*fully explore how and why – what exactly have they done to support, influence*]. Find out about the family structure [*probe, but not too much because may be single parent, etc.*]

7.2   Role of school [*probe to understand the school's role in shaping educational attainment*]

7.3   Role of any peer groups [*discuss from perspective of school, social and University – what exactly have they done, probe as much as possible*]

Explore with the student in case you have missed any issue, ask them to add
Finally, thank the student for their participation and close.

Appendix 8: Ethics Approval Form
Medium to High Risk Research Ethics Approval
Read this first

Who should use this checklist?

You should only use this checklist if you are carrying out research or consultancy project through Coventry University: This includes:

Members of academic, research or consultancy staff.

Honorary and external members of staff.

Research degree students (MA/MSc by Research, MPhil or PhD).

Professional degree students (EdD, EngD, DClinPsyc, DBA etc).

Undergraduate students who have been directed to complete this checklist.

Taught postgraduate students who have been directed to complete this checklist.

Who should not use this checklist?

You should not use this checklist if you are:

An undergraduate student (Use the low risk ethics approval checklist first).

A taught postgraduate student (Use the low risk ethics approval checklist first).

A member of staff evaluating service level quality (Use the low risk ethic approval checklist first)

Carrying out medical research or consultancy involving the NHS (Use the NHS online Research Ethics Committee approval form).

Can I begin work before the project is ethically approved?

No. Primary data collection can not begin until you have approval from one of the following:

The University Applied Research Committee (UARC)

The Research Degrees Sub-Committee (RDSC)

An External Research Ethics Committee (NHS Research Ethics Committee, Lead Partner University etc)

Alternatively, if you have established that your project does not require ethical approval using:

Low Risk Ethical Approval Checklist

Medium to High Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist

What will happen if I proceed without approval or falsely self-certify research ethics approval?

Collecting primary data in the absence of ethical approval or falsely self-certifying the level of risk associated with a project will constitute a **disciplinary offence**.

For **Students** – this means disciplinary action resulting in immediate failure in any module or project associated with the research and potentially dismissal from the University.

For **Staff** – This means disciplinary action, which may potentially lead to dismissal.

If you do not have ethical approval, the University's insurers will not cover you for legal action or claims for injury. In addition, you may be debarred from membership of some professional or statutory bodies and excluded from applying for some types of employment or research funding opportunities.

What happens if the project changes after approval?

If after receiving ethical approval your project changes such that the information provided in this checklist is no longer accurate, then the ethical approval is automatically suspended. You must re-apply for ethical approval immediately and stop research based on the suspended ethical approval.

What about multi-stage projects?

If you are working on a project which involves multi-stage research, such as a focus group that informs the design of a questionnaire, you need to describe the process and focus on what you know and the most risky elements. If the focus group radically changes the method you are using then you need to re-apply for the ethical approval.

Is there any help available to complete this checklist?

Guidance can be found in the ethics section of the Registry Research Unit Intranet. You will find documents dealing with specific issues in research ethics and examples of participant information leaflets and informed consent forms. Further advice is also available from:

Director of Studies (Students)

Faculty Research Ethics Leader (Academic Staff)

Registry Research Unit (Students and Staff)

Which sections of the checklist should I complete?

If your project involves:	Please complete sections
Desk-research only, using only secondary or published sources.	**1, 2** and **16**
An application to an External Research Ethics Committee other than the NHS.	**1** to **4** and **16**
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about, identifiable, living humans (either in laboratory or in non-laboratory settings).	**1** to **15** and **16**
Collection and/or analysis of data about the behaviour of humans in situations where they might reasonably expect their behaviour not to be observed or recorded.	
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about, people who have recently died.	
Collection and/or analysis of primary, unpublished data from, or about, existing agencies or organisations.	
Investigation of wildlife in its natural habitat.	**1** to **5, 15** and **16**
Research with animals other than in their natural settings.	**Do not complete this checklist**. Contact the Registry Research Unit for advice
Research with human tissues or body fluids.	

Research involving access to NHS patients, staff, facilities or research which requires access to participants who are mentally incapacitated.	**Do not complete this checklist.** Make an application using the on-line NHS Research Ethics Committee approval form

How much details do I need to give in the checklist?

Please keep the details as brief as possible but you need to provide sufficient information for peer reviewers from the Research Ethics Panel to review the ethical aspects of your project.

Who are the Faculty Research Ethics Leaders?

Check the Registry Research Unit Intranet site for the most up to date list of Faculty Research Ethics Leaders.

How long will it take to carry out the review?

If your project requires **ethical peer review** you should submit this to the Registry Research Unit at **least three** months before the proposed start date of your project.

How do I submit this checklist?

The completed checklist and any attachments must be submitted to ethics.uni@coventy.ac.uk.

Medium to High Risk Research Ethics Approval Checklist

1 Project Information (Everyone)

Title of Project
Why the Educational Performance Gap between BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) Students and White Students, and how can it be reduced; The Case of Coventry University
Name of Principal Investigator (PI) or Research or Professional Degree Student
Jaswinder Sekhon BSc PGCE
Faculty, Department or Institute
E Learning Unit
Names of Co-investigators (CIs) and their organisational affiliation
None
How many additional research staff will be employed on the project?
None
Names and their organisational affiliation (if known)
Proposed project start date (At least three months in the future)
September 2010
Estimated project end date
December 2012
Who is funding the project?
Coventry University. The research project is part of the University's on-going work into ethnic minority students and the variations in relation to degree classifications and completion rates.
Has funding been confirmed?
Yes, please see preceding point.
Code of ethical practice and conduct most relevant to your project: Market Research Society

Students Only

Degree being studied (MSc/MA by Research, MPhil, PhD, EngD, etc)
PhD
Name of your Director of Studies
Prof David Morris
Date of Enrolment
September 2008

2. Does this project need ethical approval?

Questions	Yes	No
Does the project involve collecting primary data from, or about, living human beings?	√	
Does the project involve analysing primary or unpublished data from, or about, living human beings?	√	
Does the project involve collecting or analysing primary or unpublished data about people who have recently died other than data that are already in the public domain?		√
Does the project involve collecting or analysing primary or unpublished data about or from organisations or agencies of any kind other than data that are already in the public domain?		√
Does the project involve research with non-human vertebrates in their natural settings or behavioural work involving invertebrate species not covered by the Animals Scientific Procedures Act (1986)?[8]		√
Does the project place the participants or the researchers in a dangerous environment, risk of physical harm, psychological or emotional distress?		√
Does the nature of the project place the participant or researchers in a situation where they are at risk of investigation by the police or security services?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, proceed to **Section 3**.

If you answered **No** to **all** these questions:

You **do not** need to submit your project for peer ethical review and ethical approval.

You should sign the Declaration in **Section 16** and keep a copy for your own records.

Students must ask their Director of Studies to countersign the declaration and they should send a copy for your file to the Registry Research Unit.

---

[8] The Animals Scientific Procedures Act (1986) was amended in 1993. As a result the common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*), as an invertebrate species, is now covered by the act.

3   Does the project require Criminal Records Bureau checks?

Questions	Yes	No
Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with children or young people under 18 years of age?		√
Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with adults who have learning difficulties?		√
Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with adults who are infirm or physically disabled?		√
Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with adults who are resident in social care or medical establishments?		√
Does the project involve direct contact by any member of the research team with adults in the custody of the criminal justice system?		√
Has a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check been stipulated as a condition of access to any source of data required for the project?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions, please:

Explain the nature of the contact required and the circumstances in which contact will be made during the project.

4   Is this project liable to scrutiny by external ethical review arrangements?

Questions	Yes	No
Has a favourable ethical opinion been given for this project by an external research ethics committee (e.g. social care, NHS or another University)?		√
Will this project be submitted for ethical approval to an external research ethics committee (e.g. social care, NHS or another University)?		√

If you answered **No** to **both** of these questions, please proceed to **Section 5**.

If you answered **Yes** to **either** of these questions:

Sign the Declaration in **Section 16** and send a copy to the Registry Research Unit.

Students must get their Director of Studies to countersign the checklist before submitting it.

5 More detail about the project

What are the aims and objectives of the project?
This project aims to explore why BME students are achieving lower degree classifications than their white counterparts. It will be an internal study, with research based on students at Coventry University. The research will consider the students journey in education to date, which will hopefully indicate social background through the informal research style. Emphasis will also be placed on how well the student felt supported by Coventry University through services such as, the student union, CAW and the student centre services. It will also investigate the role teaching staff, families and peers play in their attainment. *The main objectives are a) research to identify the factors resulting in lower degree attainment and b) how can this be addressed.*
Briefly describe the principal methods, the sources of data or evidence to be used and the number and type of research participants who will be recruited to the project. • *Individual in-depth interviews with 30 Coventry University final year students to identify which factors they feel affect their attainment.* • *60 Final year BME students from a number of faculties will be contacted via e-mail, 30 are required for interviews.*
What research instrument(s), validated scales or methods will be used to collect data? *The research will be based on qualitative in-depth interviews so that a richness of data and a true understanding of the phenomenon under investigation can be gained. This will help provide Coventry University with answers to the 'why' types questions rather than the numbers.*
If you are using an externally validated research instrument, technique or research method, please specify. *None*
If you are not using an externally validated scale or research method, please attach a copy of the research instrument you will use to collect data. For example, a measurement scale, questionnaire, interview schedule, observation protocol for ethnographic work or, in the case of unstructured data collection, a topic list. *Interview schedule is attached.*

6 Confidentiality, security and retention of research data

Questions	Yes	No
Are there any reasons why you cannot guarantee the full security and confidentiality of any personal or confidential data collected for the project?		√
Is there a significant possibility that any of your participants, or people associated with them, could be directly or indirectly identified in the outputs from this project?		√
Is there a significant possibility that confidential information could be traced back to a specific organisation or agency as a result of the way you write up the results of the project?		√
Will any members of the project team retain any personal or confidential data at the end of the project, other than in fully anonymised form?		√
Will you or any member of the team intend to make use of any confidential information, knowledge, trade secrets obtained for any other purpose than this research project?		√

If you answered **No** to **all** of these questions:

Explain how you will ensure the confidentiality and security of your research data, both during and after the project.

> Those who agree to participate will be asked if they are willing to so before commencing.
>
> *With permission from the participant, the interview will be recorded to ensure a fallback position and a transcript of the interview will be written. These handwritten transcripts will be typed into a word file which will be stored on the University's h:\. The handwritten notes will then be disposed of using the shredders in BES (William Morris Building).*
>
> *Once completed each digital copy of the interview will be converted to an MP3 format and stored in a secure manner.*
>
> *Clearly, from the MP3 files it will be possible to identify the gender of the respondent, but no respondent will be identified by name or by course level. The only identifying characteristics will be, gender, age and ethnic group and Faculty. The MP3 files will be labelled respondent 1, 2, etc. and the identifying characteristics will be stored separately, again in a secure location.*

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions:

Explain the reasons why it is essential to breach normal research protocol regarding confidentiality, security and retention of research data.

7 Informed consent

Questions	Yes	No
Will all participants be fully informed why the project is being conducted and what their participation will involve and will this information be given before the project begins?	√	
Will every participant be asked to give written consent to participating in the project before it begins?	√	
Will all participants be fully informed about what data will be collected and what will be done with these data during and after the project?	√	
Will explicit consent be sought for audio, video or photographic recording of participants?	√	
Will every participant understand what rights they have not to take part, and/or to withdraw themselves and their data from the project if they do take part?	√	
Will every participant understand that they do not need to give you reasons for deciding not to take part or to withdraw themselves and their data from the project and that there will be no repercussions as a result?	√	
If the project involves deceiving or covert observation of participants, will you debrief them at the earliest possible opportunity?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **all** these questions:

Explain briefly how you will implement the informed consent scheme described in your answers.

Attach copies of your participant information leaflet, informed consent form and participant debriefing leaflet (if required) as evidence of your plans.

Participant Information Leaflet and Consent Form attached. When participants have agreed to take part they will be e-mailed a copy of each.

If you answered **No** to **any** of these questions:

Explain why it is essential for the project to be conducted in a way that will not allow all participants the opportunity to exercise fully-informed consent.

Explain how you propose to address the ethical issues arising from the absence of transparency.

Attach copies of your participant information sheet and consent form as evidence of your plans.

8 Risk of harm

Questions	Yes	No
Is there any significant risk that your project may lead to physical harm to participants or researchers?		√
Is there any significant risk that your project may lead to psychological or emotional distress to participants or researchers?		√
Is there any significant risk that your project may place the participants or the researchers in potentially dangerous situations or environments?		√
Is there any significant risk that your project may result in harm to the reputation of participants, researchers, their employers, or other persons or organisations?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions:

Explain the nature of the risks involved and why it is necessary for the participants or researchers to be exposed to such risks.

Explain how you propose to assess, manage and mitigate any risks to participants or researchers.

Explain the arrangements by which you will ensure that participants understand and consent to these risks.

Explain the arrangements you will make to refer participants or researchers to sources of help if they are seriously distressed or harmed as a result of taking part in the project.

Explain the arrangements for recording and reporting any adverse consequences of the research.

9 Risk of disclosure of harm or potential harm

Questions	Yes	No
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of previous criminal offences or their intention to commit criminal offences?		√
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence that children or vulnerable adults have or are being harmed or are at risk of harm?		√
Is there a significant risk that the project will lead participants to disclose evidence of serious risk of other types of harm?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions:

Explain why it is necessary to take the risks of potential or actual disclosure.

Explain what actions you would take if such disclosures were to occur.

Explain what advice you will take and from whom before taking these actions.

Explain what information you will give participants about the possible consequences of disclosing information about criminal or serious risk of harm.

10 Payment of participants

Questions	Yes	No
Do you intend to offer participants cash payments or any other kind of inducements or compensation for taking part in your project?	√	
Is there any significant possibility that such inducements will cause participants to consent to risks that they might not otherwise find acceptable?		√
Is there any significant possibility that the prospect of payment or other rewards will systematically skew the data provided by participants in any way?		√
Will you inform participants that accepting compensation or inducements does not negate their right to withdraw from the project?	√	

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions:

Explain the nature of the inducements or the amount of the payments that will be offered.

Explain the reasons why it is necessary to offer payments.

Explain why you consider it is ethically and methodologically acceptable to offer payments.

As agreed with the research sponsor, each student participant will be offered a gift voucher worth £15 as a thank you for taking part in the in-depth interviews. Such a payment is in line with standard research participant practice, the University has also previously used similar inducements for participation in other research work.

One reason for the payment is to attempt to minimise sample bias; without such a payment it is anticipated that higher achieving BME students are more likely to volunteer for the research. This will also allow a comparative analysis to be completed to provide a true picture of the factors influencing attainment. The aim is to identify a representative cross section from the various ethnic groups selected. A random sample from each ethnic group will be chosen from the volunteers.

The second reason for the payment is because in-depth interviews can be lengthy in time.

11 Capacity to give informed consent

Questions	Yes	No
Do you propose to recruit any participants who are under 18 years of age?		√
Do you propose to recruit any participants who have learning difficulties?		√
Do you propose to recruit any participants with communication difficulties including difficulties arising from limited facility with the English language?		√
Do you propose to recruit any participants who are very elderly or infirm?		√
Do you propose to recruit any participants with mental health problems or other medical problems that may impair their cognitive abilities?		√
Do you propose to recruit any participants who may not be able to understand fully the nature of the research and the implications for them of participating in it?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **only the last two** questions, proceed to **Section 16** and then apply using the online NHS Research Ethics Committee approval form.

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of the **first four** questions:

Explain how you will ensure that the interests and wishes of participants are understood and taken in to account.

Explain how in the case of children the wishes of their parents or guardians are understood and taken into account.

12 Is participation genuinely voluntary?

Questions	Yes	No
Are you proposing to recruit participants who are employees or students of Coventry University or of organisation(s) that are formal collaborators in the project?	√	
Are you proposing to recruit participants who are employees recruited through other business, voluntary or public sector organisations?		√
Are you proposing to recruit participants who are pupils or students recruited through educational institutions?		√
Are you proposing to recruit participants who are clients recruited through voluntary or public services?		√
Are you proposing to recruit participants who are living in residential communities or institutions?		√
Are you proposing to recruit participants who are in-patients in a hospital or other medical establishment?		√
Are you proposing to recruit participants who are recruited by virtue of their employment in the police or armed services?		√
Are you proposing to recruit participants who are being detained or sanctioned in the criminal justice system?		√
Are you proposing to recruit participants who may not feel empowered to refuse to participate in the research?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions:

Explain how your participants will be recruited.

Explain what steps you will take to ensure that participation in this project is genuinely voluntary.

Students will be recruited via e-mail. Equal numbers from each faculty, will be contacted using data from Universe. Invitations will be sent via the MIU at the university rather than the researcher. This e-mail will express that participation is completely voluntary and they do not have to participate if they do not wish to do so.

Participants are voluntary and will not be disadvantaged in any way by participating in this research. The research will hopefully make them aware of what affects their studies, and with this awareness they may act upon it, which should impact positively on their academic performance.

Students not participating in this research will not be disadvantaged; hopefully actions put in place as a result of this research will benefit all.

13 On-line and Internet Research

Questions	Yes	No
Will any part of your project involve collecting data by means of electronic media such as the Internet or e-mail?		√
Is there a significant possibility that the project will encourage children under 18 to access inappropriate websites or correspond with people who pose risk of harm?		√
Is there a significant possibility that the project will cause participants to become distressed or harmed in ways that may not be apparent to the researcher(s)?		√
Will the project incur risks of breaching participant confidentiality and anonymity that arise specifically from the use of electronic media?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions:

Explain why you propose to use electronic media.

Explain how you propose to address the risks associated with online/internet research.

Ensure that your answers to the previous sections address any issues related to online research.

14 Other ethical risks

Question	Yes	No
Are there any other ethical issues or risks of harm raised by your project that have not been covered by previous questions?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **this** question:

Explain the nature of these ethical issues and risks.

Explain why you need to incur these ethical issues and risks.

Explain how you propose to deal with these ethical issues and risks.

15 Research with non-human vertebrates[9]

Questions	Yes	No
Will any part of your project involve the study of animals in their natural habitat?		√
Will your project involve the recording of behaviour of animals in a non-natural setting that is outside the control of the researcher?		√
Will your field work involve any direct intervention other than recording the behaviour of the animals available for observation?		√
Is the species you plan to research endangered, locally rare or part of a sensitive ecosystem protected by legislation?		√
Is there any significant possibility that the welfare of the target species or those sharing the local environment/habitat will be detrimentally affected?		√
Is there any significant possibility that the habitat of the animals will be damaged by the project such that their health and survival will be endangered?		√
Will project work involve intervention work in a non-natural setting in relation to invertebrate species other than *Octopus vulgaris*?		√

If you answered **Yes** to **any** of these questions:

Explain the reasons for conducting the project in the way you propose and the academic benefits that will flow from it.

Explain the nature of the risks to the animals and their habitat.

Explain how you propose to assess, manage and mitigate these risks.

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[9] The Animals Scientific Procedures Act (1986) was amended in 1993. As a result the common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*), as an invertebrate species, is now covered by the act.

16 Principal Investigator Certification

Please ensure that you:

Tick all the boxes below that are relevant to your project and sign this checklist.

Students must get their Director of Studies to countersign this declaration.

I believe that this project **does not require research ethics peer review**. I have completed Sections 1-2 and kept a copy for my own records. I realise I may be asked to provide a copy of this checklist at any time.	
I request that this project is **exempt from internal research ethics peer review** because it will be, or has been, reviewed by an external research ethics committee. I have completed Sections 1-4 and have attached/will attach a copy of the favourable ethical review issued by the external research ethics committee. Please give the name of the external research ethics committee here: Send to ethics@coventry.ac.uk	
I **request an ethics peer review** and confirm that I have answered all relevant questions in this checklist honestly. Send to ethics@coventry.ac.uk	√
I confirm that I will carry out the project in the ways described in this checklist. I will immediately suspend research and request new ethical approval if the project subsequently changes the information I have given in this checklist.	√
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the Code of Research Ethics issued by the relevant national learned society.	√
I confirm that I, and all members of my research team (if any), have read and agreed to abide by the University's Research Ethics, Governance and Integrity Framework.	√

Signatures

If you submit this checklist and any attachments by e-mail, you should type your name in the signature space. An email attachment sent from your University inbox will be assumed to have been signed electronically.

Principal Investigator
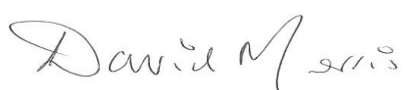
Signed J Sekhon .... (Principal Investigator or Student)

Date 24th June 2010 ....

Students submitting this checklist by email must append to it an email from their Director of Studies confirming that they are prepared to make the declaration above and to countersign this checklist. This email will be taken as an electronic countersignature.

Student's Director of Studies

Countersigned   (Director of Studies)

Date   24 June 2010

I have read this checklist and confirm that it covers all the ethical issues raised by this project fully and frankly. I also confirm that these issues have been discussed with the student and will continue to be reviewed in the course of supervision.

This item has been removed for data protection reasons. The unabridged version of this thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester library, Coventry University.

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Appendix 10: Emerging Themes

Participant 1 – a second generation Asian British – Indian/Sikh male; lives at home in Coventry, on final year of Computing degree.

The overall feel of interview one was down beat, through his tone of voice a negative attitude was sensed, he didn't express satisfaction with any aspect of university life, he didn't smile – even though he aware of the importance of achieving highly, he lacked motivation and was not engaged in his studies.

Participant 1	Themes
'Didn't get enough points.'	Felt a failure before entering HE
'Put up with lectures'	Accepting, blasé
'Forms don't bother me'	No interest
'I'm from Coventry, its home. University is only a step. Not bothered if it's welcoming.'	Identifies with home town *(3)*
Should – at teacher conferences, try and keep in touch/teaching process.	Interested in the institute, suggested improvements.
Used 'bothered' 3 times.	Non committal
One main influencing factor - *'Lack of interest'*	No motivation or engagement

Notes
Route and journey affected him resulting in feeling a failure before starting HE - *2.1 and 2.3*
General background, lives at home with family, parents didn't attend HE – *2.2*
Entered HE due family advice, lives in extended family - *7.1*
Prior attainment, disappointed with A-level results – *5*
Felt strongly about lectures – *6.6*
Coursework aspects, preferred written work, not much on a computing course - *6.7*
Chose wrong course – *Concept 2*
Lack of belonging due to living at home, no extra-curricular activities – *4.1*
Personality clash wish to select own tutor – *6.3*

Participant 2 – a second generation Black British – African female; lives in student accommodation, on final year of Business and Marketing degree.

The overall feel of interview two was that of a student who is interested in her studies, wishes to do well and is satisfied, but not as well as she wants – seeing the cause of this in institutional facilities. 'Middling' – sense of belonging and welcome, but not completely.

Did want to completely identify with the institute. More positive, than negative (scale 1-5, ….3.5). motivated (future benefits) and engaged.

Participant 2	Themes
'Achieved a merit at BTEC'	Positive/middling *(5)*
Lots of different ethnic groups here, embrace different cultures (focus not on one).	Feels welcome *4.1*
East African society, not joined for the university, but to be with others of own culture	Wants to belong *(3- identity/ethnicity)*
Sister came here, saw CU at her graduation, thought 'wow'.	Entered with a positive *image* of Coventry University
'OK' with university – poor facilities, paper, printing	Had an opinion on how improve facilities/procedures e.g. *Interested in university*
There is an avenue to see, but don't go/see benefit of...work is done, can't be improved.	Extra support won't improve grade *(6)*
Not enough information, thought CAW was for law students only. But will make an appointment in 3rd year	Committed, but *blames institute*
One main influencing factor - *this year affects/determines what/will do next year (future)*	*Future aspirations*

Notes
Social background, committed, parents and sister attended HE – *2.2*
Maybe positive due to prior achievement, achieved merit at BTEC - *2.3*
Feels welcome, lots of ethnic mix - *4.1 and 4.2*
Identifies with own culture, joined a society for this reason – *Concept 3*
Family influenced first course choice – *7.1*
Interested in support departments– *6.1*
Work affects studies – [no code]
Positive peers – *7.3*

Participant 3 – a first generation mature Black – African female; lives at home in Coventry, on final year of Nursing degree.

A 'functional' student, isolated from the university, except for course, valued any support. No emotions were communicated during the interview, she was however motivated to

achieve to provide for her family/career. Engaged in her studies – valued feedback from tutors concerning placement. Short responses.

Participant 3	Themes
Always wanted to do 2ⁿᵈ degree, always wanted to do nursing. 2.2	Clear goal, aspirations
GNVQ completed, followed by access course.	Studied many years ago, feels she is not good enough Re-entering education No self belief *(2.1 – academic journey)*
No time for other things; family (children), work, attend lectures and go. Not member of any clubs/societies.	No time to immerse self into university life. *4.1*
	Not part of University life due to other commitments. Detached/ Sounded distracted
Referencing improved by internet, some lecturers gave guidance.	*Wish to improve/interest* Independent approach
See him after placement for updates. Helpful, guidance on what to include in portfolio;	Beneficial to have a tutor/guidance *6.2/6.3*
CAW – once, not really helpful, not much time given to me. Use library for books.	other departments not interested in individuals *6.1* Responsibility on self to improve
One main influencing factor - *lot on my hands – family, work.*	Achievement is individual responsibility *Outside responsibilities* influence

Participant 4 – an international Black – African male; lives in student accommodation, on second year of Marketing degree.

A highly motivated student, wanted to do well and nothing was going to distract him; engaged in his studies showed an interest in his course. Positive feel to interview, participant was happy and enthusiast.

Participant 4	Themes
Typical in Nigeria/back home they /we put education first.	Always expected/aspired to enter HE *2.1/2.2*
Lots of African students, good mix, made me feel welcome; really helps when there are people from back home in a new place – can relate to them.	Identifies with own ethnicity group, feels welcome as a result at Coventry University. *4.1/concept 3 identity*

Definitely positive, they go all the way; broad sense of what you're supposed to do, no problems.	Pleased with all aspects of course, enthusiast. *6.6*
'Yes happy, (feedback) helps with next piece of work, tell you in good time Discussing this years modules last year, helped'	Awareness of how grades can be improved, interested. Satisfaction. *6.8*
One main influencing factor - *'My drive, lots of resources available to help you get a first class degree as long as you put your mind to it. Got people looking up to me'*	Individual responsibility/motivation to achieve Is a *role model* to others

Notes
High socio-economic background, parents attended HE (see interview) - *2.2*
As a January starter had limited choice of course – *5.1*
Peers were not influential - *7.3*

Participant 5 –
A second generation Asian British – Pakistani male; lives at home in Birmingham, on second year of Business and Advertising degree.

'Middling', didn't appear too motivated but expressed a wish to do well and an interest in his course. Engaged, as did achieve a 2:1 previous academic year. Neutral feel of interview, neither positive nor negative.

Participant 5	**Themes**
'Because it involved creative thinking. (Satisfied with course) alright, better compared to some of my mates' (Specific course issues)	Applied specifically for course, knowledge of course
Step ahead (HE) because of recession	Aspirations
School didn't encourage me	Lack of Encouragement
Alright, it's a bit far – expensive to commute, I am here all the time though, (commuting) doesn't affect my attendance.	Wish to be at university, attend lectures
'Alright, wasn't first choice (3rd choice) – attended Cov due to change in family situation; didn't attend open day'	Not 'keen', something he has to put up with.
happy kind of, can't really remember – 2:1	Not much interest, eagerness Not a priority to do well
yes, no not been; forgot to book an appointment.	Non-committal, Laid back
'Friendship groups, if you hang around with someone who is lazy – do same as them. If they work motivates you. 7.3	Peers influence

Notes
From lower socio-economic status/social background, lives at home, parents didn't HE, mother didn't influence – *2.2*

Took a mixed route into HE, completing one A-level and BTEC together – *2.3*

Participant 6
 A second generation Black British – Caribbean female; lives in student accommodation, on second year of Marketing degree.

Lengthy journey to HE, demonstrating a desire to enter HE; appeared detached and negative. Not interested in university life, lived alone as didn't wish to live with other students, was motivated as interested in 'self'. Engaged in studies but not university.

Participant 6	Themes
Then did diploma in travel and tourism from levels 1-3, was at FE community college for 5 years (long route into HE) 2.3	Persevered to enter HE Determination Wish to be in HE
Business & Marketing second choice. Was offered my second choice, so took it. 5.1	Desperation HE, not course that was important
Family and school encouraged	Encouragement
Some lecturers are approachable, some aren't. When I do approach – explain the work and are helpful to level of understanding. *OK, no personal relationship with any tutor 6.3/6.3*	Formal relationship with tutors, not forthcoming. Student needs to make the effort to approach tutors.
(Lectures) 'most of them are OK, can't be pleased with all. Not regularly see any tutor – either not available, or "I'm too busy"'	*Accepting,* doesn't have high expectations.
'No don't want to (partake in extra-curricular activities); didn't want to get committed to something I'm not going to continue doing' 4.1	No benefit seen of joining wider university activities for self.
One main influencing factor - *'Research, lots of research, academic research (need training)'*	Academic skills influence

Notes
Social background, parents didn't attend HE, student was self -motivated – *2.2*
Friends recommended Coventry University – *5.2*
Student communicated that work doesn't affect studies – [No code]
Tutors were too busy – *6.2*

Participant 7
An international Black – African male; lives in student accommodation, on second year of Business and Finance degree.

A highly motivated student, achieving highly, involved in university life – engaged; positive and enthusiast verbally and non-verbally throughout interview.

Participant 7	Themes
'Dream of better tomorrow, coming from Botswana, I can see benefit of studying in England (such good education compared to home), benefit of doing well. 2.1/2.2	Aspirations, clear goal to succeed
Everything is welcoming – lecturers – well trained, make you feel welcome, teach so we understand. Onus is on us to research. 4.1	Very satisfied with all aspects of university. University not to blame. Responsibility is students own to succeed.
Students are very friendly, tolerant of other cultures, makes you feel welcome.	Individuals (students) make the university welcoming.
Member of African society, accounting society *Play sport – athletics club.* 4.1	Fully participating in university life. Taking every opportunity.
'Happy, exposure to both markets (business and finance) examples on tape – practical; application software' 5.3/coursework aspects	Interest and knowledge of course. Satisfaction.
'When I see others get high grades – motivates me to maintain a high level of excellence. *Self disciplined/ wouldn't skip lectures because of friends.* *Came here (not for friends) for myself; will face the world alone.* 7.3	Seeing achievement of others is motivating. Self motivation. Responsibility on self, future.
All teachers teach well, homogenous – teach same way therefore it is upon the individual.	Lecturers not to blame, individual responsibility.
One main influencing factor - *Motivated, from background – seen parents suffer/ grandparents - not well of, see why I need to do well. 2.2*	Motivation is an influence Family circumstances

Notes
Social background of student – parents attended HE and encouraged him to attend also – *2.2*
Lots of encouragement around - *Encouragement*

Participant 8

A second generation Asian British – Pakistani male; lives at home in Birmingham, on a post-graduate Psychology course.

Despite expressing negative experiences throughout education (including HE) was motivated to succeed, engagement varied – enjoyed post-graduate course more, participated in student union activities some years; participant was verbally expressive throughout interview, rarely smiled.

Participant 8	Themes
The area I come from not many people are educated. *Everyone was surprised I entered HE – school didn't encourage me, had low expectations from me 2.2*	Not expected to achieve. Entered HE with low expectations of self, from others.
Close to home, can continue boxing and boxing for university.	Commitment to home and university.
1st year – attended all lectures, getting good grades, 1st year grades better than 3rd year grades. (NOCODE – attendance)	Started well, believing attendance was the key.
Yes, alright. Hear some complaints about lecturers from friends 'lecturers don't like me.' 6.3	Wants to feel welcome, despite negative comments.
I knew my dissertation was better	Teacher labels
Lecturer wouldn't help – thought I left it (dissertation) too late, so he didn't bother with me. 6.3/4.1	Pre-conceived images on both parts – student and lecturer.
One main influencing factor - *Not a question of ability, now I put my head down and can get good grades.*	Individual responsibility Time spent on studies

Notes
Dad was disappointed after one parents evening – *encouragement/proud*
Changed A-levels after 1st year, wrong subject choices or difficult – *2.1, 2.3*
Felt intimidated to approach lecturers– *6.3*

Participant 9
A second generation Asian British – Indian male; lives at home in Coventry, on final year of Creative Computing degree.

'Middling', wasn't highly motivated or engaged in course or university life, putting this down to being from Coventry. Appeared to be a 'better' student before entering HE due to more attention at school; didn't appear interested or pleased.

Participant 9	Themes
Achieved a DDM, at 6th form in Cov. Cov was my first choice (why) because I wanted to stay at home, it's easier. *2.2/ 2.3*	Performed highly at level 3, decided Coventry University based on one condition only – stay at home.
Guess so, feel welcome, come for lectures then go home, no need for me to spend time here.	Detached from the institute – middling. Not interested in University life.
Not member of any society.	Lack of commitment.

I am from Cov, just being in town, extension of school life. (Identity 3.1)	
1st year not too good – didn't know what to expect …..at school was pushed and helped, no one to push at university, just told to do it.	Lack of knowledge of studying at university.
Better chance of getting a job	Aspirations
Hang around with friends I've known before from Cov	Identifies with home town/peers 2.2/7.3
Yes can approach – help is available if wanted depends on lecturer	Relationship with tutors 6.3
One main influencing factor - *mark improved in 2nd year because I did so bad in 1st year, pulled socks up.*	Individual responsibility Time spent on studies

Notes
School and parents encouraged – *lots of encouragement*
Coursework issues and choice (look at interview)
Parents didn't attend HE, lives at home in Coventry – *2.2*

Participant 10
An international Black – African female; lives in student accommodation, on final year of a Business Finance degree.

A hard-working, conscientious student, highly engaged – effort put in, but appeared concerned about her achievements, negative emotions communicated. Motivated and wished to succeed – could see the benefits of success.
Makes use of tutor, other departments….

Participant 10	**Themes**
Parents wanted me to enter HE, both parents have masters…..However I am pleased I entered HE, and realised I really wanted this. 2.2	Entered HE upon encouragement.
Yes, friendly lecturers and people, good environment.	Positive attitude.
Feel very welcome, more than I expected. College told us not to expect much – lecturers are busy, friendly people, good facilities. 4.1	Entered HE with low expectations, institute exceeded expectations.
In the 1st year was member of Black, ethnic society, attended a few times, after that no….died out.	Enthusiasm reducing.
Fees not paid on time, some confusion.	Even though Coventry University was at fault, institute not blamed.
Some don't have time for students, have time for some students, those who get good grades, they are closer to good students; should see all students as one. 6.3	Student/Lecturer relationship.

One main influencing factor - *Own life, lectures did what they could. All alone, miss home, not enough money.*	Individual responsibility, not the institutions Personal issues

Notes
School and college encouraged – *encouragement*
Non traditional route taken - access course, then foundation year – *2.3*
Found lecturers approachable, liked the fact could e-mail/alternative forms of communication – *6.3*
Used a tutor a lot in 1st year, no contact 2nd year – *6.2*
Used a variety of other support departments – *6.1*
Felt grades could have been better on alternative course – *5.4*
Positive peer influence, *we discuss/influences me – 7.3*

Participant 11

A second generation Asian British – Indian female; lives at home in Coventry, on final year of Illustrating and Graphics degree.

Participant lacked confidence in her ability/overall – as a result 'middling' motivation; satisfaction and belong improved with time at university, was now pleased/satisfied. Engaged since being more involved with university.

Participant 11	Themes
Not sure which path I wanted…..did foundation course to see which way to go. Not necessary for me to go, if I knew what I wanted to do in the first place. (Indecisive/lack of advice)	Uncertainty
School encouraged, in particular art teacher – suggested foundation degree at university. (and parents 7.2 – encouragement)	Encouragement, listening to teacher
From Coventry – live at home (for 4 years), have a life outside and in university. 2.2	Identifies with university, and life outside university.
Each year has been different, didn't enjoy first year or 2nd year. 3rd year found my niche, enjoying it more – the course mainly. Social aspect – get to know everyone more.	Engagement increases with time.
Belonging, yes improved. Part-time job at the university…..Depends on student's effort they put in themselves. Would have been better if I'd been more involved. 4.1	Involvement with institute results in belonging.
One main influencing factor - *Different modules/course…..changed. Asked us at end of 2nd year which we prefer.*	Course structure Choice (of modules/within course)

Parents didn't attend uni – 2.2
There was support, I could go to – technicians helped (specialist support) -6.1
Went to tutor when I didn't understand, helped a lot – 6.3
Hardly have any lectures – workshops – 6.6

(modules) changed throughout the 3 years – got better – course aspects
when I started the course wished I'd chosen something else – 5.4
if peers decide to do something good would (let them influence). Negative people don't
come to uni – 7.3
family help me out drive me, get materials – 7.1

Participant 12

A second generation Asian British – Indian female; lives at home in Birmingham, on a
diet year half 2nd/3rd year of Advertising and Business course.

An enthusiastic, motivated student, enjoying university life. Positive and happy; engaged,
wished to be more engaged into university life. Pleased to be part of the institute.

Participant 12	Themes
When I hear Cov Uni anywhere I feel that's part of me, feel part of it. Seeing the logo everywhere…..Member of Facebook cov uni group….4.1	Feels proud, belongs
No students union, never have been, don't feel the need to, and would like to help with uni - open day student ambassador. (represent uni)	Positive feelings towards institute Wish to belong
Friends on and off course, if you don't know anyone on your course, you don't attend. 7.3	Friendships on course
Down to my commitment, if you want good grades, you'll study hard to achieve them.	Need goals, achievement is the individuals responsibility.
Yes came to open day, came into this building, took us to the post graduate suite, liked the facilities;	Chose institute after attending open day
Yes comfortable to go and see lecturers. If lecturer knows what he's talking about you have more people attend/concentrate.	Positive about all aspects of university. Interested and observant.
See her more often, keeps you motivated.	Encouragement leads to motivation.
One main influencing factor - *Knowing that when you get your coursework back and you get your mark, it'll encourage…..you to do better.*	Present grades and feedback

To get a better job…(interview) – aspirations
Have 3 older siblings—followed in their footsteps – 2.2/7.1
HND – 2.3
From Birmingham commute – 2.2/ethnicity
Most of my friends who live out don't get as much work done – 7.3 /ethnicity
Chose own course – 5.1
Feedback – don't explain enough – general comments – 6.8
Made use of a tutor, tells you what to achieve – 6.2
Lectures- time and talking effect – 6.6
School didn't touch on it (HE) – lack of encouragement

Participant 13 - an Asian British – Indian male; lives at home in Coventry, on second year of Marketing degree.

Lacked confidence – overall and in ability, appeared shy. Has integrated into university life due to meeting like-mind peers. Would integrate further if not living at home. Partly engaged, again due to peers and support. Motivated to succeed.

Participant 13	Themes
A levels at 6th form at school; didn't get enough points therefore foundation. (prior attainmnet2.3)	Entered HE with disappointing grades Lack of confidence in ability
1st in immediate family to go to uni, no parents didn't attend, older 3 siblings didn't either. They all encouraged me to go to uni because of their own experiences. Mum is very proud, (2.3)	Family influence and encouragement Make family proud
(Factors effecting grades) lack of points – mostly due to lack of concentration, dyslexic – had trouble writing. (2.3)	Awareness of what influences grades
- Came to Cov because of grades, not enough UCAS points so had to do a foundation course, enjoyed this year so decided to stay in Cov. Like convenience of uni, have home comforts, same friendship groups – didn't have to branch out; (2.3)	Didn't come to Coventry out of choice Satisfaction with foundation course and Coventry University Convenience of living at home
I have a job, live at home, no bills so money gets spent on stuff I want – computers, etc. so lots of distractions at home. (3.1/ethnicity)	Accommodation – living at home is distracting
Teacher's supportive, help available, enquiry about dyslexia dealt with quickly; lots of support. People are very friendly, have made new friends on the course, hang out at uni, helps with group work. 4.1	Satisfied with numerous aspects – Support Friendships on course
No clubs, tried to join hockey, but not good at it. 4.2 *Come in when I need to because I live at home, hang around at breaks between lessons.*	Wish to belong Lack of confidence Convenience of living at home
Make all proud – want to get a good grade, be successful, get a good job.	Aspirations Please others
Doing some research and interviews at the moment – like practicals.	Coursework
***Other departments** – no don't use but have heard of them, don't feel comfortable going. Usually go to another student/friend.*	Lack of confidence to approach support departments.

Have friends from outside (from Coventry) and at university. Yes would go with friends (if they said lets go into town). Yes they do influence me, but my current group of friends aren't like that – good attenders.	Peers influence - positively
One main influencing factor - *myself, I want to do well, all down to me, even with nagging, it's my concentration and determination.....will continue to push (myself) to do well.*	Individual responsibility – aspirations Own ability to focus on studies

Support of family, school teachers - support
Want to be successful, get a good job – aspirations.
Has positive mixed peer group – 7.3

Participant 14 - an Asian British – Indian female; lives at home in Wolverhampton, on second year of a Business and Marketing degree.

A hard-working, highly motivated student, mainly due to being encouraged by teachers and family. Appeared satisfied and pleased, but felt she these feeling could be improved, not entirely satisfied with all aspects. Engaged, completes all work to best of her ability.

Participant 14	Themes
Parents had a great influence on my studies, did want me to do great because they didn't go to university; had a lot of influence on the decision. (Encouragement)	Family influence – no individuality/choice
A levels got enough points to get onto degree, worked hard at A level (religious school) worked hard at my studies.....school teachers were good - helped me get a good grade at teaching, supported and encouraged, (Route – 2.3 journey 21.)	Hard work gets results Awareness of schools encouragement
(Live at home interfere?) its ok for me I am motivated and a hard worker I would come in get up in the morning, for others it might be difficult get distracted.	Knows she is a hard worker, has what it takes to succeed.
'Writing centre been to, nowhere else, they checked my work how to improve it – standard of writing, went myself not advised, know about them from 1st year told about them'.	Motivated and engaged

At uni and on my course have got quite a few friends, we help each other, supportive in that way (Mixed peers on course 7.3	Supportive friendships
Type of course made me chose Cov – advantage, personal skills module – helped influence decision.	Interested in course, knowledge, researched
Before I attended was scared, was hard, but everyone here was helpful and warm – nice uni would recommend it 4.1	Lacked self-confidence, Coventry University was welcoming.
One main influencing factor - *Could do better if I didn't spend that much time travelling, living with other students does influence working time, equal on both sides' peers – let's go out.*	Personal issues (not institutional)

Improve prospects for better job I future - aspirations
Parents didn't attend HE – older sister did – 2.2
Lots of facilities available – no code
Good students make use of facilities (would also use a tutor – helped to talk…about course, check progress)– 6.1, visited CAW by self.
Thought I would get higher but it was my first year – try and work harder
Relationship with tutor depends on module – too bug feel intimidated – quiet student
Type of course made me chose Cov – advantage, personal skills – course aspects
Parents wouldn't let me stay out of home - ethnicity

Participant 15 – a Mixed – White and Black Caribbean female; lives in student accommodation, on second year of Marketing and Advertising degree.

Participant 15	Themes
Why Coventry University - *Course here interested me more - Opportunities I can get from this course, placement, stuff like that interested me more. (course aspects)*	Knowledge of course Course will help reach aspirations
6th form encouraged, helped us do UCAS forms, someone came from Cov to talk to my class, when I came here first day here he came and spoke to us. 6th form college, step by step helped with personal statements, lecturers checked (encouragement)	Interest shown by institute School encouragement
Family supportive – yeahhh….they wouldn't not let me go to uni, I'm the first girl to go to uni. (encouragement)	Proud to be in HE
Ethnic classification – *mixed British/Caribbean, in high school – no option for me, always other, felt really*	Wants an identity

excluded. Not the best thing – put down as other.	
Welcome/belonging *– yes, being able to call lecturers by their first name, sort of helps, did it at A- level, not the same when told off.....students, like if you turn up, it's your own fault, openness, email teachers, 4.1 – smaller aspects feel welcome*	Smaller aspects makes student feel welcome
Wouldn't approach – just nervous, new people, would e- mail them or ask a course mate (reliable).	Lack of confidence with approaching lecturers Other forms of communication are vital
Didn't really see the need (for 1:1 tutor) unless I have a problem. (Would it help encourage you?).....not really, I know it can improve but I notice those things myself and try and make the change. Grades are down to me.	Grades are individual responsibility Aware how to improve grades
how do you motivate yourself – if I don't get the work done, I remind myself I'm in my 2nd year, good job, motivates me). Have a mix of friends (good group).	Peers influence Aspirations influence
One main influencing factor - *I don't want to fail, get a good job, make money; mum – feel if I don't do as good, have a lot to live up to,*	Aspirations

BTEC media – route
Parents didn't attend uni – first girl – 2.2
Ethnic classification – felt really excluded
Wish it was more practical than written – 6.7
No wouldn't approach lectures/I didn't say much (1:1 tutor) not comfortable working I a group – detached, wants to be left alone
Yes (satisfied with course, I like the new system of handing in work – smaller aspects – feel welcome
If I'd stayed at home would have been distracted – 7.3/ethnicity
Yes) engaged – mixed good peers

Participant 16 – an Asian British – Pakistani female; lives at home in Coventry, on second year of Business and Marketing degree. First generation in family to attend university.

Participant	Themes
Basically my Dad didn't get a chance to go to uni, but he wanted to. He wanted me being the oldest daughter to, 2.2/encouragement % proud	Parents influence Achieve higher

I wanted to go to Birmingham didn't want to go far I don't see any point to it, really unless it's a really good uni like Oxford, but I'm not on that level, kind of thing. – iamge of uni/self-belief/identity	Coventry University viewed as lower status
I had a cousin come here to Cov.....she just told me what it's like and I was at city college I used to walk past here.....If I came to an open day, I knew what the uni was like but maybe for the course I could have come I was interested in because anyway, so I wanted to do it regardless of whether it was hard/easy or whatever.	'Knows' the university because it is in Coventry Specific course
my RE teacher, I got an A* in that, she was Asian as well, she was on that level and used to talk to us. We'd sit in the front row of that class but other teachers were just normal, just teach us, wouldn't explain or say you can do it 6.3	Achieved at school due to good relationship with teacher
He had passion for what he done, he loved marketing that's what got me into it. (tutor 6.2 and prior education)	Inspiring teaching
If you go to the interview; for me because I wear a scarf as well they look at me first and for my next one I didn't wear a scarf so I got a job.	Awareness that appearance influences others
(Optional modules) -yeah like E marketing that's optional but they did say if you do it it's an advantage for you cos a lot of work placements look for E-marketing. (coursework aspects)	Course advice is listened to /valued Wish to be employable
I'm happy even if I'm not getting 1st's, I'm ok with that cos I'm not clever.	Accepting of grade Deserving of lower grade
One main influencing factor - *the teachers, it is quite independent but there's still like, ' you need to..'you know, when you think about placement, jobs.....they're approachable – help me at this stage of work, they talk to you (lecturers 6.?)*	Teacher encouragement, advice and interest helps/pushes student

Mum – you have other priorities as well – ethnicity
I done a BTEC.....I got DDM – confident/prior achievement/ route 2.3/2.1
No British Pakistani – ethnicity classification
I prefer written work, can come back to it, with an exam – if you fail it, you fail it – coursework aspects)
X told me to write in third person – feedback helped -6.?
I'm part of ISOC(Islamic society of Coventry) – clubs linked to culture

Participant 17 – a Black – African female; lives in student accommodation, on first year of Advertising and Marketing degree.

Participant 17	Themes
'In our country if you don't have a good degree you can't find jobs, also in our country if you decide to go to uni, because of different strikes and things can affect your studies, tend to do more (years)'. (Aspirations)	Aspirations – wish to be employable Value education in UK
Coventry (University) allow you to re-sit and pass, don't pay. Everybody knows everybody, it's a small town.	Considering re-sits – lack of self-confidence in ability.
could share my problems with my tutor and tutor could guide me and tell me exactly what to do.	Tutor guidance and communication cold improve performance.
had a tutor last year he looked through my coursework, draft, correct it, you go back and correct it, get a higher grade	Knowledge of how to improve own performance
thought I'd get 80 something, but got 75% (higher expectations?); so much effort I put into it, I expected more.	Grade doesn't reflect effort
One main influencing factor – *Distractions…..If you are not careful you can just fall, I think basically all we need to know how to balance our social life with our academic life*	Require time management/planning

Family encouraged – father really believes in education – encouragement
Parents and sibling attend HE – 2.2
We have Moodle – we can go and see things, should have a type of communication –
Deadlines/time limits – coursework aspects
Not actually my course choice – late starter -

Participant 18 - a Black – African female; lives in student accommodation, on first year of Advertising and Marketing degree.

Participant 18	Themes
Like the communication between teachers and students, like the fact you have your tutors.	Wish for communication with lecturers
(Tutors should) like ask us questions, "do you understand, what do you understand?", like interaction.	Learning should be checked.
(1:1 tutor) would love to have one.	
Always full, when you're looking for text books might not get it or someone borrowed it, it's frustrating.	Feeling frustrated – resources

Last course was accounting and finance, too much calculations I hate maths, so I chose simple course without calculations.	Course choice – easier to achieve
I might just let it pass or ask how to improve.	Lack of motivation
One main influencing factor - *Distractions, like friends, parties.*	Require time management/planning

Yes family encouraged, every parent wants…
One parent attended HE..4 (siblings at Cov uni) 2.2
I wanted 70 something, but got 55%. Improve next time- study harder, read through the questions, I'll reflect- coursework and course effects grades
Don't like talking and talking (lectures) –
Tutor made us plan/timetable – own life

Participant 19 – an Asian British –Indian male; lives at home in Birmingham, on second year of Advertising and Marketing degree.

Participant 19	**Themes**
I wanted to stay at home. I got conned into it, they made it sound so much better than it is basically, was like a re-sit of maths and English. I tried to get out of it – but it was too late.	Mislead – course information Limited options Dis-satisfaction
BTEC in software development. Was good at business at school, too easy, boring, so did computing – but found it tedious, script upon script, lot to read through	Indecisive, lack of advice Self confidence in the subject (Long route – 2.3)
Then college, sorted myself out, got GCSE's and then did everything, BTEC level 3 ND.	Able to achieve when applies himself.
Hate this university to the core, don't know what it is, just doesn't look nice. Doesn't feel welcoming, if you go down the corridor feels like you're in a hospital – don't like it. Maybe because I'm a lot older than other students	Unable to feel welcome/warmth towards institution. Institution not appealing to older students
I'm paying for something I'm not happy with….. I don't want to do no advantage…..only half a module, doesn't give full in-depth knowledge (don't see the point).	Unhappy with modules, course structure Doesn't see relevance of their teaching
made most my friends on foundation, chat to every single person, even now. Can't be arsed to make more friends.	Associates with peers on initial course Friendships formed on arrival

been to the Hub to do group work 4/5 times, 1 night out in the Hub – hated it. Canteen – don't like their food, extortionate for students, quality of food is disgusting.	Other aspects of university contribute to dissatisfaction
would love smaller class sizes, some seminars there's like 60 people.....lecturers allow them to come in, they should be more strict.....People I talk to who are quite shy, not willing to put hand up and willing to interact	Interested in improvements Offers suggestions Care shown towards peers
not pleased with uni effects grades. Last year's grades, I didn't care as long as I passed, I put minimal effort in last year. To do with myself..... Yes if I did feel more welcome I probably would try harder	Not interested in achieving higher grades Institution effects grades Aware how grades can be improved
Went to a couple of tutorials in 1st year liked my tutor at that time, he was a laugh/good. In a group of 4 (would be good 1:1) – would help more, I don't know if uni does it. If I was in top 20 uni's then I probably would (referred to league tables) cov is 57th, don't have high expectations of uni.	Would like interaction with lectures Doesn't hold institution in high status
No(school/college encourage), everyone else – yes	
If I'd worked harder I would never have come here	At Coventry – as a 'punishment'.
Everything around theory.....don't consider new approaches. *(Education system) diminishes our creative side – did research to find that out.* *Don't like the environment of lectures.*	Interested, takes notice of the studies. Offers suggestions, researches Feels able to learn and achieve, system is preventing
read that, write a report',	Different ways of assessing required
I don't read the feedback; look at the grade if it's a pass I don't care. (guidelines?) I already know how I can improve, I don't put effort into it, I know what it's gonna say. If I put effort in I'd easily get a first every time.	Lack of interest in university systems, Confident of ability Awareness of how grade can be improved
One main influencing factor	

Applied for course late, was going to attend another uni – not own uni choice effecting his performance.
Course own choice, never really wanted to come to uni, family pressure – 7.1
Mum went to uni, mum influenced a lot..you'll end up (working in a supermarket) –
Loath group work, wants choice paying – coursework aspects
Do need a tutor in 2nd and 3rd years, see students stressed out –

Worked lots of hours
Applies the negative peer pressure

Participant 20 - an Asian British –Indian female; lives at home in Coventry, on second year of Advertising and Marketing degree.

Expressive, determined. Refuses to get distracted. Highly motivated due to the fact she enjoys studying. Engaged in studies – competitive, desire to achieve good grades.

Participant 20	Themes
First child in family (to go to university) had loads of reasons for coming to university but the main one was to enhance my learning, I genuinely liked education.	Keenness to enter HE Eager and interested in learning
I didn't do very well at school did do good at GCSE but generally had a talent in business – I really enjoyed it, they said take that further in university – so that's why I went.	School encouragement/advice is valuable – listened to.
No one stressed how important A levels were, that's why I didn't put enough effort into A levels; I didn't have that kind of person telling me what to do.	Encouragement is needed.
The support I get, if I went to a different university I wouldn't get the support I get at Cov that's why I'm doing really well…..My tutor, spent so much time explaining to me, e-mail, got e-mail back straight away. That's why I carried on, didn't quit.	Finds the institution supportive Support is helps her achieve
(See's university logo) I'm proud – Coventry- I go there.	Feels proud to be part of institute – belonging.
no societies, wish I was, every time I go it's over, always late – get no chance, never hear of these things/take notice of them	Wish to participate further in university Lack of information
Yes helped me decide….. Helped me realise which course I wanted to do.	Right choice of course
Like interaction, like (pick on you) makes it…you express your ideas, makes me more confident as well when I'm put on the spot but I enjoy it. If they didn't I'd just be sitting in the corner and I wouldn't know if I'm right/wrong either, like to be challenged.	Desire to be pushed – improves learning (lectures – 6.6)
Generally happy with uni cos I get good grades and I attend, I make good use of it.	Aware she needs to work hard and stay committed.
One main influencing factor - *hard work, sleepless nights, coffee. Me. I motivate myself and my parents*	Achievement is individual responsibility

Parents didn't attend HE, but they said its good to do something different and work hard in life- 2.2

Business BTEC and 1 A level, didn't get enough points, no on stressed how important – route 2.3

Chose Cov because of course and wanted to stay at home, did attend open day, helped chose course

I'm proud (to see logo) – Cov I go there

Practical and written coursework, don't like group work, rely on others for grade – coursework aspects

Wants more specific feedback, not vague – feedback.

No1:1 tutor, would like one – can discuss coursework issues.

Appendix 11: Clustering Themes Table

1. Previous attainment/school shapes students	Felt a failure before entering HE. *Achieved a merit at BTEC* – previous attainment. *School encouraged, teacher suggested foundation degree at university*.
2. Accepting/ blasé attitude/lack of interest	*Put up with lectures* – accepting. *University is only a step. Not bothered if it's welcoming* – blasé. *Forms don't bother me* - Non-committal laid back.
3. Identity – identify with university/own ethnicity/home town.	*Hang around with friends I've known before from Cov* - Identifies with home town/peers. *Lots of African students, good mix* - Identifies with own ethnicity group, feels welcome as a result at Coventry University.
4. Feeling welcome and proud (to belong to institute) OR a wish to belong. (smaller aspects increase sense of belonging).	*Lots of African students, good mix, made me feel welcome* - as a result at Coventry University. *Would like to help with uni* - open day student ambassador – wish to belong.
5. Holding a positive/negative image of the Institute.	*Sister came here, saw CU at her graduation* - Entered with a positive image of Coventry University. *If I'd worked harder I would never have come here* – negative image.

6. Aspirations/goals	*This year affects/determines what/will do next year*. *Step ahead (HE) because of recession.* *'Dream of better tomorrow, coming from Botswana, I can see benefit of studying.*
7. Lack of self belief/confidence (in studying, communicating). .	*Didn't get enough points therefore foundation* - Lack of confidence in ability. Lack of confidence to approach support departments. *I'm happy even if I'm not getting 1st's, I'm OK with that cos I'm not clever*.
8. Aware how own grades can be improved (institute can't help)	*I notice those things myself and try and make the change. Grades are down to me.* *I don't read the feedback. I already know how I can improve. If I put effort in I'd easily get a first every time.* *Myself, I want to do well, all down to me.*
9. Influence of peers, especially friendships on course.	*At uni and on my course have got quite a few friends, we help each other, supportive in that way.* *Friends on and off course, if you don't know anyone on your course, you don't attend.* *Friendship groups, if you hang around with someone who is lazy – do same as them. If they work motivates you.*
10. Teaching staff (communication/relationships)	*OK, no personal relationship with any tutor.* *No effort by both* (tutors or students). *Some don't have time for students, they are closer to good students.*

11. Lack of knowledge of studying in HE/lack of advice.	*1st year not too good – didn't know what to expect …..at school was pushed and helped, no one to push at university, just told to do it.* *School didn't even mention it* (HE).
12. Encouragement (Family/school)	*School and parents encouraged* – lots of encouragement. *Parents wanted me to enter HE, both parents have masters…..However I am pleased I entered HE, and realised I really wanted this*.
13. Course aspects – modules delivered, having a choice of modules and resources.	*Knowing that when you get your coursework back and you get your mark, it'll encourage….* *Doing some research and interviews at the moment – like practical's.* *(Optional modules) -yeah like E marketing that's optional….. it's an advantage for you cos a lot of work placements look for E-marketing*.

Appendix 12: Ethnicity Effect Diagram

Figure 7.1: Typology of Influential Factors on BME Attainment

geographical area largely BME

not being able to relate to institute
Lack of 'ethnic' activities

EXTERNAL FACTORS

(strong) home culture

discrimination at school

1. Previous Experience
School

Middle Ground

Feeling welcome

language

understanding of ability

2. Product
Course Aspects

Image of institution

Little communication with staff

lack of advice/support

confidence due to

3. Others
Teaching Staff

high expectations from HE.

need HE to get on in life

false image portrayed

teacher stereotypes/ attitude

INTERNAL FACTORS

1. Self/Individual
Attitude, Aspirations
Lack of self-belief/ confidence,
self-awareness

- distinctive lifestyle
- portrayals in media
- home/family circumstances

perception of how others see/view us

2. Others
Peers on course
Encouragement

parents lack knowledge due to ethnic disadvantage/opportunities

3. Knowledge
A lack of HE knowledge

lack of relationships outside of ethnicity