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The significance of faith for Black men's educational aspirations

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It is uncontested that British African Caribbean men are minimally represented in elite UK higher education institutions. Even as data demonstrates that African Caribbean males are more likely to study further education than White males[1] and that the proportion of UK-domiciled Black students pursuing higher education has increased since the 2003/04 academic year (ECU, 2014), the representation of Black students throughout the Russell Group remains low.[2] Less than 3% of the entire Russell Group's student population comprised British African Caribbean students in 2011/12 and 2012/2013 (ECU, 2013, p. 203; ECU, 2014, p. 358). However, according to the 2011 Census, 'Black' people represent 5.5% (3.1 million) of the total UK population (ONS, 2015). For the few Black men who are successful in attaining acceptance at these exclusive universities, to what assets or capitals do these young men attribute their ability to get to and successful graduate from these institutions? Interviews with 15 Black male students who attended Russell Group universities in England and Wales were analysed and several 'capitals' or resources were identified as beneficial to their ability to succeed. Drawing on Bourdieu's work on cultural and social capital, this paper advances the concept of 'faith capital' as a unique recognised asset that six of the participants described and reflected upon as being influential on their academic trajectories. Based on findings from the ESRC-funded research *Exploring the narratives of the few: British African Caribbean male graduates of elite universities in England and Wales*, this paper discusses these six participants' accounts of their higher education journeys in relation to how they identified faith as a resource that was influential to their academic success.

Keywords: faith capital; British African Caribbean men; aspiration; achievement

Introduction and usage of the terms 'Black' and 'BACM'

British Black African Caribbean academic success is an under-researched area (Byfield, 2008), and few studies in the UK have sought to identify factors that support and promote it (Rhamie & Hallam, 2002). There is a need for research that can develop an understanding of social processes that can positively impact achievement in academic settings for British African Caribbean males through the representation of their experiences in UK educational institutions. This study explored young Black men's narratives about factors that influenced their academic pursuits towards elite higher education (HE). One of the recurrent themes of many participants was how faith as a capital resource[3] motivated them to academically achieve, as well as resist

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succumbing to challenging negative circumstances that were often prevalent in the communities where many of them grew up. Using a Bourdieusian intersectional approach to class, race and gender, this research explores these Black men's counter-narratives,[4] where they identified 'faith' as an asset that positively influenced their educational journeys. In acknowledgement of the complicated historical background of the term 'Black' in the UK, throughout this paper the term 'Black' is used to refer to young men of British African Caribbean descent. The terms 'Black' and British African Caribbean men (BACM) will be used interchangeably when discussing the participants and their accounts.[5]

A small African minority have lived in the UK for the past four centuries (Killingray, 1994). They primarily came to the UK from British African colonies as seafarers, who unofficially settled in British docks, or came to the UK temporarily as students seeking to further their education in hopes of improving their financial prospects upon return to their own countries (Daley, 1998). Many African immigrants came from prominent African families as descendants of chiefs, or were sponsored by missionaries or British mercantile companies that traded in Africa (Killingray, 1994). By the late 1940s, some well-established African communities had begun to develop in Britain.[6] From the 1960s through to the 1980s, additional influxes of African immigration to the UK to acquire advanced educational and professional qualifications occurred, which often placed Africans in a higher socio-economic status compared with Caribbeans—whom Britain had specifically recruited, beginning with the *Windrush* ship in 1948, as cheap labour to help rebuild the British Empire's struggling economy after World War II (Coard, 1971; Ramdin, 1987). Even though many Caribbeans arrived in the UK with skills and qualifications, these were customarily identified as unacceptable in the UK, which led Caribbeans to take the least desirable jobs, housing, pay and schooling. Consequently, Caribbeans were often positioned at lower socio-economic statuses or trajectories than Africans (i.e. British Africans were more likely to be middle class compared to British Caribbeans). Despite this difference, for the purposes of this paper, British African and Caribbean groups are amalgamated as one due to their similar higher educational challenges and outcomes. Based on the 2011 Census and HESA data, 82.8% of students attending Russell Group institutions are White, compared to just 0.5% British Caribbean students and 2.1% British African students (ONS, 2011 in Boliver, 2014). Resources (in this case faith) that these students identify as helping them to succeed in these environments are an interesting and important area to explore with respect to how they may shape their aspirations.

Cultural and social capitals and habitus' significance

There are many interpretations of social and cultural capital that have been linked to the 'theoretical giants' of these concepts, Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu. Some academics have conceptualised social capital within families and the community as functioning as a significant producer of young people's future human capital that emerges from the development of community norms, expectations and values arising from close personal relationships and ties (e.g. Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). However there has been a growing disagreement with Coleman's approach which has led to the

rise of contesting perspectives that consider social capital as resources which are firmly rooted within networks (Dika and Singh, 2002; Horvat, Weininger and Lareau, 2003). Bourdieu interpreted social capital as an array of resources or assets, embedded in networks that can be accessed by social actors (Bourdieu 2001).

Recent studies have shown the positive effects that family resources can have on educational outcomes for secondary students (Rollock *et al.*, 2011; Vincent *et al.*, 2012, 2013). Using Bourdieu's framework, researchers have found social networks to be sources of social capital, whereby the family was influential in providing students with resources to facilitate success in the educational system and future occupations (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Bourdieu, 2001; Horvat *et al.*, 2003; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Devine, 2004). Bourdieu identifies cultural capital as encompassing specific values within education. Research suggests that linking education to personal values and goals can promote students' sustained school engagement, positive educational beliefs and higher academic aspirations, which can influence grade performance and educational outcomes of academic achievement and persistence (Regnerus, 2000). Aspiration or 'aspirational capital' has also been identified as promoting a culture of possibility that enables ethnic minority people to hold onto hopes and dreams beyond their present circumstances (Yosso, 2005; Basit, 2012).

Putnam defines social capital as 'networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives' (Putnam, 1995, pp. 664–665). He suggests that community, or 'civic engagement', is an essential facet of social capital because participants' involvement leads to various forms of collective action (Reynolds, 2006). Coleman advances a functionalist approach to social capital, where he sees it as embedded in family and community relations that develop mutually beneficial relationships of responsibility and reciprocity (Morrow, 1999).

Each of these theorists has a different approach to defining social capital, and both provide substantial contributions to social capital theory. However, neither Coleman's nor Putnam's work addresses capital resources in relation to 'race' and ethnicity.[7] Social capital is a resource that is fluid, and is shaped and constrained by ethnic, racial, gender and social class divisions 'within society' (Reynolds, 2006, p. 1093). For this reason, Bourdieu's work is better for the present research as he partially recognises sectional aspects of class, gender and race in society. Bourdieu's work has been used to examine the inequality underlying issues of people's access to social resources in relation to class, gender and race (Bourdieu, 1961; Skeggs, 1997; Reay *et al.*, 2001a,b; Goodman, 2009; Go, 2013).

Like most of Bourdieu's concepts, 'capital' has been written about at length (Reay *et al.*, 2001b, 2005; Power & Whitty, 2006). Capital is most often represented in three forms: economic (money and assets), social (social relationships and networks) and cultural (unevenly distributed and socially distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge and practices, embodied as implicit practical knowledge, skills and dispositions, and objectified in particular cultural objects and credentials) (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998; Smith, 2003). Lareau and Horvat (1999) emphasise that possessing capital does not necessarily mean that an individual can realise a social advantage from those resources. Capital requires activation or agency in order to have value (Lareau, 1989). Lareau and Horvat (1999) and Rollock (2007) contend that cultural capital is content-specific, and its currency varies across different social spaces where struggles

for legitimation and power exist. Possessing capital without having the skills and/or agency to activate it can render the capital worthless. How legitimate a person's capital is, is determined by the dominant power structures that determine the value of the capital (Ball *et al.*, 2011). Bourdieu described habitus as the representation of an individual's daily practices or 'way of being', which are acquired through 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which . . . function at every moment as a matrix of *perceptions, appreciations, and actions*' (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 82–83; italics in the original). He sees habitus as being developed based on an individual's 'subjective rationality', which is shaped by experiences in their family, community and social environment. Bourdieu's work demonstrates how, within education, norms of behaviour are often set based on middle-class values, which place children from those backgrounds at a distinct advantage. For example, Lareau and Weininger (2003) and Gillies (2005) contend that through their middle-class parents, children are socialised into acquiring middle-class attributes through learned cultural codes, styles and educational talents—including demeanour and ways of conversing—that aid in easing their successful acclimation to school and other social institutions. This socialisation equips these children with an instinctive awareness of what is intrinsically appropriate or, in Bourdieusian terms, habitus (Bodovski, 2010). Middle-class habitus aids and supports success by instilling an orientation that promotes the achievement of educational capital, therefore legitimating it with more status.

The poker game of capital in relation to class and educational field

The relationship amongst class, educational field and habitus is always dynamic and mutually dependent. Bourdieu acknowledges that fields often involve games, where capital is distributed unequally based on a 'field of struggles' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 101) over the exchange of resources, where individuals endeavour to maintain and/or improve their positions. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) use the metaphor of a poker game to describe the relationship between social class and forms of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Each card and each hand that poker players possess has a different value. The accumulation of capital through poker chips (i.e. cultural, economic and social) is partially determined by the cards that each player is dealt, and varies relative to the worth of each player's hand. Lareau argues that 'individuals play their cards with varying temperaments and skill, but the field encompasses the rules of the game at any moment' (Lareau, 2001, p. 84). Middle-class players are more dominant within the field of education, as they enter the educational poker game in a more privileged capital position due to the habitus-formation process of their upbringing and family connections. The dominant (middle) class enjoy a larger supply of gambling chips (i.e. forms of capital) than the working class, and are more likely to have a better 'feel for the game' because they are more attuned and acclimated to the implicit routines of the particular field, which enables them to be seasoned and successful players in educational field games (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1973, 1979; Manton, 2008).

Consequently, working class or marginalised students (e.g. some BME groups) may be less experienced poker game players. Because the game (field) *may* be new to many working class and BME students, some of them may more anxiously and

deliberately focus on the primary rules of the game and miss out on the understated yet nuanced and implicit clues of the game that more seasoned middle-class students may be aware of that help them advance.

Within the educational poker game and institutional habitus of elite universities there are elements of Bernstein's theory of pedagogic device (Bernstein, 2000; Singh, 2002), which requires students to have 'recognition and realisation' of the rules of the field (Bernstein, 2000, p. 121). Hence, while the privileged children fit into the world of educational expectations with apparent 'ease', the less privileged or unprivileged may find the experience more challenging to navigate.

Research on how White working-class boys and girls (Willis, 1977; Skeggs, 1992; Reay, 2002a) actively compete and engage in the development of their own cultural capital is often considered to be oppositional to the habitus and field of secondary institutions (Sadovnik, 1991; Bernstein, 2004). Here we contend that in certain circumstances, the same may hold true for some working-class and middle-class aspirant BACM students, whose capital resources are often perceived as less relevant or valuable by the dominant group and holders of power within secondary and elite HE institutions (Willis, 1977; Skeggs, 1992; Reay, 2002a,b). Within the context of a 'race' and space, for example, Rollock (2014) contends that even though she is a Black middle-class person, she does not always possess similar capital resources as a White middle-class person. The fact that she is Black does not endow her with an equivalent degree of 'privilege' as a White person of a similar stature or, as Reay *et al.* (2007, p. 1042) contend, 'to embody both whiteness and middle classness is to be a person of value'. Similarly, placing a working-class habitus in a middle-class education system increases the likelihood of alienation and conflict for working-class students (Hooks, 1994). Secondary schools and universities have distinguishable institutional practices and habitus that they implement through particular behaviours and cultural norms, which are maintained and reproduced. In some cases, BACM culture is removed from White middle-class behaviourally accepted norms within the education field, which can lead to isolation of these students within such educational fields (Dumangane, 2016). However, it is suggested that faith may be an influential poker chip that can assist BACM to reduce some of the imbalance they experience in the educational poker game field.

The impact of faith on cultural capital

Over a century ago, Durkheim explored the influence of faith on societal behaviour (Durkheim & Swain, 2008). He highlighted the significance of religious rituals (e.g. church attendance, membership and participation in church activities) as influential in developing and promoting solidarity and values amongst members, which beneficially strengthen faith members' assets. Research contends that faith communities may serve as an impetus for the development of proscriptive norms such as hard work and normative behaviours, as well as establishing strong bonds with civil social responsibilities—such as improving local communities (Eklin & Roehlkepartain, 1992; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Elder & Conger, 2000; Mattis *et al.*, 2000; Muller & Ellison, 2001; Brown & Brown, 2003).

Faith may act as a resource or capital that can assist UK Black students with educational habitus that is incongruent with the educational field they inhabit, to address challenges and manage and/or acclimate within these environments. In the UK there is a growing body of work addressing ways that faith may shape some ethnic minority group identities, higher education and career aspirations and drive for qualifications, in particular within some South Asian and Muslim groups (Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006; Shah *et al.*, 2010; Bhatti, 2011; Basit, 2012). Much of this work emphasises how researched participants expressed and prioritised a religious and/or Muslim identity as a central component in moulding their values, attitudes and normalised study practices (Shah *et al.*, 2010). Minimal research on faith as a capital resource has been conducted about Black men in the UK (Byfield, 2008). Research in the USA indicates that American youth who participate in religious activities gain distinctive types of cultural capital through biblical literacy that provides them with an understanding of historical western contexts of world civilisations (i.e. the Egyptian and Roman Empire, the Middle Ages and the Reformation) and scriptural moral teachings, which can help to foster values and discipline (Iannaccone, 1990; Smith, 2003). It is suggested that through this exposure, young people's understanding of history and civilisation is enhanced, which can assist them in gaining an advantage in terms of their ability to appropriate cultural capital based on religious teachings (Iannaccone, 1990). Smith (2003) contends that young people involved in religious activities gain advantages with regard to their ability to appropriate cultural capital that fosters positive, constructive attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. These attributes increase their ability to converse on a variety of subjects, which can enhance their performance in humanities and social science courses (Smith, 2003). Affiliations with faith have also been shown to have a positive effect on US urban youths' educational expectations related to their mathematics and reading achievements (Regnerus, 2000). It is argued that similar effects have occurred with BACM, who have been involved in faith-related activities in the UK.

Bourdieu's contribution to research on 'race' as well as class

Most researchers focus on Bourdieu's work as a class theorist (Sayer, 2005; Weininger, 2005; Wright, 2005; Crompton, 2008; Savage, 2010). There has been considerably less focus in the UK on the significance of his early works in relation to race (see Bourdieu, 1958, 1961). Bourdieu's early writings in Algeria identify him as someone who saw racism through the lens of colonialism and hoped-for post-colonialism (Seibel, 2004; Yassine, 2008).

Bourdieu's theories of class, habitus and race use an element of subordination that aligns well in a post-colonial era based on the understanding that 'race', like class, is manipulated and exercised based on an unequal distribution of various capitals possessed by the dominant group (White people and middle-class people). Bourdieu's work has been used by several researchers to understand forms of domination and discrimination based on race as well as class (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Reay *et al.*, 2001a; Horvat, 2003; Yosso, 2005). Horvat (2003) contends that the use of habitus:

> . . . impels social scientists to examine race and class in terms of a specific field of interaction. This means that we need to look at fields of interaction more carefully. We must examine the power context or 'rules of the game' within which action takes place to arrive at an accurate understanding of practice. (Horvat, 2003, p. 11)

Thus, a Bourdieusian perspective is a useful tool to incorporate an intersectional approach to class, 'race' and gender when exploring the experiences of BACM in elite UK educational institutions (Hall, 1980; Skeggs, 1994, 1997; Reay *et al.*, 2001b; Gillborn, 2008, 2010; Rollock, 2014).

Methodology

The initial research study involved 15 male participants, recruited from 10 Russell Group institutions in England and Wales; 4 participants attended Oxbridge and the remaining 11 attended other Russell Group universities. The criteria for recruiting from these 10 institutions were twofold: (1) universities chosen were known for their academic and research excellence and were either Russell Group or Oxbridge institutions; (2) all institutions were within six hours' travel time by public transport, enabling reasonable access to participants for discussions. Accessing BACM at elite institutions was often challenging, due to the minimal number of Black men who actually study at first-class universities.[8] Purposive and snowball sampling was conducted to recruit participants via e-mail, recruitment flyers, African Caribbean Society meetings, Facebook and WhatsApp. After several months of recruitment, 13 participants had been secured, the majority of whom were current students or recent graduates (within 3 years of completing university). However, given the scarcity of 'home' BACM who responded to the call for participants, it was decided to augment the sample size with two additional Black men, both of whom had graduated from elite universities within the past 7 years. All participants were aged 30 years or younger. Of the six individuals who identified faith as an influential resource to their education journeys, three attended Oxbridge institutions and three attended other Russell Group universities. Five out of six of these participants were from working-class backgrounds. Information on participants' backgrounds (e.g. ethnicity, class, university, area of study, type of work/further study) is located in Table 1. The primary research questions for this study were as follows. What is the student experience like for BACM 'home' students studying at predominantly White elite universities in the UK? How have 'race'/ethnicity, gender, class and culture influenced these students' constructions of their identities and their ability to gain access to, attend and graduate from elite UK universities? A list of other underpinning areas of exploration is located in Table 2.

As participants would be sharing sensitive, personal perceptions of their university experience, in advance of all interviews they selected a pseudonym of their choosing to protect their identity and help ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Owing to the low numbers of BACM attending these institutions—and in the interests of protecting their privacy and confidentiality—the names of their institutions have been removed to maintain their anonymity. Participants were also informed that they had the right to refuse to participate in the research and could withdraw at any time.

Table 1.   Participants' Background Information

Participant Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Class (as defined by participants)	University	Area of Study	Graduation	Type of work/Further Study
1. Kevin	British African	Working Class	Russell Group	Econ/Maths	Graduated by end of study	Social Community Change Worker
2. Peter	Mixed race: British African and Irish	Lower Middle Class	Russell Group	Econ/Maths	Recent graduate within past 2 years	Financial Servicesand Part time Self Employed Business Owner
3. Damien	British Caribbean and Mixed race Irish	Working Class	Russell Group	Econ/Maths	Recent graduate within past 3 years	Self Employed Business Owner
4. Franco	British African	Working Class	Russell Group	Econ/Maths/Business	Graduated w/in the past 7 years	Pursuing a Graduate Degree at Russell Group Institution
5. Duncan	British Caribbean	Working Class	Oxbridge	Econ/Maths	Recent graduate within past 1 year	Social Community Change Worker
6. Allen	British African	Middle Class (*downgraded self to Working Class*)	Oxbridge	Arts and Humanities	Recent graduate within past 1 year	Social Community Change Worker
7. Jason	British African	Middle Class	Russell Group	Medicine	Graduated by end of study	Attending Medical School, Russell Group Institution
8. Alex	British African	Middle Class	Russell Group	Law	Graduated within the past 6 years.	Marketing and Promotion Business Field

Table 1.   (Continued)

Participant Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Class (as defined by participants)	University	Area of Study	Graduation	Type of work/Further Study
9. Bob	British African	Poor 'Underclass'	Russell Group	Arts and Humanities	Graduated w/in the past 3 years	Pursuing Graduate degree at a Post-1992 Institution
10. John	British African	Middle Class	Russell Group	Law	Graduated by end of study	Contract working towards becoming a Barrister
11. Jay	British African	Middle Class	Russell Group	Law	Graduated by end of study	Contract, Int'l and Commercial Law
12. Edmund	British African	Working Class	Russell Group	Law	Graduated by end of study	Pursuing a Masters at Oxbridge Institution
13. Duane	British Caribbean	Working Class	Oxbridge	Econ/Maths	Graduated by end of study	Social Community Change Worker
14. Ted	British Caribbean	Middle Class	Oxbridge	Arts and Humanities	Graduated by end of study	Pursuing a Graduate degree at Russell Group Institution
15. James	British African	Working Class	Russell Group	Law	Graduated by end of study	Working for Law firm under contract

Table 2.   Research Questions

Research aims	Research questions
To explore how British African Caribbean men experience elite universities.	What is the student experience like for BACM 'home' students studying at predominantly white elite universities in the UK?
	How have 'race'/ethnicity, gender, class and culture influenced these students' constructions of their identities and their ability to gain access to, attend and graduate from elite UK universities?
	Further Underpinning Research Questions
	How have black males' secondary educational trajectories impacted their experiences in elite institutions?
	What kinds of resources and capitals (e.g. familial, socio-economic and cultural) do elite university black students perceive as well as fail to recognise themselves to have? And are these men able to successfully exercise these resources within elite HEI environments?
	Did participants experience discriminatory incidents during their educational journeys – and if so how did they manage these situations?

Participants were informed that a thorough university ethics process had been gone through, and that the research would be carried out in compliance with the ethical requirements of the Social Research Association (SRA), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA)'s revised ethical guidelines.[9]

Initial interviews were conducted face to face at the participants' institutions or at locations of their choosing and averaged 1 hour, 45 minutes to 2 hours, 50 minutes. Within three to nine months of the initial interviews, second and third interviews were conducted with all participants either in person or via Skype, depending on logistics and access to participants. Second and third interviews varied from 25 to 90 minutes. To gain further clarification of some of the issues discussed, two additional follow-up interviews were conducted with a participant from Oxbridge and one from another Russell Group institution. In total, 47 in-depth interviews were conducted over the course of a year. These young men studied a range of subjects, including STEM, Law and Humanities areas (see Table 1). All participants were British 'home'[10] students in their third/final year of study or recently graduated alumnus.[11]

The initial interviews used 'third objects' (Winnicott, 1968; Pink, 2001a,b), which helped to facilitate informal discussions with the participants. For example, an ice breaker exercise was implemented using cufflinks to try and relax the participants and encourage them to share their stories. All participants were asked to select three different cufflinks that reminded them of each of their parents/care givers as well as someone who was special in their lives. Having piloted this method in advance, third objects[12] were found particularly useful for discussing personal or emotional issues, and helped encourage reflection. Additionally, a topic guide was used to assist in addressing some core research areas.

The benefit of qualitative data methods—what was explored

Qualitative data methods are ideally suited to small-scale projects that seek to provide in-depth findings. An interpretative interview process was chosen in an effort to gain understanding of a sample of young Black students' experiences, as described by them (McMillan, 2008). The research adopted a narrative approach that focused on listening 'to others rather than making assumptions about their existence' (Skeggs, 1997, p. 33). This type of data collection is ideally suited to 'understanding' and 'description', rather than 'measurements' and 'prediction' (McKernan, 1991). The primary purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of BACM getting into and completing study within elite HE institutions through identification of key factors, elements and support systems that these students reflected upon as being significant and/or influential to their academic success. Through in-depth interviews, considered as dialogue, voice was given to the stories of those who are frequently unheard (Collins, 2000). This method also links more closely with 'ways of knowing that are also more likely to be used by people of colour' (Collins, 2000), through which the participants' thick, rich and descriptive counter-stories were explored, regarding their beliefs, concerns, aspirations and experiences of and through predominantly White UK elite universities.

How the data was analysed

Participant data was analysed using a critical race theory lens, which acknowledges the importance of understanding the 'everyday' experiences of people of colour (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) to 'counter' the deficit storytelling of these 'others' (Alexander, 1996; Van Dijk, 1999; Žižek, 2008). Centring the lived accounts or counter-stories of people of colour helps to disrupt implicit dominant discourses about 'race' and racism (Gillborn, 2006). This framework provided the space to conduct, analyse and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of colour.

Initial analysis of the first interviews was carried out immediately after they were completed. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly read through, for familiarity with the text. Personally transcribing the interviews allowed for reflection, and an awareness of simple things like pregnant pauses and 'uhmms' within the dialogue, which were then included in the transcripts. The next stage involved listening to the MP3 file recordings alongside the transcriptions of participant stories to glean a more intimate understanding of the stories. Field notes taken during the discussions were also referred to, alongside the transcripts and MP3 files.

The data was coded and indexed to identify and more closely analyse key issues, recurrent events, activities and categories that emerged. NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to explore and manipulate the data. Theoretical coding was done to identify dominant themes to summarise participants' experiences, which helped make the data analysis and conclusions more meaningful.

An additional strength and limitation of this research study is the 'emic'/'etic' 'race'/ethnicity relationship shared by the researcher and the participants. The researcher's 'race' may have assisted in building rapport with the participants by helping to put them at ease about sharing information about their sensitive and sometimes

emotional experiences. However, this 'race' may also have acted as a limitation in that the researcher's cultural experiences are somewhat different from those of the participants. There was also the benefit of insights about some of the nuances of language and cultural experiences that a non-Black 'outsider' might not understand. This positioning provided a useful perspective of a 'situated knower' (Collins, 2000) or an 'outsider within' (Collins, 1986). Simultaneously, the researcher was an 'outsider' as a Black American who was unfamiliar with some of the British/cultural/localised slang language and terminology that the participants used, which they readily explained. Lastly, the researcher was an 'outsider' in being neither British African nor British Caribbean, with a cultural background of second-generation African American lending both similarities and differences to the researched participants' lived experiences.

Faith's resilience and academic benefits—who identifies with it in the UK?

Bourdieu's (1986) notion of the habitus and its role in the religious field expands capital beyond economic forms to include non-economic applications such as social, cultural and symbolic capital. Faith or belief can be understood as an intangible resource or capital attained from one's ongoing interplay and involvement with a higher power, and is helpful in explaining the educational outcomes that some of the participants have achieved. It is also a resource that is unevenly 'distributed', with adults of Black ethnic origin attending church at rates over three times as high as White adults (48% versus 15%) (Ashworth & Farthing, 2007, p. 8). Research suggests that linking education to personal values and goals can promote students' sustained school engagement, positive educational beliefs and higher academic aspirations, which can influence grade performance and educational outcomes of academic achievement and persistence (Regnerus, 2000). Faith 'capital' can benefit one's health by bolstering optimism and serving as a form of support that helps make sense of uncertainties and difficult circumstances (Strawbridge *et al.*, 2001; Nooney & Woodrum, 2002; Brown *et al.*, 2004).

In the UK, Black churches are one of the few institutions owned and operated by the Black community (Patacchini & Zenou, 2016). Religious beliefs and church communities in the UK and USA have linked the development of ideological beliefs and social networks which have been found to impact individuals' lifestyles as well as influence positive educational outcomes (Byfield, 2008). US literature on religious behaviours and beliefs has found faith beneficial in promoting academic achievement outcomes through decreased risky behaviours and substance misuse (Chandy *et al.*, 1996; Regnerus, 2000; Milot & Ludden, 2009). Religious communities may build social capital in part by providing norms, values and information for young people as they often articulate proscriptive norms through the discouragement of certain life choices (i.e. sexual promiscuity, substance misuse), morality and personal behaviour, as well as civil social responsibilities—including the impetus to want to improve conditions in their local communities (Eklin & Roehlkepartain, 1992; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Elder & Conger, 2000; Mattis *et al.*, 2000; Muller & Ellison, 2001; Brown & Brown, 2003; Strhan, 2014).

Researchers have demonstrated a strong positive correlation between religion and academic achievement (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Channer, 1995; Glaeser & Sacerdote,

2001; Rhamie & Hallam, 2002; Guest *et al.*, 2013), as well as how UK and US university students' Christian identities influenced their behaviour within university life (Guest *et al.*, 2013; Sharma & Guest, 2013). Yet, minimal research has been conducted on faith as a resource specific to Black male youth in the UK (Byfield, 2008). Two of the underpinning questions in the present research were: (1) What kinds of resources and capitals (e.g. familial, socio-economic and cultural) do elite university Black students perceive, as well as fail to recognise, themselves having? (2) Are these men able to successfully exercise these resources within elite HE environments? The remainder of this paper explores how, for six of the participants, faith 'capitals'[13] were identified and discussed as having assisted them to aspire to achieve—despite encounters with challenging environmental factors such as underperforming schools, marginalised community localities, gangs and peer pressure.

The protective and aspirational benefits of faith capital

In the following subsections, we will see how the Black respondents in this research variously drew upon their faith as a resource. From the research, five factors emerged as having been significant in helping these young Black men get into and stay in elite White institutions: (1) Faith as a motivator and a form of protection from destructive behaviours. (2) Church and faith as a source of skill acquisition, application and support. (3) Faith participation and protective and aspirational influences. (4) Parents, faith and effects associated with prayer. (5) Faith's influence on civil society and community-focused goals. Each of these factors will be addressed individually, through a thematic exploration of various participants' narratives.

Faith as a motivator and a form of protection from destructive behaviours

For three of the participants, having faith and/or being involved with a church served as a form of protection from adverse challenges within their communities. Allen was a British African participant who attended Oxbridge. He self-identified as working class, though aspires to be middle class. He grew up in a two-parent family, but his father died when he was 11 years old. Growing up, Christianity was a central tenet in Allen's family. In conversation with Allen, he was asked whether there had been any role models that had impacted his academic progression and success. He identified the church:

> The church as an institution ... the institutions are the role models for me as opposed to the particular individuals ... when I went to university I wasn't a regular member of any faith group or anything. I go to my college chapel because they did services ... I didn't really go very often ... And then I realised that your personality is really shallow when you're not in a church ... Because in a church, you are (pause) well good churches, totally embody all of the things that Christianity is about. They're places where human beings are at their best, I believe. And I wanted to be part of that. And it's nice to have a church with spiritual values and a support network of other people who are Christians to talk to, to fellowship with. (Allen, working-class British African Oxbridge graduate)

Allen's account offers the church as an institutional role model that embodies the values that he believes all people ascribe to attain and represent in their lives. In addition

to being a place of important values to him, he appears to identify the church as a place of refuge where people can fellowship together and support each other. Three of the six participants discussed God and the church as being a central foundation to their motivation and ability to succeed, not just in education, but in life in general.

Research shows that for many African American students, religious belief is an underlying force that serves as a preventative measure (i.e. prevention from being involved in crime, gangs, drugs, etc.), which helped Black students focus on achieving educational success (Byfield, 2008). Additionally, faith serves as a source of strength and as a survival mechanism in the face of peer pressure and other adversities. Thus, instead of adopting pathological responses to adverse situations, Black students with faith are able to employ an adaptive strategy whereby their faith and hard work ethic helps them to achieve success (Byfield, 2008).

James is from a two-parent family and self-identifies as working class. James grew up in an urban neighbourhood that he defines as 'tough'. In the following excerpt, James attributes his ability to stay safe and avoid becoming involved in his neighbourhood's criminal culture to his faith and his church:

> I think faith helped me stay away from a lot of these things because when they saw me and I spoke to them and quite a lot of them went to my secondary school as well because as I told you they pretty much took anyone that wanted to go to school even people that had been excluded from other schools would come to that school. I used to see them in school and outside of school but they knew that I was a Christian because my church is in [neighbourhood location] (. . .) and so it was a thing of oh, he's a 'church boy' in a sense, so they knew that I wouldn't get involved in what they were getting involved with. But there was sort of a respect for me. (James, working-class British African Russell Group graduate)

James' persona as a 'church boy' in his community acted as an alternative identity and provided him with a safety net, or an 'affordance' from being coerced into joining gangs. It served as a resource which prevented him from being harmed by local gang members.

Faith and BACM's involvement in university socialisation: Drinking

Excessive drinking as a social event at university was another factor that four of the six participants' narratives discussed being able to avoid due to their faith involvement on campus.

Drinking to socialise is a common and accepted activity on most university campuses. It is also an expected rite of passage or induction into the foray of university life and young adulthood (John & Alwyn, 2010; Bartlett & Grist, 2011; Robinson *et al.*, 2014). For those who don't drink, navigating the pressures to consume and be accepted can be challenging. In the following account, James describes some of the socialisation aspects of university life that did not fit with his values and how finding other faith-minded people at university enabled him to avoid what could be termed a 'fresher-pressure' imbibing campus culture. In conversation, James mentioned 'pub crawls' with which he refused to become involved. He was asked to explain this term:

> It's when you go from pub to pub and drink in every pub and essentially you're meant to get in a drunken stupor . . . There was a bit of pressure [to join in] but I think it's about

finding people that have the same mind set. So I joined a society called '[religious gospel choir group]' and it's quite mixed. But there's quite a lot of black people (pause) I think that's where I know the most black people from – and a lot of ethnic minorities as well. So it was there that I made a lot of friends … and that's what reduced the pressure of sort of wanting to fit in somewhere that I knew I was never going to fit in because that's just not me. (James, working-class British African Russell Group graduate)

James' account suggests that his involvement in a university faith-based choir served as a social capital outlet during his university years. As he does not drink, when other students were out drinking he socialised with people in his religious choir group who appeared to share similar values to his own, which helped alleviate the pressure to become involved in drinking in order to fit in. It is suggested that James' ability to find like-minded students who were involved in faith-based activities acted as a source of 'capital' protection from pressured activities which were incongruent with his faith and values.

Church and faith as a source of skill acquisition, application and support

Research contends that church can act as an influential positive source for developing values and other dexterities that may be transferable and beneficial skills within school environments (Glaeser & Sacerdote, 2001). Allen is a British African participant who attended Oxbridge. He self-identified as working class, but aspires to be middle class. He grew up in a two-parent family, but his father died when he was 11 years old. Growing up, Christianity was a central tenet in Allen's family. In the following account he discusses how religion and attendance at an array of churches impacted his upbringing:

Education and faith were two pillars of my household. They were equally important and connected (…) My dad was a very devout Catholic so we went to St. [name of church] church [where] I did my Holy Communion. My mother was Pentecostal. So after going to St. [name of church] church we'd drive down to [her church] and worshipped there as well. They were long services which meant long days. We also listened to American, British and Nigerian televangelists on the TV, on the radio and on tape at home. We'd sing hymns. There'd be [African] spirituals playing in the house. We prayed all the time which is quite moving and powerful.

Researcher: How you do think that affected your upbringing?

It was overwhelmingly positive. My parents would often go to other churches during the week, like as a leisure activity (…) and it was good for me because I think it helped instil a lot of those values around patience, discipline, respect and love. A sense of morality in the world was really strong from that upbringing. We had a wide social network of people at church who really cared about us. And, particularly after my dad died I think that was very important and useful (…) the church was supportive. I think it gave me some advantages. It meant that I was very comfortable. And to this day I'm very comfortable in any type of church and religious setting. And I'm quite open and tolerant about [other religions]. (Allen, working-class British African Oxbridge graduate)

Allen's account of his diverse religious experiences discussed spending Sundays attending long church services at his parents' different denominational churches.

Traditionally, Pentecostal and Black majority churches have longer services than majority White churches (Byfield, 2008, p. 196). He acknowledges that his church attendance inculcated him with values of patience, discipline and respect, all of which are principles that are beneficial to doing well in an academic environment. Glaeser and Sacerdote (2001) contend that 'sitting still and listening' in church are transferable skills that are beneficial in school environments, where students must sit and listen for considerable amounts of time. Like Allen, four out of six faith-identifying BACM's accounts held the view that their religious beliefs developed their character through discipline, respect and morality. Allen says that the church also acted as a network of support for him after his father's death, which upholds previous research findings on the supportive benefits that faith may provide (Strawbridge *et al.*, 2001; Nooney & Woodrum, 2002; Brown *et al.*, 2004). Allen attributes his broadened horizons on diverse forms of religion to attending various church denominational services, enabling him to be open-minded towards other faiths. It is suggested that Allen's diverse religious experiences provided him with social and cultural capital, which afforded him a tolerance to comfortably engage with people of various faiths and backgrounds. His involvement with people from a variety of denominations may also have enhanced his habitus' ability to fit more seamlessly like a 'fish in water' (Dumangane, 2016, p. 68) within the Oxbridge environment, where people were from a multiplicity of backgrounds and faiths different from his own.

In a follow-up interview, Allen made reference to the social skills he developed through church attendance. Asked whether he felt faith had influenced his academic capabilities, he said:

> Yeah in being able to talk about religion and faith. Like it definitely did. I think actually going to those Pentecostal churches and actually listening to these televangelists was an early lesson in like how to do research. How to read something and get some meaning out of it. How to communicate that succinctly to somebody else in public. And what was effective. You know like the idea of giving a speech or talking in public about something. Yeah, think I was learning those things by watching these guys in a way that my friends who didn't go to church I don't think got. (Allen, working-class British African Oxbridge graduate)

Allen appears to hold the view that church attendance enabled him to develop certain research skills that were beneficial to his academic environments. Allen mentioned in a separate discussion not included here that while at university he ran for multiple public office positions where he was required to speak in public, which he won. His account suggests that he gained valuable capital through research, communication and public-speaking skills from attending church, which were beneficial in his development and presentation of arguments when he ran for public office at university. US research found that Black youth from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who were routinely involved in religious activities (church services and church youth groups) gained positive educational outcomes from the experience (Barrett, 2010). Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical framework of social and cultural capital can be employed to suggest that religious socialisation bolsters attitudes, outlooks, behaviours and practices among students' educational practices and outcomes.

Faith participation and protective and aspirational influences

Four of the six faith-centred participants identified faith as a source of support, strength and protection and an affordance towards future ways they could become academically competitive and improve themselves and their communities. Edmund is British African. He grew up in a two-parent family, though his father died unexpectedly while he was in sixth form. Even though both of his parents had some degree of higher education, when the family relocated to the UK they initially had to take low-paying jobs well below their academic capabilities as their credentials were not recognised as valid. Gradually they were able to build their way back into jobs in their respective semi-professional careers. Edmund self-identified as working class, as he grew up on a council estate in a disadvantaged, predominantly ethnic minority urban area. However, he aspired to be middle class one day. Edmund's ambitions were classified as middle-class aspirant. He attended a church with a strong pro-education youth culture in his teens that was instrumental in helping him develop and structure his values. In the following excerpt Edmund discusses how prior to his conversion to Christianity during secondary school, he was occasionally involved in nefarious activities which could have landed him in prison or worse.

> I mean basically I grew up in a tough area in [urban UK city] It was tough. And basically I went through a period whereby the type of friends that I had they were getting involved in gangs in these kinds of things … And I then made this decision to find God (…) and actually then I felt more secure to be honest because I knew I could go home and my parents wouldn't be expecting a call from the police. And I knew that people wouldn't be after me. So to be honest, it was tough in terms of trying to segregate myself from [the gangs] but eventually I found a church which was useful and had many young people which I could associate myself with and yeah, I didn't feel unsafe. (Edmund, working-class British African Russell Group graduate)

Edmund's account credits faith and his church involvement with preventing him from having a life with less positive outcomes. He acknowledges the immense pressure and temptation to hang out with local youth who were affiliated with gangs. Yet he emphasises how finding faith and God acted as a security mechanism for him as well as his parents, who would no longer have to worry—wondering if he was involved in activities that could jeopardise his freedom and life. Faith acted as a mechanism of constraint (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000; Bonino *et al.*, 2005) to prevent him from becoming involved in nefarious situations that may have drastically affected his educational and life outcomes. Below, Edmund shares the challenges and temptations of growing up in his neighbourhood. He also emphasises the church's role in directing him onto a path towards academic success:

> I think because everybody (pause) everyone looked at things in a very short term manner. They wanted everything instantly. This culture of instant gratification. Like quick money. You know get things quickly. They never thought long term. Most of the people around me (…) always thought about the now rather than the future. And from that you've got a lot of people who (…) were just working in order to just spend on material things like clothes, trainers. [But] (…) when I started getting into my church I found youths who were very long-term thinkers (…) and they knew what they wanted. And I wanted to be one of those people, you know. I wanted to know what I wanted. And I think the academic competition – it was a healthy competition within the church amongst the youth. So in my

> year we had (…) probably about 12 to 15 of us went to Russell Group universities …. I think there was definitely a positive correlation in terms of from when I started to take my faith seriously. I think [teachers] tried to pinpoint what it was that changed in me. They (…) started to say, 'Oh yeah Edmund is quite a serious guy'. (Edmund, working-class British African Russell Group graduate)

Edmund's narrative can be interpreted as an engagement in the exercise of future time perspective goal setting (Lewin, 1942), as a result of his involvement in his church. Adopting this mind-set enabled Edmund to take into account his past and present, which also motivated him to concentrate on and aspire to positive long-term future goals (Nuttin & Lens, 1985; Lens, 1986; de Bilde *et al.*, 2011). Edmund discussed his church youth group involvement acting as a form of encouragement for him to take learning more seriously. His narrative represents a form of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005; Basit, 2012) that he has attained from his involvement and association with his church that appears to have enhanced his ambitious academic inclinations, despite encountering considerable barriers. The desire to achieve educational success, carve out a career path and gain social mobility was a common theme emanating from the Black male participants' narratives. Consequently, whilst in sixth form his hard work and aspiration paid off as he went on to secure an internship with a senior Westminster politician.

Parents, faith and effects associated with prayer

A recurrent theme amongst the participants centred on the intersection of parental faith and community. Duane is a working-class student who attended an underperforming secondary school and then Oxbridge. Duane's story provides a prime example that is reflected in four of the other participants' similar experiences. Duane is British Caribbean. He was raised in a Pentecostal church and attended Oxbridge. He is from a two-parent family and self-identifies as working class. He grew up in an urban area and attended an underperforming secondary school. When asked what factors he attributed his success to, he said:

> Part of it was from my church and from my faith. Part of it was yeah I think from my parents and my dad actually was really influential – yeah had kind of a real passion to kind of do things in the community. On a Sunday morning he would kind of take us out to church and afterwards he'd kind of take us for a walk around the community together to get us familiar with it and understand its challenges and needs. So yeah my faith very much had this kind of community focus for me. (Duane, working-class British Caribbean Oxbridge graduate)

Attending church with his parents, coupled with his father's focus on familiarising him with the neighbourhood, provided Duane with an interest in wanting to give back to his community. It is suggested that the values he gained from attending church, coupled with his father's edification of him to his neighbourhood, was an impetus for him to become involved in social projects to aid in improving problems in his community for future generations, and hence why he became involved in civil society community activism as a job. Similar findings have been explored within South Asian and Muslim communities where parents, community and faith play an influential role in

shaping young people's values and identities (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Shah *et al.*, 2010). James attributes his success in life to his parents, his Christianity and his hard work ethic. In the following excerpt he discusses how faith was an important component of his family's life from a very young age, and how his hard work and continued faith has benefitted him in his quest to become a barrister:

> I think, for me, when I was quite young we were talking about careers, about six, maybe seven. My dad had this belief. He's quite religious as well and he believed that I was going to become a lawyer and that kind of stuck in my head. He didn't pressure me, but he did have this belief (…) that no matter how difficult something is whatever God wants you to get you'll get there. That was my first sort of tenet that I held on to from my youth. Second, yes it is very difficult, but there are some Black lawyers out there and I believe they are out there because of God's grace. The Bible talks about God's determined time and chance, yeah, so all those things come into play. But also, they've given themselves the best chance by going to stellar and very academic and respected universities. And they have worked really hard and gotten good grades all the way through. My dad always said this: that if you always work hard and you know that there's nothing else that you could have done and you leave it all to God whatever you get is God's will and there's a reason for it. Sometimes I haven't (pause) like with Oxbridge I didn't get that. But coming to [university name] there are a lot of things that I've achieved (…) So I think I understood a lot from what my parents said (…) I think faith all around has made me a certain kind of person. And it means that a lot of things that would generally faze people don't really faze me. Just because I'm so confident that God will do what he promised to do. The most important thing for me is my Christian walk. As long as that can be going well in terms of I'm praying and reading my Bible, I'm worshipping and I'm serving in church. As long as I'm doing that I have no doubt that God will put everything into place. (James, working-class British African Russell Group graduate)

James discussed the combination of faith, hard work and aspiration which he learned from his parents. His account says that he has been able to progress in life as a result of these ideals, which he developed through his faith as he grew up. He emphasised that no matter how difficult something may be to achieve, if 'God wants you to get you'll get there'. James' faith placed him in a 'win/win' situation. His pursuit to do the best comes from his parents, and now his belief that God will take care of him. Like neoliberal meritocratic beliefs, James' belief is that his hard work will either lead to academic success or to something else that he is destined to do. In accord with meritocratic worldviews of society and success (Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012; Warikoo & Fuhr, 2014), James' faith—which he accounts as being passed on to him via his parents—provides him with a sense of confidence that his hard work is not in vain. In concurrence with Basit (2012)'s and Bhatti (2011)'s research on Muslim girls and boys, a consistent finding with James (and some of the other participants) was that the resources that help drive his ambitions are a mixture of faith, values, beliefs and a hard work ethic, which appears to be an amalgamation of 'faith capital' and aspirational capital (Basit, 2012). James emphasised that a goal must be something that God wants for him. In the instance of his failed interview at Oxbridge, James appears to feel that even though he wanted this opportunity, it was not what God wanted for him. However, he was able to attain his legal goal through a different avenue, which he appears to believe is what God wanted for him. James' faith appears to be a foundation on which his ability to succeed is built.

A common theme identified throughout American literature on Black students is the use of spirituality and religion as a safeguard between themselves and the harsh realities of the predominant—in this case, White middle-class—group at university from which they may experience adversity (Brown & Gary, 1991; Mattis *et al.*, 2000; Constantine *et al.*, 2002; Barrett, 2010). Amongst two of the participants, faith was not as central to their worldviews as the other four in the study. Franco, a working-class Russell Group graduate, and Ted, a middle-class Oxbridge graduate, both describe gaining a sense of grounding from faith or prayer. When asked whether faith or church had any impact on his life and education, Franco said:

> Yeah, I used to go to church. I used to be an altar boy. I used to go to church every week. I even used to go to church without my mother. I've always had faith.

Researcher: What does it mean to you?

> Okay so like I pray and stuff but I don't go to church anymore. I don't like church and organised religion anymore. I just started to realise that actually a lot of the people who I knew who were very religious were also dis-empowering themselves to a large extent. And I thought actually I don't want to do that . . . But then I sat there and said, do I believe in God? Yeah. Do I have this sort of relationship? Yeah. Does it affect my educational focus and how I act? Yeah. Actually I never talk about religion because it's such a problem when you're talking about it with people and the politics of it, so I just avoid it usually. Spiritual-ity is (pause) it's something that is important to me. It's grounding. And faith impacts what is good behaviour versus bad behaviour . . . and as much as I don't talk about it, it's impor-tant to me. Even at [name of university] I literally pray every day. (Franco, working-class British African Russell Group graduate)

Although Franco said he was unsure whether faith was a factor in his educational outcomes, he did acknowledge faith being an important part of his life since childhood. A recurring theme amongst all six participants that mirrors existing research (Jeynes, 1999; Glanville *et al.*, 2008; Barrett, 2010) was their involvement with faith during their primary and secondary schooling years. Franco became an altar boy during his adolescent years and continued to attend church even when his mother was not present. This entry to faith in their formative years may have had a lasting effect on the maintenance of their faith or belief (Jeynes, 1999; Al-Fadhli & Kersen, 2010). Even though Franco no longer attends church, he does acknowledge that faith has an impact on his behaviour and he still 'pray[s] every day'.

When asked whether he thought faith played a role in his education, Ted identified church as providing him with a sense of solitude and centring:

> Yes, to an extent I believe. I mean I pray and I'm grateful and you know happy to be alive. Though I like the idea that my life is in my hands because that gives me a sense of purpose and control. So that's my only kind of beef with faith as a very kind of wider point. But yeah in terms of my academic motivation and other aspirations I'm aware of the fact that even though I say the confidence is my own or the determination to do something or the drive is mine, I'm aware that in another sense it comes from somewhere else whether God or whatever (. . .) I went to church a lot [as a child]. We have such a nice church here at [Oxbridge] – a chapel here as well.

Researcher: Do you go there?

> Yes, I go sometimes. I like listening to the singing. So am I religious? Yeah, kind of. I don't
> practice proactively. But I do often pray and now I'll show you our chapel [Ted gives me
> an interior tour of his College's church as we talk]. This is where I come to pray and get
> centred. It's very peaceful and quiet. (Ted, middle-class British Caribbean Oxbridge
> graduate)

In accord with Franco, Ted said he 'believe(s)', however he was ambivalent about
religion because he liked to have a 'sense of purpose and control' over his life. Both
participants' accounts raise concerns that religion can be disempowering to some
people's ability to make decisions. However, both participants' accounts said faith
had an ongoing centring effect on their educational lives. And to this day, both men's
accounts suggest that they continue to routinely pray because of the grounding and
placid effect that it provides them.

Faith's influence on civil society and community-focused goals

Community organising and support for their local neighbourhoods was a common
theme discussed by five of the participants. In the fourth interview with Duane, upon
completion of his Oxbridge degree, he discussed his desire and subsequent return to
his local neighbourhood to work as a community organiser. He emphasised faith as a
central component of his life and one of the reasons he aspires to be involved in work
to improve conditions and opportunities in his local community:

> . . . being a Christian and having faith has kind of played a part in my life as well. So like,
> literally my whole family is Christian (. . .) At first it was quite a source of frustration in
> terms of seeing like the difference between (pause) like a lot of what I kind of read in the
> Bible and a lot of what I heard being preached on, and the whole split – in how I saw peo-
> ple living, doing and acting in daily life. I had to like kind of actually say to myself, 'you
> know if I'm going to be a Christian, if I'm going to really believe then I'm going to do
> everything I can to live a true Christian life.' So I think that was kind of at the heart of me
> wanting to change my community. I wanted to serve my community. And so I'm just kind
> of thinking about the most effective way to do that. So I already kind of had like two poten-
> tial things come up. One to try to develop some kind of like community trust fund using
> like an idea of community-based bonds to help develop like a small pot or fund of money
> to start little projects in the community for young people (. . .) and the other is working a
> lot more with the police on like crime issues (. . .) to build bridges in the Afro-Caribbean
> community. (Duane, working-class British Caribbean Oxbridge graduate)

Duane acknowledges the dichotomy between what he has been taught in the church
compared to what he has observed in terms of how some young people live their daily
lives in his distressed community.[14] As a result of the capital resources that he feels he
has gained from his faith, he wants to give back to his community, particularly to
young people, to ensure there are opportunities for them so that they will not neces-
sarily feel the need to become involved in criminal activities. Several of the partici-
pants' accounts discussed that being a good Christian involved the responsibility to
serve and support their church and local community through improving their neigh-
bourhoods, schools and/or churches. In alignment with research on other groups of

British ethnic minority young people, social and cultural capital have been found to be 'significant assets that give agency to young people to seek social justice' (Basit, 2012, p. 139). Similar to Duane's account, since completing their university studies, three other participants chose to work in local community organising roles in three urban cities in the UK.

Concluding remarks

Bourdieu's (1986) framework expanded the concept of cultural capital as useful for explaining the educational outcomes that some of the participants in this study achieved. Research suggests that the linking of education to personal values and goals with faith/religiosity may be instrumental in promoting students' sustained school engagement, positive educational beliefs and higher academic aspirations (Byfield, 2008; Witherspoon & Madyun, 2010). Bourdieu's (1986) broadened concept of cultural capital in the religious field has been useful in exploration of BACM faith accounts, because it expands capital beyond economic forms to include non-economic applications such as social and cultural capital. Research on churches in the USA indicates that these institutions play an instrumental social action role in their work to support the educational needs of Black children (Putnam, 2000; Glaeser & Sacerdote, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Byfield, 2008; Glanville *et al.*, 2008). From the narratives of the BACM here, it appears that a similar role is occurring for some Black men who are involved with faith in the UK. It is suggested from the participants' stories that faith (and to a lesser extent prayer) served as aspirational, motivational, social and educational capitals that were instrumental in assisting these young men to avoid and/or succeed against challenging obstacles.

Amongst the six researched participants' accounts discussed in this paper, there were varying degrees of expressed religiosity, some being very active in church or church youth groups and others being lapsed, yet still acknowledging faith as having an impact on their confidence, motivations and personal behaviour. Faith through varying degrees of belief and practice appears to have provided these BACM with the motivation to apply themselves, and has assisted them in gaining and/or maintaining their academic aspirations. Several participants also reflected on how their faith involvement served as a form of protection, and avoided them becoming involved in risky situations in their communities. Additionally, faith appears to have had an impact on these BACM's post-university work ambitions, as four of the participants became involved in activities to support and improve their local communities. Although it may be unreasonable to completely correlate faith capital with social and cultural capital, it is apparent from these six participants' reflective accounts that faith played a substantively meaningful and authentic contribution to their successful educational journeys. Within the UK there is a dearth of research that examines faith's impact on youth and academic aspiration and achievement. It is suggested that more UK research needs to be done to explore the possible links that faith organisations, individual faith, religion or belief and prayer may have on ethnic minorities and young people in general in relation to resiliency, aspiration and educational success.

NOTES

[1] Research indicates that the proportion of UK-domiciled Black students pursuing higher education degree courses has increased since the academic year 2003/04 (ECU, 2014).

[2] It is important to acknowledge that on the whole, undergraduate Black students are over-represented in higher education and in 2012/13 experienced the largest increase in the proportion of all BME students attending university to 6.3% (ECU, 2014, p. 114). However, the majority of this increase in Black student representation is accounted for in non-Russell Group institutions, particularly at the less prestigious universities that comprise the Million+ Group. The Million+ Group comprises the following universities: Abertay University, Anglia Ruskin University, Bath Spa University, University of Bedfordshire, University of Bolton, Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Cumbria, University of East London, Edinburgh Napier University, London Metropolitan University, London South Bank University, Middlesex University, Staffordshire University, University of Sunderland, University of West London, University of the West of Scotland and Southampton Solent University (www.millionplus.ac.uk/who-we-are/our-affiliates/).

[3] Faith is one of many forms of capital that can be acquired and habitus-shaped to attain academic success. Other forms of capital that these young Black men identified as influential on their academic trajectories are discussed in the paper 'Capitals that British Black man identify as helping them progress to and through elite UK institutions', which is currently under review with the *Oxford Review of Education*.

[4] Counter-narratives are accounts of people whose experiences are not often told (i.e. those less represented and/or on the margins of society). CRT uses counter-storying as a tool for exposing, analysing and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. A CRT researcher acknowledges ethnic minorities' experiences and perspectives of their realities as an accepted basis of knowledge.

[5] Historically, within the UK, the term 'Black' has a complicated history. From the 1970s through the 1990s, 'Black' was used in an inclusive solidarity-political sense, to refer to non-white British people (primarily referring to people from the British West Indies and the Indian subcontinent) who faced oppression on the common grounds of race. Warmington (2014, p. 5) states that: 'depending on context, [Black can] denote either people of African/African-Caribbean descent or . . . the wider assembly of African, African-Caribbean, Asian, Arabic and mixed race peoples constructed in the post-war period of immigration'. One reason that led to the demotion or deskilling of BACM lay in the disparity between the West Indian and British economies. African Caribbean emigrants found that their prior handyman or jack-of-all-trades skills that were invaluable in their predominantly agricultural and craftsman-focused countries of origin were considered worthless in the industrial UK. The UK also required certification of skills. Many Caribbeans who possessed technical and professional skills such as engineering found that their expertise was not deemed as a credible or recognised qualification in the UK, which relegated most of these new emigrants to low-skilled menial jobs (see Ramdin, 1987; Cross & Johnson, 1988; Collins, 2001).

[6] Prior to the 1950s, Black Africans numbered less than 10,000 in the UK (Banton, 1955). According to the 2011 Census, there are now 989,628 Black Africans, 594,825 Black Caribbeans and 280,437 who identify as 'Other Black' living in England and Wales (ONS, 2012).

[7] Putnam's (1995) analysis of social capital within US Black communities in which he refers to Black-led churches and the barbershop research studies (Duneier, 1992) has been strongly criticized because of its lack of discussion of how race and ethnicity can influence 'civic participation' among Black community members as well as churches and barbershop relationships with other ethnic groups living within the community (Orr, 1999). Coleman's work is contested because the distinctions he engages with between 'strong' and 'weak' social capital in family relationships fails to recognise the significance of racial discrimination and disadvantage in constructing and constraining ways that ethnic minority families access and employ social capital in family relationships (Campbell & Mclean, 2002; Reynolds, 2006).

[8] For example, at one Russell Group institution I was successful in interviewing the first Black British male student to be accepted within that College in 10 years. Additionally, there is a tendency for most Black students to attend universities in metropolitan areas such as London and to a lesser extent Birmingham and Manchester. I worked hard to ensure my sample of elite institutions also included institutions outside these localities.

[9] All participants received information about the research project and how the data would be used in advance of their interviews and were given a copy of my university ethical approval. Consent forms were signed prior to their participation and have been securely stored. Participants were provided with a copy of their signed agreement. Throughout the research, the UK Data Protection Act was adhered to in order to ensure that 'personal information concerning research participants [would] be kept confidential' (Bryman, 2008, p. 124).

[10] Black British home students were specifically selected for recruitment for this research. International African Caribbean students' experiences are not included within this research, as the data and research on their degree attainment is different from that of 'home' students and is not easy to access, explore or compare (Stevenson, 2012).

[11] All of the participants discussed in this paper were either final-year students or had graduated from their institutions within the past five years.

[12] Another third-object tool involved using a video entitled 'Shit White girls say to Black girls', which was helpful in enhancing my ability to get participants to share their accounts about discrimination and racism in ways

that did not emerge as easily when only using semi-structured interview questions. 'Third-object' video, cuf-flink and photo elicitation was previously piloted during my Master's thesis with young black men.

[13] Participants identified several other 'capitals' which were influential on their HE journeys and will be explored in future papers.

[14] In a follow-up conversation I asked Duane to clarify what he meant by people 'acting in daily life'. He informed me that he was referring to drug crime, violence, stealing and gang warfare in his community.

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